Library-School Partnerships: One Box At A Time

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Jackson District Library

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JDL serves a population of 160,000 across Jackson County
• 13 branches + 1 bookmobile

Jackson County has 19 school districts
• Includes public, private, religious, and charter schools
The Jackson District Library Juvenile Outreach Program started in the late 2000s because Head Start classes could no longer visit library branches.

Jackson County has between 20 & 25 Head Start classrooms every year.

At that time, our Children’s Department had 3 FT and 1 PT staff members and could not visit all the classes.

The classes didn’t have large libraries of their own.

Sending 25 books to each class monthly gave the children access to books.
Program History

• Some of Jackson County’s Head Start classes were in local elementary schools
• We quickly discovered teachers talk to each other and also shift classrooms
• We slowly added more schools and classrooms as teachers asked to be part of the program
• By 2015, Carnegie was delivering bins to 80 classes in a 4 week rotation with each class getting books once a month
• In 2017 the Spring Arbor, Concord and Hanover Branches were also delivering bins to their local schools.
Schools

- We serve Head Starts, Preschools, Day Cares, and Elementary Schools
- Send books to children from infants to 3rd grade
- Stop at 3rd grade as program is meant to support literacy efforts
- Schools are assigned to a weekly group based on geography and how many bins they require
Where do we go?
Program Goals

- Program goals:
  - Curriculum Support
  - Reading Support
  - Pleasure Reading

- Books are age and grade appropriate
- Teachers can request topics or authors every month
  - We found between 2 and 4 fiction or nonfiction titles for them
  - Have to limit it as some topics are highly requested
    - Examples: seasons, ABC and counting, holidays, and social-emotional
What kinds of materials do we send?

25 books:
• 10 Non-fiction titles
• 15 Other books – picture books, easy readers, board books, chapter books, graphic novels
• Selections are based on teacher input and tailored to each classroom

Exception: Infant class gets only board books!
What kinds of materials do we send?

Format considerations:
• We select books only – no AV
• Hardcover is preferred for durability

Why just books?
• No player or headphones required
• No discs or pieces to get lost
• Avoid expensive formats like Wonderbooks
Collection & Budget Considerations

How we started:
• Goal was to make better use of the materials we already had at our main branch
• Easy to start small – pick a scale your collection can accommodate and grow slowly

How our program changed as it grew:
• Adding more classes meant pulling more materials from our smaller branches
• 98 classrooms x 25 books each = 2450 books each month!
• Began dedicating budget $ in 2018 to build the Outreach Collection housed at Collection Services
• Curriculum needs shape collection development

A program like this can be sustainable at any budget level, just need to be mindful of the scale
Program Process

• Process starts with emailing principals, teachers and secretaries for schools we have worked with in the past

• Get a list of staff from our local ISD and from Community Action Agency

• Principal buy-in is important

• Getting the secretary on board to help is key to keeping track of everything
Yearly program at a glance

AUGUST: Teachers sign up

SEPTEMBER: Behind the scenes work
- Plan weekly schedules
- Delivery routes designed
- Create automated email messages
- Update teacher cards and contact info
- Print bin and shelf labels

OCTOBER: First delivery cycle begins
• Branch staff selects books
• Books delivered to centralized hub
• Books checked out and bins packed centrally
• Delivery to schools
• Old bins unpacked and books checked in centrally
• Branches follow up with teachers re: any missing materials
• Automated email gathers requests for next month’s bin
• Repeat for each of the 4 weekly groups

OCT-MAY: 4 week cycle

MAY: Final pickup
Communication

• We use email as our main communication tool
  • Guidelines and schedules
  • Pickup reminders
  • Book request reminders
  • Non-returned books and bins
• Paper copies of guidelines, schedules, list of books and reminder sheet included in bins
• Microsoft Forms used during 2021-2022 school year for the first time.
  • Allows teachers to fill out a form when signing up to request topics for school year and book types wanted
  • New form for each month for additional requests
Each classroom has a card

Automate wherever possible!

We added barcodes to our labels to make processing quicker and easier

• Create a spreadsheet with teacher information
• Microsoft Publisher and Word have “Mailings” function can convert that spreadsheet into formatted and collated labels
• Barcode font creates scannable labels
• Creating labels for new teachers is as simple as adding them to the spreadsheet and refreshing the label document
Organizing holds
How does the material move?

Pre-2020:

• Decentralized: Branch staff packed their own bins
• Delivered by our facilities crew in their cargo van
• Five day delivery cycle
  • Bins picked up from the schools on Thursday
  • Staff would check in old items and refill with new items over the weekend
  • Bins returned to the schools on Tuesday
  • Same bin reused for the same classroom each week
• Pros: Easier for branch staff to cycle materials between classrooms, fewer bins needed
• Cons: Extra mileage, almost a week without books, not as many bins fit
2021 - 2022

- Centralized: Branch staff still select materials, but bins are packed and delivered from Collection Services
- Delivered by our 2-person delivery crew
- Single delivery day
  - Bins filled on Wednesday at Collection Services
  - Delivery on Thursday – swap with old bin
  - Old bins checked in on Friday at Collection Services
- Pros: No delay between deliveries, more efficient mileage, more consistent experience for teachers
- Cons: More bins needed (always need a week’s extra), more materials moving between branches to Collection Services
How does the material move?
Guidelines

• Guidelines help make the program run smoothly
  • Help with safety and the few issues we have run into

• JDL Role:
  • Will send age and grade appropriate books
  • Books in good condition and noncontroversial
  • Will keep to schedule decided upon at beginning of school year
  • Will remind teachers of pickup date and give them time to request material

• Teacher Role:
  • Will have bin ready to be picked up in designated area with all books
  • Will model proper book treatment
  • Will only use JDL bin for JDL material
Guidelines

Consequences:
- Three strikes you're out! If bins are not returned multiple times, we will remove teacher from program
  - It's a 1-for-1 swap: We won’t leave a new bin if we can’t swap out your old one
  - Has only happened once

Lost and damaged books
- We note if books come back too damaged to circulate
- We do not charge schools for replacements or damage
- However, repeat offenders may get their selections adjusted to board books
Lockdown

• March 2020
  • Jackson County Schools and Jackson District Library shut down
  • When the library reopened worked with schools to retrieve bins
• 2020-2021 School Year
  • No Program
• 2021-2022 School Year
  • Program restarted with increased flexibility about bin pick-up to accommodate for Covid closures
Adapting to COVID

COVID Closures
- Flexibility helps everyone – we won’t count a missed bin due to COVID closure as a “strike”
- Range from a few days to permanent depending on reason

Teacher resignations and changing classrooms
- Once service has been established, our practice has been to preserve the service to the classroom even if the teacher moves on
- Helps to have a good relationship with the school office
Adding new classrooms

New classroom requests
• We need to consider routes and how much room is on the truck
• New classrooms can be added to existing locations before December if there’s room on the truck
• After January, no new additions, but try again next year

New location requests
• New locations considered in the first month before routes & schedules get solidified
Our investment in the program

Program scope:
• 98 classrooms at 29 schools
• Providing 2,445 books each month

Time
• Selection: Average 15 hours per week
• Communication with teachers: 1 hour per week
• Centralized processing: 12-16 hours per week
• Delivery: 4-5 hours per week

Budget: $5000 Collections budget to support materials

Total staff: 13 public service staff, 4 collection services staff, 2 delivery drivers
Program Benefits

• Increased communication with the schools
• More opportunities for outreach
  • School Open Houses
  • Kindergarten Round-ups
  • Parent nights
  • Storytimes
• Better relationships with teachers and school staff
Future of Program

- Expand school participation rate
- Add 3rd Western Elementary School
- Expand to more schools
- Work with Jackson County ISD to help with delivery of books
Questions

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