

FEATURE

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anchoring Out

A stylized illustration featuring a cluster of red, serrated leaves in the center. Surrounding the leaves are several blue paper airplanes, some in flight and others resting. The background is a solid light yellow.

Promoting Reading and
Providing Access When
the Library Is Closed

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Building lifelong readers is a core tenet of our mission as school librarians; it is practically encoded in our collective DNA. "Reading is the core of personal and academic competency" is even one of the stated Common Beliefs of our profession (AASL 2018, 13). We aim to develop and maintain a vibrant reading culture in our schools by promoting quality reading materials for our users and ensuring equitable access to those materials. "A love of reading is just as essential to the future development of students as showing them how to research and manage information" (Ercegovic 2012, 36). In an ideal world, nothing would stop our students and staff from accessing all our collection at any time, and we would be unlimited in our resources of time, space, and budget to support our readers.

However, the hard truth is that sometimes our school library spaces are closed to users, with or without our consent, and are inaccessible. During the school year, many school libraries are closed for standardized testing, school-wide activities, or any number of other events that prevent students and staff from using the library space as they normally would. As of this writing, we are experiencing a global pandemic with COVID-19 and for many of us, our school buildings are off limits. However, there are other times when schools are closed, including natural disasters, weather events, school vacations, summer break, and more. Regardless of the reason or how much of your school library or

your school is inaccessible, there are creative ways to support reading in your school community. Your role as a supporter of readers and champion of quality books for independent choice reading continues to be crucial, regardless of the temporary inaccessibility of your space.

Even though it might take some creative thinking on our parts, "the school library has the ability to provide continuous access to resources" and can ensure that the love of reading and access to materials continues (AASL 2018, 56–57). Here are a few ways to get you started as you consider how to support readers and build excitement around reading without the benefit of your school library space.

Thinking Outside Your Space at School

A closed school library space does not have to lead to the elimination of library services to users. According to AASL, "the school library is not confined to the physical library space" and can reach farther than your library's four walls (2018, 56–57). If your school library is inaccessible, think about how you can reach into other spaces to continue to promote reading to your students and staff. The cafeteria is often an excellent place to have a "pop-up" library, since it is a location that most students visit daily, regardless of testing or other activities. Set up a table with a computer capable of accessing your circulation system, and bring along a cart of high-interest books for your students. They

may not be able to access your entire print collection at that moment, but you can bring a piece of the library to them. You can also use this opportunity for students to return books, since you will be in a high-traffic area where returning materials might be easier. If the cafeteria isn't an option, consider using a lecture hall, the lobby before and/or after school, or other popular areas; the important thing is that students are still able to access high-quality reading materials and continue to see you at the forefront of reading promotion.

Students may also have specific titles that they would like to check out but are unable to access. Consider setting up a system for them to request specific titles from your collection that you can have available for them at the next pop-up library day. You can expand this into a wider initiative, where any student can request a book via an online form and have the book delivered to them at a determined time or class, such as during their English class or their first period. If your building is closed but you can access the library shelves, consider arranging a curbside pick-up and drop-off system for requested titles. Although it takes some logistical planning on your part, this concierge-style service can help ensure that users maintain access to the collection.

Brainstorm ideas for how you will continue to promote titles and reading without the displays and activities in your school library space. If you don't already, you may want to highlight specific books on your school's morning announcements, news show, and/or newsletter while access to your space is limited or nonexistent. Placing book advertisements with cover images and descriptions in the hallways, social

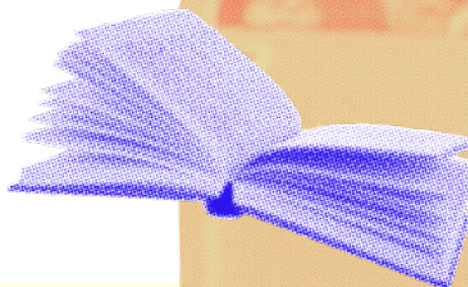
media, or your school library's website can also be effective to continue book-promotion efforts. These ads can have links or QR codes to book trailers, your catalog, or other supporting resources. Students can assist in the creation and posting of these ads. In addition, do not discount the value of standing in the hallways during high-traffic times, holding a book for all to see; sometimes, all a student needs is an engaging book cover highlighted by a school librarian with a friendly smile.

Collaborating with Educators in their Classrooms

When the library space is closed, consider reaching out to educators to collaborate on lessons or activities, just like you would in the library space, but go to their classroom instead. Some schools use end-of-year testing to host a mystery reader program during English classes. Mystery readers may include the school librarian, principal, parents, or other staff members. Teachers may offer clues in the days leading up to the event, challenging students to guess who will be visiting their classroom for a read-aloud activity. Mystery readers can coordinate with the teacher for a specific genre or type of reading, such as a picture book, short story, or the next chapter of the class's read-aloud novel. Activities like mystery reader excite students and engage them in reading in a different setting.

Another way to collaborate with teachers to promote reading is by taking the library to them. Throughout the day or time period your space is closed, you may want to set up a schedule to visit classrooms to do book talks and offer students a variety of titles on a cart, similar to a pop-up library in the cafeteria. Bring your laptop and a scanner so

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students can check out books without leaving their classroom. Consider collaborating with teachers to offer books on a particular theme or a specific format. Also, reach out to teachers other than English (science, history, electives, etc.) and offer to book-talk fiction and nonfiction titles that relate to the topics they have been studying recently.

Get students reading by collaborating with teachers on reading-related activities that take only one or two class periods. Pull some high-interest graphic novels for partners to practice inferencing skills, study the use of dialogue, or elaborate with details about what is happening in various scenes. For additional content areas, consider choosing nonfiction titles related to a particular subject and collaborate with a teacher to design a lesson related to questioning techniques, writing fiction based on facts they learn, or sharing fun facts they find. Embed literacy skills by having students summarize or prioritize information they learn, identifying cause and effect, or using text-based evidence to support claims about their topic. To get the most impact, collaborate with the teacher to determine which skills to focus on, and choose books that best help students master that skill.

While these ideas are best suited for a face-to-face classroom, other options can also be done digitally. For example, school librarians can provide screencasts to make the most of graphic novels, analyze text features, or recognize elements of different genres. Remember that many of the services you provide to other educators to promote reading can extend to the digital classroom, as well.

Encouraging Reading through Programming

Programming is also an excellent way to promote reading and a school-wide reading culture, even when your space is off limits. Reading contests and activities that encourage students to read outside of school can be wonderful promotional efforts when your space cannot be used. Something like a reading bingo, where students read books that fit different categories, can help buoy excitement around reading throughout your school building, regardless of access to the physical library space. Once students submit their completed bingo boards (which could happen in non-library locations such as the main office, digitally, or their classrooms if needed), students' names might go into a raffle drawing for a prize of some kind. Even if your budget is not extensive, a small prize can help build up excitement around reading during the school library closure.


Additionally, consider how you might use book trailers and reviews to encourage students to read. There is a plethora of quality book trailers found on authors' and publishers' websites as well as YouTube. Promote selected book trailers on social media, in the hallways, in the cafeteria, or any location where students may gather and have access to their phones or other devices, helping to encourage them to continue reading. Similarly, you can also promote book reviews created by you or the staff, highlighting specific titles. These book reviews or book talks can be words on hallway posters, videos shared in English classes, or live talks given on the morning announcements, among many other options. You can even have students join in the creation of book reviews for other

students to view, using Flipgrid or other digital tools. Having student-created reviews and book talks can help incorporate some student ownership and voice into your reading promotion efforts (Chance and Lesesne 2012).

For schools that have feeder schools, such as elementary schools that feed into a middle school, reach out to the school librarians at your lower feeder schools toward the end of the school year to set up a visit to meet your future students. These visits can give you a way to connect to your future students while simultaneously promoting reading and your school library. While you're there, you may want to ask students about the books they like to read, highlight exciting components or activities in your library, and highlight titles for summer reading initiatives. You can then use the titles the students provide to inform your suggestions for read-alikes and your displays at the start of the next school year (Kordeliski 2017, 12). Imagine the feeling of walking into a new school and a new library and seeing not only a friendly librarian face that you recognize but also books that you like already featured! Whether or not you make an in-person visit, consider creating a digital message to send to feeder libraries introducing yourself that perhaps includes a mini-tour of your space. These are great ways to use the time that your library is closed to your advantage to start building your reading culture for the next year.

Suggesting Alternative Sources for Reading

In addition to promoting your book collection, consider other avenues to keep students reading. If your school library subscribes to magazines, you



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may make previous issues available in places like the cafeteria, nurse's office, or counselor's office. Another idea is to partner with the youth services librarian from your nearest public library branch. They can help promote new books, advertise upcoming activities at the public library, organize a library card sign-up event at your school, and more.


Consider reminding parents and staff that digital reading is reading, too! Whether or not there is access to your physical space, e-books, audiobooks, and other digital media can be excellent ways to keep students reading. When possible, dedicate a portion of your library budget to digital formats, since many students prefer reading digitally. Promote

various ways to access e-resources throughout the year, such as online subscriptions, the public library, and your school library collection. Advertise these electronic titles anywhere your students and staff may notice them, including social media, newsletters, and your school library website (Kordeliski 2017, 14). There are also several ways to share digital read-alouds with students, including screencasts, Flipgrid, and YouTube playlists. Always be sure to acquire publisher permission before creating or sharing digital read-alouds with your school community.

Removing Barriers to Continue Access (and Reading!)

Whether your collection is truly inaccessible or if you are temporarily displaced, students still need access to reading materials. As Sonja Beckham states, "being stewards of our school resources doesn't mean

books should remain on the shelf in pristine condition, but instead means resources should be placed in the hands of students to explore" (2011, 53). Bringing parts of your collection to them in the hallway, cafeteria, classrooms, and online still provides students with accessibility to your collection. Work with teachers and other staff in your building to promote reading through lessons and activities like mystery readers, book talks, and infographics. Examine your digital collection as well as your public library to offer reading in other formats. By implementing one or more of these ideas in your school, you are demonstrating to students that the school library isn't just an extra part of their school experience; instead, the school library can meet students and staff everywhere they are and continue to promote the love of reading.

A decorative illustration featuring a branch with red leaves and several blue books. One book is open on the left, another is open in the center, and a third is closed on the right. The books are scattered among the leaves, which are in various shades of red and orange.

Consider **reminding** parents and staff that **digital** reading is **reading**, too! Whether or not there is access to your **physical** space, **e-books**, **audiobooks**, and other **digital media** can be excellent ways to **keep** students **reading**.



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Practice Distance Learning During School Closures with the AASL Standards Card Game

Engage with your professional networks exploring the *National School Library Standards* and implementation strategies while observing social distancing.

Download modified instructions for organizing virtual game play at standards.aasl.org/card-game



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