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Library Linx:

Bringing the Public Library to the Schools

by Linda Bilyeu &
Heather McNeil

Linda Bilyeu is the Information Technology and Library Media Specialist for the Bend-LaPine Schools. She is a member of OASL/OLA and this year's District Librarian of the Year for Oregon. Linda is currently involved with a Professional Learning Community of secondary librarians who use Lesson Study to increase collaboration with teachers/librarians. She uses the Deschutes Public Library to provide books for her reading habit and believes Library Linx is the answer for staff and students with a similar reading obsession.

Heather McNeil is the Youth Services Coordinator for Deschutes Public Library. She is also the award-winning author of two collections of folklore, and an internationally recognized third generation storyteller. Teaching early literacy tips and skills, telling stories, reading about Africa, riding horses with her daughter and encouraging students and teachers to use Library Linx are some of her many passions.



Like bookends, Heather McNeil from Deschutes Public Libraries and Linda Bilyeu from Bend-LaPine Schools work together through Library Linx to support literacy for students.

Heather: The History of Library Linx

In 2002 the Deschutes Public Library (DPL) District Board identified working closely with schools as a high priority. This was due to several reasons: a) a lack of financial support available to school media centers was resulting in severely outdated collections and minimal staffing; b) many new neighborhoods with large populations were being developed in areas without close proximity to a public library; and c) limited availability of public transportation in central Oregon. Then-Library Director Michael Gaston determined that the best solution was to make library resources available as easily as possible by “bringing the public library to schools.” Library Linx was the result of that vision, and has been successfully operating in 10 schools, increasing to 15 in the fall of 2009, and eventually reaching as many as 30 schools in three school districts.

The idea of Library Linx is that students and teachers place holds on public library materials, and the public library delivers the materials, via DPL's courier van, to a designated location, selected by the school district. Then the school district's

courier delivers the materials to each of the schools, Monday-Friday. The media manager checks out the items to the student or teacher using one of DPL's Innovative Interfaces Express Lane self-checkout computer. Materials are returned to the school's media center, picked up by the school's courier, returned to the designated site, and picked up by DPL's courier to be returned to the public library.

Obviously, this arrangement required quite a bit of cooperation from the three school districts of Deschutes County and Deschutes Public Library. An interagency committee was created, comprised of representatives from each of the school districts, appointed by their superintendent, and DPL staff, including the managers for Access Services, IT, Facilities, and Youth Services. They met several times in order to work through the challenges of gradually expanding to over 30 schools in three school districts. For instance:

- Courier service. With no additional staffing, would schools be able to deliver the crates of library materials?



- Access to library materials. Would schools be able to support the fact that no restrictions are placed on public library materials, which means that students could reserve movies and print materials that might be controversial?
- Financial support of the media center. It has never been the intent of Library Linx to replace the media center, but rather to emphasize its importance. Therefore, DPL required that the school must financially support the media center with an amount that was half the national median expenditure per student. (We used School Library Journal's annual report to determine that amount.) Would schools be able to meet that requirement?
- DPL also required that the media center be regularly staffed by a media manager or media specialist. Would schools be able to guarantee that level of staffing?
- Funding. How would everything be paid for?

Each of the above concerns was addressed carefully with the three superintendents, and all expressed support. We began with three schools, with everything paid for by DPL. Bend La Pine schools assigned their grant writer to support this project by researching and writing grants so that we were able to expand to seven more schools in 2008. At least five more will be added in the fall of 2009.

The financial requirement can be addressed in a myriad of ways—school budget, PTO support, grants, donations, etc. However, when the economy changed so drastically we knew that our requirement for financial support needed to be adjusted, so that is not currently a requirement.

Other continuing requirements include:

- The superintendent signs a Memo of Understanding, and principals and media managers sign off on the list of requirements.
- Each school arranges for DPL staff to visit students and teachers four times during the year to promote Library Linx and library resources,
- Staff in the media center must promote a library card campaign in the fall, with a target of 80 percent of the students and teachers at each school to have Library Linx cards.

Linda: The Challenges

Growing pains are necessary in the birth of any new project. School library staff needed to be trained on DPL library card applications, circulation policies, placing holds to be delivered to the schools, ready reference, and dealing with questionable books or movies arriving at the schools. School libraries select materials allowing for age appropriateness, whereas public libraries offer a wider selection of reading interests and allow patrons to check out anything in the collection. School staff was encouraged to talk to students and call parents if necessary to alert them about school library parameters. After a few discussions, students realized that the staff were partners with parents in providing the best resources for their children.

Media Managers were also educated about the Library Bill of Rights and confidentiality of patron records. Library Linx books are kept behind the circulation desk and only school library staff can check them out so patron requests are kept private. Methods for alerting students about books waiting to be picked up, while protecting confidentiality, were brainstormed among the group.



Other challenges include:

- Students may have a book delivered but are unable to check it out until fines over \$10 are paid at the public library.
- Adding more schools will impact courier service, and may require changing delivery to every other day.
- School books are sometimes returned to the public library.

Heather: The Challenges

The biggest challenge is funding. The first two years were paid for entirely by DPL. Now we have a \$66,000 LSTA grant that will pay for a larger courier van, licensing software, library cards, printers, and promotional materials such as banners and bookmarks.

The library card campaign creates a huge workload for our circulation staff during the first months of school. With each year we learn better ways of clarifying the application and streamlining the process.

Our IT department provides, installs, and remotely supports the Innovative computers for checking out. During a couple of weeks of late summer the staff is dedicated primarily to Library Linx to get everything ready at all the schools.

Finally, there is the challenge of making sure that Library Linx is a success. We have children’s and teen librarians who are assigned as liaisons to the schools, and it is their responsibility to make sure that they promote the project and the library whenever possible, as well as answer questions from the media managers. But 90 percent of the success is due to the dedication of the media managers/specialists, and their willingness to remind students and teachers, “Your school is a Library Linx school!”

Linda: The Successes and the Future

With the growth pains has come an amaz-

ing collaboration between school and public libraries!

“How do we love thee, let me count the ways ...”

1. We love the access to over 400,000 items at DPL.
2. We love the access that students and teachers have without traveling to the downtown library.
3. Our Latino population schools are farther from the public library and often these students do not go to the public library. Having a Library Linx card has opened students and staff to a large collection of books in Spanish allowing parents to read to children at home.
4. We love the training provided by the DPL staff.
5. All Linx schools’ library staff are included in the Central Oregon Regional Library Conference that brings nationally acclaimed speakers and workshop presenters.
6. DPL staff also visit Linx schools to talk to staff about services available at DPL and help with collection development.
7. School staff say, “The convenience of having books delivered here and being able to place holds from school or home is soooooo convenient.” Students at Juniper Elementary say, “The public library has awesome books. We had to sell our car and never get downtown any more. It is great to still have access to all those books.” Juniper’s Media Manager, Peggy Whitney, has been a Linx supporter from the beginning. The enthusiasm of the school library staff is essential to the success of the program.



Peggy comments, "Sure it takes extra work, but the benefits are worth it."

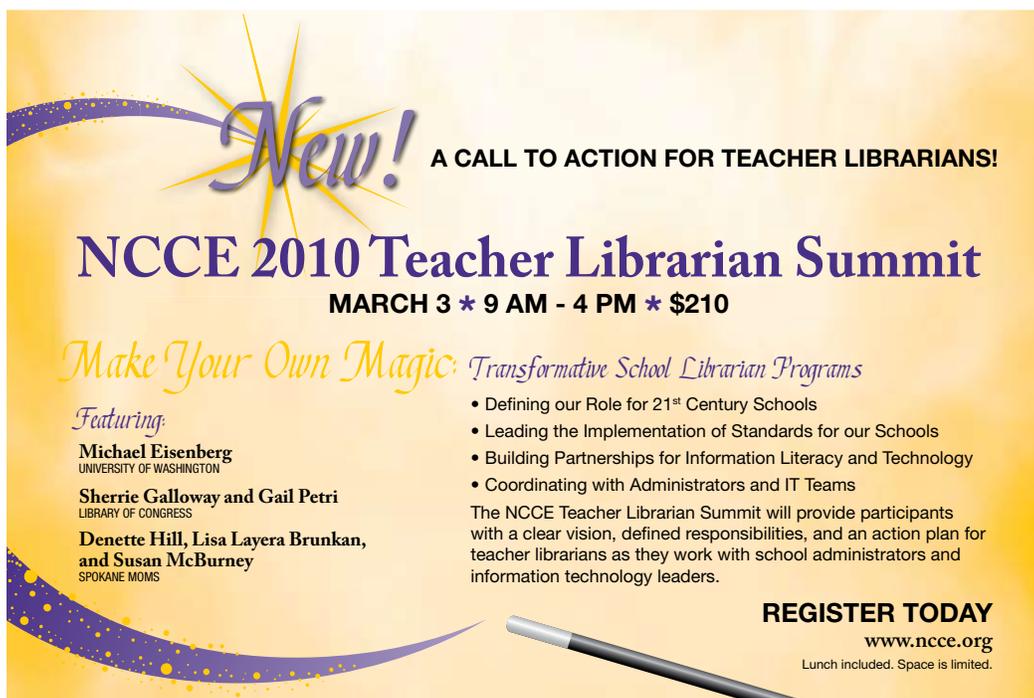
When Library Linx was started, the Bend-La Pine School libraries were a diverse group. Depending on the support of the school principal, funding for books was inadequate which left collections outdated and with insufficient funds to do much about it. Most schools used book fair or PTA money to buy new books, and only a few schools could qualify for Library Linx because of the required \$10 per student funding to become a Linx school. Today the school district gives adequate funds to qualify all schools in the program. Eventually we hope to include all the 26 Bend-La Pine Schools in Library Linx.

This has been a learning process for the Media Managers and Librarians but the growing pains have definitely been worth it. Students and staff have embraced the collaborative project and we have strengthened our ties to the Deschutes Public Library and

all it has to offer. Schools without librarians have welcomed the amazing librarians from DPL, inviting them to give book talks and poetry readings, and promoting the many resources available at DPL, such as databases, programs, and, of course, books!

Heather: The Future

Although Bend La Pine Schools has definitely addressed the importance of the media centers in their district with adequate staffing and funding, it continues to be a challenge for the Redmond and Sisters School Districts. Budget shortfalls have resulted in less staff and flexibility, which means Library Linx might need to be postponed in those two districts. However, DPL continues to be dedicated to the original plan of providing Linx to any school that is able to meet the requirements that aim toward a relevant media center and a strong partnership between school and public library. 



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