

Components of Cooperation: Schools and Public Libraries Link for Enhanced Service and Information Access for Youth

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The most northwest city in Indiana, twenty-two miles southeast of Chicago, Hammond is experiencing a decline in its industrial economy. The population has decreased 20% from 1970 to 1984. Currently, the school enrollment is estimated at 18,589. Eighty-three per cent of the school children attend public schools. The population of the city is approximately 89,000, twenty per cent of which falls within the age range of 5-17. The racial makeup is 69% White, 16% Hispanic and 15% Black. It is within this context that the Hammond Public Library and the School City of Hammond serve the community. The library system operates a main library and seven neighborhood branches while the school corporation operates 19 elementary, 5 middle and 4 high schools. In addition, there are 8 parochial schools, 1 private school, and a career center which serves high school age students through adults.

The need for cooperation between the public library and the schools developed as a result of an evaluation of library use based on number of card holders, circulation and children's program attendance. It was evident that measures needed to be taken to involve school children more by

reaching out to them through the schools in the community. The Hammond Public Library mission statement notes the first priority to be "information services for individual improvement and community development." The secondary and tertiary missions are that the library provide for "recreational and cultural interests" and "outreach to individuals and groups not currently using the library."

In 1985, the Hammond Public Library, under new leadership, began taking a more active role in the community. The School City of Hammond, also under new leadership, was moving in a similar direction. Philosophically, both organizations had a similar mission in the community. The public library recognized the need to synchronize actions with the schools. To accomplish this, focus was placed on the following principles;

1. Programs developed in isolation do not best serve youth in the community; cooperative programs benefit all.
2. There is a direct and positive relationship between education and quality of life and between public libraries and schools.

3. Linkage of human and material resources is the key to effective and efficient programs.
4. Access to information and library resources and services must be aggressively promoted and available to all.

Linkage of Systems

To begin the cooperative program, the public librarian needs to take the initiative because the reality is that the schools work in the community with well established programs solidly in place. If the public library wants to establish cooperative programs with the schools the movement must come from the library or it is probable that no cooperative effort will occur. In the Hammond situation, the head of children's services for the public library contacted the superintendent of the School City. The response was favorable, so a face-to-face meeting was scheduled. In preparation for the meeting the librarian assessed the type of involvement that was desirable and feasible. Priorities needed to be established, with a specific agenda noting the goals and how they would be accomplished. A mutually beneficial relationship needed to be evident from the start of the program. Once lines of communication between the public library and the school administration were open and a procedure was established, the key players were free to develop the cooperative program.

At the meeting, the head of children's services and the superintendent explored the possibilities of developing cooperative ventures which would have the ultimate effect of enhancing library services and encouraging reading for children in grades K-8. The public librarian recognized that it was necessary to work through the school system because that was the most efficient

way to reach the largest number of children. The superintendent agreed and readily connected the librarian with the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, who suggested that the liaison be the supervisor of library media services and communications.

The supervisor of library media services arranged for a meeting between the head of children's services and all of the library media specialists in the school system. Every elementary school in the Hammond system has at least one half-time media specialist and a media aide. This meeting took place at the opening of school in early September. The process of communicating with each school was established, and specific programs the public library could provide to teachers and students were examined. School library media specialists were enthusiastic about how the public library could have impact on the lives of youth through cooperative programs with the library media centers and classrooms.

Once the administrative support was established, the building level staff were encouraged to participate and to "own" the cooperative efforts. To accomplish this, it was necessary to provide specific examples which demonstrated the immediacy of the benefits to children. Steps were taken to ensure that the library media specialists were aware of the increased resources and services that were available to them.

Action Plan

This section will highlight types of cooperative efforts that have been accomplished over the previous two years and will cite plans for the future. These examples feature contacts with the public schools, but the same types of efforts are directed toward private and parochial schools.

One of the most beneficial and positive programs a public library can offer is the school visit. These visits have been the lifeblood of our cooperative program. Each branch is matched with the schools which are located in its neighborhood. The branch librarians are responsible for contacting the school library media specialist who in turn schedules visits to the classrooms. The visits are usually grouped by grade level and include book talks, distribution of bibliographies, and other helpful information about the neighborhood library. Depending on the grade level, puppetry, reader's theatre and other dramatic approaches are used. Each class is introduced to five to ten books during the visit. In the 1987-88 school year seventy-five percent of the K-8 population experienced a visit to their classroom by the local branch librarian.

Commitment to school visits is evidenced by strong administrative support and enthusiastic implementation by branch librarians. An attempt is made to complete all school visits during the first semester so students have a maximum amount of time to take advantage of the public library the remainder of their academic year. The second semester, branch librarians concentrate on student field trips to the library. The trips go beyond basic tours as students are taught to use the online computer terminals to meet their research and recreational reading needs. Most branches are within walking distance of the schools, so teachers often schedule regular visits.

At the conclusion of each school visit, branch librarians complete an evaluation form which is kept on file in the office of the Children's Division. This form serves as a valuable reference for future contacts with building media specialists and teachers.

Information is often shared with library staff via a newsletter and at bi-monthly children's services meetings. This exchange of information, both ideas that worked and ideas that didn't, is essential for professional growth of the children's services staff.

In addition to resources used during school visits, the teacher has access to 143,000 children's books in the public library system through the Classroom Library Collection (CLC) program. To participate, the teacher completes a CLC request form which is sent to the Main Library, where it is processed by the children's services staff. The CLC material is delivered by library courier directly to the teacher at the school. Requests range from the generic "good fiction for 4th and 5th graders" to specific title requests or books related to a particular curricular unit. Classroom Library Collections are circulated for loan periods of four, six, or eight weeks. The public library continually receives appreciative words and notes from teachers who use the service. There are some definite strains on the public library staff for time, so consideration is being given to creating a part-time position devoted to working exclusively with the CLC program.

The Classroom Library Collection is a supplement to, not a replacement for the school library media collection. Teachers will generally go to their own library media center before contacting the public library. The philosophy of cooperation encourages working together to improve reading skills and enhance information access.

Community and Business Involvement

Because the philosophy of the Hammond Public Library is to be actively involved in the community, its administration works with organizations which share this objective. One

such organization is the Hammond Education Foundation, founded in 1984, with the purpose of bringing together the public and private sectors of the community to support public education. The mutual goal of improving quality of life in the community benefits everyone. The supervisor of library media services is executive of the Foundation, allowing easily managed connections among the three organizations. Due to the success and growth of cooperative public library and school system ventures, the director of the Hammond Public Library was elected to the Board of Directors of the Hammond Education Foundation. The membership believes that education goes beyond the walls of the school and views the public library as a vital link in the education chain of the Hammond community. In 1988, the Foundation granted \$1000 to help the public library attain its goal of purchasing classic video programs through the MacArthur Foundation project. These videos are currently in use in the community.

To enable the public library to become involved with instructional innovation, the head of children's services was appointed to the Project Committee of the Foundation. This committee awards mini-grants to teachers who plan creative educational projects for their classrooms. Inclusion in the award process in its early stages allows the head of children's services to increase teacher awareness of public library staff, resources, and services that can be used effectively for quality instruction. Another joint program which increased awareness and use of the public library was get-acquainted breakfasts for teachers and library media specialists. The breakfasts were hosted by library branches and the costs were shared with the Foundation.

Another valuable Foundation program in which the public library takes an active role is called "Time-Out For Reading." Started in 1986, this sustained silent reading project was intended to bring awareness of the importance of reading to all staff and students in the school system. The public library and the Chapter I reading staff were included in the project in 1987 and by 1988 the project included an author visit, a storytelling workshop, and a library card application for every child in the school system. A poster created by the school system's public information department to promote the program featured a child reading at a branch library. In 1989, Time-Out For Reading will feature a week of activities with the theme, "I Love to Read." Special after-school programs at library branches will highlight biographies, poetry, writing, favorite books and reading aloud. The week-long event is sponsored by the Foundation, the Hammond Public Library, Chapter I Reading Program, Hammond PTA Council, and the Calumet Area Literacy Council, and is a further example of the cooperative spirit in Hammond.

Additional School City Programs

Through networking efforts, public library staff have become involved in committee work which benefits students and community residents. Public librarians are welcome to speak at faculty meetings and certain staff have been asked to participate in key program planning such as the Gifted and Talented project. Additionally, public library staff are taking part in a Lilly grant entitled Program for Reaching Individual Students at Middle School (PRISMS) to help plan programming at the library for at-risk middle graders.

Public library staff have also become involved in information

gathering for participants in the School Improvement Process (SIP) which is involved with building-based management. Individual branch librarians have provided input and resources for persons involved with this process. Such participation enables public librarians to voice concerns, such as the necessity for "homework alerts" and suggest constructive ideas, such as specific after-school programs which assist children and parents. By participating from within the school structure, public librarians are better able to promote the resources and services that would most benefit particular schools, teachers, and students.

The public library has also cooperated with the special education department of the School City of Hammond in terms of providing job training opportunities. The high school students involved in this program are placed in a public library setting to learn routine library functions. In the four semesters that the program has been in place, twelve students have worked for the library. A job coach from the school system works daily with the student and is supervised by public library staff members. The work assistance received at the library and the skills learned by the student make this a valuable program for all involved.

Involvement with Parents

The public library serves a vital role in providing information to families on a variety of topics during a child's school career so it is important for the library staff to have a good relationship with parent groups. This positive relationship is being developed by becoming involved with the PTA Council, which is a group composed of PTA presidents from the twenty-four individual school chapters. Through this participation the library has the

potential to connect with all affiliated parents. Contacts made thus far have been positive. Time, however, has limited the contacts. Currently, a slide presentation is being produced highlighting fiction for children in grades four through eight, to be presented as a program at PTA meetings. Assistance on the program is being provided by the media services department of the school system. Librarians in Hammond know from personal experience that parents are eager to have information about good books for their children. Efforts to reach parents of remedial readers are handled through joint programs with the Chapter I staff. In addition to working with the Chapter I office on the Time Out for Reading project, Hammond Public Library and Chapter I staff have developed Family Night at the Library. The library's children's staff conduct a program for children while the Chapter I staff work with the parents. Then all staff and family members come together for a group activity.

Currently, Chapter I is co-sponsoring a "Read for Life" poster contest to help promote adult literacy. The Calumet Area Literacy Council initiated the idea, Chapter I became involved and invited the Children's Division to participate so all groups would be promoted. In the future, the public library plans to be more involved in the Chapter I-sponsored Young Authors' Conference.

General Cooperative Activities

The school system and the public library cooperate in numerous areas to bring benefits for our ultimate target group-youth. Both organizations employ a full time graphic artist. The public library artist creates the bookmarks and book flyer material while the school system artist creates more sophisticated materials because

of the availability of state-of-the-art computer publishing equipment. When time permits, the school system also prints library material which is designed to go home with children. When the public library would like a distribution to be system-wide, they supply the paper and the school city provides the labor and distribution from its central transportation facility. The theory is that if the school system can help to encourage reading and information retrieval, it will.

Other services the school system provides to the public library include use of specialized equipment, such as photo copystand for producing slides, use of a camcorder to tape special programs, and duplication of audio and video tapes that are copyright free.

The Hammond Public Library director and school system administrators are working together to obtain funding for a shared database, "Project CONNECT," linking school and public library resources. This has given the School City of Hammond the impetus to start a retrospective conversion to MARC records of its holdings at the high school level.

Hammond Public Library staff instruct groups of students and individuals in how to use OTIS, the public access computer and databases on CD-ROM, including Newsbank and Infotrac. Students are encouraged to use the "hold" system to request materials not at their local library facility. They are also free to request materials through the interlibrary loan program. Both the Hammond

Public Library and the School City of Hammond are committed to equal access to information.

Conclusion

After two years of cooperation, the children's services staff presented book talks to nearly every classroom, grades K-8, in the Hammond schools. The number of children registered for borrower cards increased in one year from 6,801 to 10,637. Circulation of children's materials increased in this same period from 78,282 to 95,232. Hammond Public Library and School City of Hammond staff work together with parents and community members to promote reading and foster the role of the library in enriching children and increasing individual improvement and achievement.

The Hammond Public Library and school staff interrelate effectively with each cooperative program. They demonstrate flexibility, professionalism and creativity—all vital elements to forging a strong, successful education chain.

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