

Virginia Independent School Librarian Survey



Summer 2021

Survey report prepared by
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Purpose

This document reports the results of the Virginia Independent School Librarian Survey. The survey was conducted in May/June 2021 on behalf of the Virginia Association of Schools Librarians (VAASL). The purpose of the survey was to gauge VAASL participation and interest among this population, as well as to better understand the unique experiences and needs of independent school librarians statewide.

Survey Instrument

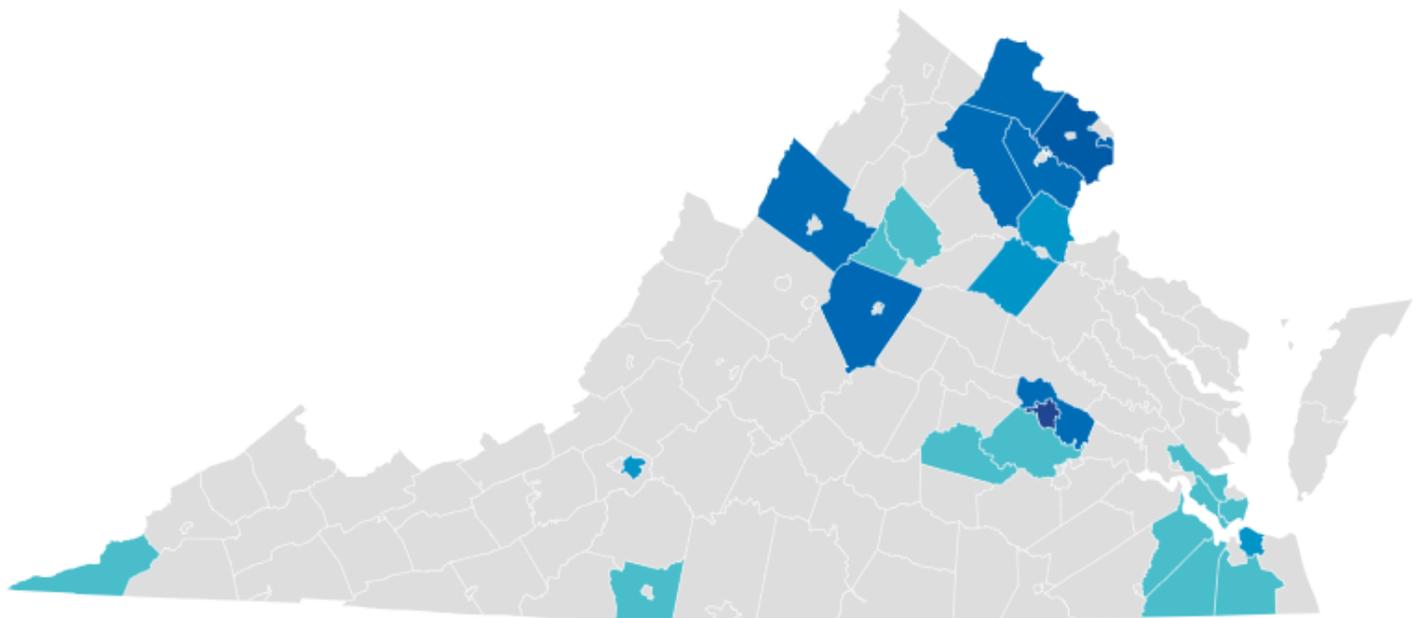
The 12-question survey consisted of open-ended and multiple-choice questions. It was administered using Google Forms.

Sample

A list of library staff names and emails was compiled using the Virginia Council for Private Education's school locator (<https://vcpe.org/SCHOOL-LOCATOR>). The survey was then emailed to 166 recipients in May 2021. Two additional follow-up messages were sent to recipients who had not yet completed the survey.

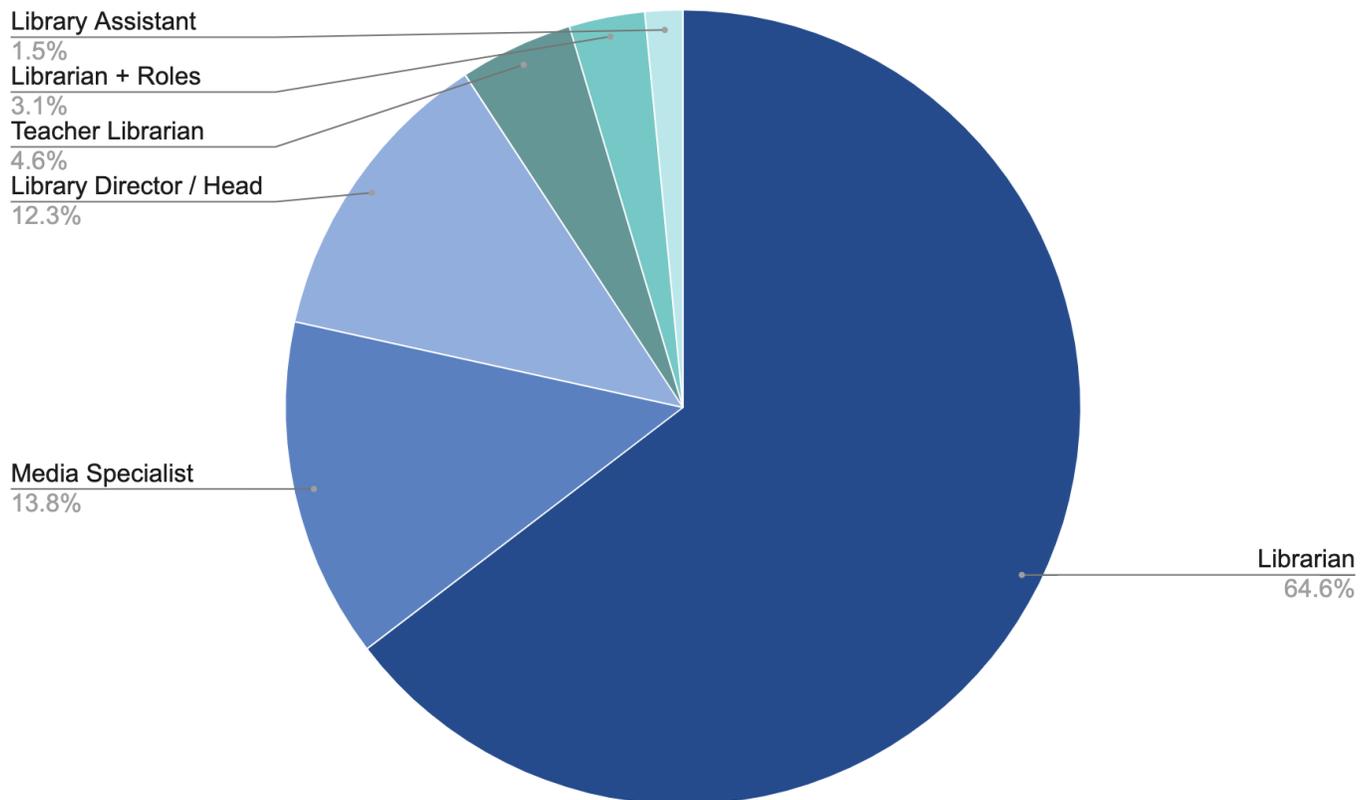
Responses

A total of 64 recipients (38.6%) completed the survey.



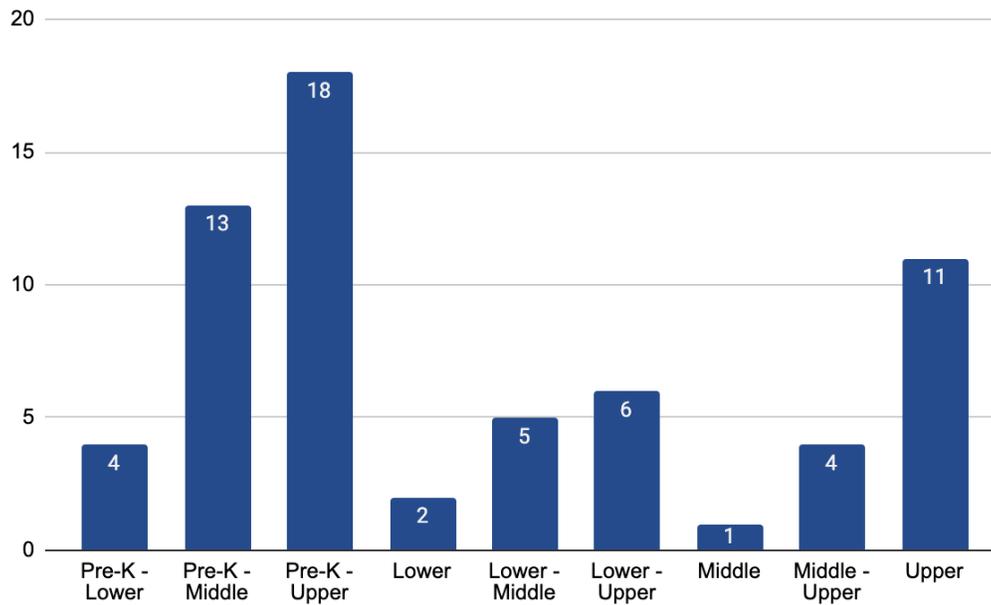
Job Title

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (n=42) hold the job title of Librarian. Similar titles include Media Specialist (n=9), Teacher Librarian (n=3), and Librarian combined with other roles (n=2) such as Archivist and Technologist. Eight library leaders responded to the survey, indicating that their job title was either Library Director or Head Librarian. One Library Assistant also responded.



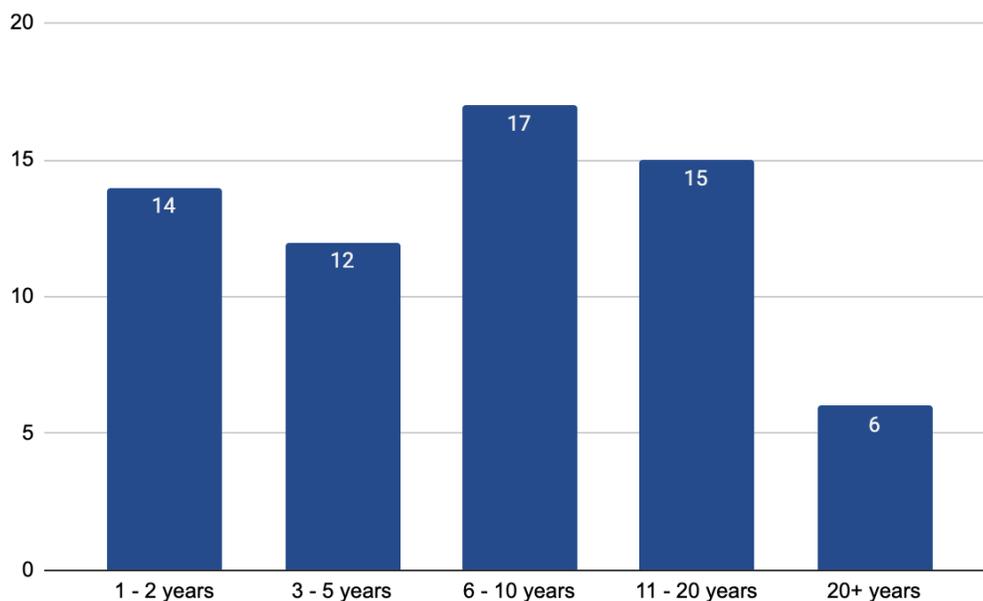
School Type

The largest group of respondents represented schools that serve students in Pre-K through 12th grade. The least represented school types were middle-only (typically grades 6-8) and lower-only (typically grades K-5).



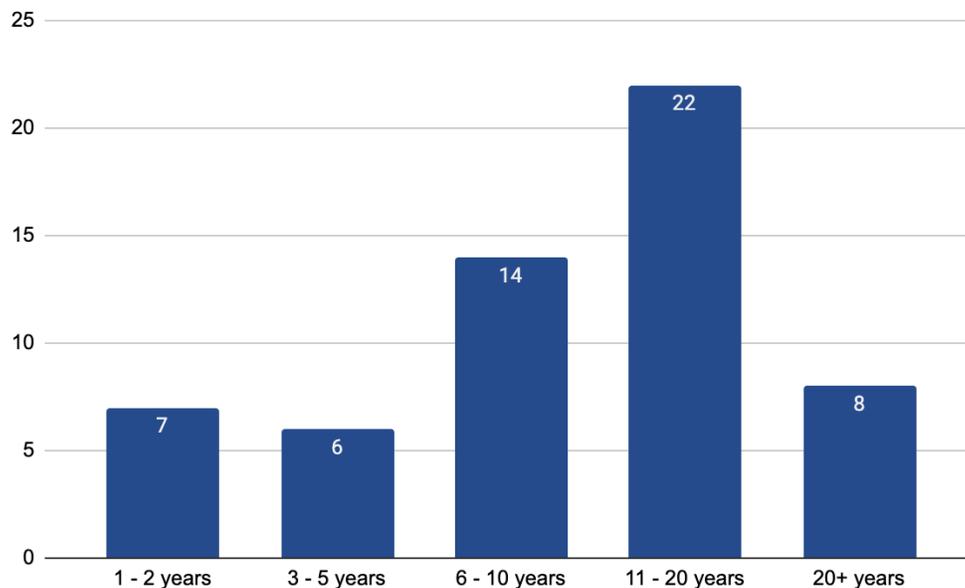
Years at Current School

Respondents reported the number of years served at their current school. Their service may or may not have been in a library role.



Years of Library Experience

Respondents reported the number of years served in a library role. This service may or may not have been at their current school.



Responsibilities Beyond the Library

The most common responsibilities reported were teaching (n=19); club and/or class sponsorship (n=12); student advising (n=12); and after school duties (n=14), such as car rider duty and dormitory monitoring. Numerical order represents the frequency of response.

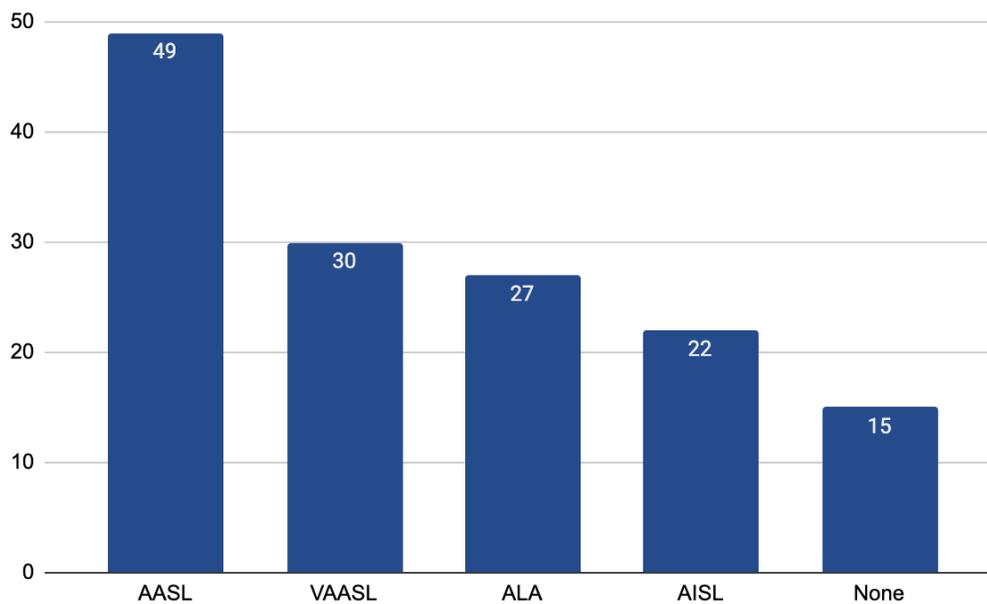
1. Instruction (Technology, Research, Electives, and Core Subjects)
2. After School Duties (Car Rider, Dorm)
3. Student Advisor
4. Club/Class Sponsor
5. IT Support
6. Committee Member
7. Athletic Coach
8. Program Coordinator
9. Administrative Duties
10. Archivist
11. In-School Duties (Lunch, Hall Monitor)
12. Classroom Substitute/Proctor
13. Bible Study
14. Department Chair
15. Tutor
16. Social Media
17. Yearbook
18. Curriculum Coordinator
19. Professional Development
20. School Garden
21. School Uniform Manager
22. Substitute Nurse

Library Association Memberships

Respondents were asked to indicate if they belong to the following associations:

- American Library Association (ALA)
- American Association of School Librarians (AASL)
- Association of Independent School Librarians (AISL)
- Virginia Association of School Librarians (VAASL)

More than two-thirds (65.6%) belong to at least one of these library associations, with AASL membership being the most common. Also of note, 25% of respondents were members of at least three of these library associations while 21.8% were not members of any of them.



Other Professional Association Memberships

More than one-third of respondents (n=22) reported membership in other relevant associations. The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) was the most popular association with nine members represented in the sample. Other associations with two or three members in the sample are highlighted in blue below.

- American Montessori Society (AMS)
- Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC)
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)
- Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)
- Catholic Librarians Association (CLA)
- Delta Kappa Gamma
- International Relations Round Table (IRRT)
- International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)
- Mid-Atlantic Regional Archive Conference (MARAC)
- National Association for Family and Community Education (FCE)

- National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE)
- National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)
- Northern Virginia Catholic Librarian Association
- Society of American Archivists (SAA)
- Virginia Association of Independent Schools (VAIS)
- Virginia Library Association (VLA)
- Virginia Society for Technology in Education (VSTE)
- Virginia State Literacy Association (VSLA)
- Virginia State Reading Association (VSRA)

VAASL Membership

Of the 37 (57.8%) respondents who responded that they are not currently members of VAASL, 16 have considered joining, 17 have been members in the past, two are not interested, and one had never heard of VAASL.

Of the 27 (42.1%) respondents who responded that they are currently members of VAASL, the majority indicated that they joined in order to attend conferences, network with fellow school librarians, and share ideas at events and via the listserv.

When asked if they would be interested in joining the Independent School Committee, 15.6% (n=10) of respondents indicated that they would be interested, 23.4% (n=15) indicated that they might be interested, and 1.5% (n=5) indicated that they would not be interested.

Independent School Librarian Concerns

Funding was the most common concern reported by respondents. Having enough money for print and electronic resources as well as adequate staffing were mentioned by nearly one third (n=21) of respondents overall. Independent school librarians worry that their school administrators and board members are not aware of their role in their school, nor do they fully understand the value that librarians, as information professionals, are capable of bringing to the school community. Several respondents (n=18) expressed the need for **advocacy** efforts and greater job security. The issue of job security and administrator understanding extended to staffing concerns. More than a quarter (n=17) of respondents expressed concerns related to **understaffing** and excessive responsibilities outside the library.

Collection management emerged as another common concern among respondents. More than 20% of respondents mentioned challenges related to rising book costs, maintaining and refreshing their collections, providing access to electronic resources, and effective weeding practices. **Diversity, equity and inclusion** was a related issue. Respondents (n=8) expressed the desire to infuse their collections with more diverse authors and texts while also championing this valuable work in their school communities.

A small but notable number of respondents (n=7) expressed feelings of **isolation** at their schools. For some of these librarians, efforts to forge **collaborations** with teachers prove difficult due to time constraints or school dynamics. Issues related to increasing **technology expectations** and **diminishing space** also emerged. Amid related concerns of **teaching digital citizenship and information literacy**, respondents indicated that they struggle to encourage **library usage and inspire readership**, especially among upper-level (high school) students.

Supporting Independent School Librarians

When asked what support, resources, and information from a professional association would be the most beneficial, respondents were eager to share a variety of ways to engage with them. **Connection, communication, and idea-sharing** were high priorities. From budgets and branding to information literacy and gamifying lessons, respondents want to know how other independent school libraries are managed. They would like to hear from their professional peers and share ideas about new books, resources, and instructional approaches.

Respondents suggested **listservs**, networking events, discussion boards, Zoom meetings, traveling review panels, and informal gatherings as ways to share information and ideas. Additional suggestions include a **mentorship** program, a repository of **sample policies and resources**, **professional development** opportunities, and the development of a **purchasing consortium**.

Discussion

The Virginia Independent School Librarian Survey provides valuable insight into the population of librarians serving Virginia's private schools. As expected, responses reflect the high density of independent schools near cities in Northern, Central, and Southeastern Virginia. An unexpected finding is that a large number of respondents serve in schools that span PreK through 12th grade. This particular group of librarians must address a wider range of reading levels and interests; accommodate different groups in their library spaces; and provide relevant instruction at every learning level.

The survey revealed that Virginia independent school librarians are highly experienced, with more than half of them reporting double-digit years of service at their school and in other library environments. Perhaps due to their experience, respondents are tasked with a broad range of responsibilities beyond the traditional librarian role. While it is common for independent school faculty and staff to "wear many hats," the perspective of being pulled in many directions was significant.

Membership in professional associations is common among Virginia independent school librarians; an impressive 82.8% are members of at least one professional association. While less than half reported being members of VAASL, the likelihood of independent school librarians to join a professional association shows that VAASL could do more to engage this population.

Independent school librarians face the same challenges as public school librarians. They contend with lack of understanding from administrators about their role and value in the school. They worry about funding and the rising costs of books and electronic resources. They struggle to do more with less amid budget cuts and the loss of support positions. What sets this group apart from their public school counterparts is isolation. Independent school librarians typically work alone in their schools and sometimes in their region. They do not have county or district connections to turn to for support or resources. For this reason, it is important for this population to have ways to connect. Moving forward, the VAASL Independent School Committee should work to address the challenges posed by isolation and find ways to support independent school librarians statewide.