

Research Article

Practitioner Perceptions of School Library Advocacy

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Abstract

School library advocacy is increasingly important due to decreases in funding and staff. National organizations attempt to engage school librarians in advocacy and have developed resources and tools to assist with this task. However, there is little research examining how practicing school librarians engage in advocacy and how their advocacy efforts impact their library programs. This study explored school librarians' perceptions of advocacy within the context of their school library setting. Findings suggest school librarians must continue to build relationships with stakeholders and create awareness for the school library position as they define the activities of advocacy unique to their library setting. An emphasis should also be placed on creating meaningful advocacy training in school library preparation courses.

Introduction

Between 2007 and 2013, there was a steady decline in the number of school librarians staffed in schools across the United States (ALA, 2013). This loss of library positions has prompted advocacy campaigns and initiatives at the national level. The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) advocacy toolkit defines *advocacy* as the ongoing process of building the partnerships necessary to cause others to act in support of the library program (AASL, 2007). However, AASL also defines *Public Relations*- one-way communications of who we are, what we do, when we do it and for whom- and *Marketing*- a process to assess the customer's needs and then select materials and services to meet those needs- on the same page (AASL, 2007). This could lead to conflicting definitions and varied understandings by school librarians of what their organization recognizes as advocacy. Various interpretations of advocacy can lead to diverse advocacy practices of school librarians.

The position statement of AASL on the Role of the School Library Program states that school libraries are instrumental to the academic success of students (AASL, 2010). One of the stated factors to a successful program is having a highly qualified school librarian who builds influence and support for the position, as well as for the school library program. Although the school library field supports and recognizes that school library advocacy is an essential component to building and maintaining strong library programs in schools and contributing to academic success, there has been minimal research conducted on how school librarians perceive advocacy or the advocacy efforts in which they engage for their program. More directly, a

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comprehensive search of library literature finds there has been no research investigating what advocacy efforts by school librarians have been successful. This study examines how school librarians engage in advocacy. Moreover, it also identifies perceived barriers to advocacy, as well as what school librarians perceive the impact of their advocacy efforts to be for their school library programs.

Literature Review

Advocacy resources within the school library field frequently focus on building a quality school program or advise school librarians on the benefits of promoting activities to raise awareness for the position of the school librarian (AASL, 2013a, 2013b). Ken Haycock, an early proponent of school library advocacy, realized the necessity for school librarians to do more than simply promote the quality programs they developed within their own schools. With the adoption of new national standards for AASL in 1998, Haycock and Cavill (1999) state that the national organization needs to focus advocacy efforts to aggressively educate school librarians on the task of advocacy. Haycock and Cavill argue for a more unified approach to advocacy from AASL, which would in turn lead to a national advocacy campaign with a single, clear message. In order to take the next steps and implement change, a more structured plan of advocacy would be needed. According to Haycock, such a plan has still not been developed (K. Haycock, personal communication, March 8, 2013). At the national level, advocacy has become a variety of different initiatives, some mixed with public relations and some mixed with lobbying.

Due to the dearth of research in the profession, the field relies on the literature of thought leaders. To date, only one empirical study has been conducted examining school library advocacy activities among practitioners. The field has yet to investigate how school librarians define advocacy in practice and what they perceive their role to be in engaging in advocacy for their program. Ewbank (2011) examined the activities and actions of practitioners associated with school library advocacy. Because of the lack of empirical research on advocacy in the school library field, her work is grounded in the writings of thought leaders, as is this study.

There is little consistency in school library literature and among school librarians of what exactly constitutes advocacy. Some (Hand, 2008; Kerr, 2011) align advocacy primarily with promotion of the school library program and generating awareness of library resources. Hand (2008) suggests that constant advocacy includes keeping teachers, students and school administrators aware of the expertise of an effective school librarian. Emphasizing the school librarian's knowledge of information literacy keeps them relevant to student learning. Kerr (2011) suggests that school librarians need to get in the habit of showing, rather than telling, how school libraries contribute to student achievement in schools if decision makers are going to understand the impact school libraries have on education.

Others advocates (John, 2007; Plunkett, 2010) align more closely to the political activism of Sandy Schuckett (2004) in her call to action. These advocates rely more on engaging legislators and building relationships with external stakeholders. Though these activities may not come naturally to many school librarians, Johns (2007) contends school librarians must realize they are not promoting themselves, but rather the profession. She urges school librarians to become active, to be visible, and to use the advocacy resources available through professional organizations to engage multiple audiences in a conversation on the benefits of a strong school library.

For school librarians, establishing an advocacy plan is essential as one of the first steps for successful advocacy (Hunter & Applegate, 2009; Johns, 2007). Due to the lack of a consistent definition in the school library field, it is difficult for professional library organizations to develop definitive goals and strategies when developing advocacy resources. Inconsistency in the definitions used by practitioners has made developing coherent resources difficult for professional library organizations. This, in turn makes it difficult for practicing school librarians to prioritize advocacy and establish an effective advocacy plan. Ewbank (2011) surveyed practicing school librarians. She found that while 75% of respondents believed they participated in some form of advocacy, 28% cited inadequate resources.

The American Library Association (ALA) and AASL have toolkits and websites dedicated to assisting with advocacy plans. The *Toolkit for School Library Media Programs* (2003) (,) developed jointly by the ALA and AASL, provides some structure to implement a strong advocacy initiative. This resource offers guidance and suggestions for building support for a school library program with multiple stakeholders in a user-friendly format. Practitioners looking for usable templates and practical advice from those established in the field can use this toolkit as an initial resource to implementing advocacy in their own school setting, though it is has not been updated in the last decade. Other advocacy resources are available through the website of both organizations, but practitioners must be proactive in seeking them for their personal use.

Unfortunately, for many school librarians, advocacy remains a lower priority than many of the tasks with which they are charged. 31% of the participants in Ewbank's (2011) study reported the lack of priority a barrier to advocacy. Gary Hartzell (1997), a former school administrator and library advocate, admits that many in the profession do not innately enjoy the role of advocate primarily because much of advocacy seems self-evident to school librarians. School librarians perceive the necessary actions as some of the tenets of librarianship- collecting evidence-based data to support the value of a program and working with legislative bodies to ensure funding to provide equal access. He argues these actions do not happen instinctively and advocacy must mature with a committed effort over time. Because the purpose of these activities does not always seem evident, school librarians will oftentimes not put forth the time and effort that advocacy requires. They believe hard work will be evidence enough of their importance to student education (Hartzell, 1997, p. 26).

While teachers and administration may acknowledge the role that school librarians play in the education of students (Haycock, 2003), parents and students must also be aware of the unique contribution school librarians make to the educational experience of students. The professional literature discusses the importance of building relationships with local stakeholders, such as teachers and parent groups, who will advocate for the program (Hand, 2008; Haycock, 2003; Kerr, 2011; Johns, 2007). School librarians must be able to articulate their value and do so in a way that is meaningful to their stakeholders (Kirkland, 2012). Additionally, Johns (2007) points out the school librarians themselves need to be a part of the vocal group. Only then will the message be articulated to those in a position able to help, facilitating actions required for stakeholders to become advocates for the programs in a time of need. Plunkett (2010) and Hand (2008) suggest that school librarians stress the importance of their services by showing they are indispensable to teachers and administrators. Further, to be most effective, advocacy must be seen as advocating for students and not necessarily programs (Plunkett, 2010; Hunter & Applegate, 2009). Plunkett (2010) suggests using student achievement data to substantiate this claim to administrators and community stakeholders. She suggests having at least two facts

memorized and ready to recite to back up the claim that the school library facilitates student learning.

Research Questions and Purpose Statement

This study attempts to identify and understand the perceptions school librarians have toward advocacy as the first step in developing school librarians' definition of advocacy. Next, it attempts to understand school librarians' perceived involvement in integrating advocacy strategies in a school library program. Further, it explores school librarians' preparation to advocate for their programs, as well as their knowledge of available advocacy resources. By exploring how school librarians at the school level blend the perspectives of these understandings, the school library field can better identify how advocacy is incorporated into the K-12 library program and identify resource and training needs.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do school librarians define their engagement in advocacy?
2. To what extent do school librarians feel they have been prepared to advocate for their programs?
3. How do school librarians perceive their advocacy efforts impacting their program?

For the purpose of this study, *school librarians* are defined as those professionals who hold a teaching degree with a school library certification or endorsement. A *library program* is defined as an integrated program in the school that provides instruction, resources, and services to assist students and teachers in becoming critical thinkers in the pursuit and use of ideas and information.

Methodology

This study was conducted in the qualitative phenomenological tradition (Moustakas, 1994) using a social constructivist paradigm. The researcher attempts to understand the essence of the participants' experiences of advocacy. Ontologically, there is no one correct way to advocate for a program or the library profession, so each participant brought a unique perception of advocacy which will add to the understanding of library advocacy engagement. The axiology of this research was grounded in the values of the researcher in respect to advocacy, though the research maintained an objective design. Through the use of interviews, participant voice contributes to the findings in the form of direct quotations and descriptive responses. This allowed for the topic to develop naturally since there is little previous work from which to develop theory.

Context

The study was conducted in the state of Virginia and focused on the perceptions of school librarians working in public schools. There are approximately 1,264,880 students enrolled in 1,867 Virginia's public schools (Virginia Department of Education, 2013). The Virginia Standards of Quality ensure a minimum staffing of a part-time certified school librarian in each school with enrollment fewer than 300 students, a full time librarian in schools with enrollment between 300-1,000 and two school librarians in schools with enrollment over 1,000 (Code of Virginia, Standard 2, 2012). School librarians in Virginia meet certification requirements through the State Department of Education. School librarians are staffed and evaluated in

Virginia schools as teachers. While school libraries are currently supported in Virginia (Code of Virginia, Standard 2, 2012), school librarians must continue to demonstrate their impact on the learning of all students in a school to ensure continued, statewide support.

Participants

Ten participants were selected for this study via criterion sampling (Patton, 2002). Selected participants represent school librarians working in public schools in Virginia. Each participant was a certified school librarian, licensed by the Virginia Department of Education, and currently employed in the public school system. To obtain a random representative sample, every school librarian in one district of a region was contacted for participation. One school librarian was selected from each of the seven geographic regions, as established by the state library association. Participants were contacted via email for participation in the study and were informed of their voluntary consent for participation prior to data collection. Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participants in the study.

Table 1
Demographic Summary of Study Participants.

Participant	Degree	Years Teaching	Years in Library	School Level	Geographical Region
Janet*	Master of Ed. w/ Library Endorsement	10	8	Elementary	James
Marie*	Library Endorsement	30	10	Middle	James
Anna	MLS	22	22	Middle	Potomac
Maggie	Master of Ed. w/ Library Endorsement	23	15	Elementary	James
Theresa	Master of Ed. w/ Library Endorsement	18	10	High	York
Erin	MLS	12	12	High	Shenandoah
Vickie	Master of Ed. w/ Incomplete Library Endorsement	20	1 month	Middle/High	Roanoke
Sarah	Master of Ed. w/ Endorsement	29	13	Elementary	Rappahannock
Lisa	Master w of Ed. w/ School Library Concentration	18	14	Elementary	Rappahannock
Taylor	EDS/Master Library Science	39	23	Elementary	York
Kat	Library Endorsement	14	7	Elementary	Clinch
Sue	MLS	18	14	Middle	Potomac

Mean years in teaching 21 ($n=10, SD = 7.83$) Mean years in school library 13 ($n= 10, SD=8.17$)
 Note¹: Those participants marked with an * are pilot participants and are not included in the mean and SD

calculations.

Note ²: All participant names have been changed to pseudonyms to maintain participant confidentiality

All participants in the study are women. The mean number of years participants have been involved in K-12 education is 21 years ($n=10$, $SD=7.83$). The mean number of years practicing as school librarians is 13 ($n=10$, $SD=8.17$). All but one participant possesses a graduate degree. Four participants hold a graduate degree in library science; five have certification in school library media. One participant is completing the state endorsement program. Five participants teach in an elementary setting, two in a middle school, two in a high school, and one teaches in a combined middle/high school.

Data Collection and Analysis

In an effort to capture the unique experiences of each participant and represent their particular settings, individual, semi-structured interviews were used as the primary source of data collection. Each participant was interviewed once. Interviews were conducted via online video chat (Skype, Adobe Connect) and recorded for transcription. Questions explored the school librarian's perception of engagement in program advocacy and how advocacy for their program impacts the program's success (see Appendix).

The primary researcher transcribed all participant interviews verbatim within one week of occurrence. Upon transcription, participants were provided complete transcripts of the interviews and given opportunities to clarify their responses. Minimal clarifications were made. These changes did not alter the coding and analysis of the data. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to help maintain participant anonymity.

Analysis began with bracketing of researcher beliefs and assumptions. This helped acknowledge and mitigate researcher bias. A research team was assembled to assist with the study. Two doctoral students with diverse research interests, but with experience in conducting qualitative research analysis, assisted with the study. The research team helped to develop the interview protocol, as well as conduct data analysis. The varied research interests of the team provided multiple perspectives during data analysis.

Horizontalization for phenomenological research analysis, as developed by Moustakas (1994), was used as a means to accurately represent the phenomenon for these participants. This involved analyzing the data for any experiences relating to the research questions. Themes pertaining to advocacy that emerged from the interviews were identified. An initial codebook was developed based on this horizontalization process. Next, codes were clustered to identify units that describe the textures of the advocacy experiences of the participants. As horizontalization was conducted and data was analyzed, a partial-ordered meta matrix was constructed to display the data as a case display to visually represent the essence of the participant's experience. After the primary researcher initially coded each transcript, the research team participated in consensus coding. Research team members coded all transcripts and reached 100% consensus on coding.

Textural descriptions were recorded and simultaneously reviewed until patterns were established. Once textural themes had been identified, findings were presented in a written narrative that represents the findings of the study. The findings provide a thick description of the meanings of the experiences of the participants, including the group as a whole. To fully capture the essence of these experiences, the researcher included quotations from the participants.

Finally, a structural description of the themes is presented to fully represent the meaning of the advocacy experience for the participants as it relates to their practice.

Pilot Study

To gather initial data, a pilot study of two participants was completed. These participants participated in individual interviews that were conducted via Adobe Connect, recorded, and transcribed. With only two participants' transcripts to analyze for the pilot study, it was not possible to identify structural descriptions; however, each participant's unique experience with advocacy led to multiple textural themes that exemplified their engagement in and understanding of advocacy at the building level. Pilot findings suggest librarians need to be visible, but they realized this could sometimes be a difficult task. Just being visible did not adequately communicate advocacy goals. Participants identified promoting the library program as a primary goal in advocacy. A strong need for creating a common language and crafting a universal message that could be uniformly used by the profession was discussed. Finally, pilot participants identified difficulty in knowing how to properly advocate. This was attributed to advocacy largely being left out of the formal training of the pilot participants.

When describing how advocacy may impact the library program, pilot participants rely on the perception of students and teachers in the building to convey value, as well as how the librarian is viewed as a teaching resource. Participants established a recognized need to build influence among stakeholders for the school librarian position. This involved a need to emphasize the roles of a school librarian in the school setting so that others will advocate for the school library program as a resource for student achievement. These emerging themes were identified and further developed in the larger study.

Findings

Five structural themes were identified from the data: Awareness, Influence, Engagement of the Librarian, Advocacy Resources, and Obstacles to Advocacy (see Table 2). The unique experience of each participant further led to multiple textural themes, which exemplified how each participant perceived advocacy in their particular setting through their lived experiences.

Table 2
Structural Codes and Descriptions

Code	Description of Code
Awareness	Describes experiences of advocacy as participants build awareness for school librarians and their programs
Influence	Describes experience of advocacy as participants attempt to gain influence for their role and their library program
Engagement of Librarian	Describes activities enacted by school librarians as they engage in advocacy
Advocacy Resources	Describes perceived advocacy tools or support available to school librarians
Obstacles to	Describes perceived barriers to advocacy to school librarians

School Librarian Engagement in Advocacy

The first research question explored how the participants defined their engagement in advocating for a school library program and the school library position. *Engagement of the librarian* was defined in this study as the actions of school librarians they define as advocacy activities. Multiple participants expressed one of the primary responsibilities of the librarian was to be a visible presence and, as Maggie said, “let them see what you do ‘cause otherwise they just don’t know.” Anna concurred with this, stating she felt she needed to “constantly be vocal about where we are and what we can do.” Vickie found her advocacy actions centered on vocalizing her presence in the school and her role in student education:

[Advocacy is] trying to make the community aware of our existence and how we support education and the public library. Advertising what we have to offer. And not only on the community level..., but I am finding myself in a position where I’ve really got to start educating teachers and students as to the services we provide. They just don’t know.

The participants reconciled their responsibility to engage in advocacy with the theme of awareness. *Awareness* was defined as shared experiences of advocacy as participants build awareness for school librarians and their programs. Participants placed a great deal of emphasis on the need for community awareness for successful advocacy of school library programs. Promotion of the library program and library activities was frequently mentioned as a means for accomplishing this task.

All participants in the study described activities to promote their library program when describing ways in which they advocate for their school library. These promotional activities ranged from creating brochures and presentations that could be shared with their school community to engaging in dialogues with various stakeholder groups to share information about their programs. As Sarah described:

Being in a school, the teachers don’t always have a chance to come and see what is going on in the library or to even see everything that I have. So I have to go out and kinda sell my wares to the teachers- and even to the administration.

Participants also discussed adding technology as an additional tool for promotion of their program. Maggie described the importance of an online presence:

I try to get the projects and things the kids do in the library out there visible to the parents or whoever else wants to see it. I put links to my blog or my website to some of their work. Just to get it out there so that teachers go, and parents go, “Oh wow, look what they did in the library.

An additional structural theme that was ever-present throughout the study was the perceived obstacles to advocacy. *Obstacles* were defined as those barriers identified by school librarians that prevent them from effectively advocating for their program or position. At times, participants in the study found it difficult to engage in advocacy and promote their program and the position of school librarians because of the perception they were disconnected from the community they serve. Participants perceived the lack of knowledge among the stakeholders on the responsibilities of a school librarian and their position within the school to be an obstacle to creating awareness and advocates for the library program.

The idea that times have changed, and with them the duties of the school librarian (,) is explained by Maggie: “Getting over stereotypes is huge. I think a lot of the adults that are making decisions are basing them on their library experience when they were in school and maybe that wasn’t such a positive thing.”

Additionally, there was significant variance in the amount of administrative support and job security participants reported based on the geographic demographic data presented. Those participants teaching in larger, more urban areas tended to have a more mature concept of advocacy and were more secure in their advocacy efforts. It was typical for these librarians to meet for professional development, as well as have their concerns represented in the district office. This was evidenced by the support of a library supervisor. Anna stated that(:

Having a library supervisor gives librarians a voice in the school division’s leadership team. Somebody who has the ear of the superintendent. And, of course the supervisor is constantly sending out articles or referring us to websites with good ideas. So we have both printed and personal, um, support provided to us.

Conversely, those working in smaller districts tended to feel as though they had little support over all. This year, Kat found her position of half time at two schools was changed to one-third time at three different elementary schools in her small district. Kat found support from her local public librarian, but little from those within her school district.

School Librarian Preparation for Advocacy

The second research question explored training in advocacy. Many participants noted a lack of training in advocacy or training that had little meaning. Lisa described her experience with advocacy training:

I don’t particularly think any of my classes dealt with that at all that I can think of. I am sure there was a component of one of my classes- because we had to put together our personal goals, and our school goal, so we were advocating for ourselves in a sense, but in terms of a larger picture of advocacy- I’m not sure we did much with that.

Her account is not much different from others as they expressed advocacy had been a part of their certification program, but the overall effect of the training was not particularly effective for their practice.

While some participants reported that they had no formal training on advocacy, even those that did receive training or sought individual training perceived the training and resources available to school librarians less than adequate. Sarah stated frankly: “We talked about it in class. Nobody gave me any tools or techniques for going about it.”

One noted problem with resources for advocacy is that there may not be many successful examples from which to draw. The participants were seeking a success story, someone to guide them in how to successfully advocate for their specific program on an individual basis. Kat says the best resource would be “a person, that is real knowledgeable, and had a very successful library program.... To just share all their different ideas and things that they have done to promote you ...and even involve the community.”

In order to achieve many tasks associated with advocacy within a school library, advocacy resources must be identified and available. *Resources* were defined as tools or support accessible to school librarians used during advocacy initiatives. The most beneficial resource school librarians noted utilizing is some form of support from each other. Many believed other school librarians were their only resource. When asked what resources for advocacy she was

aware of, Sarah, who works in a small district comprised of only three librarians, responded: “The three librarians themselves- that is probably going to be the extent of it.” Some had more involvement at the district level. Erin is more strongly supported. The librarians in her division “have vertical team meetings where they meet together once a month.” The librarians in her division work together to coordinate advocacy efforts. When discussing advocacy efforts involving contact of legislative members she describes, “One of the other high school librarians is involved in getting the information out to us... If she sends a form or an email that I can easily kind of send off to a specific person, I will.” Some participants were aware of resources available through associations such as ALA and AASL, though none stated that they had used them.

Participants did note that current technology, including the use of social media, has been beneficial in providing a means to find and share advocacy resources. School librarians who may feel isolated working independently in their school buildings find social networks have opened the door to for sharing advocacy ideas with others. Maggie has been using this medium and found:

You can share your ideas for advocacy, how to get your message out there. I learned of a couple of new websites that I hadn't heard of before that I am going to use for communicating with parents and some teachers- and students probably, too.

Sue stated that if she were to ever need to advocate for her program in a time of crisis she would turn to social media and draw on the experiences of “people in the trenches.”

Additionally, instruction on how to advocate tactfully in uncertain political and fiscal times was a concern. An obstacle that was repeated throughout the participant interviews was that of fear, often mentioned in conjunction with job security. Though none of the participants were new to education and many had long been established in their position as the school librarian, there was the feeling that they needed to tread lightly when advocating for their program and, by extension, their position. Taylor stated this most bluntly:

Even though there is a huge shortage of media people out there, at the same time you're still job scared. Particularly if you don't have a continuing contract. Uh, we have two new people in the system this year and we can tell by looking at them they're deer in the headlights. They're barely keeping their head above water on a daily basis, much less stopping to think about, I need to talk to this person about this- Oh, oh maybe not, maybe not. I may lose my job if I do.

Lisa expressed the same concerns:

Sometimes you have to be careful when you speak up for your job because you are not just advocating for your library in general, you are advocating for your job. You know, sometimes you are not perceived real well and you basically put your foot in your mouth because if they don't like what you say or how you say it then you get further along on that chopping block.

In the end, as Sue described it, advocacy represents change and people just “don't want to upset the apple cart.”

Advocacy Impact on Student Learning

The final question examined how school librarians perceive their advocacy efforts impacting the school library program. Those perceiving the most success in their advocacy efforts articulated the ability to build influence for their position and their program. *Building*

influence is described as gaining a position of indispensability for their library program. It was the participant's perception that they had an impact on student learning, either directly or indirectly. Those perceiving success articulated a connection between the library and student learning. They incorporated a sustained advocacy plan and worked to create meaningful partnerships between themselves, their program, and multiple stakeholder groups.

Vickie described her own perception of the library's influence on teaching and learning. She discussed her perception on the relevance of library services in the Google age. :

I thought libraries were becoming obsolete because everyone was just Googling everything, but nothing could be further from the truth. People are confused. They don't know what to do. They don't know where to go. Before you could just hand them an encyclopedia and the card catalog and you're good. People are lost and they need librarians that can help them find their information. So to me advocacy means making people more aware of that. Teaching them, getting the word out, that there's something that we really do have to offer even more for them now than ever.

Because of this realization, she has attempted to build influence for herself and the library program with each stakeholder group within her school to influence the need for a stronger relationship to support learning opportunities.

Creating these influential opportunities was also an area of specific focus for Anna. Her experiences have centered on the creation of advocacy training for her school staff with the purpose of building influence for the school librarian.

We [are a] constant voice in the back of a teacher's and administrator's mind that we've got space, we've got resources, we've got expertise and we want to help in whatever way we can. We *want* the kids to see us as a place for learning.

But while the changing role of school libraries may have positive effects on student learning, the library is not always adequately addressed through staffing or licensing and evaluation. Lisa suggested that with these changes and budget cuts "it becomes difficult to maintain our original role." Taylor, who lost her clerk, worried that when evaluated the librarian is not "seen as a librarian, but as a teacher," which changes the program they are promoting.

The greatest obstacle to advocacy was the lack of value placed on the library program by the stakeholders in the school community. Anna stated this simply, "Very often, the library gets taken for granted." Sara feels that since she received grant funding several years ago she will not receive any further financial support from her community, even if she were to engage in advocacy efforts on behalf of her school:

I think as far as improving the library, the library takes a back seat to all the other programs that are going on in our district. The library is probably the bottom of the barrel. So I can go out and be an advocate for this library all I want with the community... my library isn't gonna get a plug nickel from anybody.

These attitudes that advocacy would be unproductive kept many from engaging in any advocacy at all.

Discussion

Through the examination of school library advocacy, a definition of what practitioners perceive advocacy to be, as well as the engagement of school librarians in enacting advocacy remains difficult to determine. Advocacy is uniquely defined by each school librarian based on her understanding of what advocacy entails and what activities fall within her duties. This remains a characteristic of each participant's particular program setting.

Increasing awareness of the school library position among stakeholders remains a challenge. Without a new definition of the school librarian's role in facilitating student achievement by building partnerships, people may fall back on their prior stereotypes and misconceptions (Oberg, 2006). Awareness of perceived advocacy responsibilities is an emerging theme that suggests areas the school library field may develop for a cohesive advocacy initiative.

In order to create and sustain an advocacy plan, advocacy resources must be identified and available. While advocacy resources may be available at a national level in the school library field, only those who actively seek them find and benefit from their use. Additionally, depending upon the security one feels in their particular situation, advocacy may present as more urgent for some participants than others. Therefore, the goals and attitudes associated with advocacy must be considered when exploring the effectiveness of advocacy initiatives of school librarians. As the field attempts to unify advocacy strategies, advocacy resources must be developed that are meaningful and authentic.

Positive outcomes of the study include that all participants were able to identify with some activities that comprise advocacy and speak to the implications that advocacy efforts have on their programs. While these experiences cannot be generalized, there is some amount of transferability of information obtained in research studies such as this so that educators can use the information and apply it to their own environment. Finally, while no correlations can be made connecting advocacy and student learning through this study, those participants engaging in actions that led to stronger stakeholder relationships feel they are making an impact on student success in their school environment.

Limitations

While the study proposes examining the perceptions of typical school librarians, the criterion sample is derived only from the state of Virginia. Currently, Virginia's Standards of Quality (Code of Virginia, Standard 2, 2012) guarantees staffing a minimum of half a library position in schools of 299 students or greater. This makes de-staffing less of a concern for school librarians in Virginia than in other areas of the country. The design of the study did not include a sample across multiple states. While this would provide a unique look at advocacy, it would also introduce multiple confounding variables. The researcher attempted to mitigate this and explored the various demographic characteristics (rural vs. urban, large vs. small) by obtaining a diverse sample and purposively using at least one participant from each of the geographic regions of the state and a variety of school levels.

Conclusion

There are multiple future implications for research from this study. Given the lack of research on the topic, there seems to be a great need for further research in the area of school library advocacy. The participants from the study are able to identify the lack of research in the area and a desire for more information on the topic. Compounded with the current fiscal climate, advocacy is a contemporary topic that will remain at the forefront of educational research.

As Ewbank (2011) suggests, the lack of empirical research on school library advocacy leaves practitioners and school library educators with few examples of sound training techniques and/or models to draw on for best practice. It further emphasizes the arguments of longtime library advocates (Hartzell, 2003; Haycock, 1999) who suggest it is not enough to promote the

activities and actions of a school librarian, but rather that influence must be built for the role of school librarian itself. The findings of the study are similar to those of Haycock and Cavill (1999) who noted that it was easier to promote library activities than build influence for library programs.

Further exploration of advocacy should focus on encouraging strong stakeholder relationships that emphasize support of student achievement. Consideration of the perceptions of multiple stakeholders across the educational landscape will be valuable in exploring the impact of school library advocacy. Follow up research should include the perspectives of teaching peers, administrators, and district-level decision makers to determine if advocacy efforts are creating an educated support base for the school library program.

As is demonstrated in the inconsistent message of national organization advocacy definitions (AASL, 2007) the school library field is unsure of the role school librarians must take in advocacy to successfully promote themselves and ensure others see them as instrumental to the success of the student populations. The findings of this study echo these beliefs, and will add to the literature on school library advocacy.

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Appendix

Intro: Thank you for participating in this interview today. I am trying to understand what advocacy looks like in a typical school library setting and your experiences with advocacy at the school level.

Your participation is completely voluntary. Your identity and responses will be confidential. The session will be recorded then transcribed. You will have an opportunity to read and add to the transcript after the interview. A report of the complete study will be made available to you as well.

Do you have any questions before we start?

How would you define advocacy in the school library setting?

What types of activities constitute advocacy in a school library setting?

What do you think the school librarian's role is in terms of advocacy?

Tell me about your relationship with stakeholder groups (students, teachers, admin) in your building. How about in the community (parents, school board, legislators)?

How could it be improved, if at all?

What resources are available to school librarians to help with establishing an advocacy plan or actions?

What, if any, training did you receive on advocacy (formal or informal)?

What type of training do you feel would be useful/helpful?

What obstacles, if any, are in place that might prevent a school librarian from advocating for his/her program?

In what ways do you think your school library program impacts a student's success in school?

Is there anything else that you would like to add or clarify that I may not have specifically asked about today?

Thank you so much for your time- I hope I can contact you if I need to clarify anything we have talked about today.

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