

OPEN THE DOORS TO LEARNING



*A Blueprint for Partnerships
Between
Public Schools and Libraries*

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	Page 1
Goals and Objectives.....	Page 1
Blueprint for Project: Open the Doors to Learning.....	Pages 2 – 3
Project’s Relevance.....	Page 3
Future Plans.....	Page 3
Toolkit.....	Disc
1. Application for a library card	
2. Library resource page	
3. On-line catalogue tipsheet (Gr. 4-6)	
4. On-line resources (Gr. 7-8)	
5. Teacher’s Guide for On-line Catalogue	
6. Library scavenger hunts (Gr. 4-6) and (Gr. 7-8)	
7. Ready reference questions (Gr. 7-8) (drawn from 5 reference tools)	
8. Answers to ready reference questions	
9. Summers’ Corners student and teacher evaluation forms	
10. Title page for student package	
Additions to Toolkit (to be made by local library)	
1. Map of the library	
2. Library Information package	

Executive Summary

The success of one partnership, Open the Doors to Learning, between the Aylmer Old Town Hall Library and Summers' Corners Public School, led to the development of a **blueprint** for future library tours for school children in all Elgin County branch libraries. In the process it created a **toolkit** of games, activities, and information sessions for the libraries to use in their tours.

Summers' Corners received a Learning Opportunities Grant that funded six bus trips to and from the Aylmer Library for students in grades 4-8. This grant facilitated a collaboration that enabled approximately 300 students to tour the library in April 2005 and receive in-depth, hands-on experiences of current library practices from library staff. Preparation for the tours included the development of a multifaceted set of learning sheets to address a broad range of library information and methodology.

Each journey through the library consisted of an intense and energetic two hours in which student groups rotated between three library centres. The tours introduced students to the library's layout, materials, resources, policies, and staff and gave them practical research methods to assist them with their schoolwork. Students also learned about various Internet and reference tools and had the opportunity to sign up for a library card.

As a Partnership for Excellence school, many of the students at Summers' Corners are deemed students "at risk" (disengaged with learning for a variety of reasons - social and economic factors, learning disabilities, ESL, poor attendance). The students learned to feel comfortable in the library and to understand that their community library belongs to them and their families. Library staff promoted the library as a resource these children will be able to use competently and with confidence now and when they enter high school.

Goals and Objectives:

- To support literacy in students.
- To enable students to become knowledgeable about the library, its layout, materials, resources, policies, and staff.
- To promote the library as a resource children can use competently and with confidence.
- To increase the number of students who are active users of their community library.
- To foster a comfort level in students and their families when using the library and speaking with librarians.
- To create a co-educational partnership between an elementary school and a public library.
- To facilitate further discussions about how to best address the needs of the students and their parents.
- To open the doors to learning for all students through library tours conducted by library staff.

Blueprint for Open the Doors to Learning

1. At the school level, meet with staff to establish the literacy needs of students and brainstorm ideas on how the public library may help to meet those needs. Share information with School Council and enlist their support.
2. Set up a meeting between school and library representatives to discuss a proposal for a joint project. A school representative should outline literacy work currently underway at the school and a summary of the characteristics of the student population. Establish the needs of the students and jointly discuss how to best meet those needs to support the literacy of students.

Example:

- To enable students to become knowledgeable about the library, its layout, materials, resources, policies, and staff – create three centres for active, hands-on experiences led by library staff
 - To promote the library as a resource children can use competently and with confidence – open all computer stations for students to work through specific tasks; provide reference activities and scavenger hunts to know where and what to look for; review the Dewey Decimal system; and provide a virtual tour of the library
 - To increase the number of students who are active users of their community library – provide a cover letter and application form to be sent home with students prior to the library tour; process the application by the library staff; distribute the new library cards by school staff
 - To foster a comfort level in students and their families when using the library and speaking with librarians – open the library in the evening to a family night for the school community to review the tour with parents and promote library programs and resources.
3. Formalize tour data: number of classes attending (e.g., grades 4 to 8 in year one, grade four and eight in following years to ensure new students receive necessary skills and grade eights review skills before entering high school); dates for tours; timing of tours. School representatives book buses and complete field trip forms.
 4. At the school, photocopy the cover letter and application form for a library card for students going on the tour. Hold an assembly for classes going on the tour to review purpose of the trip, help students understand the importance of the skills being taught, and distribute library card application forms. Collect completed forms and pass on to the library. When library cards have been processed, library staff return cards to the school for distribution.
 5. Library staff meet to review toolkit and revise as needed, depending on the goals and needs of the students. Provide school with worksheets that require photocopying and distribution to students the day of the trip. School representative may need to attend a library staff meeting to review any revisions, answer any questions, and help to solve any logistic questions that may arise in the planning.

6. Library Supervisor completes final preparation for tours, assigns staff members specific roles for the tours and co-ordinates the movement of students between the three learning centres.
7. Carry out the tours and use the follow-up evaluations by students and staff to review for planning next year's tours.
8. Meet to plan a follow up Open House at the library for parents and students. School staff and school council advertise evening, attend, and support.

Project's Relevance

Open the Doors to Learning creates an important partnership between the local school and the community library. It encourages a dialogue between the school and the library that begins an analysis of what the community looks like, what its needs are, and how best to address those needs. It can significantly increase the number of students and their families that apply for a library card. It allows for students to feel a comfort at using the local library because the students have had a chance to talk and work with all of the librarians employed in the library, as they complete the activities in the tour. When the students enter high school, they will know that the public library (for our students at Summers' Corners, the library is only two blocks from their high school, East Elgin, and easily accessible to them during their lunch hour or after school) will give them the tools and free resources they need to be successful in completing their OSSD. The follow up evening open house of the library for the school population allows the parents to have an opportunity to share in the information the students learned in their tour and to see their children easily accessing library resources and information. The evening open house allows an opportunity to promote library programs open to the public and to improve the library's awareness of the needs of the community, allowing for the possible review of current programs and expansion of programs to areas of need

Future Plans

- Continue the dialogue with staff, other principals, learning co-ordinators and supervisors, superintendents, and library staff about the literacy needs of your students and how to address them through partnerships. Encourage staff to apply the skills students learned on their tours to their daily school work.
- Involve the secondary school as part of the bus trip. Include a tour of the local high school's library for the grade eight students.
- Work with the School Council to promote the use of the Public Library through further partnerships with the school.
- Share successes and brainstorm ways to overcome barriers during Thames Valley Community of Schools meetings, Family of Schools (i.e., high school and feeder schools) meetings (invite your local library supervisor), and library staff meetings.

Feedback Procedure

- Please fill in your librarian's name so contact can be made through email.
- Share this information with your librarian when you return to your school.