

School & Public Libraries:

Partners in Fostering Literacy

School and public libraries play a crucial role in supporting adolescent literacy, serving as foundational spaces for developing and supporting lifelong reading, writing, and critical thinking habits and skills.¹ Public library programs are excellent resources for teachers, students, parents, and the broader community. They serve many roles in communities and offer continuing early learning and literacy engagement opportunities, summer and after-school literacy programs for students, and adult literacy learning.

Libraries provide vital resources for personal growth, community engagement, education, and cultural preservation. Their role is pivotal in shaping a well-informed, literate, and connected society. As adolescents navigate the complexities of their academic and social lives, libraries and library staff offer essential resources and opportunities that cater to their literacy development.

Foster Independent Reading

A well-stocked library encourages students to take charge of their own learning by promoting independent reading. This autonomy is particularly important in middle and high school, as it helps students build self-confidence and develop a lifelong love of reading. Libraries provide a safe, welcoming environment where students can explore books and resources at their own pace, helping them build fluency and comprehension skills.²

Access Diverse Reading Materials

Libraries provide students with a wide variety of texts, including fiction, non-fiction, graphic novels, magazines, and academic journals. In addition, library staff strive to build collections that represent diverse authors, characters, and stories. This text diversity ensures that students can explore different genres, topics, and perspectives, helping them develop their own interests and reading preferences. Access to a broad range of materials in multiple formats—including ebooks and audiobooks, and online content—also supports students at various reading levels, encouraging those who might otherwise struggle with reading to find books that resonate with them and promote engagement.³

Support Readers and Writers

Libraries often provide specialized programs and interventions for students who are still working towards proficiency.⁴ This can include targeted reading programs, tutoring, or opportunities for peer mentoring. By offering a supportive environment where students feel safe to explore their reading and writing challenges, libraries can help close literacy gaps and encourage academic growth.⁵

Create a Literacy-Rich Environment

Beyond providing books and other resources, libraries often host events such as author visits, book clubs, and reading challenges, all of which foster a literacy-rich culture. These activities create a sense of community and excitement around reading, showing students that literacy is not only a school requirement but also an enjoyable and socially engaging activity.⁶

Promote Critical Thinking

Libraries are not just places to read; they are spaces where students can interact with information critically. Teacher-librarians instruct students in information literacy, and the library environment often includes access to digital resources, research tools, and databases, which encourage students to analyze texts, synthesize information, and formulate their own opinions. These skills are essential for navigating the complexities of academic writing, engaging responsibly and ethically with digital information and technology, and developing the ability to engage thoughtfully with diverse perspectives.

Encourage Digital Literacy

In today's increasingly digital world, libraries provide students with the skills to navigate the vast amounts of information available online. Teacher-librarians teach students how to evaluate digital sources for credibility and relevance, which is critical in both academic and real-world contexts. Digital literacy also includes the ability to engage in online discussions, conduct research effectively, use information ethically, and utilize technology to express ideas, which are all key components of modern literacy and strong school library instructional programs.

Support Curriculum and Classroom Instruction

Teacher-librarians serve as partners to classroom teachers by offering instruction and resources that complement and extend the curriculum. Library staff can collaborate with teachers to curate reading lists, provide research materials for projects, and facilitate activities that reinforce or extend classroom instruction. This collaboration supports literacy across various subjects, whether students are analyzing literature, conducting research in science, or writing essays in social studies.

LIBRARY STANDARDS

School libraries are dynamic spaces that nurture literacy development, helping students become skilled readers, thinkers, and communicators both in and outside of the classroom. Just as with content area instruction, school librarians rely on [standards](#) when designing instruction. These library standards support disciplinary literacy development across disciplines as well as help students hone their skills in research.

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