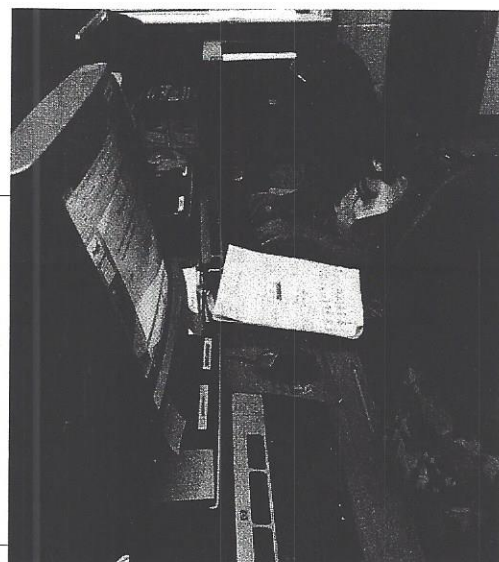
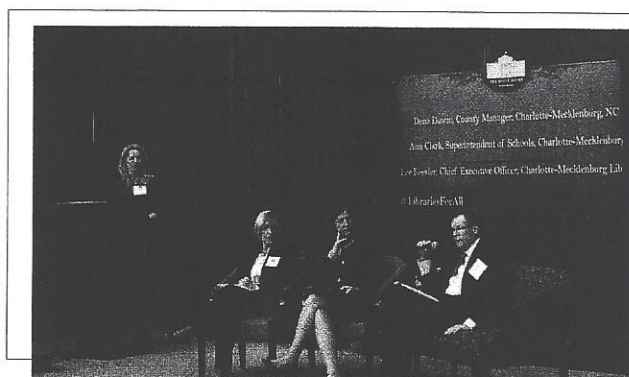


PUBLIC PARTNERS

By Lisa Peet

From shared systems to automatic library card sign-ups, more public libraries are teaming up with public schools to achieve greater impact



While librarian-to-librarian collaborations between school and public libraries are nothing new, public libraries are now ramping up their efforts for deeper strategic engagement and collaboration at scale, embedding public library services within schools' daily operations and combining catalogs and access services. Such deeper integration requires both sides to take into account a range of complex issues—commanding all-in support from library leadership and a strong working relationship with local educational administrators.

A few joint efforts involve shared locations, with libraries occupying a portion of a school building or adjacent space, such as Chicago Public Library's Back of the Yards Branch, collocated with Back of the Yards College Preparatory High School. More often, however, school and public libraries combine resources rather than footprints. But no matter what form the collaboration takes, the key to success is top-down backing on both sides—and, often, help from a third party to get the ball rolling.

CIVIC STRENGTH

One of the best-known full-scale partnerships, Nashville's Limitless Libraries, didn't originate with the Nashville Public Library (NPL) or Nashville's public schools. It was the brainchild of former mayor Karl Dean. In 2008, Dean came

up with the idea of using the purchasing and programming power of NPL to bolster the city's struggling school libraries. With the approval of then-NPL director Donna Nicely and Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) administration, the school system, library, and mayor's office signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to allow schools to share student information with NPL and initiated a four-high school pilot project in 2009.

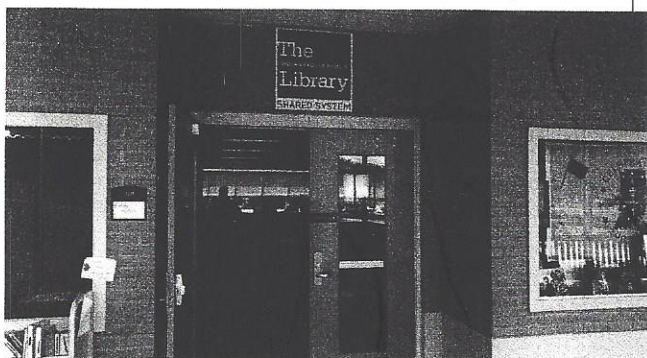
NPL librarians and school library personnel worked together to weed school collections and replace discards with updated material. Student IDs became library cards, and NPL provided materials to students and teachers via the schools' delivery service.

The following year, Limitless Libraries expanded to all 16 of the district's high schools; the next year, the city's 35 middle schools were added. As of 2016, NPL provides collection development for all Nashville public schools that have school libraries and librarians and delivers public library materials to third through 12th graders at those schools from holds placed online.

Limitless Libraries dispensed nearly 131,000 items during the 2015–16 school year—34,838 of them borrowed by third and fourth graders—and infused some \$6 million into school library collections and technologies, along with another \$4 million to turn existing school library spaces into 21st-century learning hubs. "Our relationship with the schools is getting stronger and stronger," says NPL's Limitless Libraries

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CHARLOTTE PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG LIBRARY; INDIANAPOLIS PHOTOS BY SARAH JANE BATT



INTEGRATION EVERYWHERE (Clockwise from top l.) (Seated, l.-r.) Mecklenburg County manager Dena Diorio, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools superintendent Ann Clark, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library (CML) CEO Lee Keesler were invited by the White House and IMLS to speak at the ConnectED Library Challenge Summit in Washington, DC, in January 2016; with student ID numbers as library cards, students can easily log in to use CML's digital resources for classroom assignments; Cathedral High School, Indianapolis, shows off its public library connection; Indianapolis Public Library materials made ready for delivery to the schools

coordinator Allison Barney. "The schools see us as a partner who's trying to help them reach their goals." (For more detailed coverage, see *School Library Journal's* "Libraries with No Bounds: How Limitless Libraries Transformed Nashville Public Schools' Libraries," ow.ly/BvSu30ap8h7; Keith Curry Lance's executive summary is at ow.ly/bkWK30apa7X.)

Going forward, Barney hopes to consolidate school library purchasing to remove some work from school librarians' plates. "Their discounts are a lot lower," Barney explains. "It takes a lot of time to go through the ordering process. If we could consolidate that, use our discounts and take that procedural burden off of them while still...making sure that the collections reflect what they [need], that would be a great efficiency."

In September 2016, the San José, CA, city manager designated the San José Public Library (SJPL) as the lead agency to develop a citywide Educational and Digital Literacy Initiative. Since then, city librarian Jill Bourne—*LJ's* 2017 Librarian of the Year—has worked with the mayor's office to coordinate the Schools City Collaborative, a partnership between the city and its 19 school districts.

Because many local schools can't support an adequate library, one of SJPL's pilot programs is a shared ebook platform provided by the library and accessible throughout the districts. So far, the platform has been implemented in four schools in one district, with a second district ready to join this spring, and is planning for a summer reading version targeting readers in the 25th–50th reading percentile.

"Working out the specifics of technology and data sharing was definitely the most challenging aspect," explains Bourne, "and delayed implementation significantly."

SJPL is also working to ensure that middle and high school students have access to digital collections, research databases, and online tools through a teen/student library card that allows limited physical checkouts and unlimited online use and doesn't require parental authorization, so teachers or schools can issue them.

SHARE AND SHARE ALIKE

In 1989, an anonymous donor left a large sum to benefit high school libraries in Marion County, IN, as well as several area colleges and universities. The schools chose to use the money to bring libraries that were not yet automated up to speed and contracted with the Indianapolis Public Library (IPL) to do the conversion. When catalogers finished the automation process, the schools elected to leave their records in the IPL catalog, and those became the basis for the Shared System, launched in 1995.

Currently, students at 47 public, private, and parochial schools and two art museums across three districts share IPL's integrated library system (ILS). As part of the ConnectEd initiative students are issued library cards, with access to all library materials. Items are delivered to the schools, but instead of returning to IPL once the checkout period is over, materials can stay in the school and circulate via its library. Explains Shared System manager Sarah Jane Batt, "I don't see any reason for a popular book to get...put in a tote to come back to us and sit there for three days if there's a kid at that school who might want to check it out that afternoon." The sharing runs in both directions: schools can also lend items to library patrons.

TEAMWORK IN TACOMA

Support at all levels was critical for the Tacoma Public Library (TPL) to move its Pathway Partnership Program forward. The alliance began with a brainstorming session between TPL teen services librarian Sara Sunshine Holloway and Judy Chichinski, a liaison from the school district in charge of all teacher librarians. In discussing ways to provide more services to students, getting every student in the Tacoma Public School District a library card came up—"one of the wildest and craziest things we talked about," recalls Holloway.

They took the idea to TPL director Susan Odencrantz, who brought it up to school district superintendent Carla Santorno. "They decided to go all in," says Holloway, "then came to us and said, 'Now you guys figure out how to do it. Make it happen'.... That's when the real work began."

Planning moved slowly because of legal issues around sharing student data—particularly the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which protects the privacy of student education records. But once an MOU was created and signed by the school district and the library Board of Trustees in 2014, the program began its first year as a pilot for high schools and middle schools. The following year the program rolled out to the entire district; each student's ID number became a working library card number, which they can use to log into computers, access databases from home, check out print books, or download up to 20 ebooks.

One thing that made the process easier, Holloway explains, is that the district assigned the TPL team a liaison

from its Office of Partnerships, “specifically to work with us to make this happen.” Still, implementation was not without glitches. During the first year, the permission letter sent to district parents had an opt-out directive. But some parents had already opted out of sharing FERPA-based data when their child entered school, and that information carried over to the library card sign-up and was difficult to change. The following year, the choice was changed to opt-in, and parents could decide to share data with the library only.

Those changes are handled by teacher librarians within the school system, which takes some of the load off TPL, says Holloway. The solid relationships and teamwork involved have “gone a long way to making this easier and successful in...a relatively short amount of time.” The school system further endeared itself to the library—“a nice in-kind acknowledgment”—by offering to print 15,000 additional IDs for elementary school students, who weren’t traditionally issued cards, to use at the library.

ACCESS EVERYWHERE

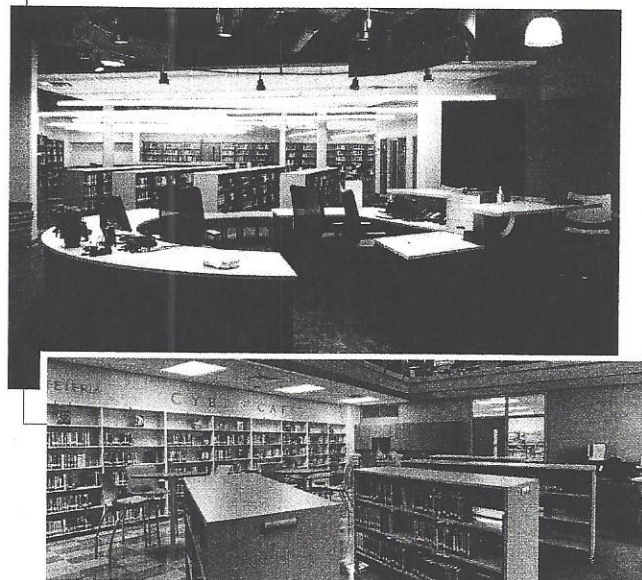
In 2014, the City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, NC, took a 2015 survey from the Pew Research Center, which found that 85 percent of respondents nationwide believe public libraries should coordinate more closely with local K–12 schools to provide resources to children, as a call to action. Charlotte Mecklenburg Library (CML) CEO Lee Keesler and then-school superintendent Heath Morrison wanted to work more closely to align the 170-facility school district’s and library’s missions with a focus on literacy. The result was a pilot for the 2014–15 school year providing library cards to every pre-K through third grade student who didn’t already have one, funded by Mecklenburg County. The two drew up an MOU spelling out the details of the partnership, starting with a statement of shared purpose.

The MOU also established an educational partnerships manager position at CML, which Martha Yesowitch stepped into in December 2014. As the pilot wound down, it became clear that the initiative hadn’t returned the hoped-for results; in a population of more than 60,000 students, fewer than 20,000 new cards had been distributed. Yesowitch looked at the programs in Nashville and Tacoma, as well as the integrated library cards, bus passes, and student IDs in Boston and Louisville, KY. She thought, why should it be a physical card? Her son was a third grader in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) system and was able to use his student number to log on to his student portal and play literacy games—if a third grader knew his student ID number, she thought, surely middle and high school students could do the same.

With the help of a systems analyst in the CML information technology department, Yesowitch came up with a plan to integrate student ID numbers and library logins. The ONE Access™ initiative launched in 2015, and together CML, CMS, Mecklenburg County, and the City of Charlotte pledged to provide students with accessible resources in response to the White House’s ConnectED Library Challenge. Students can use their ID to log into an online portal from which they can upload assignments, get messages from teachers, and access the CML website to do research and check out ebooks. They can also type their numbers into self-checkout machines at branches for physical materials.

In the 2016–17 school year, faculty and staff were added

LASTING IMPROVEMENTS Libraries (this page) at Nashville’s McGavock High School (top) and DuPont Tyler Middle School (bottom) after renovations financed by Nashville Public Library’s Limitless Libraries program; (page opposite) participants in the Teacher Lab professional development program learn how to integrate cooking into STEM and English Language Arts lessons using recipes at Brooklyn Kitchen (top) and examine primary sources at Brooklyn Public Library’s Brooklyn Collection (bottom)



to the system via their employee number, and CML encourages them also to get teacher loan cards, which give them the ability to check out classroom materials.

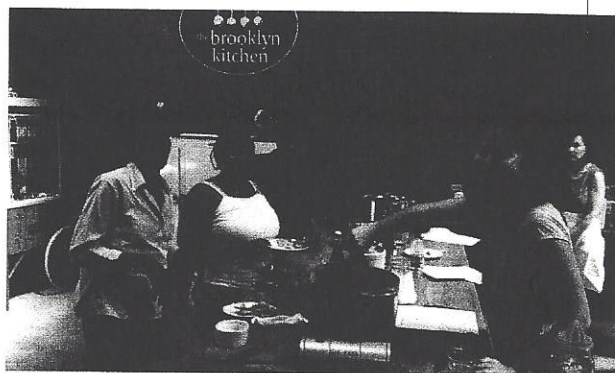
The library and school district are working to finalize an MOU for next year with one of the county’s largest charter schools, hoping that ONE Access can eventually incorporate the county’s charter, private, and parochial schools as well. The county has recognized the value of the collaboration, and the library is happy to spend less time explaining its services and more time providing them, says Yesowitch. ONE Access “has allowed our staff to talk more about our resources, to highlight books, to skip that first step of ‘hey, this is the library’ [and move on] to ‘you all *have* the library, let us show you what it can do.’”

DECENTRALIZED SUCCESS

School/library alliances are nearly always easier when a single library serves a single school district. However, New York City’s MyLibraryNYC program has triumphed in spite of operating across five boroughs, three systems, and 550 schools governed by a decentralized Department of Education.

The partnership began after Barbara Stripling, then New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) director of library services, called New York Public Library (NYPL) to ask for assistance in creating a union catalog for New York City schools. The conversation eventually turned to the students shared by NYCDOE and NYPL, recalls chief branch library officer Christopher Platt. “Were there more ways we could work together to...surface all the resources of the library to students in a broader way?”

Because New York City schools are under local control—each principal sets the curriculum and standards—a



centralized ID system was out of the question, and the services provided would have to be highly flexible. The program launched in 2011 as a pilot for schools served by NYPL in Manhattan, the Bronx, and Staten Island, then expanded to include the Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) and the Queens Library (QL), in partnership with NYCDOE, with the help of \$5 million in funding from the Citi Foundation.

In the beginning, says MyLibraryNYC school outreach manager (and 2017 *LJ* Mover & Shaker) Amie Wright, “We anticipated that schools would be contacting us for core curriculum needs. In fact...our best role was to serve as a supplementary enhancement to their classroom and school libraries.” While school librarians buy from educational vendors, New York’s libraries deal directly with trade publishers, including foreign and independent presses, and often have access to more current material. For instance, John Lewis’s *March* graphic novel trilogy had not been on many school librarians’ radar when Wright added it to the MyLibraryNYC civil rights special collection, and it was an enormous hit in the classrooms.

The program developed an outreach menu to tailor its services to schools’ participation over time. “Schools we’ve worked with for several years are going to have different requests than a school [using] the program for the first time,” explains Wright. As MyLibraryNYC grew, libraries have expanded into additional partnerships with other arms of NYCDOE, including NYPL’s New York Reads 365 independent reading program. But primarily, its aim is to strengthen the ties between the schools and their branches, “making sure it’s a reciprocal, ongoing relationship,” notes Wright. “It’s not just about making one phone call. It’s about stopping by [again and] again.” She adds, “We’ve found...this relationship has continued to improve. Especially with the schools that have been in the program for years—we’ve seen great successes.”

Such successes are not only with students. BPL coordinator of school outreach Amy Mikel used her experience with MyLibraryNYC to develop the Teacher Lab, an information

literacy and research skills course for educators in partner schools. She piloted the Teacher Lab as a two-week course in 2014, and the following year transitioned it to a four-day course in the summer, supplemented by stand-alone workshops throughout the year. A \$25,000 Sparks grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services allowed her to hire a part-time staffer and expand the program, bringing in lecturers from organizations such as NYC Open Data and taking the program on the road. “The library can be engaging with teachers in all these different ways above and beyond what we traditionally do,” says Mikel.

DON'T STEP ON TOES

While a successful school-library collaboration depends on explicit buy-in from public library leadership, clear lines of communication with partner school libraries—and librarians—is critical. This involves not only a good working relationship but proactive assurance on the part of public libraries that they are not interested in doing school libraries’ jobs.

“When you start this kind of a partnership there’s always a little bit of fear...that somebody’s going to get into their head that the public library’s going to replace the school library. But we don’t do the same things. [Public librarians] supplement, we don’t replace,” says TPL’s Holloway. “You have to have clear boundaries of what you do and don’t do.”

At Hartford Public Library [HPL], CT, where the Boundless partnership has provided library cards to all Hartford public school students, one successful strategy has been to identify supporters among the media specialists who would promote the partnership to their peers, talking up the reduction of daily tasks and the ability to generate reports easily. “The lead contact at [HPL] participated in quarterly service meetings with the school staff, offered training on the ILS software, and fielded some pretty hostile questions in the early stages,” says youth and family services director Marie Jarry. “Eventually a greater understanding and an enhanced level of trust convinced a majority that the collaboration would ultimately elevate the importance of school libraries, not the opposite.”

Still, says Christine Caputo, chief of youth services and programs at the Free Library of Philadelphia, which provides free library cards across all city schools, “The best way to do school library and public library cooperation is to have a school library with a school librarian. I wish there was a way to have more funding for the schools to be able to provide that.”

GROWING TRENDS

From complex resource sharing to library card initiatives, the accomplishments of these unions reverberate not only at the district and local level but nationwide. Salt Lake City PL children’s services coordinator Liesl Jacobson cites Limitless Libraries and MyLibraryNYC as inspirations for her to approach then-director John Spears—on his first day on the job, no less—with the idea to partner with the Salt Lake City School District on shared student ID cards. (“He said, yes, absolutely, that sounds fantastic—my first decision as a director!” recalls Jacobson.) Mikel will bring her Teacher Lab to Salt Lake City later this spring.

“It’s an exciting opportunity, as public libraries across the country are positioning themselves to be more explicitly learning institutions for their communities,” says NYPL’s Platt. “It takes intention and focus and resources, but the payoffs are massive.”