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Collaboration Ideas for K–12 School and Public Libraries

by Jacqueline Partch



After working for more than 15 years in a public library program that collaborates with schools, I've found lots of ways for school and public libraries to work together. Here are some of my favorites:

Summer reading programs

Summer Reading is a natural collaboration point. Multnomah County Library has begun signing up most K–12 students before school ends. The districts send us student information electronically so we can add it to our database. If this sounds overwhelming, maybe public library staff could visit the school during library time or lunch to sign up students. Some schools have a party or other prize in the fall for students who completed the public library's summer reading program; this provides extra incentive to finish. I've even heard of a few schools that open the school library occasionally during the summer for students. What about inviting someone from the public library to stop by and sign students up for summer reading or award prizes to those who finish?

Newsletters

Does your school or library have a newsletter? Maybe you could ask your collaborative partner to write an article with you, sharing new books or programs of interest to the audience. (I'm writing this article because a school media specialist, Erin Fitzpatrick-Bjorn, recommended me. Thanks, Erin!)



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School assignments/Common Core

Overwhelmed with teacher requests on a small budget? Your public library may be able to pull some books for students to check out or make a list of recommended titles. (Public librarians really appreciate knowing about those perennial assignments, so we can keep them in mind the next time we do a book order.)

Parent nights

I occasionally get panicked phone calls from schools looking for someone to come to a parent night. Public librarians are usually happy to visit these events in order to staff a table about library resources or speak to parents about topics like homework resources or books for beginning readers. These visits let us connect with families we might not see otherwise. Some libraries may even be able to issue library cards on-site.

Library card signups

Perhaps you could hand out applications for public library cards at your school, maybe during parent/teacher conferences. Once all those students are signed up for cards, partner with your public library colleague to show students what they can do with them: access databases to help with homework, reserve books in the library catalog, etc.

Battle of the Books

If your school offers Oregon Battle of the Books (OBOB), consider asking public library staff to serve as judges. Or perhaps you could collaborate to run an OBOB book group.

Other school contacts

My first point of contact in a school is always a school library staff person, but my school library colleagues have also introduced me to others in the school who are eager to connect with the public library, such as the after-school program director, the school counselor, and the Title I coordinator.

There are many opportunities for school and public libraries to collaborate. I encourage you to develop a partnership using one of these ideas or one you create. You are sure to find an opportunity to collaborate that will become your favorite, too. 

