

# Connect to Your Community

In April 2002, I went to an interview at North Elementary School. I still remember it for many reasons, but one of them is that I can remember walking out the door thinking, "I can work here!" The building just had that vibe. I could feel the sense of community the students and staff had built. It felt very much like the school was one big family. I knew if I was hired, I could work there because it had the climate and culture that I thought was important for a school. As luck would have it, I was offered the job and began a job that I loved for thirteen years. To this day, I still hold many dear friendships from that time.

After I got to North, I learned that the community stretched far beyond the school walls. The school was located just two blocks from the town square where there were many local businesses. The school was located just outside of the boundaries of the original town (which had grown and grown and is now city); there was so much history to share with our students.

Each year our fourth grade team took their students on a walking tour of the town. I enjoyed joining them from time to time. We learned about the history of some of the buildings around the town square. We learned about the architecture of the buildings and houses in the area—many of which were where our students and their parents lived and worked. We explored the local cemetery where many of the pioneers of our town were buried. The tour was a fascinating way to learn about the roots of our town.

The town square also contained many local businesses. We were lucky that one was an independent book store, so for our reading celebrations we would walk over to the store and let the students all pick out a book as a prize for their accomplishment. We might have visited the local ice cream store next too. Many of the owners of the businesses were guest speakers in the school, talking about what they did, how they learned their craft, and how their business was an important part of the community.

Beyond the community resources in our town, I helped to coordinate bringing all kinds of experts and speakers to our school. I missed a PTO meeting once and the next thing I knew I was in charge of the enrichment programs. That role allowed me to bring in authors, performers, storytellers, animal experts, and more, all connecting to the learning in the classroom. We also used Skype and FaceTime to bring in experts from all over the world. These connections allowed our community to grow beyond just our school and our town.

By making these connections to our local community and beyond, our library was able to expand the resources that we had available to students. Our collection of resources went beyond just the books on our shelves, and included the community connections we brought into the school or took students to visit locally to help enrich their learning experiences.

We all have our own unique situations. Our schools might not be located in the middle of a town. However, whatever or wherever our community is, we should make every attempt to make connections with the school. As the school librarian, we are a natural conduit for bringing in local speakers, learning about our community, and making rewarding learning experiences in our community.

## About the Editor

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Harvey received his master's degree from Indiana University and is the author of six books, most recently *The 21st-Century Elementary School Library Program: Managing For Results, 2nd Edition*. He is a past-president of the American Association of School Librarians, and his school has been the recipient of the National School Library Program of the Year.

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