

“Libraries: The Hub of Our Community Schools”

Project Justification

What need will your project address, and how was it identified? Brooklyn Center STEAM Schools is a full-service community schools district-- both a place and a set of partnerships. Through our rich community partnerships, children and community members are able to access before and after school programs, mental, medical, and dental services, academic supports, and family resource centers.

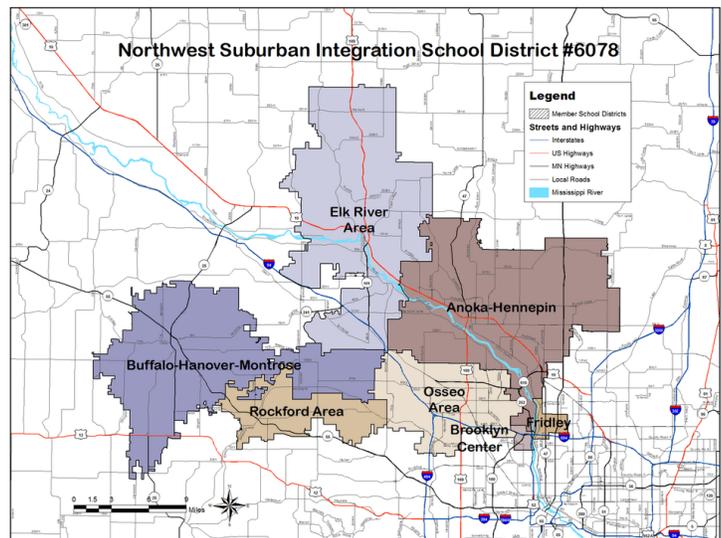
Similarly, libraries are both physical spaces and connections to resources. Libraries are essential community institutions, providing space and resources that promote life-long learning, remove barriers, and foster community. However, Brooklyn Center School’s elementary and secondary libraries are not equipped to serve as dynamic community hubs. Because of dated facilities, traditional hours, ill-performing equipment, and limited collections our libraries are stunted from fully evolving into the powerful, responsive environments they can and should be. Recent renovations brought our buildings into the 21st century. Our libraries were left in the 1960s. Our library professionals have made tremendous strides: they work to create collections that reflect our students, to collaborate with teachers to infuse our curricula with inquiry-based learning, to teach digital literacy and critical-thinking skills, and generally promote a climate where curiosity and stories are valued. However, one step into our libraries reveals outdated books and heavy, inflexible furniture. Most of our community members don’t step into our libraries because they are not accessible beyond the strict confines of the school day. Despite their inhospitable appearances, our libraries are heavily used by students. They are used for meetings among every combination of school staff and community partners. There is enormous potential for these spaces to be the heart of our community schools model. The IMLS Accelerating Promising Practices for Small Libraries (APP) grant specifies in the Transforming School Library Practice project category that librarians be positioned as “integral instructional partners to classroom teachers”. We seek to push one step further-- in this project, we plan to establish our libraries and library staff as integral partners in our community schools model.

What best practices or prior IMLS funded work will inform your approach? We look to the work of previous grantee “Simmons Middle School: A Small Library with Big Ambition” to guide us in transforming the BCS libraries. Their work implementing the vision articulated in *Learning Labs in Libraries and Museums: Transformative Spaces for Teens* (IMLS) will be a foundation for us as we integrate the principals and goals of the full-service community schools model. In growing the concept, we will ensure that “Connected Learning—learning that is interest-driven, socially relevant, and aimed at expanding educational or economic opportunity” can happen for our students, families, and community members.

Unlike the Aurora district project, our librarians have already established rich collaborative relationships with our teachers. Because of our conversion to STEAM, BCS staff are ready and able to partner in integrated, inquiry-based, production-centered learning experiences. Spaces, resources, and access are our limitations, not stakeholder’s perception of our libraries’ potential. We will focus our work instead to “capitalize on [our] community’s rich set of resources by forging collaborations,” towards the outcome (noted by Mimi Ito in her research) of “intergenerational relationships, centered on shared interests, identity, and mutual respect.” We will do this by following the best practices outlined in *Learning Labs in Libraries and Museums*.

How would you qualify your library as small/rural?

Brooklyn Center Community Schools consists of Earle Brown Elementary School, Brooklyn Center STEAM (a secondary school encompassing a middle and high school), Brooklyn Center Early College Academy (an alternative school), and Insight Online School? We are a uniquely small district within the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area. Our surrounding districts are composed of tens of elementary schools that feed into multiple high schools. We have approximately one thousand students in our elementary and secondary buildings each, with one library professional alone serving those sites. We have no library support staff, and volunteers are extremely rare.



Our secondary school librarian has aggressively weeded our dated collection, leaving just over 7,000 books in the collection, equating to roughly seven items per student, well below recommend collection numbers. The average age of the collection was brought up to 2009, with the nonfiction title’s average falling at 2008. Even with aggressive weeding, less than one third of the collection is six years old or newer. Our elementary school library sat without a librarian for several years, and has not undergone the weeding the collection needs. Despite this, the collection only holds 8,854 titles. While our secondary school library finally has a consistent budget of \$10,000 a year, it is not enough to make up for years of collection neglect, and is just serving to keep the collection functioning, not robust. Our elementary library does not currently have an allocated budget. We know how impactful a print-rich environment can be, especially for communities like Brooklyn Center, that have been traditionally underserved. Brooklyn Center’s libraries are small, but could be mighty, given the opportunity to implement the Accelerating Promising Practices for Small Libraries grant.

Who will benefit from your project and how have you engaged them in planning? Creating dynamic school libraries in Brooklyn Center will serve our city-- students, their families, and community members. This grant project was planned in partnership with our Curriculum and Instruction team, library professionals, STEAM coordinators, and Community Schools representatives. Our Community Schools Coordinator is integral to this team as her vision and the community schools model shape how we will turn our libraries into dynamic spaces for the community. She will be integral in bringing parent and community members’ voices into planning as the project progresses. We have already begun this process by engaging our Native American and English Learner families in text evaluation and recommendation for our library collections.

We wish to note that we have a rich collaborative relationship with our local branch of our public library system, and that our work to build our libraries as community hubs will amplify, not supplant their work in our shared community. Time to plan and engage community members together is stipulated in our grant timeline.

How will your project address the goals of APP? Funding and implementation support for “Libraries: The Hub of Our Community Schools” within the Transforming School Library Practice category will “strengthen the ability of [our] small libraries...to serve [our] communities”. The APP grant will enable us to create dynamic hubs: flexible learning and community spaces, collections that reflect and celebrate our community, resources that are needed and wanted by community members, and access to all of these improvements for every community member. Because our libraries will be the dynamic hub of our community schools, our project fulfills several objectives within IMLS’ goals of Promoting Lifelong Learning and of Increasing Public Access. At its core, this project seeks to empower “Continuous learning for families and individuals with diverse backgrounds and needs.”

Project Work Plan

What specific activities will you carry out? During our current school year, 2019-2020, we will develop survey instruments to formally collect data from students, teachers, families, and community members about what makes a library accessible and responsive to their needs. Surveys will be administered beginning March 2020. In addition to surveys we will also employ focus and advisory groups with various stakeholders to learn more about the needs of specific groups within our community and collaboratively develop plans for the reimagined library spaces. The findings from our surveys, focus groups, and advisory group will guide our grant implementation, starting in September of 2020. In addition, our key staff members will visit the Learning Labs of St. Paul Public Library to experience and learn about the transformation that took place in SPPS as the libraries transformed into Learning Labs that center the student and their interests as the heart and purpose of the space.

Beginning in the 2020-2021 school year, we will act on what we learned through our surveys, focus groups, advisory group, and site visit. We will purchase new flexible furniture arrangements to create spaces that are inviting, functional, and able to transform based on the needs of those utilizing

our libraries. The elementary library collections will undergo aggressive weeding. With direction from our stakeholders, we will acquire culturally responsive, current, high-interest, authentic and engaging texts for our libraries. We will also print books our students have written in STEAM integrated units and add them to the library collections. Upon completion of the collection weeding and new book acquisition our collections will reflect the cultures, lived experiences, interests, and values of our community members. In addition, we will overhaul and replenish the technology available to patrons of our libraries. This will involve both updating the computer stations located within each library and developing a wifi hotspot and laptop checkout program. We will open our libraries for an extra two hours each week (one hour before school, one after), and also open the libraries during one community event a month.

We will meet at scheduled points with the public library to ensure that this project amplifies their resources and programming. We will open our libraries for summer hours, and participate in the IMLS community of practice.

In the 2021 school year we will continue to gather data and convene our advisory group monthly. We will apply to present our work and preliminary findings at the AASL conference in October. The advisory group will gather careful data at designated periods to inform our work going forward, and to present to the IMLS community. In the second phase of our project we make STEAM equipment (such as vinyl and laser printers) accessible to the community through our libraries. We will also partner with our Community Education program to bring adult learning into the library spaces.

Who will plan, implement, and manage your project? This project was initiated by Jena Carlson, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, and Ellen Morehouse, Curriculum and Instruction Coordinator for the secondary level (and MLIS). Together with Kendrick Davies (Media Support Professional) and Jane Gottfried (Secondary School Librarian) Miamon Queeglay (Community Schools Coordinator) and our Elementary and Secondary STEAM Coordinators, Alexandra Holter and Mike Reed, we will implement, manage, and evaluate this grant project. Our team will meet monthly to ensure timely progress and to respond to project developments. Ellen Morehouse will represent our team as part of the IMLS community of practice. Miamon Queeglay will ensure communication to and from our community partners. Please see our List of Key Project Staff for a more detailed outline of key staff and responsibilities.

What time, financial, personnel, and other resources will you need? Brooklyn Center Community Schools has many resources in place that lay the groundwork for this project. Our community schools model, staff, and partners, along with our STEAM assets and team, strong library professionals, and supportive administration position this project to succeed. We need funding to staff our libraries for extended hours, to update our spaces, technology and collections, and the time to collect data and evaluate this project at each step in converting out libraries to community hubs. Please see our Budget Form & Justification for more details.

What are the risks to the project and how will you mitigate them? A risk for any library program is always the gap between what we, the program implementers, believe to be accessible and useful, and what is accessible and useful for patrons. We hope to mitigate the risk that our project implementation does not match with patron needs by ensuring that patron voice is solicited at every critical interval in this project. Because our project vision is to create spaces and resources that serve our greater community, this stakeholder input is all the more essential, and planned for.

An inherent risk to this project is the traditional public conception of school spaces as for students, and not for the larger community-at-large. The risk that our community does not view our school library spaces as community spaces is mitigated by the fact that we are replicating an already successful model. Our health resource center and family resource center are popular school-building based resources functioning at the boundary of school and community. We will leverage their success when communicating that our new library spaces and resources are for the use and benefit of all Brooklyn Center residents.

How will you measure your progress and evaluate your goals? The project advisory group will meet monthly to ensure that the schedule of completion and budget plan are adhered to with fidelity. Progress toward the success of our project will be measured through several tools. We will employ library circulation statistics and visitor statistics over time, facilities checkout data, survey data, and focus group evidence to evaluate our project at critical intervals. This data will inform our project advisory group’s work.

Project Outcomes

What are the intended results and outputs of your project? How will you define success? This project will be successful if our stated outputs result in our projected results. It will also be successful when we center all of our stakeholders-- staff, students, and community members-- at each point in this project’s development. When we aim to empower our libraries as community hubs, community investment is the work and the end goal. Ultimately, we wish for the outcomes of Connected Learning experiences noted by Mimi Ito in *Learning Labs in Libraries and Museums*: “A supportive and safe environment for developing interests and expertise” through “intergenerational relationships, centered on shared interests, identity, and mutual respect.” Through this project, we aim to create libraries that serve as the hubs for our community schools. Needs, outputs, and results are below:

Result	Output	Need Addressed
Increased access to library resources by students and community members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compiled circulation statistics increasing over time of grant implementation ● Compiled visitor logs showing increased use of library spaces over time of grant implementation ● Survey data showing increased awareness of available library resources 	Outdated library resources
Increased access to library facilities by community members and partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Facilities reservation calendar records showing increased use of library facilities over time of grant implementation ● Participation logs showing increased use of space at community events held in libraries ● Documentation on the use of space by patrons during extended library hours 	Inhospitable library environments

What is your plan for collecting and reporting data on your goals and outcomes? The project advisory group will facilitate the administration of all surveys and focus groups as outlined in our project plan. The project advisory group will also compile the statistics and data needed to track use and growth at the intervals noted in the project plan. Ellen Morehouse will communicate guidance from the IMLS community of practice, and be responsible for submitting any information needed to the community of practice. The project advisory group will adapt their work according to the advice of the community of practice and mentor organization.

How will you sustain the benefits of your project beyond the funding period? How will you sustain the lessons learned and knowledge gained through the community of practice? The core benefits of this project will outlast the material goods whose purchase this grant also enables. Namely, the work of the advisory group will establish communication lines between library stakeholders, and serve to form library advocates from participating staff, students, and community members. Through sharing our experiences as libraries in a full-service community school district at AASL, our state library organization, and within our integration district, we will establish collegial peers with whom we can exchange ideas, support, and best practices. The data we gather through surveys, focus groups, and circulation and facilities statistics for the implementation and evaluation of this project will be invaluable in ensuring district funding priority for our library services. In short, though we will use the technology and furniture this grant would provide for years after the grant is complete, establishing of our libraries as community hubs will position our libraries for continued success. If we center the voices of our community members at every step of our project plan with transparent communication of the knowledge gained through the community of practice, we will create responsive library spaces and resources for our community’s use, and our libraries will sustain themselves as rich community hubs.

