

The Plusses of the Pandemic

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It's a vast understatement to say that the pandemic has changed numerous things for many people. As more people are getting vaccinated and looking forward to the "new normal," what will library programs for the school-aged look like? What changes were made to library programs and services during the pandemic, and were these changes temporary, or have they permanently impacted the way we do things?

These are some of the questions we addressed to ALSC membership in an April 2021 survey; while response was light, here is a summary of what we learned.

Is Virtual Programming Here to Stay?

Some were unsure if any programming changes would continue; others hoped that the virtual format would persist; while many staff and patrons long for the return of in-person events, other patrons seem to appreciate the flexibility and convenience of attending programs from home. For example, in one virtual LEGO Club program, a child participated on a tablet computer, seat belted in the back of his parents' car as they dashed off somewhere.

Another survey respondent shared that their virtual LEGO Club allowed for better interaction between kids than its in-person counterpart. Other responded that they would consider continuing programs like Take and Makes and other pickup bags.

Some such programs were paired with instructional videos posted on libraries' YouTube channels. Another agreed that a kids' baking program via Facebook live would likely continue that program.

It's easy to see the benefit of recording these programs and archiving them to YouTube for future access. Our guess is that post-pandemic, we will see more libraries adopt a hybrid model, where some in-person programs are live-streamed or even recorded.

Readers' Advisory

Many libraries reported a shift in how readers' advisory is offered. Book bundles (created for easy selection via curbside) have remained popular, even as doors open. It is fast and easy for patrons to grab a collection of children's books at a similar reading level or on a particular topic that library staff has curated.

Long-Term and Short-Term Impacts

To assess the overall impact of the pandemic, the survey responses were a testament to the library community's creativity and resilience. Many

shared that the virtual pivot was a positive experience for both librarians and patrons. One respondent said the pandemic helped them realize how many more families they could serve virtually rather than in person.

Yes, we miss in-person interactions. Yes, our foot traffic has been lower. And we may have lost touch with some of our

regular patrons and certain segments of the community, but there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

Like many, we look forward to rebuilding these connections and carrying some valuable parts of our pandemic experience into the future. &

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