

Wisconsin Libraries, 2006-2007

Progress, Challenges, and
Recommendations

Biennial Report
Council on Library and Network Development
January 2007

By statute, on or before July 1 of every odd-numbered year, COLAND is required to transmit to the state superintendent a descriptive and statistical report on the condition and progress of library services in the state and recommendations on how library services in the state may be improved. [Wisconsin Statutes s. 43.07 (5)]

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Introduction

Wisconsin's libraries are more heavily used than ever—and they are more important than ever. Wisconsin's libraries of all types connect the state's residents to a world of information and knowledge. Because the economy of the future is increasingly based on knowledge, good libraries are one key to a healthy state economy and a bright future for all residents of Wisconsin.

Wisconsin now has:

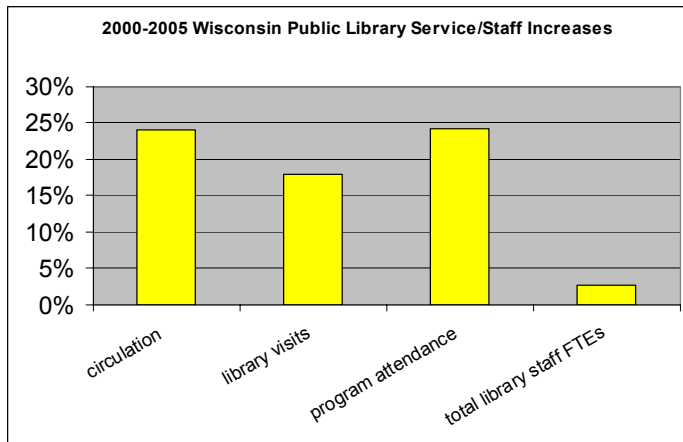
- 388 public libraries that serve 5.6 million state residents
- approximately 2,000 public school library media centers serving almost 880,000 students
- hundreds of academic and special libraries serving students, professionals, businesses and others

All of these libraries make important contributions to the education and quality of life for Wisconsin residents, and to the economic health of the state. A recently completed research study of Wisconsin's school library media programs shows that high-quality school libraries correlate with high student achievement. Other studies show that investments in public libraries result in positive returns ranging from 30% to 1000%.

The public benefits of library service in Wisconsin are further multiplied through high levels of interlibrary cooperation. Wisconsin's libraries cooperate through regional library systems and statewide services and organizations. Every year, millions of library items are shared among all types of libraries throughout the state. This statewide sharing of library materials means that everyone in Wisconsin has access to over 7 million titles owned by Wisconsin libraries of all types. Resource sharing is also a cost-effective method of avoiding unnecessary duplication of purchasing.

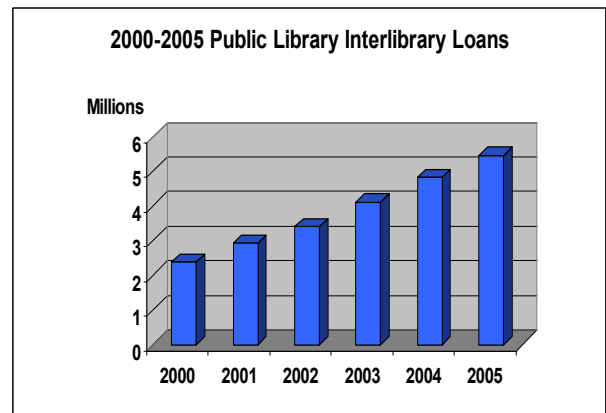
Progress

Library use in Wisconsin continues to grow, and the library services available in Wisconsin continue to improve.



While Wisconsin's population has increased 4 percent from 2000 to 2005, public library use has grown at a much faster rate. As shown on the graph to the left, public library service levels have increased dramatically. However, during this period, total library staffing increased by only 2.9 percent. This indicates that public libraries have been relying on relatively stable staffing levels to provide higher and higher levels of library service to the public.

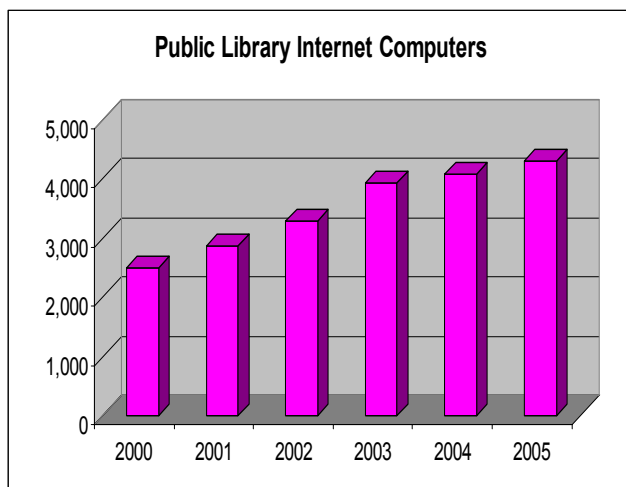
Wisconsin now ranks #1 nationally in per capita public library interlibrary loans. Public library system efforts to develop shared integrated systems have greatly contributed to the accessibility and growth of resource sharing. Currently, 83 percent of Wisconsin residents are served by the 310 public libraries participating in shared integrated systems. Interlibrary loans continued the double-digit annual growth that began in the mid 1990s. This increase in interlibrary loans has been supported by a corresponding expansion of regional and statewide interlibrary delivery services, an activity heavily supported by public library systems.





Wisconsin has also made great progress in providing statewide access to electronic resources through the BadgerLink program. Established by the DPI in 1998, BadgerLink provides online access to information resources for Wisconsin residents in cooperation with the state's public, school, academic, and special libraries. Through statewide contracts, BadgerLink provides access to more than 700 newspapers and more than 11,000 magazines, photographs, maps, book reviews, and reference materials. BadgerLink patrons conduct more than 13 million searches yearly.

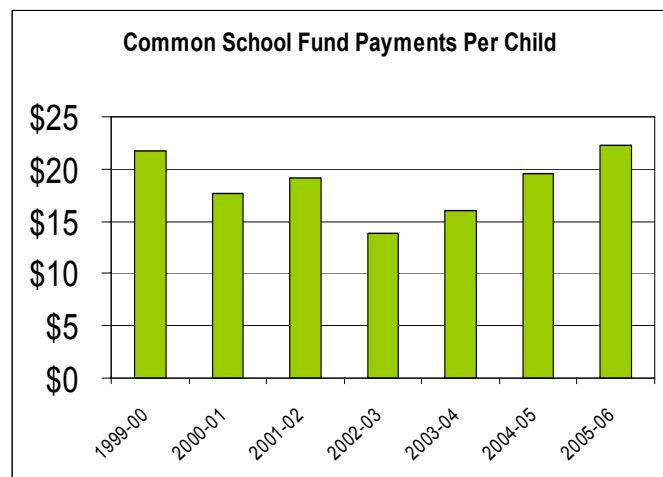
Wisconsin libraries of all types have been leaders in the use of technology to increase the information available to library users.

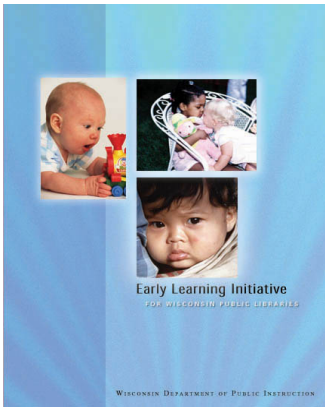


Wisconsin's public school library media centers now provide a total of over 32,000 computers for the use of their students in completing class assignments and research. Wisconsin's TEACH program has been instrumental in making high-speed Internet connections available to Wisconsin's schools and libraries. All Wisconsin academic, school and public libraries now have Internet connections, and almost all now have high-speed Internet access.

The number of Internet-connected public-use computers available at public libraries increased 73 percent between 2000 and 2005, to over 4,300. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation distributed 743 PCs and servers to 235 Wisconsin public libraries and branches in 2003, and the Gates Foundation continues to provide grants to the DPI to support public access computing in Wisconsin public libraries.

The Common School Fund, one of the trust funds set up by the Wisconsin Constitution, funds the purchase of books and other instructional resources for school libraries. The annual earnings of the Common School Fund are distributed on a per pupil basis each spring with more than \$375 million distributed over the last 25 years. In 2005-06, \$28.2 million was distributed to Wisconsin's 426 school districts, which amounts to \$22.32 per child. Common School Fund aid now represents the only source of funding for the purchase of school library materials in most school districts. While Common School Fund aid has generally been stable, it has been threatened by legislative attempts to divert for other purposes the funds going into the Common School Fund.





Research shows that the very earliest experiences in a child's life have significant long-term effects on how that child will learn and develop. Consequently, with encouragement from the DPI's Early Learning Initiative, more and more public libraries are providing programs for children ages 0-5 and their parents to provide experiences giving young children the best possible start to life and learning. Between 1994 and 2004, the number of public library programs for children of all ages in Wisconsin increased by 54 percent.

Wisconsin libraries of all types are also expanding services beyond the walls of their libraries by digitizing library materials and making them available on the Internet. With the help of DPI-awarded federal Library Services and Technology (LSTA) grants, many libraries have contributed to the over 1 million

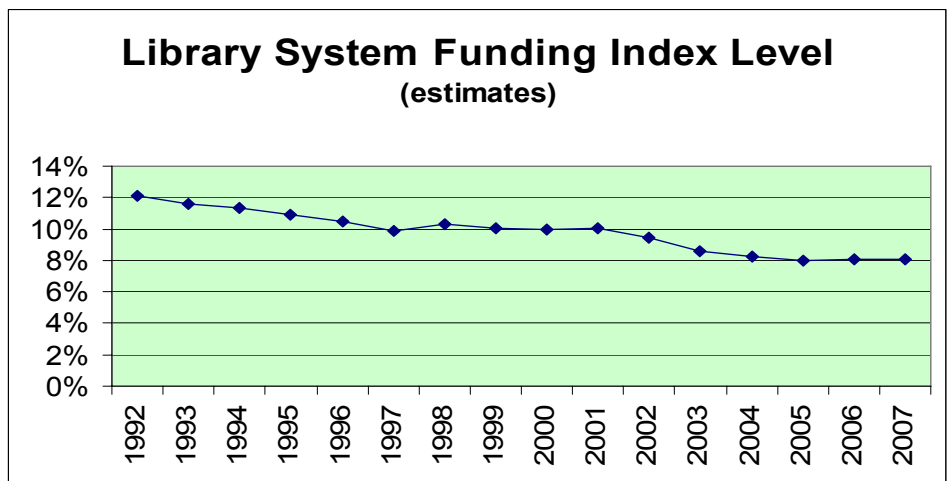


digital items available at Wisconsin Heritage Online (wisconsinheritage.org). Also with the assistance of LSTA grants, many Wisconsin libraries of all types are cooperating to provide 24/7 virtual reference service through the AskAway program (www.askaway.info). Any Wisconsin resident can use AskAway to submit a request for help with research or general information needs that will be answered by reference librarians throughout the state, nationally, and globally.

Challenges

While Wisconsin's libraries have made significant progress, they also face challenges.

- Despite the fact that many studies show the importance of high-quality school libraries to student achievement, many school districts have cut school library staff positions and material funding. Currently, 25% of the state's elementary schools, 38% of the middle schools, and 48% of the high schools do not have library media specialists at the levels recommended by the DPI. Worse, some schools do not even have a library. Students will benefit if more schools have adequate levels of school library staff and materials.
- Over the past 30 years, Wisconsin's 17 public library systems have developed strong programs of service to their 388 member libraries, including resource sharing and open access for all state residents. Participation in public library systems is voluntary, and the public library system aid program is the primary state mechanism to support public library services in Wisconsin. Public library system aid, which is targeted at 13 percent of local and county library expenditures in the previous year, decreased to an estimated 8 percent in 2005, which is the lowest state index level of funding in the past 20 years. The legislature and governor approved public library system funding aid increases of 5% in 2006 and 4.1% in 2007, which have helped to offset recent funding reductions.



- Academic and special libraries, especially, are threatened by rapidly increasing journal prices. For the five years from 2001 to 2005, the average price for journal titles purchased by academic libraries increased by 38%, to \$485. This increase is well in excess of general inflation and has created great difficulties particularly for academic and special library budgets and service levels.

- Statutory levy limits and revenue caps combined with rapidly increasing costs (including costs for books, health insurance and utilities) have induced many schools and municipalities to reduce library service levels.
- Wisconsin library service levels are threatened by continued underfunding of the DPI's library service contracts with the Milwaukee Public Library, Wisconsin Library Services, the Wisconsin Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, and the Cooperative Children's Book Center. Service reductions have occurred because of a 15% funding reduction for the 2003-05 biennium and flat funding for 2005-2007. In particular, the interlibrary loan contracts have been cut substantially. This has meant that materials are not always accessible from the University of Wisconsin and private academic libraries outside of Madison and that there was not sufficient funding to fulfill all requests that could have gone to UW-Madison.

Key Recommendations

A healthy state economy and a bright future for all Wisconsin residents will require high-quality school, public, academic, and special libraries. To achieve this future, COLAND recommends that:

- Wisconsin should provide 13% index level funding for public library systems. Wisconsin's public library systems have a proven track record of cost-effective services provided in cooperation with member libraries and member counties. These services, including resource sharing and open access, are threatened if the funding index level continues at a level below 13%.
- Wisconsin should remove arbitrary levy limits and revenue caps that interfere with local decision-making about the quality of local libraries.
- PK-12 schools should improve levels of library staffing and funding to levels recommended by the DPI. Quality school library programs have a proven positive effect on student achievement.
- The Common School Fund must be protected for its constitutional purpose--the purchase of school library materials.
- Wisconsin should fully fund the statewide resource library contracts and expand the resources available through BadgerLink. These statewide resources cost-effectively expand the information available to Wisconsin libraries and to all residents of the state.