

Who Are Your Partners?

Article

by Maria Cahill, June 2016

What's a school librarian's favorite greeting? Well, it should be, "Howdy partner!"

We asked school librarians to identify the community organizations and businesses with whom they partner, and we were impressed that more than 85% of the 400 respondents confirmed partnering with at least one community organization, agency, or business, and most of those librarians identified multiple community partners.

Because instructional partnership is such an essential piece of the school librarian's professional responsibility, it's hard to attend a school library conference or read a publication targeted to school librarians and not encounter the idea of teacher and librarian collaboration; however, most school librarians also develop collaborative partnerships beyond the walls of their own schools. Both *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs* (AASL, 2009) and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions *School Library Guidelines* (2015) convey the importance of engagement with leaders, businesses, and organizations in the community as means for school librarians to support students and their families.

Given the overlap in their organizations' missions and services, it is not surprising that school librarians frequently partner with their public and academic librarian counterparts. In fact, one of our respondents wrote, "I don't know how school librarians survive without partnering with the local library."

As the chart above demonstrates, most school librarians do partner with the public library, and many also partner with an academic library. Naturally, most of the academic library partnerships are with secondary school librarians: nearly a quarter of high school librarian respondents to our survey identified a collaborative relationships with academic librarians.

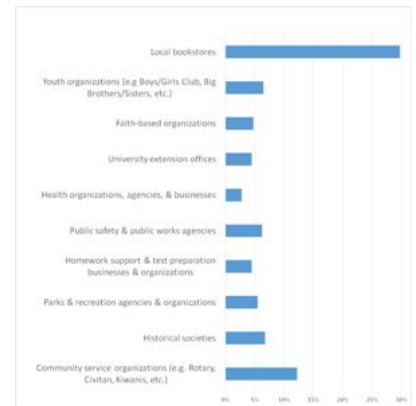
Local bookstores also tend to be natural partners for school librarians, and they tend to support reading incentive programs, author visits, and state book award promotions and activities.

There are also many other community organizations, agencies, and businesses with whom school librarians collaborate. The chart at right illustrates the breadth of these community partnerships for school librarians.

In addition to the collaborations conveyed in these charts, school librarians also commented on other interesting partnerships. One librarian worked with a local comic bookstore to create a Library Comic Con, another partnered with a local community organization to support homeless veterans, and still another worked with the local utility company who provided book fair volunteers and incentives for teachers and students for various library activities and programs.

Given that our federal government supports libraries through an agency titled, Institute of Museum and Library Services, it is surprising that no school librarians identified museums, zoos, or aquariums as partners. Reaching out to professionals in these organizations that specialize in informal learning might be especially beneficial for school librarians designing makerspaces.

As always, we hope participation in the One Question Survey prompts school librarians to reflect deeply on their practices and that reading about and analyzing other librarians' practices will inspire librarians to build upon existing strengths, identify new strategies, and improve ineffective practices. In that spirit, we challenge our readers, especially the 13% that currently do not collaborate with any community partners, to identify and communicate with one local organization, agency or business that can support or extend a service or program you are already providing. Hopefully, doing so will enhance student learning and student opportunities!



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MLA CITATION

Cahill, Maria. "Who Are Your Partners?" *School Library Connection*, June 2016, schoollibraryconnection.com/Content/Article/2022720.

<https://schoollibraryconnection.com/Content/Article/2022720>

Entry ID: 2022720

