

What to look for in—and how to help support—your school's reading resources.

School Libraries

If your school has a dedicated library space:

- What hours is the library open? Every school day? Before school and after school? Is student access flexible and equitable?
- Does your student have a dedicated time to visit the library? For how long, and how often?
- How long can a student keep a book, how many times may they renew it, and what happens if a book is lost?
- Can students select their own book from the whole collection or are they limited to particular parts of the library based on age or teacher-evaluated reading level?
- How does your child *feel* about the library? Is it a physically inviting space for your child? Does your child feel empowered or nervous about navigating the space? Why?
- What resources are available to your child beyond books? Are there audiobooks, digital access to online resources, computers for work, quiet spaces for studying, book clubs, maker space, serve as a haven from the lunchroom, is there an affiliated library card program with your local public library, etc.?
- Is the technology available to students up to date?
- How are new books chosen for the collection? Are books purchased once a year or on an ongoing basis? Can teachers or students make suggestions of books for the collection?
- Does the collection serve your child's needs? Are their interests reflected in the book collection? What about their language skills and their reading ability? Do they know how to find what they're looking for in the space? Would they know how to find a book by themselves and, if not, do they know who and how to ask for help?
- Not every parent is in a position to advocate. Does the collection of books serve the needs of *other children* in the community? What about *their* language skills?
- How often is the collection evaluated for timeliness, accuracy and student interest?
- Does the library collection meet the needs of the curriculum?

- How is the collection organized? Does the library use a Dewey Decimal system or has it been genre-fied, meaning the books are organized by category, subject and sometimes format (e.g., graphic novels are all shelved together)? Has anyone explained to your child how the library is organized?
- Does your librarian (if you have one) make library policies, or are they determined by administration at a local or district level?
- Who determines the library's budget, and are funds committed to support the stability and growth of the library program?
- Does a public librarian visit the school, perhaps to discuss summer reading or sign students up for public library cards?
- Can you volunteer in the library, either to help to check out or reshelve books, or as a guest reader?

If your school does not have a dedicated library space

- Do you have a trained librarian on staff?
- Is it a conscious choice on the part of administration not to have a physical library space? Can someone talk you through that decision-making process to help you understand the decision not to have a library, as well as the school's/district's vision for promoting literacy in the absence of a library collection and space?
- Where and from whom does your child learn how to research (citing sources, distinguishing fact from opinion, etc.)?
- The library is often perceived as a neutral and safe space for students. Is there an alternative space on campus that fills this need for your student?
- What is the school doing to promote a culture of literacy?
- Does a public librarian visit the school, perhaps to discuss summer reading or sign students up for public library cards?

If your school has a trained librarian or media specialist on staff

Connect with them to answer the following questions and fill in the blanks on any questions you had remaining above.

- Does the school employ a certified teacher librarian or media specialist? Is there a paid staff assistant?

- Do library employees participate in local, state or national library organizations and advance their own professional development?
- Does your library staff visit the classroom or teach from the library?
- Does your library staff offer book talks to students to spark interest in new titles?
- Is there collaboration between the library and classroom teachers to support their lesson plans with books?
- Does your library staff have the opportunity to model ethical practices in a digital world, model and encourage a love of reading and promote reading for both academic and personal enrichment at all grade levels/reading abilities?
- Do they set library policies or are policies determined by administration at a local or district level?
- Does your library staff collaborate with other librarians in the district?
- Where is the library staff located within the school? Are they accessible to all students?
- Does your student know how to contact library staff?
- Ask them what they see as strengths and areas of growth for the library space, their work and the collection.

If your school does not have a trained librarian or media specialist on staff

- Is there a district library supervisor? How do you contact them?
- If you have a physical library space, who staffs the library and how are they trained for the position?
- Is there budget flexibility for a trained librarian or media specialist?
- When was the position eliminated (if it ever existed) and why? Are there libraries elsewhere in the district, if not in your building?
- If you have a physical space for a library, how is the space functioning in the absence of a dedicated librarian?
- If you are interested in advocating for a school librarian or media specialist, here are [statistics that support the educational impact](#) on your student of having these positions.

Classroom Libraries

Separate from a dedicated library space, many educators make books available to students through a classroom library.

If your child's teacher has a classroom library

Connect with your student's teacher to answer the following questions.

- Does every classroom/subject have its own collection, or do books rotate among classrooms?
- Who selects classroom books? Did your current teacher choose this collection or "inherit" it from a prior teacher?
- When was the last time the collection was evaluated for accuracy and appeal?
- Has the teacher ever performed [a diversity audit](#) of the classroom collection?
- Who pays for those books (the school, your district or your child's educator)?
- Does your child have the ability to borrow those books, or can students only read them while at school? Does the selection suit students' needs (book variety, topic, language)?
- How are the books organized (by theme, by series, by reading level) and does your child know how to find books they are excited to read?
- Are all teachers within your school able to provide a classroom library the same way as your child's teacher?
- If you are in a position to do so, how can you support the classroom collection?

If your child's teacher does not have a classroom library

- Does your school have existing policies about classroom libraries?
- Would you feel comfortable spearheading a book drive?
- Have you connected with your child's teacher to ask them about the possibility of a classroom library?
- Would the educator consider bringing in public library books that connect to the curriculum? (Most public libraries have no limit on check-outs to educators and are happy to help teachers find books.)
- [Research is very supportive of classroom libraries](#). Consider advocating at the school, if not district level, for books in every classroom.