



Leadership Brief: Partners for Education

ABOUT THIS LEADERSHIP BRIEF

This Leadership Brief highlights the changing education landscape and the progressive work of public libraries to meet the diverse education needs in the communities they serve. It identifies seven action strategies for local, elected, and appointed officials to pursue with public libraries to improve education outcomes.

OVERVIEW: Education is the challenge of the 21st century. Mayors, county executives, city managers, library CEOs, school superintendents, educators, and business and civic leaders recognize that succeeding today requires a higher order of problem-solving, critical-thinking skills, and continuous learning from cradle through career.

“I don’t know how you can be a mayor in the 21st century and not have education as a central tenet of the work you’re doing,” said Mayor Chris Coleman of Saint Paul, “Education is my job strategy, my economic strategy, and my public safety strategy.”¹

Traditional education systems cannot meet today’s learning and skill development needs alone. Like many modern challenges, education takes a village — a well-coordinated network of government, business, and formal and informal education institutions committed to improving education outcomes. While awareness of the need for new approaches to education is widespread, strategic collaboration among key players is often lacking, leading to missed opportunities, community confusion about available resources, disconnected outcomes, and competition for public and private resources.

A critical and sometimes overlooked resource is the public library, which is well-positioned to facilitate collaboration, build partnerships, address gaps, and support a lifetime of improved education outcomes.



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21ST CENTURY EDUCATION

Our understanding of education has changed dramatically over the last decade. Research shows that an integrated and continuous approach to learning that begins early, draws on a variety of resources, extends beyond traditional classrooms, and is interest-driven enables children, youth, teens, adults, and seniors to succeed in school, careers, and life.

Local government officials recognize that educational opportunities play a key role in quality of life, economic development, and public safety and have made education a top priority, whether or not they have authority over the school system.

- ▶ **Chattanooga** Mayor Andy Berke established his commitment to improving education in collaboration with the school district at his 2013 inauguration. “For too long in our community, we have pointed fingers rather than raising hands when asked who is responsible for educating our children,” Berke said. “Today, I raise my hand as mayor and say the city is ready to do its part.”²
- ▶ **In Houston**, the Mayor’s Office of Education Initiatives coordinates community resources that are designed to help learners graduate from high school, receive workforce training or earn a college degree, and find jobs that support long-term success. In 2016, Mayor Sylvester Turner created a new Director of Education position to support his goal of ensuring educational equity. “Creating a strong, well-educated Houston of tomorrow will require everyone working together,” Turner said.³
- ▶ **In Hartford**, Mayor Pedro Segarra created an Office of Families, Children, Youth, and Recreation to coordinate city learning programs and appointed Hartford Public Library Chief Executive Officer Matthew Poland to the Hartford Board of Education.
- ▶ **Howard County, Maryland**, has worked to align education resources including schools, county offices, the public library, the community college, museums, and historic sites to create a comprehensive education system. At the start of his first term, County Executive Allan Kittleman identified education as a top priority. “I intend...to do everything within our power to help every student achieve to the top of his or her potential,” Kittleman said in his December 2014 inaugural speech.⁴

LIBRARIES AS EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Public libraries have a history of responding quickly to changing community needs. “We lament when institutions dig in their heels and embrace the status quo,” said Julia Stasch, interim president of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, in an interview for a special edition of *National Civic Review*. “In contrast, libraries on the whole are eager to embrace changes in society.”⁵

Libraries bring a wealth of assets and education expertise, including status as trusted community hubs, a longtime commitment to literacy, technology tools, creative-learning labs, homework help, business incubators, and development of workforce skills. Perhaps most important, libraries are multidisciplinary organizations, uniquely able to serve audiences from cradle through career and knit together diverse resources to meet broad needs. In today’s knowledge economy, libraries fill the urgent need for a public knowledge institution.

21ST CENTURY EDUCATION PRINCIPLES

1. Learning may occur at any time, any place, any path, and any pace.
2. Quality learning experiences for children from birth to age five pay long-term dividends, including school and employment success, stronger families, and reduced crime.
3. Young people respond more positively to learning that is personal, interest-driven, informal, and supported by peers and mentors.
4. Well-designed networks that connect diverse resources and approaches improve education outcomes.
5. Quality after-school and summer learning programs improve outcomes, reduce out-of-school learning loss, and support families and communities.
6. Technology is a catalyst for learning.
7. Well-designed, easily accessible, and welcoming spaces contribute to active participation and successful education outcomes.

“Physical libraries create a space for learning that is very different than the learning taking place in a classroom in a public school or even a university,” said Richard Reyes-Gavilan, executive director of the District of Columbia Public Library. “You’ve got a real laboratory-like atmosphere, and that spirit of innovation is only getting more popular in libraries.”

To improve education outcomes, libraries are committed to (1) creating programming and partnerships that fit into a community learning continuum; (2) demonstrating that learning at the library is real, valuable, and transferable; and (3) integrating community, school, and library metrics to measure and assess education outcomes.

The following provide examples of library education innovations.

▶ **The Howard County (Maryland) Public Library System’s**

HiTech digital media lab delivers cutting-edge science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education to students age 11–18 and serves as a launching point for STEM careers through partnerships with employers in the region.

▶ **In Nashville**, Mayor Karl Dean created Limitless Libraries, a program that brings the vast resources of the **Nashville Public Library** to the city’s 128 public schools. Mayor Dean said the initial challenge was to “break down the walls” between the public library system, which is part of the general government, and the Metro school system. Four years later, the number of students with library cards has quadrupled, circulation of library resources to all schools has increased dramatically, and kids have easy access to books, music, videos, and other resources—all delivered to their schools within one or two days of request.

“We want Nashville to be a city of lifelong learning and a place where people are curious—and a strong library system is essential to that,” Mayor Dean said. “We have constructed new branches and undertaken renovations of others, and there is nothing that I do as Mayor that is more popular with our citizens than investments in libraries.”⁶

▶ **In Alaska**, nearly half of all children enter kindergarten unprepared to read. The **Anchorage Public Library** delivers early-literacy resources to every corner of the state. Learning kits are shipped to libraries, health agencies, tribal council offices, rural educators, and child-care providers.⁷

▶ **The Carlsbad (California) City Library Learning Center**

is a bilingual community-gathering place dedicated to supporting all city residents in their learning journeys. Opened in 2008, the branch library consolidated previously scattered early childhood, English as a second language, and adult literacy programs into a renovated former girls’ club and emphasizes partnerships to create a community-learning continuum.⁸

▶ **The Hartford Public Library** opened branches in several public schools to serve students and the general public during regular library hours. For example, the Mark Twain Branch, which opened in the author’s home in 1930, relocated to Hartford Public High School in 2011, where it supports library services for the high school and three nearby middle and elementary schools.

▶ **The Chattanooga Public Library’s** “4th Floor” is a 12,000-square-foot public lab and education facility that focuses on information, design, technology, and

FIVE LIBRARY EDUCATION ASSETS

1. Because of their position as safe, trusted, inclusive community hubs, libraries are in touch with the changing education needs of the community.
2. Libraries are the only education institutions that connect with individual learning needs from birth through senior years. No one ages out of the public library.
3. Libraries know how to use diverse education formats, from one-on-one coaching to building high-tech skills. They keep abreast of changing learning models without abandoning approaches that are timeless.
4. Nobody does personalized learning better than libraries. They meet individuals where they are and help them move to the next rung on their learning ladders.
5. Libraries are adept at building partnerships to support education goals. Partners include schools, workforce centers, community colleges, federal agencies, high-tech companies, civic organizations, and nonprofits.

applied arts. The space provides technology equipment, expertise, and programs, and a “GigLab,” which offers high-speed Internet access as a platform for innovation, collaboration, and 21st century learning.⁹

► **The Chicago Public Library's** Youmedia teen digital center is a national model for learning labs in libraries and museums across the county to help teens gain the skills they need to succeed. Learning labs provide access to new media, emphasize interest-driven and production-centered learning, connect teens with adult mentors, and leverage community resources to support long-term success.¹⁰

STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS

The following strategies will help local officials maximize the capacity of libraries as education resources.

1. Connect with your public library and the education services it provides.
2. Regardless of organization structure, talk to the library executive regularly to explore opportunities for collaboration.
3. Use the power of your position to make connections happen that can improve education outcomes.
4. Include library leaders at all tables where community education issues and strategies are discussed.
5. Take advantage of the library's unique assets and its place in the community to connect with residents and understand their education needs.
6. Make the library a regular component of the community education system and expect it to contribute in meaningful ways.
7. Encourage and support innovation in education that goes beyond traditional models, and celebrate successes, no matter how small.

IMPROVING PUBLIC EDUCATION TOGETHER

Education in America must be more powerful to prepare people of all ages to meet the challenges of today's global economy and succeed throughout life. No one organization or education system can accomplish that alone. Libraries are already carrying out education programs that are producing impressive results. Local

officials need to seize the opportunities offered by their public libraries to broaden, deepen, and strengthen education outcomes. Failing to leverage the library's broad capacities and community connections is a missed opportunity when the learning needs are so great.

ULC thanks our sponsor, Gale, a part of Cengage Learning, for creating the foundation of this Leadership Brief in October 2013. Gale believes the library is the heart of its community, driving meaningful and measurable outcomes for individual users and groups. Gale is a partner to libraries and businesses looking to deliver educational content, tools and services to support entrepreneurship, encourage self-directed learning, aid in research and instruction and provide enlightening experiences.

Urban Libraries Council (ULC), founded in 1971, is the voice for public libraries and the force that inspires them to evolve. ULC creates the tools, techniques, and ideas to make ongoing improvements and upgrades in services and technology. ULC also speaks loudly and clearly about the value public libraries bring to communities, and secures funding for research that results in the development of new programs and services. And by serving as a forum for library leadership, ULC produces innovative ideas and best practices that ensure community impact. For more information, visit UrbanLibraries.org.

- ¹ Joe Kimball, “St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman Q-A: Challenges Ahead, But Great Projects Transforming the City,” MINNPOST, February 14, 2013.
- ² 2013 Inaugural Remarks. <http://www.chattanooga.gov/mayors-office/speech/inaugural-remarks>.
- ³ Mayor's Office of Education Initiatives. <http://www.houstontx.gov/education/>.
- ⁴ Amanda Yeager, “Kittleman, Howard Council Take Oath Of Office,” Howard County Times, December 2, 2014.
- ⁵ “Investing in Civic Education and Public Libraries: A Roundtable Discussion with Paula Ellis, Deborah Jacobs, and Julia Stasch.” National Civic Review (Winter 2012): 5–10.
- ⁶ “Limitless Libraries Executive Summary: How Students Use and Benefit from Limitless Libraries.” <http://www.limitlesslibraries.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/executive-summary-web.pdf>. and “Rising to the Challenge: Re-envisioning Public Libraries” Panel Discussion, New York Public Library, October 14, 2014. <http://csreports.aspeninstitute.org/Dialogue-on-Public-Libraries/2014/in-the-news/details/0019/Libraries-Report-Launch-Video>.
- ⁷ Anchorage Public Library, <http://libguides.anchoragepubliclibrary.org/content.php?pid=520749&sid=4284440>.
- ⁸ Carlsbad City Library at <http://www.carlsbadca.gov/services/depts/library/about/locations.asp>.
- ⁹ Chattanooga Public Library, 4th Floor. <http://chattlibrary.org/4th-floor>.
- ¹⁰ Learning Labs in Libraries and Museums: Transformative Spaces for Teens. Washington: Association of Science-Technology Centers, Urban Libraries Council, October 2014.