Anatomy of Advocacy: A Case Study of the White House Petition

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Abstract

Little research has been conducted examining advocacy efforts in the school library field despite the fact that program advocate is a prominent role for school librarians. One element of advocacy is the engagement in political initiatives that may affect school library programs. This case study investigates the effectiveness of one advocacy effort in response to a call for support of a national petition in support of school libraries. Data were collected, and factors underlying this advocacy campaign were analyzed. This report is a case study analysis of a time-constrained advocacy initiative, including the number of participants, demographic factors in relationship to participation, and the interaction of participants on an e-mail discussion list. With the emergent focus on lobbying for the reauthorization of ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act), this study has import for the design and development of successful advocacy efforts now and in the future.

Keywords: school libraries, advocacy, petition

Introduction

In 2015 the ALA Office released a statement calling for the reauthorization of ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act) with the stated objective to "Help every K–12 student in America realize their maximum academic potential by ensuring their access to an up

to date school library staffed by at least one state-certified school librarian working hand in glove with classroom teachers to develop and deploy successful curricula" (ALA Washington Office 2015). In particular, the association lobbied for inclusion of the SKILLS Act (Strengthening Kids' Interest in Learning and Libraries) sponsored by U.S. Senator Jack Reed. E-mails were sent exhorting AASL members to contact their congressional representatives and to make other efforts to garner political support for the passage of legislation that included school libraries. On March 16, 2015, several corporations sent a memo to chairman Lamar Alexander and ranking member Patty Murray of the U. S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions; the memo advocated inclusion of the SKILLS Act in ESEA legislation (ALA 2015). On April 9, 2015, school librarians and others were urged to tweet with the hashtag #getesearight and to join the National Education Association (NEA) Twitter campaign in the hour between 7 and 8 p.m. Eastern Time (School Library Journal 2015). At the start of summer 2015, the Senate was expected to vote on reauthorization of ESEA and members of the U.S. House of Representatives were discussing bringing back the House's own version. According to R. Morris (2015) the Senate committee approved school libraries as an eligible use of literacy funding but fell short of adopting the language of the SKILLS Act.

These efforts were not without precedent. In this paper we share our findings from a previously unpublished study of an earlier effort to gain reauthorization for ESEA with the inclusion of school libraries. On January 5, 2012, Carl Harvey, then president of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), posted a *We the People* petition documenting support for school libraries. *We the People* <https://petitions.whitehouse.gov> is based in the executive branch of the U.S. federal government. Claiming to "encourage all Americans to engage their government in a way that matters to them," the petition website allows citizens to develop and post a petition for other like-minded citizens to sign. At that time, if a petition received 25,000 signatures within thirty days, the White House would issue a formal response to the petition. The petition specifically encouraged the federal government to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Harvey's petition stated:

> Every child in America deserves access to an effective school library program. We ask that the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provide dedicated funding to help support effective school library programs. Such action will ensure more students have access to the resources and tools that constitute a 21st century learning environment. Reductions in school library programs are creating an 'access gap' between schools in wealthier communities versus those where there are high levels of poverty. All students should have an equal opportunity to acquire the skills necessary to learn, to participate, and to compete in today's world.

The time was ripe for this petition. In May 2011 the U.S. Department of Education had suspended Improving Literacy through School Libraries, a competitive federal program designed to support school libraries. School library advocate Senator Jack Reed shepherded an appropriations bill for school libraries through the U.S. Senate in December 2011 and set his sights on the inclusion of school libraries in the reauthorization of ESEA in 2012 (Whelan 2012).

To receive an official response from the executive office, the petition had to receive 25,000 signatures by February 4, 2012. The petition was announced on the AASLForum discussion list, and AASL members were encouraged to re-post on state affiliates' electronic mailing lists as well. Members of AASL, including the authors of this study, signed the petition, and most encouraged their colleagues, students, family, and friends to sign. Members posted tweets and Facebook messages to promote the petition. The campaign to get at least 25,000 signatures in thirty days was dramatic and suspenseful. Some alarm was noted when, days before the deadline,

it looked like the petition would fail to gain the requisite number of signatures. On January 27, then ALA president Molly Raphael (2012) sent an e-mail to all ALA members regarding the need for another 6,000 signatures and asking readers to recruit ten friends, or ask school PTAs to sponsor drives for signatures. Finally, January 31, 2012, four days before the deadline, the petition had the requisite number of signatures.

The Harvey school library petition received over 27,000 signatures by February 4, 2012. The required response from the White House came from Roberto Rodriguez, Special Assistant to the President for Education Policy. Rodriguez stated that the Obama Administration acknowledged the role school libraries play in creating learning opportunities for students, particularly helping them develop in the area of literacy. He suggested library support may be one strategy states would carry out in implementing the previously proposed presidential reform of ESEA, part of the president's 2010 education reform. Rodriguez went on to state that the president was waiting for congressional approval of his literacy proposal and other literacy initiatives were being funded in the interim (2012). While Carl Harvey felt the response was not as strong as hoped for, it did acknowledge some intended support for school library programs. Though the result may not have received the intended amount of attention, Harvey did state that the "issue is now in front of the White House so it was a step in the right direction" (Harvey 2012a).

Immediately following the White House response, in his blog Harvey wrote about the implications of the petition effort:

> We were successful! We got school libraries on the White House radar. Their statement clearly shows a support for school libraries and the critical role they play in schools. We saw what happens when we all work together. In my career, I've never seen such an amazing job of coordinating libraries of all type to work on a single issue. This is a clear example we can succeed when librarians advocate for each other (regardless what type of library they are). We need each other and have to be willing to work together! This was a great example of doing just that.

> We continue to work on being a more vocal and visible presence. With the AASL Congressional Briefing, the White House Petition, and now in a few weeks with National Legislative Day, we continue to raise the important issue of school libraries to our nation's leaders. We still have a long way to go, but I think we are moving in the right direction. (Harvey 2012b)

The following case study provides an analysis of the petition as an advocacy initiative.

Background

ESEA

The goal of reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is not a new one for school library advocacy. The act was first passed in 1965 under the presidential administration of Lyndon Johnson. Title II of this act was first authorized with $100 million dollars and largely provided the impetus for the development of school libraries. As Gail Dickinson (2003) has noted, pressure was brought to bear almost immediately to reduce or eliminate the allocation for school libraries, which were seldom funded at their true allocation. The Committee on Full Funding for Education, comprised of the American Library Association (ALA), the National Education Association (NEA), and related groups, conducted intense lobbying each year to ensure that at least some money was allocated to school libraries (Frase 1975 as quoted in

Dickinson 2003). Still, ESEA has to be seen as a success. Before the implementation of ESEA, fewer than 50 percent of schools had school libraries. By 1985 the number of schools with school libraries was over 90 percent. There is little doubt that the influx of federal funds created a modern concept for school libraries with resources in multiple formats, organized catalogs of materials, and an accepted model for school library programs. As Lillian N. Gerhardt (1985) pointed out, the always-perilous nature of the funding also made long-term planning impossible, and sometimes resulted in haphazard purchasing plans. In the mid-1980s, categorical funding plans such as ESEA fell out of favor, and ESEA was later replaced in 2001 with the No Child Left Behind Act, containing no federal money for school libraries. In spite of the problems associated with the lack of funding, and the time and effort spent in constant lobbying to retain funds for school libraries, the ESEA era is still seen as the golden age of school libraries. Indeed, it can be said that school libraries were built with ESEA funds, and the field has never stopped trying to get the mandate for categorical funding for school library resources, staffing, and support mechanisms reinstated (Dickinson 2003; Henderson 1995; Levitov 2011; Long 2000; Olson 1999; Turock 1994).

In early 2012 national policy makers had yet to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). To aid in the continuing struggle to reauthorize this critical legislation, the American Association of School Librarians adopted the position that school libraries are instrumental to successful education in four key areas.

- Library program standards align with 21st-century learning standards.
- School librarians serve as innovative teachers and professional building-level leaders.
- School librarians use data to inform their practice.
- School librarians act as collaborators to facilitate student achievement. (AASL 2010b)

Ann Dutton Ewbank called the focus on the reauthorization of ESEA "ALA and AASL's most ambitious school library advocacy activity to date" (2011, 41).

Advocacy

The American Association of School Librarians defines advocacy as "The on-going process of building partnerships so that others will act for and with you, turning passive support into educated action for the library program" (AASL 2007). Advocacy works best when conducted systematically using a well-developed program with specific goals. Though the field has been engaged in advocacy, no systematic research agenda exists on the topic (Haycock and Cavill 1999). Advocacy receives explicit attention in AASL's *Empowering Learners* through the guideline, "The school library program is guided by an advocacy plan that builds support from decision makers who affect the quality of the school library program" (AASL 2009, 41). "ALA/AASL Standards for Initial Preparation of School Librarians" also include an element related to advocacy with a similar focus on identifying stakeholders and developing an advocacy plan (AASL 2010a). Despite the prominence of advocacy as a professional responsibility and a high priority for professional associations, a gap remains in the research on advocacy behaviors. In practical terms, little empirical data is available to help organizations design successful advocacy strategies.

History of School Library Advocacy

Leaders in the school library profession have attempted to raise colleagues' awareness of the importance of advocacy. In an early article, Ethel Manheimer (1981) labeled the act of building support for school libraries and building support networks as political activism, stating that school librarians must recruit their own allies to support and defend the need for strong school libraries. In her effort to save the loss of California school librarians' jobs in the early 1980s, in practitioner literature Manheimer began to raise awareness of the need for school librarians to influence others outside the field to speak on behalf of librarians in need. Her efforts began a marked turn in the literature from an agenda to promote library programs to an attempt to gain support and supporters for library programs (Birch 1981; Curley 1994; Haycock 1994). In an early publication, Joyce Birch (1981) attempted to describe school library advocacy as more than awareness, but rather as a deliberate attempt to influence.

Ken Haycock suggested that for stakeholders to value school librarians and the impact they make on student learning, vigorous advocacy, which includes dedicated public relations, must be enacted. This effort cannot be simple promotion of activities conducted in the school library. It must involve a network of support that extends beyond the institution into the community (Haycock 1994, 31).

New initiatives have frequently been adopted and resources that focus on a variety of topics have been available through professional organization websites. In 1994, then president of AASL Arthur Curley launched an advocacy initiative *Library Advocacy Now!* This program promised to launch a network of library advocates willing to speak on behalf of libraries and library legislation. This advocacy initiative ideally would train others to act in support of libraries across the country. After the release of *Information Power* in 1998 (a joint effort of the American Association of School Librarians and Association for Educational Communications and Technology, published by ALA), Ken Haycock and Pat Cavill (1999) suggested that the school library field refocus advocacy efforts and develop a single clear message. They suggested that it would be necessary to do more than promote quality programs; school librarians would need to be educated in the practices necessary to build influence for the position of school librarian.

ALA and AASL each have a committee dedicated solely to the mission of providing resources and support for developing an advocacy program to their members. Currently, ALA and AASL each have online toolkits to assist librarians as they create advocacy plans (AASL 2006; ALA 2013). One joint advocacy resource developed by these committees is the *Toolkit for School Library Media Programs* (2003). The literature in the toolkit provides strategies and techniques for practicing school librarians to use as they launch well-organized advocacy campaigns seeking partnerships among stakeholders and demonstrating efforts in support of student achievement.

Another advocacy initiative of school librarians is National Library Legislative Day organized through ALA. By taking the role of library advocate out of the school building and away from the attention of the primary stakeholders, this initiative places library advocacy on the desks of legislators and others with political influence. While these efforts are important, they fall short of Haycock and Cavill's 1999 call for AASL to develop a coordinated, strategic advocacy plan.

Advocacy includes sharing with others the unique role that a school librarian holds within a school. Larry Leverett (2001) wrote that professionals who know and understand the issues relevant to school libraries and their importance need to be the voice for these programs. Pam Campbell (2009) explained that school library advocates find themselves supporting intellectual freedom, providing access to information, collecting evidence-based data to support the value of

a school library program, and working with legislatures at both the state and federal level to ensure political support of school libraries. Advocacy does not happen instantly, nor easily. It requires dedicated commitment and effort sought and nurtured over a significant period of time to affect change.

Civic Engagement as a Form of Advocacy

The basis for school library advocacy has its roots in the centuries-old push for civic engagement. The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees citizens the right to petition the government (U.S. Const. amend. I). Throughout history, Americans have used this right to organize around issues they support. Kristin A. Goss (2010) noted the powerful impact that individual citizens have had when issue-specific arguments are made to political leaders. Participation in the *We the People* White House petition site affords individual citizens the opportunity for civic engagement. Initiated in 2011, the site was relatively new when Carl Harvey created the school library petition. Current petitions include one to put Ayn Rand on the ten dollar bill, one to keep Alexander Hamilton on the bill, one to provide paid maternity and paternity leave for federal employees, and one to end "Islamaphobia" in the U.S. As of January 2013, the threshold for a petition to receive a White House response has risen to 100,000 signatures within thirty days.

The engagement of citizens in the political mechanics of government is changing rather than declining in the United States (Caren, Ghoshel, and Ribas 2011). Often this engagement is through non-electoral forms of participation. Electronic forms of government communication and information delivery are believed to offer improved opportunities for interactions between citizens and government agencies. The use of this type of online communication is believed to increase involvement between citizens and government officials (VanFossen 2006).

The Internet has had some impact on the political knowledge of citizens and their ability to react to this knowledge. In a study about online political participation, Lindsay H. Hoffman, Philip E. Jones, and Dannagal G. Young (2013) found that just over 18 percent of adults surveyed in 2010 had signed an online petition, second only to the almost 52 percent who said they had voted in an election. Adults who signed an online petition perceived this effort as almost equal to voting in its ability to influence government and to communicate information. Additionally, Phillip J. VanFossen (2006) found the Internet has had some impact on the engagement of citizens in politics, as well as access to political figures. He contended that civic engagement through the Internet engages candidates and holds them to a higher level of accountability because constituents can interact with them in a timely fashion. However, access to the Internet does not in itself compel citizens to become more politically active. Van Fossen's exploration of the topic found that citizens who have been politically active offline continue to be politically active offline and those who are active online would have been politically active without benefit of the Internet.

Purpose of the Study

Harvey's use of the online White House petition and the use of e-mail to get the word out made effective use of technology to gain support and signatures. Along with the important count of signatures, the Whitehouse.gov site provided access to signatures and limited information about those who signed the petition and when they signed it. We wondered what we could learn from

responses to this petition about rallying national support for school libraries. In particular, the following research questions guided our inquiry:

- What factors influenced the success of the 2012 petition advocacy campaign?

- What could we learn about advocacy from the patterns of signing behavior for the petition?

Methodology

Data for this study was collected from two primary sources: the petition site itself and postings on AASLForum (AASL members' e-mail discussion list) related to the petition. The petition site required signers to follow a multistep process to create an initial logon. Publicly available data on the petition site listed each signer's first name and initial of the last name, the city, state, and the date the signature was entered. The signatures were also numbered in relation to how many signatures had been entered, i.e., the first person to sign the petition was signature number 1, the second to sign was 2, and so on. The numbers were displayed in reverse order, with the most recent signatures first, so that succeeding signatures were also listed first. Approximately twenty signatures were listed on the screen, but it was possible to scroll down to the very first signature and, therefore, to retrieve all signatures.

Data Sources

We first retrieved all signatures by scrolling down through the signatures and copying and pasting signatures into a word processor document; the numbering of signatures allowed us to ensure that all signatures were collected. A total of 26,739 signatures were analyzed. The data were entered into a spreadsheet with columns for each field: name, city, state, date of signature, and number of signature. The retrieved signatures were grouped according to state for analysis. State populations were obtained from 2010 census data (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). AASL membership, school librarian totals, and school library totals were obtained from the AASL office and recorded, grouped by state.

Data Analysis

To identify factors influential to the success of the advocacy petition campaign and examine petition signature patterns, two types of data analysis were conducted. First, descriptive and correlational statistics were conducted to analyze the data from the petition. Given that state data was provided for each signature, we examined statistical relationships with other known state data. We sorted all signatures by state reported by the petition signer. Next, we aligned total frequencies of each factor—number of AASL members per state, number of school librarians per state, and total number of schools per state—and analyzed this data using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Each of these factors was compared with the quantity of signatures on the petition from that state to determine if a statistical relationship existed between the quantity of signatures on the petition and the dependent factors. Each of the factors was analyzed using a Pearson product-moment correlation, as well as multiple regression analysis to determine if a relationship existed between the factors.

The spreadsheet was further analyzed using descriptive statistics of central tendency to examine the signing patterns of the petition. We examined the petition records in an attempt to identify

days of the week that produced a marked increase or decrease in signatures. We also analyzed the signing patterns to identify trends in the signing of the petition.

Finally, a qualitative content analysis was performed on archived AASLForum postings related to the petition. Based on the subject lines, messages were selected for coding if they addressed, directly or indirectly, the topic of the library petition. The AASL discussion forum posts were analyzed to identify themes and trends among members discussing the petition initiative. The identified messages were coded for the perceived intent of the message. Additionally, active posters, defined as people who posted more than one post to the discussion in relation to the petition, were identified by their role in the library field and assigned a code based on this self-reported data.

Two researchers individually coded 104 postings. Some postings were assigned more than one code as the content of the message met the criteria for multiple codes. Codes were compared for agreement. The analytical process of coding the messages produced the following codes for message content, arranged here in order of frequency:

>
> (L) LOGISTICAL: Directions for signing the petition
>
> (A) ADVOCACY: Reaching out to others to get additional signatures
>
> (E) ENCOURAGING: Supporting the effort for the profession
>
> (M) MEANING: What it means to the profession, explanatory
>
> (C) CELEBRATORY: Celebrating the success of the initiative for the petition
>
> (O) OTHER

The following codes were identified for roles of active posters to the electronic discussion:

>
> (BL) Building-level school librarian
>
> (D) District-level library professional
>
> (P) Library professor, not including adjuncts
>
> (A) Library association leader
>
> (S) State-level library professional

Each coded post was analyzed for content of the message, as well as the role of the poster in the school library field.

Findings

Numbers of signatures were graphed by date as displayed in figure 1. The graph in figure 1 displays an overall bowl shape showing a flurry of signatures at the beginning and end of the petition period with a dip in the middle. Of particular interest was the period between January 20 and 24, the dates of the American Library Association Midwinter Meeting in 2012. A concerted effort was made at this conference to garner signatures; cards and flyers were distributed to attendees with petition information, and computers were provided for attendees to use to sign. Yet the pattern of signatures during this period does not represent a surge in numbers; in fact, the surge seemed to occur after the conference, perhaps as attendees returned home. The graph also indicates another possible pattern with noticeable dips in number of signatures over weekends.

These weekly patterns suggest that those participating in this advocacy activity participated at a higher rate during the workweek, rather than during off-peak weekend hours.
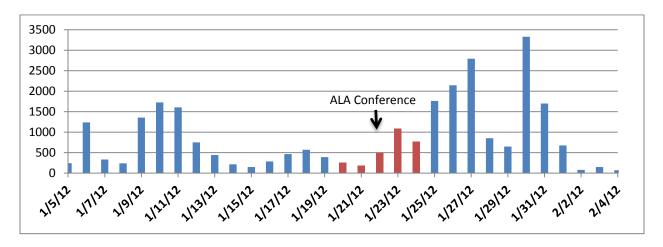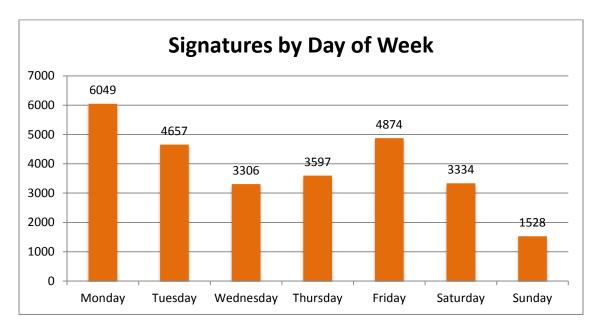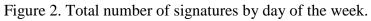

Figure 1. Number of signatures each day.

This graph reveals that the number of signatures were not evenly distributed over the course of the thirty days. A further manipulation of the data assigning days of the week to the data, as noted in figure 2, shows the total number of signatures on each day of the week, (i.e., how many signatures were entered on Mondays, Tuesdays, etc.). Based on this data, Monday was the day of the week signers were most likely to sign.

Figure 2. Total number of signatures by day of the week.

In preparation for statistical analysis, the dependent variables of state population, number of schools per state, number of school librarians per state, and number of AASL members per state were analyzed for normality (see Appendix A). Because none of the factors met the assumption

of normality as measured by the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality (see table 1), a log10 transformation was performed on each.

Table 1. Test of normality showing violation of assumption for all factors.

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
# of signatures	.203	51	.000	.797	51	.000
AASL members	.223	51	.000	.824	51	.000
school librarians	.168	51	.001	.823	51	.000
# of schools	.207	51	.000	.731	51	.000
state populations	.226	51	.000	.717	51	.000

a. Lilliefors significance correction

Once the transformations had been performed, the signature data were significant as measured by the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality, $W= .089$, $p >.05$. The transformed state population data were significant: $W= .381$, $p> .05$. The transformed significance of the number of schools in each state was .653 $p>.05$ as measured by the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality. After transforming the data, the resulting significance of the number of school librarians in each state was still not significant: $W=. 038$, $p>.05$; however, it did get much closer to significance after the transformation. The transformed AASL member data were significant, $W= .543$, $p>.05$, tested on the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality (see table 2).

Table 2. Normality test of transformed signature data.

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
# of signatures	.092	52	.200[*]	.961	52	.089
AASL members	.078	52	.200[*]	.980	52	.543
school librarians	.146	52	.007	.953	52	.038
# schools	.074	51	.200[*]	.983	51	.653
state populations	.074	51	.200[*]	.976	51	.381

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.
a. Lilliefors significance correction

To assess how significant the relationship was between the number of petition signatures in each state and each factor of state population, number of schools per state, number of school librarians per state, and number of AASL members per state, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis was performed. Results of the analysis indicated a positive correlation between each set of variables.

A statistically significant relationship indicated a positive correlation between the number of signatures and the population of a state: $r = .913, n=51, p <. 001$ (see table 3). This finding indicates that the more densely populated a state is, the more signatures were reported from that state. Those states with larger populations provide a greater supply of potential participants able to interact with the petition effort.

Table 3. Correlation between signatures and population data.

Correlations

		# of Signatures	State Population
Signatures	Pearson Correlation	1	.913[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	52	51
Population	Pearson Correlation	.913[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	51	51

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

An analysis of the data revealed that the number of signatures and the number of schools in a state were significantly correlated: $r = .877, n=51, p < .001$. This positive correlation suggests the more schools present in a state, the more signatures were reported from that state. Likewise, a positive correlation was found between the number of signatures and the number of school librarians in a state: $r = .818, n=51, p < .001$. The more school librarians working in a state, the more signatures were reported from that state. This petition effort was encouraged and supported in school libraries both as an advocacy initiative and as a teaching opportunity. Higher numbers of schools and school librarians facilitated increased numbers of signatures as schools and school libraries were the targeted audiences of this campaign.

Finally, between the number of signatures and the number of AASL members in a state a positive correlation was found: $r = .850, n=51, p <. 001$ (see table 4). The more AASL members in a state, the more signatures were reported for that state. Though this was not an AASL initiative, AASL members supported the initiative and, throughout the month, rallied support for the petition by means of state and national electronic discussion boards and e-mail lists.

Table 4. Significance levels of Pearson product-moment correlations.

Correlations

		# of Signatures	AASL Members	School Librarians	# of Schools
Signatures	Pearson Correlation	1	.850[**]	.818[**]	.877[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	52	52	52	51
Members	Pearson Correlation	.850[**]	1	.807[**]	.769[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	52	52	52	51
School Librarians	Pearson Correlation	.818[**]	.807[**]	1	.866[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	52	52	52	51
# of Schools	Pearson Correlation	.877[**]	.769[**]	.866[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	51	51	51	51

[**]. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

To provide additional evidence, a standard multiple regression analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship among each participant's possibility of signing the petition and the factors of state population, number of schools in a state, number of school librarians in a state, and number of AASL members. Tables 5 and 6 summarize the results of the regression analysis of the three predictors and the state population. The results of the regression indicated the predictors explained 91 percent of the variance: $R^2 =. 91$, $F (3, 50)=158.129$, $p < .05$. The number of schools in a state was found to significantly affect the number of signatures on the petition, $\beta= .545$, $p=. 01$, as did the number of AASL members in a state, $\beta= .644$, $p=. 01$. The number of school librarians in a state was not statistically significant in predicting a participant's possibility of signing the petition: $\beta= -.098$, $p=. 01$.

In summary, states with larger populations and, therefore, a need for greater numbers of schools were found to be a predictor of higher rates of signing the petition. Overall, larger numbers of people in a state may contribute to greater participation. However, simply having a school librarian was not a significant predictor. Having school librarians who were members of AASL *was* a predictor of greater numbers of signatures. Though correlation does not imply causation, this analysis shows there was a greater statistical prediction of people signing the school library petition in a state with higher numbers of AASL members than in a state that simply has school

librarians (see tables 5 and 6). This finding suggests possible relationships to develop in future advocacy efforts.

Table 5. Multiple regression analysis summary.

Model Summary

Regression Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
	.954[a]	.910	.904	.13184

a. Predictors: (Constant), schools, members, SL

Table 6. Significance and beta levels for regression model.

Coefficients[a]

Multiple Regression Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-.238	.162		-1.469	.148
# of AASL members	.644	.081	.618	7.929	.000
# of school librarians	-.098	.103	-.095	-.953	.346
# of schools	.545	.101	.484	5.414	.000

a. Dependent Variable: # of Petition Signatures

Although the petition effort was not sponsored by AASL, the AASL e-mail discussion list (AASLForum) was used to publicize the petition and encourage AASL members to sign and advocate for signing. Although other discussion lists from other divisions of ALA also encouraged signatures, and then ALA President Molly Raphael sent an e-mail to the 60,000 members of ALA requesting their assistance, as school librarians (and instructors of aspiring school librarians) the participants in the AASL member forum were the ALA members who had the most to gain from encouraging signatures.

Over the period of time that the petition was active (January 5, 2012 through February 4, 2012) over 100 messages were posted to AASLForum by 43 different people. Figure 3 shows the school library role, self-identified by the signature tag, of those people posting messages to the AASLForum. Of the 37 identifiable participants, 16 identified themselves as building-level

school librarians, and 11 identified themselves as university faculty. Four worked at the district level, and 3 identified as association leaders.
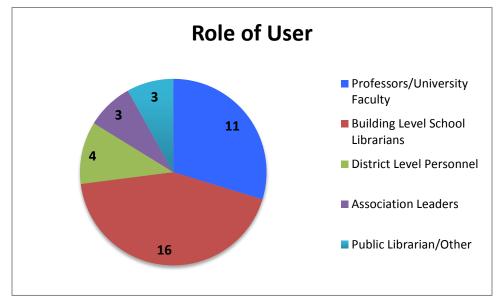

Figure 3. Self-Identified role of AASLForum users posting about the petition.

Only 16 people, though, posted more than one message. Figure 4 identifies the number of the active forum participants and their activity on the forum. Of those in an association role, the posters were Carl Harvey, then AASL president, along with others on the AASL executive committee and the two candidates for AASL president-elect. Also in this group were posters who self-identified in their signature line as being active in the state association. Some states were more heavily represented in these multiple posts as identified by the posters' signature lines.
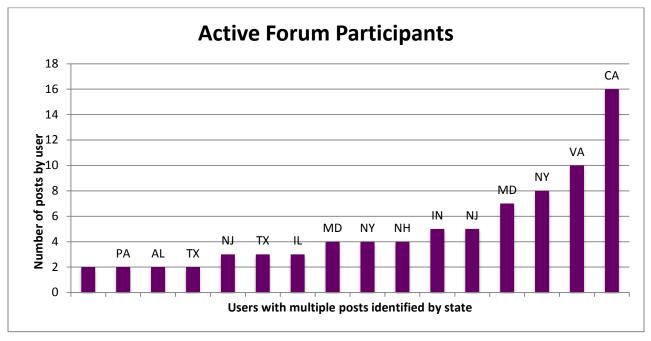

Figure 4. Representation of AASLForum participants who posted more than once about the petition.

People had some difficulty in signing the online petition, as evidenced by the largest number of postings coded as LOGISTICAL (L). This type of message occurred frequently in the first week that the petition was open. A typical message, posted to AASLForum January 6, 2012, was: "I have tried signing in, logging out and signing back in and all that happens is an endless loop of me signing in, going to the petition page, clicking on it, and being brought back to the sign in page." Some posters acknowledged the frustration of the process and created directions for signing, including the wiki (at PBWorks.com) developed as a result of the individual efforts of various people (petitionlessons.pbworks.com).

The second-largest coded group of postings was about reaching out to other groups, including school librarians not members of AASL (and, thus, not able to read AASLForum postings), to ask for signatures. These postings reiterated the classic definition of advocacy by working to create a coordinated continuum of supporters. Sample postings exhorted AASL members to "ask your friend and family to sign" (January 26, 2012), "spread this post far and wide" (January 5, 2012) and "... any subject matter elists / or listservs you might be members of, faculty members, your own email list, PTA, your union" (January 9, 2012). Some members of the list spread the advocacy to students by using the petition as a teachable moment: "Tomorrow, one of my students is giving his senior project presentation on education reform. The topic he came up with is saving school libraries..." (January 9, 2012).

Other coded groups of postings were directed internally toward the discussion list members. ENCOURAGING (E) messages were usually at the end of postings coded in other categories, with closing lines such as "You really need to be committed to do this" (posted January 7, 2012) and "We are so close" (January 28, 2012). Postings coded as MEANING (M) explained what the petition signing success could mean for school librarianship as a profession, using phrases such as "21st century libraries" (January 27, 2012) and "mandates" (January 17, 2012). Some posts were quite poignant: "School administrators need to look hard and long at their schools and create priorities for what kinds of instruction and curriculum they will be giving to their students" (January 27, 2012).

A small category of OTHER postings did not fit in with advocacy but were instead about other issues in school librarianship or the current political scene. Those messages were included in this analysis because they were in response to a petition post.

The excitement built as the 25,000 mark was neared in the end of January 2012, with CELEBRATORY (C) messages posted as the number was achieved: "Congratulations, Carl, and to all who participated in this" (January 31, 2012).

In many instances, the intent of the messages mirrored the pattern of the posts in their timing (see figure 5). There were a high number of posts on AASLForum the initial week the petition was available as participants provided logistical advice and advocated for participation. Likewise, the final week demonstrated a spike as final pleas for member participation were made, culminating in congratulatory responses. The one-day outlier of January 21, 2012, presented encouraging reminders of the petition.
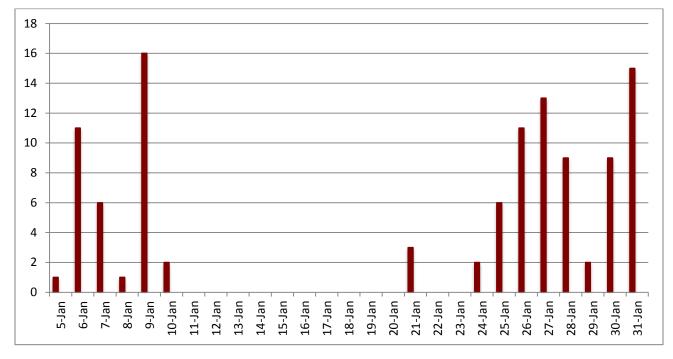
Figure 5. Number of petition-related posts to AASLForum by date.

Discussion and Directions for Future Research

Introduction

Advocacy is a focus of both AASL and ALA; however, little to no research has been conducted to analyze the factors that contribute to the success of advocacy efforts for the library field. Although no generalizations can be drawn from the conclusions of this limited case study analysis, results of this thirty-day petition effort provide an excellent case study on one successful advocacy initiative. From our analysis, it is obvious that the efforts related to this petition fit the definition of advocacy. Those who lent their signature to the petition turned their passive support for school libraries into focused action. People who encouraged the signing of the petition seemed to understand that advocacy is the development of a sustained community of supporters and worked to encourage that support. They assisted each other, shared materials, and reported successful mini-initiatives to build the signature list. This coordinated effort happened within the thirty-day period within which the profession had to get the signatures.

Factors That Influenced Success of Advocacy Initiative and Directions for Future Research

From the findings, several factors can be identified as influential to the success of the petition advocacy campaign. There were few surprises in the statistical analysis of signatures with regards to population. States with higher populations had more signatures; states with more schools had more signatures, and states with more AASL members had more signatures. This finding would suggest that national advocacy efforts be focused on states with large populations.

Interestingly, the number of school librarians in a state was not a predictor of a higher number of signatures, though the number of AASL members *was* a predictor. It could not be determined through this study if AASL members are more likely to engage in advocacy activities, or whether other factors affected the number of signatures from a state. However, this observation could lead to research in the specific advocacy behaviors of AASL members versus non-AASL members.

These results offer some direction for future research initiatives to identify those stakeholders toward whom efforts must be directed to engage them in advocacy, including school librarians who may not have the same sense of belonging as AASL members. Are AASL members more inclined to engage in advocacy behaviors than non-AASL members? Or are AASL members more informed about national initiatives such as the petition? What venues, such as state conferences, might be fruitful for encouraging advocacy participation by non-AASL members?

The number of schools in a state was also a predictor, which raises questions about how many teachers, principals, or parents were influenced to sign, and how they were recruited to participate. Future research on advocacy efforts of this type may include exploring the role organization members play in influencing non-members to petition for library services.

Indicators of Advocacy through Petition Behavior

Our analysis identified patterns in the behaviors of those signing the petition. Although most school librarians are busy during the school week, our findings revealed that fewer people signed over the weekends than on weekdays. The launching of the petition on a Thursday, heading into the weekend, may have gotten the petition off to a slow start. Starting it on a Sunday or Monday, leading into the peak days of the workweek, may have resulted in a stronger start. Survey Monkey has found better response rates for surveys initiated on Mondays (Zheng 2011).

A major push for signatures occurred during the ALA conference, yet this push was not evident in the signature pattern and resulting number of signatures. Though at the conference venue signing kiosks were staffed with members actively recruiting participants, these efforts made little impact on the number of signatures during the time period of the conference. This finding might suggest that AASL members and other interested ALA members had already signed the petition or that they obtained signing information at the conference and then waited until they arrived home to create an account and sign. Kiosks at a conference may elicit behaviors similar to those at malls; Rodney Runyon, Jung-Hwan Kim, and Julie Baker (2012) conducted a focus group and found that aggressive salespeople at mall kiosks served to create a greater level of arousal that may have provoked avoidance as well as approach. Kiosks at ALA Midwinter Meeting may have had a similar effect on busy attendees who were as likely to avoid the opportunity as they were to take time from a busy conference agenda to stop.

Librarians who work in other types of libraries are always encouraged to advocate for changes in school libraries, but little research has been conducted to determine how these pleas are understood and responded to. Felicitas Evangelista, Patrick Poon, and Gerald Albaum (2012) explored the application of social exchange, cognitive dissonance, self-perception, and involvement/commitment theories to survey responses in Hong Kong and Australia. These researchers found cultural differences in the response rates for different types of appeals for participation. Their findings suggest the use of various appeals may attract diverse individuals to respond. For some the promise of something in return (social exchange) is effective, while others may be motivated by the dissonance associated with a decision not to participate, or the perception of oneself as somebody who does participate in a survey or sign a petition. The

involvement/commitment theory asserts that someone will decide to participate based on his or her commitment to the cause or social group and seems particularly appropriate for the general library profession's response to the petition. Stavros P. Kalafatis et al. (2012) found that, in their work on market surveys, over-stating the purpose or importance of the survey created less response than did a lower-key approach. In an investigation of Web survey response, Stephen R. Porter and Michael E. Whitcomb (2003) found that statements of scarcity including a looming deadline and small group of respondents did have a positive impact on response rates. This impact could clearly be seen in the increased response to the petition as the deadline approached. The degree to which these and other survey-methodology research findings apply to school library advocacy and lobbying is unknown, but this area is ripe for further exploration into the best way to encourage advocacy efforts.

Other Questions

Our findings suggest that AASL members who engaged in the discussion list understand how to engage in advocacy, and can perform those activities quickly and confidently. As demonstrated through this case study, when participants engage in advocacy, those efforts can be successful. However, the number of school librarians was not a statistically significant predictor in determining the number of signatures in a state. Further evidence is required; one area of future research may include the specific behaviors influenced by membership in professional organizations and why membership was a good predictor of participation in the advocacy effort focused on the petition. Additionally, continued emphasis is needed to ensure professional organizations, at both the local and national level, are extending their advocacy efforts to engage all members of the school library field.

Limitations

The public nature of the data regarding the petition, the structure of the petition process, and the limited, time-sensitive nature of the advocacy efforts made this a concise case study and an opportunity to examine a successful advocacy project. Limited demographic information was available for analysis. Because petitions are open to all registered citizen signers, it is unknown how many signatures were collected from school librarians and how many came from other supporters.

Closing

AASL defines advocacy as "the on-going process of building partnerships so that others will act for and with you, turning passive support into educated action for the library program" (2007)**.** Through this study we learned that the school library field could be successful in rallying sufficient support on a national level for a defined purpose in a short period of time. However, the petition was not an advocacy initiative that had significant impact for school libraries. A few years have passed, and once again we are lobbying for the reauthorization of ESEA and the inclusion of school library programs led by qualified school librarians. The 2012 petition demonstrated that our message could get to over 27,000 people in barely thirty days and earn the attention of the executive office of the president. Can we sustain that type of effort over more days with a stronger message and a broader audience? An open question would be whether we could meet the current threshold of one hundred thousand signatures in thirty days. Our message went all the way up to the president, but did it trickle back down to the legislative levels? The

Common Core initiative was promoted at the state level through the governors. Perhaps school librarians need to conduct a simultaneous advocacy effort directed at the fifty governors? It is important for the field to determine the most effective means by which to engage supporters so library issues are brought to the attention of those in decision-making positions.

School libraries require more-sustained and targeted advocacy efforts, including rallying supporters to directly contact legislators in support of school libraries and library legislation. Future research might explore the direction these opportunities will take. Additionally, future efforts must examine the effectiveness of local advocacy initiatives. By targeting local school boards, city councils, and other local funding sources or state-level agencies, advocacy efforts may be able to build and sustain support from the ground up.

This is a limited case study, and as such, cannot be used to demonstrate factors influential in sustained advocacy activity. It is, however, one of the very few attempts to provide a data-based analysis of an advocacy initiative. Future research will provide a greater foundation for advocacy planning and assist in guiding the efforts of committed members of the profession.

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Appendix A

State	Number of Signatures	Number of AASL Members	Number of School Librarians	Number of Schools
AK	99	40	170	507
AL	210	84	1425	1605
AR	187	63	1007	1129
AZ	318	74	733	2186
CA	1561	379	1159	10029
CO	429	102	840	1779
CT	438	208	817	1150
DC	123	56	127	230
DE	95	36	137	240
FL	935	241	2834	3985
GA	440	191	2300	2472
HI	99	48	249	290
IA	406	75	590	1490
ID	85	15	140	735
IL	1242	411	2057	4402
IN	595	103	951	1973
KS	473	97	895	1428
KY	418	104	1120	1531
LA	228	102	1195	1643
MA	694	301	867	1855
MD	683	272	1235	1457
ME	161	54	247	663
MI	778	165	1037	4078
MN	417	286	813	2263
MO	454	113	1400	2423
MS	94	26	973	1077
MT	70	25	381	879
NC	569	289	2352	2548
ND	59	41	193	525
NE	250	103	568	1122
NH	163	98	324	492
NJ	1460	323	1777	2588
NM	114	42	295	853
NV	129	33	367	617
NY	2038	647	3128	4690
OH	1124	206	1355	3852
OK	203	86	1116	1796
OR	394	71	377	1304
PA	1390	314	2197	3248
RI	96	43	308	327
SC	203	120	1135	1211
SD	71	19	141	721
TN	325	158	1907	1755

State	Number of Signatures	Number of AASL Members	Number of School Librarians	Number of Schools
TX	1412	442	5084	8530
UT	170	43	262	1029
VA	804	317	2041	2009
VT	71	53	225	328
WA	506	112	1238	2321
WI	420	149	1182	2268
WV	105	14	364	762
WY	88	34	170	360
Other	3048	71	1521	

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