Strategic Plan

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Strategic Plan, 2016-2020

Swanson County Public Library

Dear Swanson County Board of Trustees:

Libraries serve as the cornerstone of American democracy; they provide informational resources to millions of Americans in order to keep them informed about issues that matter in their lives. Today, more than ever, libraries are needed by more Americans to bridge the existing digital divide and to make information accessible digitally. Providing access to digital resources, such as electronic journals and e-books, serves the needs of thousands of families in our community who utilize the library and its website to find educational resources to complete homework assignments for their children. Within the library, there are many wonderful opportunities for children to develop educational skills that will serve them well in life through story-time and summer reading programs. As children grow, the library grows with them. Age-appropriate resources are available for individuals within the library and on its website.

While library materials may be available online, however, that is not an option for many struggling family within Swanson County. They cannot afford to purchase internet service, which is becoming a necessity in the twenty-first century. Students without internet accessibility will find it difficult if not impossible to complete assignments that are routinely handed out in classrooms today. So, what do we do about it? Working with the Swanson County Public School District, students can be transported by school bus after their regular school day to the public library, where they will have access to computers and skilled librarians, who can help them with homework assignments. This idea is not only supported by county residents but it will also serve to transform the effectiveness and utility of the public library forever.

Vision:

Swanson County Public Library strives to make information easily accessible to meet the diverse educational, professional, and leisure interests of county residents.

Mission:

The library supports literacy outreach initiatives and endeavors to make information more accessible to users not only through the expansion of its digital holdings but also by pursuing an increased partnership with the county's public school system.

Acknowledgements:

The Swanson County Public Library would like to thank the Board of Trustees, the Friends of the Library, the Planning Committee, and Principals Joseph Sanders of Swanson County Elementary and Denise Brooks of Flamingo Tropical Elementary who distributed surveys for parents to fill out regarding their interest in potential library services.

Planning Methodology:

Planning Methodology would include research on after school care programs and their effectiveness. It would also discuss the value that libraries have in the community. From there, it would expand to discuss the results of a survey that was conducted to determine interest in the library outreach initiative.

Every child at Swanson County Elementary School received a survey, entitled "Survey of Library Services," to give to their parents. These surveys requested that parents answer seven questions regarding their use of the public library and sought input on the eagerness of parents of elementary school-age children to support literacy outreach efforts from the library.

The survey was posted on surveymonkey.com for a thirty-day period, from September 1st to September 30th. Swanson County Elementary and Flamingo Tropical Elementary also emailed parents a copy of the survey to ensure that they received it. Parents were reminded to complete these surveys during the school's open house and computers were made available for parents who wanted to complete them at that time. Considering the possibility of a digital divide, paper forms were also accepted in order to increase the number of responses received. Upon completion of paper forms, students could return them to their teachers, who would transmit them to the principal, who would deliver them to the public library. While the online survey ended on September 30th, paper copies were accepted up to October 7th to provide adequate time for the school to submit paper copies to the library. At that time, Ms. Regina Winters, the head librarian, tabulated the results.

On the following page, please see an attached copy of the survey questions as they appeared both online and in print.

Survey of Library Services

Directions: The Swanson County Public Library would like to find out how county residents feel about the services offered and to inquire about interest level in potential new services that may be offered. Please select one of the following choices for each question.

Estimated Time to Complete: 5 minutes

1. **Over the course of an average week, how many days do you or your children visit the Swanson County Public Library in person?**

   a. 0 Days   b.   1-2 Days   c.   3-5 Days   d   6-7 Days

2. **Over the course of an average week, how many days do you or your children visit the Swanson County Public Library website to utilize online resources, such as journals, databases, and/or e-books?**

   a. 0 Days   b.   1-2 Days   c.   3-5 Days   d   6-7 Days

3. **What is your preference between using print resources and/or electronic resources?**

   a. Print   b.   Electronic   c.   Combination d   None

4. **What is the predominant reason for not visiting libraries in person more often?**

   a. Long Work   b.   Travel   c.   Digital   d.   Frequently at
      Hours   Costs   Availability   the Library

5. **On a scale of 1-4, with 4 being the highest interest, how interested would you be in a literacy outreach initiative, in which children were bused (at no additional charge) after school from their elementary school to the public library in order to receive assistance with their homework?**

   a. 1   b.   2   c.   3   d   4

6. **For which of the following reasons are you most likely to support the literacy outreach initiative discussed in question 5?**

   a. Cost   b   Quality   c.   Safe   d   None -
                           Learning   Environment   Hate the Idea

7. **What factors would limit your support for such a program?**

   a. Concern over   b.   Time Away   c.   Having to   d   None -
      Indoctrination   from Home   to Pick-up   Love the Idea
                                              Kids

Survey Results:

The library requested completion of a survey from parents of students at Swanson County Elementary and Flamingo Tropical Elementary. Each school has a total of 750 students, ranging from grades 1 through 5. That amounts to a survey that was provided to 1500 children in order to have their parents complete. Out of 1500 potential responses, the library received 768 responses from parents. The survey results are not scientific, because the survey completion was voluntary, did not involve a simple random sample, and parents may have more than one child at the school, or completed more than one survey. However, the results are indicative of how parents of elementary school-age children feel about the county library and their views on the introduction of a new literacy outreach initiative to provide homework assistance to children.

1. **Over the course of an average week, how many days do you or your children visit the Swanson County Public Library in person?**

    a. 0 Days   b.   1-2 Days   c.   3-5 Days   d   6-7 Days

        (476 Votes)   (184 Votes)   (88 Votes)   (20 Votes)

2. **Over the course of an average week, how many days do you or your children visit the Swanson County Public Library website to utilize online resources, such as journals, databases, and/or e-books?**

    a. 0 Days   b.   1-2 Days   c.   3-5 Days   d   6-7 Days

        (331 Votes)   (312 Votes)   (111 Votes)   (14 Votes)

3. **What is your preference between using print resources and/or electronic resources?**

    a. Print   b.   Electronic   c.   Combination d   No Preference

        (188 Votes)   (237 Votes)   (221 Votes)   (122 Votes)

4. **What is the predominant reason for not visiting libraries in person more often?**

    a. Long Work   b.   Travel   c.   Digital   d.   Frequently at
        Hours   Costs   Availability   the Library

        (315 Votes)   (57 Votes)   (212 Votes)   (184 Votes)

5. **On a scale of 1-4, with 4 being the highest interest, how interested would you be in a literacy outreach initiative, in which children were bused (at no additional charge) after school from their elementary school to the public library in order to receive assistance with their homework?**

   a. 1   b.   2   c.   3   d   4

   (86 Votes)   (37 Votes)   (127 Votes)   (518 Votes)

6. **For which of the following reasons are you most likely to support the literacy outreach initiative discussed in question 5?**

   a. Cost   b   Quality   c.   Safe   d   None -
                                Learning   Environment   Hate the Idea
   (381 Votes)   (232 Votes)   (97 Votes)   (58 Votes)

7. **What factors would limit your support for such a program?**

   a. Concern over   b.   Time Away   c.   Having to   d   None -
       Indoctrination   from Home   to Pick-up   Love the Idea
                                                      Kids

   (32 Votes)   (2 Votes)   (193 Votes)   (541 Votes)

Summary of Results:

When in need of library services, parents of children at two elementary schools within Swanson County are more likely to utilize digital resources on the library's website instead of print resources that are available in the library. This signifies that the library should continue its expansion of online resources, which are in greater demand than print sources. However, there is still significant demand for print sources, which warrants additions to the collection, as nearly one-third of respondents asserted that they utilize a combination of resources.   Nearly half of respondents contend that they do not visit the library more often because of their long work hours.

In order to improve usage of the library, library staff developed an after-school program, where elementary school students could be transported by school bus in order to receive homework assistance from trained librarians. Two-thirds of respondents thought that this was a great idea, and especially liked the fact that there would be no additional cost imposed on parents. Some respondents were not thrilled that they would have to pick-up their kids from the library at the end of the day, but more than two-thirds of the respondents had nothing negative to say about the program and thought that it was a great idea.

Executive Summary:

For years, one of the greatest problems faced by parents of school-aged children is to help them with their homework. Often times, parents may not be familiar with the curriculum or know on how to answer some of the questions that their kids have. This is because curriculum has evolved since parents attended school themselves. Many homework assignments also rely on student access to internet services, which some parents may not be able to afford to subscribe to; this creates a digital divide, in which students without internet access cannot build their skills in the same manner as their peers. Additionally, many parents come home after a long day of work and feel too exhausted to help their children with homework. A popular phrase from parents in response to such an issue deflects responsibility, saying that educating their kids is the "teacher's job." However, why has nobody suggested that it be a librarian's job?

Librarians, like teachers, have a desire to help, inspire, and educate individuals to meet their full potential and to realize their goals. Librarians are highly educated, possessing a minimum of a master's degree. This education level is, in fact, higher than the bachelor's degree that is required to teach in grade school. The library provides a safe environment, where students can complete their homework and be able to ask questions to librarians who are skilled in finding answers to a multitude of questions that children may have.

Based on scholarly research and parental surveys, the library recommends utilizing an auditorium-style room in each of its 15 branch libraries for student after school homework assistance. After completing their day, elementary school students may, at their parents' discretion, be transported by school bus to a local branch library, where they can receive help with their homework. Each library has a large auditorium, style room that can accommodate up to 120 students, with room to install computers that would accommodate all students. The computers

installed as part of the program would include filters that block access to inappropriate sites. Library staff would monitor student activity as well and no outside individuals would be permitted in the auditorium while children were present. Children who require books from the library's collection would be escorted by library staff on a one-by-one basis to ensure their safety. These safety provisions ensure compliance with the Children's Internet Protection Act.

Upon arrival, a branch librarian would meet the school bus and walk with students in a single-file line to the "homework room," as it will be called. For two hours each day, students could receive homework assistance from librarians that are specifically trained to assist with research and informational endeavors. Providing such a service would offer a bridge for parents between the time that the school days ends and the time that parents leave work. Students would complete their school work earlier, enabling them to be better rested, and parents would be happier, in turn, knowing that when their kids come home, it would be "family time" without any work obligations. Parents are always able to pick-up their children before the service officially ends by showing identification and verifying information against school records that reflect parental contacts. All students will be monitored until they are picked-up by their parents.

Profile of Swanson County:

Over the past ten years, Swanson's population grew slightly from 330,000 to 360,000. The county's population is expected to continue to grow at a slow rate. The county has seen the highest growth with Hispanics. The county's demographics are as followed: 61% Caucasian, 23% African-American, 9% Hispanic, 5% Asian, and 2% Other. The majority of the country's adult population has a minimum of an associate's degree.

Community Needs:

Statistics show that individuals who have a strong educational foundation in their childhood become more successful adults and lead happier lives. When citizens are happier and more successful, it results in lower crime. We want to see that trend continue in Swanson County. Through a new library initiative, librarians can make a difference in the community by helping students to complete their homework after school. This program could be implemented at low cost, but with a high return for the investment. Based on a survey provided to parents at Swanson County Elementary and Flamingo Tropical Elementary, two-thirds of the respondents supported this initiative.

Library Profile:

Swanson County Public Library offers many services for county residents, including computer training, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, story time, and a Summer Reading Program. Each branch of the public library has twenty-five computers for county residents to utilize in one hour increments. Presently there are a sufficient number of staff members to meet the needs of residents. However, it may be necessary to employ one more librarian at each branch in order to meet the needs of the library's plan to offer after school homework assistance to elementary schools. The library is open Monday through Thursday, from 12 pm to 8 pm, and on Saturday, from 10 am to 8 pm. We have fifteen branches that are committed to meeting the educational, professional, and leisure needs of county residents. We continue to thrive and expand library programs and to develop new initiatives that promote interest in learning, which is necessary to ensure a flourishing democracy. The library currently receives $10 million dollars annually from the general fund, which amounts to $27.77 per capita. This amount is sufficient for present needs, but as the population grows in the county, which is expected over the next ten years, the library will need small increases in order to meet the needs of new residents. The library proposes an increase of $100,000 per year to meet the growing needs of the county. In order for the literacy outreach initiative proposed in this plan to be enacted, the library will need an additional $5 million dollars as a one-time cost to purchase new computers and an additional $1 million per year to expand the number of librarians, along with other miscellaneous supplies.

The library requests the following amounts for fiscal years 2016-2020

2016 - $16.1 million
2017 - $11.2 million

2018 - $11.3 million
2019 - $11.4 million
2020 - $11.5 million

Strengths and Weaknesses:

In consultation with the Planning Committee and other library staff, these are the strengths and weakness of the Swanson County Public Library

Strengths

- Quality Customer Service
- Commitment to Diversity
- Forward-Looking Librarians
- Great at Multi-Tasking

Weaknesses

- Long Wait Times to Respond to Phone Calls
- Need to Digitize Materials Faster
- Need to Improve Time Management

Level of Use for Past Three Years:

Despite harsh economic conditions nationally, the library sustained its hours of operation over the past three years. Library visitors have declined annually over the previous three years from 878,000 visitors in 2011 to 815,000 visitors in 2014. Despite a decrease in the number of in person visits, the number of people utilizing library services has increased. Web traffic increased over the same period of time from 1.25 million unique hits in 2011 to 3.8 million unique hits in 2014. Website traffic grows the most during the summer when children are searching for reading materials, as part of our summer reading program. This means that users are spending greater amounts of time on the library's website, which continues to expand its digital collection every year. Additionally, the library's "reference chat" service proved quite successful as in house librarians answered 125,000 research-related questions over the web in 2014.

Service Priorities:

Goals

- Expand Digital Holdings
- Implement Literacy Outreach Initiative, in conjunction with Swanson County Public Schools
- Improve Time Management

Objectives

- Expand Digital Holdings
    - Read through circulation data to determine the types of books that are most often checked out at the library
        - Books on subjects with the greatest demand will be made available as e-books
- Literacy Outreach Initiative
    - Meet with School Board to Discuss Logistics
        - Cost
        - Busing
        - Security
    - Meet with County Government
        - Joint-Meeting with School Board and Library
            - Cost
            - Busing
            - Security
    - Improve Time Management
        - Ask Librarians to Document Daily Work Schedule
            - Brainstorm Ways to Multi-Task to Improve Efficiency
        - Library Meeting to Discuss Collective Ways to Improve Time Management

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