

School Visits

A key to getting kids to the library during the summer is your promotion of your activities at their schools.

Holding summer activities in the public library without connecting with kids at their schools beforehand = throwing a party and inviting the whole neighborhood through a sign in your lawn.

A few people may come. But most of your neighbors will not feel specifically invited. And after all, they think, we don't really know Kathy. Perhaps her party will be boring or weird. Better not to risk it.

It's the personal connection with kids - letting them see and hear you, preferably being energetic, nice and a little bit funny - that will get kids to badger their parents to bring them to the library.

That's exactly what we want. We also want the parents to see the value - and we know that if a kid wants to do something the parents knows is educational, the parent is likely to jump all over that. So by getting the kid, we also get the parent.

This means that your Summer Library Program doesn't start in June, it starts in May with your first school visit. So planning for summer involves not just what you're doing at the library or at outreach sites, but also how you will get into the schools and what will happen there.

So let's talk about getting into the schools. We're going to talk about

- fitting in school visits

- collaborating with libraries that serve the same schools
- knowledge and relationships
- pitching our cause
- ideas for school visits
- what to do if we absolutely can't get in

How do we do school visits on top of everything else?

Staff for school visits. If it means fewer in-library programs in late April and May, then it does. Planning for and doing effective school visits takes time. Be clear and be firm with your bosses about this. When you're going to the schools, you're not just promoting one program or even a summer's worth of programs. You're promoting the library and you're building relationships. The cost-benefit ratio is clearly in favor of dropping a few programs to prepare for and do school visits.

Collaborating with the libraries who serve the same schools

In rural places, the school is in one town but the students also live in other communities with libraries.

This is where the librarians in the library where the school is physically located have to be magnanimous leaders and open collaborators.

Even if you have a strong relationship with the school and it's easier to put together a joint promotion, don't do it. You wouldn't like it if you were in the position of the other libraries, and you don't want to be a hog or a lone ranger.

Share the decision-making, the responsibility, the work, and the opportunity to build relationships.

If you're one of the other libraries and that isn't happening, be proactive.

Address the issue head-on in a polite email to all the involved library directors. Include a doodle poll for a meeting to begin planning.

Do it soon before plans can be made without you.

What do you know about the schools? We want to do our homework and cultivate relationships!

How many do you have in your service area - not just public, but all? For each school:

Is there a school librarian or someone in charge of a library or even just literacy? Do you know him or her?

If not, you want to cultivate the relationship NOW. Ask to drop by to meet him. Invite him to meet for coffee at the end of the school day. You're the one who wants to make friends, so make it easy for him.

What is your relationship with the principal? Nothing happens without the approval of the principal. Do you know him or her?

If not, you want to cultivate the relationship NOW. Drop by to meet her. Call and set up a ten-minute meeting (and say you only want ten minutes) to introduce yourself and explain what you can do for the school. Preview generally what you'll be asking for later in the spring. Maya - preview Christmas present.

Do you have any other ideas on cultivating relationships with school folks?

Pitching the principal. So how do you pitch to the principal your desire to come in and talk to students? First, understand that it's a negotiation. Start with what you would ideally like - the maximum you could do - but understand that you may not get it.

Points to make:

- Importance of reading over the summer to reduce summer slide
- That you track kids' reading and will report to school the ones who participated so their accomplishment can be reinforced
- That school and PL are partners in literacy
- That you're pleased to build this relationship because you have other ideas for supporting the school's literacy efforts
- That it's kids seeing you in person and getting them excited about the library that will make the biggest difference in X school's students getting to the library this summer. We know that if a kid wants to do something the parents knows is educational, the parent is likely to try to make that happen. So we get the kid, and we may also get the parent more onboard with their child's learning.
- Involving teachers and principal in a program

Other selling points you use?

School visit ideas

Types of school visits in order of my preference:

1. Spend day in school library or central place- classes come to you
2. Travel from class to class
3. Assembly

Great ideas:

Something lively and funny: entertain them (younger ones) and make them laugh! Skit, song . . .

Go last day/week of school. Use something catchy like “Baby Shark” song (BERN)

Stamp on hand - when you wash your hands tonight, tell Mom . .

Use costume (horse, for example) that is drapery and can accommodate two kids. Pull them out of class while colleague talks to class. Give the kids instructions, then bring back on and ask them questions that require the “horse” to stamp its feet for answers. (UHLS)

Bingo & trivia games with each group (COB)

Add jokes, use Garrison Keillor’s library chant (SCP)

Parodies also funny and popular. Usually a song triggers COLN’s skit idea (as they use the song in the skit)

Pinterest board – show what programs are going to be (ALTM)

Hold last PTO meeting in public library so that you can get to parents

What if you absolutely can't get in?

- **Information sent out:** Negotiate for them to send out information and also for school librarian to promote it. Consider writing brief points to highlight for the school librarian when/if he talks about it with the kids.
- **Stickers on report cards**
- **DVD or podcast for school to air**
- **Volunteer at refreshment stand at Field Day** and talk to parents and teachers there (MEND)
- **Set the intention for next year with the principal** that you're going to work together to get in to talk to the kids and get them reading over the summer