



School Libraries and Public Libraries: A Kansas Library Association White Paper

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to clarify the differences between the mission and services of public libraries and K-12 school libraries.

Audience

The intended audience of this document includes public library directors, library staff, library trustees and friends, school library media specialists, teachers, school administrators, school board members and all others who support education and libraries in Kansas.

Definitions

School libraries refer to the school library media programs that are centered on the materials collections and teaching activities in K-12 schools. *School libraries* are directed by trained and licensed teacher/school library media specialists. *Public libraries* are libraries with programs and resources that serve the recreational reading and information needs of the members of their community. *Public libraries* are directed by trained library directors.

Overview

There is often confusion surrounding the difference in mission between school libraries and public libraries. This confusion leads, at times, to the assumption that both of these entities perform the same service and therefore can be easily combined or substituted, one for the other. Kansas has all types of libraries. Each type has a distinct mission, collection focus, user group, and array of services. No one type of library can provide all the services needed by the children, students, adults, elderly, businesses, and public institutions of Kansas. Types of libraries serving those needs include:

- Public Libraries, serving the needs of the general public
- School Libraries, serving the needs of the K-12 students and teachers
- Academic Libraries, serving the needs of higher education
- Special Libraries serving the unique needs of business, governmental agencies, institutions and organization.

Each type of library collects resources and provides services especially designed for their specific clientele and has library staff with specialized training for their type of library. These libraries cooperate with each other to offer the broad array of library services that Kansans enjoy.

Because there are, for the most part, school and public libraries serving every Kansas community, and because they cooperate to provide services, it is sometimes assumed that one or the other could close, with little impact to that community. This is not true.

School Libraries (School Library Media Programs)

The mission of the school library media program is to ensure that students and staff are effective users of ideas and information. This mission is accomplished by providing intellectual and physical access to materials in all formats, by providing instruction that fosters competence and stimulates interest in reading, viewing, and using information and ideas, and by working with other teachers to design learning strategies to meet the needs of individual students.

- **Clientele:** K-12 students and teachers are the clientele of this type of library.
- **Resources:** Resources and materials in the collection are selected to support curricular and instructional needs, complement course work, and support and enhance the teaching of reading.
- **Services:** Primary services include teaching information/research skills and the use of technology, teaching concepts that support learning in a variety of subject areas, selecting, organizing and recommending resources that meet the needs of K-12 students, and provide collaborative curriculum and instruction support to classroom teachers.
- **Facilities:** Facilities provide class instruction space, group workspace, and individual workspace with furniture, shelving, and technology designed to provide a safe environment for children.
- **Staff:** School library media specialists, licensed teachers with additional specialized training in library and information management, staff the school library.

Public Libraries

The mission of the public library includes meeting the learning, recreational, and informational needs of their users. Public libraries provide an open learning environment for the community.

- **Clientele:** The general public of all ages, preschoolers through senior citizens, individuals, companies, non-profit organizations, and wide variety of other governmental entities are the clientele of this type of library.
- **Resources:** Resources and materials in the collection support a broad spectrum of interests and activities. Collections reflect community needs and popular interests. In-depth information is provided.
- **Services:** The primary services include loaning a broad spectrum of materials, providing access to digital resources and the internet, providing reference services, supporting research and homework, and providing year-round programming for community outreach and networking.
- **Facilities:** Facilities are open to the public and provide storage for the materials collection, space and furniture for study and relaxation, public meeting rooms, and technology designed to provide a wide range of resources.
- **Staff:** Librarians, with a wide variety of backgrounds, trained in library and information management staff the public libraries.

Conclusion

Although some of the services provided by school and public libraries seem to overlap, the missions, goals, collections and activities of these two types of library programs are quite different. The members of each Kansas community need the services provided by a public library. The students and teachers in each Kansas school need the services provided by a school library program.

Additional Resources

- **Kansas Library Association** <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/KLA/index.html>
- **Kansas State Library** <http://www.skyways.org/KSL>
- **Kansas Association of School Librarians** <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/kasl>
- **American Library Association** <http://www.ala.org>

Endorsed by the Kansas Library Association Council on October 31, 2004.