

Guest Editorial

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Year of COVID, Wisconsin's library workers' dedication never wavered

A guest editorial by State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor on National Library Week

Though the COVID-19 pandemic has had immeasurable impacts on nearly every aspect of our daily lives, Wisconsin's public libraries have risen to the challenge and re-emphasized the critical role they have in our communities.

This week represents National Library Week, a time for us to recognize the essential resources and services our libraries provide and to honor the incredible librarians and workers who help transform lives, strengthening our communities in the process.

Libraries have always been the hub of our communities. Though four walls surround their physical environment, our libraries extend far beyond them. Whether people visit virtually or in-person, our libraries remain accessible and inclusive places, providing services and access to information, while fostering a sense of community through learning, discovery, and exploration.

A little more than one year ago, Wisconsin's libraries and their staff were faced with daunting circumstances of finding new ways in delivering vital and equitable services. Libraries responded by strengthening Wi-Fi signals to areas around physical buildings, ensuring students, families, and those in the community had critical access to the internet. By implementing curbside and no-contact pickup options for physical materials and pivoting to virtual programming, libraries reimagined ways they could safely connect with the surrounding community.

During these challenging times, library staff have responded in such resounding ways with professionalism, creativity, and grace. They have gone above and beyond to adapt and expand resources and services, continuing to meet the needs of their patrons and helping them maintain access to learning. School librarians, through electronic learning resources and services, online homework assistance, virtual cooking classes, book clubs via Zoom, and virtual story time, have been a needed support for Wisconsin students and families. Our libraries continue to examine ways to connect with people who are underserved and which

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practices developed in response to the COVID-19 crisis will be instrumental in meeting community needs going forward.

The staff who work in our libraries are truly difference makers. I thank and applaud each of them for their tireless dedication, enthusiasm, and the inspiration they bring.

This National Library Week, I ask you to take a few moments to realize the impact our libraries have and thank the spectacular staff, who have not wavered when faced with uncertainty.

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