

CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

No. 109

**Feasibility of Public Library branches in
Elementary Schools**

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Approved by
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Citizens League
545 Mobil Oil Building
Minneapolis 2, Minnesota

April 29, 1959

MEMORANDUM TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Education Committee

SUBJECT: Public Library Sub-Branches in Elementary Schools

The Education Committee's current concern with the Public Library quite naturally grew out of the 1959 emergency regarding school library service. In the absence of action by the Library Committee of the Citizens League, the Education Committee appointed a subcommittee to act as fact finders.

This report, submitted by the Education Committee, is a summary history of matters pertinent to the immediate problem of elementary school libraries. It is apparent, however, that any ultimate decision regarding school libraries should be made on the basis of broad and thoroughly considered policies, with a sound plan for school library service in the whole community. The recommendations herein suggest a way that the community might begin to formulate such policies.

BRIEF HISTORY

A working relationship between the Public Library and the Minneapolis Public Schools began in 1895, when the first Library sub-branch opened at Schiller School. By the time of the opening of Kenry School's sub-branch in 1954, a total of 20 sub-branches could be counted. In the instance of Waite Park (1951), Wewonah (1952), Armatage (1953) and Kenny (1954), the original plans for the school building included provisions for sub-branches of the Public Library.

Early planners in the Public Library system were very eager to bring libraries to young children. The Library's 1915 annual report says that "these school stations. . . are worth much more than their cost." A contract made in 1926 between the Board of Education and the Library Board stipulates that at sub-branches in school buildings the Board of Education will provide light, space, heat and janitor service; the Library Board will provide equipment and professional service.

The Board of Education opened its first elementary school library in 1923 at Hiawatha School. Within very recent history, these elementary school libraries have expanded to number 38 out of a total of 76 elementary schools. They operate as fairly autonomous units, without a central circulating collection.

Current school statistics show these 38 Board of Education libraries to be smaller than the public library sub-branches. They are available only to children enrolled in the schools and on a limited time schedule.

CURRENT EVENTS

A number of decisions affecting elementary school libraries have been made during recent months. It is very apparent that School and Library Boards have not coordinated their efforts, and that no joint plans have been made.

January 13, 1958 - A joint meeting of school and library personnel was held, and it was generally agreed that the sub-branches in the elementary schools should be converted to school libraries. Although there was agreement as to the desirability of this move, no specific plans were drawn up, and the time element was left vague. There was some talk about replacing the present sub-branches one at a time as the library system opened up new regular branches.

November 20, 1958 - Jane D. Strebel, consultant in library service to the Board of Education, submitted a memorandum to Dr. A. D. Lewis, Assistant Superintendent in Charge of Elementary Education, regarding elementary school libraries. In August, 1954, a committee of elementary school principals had been set up to study this problem, but had come up with only the general conclusion that library service in the elementary schools was not up to the standards for school libraries set by the state. Miss Strebel's memorandum was much more specific, and offered detailed plans for developing a school library system in all 76 elementary schools.

December 11, 1958 -- At its regular monthly meeting, the Library Board decided that, owing in part to financial difficulties, the Board would withdraw service from its 20 sub-branches in the elementary schools on or before June 1959, and that the Board of Education would be notified of this decision. The Library Board planned to turn over the book collections and equipment in these sub-branches to the Board of Education.

December 18, 1958 - The Library Board decided to close eight of the sub-branches effective January 5, 1959, and to close the remaining 12 in June, 1959.

January 22, 1959 - The Library Board decided to reopen the eight sub-branches that had been closed, and to provide them with limited service, effective February 6. Service to the other twelve sub-branches was reduced slightly, and all 20 sub-branches were still scheduled to be closed in June, 1959.

March 18, 1959 - At a joint hearing of the Board of Education and the Library Board, it was made clear by Librarian Raymond Williams that the sub-branch decision had rested only partly with finances, and had chiefly to do with the Public Library's interpretation of its public responsibilities and functions.

March 26, 1959 - The Library Board, at a hearing before the Charter Commission, requested a referendum for a 1 mill increase (estimated at \$400,000 in revenue) to be added to the property tax. The request did not specify that any portion of this increase would be spent for restoration of sub-branch services.

SUMMARY DATA

The Public Library operates a main library, 15 branch libraries and the 20 sub-branches located in elementary schools. Its annual budget is now about \$2,000,000, and its collection is about 1,000,000 books. It is requesting an operating budget increase of about \$400,000.

Total circulation for the system in 1958 was roughly $3\frac{1}{2}$ million units. 714,000 of these -- 20% of the total circulation -- were loaned through the sub-branches in 1958. The Public Library's budget for the sub-branches was \$125,000, or 6% of the total operating budget, according to the Librarian.

Unit cost to the Library per transaction in the sub-branches averaged 8¢ in 1958, compared to 25¢ at a typical branch library. The branch library, however,

maintains a far wider collection of books on its shelves, including reference materials.

Children, representing 10% of the city population, held 40% of the library cards, and took out 55% of the total 1958 circulation. Over 650,000 juvenile books were circulated in the 20 sub-branches, averaging 51 books per child enrolled in the 20 elementary schools. In comparison, in the total library system, the average adult cardholder borrowed 14 books.

The Board of Education libraries keep no circulation figures. The minimum cost estimate of the Library Consultant to the Board of Education for beginning to extend basic book collections in 76 elementary schools is \$160,000 for book purchases during the first calendar year. \$1½ million is the total estimate for purchases which would bring Board of Education libraries up to minimum state and national standards. No operating cost estimates have been made public.

CONCLUSIONS

The question of elementary school libraries is a complex problem, involving more than budgetary or jurisdictional technicalities. It involves basic philosophies concerning the availability of books to all segments of the community, including school children as an active portion of the reading public.

At least two divergent philosophies are discernible.

The first, offered by the present Library Board, insists that libraries within schools should be primarily adjuncts to the curriculum, and that juvenile readers may go elsewhere for so-called "recreational" reading. The Public Library would stock branch libraries with juvenile books available as "recreational," and the School Board would take responsibility for reading matter suggested by the teachers as teaching aids.

The second point of view, expressed by a newly-formed Committee for School and Neighborhood Libraries, asserts that "convenient access to large numbers of books on a variety of subjects is immensely important. . . especially during the earliest years of reading," and that access, or the lack of it, may "affect lifelong attitudes toward reading." They therefore urge retention and expansion of Public Library stations at the extremely local level, pointing out that very young readers, as well as the aged, often cannot reach branch libraries,

To date, the Board of Education has not expressed an official policy.

It is possible to take a number of stances between the positions of the Library Board and the Committee for School and Neighborhood Libraries. Any policy, however, should deal with the questions of how many and what kinds of books are to be directly available to all residents, including children, at the neighborhood level, as well as with secondary questions of jurisdiction and financing. The relations between school and public library systems have become a vexed question throughout the United States in recent years, and there seems to be no uniform national pattern for school library services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the present sub-branches be maintained in operation by the Public Library until such time as it can be clearly demonstrated that other services have replaced them, if it be found desirable to do so.

2. That a joint committee be established, consisting of representatives of the Library Board, Board of Education, and interested citizens to work out a long-range plan for library services.