

HENNEN'S AMERICAN PUBLIC LIBRARY RATINGS 2008

"HAPLR 8" is how I'm dubbing this edition of Hennen's American Public Library Ratings, as they enter their second decade. Although I have tried to avoid doing so, others have frequently called the ratings annual. But the vagaries of federal data reporting have kept that from being the case. The ratings were first published in *American Libraries* in 1999. "HAPLR 8" corresponds to the current year but only by happenstance.

What has changed in the statewide outlook over the past four years? New Mexico and Wyoming have increased their standings the most (from 42nd to 25th for New Mexico and from 23rd to 15th for Wyoming. Maine, Arizona and Florida have fallen in the standings most (from 26th to 33rd for Maine, from 18th to 23rd for Arizona, and from 30th to 35th for Florida). Ohio, Utah, Oregon, Washington, and Indiana all maintained their relative spots at the

top five. Mississippi, Louisiana, the District of Columbia, Alabama, and Tennessee, took the bottom five spots for this year's rankings.

The top 10 libraries in each service-population category are listed on the accompanying chart. Ranking number one in their respective slots are six Ohio libraries: Columbus Metropolitan Library (500 K), Washington-Centerville Public Library (50 K), North Canton Public Library (25 K), Twins-

burg Public Library (10 K), Columbiana Public Library (5 K), and Grand Valley Public Library (2.5 K). The other four in the number one slot are: Howard County in Maryland (250 K), Naperville Public Library in Illinois (100 K), Sodas Free Library in New York (1 K), and Hardtner Public Library in Kansas (less than 1 K).

The "Year-to-Year Changes" chart (see sidebar) compares data for this edition with data from the prior (2006)

By Thomas J. Hennen Jr.

edition and from the first edition (1999). Consider some of the changes. On average, for every dollar spent on operating costs, 14 cents is spent on capital. That continues a decade-plus trend of 13 to 15 cents for capital for every dollar of operating expenditures. Total operating expenditures went up 6.0% while collection expenditures increased 5.8%. Public library circulation continued its multiyear climb with a 4.2% rise. Library visits bested the circulation amounts with a 4.4% increase. Reference answers saw a 0.5% increase, but that was better than the declines posted in the past several years. Nevertheless, reference is still 7.4% ahead of the rate for the 1999 edition. The most noticeable change since 1999 was in the availability of magazine subscriptions per capita, a 0.1% increase. That is probably a testimony to continuing library preference for online sources over their print counterparts. Overall, libraries have just 1.9% more subscriptions than they did for the 2006 HAPLR edition.

The most noticeable decline was in the availability of magazine subscriptions per capita, a 4.2% drop. That is probably a testimony to continuing growth in library preference for online sources over their print counterparts. Overall, libraries have 1.9% fewer subscriptions than they did in the 1999 HAPLR edition.

Back in the mid-'70s when I went to graduate school, Wheeler and Goldhor's numbers represented the gold standard for library planning when they published *Practical Administration of Public Libraries* in 1962. It was a library school textbook for a long time thereafter. They recommended that 20% of a public library budget should go toward materials. More recently, the common wisdom has pointed to 15%. The latest data shows another in a series of continuing declines, to 13.2%. In the 1999 HAPLR edition it was 15.1%.

Circulation per staff hour is up 2.5% this year and 5.9% since the first edition. Visits and circulation per hour open are up again for this edition by

Data	YEAR-TO-YEAR CHANGES		
	HAPLR 2008	HAPLR 1999	HAPLR 2006
Number of Libraries	9,353	6.9%	3.1%
Population	293,392,892	13.1%	2.7%
Staff FTE	139,677	18.6%	2.7%
Collection Expenditure	\$1,208,589,300	43.7%	5.8%
Total Expenditure	\$9,150,389,741	64.8%	6.0%
Book Volumes	826,971,023	16.6%	3.0%
Periodical Subscriptions	1,855,717	0.1%	1.9%
Hours Open	36,860,034	11.4%	2.6%
Visits	1,378,848,471	36.2%	4.4%
Reference	305,455,445	7.4%	0.5%
Circulation	2,092,205,586	27.5%	4.2%
Expend per capita	\$31.19	45.8%	3.2%
Percent Budget to materials	13.2%	-12.8%	-0.2%
Materials Expend Per capita	\$4.12	27.1%	2.9%
FTE staff per 1000 popul	0.48	4.9%	0.0%
Periodicals per 1000 residents	6.3	-11.5%	-0.8%
Volumes per Capita	2.8	3.1%	0.2%
Operating Expend. per circulation	\$4.37	29.3%	1.7%
Visits per capita	4.7	20.4%	1.6%
Book Collection turnover	2.5	9.3%	1.2%
Circulation per FTE Staff Hour	7.2	7.4%	1.5%
Circulation per Capita	7.1	12.7%	1.4%
Reference per capita	1.0	-5.0%	-2.2%
Circulation per hour	56.8	14.4%	1.5%
Visits per hour	37.4	22.3%	1.7%
Circulation per visit	1.5	-6.4%	-0.2%

a whopping 20.2% and 12.7% respectively from the first edition.

After adjusting for inflation since the first edition, expenditures per item circulated remain about the same as they did nearly 10 years ago. How many public or private enterprises can say that?

First published two years after the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) created its Peer Assessment Tool, the HAPLR ratings rely on six input and nine output measures, compared consistently for each population grouping. The measures are fairly traditional. I thought then, as now, that electronic resources, youth services, and building size ought to be included,

but the data for these measures is simply too unreliable for consistent calculation and comparison.

I had hoped to publish this eighth edition of HAPLR in fall of 2007 but the release of the necessary data for FY2005 became a problem. A handoff of the statistics-reporting duty from NCES to the Institute of Museum and Library Services had been scheduled for 2007. It appeared at that time that the late publication of FY2005 data by NCES would be followed in just a matter of months by the much earlier-than-usual publication of FY2006 data by IMLS. For that reason, I chose to skip the normal fall 2007 publication

Top 10 Libraries in 10 Population Categories

Pop	Rank	Library	State	Score
500,000	1	Columbus Metropolitan Library	OH	879
	2	Cuyahoga County Public Library	OH	871
	3	Multnomah County Library	OR	830
	4	Hennepin County Library	MN	803
	5	Salt Lake County Library System	UT	802
	6	Baltimore County Public Library	MD	796
	7	Denver Public Library	CO	789
	8	King County Library System	WA	776
	9	Pikes Peak Library District	CO	747
	10	Cincinnati And Hamilton County, PI Of	OH	743
250,000	1	Howard County Library	MD	892
	2	Santa Clara County Library	CA	876
	3	Saint Charles City-County Library District	MO	856
	4	Central Rappahannock Regional Library	VA	814
	5	Madison Public Library	WI	811
	6	Lincoln City Libraries	NE	793
	7	Johnson County Library	KS	788
	8	Kent District Library	MI	755
	9	Stark County District Library	OH	754
	10	Allen County Public Library	IN	748
100,000	1	Naperville Public Library	IL	945
	2	Monroe County Public Library	IN	901
	3	Santa Clara City Library	CA	897
	4	Douglas County Libraries	CO	878
	5	Medina County District Library	OH	873
	6	Arapahoe Library District	CO	868
	7	Salt Lake City Public Library	UT	865
	8	Schaumburg Twp District Library	IL	860
	9	St Joseph County Public Library	IN	857
	10	Loudoun County Public Library	VA	855
50,000	1	Washington-Centerville Public Library	OH	949
	2	Worthington Public Library	OH	916
	3	Carmel Clay Public Library	IN	914
	4	Euclid Public Library	OH	914
	5	Newton Free Library	MA	900
	6	Willoughby-Eastlake Public Library	OH	896
	7	Geauga County Public Library	OH	882
	8	Wheaton Public Library	IL	882
	9	Lakewood Public Library	OH	879
	10	West Bloomfield Township Public Library	MI	878
25,000	1	North Canton Public Library	OH	933
	2	Porter Public Library	OH	922
	3	Upper Arlington Public Library	OH	909
	4	Wadsworth Public Library	OH	900
	5	Elmhurst Public Library	IL	896
	6	Plymouth District Library	MI	893
	7	Lake Oswego Public Library	OR	887
	8	St. Charles Public Library District	IL	886
	9	Middleton Public Library	WI	884
	10	Crystal Lake Public Library	IL	884

in favor of a spring 2008 set of HAPLR ratings based on the FY2006 data. Subsequent events proved that to be a bad decision, because the new IMLS data was not forthcoming. This was not the first time it became necessary to

skip a year of HAPLR reports because of a delay in federal data. I had to do so back in 2004 because the FY2002 data was fatally flawed: One of the largest states in the nation failed to report any data for that year, so we skipped a year

of HAPLR reports. As soon as the FY2006 data is released by IMLS, I will begin working on the next edition, which I hope it will be available in the first half of 2009. For now, accept my apology that this eighth edition is a year later than I would have preferred. When I started my library career, no survey by ALA—or indeed any other organization—would have asked the public whether or not they thought public libraries would continue to be needed in the future. But by the turn of this millennium, it became a standard question to all those op-ed writers speculating about the internet replacing what librarians do. The 2006 American Library Association @ your library: Attitudes Toward Public Libraries Survey shows that 90% of the public says yes, they need us more than ever, the internet notwithstanding. But the scrutiny about what we do and how well we do it will continue to grow. This is one of the main reasons that in the last decade we have seen an increase in attempts at rating public libraries. The public and the profession want to know: How can we demonstrate our worth? How do we measure the results of our investment in libraries? A number of efforts have been undertaken over the past 11 years:

NCES Peer Assessment Tool The NCES established the Peer Assessment Tool in 1997. This online tool is now the responsibility of the Institute of Museum and Library Services and available at harvester.census.gov/imls/. The tool lets library planners set parameters and come up with peer libraries that the library specifies. Although it is useful for many purposes, the learning curve is somewhat steep and the number of options and variables can be overwhelming.

BIX, German Library Index In 1999, the same year that HAPLR was introduced, the Bertelsman Foundation sponsored BIX (Der Bibliothek-sindex) to compare libraries in

Top 10 Libraries in 10 Population Categories

Pop	Rank	Library	State	Score
10,000	1	Twinsburg Public Library	OH	956
	2	Wickliffe Public Library	OH	936
	3	Hays Public Library	KS	930
	4	Madison Public Library	OH	921
	5	Orrville Public Library	OH	911
	6	Peters Township Public Library	PA	905
	7	Rocky River Public Library	OH	902
	8	Darien Library	CT	901
	9	Henry Carter Hull Library	CT	899
	10	Way Public Library	OH	893
5,000	1	Columbiana Public Library	OH	953
	2	Bridgeport Public Library	WV	933
	3	Wright Memorial Public Library	OH	919
	4	Crestline Public Library	OH	907
	5	New Cumberland Public Library	PA	907
	6	Bristol Public Library	OH	906
	7	Dover Town Library	MA	906
	8	Kinsman Free Public Library	OH	899
	9	Grandview Heights Public Library	OH	899
	10	Freeport Community Library	ME	891
2,500	1	Grand Valley Public Library	OH	924
	2	Mt. Pleasant Public Library	UT	914
	3	James Kennedy Public Library	IA	914
	4	Bell Memorial Public Library	IN	900
	5	Pelican Rapids Public Library	MN	898
	6	Tracy Memorial Library	NH	885
	7	Belleville Public Library	WI	883
	8	Rock Valley Public Library	IA	878
	9	Perry Public Library	OH	875
	10	Soldotna Public Library	AK	870
1,000	1	Sodus Free Library	NY	921
	2	Centerburg Public Library	OH	917
	3	Flomaton Public Library	AL	914
	4	Edgerton: Runals Memorial Library	MN	900
	5	Seneca Free Library	KS	898
	6	Utica Public Library District	IL	890
	7	Conrad Public Library	IA	887
	8	Dike Public Library	IA	877
	9	Hazel L Meyer Memorial Library	SD	876
	10	Upton County Public Library	TX	870
>1,000	1	Hardtner Public Library	KS	892
	2	Poland Public Library	NY	890
	3	Wagnalls Memorial Library	OH	880
	4	Browns Valley Public Library	MN	875
	5	New Woodstock Free Library	NY	873
	6	Clayville Library Association	NY	870
	7	Meadow Grove Public Library	NE	863
	8	Raquette Lake Free Library	NY	860
	9	Silverton Public Library	CO	858
	10	Washburn Public Library	TN	852

Germany. BIX uses many of the same measures as HAPLR, but there are three major differences. First, the German project is voluntary and libraries must pay to participate. Second, the project provides for measures from year to year, often called a longitudinal analysis. Third, BIX ratings include employee retention as a positive measure of employee satisfaction, a factor that the U.S. data has never included. As planned, the BIX project was turned over to the German Library Association in 2005.

Audit Commission Reports, U.K.

In 2000, Great Britain adopted national library standards, and the Audit Commission began publishing both summary annual reports of library conditions and individualized ratings of libraries. Audit Commission personnel base the reports on statistical data, long-range plans, local government commitment to the library, and a site visit. The Audit Commission is an independent body. Every library is assigned a score. The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. A horizontal axis shows how good the service is at present, on a scale ranging from no stars for poor to three stars for excellent. A vertical axis shows the improvement prospects over time of the service, also on a four-point scale. "Building Better Library Systems" is available at www.audit-commission.gov.uk. From the data on the website, however, the project appears to have stalled after 2001.

Bibliostat Begun in 1998 and acquired by Baker and Taylor in 2000, Bibliostat Connect is a tool that provides access to national, proprietary, and local summary statistics for public library peer comparisons. Bibliostat Connect's annual subscription prices of \$300 to \$4,500 are based on a subscribing library's population. A number of states use the software for collecting annual statistics for their public libraries.

Normative Data Project Before it was launched in 2005, I reviewed the Normative Data Project for *American Libraries* (April 2005, p. 81). Sponsored by SirsiDynix, the integrated library system vendor,

the project promised to meld library data, demographic data, and even GIS (geographic information systems) information into a seamless product available to libraries for analysis and planning. I wrote at the

time that the project seemed very promising, but that I was concerned that the company only let me see the prototype data as presented by the developers rather than letting me drive the product myself. (For the information that was presented at the time, see SirsiDynix's February 2005 *OneSource* newsletter.) Alas, since the introduction of the Normative Data Project and my review, the company appears to have abandoned this very promising project.

Gannett Database Gannett News Service released a searchable database July 17 (*AL*, Sept., p. 30) that compares trends affecting public library systems between 2002 and 2006. The analysis used NCES data as well as more current statistics collected directly from state library data coordinators, compared figures for about 9,200 library systems, and found that library visits

increased by roughly 10% during that five-year period and circulation of materials rose by 9%. Database users can select a library system from a dropdown list of counties by state to learn about changes in book and video circulation, number of visits, operating expenses, and the number of public-use computers.

The intent is to provide newspapers in the Gannett chain with information on libraries that local newspapers can use to highlight comparative data about libraries in their media market. As I see it, the problem with the Gannett database is that it does not provide sufficient data to make broad comparative analyses of a given library to other libraries.

A fair number of newspapers have already used the Gannett Library Systems Database for local newspaper articles, but comparative data and analysis are lacking because of the limitations of the product. The Gan-

nett News Service Library Systems Database is available at data.gannettnewsservice.com/libraries/library_start.php.

HAPLR vs. LJ Index

For years, critics of HAPLR have argued that these ratings are improperly done and, in fact, should not be done at all, asserting that libraries, unique among American institutions, are just too local to be judged nationally. Recently, however, *Library Journal* announced that two of those critics, with backing from Bibliostat, plan to publish the "LJ Index." They are calling it "a new ranking system that focuses more transparently on ranking libraries based on their performance." They say it will scrutinize "only such statistics that describe library service outputs, such as visits, circulation, public internet computer usage, and program attendance." It will exclude "resource inputs, such as staffing levels,



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Keeping up with the latest information technology isn't easy. That's where Michael Stephens comes in. An instructor in Dominican University's Graduate School of Library and Information Science, he has a knack for making even the most complex concepts simple to grasp. He's written a how-to guide for tech trainers and prides himself on teaching students in a compelling and entertaining fashion. His approach—and Dominican's—is anything but by the book.

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“Many libraries have noted that you get what you pay for as a community.”

collection size, and revenues and expenditures.” In announcing their new rankings system in *LJ*, Keith Curry Lance and Ray Lyons said, “Inputs, we believe, do not measure library performance. That is why we emphasize outputs, which indicate some of the services people receive from libraries.” It will be interesting to see how the LJ Index rankings then differ from the position of those same libraries in HAPLR.

A part of me wishes that I hadn’t chosen so many factors or weighted them when developing HAPLR. It certainly seems that the LJ Index will be easier to calculate—four factors as opposed to 15 and no weighting of the factors. I chose to use both input factors and output factors for HAPLR; what a community brings to the table in spending per capita, books per capita, and staffing levels matters. One also must judge some factors more important to the equation than others, but by refusing to weight factors, Lance and Lyons make all factors equal. Are the number of actual visits, circulation, electronic uses, and program attendance really equal in importance? Don’t some things we do in libraries cost more and count for more than others?

Both LJ Index authors have berated me about the variations that result from using per-capita measures. They lament that when one moves from one population category to another the ratings change in HAPLR. But, as far as I can tell, the same thing will happen for the LJ Index. One is tempted to ask why what is good, or bad, for the HAPLR goose is perfectly okay for the LJ Index gander.

In “The Trouble with Hennen,” published in the Nov. 15, 1999, *Library Journal*, Oregon State Librarian Jim Schepke criticized the HAPLR methodology for using outputs rather than his preferred method of inputs only. We should judge libraries on what they have to offer in terms of available staffing, materials, and building size,

he said. But what will he say if the LJ Index ignores those factors?

Lance and Lyons talk about not wanting to use funding per capita as a factor. They assert in the June 15 *Library Journal* that “few potential rankings users would welcome the news that their libraries topped rankings on staffing, collection size, or—least of all—funding. While such rankings should be something to brag about in an ideal world, in these tight economic times, they could invite cuts on the rationale that the library would still have ‘nothing to complain about,’ or that maintaining outputs despite input cuts (a doubtful eventuality) would represent an improvement in the library’s ‘efficiency.’ *For these reasons, we chose to leave input measures out of the LJ Index*” [emphasis mine].

Using input measures

I read this criticism of using input measures while visiting Cuyahoga County, where that is exactly what they were doing. Cuyahoga County Library Director (and vice-president of ALA’s Public Library Association) Sari Feldman is leading her library’s push for a bond issue for operating and capital expenses. Their campaign is based, in part, on their great HAPLR scores. These are scores that include high spending and other output measures that are matched by comparably high usage (output measures). High investment equals high yield. Cuyahoga has a lot of company. Many libraries have noted that you get what you pay for as a community. Most of the time, the more a community puts into a library the more its residents receive. If that is not a message for our times, what is? HAPLR presents the balance between inputs and outputs. The LJ Index wants us to avoid the issues.

But what was the reason again? Is it to protect libraries, taxpayers, or who exactly? Have they suppressed information to protect libraries regardless of the consequences? Or, protect libraries at the expense of information? Neither formulation looks all that good from the perspective of a respect for the free flow of information that one might expect from our profession.

Lance and Lyons talk about not using the input measure of spending because some libraries in small towns don’t capture all the personnel costs. But then they want to use program attendance as a measure, even though a library may have no space to program.

Now let’s have a word about those statistical and philosophical justifications for a “clean use” of just four variables: Here is what happens with statistical theory that I believe does not work in the real world of library services. Total spending by a library on a per capita basis and just the materials spending per capita *almost* always go together. Because that is so, the LJ Index authors would have us abandon one or the other measure. But here is where it matters in the real library world: sometimes a library has a lot of money per capita but devotes very little of it to buying materials. I continue to judge that a bad thing. Their statistics and philosophy would have us ignore it.

Providing that all other things are equal, which they rarely are, and looking at things from only the big picture perspective, they might be right. But—and this is what is important—the HAPLR ratings judge things at the *library_level*. That way, the disparity between total spending and materials spending per capita speaks, one can only say, volumes. ■



Learn more about HAPLR @ www.haplr-index.com.