



## Leadership Brief: Partners for Education

### Overview

Education is *the* challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Governors, 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 21<sup>st</sup> century and not have education as a central tenet of the work you’re doing,” said Mayor Chris Coleman of Saint Paul, Minnesota, and immediate past president of the National League of Cities in a published interview. “Education is my job strategy, my economic strategy, and my public safety strategy.”<sup>1</sup>

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.

### 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.

### 21<sup>st</sup> 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.”<sup>2</sup>
- 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.<sup>3</sup>

- 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. Newly elected County Executive Allan Kittleman identified education and public safety as his top priorities. “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, adding that he will focus on a “24/7 education initiative” to support Howard County students after hours as well as during the school day.<sup>4</sup>

## 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.”<sup>6</sup> That mission flexibility has led libraries to expand and modernize their approaches to literacy, learning, and education to meet 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges.

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.

“What physical libraries do is 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) building systems that demonstrate that learning at the library is real, valuable, and transferrable; 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 aged 11–18 and serves as a launching point for STEM careers through partnerships with employers in the region.<sup>7</sup>
- 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

### 21<sup>st</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

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.”<sup>8</sup>

- In Alaska, where 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. Resources include ready-to-read packages with picture books for children from birth to age three; bags with a book, puppet, and music CD for group story-time sessions; and read-to-me at-home kits for parent/child at-home reading sessions.<sup>9</sup>
- 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. The center’s programs emphasize partnerships to create a community-learning continuum and accomplish more than any one agency could on its own. “By leveraging partnerships, the City of Carlsbad has been able to do things we couldn’t do alone,” said Carlsbad City Manager Steve Sarkozy. “We’ve been able to offer more programs and serve more residents at the learning center as we’ve fostered new partnerships.”<sup>10</sup>
- The **Hartford Public Library** opened branches in three public schools to serve students during the day and after school and the general public during regular library hours. The Mark Twain Branch, which opened in the author’s home in 1930 and later moved to a busy thoroughfare, relocated to Hartford Public High School in 2011, where it supports library services for the high school and three nearby middle and elementary schools. In 2013, this branch received a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Educational Grant from the Connecticut Department of Education for out-of-school programming, the first public library to receive this award. The Ropkins Branch and Sand Elementary School opened in 1998 in a new school/library complex that serves 1,100 students in two neighborhood schools as well as the community.

## 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. They have their fingers on the pulse 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 and customized learning better than libraries. They meet individuals where they are – from a new mother wanting to get her infant off to a good learning start to an immigrant learning English to become a productive part of the new economy – 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. Never the Lone Ranger, libraries seek out and thrive on partnerships that broaden impact.

The Dwight Branch, the library’s oldest, relocated to the Parkville Community School in 1979; it was renovated and expanded to accommodate the demand in 2012.<sup>11</sup>

- 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 applied arts. The space provides technology equipment, expertise, and programs, and includes a “GigLab,” which offers high-speed Internet access as a platform for innovation, collaboration, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.<sup>12</sup>
- 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 capitalize on community resources such as museums, science centers, and other organizations to connect teens to future opportunities.<sup>13</sup>

- Working with the local chamber of commerce, the **Skokie (Illinois) Public Library** created a business and career center to support small and home-based businesses, entrepreneurs, and job seekers. The center provides space where independent business people can work, hold meetings, learn from one another, and use a range of resources – including an online business portal and a reference librarian with an MBA who provides guidance to individuals on solving problems and meeting new challenges.<sup>14</sup>

## Strategies for Strengthening Education Partnerships

It takes a well-coordinated strategy to tackle today's education challenges. Library leaders already participate in, support, coordinate, and lead networks that will broaden impacts and improve education outcomes from cradle through career and are ready to do more. 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 whether the public library is part of your local government or a separate institution, talk to the library executive regularly about how he or she can support your education priorities.

3. Use the power of your position to make connections happen that can improve education outcomes.
4. Include the library 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 and innovative ways.
7. Encourage and support innovation and creativity 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 heavily involved in carrying out education programs that are producing impressive results and offer great promise. 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.

<sup>1</sup> Joe Kimball, "St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman Q-A: Challenges Ahead, But Great Projects Transforming the City," MINNPOST, February 14, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> 2013 Inaugural Remarks. <http://www.chattanooga.gov/mayors-office/speech/inaugural-remarks>.

<sup>3</sup> Mayor's Office of Education Initiatives. <http://www.houstontx.gov/education/>

<sup>4</sup> Amanda Yeager, "Kittleman, Howard Council Take Oath Of Office," Howard County Times, December 2, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from *Leadership Brief: Libraries Igniting Learning*, Washington: Urban Libraries Council, Summer 2014.

<sup>6</sup> "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.

<sup>7</sup> 2013 ULC Top Innovators, [http://www.urbanlibraries.org/hitech--the-road-to-a-stem-career-innovation-834.php?page\\_id=175](http://www.urbanlibraries.org/hitech--the-road-to-a-stem-career-innovation-834.php?page_id=175), and Howard County Public Library System, [www.hclibrary.org](http://www.hclibrary.org).

<sup>8</sup> "Rising to the Challenge: Re-envisioning Public Libraries," op. cit., and "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>. "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>.

<sup>9</sup> Anchorage Public Library, <http://libguides.anchoragepubliclibrary.org/content.php?pid=520749&sid=4284440>

<sup>10</sup> Carlsbad City Library at <http://www.carlsbadca.gov/services/depts/library/about/locations.asp>.

<sup>11</sup> Hartford Public Library at <http://www.hplct.org/locations-hours>

<sup>12</sup> Chattanooga Public Library, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor. <http://chattlibrary.org/4th-floor>

<sup>13</sup> *Learning Labs in Libraries and Museums: Transformative Spaces for Teens*. Washington: Association of Science-Technology Centers, Urban Libraries Council, October 2014. Library learning labs are operating in Billings, MT; Columbus, OH; Howard County, MD; Kansas City, MO; Las Vegas-Clark County, NV; Lynn, MA; Miami, FL; Monroe County, NY; Nashville, TN; Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, PA; Pima County, AZ; Poughkeepsie, NY; Thornton, CO; Saint Paul, MN; and San Francisco, CA.

<sup>14</sup> 2013 ULC Top Innovators, [http://www.urbanlibraries.org/skokie-public-library-business-and-career-center-innovation-868.php?page\\_id=170](http://www.urbanlibraries.org/skokie-public-library-business-and-career-center-innovation-868.php?page_id=170), and Skokie Public Library at <http://skokieliibrary.info/about/>.



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