

Guest Editorial

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Libraries much more than books

A National Library Week guest editorial from State Superintendent Tony Evers

Today's libraries are more than just books. Increasingly they are community institutions that help library patrons learn literacy skills, navigate digital technology, find jobs, research business opportunities, and much more.

The April 12 to 18 observance of National Library Week highlights the changing roles of libraries, librarians, and library staff through the 2015 theme, "Unlimited possibilities @ your library." First sponsored as a national observance in 1958, National Library Week celebrates the contributions of our nation's libraries. All types of libraries — public, school, academic, and special — join the national observance.

Just how integral are libraries in Wisconsin communities? In our state, library staff members regularly offer off-site programs, story times, and early literacy programs at child care centers, nursing homes, Head Start facilities, coffee shops, and after-school programs. Libraries are doing their part to close the digital divide and level the playing field by providing free access to information and technologies that many in their communities would be hard pressed to find elsewhere. Public libraries are often the only public space offering high speed Internet access and computers with current software to prepare resumes, cover letters, and presentations.

Librarians work with elected officials, small business owners, students, and the public to discover and meet the needs of their communities. Whether through e-books and technology classes, materials for English-language learners, programs for job seekers, or a safe haven in times of crisis, librarians listen and respond to the communities they serve. Libraries help to ensure the American dream and promote democracy by providing service to all regardless of race, ethnicity, creed, age, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or socio-economic status.

During the April observance of School Library Month and the April 12-18 National Library Week celebration, please join me for "Unlimited possibilities @ your library."

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NOTES: A high resolution photo of the state superintendent is available on the Department of Public Instruction "Media Contacts and Resources" webpage at <http://dpi.wi.gov/news/contacts-resources>. This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/news-release/dpinr2015_34.pdf.