



## *Best Practices Case Study*

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Editor's note: The Confidence in Kansas Public Education Task Force sponsors the Friends of Education Awards. To recognize exemplary partner development, Kansas Partners in Education sponsors the Partner Activity award category. Each nominee is a business, company, or agency that has provided an on-going partner activity over an extended period of time (minimum of three years), by means of volunteer time, services, finances or other types of support, in amount that exceeds typical collaboration from a private or public institution. This case study provides information about a 2008 Partner Activity nominee and is an educational service to KSPE members, their organizations, and prospective partners.

## Newton Public Library: Heartbeat of Newton

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The Newton Public Library is a virtual hub of positive, creative energy within the community. Children from pre-school through high school join adults from the area in active participation of group activities, events, programs, and resources. Once a quiet resource in the heart of Newton, the public library is recognized by all as vibrant, up-to-date, and inviting. Teachers in the Newton Public Schools work in on-going partnership with staff from the library to provide enriched services for children and families.

A sampling of ways the NPL works on behalf of Newton's schools and community:

Resources to pre-school children and teachers

- Storytime – Fourteen classes held weekly during the school year, serving USD 373 early education program, St. Mary's preschool, and Head Start. (Story time for older children is added during the summer months)
- Toddler Time, for children 6 months – two years, emphasizes reading, puppet shows, music, gross motor skills, and parent interaction
  - A total of 11,064 children were served in 2007

#### Resources for school aged children

- Reading is FUNdamental Program for children through age twelve years provides free books for participants three times during the year. The Florence Bessemer Foundation and the federal Reading is FUNdamental program fund this initiative.
  - 989 books were shared with over 300 children in 2007
- Summer Reading Program encourages children of all ages and their families to achieve their reading goals by staying active as readers during the summer months. Children are expected to read or have read to them at least 20 books or twelve reading hours per goal, and are encouraged to achieve up to three goals.
  - In 2007, 655 children from USD 373 participated in the Summer Reading Program and were joined by 117 from private and/or out of district schools and 512 area preschoolers. Over 1,200 children attended summer fun activities sponsored jointly by the Newton Public Library, USD373 Latchkey, and the Newton Recreation Center.
  - Additionally, special programs are offered to school-aged children during spring break and Christmas break. 340 children were served in 2007.

#### Resources for teens and at-risk youth

- Older children and teens are not overlooked by the Newton Public Library. A young adult summer reading program is enormously popular. Teens and pre-teens are engaged in book discussions, babysitting and CPR clinics, genealogy studies, mystery parties, crafts, and movies. What a joy to see teenagers scheduling their summers around activities at the public library. In collaboration with the Newton High School media specialist, a Teen Advisory Council was initiated in fall 2007. School district media specialists at all grade levels work closely with staff at the public library to insure the most effective use of time and resources.
- Since 2001, the NPL has worked closely with USD 373 Cooper Alternative Learning Center to provide programs for students struggling to complete their high school education. Many of these students are single teen parents; others have left school for other reasons. Funded by a joint grant application to the National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Library Association, the schools and the library have formed an ongoing program that brings humanities scholars, storytellers, and reading activities geared to children and families struggling with low literacy skill, many of whom live in poverty or have limited English proficiency. Newton school district elementary teachers are instrumental in recruiting and supporting participants for the Prime Time Family Reading.

- Librarians from the Newton Public Schools, Bethel College, and the Newton Public Library, under the leadership of Marianne Eichelberger, NPL, organized a planning group to celebrate the profound works of Kansas's own Gordon Parks. A community-wide reading/discussion of *The Learning Tree* was held at Newton High School, and a Kansas Poetry Night held at a local bookshop featured students and teachers reading the work of Gordon Parks. The movie "The Learning Tree" was shown one evening for anyone in the community, and the audience enjoyed a presentation by Jason Kinchion, a young African-American filmmaker and photographer from Wichita who spoke about his friendship with Gordon Parks and the influence of Parks on his work.

Over the years, the Newton Public Library has extended itself in rich cooperation with the Newton Public Schools to support and enrich the efforts of students and teachers in the classroom. 'Homework Kansas' provides free online tutoring for grades 4 – 12 via the library's webpage. A community-wide celebration of the NPL's 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary brought NHS graduate and national children's book illustrator, Brad Sneed, back to Newton to share his experiences in the publishing world with over 600 students and teachers from USD 373 and St. Mary's Catholic School. Ms. Eichelberger, NPL librarian, arranged for video conferencing at NPL so that the community could watch the high school RoboticsFirst team compete at the US regional robotics competition. The Newton Public Library simply goes the extra mile on behalf of students and the community!

As a community resource, the library opens its doors as a training site center for meetings and training events. The NPL staff has been actively involved in the community's 'Bridges Out of Poverty' training and the Getting Ahead task force. In Newton, Kansas, the public library is the heartbeat of the community.

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