

Aimee Norris

Prof. Crowley

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The *Public Libraries: Informational Brief: Impact of Public Libraries on Students and Lifelong Learners* prepared by the New York Comprehensive Center Educational Technology Team addresses the importance of public libraries in the community through its impact on child development, students, and lifelong learners. Using research, examples of actual programs being implemented, and impact studies, the team creates a compelling argument for the critical need for political backing, funding, and expansion of public library services. The brief specifically focuses on: early childhood learning opportunities, the impact of achievement for all students through information and digital literacy, summer learning opportunities, and supporting underrepresented populations, as well as lifelong learning opportunities.

The public library, as the team emphasizes in this paper, is essential in providing opportunities and solutions to real problems being faced by the community. Through fostering literacy at a young age, providing mentors and support for students and lifelong learners, giving digital and internet access to those who need it, and through services such as tax and job-searching assistance as well as cultural programs for community awareness, the public library's services are not only high in demand but essential for community growth. For early childhood learning, we see storytime programs and Family Place Libraries where parents are encouraged to read to their children so that they can nurture learning (6-7). Summer reading and education programs such as the summer reading program in Illinois and New York Public libraries can help students battle the summertime slump and ensure that they start the new school year retaining knowledge from the year before (13). Chicago Public Library's YOUmedia program gives teens a space to hang out, venture onto social media, learn and explore personal interests

at their leisure, and have access to digital media (11). There are special needs programs and opportunities geared towards at-risk populations, such as the Child's Place program in Brooklyn, New York and the SK8 and Rock program seen at the Phoenix Public Library (16). For new immigrants, studies done in Queens, New York have shown that services provided at the public library have been "shown to increase awareness of public library services among cultural and ethnic communities" (17) as well as increase library use and participation. Also, with the lingering effects of the recession and the rise of job seekers, the public library has become an essential tool for those who need assistance with government information online, taxes, job searching, and resume-building. North Carolina State Library and New York Public Library have devised programs and trained librarians to specifically help patrons in this regard (21). Overall, as the New York Comprehensive Center Educational Technology Team has shown with its spectacular collection of data, public libraries are integral to society and in order to keep their status as an important hub for learning and community growth, they need the financial and social support to be able to expand, grow, and develop consistently to meet the people's needs.

One particularly intriguing program is Read Down your Fines offered at the New York Public Libraries. Allowing the students to erase a dollar of their fines for time spent reading, which is logged into an online database, allows students who may come from financially poor families a far more feasible and beneficial opportunity to pay off library debt, which often times can bar patrons from using certain library facilities. Punishing the poor for their inability to pay off their fines has always been counterproductive and especially so for children who have no means of paying off the debt. While the library may potentially lose a small amount of money with a program like this, the appeal of the program for students and parents should definitely show an increase in library visits and reading time logged in by the young patrons. In my opinion, I would like to see this kind of program and opportunity extended to adult patrons in some form.

As for my own ideas, I think that there needs to be more programs focused on the rising group of autistic children in America. While there are a few libraries already implementing programs, the field is still young and in dire need of expansion to meet this growing demand. As the older sister of three boys with autism, I know very well the issues that surround education and learning in regards to autistic children. Allowing a space for teachers, therapists, and specialists to work with autistic children and their parents outside of the bluster and chaos of the classroom and the awkwardness of home visits could enhance learning, socialization, and development. Children's librarians should be trained on how to work with autistic children and teens and meet their needs. There is also digital media out there directly geared towards autistic children and teenagers such as: computers that are used as communication devices for severely autistic children, tablets as tools for teens, and video games that help autistic kids meet social challenges in real life. Libraries can also provide specialty digital literacy programs, storytimes that are more autistic child friendly—like a soundproof room and quieter group activities, and skills training for teens with high functioning autism and Aspergers to prepare them for college and self-sufficiency in the adult world. There can also be programs specifically for the parents. Too often I see and hear stories of parents of autistic children who are woefully ignorant of the scientific research and studies around autism. There can be lectures, open chats, and meetings for parents to learn about current studies, discuss theories and experiences, and ultimately connect with fellow parents and peers to create a sense of unity and community.

Ultimately, I appreciate the New York Comprehensive Center Educational Technology Team's work on compiling the data for this information brief on the importance of public libraries. I learned a great deal about various innovative programs and opportunities being explored in libraries throughout the world, some quite ingenious, and seeing the qualitative data to back up these programs was reassuring and inspiring. In many ways, as well, the paper reiterates what I already knew: that despite what some people may think, the public library is still essential to the

community, an invaluable resource for learning, self-betterment, and cultural connection, and the demand for its services is on the rise. And in order to stay that way, to keep up with technological and social developments, the public libraries will need all the support they can get.

Works Cited

Shrem, Jonathan. *Public Libraries: Information Brief: Impact of Public Libraries on Students and Lifelong Learning*. Prepared by New York Comprehensive Center Educational Technology Team. New York Comprehensive Center: New York, 2012.