Reopening School Libraries Safely

The academic success of students corresponds with access to an effective school library program, led by a certified librarian. Schools can safely manage school libraries and school library materials circulation during the pandemic. Indiana Library Federation recognizes that library space, staffing capacity, and local situations may vary.

Safe Materials Handling
According to existing and emerging research, time serves as an effective disinfectant for the coronavirus on library materials. During this pandemic, libraries around the world have developed safe collection handling practices, including quarantine periods and/or sanitation with cleaning supplies for various library materials before they return to circulation. Based on scientific research and library best practices, K-12 schools should continue to circulate books throughout the 2020-2021 school year.

Children NEED Access to Books
Research agrees to the importance of reading and literacy. While online reading has increased, research shows that physical books are still preferred over electronic reading. Many students have no access to books, internet, or technology at home. Students physically require non-screen time and memory functions better from physical print. K-12 school libraries maintain 15,000 books in the library collection, while districts average about 58,000 books. K-12 schools should prioritize continued purchase and circulation of physical books.

Students NEED Library Time
Whether your school offers a “Library Special” or “Flexible Library Visits” throughout the day, students benefit from the ability to browse, explore, and the freedom and privacy to choose books of interest to them. Stories provide mirrors to see themselves and windows and doors into the world and other people’s lives. Access to diverse narratives builds empathy, social, and emotional skills. The school librarian helps grow students’ minds, provides additional personal connection, and often provides a support for at-risk, high-ability, English-language learners, and students who have not yet found their niche in school. As schools plan for extended period in the same classroom, children need the movement of walking to the library. K-12 should schools prioritize library time for each student during each week.
Schools NEED qualified school librarians AND paraprofessional staff assistants

The eLearning experience from March to June illustrated how teachers, students, and their caregivers all rely on the school librarian to curate digital resources, to assist faculty with online instruction modules, to promote and select reading, and to help students with their courses and technology. Library paraprofessional assistants are needed to help ensure safe collection handling, to staff library specials, and to provide additional tech support across faculty, students, and parents. **We recommend schools prioritize qualified school librarians and paraprofessional staff, as they are required to support the school’s literacy, wellness, digital, and outreach goals.**

How School Libraries served during stay-at-home order

School librarians statewide met weekly to share best practices to serve students and faculty during the school closures. Librarians:

* Led professional development with fellow faculty, creating tutorials and supporting transition to virtual instruction.
* Supported students and teachers with online instruction, learning, technology support, and reader’s advisory.
* Assisted in providing technology to students without technology or internet at home.
* Created tutorials on using technology and digital resources.
* Assisted students and faculty with transition to remote learning.
* Collaborated with public, academic, and special libraries.
* Hosted virtual author visits, maker labs, and programs.
* Checked in with students on academic, technology, social, and emotional needs.
* Curated online apps and vetted offers of “free software”
* Convened book clubs, open office hours.

Indiana Library Federation believes that libraries, with all of their modern amenities and innovations, are a smart investment, with the potential to transform communities and create a passion for lifelong learning.

Indiana’s K-12 schools by the numbers*

**1,135,194** students enrolled in 2019-2020
Income eligibility: **40%** free lunch  **7%** reduced-price
Ethnicity: **67%** White  **13%** Hispanic  **12%** Black  **5%** Multi-racial  **3%** Asian
**1:1** device adoption: **83%** districts

*IDOE Reports: [https://www.doe.in.gov/doe/idoe-data](https://www.doe.in.gov/doe/idoe-data)
Sources on Safe Library Materials Handling
A collaborative project between IMLS, OCLC and Battelle is researching virus interaction with various types of materials that circulate in libraries. Researchers are testing how long the virus is detectable in optimum conditions on various items circulated in a library (i.e. hardback book, softback book, DVD case, different types of paper, open or stacked configurations). Review the literature review and updates from the Reopening Archives, Libraries, and Museums (REALM) Project at https://www.oclc.org/research/news/2020/project-realm-updates.html.


Sources on Needing Physical Books


School Library Survey by Indiana Library Federation, June 2020, which showed school library collections ranged from 6,800 to 23,000 books and district-wide collections ranged from 15,000 to 478,535 books. Many schools offer curbside library book lending through spring and summer.

Sources on Library Time – either fixed schedule or flexible


Sources on School Librarians and Paraprofessionals