

Stepping Up to the ConnectED Library Challenge:



A Call to Action

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The delegation from Charlotte-Mecklenburg County discuss approaches for getting library cards into the hands of all school children at the Connect ED Library Challenge Event. Pictured: Dena Diorio, County Manager; Ann Clark, Superintendent of Schools; and Lee Keesler, Chief Executive Officer of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library. (Photo Credit: Gediyon Kifle)

LETTER FROM IMLS DIRECTOR DR. KATHRYN K. MATTHEW

I am pleased to share this report, *Stepping Up to the ConnectED Library Challenge: A Call to Action*. The report highlights the responses of communities across the nation to answer the White House's challenge to public librarians, superintendents, and public officials to collaborate so that every student has access to the many learning resources of their local library. The report outlines the conditions gleaned from these responses that point to indicators of successful partnerships and some of the many different forms these collaborations are taking. These examples can serve as models for jurisdictions nationwide.

The Library Challenge initiative highlights the real strides we have made as a country in focusing on libraries and their critical importance in a child's education.

I am grateful to the Obama Administration for launching the ConnectED initiative, which laid the groundwork for the Library Challenge progress. And I am especially thankful to the Urban Libraries Council, which took the lead in compiling this report, as well as the American Library Association, which has been an engaged and dedicated participant every step of the way.

I hope you read this report and are inspired to roll up your sleeves and join the efforts to deeply connect our public libraries, schools and communities. Continued collaboration will truly make a difference in the lives of our children.

Sincerely,



Dr. Kathryn K. Matthew
Director
Institute of Museum and Library Services



STEPPING UP TO THE CONNECTED LIBRARY CHALLENGE: A CALL TO ACTION

In April 2015, President Obama launched the ConnectED Library Challenge to ensure that all school children have access to the learning resources available in public libraries. Connecting children and youth to library resources, the President said, would “even things out between poor kids and rich kids,” creating equal access to books, digital resources, expanded learning opportunities, and ultimately, brighter futures.

The ConnectED Library Challenge grew out of a belief that more intentional collaboration among chief elected officials, school superintendents, and library directors could improve education outcomes for all students, begin to close achievement gaps, and create a framework for an integrated approach to education.

Sixty communities answered the President’s initial call to action and collectively issued new library cards to more than one million school children as a direct result of their work on the ConnectED Library Challenge. More importantly, these communities created or strengthened partnerships among elected officials, school superintendents, and library directors that provide a foundation for sustained collaboration around shared education goals.

The ConnectED Library Challenge is a way for communities throughout the country to create or strengthen partnerships so that every child enrolled in school can receive a library card. The initiative calls upon library directors to work with their mayors, school leaders, and school librarians, to provide wider access to the learning resources and books of America’s libraries. In addition to partnerships that improve library card access, participating libraries will also commit to:

- Support student learning through programming that develops language, reading, and critical thinking
- Provide digital resources, such as eBooks and online collections of traditional media
- Provide broadband connectivity and wireless access within library facilities

With the library card as a starting point, the community teams found new ways to:

- Simplify student library card sign-up and activation processes
- Share data between school and library systems while working within student privacy guidelines
- Create children- and family-friendly policies to support access for all
- Address obstacles that keep some children from using library learning resources
- Connect students with digital resources that make libraries 24/7 learning places
- Embed the library into children’s school learning experience beginning in kindergarten

In January 2016, mayors, county executives, school superintendents, and library leaders from 60 cities and counties met in Washington, D.C., for a convening hosted by the White House and with support of the Institute of Museum and Library Services and contributions of the Urban Libraries Council and the American Library Association. The “ConnectED Library Challenge: Answering the Call” convening was both a strategy session and a celebration of the community leaders who accepted the President’s challenge.

This report highlights the lessons and experiences of the representatives at the White House ConnectED Convening and from some of the original 60 ConnectED Library Challenge communities. Their work is helping to ensure that the public library is, and continues to be, an integral part of every K-12 student’s learning experience.

At the moment that we persuade a child, any child to cross that magic threshold into a library, we change their lives forever, for the better.

– President Barack Obama

PARTNERSHIPS FOR AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO EDUCATION

The ConnectED Library Challenge emphasizes the importance of high-level collaboration by requiring participating leaders, including the chief elected official, at least one school superintendent, and the library director from each participating community to sign a commitment letter to pledge their commitment to the challenge. By requiring the three community leaders to pledge their support, the ConnectED Library Challenge helps guarantee that the responsibility of ensuring library access for all children will be shared among the leaders equally, and not solely the library directors.

The signed ConnectED leadership commitment, effectively:

- Sparks new collaborations between library and school leaders who have been operating independently in the community learning space;
- Energizes stalled partnerships around a concrete goal;
- Launches vital conversations about education outcomes, opportunities for collaboration, and the importance of ensuring that all children have access to the best learning resources; and
- Identifies ways to move from ad-hoc connections to deeper relationships for sustained success.

The goal of these partnerships is to create in communities integrated approaches to education that involve key community leaders, extend beyond traditional classrooms, connect diverse resources, and improve learning outcomes for children. In this report, an integrated approach to education can be characterized as efforts by the leaders of both a community's formal educational systems (schools) and the informal learning systems (libraries), as well as elected leaders, to work together to achieve joint education goals. Examples detailed in this report include work to connect library card and school ID systems in ways that result in a more integrated experience for students; the promotion of public library services to children by classroom teachers in schools; and the incorporation of public library programming and resources into the schools.

Ralph Smith, Managing Director of the Campaign for Grade-level Reading and Senior Vice President of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, argues that sustained collaboration among elected leaders, school superintendents, and library directors is essential to provide the “leadership and the glue that will put solutions in reach, particularly for children who are falling beyond the reach of schools.”¹

Such partnerships among local elected leaders, school superintendents, and library directors enable more resources to be shared, new synergies to happen, and a greater chance that a community's education goals will be realized.

A Starting Point for Collaboration: Connecting Kids, Schools and Libraries

It is a simple goal - ensuring library access for all school children - with significant impacts both for children and for successful long-term collaboration.

Yet, despite a growing recognition of the benefits of public library learning resources, many children do not have library cards or regularly use the library. According to an IMLS analysis, the most powerful demographic predictor of library card ownership in first grade was poverty. More than three out of five first graders (62.2 percent) living below the poverty level did not have library cards. First-grade children living at or above the poverty level were more than twice as likely to have library cards as their poorer classmates. The analysis also confirmed that library card ownership positively influences active library use. Nearly 60 percent of the first graders with library cards had visited the library during a one-month period compared with only 33 percent of those without cards.²

Overcoming obstacles to library access and raising the library's profile as a learning institution are vital for an integrated approach to education.

Leadership Threefold – Collaborating to Create Change

Each member of the threefold partnership has an important role to play. The following three sections outline the contributions of each member of the partnership and provide examples from individual communities.

Elected Officials

Top elected and appointed leaders set the tone for an integrated approach to education and often serve as catalysts for innovative action. Mayor Chris Coleman of Saint Paul has taken steps toward setting the tone for his community, highlighting, “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.”³

“It takes an extraordinary amount of collaboration to ensure that all children have access to the public library,” said Lee Keesler, Chief Executive Officer of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library. “All three of us [county manager, school superintendent, and library CEO] are all-in on meeting this goal of ensuring access to the library. It is a grand partnership that we’re only beginning to tap.”

Regardless of government structure and formal reporting relationships, elected leaders bring significant assets to the education partnership including:

- The power to assemble key players and create decision-making tables
- Connections across broad local, regional, and national networks
- Program and budget authority to implement action
- Political influence to solve problems and open new doors
- A platform to increase awareness of the importance of an integrated approach to education.



Active involvement of elected leaders makes a difference, as demonstrated by the following communities who took part in the ConnectED Library Challenge:

- In 2014, in **Chattanooga, Tennessee**, Mayor Andy Berke eliminated a library membership fee for Hamilton County residents, which had been in place since 2011. The mayor used his budget authority to allocate additional funds to the Chattanooga Public Library to ensure free access to all public school students in Hamilton County. Additionally, Berke allocated funds to help launch a partnership between the city, the Hamilton County Department of Education, and the Chattanooga Public Library. Berke commented on his efforts stating, “No child should be charged to use a public library. This initiative ensures that kids who are motivated to learn and discover new things have access to one of the best libraries in the country.”⁴
- In **Washington, D.C.**, when Mayor Muriel Bowser made connecting school IDs to library access a top priority, more than 70,000 middle- and high-school students received immediate access to the public library using their D.C. One Card student IDs. While the idea of making that connection had been on the city agenda for some time, D.C. Public Library Executive Director Richard Reyes-Gavilan said the Mayor’s leadership expedited action including creation of two memoranda of understanding to define roles in implementing the plan and ensure sustained collaboration.
- Each of the 130,000 K-12 students in the Prince George’s County Public School system can use his or her student ID number as a library card to access resources of the **Prince George’s County, Maryland**, Public Library. Library CEO Kathleen Teaze said the leadership of County Executive Rushern L. Baker III was the key to creating the county-school-library partnership and breaking through a number of barriers to work together for all students.

School Superintendents

School superintendents play a pivotal role in broadening learning resources available to children to improve education outcomes. When school superintendents view the public library as an essential component of their educational system, the library becomes a powerful learning resource rather than an optional fieldtrip destination.

School superintendents serve a unique role in educational partnerships, providing assets, including:

- Daily access to students and their families
- A broad network of teachers/educators who can bring the library into children’s lives every day
- Experience tracking and measuring learning outcomes
- Physical infrastructure for learning
- Communications channels that can draw attention to the value of an integrated approach to education and raise the library’s status as a key part of the community’s education system.

For the first 60 ConnectED Library Challenge communities, superintendents played crucial roles in ensuring successful partnerships:

- **White Bear Lake Area, Minnesota**, School Superintendent Michael Page says the school district’s partnership with Ramsey County Public Library has been “a real game changer” for 7th and 8th grade students, who are participating in a pilot program to increase access to library and school digital resources using a single school-library barcode. While the partnership started with

distributing traditional library cards in classrooms, it shifted to maximizing use of digital resources to take advantage of the school system's one-to-one Chromebook initiative. For Superintendent Page, the partnership is a starting point for deeper learning opportunities. "The kids are talking about books, they're talking about homework help and other resources in a whole new way," Page said. "We hope it's just the tip of an iceberg in terms of a continuing partnership between Ramsey County Library and White Bear Lake Schools."⁵

- In December 2015, **Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina**, School Superintendent Ann Clark issued a challenge to teachers throughout the district to ensure that all students activated their new ONE Access library cards by the end of the calendar year. Students activate their cards by logging onto the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library website using their student ID number to access library digital resources or by checking out materials at a library branch. The strategy engaged teachers in connecting students with the library as part of their classroom work and created competition among teachers to achieve 100 percent activation in their classrooms. More than 110,000 of the school district's 150,000 students activated their ONE Access library cards over a three-week period in response to the challenge.

Library Directors

Library directors are the third leg of the education partnership stool. Their unique skill set and direct involvement in community libraries adds value to the partnership by providing:

- Deep community connections that are based on trust and confidence in the library as a valued institution
- Physical infrastructure that is specifically designed for use by children and youth, such as teen learning labs, and staff and volunteers, trained to mentor and work with students
- Experience building community partnerships that are essential to improving education outcomes
- A flexible, agile, and resourceful approach to meeting lifelong learning needs.

Libraries and their directors have considerable mission flexibility that has made it possible for them to broaden, deepen, and constantly adapt their learning programs to respond to changing needs and interests. Continued and sustained collaboration with library directors will ensure an education environment in which library resources and programs are embedded in schools and classrooms every day and children view the public library as part of their school learning experience.

We lament when institutions dig in their heels and embrace the status quo. In contrast, libraries on the whole are eager to embrace changes in society.⁶

*– Julia Stasch, President,
John D. and Catherine T.
MacArthur Foundation*

Strategies for Building Successful Partnerships

The ConnectED Library Challenge encourages top elected and appointed leaders, school superintendents, and library directors to combine their efforts and work toward the same three goals.

When working to build successful education partnerships, there are four strategies to consider:

1. Create infrastructure

Partnerships thrive when there is an explicit commitment, shared goals, mutual trust, and productive working relationships. Many successful partnerships start with a handshake and an ad-hoc approach to collaboration, often to carry out a specific short-term project. As collaborative work and expectations expand, governance structures—such as standing working groups or a mayor’s cabinet for education, and formal signed agreements—become important to document roles and responsibilities and to ensure that partnerships extend beyond the leaders who shook hands.

Many of the cities participating in the ConnectED Library Challenge made progress toward establishing effective infrastructures for collaboration within their communities, for example:



The ConnectED Library Challenge event’s afternoon sessions fostered productive discussions between elected officials, school superintendents and public library leaders. Pictured: Michael Page, Chairman of the Durham, NC, Board of Commissioners; Susan Benton, President and CEO of the Urban Libraries Council; and Toni Harp, Mayor of New Haven, CT. (Photo Credit: Gediyaon Kifle)

- In **Denver, Colorado** the Mayor’s Office of Children’s Affairs spearheaded establishment of the MY Denver card, which serves as a library card and provides free, year-round access to the city’s 23 recreation centers and 29 swimming pools for all students aged 5 to 18. The Office of Children’s Affairs coordinates fundraising, partner development, and implementation of the MY Denver card program working closely with Denver Public Library, Denver Public Schools, and Denver Parks and Recreation to manage data sharing and MY Denver card registration.
- **New Haven, Connecticut** designed its partnership around the New Haven School Change initiative to achieve education success. Led by Mayor Toni Harp, the New Haven Free Public Library and New Haven Public Schools have aligned goals, programs, and resources to carry out the city’s commitment to “launching all students to success in college, career, and life.” The partnership includes a memorandum of understanding between the school system and public library to serve as a roadmap for deeper collaboration and creation of a UniCard – a virtual card that uses student school IDs to access public library resources.
- **Indianapolis Public Library** and the **Metropolitan School District of Lawrence Township, Indiana**, signed a joint services agreement that defines how the two institutions work together to enrich and support school instruction by increasing access to library learning resources in schools. The agreement formalizes what had been a productive working relationship between the school



superintendent and library director with a particular focus on maximizing student access to library electronic resources. District Superintendent Shawn Smith said the partnership agreement has made their working relationship “more methodical rather than hit or miss.”⁷ Provisions of the agreement include services to be provided by the two parties, communication and information sharing responsibilities, obligations of district principals to work with library staff and link the school day with library electronic and physical resources, and details on school data requirements for providing library access to all students.

2. Implement incrementally

Many public libraries serve multiple school districts. Addressing the needs of multiple school districts requires strong partnerships to ensure library access for school children and to build sustained working relationships. Incremental roll-out has proven successful in many communities as it enables the library to build on existing informal relationships, use a shared commitment to technology as a framework for working together, and strategically choose a library-school district partnership that has a high likelihood for success.

Some libraries participating in the ConnectED Library Challenge found success by capitalizing on new technology provided to students in schools or by formalizing partnerships, one school district at a time, for instance:

- **Ramsey County, Minnesota, Library, and King County, Washington, Library System** both started their collaborative work with school districts that had technological resources including school-provided iPads or Chromebooks. School district commitments to technology in both cases supported use of virtual cards and access to online library resources from classrooms so that students could connect with the library instantly. In Ramsey County, the process of distributing new library access cards to students in White Bear Lake Schools is managed through the school media centers providing immediate access to library digital resources. In King County, the Library System and Bellevue School District joined together to pilot use of virtual cards with the student ID as the library account number. In a joint letter to parents and guardians, school and library leaders said the virtual cards would provide seamless access to databases, not accrue fines or fees, and have easy-to-remember account numbers making a physical card unnecessary.
- **Marin County Free Library, California**, is building partnerships with the 19 school districts in its service area by crafting agreements and program plans one district at a time. The library began the incremental effort with the Novato Unified School District with a facility and program agreement designed to improve educational achievement and promote the development of 21st century skills in all students. The foundation of the school-library partnership was construction of a joint learning center that includes a 6,000 - square-foot library complex.

Even in communities with one school district in the library service area, partners sometimes launch their collaborative work in one school or one segment of the school population (e.g., junior high) to pilot approaches before introducing to more schools and more students.

- **Montgomery County, Maryland**, launched its Library Link Program at one elementary school with plans to extend the program to all 200 schools in the county gradually. The partnership between Montgomery County Public Schools and Montgomery County Public Libraries is designed to link



schools with 21 public libraries across the county and guarantee that every child enrolled in a school has a library card.

3. Establish safe data sharing

The Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the law protecting privacy of student education records, has been a challenge to library-school collaboration in some communities. Agreeing on how to share data within the parameters of FERPA is an important starting point for ensuring library access for all students and for pursuing other joint work to measure and improve education outcomes for all children.

FERPA gives parents specific rights regarding the use of their children’s education records until their children turn 18. Generally, schools must have prior written permission from the parent or guardian in order to release any information from a student’s record. However, under appropriate circumstances, schools may share, without prior consent, some types of information that has been designated as “directory information.”⁸

Successful sharing of the basic student data starts with a clear understanding of FERPA and any related state laws, combined with a willingness by both parties to share the information that is needed to ensure library access for all children. It is vital that library and school officials establish agreements for protecting privacy of student records while sharing the data needed to provide students with easy access to resources.

Communities participating in the ConnectED Library Challenge have found a variety of ways to share student data, while keeping personal information secure, for example:

- **Charlotte Mecklenburg Public Library and Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, North Carolina**, address confidentiality of student data in a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that outlines the partnership to provide library cards using student IDs. The MOA includes a specific reference to FERPA and any other federal or state regulations pertaining to student education records. The MOA also requires that library staff sign statements agreeing to keep all student record information confidential if they will have access to the data.
- In the city of **Washington, D.C.**, the D.C. Public Schools, the Public Library, and Office of the Chief Technology Officer crafted a three-way Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that defines responsibilities and boundaries for sharing educational data to permit use of the multi-purpose D.C. One Card as a public library card for all public and charter school students. MOA provisions include:
 1. An annual assessment of opt-out forms to ensure compliance with student/family preferences
 2. Provisions for retaining student directory information for other uses
 3. Affirmation of compliance with confidentiality provisions of FERPA and any other relevant state and local statutes.
- **Prince George’s County Memorial Library System and Prince George’s County Public Schools, Maryland**, entered into a data sharing agreement to allow the parties to connect students to the library “for educational enrichment and ensure that every student has access to library services that will enhance his/her educational success.” The agreement limits data sharing to four elements -- student ID, full name, school, and grade level. The school system provides updated data to the

library on a monthly basis.

4. Meet regularly

While the daily responsibility for implementing a partnership is usually delegated to staff, maintaining the commitment at the leadership level is vital. An integrated approach to education requires regular communication and interaction to share information, monitor process and build rapport between the library, school, and elected leaders. Without such interaction, the connections that fuel initial success can slip away quickly in the pressure of everyday business.

When community teams involved in the ConnectED Library Challenge met in Washington, D.C., in January 2016, they highlighted the importance of establishing recurring opportunities for team members to talk and brainstorm – leader-to-leader as well as staff-to-staff – to deepen the partnerships and sustain action. In the time since, many participants have voiced support for regular touchpoints to maintain the collaboration’s momentum.

Strategies for Ensuring Library Access

Despite the obvious benefits of connecting school children to public libraries and integrating library and school learning resources and programs, obstacles to access remain including:

- Lack of knowledge about the valuable resources libraries offer, particularly among immigrant parents whose home countries did not have local library systems;
- Cumbersome library card application processes;
- Fear of fines for late or lost materials;
- Time constraints that prevent parents from bringing their children to the library;
- Transportation issues that prevent families from visiting their neighborhood libraries.

Lack of library access is often related to low socioeconomic status as evidenced in earlier cited studies. The experiences of the initial 60 communities involved in the ConnectED Library Challenge helped determine five strategies for overcoming long-standing obstacles to library access.

STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING THE TRANSPORTATION BARRIER

Libraries and schools are working together to ensure that all children have access to library learning resources even if they can’t get to the library. Successful strategies include:

- Using virtual cards to access library resources electronically
- Delivering library resources to schools
- Locating public libraries in schools
- Providing bus transportation from schools to libraries for periodic visits
- Building joint collections in school libraries
- Making schools a home base for library access by involving teachers in using library resources in the classroom, coordinating library card sign-up and distribution at the school, and offering in-school training on how to use library resources

1. Streamline library card enrollment

Access starts with a library card. Application processes that require parent signatures and a visit to the library make it difficult for some children to get cards. By working closely with their local school partners, libraries are finding ways to make it easier and quicker for students to get access, often starting in their schools rather than in the library.

As library electronic resources grow and students become more tech savvy, virtual cards that provide 24/7 access to library resources are supplementing traditional cards. Using student ID numbers instead of tangible library cards has proven to be effective. This approach makes it possible for students to access library resources by entering their school ID into the library website from classroom or home computers – eliminating the need for trips to the library to get a card or to use the learning resources.

In communities that do not use an ID number that stays with the student over multiple years, other numbers such as a statewide testing score or a special student library bar code can be used for automatic sign up and easy 24/7 access to both school and library resources.

The following communities each found their own way of linking school and library efforts to promote library card ownership among students:

- **Richland County, South Carolina, Library and School District 2** addressed obstacles to getting library cards to all children by eliminating fees, applications and parental signatures and bringing the distribution and activation process into classrooms. The library also waives its non-resident user fee for Richland County teachers who live outside the county so they have access to the same library resources as their students.
- **Kansas City, Missouri, Public Library** shifted from signing students up for conventional cards to making school IDs library cards. The change automatically enrolled about 10,000 additional K-12 students who did not yet have conventional cards.⁹ Nearly 70 percent of students in the Kansas City area have full access to public library resources, day or night, using their student IDs.
- **King County, Washington, Library System** provides both student and classroom eCards using student ID numbers and school district codes to increase access to and use of the library's databases, downloadable materials, and online homework help. The classroom cards connect the school rather than a student to the library, enabling teachers to use online resources in the classroom even if all students do not have their own accounts. The eCards supplement rather than replace traditional library cards, can be used all year round, and expire in July of the year after the student turns 18.
- In **Milwaukee, Wisconsin**, all public school students will get access to Milwaukee Public Library learning resources in September 2016 using their student IDs. The library is creating virtual accounts for all public school students, which can be used both online and at the public library. No

Benefits of Using Student IDS for Library Access

- An easy-to-remember number
- No risks of lost cards
- Provides continuity for students throughout their school life
- Serves multiple purposes for students
- Facilitates data sharing
- Creates a strong connection between the library and school

physical library cards will be issued.

- **Rochester Hills, Michigan, Community Schools** use barcodes provided by the Rochester Hills Public Library to issue IDs to middle and high school students, which serve as both a library card and student ID. The transition to electronic library cards introduced 7,000 students to library access for the first time.

2. Eliminate fines

It has long been a standard practice for libraries to minimize their financial risks by limiting the number or types of materials students can check out at one time and/or retaining fees for lost materials. More and more libraries have taken steps toward eliminating fines on student cards to ease parents' worries about potential costs for overdue or lost materials.

Approaches to fine elimination have varied, and include the following examples:

- **Ohio's Cleveland Public Library** will not charge fines for overdue books that students check out using ConnectED library cards that have been distributed to 90,000 children in all preschools, parochial, charter, and public schools. The cards give access to all online resources and allow a limited number of books to be checked out at one time. DVDs, CDs, and other audiovisuals may not be checked out using the ConnectED student card.
- Providing access to the **Washington, D.C., Public Library** using the D.C. One Card was designed to remove all barriers to participation, including fear of fines, said Library Executive Director Richard Reyes Gavilan. Students under the age of 20 do not incur any fines or fees when using their D.C. One Cards for library access.
- **California's Marin County Free Library** eliminated fines on children's materials and gave all students a "clean slate" by waiving existing fines so that every student library card worked for full library use.
- **Skokie Public Library in Illinois** still charges for overdue materials checked out on student library cards, but allows students to work off fines by attending a library program, volunteering at the library, or completing a summer learning program. The approach minimizes the financial impact of fines on families and encourages student engagement with the library.

While eliminating fines could be viewed as a financially risky undertaking, many library directors argue that the benefits experienced when students are ensured library access outweigh the potential loss of revenue.

3. Bring library resources into schools

One of the biggest obstacles that hinders children from getting connected to their libraries is lack of transportation. When getting a physical copy of a card requires going to the library, many children miss out on the resources and opportunities. Ensuring that students can access library resources electronically—particularly when they are in school if they do not have Internet access or computers at home—has helped eliminate the issue of transportation. Another strategy is to make schools the primary library home base by:

- Providing seamless access to online resources and databases from school

- Delivering library resources to schools
- Locating public libraries in schools
- Building joint collections in school libraries.

The examples that follow describe bold library-school partnerships that are reshaping the delivery of library services in their communities through sharing of resources and facilities:

- **In Nashville, Tennessee, *Limitless Libraries***, a program that brings the vast resources of the Nashville Public Library to the city's 128 public schools, has become the cornerstone for a powerful city-school partnership to:
 - Foster resource sharing between the two learning institutions
 - Strengthen school libraries through joint purchasing
 - Ensure student access to learning resources.

Launched by then-Mayor Karl Dean in 2012 with an initial challenge to break down the walls between the public library and the Metro School System, *Limitless Libraries* delivers library materials to students at their schools within a few days of request. More than 60,000 Nashville Public School students have access to the library's collections and technology through *Limitless Libraries*.

- In **Hartford, Connecticut**, the public library and school system joined together to open library branches in three public schools to serve students during the day and after school in addition to the general public during regular library hours. Library branches in schools is one component of the city's *Boundless* partnership which created a sustained system of sharing between the city's two biggest educational institutions to reduce redundancy and leverage resources to better serve school students and their families while providing an integrated approach to education.
- **Richland Library and Richland School District Two in South Carolina**, are opening a joint-use building including both a branch library and a student learning center designed to connect library resources with career-focused and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) learning opportunities for students. The facility will be a community hub for learners of all ages. By building a joint facility, the library and school system can expand space and capacity at a lower shared cost. The library will tailor its collection at the new branch into the specialized curriculum at the school.

4. Instill lifelong learning habits in children

The library card is a key that opens the door to remarkable resources and new opportunities. But simply giving students the key does not guarantee they will open the door and use the resources. When students connect with the library when they first get their cards or access numbers, they are more likely to understand its value and start using library resources regularly.

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. In the examples that follow, libraries and schools work together to instill library-going habits in young children.

- **In Ohio, Columbus Metropolitan Library and Columbus City Schools** combine distribution of Kids Cards, a library card that does not require a parent's signature, with school visits to the local public library. The library-school team uses the following five-step approach to distribute library cards and encourage immediate use:

1. The school brings the entire student body to the library over a period of several days.
2. All students receive their own Kids Cards during the library visit.
3. After participating in a library program and a tour of the resources available, students are given time to get acquainted with the library.
4. Each student is able to checkout up to five books.
5. Students are invited to visit the library with a parent.

While working on the ConnectED Library Challenge, school and library officials rethought their approach to getting cards into the hands of all school children when it became clear that many students had never been to the library, regardless of whether or not they had a card. The library pays for school bus transportation for one-time classroom library visits to issue Kids Cards. During the first half of the 2015-2016 school year, 32 of the system's 109 schools brought their entire student bodies to one of the city's local library locations issuing a total of 14,000 Kids Cards.

- Both **Cincinnati/Hamilton County, Ohio**, and **Ramsey County, Minnesota**, focus on getting library cards to children in kindergarten so that the library becomes an integral part of their school life from the start. Kindergarteners are often the least likely of school aged children to have their own cards, relying on using their parent's library card.
 - Staff from **the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, Ohio**, visited every kindergarten class in the 22 school districts in the library's service area and signed students up for a special child-only card that could be used immediately.
 - **Ramsey County Public Library, in Minnesota**, makes getting a library card a special occasion for kindergarteners and their families. The annual *Library Card Party* is a day-long event to introduce the youngest students to the library and the power of their new cards. The program ends with a ceremony in which each child's name is announced and they are presented with a free book and a brand new library card. The approach is intended to celebrate a significant turning point at the start of each child's learning adventure and communicate the importance of the library to these young learners.

5. Involve teachers

When teachers know every student has a library card, they are able to use library resources in the classroom, recommend library learning tools for homework and research projects, and make the library part of the learning process.

- **King County, Washington, Library System** makes teachers the front line for connecting students to the learning resources at the public library as part of its partnerships with the 20 school districts in its service area. "The approach has transformed how we relate to schools," said Library Director Gary Wasdin. "Teachers are better people to deliver the message about the value of the library to their students than library staff," Wasdin said. In addition, Wasdin said King County library staff and teachers are initiating more substantive conversations about how the library can support classroom learning as opposed to less informative sessions about general library resources, programs, and services. One of the next goals of the partnership with school districts is to create a portal on the library's website that directs students to resources for their age level and classroom work – a portal that will be designed in collaboration with teachers.
- **In Minnesota, the Hopkins School District** and **Hennepin County Library** teamed up to increase student access to digital resources both in and out of the classroom. The partnership utilizes the



school district's one-to-one technology environment which provides iPads to all students in junior high and Chromebooks in high school. Kevin Kos, a teacher at West Junior High School in Hopkins said the school district's partnership with Hennepin County Library will double or even triple the learning resources kids have access to and provide exciting tools that teachers can implement into the school day. "What I think is going to be amazing is that we'll be able to bring the library into our classrooms," Koss said. "We'll be able to partner with the library as we develop our curricula and that's going to benefit the students."¹⁰

- **In Arizona, Pima County Public Library** and the Tucson Unified School District's partnership included training for more than 200 school staff from the superintendent and principals to learning support coordinators. The training provided school personnel the opportunity to get familiar with a wide range of library learning resources that support student achievement.

Improving Education Outcomes Together

Ensuring that all school children use their libraries regularly is a critical step toward improving a community's education outcomes. Even more important is ensuring that local elected and appointed leaders, school superintendents, and library directors are committed to building an integrated approach to education that continues far beyond library access.

Community teams that embraced the ConnectED Library Challenge experienced major success by finding solutions to combat against obstacles to library access and creating meaningful partnerships that offer models for success.

To continue to move forward, community leaders across the country must:

- Commit to building an integrated approach to education that ensures that all children have an opportunity to succeed
- Develop shared plans for ensuring that library cards are used to their fullest advantage
- Explore approaches to expand school-library data sharing to
 - drive decision making;
 - create collaborative strategies based on shared information;
 - begin to measure outcomes and impacts of an integrated approach to education
- Continue to seek meaningful collaborative opportunities that can produce measureable impacts
- Regularly take inventories of what is being done already in schools and libraries to
 - pool resources;
 - minimize duplication;
 - break down traditional silos; and,
 - enhance coordination.

There are also important roles and opportunities beyond the work of community teams to create greater impact across the country. National organizations, associations, and nonprofits that work with local government, schools, libraries, education, and more can support this movement toward an integrated approach to education by connecting national networks to broaden awareness of the importance of collaboration; working on common language and metrics that address why an integrated approach to education will make a difference; publishing and widely distributing best practices; developing a scalable model that can be rolled out to small or rural communities; and providing national leadership, resources,



and guidance on how to collect, share, and use data to demonstrate that specific programs work.

More importantly, telling the story about these 21st century communities – local leaders, schools, and libraries – working together to tackle the challenges of ensuring that all children have an equal opportunity to succeed will go a long way towards normalizing integrated, collaborative approaches between public libraries and schools.

The Continuing Challenge

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.

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 officials throughout the country to answer the call and deepen the educational opportunities of children throughout the country.

¹ Keynote speech at the White House ConnectED Library Challenge National Convening, January 19, 2016.

² First Grade Student Library Card Ownership Linked to Library Visitation (2015, May), IMLS, Research Brief No. 6, pages 1-2.

³ Panel presentation at the White House ConnectED Library Challenge National Convening, January 19, 2016.

⁴ "Mayor provides free access to public libraries," Hamilton County Herald, October 2, 2105.

Available at <https://www.hamiltoncountyherald.com/Story.aspx?id=10%2F2015>.

⁵ Digital Access Initiative: A Partnership with Ramsey County Library, January 2016. Available at <https://whitebear.wistia.com/medias/8g10dz7u7t>

⁶ "Investing in Civic Engagement and Public Libraries: A Roundtable Discussion with Paula Ellis, Deborah Jacobs, and Julia Stasch," National Civic Review, Special Issue: Public Libraries and Civic Engagement, 101, no. 4 (Winter 2012), page 7.

⁷ Interview on No Limits, WFYI Indianapolis, March 17, 2016. Available at <http://www.wfyi.org/programs/no-limits/radio/indy-libraryconnected>

⁸ Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), U.S. Department of Education, <http://www2.ed.gov/print/policy/gen/guide/fpco/ferpa/index.html> and FERPA Frequently Asked Questions, <http://familypolicy.ed.gov/faq-page/ferpa-school-officials>

⁹ Timothy Inklebarger, Linking Students to Libraries: Student IDs serve as library cards in Kansas City and Nashville, American Libraries Magazine, January 4, 2016.

¹⁰ Power Up: Libraries, Hopkins Public Schools and Hennepin County Library, MN, available at <https://vimeo.com/141092985>