

2016

## Parent perceptions of support from the school library

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## Parent perceptions of support from the school library

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#### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze and describe parent perspectives and aspirations related to their child's information literacy, lifelong reading, and digital literacy skills and the role of the school library program to enhance these skills. Four parents of fourth or fifth grade students in a rural Iowa district were asked questions regarding their knowledge of the current library program and how the library curriculum could improve to better aid their children as they progress through school. Three research questions guided the interviews: 1. What do parents already know about their children's skills in information literacy, lifelong reading, and digital literacy?; 2. What expectations do parents have for the school library and librarian regarding instruction to enhance their child's skills in information literacy, lifelong reading, and digital literacy?; and 3. How do parents envision the school library being utilized in their child's education? Analysis of this data showed that the parents interviewed from this community were unaware of how the library fit their children's education. Parents also expressed an overwhelming desire for the library to become a more central hub for engagement with reading and learning to read for pleasure. The findings are consistent with prior studies by Deskins (2011) and Murvosh (2013) regarding parent involvement in the library, as well as Thweatt (2012), Harris (2015) and Everhart and Mardis (2014) regarding parent outreach and interactions with literacy programs designed by the school library.

PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF SUPPORT FROM THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

A Graduate Research Paper  
Submitted to the  
Division of School Library Studies  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by  
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August 2016

This Research Paper

Titled: Parent Perceptions of Support from the School Library

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the  
Degree of Master of Arts.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyze and describe parent perspectives and aspirations related to their child's information literacy, lifelong reading, and digital literacy skills and the role of the school library program to enhance these skills. Four parents of fourth or fifth grade students in a rural Iowa district were asked questions regarding their knowledge of the current library program and how the library curriculum could improve to better aid their children as they progress through school. Three research questions guided the interviews: 1. What do parents already know about their children's skills in information literacy, lifelong reading, and digital literacy?; 2. What expectations do parents have for the school library and librarian regarding instruction to enhance their child's skills in information literacy, lifelong reading, and digital literacy?; and 3. How do parents envision the school library being utilized in their child's education? Analysis of this data showed that the parents interviewed from this community were unaware of how the library fit their children's education. Parents also expressed an overwhelming desire for the library to become a more central hub for engagement with reading and learning to read for pleasure. The findings are consistent with prior studies by Deskins (2011) and Murvosh (2013) regarding parent involvement in the library, as well as Thweatt (2012), Harris (2015) and Everhart and Mardis (2014) regarding parent outreach and interactions with literacy programs designed by the school library.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*“What did you do at school today, honey?” a mother asks her child at dinner.*

*“We learned how to do research and make presentations!”*

*“Really? Where did you do that?”*

*“In the library!”*

A welcoming library environment is essential to any school. While some teachers and students view their current school library as part of a program rich with literacy and technology instruction and a welcoming space for shared resources; others, including parents, rarely know what is going on in the school library. Likewise some stakeholders hold memories of silent libraries with stereotypical librarians and may feel the library does not hold a relevant place in the 21st century school. While some librarians share how they enhance the educational environment of the school, some parents do not understand how the skills they learn from the librarian fit in the context of their child’s education. On the other hand, librarians are aware of how important community and parent involvement is to the library, but they may not always engage in conversations which would allow parents to become advocates for the library program (Donham, 2013). Parents should be informed about the library curriculum and how it is impacting the classroom. They should also understand that librarians are important to enhancing the curriculum and demonstrating new ways to present their findings or learnings in a variety of ways. Without knowledge of the school library program, parents and community



members are unable to advocate or advise the development of a quality school library program (Donham, 2013).

### **Justification**

School libraries are accountable to many stakeholders. Students, teachers, and administration make use of and experience the school library program daily, making their ideas and needs vital to the function of the school library program. Although parents and community members may not be present in the school library on a daily basis, they are stakeholders who also need to have an understanding of the school library program in order to be library supporters or advocates. Whereas many students and teachers visit the school library daily for reader's advisory and to engage with technology and inquiry instruction, parents and community members are often unaware of the school library's activities and curriculum, knowledge that could inform their perspectives when district school library issues are discussed either formally or informally.

### **Parent Knowledge of School Library Programs**

Deskins (2011) found that school libraries across the United States that enacted strong advocacy programs were well received and had a strong voice and presence in the community. Those libraries also received more attention from policy makers and administrators than they otherwise would have because of parental support for the library. Teacher librarians who open the library to parents have the opportunity to build relationships and inform parents, who in turn may defend school library programs if the need arises. In her article *Follow the Leaders*, Murvosh (2013) describes an instance where parent advocacy groups in Washington state were able to save several teacher

librarians' positions there through informed advocacy. In this instance, parents and teacher librarians were able to collaborate together to inform legislators at the state level of the viability and necessity for school librarians, creating legislation and curriculum mandates that secured the presence of school librarians in schools. By informing these parents of the purpose and benefits of a full time school librarian in their children's schools, parents were able to advocate for the library in other settings.

### **Engaging Parents in School Library Programs**

No matter how well intentioned, parents are not always aware of what happens in every setting of the school. In order for parents to be a positive influence on the library, they must be aware of school library activities. Engaging parents through open houses, question and answer panels (Harris, 2015), workshops, family literacy nights (Thweatt, 2012), and library advisory committees (Harper & Schwelik, 2013) allows parents to feel welcome in the school library. During open houses, parents are invited into the library to orient themselves to what the school library offers. They meet the teacher librarian and investigate the library program, catalog, and events that will keep their students involved throughout the year (Harris, 2015). For those parents who require assistance in promoting student reading, family literacy nights are a great connection to the library program (Thweatt, 2012). Thweatt encourages parents who do not feel proficient in reading, or who are not confident in their literacy abilities, to come to the school library for family literacy nights in order to access a variety of books, learn about reading strategies, and take home activities or games to promote skills taught in the classroom. Finally, parents who want to have more active involvement in the functions of the school library can join

the library advocacy committee. Harper and Schwelik (2013) describe library advocacy committees as groups of students, parents, administrators, teachers, and school librarians working towards promoting and developing the school library program. These committees target strengths in the program, help to promote the program in the community, and shape the collection through fundraising and recommendations. While one role of the library advocacy committee is to share concerns for the current library program, the main intention of the committee is to promote the use of and benefits for having an up to date library in the school setting (Harper & Schwelik, 2013). Welcoming parents into the library through programs will ensure their comfort and gain their support for the work done by teacher librarians.

Once parents feel they have a relationship with the teacher librarian, they may be more willing to listen to the teacher librarian share one's vision for the school library and how it connects to the classroom curriculum. They are also more willing to listen to and share concerns about library programming with other stakeholders in order to ensure the best school library experience for their children (Delguidice & Luna, 2013). Donham (2013) also suggests collaboration to create a parent library within the school library. Parent libraries include digital and paper materials for a variety of parenting issues: parenting students with special needs, providing enrichment options for gifted students, and supporting learning outside of the classroom. When parents have an active interest and connection to the school library, they are more likely to advocate for quality programs to continue and grow.

### **Problem Statement**

Whereas many students and teachers visit the school library daily for reader's advisory and to engage with technology and inquiry instruction, parents and community members are often unaware of the school library's activities and curriculum. Having such knowledge could inform their perspectives when district school library issues are discussed either formally or informally.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to analyze and describe parent perspectives and aspirations related to their child's information literacy, lifelong reading, and digital literacy skills and the role of the school library program to enhance these skills.

### **Research Questions**

1. What do parents already know about their children's skills in information literacy, lifelong reading, and digital literacy?
2. What expectations do parents have for the school library and librarian regarding instruction to enhance their child's skills in information literacy, lifelong reading, and digital literacy?
3. How do parents envision the school library being utilized in their child's education?

### **Assumptions**

It is assumed that many parents do not know how the school library program impacts their child's education. It is also assumed that most parents expect their children to learn

how to analyze and interpret digital and print text and to use technology appropriately in many different situations.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to analyze and describe parent perspectives and aspirations related to their child's information literacy, lifelong reading, and digital literacy skills and the role of the school library program to enhance these skills. In order to establish these expectations, parents must be informed about the school library program including library procedures, connections to classroom, and library curriculum. The literature reviewed to inform the current study includes stakeholder knowledge about school library programs, leadership of parents in schools, and engagement of parents in school library initiatives. These studies inform the current research because they help to define what parents and other stakeholders perceive about school libraries and what parents may do to become leaders for school initiatives. These understandings will inform the development of questions for parent interviews or focus groups in the current study.

#### **Stakeholder Knowledge of the School Library Program**

Before school librarians can expect parents to give valuable or constructive feedback, parents must be educated in the library program and how the library connects to curriculum and classroom instruction. One study conducted by Everhart and Mardis (2014) explored how well stakeholders understood the function of the library program. Before participating, Everhart and Mardis (2014) found parents had little understanding of the school library program. Using a focus group model, participants were informed about the current conditions of school libraries in the state and asked to identify the most

essential elements of the library program. Out of the 71 participants in these focus groups, all participants gained knowledge of the state's funding and guidelines for school libraries. After acquiring this information, stakeholders showed increased interest in the school library at their location. Everhart and Mardis concluded there was a need to provide stakeholders with advocacy toolkits, such as the AASL's Parent Advocacy Toolkit (2012) in order to allow for deeper understanding and advocacy of school library programs. Everhart and Mardis also recommended parents and other stakeholders should be provided the opportunity to process information over a longer period of time in order to experience the value of the school library program in the school district.

Ewbank (2011) provided a further look into the benefits of informing parents as library stakeholders and revealed that equipping parents and other stakeholders with policies and library practices may help to retain teacher librarian positions. Ewbank led a case study in which one district was able to maintain several teacher librarian positions through a deep understanding of the teacher librarian role in the education process. Many districts in the same Southwest state were forced to cut programs and staff due to a 10% funding cut from the state level. During this time, teacher librarians were cut in many districts around the state, leaving paraprofessionals or volunteers to run the school libraries. In one school district, however, the superintendent, along with a governing board, were able to work with all members of the school campus to establish essential positions and programming. Using the school's structure for learning and teaching, stakeholders, including parents, were able to keep teacher librarians in the library, while finding other programs or soft monies to cut.

Ewbank (2011) asserts much of this occurred due to the stakeholder's prior understanding of how teacher librarians utilize their time and position to enhance student learning within the district. Through interviews with members of the deciding board, Ewbank determined that due to employee involvement, transparent communication with all stakeholders, a foundation of trust between leadership and the governing board, as well as the commitment to the district's core values and learning structure, teacher librarians were able to keep their positions. Specifically, participants stated their knowledge of the four roles of school librarians, along with the deep understanding of all decision makers from the district, helped school librarians continue to offer programming to high school students in this district while other districts in the state were forced to cut school library programs.

In the same way Ewbank (2011) found that communication and district values contributed to greater understanding of school libraries, Small, Shanahan and Stasak (2010) also found promising indicators of stakeholders' interests in school library programs. In a three part study of school library programs in Pennsylvania, Small et al. used one part of their study to understand how the school library promotes student achievement and motivation. Small et al. interviewed 37 parents from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds from ten different schools. Of the parents interviewed, several made statements, both general and specific, about the ways teacher librarians aid their students in both research and questioning skills. Parents shared how librarians in each of their children's schools helped students to distinguish valid, quality sources as well as the need to evaluate information gathered from the internet. Parents



also expressed their appreciation for programs offered by teacher librarians for parents such as internet safety. Overall, parents, while not directly presented with the curriculum or practices of their students' school library, found the library program was a core piece of their child's education. Small et al. also stated parents' genuine interest in adult programming offered by teacher librarians was a wonderful outreach for families and communities that should be encouraged and promoted by all school districts.

In summary, these studies indicate that when stakeholders are educated about the current status and funding of school library programs, they become more interested in their local school library programs (Everhart & Mardis, 2014), and when they understand library programs, they are more likely to retain programs in spite of statewide cuts (Ewbank, 2011). Likewise, parents whose children have been served by library programs and who may have participated themselves in adult outreach through the teacher librarian expressed appreciation for the skills their children gain in determining quality sources and learning about internet safety (Small et al., 2010). These studies provide detail of positive perceptions and attitudes cultivated or acknowledged in districts with school library program successes that will inform the potential stakeholder interviews created for the current study.

### **Parent Involvement in Schools**

In addition to understanding the context of positive stakeholder perceptions of school library programs, it is also helpful to understand how parents may be taking an active role in their child's education or school. To better understand how parents may be involved in the school library, it is important to know how parents are engaged in

advocating for education in their school districts. Some parents who wanted to be involved, but didn't know how, were offered seminars in leadership, such as Vision and Voice Family Leadership Institute (VVFLI). In a study by Cunningham, Krieder, and Ocon (2012), the effectiveness of VVFLI to create parent leaders was investigated. Two surveys were done together, one for parents attending the program for the first time, and one for alumnis of the program. Through pre- and post- tests, Cunningham et al. found that parents who had attended the program were more prepared to engage administrators and teachers at their child's school. More importantly, parents who were alumni of the program were 22% more likely to to participate in school advisory groups and 57% more likely to recruit other parents and advocate for programming at their schools. These results show that educating parents to voice their opinions and get involved in their child's school will help programs, such as the school library, to continue and develop to meet the needs of the community.

Some parents want training in order to be involved in their child's school, but some parents don't know how important they are to the school setting or their child's education. Loera, Rueda, and Nakamoto (2011) examined one subgroup, Latino families, in order to distinguish how a parent's involvement in selecting and engaging with books affected their child's interest in reading. After stating research detailing how Latino parents are better advocates for their child's schooling after they are educated, Loera et al. selected 128 parents of children in elementary, middle, and high school aged children from two different school districts. Student participants completed a motivation for reading questionnaire while parent participants completed a parent survey regarding their

involvement in their child's reading as well as their knowledge of resources available to their child for successful reading. Once results were collected and analyzed, Loera et al. determined that parents who were more involved in their child's reading created more motivated readers. Parents who engaged their children in discussion about their reading also created readers who were more focused, engaged, and literate students. As part of these surveys, parents also voiced the need for quality school literacy resources and workshops to educate them in best reading practices and other ways to advocate for programming in schools (Loera, et al., 2011). While not a direct study of parent leadership, this research showed how parents desire to be more involved in creating positive futures for their children. Using these practices, such as workshopping and parent nights, can create more literate students and more active parent communities within the school district.

Creating a positive relationship with parents can create better students and more parent leaders. In an analysis of four case studies from around the United States, Shatkin and Gershberg (2007) discussed how parent leadership was developed as a tool to create valued decision making in their school districts. Through descriptions of disillusioned communities and ignored minorities, Shatkin and Gershberg demonstrated how programs established at the state or district level allowed parents from diverse settings to form councils in order to become a decision making body for their school. Parents increased the community's involvement in the school, allowing for much needed reforms to occur. Parents on school site councils (SSC) were able to make curriculum and programming changes, voice their opinions about budgetary spending, and improve communication

between administration and the community. SSCs were more influential in areas where communities showed interest in the school and principals demonstrated a collaborative leadership style. Parents in school districts with SSCs were also more aware of school decision making processes and school law. While each school described in this study had varying results, Shatkin and Gershberg expressed the benefits of more parent involvement and leadership roles in school districts. The same could be applied to the school library.

While some parents are leery of becoming leaders in their child's school, there are benefits. There are ways to train parent leaders, such as the VVFLI program described by Cunningham, Krieder, and Ocon (2012). Parents who are trained to be leaders better understand school law and expectations, preparing them to understand the school library better as well. Schools with parent leaders have a more complete picture of the goals from all decision makers, resulting in happier parties and well educated children (Shatkin & Gershberg, 2007). In order to make sure all parents have an equal opportunity, teacher librarians and administration must also work to engage parents from all ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds as well (Loera et al., 2011). As vital as parents are to the success of a child's education, there are few ways parents can currently engage with the school library.

### **Parent Engagement with the School Library**

Little research has investigated engaging parents in the school library. While a topic of discussion in many journal articles (Murvosh, 2013, Deskins, 2011, Harris, 2015, and Thweatt, 2012 to name a few), few studies have been conducted to evaluate the use

or benefits of parents being active decision makers in the library. Some parents find themselves involved with the school library when their child brings home books that they, the parents, find unsuitable. Such is the case in Walker's (2010) case study. In this study, Walker described an elementary parent concerned with the book *And Tango Makes Three* being available to young children at her child's school. Though meant to be a cautionary tale for administration, Walker illustrates how a librarian and administration allow the book to be removed because of threats from parent organizations to cause public scrutiny and issues with the school board. Later, this case study addresses the backlash from the American Civil Liberties Union resulting from the failure to employ proper guidelines consistent with the American Library Association's *Library Bill of Rights* and the violation of children's First Amendment rights enacted through the banning of this book. Administrators have a duty to work with parents and librarians to find a way to deal with these encounters. This case study gives conversation starters for administrators who are dealing with book censorship issues, especially ones involving overly vocal parents. It also demonstrates how parents who do not understand the library's operations can hinder the learning of more children than their own. While parents can interact with the library in issues of access, they also deal with the library program itself.

While American schools are not focusing on parent perceptions of the impact of the information literacy on their children, other countries are. One private elementary school in Lebanon allowed Sakr, Nabhani, and Osta (2009) to evaluate the effectiveness of their school library's information literacy program through interviews with students

and parents. This school used standards and a framework suggested by the American Association of School Libraries and Association for Educational Communication and Technology organizations to create their curriculum. Students were questioned about their abilities to research, use the skills they learned in the library in other settings, and independently discern the quality of information they gathered to create new meaning. Sakr et al. also interviewed 18 parents to see what perceptions parents had of their child's information literacy abilities. While Sakr et al. found that parents were not as involved with the library as they would like, however they were interested to understand what was happening in the library and how it connected to the classroom. Parents were impressed with their students' abilities to research and use a library to gather information. Parents also felt that the library promoted reading for pleasure and learning. Sakr et al. made recommendations to the library staff to communicate with parents via brochures or other reading material to allow parents better understanding of the library. They also asked that parents be given an open invitation to visit and volunteer in the library regularly.

Helping parents engage with the library can help librarians continue to operate and perform at peak levels, as Copeland (2012) explained in her dissertation. Copeland interviewed and observed 14 parent volunteers at three different elementary libraries to understand how parent volunteers were recruited, trained, and helped in the library. Copeland chose three schools, two suburban and one rural, using volunteer information, Title I eligibility, and student access to a librarian. Parents were interviewed twice, initially and in a follow up. Volunteers at each school had different experiences with the library and recruitment. One school actively recruited parents and grandparents to

volunteer in the library and would match the parent interests and abilities to library jobs, such as shelving books or working with students. Another school librarian described her parent volunteers as people who worked in the background to make the library operate more smoothly. The final school setting described a new parent volunteer program for the library after a new teacher librarian took over the librarian role. In these three schools, many parents were recruited from a PTA volunteer coordinator who helped guide parents to the library program. Other parents were recruited through advertisements in the school newsletter or back to school nights. Parents also came from past teaching or library experiences. Librarians from the participating schools explained how vital their volunteer programs were to the daily operation of the school library program; but they also expressed they found recruiting, training, and organizing volunteers to be a tedious task that required a fair amount of time. Copeland also found that parents were drawn to the library because of positive experiences with their school library or books, and the flexibility of scheduling. Once parents were volunteers, Copeland noticed that parents also became advocates for the library program. Each librarian discussed how parents purchased books to donate to the library, attended school board meetings to fight for library funding and librarians, and encouraged other parents to better understand the library program. Librarians also noticed students were happier in the library when they were able to get more attention and help from an adult or were able to read with an adult in the library. These attributes demonstrate a strong need for more interaction between parents and the school library.

While some teacher librarians may have heard about the horrors described by the Walker (2010) case study, many are finding ways to engage parents in the evaluation of and engagement in the library program. Sakr et al. (2009) found that even when parents don't know about the library program, they can still see the benefits of creating independent thinkers and researchers. Parents who are involved with the library are more likely to demonstrate a great understanding of its importance to children and how it can prepare children to be 21st century learners (Copeland, 2012). In summary, parents need more opportunities to engage with the school library in order to understand what it does for their child's education and how it prepares children for the future.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study is to analyze and describe parent perspectives and aspirations related to their child's information literacy, lifelong reading, and digital literacy skills and the role of the school library program to enhance these skills.

#### **Research Design**

This qualitative study used discourse analysis methods to understand the current level of participating parents' knowledge regarding the school library program. Parents were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview to discuss their aspirations for the library curriculum in regards to their child's lifelong reading abilities, information literacy skills, and understanding of digital literacy.

#### **Participants**

Participants for this study included four parents of fourth and fifth grade students from a rural Iowa school district. The school serves approximately 1,500 students kindergarten through twelfth grade. This district has two teacher librarians, one for the elementary and one for the middle school and high school. Each school building also has a paraprofessional available in the library for seven hours a day.

The elementary teacher librarian teaches computer and library classes for students in each grade kindergarten through fourth, which meet for 45 minutes per weekly session. There are five sections per grade level, so each student goes to the library once a week for library and computer skills class, which includes a time for checking out materials. These fixed schedule classes are in the library approximately five hours daily, during which

time other students and teachers do not access the library. There is one paraprofessional in the elementary library who manages cataloguing, circulation and reshelving. Students are allowed to check out one book at a time per week, with opportunities to exchange books throughout the week before school. Additionally, the school library curriculum states that students learn a variety of information from the library program, ranging from selecting and caring for books, the operation of computers, and the use of online databases offered through the local Area Education Agency. Additionally, students and teachers come to the library to use the guided library, a collection of leveled readers used for interventions within the classroom for small group or individual, targeted reading interventions with teachers or volunteers.

Parents from this school district come from diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, economic status, and education levels. The parents invited to participate in this study had at least one student in fourth or fifth grade. Participating parents were selected from those who have lived in the area with their child for at least two years.

### **Procedure**

#### **Data Collection**

One hundred parents fitting the above criteria were invited to participate in an individual interview with the researcher for approximately 30 minutes regarding their perspectives on and aspirations for a school library program. A total of four parents were selected from the five who returned their participation consent forms to the researcher. While every parent participant was asked the same questions (see Appendix A), the semistructured interview method, as described by Luo and Wildemuth (2009), allowed

for the parents to deeply describe their thoughts and aspirations for the library program.

The interviews were audio recorded in order to allow for thorough data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Wildemuth and Perryman (2009) explain that “outcomes of your analysis should add clarity and focus to the text of the discourse you have examined” (p. 324). After transcribing, the researcher looked for common themes throughout all of the parent interviews using steps from Wildemuth’s discourse analysis techniques. Using the research questions investigating parental knowledge of their child’s information literacy, reading, and digital literacy skills, expectations of the school library, and vision for the school library within their child’s education, the researcher prepared a list of questions to ask parents (Wildemuth, p. 323). Parent volunteers were recruited for interviews through a flyer sent home from school with students. These interviews were arranged based on the schedules of the researcher and the parent participants. After conducting all four parent interviews, the researcher transcribed the interviews and identified themes within each series of questions to create a picture of the current discourse as it is experienced by parents (p. 324). Categories of commonalities were created across parent interviews and conflicting ideas were also identified. Finally, the researcher attempted to create insight into parent perceptions of the school library setting based on these findings (p. 324).

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to analyze and describe parent perspectives and aspirations related to their child's information literacy, lifelong reading, and digital literacy skills and the role of the school library program in enhancing these skills. Four parents whose children were in fourth or fifth grade at the time of the interviews met individually to discuss their aspirations for the school library program. They were asked to respond to questions in order for the researcher to analyze their responses and provide insight into the research questions.

#### **Parent Knowledge of their Children's Library Skills**

##### **Lifelong Reading**

The four parents interviewed, who are addressed with pseudonyms below, each felt they knew their child or children well, especially when it came to their ability to read and enjoyment of reading. Although all four parents stated that they enjoyed reading themselves, their children's reading experiences varied. One parent, Gretchen, explained that her child enjoyed reading because she competed in a reading program challenge at school called Battle of the Books. Gretchen stated that in fifth grade, her child brought many books home that were used in the competition. Two other parents, Catherine and Elaina, described their children as readers who bring home books from the library that interest them or that helped them complete book reports. Catherine also shared that one of her children sets goals for herself using library books: "So my youngest daughter is big into the Magic Tree House books. Her goal, for almost half the school year, is to check

out a book, and have it read by the next time she goes to the library for her special. And she has been doing it regularly.” Jessie stated that her children both read when they are interested in a topic, but in general they struggle with reading and do not feel motivated to read for pleasure. Elaina also stated that this is the case with her middle child, who enjoys listening to Elaina read, but because of her struggles with reading does not read for pleasure.

### **Information Literacy**

In each interview, the parents were confident that their children could use the internet to find answers. Elaina knows her daughter will find information on topics that interest her in order to learn more about them. For example, Elaina described her fourth grader’s research abilities when looking for facts about pheasants: “She likes pheasants. She will look up things about pheasants, and she will probably get on five to six websites to find out different information.” Catherine also knows her child can find information to simple recall questions on her homework: “I know she will bring home the State of the Week pages to fill out, and she will use the internet to do that. She’s successfully able to do that and fill out and answer the question on her own.” Gretchen quipped that she knew her daughter could find information on the internet “because she can do it faster than me.” While most of the parents’ responses related to their child’s ability to use the internet to find information, two parents mentioned other resources their children were able to use. Gretchen mentioned that her child knew how to use card catalogues to find information in the library and Jessie mentioned that her children had previously used encyclopedias to gather information.

Even though these parents felt their children could find information, they were not especially confident in their children's abilities to judge the accuracy of information they found. The reason for this stemmed from the fact that parents felt their children were young and still working on determining fact from opinion or fiction. Elaina simply explained, "She's a kid. She believes everything." Gretchen echoed these sentiments: "I'm not sure about that yet. I think when they read it, they think it is true still."

Regarding her child's ability to decipher fact, Catherine was more optimistic stating that her child could do so "for the most part... She's a fourth grader."

### **Digital Literacy**

The interpretation of what was meant by digital literacy was very different for each parent, even when given an explanation of digital literacy from the interviewer (see Appendix A). These parents agreed that their children knew how to correctly use digital resources to find information, but specifically addressed the use of simple searches to find recall answers. They supported these thoughts by sharing that their children could look up information or answer questions using Google, or were able to use other websites, such as Mapquest, to help their parents find answers. All four parents agreed that their children were able to create digital presentations in PowerPoint or Keynote. Catherine mentioned that her child had created a trailer using iMovie in class as well, and was learning to create documents. None of the parents mentioned web based projects or other digital presentations.

## **Expectations of the Library and Librarian Regarding Instruction**

### **Lifelong Reading**

Each parent's expectations for the teacher librarian and library had a strong focus on lifelong reading skills, specifically book selection and encouraging students to read a variety of texts. Parents emphasized a desire for a strong school library program and professional librarian time to support their children's lifelong reading. When asked how school librarians are helping their children become people who read for pleasure, parents were unsure of specifics, but cited other factors that helped their children become readers. Catherine felt that her children's excitement for reading came from family members. Elaina shared that her children get help from the library's paraprofessional in selecting books. Parents also made suggestions for the library program that they felt would encourage their children to read more. While one wished they had a more up to date collection, another wished that their child had more time to read in the library. Jessie also felt that extracurricular programs, such as book clubs, may encourage more children to read a variety of books because they have a place to read and share what they learn with their peers.

### **Information Literacy**

Parents were asked how important finding accurate information was to their child's education. Each parent responded in the affirmative, but to varying degrees, ranging from "Probably very important" to "I think they are highly important with how much research is being done online and being able to tell what is accurate information and what isn't." Again, parents were unsure of the specific ways the library curriculum fit into their

child's learning. When asked how school librarians have helped prepare their children to inquire and determine the accuracy of information, most parents were unsure. "Honestly I don't know... I've never heard my daughter say 'This was taught to me in the library' I guess." Parents knew their children were learning the skills to inquire and form their own opinions at school, but most of the parents were unable to share specifics. One parent, Elaina, did state, "I know that [my child] has said she has gone in there for several other things, to find things in books... So [the teacher librarian] helped her find the right books for things."

### **Digital Literacy**

In the 21st Century world, each parent interviewed believed that technology was important to their child's learning. When asked what should be the focus of technology in student learning at the elementary level, parents had a variety of expectations. Elaina wanted her children to understand how technology could be used as a tool for learning and not just entertainment. Jessie echoed these sentiments by responding, "Technology is life these days... They need to know how to look up information online and fact find." She also expressed the need to teach students how to access online books. Both Gretchen and Catherine strongly felt internet or computer safety were important skills each child should acquire in elementary school. Catherine, whose child is no longer in elementary, expressed that this generation of children has grown up with technology, so the technology program should be enriched in order to keep students interested and engaged.

When asked to pinpoint skills the librarian has taught related to technology and digital literacy, parents were unsure. Two parents were unaware of how the library



curriculum contributed to the products they had seen to the classroom. One also believed that her child learned digital literacy at home instead of in the library. Elaina, on the other hand, was able to share some experiences regarding technology in the library. She knew “[The school librarian] has given her websites to look at to give her more accurate information,” and when asked how the school librarian at the elementary has helped her child produce new information, she shared about an enrichment opportunity involving vacation pictures and creating a slideshow with the librarian.

Parents also had very different views regarding the skills that were needed in order to successfully use digital resources and technology. When asked what could be done to improve or advance efforts in this area, three parents felt their children were on the right track with technology use in their education. They wished for more practice as the years continued, but were pleased with how technology was implemented in their children’s education. The fourth parent wanted to see more structure when it came to producing digital writings. Catherine expressed the need for deliberate instruction of a writing format in earlier grades in order to prepare students for writing in secondary and postsecondary courses. She explained, “Why not teach them that from the very beginning? It makes it so much easier. It makes them write correctly. It makes them look like smarter students.”

### **Parental Visions for the Library and their Children’s Education**

Each parent was asked to share the aspirations they have for their children and how they felt the school library fit into the education their children will receive. These aspirations were broad and related to their children receiving some form of postsecondary

education. When asked how the library fit into these aspirations, each parent had different ideas. Gretchen reinforced the need to teach students to write and format papers correctly using technology. She strongly felt citing sources, avoiding plagiarism, and being able to quickly produce documents were very important to her child's library curriculum. She also stressed the need to find accurate information from reputable databases or web sources: "If you are in Psychology, you need to look at Psychology literature, because nothing else counts." Catherine wanted to see more practice of library skills as her children continued through middle and high school, along with an emphasis from the librarian on lifelong learning and reading. Jessie stated that although she hopes her children will get a postsecondary degree, she also knows one child is interested in the military. She would like to see the library curriculum offer research opportunities that allow her children to understand various careers and the world around them. Jessie also stated that the library program can also encourage the love of reading in her children as well as the rigor of the research curriculum. She stated: "Our fifth graders did those big research projects, but they [moved to] the middle school [now]. If they could tailor that back a little bit for...fourth grade. So, really teach them how to find and back up the different resources for better writing." Elaina looks at the library as a place that offers her children opportunities that they may not have otherwise. She wants the library to help her child branch out and read or find information about topics that may not interest her now so she is better prepared for the future. Three parents also wish for typing instruction to begin at a younger age in order to help students produce more writing and digital presentations in elementary school.

### **Summary of Findings**

While parents may not have exact, detailed knowledge of the school library curriculum, they perceive that the library curriculum is based around acquiring new information and creating products based on what their child has learned. Parents also value the appropriate use of technology in their children's education. In this particular case, parents would like to see more opportunities for their children to access library materials. Parents aspire to see their children either read more or access a variety of reading materials and wish for their school library to aide in this aspiration. Parents would also like to have more communication between the library program and home in order to better understand the library program and how it fits into their child's learning and production of information.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to analyze and describe parent perspectives and aspirations related to their child's information literacy, lifelong reading, and digital literacy skills and the role of the school library program to enhance these skills. Four parents of fourth or fifth grade students in a rural Iowa district were asked questions regarding their knowledge of the current library program and how their children progress through school. Three research questions guided the interviews: 1. What do parents already know about their children's skills in information literacy, lifelong reading, and digital literacy?; 2. What expectations do parents have for the school library and librarian regarding instruction to enhance their child's skills in information literacy, lifelong reading, and digital literacy?; and 3. How do parents envision the school library being utilized in their child's education? Analysis of this data showed that the parents interviewed from this community were unaware of how the library fit their children's education. They knew that the library was a place to check out books and that it was where students were instructed regarding technology, but they did not know what specifically was taught, created, or how what they learned in the library was used in the classroom. Parents also expressed an overwhelming desire for the library to become a more central hub for engagement with reading and learning to read for pleasure. These findings are consistent with prior studies by Deskins (2011) and Murvosh (2013) regarding parent involvement in the library, as well as Thweatt (2012), Harris (2015) and

Everhart and Mardis (2014) regarding parent outreach and interactions with literacy programs designed by the school library.

### **Parent Knowledge of their Children's Library Skills**

The four interviews showed parents felt they were able to judge their children's ability to perform functions that are taught in the library. They, however, were not aware the skills were taught in the library program and did not understand the curriculum or functions of the library program. Each parent described his or her child's ability to find basic information using web browsers, but did not give many indications of their child being able to search for answers to questions that require deeper thinking or analysis. Parents were not aware of where or how digital literacy, the appropriate and ethical use of digital materials to gather or create information; was taught in the curriculum. Each parent expressed the need for their student to understand different elements of digital literacy, but did not know that this instruction occurs in the library. Notably, studies by Deskins (2011) and Murvosh (2013) showed that well informed parents are more likely to defend the need for teacher librarians. Thus when parents are uninformed about the library program, they may not be able to see the benefits of having a teacher librarian working with their students. These studies also demonstrated that parents, due to lack of information regarding the daily operations of the school library program, are unable to see the value added through the teacher librarian's collaboration with classroom teachers to create more meaningful learning.

### **Parent Expectations and Visions of the School Library Program and Librarian**

Each parent stated that lifelong reading is the most essential contribution that the library program offers to their child's education. As such these parents shared the same views as the parents represented in Thweatt (2012), where extracurricular programs such as literacy nights, open houses, and workshops were identified as helping to engage parents and students in the school library. Parents from the current study also showed similarities with findings from Everhart and Mardis (2014). In both cases, parents showed a lack of information when it came to defining the curriculum of the library. While creating products from newly acquired information is an information literacy skill, parents did not know which presentations were created using library skills and which were developed in the classroom, possibly with aide from the teacher librarian. If these parents were provided with more information and communication, they would likely exhibit increased understanding and interest in their school libraries.

### **Insights for Parent Communication and School Library Advocacy**

Four categories of insight gained through this study correspond with lessons learned from past studies and inspire future teacher librarian communication with parents and advocacy for school library programs. Appendix B thematically summarizes the aspects of school library programs that the researcher identified from the participant interviews as support strategies for communication and advocacy: Libraries and Reading, Inquiry and Information Literacy, Technology and Digital Literacy, and the School Library in Education. The categories were derived from *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs* (AASL, 2009). Themes and sub-themes were

drawn from parents responses to the interview questions. For example, creating students who are able to find and evaluate information is part of the standards for school libraries from *Empowering Learners*, but parent views of how their children gather information and the need for more practice to create efficient researchers were developed using parent interview data. The interviews revealed that parents were very unsure about or unaware of the specifics of the library program. This gap demonstrates a strong need for communication between each student's school library and home.

First, in order for the library to be better understood by parents, the teacher librarian should increase communications with parents about library lessons and lifelong reading goals. After discussion, parents showed they are interested in hearing from the library regarding lifelong reading, information literacy, the use of technology, and how the school library works with the classroom. For example, parents who were interviewed felt lifelong reading was essential for their children. Communicating ways parents may aid in the reading process through newsletters, websites to aid reading, or other connections to reading promotion through the library will help parents to feel they are working along with the librarian to instill a joy of reading. Harris (2015) and Thweatt (2012) shared similar insights, further suggesting open houses and family nights run through the library to encourage more parents to enter the library setting furthering an understanding of how it functions within the school. Similarly, the studies by Harris and Thweatt also found that distributing library policies related to circulation of materials, etc. to parents also helped parents to understand what is expected from their child in the library or how their children could be involved in special library programs. In the current

study, parents lacked knowledge to confidently share what occurred in the library, but with access to policy and program information, parents could be better informed and more confident about the school library program.

In keeping with a greater need for parent information about the library program, parents interviewed for this study felt that their children were successfully able to gather information and use technology, especially using web browsers. However the parents did not fully understand how inquiry learning instruction aids students to become deeper thinkers who are better able to gather accurate information. Parents agreed their children need more help with inquiry learning. Thus the librarian is encouraged to educate parents about how their students are learning to gather information from multiple sources and evaluate the relevance and validity of that information. Whether it be through newsletters, sharing pictures or explanations on school websites, or other means, parents like to know what their children are able to accomplish as a result of a school lesson or activity. They also wish to see and hear about collaboration between the teacher librarian and the classroom teacher. Deskins (2011) shared examples of school districts whose teacher librarians communicated with community members about what students learned, and through an informed public, advocacy was possible when budget cuts threatened the library program. Similarly, Deskins showed that teacher librarians who communicated with parents and the community were more involved in the classroom and their school library's presence was more evident in the school and community. Many classroom teachers communicate with parents regularly about curriculum. Similarly, the teacher librarian should also help stakeholders understand how librarians work with students and



teachers to support students' information skills as informed and digitally prepared citizens.

Once a strong line of communications home to parents regarding the school library program and instruction is established through newsletters, web presence, and social media, the teacher librarian is ready to step up to district-wide advocacy for the school library program through or in conjunction with strong parental support. The second advocacy area identified through the thematic discourse analysis is then need to share library program information and technology instruction successes and needs with school stakeholders in a direct effort to influence opinion in favor of funding library programs and resources. Both Deskins (2011) and Harper and Schwelik (2013) describe instances where parent involvement in library committees and advocacy groups helped to build better library programs that met the needs of student learners. The AASL (2012) created a *Parent Advocacy Toolkit* in order to help teacher librarians create these groups and establish their purposes with stakeholders. Parents who are given a voice in the school library program will be more likely to understand how the library relates to the classroom and how the school library program enhances their children's education through building lifelong reading, information literacy, and digital literacy skills.

### **Recommendations for Future Studies**

Due to the small sample of this study, this researcher recommends gathering a larger sample to help create a wider view of the current reality of school library programs and parent perceptions. It is also recommended, if possible, to have more gender and socioeconomic diversity in the sample. No fathers or male guardians were available for

interviews during this research study, but it is recommended that the male perspective be investigated. This research study could also show different results if conducted within a larger, more populated school district. The final recommendation from this researcher is to perform a comparative research study in a school district with an already established library advocacy team that includes parent involvement. Perspectives from these studies would establish a more well rounded perspective of parent expectations and aspirations for the school library program.

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## APPENDIX A

### PARENT PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I will be asking you some questions about opinions you may hold as a parent regarding your child's school library program and aspirations for your child's learning through the school library program. The first group of questions have to do with libraries and reading in general.

1. Do you like libraries? If so, explain what you like most about them. If not, explain what is least attractive about libraries.
2. What do you think are the most important contributions a school teacher librarian can make to a child's education? Discuss as many as you'd like....
3. Does your child like to read? How do you know?
4. Does your child bring home library books from the school library? What kinds of books does your child bring home to read?
5. How have the school librarians helped your child become a person who reads for enjoyment?
6. What do you think could be done to make your child's reading experiences more enjoyable?

Another aspect of a quality school library program is to help your child become an effective and efficient researcher who seeks accurate information in books or on the computer. They focus on meaningful and focused questions in pursuit of learning about curricular subjects and topics about which your child shows a passion or interest. For example, the librarian at our elementary has done animal research projects with second

and third graders in the past. She has also worked with the fourth grade teachers and students to find information for state fair projects and biography reports.

7. Finding information in response to asking questions and then judging the accuracy of that information is called information literacy. How important do you feel information literacy skills are to your child's education?
8. Is your child able to find information in multiple sources in response to a question? How do you know?
9. Is your child able to judge when information is accurate? How do you know?
10. What else do you feel could be done to further your child's ability find information and determine if information is accurate?
11. In what ways do you think the school librarian has helped prepare your child to find information and determine if information he or she finds is accurate?
12. What do you think could be done to help your child find information and judge whether information he or she finds is accurate?

The appropriate use of technology and online resources to create projects is also part of the library program. Librarians use the *AASL Standards for the 21st Century Learner* to help students find information and create presentations or projects with what they have learned. These could be related to the curriculum or based on a topic of the child's choice. The next set of questions is about your perceptions of your child's use of technology as a learning tool.

13. What do you think is important for a student to learn about technology at the elementary level?

14. Do you feel your student is able to use technology to find or create new information? How do you know?
15. In what ways do you think the school librarians have prepared your child to use digital sources to find or create new information?
16. Describe further skills that are needed for your child to use digital resources correctly.

Finally, I have a few questions for you about the future of your child's education and how the library fits into your child's schooling.

17. What do you think the library program might add to help your child be better prepared for middle and high school?
18. Are you aware of any ways for parents to be involved in the school library? How do you know?
19. What do you aspire for your child to do when he or she leaves high school? How does the school library fit into your aspirations?

Thank you for your time and responses. I appreciate your opinions, suggestions, and ideas of the library program at our school.



## APPENDIX B

### *Category, Themes, and Sub-themes*

Category	Themes	Sub-themes
<b>Libraries and Reading</b>	1. Lifelong Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Most important contribution by librarian to child's education</li> <li>b. Genre introduction</li> <li>c. Lifelong reading instilled in many settings</li> </ul>
	2. Library Material Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Circulation</li> <li>b. Time</li> <li>c. Book Clubs</li> </ul>
<b>Inquiry/ Information Literacy</b>	1. Gathering Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Ability</li> <li>b. Evidence</li> </ul>
	2. Accuracy of Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Ability to determine accuracy</li> <li>b. Importance</li> <li>c. Further Practice</li> <li>d. Library Involvement</li> </ul>
<b>Technology/ Digital Literacy</b>	1. Use of Digital Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. "Googling"/ web searches</li> <li>b. Presentation tools</li> </ul>
	2. Focus on Technology Skills in Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Computer safety</li> <li>b. Appropriate academic use</li> <li>c. Products</li> </ul>
<b>School Library in Education</b>	1. Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Defining/ Evidence</li> <li>b. Creating products of knowledge</li> <li>c. Finding and citing sources</li> <li>d. Finding information from appropriate sources</li> <li>e. Rigor</li> <li>f. Keyboarding</li> </ul>
	2. Extracurricular	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Book clubs</li> <li>b. Access or Engagement with a variety of books</li> <li>c. Pleasure reading</li> </ul>