

# 2020 in the School Library

## The Power of Collaboration

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A global pandemic, an economic shutdown, and a swell of racial unrest have been referred to as a “triple trauma” for children. In the midst of these events, there was an unprecedented shuttering of public schools across the country that left many children isolated from their peers and teachers who provide consistency and stability.

In summer 2020 the Franklin Special School District in Franklin, Tennessee, was one of many districts across the nation that had to determine how the global health crisis would affect school reopening and develop a plan for the coming school year. As part of this planning Dinah Wade, librarian, and Joel Hoag, Ed.D., principal at Freedom Intermediate School, began collaborating on how the school library could best support students regardless of what the school year would look like. Andrew Carnegie’s quote, “Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results,” captures what made the 2020–2021 school year a success for the 520 students of this fifth- and sixth-grade school (“Andrew Carnegie Quotes and Sayings” n.d.).

### The School Library’s Role in Reopening

When summer arrived Hoag and Wade knew the school library would be vital to the school’s reopening plan. Hoag reviewed and outlined budget items

that wouldn’t be possible due to COVID-19 protocols and directed these funds to the school library, releasing an extra \$1,000 to help build a stronger resource library for virtual learning. The funds allowed Wade to compile an e-book collection for virtual learners.

**Freedom Intermediate School**  
**2020-2021 Snapshot**

*Freedom Intermediate School is located in Franklin, TN, about 20 miles south of Nashville. It is a part of the Franklin Special School District which serves Pre-K through 8th grade students in the Historic City of Franklin.*

**Enrollment**

<b>5th grade - appx 260</b>	<b>Virtual Program - 105</b>
<b>6th grade - appx 260</b>	<b>In-Person - 415</b>
<b>Hisp. = 20%</b>	<b>SWD = 15%</b>
<b>Asian = 10%</b>	<b>ELL = 6%</b>
<b>Black = 17%</b>	<b>ED = 39%</b>
<b>White = 49%</b>	

**Attendance:**

- A Virtual Program was created for families who did not want their child to attend school in-person. Students attended Zoom classes throughout the year following a typical school schedule.
- SWD and ELL students were invited to attend school in-person from day one.
- All other students began the school year with two weeks of remote learning. They logged into Zoom classes according to the regular school day schedule. Following this two week period, the school was open to in-person learning for the remainder of the year.
- Remote learning occurred when students were excluded from school due to contact with COVID-19. This learning was largely asynchronous, but could include live Zoom lessons.

As guidelines were released from multiple agencies, a comprehensive plan was developed for Freedom Intermediate and the library. Hoag consulted CDC guidelines, school district protocols, and other schools to ensure student safety could be maintained, while Wade researched the recommendations for libraries during COVID-19, such as recommendations regarding disinfecting books versus quarantining books (Bowie 2020).

After completing their research, Hoag and Wade met to discuss their findings and to create a plan for the upcoming school year. They met weekly to discuss any changes that needed to be made and fine-tune the workings of the school library. Hoag's open-door policy made it easy for Wade to present ideas for thought and feedback. "Having a principal who is willing to listen and tailor ideas to best meet the needs of our students is vital to our school and library," Wade said. "Dr. Hoag sees the library as an important resource to our school and works to ensure that I am involved with school decisions."

Hoag had three priorities for Freedom Intermediate's reopening success: virus mitigation, instructional integrity, and creating a culture of resilience. The entire school schedule was impacted by the need to implement new processes to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Many of these processes required a stark transition away from what school typically looked like for students, such as no more community supplies, no grouping of students during classes, and the district requirement of wearing masks at all times.

Knowing that our entire country was living in a time of acute uncertainty, it was critical to make the most of every second with students. There was a looming sense that school could be closed at any moment, so ensuring lessons focused on essential standards and students were being empowered to be successful remote learners were paramount.

As a Title I school, Freedom Intermediate serves an incredibly diverse population with an equally diverse range of life experiences. From students who depended on

### *The School Librarian's Technology Tasks during 2020–2021*

Wade assisted with these technology tasks during the 2020–2021 school year:

- Recorded screencast videos for students and parents on how to use Chromebooks, Google classroom, Kami, etc.
- Met with subject-level PLCs to help plan in-person and virtual instruction
- Co-led technology deployment and return

the district's mobile food delivery program throughout the closure and the summer, to students who spent the closure at their families' beach houses and happily signed up to learn from home through our virtual program in the new year, it was clear

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that all students would need support, perspective, and encouragement to stay focused on what they were capable of accomplishing.

Wade sees the school library as a hub of learning and strives to be a leader, instructional partner, information specialist, teacher, and program administrator as defined in the AASL *National School Library Standards*. These roles have been especially important during the COVID pandemic. “I work to support teachers by integrating the AASL *National School Library Standards* within their state standards,” said Wade. “I try to find ways to engage students with creating, thinking, growing, and sharing.”

As schools reopened at the beginning of the 2020–2021 school year, many of the circumstances for in-person learning changed. Students had assigned seating, were assigned restroom and locker time, ate lunch in the classroom, had temperature checks, wore masks, and were unable to participate in school-wide in-person activities. Since the school library is a large space, Wade and Hoag agreed that classes could still visit the library for class. Wade ensured that tables and the circulation counter were disinfected between each class and that books were cleaned and quarantined according to best practices before

reshelving (“Cleaning and Disinfecting BSB Books” 2020).

Hoag and Wade met to discuss how the school library could best be utilized during this learning transition. It was decided that Wade’s technology training would benefit the school as an added resource to help with technology integration and instruction. Wade spent time on phone calls with parents instructing them on the various digital programs, troubleshooting Chromebook issues, assisting teachers with technology, and creating screencast videos to be sent to parents, students, and teachers to assist them with the new technology. “[Wade] kept me informed of changes around the school,” noted Lisa Springman, the school secretary. “She helped with technology issues that arose due to virtual learning, and she was proactive in training teachers and parents with technology.”

Wade and Hoag also worked to make the school library experience as normal as possible while implementing the mitigation processes. With the uncertainty of the pandemic, students and teachers appreciated having a space that was welcoming and reminiscent of previous years. Hoag and Wade worked to ensure students and teachers were able to meet in the library for parent

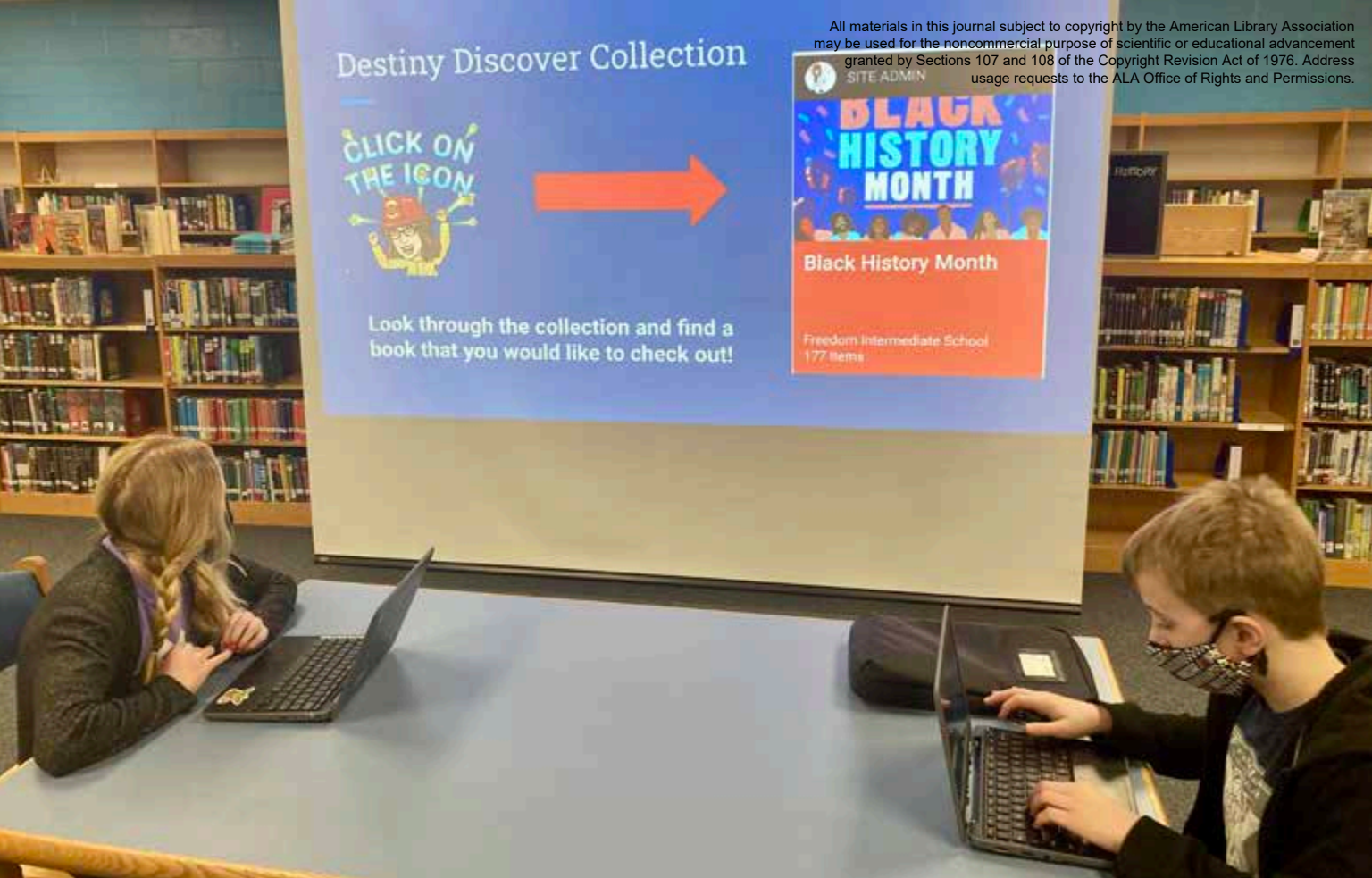
## *Resumption of Normal School Library Activities*

Normal activities in the school library included:

- Regular schedule of ELA classes for library lessons and checkout
- Open checkout throughout each day
- Reading incentive programs for in-person and virtual students
- Reading books from the list of nominated titles from the Volunteer State Book Award program and voting for the winner
- Student library workers

meetings, IEPs, district meetings, and other classes.

The school library also was used for other commonplace activities that could not occur in the regular classroom due to lack of space for social distancing. Because group work and science labs were difficult to complete with the mitigation processes in place, science teachers brought their students to the library



to complete several different labs in the expanded space. The students thrived during these lessons! “The space in the library allowed me to continually follow COVID safety protocols while providing high-quality lab instruction to meet science standards,” noted Dr. Casey Heard, a sixth-grade science teacher in the

school. “Labs would not have been possible without the large space in the library and cooperation of the [school librarian].”

While mitigation protocols prevented some activities from taking place, like collaborative makerspace time and utilizing the LEGO wall, the school library could

host more events with a variety of attendees, allowing it to continue to showcase learning.

At the end of the school year, a survey was sent to students to determine their perceptions of the use of the school library during the past school year. Of those surveyed, 87 percent said they felt safe in the library,

while the remaining 13 percent stated “maybe.” When asked how COVID-19 affected the school library, an overwhelming number of students noted that, “it didn’t really change it,” with some saying that it was as fun as ever. Students did recognize the precautions of cleaning books, wearing masks, and social distancing as they utilized library resources. When asked about their favorite activities, most students indicated the science labs. Analyzing these results validated the collaborative plans put in place to make the year a success.

### Addressing Racial Unrest and the Economic Fallout

Not only were students suffering due to the pandemic, they also were affected by the racial unrest in our country. Wade has worked to ensure that the library collection reflects all cultures. Some specific purchases made include the “Rick Riordan Presents” collection, which details the history and mythology of several cultures. Wade also added books with strong lead characters that represent the diversity of the Freedom Intermediate student body. Book displays throughout the school year featured characters who faced adversity, Black History Month selections, and African-American authors, such as Jason Reynolds, Duchess Harris, and Kwame Alexander. In addition, Wade collaborated with the social-emotional learning (SEL) committee to curate lessons for the school’s daily SEL time.

In order to help ease any financial strains on school families, Wade decided to eliminate overdue book fines and did not charge families for lost or damaged books during the pandemic. Federal grants allowed the school district to provide free breakfast and lunch during the summer and school year. Also, fuel

bags (which provide students with extra food at home over the weekend) continued to be provided to students in need every Friday.

School libraries have been instrumental in the navigation of the triple-trauma crisis of 2020–21. COVID-19, national racial strife, and an economic crisis have had a huge impact on many families in the United States. Joel Hoag and Dinah Wade worked together to ensure their students had the mental, physical, and educational resources needed to be successful in the wake of these unprecedented times.

While the triple trauma has impacted all schools, Freedom Intermediate students continue to learn and grow



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Level 1 and 2 Certified Educator, Google Certified Trainer, Raspberry Pi Certified Educator, BrainPop Certified Educator, and Code.org Facilitator. She was awarded the 2019 District Teacher of the Year in Franklin and 5–8 Mid Core Cumberland Region Teacher of the Year for Tennessee. She is a member of AASL.

with the support of the school library. The library is vital to the nurturing and growth of students. A strong partnership between the principal and school librarian ensured that students were supported with their need for normalcy, assurance, and growth. Hoag stated, “It’s empowering to know I have a leader in the library who I can rely on to add value in every scenario. Wade’s expertise, knowledge of resources, and ability to research have had outsized positive impacts on every student and family this school year.”

This school year has truly been a crucible experience that demanded more from every educator in the country, and the collaboration and partnerships that have resulted will continue to help students understand that they have a village to support them. In the words of Helen Keller, “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much” (Lash 1997).

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