

# Chapter 12

## Bridging the Divide

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this chapter is to provide an example of a productive working relationship between a public library and a public school district. For years the Clearview Library District (CLD) struggled with an estranged relationship with the Weld Re-4 School District. Various contributing factors made it difficult for staff to proactively connect with educators and school administration. In 2008, CLD made a commitment to reassessing its role in the community and began exploring ways to better serve more members of the community. CLD selected schools as a priority because they presented a tremendous opportunity to touch a large percentage of the population. This new relationship became a major focus for the Youth Services and Outreach Departments of the Clearview Library District, who worked together to develop a plan to bridge the divide.*

### INTRODUCTION

As the role of public libraries continues to evolve, it has become increasingly important that libraries insert themselves into communities as necessary partners. To accomplish this goal, CLD opted to pursue a strong partnership with the Weld Re-4 School District. Both districts share the same boundaries and are centrally located within the town of Windsor, Colorado, a bedroom community of roughly twenty thousand citizens. CLD is a dual-branch library district consisting of a “brick and mortar” main branch and a new mobile branch. The Weld Re-4 School District is comprised of

five elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school.

The library-school partnership was optimal because of the similarity between both entities. “The educational focus as a shared role/goal of school and public libraries is one of the most critical factors in rationalizing the need for cooperation and collaboration between the two” (Fitzgibbons, 2001, 4). When library service takes place only within library walls, it is only possible to reach those who come through the library doors. Taking library services into the schools allowed CLD to have direct access to every student, parent, and educator in the district, thus strengthening the

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community's educational network while simultaneously conducting a large-scale promotion of CLD services.

As CLD expanded its outreach services via a new bookmobile (the Clearview Library District Mobile Branch), it also sought other avenues of connection within its community. Building a relationship with the School District was a clear way of connecting with a large portion of the community and was therefore selected as a major focus of outreach. Several major players contributed to the fostering of this successful relationship: Karen Trusler, Weld Re-4 Superintendent; Jen Maley, Weld Re-4 Information Literacy Coordinator; Erica Rose, CLD Head of Outreach Services; Hillary Dodge, CLD Head of Youth Services; and the CLD and Weld Re-4 administrations. Forging strong relationships among these individuals resulted in a shared sense of purpose and responsibility across departments and organizations.

The following case study will outline the steps taken by the Clearview Library District in the creation of this partnership. It will discuss the history of collaboration between the Districts, the creative process of molding the relationship, and address the challenges and successes of making it beneficial for both parties.

## **BACKGROUND**

A survey of the current literature revealed a number of different approaches to the school/public library relationship. Many articles were repetitious in that they described similar ventures and practices. A few incorporated new thoughts or were particularly well written. Interestingly enough, there appeared to be an equal distribution of articles geared towards educators as well as librarians. Below, a few of the stronger articles are listed as examples.

By far, articles on best practices and collaborative programming were most prolific. Margaux

DelGuidice's article, "Are you Overlooking a Valuable Resource?," is a good example of a piece aimed at educators. Her approach on best practices focuses on creating lines of reciprocal communication. Likewise, Sara Ryan, shares tried and true practices from the public library's perspective in her article, "Be Nice to the Secretary." Ryan addresses cross-promotion, bringing schools to the library, and using outreach as a tool to reach schools outside library walls. Two articles of note that address successful program collaborations are "School and Public Librarians Working Together" by Julie Scordato and "Hand in Hand" compiled by Jana Fine. Scordato's article, a column in *Library Media Connection*, describes a joint teaching venture involving the public librarian and online research classes. Fine's article, geared towards public librarians, is a compiled list of mini-stories – each one describing a fruitful project or program.

Articles concerning best practices and programming were followed closely by articles with a historic or theoretical perspective. Shirley Fitzgibbons explores the changing climate in education alongside movements within the professional library world. Her article, "School and Public Library Relationships," emphasizes the rationale behind bridging the divide between these two entities and provides an impetus for understanding and overcoming various barriers and challenges. Fitzgibbons also provides several key recommendations for moving forward. Another great article detailing from a historical perspective, the relationship between the school and public library, is Edwin Clay's "The Partnership Between Public Libraries and Public Education." Aimed at demonstrating the commonalities between the two institutions, Clay draws from primary sources to make connections between the past, the present, and the future.

Rarer was the piece that sought to educate teachers and librarians about the differences between public library and school cultures. Mostly, this sort of information was incorporated into the

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