

## LIBRARIAN JOBS IN COLORADO PUBLIC LIBRARIES, 1990-2004

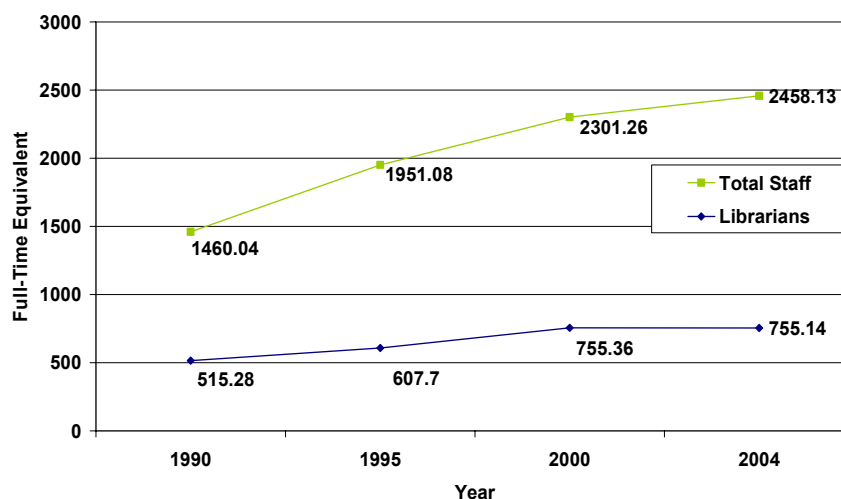
ED3/110.10/No. 225

July 7, 2005

Is there a librarian shortage or surplus? This is a debatable question. Studies such as the LRS's *Retirement, Retention, and Recruitment: The Future of Librarianship in Colorado* describe the high number of librarians who are expected to retire in the next five years. In regard to the profession of librarianship, the Bureau of Labor Statistics states that "Employment of librarians is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations over the 2002–12 period. However, job opportunities are expected to be very good because a large number of librarians are expected to retire in the coming decade, creating many job openings. Also, the number of people going into this profession has fallen in recent years, resulting in more jobs than applicants in some cases."

Ask a graduating LIS student and you might hear a different story. An article written by Rachel Holt and Adrienne Stock for *Library Journal* examines what they call the "Entry Level Gap." They mention the relative scarcity of entry level jobs for new graduates. Additionally, they point to a more disturbing trend in the field – the "growing tendency of libraries to hire individuals for staff positions who are not MLS librarians at all."

**Chart 1: Total FTE Staff and Librarians in Colorado Public Libraries, 1990-2004**



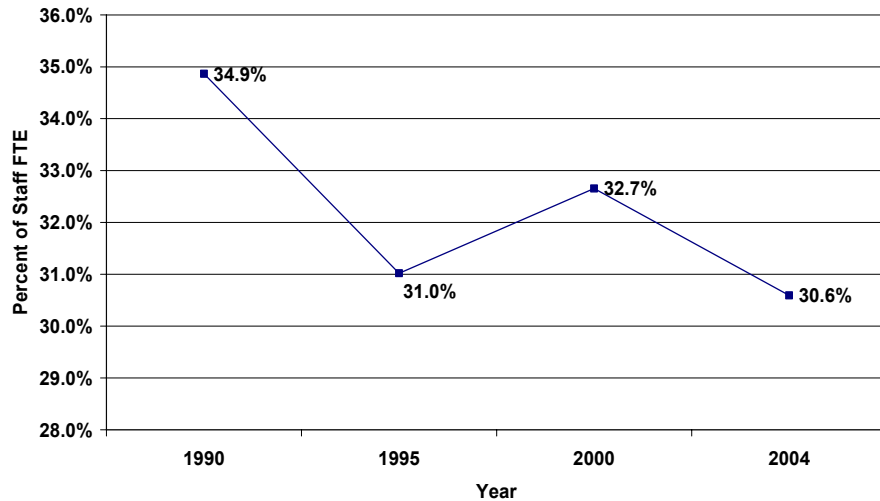
While further research might be needed to better address the question of whether today's library students will find it easy or difficult to obtain a position, we have plenty of data that look at how librarians have fared in Colorado's public libraries over the past fourteen years.

Chart 1 shows the total number of FTE (full-time equivalent) staff at Colorado's public libraries for the 100 libraries for which data are available as far back as 1990. While the number of FTE staff has increased by nearly one thousand in the past fourteen years – an increase of over 68 percent – the number of FTE librarians has only increased by around 240, or 47 percent.



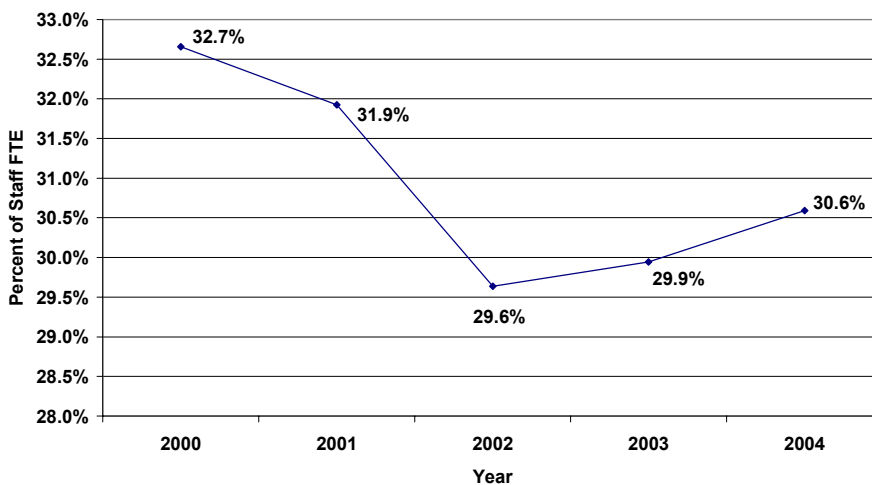
Chart 2 looks at this information another way, by examining the number of FTE librarians as a percent of total staff FTE. In 1990, 34.9 percent of staff time in Colorado's public libraries was provided by librarians. Last year, the portion of librarian time in the same libraries was down to 30.6 percent, a twelve percent decrease for this ratio, and a

**Chart 2: Librarian FTE as Percent of Total Staff FTE, 1990-2004**



disconcerting trend. In an era when technology is being used in libraries in large part to eliminate or decrease the number of repetitive tasks normally done by paraprofessionals, the expectation might be the opposite. As these tasks are more quickly done with the aid of technology, fewer non-professional employees should be needed for these tasks. By extension, the ratio of professionals to total staff should increase. The opposite appears to be happening. More staff members are being hired, but they are less likely to be librarians than they were in 1990, before most of this time-saving technology was available.

**Chart 3: Librarian FTE as Percent of Total Staff FTE, 2000-2004**



There is a silver lining to this apparent cloud of discouraging data. When viewing only the last five years' worth of data, things appear to be on the upswing for librarians. In 2000, 32.7 percent of staff time in Colorado's public libraries was provided by librarians. Last year's number, 30.6 percent, is significantly lower than that, but it is

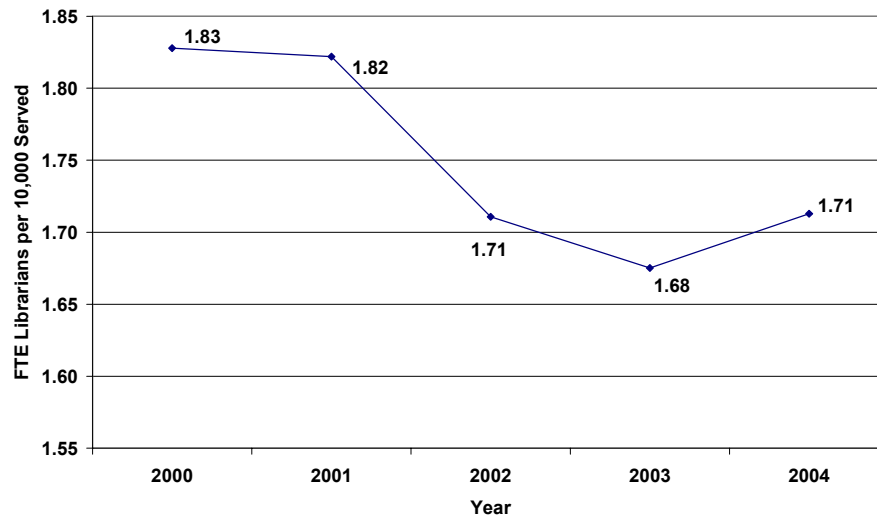


higher than 2003's number, which in turn was higher than that for 2002 (see Chart 3). In 2002, when budget cuts swept the state's libraries, only 29.6% of staff time in Colorado's public libraries was served by librarians – the lowest such ratio since 1987. Colorado's public libraries are far from economically flourishing today, but they seem to be recovering, at least in terms of librarian time.

Another way to approach this is by looking at the number of librarians per 10,000 served – how many public librarians are out there for every ten thousand people (See Chart 4)? In 2000, there were 1.83 librarians for every 10,000 people in the state – in other words, one librarian for every 5,471 people. Last year, this ratio was down to 1.71 – one librarian for every 5,838 people. Again, there is improvement over the last year, but there is still a long way to go to catch up to 2000 levels.

Only time, and further studies, will tell whether we are currently experiencing a librarian shortage or a surplus, but existing data have a story to tell. Librarians currently make up a smaller percentage of library staff than they did in 1990 or 2000, and there are fewer librarians per capita than there were in 2000. While the situation may be getting better, there is still considerable room for improvement.

**Chart 4: FTE Librarians per 10,000 Served, 2000-2004**



**Sources:**

Retirement, Retention, and Recruitment: The Future of Librarianship in Colorado.

Library Research Service, available at:

[http://www.lrs.org/documents/closer\\_look/RRR\\_web.pdf](http://www.lrs.org/documents/closer_look/RRR_web.pdf)

Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, Librarians. Available at:

<http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos068.htm>

Holt, R & Strock, A. (2005, May 1). The Entry Level Gap. *Library Journal*, 130(8), 36-38.

Colorado Public Library Statistics available at <http://www.lrs.org/pubstats.asp>.

Note: 2004 data is preliminary and hasn't gone through the Federal data submission process/edit checks.

**CONTACT ABOUT THIS ISSUE**

Zeth Lietzau • Senior Research Analyst

Library Research Service • 201 East Colfax Avenue, Suite 309 • Denver, Colorado 80203-1799

Phone 303.866.6900 • E-mail: [lietzau\\_Z@cde.state.co.us](mailto:lietzau_Z@cde.state.co.us) • Web site: [www.LRS.org](http://www.LRS.org)

Layout, and production by Fabian R. Maes • Phone: 303.866.6906 • E-mail: [Maes\\_F@cde.state.co.us](mailto:Maes_F@cde.state.co.us)



## PUBLIC USE AND SUPPORT SKYROCKET WHEN NEW LIBRARIES ARE BUILT

ED3/110.10/No. 226

August 22, 2005

Most library directors and trustees probably believe the “Field of Dreams” dictum: “build it and they will come.” While there is little formal research on this issue, the impact of new facilities on the resources and services of most public libraries is so overwhelming that this assertion is regarded as a truism.

Seven single-outlet libraries built new facilities between 2000 and 2003. They include the Broomfield, Cortez (pictured, upper right), Englewood, and Wellington public libraries and the Estes Valley, San Miguel #1 (Telluride), and West Routt (Hayden, pictured lower right) library districts. To measure the change in resources and services associated with the opening of those new buildings, data for selected input and output measures were compiled for each library for the year before and the year after the reported year of completion for their new buildings. (In other words, if a library reported building a new facility in 2001, data for 2000 and 2002 were utilized.) For each library, the percentage change in each measure between the pre-building year and the post-building year was calculated. The resulting figures were compared with the average annual percent change in the same measures for all Colorado public libraries.



### Local Operating Income

*When new public libraries are built, increases in local tax support are imperative to cover increased costs of operation.* Single-outlet libraries with new buildings received increases in excess of 25 percent from the year before to the year after opening a new building, compared with just over seven percent for all Colorado public libraries. Thus, these stand-alone libraries receive three and a half times as large proportional increases in local government funding as libraries statewide.

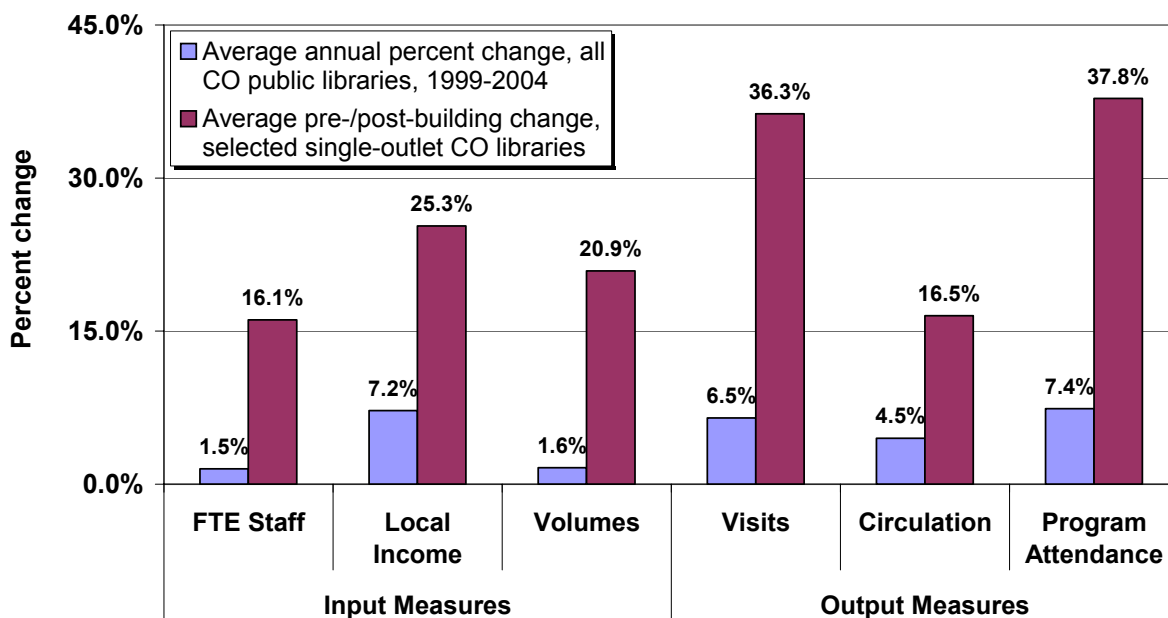


### Staff and Volumes

*When new public libraries are built, there is room for larger collections and additional staff are required to serve members of the public who wish to use the library's facilities and collections.* On average, staff associated with single-outlet libraries with new buildings increased by more than 16 percent from the year before to the year after a new facility opened, compared with 1.5 percent for all Colorado public libraries.



## Comparison of Selected Inputs & Outputs for State Norms with Single-Outlet Libraries with New Facilities, 1999-2004



That is a proportional increase in additional staffing of more than 10 times. Similarly, the number of print book and serial volumes found in these newly housed libraries rose by more than 25 percent from pre- to post-building years, compared with just over seven percent for all Colorado libraries. That is a proportional increase in print collections of 13 times.

### Visits and Program Attendance

*When new libraries are built, visits and attendance at library programs increase most dramatically of the three output measures examined.* On average, both the number of visits and program attendance for single-outlet libraries increased by more than 35 percent (36 percent for visits, 38 percent for program attendance) from pre- to post-building years, compared to seven percent for both visits and program attendance for all Colorado libraries. Those are proportional increases in additional visitors and program attendees of six times and five times, respectively.



### Circulation

*When new libraries are built, more items are checked out.* On average, total circulation for single-outlet libraries increased by 16.5 percent for pre- to post-building years, compared to 4.5 percent for all Colorado libraries. That is a proportional increase of almost four times.



While the statistical differences between all Colorado libraries and the small group of single-outlet public libraries that built new facilities between 2000 and 2003 are impressive, they should not be taken as indicative of the likely size of input and output increases that could be expected by any given library. Nonetheless, the size of these differences supports a more general claim that new facilities are likely to lead to substantial increases in the resource inputs and service outputs of public libraries.

#### CONTACT ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Keith Curry Lance • Director

Library Research Service • 201 East Colfax Avenue, Suite 309 • Denver, Colorado 80203-1799

Phone 303.866.6900 • E-mail: lance\_K@cde.state.co.us • Web site: www.LRS.org

Layout and production by Fabian R. Maes • Phone: 303.866.6906 • E-mail: Maes\_F@cde.state.co.us



# CHALLENGED MATERIALS IN COLORADO PUBLIC LIBRARIES, 2004

ED3/110.10/No. 227

October 20, 2005

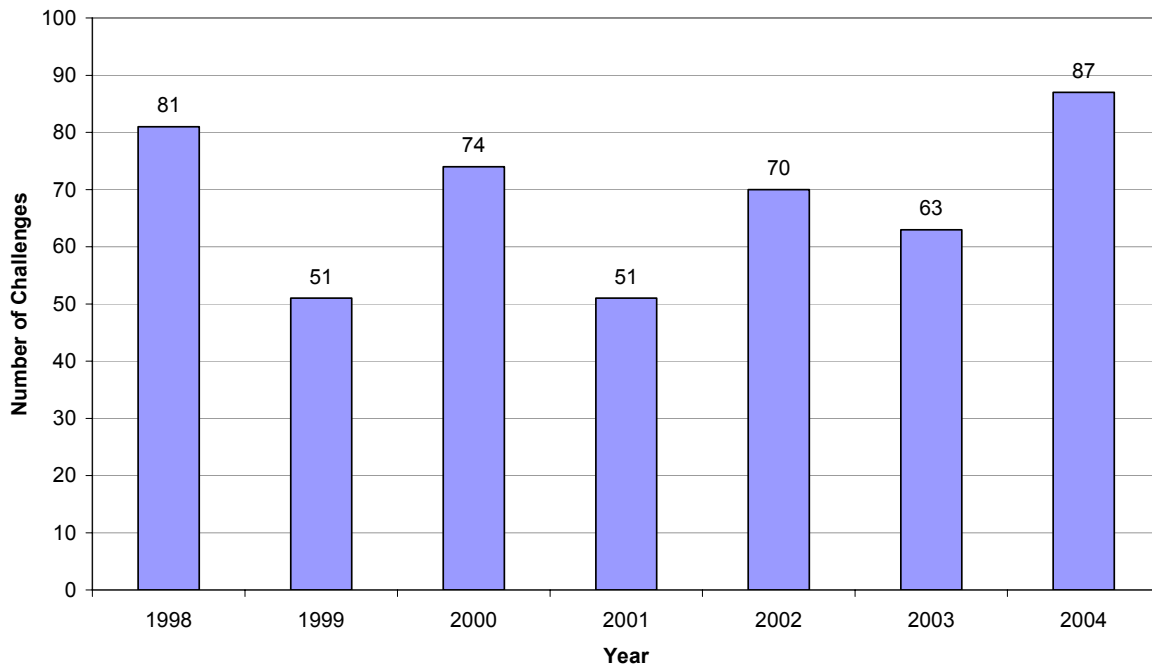
As a part of its annual survey of Colorado's public libraries, the **Library Research Service** collects data on books, periodicals, non-print materials, events, and exhibits that have received formal challenges during the previous year. A challenge – as defined by the American Library Association – consists of “an attempt to remove or restrict materials, based upon the objections of a person or group... Challenges do not simply involve a person expressing a point of view, rather they are an attempt to remove material from the curriculum or library, thereby restricting the access of others.”

In 2004, 22 Colorado libraries reported 87 challenges to books, materials, events, and exhibits. This was a marked increase from the 63 challenges reported in 2003, and represented the largest number of challenges recorded during the last seven years (see Chart 1). The number of challenges to materials, events, and exhibits reported in 2004 was also well above the average of 65 occurrences for the preceding six-year period.

## Highlights

- The video for David Lynch's film *Blue Velvet* was the only title receiving more than one challenge in Colorado's public libraries during 2004.
- More than one in every six (17%) challenges to books in 2004 involved graphic novels, comics, or anime titles.
- Young adult materials represented a larger proportion of challenges in 2004 than in previous years, while children's titles accounted for a smaller percentage.

**Chart 1: Number of Challenges Reported by Colorado Public Libraries 1998-2004**



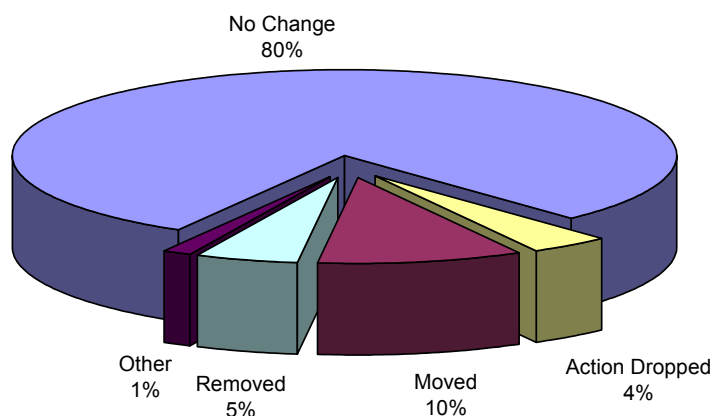
Since 2002, challenges to Internet content or access policies have been reported separately from materials and event challenges. Six Colorado public libraries reported a total of 13 challenges to these services in 2004, a near duplication of the figures from 2003 (12 challenges from six libraries), and a reduction of 59% from the 2002 total of 29 Internet-related challenges.

A follow-up questionnaire was sent to each library that reported challenges, requesting information about format, title, author, date of publication/incidence, reasons for each challenge, and actions taken by the library in response. Of the 22 libraries that had reported challenges of any kind, 20 responded to the follow-up survey. As a result detailed information was obtained for 86 of the 100 total challenges relating to materials, events, exhibits, and Internet access.

### Actions

Actions taken by Colorado public libraries in response to formal challenges are summarized in Chart 2. Of the 79 non-Internet challenges reported in the follow-up survey, 63 (80%) resulted in no change being made by staff regarding the location, availability, description, or classification of an item. In eight cases (10% of the total), the item was moved to an alternate location in the library or reclassified. Four challenges (5% of the total) resulted in the removal of the item from the collection. In three cases (4% of the total) the action was dropped by the individual who filed the challenge before the library took official action on the matter in question.

**Chart 2: Actions Taken by Colorado Public Libraries  
in Response to Formal Challenges  
2004**



Of the seven Internet-related challenges listed in the follow-up survey, three resulted in the modification of existing filtering software, while three resulted in no change to Internet policies or software configurations. In the remaining case, the action was dropped by the patron.

Overall, formal challenges prompted changes to availability, location, classification, description, or access policy in 16 of the 86 cases (19%) detailed in the follow-up survey. This figure is only



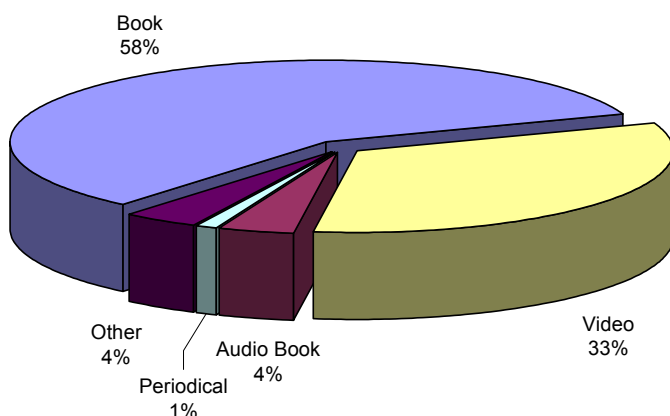


slightly higher than in 2003, when 17 percent of challenges resulted in changes in availability to materials and services.

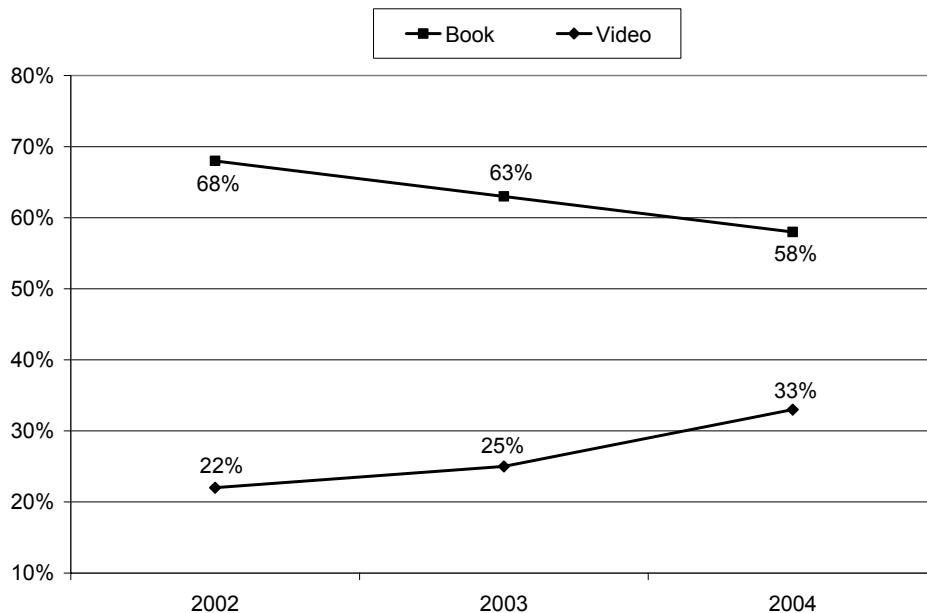
**Formats**

As in previous years, books were the most challenged format in Colorado public libraries in 2003. Over half (58%) of formal challenges unrelated to the Internet involved books, while a third of challenges (33%) were directed at video titles. Challenges involving periodicals, audio titles, and other formats (including events and programs) accounted for the about one-tenth (9%) of occurrences (see Chart 3). These figures are indicative of a continuing trend in which videos

**Chart 3: Formats of Non-Internet Materials Challenges in Colorado Public Libraries 2004**



**Chart 4: Proportion of Book & Video Challenges in Colorado Libraries, 2002-2004**

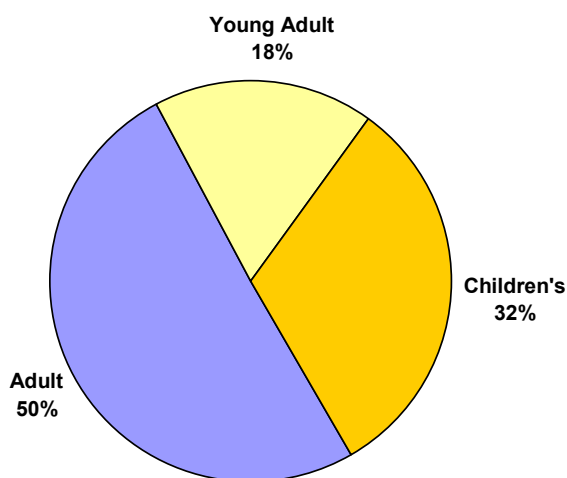


account for a greater proportion of challenged titles. While books are still the most frequently challenged format, their proportion of all non-Internet challenges fell from 68 percent of 2002's total to 63 percent in 2003, and then to 58 percent in 2004. During the same time period, the proportion of challenges to video titles increased from 22 percent of all 2002 challenges to 25 percent in 2003, and then to 33 percent in 2004 (see Chart 4).

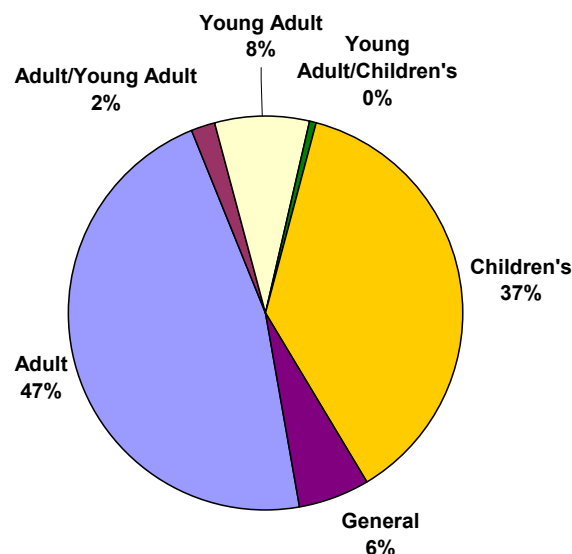
### Audience/Age Group

One half (50%) of the challenges in Colorado public libraries concerned materials classified as adult or general. Children's materials accounted the next highest proportion at 32 percent, while young adult titles made up 18 percent of the total (see Chart 5). In comparison with historical figures from the preceding five years, the proportion of challenges to adult/general materials has remained essentially unchanged (see Chart 6). The proportion of challenges to young adult titles, however, exceeded the average for the previous five-year period, while children's titles accounted for a smaller percentage than in the previous five years.

**Chart 5: Challenges to Materials in Colorado Public Libraries by Audience/Age Group 2004**



**Chart 6: Challenges to Materials in Colorado Public Libraries by Audience/Age Group 1999-2003**



### Reasons for Challenges

As has been the case in past years, multiple objections were often cited for challenges in 2004. Two reasons for challenges accounted for over half (51%) of the reported objections: sexually explicit and unsuited to age group. Reported frequencies of reasons for challenges are listed in Table 1. It should be noted that the "other" category includes all responses that were not listed on the follow-up survey, including instances in which no specific reason was given for a challenge.

### Challenged Titles

While the number of formal challenges to non-Internet materials reported by Colorado libraries increased from 63 in 2003 to 87 in 2004, no single title was responsible for producing this increase. Rather, these challenges were distributed among a vast array of individual titles. In fact, only one title – the video for David Lynch's film *Blue Velvet*, which was challenged twice – received more than one challenge in 2004.



An interesting trend, however, seems to be emerging, concerning one particular genre. More than one of every six (8 of 46) challenges in 2004 to print materials involved graphic novels, comics, or anime titles. Of these eight challenges, six were to young adult titles. In contrast, only four titles in this genre were challenged during the previous four years, three of them to young adult titles.

**Table 1:  
Frequencies of Reasons for  
Challenges Reported by Colorado  
Public Libraries, 2004**

Reason	Frequency
Sexually Explicit	37
Unsuited to Age Group	25
Violence	12
Offensive Language	11
Other	10
Nudity	8
Homosexuality	5
Anti-Family	4
Sex Education	3
Insensitivity	2
Occult/Satanism	2
Religious Viewpoint	2
Political Viewpoint	1

As mentioned above, the video for *Blue Velvet*, was challenged twice in 2004. Having been challenged three times over the past five years (2000 through 2004), *Blue Velvet* was the most frequently challenged video in Colorado libraries during this five-year period. The objection “sexually explicit” was mentioned in all of the challenges to this title.

Although it received no formal challenges in 2004, Michael Bellesiles’ book *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* remains the most challenged title in Colorado libraries over the past five years with a total of six challenges during that time. The most frequently cited reason for challenges to this title was “political viewpoint” (three occurrences).

*It’s Perfectly Normal: A Book About Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex, and Sexual Health* by Robie H. Harris was challenged once during 2004 and has been challenged on five occasions during the past five years. The objection “sexually explicit” was mentioned in each formal challenge to Harris’ book. From 2000 through 2004, no other individual titles were challenged on more than three occasions.

### Other Intellectual Challenge Resources

For more information on challenge policies and challenged titles, see the following resources:

Colorado Association of Libraries: Intellectual Freedom Handbook

<http://www.cal-webs.org/ifhandbook.html>

American Library Association: Intellectual Freedom/Censorship

<http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=if>

The 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 1990-2000 (ALA):

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbookweek/bbwlinks/100mostfrequently.htm>

Support for Dealing with or Reporting Challenges to Library Materials (ALA):

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/challengesupport/challengesupport.htm>

#### CONTACT ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Don Dickenson • Research Analyst

Library Research Service • 201 East Colfax Avenue, Suite 309 • Denver, Colorado 80203-1799

Phone 303.866.6900 • E-mail: lance\_K@cde.state.co.us • Web site: www.LRS.org

Layout and production by Fabian R. Maes • Phone: 303.866.6906 • E-mail: Maes\_F@cde.state.co.us

Fast Facts – Recent Statistics from the Library Research Service

Colorado State Library • Colorado Department of Education

Library & Information Science Program • College of Education • University of Denver

© 2005 • Permission granted to reproduce for nonprofit purposes



# Eight Out of Eleven Colorado Library Ballot Measures Win Voter Approval

ED3/110.10/No. 228

November 4, 2005 (revised December 2, 2005)

The results of the elections finalized on November 1, 2005, included good news for several Colorado public libraries.

- East Routt Library District, serving the Steamboat Springs area, and the Ignacio and Mancos Library Districts all won voter approval for funding to improve and operate public library facilities. Ignacio also won a mill levy increase for operation.
- Nederland Community Library District won exemption from revenue-and-spending limitations imposed by the so-called Taxpayers' Bill of Rights, or TABOR.
- Fort Collins Public Library benefited from passage of a multi-purpose city measure, "Building on Basics" (or BOB), which is expected to generate an additional \$6 million of support for library technology.
- Residents of the Boulder County portion of Erie voted to join the city's Weld County residents in being provided public library service by Weld Library District.



## Ballot Measures Involving Public Libraries in Colorado, November 2005

Library	Ballot Measure	Percent Voting for Ballot Measure
East Routt Library District (Steamboat Springs)	Mill levy increase (1 mill for operation)	57%
East Routt Library District (Steamboat Springs)	\$11.4 million bond (for library building expansion)	55%
Fort Collins Public Library	"Building on Basics"—10-year continuation of ¼ cent sales tax for municipal projects (including est. \$5.95 million for library technology)	72%
Ignacio Library District	Mill levy increase (additional .5 mill for operation)	53%
Ignacio Library District	\$2 million bond (for library building)	50% (49.57% --decided by 8 votes)
Mancos Library District	Mill levy increase (2.5 mills to construct & operate new & larger facility)	66%
Montrose Regional Library District	Creation of library capital facility district (Naturita area)	32% (failed)
Nederland Community Library District	Exemption from TABOR limits	71%
Rangeview Library District (Adams County)	Mill levy increase (3.494 mills to construct & operate expanded library facilities)	45% (failed)
Weld Library District	Residents of Boulder County portion of Erie vote on joining Weld Library District	60%
Weld Library District	Dacono residents vote on joining Weld Library District	41.5% (failed)

Fast Facts – Recent Statistics from the Library Research Service  
Colorado State Library • Colorado Department of Education



Library & Information Science Program • College of Education • University of Denver  
© 2005 • Permission granted to reproduce for nonprofit purposes



The bad news for libraries and their patrons on November 1 included the failure of measures to expand and operate library facilities in both Montrose Regional and Rangeview Library Districts.

Overall, eight out of 11 library issues (73%) passed—a substantially higher success rate than school or special district ballot issues. Nine out of 16 school bond requests (56%) and nine out of 17 special district override requests (53%) were approved by voters during the elections concluded last week.

**CONTACT ABOUT THIS ISSUE**

Keith Curry Lance • Director

Library Research Service • 201 East Colfax Avenue, Suite 309 • Denver, Colorado 80203-1799

Phone 303.866.6900 • E-mail: lance\_K@cde.state.co.us • Web site: www.LRS.org

Layout and production by Fabian R. Maes • Phone: 303.866.6906 • E-mail: Maes\_F@cde.state.co.us

Fast Facts – Recent Statistics from the Library Research Service  
Colorado State Library • Colorado Department of Education



Library & Information Science Program • College of Education • University of Denver  
© 2005 • Permission granted to reproduce for nonprofit purposes



# Colorado's Low Ranking on State Funding for Public Libraries Plummets Further

ED3/110.10/No. 229

November 8, 2005

## *Spending on Library Collections Reduced by Almost 10 Percent from 2002 to 2003*



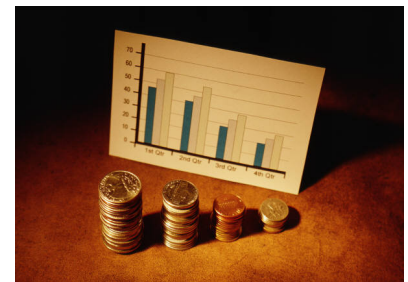
In 2003, Colorado—at five cents per capita—ranked 46<sup>th</sup> among the 50 states on state revenue to support public libraries. The only states that spent less than Colorado were Wyoming, New Hampshire, Vermont, and South Dakota, with three, two, one, and zero cents per capita, respectively. In 2002, Colorado spent 51 cents per capita, ranking 34<sup>th</sup>. That low ranking was no reason for pride, except that it put Colorado ahead of an additional dozen states.

The top ten states for state revenue per capita for public libraries are: Ohio (\$39.87), Hawaii (\$18.92), Pennsylvania (\$6.60), Rhode Island (\$6.35), Maryland (\$5.06), West Virginia (\$4.77), Georgia (\$3.80), Delaware (\$3.21), Indiana (\$2.94), and Illinois (\$2.76).



That interval, from 2002 to 2003, was when Colorado libraries lost the \$2 million State Funding for Libraries grant program. Those grants were earmarked entirely for library collections. Their loss lowered spending on books and other materials from \$6.09 to \$5.65 per capita. In fact, by the most conservative estimate (based on the Consumer Price Index), inflation cut the spending power of that \$5.65 to \$5.52—in effect, a cut to collection buying power of more than 60 cents per capita. That represents a drop of 9.4 percent in per capita spending on library books and other materials.

For perspective, 32 out of 50 states provide 50 cents per capita or more for public libraries, and half of all states allot a dollar or more per capita for libraries.



SOURCE: LRS.org (the Library Research Service website), Public Libraries, National Statistics,  
[http://www.lrs.org/asp\\_public/national.asp](http://www.lrs.org/asp_public/national.asp)

### CONTACT ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Keith Curry Lance • Director  
Library Research Service • 201 East Colfax Avenue, Suite 309 • Denver, Colorado 80203-1799  
Phone 303.866.6900 • E-mail: lance\_K@cde.state.co.us • Web site: www.LRS.org  
Layout and production by Fabian R. Maes • Phone: 303.866.6906 • E-mail: Maes\_F@cde.state.co.us



# State's Public Libraries Still Place Colorado in Top 10 But Rankings Slipping After 2002-03 Cuts

ED3/110.10/No. 230

November 8, 2005



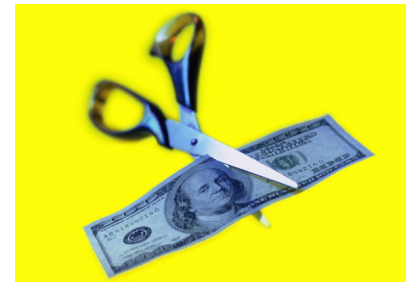
Since 1995, the National Center for Education Statistics has ranked the 50 states and the District of Columbia on selected statistics, usually per capita or another population-based ratio. Since 1998, Colorado has consistently placed in the top 10 states on three per capita measures of public library service output: library visits, circulation, and reference questions.

Notably, however, after “peaking” in 2001 (before the state budget cuts of 2002 and 2003), the state’s rankings on all three indicators for 2003 dropped.

### Colorado's 2001 & 2003 Rankings on Selected Measures of Public Library Service Output

Statistic	2001 Ranking	2003 Ranking
Library visits per capita	1 (6.4)	3 (6.4)
Circulation per capita	5 (10.4)	7 (10.1)
Reference transactions per capita	6 (1.4)	9 (1.3)

The demand for excellent public library services is high in Colorado, very largely because of the high educational attainment of its population and the vitality of the state’s economy. But, in 2002 and 2003, state budget cuts eliminated the Colorado Resource Center at Denver Public Library and the State Funding for Libraries grant program. Those cuts were followed by the loss of funding for the seven Regional Library Service Systems and their replacement by a dramatically smaller single organization, the Colorado Library Consortium. As a result of these wholesale cuts and dramatic cutbacks, local public libraries receive less to spend on new books and other materials, less support from the state’s largest public library, and less training and technical assistance to improve their performance.



One has to wonder: how long will Colorado remain one of the top 10 states for public libraries?

SOURCE: LRS.org (the Library Research Service website), Public Libraries, National Statistics, [http://www.lrs.org/asp\\_public/national.asp](http://www.lrs.org/asp_public/national.asp)

#### CONTACT ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Keith Curry Lance • Director  
Library Research Service • 201 East Colfax Avenue, Suite 309 • Denver, Colorado 80203-1799  
Phone 303.866.6900 • E-mail: lance\_K@cde.state.co.us • Web site: www.LRS.org  
Layout and production by Fabian R. Maes • Phone: 303.866.6906 • E-mail: Maes\_F@cde.state.co.us



## ASKCOLORADO USE CONTINUES TO GROW IN SECOND YEAR

ED3/110.10/No. 231

November 8, 2005

AskColorado, a statewide virtual reference service which recently completed its second year of helping Coloradans, continues to gain momentum and receive positive feedback from its users. The 24/7 reference service, staffed by over 200 library personnel from all types of libraries throughout the state, significantly increased its number of users between its first and second years. . During the first ten months of its existence (September 2003 through June 2004), the librarians were involved in an average of 2,000 reference transactions per month. In its second year (July 2004 through June 2005), that number rose to an average of over 3,500 transactions in each month. In February 2005 alone AskColorado librarians were involved with 6,483 reference transactions. Note: a reference transaction is defined as a discrete online reference session with one or more users which may include one or more questions and answers.

A pop-up survey, in English or Spanish as appropriate, was presented to users of the AskColorado following each virtual reference transaction. Between November 2004 and June 2005, 3,828 responses were received – 3,679 in English and 59 in Spanish. During this time frame, there were 34,988 English-language reference transactions, and 582 reference transactions completed in Spanish, meaning 10.5% of English-speaking users and 10.1% of Spanish-speaking users responded to the pop-up survey. As in its first year, AskColorado once again received high marks from its users.

Of all respondents:

- Over two-thirds (68%) found the virtual librarian to be helpful or very helpful, with over half (53%) perceiving the librarian as very helpful. (See Chart 1.)
- Sixty-two percent were satisfied or very satisfied with their answer, with 43 percent being very satisfied. (See Chart 2.)
- Three-quarters (75%) stated that they were likely or very likely to use the service again, with 60 percent being very likely to return. (See Chart 3.)
- Nearly one-third (31%) of the respondents used AskColorado to obtain a specific fact or document. Almost one-quarter (23%) of them used it to do research for homework or a school project, and another 22% identified a new source of information to search. Additionally, 16% found information needed for work, and 13% learned how the library can help them. (See Chart 4.)

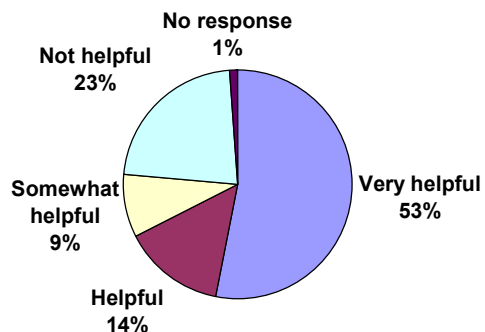
"This was my first visit to this site, and I am very impressed! Excellent response time and relevant information. I'll bookmark this one!"

- AskColorado User

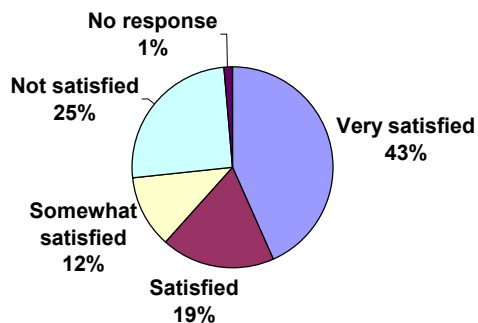




**Chart 1**  
How helpful was the virtual librarian?



**Chart 2**  
Did you get your question answered to your satisfaction?

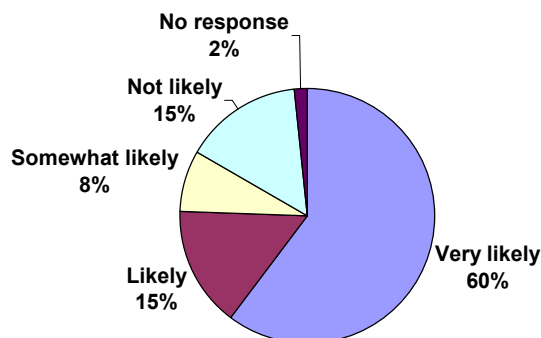


"Thank you so much for this service, it is quite refreshing to know there is a kind person out there willing to help me find something that I find important to me."

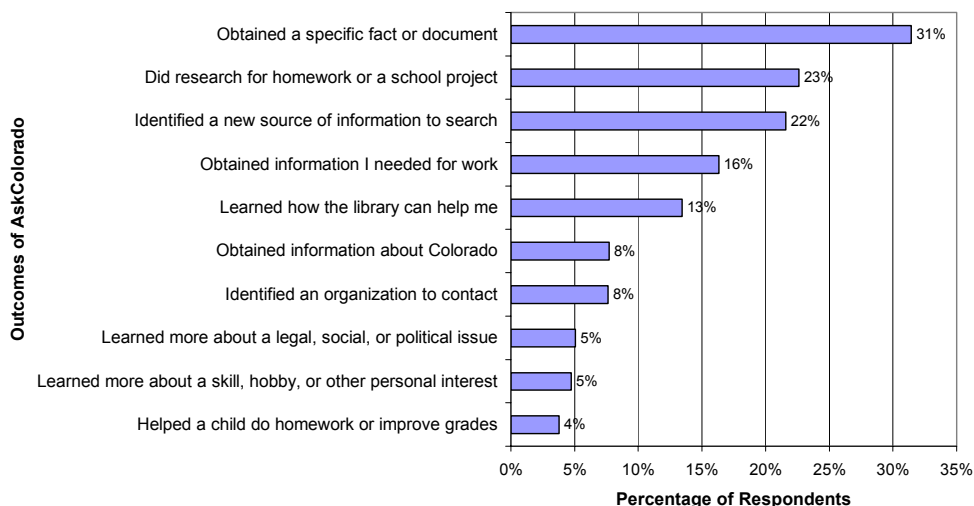
- AskColorado User



**Chart 3**  
**How likely is it that you will use the AskColorado virtual reference service again?**



**Chart 4**  
**What did you achieve today by using the AskColorado reference service?**



The pop-up survey also included an array of demographic questions. Interesting findings about the respondents to the survey included that twice as many women as men responded to the survey, nearly half of the respondents (49%) were under 18 years old,

"Your site is wonderful! It is absolutely one of the best sources on the internet. All the librarians are professional and friendly."

- AskColorado User



and every Colorado county was represented in the respondents, with the sole exception of Sedgwick.

Cross-tabulations of outcomes reported by AskColorado users with gender, age, current student status, and educational attainment were examined. Findings include:

#### Gender:

- Over a third of male respondents (36%) and nearly as many female respondents (32%) used AskColorado to obtain a specific fact or document. (See Chart 5.)
- Male respondents were more likely than female respondents to cite using AskColorado to obtain information needed for work; learn more about a legal, social, or political issue; help a child do homework or improve grades; learning more about a skill or hobby; and/or obtaining information about Colorado. (See Chart 5.)

#### Age:

- Compared to respondents in other age groups, those in the younger age groups were more likely to use AskColorado to do research for homework or a school project. Over one-third of respondents under eighteen (34%) and more than one-quarter of those between 18-24 (28%) cited this as a reason for using the service. (See Chart 6.)
- Compared to respondents in highest and oldest age groups (those under 25 and over 59 years old), respondents between these ages were more likely to cite using AskColorado to identify a new source of information to search and/or to learn how their libraries can help them. (See Chart 6.)
- Older respondents, those over 24 years of age, were more likely than younger respondents to use AskColorado to identify an organization to contact or to obtain information about Colorado. (See Chart 6.)

"This site is awesome and I recommend it to many people. I know the Internet has a wealth of information on it but so often it is hard to find. Your site takes so much of the frustration out of research. Thank You! Thank You!"

- AskColorado User

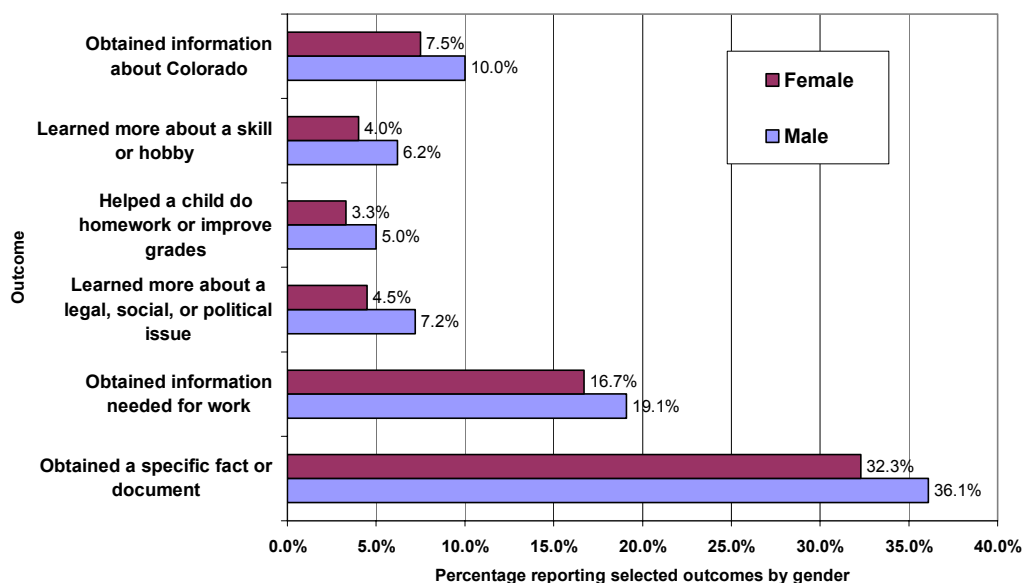
#### Educational attainment:

- Respondents with lower levels of educational attainment were more likely than those with higher levels to use AskColorado to do research for homework or a school project, suggesting that they will be raising their educational attainment level. (See Chart 7.)
- Respondents with higher levels of educational attainment were more likely than those with lower levels to use AskColorado to identify a new source of

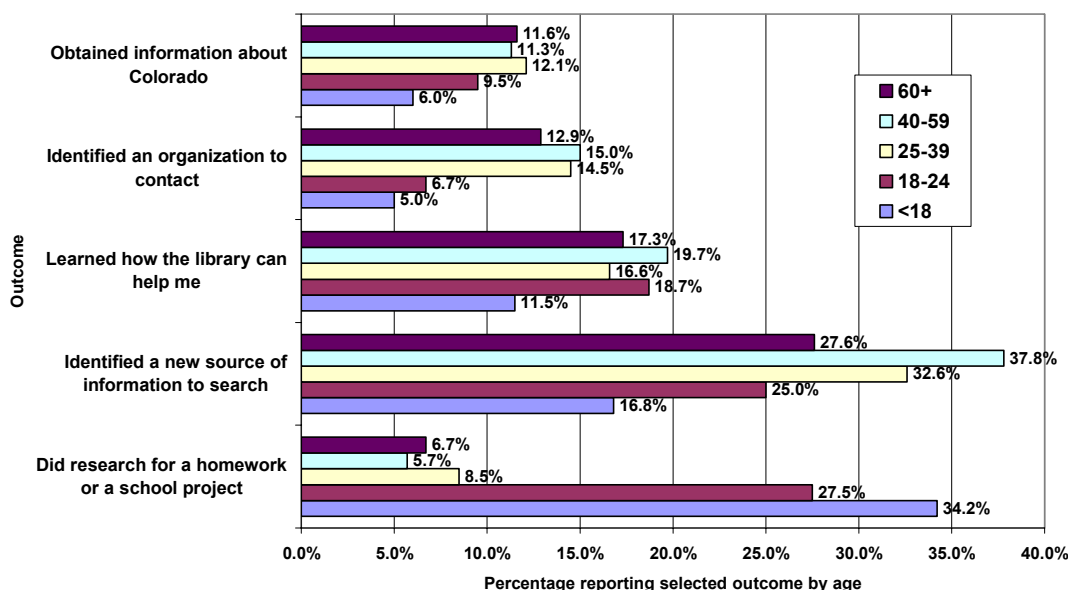


information to search; obtain information needed for work; identify an organization to contact; and/or obtain information about Colorado. (See Chart 7.)

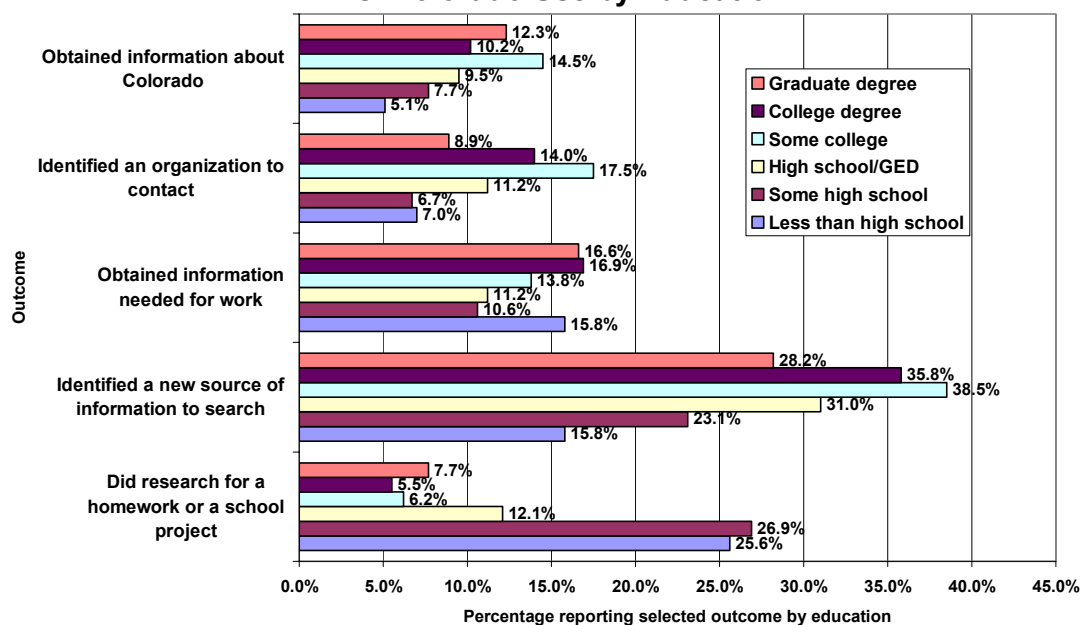
**Chart 5**  
**Percentage of Respondents Reporting Selected Outcomes of AskColorado Use by Gender**



**Chart 6**  
**Percentage of Respondents Reporting Selected Outcomes of AskColorado Use by Age Group**



**Chart 7**  
**Percentage of Respondents Reporting Selected Outcomes of AskColorado Use by Education**



In its first year, AskColorado hit the ground running, and it only picked up speed during its second year. Use of the service continues to rise, in its second year it fielded over 3,500 reference transactions per month, and answered more than 6,000 in February. Additionally, users of the service continue to suggest that they are pleased with the service that the librarians are giving them. Continued dedication to evaluating the efforts of AskColorado, such as pop-up surveys like this one, will go a long way toward ensuring that AskColorado's users continue to receive great service.

"I stumbled onto this resource while researching for a project. I have been stumped for weeks trying to find information for this project and now a fog has been lifted. This was SO helpful I am jumping for joy."

- AskColorado User

Visit AskColorado online at  
<http://www.askcolorado.org>.

**CONTACT ABOUT THIS ISSUE**

Zeth Lietzau • Senior Research Analyst

Library Research Service • 201 East Colfax Avenue, Suite 309 • Denver, Colorado 80203-1799

Phone 303.866.6900 • E-mail: [lietzau\\_z@cde.state.co.us](mailto:lietzau_z@cde.state.co.us) • Web site: [www.LRS.org](http://www.LRS.org)

Layout and production by Fabian R. Maes • Phone: 303.866.6906 • E-mail: [Maes\\_F@cde.state.co.us](mailto:Maes_F@cde.state.co.us)

Fast Facts – Recent Statistics from the Library Research Service

Colorado State Library • Colorado Department of Education

Library & Information Science Program • College of Education • University of Denver

© 2005 • Permission granted to reproduce for nonprofit purposes

