

# Programs for School-Age Youth in Public Libraries:

Report of a survey conducted  
for the DeWitt Wallace – Reader’s Digest Fund

American Library Association  
Chicago Illinois

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Office for Research and Statistics  
American Library Association

In partnership with  
Library Research Center  
School of Library and Information Science  
University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana

American Library Association  
Chicago Illinois 1999

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## Executive Summary

The DeWitt Wallace Reader's Digest Fund recently approved a long-term investment to increase the availability of high-quality programs for school-age youth in public libraries, especially in low-income communities, and to build the capacity of the public libraries to support and sustain these programs. As a first step in this investment the Fund asked ALA to collect and disseminate information about current public library programs for youth. In early February 1998, questionnaires were mailed to 1,500 public libraries in the United States. All 461 public libraries serving populations of 100,000 or more received the questionnaire. Libraries serving from 5,000 to 100,000 were sampled if they met certain criteria regarding staff, hours open, and annual operating expenditures. By May 18, 1,256 libraries had returned surveys (83%) and 1,248 of them reported offering programs for school-age youth. This report summarizes those 1,248 responses.

1. The questionnaire listed six **common types of programs** and asked if the library provided them. The programs are listed below in order of popularity.
  - 99.6% provided reading programs. For example: a librarian leads youth in discussion on preselected books, a librarian or invited guest tells stories to youth, library staff prepare lists of books for summer reading and/or provide prizes for youth who read a specific number of books.
  - 82.6% provided cultural programs. For example: authors of books are invited to talk about their work or read from it, local or national musical or dramatic groups are invited to present their work, librarian or other expert leads workshop on creative writing.
  - 42.2% provided community service/leadership programs. For example: youth join the "Junior Friends," a group modeled on the adult Friends of Libraries groups that provide financial and moral support for public libraries, youth tutor younger students in the library, youth volunteer to do tasks around the library.
  - 33.2% provided computer classes/workshops. For example: librarians or other local experts teach youth how to use the Internet, how to design and construct Web pages, how to use specific software packages.
  - 23.4% provided homework assistance. For example: library sets aside space where youth can work in private and provides basic reference books for their use, library offers a special telephone "hotline" youth can call to get answers, library staff organize a tutoring program using volunteer tutors (adults or older youth).
  - 19.2% provided career development programs. For example: library provides extensive information about careers, library staff organize or sponsor a "career fair" where youth can get information about many careers from people already

working in them, library invites representatives of different occupational groups to demonstrate or talk about what they do.

Respondents providing each of the six types of programs were asked the same set of eight questions about each of the six types. Responses are summarized in the next seven points (numbers 2-8).

2. The questionnaire defined outlets as “main library, branches, bookmobiles.” The percentage of **outlets involved** varied by type of program but libraries with more than one outlet always involved more than one (e.g., the main library plus one or more branches, several branches but not the main library, the main library plus several branches and several bookmobiles).
3. Paid library staff usually took **responsibility for planning and implementing programs**. The six other categories given as choices on the questionnaire (paid school district staff, paid community-based organization staff, parents/caregivers, school-age youth, Friends of Libraries, other volunteers) were selected much less often. “Other volunteers” was the most frequently selected of these other six.
4. The **roles school-age youth play in planning and implementing programs** varied by type of program but was not a major factor for most types of programs. In only two cases was the most frequently chosen category something other than “none of the above.” For reading programs, the category chosen most often was “set up or clean up” and for community service/leadership programs the most frequent choice was “recruit youth to participate” with “set up or clean up” as close second.
5. **School levels targeted** varied by type of program. Elementary school children are the primary target for reading programs (90.7%), cultural programs (82.6%), and homework assistance (80.7%). Middle school youth are the primary target for computer classes/workshops (72.6%) and community service/leadership programs (82.6%) and high school youth are the primary target for career development programs (81.9%).
6. The **scheduling of programs** follows two common patterns. For reading programs, homework assistance, and community service/leadership the most common schedule is “once a week or more.” For computer classes/workshops, career development programs, and cultural programs the most common schedule is “2-11 times a year.”
7. Most libraries did not **design programs for the six specific groups** of special interest to the DeWitt Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund (recent immigrants, English is not the primary language at home, low income communities, rural youth, institutionalized youth, youth with disabilities). The most frequently chosen target was “low income communities.”

8. Most **programs of all six types were held** in the public library. Reading programs, career development programs, and cultural programs were occasionally held in schools or in community-based organizations.
9. The majority of respondents **expected to serve** more youth next year for four of the six types of programs: reading programs, computer classes/workshops, homework assistance, and cultural programs. Very few respondents expected to serve fewer youth for any of the six program types.
10. Each respondent was asked to describe a program “that you are proud of” and select three main objectives of that program from a list of fourteen. The top two objectives selected were: “Promote reading for pleasure” (64.7%) and “Help youth become better users of the library” (45.9%). All other categories were selected less than 25% of the time.
11. Public libraries collaborated most often with schools (70.8%), community-based organizations (56.3%) and park districts or recreation centers (37.5%).
12. Financial support for programming was most often provided by local library budget (92.5%), by Friends of the Library (73.5%), and by state funds (43.4%).
13. In-kind support (e.g., supplies, space, expertise) was most often provided by schools (27.7%), and by corporations/businesses (25.9%).
14. Respondent’s estimate of the level of commitment to programs for school-age youth was highest among respondents themselves, with an average rating of 4.56 on a five point scale. Others with a high commitment level were library administrators (4.29), library staff (4.09), and library boards (4.07).
15. Training or staff development specifically related to youth work was provided by 62.7% of respondents. This was most often provided in the form of “reimbursement for travel to meetings” (87.7%).
16. Of the ten possible strategies for increasing community awareness of youth programs, the one most often rated highly effective was “word of mouth” which received an average rating of 3.99 on a five point scale. Community newspaper was next with a score of 3.72, followed by flyers/brochures at 3.65.

## Introduction

This report presents findings from a national survey commissioned by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund as part of a new initiative to help public libraries provide educational and career-development programming for low-income youth during the hours they are not in school. To conduct the survey, the Fund awarded a grant to the American Library Association (ALA) to work in partnership with the Library Research Center, at the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science. This is the first survey of its kind to collect—from a nationwide sample of public libraries—information on the types and kinds of programs offered to school-age youth, the populations served and the level of commitment for this programming. The Fund used the survey findings to examine current practices in serving youth and to determine steps that could be taken to improve those practices so more young people can be better served.

Two publications were very useful in providing an information base for this project. In August 1995, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) published a statistical analysis report entitled *Services and Resources for Children and Young Adults in Public Libraries* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, 1995). This report summarized results of two national sample surveys conducted in 1994—one on services for children in public libraries and one on services for young adults in public libraries. The questionnaire on services for children listed fourteen “services” and asked about their availability and the extent to which they were used, when available. Two widely available and well-used services for children fell into the area of programming: summer reading programs (in 95% of public libraries) and story hours (in 90%). Two other programming services for children are less widely available but are well used where they are available: after school and weekend programs (available in 48% of public libraries) and homework assistance (in 15%). The questionnaire on services for young adults listed fifteen “services” and asked about both availability and usage. For young adults, only 57% of public libraries provide summer reading programs but those are well used. Three additional programming services for young adults listed in this report are not widely available but are well used when available: presentations and workshops on topics of interest to teens (available in 33% of public libraries), homework assistance (available in 12%), and young adult book/film discussion groups (available in 12%).

Another publication that proved useful was *Excellence in Library Services to Young Adults* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1994). This work was edited by Mary K. Chelton on behalf of the American Library Association President's Committee for Customer Service to Youth. It contained short profiles of libraries that go beyond “answering reference questions and circulating books for schoolwork and personal pleasure,” to provide programs that enhance the lives of adolescents.

To design a questionnaire for this project, we used the publications just described plus advice from a panel of distinguished librarians and representatives of other organizations interested in positive youth development. Names and affiliations of the Advisory Committee members appear in Appendix C. On the same list we show several consultants who worked on the project and the ALA Staff Project Team. ALA contracted with the Library Research Center (LRC) of the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science to assist in the survey process. LRC staff selected the sample, managed the mailings, and produced printouts for use in the report.

Key project staff at ALA included Project Director Mary Jo Lynch, Director, Office for Research and Statistics, and staff consultants Susan Roman, Executive Director, Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) and Linda Waddle, Deputy Director, Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA).

Key project staff at DW-RD included Catherine Pino, Program Associate, Pamela Stevens, Program Officer, and Tom Brock, Evaluation Officer.

### **Sample Design and Survey Methodology**

The sample was based on the universe file created by the Federal State Cooperative System (FSCS) which is used to create the annual report on *Public Libraries in the United States* published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Using the 1994 universe file, questionnaires were sent to all 461 public libraries serving populations of 100,000 or more. In addition, surveys were sent to a random sample of libraries serving between 5,000 and 100,000 that met the following criteria:

- at least one MLS librarian (i.e., has a master's degree from a program in library and information studies accredited by ALA).
- at least two paid full time staff.
- open at least 40 hours per week.
- operating expenditures of at least \$100,000 a year.

The ALA staff team believed that public libraries that do not meet those criteria are unlikely to be able to conduct substantive educational and career development programs for school-age youth. Because almost all public libraries serving fewer than 5,000 failed to meet the criteria, none of those libraries are in the sample.

The initial mailing of 1,500 questionnaires was done the week of February 9-13, 1998. In early March, reminders were sent to nonrespondents and then sent again in early April. By May 18 responses had been received from 1,256 libraries (83%) and the file was closed. For additional details on the survey methodology, see Appendix B.

# Results

## Characteristics of Respondents

The five tables in this section describe the respondents to this survey using data reported to NCES for use in *Public Libraries in the United States, 1994*. Table 1 displays those respondents in terms of the size of population served, Table 2 in terms of location, Table 3 in terms of number of staff (full time equivalent), Table 4 by size of operating expenditures and Table 5 by operating expenditures per capita.

**Table 1**  
Respondents by population served

Population	Number	Percentage
5,000-9,999	107	9.1
10,000-24,999	321	27.5
25,000-49,999	246	19.8
50,000-99,999	179	13.5
100,000 or more	375	30.1

**Table 2**  
Respondents by region

Region	Number	Percentage
North Atlantic	368	29.3
Great Lakes and Plains	400	31.9
Southeast	244	19.4
West and Southwest	243	19.4

**Table 3**  
Respondents by number of paid full time equivalent (FTE) staff

FTE staff	Number	Percentage
2-4.99	75	6.0
5-9.99	256	20.4
10-24.99	395	31.4
25-49.99	214	17.0
50-99.99	162	12.9
100 or more	153	12.3

**Table 4**  
Respondents by total operating expenditures

Total operating expenditures	Number	Percentage
\$100,000-\$199,999	128	10.2
\$200,000-\$399,999	228	18.2
\$400,000-\$699,999	237	18.9
\$700,000-\$999,999	124	9.9
\$1,000,000-\$4,999,999	397	31.6
\$5,000,000 or more	141	11.2

**Table 5**  
**Respondents by total operating expenditures per capita**

Total operating expenditure per capita	Number	Percentage
\$3-\$8.99	127	10.1
\$9-\$11.99	128	10.2
\$12-\$14.99	156	12.4
\$15-\$19.99	225	17.9
\$20-\$29.99	313	25.0
\$30 or more	306	24.4

### Common types of programs

**Frequency of each type.** The questionnaire listed six common types of programs and asked if the respondent’s library provides them. Only eight respondents did not provide programs. Percentages shown below are for the 1,248 respondents who offered any programs for school-age youth:

- 99.6% provide reading programs  
(e.g., book discussions, story telling, summer reading)
- 82.6% provide cultural programs  
(e.g., author presentations/readings, musical or dramatic performances, creative writing workshops)
- 42.2% provide community service/leadership programs  
(e.g., Junior Friends, tutoring, volunteering)
- 33.2% provide computer classes/workshops  
(e.g., introduction to Internet, Web page design, software-specific instruction)
- 23.4% provide homework assistance  
(e.g., a center, a hotline, tutoring)
- 19.2% provide career development programs  
(e.g., information center, career fair, vocational demonstrations)

Respondents were asked the same eight questions about each type of program. The rest of this section summarizes answers to those eight questions.

**Outlets involved.** For each type of program, we asked “How many outlets (main library, branches, bookmobiles) are involved in these programs?” Results from this question were cross tabulated with results from Question 2 in the “Background” section of the questionnaire which asked “How many outlets (main, branches, bookmobiles) does the library have?” to produce the six tables which follow. For each table, the rows indicate seven ranges of outlets maintained by the library. The columns indicate, for those same seven ranges, the number of outlets participating in a particular type of program. For example, the fifth row on Table 6 shows that for libraries with 7 to 10 outlets, 1.9% have reading programs in 3 to 4 outlets, 12.1% have reading programs in 5 to 6 outlets and 86.0% have reading programs in all outlets.

In observing these tables it is important to note that 47% of the responses to this survey were from libraries that had only one outlet. Libraries with more than one outlet always involve more than one outlet in programming, but the percentages of outlets involved varies by type of program. Observation of the top figure in each column of Tables 7-11 shows what percentage of libraries with a particular number of outlets offer a particular type of program in all of their outlets. Proceeding from the far left column (number of outlets) and reading across each row enables the observer to summarize outlet participation for a type of program. For example, Table 6 shows that for those libraries that have 5 to 6 outlets, 18% hold reading programs in 3 to 4 outlets and 82% hold reading programs in *all* outlets. Note that 82% is the lowest percent at the top of a column on Table 6. The percentage of *all* outlet participation is usually higher. Similarly, Table 7 shows that at least 38.5% offer cultural programming in *all* outlets and percentages for this are usually higher as well.

**Table 6**  
Percent of outlets that provide reading programs

Number of outlets	Number of outlets with reading programs						
	1	2	3-4	5-6	7-10	11-20	>20
1	100.0						
2	10.7	89.3					
3-4	1.5	6.0	92.5				
5-6			18.0	<b>82.0</b>			
7-10			1.9	12.1	86.0		
11-20				2.0	4.1	93.9	
>20						7.7	92.3

**Table 7**  
Percent of outlets that provide cultural programs

Number of outlets	Number of outlets with cultural programs						
	1	2	3-4	5-6	7-10	11-20	>20
1	100.0						
2	37.4	62.6					
3-4	27.1	16.7	56.3				
5-6	13.8	13.8	33.8	<b>38.5</b>			
7-10	6.7	6.7	16.0	18.7	52.0		
11-20	5.4	4.3	7.6	4.3	13.0	65.2	
>20	--	2.1	--	--	--	10.6	87.2

**Table 8**

Percent of outlets that provide community service/leadership programs

Number of outlets	Number of outlets with community service/leadership programs						
	1	2	3-4	5-6	7-10	11-20	>20
1	100.0						
2	58.1	41.9					
3-4	41.1	17.9	41.1				
5-6	20.0	13.3	23.3	43.3			
7-10	19.0	4.8	26.2	14.3	<b>35.7</b>		
11-20	10.9	1.8	5.5	16.4	18.2	47.3	
>20	3.1	6.3	12.5	--	9.4	12.5	56.3

**Table 9**

Percent of outlets that provide computer classes

Number of outlets	Number of outlets with computer classes						
	1	2	3-4	5-6	7-10	11-20	>20
1	100.0						
2	66.7	33.3					
3-4	57.8	13.3	28.9				
5-6	44.4	11.1	27.8	<b>16.7</b>			
7-10	28.2	7.7	17.9	15.4	30.8		
11-20	20.0	12.7	21.8	12.7	5.5	27.3	
>20	3.3	3.3	6.7	6.7	13.3	26.7	40.0

**Table 10**

Percent of outlets that provide homework assistance

Number of outlets	Number of outlets providing homework assistance						
	1	2	3-4	5-6	7-10	11-20	>20
1	100.0						
2	64.0	36.0					
3-4	70.0	13.3	<b>16.7</b>				
5-6	52.9	11.8	17.6	17.6			
7-10	28.6	3.6	28.6	--	39.3		
11-20	22.2	6.7	22.2	8.9	11.1	28.9	
>20	20.0	11.4	8.6	5.7	11.4	20.0	22.9

**Table 11**

Percent of outlets that provide career programs

Number of outlets	Number of outlets with career programs						
	1	2	3-4	5-6	7-10	11-20	>20
1	100.0						
2	66.7	33.3					
3-4	53.8	26.9	19.2				
5-6	57.1	--	--	42.9			
7-10	52.2	13.0	13.0	17.4	<b>4.3</b>		
11-20	35.7	3.6	17.9	7.1	7.1	28.6	
>20	28.6	7.1	7.1	10.7	10.7	10.7	25.0

**Responsibility for planning and implementing programs.** For all six types of programs, we asked: “Who is responsible for planning and implementing [this program]?” The following eight choices were listed and the respondent was asked to “circle all that apply”:

- Paid library staff
- Paid school district staff
- Paid community-based organization staff
- Parents/caregivers
- School-age youth
- Friends of Libraries
- Other volunteers
- Other (specify)

Table A-1 in Appendix A shows that for all of the common types of programs except homework assistance, over 95 of the respondents indicated that paid library staff were responsible for planning and implementing. For homework assistance programs only 80% indicated that paid library staff were responsible for planning and implementing programs, 12.8% chose paid community-based organization staff, and 13.1% chose school-age youth. In both cases these two groups were chosen by a higher percentage of respondents than chose these two for any of the other five types of programs. For all program types except cultural programs and community service/leadership programs, the second highest choice was “other volunteers,” i.e., volunteers who were not in the three previous categories: parents/caregivers, school-age youth, or Friends of Libraries. For cultural programs “other volunteers” was chosen by 18.5% of the respondents whereas Friends of Libraries was chosen by 18.8% of respondents. For community service/leadership programs, school-age youth was the second highest, chosen by 11.6%.

**Roles played by school-age youth.** The questionnaire asked about this topic in two ways. Question 6 in the Background section of this questionnaire asked: “Do you have one or more Youth Advisory Boards?” Overall only 13.3% of respondents indicated yes and Table 12 shows the percentage of respondents that have youth advisory boards in each of five ranges of population served. Table 12 shows that such boards are more likely in libraries serving 100,000 or more (20.6%) than in libraries that serve smaller populations.

**Table 12**  
Youth Advisory Boards

Population served	Do you have a youth advisory board	
	Yes	No
5,000-9,999	8.0	92.0
10,000-24,999	6.7	93.3
25,000-49,999	12.0	88.0
50,000-99,999	16.1	83.9
100,000 or more	20.6	79.4

For each of the six common programming types we asked: “What roles do school-age youth play in planning and implementing homework assistance programs?” and listed the eight choices given below:

- Make recommendations on program content or structure
- Publicize the program
- Recruit youth to participate in the program
- Lead, facilitate, or present the program
- Help set up or clean up after the program
- Evaluate the program
- None of the above
- Other (specify)

Table A-2 in Appendix A shows that for four of the six program types, the highest percentage of respondents chose “none of the above.” For reading programs, the category chosen most often was “set up or clean up” and for community service/leadership programs the most frequent choice was “recruit youth to participate” with “set up or clean up” as close second. Looking at Table B from the perspective of the six roles, it is clear that school-age youth are most likely to play any or all of the roles in community service/leadership programs. The most popular role across all six types of programs is “recommendations on content or structure,” reported by from 22.4% (homework assistance) to 41.3% (community service/leadership) of respondents. Next in popularity is “evaluate,” reported by from 17.6% (homework assistance) to 33.6% (community service/leadership) of respondents.

***School levels targeted.*** For each type of program we asked the respondent to “Please indicate the school levels you target by circling all that apply.” Table A-3 shows that most programs have a clear grade level target. Reading programs are most likely aimed at elementary school youth (90.7%) with middle school youth as a secondary target (72.2%). Computer classes/workshops are directed toward both middle school youth (72.6%) and elementary school youth (70.1%). Homework assistance shows a similar pattern with 80.7% of respondents targeting elementary school youth and 75.5% targeting middle school youth. Career development programs and services are quite different, with 81.9% targeted at high school youth and only 50.2% at middle school youth. Community service/leadership programs are more likely to target middle school youth (82.6%) with high school youth as a secondary target (70.5%). Most cultural programs (82.6%) target elementary school youth. Looking at Table A-3 from the perspective of each age group, it seems clear that elementary school youth are the primary target for reading programs (90.7%), cultural programs (82.6%), and homework assistance (80.7%). Middle school youth are the primary target for computer classes/workshops (72.6%) and community service/leadership programs (82.6%) and High school youth are the primary target for career development programs (81.9%).

**Most common schedule.** For each program type we asked, “In general, what is the most common schedule for programs in all outlets?” The respondent was asked to choose one from among the following categories:

- Once a week or more
- 2-3 times/month
- Once a month
- 2-11 times/year
- Once a year series
- Once a year event
- Too many programs or outlets to generalize
- Other

Table A-4 shows two common patterns. For reading programs, homework assistance, and community service/leadership the most common schedule is “once a week or more.” For computer classes/workshops, career development programs, and cultural programs the most common schedule is “2-11 times a year.” Since over 20% of respondents offering homework assistance checked “other,” we examined what was given after the request to “specify.” Of the 57 cases giving specifics, over 30 implied that help was given “as needed” or “daily.”

**Specific groups targeted.** For all six program types we asked, “Does the library offer programs specifically designed for any or all of the following groups of youth?” The question then listed six specific groups that are of special interest to the DeWitt Wallace Reader’s Digest Fund:

- Recent immigrants
- English is not the primary language at home
- Low income communities
- Rural youth
- Institutionalized youth
- Youth with disabilities

Table A-5 shows that by far the most common answer was, “None of the above.” The group that received the second highest percentage of responses for all six types of programs was, “Low income communities.” Respondents designing programs for this group ranged from a high of 24.5% for homework assistance to a low of 7.5% for community service/leadership. Two of the possible target groups, “institutionalized youth” and “youth with disabilities,” were targeted less than 10% of the time by all six types of programs and three groups were sometimes a target by slightly more than 10%. The “English is not the primary language at home” group was a target more than 19% of the time by three types of programs: reading programs (11.5%), homework assistance (19.0%), and career development programs and services (10.1%). The “recent immigrants” group was targeted by 10.3% of homework assistance programs and the “rural youth” group by 13.0% of reading programs.

***Where programs are held.*** For all six common program types we asked, “Where are the [programs] held?” and gave the respondents the following five categories:

- In public library outlets
- In schools
- In community-based organizations
- Online
- In other settings

Table A-6 shows that five of the six types of programs are held in the public library over 92% of the time. The exception to this pattern is career development programs and services which are held in the public library by only 75.5% of respondents. Schools were the second highest percentage for both reading programs (26.6%) and for career development programs and services (21.5%). Community based organizations were chosen by the third highest percentage for those two program types, chosen by 21.2% of respondents for reading programs and 13.9% for career development programs. Cultural programs are in community based organizations for 12.4% of the respondents and in school for 10.9%.

***Future expectations on number served.*** For all program types, the last question asked the respondents, “Looking ahead to next year, do you expect that the library’s [programs] will serve...” and gave four choices:

- More youth than are being served this year
- About the same number of youth
- Fewer youth
- No youth (e.g., because the program is being discontinued)

Table A-7 shows that most respondents expected to serve more youth for four of the six types of programs: reading programs, computer classes/workshops, homework assistance, and cultural programs. The greatest growth was expected for computer classes and workshops with over 70% expecting to serve more youth. For the career development and community service programs most respondents expected to serve about the same number of youth. Very few respondents chose either of the last two categories for any of the six program types.

## **Program Profiles**

Question 15 directed the respondent to “[Look] at all of the programs your library provides to school-age youth, select one that you are proud of and tell us about it.” Then the respondent was asked, “In 25 words or less: what makes you proud of this service or program?” Answers to these two questions were considered together in a content analysis that did two things:

1. Classified the program by type. We began with the six types used throughout the survey and added two programming categories: Science and Other Topics. Also, because so many of the programs described were reading programs, we divided them into subcategories shown on Table 13.
2. Classified the program by the reason given for what makes the respondent proud.

Results of the first analysis are shown on Table 13. Of the 1,248 respondents who offer programs for school-age youth, 1,107 (88.7%) provided a usable answer to Question 15. (The others gave an incomplete answer or described a program for preschoolers.) Table 13 shows that most of the programs respondents were proud of were reading programs, either summer reading (44.1%), year round reading (15.5%) or a single special event (2.8%). After reading, the profiled programs fell into the following categories in order by popularity: cultural, community service/leadership, homework assistance, computer classes, science (a category added during coding), and career development.

**Table 13**  
Program profiles by category

Type of program	Number	Percentage
Reading		
a. Summer	488	44.1
b. Year-round	172	15.5
c. Other	31	2.8
Cultural	86	7.8
Community Service/ Leadership	74	6.7
Homework Assistance	31	2.8
Computer Classes	19	1.7
Science	18	1.6
Career Development	5	0.5
Other topics	183	16.5

Reasons why respondents are proud of a profiled program are shown on Table 14. Fourteen categories come from a question asked of all profiled programs: “What are the three main objectives of this service or program?” Seven other categories (marked with an asterisk on Table 14) were developed by staff at DW-RD and ALA. Question 15 was not entirely successful in eliciting “reasons for pride” from respondents. Many used most or all of their “25 words or less” describing the program itself rather than responding to “what makes you proud?” Some respondents did state those reasons clearly and coders were able to deduce the reasons in many other cases, though not in all. Of the 1,107 respondents who provided a program profile some gave no reason for pride, some gave only one, and some gave two. (No more than two were allowed). A total of 1,320 reasons for pride were coded and results are shown on Table 14 arranged in order by the frequency of occurrence. “High participation levels/enthusiasm” was the most frequently mentioned reason for pride (23.7%) followed by “promotes reading for pleasure,” (12.9%). Not shown on Table 14 are the following reasons for pride, which were fewer than one percent of the 1,320 reasons: provides a “safe space” for youth to come after school or on weekends, builds computer skills, increases awareness of future career or

academic opportunities, increases awareness of youth’s own communities, history, or culture, builds vocational skills. In addition, 3% gave an “other” reason that did not fit into the fourteen categories.

**Table 14**  
Reasons for pride in profiled programs

Reason for pride	Number	Percentage
High participation levels/enthusiasm*	313	23.7
Promotes reading for pleasure	170	12.9
Outreach—reaches people who have not used the library before*	100	7.6
Involves parents and families*	85	6.4
Fosters good collaboration between libraries, school, and other organizations*	83	6.3
Helps youth become better users of the library or other community resources	76	5.8
Psychological benefits to children (e.g., self confidence, interaction, pride in accomplishment)*	77	5.8
Engages youth in helping others in their community	63	4.8
Encourages creative expression	53	4.0
Especially creative or unusual*	53	4.0
Builds academic skills	45	3.4
Displays positive aspects of library (e.g., staff team work)*	41	3.1
Exposes youth to new ideas and ways of thinking	28	2.1
Increases awareness of other peoples’ communities, history, or culture	22	1.7
Provides positive opportunities for youth to come together and socialize	18	1.4
Helps youth do better in school	15	1.1

\* Additional categories developed during analysis.

***Length of time in operation.*** Regarding profiled programs, the respondent was asked: “How long has [the program] been operating?” and given six choices. Results are shown on Table 15 which shows that respondents chose as their favorite programs those that had been operating for a long time.

**Table 15**

## Length of time in operation

Possible operating time	Percent
Less than one year	9.9
1-2 years	13.9
3-5 years	18.2
6-10 years	16.1
11-20 years	20.4
More than 20 years	21.5

**Number targeted and number participating.** In order to find out how many youth were targeted as a potential audience for programs and how many actually participated, we asked respondents to report both the number targeted and the number of actual participants in the profiled program. Respondents from 950 public libraries provided both figures. Eight ranges were created from this data as shown on Table 16. Respondents with program targets in these eight ranges were cross tabulated with respondents reporting actual participation. The resulting grid (Table 16) reveals that libraries often met their targets and sometimes exceeded them. For example, the second line shows that of the libraries targeting 51-100 participants, 30.9% get less than 50 participants, 54.3% get 51-100, 13.8% get 101-200 and 1.1% get 201-500. Cells in bold on Table 18 indicate percentage of cases where number targeted and number of actual participants intersect. The lowest percentage of such intersections is 44.5% for the target of 2,001-10,000. All other figures in bold are higher. Observation of cells to the right of the cell in bold indicates that targets were sometimes exceeded, but never by a very high percentage of respondents. Observation of numbers to the left of the bold figure indicates that the number of participants was often less than the target but usually by a relatively small percentage of respondents.

**Table 16**

## Percent of respondents that met numerical targets for participation

Number targeted in last year	Actual participants in last year							
	<50	51-100	101-200	201-500	501-1,000	1,001-2,000	2,001-10,000	>10,000
<50	<b>88.5</b>	9.1	1.8	0.6				
51-100	30.9	<b>54.3</b>	13.8	1.1				
101-200	12.5	20.0	<b>56.3</b>	11.3				
201-500	2.6	7.2	15.8	<b>65.8</b>	8.6			
501-1,000	4.4	2.2	3.0	25.2	<b>50.4</b>	12.6	2.2	
1,001-2,000	1.7	1.7	3.5	9.6	27.0	<b>46.1</b>	10.4	
2,001-10,000	1.4		4.8	8.9	17.1	19.2	<b>44.5</b>	4.1
>10,000					1.6	3.2	38.1	<b>57.1</b>

**Main objectives.** The third question asked only of the profiled programs was this: “What are the three main objectives of this service or program?” The respondent was directed to “circle no more than three” from the fifteen categories shown on Table 17. The categories are listed here in rank order by the percentage of times each was chosen:

**Table 17**

Main objectives of profiled program.

Possible objectives	Percentage
To promote reading for pleasure	64.7
To help youth become better users of the library or other community resources	45.8
To encourage creative expression	24.1
To build academic skills (reading, writing, science, math)	22.7
To provide positive opportunities for youth to come together and socialize	22.2
To help youth do better in school	21.2
To expose youth to new ideas and ways of thinking	20.5
To increase awareness of youths own communities, history, or culture	9.3
To increase awareness of other peoples communities, history, or culture	8.7
To engage youth in helping others in their community	8.3
Other	8.2
To provide a “safe space” for youth to come after school or on weekends	4.3
To build computer skills	3.3
To increase awareness of future career or academic opportunities	3.0
To build vocational skills	1.2

**Infrastructure for programming**

**Collaborators and partners.** Question 16 asked, “During the last twelve months, which outside agencies collaborated or partnered with your library in providing programs to school-age youth?” The eight possible responses are shown on Table 18 in order by the percentage of respondents selecting each one. Schools are the most frequent partners followed by community based organizations and park districts or recreation centers. Because the category of “other” was chosen by such a high percentage of respondents (19.3%), we examined what respondents wrote after the direction to “specify.” The 218 agencies mentioned included a wide variety of types. In 69 cases, the partner specified was a business or corporation (over 30% of all agencies mentioned) and the note for some businesses indicated that the business named provided prizes. This indicates some overlap between Question 16 and Question 17 (financial or in-kind support). Another indicator is that eighteen of those who chose “other” in Question 16 specified that the

“other” was a Friends of the Library group—another one of those named in Question 17 as a possible provider of financial or in-kind support.

**Table 18**  
Outside agencies collaborating or partnering with the library in programming for school-age youth.

Outside agency	Percentage
Schools	70.8
Community based organizations	56.3
Park districts or recreation centers	37.5
Museums	19.6
Other	19.3
Social service agencies	17.1
Literacy centers	14.3
Low-income housing centers, housing projects	13.9
Religious institutions	8.2

**Sources of support.** Question 17 listed eleven possible sources of financial or in-kind support to programming for school-age youth and asked respondents to indicate which had helped the library in the last twelve months. The eleven possible sources of financial support are listed in Table 19, in order by the percentage of respondents selecting each one. The local library budget is clearly the most important source of funds (92.5%) indicating that these programs are a regular part of the library budget and not totally dependent on outside revenues. Friends of the Library groups are an important source, named by 73.5% of respondents.

**Table 19**  
Sources of financial support

Sources	Percentage
Local library budget	92.5
Friends of the library	73.5
State funds	43.4
Individual donors	38.9
Corporation/business	36.9
Local service/civic groups	30.8
Federal funds	18.8
Community or local foundation	18.8
Library foundation	13.9
School	7.6
National foundation	4.1
Other	3.3

The eight sources that might be expected to provide in-kind support (e.g., supplies, expertise, space) are listed in Table 20 in order by the percentage of respondents selecting each one. In contrast to Table 19, Table 20 indicates that in kind support is not available to a large percentage of respondents. Schools are the most likely source of in-kind

support (27.7%) followed closely by corporations/businesses (25.9%), individual donors (22.6%), and Friends of the Library (22.3%).

**Table 20**  
Sources of in-kind support

Sources	Percentage
School	27.7
Corporation/business	25.9
Individual donors	22.6
Friends of the library	22.3
Local service/civic groups	13.3
Community or local foundation	7.4
Other	3.4
Library foundation	1.6
National foundation	0.5

**Commitment by stakeholders.** Question 18 listed seven possible stakeholders in the library’s programs for school-age youth and asked the respondent to estimate the level of commitment to library programs by each and indicate it by circling one of the following numbers:

- 1—Not Committed
- 2—Limited Commitment
- 3—Modest Commitment
- 4—Strong Commitment
- 5—Total Commitment

Table A-8 in Appendix A shows, for each stakeholder group, the percentages of respondents indicating each level of commitment. Weighted average scores were computed as shown on Table 21 where the stakeholder groups are listed in order by weighted average score. Thus we know that the survey respondents (first row) estimated that they themselves had a commitment level of 4.56—midway between 4 (Strong Commitment) and 5 (Total Commitment). Next in line was library administration (4.29) followed by library staff (4.09) and library board (4.07). The three groups outside the library had the lowest scores but none of these groups fell below modest commitment (3).

**Table 21**  
Commitment by stakeholders.

Stakeholder	Commitment score*
Yourself (survey respondent)	4.56
Library administration	4.29
Library staff	4.09
Library board	4.07
Parents	3.77
Educators	3.39
Local government officials	3.06

\* Weighted average scores were computed for each stakeholder group by multiplying the value of each category by the number of times it was chosen and dividing by 5 (the number of categories).

**Training and staff development.** Question 20 asked: “During the past twelve months, has the library offered training or staff development specifically related to youth work to staff and/or volunteers?” The 62.7% of respondents who answered “yes” to this question were then asked to “Please indicate how your library provides training/staff development specifically related to youth work.” Responses are shown on Table 22 in order by the percentage of respondents choosing a category. Clearly the most common way libraries provide training or staff development related to youth work is to reimburse staff for travel to meetings (87.7%).

**Table 22**  
Libraries offering training or staff development programs.

Program	Percentage
Reimbursement for travel to meetings	87.7
Tuition reimbursement	42.7
Library developed class/course	38.6
Other	20.4

**Publicity.** Question 22 asked, “In your experience, please rate the effectiveness of each of the following strategies in increasing community awareness of your youth programs by circling the appropriate number.” Ten types of publicity were listed and the respondent was asked to rate the effectiveness of each by circling one of the following numbers.

- 1—Not effective
- 2—Somewhat effective
- 3—Moderately effective
- 4—Highly effective
- 5—Most effective

Table A-9 in Appendix A shows, for each type of publicity, the percentage of respondents who chose each level of effectiveness. Weighted average scores were computed as shown on Table 23 where strategies are listed in order by weighted average score. Thus we know that the most effective publicity is word of mouth (3.99) and community newspapers comes second (3.72).

**Table 23**  
Effectiveness of publicity strategies.

Strategy	Effectiveness score*
Word of mouth	3.99
Community newspaper	3.72
Flyers/brochures	3.65
Library newsletter	3.44
Paid advertising in any medium	3.41
TV	3.11
School newspaper	3.10
Radio	2.98
Youth-serving organization newsletter	2.92
Web page	2.73

\* Weighted average scores were computed for each stakeholder group by multiplying the value of each category by the number of times it was chosen and dividing by 5 (the number of categories).

## Advice

The last two questions (23 and 24) asked the respondent to “Please consider your library’s experience in planning and managing programs/activities for school-age youth. Then tell us three things libraries should AVOID (e.g., never start programs without informing all library staff) and three things libraries should (DO) (e.g., always consult with the community calendar).” After a preliminary review of answers to both questions, we decided to analyze first the answers to the second question. One reason for that decision is that more respondents answered Question 24. Also, we observed that answers to Question 23 were often the mirror image of answers to Question 24 and we preferred to focus on the positive. Most respondents answered the question and provided three statements of advice. Because some gave fewer than three, the total number of advice statements coded was 2,971. A set of twenty eight categories was created to classify the advice statements. Table 26 shows most of these categories in order by the number of times each was mentioned. Not shown are categories that constituted less than 1% of the 2,971 statements. In addition, 5% gave an “other” reason that did not fit into any of the categories.

Several observations about these categories may be helpful to the reader. The most frequently mentioned category, “Plan, prepare well,” was used for a number of different recommendations, including: plan far in advance, plan thoroughly, check speakers carefully, rehearse before a program, use a checklist. Statements grouped under the

second popular category, “Publicize, Promote, Advertise,” were much less diverse. Most of them simply urged the programmer to advertise early and/or often and/or in many formats. It should be noted that a few respondents disagreed with the majority on some of those “things to do.” Although most who mentioned “age appropriate” programming were in favor of carefully targeting programs to a specific age group, a few recommended programs that appeal to many age groups. Although most who mentioned food were in favor of it, a few thought it should be avoided. “Register participants” is another category where some disagreed, preferring that programs be open to all.

**Table 24**  
Advice for successful programming

Advice	Number of mentions	Percentage of mentions
Plan, prepare well	842	28.3
Publicize, promote, advertise	544	18.3
Keep staff informed	142	4.7
Age appropriate (be sure program is)	112	3.7
Find out what they want	110	3.7
Involve staff in planning	91	3.0
Involve schools	89	2.9
Check community calendar	81	2.7
Involve youth	73	2.4
Collaborate with other community organizations	69	2.3
Have enough staff	69	2.3
Attitude (be sure you and staff are positive)	55	1.8
Check school calendar	53	1.7
Evaluate	51	1.7
Fun (make the program fun)	51	1.7
Flexible (be that way)	50	1.6
Register participants	43	1.4
Relate programs to library mission, collections, goals	42	1.4
Involve adults (parents and teachers)	40	1.3
Experiment with different programs (drop if unsuccessful)	36	1.2
Variety of programs (have it)	36	1.2
Funding (make sure you have enough)	30	1.0

Question 23 asked the respondents “In your opinion, what are the three most important things to avoid?” For the most part, these responses (what to avoid) were the reverse answers to Question 24 (what to do). In order to check our preliminary observation that the answers to Question 23 (what to avoid) were the mirror image of answers to Question 24 (what to do), we selected a random sample of 125 cases (10%) using the same 28 categories as were used to code responses to Question 24 (Table 26). Because results of

coding this sample revealed a very similar pattern, we did not code all answers to Question 23 for presentation in this report.

## **Conclusion**

This study is the first to provide statistical data on the operation of education and career development programming for school-age youth in medium sized and large public libraries. It shows that, in the relatively well staffed and well funded libraries we surveyed (all had at least one MLS librarian, at least two paid full-time staff, and operating expenditures of at least \$100,000 a year), such programming is quite common for all grade levels and librarians are working with schools and with other nonprofit and for profit agencies in the community to provide programming. Enthusiasm for youth programming is evident in responses to the several open ended questions on this survey. DW-RD has an excellent opportunity to build on this capacity and thereby expand and enhance educational and career development programs for school-age youth in public libraries.

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## Additional Tables

**Table A-1**

Responsibility for planning and implementing programs (percent)

Responsible party	Reading programs	Computer classes/ workshops	Homework assistance	Career development programs and services	Community service/ leadership	Cultural Programs
Paid library staff	97.7	97.3	80.0	95.4	97.3	98.3
Paid school district staff	3.0	1.9	10.0	8.4	6.4	4.0
Paid community-based organization staff	3.0	3.6	12.8	9.3	7.7	8.0
Parents/caregivers	4.1	1.2	3.1	2.1	2.5	3.7
School-age youth	12.0	10.2	13.1	3.8	11.6	5.0
Friends of Libraries	12.2	2.4	3.1	1.7	7.9	18.8
Other volunteers	20.9	18.9	31.0	13.5	8.1	18.5
Other	2.9	5.3	7.2	4.6	1.4	8.2

**Table A-2**

Roles played by school-age youth play in planning and implementing programs (percent)

Planning roles	Reading programs	Computer classes/ workshops	Homework assistance	Career development programs and services	Community service/ leadership	Cultural programs
Recommendations on content or structure	28.0	25.5	22.4	25.7	41.3	25.4
Publicize	14.1	10.7	13.4	10.1	23.6	13.2
Recruit youth to participate	27.4	16.0	19.7	14.8	51.9	20.0
Lead, facilitate, or present	13.8	13.8	11.0	3.4	32.4	12.2
Set up or clean up	44.7	9.7	11.0	14.3	46.5	29.0
Evaluate	22.3	24.5	17.6	27.4	33.6	25.4
None of the above	33.6	49.3	53.1	50.2	18.5	44.6
Other	5.6	2.9	2.1	2.1	6.8	1.2

**Table A-3**  
School levels targeted (percent)

School level	Reading programs	Computer classes/workshops	Homework assistance	Career development programs and services	Community service/leadership	Cultural programs
Elementary school	90.7	70.1	80.7	23.2	29.0	82.6
Middle school	72.2	72.6	75.5	50.2	82.6	68.4
High school	29.3	49.8	39.7	81.9	70.5	30.8
No specific level(s)	2.6	12.6	10.7	8.9	3.7	10.2
Differs by program or outlet	20.5	14.6	6.9	7.6	5.2	16.4

**Table A-4**  
Most common schedule for programs (percent)

Schedule	Reading programs	Computer classes/workshops	Homework assistance	Career development programs and services	Community service/leadership	Cultural programs
Once a week or more	46.4	15.8	60.9	7.1	28.8	3.9
2-3 times/month	6.0	19.6	6.3	2.2	10.3	7.6
Once a month	2.4	10.9	---	2.2	9.9	12.2
2-11 times/year	7.9	29.7	3.9	28.0	17.1	50.7
Once a year series	11.9	5.4	1.4	11.6	14.1	6.9
Once a year event	3.0	2.5	---	17.3	2.4	5.1
Too many programs or outlets to generalize	16.7	8.4	7.4	8.0	9.9	9.6
Other	5.6	7.7	20.1	23.6	7.5	3.9

**Table A-5**  
Programs specifically designed for six specific groups of youth (percent)

Groups of youth	Reading programs	Computer classes/workshops	Homework assistance	Career development programs and services	Community service/leadership	Cultural programs
Recent immigrants	4.3	4.9	10.3	5.5	2.5	6.3
English is not the primary language at home	11.5	8.3	19.0	10.1	5.0	9.1
Low income communities	19.9	11.7	24.5	15.2	7.5	11.0
Rural youth	13.0	5.8	8.3	7.6	6.4	9.0
Institutionalized youth	6.8	3.2	4.1	5.1	2.1	2.9
Youth with disabilities	9.7	2.9	7.9	3.8	5.0	6.0
None of the above	60.3	76.7	58.6	70.5	76.6	73.5

**Table A-6**  
Where programs are held (percent)

Program sites	Reading programs	Computer classes/workshops	Homework assistance	Career development programs and services	Community service/leadership	Cultural programs
In public library outlet(s)	95.2	92.2	94.8	75.5	93.8	95.4
In schools	26.6	2.9	2.1	21.5	2.9	10.9
In community based organizations	21.2	3.4	5.9	13.9	4.8	12.4
Online (Internet)	1.9	2.9	2.1	2.1	--	.3
In other settings	12.1	2.2	2.4	5.1	2.9	5.3

**Table A-7**  
Future expectations on number served (percent)

Service expectation	Reading programs	Computer classes/workshops	Homework assistance	Career development programs and services	Community service/leadership	Cultural programs
More youth than are being served this year	62.3	70.9	57.7	43.4	40.8	50.8
About the same number of youth	37.2	26.4	39.4	55.2	57.4	48.3
Fewer youth	.5	1.7	.7	.5	1.6	.8
No youth	--	1.0	2.1	.9	.2	.1

**Table A-8**  
Estimated level of commitment by stakeholder group (percent)

Stakeholder group	Not committed	Limited commitment	Modest commitment	Strong commitment	Total commitment	Don't know
Library administration	.2	2.1	8.6	46.2	42.6	.3
Library staff	.2	3.4	14.5	50.9	30.8	.1
Library board	.8	3.2	13.4	49.4	28.7	4.5
Local government officials	7.3	14.3	23.9	21.6	5.7	27.2
Educators (K-12)	3.0	11.6	29.6	34.4	8.7	12.8
Parents	.2	5.0	26.0	49.5	14.6	4.6
Yourself	.1	.3	4.1	34.2	61.3	--

**Table A-9**  
**Estimated effectiveness of publicity (percent)**

Publicity method	Not effective	Somewhat effective	Moderately effective	Highly effective	Most effective	No experience/ Do not use
Flyers/brochures	.1	8.2	35.3	38.2	17.3	.9
Radio	3.6	14.9	23.9	13.3	3.9	40.5
TV	3.4	12.2	19.9	12.7	6.3	47.6
Community newspaper	.3	7.2	31.8	40.5	19.1	1.1
School newspaper	2.1	8.5	14.3	11.6	2.4	61.1
Youth-serving organization newsletter	1.9	6.5	10.1	5.3	1.5	74.8
Library newsletter	1.4	11.4	24.8	19.3	12.8	30.3
Word of mouth	.2	5.8	20.9	41.2	31.6	.2
Web page	3.7	15.7	20.6	6.4	1.9	51.8
Paid advertising in any medium	1.1	2.3	7.8	7.3	3.0	78.4

## Technical Details on Sample Selection

The Library Research Center (LRC) of the University of Illinois conducted a national public library survey in 1998 for the American Library Association (ALA) and the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund (DWRD). The goal of the survey was to collect information about educational and career development programs for school-age youth in public libraries. Survey questionnaires were forwarded by mail to a total sample 1,500 public libraries.

The target population for the survey was delineated by the ALA staff team as follows:

1. All public libraries serving populations of 100,000 or more
2. Libraries serving populations of between 5,000 and 99,999 that meet the following criteria:
  - at least one MLS librarian
  - at least two paid full time staff
  - open at least 40 hours per week
  - operating expenditures of at least \$100,000 per year

It was concluded by the team that libraries not meeting these criteria are unlikely to be able to conduct substantive programs for school age youth, and would thus be marginal to the purpose of the survey. Of the 4,510 libraries serving between 5,000-99,999, a total of 2,384 (52.8%) met these criteria. A total sample of 1,500 was planned. ALA and DWRD specified 80 percent as a minimum acceptable rate of response (or 1,200 completed questionnaires). This number would yield adequate precision for whole-universe estimates, as well as for sub-group analyses (e.g., within different regions, ranges of population served, or levels of annual per capita expenditure).

The universe listing (sampling frame) for the survey was the 1994 Federal-State Cooperative System (FSCS) annual directory file released on disk by the National Center for Education Statistics. Application of the eligibility criteria to the total universe file delimited the following eligible library sub-classes:

Serving populations of 100,000 or more: N = 461

Serving populations of between 5,000 and 99,999: N = 2,384

In order to arrive at a sample of 1,500, it was necessary to select a sample of 1,039 (i.e., 1,500 minus 461) cases from the larger stratum. The sub-universe of 2,384 was sorted in ascending order by size of population served. Then a systematic selection of every

second case was made throughout the list, from a randomly chosen starting point, yielding 1,192 cases. Because this number would be too large, every eighth case was then systematically deleted (starting with a randomly chosen number between 1 and 8 inclusive) giving a total sample of 1,500 public libraries for the study. The result is a proportionately stratified sample, except for taking all libraries serving a population of 100,000 or more. This design is ideal for multiple purpose library surveys in which both percentages and numerical variables (e.g., the number of program attendees) are being estimated.

The survey instrument was developed and pretested by the ALA staff team, and furnished to the LRC for survey administration. The survey procedure consisted of one initial and two follow-up mailings. Data collection was conducted from February 8 through May 1, 1998.

The final disposition of the survey sample is as follows:

Disposition	Frequency	Percent
Completed questionnaire	1,256	83.7
Questionnaire not returned	218	14.5
Incomplete questionnaire	1	.1
Ineligible respondent (library system headquarters)	18	1.2
Refused to complete questionnaire	7	.5
TOTAL:	1,500	100.0