

Public and School Library Partnerships: A Resource Sharing Solution

Created by School Task Force Members

The School Task Force was comprised of members from both public and school libraries within the SELCO/SELS region: Sarah Burmeister (Grand Meadow Public Library), Cindy Flatin (Houston High School), Bev Hall (Wabasha Public Library), Beth Nelson (Rushford Public Library), Janeen Perrizo (St. Charles Public Schools), Beth Peterson-Lee (Houston Public Library), and Jill Veerkamp (St. Charles Public Library). Meetings were facilitated by Ashley Dress, SELS Librarian - School Media Centers.

Background

For a number of years, the Horizon Integrated Library System (ILS), a public library management tool, was also open to school districts as members of SELS (Southeast Library System). On May 1st, 2025, SELCO transitioned public libraries to a new system called Evergreen. School libraries transitioned to other systems. This was due to two reasons: cost and low usage.

While working to determine costs with Evergreen, SELCO staff inquired into how much it would cost to move school libraries over as well. All schools would see an increase in their annual fees. Knowing that other districts have left in the past due to rising costs and understanding that school districts continue to face funding challenges, the SELCO/SELS board decided at their July 2024 meeting to make the new system available to public libraries only. This action was supported by the fact that all school libraries were paying more in [fees](#) than the cost of the books that they were bringing in via delivery.

A School Task Force was created to come up with a sample framework that allows resource sharing to continue to happen among libraries in the region.

Goal

As was requested by some public library members, a School Task Force was formed to create a path forward for all SELS members to partake in sustainable borrowing via the SELCO ILS, with optional delivery, while building strong collaborations with their public libraries and local communities.

Optional delivery for the first year of this endeavor, FY26, will only be open to school libraries who contracted with SELCO for the ILS service up until the board's decision was made. After that, the goal is to make delivery an option for other SELS members who create partnerships with a public library.

Ultimately, the overall goal is to encourage public and school libraries to work together to provide resources for students/patrons in their communities.

Considerations

The following suggestions and templates are merely that: suggestions. While the Task Force has discussed the details below, using their own knowledge and experience, this is not a mandate on how to carry out resource sharing. Local knowledge and experience are invaluable; this is just one way that things may work.

The Task Force makes the recommendation that the partnerships start out small with the potential to grow in the future. This process changes how former Horizon school libraries borrowed materials in the past and includes some additional work and things to consider. School staff may want to only use the Agency card to order research materials for students the first year, think about what went well and what didn't, adjust and add the potential to order more pleasure reading materials the next year. A program can always be grown, but it's difficult to take something away when people have become accustomed to it.

Although SELCO and SELS strongly encourage relationships among all types of libraries and will help facilitate those, neither organization is responsible for policing its members or enforcing agreements.

Forming the Partnership

A partnership may be initiated by either a school district or public library. The school doesn't need to reside within the same community as the public library nor does it have to be within a certain proximity of the public library, but in the spirit of forming true partnerships that go beyond resource sharing, it often makes the most sense to work with the closest public library. If the public library is willing to set up an Agency card within the SELCO ILS for its location, that is all that is necessary to form a partnership in this case. It is best if the partnership is between one school district and one public library.

The key to successful partnership will be communication. Both parties should be upfront about expectations.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Between the School District and Public Library

An MOU serves as a formal agreement between two parties. It is not legally binding; it merely lays out the expectations of each party. The St. Charles Public School District

and the St. Charles Public Library have provided an example of the [MOU](#) that they use. An MOU should answer the following questions:

- Who does what?
 - The public library will extend access to the school district and its community to public library materials through the use of an Agency card. There should be designated staff members at both the public library and school who are the main contacts. These two are the ones primarily communicating with one another.
- When?
 - Agency cards expire one year after creation. Best practice is for public library staff to communicate with school library staff prior to the end of the school year to find out if the school wants to continue the relationship into the next school year. School library staff should keep a record of the relationship and inform incoming staff, to the extent possible, if they will not be in the library the next school year.
 - SELCO will send a reminder to public library staff towards the beginning of the school year to let SELCO staff know if the agency card use will continue or if it should be disabled.
- For how long?
 - Until one party or another decides to end the agreement. Either party can terminate the agreement without cause.
- Who pays?
 - If materials are lost or damaged, the school district will be responsible for the costs associated.
- How much?
 - The cost of the materials as well as any processing fees.

Setting up the Agency Card (Public Library Procedures)

- Public library staff creates an agency card using standard practices in Evergreen. The school library staff member who will be doing ordering/pick-up should be the contact person.
- The physical card may be kept at the library or by the school library staff member. Keeping it at the library may prevent issues if a school library staff member moves out of their position. In this case, the school library staff member should be given the card number and PIN in order to make requests and receive notifications.
- The school contact should be the person picking up the materials unless an alternative contact person is provided.
- Public library staff may want to be in conversation with school library staff in the spring about ending requests at some point in order to avoid books going lost over the summer when the school is closed.

- The public library receives items and checks out items in Evergreen to that Agency Card.
- Items will need to be checked out before being placed in delivery, if a school library is receiving it.

Requesting and Checking Out Materials Using an Agency Card (School Library Procedures)

- Students will communicate with school staff about what materials they would like to request from the public library.
- School staff make the request in Aspen Discovery, the public access side of Evergreen.
- In order to keep track of requester information, request data should be kept in another place, like a Google Form or Word document.
 - Information to gather may include: name of the student, grade, student/lunch number, item title, author, date requested, school email address.
- A generic email address, e.g. library@school.k12.us, could be created that allows all school library staff to receive notifications on items that are on hold, overdue, lost, etc.
- A school staff member will receive an email notification that an item is on the public library's hold shelf and available for pickup.
- Once the materials are in-hand, school staff will create a temporary record in their library management system, attaching the public library item to their student's account, and then notify a student that their requested item is available. Typical information to include in the record is title, author, and cost of the material. Cost can be obtained from the public library staff member.
 - Typically, when a temporary record is created, the item will follow the rules of the school library. School staff should be aware of this and make changes to due dates as necessary, including allowing time for the item to be returned to the public library before accruing fines, if applicable.
- Through the school's library management system, students will be able to receive notifications when their items are due. School staff will continue to receive reminders and notifications from the public library about items that are due.
 - It should be communicated with the student that the item should be returned to the school library, not the public library, in order for the record to be removed from the school's library management system.
- If students need more time with an item, the school staff member can renew the items through Aspen.

- Once the item is returned, it should be checked in on the school's library management system to remove the record from the student's account.
- The items are returned to the public library.
- Additional thoughts:
 - In order to allow time for items to be returned to public libraries in the region, school staff need to set a date in the spring for when requests will be cut off.

Delivery of Materials

Delivery provided by SELCO's courier, paid for by SELS, will be limited to one day per week. School districts are not required to utilize this service, and both partners are free to come up with a delivery system that works best for them.

If a school district would like to receive delivery from SELCO's vendor, delivery decisions need to be made prior to the beginning of the school year to provide enough time for SELCO's delivery vendor to make logistical arrangements. SELCO will provide a written agreement for this service that outlines expectations.

The school district and public library can also come up with a plan to handle delivery between both parties. If this is the plan, some questions to consider:

- Are there liability concerns if the staff person making the deliveries is in an accident while transporting items for work in their personal vehicle?
- Are there policies currently in place that speak to this issue?
- How is patron/student data privacy being maintained during the process?
- Who are individuals authorized to pick up materials from the public library?

Billing Procedures

- If the Agency card is charged fines or fees, the school staff member adds the charge to the student's account to be paid and attempts to obtain money from the student.
- The school staff member receives payment from the student and handles that according to their district policies in order to pay the public library.
 - This may include working with the public library to obtain block information from the account as well as providing information from the school's library management system showing which student had the item checked out.
- The school is responsible for paying any fines or fees attached to the Agency card.

- The public library may want to check the card towards the end of the school year to see if there are outstanding fines or fees that need to be paid by the district during the current fiscal year. If an invoice needs to be sent, a [sample one](#) has been created that uses language similar to what SELCO uses when issuing auto ILL reimbursements, including fiscal year and quarter, bib number and title.
- For instances where the school pays for an item that is then returned and the public library doesn't issue a refund, per their policy, the school can apply for [reimbursement](#) through SELS.

Other Options

None of these or the Future Options listed below are required or necessary. They are suggestions of other possibilities thought of by the Task Force that could be further explored and discussed.

- **Public Library Cards for All Students:** The Task Force highly recommends connecting all students with their public library through [public library cards](#), and sees this as a natural next-step in the resource sharing process. There are many ways to accomplish this: targeting certain grades, issuing something like [Duluth Public Library's Port Cards](#) with an [opt-out form](#) for parents, etc. Students could make requests through Aspen and select a pickup location for physical materials (see below). The school and public library can decide if it makes more sense for a public library staff member to physically bring those materials to the school and distribute them personally to students.
- **School as a Pickup Location:** Some schools, especially community libraries like Lyle and Goodhue, may decide that it is in their users' best interest to allow the school to be a pickup location for their public library materials. What this means is that when a public library patron places requests in Aspen, they can select their school as a pickup location (*if* the school has already discussed with SELCO staff about making this possible).

In this case, the school would still need to form a partnership with a public library. When the requested materials are delivered to the appropriate public library, they will be checked out to the appropriate patron and then set aside for delivery to the school. In order to respect patron privacy, the patron will either have to give permission to public library staff to share checkout information with school staff or the patron will need to communicate with school staff that they have an item that will be in delivery for them. Because it will be checked out in Evergreen, school staff will not have access to public library patron information. A question to consider:

- Who is responsible for the materials on the hold shelf?
 - Because materials are checked out to a patron at the public library first and then transported to the school, there is the potential for items to become lost or damaged during that time. Typically, patrons would be charged lost or damaged fees, but this intermediate step adds an additional complication that must be considered.

Future Options

- **Giving School Staff Access to Evergreen:** One way to avoid sending checked out materials through delivery to schools is to provide school staff with access to Evergreen. Because this is such a new process, with both school and public library staff members moving to new systems, this is a solution that can be explored further down the road.