

FEATURE

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Evaluation

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T-USE ARIES

A Living Room of Learning



Susan Casstevens

susanc@dbu.edu

Introduction

For a decade, I worked in a joint-use school/public library that serves a large high school and a community of thirty-three thousand. We usually saw several hundred visitors each day, more than a thousand when high school classes came for library presentations. The combined library is like a living room for a multigenerational family. It brings together all ages, from toddlers to retirees in their 70s and older. During a typical week in this dual-use library in Texas, preschoolers gather in eager anticipation for story time. Seated in a semicircle, their bright upturned faces burst into laughter while listening to Ladybug Girl's latest predicament or hearing Pete the Cat optimistically remind us that, "It's all good." Two afternoons each week senior adult library patrons sit at desktop computers. Proving that it's never too late to learn, the class focuses on mastering basic computer skills necessary to adapt in our ever-changing digital world. Meanwhile, high school students and faculty come and go. They gravitate to the library to check out books, movies, and music; use school desktop computers; and browse on personal devices. In a joint-use library, a grandmother may share a seating area with a seventeen-year-old working on Algebra 2 problems, while other teens play card games, and adults fill out job applications online. In this well-lit library, a living room of learning, there is space for all, and everyone is welcome.

I've always felt that this joint-use library, open year-round, is a place where people of all ages, interests, and income levels can find items of interest at no personal cost. The mission of A. H. Meadows Public and High School Library in Midlothian, Texas, is to offer what other public libraries provide: educational and entertainment resources to a

community. Yet, the staff also wants the library to be seen as an effective school library that enhances the high school curriculum and helps improve student achievement. A. H. Meadows Public and High School Library, operating since 1985, consistently tries to rise to the challenge of successfully serving more than one patron population, effectively combining public and school library services and programs to meet current economic and community literacy needs.

One example of how this joint-use library has partnered with the nine school libraries in Midlothian is the annual Field of Readers community reading event. More than one thousand parents and children bring blankets and books for a family reading night on the playing field of the city's multipurpose stadium. Last year, Midlothian's ten librarians wore eye patches, hoop earrings, and black mustaches to promote the year's theme "Read Like a Pirate!" High school students volunteer at the annual event to read stories or work face-painting tables for elementary students. Media students project video of families reading together onto the stadium jumbotron screen. The November evening includes a half-price book fair, games, and craft activities, but the main focus is reading as a community under the stadium lights.

Another example of a combined school and community effort is a special collection in Midlothian's combined library. The children's area houses a memorial collection honoring a former high school senior. Brooke Cambron wanted to be a teacher and was involved in Midlothian High School's Ready, Set, Teach training program. After a sudden illness took her life, her friends and family initiated Brooke's Books, annually hosting book drives in the children's room. The library

staff processes the donations with spine labels and bookplates with a custom Brooke's Books logo. After ten years of donations from individuals, community groups, and a corporation, hundreds of books throughout the library remind Midlothian residents of a young woman who loved literacy and libraries.

Other examples of activities at A. H. Meadows Public and High School Library that involve community members—some school-age patrons, some much older—are free classes in American Sign Language offered from August through May, AARP defensive-driving classes, and legal-aid sessions throughout the school year. The Midlothian Homeschool Association, homeowner's groups, and ACT/SAT boot camps use the three auxiliary rooms by reservation. During the summer, the library remains open sixty-two hours each week, hosting two story times and a movie afternoon for hundreds of readers to participate in the annual Texas Summer Reading Program activities. On Wednesday afternoons in the summer, the aroma of buttered popcorn fills the library as kids spread blankets to watch movies.

Prevalence of Combined Libraries

Combined libraries have existed in the United States and internationally for more than a century. Joint-use libraries are most often school libraries combined with the community's sole public library. Dual-use libraries continue to grow nationally in an effort to provide better library services to more people at a lower cost. Sarah McNicol described the financial benefits "of greater efficiency in a shared building which results in reduced overhead costs related to utilities, maintenance, and landscaping" (2008). The exact

THE COMBINED LIBRARY IS LIKE A LIVING ROOM FOR A MULTIGENERATIONAL FAMILY.



Booker	Crandall	Guthrie	Midlothian	Shallowater
Claude	Dell City	Howe	Olney	Venus
Celina	Earth	Huntington	Prairie Lea	Wellington
El Paso	Forney	Joshua	Prosper	White Oak
	Fort Hancock	Marion	Rocksprings	Wills Point

Figure 1. Texas towns taking advantage of joint-use libraries.

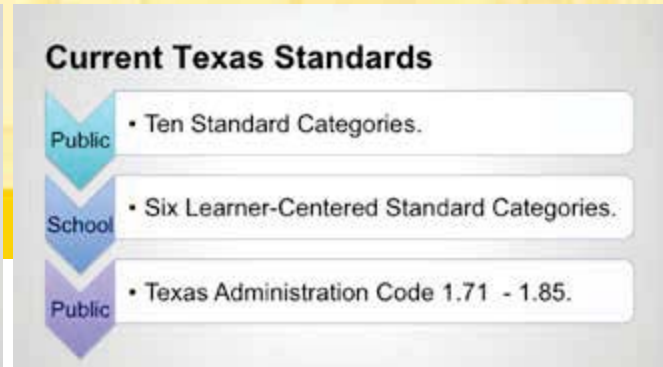


Figure 2. Texas standards for school and public libraries. (URLs for these standards are at the end of this article.)

number of combined-use libraries worldwide is unknown. At least sixty-seven joint-use libraries exist within the United States. California and Florida claim several successful shared library facilities. Two hundred joint-use libraries operate

in Canada, with one hundred and twenty in Australia. The United Kingdom listed sixty shared libraries in 2005, but this number may be an underestimate of libraries with joint-use components (Gunnels, Green, and Butler 2012).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Joint-Use Libraries

Scholarly opinions both support and criticize dual-use libraries. Several key ingredients to successful dual-use libraries are identified in the literature, such as the establishment of joint-use policies and procedures in the form of a legally binding joint-use agreement, and commitment to the shared goal of providing better information access to students and public library users.

The benefits of collaborative city and school library programs are well suited to current economic challenges, especially in rural areas. A library budget that is customized to meet students' as well as public patrons' information needs is more economically effective than establishing and maintaining two facilities. Texas researchers Claire B. Gunnels, Susan E. Green, and Patricia M. Butler (2012) pointed out that a combined library will have material for all ages and reading abilities, providing more material and extended hours than those of a separate public or school library. In addition, joint-use libraries are more likely to remain funded



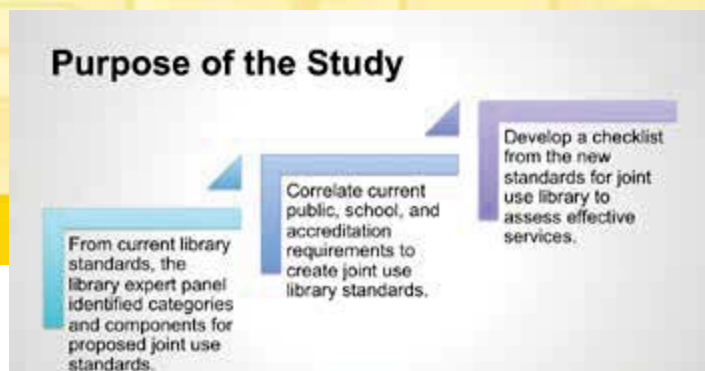


Figure 3. Characteristics of panelists who participated in the study. (Some panelists fell into more than one category.)

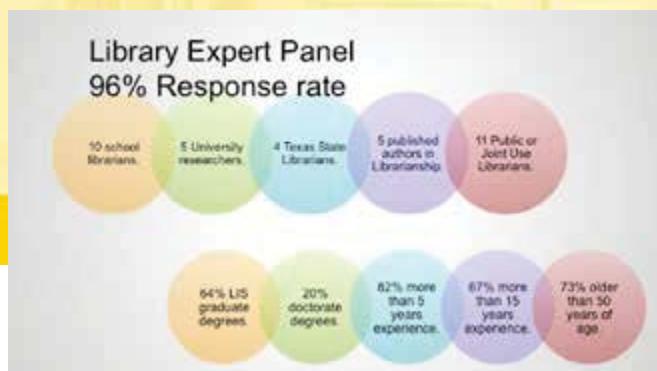


Figure 4. Study purpose and process.

during budget cuts because they have more community involvement than separate libraries. This was the case in Midlothian; when individual campus book budgets were drastically reduced, the joint high school/public library was not affected, due to consistent city funding. Mostly, a joint-use library benefits small communities that lack a tax base sufficient to support an independent public library.

The main disadvantage of combined libraries is identified in the research as a decrease in the quality of service when one library tries to meet the needs of students and a community from one facility. Sometimes adults are reluctant to visit a school campus for their personal library use, and security involving public visitors mingling with students is a paramount concern in a school library. Further, personnel issues are a complex challenge in a combined library. The defined roles for city and school library staff, management practices for a library director, and daily operating procedures can be implemented effectively only through a detailed joint-use agreement. Even the promise of economic benefits a community receives from a dual-use

library can be an empty one unless a specific set of conditions are in place:

- Community understanding and support of the joint-use library concept.
- Binding contract between public library and the school district.
- Accessibility of the joint-use library by the public from outside the school building, and separate and convenient parking.

The conditions usually exist only in communities with fewer than three thousand residents and where the joint-use library is the only viable option for library service. However, the drive for economy is the reason the number of joint-use libraries continues to increase in the United States.

Need for Joint-Use Standards

In Texas twenty-four joint-use school/public libraries currently serve community and school populations (see figure 1). Although no standards have been established for joint-use libraries in Texas, separate standards do exist for Texas public and Texas school libraries (see

figure 2), as well as accreditation requirements for public libraries to participate as members in the Texas State Library System. Specific standards are needed for Texas joint-use facilities to provide quality service. The need for such standards was the impetus behind my research described below.

In 2015 twenty-nine national and international library experts served as panel members (see figure 3) in my doctoral Delphi study (Casstevens 2016) to reach professional agreement on what joint-use standards should include and to create a checklist that Texas joint-use libraries can use to assess effective service (see figure 4). Prior to the study, I completed a background survey that revealed Texas joint school/public libraries:

- serve populations of 300–43,000 patrons,
- hold collections of 8,800–46,000 physical items,
- circulate 800–100,000 items annually, and
- often serve as the community's only public library.

97%	Technology Standards.
97%	Collection Standards.
90%	Facility Standards.
90%	Librarian Leadership Standards.
90%	Personnel Standards.
83%	State accreditation requirements.
79%	Finance Standards.
79%	Connections to Community Standards.
76%	Library Service Standards.
70%	Library Environment Standards.

Figure 5. Categories of joint-use standards identified by at least 70 percent of experts who participated in the study.



Figure 6. Five-point Likert-type scale respondents used to rate each existing standard for inclusion in joint-use standards.

Elements Important for Joint-Use Standards

Checklist Representing Categories Identified by Experts

The Delphi study resulted in a statistical consensus from the expert library panel that identified forty-two joint-use library guidelines. (Statistical consensus was determined from the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation of the aggregated scale ratings. For more about determining statistical consensus during this research, see Casstevens 2016.) Texas school library and Texas public library standards, as well as Texas state library accreditation requirements, were correlated to create these proposed standards. These joint-use library guidelines can be viewed at <http://goo.gl/forms/PKDeiqzGoB>. The checklist represents the ten categories that 70 percent or more of the library experts agreed to include (see figure 5). The respondents used a five-point scale to rate each existing standard for inclusion in joint-use standards (see figure 6).

The standards recommended by the library expert panel in the Delphi study addressed effective joint-use library leadership and harmonious long-term goals between the city and school. To meet the information needs of the school and

community, the library collection should reflect the diversity of the local school and population. The library environment should include space that meets public and school requirements, as well as adequate outdoor features such as parking, signage, ADA accommodations, and lighting. Financially, the joint-use library must designate clear monetary responsibilities to be met on a continual basis by the school district and the city, but also allow for flexible funding to reflect the current programming needs of school and public library users.

Certified School Librarian

A certified school librarian capable of providing quality instructional services is preferred for the joint-use library setting due to the instructional and collaborative nature of the work. The Delphi panel of library experts agreed that if a joint-use library is served by only one professional librarian, certification in school librarianship should be required. In addition, to maintain the integrity of lifelong learning for school and public library visitors in a combined facility:

- The library director (a certified school librarian if only one librarian is on staff) should have access to all school classrooms for research and library-use

instruction, and consistently collaborate with teachers for specific curriculum needs.

- Public library patrons should have access to the library during school hours, with simultaneous access to instructional library services, such as reference help, computer assistance, and information location services.

AASL's 2007 *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* contain common beliefs that correlate with and enhance the joint-use library environment. If equitable access is a key component for education, equitable access in a dual-use library secures books, reading, and information technology in a safe learning environment for children, young people, and adults. A certified school librarian is the appropriate person to guide the library as it provides this equitable access.

Library Director's Skill Set

The American Library Association offers a helpful fact sheet of articles and books from several states and different countries that address issues concerning joint-use libraries at <http://libguides.ala.org/Jointuselibraries/Overview>. Research indicates several critical factors that support successful combined library service:

- one library director responsible for both school and public library services,
- convenient location for all library users,
- adequate staffing and operating hours to meet school and community needs, and
- no restriction on collection access for any user group.

The director of a combined library can employ the Joint Use Library Checklist at <http://goo.gl/forms/PKDeiqzGoB> to numerically assess library services. Several of the guidelines on the checklist detail how the director creates quality service.

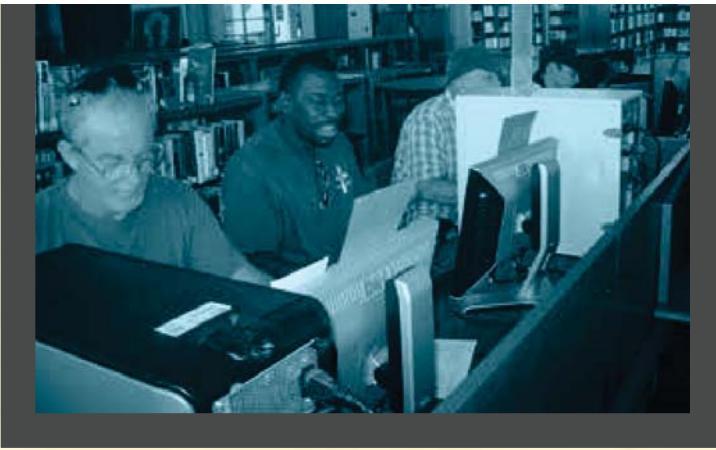
LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION

- The library director provides written policies and procedures that reflect and respect the authority of the library board, the school board, and other governing agencies of the joint-use library.
- The library director prepares an annual report for the library's funding agencies.
- The library director provides administrative assurance that the joint-use library will meet the quantitative requirements for state accreditation in the Texas State Library system.

FINANCE

- The library director appropriately administers funding as established by the articulation of clear monetary responsibilities between the school district and the city to assure funding for the joint-use library on a continual basis.
- The library director manages the budget to combine city and school funding appropriate to the community served and the school campus enrollment.





PARTNERSHIP IS THE CORE GOAL OF A JOINT-USE LIBRARY.

However, the benefits of successful collaboration still can be achieved if a stand-alone school or public library is interested in building a relationship with a library that serves a different—or overlapping—population.

- The library director proposes a budget that reflects flexible funding allocated by the current needs of programming and resources for both school and public library users.

INFORMATION SCIENCE AND LIBRARIANSHIP

- If the population served is greater than 25,000, the library director is required to have a Master's degree in library science, as stated in the Texas Public Library Standards.
- The library director organizes and provides professional development and continuing education opportunities for all joint-use library staff.

- The library director provides consistent outcome-based evaluation of library services to assess whether library programs achieve their intended results.
- The library director must be able to enact a variety of roles.

This last requirement is, perhaps the most challenging, yet it is integral to the success of any shared library. The blending of public and school professional librarianship must be organized and implemented by the library director. For example, in Midlothian, there were several school days I would read at storytimes to groups of preschool children from the school district or community day care centers and, in between storytimes, teach high

school research sessions. A library assistant and I took turns teaching the afternoon senior adult computer class. During each school day, the school library staff left at 4 p.m., and two part-time workers clocked in at the circulation desk to continue library service until 8 p.m.

Partnerships Beneficial to All Libraries

Joint-use library services can complement each other. Nationally, libraries are trying to stretch budget dollars, and one auspicious innovation to do so is to partner in providing library services. A joint-use library will have material for all ages, larger collections, and more service hours than separate libraries. The federal funding agency for libraries,

the Institute of Museum and Library Services, has described libraries as “community anchors,” places where lifelong learning is cultivated and civic engagement is encouraged (Fuller 2016). Joint-use libraries can fulfill this specific role by providing access from one location to technology, health knowledge, financial literacy, and online communication to all library patrons.

Partnership is the core goal of a joint-use library. However, the benefits of successful collaboration still can be achieved if a standalone school or public library is interested in building a relationship with a library that serves a different—or overlapping—population.

- Joint programming could emerge from a combined mission statement drafted by both libraries—a mission statement that encompasses the interests of each population served.
- Reciprocal borrowing accounts would parallel the tremendously successful TexShare card program practiced throughout Texas among more than five hundred public, academic, and school libraries.
- Community and school resources could be greatly expanded by allowing public and school sharing with database, open access, and e-book resources.
- The exciting possibility of private-sector partners joining with publicly funded libraries creates the potential to benefit different populations by providing integrated services.

Conclusion

Although the joint-use library checklist described in this article addresses only proposed guidelines for combined school/public libraries in Texas, providing quality library service by means of dual-use libraries is a national and international topic of interest. To remain relevant in the

twenty-first century, all libraries—standalone and joint-use—continually redefine their roles to provide information, entertainment, and education. This rapidly expanding, constantly changing challenge validates the need for standards in all types of libraries to ensure quality service. In 2006 library consultant Mary Lankford (a retired librarian) was commissioned by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission to identify success factors for joint-use library service. Lankford stated that the economic benefits of joint-use library service were not the most important measure of combined libraries. She stressed that quality of life improved for people with access to a school/public facility. An effective school/public library serves as a center of lifelong learning for community and school library patrons.

Each day at 8 a.m., patrons are waiting for A. H. Meadows Public and High School library to open. Students need to print a paper or check out a textbook. Public visitors turn in DVDs, bestsellers, or stop by the desk to request the new James Patterson book. Endless variety is the hallmark of working in a joint-use library, enhancing a common belief in the 2007 AASL learning standards: not only children, but all library patrons—school and public—deserve equitable access to books, information, and information technology in an environment that is safe and conducive to learning.



Susan Casstevens is a doctoral research librarian and assistant professor of library science at Dallas Baptist University. She

teaches Foundations of College Research and English classes. Susan worked as a middle school librarian and joint-use public/high school library director for seventeen years.

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