

# 3 for Me Card Removes Barriers

It takes just one spark to light a fire of collaboration within a community. We quickly found this to be true in our small suburban neighborhood of Rocky River, Ohio. The Rocky River Public Library serves a community of just over 20,000 residents and is located next to the public middle school that has an enrollment of nearly 700 sixth- through eighth-grade students.

Despite our close proximity, our interactions with the school were fairly limited until a sixth-grade teacher asked us to visit his classroom to teach his students how to evaluate websites. This one encounter set off a flurry of unique collaborative programming and led to the strengthening of a mutually beneficial relationship between our two institutions. Once we had our foot in the door, we met and quickly bonded with the new middle school librarians over a shared passion for youth services.

The four of us were determined to encourage our students to read and we realized that in addition to sharing our enthusiasm for books, we needed to remove barriers and create greater access to materials. We set to work doing just that. We arranged to have classes tour the library, we advocated for a special “3 for Me” library card, hosted several book tastings, and created a specialized building loan program within the school district. From this one small spark, a fire of collaboration and empowerment took off between our public library and our local school district.

In our first meeting with the new school librarians, it was obvious that we all shared an enthusiasm for motivating youth to read. We also discovered we had been working on similar programs within our separate buildings to showcase our collections and share our favorite books with students. We were all interested in hosting book tastings and we began brainstorming ways we could support each other. A struggle for the school library was not having enough current materials. At the public library, we have always looked for ways to increase program attendance, circulation, and community engagement. We agreed that combining forces was the ideal way to address all our needs, and a joint book tasting was the perfect way to start collaborating.

For our first joint book tasting program, we hauled two carts full of public library books and a laptop for placing holds over to the middle school. As students discovered new books, we placed them on hold, replaced the claimed book with a new title, and instructed students to come to the public library after school to check out their books. Students enthusiastically placed holds on hundreds of books. This success created a lot of chaos and extra work for public library staff and required us to enlist the help of multiple staff members to fulfill each request in time. Although it was exciting to see so many students come into the library after school to pick up books, this program was too labor intensive to continue in this manner. The reader engagement and circulation of new and popular titles told us we were on the right track, but we needed to move future book tastings to the public library to ease our workload.

Once word got out that the library was open for school field trips and collaborative programming, classroom teachers reached out to us for more book tastings and events. The first book tasting scheduled in our building was designed to introduce the seventh-grade language arts students to their 40-Book Challenge reading assignment. This program requires students to read forty books across a variety of genres over the course of the school year. We set up our book tasting tables to align with the assigned genres. This was a great way for students to find books in genres that were outside of

their comfort zone. A challenge to this setup was that many students did not bring their library cards with them. Instead of spending our time talking about books, we were looking up library card numbers. In many cases, we found that students either did not have a library card at all, or their library card was blocked. From this problem came an exciting solution: a new type of library card.

This new card, called “3 for Me,” took a lot of work within our library to get started, but it was met with enthusiasm by staff, administration, and our board. It was also celebrated and promoted by the school district. This new card was for students who did not have a parent able to come into the library with them to apply for a traditional library card or who had cards that were blocked due to fines. Any student under the age of eighteen could apply for this card by themselves. This card allows them to borrow up to three print items at a time. There are no fees or fines associated with the card. This card removed a significant barrier for tweens and teens to accessing library materials and has helped to increase circulation as well.

With each new visit and success, we found ways to adapt the programs we were offering to further promote circulation and to meet the school’s curriculum needs. We experimented with a variety of bookmarks to help promote materials, since we couldn’t book talk all the titles. Bookmark topics included “Ms. Heather and Ms. Megan Recommended 40 Book Challenge Titles,” “Post-it Note Reviews,” as well as bookmarks that simply said, “Highly Recommended.” Based upon teacher and student input, we played book trailers on a big screen and modified the traditional large book tasting into quick rounds of “speed dating with a book.” Book speed dating is like a book tasting, except students all sit at one table and have a minute or less to decide if they want to keep a book or pass it on to the next person. During one tasting, we simply provided a quiet, comfortable space to read silently and the opportunity for students to browse the library’s collections. This spirit of innovation and response to student interests strengthened our relationship with the school and our readers and brought even further interest between the two buildings on how we could create new, mutually beneficial programs.

Once our book tastings were in full swing and we had worked out most of the kinks, we started looking for new ways to partner with our schools. We found inspiration for our next project on our own shelves. At the public library, we had displays full of new books and new items coming in almost daily. We are fortunate to have a generous materials budget, but we also have limited space and a patron base that rarely takes advantage of our holds system. If tweens and teens do not come in to the library, they don’t see all of the new books. The middle school library had the opposite problem. They have plenty of space and a building full of readers, but a limited budget and a lengthy purchasing process that limits their ability to have hot new titles on the shelves. We wondered if it was possible to circulate public library books from the middle school library.

We pitched our building loan idea to our managers. The main concerns were who would be responsible for lost or damaged items and the differences in the libraries’ collection development policies. To address these concerns, the public library agreed to waive all fines and fees and adhere to the school district’s collection development policy. We established a building loan card with extended circulation periods and no fines. Our first



HEATHER TUCK-MACALLA PROVIDES DATABASE AND COMPUTER USE INSTRUCTION TO A VISITING SIXTH GRADE COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS CLASS DURING A PUBLIC LIBRARY VISIT.



LEFT TO RIGHT: MICHELLE GIBSON, ROCKY RIVER MIDDLE SCHOOL LIBRARIAN; HEATHER TUCK-MACALLA, ROCKY RIVER PUBLIC LIBRARY LIBRARIAN; MEGAN ALBAUGH, ROCKY RIVER PUBLIC LIBRARY LIBRARIAN; ANJANETTE MARNIELLA, ROCKY RIVER MIDDLE SCHOOL LIBRARIAN

building loan, delivered in December 2017, consisted of titles specifically requested by the school librarian. Since then, we have taken approximately 500 books to the middle school library. We have not had a single book challenged, though the middle school librarians have elected to return a few items to avoid

potential challenges. As of this writing, our items have circulated approximately 380 times to nearly 120 students.

With the pilot building loan program successfully underway at the middle school, we reached out to the intermediate school to offer the same service, and they jumped at the chance. The good news quickly spread through the school buildings and to the public. We shared the new pilot loan program through our social media to raise the community's awareness of our extended services. Before we knew it, the school administration had publicized the new services on their webpage and in a local newspaper. From there, the success just continued to grow. The schools promoted our "3 for Me" card services, and more teachers reached out to ask if we could customize programs and loans to fit their curriculum needs. Our latest joint venture was hosting a book discussion of **Lily and Dunkin** by Donna Gephart at the request of the middle school SAFE Club (Students Advocating for Everyone). We hope to continue to support this group of student activists in the future.

By spending time listening to the teachers and students, we gained insight on how to improve our collection to meet their needs and interests. The ability to build relationships with staff and students and to improve services has been robust and rewarding. ■

Gephart, Donna. **Lily and Dunkin**. Delacorte, May 2016. 352p. \$16.99. 978-0-553-53674-4. VOYA April 2016. 4Q 5P M J

*Heather Tuck-Macalla specializes in tween services at the Rocky River Public Library. She loves building connections and empowering youth. When not at work, she is busy collaborating with voter advocacy organizations, enjoying the great outdoors, and her two beagles.*



*Megan Albaugh discovered that librarianship was her one real dream job after leaving careers in social work and education. Not only does she get to have a positive impact on teens by sharing her love of reading and education, she also gets to have the most fun at work. Albaugh's favorite part of her job is collaborating with her friend and wonder twin, Heather. They are always look for new ways to shake things up at the library.*

