

What the School Librarian Wishes the Public Librarian Knew

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School and public librarians have commonalities that unite us in our work. Among them are the love of books and kids, a strong service ethic, and a desire to help kids grow and achieve. However, our daily lives can be something of a mystery, and by exploring them, we can hopefully get a better understanding of one another.

Here is our top ten list of items the elementary school librarian wishes the public librarian knew about the nature of being a school librarian today. We hope this will lead to improved collaboration that impacts positive outcomes for kids and families.

1. **School librarians can help you translate the jargon.** We can keep you informed about events, assignments, and other news from the school. We live in both the library and the school worlds and can be a bridge for you.
2. **Please understand that it might take us a while to get back to you.** Many school libraries are one-person operations because schools have suffered from cutbacks just like public libraries. In schools, the library is one of the first places cuts are made because it is often viewed as “non-essential” (and we are always trying to change that perception). This means the librarian is often alone for long periods of the day, especially at the elementary level, with no one else to shelve books, work the circulation desk, or even answer the phones. That said, e-mail and telephone are still probably the best ways to reach us.
3. **Please don't be put off by short, succinct replies.** There is no time for wordsmithing! Many school librarians might only get one planning period a day (if that), and most of us

have little time to attend to e-mail. The phone may be better for quick check-ins, and the hour after school lets out may be the best time to try calling. School librarians who appear to be non-responsive or hard to reach aren't trying to avoid you, so please be patient and be creative in communicating.

4. **Nothing happens without the approval of the building principal.** Whether we're sending fliers home about the public library's fantastic summer reading program or scheduling a visit to the public library, the principal has the final say on what goes on in a school. She or he will want to know about our collaborations. Sometimes this delays our action because we have to wait for approval to proceed.
5. **The school librarian often gets no more notice than you do when it comes to research projects.** You see it when it happens: All the books on US states suddenly get checked out, or resources on other topics vanish. Then you find out groups of students are doing research for a project, and you think, “If only I had some advanced notice!”

This happens to school librarians, too. We try to anticipate what's going on in classrooms, and we work as hard as we can to reach out to our colleagues in the classroom. But sometimes things still slip past us.

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6. **Things can change without notice in schools.** Research projects come and go depending on curricular changes and teacher staffing. If the books you bought in response to a previous school project don't get taken out this year, it could be because the teacher who gave out that assignment has retired or changed grade levels, or something similar.
7. **School librarians are participants in the larger world of education reform.** Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS)? Race to the Top? No Child Left Behind? Data Teams? The programs seem to change with the office holders at state and federal levels.

What isn't changing is that schools and educators are under the microscope to improve the quality of education. As educational partners with classroom teachers, school librarians are part of this reform and in many cases have to comply with state and federal teacher evaluation programs and standards. But as these reforms are often politically based, today's practices may be abandoned next year.

Lastly, the Common Core is good for libraries. Yes, it's hard to ignore the controversy and debate over the CCLS, nor

should we. However, with its emphasis on student research, there is definitely a place at the table for librarians.

8. In smaller school districts, **the librarian usually does her or his own collection development.** Any resources or insights you have into new titles to add to the collection are welcome!
9. One of the most important things we can do is **work on simple ways to become advocates for one another's programs.** Both our worlds are marked by competition for resources and are always at risk for cutbacks. Together, we can flex our political muscles in a productive way.
10. **We really believe in what you do** and are continually impressed by the quality of the programming and services at public libraries! From summer reading, to helping families get library cards, to databases, the myriad offerings from public libraries are amazing, especially considering the limited budgets available. Thank you for all you do! 🐾

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such as kitchen play items or puzzles, be prepared for sorting challenges when these materials mix together.

Remember also to create and maintain a digital space for your toy collection. Library websites can be particularly useful for offering information about how to use different types of toys for developing particular skills in early childhood. Programs can serve this purpose as well, so consider how best to connect programming with your toy collection. Whether you promote your circulating toys in your existing programs or create entirely new programs to highlight your toy collection, always focus on unstructured free play opportunities and parent-child engagement.

Finally, advocate for your toy collection and for the importance of providing access to toys and playtime for all children. As children's library professionals, "We need to communicate to parents, library staff, and community leaders the value of play in young children's lives."¹⁵ Public library toy collections are a fun and valuable way to support early literacy for every child. 🐾

References

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