

Public library eliminates barriers to reading by partnering with local school district

At Tinley Park Public Library, young adult librarian Clarice Pelczarski is well aware of the importance of providing books to her entire community. “As a librarian, I always want readers of all ages to have access to any and all of the books that they would like to read,” she said.

Located 30 miles southwest of Chicago, the village of Tinley Park, IL is home to 55,000 residents. The community has access to digital resources including ebooks, audiobooks, and digital magazines through the Media on Demand library consortium.



“PUBLIC LIBRARY CONNECT ELIMINATES MANY BARRIERS TO READING”

Public Library CONNECT enables students at Kirby School District 140 to **borrow age-appropriate ebooks and audiobooks from Tinley Park Public Library and Media on Demand using their school login credentials in Sora**, the student reading app. Setting up Public Library CONNECT is easy for both schools and libraries with a simple opt-in consent form available through OverDrive or by talking to their OverDrive Account Manager.

“Students who may not otherwise make use of their local library’s OverDrive collection are able to access a vast collection of titles for recreational reading,” explained Pelczarski. The ability to check out books through Sora encourages students to read books they might otherwise be reluctant to openly carry around in a physical format, such as those of a lower reading level. “Public Library CONNECT eliminates many of the barriers to reading that students may find, including affordability and ease of access to reading materials,” she said.

BUILDING A LIFELONG LOVE OF READING

Public libraries and school districts have long shared a common goal of fostering literacy and academic success among children. With OverDrive’s Public Library CONNECT, libraries and school districts can unite forces and amplify their impact and provide children with increased access to books. By partnering with Kirby School District 140, Tinley Park Public Library has been able to bridge the literacy gap in their community and promote a love of reading among kids.

While the majority of users of Tinley Park’s OverDrive collection are adult readers checking out adult titles, according to Pelczarski the checkouts from KSD 140 students **represent approximately 1/3 of total checkouts** from the Tinley Park OverDrive collection.

“I think any positive associations with reading through ebook lending is a net positive,” said Pelczarski. “Ideally, they would switch to the Libby app to check out ebooks from their local library after they have graduated from school.”

Turn over for the school’s perspective of Public Library CONNECT

An IL district bridges the reading access gap with public library partnership

Located in the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois, Kirby School District 140 serves more than 3,500 students in preschool through eighth grade. Like many schools in 2020, the district — which includes two middle and five elementary schools — was not fully prepared for some of the challenges of circulating reading material to students during remote learning, said Dawn Bik, Media Center Director at KSD 140's Virgil I. Grissom Middle School. **To ensure that students had access to the books they needed, they turned to the Sora K-12 digital reading platform — and its Public Library CONNECT feature — to close the gap.**



"A SIMPLE ANSWER FOR OUR STUDENTS"

Public Library CONNECT allows KSD 140's students to borrow age-appropriate ebooks and audiobooks from the Tinley Park Public Library from right within Sora, using only their school credentials.

"Sora, along with Public Library CONNECT, made it a simple answer for our students," said Bik. "While we do purchase ebooks and audiobooks for our individual school libraries, our collection cannot compare to that of the public library. Being able to offer a supplemental collection for our students from the Tinley Park Public Library helps." This is especially important given that one of the primary ways KSD 140 is using Sora is to increase pleasure reading among students, even when they may not have physical access to the school library.

"We've been making a huge push to increase reading stamina, with numerous classes implementing silent reading, and self-selected reading with conferencing," said Bik. "At the beginning of the year and during testing windows, access to the library is very limited. (But) students are allowed to utilize Sora to read."

FOSTER READING EXCITEMENT WITH SCHOOL + PUBLIC LIBRARY PARTNERSHIP

The partnership between KSD 140 and Tinley Park Public Library has been an unquestionable success toward bridging the access gap: **Since November 2020, students have borrowed more than 80,000 books from the Tinley Park Public Library. In 2023 alone, students checked out over 38,000 titles.**

To Bik, simply being asked to share KSD 140's story of the partnership with Tinley Park Public Library is an indicator of the program's huge success, and she'd encourage her peers to strongly consider similar partnerships for themselves.

"My advice to other districts would be to not hesitate," she said, acknowledging that while there may be some initial budget concerns about adding digital books, "you can supplement that with a Public Library CONNECT, if your public library participates. Getting the students into a reading app and hearing their excitement about titles available is a satisfaction that could only justify your decision."

Turn over for the library's perspective of Public Library CONNECT