

## How can schools and public libraries develop partnerships that benefit students?

Public librarians and educators are natural partners. Librarians are eager to enhance what schools are already doing and can help by linking to resources, serving on school committees, partnering on class assignments, teaching research skills and much more. Outside school hours, public libraries can help close the opportunity gap that exists for many underserved students.

The information in this document was jointly developed by the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) and the [Oklahoma Department of Libraries](#) (ODL) to encourage school and public library partnerships in support of educators, students and families through access to high-quality services and resources.

### THINGS TO CONSIDER

Public libraries are free and open to all students and families and have locations in every county of the state. Libraries support student learning, help students become engaged citizens and foster a passion for lifelong learning. Creating strong school-public library partnerships can enhance existing programs, lessons and activities, ensuring effective use of resources to benefit students.

For example, when schools identify gaps in services for students and families, a strong school-public library partnership can provide solutions. Joint planning efforts like the [Health Literacy Grants](#) in 36 Oklahoma libraries can serve as critical partners in meeting community needs. Librarians can be partners in providing successful programs for Reading Sufficiency Act Committees, [Out-of-School Time](#) Committees (e.g., 21st Century Community Learning Center Advisory Committees), [Family Engagement](#)

Committees, federal program committees and in other advisory roles.

A free library card gives students of all grades access to high-quality resources. The [Public Library Locator](#) and [Oklahoma Public and Institutional Libraries Directory](#) can help identify the library or branch that serves the community where the school is located. Some libraries provide special services for teachers and students, such as assisting with summer learning programs, providing access to science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) tools for hands-on, experiential learning and special programming for college and career readiness.

One way to effectively engage the resources of the public library is when educators share lesson plans and annual learning goals. Do students have a required reading list for the school year or

## KEY INSIGHTS

- Oklahoma public libraries can help close the digital divide with access to broadband Internet and computers inside their buildings, along with copying, scanning and faxing capabilities. Many libraries provide 24-7 Wi-Fi access to their outdoor spaces.
- Librarians are information experts trained to share their expertise with teachers and students.
- Librarians can be community ambassadors for school-led initiatives. Involve them in planning stages of initiatives like the school Reading Sufficiency Act Committee, Out-of-School Time Committee and other advisory roles.

## SEE ALSO

- [How can high-quality afterschool and summer learning programs be developed through school and community partnerships?](#)
- [Oklahoma Science of Reading Academies Initiative](#)
- [How can schools and communities partner to provide summer learning experiences?](#)

summer? Are resources available to support the [science of reading](#)? Are fifth-graders required to complete a presentation about a country or continent? [Explora](#), an easy-to-use resource provided by the Oklahoma Department of Libraries, can help students do research and write essays.

Regardless of the specific program used, the goal of public librarians is to ensure students have access to trusted resources at the appropriate reading level to support learning inside and outside the classroom.

### ATTENDING TO EQUITY

The COVID pandemic exposed [a digital divide](#) between those who have access to the software and hardware needed for 21st-century learning and those – often members of traditionally underserved student groups – who do not. Public libraries offer many free services that bridge the digital divide, providing access to broadband Internet, computers, copying, scanning and faxing services. Many libraries offer 24-7 Wi-Fi access to their outdoor spaces as well as Wi-Fi hot spot, laptop and tablet checkouts.

Student and family access is no longer limited to operating hours. Oklahoma virtual learners can log in to the [Digital Prairie](#) research databases and digital archives devoted to Oklahoma governors, the Tulsa Race Massacre and a host of other collections. [Explora](#) includes a text-to-speech feature for HTML articles to assist auditory learners, struggling readers or those developing English language proficiency. [Libby](#) provides access to e-books, audiobooks, magazines and more.

Public libraries can also help close the opportunity gap that exists for many students by providing science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics (STEAM) programming, books in multiple formats (print, audio, e-book, etc.) to meet the needs of diverse learners, health and wellness programs and others offered in the evenings, on the weekends and throughout the summer.

### RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS

- Reach out. Introduce yourself and have a conversation with a librarian about your school's unique needs and the resources the public library has to offer.
- Invite your public librarian to participate in staff or committee meetings to share an overview of available resources.
- Collaborate to identify a resource or service gap and how the public library can help fill it.
- Support student success by planning a class field trip to the public library or invite a public librarian to visit the classroom to share how it can support lesson plans and assignments.
- Engage public libraries in summer learning and enrichment planning and implementation.