Public Libraries

INFORMATIONAL BRIEF: Impact of Public Libraries on Students and Lifelong Learners

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INFORMATIONAL BRIEF: Impact of Public Libraries on Students and Lifelong Learners - *Executive Summary*

In the spring of 2012, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) asked the New York Comprehensive Center (NYCC) to demonstrate the positive impact of public libraries on all students and the lifelong learning opportunities that those libraries provide. This brief presents research-based evidence, programmatic examples and offerings, and impact studies to demonstrate the critical role public libraries play throughout the statewide educational system. The successes of public libraries presented in this brief have been aligned with the New York State Regents Reform Agenda, as outlined in the following areas:

Early Childhood Learning Opportunities

The role that public libraries play in early childhood development cannot be overlooked, as library programs, instruction, and materials may offer the only opportunities children have for exposure to important skills before they enter school. Public libraries offer a variety of programs for early learners that are aimed developing their individual capacity, teaching necessary early literacy skills and providing information to help parents and caregivers lend vital support. Such programs include: *Every Child Ready to Read @ your library*, which provides curriculum-based workshops for early learners and their families; *Family Place Libraries*, which is a national network that provides collections of books and multimedia resources, trained library staff, community outreach, and workshop series; and *Brooklyn Reads to Babies*, which encompasses sixty neighborhood libraries with a mission to reach every family in Brooklyn with children from birth to age two.

Impact On Achievement for All Students

Public libraries impact achievement for all students by furnishing them with information and digital literacy skills, by providing summer learning opportunities, and by supporting underrepresented populations.

Informational and Digital Literacy

Information and digital literacy are important skills for all students in 21st century learning environments. According to the 2010 release of the National Broadband Plan, roughly one-third of the population lacked broadband internet connection in their homes, making public library services essential for filling this void. In recent years, information and digital literacy have been regarded as the most important resources provided by public libraries, each representing essential services that are currently not being offered by other entities. An example of one such program emulating this idea is

Broadbandexpress@yourlibrary, known as the New York State Library Broadband Technology Program Grant Project, which aims to increase public library hours, to upgrade connectivity, to add over 800 public computer workstations, and to provide access to 24/7 job search resources.

Summer Learning Opportunities

Without regularly attending school in the summer, students of all ages may lack exposure to reading, writing, and learning opportunities that are necessary to overcome achievement gaps or to prepare them for the grade ahead. However, students who receive access to literacy materials and practices have demonstrated increases in engagement and have displayed greater reading gains than students who did not have such chances. Public libraries provide access and programmatic opportunities that are essential for retention and engagement during the summer months. Such programs and initiatives include: *AR BookFinder,* which is a book recommendation database of 200 books based on interest and challenge level consolidated from the resources of over 30,000 libraries; and *Summer Reading at New York Public Libraries,* which offers both face-to-face and online opportunities for summer reading instruction, materials, and interactive resources.

Supporting Underrepresented Populations

Public Libraries take on valuable roles in supporting underrepresented populations, including English Language Learners, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and Students with Disabilities. Public libraries offer instruction, access to resources and technology, and programs to help these populations succeed. The importance of providing programs to support learning is underscored by the fact that such initiatives stem from the expressed needs and desires verbalized directly by such populations. Programs that aim to do this include: *The American Dream Starts @ your Library,* which provides grant awards of $5,000 to libraries across the United States that serve urban, suburban, and rural communities, many comprised of largely non-English speaking populations; *Child's Place for Children with Special Needs,* which is a Brooklyn, NY based program aimed to include Students with Disabilities, families, caregivers, and educators working together to engage and support the development of literacy skills; and *Phoenix Public Library,* a program targeting Latino youth to engage, inspire, and attract them into the libraries to learn and develop skills.

Lifelong Learning Opportunities

Public libraries have been highly regarded institutions since their designation as a location that all community members can use to their advantage, regardless of economic or social status or demographic background. Public libraries serve as common meeting spaces for interest groups, students, and businesses, play an integral role in the assimilation of immigrants into communities, and act as hub for job seekers. They also

support their communities through their access to and support of E-Government. For example, *The New York Public Library* offers guidance to job seekers throughout their search for employment via online career exploration opportunities and programs on financial literacy, including sessions such as income tax preparation, budgeting, bonds and mutual funds, taxes, and Medicare.

As outlined in the informational brief, public libraries clearly play an integral role in communities, both academically and socially, by supporting all learners, regardless of age, level, or demographic. Increased political and fiscal support can enable such public libraries to not only sustain such programs and opportunities, but also to expand and reach even further into communities throughout the United States.

INFORMATIONAL BRIEF: Impact of Public Libraries on Students and Lifelong Learners

Across the landscape of 21st century education, students and professionals are expected to meet the necessary requirements of information, digital, and technological expertise that are applied throughout school systems and the workforce. These skills are required throughout the life of an individual, and are no longer customarily to be mastered solely within schools. Beginning at birth, progressing through P-12 education, and ultimately continuing into the workforce, residents in the United States are faced with many challenges to stay ahead, whether in college or in a career. Consequently, there are also many opportunities in which support and instruction can be utilized to promote continuous achievement, and public libraries are on the forefront as a vital resource with services, programs, and instruction that they provide to all learners.

Public libraries serve as cornerstones for communities across New York State for accessing information and technology, developing digital literacy skills, and providing numerous support services to students, families, and communities. For generations, public libraries have offered critical services to address the needs of all learners.

This paper is designed to provide insight into the role public libraries play in the successful development of community members from early childhood learners to lifelong learners, and to describe how they support such learners. To do so, this paper highlights research, programmatic examples, and impact studies regarding the following areas:

- I. Early Childhood Learning Opportunities
- II. Impact On Achievement for All Students
   - a. Information and Digital Literacy
   - b. Summer Learning Opportunities
   - c. Supporting Underrepresented Populations
- III. Lifelong Learning Opportunities

I.   Early Childhood Learning Opportunities

Public libraries play a critical role in the preparation of early learners. Dating back to the 1980's, research reports have identified public libraries as leaders in the developmental capacity of early learners. The preparation of preschoolers for learning has been identified as one major role that public libraries can play in communities (American Association of School Librarians, 2001). Further, public libraries not only provide early learners with opportunities for the development of literacy skills, they also influence parent involvement at home, and act as a support system for at-risk children (American

Association of School Librarians, 2001). Similar findings can be seen through Epstein's theory, which states that overlapping spheres of influence – in this case the public library, family, and community – help students feel supported and motivated to succeed in school (Martinez, 2008).

The importance of public libraries on the development of early learners has proven to increase throughout the years. For example, a 1995 study by the National Center for Education Statistics showed that 86% of public libraries offered group programs for preschoolers and kindergarteners, while only 56% of these libraries offered such programs in 1988(Herb, 2001). Additionally, these increases can be seen in New York State. In 2010 76% of libraries offered early literacy programs, whereas in 2007 only 67% of libraries offered the same. The role that public libraries play in early literacy[1] development cannot be overlooked, as these programs may offer the only opportunities children have for exposure to these skills before they enter school. The following are examples of programs currently offered for early learners throughout the United States:

Programmatic examples and offerings

Every Child Ready to Read @ your library: This program aims to develop the capacity of early learners, while simultaneously teaching the early literacy skills and information needed to help parents and caregivers support them. The program's curriculum revolves around six pre-reading skills: print motivation, phonological awareness, vocabulary, narrative skills, print awareness, and letter knowledge. Activities and resources accompany these curricular areas. Furthermore, sessions are divided into three separate target groups for children: early talkers, talkers, and pre-readers (Marks, Early Literacy Programs and Practices at Colorado Public Libraries, 2006). Based on a 2010 evaluation survey of the program, major successes in outreach to parents and the community generated an appeal and public engagement to put the training into practice with early learners. The training materials were regarded as high quality, and helped stimulate interaction between parents and caregivers and children (Every Child Ready to Read, 2010). This evaluation has led to the update of all workshop literature reviews and research, decreased the amount of jargon used in training materials, expanded training strategies for this population, and brought about an expectation of heightened attention to detail for the content and format of future versions (Every Child Ready to Read, 2011).

Family Place Libraries: The national network of Family Place Libraries, which originally was developed by a public library in New York State, includes 300 sites in 23 states, including New York. The main components of this framework are collections of books

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[1] Early literacy is defined as what children know, and the skills they obtain, regarding reading and writing, before they are actually able to read and write (Marks, Early Literacy Programs and Practices at Colorado Public Libraries, 2006).

and multimedia resources, a specially designed welcoming space, coalition-building with community agencies, outreach to new and non-traditional library users, developmentally appropriate programming, trained library staff, and a parent/child workshop series. The Parent/Child Workshop is a five-week program that involves toddlers and their parents and/or caregivers, featuring local professionals who emphasize to parents that they are the first teacher in their children's lives. The workshop facilitates early interventions, teaches strategies to support early learners, and offers resources to promote child development (Family Place Libraries). Based on evaluation reports for 2010-2011, program outcomes for parents and libraries exceeded expectations. Participants who attended the Parent/Child Workshop found the library to be "very family friendly" both as a destination for them and their young children and as a community resource that provides appropriate support. Additionally, 95% of all workshop participants said the library has helped them become better parents. Acquiring knowledge about techniques and resources from the program was especially important for Spanish-speaking parents, as 69% indicated the importance of reading to their children (Walter, 2011). Similarly, programmatic outcomes were positive, as 83% of participating libraries in the survey adopted changes in policy to incorporate new family-friendly practices. Additionally, all participating libraries have integrated services to families into their operations and goals (Walter, 2011).

Storytime Model for Large Groups: Although there may be barriers that inhibit the number and availability of programs in each library throughout the country - including lack of staff, funding, and time - the Storytime Model for Large Groups offers guidance to overcome these obstacles in an effort to positively influence early learners. The basis of the model is to maximize the number of participants per each story reading session, bringing in childcare personnel and participants, families, and caregivers who can then model the practices displayed by librarians on their own. The model encourages collaboration and planning with these stakeholders in order to provide the greatest number of children with exposure to reading and listening skills (Williams, 2007).

Brooklyn Reads to Babies: In 2006, Brooklyn initiated this campaign to engage early learners. The campaign offered eleven programs across sixty neighborhood libraries, including the Babies and Books program (Weiss, 2006). The campaign lasted two straight weeks, with a mission to reach every Brooklyn family with children from birth to age two. The message stressed the importance of reading to babies, as this simple practice teaches sounds, rhythms, and vocabulary. The campaign materials were printed and disseminated in seven languages, and the outreach focused on diverse families (Brooklyn Public Library, 2005).

Library has legs: A partnership targeting children aged 0-5 in Victoria, Australia, which is aimed at alleviating the detriments of disengagement and lack of access to support for youth. The program specifically employs community outreach strategies within disadvantaged or disengaged households, using collaboration and partnerships with local hospitals, parenting services, and other social or community institutions to change

perceptions towards education. Each participant is invited to reading sessions and each receives a library card, a tote bag with the slogan 'Please take me to the […] library' with a brochure of the program and recommended reading list, and a literacy flyer informing parents about reading progress and activities for collaborative reading exercises at home. Children also receive bright stickers and wristbands with program logos to stimulate conversations between them and their families. Evaluations of the program after three years (2006-2009) demonstrated an increase in awareness amongst parents and early childhood educators for the importance of addressing children's developmental needs, an increase in the development of language and communication skills in children, and an expansion of networking opportunities between early childhood environments and local services for the continued enhancement of early learning (Smith, 2008).

Impact studies

Maryland: This study was conducted across Maryland public libraries to gauge the effectiveness of early literacy programs in the community. There were 26 libraries from four counties across the state that participated in the collective case study. Commonly, all libraries understood the importance of developing relationships with schools, families, and the community (Martinez, 2008). The study showed that the libraries' main focus pertained to:
- Dissemination of materials: All four counties saw the value of distributing quarterly, monthly, or weekly flyers and newsletters. These include important information for parents and caregivers on how to teach early learners, educational activities, recommended literature, and schedules and updates on programs, speakers, and events (Martinez, 2008).
- Outreach: All four counties also displayed efforts to reach out to the community. Librarians participated in events held at malls and schools, participated in community events and festivals, worked collaboratively with satellite libraries, visited daycares, held library card drives, and conducted events for early learners and families (Martinez, 2008).
- Access: Many of the libraries throughout the counties have been adopting technology to provide more access to the community. The community can acquire information, resources, and updates online instead of through print formats or at the physical library. This trend of technological progression has been expanding throughout the counties (Martinez, 2008).

Colorado: In Colorado, a study was done to gauge the effects of adopting library programs for early learners, including the Every Child Ready to Read @ your library (Every Child) program. The study examined the process of planning, implementing, and maintaining these programs and conducted seven training sessions for over 100 participants (Marks, Early Literacy Programs and Practices at Colorado Public Libraries, 2006). These workshops, based on the Every Child program, provided participants with

training, skills, and techniques to influence early learners. The impact study found changes to the following areas:

- Changes to existing services: Over 75% of all participants stated that their library had made changes to their services, and modeled these changes to incorporate a greater focus on early learning. This included adopting story times and increasing parent and community outreach (Marks, Early Literacy Initiative Impacts Public Library Services for Young Children , 2006).
- Community partnerships: Since participating in the workshops, 66% of participants indicated that their library has partnered with community organizations and agencies, such as day care centers, preschools, hospitals, and shelter, to positively influence the development of early learning. An additional 18% indicated that such partnerships were in the process of being formed (Marks, Early Literacy Initiative Impacts Public Library Services for Young Children , 2006).
- Outside funding: Because the workshops demonstrated the importance of early learning to so many professionals, fully half of the participants had already procured or sought additional funding for their early literacy programs, and an additional 8% were in the planning stages of doing so (Marks, Early Literacy Initiative Impacts Public Library Services for Young Children , 2006).
- Resource allocation: As previously mentioned, based on the expanded awareness of the importance of early learning, 37% responded that their libraries have reallocated resources towards early learning programs (Marks, Early Literacy Initiative Impacts Public Library Services for Young Children , 2006).
- Training: The sharing of knowledge and information was very prevalent, as 40% of participants reported that they, or someone from their libraries, have trained staff and/or volunteers to address early literacy issues, and an additional 16% planned on doing so. Furthermore, more than 34% indicated that their libraries have offered training workshops for parents and/or caregivers on literacy skills and issues, and an additional 24% planned to do so. (Marks, Early Literacy Initiative Impacts Public Library Services for Young Children , 2006).
- Early literacy materials: Early literacy information was of great importance to libraries, and 92% of all participants stated that their libraries distribute and use materials on early learning that was produced by the Colorado State Library. The remaining 8% were not aware that such materials existed, and would distribute them in the future (Marks, Early Literacy Initiative Impacts Public Library Services for Young Children , 2006).

II.   Impact On Achievement for All Students

Public libraries serve the needs of all students, especially as a valuable resource of support along their school pathways. One goal of public libraries is to raise achievement rates for all students. This can be seen through programs that develop information and

digital literacy[2] skills that offer summer learning opportunities, and that provide critical support services and programs for underrepresented populations.

A.   Information and Digital Literacy

Information and digital literacy are important skills for all students in 21st century learning environments. According to the 2010 release of the National Broadband Plan, roughly one-third of the population lacked broadband internet connection in their homes (Clark & Visser, 2010). The lack of such access to infrastructure and the deficit in the development of the skills needed to effectively utilize technology represent two of the main causes of digital divide in populations, often causing students to fall behind their peers in school, in obtaining jobs, and in participating meaningfully in society (Lai, 2011). From 2008-2010, there has been an increase in public library training opportunities available for all learners. Across the country over this time period, the number of public libraries offering informal point-of-use assistance increased from 52% to 79%, the number offering formal training classes increased from 35% to 38%, and those offering online training material dramatically rose from 3% to 30% (Public Libraries & The Internet, 2011).

In conjunction with these increases in public library services, many consequently stress the challenges associated with this growth. In 2009, fifty-two million people obtained help using technology from a librarian or volunteer, and sixteen million took advantage of public library offered computer classes (Clark & Visser, 2010). The sheer volume of library patrons in demand for services and access has, in turn, increased the need for more library resources and staff. Across the country, almost 75% of libraries have reported that, for at least part of any given day, they have insufficient public access and workstations to meet the needs of users (Public Libraries & The Internet, 2011). Additionally, many libraries in Canada have voiced similar concerns, stating that they lacked funding, trained staff, and the appropriate physical space needed to effectively provide access, information and digital literacy support (Lai, 2011).

Public libraries do, however, understand the necessary and important role that they play in the field of information and digital literacy skills development. In recent years, information and digital literacy have been regarded as the most important goals of public libraries and as essential services that are currently not being offered by other entities (Harding, 2008). The following are a number of programs that have been exemplars in such undertakings:

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[2] Digital literacy refers to the ability to locate, evaluate, and use digital information. Those who are digitally literate can also determine what information is necessary and applicable for their intended purposes. Digital literacy includes the ability to effectively use a range of technologies, including computers, internet, and mobile devices (Public Libraries & The Internet, 2011).

Programmatic examples and offerings

Broadbandexpress@yourlibrary: Known as the New York State Library Broadband Technology Program Grant Project, the project is aiming to increase public library hours, upgrade connectivity, add over 800 public computer workstations, and provide access to 24/7 job search resources. The goal is to provide public access computer and teleconferencing centers with high speed broadband services to 30 libraries in economically distressed communities, create five "E-mobile" computer training units to be deployed to support underserved rural communities, and make services freely available to over six million New York residents in 41 counties (New York State Library Broadband Technology Program (BTOP) Grant Project, 2011). The E-mobile training units will travel in vans across underserved communities, offering classes on information and digital literacy to residents. Additionally, many of the libraries in this program have partnered together to offer extended digital literacy training (Clark & Visser, 2010).

Fast Forward New Mexico (FFNM): The goal of this program is to assist communities across New Mexico with training to develop information and digital literacy, enabling them to provide professional and educational opportunities (Clark & Visser, 2010). FFNM is a three-year grant funded program that started in 2010 which partnered with 16 of the state's public libraries to bring free training to locales with predominantly underserved residents of Hispanic and Native American descent. Classes that are offered by the program pertain to basic skills training, including classes on basic computer skills, introduction to the internet, computer selection, installation, and maintenance, and the methodology of taking an online course. Additionally, there are classes pertaining to small business success: internet tools for business-reducing costs, internet tools for business- increasing sales, social media marketing – choosing the right tools, and social media marketing – promoting your business (Fast Forward New Mexico, 2011).

YOUmedia: Through a partnership between the Chicago Public Library and the Digital Youth Network, this program engages young adults with information and digital literacy in exciting ways. Instead of coming to the public library to access information, participants interact with technology to access and find information, creating new content using multimedia (Clark & Visser, 2010). The essential elements that make up the program are space, mentors, interest-based learning, research, and partnerships.
- Space: The physical space in public libraries where students can work, along with online space for social networking.
- Mentors: Mentors include librarians and media professionals who can teach pedagogical skills, digital literacy and interpersonal skills. They are also expected to support participants with accessing/finding/creating media, personal portfolios, and creativity.
- Interest-based learning: Participants are offered opportunities to engage in areas of personal interest and passion.

- Research: Programming is informed by constant data collection and analysis to always meet the needs of students and provide the most current and useful services.
- Partnerships: Engaging a wide variety of partnerships within the community keeps the program running by providing mentors, funding, intellectual property, and community engagement (YOUmedia Chicago, 2011).

Impact studies

Currently, there is a dearth of research related to the effects of public libraries' information and digital literacy training and support   to verify the impact of such offerings on student achievement. Many studies have recommended, however, that such research is necessary for documenting the role public libraries play in promoting achievement. Consequently, such studies   call for funding opportunities for organizations to undertake such research. The results could then encourage increased support for the public library system, and in turn provide many public libraries with the enhanced funding and support needed to meet the high demands for information and digital literacy development programs within communities.

B.   **Summary Learning Opportunities**

Without regularly attending school in summer months, students of all ages may not have the exposure to reading, writing, and learning that are necessary to overcome achievement gaps or to prepare them for the grade ahead. There have been numerous studies completed that point to summer reading setbacks as a major contributor to the achievement gap, especially in economically disadvantaged demographics (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2010).

Research has found that access to books for successive years has limited setbacks in reading over the summer. Students with access to materials have demonstrated increases in engagement and displayed greater reading gains than students without such opportunities (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2010). Based on these results, and the importance that access to materials plays in the development and retention of student knowledge, the role of public libraries and the programs they offer to students is even more invaluable.

Additionally, wide discussion indicates that the book choices offered to students also impact the amount of time and engagement they have with materials. Public libraries have created lists that help align student interests, by grade, with the common core learning standards that are assigned to each specific level. Through such guidance, students are able to connect their interests, as well as the consensus interests of their peers nationally, to their studies (Renaissance Learning, 2012).

The following current programs offer students summer learning opportunities:

Programmatic examples and offerings

AR BookFinder: Annually, Renaissance Learning garners input from librarians across the country for book recommendations to students. In 2011, over 30,000 libraries spanning all states contributed and collaborated to select 200 books. The list is divided into four age categories, while also taking into account measurements for interest level and ATOS book level, which is an estimate of the text complexity of a given title (Renaissance Learning, 2012).

Summer Reading program in Illinois Public Libraries: Successful participation in this summer reading program is comprised of three components: school library nights, a home reading component, and a summer reading celebration. Over the length of the summer, the public library in collaboration with local elementary schools opens the school library one night per week, where both students and families came to discuss books that they have read and to take-out new books for continued reading. Stations are set up where teachers, librarians, reading assistants, and junior/senior high school student collaborate and speak with children, interact with families, and offer guidance. The home reading component encourages students to continue their reading and learning and is supported by the public library, which offers reading lists, summer reading curriculum, and access to physical space and materials for students and families. Instruction offered at the public library teaches the students how to keep track of independent reading, which can in turn be monitored throughout the program. To culminate the efforts of the students throughout the summer, a celebration for reading is planned at the end of the summer and those students who have completed at least two out of three components are invited to attend (Heaser, 2011).

Superhero summer reading program: A grant winner from the ALSC/BWI Summer Reading Grant, this program based out of the Gail Borden Public Library in Illinois linked the concepts of reading and literacy with the appeal of comic book superheroes. Program events are created around the concept of engaging students, and even feature "real-life" superheroes in costume. The public library created a short "action film" that was played throughout public school classrooms before summer break to entice children to come to the library and learn more about the program. At each session, students are encouraged to create their own comic books, read and listen to stories, and checkout books that interest them to bring home. At one such session, some nine hundred people interacted with a dressed up Spiderman in a three-hour span. Through partnerships with local schools, the program expanded and evolved, more than doubling from a 12% enrollment rate in 2009 to a 26% enrollment rate in 2010 (Brautigam, 2011).

Summer Reading at New York Public Libraries: **New York: The online collection** offers games, puzzles, reading lists, book reviews, and event listings for students. There is also guidance and instruction provided for students from birth to age 5, children, teens, and parents. The Dream Big READ program offers audio and video music features in English

and Spanish to engage students in reading, while the Own the Night Program hosts a teen video challenge, incorporating research, reading, and technology (Summer Reading at New York Libraries, 2012). Another program offered by New York public libraries, called Read Down your Fines, allows students to erase their fines by logging their books and reading times on an online database. These students are able to erase one dollar of fines for every fifteen minutes they read in or out of the library over the summer (New York Public Library, 2012).

Impact Studies

The Learning Season: Research-based evidence indicates that summer programs that are well designed and implemented have positive effects on student retention and progress. Additionally, an increase in teamwork, problem solving, communication, and various other key areas can also be realized. One specific recommendation from this study focuses on funding streams to community-based organizations, specifically public libraries, advising a combining of funding streams allocated by federal and state legislatures. Specifically, by combining funding streams intended for academic remediation, child care, delinquency prevention, nutrition, the arts, or reading into one uniform pathway, full-day services during the summer months can be established that incorporate academic and enrichment experiences. Promoting collaboration through flexible financial policies can provide the necessary services for students to progress during the summer (Miller, 2007).

The Dominican Study: This study took place from 2006-2009 by Dominican University, in partnership with the Colorado State Library Agency and the Texas Library and Archives Commission. It was designed to determine the impact of summer reading programs on student achievement, the relationship between the strength of services and student achievement, and the effect of partnerships between public libraries and schools (Roman & Fiore, 2010).
  - *The impact of summer reading programs on student achievement:* Students who graduated from third grade and participated in public library sponsored summer reading programs scored higher on administered post-tests, maintained and increased reading skills, and, according to their teachers, were better prepared entering fourth grade than students who did not participate (Roman & Fiore, 2010).
  - *The relationship between strength of services and student achievement:* Based on the findings of the study, services need to be strengthened in order to meet the needs of all students. It recommended that more money should be invested in summer reading programs, especially for public libraries serving disadvantaged students, more direct marketing should be done to families to convey the importance of participation in such programs, and more materials should be provided to serve students in impoverished areas (Roman & Fiore, 2010).

- *Effect of partnerships between public libraries and schools:* Partnerships between public libraries and schools allowed programs to reach a broader population demographically and to increase program participation. Additionally, partnerships between public libraries and community groups such as non-profit organizations, including First Book and Reading is Fundamental, help reach disadvantaged students and those who may live in impoverished areas (Roman & Fiore, 2010).

C.   Supporting Underrepresented Populations

Public Libraries take on valuable roles in supporting underrepresented populations, including English Language Learners (ELLs), socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and Students with Disabilities (SWDs). A 2008 census report showed that there were ten million people living in the United States between the ages of 5 and 17 from families in which English is their second language (Asher & Case, 2007). In 2011, there were over 6 million Students With Disabilities aged three to twenty-one years old in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Additionally, in 2008-2009, 22% of elementary and 8% of secondary school students attended high-poverty public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). These groups of students often rely on outside support from public libraries, which offer instruction, access to resources and technology, and programs to help them succeed. The need for public library services is even more vital to 21st century learners, as public libraries provide the only internet access for 70% of impoverished communities (Celano & Neuman, 2010). Unfortunately, while demand for these libraries increases, funding to them is being cut, leading to the closure of these vital community resources. Poverty stricken areas such as Camden, New Jersey and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania have faced proposals for budget cuts to shut public libraries down, depriving communities of access to technology, digital and print information resources, and the guidance needed to achieve in schools and obtain employment (Celano & Neuman, 2010).

The importance of providing underrepresented populations with programs to support their learning is further emphasized by the fact that but this is both a desire and a need expressed directly by such populations. According to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) statistics, the number of libraries offering ESOL programs in New York State rose steadily from 16% in 2007 to 20% in 2010. One example of this trend can be seen in a 2004 study focusing on library use and perceptions amongst Spanish-speaking immigrants, which showed that over half the respondents wanted public libraries to teach them information literacy skills and competencies (Asher & Case, 2007). The following programs are examples of the types of services that are being offered to underrepresented populations across the country:

Programmatic examples and offerings

The American Dream Starts @ your Library: This program, which is supported by the Dollar General Literacy Foundation and the American Library Association, provides grant awards of $5,000 to libraries across the United States that serve urban, suburban, and rural communities, many with populations comprised of largely non-English speaking. Since 2010, 75 public libraries in 24 states, including the Onondaga County Public Library in New York, used the grant funding to expand digital and print ELL collections, adopt new technologies, increase outreach and access for ELLs, build partnerships with community organizations and families, and involve media outlets to promote library resources and programs. Additionally, many of the American Dream libraries initiated courses and workshops on language, technology, and job training for the public (ALA Office for Literacy and Outreach Services, 2011).

Child's Place for Children with Special Needs: The Child's Place program, based in Brooklyn, New York, offers unique programs for Students With Disabilities (SWDs) from birth to age 12. The free programs aim to include SWDs, families, caregivers, and educators working together to support the development of literacy skills. There are after-school stories, weekend and special weekday programs. Included in this are opportunities for children with and without disabilities to interact and develop social skills through "Read and Play," parenting workshops to teach parents of SWDs techniques to help their children continue learning at home, and class visits where librarians introduce SWDs to the library, provide them with library cards, and engage them in learning activities specifically designed to meet their needs (Brooklyn Public Library, 2012).

Phoenix Public Library: Phoenix and its surrounding areas have a very large population of Latino youth, and are characterized by high dropout rates, poverty rates, and gang affiliation. In order to provide support to this demographic, the Phoenix Public Library adopted a mission to target Latino youth and develop programs to engage, inspire, and attract them into the libraries to learn and develop skills. Some examples of innovative programs that are offered through the public libraries are:

- T-shirt Design program: Partnering with local artists and teachers, this program gave participants a chance to design their own t-shirts based on an aspect of their Latino culture at their public libraries. It gave them the opportunity to learn more about their culture, use their artistic creativity, create a product, and interact with the library, developing the perception that it is place on which they can depend.
- The SK8 and Rock program: This program gave participants an opportunity to hone their technology skills by using simple public domain software to create music of their own. A local semi-professional skateboarding team was also brought in to teach participants the basics of skateboarding in the library parking lot, and then to research their favorite skate videos and magazines, helping participants learn research skills and further develop information and digital literacy through the public library.

- Fashion program: Using a simple sewing machine provided by the public library, this program allowed participants to bring in used or old clothing and re-design them into something more modern and fashionable. Participants were given the opportunity to learn about fashion trends and designers, as well as use their individual creativity to produce something of their own (Naidoo & Vargas, 2011).

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped: A program of the Library of Congress that provides equipment and materials in digital, recorded and Braille formats through two Regional Libraries in New York State. The program provides public library-like service to people with print-related disabilities. While this service is delivered directly from the Regional Libraries, some National Library Services are also available through local and branch libraries throughout New York State. Additionally, some public libraries contain workstations with scanners that allow the visually impaired to scan texts and then magnify the text utilizing special software such as ZoomText (National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS)).

Impact Studies

New York: The Queens, New York public library system is the 2nd largest public library system in the United States, circulating the highest number of books and materials in the country since 1994 to a population of over 2 million people, 48% of whom are foreign-born and 55% of whom speak a native language other than English (McBride, McNitt, Murray, & Walker, 2009). The New Americans Program, offered by the Queens Borough Public Library, serves the needs of its residents who are not native English speakers. The program is a continuously shifting model, working closely with ethnic community organizations and branch libraries to assess the needs of residents, providing them with current support systems and programs, and creating new services. The program aims to find community partners and work with them to expand the collection of materials and services to targeted audiences. One such example is the coping skills programs, which help immigrants adjust to life in the United States, and teach important information on topics including health, laws, parenting, and employment. All materials and guidance are available to residents in both English and their native languages. Additionally, there are cultural arts programs designed to engage the community and to encourage participation and utilization of public library services. The New Americans program has been shown to increase awareness of public library services among cultural and ethnic communities, increase library use by new immigrants, facilitate assimilation, leading to higher engagement and participation in the community, and has made residents view the library as a community center open to all (The Queens Borough Public Library).

Welcome Stranger: In 2008 the Urban Library Council conducted a survey of its member libraries in order to discover how these libraries benefit the immigrant population. The report's discoveries include the following:

- The libraries collect information about immigration dynamics and are thus well suited to address the needs and concerns of immigrants, especially in cities that are not traditional immigrant destinations.
- According to the 2007 survey by the Urban Library Council, 91% of urban public libraries have employees who have multiple language capabilities that they use at work to better interact with the immigrant population. In addition 71% of libraries have employees who specialize in the acquisition of non- English material, and 81% have signage in multiple languages. These data indicate that libraries are culturally sensitive to immigrant populations.
- 67% of libraries have adult English instruction and many have early literacy and family literacy programs. Consequently these libraries serve as a crucial modality for English education for immigrants.
- A large percentage of libraries have links to community organizations such as schools, refugee agencies, and social service agencies, as well as connections to health organizations that utilize the library to extend their services to underserved populations.
- Libraries serve as a nexus for newcomers in the community to get involved in civic activities while simultaneously libraries also serve as a point of dissemination for the community to gain knowledge about immigrant populations (Ashton & Milam, 2008).

Hunt Valley: Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia conducted a study with one objective being to increase student achievement in mathematics at all grade levels. Administrators sought to do this through the integration of technology, increased use of manipulatives, and staff professional development. This objective was supported, in part, through the expansion of math professional library resources. At the end of the year achievement increased by 5% overall, with significant rises in Limited English Proficiency and Students with Disabilities (Fairfax County Public Schools, 2009).

Meta-analysis: In 2011, a meta-analysis was completed, aimed at capturing the influence that public libraries can have on mitigating the effects of poverty on student achievement. One of the most important elements, as seen in this meta-analysis, is the notion that public libraries can support disadvantaged students through the provision of access to materials. The results support this claim through:
- A 2010 study, with a sample size of 70,000 15-year olds from 27 countries, showing that those students in homes with access to books stay in school up to three years longer than students in homes with no books. Access to books had the same effect on a student's education as parental education, twice the effect of a father's education, and was more impactful than socio-economic standards of living.
- Another study from 2008, specifically aimed at the impact of libraries on student achievement, demonstrated that for 11th grade students in California, the library had as strong an impact on student language arts test scores as community

factors, and had a greater impact on student US history test scores than community factors.

- A Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) that administered reading tests to fourth graders from 40 countries showing that access to libraries with over 500 books was a strong predictor of reading achievement. The library predictor had nearly the same impact on student achievement as social class (Krashen, 2011).

III.   Lifelong Learning Opportunities

Public libraries have been a highly regarded institution since their designation as a location that all community members can use to their advantage, regardless of economic or social status or demographic background. Andrew Carnegie once said, "there is no such a cradle of democracy upon the earth as the Free Public Library, this republic of letters, where neither rank, office, nor wealth receives the slightest consideration"(Senville, 2009). This idea of a community center is still being practiced today, as public libraries serve all residents, regardless of age or income.

Public libraries serve as common meeting spaces for interest groups, students, and businesses, play an integral role in the assimilation of immigrants into communities, and act as hub for job seekers who can research information and receive instruction in the application process and other key activities in the search for a new job (Senville, 2009). Librarians frequently provide information and referral services to the community and are trained to provide information about local businesses, effectively connecting the community (Pettigrew, Durrance, & Vakkari, 1999). Furthermore, 24.4% of unemployed individuals without internet access utilize the internet at a library to conduct their job search (Kuhn & Skuterund, 2000). The 21st century library not only caters to students, but all learners and residents in communities, including businesses. Small businesses have utilized library resources and expertise for generating entrepreneurial ideas, receiving assistance in the development of business plans, and as a valuable physical space to launch a business (Pankl, 2010).

Another way in which public libraries support their communities is through the provision of support in E-Government, since the government has moved information and services to the internet for efficiency, and has also decreased the number of agencies which were previously responsible for providing citizens with face-to-face support (Gibson, Bertot, & McClure, 2009). Residents have turned to their public libraries for support, as E-Government has increasingly been the preferred method of service delivery at the federal, state, and local levels (Gibson, Bertot, & McClure, 2009). Public libraries have helped communities by serving as access points and administering support with "tax information, citizenship and immigration services and resources, social services, health information, emergency and disaster response, and more" (Public Libraries & The Internet, 2012). There is also a large demand for these types of services, as almost 90%

of public libraries reported that E-Government services are important to their communities (Public Libraries & The Internet, 2012).

The following are examples of programs that support lifelong learners, businesses, and communities:

Programmatic examples and offerings

Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA): MELSA is an alliance of 103 public libraries in the Twin Cities metro-area based in Minnesota. MELSA offers a number of programs designed to engage the community, support learning for all ages, and help residents along their career paths. The following programs are included in MELSA services:

- *JobNow!:* JobNow! Is an online program offered by the public library alliance that offers real-time help with resume creation and job interview preparation. There are coaches who offer career advice, feedback, templates, and tips ten hours a day, seven days a week. For residents who may not have internet access at home, the 103 public libraries in the area offer access to the necessary workstations, making sure the entire community can benefit from the program.
- *Quiet on the Set:* Quiet on the Set is a short film competition hosted for all residents of the community, offering prizes and incentives to winners. The competition gives residents an opportunity to express their creativity, interact with digital media, and learn from one another as they receive assistance from public library librarians on digital literacy.
- *Homework Rescue:* Homework Rescue offers one-to-one homework help from online tutors for students. The services include live help, skills building, writing labs, language labs, and 24-hour access to help and test centers online. There are services for students grades 3-12 along with opportunities for adult learners to receive training for GED and citizenship tests and in digital literacy (Metropolitan Library Service Agency, 2011).

New York: The New York Public Library offers guidance to job seekers throughout their search for employment. One such example is the Bronx Center's Career and Educational Information Service where one-on-one counseling, resume assistance, and career planning is available. Other sessions are available at locations throughout the city. Topics for sessions include finding the right career path, how to get interviews, networking, negotiating salaries, and other topics for all ages. Online career exploration and job searching that features free databases, eBooks, audiobooks, and videos pertaining to job seekers and entrepreneurs is also available to all residents There are also small business assistance programs, both online and face-to-face, offering guidance on starting small businesses as well as individual consultations provided by retired executives (New York Public Library, 2012).

In addition to programs for job seekers and businesses, the New York Public Library offers programs on financial literacy, including sessions on income tax preparation, budgeting, bonds and mutual funds, taxes, and Medicare, among others. There are also resources and programs for teens, at-risk youth, and children that are available throughout the year (New York Public Library, 2012).

North Carolina: The North Carolina State Library initiated a program in 2009 to train over 300 public librarians to help residents conduct job searches and connect with employers. The program started with a series of seminars across nine public library locations, all of which were filled to capacity. Participants were introduced to resources for help with resume writing, job searching, and interviewing (Oder, 2009). One year later, after an increase in community engagement, the program has expanded to include new online job search tools and online portals that provide information for job seekers, students, business owners, and investors. Participating libraries have also individually increased efforts and community outreach, by offering office hours and even creating job centers for all residents (Herman, 2010).

The Library Partnership: A partnership between the Alachua County Library District (ACLD), the Florida Department for Children and Families (DCF), the Partnership for Strong Families (PSF), the Casey Family Program, and approximately thirty social service agencies whose ultimate goal is to strengthen family and community ties. The partnership, through the public library, offers a resource center that provides support by addressing self-sufficiency, child welfare, health, safety, and family issues (Bishop, 2011).

Impact Studies

New York: According to New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, public libraries throughout the city helped place people in 35,000 jobs in 2011. New York City is also opening Workforce1 Career Centers in public libraries in 2012 to help more New Yorkers find employment, and Mayor Bloomberg has estimated an additional 1,000 job placements from the Brooklyn public library alone (Blau & Moore, 2012).

Florida: A study completed in the Florida public library system showed the effects that library services had on helping residents meet their E-Government needs. Due to limited access at home, residents turned to public libraries for assistance with federal, state, and local government information, services, and resources. During trips to the public library, 31% of residents searched for federal information, 33% searched for state information, and 28% searched for local information. Additionally, while using E-Government features in the library, almost 30% of residents required assistance to do so, with 40% of residents who requested help needed assistance completing forms, with 40% of those inquiries dealing with tax-related assistance. Based on these findings, the role of public libraries in E-Government is clearly documented, and recommendations

have included an increase in library staff training, improving technology, and expanded funding for these purposes (Gibson, Bertot, & McClure, 2009).

IV. Conclusion and Takeaways

The effectiveness of public libraries has been demonstrated through reports, studies, and analysis that have been highlighted throughout this informational brief. The programs and services offered across the United States through public libraries have taken on significant roles in supporting many learners and communities,

As emphasized previously in this brief, the demand for the services offered by public libraries is increasing rapidly, and in order to meet the needs of all residents, the amount of support provided to public libraries, through funding and staffing, needs to expand simultaneously. Public libraries play critical roles in the lives of all learners by offering early childhood learning opportunities, developing information and digital literacy, providing summer learning opportunities, supporting underrepresented populations, and operating as a foundation for lifelong learning opportunities.

The following are key takeaways as they relate to each of the areas presented.

I. Early Childhood Learning Opportunities

Various studies have shown that libraries are a crucial resource for promoting early childhood literacy. Libraries accomplish this through a variety of modalities. 86% of libraries have programs that directly promote childhood reading, such as Brooklyn Reads to Babies and Every Child Ready to Read. Libraries also provide parents the opportunity to get involved with their children's reading education and provide a safe outlet for at-risk children. Finally, while acting as a community nexus, libraries provide children a meaningful connection to their communities by fostering feelings of support and motivation.

II. Impact On Achievement for All Students

Information and Digital Literacy

Libraries provide support to students of all ages in many ways. Libraries are an excellent resource to gain skills in using information technology, either through programs such as Fast Forward New Mexico and YOUmedia or through high-speed internet which studies show is an incredibly salient element in education success and computer literacy. In today's internet-connected world, it is becoming all but a necessity to

cross the digital divide, and public libraries are a powerful resource to do just that.

Summer Learning Opportunities

In the United States, the majority of schools are in recess during the summer. Unfortunately studies indicate that students lose a significant amount of reading ability during the summer if they are not exposed to literature. Libraries alleviate this by offering programs that encourage students to read during the summer such as the Summer Reading Program in Illinois and its counterpart in New York which both offer engaging experiences to bridge the achievement gap during the summer months.

Supporting Underrepresented Populations

Libraries are one of the leading trackers of community composition, so libraries are some of the first organizations that respond to changes in community makeup. Libraries are extremely valuable to the immigrant population by having a diversely multicultural staff that is competent in many languages, by offering non-English material, by offering English learning classes, and also by the connections that Libraries have through their community information networks. Libraries are often the place where new immigrants go when they need resources from their community. In addition libraries serve as a meeting place for community organizations such as hospitals, which often use these sites to deliver free or low cost care to the community.

III. **Lifelong Learning Opportunities**

As previously stated, libraries often act as a community nexus, and as such they provide valuable information for the entire community. Many individuals utilize the library computers to apply for jobs utilizing the library's own internal community listings or even programs such as JobNow! which actively assists members of the community in finding new work. In addition, libraries are often places where various community interest groups have their meetings, further fostering a sense of community. Finally, libraries are one of the few locations in which one can find support for E-government, helping many people file taxes, deal with citizenship matters, and explore other social services.

In conclusion, libraries are an extremely valuable resource, not just because of the large collection of books, but also because of programs that foster learning and community in the areas that they serve.

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