School and Public Library Collaboration

Opportunities for Sharing and Community Connections

Denise Moreland
morelandda@yahoo.com

Jenna Kammer
jkammer@ucmo.edu

School and public librarians both strive to offer resources and services to their communities, often with limited budgets. School and public libraries offer different business hours, diverse resources, different online databases, unique facilities and makerspaces, and varying services. Both also collect materials and provide programming for many of the same patrons. It is well established that collaboration between libraries can connect patrons with more resources and services. Through collaboration, school and public librarians can increase opportunities to serve their patrons, ensuring their services and resources are used fully, which would not be possible while working independently. The end result is better service to the community as a whole.

The problem is that even though many school and public librarians share a common goal to serve their community, they seldom work together to share resources and services. In *School Library Journal's* 2018 Spending Survey, only 18 percent of school librarians indicated that they had a high level of partnership with their local public library (Jacobson 2018). There are many legitimate reasons for this. For one, school or public libraries may have inadequate funding, resources,

or available staff to dedicate to collaborate with the other library. School librarians are often needed in the library or school for most of the day. However, some of these same reasons are exactly why school and public librarians should collaborate.

In a *Knowledge Quest* blog post on school and public library collaboration, Elizabeth Pelayo described how public and school libraries share a common goal in that they both want children and young adults to get excited about reading (2019). She suggested that librarians make an effort by e-mailing and finding time to get together in person. She was able to see exactly how the two libraries could collaborate after one visit to the public libraries teen section.

Why Collaborate?

Librarians often want to work with other librarians to help the people they serve. School librarians are motivated to collaborate with others not only for the learners but also to improve their own job satisfaction. Library collaboration can create friendships, inspire new ideas, and develop supportive advocacy networks when it is desperately needed. It also can help secure the support needed for resources, such as funding,

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materials, space, equipment, staff, and programming.

School and public library collaboration can build community connections, while also sharing resources or improving learning opportunities for students. In their *Knowledge Quest* article, "Beyond the Four Walls," Lori Hancock, Amanda Kozaka, and Allison Mackley explained that school librarians who collaborate with a public librarian are able to strengthen both library programs (2019, 52).

School librarians can explain the *AASL Standards Framework for Learners* to the public librarians or suggest the public library attain a copy of the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*.

The process of working together to enhance student learning outside of the classroom is also relevant to multiple frameworks and Shared Foundations in the AASL Standards. In the *AASL Standards Framework for School Libraries* (2018), school and public library collaboration is part of the Collaborate and Explore Shared Foundations. The Collaborate Shared Foundation states that the school library should promote and model the library's services to the community, as well as engage in community activities (III.C.3). The Explore Shared Foundation indicates that the school library should encourage members of the community to participate in school library activities (V.C.2) as well as build and advocate for strong relationships with stakeholders (V.C.3).

A Case Study

We wanted to understand how school and public libraries are collaborating. We asked more than twenty school and public librarians in one region of central Missouri about what they do to collaborate with each other. This article presents those findings. We found that every librarian we talked to had at least one experience collaborating, partnering, or communicating with the other library in their area. When their experiences of collaboration were examined for patterns and categorized, we found that all collaborations occurred in three areas: sharing resources, sharing spaces, and sharing programming.

Sharing Resources

Libraries can share resources by collaboratively purchasing resources or developing a system that allows another library's patrons to access their resources. Librarians can also discuss selections and acquisitions by consulting each other about materials or sharing what has been purchased at each library. Resources can include print materials, digital databases, and technology.

The librarians we talked to described how they shared resources or how they each had unique resources to offer one other. Public libraries shared access to their digital collections with school libraries through the use of library cards. The librarians described the benefits of shared access, including providing more awareness to students and improving usage statistics. One public librarian said, "The more access you give to kids through books, the more knowledge [is gained]." Another public librarian said, "By sharing the collection, the funds can be utilized more fully."

Listed below are a few ways that the school and public librarians that we talked to were working together.

Public Library Cards and E-Cards. The public librarian would work with schools to sign up students for library cards or e-cards that allowed students to access digital collections. Many of the school librarians we talked to were working with public librarians to allow students to access e-books by setting students up with e-cards that allowed them to access OverDrive, Hoopla, Zinio, or Tumblebooks.

Books. School and public librarians helped transport books back and forth to each other. The public library could provide additional copies of popular books for school use. Another public librarian provided curriculum-relevant books as needed during specific times of year. A school librarian also talked about how she sent teachers to the public library to access specific titles or collections.

Technology. The public library often had technology that was useful to the school libraries. One public library offered its copiers, computer labs, launchpads, and iPads for students to use. Another school librarian sent students to check out hotspots from the public library so that they could access the Internet after school for homework.

Sharing Spaces. The physical location of the school and public library buildings can determine the use of the facilities for collaboration. Collaboration is easier if the buildings are close by and are accessible by walking or short bus trips. However, there are times when greater distance inspires librarians to work together, and vice versa. A few schools had programs where students could take a bus to the public library after school. Several school librarians arranged field trips to the public library. A public librarian said that "in one town, the school is just a couple of blocks away and the classes come once a week by walking." Listed below are a few other ways that the librarians in this study worked together to share their spaces.

- **Meetings Spaces.** Space is often needed when serving a large number of people. In one example, the public library used the school's theater building for their summer reading programs because the public library needed more space. The public librarian said, "We used the school's theater because it could hold 60 people [and some of our programs] drew in large crowds." Another public library had space and offered it to schools for meetings and study rooms.

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This is a collaborative way to share the physical library space.

- **Makerspaces.** Several public librarians talked about the technology in their makerspaces that might be useful to students, but they were not aware of what schools were teaching in their curriculum. One school librarian explained how she visits the public library periodically to see what is in their makerspace so that she can direct students there as needed.

Sharing Programming

Creating and executing events is a very task-intensive exercise. Events require many people to plan and advertise and obtain funds, space, and technology. However, collaborating to create events for the community is a great way to utilize materials, space, technology, and staff in more productive ways. In addition, librarians can collaborate to write grants or share funding to fund the events.

The workload can be divided, so that the burden is not too great for either the school or the public library.

Summer Reading Program. The public library's summer reading program is the most common program that is promoted by both public and the school libraries. The majority of school and public librarians interviewed mentioned the summer reading program as a collaborative activity. The public librarians want the school librarians to promote the summer reading program to their students, and the school librarians want students to attend the summer reading program to prevent summer slide. Several school librarians discussed how they encourage students to participate in the public library's summer reading program. In addition, many school librarians allowed public librarians to come to the school during summer school to conduct summer reading programs. One school librarian said that during summer school, "The public librarian would come at least once or twice a week and do experiments to go along with the summer reading program theme and bring in guest visitors, like from the zoo."

Battle of the Books. The Battle of the Books is a collaborative activity that encourages three different age groups of students to read the Missouri award books (Gateway 9th–12th grade, Truman 6th–8th grade, Mark Twain 4th–6th grade) in order to compete in a question-and-answer game. In one community, the public librarian makes the questions, brings in the book prizes, and provides three spray-painted discarded Stephen King books with pictures of the Gateway Arch, President Truman, or Mark Twain on them to serve as trophies. The public librarian runs the competition and becomes the deciding vote if an answer should be accepted. In the areas that have a Battle of the Books event, the school librarians encouraged students to participate and form their teams, purchase t-shirts (optional), and arrange transportation and supervision for the students.

Meet Me at the Library. Another collaborative activity mentioned by two librarians was Meet Me at the Library, where students came into the public library after it was closed and played games. A public librarian who participated in this activity said, "One-time students had to solve a mystery of who killed the public library director." The students had to ask the public library director and other staff questions to figure out clues as to the identity of the murderer, much like the game Clue. In one case, a teacher within the school coordinated the event with the public librarian. The school librarian said, "The collaboration was between an ELA teacher, who coordinated with the public librarian to create the event."

Library Tours. In one story of collaboration, a school librarian described a time when she arranged a tour of the public library for the students in her school. This school librarian contacted the public librarian about allowing her students to come to the public library for a tour as a reward for bringing back all of their school library books at the end of the school year. The public librarian opened early for all the classes to come.

Guest Speakers. Several school and public librarians explained how they worked with each other to jointly fund guest speakers. In Missouri the state library offers grant opportunities to fund author visits, with priority going to school and public libraries that work together.

After-School Activities. In some school districts, students are released before 3 p.m. to allow teachers

and staff time to collaborate at the school. Three public libraries run a book club or hold an after-school program on these early release days and provide snacks and crafts. One public librarian uses her own money to provide the snacks and crafts. Another school librarian has a high school and a middle school book club that meet during their lunch hour at the school library. The public librarian has students from grades second and up who walk to the public library on early release days to meet for the public library's book club. Two of the libraries have the students bused there, and one public library is within walking distance. These collaborative activities help the school, the public library, and the parents of the students.

Useful Resources for School and Public Library Collaboration

There are several resources that school librarians may find useful for planning collaborations with public libraries. AASL, ALSC, and YALSA created a guide for school-public library collaboration called the "Public Library and School Library Collaboration Toolkit." (<www.ala.org/alsc/publications-resources/professional-tools/school-public-library-partnerships>). In it they recommend that librarians start a partnership by identifying their counterpart in the other library, and then begin regular communication and meetings. The toolkit also provides examples of what school and public libraries can do to work together. They list a few opportunities that are relevant to both types of libraries as a way to start working together, including partnering on National Library Week, Teen Read Week, or Library Card Sign-Up Month. ALSC also provides an extensive list of cooperative programs that school and

public libraries are doing at <www.ala.org/alsc/aboutalsc/external-relationships/schoolplcoop>.

Opportunities for Collaboration

Talking to librarians helped us to understand how many opportunities there are for school and public librarians to work together. One lesson learned from this study is that collaborating helped to improve the services for each library by making them more efficient. At the same time, the librarians involved felt that their partnerships created improvements and created more access for students.

In addition to the examples listed in this article, school and public librarians can work together to co-teach or collaboratively facilitate programs. They can share funding or projects to collaboratively bring in guest speakers or build collections. Also, simply communicating periodically with the public librarian in your area can be a great way to start a collaboration or at least improve the information flow between the two institutions. Many of the librarians in this study communicated with their public librarian by e-mail once a semester to share ideas, events, and new resources.

We encourage all school librarians to take steps to develop a relationship with the public library in your area. Start by visiting the public library to see what is offered, then follow up with an e-mail to a public librarian to get the conversation started.

Jenna Kammer, PhD, MA LIS, MA Ed, *is an assistant professor at the University of Central Missouri. She is a member of the Missouri Association of School Librarians where she serves as a sitting director and a member of the new membership committee and the editorial board of the* School Libraries in Action *journal. She is also the president for the Central Regional Association of School Librarians. She is a member of AASL and a member of the Educators of School Librarians Section. Jenna has published in* Library Hi Tech, IFLA Journal, Library and Information Science, Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication, *and* School Libraries Worldwide.

Denise Moreland, EdS, MLIS, *is a graduate of the University of Central Missouri. She recently earned her certification in school librarianship and previously worked as an adult reference librarian at a public library. She is a member of the Missouri Association of School Librarians. She has published in* School Libraries Worldwide.

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