

# Libraries: Connecting family learning across settings

Libraries are learning hubs that connect families to free resources, activities, and services to cultivate children's learning about topics that excite them. Despite recent technological developments which have revolutionized how we read and access information, libraries continue to evolve in order to serve their communities, especially families with lesser means to access these resources.

The Families Learning Across Boundaries (FamLAB) Project surveyed 407 library professionals, 1,550 parents, and 600 pre-K through grade 8 teachers in the United States about how they support 3–12-year-old children's learning in their communities. Here are suggestions that emerged from the survey, which could help build on the important work you're already doing to support learning.

## What we found

Children from higher income families are more likely than their peers to visit libraries. Yet children of all backgrounds spend time in malls, stores, restaurants, cafes, parks, churches, and in transit. Children from lower income families are also more likely to spend time in laundromats.

## What to do

Bring your library to where kids are.

Many libraries are partnering with local businesses and services to bring their offerings to the places where families of all backgrounds spend time. The Wash & Learn Initiative by Libraries Without Borders, for instance, has brought literacy activities and programs to laundromats across eight states and the District of Columbia. Madison Public Library's free outdoor summer program, Wild Rumpus: An Anji Play Experience, engages the city's parks department and local food carts to provide free play-based learning activities to kids of all ages. At the events, families can return books and sign up for library cards too. And the Suffolk Public Library in Virginia hosts Pop-Up Libraries at community events and locations, like farmers markets, coffee shops, food pantries, and religious centers.

## What we found

Nearly all 3–12-year-olds ride in cars regularly, and 43% spend more than three hours per week in them. One in five children also take public transportation regularly.

## What to do

Help families cultivate their kids' interests on the go.

Time in transit can be used to communicate, engage in literacy activities, and dive more deeply into children's passions. Launch an information campaign inside your library that highlights resources like downloadable audiobooks or books on CD for kids. Check out Oregon's Cedar Mill & Bethany Community Libraries' list of early learning activities for car rides and the Seattle Public Library's list of popular kids' books that are available on CD at their Washington State branches. Be ready to suggest options in other languages for multilingual families as well.

## What we found

Half of parents (56%) believe there aren't enough affordable, convenient activities for their children to attend in their communities. And while the vast majority of parents report having access to libraries, only 24% visit libraries regularly to seek advice for finding and selecting activities for their kids.

Meanwhile, 42% of librarians do not think community members are aware of their libraries' programs and services. While most libraries use their websites, social media, e-mail and print newsletters, and paper flyers to relay this information, librarians realize they need to better promote themselves and change the perception that libraries only provide books.

## What to do

### Forge creative partnerships.

Reach out to your local public media station to see if it can help spread the word about your offerings and services. Public radio stations can broadcast on-air public service announcements, and some stations have educational outreach programs for families that libraries can collaborate on. Get involved with [PBS Books](#), which recently launched its Library Engagement Program to build relationships between libraries and local PBS stations.

The Public Library Association and the Global Family Research Project's [IdeaBook: Libraries for Families](#) provides other creative partnership ideas, including:

- + [Baltimore County Public Library in Maryland](#) [partnered with local schools](#) to provide summer lunches at their branches. When adults brought their kids to the library for a free lunch program, caregivers had the opportunity to learn more about library programming.
- + [Wichita Public Library in Kansas](#) [partnered with pediatricians](#) to share information with families, like flyers about library events and vouchers for books, only redeemable by visiting the library. This program brought new families into the library to learn more about what it offers.



## What we found

More than half of librarians (69%) want to have more communication with schools and teachers. School assignments and projects are the most common topic librarians want to discuss, but only 29% say they communicate with local schools and teachers about aligning school curricula or lessons with library materials, services, or youth programming.

## What to do

### Create ongoing, sustainable relationships with schools.

While it can be difficult to connect with busy teachers and school staff, engaging in low-maintenance partnerships and programs may help with communication and collaboration. [The Public Library & School Library Collaboration Toolkit](#)<sup>1</sup> presents various partnership models. For example:

- + [Assignment Alert](#) enables teachers in Multnomah County schools in Oregon to share their assignments with local librarians via online form.
- + [PAL PAKS](#) are boxes of 25-30 books that local teachers can request from Orland Park Public Library in Illinois in order to supplement lessons for three-week loan periods.

Implementing new initiatives, programs, and partnerships can be challenging without financial support. Try securing resources beyond local tax funding. For example, utilize EveryLibrary Institute's [Fund Libraries](#), the only crowdfunding website solely for library and literacy projects. Sign up for grant alerts from services like [GrantWatch](#). See [EBSCO](#) and the [American Library Association](#) for other links to grant sources and guides for writing successful grants.

For more about the FamLAB project and findings, visit:

[joanganzcooneycenter.org/famlab](http://joanganzcooneycenter.org/famlab).

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**SESAME WORKSHOP**

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<sup>1</sup> The Public Library & School Library Collaboration Toolkit was created by the American Association of School Librarians, Association for Library Service to Children, and Young Adult Library Services Association Interdivision Committee on School/Public Library Cooperation.