

EdSource

To: CNPA Entry
From: EdSource
Re: Enterprise News Story or Series: Library or police, a small town's struggle
Date: Dec. 30, 2022

These stories on a small town's struggle over its library began with the startling revelation that leaders in McFarland, a small town in the state's agricultural Central Valley, were considering turning its library into a police headquarters. Proponents of the plan included the city's police, city and school officials claiming falsely, that few people would care.

Entry URLs:

<https://edsource.org/2022/a-small-town-in-kern-county-contemplates-turning-its-community-library-into-a-police-station/670373>

<https://edsource.org/2022/cities-and-towns-across-california-only-get-the-libraries-they-can-afford/677969>

<https://edsource.org/2022/amid-community-pressure-county-blocks-mcfarlands-plan-to-convert-library-into-a-police-station/677746>

<https://edsource.org/2022/once-again-mcfarland-city-leaders-lobby-the-county-to-turn-its-library-into-a-police-station/679010>

The problem was few people knew about the plan until EdSource called attention to it and its opposition, including young patrons who fill the library after school and community members who pointed out the long history of corruption and misconduct in the local police force.

This series of enterprise stories used the conflict in McFarland as a jumping off point to survey the troubling inequities rife in California's public library system. One of the city's arguments for taking over the McFarland library building was that, because it was open just two days a week, it was underutilized.

An EdSource analysis of state funding showed that McFarland's library branch is part of the lowest-funded county system in the state, the Kern County Library. And, poorly funded libraries aren't a problem unique to Kern County.

The passage of Prop. 13 in 1978, which slashed property and made it harder for communities to levy additional taxes, has created communities of haves and have-nots. In contrast, Ohio, a state provides about half of library funding, and has some of the best-funded and most-visited libraries in the country — even in impoverished Appalachia.

Public libraries while a complement to schools, is almost entirely the responsibility of local rather than the state or federal government. In practice, this hyperlocal funding system means that the wealthy have well-resourced libraries open on evenings and weekends. The poor may have a branch in a crumbling building with an out-of-date collection open a couple days a week or a visit from a bookmobile — if they have any library at all.

EdSource visited two neighboring communities to highlight the disparities: Merced County Library with its \$12 in annual funding for each resident compared to Santa Clara County Library's \$147.

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Some city and county leaders are still pressing for McFarland's library to be converted to a police station, but there is a rising effort to preserve the library, including within the county administration. Since the first piece was published, Kern County has decided to open up the McFarland Library five days a week. EdSource's library funding analysis has been cited at city and county meetings. A local taxpayer group that opposed additional county funding for Kern's libraries in 2016 is now a strong voice supporting libraries, arguing that they are critical for workforce development. EdSource has been invited to share its findings on a series of panels across the county in 2023.

Our coverage also included a [podcast](#) on the issue: OCTOBER 20, 2022

[Kids or cops: who should use this library building?](#)

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rose Ciotta". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Rose Ciotta
Investigations and Projects Editor
EdSource