YEAR FOUR: A PARTNERSHIP FLOURISHES

We have much to celebrate as we assess year four of A+ Partners in Education! Working collaboratively, Howard County Library and the Howard County Public School System enhanced and expanded the many ways we work together to provide for our children the best possible pre-kindergarten through 12th grade education.

This year, we celebrate both the highlights of the year and the increased national visibility, as more library and school systems across the country desire to replicate our program, which supplements the school system’s curriculum and the bridging of achievement gaps by:

- Connecting each of our 70 schools with a liaison branch library,
- Bringing the Library into the schools and the schools into the Library,
- Providing all students a library card through school registration,
- Offering students free tutoring via Live Homework Help—especially effective in English, math and science, subscription databases, LearnATest, and AskUsNow!,
- Extending borrowing privileges for teachers through the A+ Teacher Card, and
- Linking the Library to academics from the start with field trips to the Library as part of the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten curriculum.

This past year provided three major opportunities to promote the partnership. In August, Public Libraries, the Public Library Association’s journal, published an article entitled, “A+ Partners in Education: Linking Libraries to Education for a Flourishing Future.” In March, we presented “Make the Honor Roll! Effective Strategies for Successful School Partnerships” at the Public Library Association’s annual conference. In May, we presented a similar session at the California Library Director’s Conference.

Each of these efforts resulted in numerous requests for our A+ Toolkit, a compilation of materials—including a 14-minute DVD—intended to assist others with launching a similar initiative. To date, we have disseminated 60 toolkits. Feedback has included the following:

**PARTNERSHIP STATISTICS**

- Interactions between Library staff and students, teachers or parents in A+ programs and activities: 61,384
- A+ Partnership library cards generated: 4,894*
- A+ Teacher Cards generated: 468
- Materials checked out on Teacher cards: 31,227

* Nearly 20,000 A+ cards generated since the partnership’s inception in 2002.
Quality education is a Howard County hallmark. Our public school system ranks first in the state and is a leader among schools in the nation. Our Library ranks first in the nation among great public library systems. In addition, Howard County was deemed one of the “100 Best Communities for Young People” by America’s Promise and fourth in the nation among the best places to live by Money magazine.

From Burlington Public Library (IA): “I attended your A+ Partnership session at PLA and loved the idea so much I came home and talked to our director and a contact at the school. I have a meeting in a week with the school administration to start a discussion. I’ve directed everyone to your web site to see your reports from the last three years so they can get an idea of what we could do.”

From San Bernardino Public Library (CA): “I was impressed with the packet of materials. Would it be possible to receive six more packets—for the schools and for the mayor?”

From Pendleton County Public Library (KY): “I am impressed with what your library and school system have accomplished as stated in the feature article in the July/August 2005 issue of Public Libraries. Our county has a population of 15,000 with two elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. The library has been discussing with our superintendent of schools ways that we can help literacy levels in our county and I thought of your program. If you could send us an A+ Toolkit, we would appreciate it. I have already made copies of the article to share and we are excited about the opportunities and the benefits for the community that you have described.”

From a Media Specialist (NJ): “I am a School Media Specialist at the E.A. Tighe School in Margate, New Jersey, and am beginning my M.L.S. thesis at Rowan University. Our Margate Public Librarian, who is also working on her thesis for the same degree, read your article and brought it to my attention. We think it would be the topic for our thesis. Can you please send us the A+ Toolkit for us to use to develop our research, and as a foundation for our partnership we are working on?”

From Grand Rapids Public Library (MI): “I attended your wonderful session at the PLA Conference on the A+ Partnership and thoroughly enjoyed hearing about your successes. We are attempting to launch a similar initiative and I am in the process of putting together a focus group in the fall. All of the handouts you distributed at PLA have been helpful in my planning. My question concerns whether we might be able to use ‘A+ Partners in Education.’ It’s such a great slogan.”

Closer to home, Board of Education Chair Courtney Watson commented on the Public Libraries article, “What a wonderful article, as well as a tribute to the A+ Partnership between Howard County Library and the school system. Howard County students certainly are the beneficiaries of the partnership, but the initiatives of the partnership touch so many more, including parents and teachers. The Howard County community is very fortunate that so many people are committed to the education of our children. Thank
you on behalf of the Board of Education, the Howard County Public School System and, most importantly, our students.”

A special note of thanks to the boards and administrative staff at the Library and school system for their ongoing support of the partnership. We are equally grateful to the A+ Partnership Advisory Committee’s dedication, as well as to our talented Library staff, school principals, media specialists, and teachers who support A+ programs throughout the year and provide ideas to continually improve the initiative. Finally, we thank the school system, the Library, and the many sponsors for their financial contributions that make A+ Partners in Education possible.

EDUCATIONAL ENRICHMENT

Spelling Bee
The standing-room-only audience held its breath as the last two contestants vied for the opportunity to represent Howard County at the National Spelling Bee. But not Joey Haavik. With great confidence, the Pointers Run Elementary School fifth grader spelled, “Z-O-R-A-S-T-R-I-A-N,” winning the second annual Howard County Library Spelling Bee.

Haavik won an all-expenses-paid trip to the National Spelling Bee in Washington, DC courtesy of The Baltimore Sun’s sponsorship. Mary Kate Helm, sixth grader at Trinity School, was the second place finalist. Both won college scholarships, trophies, and copies of Webster’s Third New International Dictionary. Fifty-one winners from bees held at public schools, private schools and homeschool associations participated in this year’s bee, a 31 percent increase over last year.

Local elected officials, community leaders, and Library Board of Trustees served as judges and officials. Area newspapers provided major press coverage preceding and following the Bee. Additionally, Channel 72 aired the event in its entirety numerous times over the following weeks. Governor Robert Ehrlich issued a proclamation for the event and invited Joey, his teacher, and Library staff to the State House for a congratulatory photo.

Live Homework Help
Through the Library’s web site, students in grades 4 and up can chat – for free – with tutors in math, science, English, and social studies. Students benefited from Live Homework Help 5,000 times in FY
2006, a 50 percent increase in usage over the prior year. Over 20,000 sessions have been recorded since September 2002. The Library and the school system share in the expense of providing this service. The tutoring service was used most often for math. Student comments included:

- My tutor was patient, personable, and very good at chemistry in general. Her explanations were clear, and she went through the problem step-by-step to make sure I understood everything.
- This program helped me re-understand geometry, which might just save me on the PSATs!
- I didn’t understand my homework. Now, I finally get it.
- With your help I was able to pass the College Algebra and College Mathematics CLEPs [College-Level Examination Program].
- Every time I take a math test, this is where I will go.
- Helped me prepare for a horrible poetry test.
- She helped me understand everything I needed to know for my English final, and I am coming back to this tomorrow for my science final.
- This improved my grades!
- Yay! I understand biology!
- This is so cool — I’m actually passing math now.
- You helped me and I finished my work with an A+.

Live Homework Help tutors are available seven days a week from 2:00 pm until 12 midnight. Math and science tutors also are available in Spanish, Sunday through Thursday from 2:00 pm until 10 pm.

Summer Reading Program
Howard County Library’s summer reading programs—Wild About Reading for elementary school students and Say What? for teens—attracted a record number of participants. For the first time, the Library offered a version just for babies and toddlers: Babies Are Wild About Reading. Families with very young children took advantage of this new opportunity and enjoyed having a summer reading program for their little ones. One mom-to-be even registered to read to her unborn child!

Winter Reading Program
More than 100 families participated in the Library’s new Winter Reading Program, which coincided with the Howard County Public School System’s Reading Month in January and celebrated the joys and benefits of families reading together. Families submitted photographs of their reading experiences, which were posted in the branches and on the Library’s web site. Glenwood and Savage Branch Library staff promoted the program heavily in their liaison schools, achieving the highest participation.
Early Literacy
Library staff presented a program on library resources at the Language Here, Literacy Here, Language/Literacy Everywhere! seminar sponsored by six early childhood organizations. The audience of 66 childcare professionals gave high marks to the presenters and borrowed 150 library books at the end of the session.

Children’s Discovery Fair
Held in April, the Children’s Discovery Fair attracted nearly 1,000 people to the East Columbia Branch Library. Previously held at area high schools, the Howard County Early Childhood and Child Care Coalition chose to host the event at the Library because it was the perfect venue for the theme: Read Around the World. The day-long fair focused on literacy for children between the ages of three and five, and featured special performances, workshops, and activities.

Dogs Educating and Assisting Readers
One of most rewarding A+ Partnership activities is Dogs Educating and Assisting Readers (DEAR). Each year, teachers identify struggling third graders and invite them to participate in DEAR. This year, students from Bollman Bridge, Cradlerock, Guilford, Lisbon, Phelps Luck, Stevens Forest, and Talbott Springs elementary schools were paired with therapy dogs and handlers from Fidos for Freedom at the East Columbia, Glenwood, and Savage branches. Library staff coordinate with the teachers and select books for the children to read. A parent wrote the following note to a Fidos volunteer who participates in DEAR at the Savage Branch Library:

“Gillian started stuttering in kindergarten. When the reading specialist from Gillian’s school recommended DEAR, we were very excited because it met our need by providing her a structured opportunity to read, which she was not willing to do at home, and it was interesting for Gillian because she LOVES dogs. We are happy about the bond between Gillian and Penny, her DEAR dog, but that bond underlies what is more important – the interaction between Library staff and Gillian. Gillian was not self conscious about stuttering and was able to work with you in a trusting and supportive environment. Gillian’s stuttering is decreasing, and she recently said she rarely stutters during school. We are excited about the progress she has made and know it is possible because of the efforts of many concerned and caring people. Perhaps giving up a few hours of your weekend may not seem like a lot to you, but you should know it means the world to one little girl (and her parents).”
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL INITIATIVES

Kindergarten and Pre-Kindergarten Field Trips to the Library
Two years ago, the A+ Partnership incorporated kindergarten and pre-kindergarten field trips to the Library as part of the Howard County Public Schools’ curriculum. FY 2006 saw a significant increase in field trips due to the addition of full-time kindergarten implemented at 12 schools. We received the following from a teacher after a recent visit: “WOW! What an amazing field trip! I have been on many field trips over the years, but none compares to this one. This was by far the most organized, well-planned, and well-administered field trip I have ever been on. Please tell your entire staff who worked so hard to make our day a success, that we noticed it and we appreciate it. I can’t wait to do it again next year! Thank you.”

Getting Ready for Kindergarten
New this year the Library held Getting Ready for Kindergarten at the Glenwood Branch Library. A school bus driver contributed his expertise—and his school bus—to the program. Soon-to-enter-kindergarten students gathered to listen to stories about kindergarten and the first day of school, then practiced boarding the bus and waving goodbye.

Teachers
Getting an A+ teacher card was a top priority for new and returning teachers. Library staff registered more than 400 teacher cards this year, the majority at New Teacher Orientation.

Reading Specialists
Library staff presented a workshop at the HCPSS Reading Specialists’ fall In-Service Day, which prompted the following response from one of the leaders: “Thank you for a wonderful workshop today. It melded perfectly with our theme of motivation and encouraging readers. The evaluations were all very positive. Many of the teachers requested more book talk sessions in the future. I look forward to our continued partnership.”

MIDDLE SCHOOL INITIATIVES

Enriching School Curriculum
Strengthening ties with the school system’s social studies department, Howard County Library participated in History Day at local middle schools. Students indicated they wanted debate as part of their education, so Library staff presented debate programs to classes at several middle schools. Debate is now a component of the Gifted and Talented curriculum, thanks in part to the Library’s presentation at last year’s Middle School Enrichment Fair.
Several staff presented overviews of the Library’s electronic resources for homework assistance, such as Live Homework Help and LearnATest, along with databases students commonly use. One student was able to log on to Live Homework Help during the presentation and get assistance from a tutor on an actual assignment. A Science Fair Project Resources presentation at one middle school helped students experience live demonstrations of the Library’s science databases and a tour of print materials at the branch.

Law Day
Following the Law Day event at the East Columbia Branch, a teacher whose students attended, wrote: “Thank you for the outstanding opportunity today! The program was terrific, and the students shared much positive feedback. It was an honor to be in the presence of so many wonderful people from the Library and to have the Honorable Bernhardt judge the debate. Please consider Harper’s Choice for next year’s Law Day. We learned a lot and enjoyed ourselves.”

Teen Read Week
Howard County Library celebrated Teen Read Week in October, inviting teens to explore the world of nonfiction books. The week’s theme, Get Real @ Your Library, encouraged teens to read biographies, self-help books, and “strange but true” stories. Each branch library displayed relevant materials to assist students with finding books of interest.

Teen Time
Begun in 2005 as part of a comprehensive plan to address challenges presented by disruptive students at the East Columbia Branch Library, Teen Time has become a successful program that focuses on academic achievement and healthy behaviors.

Throughout the year, Teen Time students participated in programs such as Books for the Beast, a literature conference in Baltimore with a presentation by science fiction author Patricia Wrede, a workshop on graphic novels, a demonstration by illustrators on how to create comic characters, and discussions of great books. In partnership with the Howard County Health Department, Teen Time students also participated in programs centering on communication, leadership, and life skills (e.g., anger, conflict and time management). Other programs focused on developmental assets (support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity), which have been identified by the Search Institute as most significant in helping teens develop into healthy, caring, and responsible adults. Teen Time also highlighted African-American History Month programs, featuring a presentation by the Slave Descendants Freedom Society.
on African American genealogy, a class on the history of Baltimore music, and a field trip to the African American Art Museum in Howard County.

Numerous special guests spoke to Teen Time students, such as Gregory McPhee of Howard Community College, who conducted a workshop on preparing for college. Kendra Kopelke of the Howard County Poetry and Literature Society hosted a poetry contest, and Heidi Strominger of the Sexual Trauma Treatment, Advocacy and Recovery Center (STTAR Center) discussed the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships, noting where teens can seek help if they ever experience any type of abuse. Students also learned about poetry and life skills with Maryland poet Truth Thomas, who worked with them to write their own poems. The poetry was compiled into a custom literary magazine at the end of the year.

An important feature of Teen Time is parental involvement. Open houses, attracting an average of 50 parents and family members, include an educational component for parents and an overview of accomplishments and upcoming themes.

HIGH SCHOOL INITIATIVES

Teachers
Collaboration between the Library and high school English departments continues to increase. New this year, Library staff presented an In-Service Day program for all high school English teachers relating to the recently developed Banned Books project for the tenth grade.

Enrichment Programs
Reservoir and Howard high schools contacted the Library for enrichment programs for ninth and twelfth grade students not involved in PSAT testing. Ninth graders were given information on online services such as Live Homework Help, AskUsNow!, and databases, with special emphasis on the databases most relevant to current and upcoming research projects. Seniors learned about college and career databases, such as CollegeSource Online and LearnATest.

Teen Job and Volunteer Opportunity Fair
Library staff attended the Teen Job and Volunteer Opportunity Fair at Long Reach High School. More than 800 students and their families visited the Library’s table, registering for library cards and taking employment and volunteer applications.

Teen ‘Zine
The Library launched an online publication written and designed by teens. The goal of Teen ‘Zine is to engage teens, showcase the ability of teen writers, and voice their thoughts. The Teen ‘Zine can be read at www.hclibrary.org/teenzine.
PARTNERING WITH PARENTS

Back to School
For parents of students in Howard County’s public schools, September meant Back to School Nights. Howard County Library staff attended the vast majority, as evidenced by the 7,408 interactions with parents, students and staff in September – a 50 percent increase over last year. Staff talked about signing up for a library card, using homework help services such as AskUsNow! and Live Homework Help, strengthening test taking skills via LearnATest, and accessing the Library’s databases for research or homework projects. Staff also attended the Back to School Night for high school technology magnet class students at the Applied Research Lab. This was the first time the Library attended (the only outside group to participate).

As a result of presentations to the PTA Council of Howard County and the Citizens Advisory Council, numerous schools requested additional information on Live Homework Help, as well as information packets for parents and school staff. One parent even wrote an article about homework help resources for her school’s PTA newsletter.

Internet Use & Safety
Library staff presented an Internet Safety program to a middle school PTA, talking with parents about the way teens use the web for communication and interaction. Parents familiarized themselves with the technologies so they could converse with their children about public vs. private information, as well as the unreliability of information recovered from the web vs. reliable sources such as library databases.

CELEBRATING CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Reading America
The Library expanded Reading America to a year-long program for two groups of mostly Hispanic students at Oakland Mills Middle School. The project involves working with teens and their families to discuss culturally relevant books and movies. It aspires to build bridges between youth and adults, break down language and cultural barriers, and empower participants by introducing them to resources available in the Library and the County. The students read and discussed Call Me Maria, a book about a 15-year-old girl who leaves her home in Puerto Rico to live with her father in New York and the challenges she faces learning to live in two cultures. They viewed and discussed the film “Stand and Deliver,” the story of an inner city math teacher who
refuses to give up on his students. At the conclusion of the program, the Library hosted a showcase, Una Celebracion Latina, to summarize the year’s discoveries and highlight personal photography exhibits of participants, representing the countries of Mexico, Bolivia, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Peru, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, the territory of Puerto Rico, and Nigeria.

**English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)**

Library staff promoted LearnATest to speakers of Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Urdu and Vietnamese by distributing fliers about the database in each of these languages during Family Nights. Howard County Library also established a new Transitions Collection, which includes resources specifically designed for secondary school students with limited reading proficiency, adult new readers, and people learning English as a second language. The collection includes audiobooks, videos, DVDs, and print materials with simplified English in a variety of subjects (e.g., health and nutrition, fiction, poetry, outdoor recreation, biographies, life skills).

**A+ ON THE RISE**

What began as an idea in Howard County has grown into a national movement. The A+ Toolkit disseminated across the nation to the 60 library and school districts requesting them is now also posted on the Library’s web site. We take pride in the partnership model that has evolved.

California’s Oceanside Public Library summarizes the growing momentum, “Thank you so much for sending me the A+ Toolkit following your presentation at the California Library Director’s Conference. The timing of your message couldn’t have been better, as we were creating our own package to promote a new Educator’s Card for teachers. I loved your logo and couldn’t believe the good news that you were willing to share it! Howard County certainly deserves to be recognized for this. Please let me know the next steps to join the A+ movement.”

Looking back—and looking forward—we celebrate! We celebrate quality education, and innovation, in Howard County.

“It is truly a pleasure to receive the announcement that Howard County Library ranks number one in the nation! I am very appreciative of the role that Howard County Library plays in providing programs and services that continue to enhance economic development and quality of life. Thank you for all your efforts to continue to provide first-rate educational and enrichment programs.”

- Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick, Maryland State Superintendent of Schools
LEADERSHIP

Valerie J. Gross, Director, Howard County Library (HCL)
Dr. Sydney L. Cousin, Superintendent, Howard County Public School System (HCPSS)

A+ Partners in Education
Advisory Committee for School Year 2005-2006

Liz Lancaster, Associate Director, HCL (Co-Chair)
Carol Fritts, Coordinator of Media and Educational Technology, HCPSS (Co-Chair)
Joyce Agness, Instructional Facilitator, Special Education HCPSS
Sandra Cartagena, ESOL Liaison, HCL
Hope Chase, Head of Youth Services, HCL
Irva Gabin, Children’s Librarian, HCL
Katie George, Teen Specialist, HCL
Laura Hook, Resource Teacher, Elementary ESOL, HCPSS
Cindy Jones, Materials Management Coordinator, HCL
Molly Kelley, Instructional Facilitator, Media Technical Services, HCPSS
Christie Lassen, Head of Marketing and Public Relations, HCL
Marilyn McKenna, Media Specialist, Reservoir High School
Courtnay Moore, Media Specialist, Glenwood Middle School
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Sharon Stein, Instructional Facilitator, Reading, HCPSS