

## **Putting Library Cards in the Hands of Young People**

A library card is one of the most important school supplies a child needs to be successful in school. The Santa Cruz Public Libraries (SCPL) work collaboratively with families and schools to put cards in students' hands and to provide opportunities for students to explore the services the card offers them. Library card applications are signed by parents and SCPL makes every effort to inform families of the advantages and responsibilities of having a library card.

In the fall of 2009, SCPL removed the age requirement for receiving a library card. A child of any age is now eligible for a card...using the Library is truly a family activity.

### ***READ TO ME: Early Literacy***

Language learning begins in infancy. Under the program name, [\*READ TO ME\*](#), SCPL provides services to families with young children. [\*READ TO ME\*](#) encourages families to begin the library habit early by inviting parents to bring their very young children to the Library to participate in [\*Together @ the Library\*](#), our parent education service. Parents learn how the Library can support them as they raise their children, and children learn that the Library is fun. [\*READ TO ME\*](#) provides over 250 subject-themed kits of children's books which can be checked out by anyone with a library card.

SCPL also participates in First Five Santa Cruz County's *Raising a Reader* program. *Raising a Reader* is administered by the Pajaro Valley Unified School District and enrolls families for several months, teaching them about language development and the importance of books. A visit to the Library is included and preschoolers receive library cards and a blue or purple library bag so that they can return to the Library and check out more books. The Aptos, Branciforte, Central, Garfield Park, La Selva Beach, and Live Oak branches have hosted *Raising a Reader* families and look forward to many more visits. *Raising a Reader* partners include Walnut Avenue Women's Center and the Live Oak Child Development Program.

### **Kindergarten and First Grade**

Class visits of kindergarteners and first graders to the Library are common in many school systems. Teachers pick up card applications from branch libraries and distribute them to parents well in advance of the visit. Applications are returned to the Library with sufficient time to process so that library cards are ready for the children when they arrive at the Library. Central Branch staff hosts BayView, Westlake, and Holy Cross schools, for instance, while Branciforte hosts Gault. All of Del Mar Elementary School's kindergarteners visit Live Oak and Green Acres schedules visits for first graders. Soquel Elementary and Mountain School kindergarteners have always visited Capitola Branch, but this is more difficult since the change in hours.

Soquel High's reading teacher partners high school students with kindergarteners and both age groups need library cards to participate.

### **Elementary School**

Class visits remain common from schools that are close to a branch library. Santa Cruz Children's School is a frequent visitor to Branciforte and nearly every child has a library card. On a recent visit to Holy Cross school, library staff found that every student had a library card as Holy Cross students can easily visit the Central Branch. Individual classes from Rio del Mar, Aptos Academy, and Mar Vista visit Aptos.

Many teachers in schools where class visits are very difficult to arrange assign students to get a library card as a requirement for class. Families at these schools come into the Library on their own to apply for cards.

Some schools assist the process by collecting applications from students in batches, sending these to the library for processing, and then distributing the cards as they are returned to the school. St. Lawrence Academy in Felton and San Lorenzo Valley Schools have opted for this process. Library staff attempts to visit these schools to explain the value of the library card but this is less and less possible with reduced library staffing.

At the beginning of the school year, the Valley Women's Club gives every Boulder Creek Elementary School student a school bag with a library card application in it. Families return the applications directly to the Library to receive the library card. Sometimes library staff have been able to visit the school during the year to reinforce library card use.

**Middle School**

When the Library works with classes in middle school we focus on library cards, PIN numbers, and database instruction. Star of the Sea Academy (ages 12-15) visits Branciforte often and nearly every student has a library card. Sheri Kilkenney of Mission Hill Middle School requires all of her students to have a library card and a pin number and every spring the Central Branch hosts 6-9 science classes of 8<sup>th</sup> graders for instruction on the use of databases. Andrea Roth at Pacific Collegiate School requires her 7<sup>th</sup> grade students to have library cards. We have had success at schools where a library card is required and follow-up is done in database instruction. There are many middle schools, however, where Library contact is only made with individual families.

**High School**

SCPL has a very successful library card program at Harbor High School with librarian, Nancy Litvack. Four years ago, over a period of 4-5 weeks, teams of public library staff took laptops to the school library and systematically connected with every student in the school to either issue library cards or update existing ones. Nancy followed up the sessions with database instruction in the school's computer lab. Every year since then a team of library staff visits Harbor every fall to give cards to 9<sup>th</sup> graders and transfer students and Nancy continues database instruction follow-up. While library teams also visited Soquel High School four years ago, similar follow-up has not occurred there.

The Central Branch has a training program established with Santa Cruz High School working with the Health/Tech Core classes required of all freshmen. The classes visit the branch, and library cards, PIN numbers, and database instruction are required of the students and provided by Central youth services staff. Each year 4-5 classes visit in September and March.

Star of the Sea Community School (ages 13-18) visits Branciforte Branch and all of those students have library cards. Costanoa High School (a collection of alternative schools and a district-supported homeschool based in the old Branciforte Elementary School) also visits Branciforte Branch to receive library cards and do research.

SCPL is currently partnering with the elementary schools of Santa Cruz City Schools to put library cards in the hands of all students. Working through the school librarians, applications are being collected in class batches and are forwarded to SCPL. These applications are being processed and cards are being returned to the schools now. We have found that the majority of students already have cards, but this project has registered approximately 60 more children attending city elementary schools. In an agreement with Mary Anne James, Director of Curriculum & Assessment of Santa Cruz City Schools, SCPL will participate in a focused library card initiative for kindergarteners and 6<sup>th</sup> graders in 2010/2011.

In November, Michelle Galipeaux of Valencia Elementary School contacted the Aptos Branch to ask about registering all students at the school for library cards because budget cuts may force the closing of the school library. SCPL immediately agreed and that initiative is underway. Applications are being collected now and we anticipate issuing the cards sometime in January. A school-wide assembly will be held to underscore the importance of library cards and SCPL staff will attend that assembly.

### **Summary**

The Santa Cruz Public Libraries uses many strategies to issue library cards to young people. The most successful strategies evolve from partnerships with schools to either host teams of public library staff at the school or to arrange visits to the local library branch. Bibliographic and database instruction are essential to long-term library card use.

While these strategies are effective, they are staff intensive. SCPL staff sometimes works with school staff to provide necessary instruction, but SCPL staff must process the applications. A trained staffer can process approximately 10 applications an hour. Local branch staff often handles the requests from their local schools, although library team visits to schools and large batches of applications always involve Outreach staff. Confidentiality issues prevent volunteers from processing applications, but volunteers can help with tasks such as sends lists and route-ins to free staff to work on applications.

There are over 56 public schools in Santa Cruz County, over 48 private schools, and numerous homeschools. Although we have not yet partnered with each of these, our summer reading sign-ups tell us that we have reached families in over 100 schools.

SCPL staff responds to all school requests for library card assistance and the number of these requests is growing and keeps us busy the whole school year.

We worry about reaching critical mass, but we know that the collaboration of families, schools, library staff, and the community is the key to opening library doors to young people.

Janis O'Driscoll  
Programs and Partnerships  
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