

Stepping Up to the ConnectED Library Challenge: A Call to Action

Executive Summary

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In April 2015, at the Anacostia branch of the District of Columbia Public Library, President Obama launched a new effort to strengthen student learning by improving access to public libraries. The ConnectED Library Challenge was developed by the Institute of Museum and Library Services to bring community leaders together around a shared educational goal of improving education outcomes for children across the nation.

In the months following the launch, 60 communities answered the President's call, signing formal agreements to establish threefold leadership teams, each with a local elected leader, school superintendent, and library director. With a focus on ensuring that all children have access to resources of the public library and a library card, community teams worked to eliminate obstacles to collaboration, launch conversations about education outcomes and opportunities, and identify ways to move from ad-hoc connections to deeper relationships for sustained success. Collectively, the 60 communities involved issued new library cards to more than one million school children as a direct result of their work on the ConnectED Library Challenge.

The Stepping Up to the ConnectED Library Challenge report outlines a concrete framework for successful and sustainable partnerships. It describes various approaches used by communities to improve student education outcomes, and it provides examples that can serve as models for jurisdictions nationwide.

All of the challenges in our communities come down to education, and it is essential that we work together to create education opportunities for all in our schools, our community centers, and our libraries.

– Mayor Chris Coleman, Saint Paul, MN

Threefold Leadership—Collaborating to Create Change

While there are many players and resources in the 21st century educational landscape, three types of community leaders are particularly well positioned to bring about lasting change. Local elected leaders, school superintendents, and library directors are each able to contribute substantial assets to a community education partnership. The overall effect of their contributions are multiplied when their assets are connected in a systematic way.

- **Top elected officials** set the tone for an integrated approach to education and serve as catalysts for innovation.
- **Schools** are at the center of the daily education lives of children, youth, and teens for up to 12 years.
- **Libraries** bring a range of education resources and approaches that supplement the classroom experience and facilitate seamless year-round learning.

*The work is hard, and the obstacles are real.
But connectedness of our learning partners is the
biggest thing we can do to improve education outcomes.*

*– Dr. Kevin Maxwell, Chief Executive Officer,
Prince George’s County Public Schools, MD*

Strategies for Ensuring Library Access

This report provides examples of successful efforts to build effective partnerships and overcome obstacles to library access. Strategies for ensuring library access focus on:

- **Ease library card enrollment processes.** Many forward-thinking communities created virtual cards using student ID numbers as library accounts. The accounts provide students 24/7 access to library resources from anywhere.
- **Eliminate fines for late returns.** Relaxing some traditional library policies and practices—such as fines for overdue materials, detailed library card applications, and parental signatures—helps provide greater library access to students.
- **Bring library resources into schools.** Students who lack transportation to the library or who do not have Internet access at home miss out on many library resources. By working together, schools and libraries can provide seamless access to online library resources and databases from school.
- **Instill lifelong learning habits in children to ensure they use their library cards.** Providing library cards to students at a young age and presenting them in a memorable way helps to build positive attitudes about going to the library.
- **Involve teachers in encouraging library use.** Teachers play a pivotal role in helping students understand the value of the public library. When teachers know that every student in the classroom has a library account or card, teachers can incorporate library resources in the classroom, recommend library learning tools for homework, and make the library part of the year-long learning process.

Improving Education Outcomes Together

Access to quality educational resources is a critical piece of preparing children to succeed in today’s global economy. Working together, local elected and appointed leaders, school superintendents, and library directors are making considerable progress on this 21st century education challenge – one community at a time.

*What I think is going to be amazing is
that we’ll be able to bring the library
into our classrooms. We’ll be able to
partner with the library as we develop our
curricula and that’s going to benefit the
students.*

*– Kevin Kos, Teacher,
West Junior High School, Hopkins, MN*

It is essential that more communities embrace the power of an integrated approach to education to leverage learning resources to produce improved outcomes. The examples in this report highlight the possibilities that emerge when community leaders work together to achieve shared education goals. The strategies outlined as part of the ConnectED Library Challenge provide a framework for elected officials, school superintendents and library directors – whether from a large metropolitan area or a small, rural town. It is up to community leaders throughout the country to answer the call and deepen the educational opportunities of children throughout the country.



The ConnectED Library Challenge event at the White House featured a panel about 21st century school challenges with Dr. Romules Durant, CEO and Superintendent of Toledo, OH, Public Schools; Dr. Debra Hamm, Superintendent of Richland School District Two, Richland County, SC; and Michael Casserly, Executive Director, Council of Great City Schools. (Photo Credit: Gediyon Kifle)