2018 LGFCU Excellence in Innovation Award Project Evaluation

Project ID	IGC-4
Title of Program	HCPL Student Access
Program Category	
Submission Date	6/1/2018 5:06:17 PM
County	Henderson
Employee	Trina Rushing
Employee title	Director
Email	trushing@hendersoncountync.org
County Department	Library
Phone	828-697-4725 x 2334
Address	301 N. Washington Street Hendersonville, NC 28739
County Manager	Steve Wyatt
Supervisor	Amy Brantley
Implementation Date	1-Oct-17
FLSA Designation	Both (if applicable to a team)
Project Team Members	Trina Rushing, Director, Henderson County Public Library Marcie Dowling, Marketing & Digital Strategy Librarian, Henderson County Public Library Rick Fender, Chief Technology Officer, Henderson County Public Schools

Description of Productivity Improvement

The collaboration between Henderson County Public Library and Henderson County Public Schools to automatically provide every public school student with a county library card has resulted in increased access to educational material, cost savings for both systems, and added curriculum flexibility for county teachers and their students. The implementation of the Student Access initiative in Henderson County created 15,507 electronic public library cards for county public school students. Rather than making sure students keep track of a physical card, they simply provide their student ID number to county library staff to access databases and check out material.

Prior to the launch of this initiative, library staff worked with teachers on an individual basis to obtain required parental permission forms for students to receive cards while visiting the library with their class. During the visit, library staff would collect the forms and work on making and distributing the physical cards to each student. This was a very time-intensive process, with each card taking 3-5 minutes to create. Given that each classroom contains 20-30 students, this would require a minimum of 2 staff members to give this process their full attention for the hour during which the students were visiting. This was a flawed process in that any student who, for whatever reason, did not turn in their permission form would not receive a library card.

All public school students now have unfettered access to the county library's collection of 267,576 books and audiobooks. In addition to physical material offered from six county library locations, students and teachers can also access the 96 online databases offered through the county library system. Each of these databases can have annual subscription costs in the thousands of dollars, and being able to access them through the library allows schools to spend their budgets on other resources.

Since starting the Student Access program in October of 2017, the library has seen a significant increase in the usage of children's titles, with the highest increases in the digital audiobook and e-book collections. The Student Access program grants school children access to 268,243 eBooks and digital audiobooks, many of which are simultaneous use titles. This feature allows several students to read and discuss the same book within the classroom setting, and vastly expands the variety of titles available to teachers for literacy instruction.

Description of why this project was initiated

Previous to the launch of the Student Access program, children within the county had segregated access to material. Schools provided material through their school media center, but teachers wishing to utilize the materials of the Henderson County Public Library had few options since it could not be assumed that all children had county library cards. To receive a Henderson County library card, parents had to be present with their child and provide appropriate verification of their residency within the county. This presented a barrier to many parents who found it difficult to get to the library due to work schedules and/or transportation issues. Additionally, parents often hesitated in registering their children for cards due to concerns over cost of overdue fines that could accrue on their accounts. This left inequalities throughout our county with many children unable to use the material that they were entitled to access as citizens of Henderson County. By providing all students instant library access, these children are given an equal chance at the educational success that comes with improved literacy.

Through Student Access, students enrolled in any Henderson County Public School are automatically issued a digital library card tied to their school ID number. The information taken at school registration is loaded into the library's system so that there is no need for families to register separately at the library. By ensuring that all students have access to Henderson County Public Library resources, teachers are able to include the use of library material (books, audiobooks, digital material, and databases) in their curriculum. Student Access cards also do not accrue overdue fines. As long as students eventually return their material, they will never be charged for returning items late. This feature puts parent's minds at ease and encourages unfettered use of the library. The county school and library system not only gain strength from sharing resources, they now have a stronger sense of partnership and collaboration.

Quantifiable results (sustainability, cost savings, cost avoidance and/or a higher level of service). Indication of what resources were used and what was done with any accrued time savings

By bringing the strengths of the Henderson County Public Library's collection to the students and teachers of Henderson County Public Schools, both organizations are better able to serve the Henderson County community through access and improved return on investment. Digital cards for students and teachers were created en masse through the importing of school registration records into the library's integrated library system. There was no cost involved in the import and no cost for physical library cards. If the library were to make individual cards for each student, it would require 77,535 staff hours and $4,497 in library cards. Student and teacher lists are updated into the library system quarterly at no cost and unless one of the departments decides to end the partnership, which is highly unlikely, as the library system is very supportive of this project.

The library has seen a greater return on investment through increased usage of their materials. The cost of individual database subscriptions and digital collections remains the same regardless of the amount of times they are accessed. The combined cost of these subscriptions and collections totals $70,000 annually. By extending access to county students and teachers, the library's resources are better utilized, the school curriculum is enriched, and the schools expand their accessibility as teachers are able to use the digital copies at no additional cost.

The library resource used to see the greatest increase in usage following Student Access initiation, is NC Kids Digital Library, a digital collection of K-4th grade reading level eBooks and audiobooks funded in large part by the North Carolina General Assembly and free to all residents of North Carolina. Prior to the addition of Student Access cards, these early literacy titles were checked out, on average, 178 times per month. After only six months of Student Access inclusion, the usage jumped to an average of 749 monthly checkouts, an increase of 320% at no additional cost. While this number mixes resident and student cards, it is clear that the introduction of Student Access impacted the increase. Since the initiation of the NC Kids Digital Library collection in October 2017, Henderson County Library cardholders have checked out 5,838 items.

Other descriptive information

Henderson County Public Library and Henderson County Public Schools share a commitment to providing education and encouraging literacy for all members of the Henderson County community. The partnership fostered through the Student Access program was a natural collaboration that combines the collective strengths of both departments. The partnership has fostered library and school communication beyond the Student Access program. Library staff have participated in meetings with school media specialists, staffed information tables at parent events, and promoted library programming such as the summer learning program. School classes have also taken the time to visit the library to learn about all the things they can do with their new electronic cards. During these visits children bound around the rows of books and audiobooks, excited to check out anything they're interested in and with guaranteed access, teachers and librarians no longer need to worry about who has a card and who does not.

Lisa Donaldson, Youth Services Coordinator for Henderson County Public Library, notes that before Student Access, many children visited the library without having a library card. "Now, instead of turning them away empty handed," she said, "we are able to encourage them to continue reading at home, whether it is for fun or to help complete a homework assignment." Lisa adds that "the Student Access program has made the library, especially the children's areas, a more inclusive environment that can better serve our county's students, particularly those who might otherwise be left behind."

By increasing access to county library materials, county schools expand the opportunities children and teachers have to explore their interests. Teachers can create more expansive curriculums now that access to county library material is guaranteed to all public school students. With the proven success of the Student Access program, Henderson County Public Library administration is actively pursuing the inclusion of private school students for the 2018-19 school year. By integrating students into the county library system at a young age, the partnership is creating lifelong library users, supporting literacy in the community, and encouraging the young to live enriched lives.