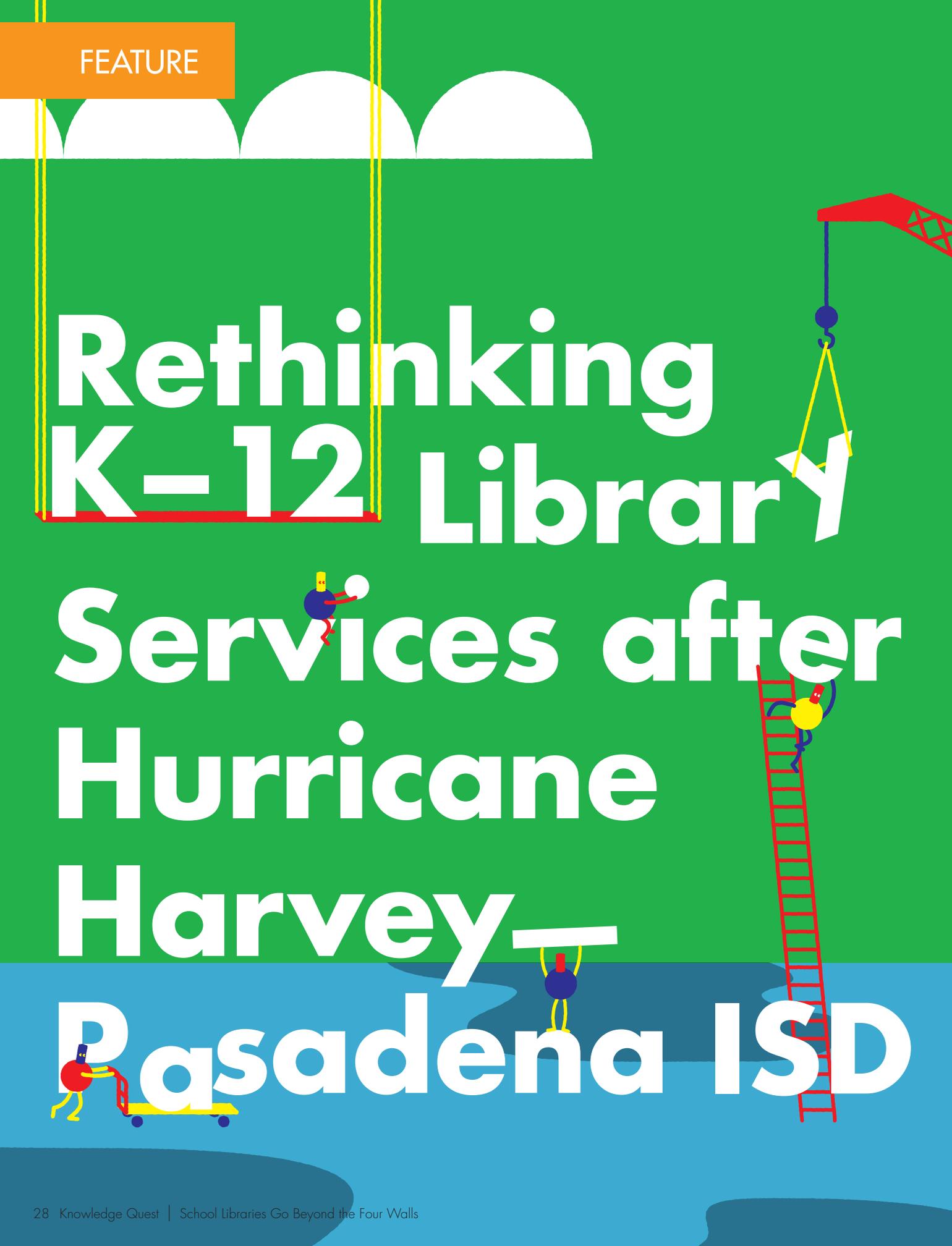


# Rethinking K-12 Library Services after Hurricane Harvey— Pasadena ISD

The background is a vibrant green and blue. At the top, there are white semi-circles representing clouds. A yellow crane with a red hook is positioned on the right side. A red ladder is leaning against the right side of the text. Several small, colorful figures (red, blue, yellow) are scattered around the text, appearing to be working or observing. One figure is on a yellow cart at the bottom left, another is on a ladder on the right, and others are near the text.



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## Background

Hurricane Harvey dealt a devastating blow to the Pasadena Independent School District (PISD) community when it made landfall August 25, 2017, one week into the PISD 2017–2018 school year. A large urban school district located in southeast Harris County, Texas, east of downtown Houston and south of the Houston Ship Channel, PISD served more than fifty-four thousand learners last year in sixty-seven schools scattered across contiguous parts of the municipalities of Pasadena, Houston, South Houston, and Pearland. By the time the storm hit, the campus library programs had been up and running, and many PISD learners had already checked out school library books. Many students also still had books checked out from the summer library program. Pre-Harvey, the school year was off to a great start for the PISD school libraries, but everything was about to change!

Hurricane Harvey affected all PISD stakeholders and all campuses to some extent, displacing more than 2,000 district families and tripling the number of homeless learners to 13,203 in the 2017–2018 school year. Three campus libraries sustained serious damage, rendering the library spaces temporarily unusable. A fourth campus, Thompson Intermediate, sustained substantial damage and could not reopen. Book loss, whether through water damage in the library or in students' homes, affected all school libraries in the district. It quickly became obvious that business as usual would not help PISD students recover from the disaster. In the Libraries and Instructional Materials Department we had to review our policies and procedures, collaborate with others to obtain needed resources, and rethink how and where to provide access to library

services and resources at the four campuses with damaged libraries. For the remainder of the 2017–2018 school year, while everyone in PISD travelled the road to recovery, PISD students did so with the benefit of a strong school library program. A year later, while the effects of Hurricane Harvey are still visible throughout the community, PISD school libraries are stronger than ever. The lessons learned during this journey left a lasting impression and still inform our efforts to meet students' needs and improve the district's school libraries.

Between the time Harvey made landfall and the district's September 11, 2017, reopening date, district leaders worked with campus personnel to assess damage to campuses, as well as determine the impact of the storm on students and staff. The Libraries and Instructional Materials Department immediately surveyed all school librarians to determine the extent of physical damage to campus libraries, technology, and books. This information was used both for insurance claims and for assessing the level of urgency for repair work and replacement of library furniture, books, and technology. Pictures sent by school librarians and site visits by department members provided additional documentation. Photographs became extremely important for communicating the extent of damage and for supporting insurance claims. Devising a systematic way to gather, retrieve, and share information, especially for a large district, was key to efficiently working through the disaster recovery process. Sharing information using a common vocabulary instead of library lingo facilitated effective communication with administrators, the Business and Financial Services Department, Communications Department, Grants Department, Facilities

and Construction Department, Curriculum and Instruction Department, and Maintenance Department.

In light of the damage throughout the community and the resulting disruption of daily life for many PISD learners, everyone involved with the PISD school libraries was resolved to continue providing library services and resources regardless of the personal and professional obstacles created by the storm. PISD learners, many of whom would end up living with relatives or friends for months, needed a safe, inviting, and nurturing space they could count on as they dealt with the chaos and uncertainty in their daily lives, and they needed access to books and information more than ever! Collaboration and effective communication with all district departments focused on removing access barriers to library services and resources, ensured that the library remained a consistent part of daily school life, and provided a sense of normalcy and comfort to all students.

## Removing Barriers to Book Access

### *Library Fines and Fees*

To meet learners' needs, PISD Libraries and Instructional Materials staff worked with campus librarians and administrators to ensure access to library resources and services when instruction resumed on Monday, September 11, 2017. The first e-mail sent to school librarians and administrators stated that we would remove the traditional access barrier of library fees for all students:

First and foremost: When students return to school, please encourage them to check out books and read! We will not worry about books already lost/

# It quickly became obvious that business as usual would not help PISD students recover from the disaster.



damaged or books that might be lost or damaged in the weeks to come.

Two new patron types, “Harvey Home” for books checked out to students that were lost or damaged as a result of the hurricane and “Harvey Building” for books that sustained water damage at a school library, were created in Symphony, the PISD integrated library system. Tagging database records with these patron types when appropriate facilitated keeping tabs on the number of lost or damaged books, providing documentation to support insurance claims, and putting together book orders as the school year progressed.

School librarians waived overdue and lost-book fees for books damaged or lost due to Harvey, noting the reason in the student’s record. No proof was required on the student’s part, and students were not asked to return water-damaged books.

However, it quickly became apparent that the disruption of daily life and the financial burden faced by many families would not be resolved quickly. So as not to add to the financial burden many families faced during Harvey recovery—and to encourage reading—the district waived all overdue library fines and lost-book fees for the remainder of the school year, even those not due to the hurricane. It was important to do all we could, through large and small gestures, to help our students and their families recover from the impact of Hurricane Harvey and keep our students reading.

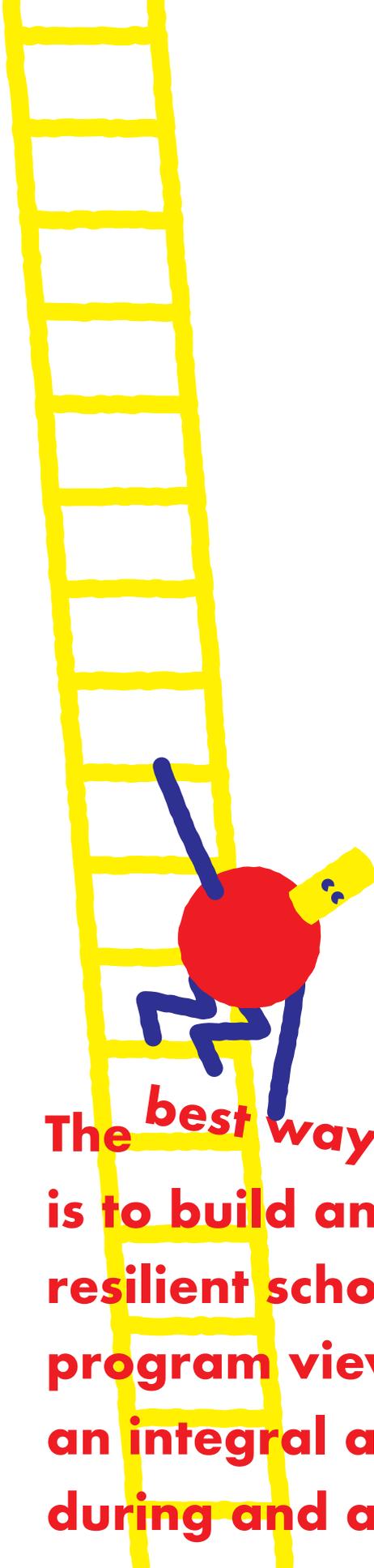
## *Little Free Libraries*

PISD has thirty-three Little Free Libraries (LFLs) located at various campuses across the district. The LFLs provide PISD learners with additional access to books year-round. While PISD does not track LFL books through circulation

software, the fact that keeping the Little Free Libraries stocked was a challenge is evidence of use post-Harvey. PISD was fortunate to receive numerous offers of assistance from generous vendors, business partners, schools in other parts of the country, and concerned individuals. Donations of both new and gently used books kept the Little Free Libraries well stocked, providing PISD learners with alternative access to print books, especially during weekends and holidays, throughout the year.

## *Book Replacement*

The PISD district-level administration values and supports the district’s libraries. Shortly after determining the extent of loss to each campus collection, district funding replaced all books damaged or lost due to Hurricane Harvey. This purchase included an entire new core collection for Thompson Intermediate School, as well as 2,695 additional books to replace those lost due to water damage, either in the library or while checked out to students, at other PISD campuses. Once again, contributions from generous vendors and individuals provided more books for campus library collections and books for our learners to rebuild their home libraries. Strong working relationships among district leaders, school librarians, vendors, and community organizations over the course of many years prior to Hurricane Harvey accounts for the outpouring of assistance offered after the hurricane. Accurate record-keeping before and after the disaster was key to ensuring that donated materials and funding were efficiently and effectively used to replace lost or damaged library materials and to continue providing learners with quality school libraries.



### *Grants*

Over time, several successful grant applications provided additional books for the four campus libraries. While not an immediate solution to the problem of replacing Harvey-damaged books, the grant writing process afforded the school librarians time to select fiction and nonfiction titles to address students' emotional needs as related to Hurricane Harvey. Ongoing assistance and support from the Grants Department made it possible to submit grants during a very busy and stressful school year.

### *Virtual Library*

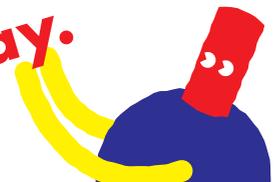
PISD learners also have access to a wide variety of digital resources. These resources became even more important after Harvey. The key was to increase awareness and use of the district's Overdrive e-book and audiobook collection, other digital subscriptions such as TumbleBooks, and campus-specific digital resources. The district's library website and campus library websites were used to provide learners with 24/7 access to digital resource information. During the school day, school librarians provided guidance to learners, teachers, and parents on how to access these resources.

### **Rethinking the Physical Library Space**

A damage survey sent out to district librarians revealed that most of the sixty-seven campus libraries had some storm-related damage, but district personnel worked around the clock to repair damage as quickly as possible before or shortly after September 11, 2017. However, the libraries at Frazier Elementary, Freeman Elementary, and Williams Elementary sustained damage sufficient to prevent student use when classes resumed. The first task was to find an alternative way to provide access to library services and resources. Thompson Intermediate, serving students in grades seven and eight, faced an even bigger challenge due to campus-wide flood damage. It quickly became evident that the campus could not reopen anytime soon. The library and the collection, due to massive flooding after days of rain and no air conditioning, suffered extensive damage. The book collection was a total loss.

Staff members at each of the three damaged elementary school libraries figured out an alternative space to set up shop and continue providing access to library services and resources.

**The best way to prepare for the unknown is to build and maintain a strong and resilient school library program, a library program viewed by students and staff as an integral and essential part of daily life during and after the school day.**



The Freeman Elementary library moved into a classroom for fourteen weeks, housing as many books as possible on temporary shelving and maintaining a regular schedule for library visits and checkout time for 507 students. In spite of this challenge, Freeman learners visited the library 27,538 times during just the first semester of the 2017–2018 school year; total school library visits for the previous year were 45,042. Students continued to read, checking out 2,491 books in September and 3,377 in October, in spite of the temporary library space, missed school days, and their own personal storm-related problems.

The cafeteria stage at Williams Elementary became the library for several months. Books were placed on carts instead of shelves. The school librarian kept the carts full, providing a variety of titles, and also retrieved requested books from a storage area to fill specific student requests. The 507 students at Williams Elementary checked out 3,127 books in September 2017 and a staggering 6,733 books in October. Students even enjoyed an author visit during this time.

At Frazier Elementary, the library came to the learners. The school librarian made daily rounds with books on a cart, rotating the selection and retrieving books from storage when requested. Frazier's 509 students checked out 1,277 books in September and 4,714 in October. Story time and lessons continued as usual but took place in classrooms.

Thompson Intermediate students experienced the most far-reaching change. Until February 20, 2018, about 900 Thompson students attended Beverly Hills Intermediate School, sharing classrooms, library space, and books with the 1,033 learners already enrolled at Beverly

Hills Intermediate. Space allocated for the staff and programs of the Collaborative Learning Center, usually housed at the Beverly Hills site, was vacated and repurposed to accommodate additional students and staff, but common areas such as the library were shared by students from both schools. The Beverly Hills Intermediate school librarian and the Thompson Intermediate school librarian worked together to provide resources and instruction for the combined student body. Students from both campuses experienced no disruption in library services, use of technology, assistance with research, or access to books and magazines. More importantly, Thompson students could still count on the school library as the constant and "normal" space in which to meet friends, decompress, and temporarily get away from the daily problems created by Hurricane Harvey. Generous vendors donated additional books to increase access to popular titles, and district funds purchased additional books. Thompson students checked out 1,870 books in September and 2,579 in October, and continued to check out books until Thompson Intermediate reopened on February 20, 2018 with a renovated school library and new print collection.

### Lessons Learned

A natural disaster such as Hurricane Harvey drives home the realization that having a quality school library in place prior to the disaster is key to providing student access to resources and services after a natural disaster such as Hurricane Harvey. While it is obviously important to have a disaster preparation plan in place, and practical considerations, such as moving books, covering technology, accurate cataloging and circulation data, etc., worked out in advance of a disaster, the best preparation is long-term and difficult to quantify.

The best way to prepare for the unknown is to build and maintain a strong and resilient school library program, a library program viewed by students and staff as an integral and essential part of daily life during and after the school day. At the district level, this entails building support at the campus and district level, nurturing a cadre of well-trained, dedicated, and resourceful librarians, having long-standing open lines of communication with other departments, and fostering a collaborative can-do approach to problem solving. With these cornerstones in place, the school library program can be rebuilt in any space, for any length of time, continuing to serve the educational community and help learners deal with the aftermath of any disaster.



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School District in Texas. She earned her PhD in Education from Capella University in 2007 and her Master's of Library Science from Sam Houston State University in 1990. Christine was a member of the 2017–2018 Awards Committee for the Texas Library Association and the 2018 Nominating Committee for the Texas Association of School Library Administrators. She was a co-chair of the 2015–2016 Texas Library Association School Administrators Task Force. She co-presented the conference program "Summer Reading Reinvented" at the 2016 TLA Annual Conference. She is a member of AASL.