

Fact Sheet: About Public and School Libraries

To meet the needs of communities across the United States, both school and public libraries are vital.

Public and school libraries help learners of all ages access information and technology to further their interests and education. These essential institutions, in neighborhoods and schools across the United States, provide complementary services in the pursuit of shared goals:

- Equity of access to information and resources
- Appreciation of reading
- Lifelong learning
- Critical use of information and technology
- Knowledgeable and informed citizens

Both public and school libraries pursue these goals by providing:

- A safe, welcoming environment
- Responsive, knowledgeable, well-trained staff
- Convenient access to technology and databases on and off-site
- Access to the Internet
- Information in a variety of media

Although each type of library works in similar ways to achieve these goals, important differences exist. The chart below contrasts some key information about public and school libraries.

Public Library		School Library
To meet the informational, learning, and recreational, needs of customers, providing an open environment for our community	MISSION	To prepare students to become effective, efficient, and ethical users of information and ideas, capable of lifelong learning, problem solving, knowledge creation, and communication.
General public, all ages – preschoolers to senior citizens	USERS	Specific, known community of youth and those who teach them
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadest spectrum of community needs and interests • Popular interests • Homework/research assignments • Summer reading requirements 	FOCUS OF COLLECTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for curricular and instructional needs of school • Personal reading interests and abilities of students • Professional needs of teachers and administrators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loan a variety of materials • Reference services • Homework/research support • Community networking and outreach • Independent selection of resources • Programming to meet community needs and interests for all ages 	PRIMARY SERVICES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction in research skills and use of information and communication technologies • Curriculum planning and support • Guided selection of resources • Collaborative planning and teaching • Programming to promote reading for students/school community
Year-round, all day, with evening and weekend hours.	HOURS	Generally open when school is in session, with some before and after school hours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting rooms • Open public access 	FACILITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible instruction space • Secure access within school for student safety