

COMBINED SCHOOL/PUBLIC LIBRARIES  
IN THE UNITED STATES

Wilma Lee Broughton Woolard, Library/Media Specialist  
Metamora Township High School  
Metamora, Illinois

The author's investigation of the combined school/public library concept was initiated in 1976. The information secured was subsequently included in a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master's Degree awarded by Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois.

Objectives of the study were: 1) to ascertain the number and locations of combined school/public libraries in the United States; 2) to determine whether or not combined libraries could function successfully, and if so, to identify the conditions and circumstances which appear to be most conducive to combining school and public libraries; and 3) to identify strengths, benefits, weaknesses and limitations of combined libraries.

Letters were sent to the chief education officers in each state and to the education officer of the District of Columbia requesting a list of known combined libraries within their areas of jurisdiction. Replies were received from forty-three education officers identifying a possible 128 combined libraries. A four-page survey questionnaire was then sent to all identified combined libraries in each state, except those in Massachusetts and Michigan. In these instances, ten libraries from the thirty-six identified in Massachusetts and ten from the twenty in Michigan were chosen for sampling purposes. (The largest number of combined libraries identified from any other state was nine.) Seventy questionnaires, or

seventy-four percent, were returned confirming fifty-five libraries as combined school/public facilities.

Because of the positive response to the survey, sixty-one abbreviated questionnaires were later mailed to: 1) the libraries in Massachusetts and Michigan which were not contacted through the first survey; 2) the libraries identified by respondents to the original questionnaires; and 3) the libraries which had not originally responded by the November 15, 1976 deadline. Twenty-nine additional facilities were identified in this manner, thus confirming a total of eighty-four combined school/public libraries known to be functioning in the United States in the spring of 1977.

A re-survey of these libraries was initiated in the spring of 1979. Of the fifty-five libraries identified through the responses to the first questionnaire, fifty-two were found to be continuing to function as combined facilities. Twenty-five of the second group also continue their status as combined libraries. In addition, fifty-four more libraries were identified, making a total of 131 known combined libraries operating in the United States, as of October 1979.

The term "combined library," as used in this report, applies to the libraries which were confirmed as being combined by the respondents to the surveys. The conclusions and recommendations made as a result of the study have been based largely on the information collected from the fifty-two libraries referred to earlier. (These are the libraries which responded to the original four-page questionnaire in 1976 and which were continuing to function as combined facilities at the time of the 1979 re-survey.)

Combined libraries are found in all geographical areas of the United States and in thirty-six different states, including Alaska and Hawaii. They are located in all types and sizes of communities, but are most often found in rural areas of the country.

The following charts summarize some of the significant data collected.

COMMUNITY SIZE

| <u>Population</u>         | <u>Number of Libraries</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Under 1,000 . . . . .     | 6                          |
| 1,000 to 5,000. . . . .   | 27                         |
| 5,000 to 10,000 . . . . . | 11                         |
| 10,000 to 20,000. . . . . | 6                          |
| Over 20,000 . . . . .     | 2                          |

DATES OF MERGERS

| <u>Date</u>           | <u>Number of Libraries</u> |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1970s . . . . .       | 23                         |
| 1960s . . . . .       | 12                         |
| 1950s . . . . .       | 4                          |
| 1940s . . . . .       | 2                          |
| 1930s . . . . .       | 1                          |
| 1920s . . . . .       | 5                          |
| 1910s . . . . .       | 4                          |
| Before 1900 . . . . . | 1                          |

(Kansas City, Missouri Library, the oldest combined library in continuous operation, was organized in 1873.)

### SCHOOL SIZE AND TYPE

| <u>Type and Number of Students</u>                 | <u>Number of Libraries</u> |
|--|----------------------------|
| Elementary & high school - Under 500 . . . . .     | 13                         |
| Elementary & high school - 500 to 1,000. . . . .   | 7                          |
| Elementary & high school - 1,000 to 2,000. . . . . | 8                          |
| Elementary & high school - 2,000 to 3,000. . . . . | 2                          |
| Elementary & high school - 3,000 to 4,000. . . . . | 1                          |
| Elementary & high school - 6,000 to 7,000. . . . . | 1                          |
| Elementary & high school - Over 50,000 . . . . .   | 1                          |
| Elementary, only - Under 300 . . . . .             | 3                          |
| Elementary, only - 300 to 500. . . . .             | 3                          |
| Elementary, only - 500 to 1,000. . . . .           | 1                          |
| Elementary, only - 1,000 to 2,000. . . . .         | 2                          |
| High school, only - Under 300. . . . .             | 1                          |
| High school, only - 300 to 500 . . . . .           | 1                          |
| High school, only - 500 to 1,000 . . . . .         | 4                          |
| High school, only - Over 1,000 . . . . .           | 2                          |
| Not given . . . . .                                | 2                          |

### LOCATION OF LIBRARIES

| <u>Location</u>  | <u>Number of Libraries</u> |
|--|----------------------------|
| Elementary schools . . . . .                                       | 10                         |
| High schools . . . . .   | 14                         |
| K through 12 schools . . . . .                                     | 13                         |
| Several attendance centers . . . . .                               | 5                          |
| Community culture centers (at a school attendance center). . . . . | 6                          |
| In buildings other than schools. . . . .                           | 4                          |

As might be expected, most combined libraries are located in schools. Only a few are found in public library buildings. Others are located in community culture centers which are usually a part of or adjacent to school buildings. From evidence collected in this study and from studies made by other researchers, more important than the type of school is the location in relationship to its accessibility to the public. Authors of some studies have recommended that combined facilities be placed in elementary schools because they are often located near the centers of communities.

Not only is the geographic location important, but the library's placement in the building is of equal concern. Of great importance to public patrons is that there be no steps to climb, that there be a direct entrance to the facility from the outside, and that adequate parking facilities be provided.

A possible solution to the problem of placing the facility in a school which is located in the country or otherwise removed from the center of the community would be to employ the branch library concept. Branches of public libraries are often placed in shopping centers in order to make them more visible and accessible. The Cincinnati Public Library is currently employing the use of small island-type branches in shopping centers in that city. The installations utilize computerized cataloging as well as the registration of patrons by computer. Many school districts operate, in effect, the branch concept by hiring a library coordinator or supervisor and by utilizing a union catalog of materials available on the district level. It would seem to be possible, therefore, for the combined library to be located in a school, or schools, regardless of placement in the community, if small branches could also be located in convenient places, i.e., store fronts, community buildings, shopping centers, churches, etc.

REASONS FOR LIBRARY MERGERS

| <u>Conditions Contributing<br/>to Library Merger</u>               | <u>Number of<br/>Libraries</u> |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Need for school library facility, only . . . . .                   | 2                              |
| Need for public library facility, only . . . . .                   | 13                             |
| Need for both school & public facilities . . . . .                 | 26                             |
| Need for school librarian, only. . . . .                           | 6                              |
| Need for public librarian, only. . . . .                           | 2                              |
| Need for both a school and a public librarian. . . . .             | 11                             |
| Need for both a facility and professional staff. . . . .           | 17                             |
| Small size of community. . . . .                                   | 1                              |
| New school with adequate facility to accommodate facility. . . . . | 2                              |
| Not given. . . . .   | 4                              |

CHIEF AGENTS RESPONSIBLE FOR INITIATING MERGERS

| <u>Agent Responsible</u>  | <u>Frequency</u> |
|---|------------------|
| School personnel and/or board . . . . .   | 23               |
| Public library staff and/or board . . . . .                                       | 11               |
| Financial grant from government . . . . .   | 9                |
| Cooperative effort of both school and public personnel<br>and/or boards . . . . . | 8                |
| Citizen groups . . . . .  | 10               |
| State level library departments or library systems . . . . .                      | 3                |
| Private donor. . . . .  | 1                |
| More than one agency . . . . .  | 16               |

It should be emphasized that planning should involve as large a representation of every segment of the community as possible. There should also be a major effort to inform citizens about the proposed merger well beforehand with opportunity given for citizen involvement in all stages of the development.

All but eleven libraries function under some type of cooperating board relationship or under a specially organized board made up of representatives of the school and public library boards. (The matter of resolving the issues of governance and management is the most important concern and it is the major determinant to the success or failure of the combined library. Further discussion of some of these issues will follow below.)

More librarians responded to the opportunity to list benefits of combining school and public libraries than those who listed weaknesses and problems. Fifty of the fifty-two librarians offered at least one advantage of the combined facility, as it pertained to their communities. Advantages included:

- 1) Better selection of materials, print and non-print
- 2) Better reference and periodical collections for students and/or public patrons
- 3) Library service for public patrons for the first time
- 4) Elimination of some duplication of materials
- 5) Better use of financial resources
- 6) Wider range of media sources including production and video facilities
- 7) Expanded use of facilities
- 8) Better physical facilities including community culture centers, in some instances (The community culture center concept is commonly employed in Hawaii and is also utilized in a few libraries in Colorado.)

Librarians from eleven communities volunteered unreserved enthusiasm for the concept as seen from their perspective. The following quotations illustrate their enthusiasm: "The success is unreal, it is so great!"; "I honestly don't think our system has any weakness"; "I could help sell our system to any community"; "The

public has cooperated beyond our expectations and the community is proud of the facility." (A number of librarians emphasized that citizens were proud of their library.)

Forty-two librarians listed weaknesses and problems which were of concern to them. Fourteen were concerned with problems that had developed because the roles, responsibilities and administrative procedures had not been defined sufficiently. (The matter of defining the roles of boards, administration, and employees has also been cited as a major concern in almost every piece of literature dealing with combined libraries.) The matter of the often differing salary schedules for school and public library employees is a related problem that must be resolved.

The second most frequently mentioned problem had to do with inadequate facilities. This was usually seen as being the result of inadequate financial resources and the inability of the library planners to foresee the demands that would be placed on the merged facility. Too often, old library quarters designed with traditional public or school programs in mind, have been expected to accommodate new programs and services, with little or no change in the facility or staffing.

Other problems cited included:

- 1) The poor location of the library in the building
- 2) Legal deterrents
- 3) The noise and confusion of the school setting
- 4) Lack of adequate parking
- 5) Inability to serve both groups adequately
- 6) Inability to communicate to the public patrons that the library was, in fact, a public library
- 7) The geographic location of the library in respect to public patrons (mentioned only one time)
- 8) Minor discipline problems because students did not view the library as a school library



The program is supported by thirteen staff members. It serves approximately 10,000 people and is located on a school campus complex accommodating over 2,700 elementary and 3,700 high school students.

#### Illinois

The Wendall Smith Library in Chicago is a relatively new program. It was planned cooperatively by the Chicago Board of Education and Chicago Public Library. It serves approximately 1,000 children and all the residents of a neighborhood community. It is housed in an elementary school which is located within walking distance of a high school, junior college and university. The library is staffed by two full time teacher-librarians and a library assistant provided by the school system. Three professional librarians plus pages and clerical staff are provided by the Chicago Public Library. The school-employed staff work regular school hours and the public library staff works the same hours as other employees of the Chicago Public Library.

#### New Mexico

The Woolworth Community Library, located in Jal, New Mexico, began operation in August 1978. Jal, population 3,000, is located in oil and gas production country. The school has an enrollment of 725 students. The \$1,200,000 facility was built with funds given by the Woolworth family, prominent citizens of the area for many years. The major operation is also funded by the trust fund, but some additional monies are provided by the city and the school. The library will house 35,000 volumes and will accommodate a variety of activities and programs. It contains a film and lecture theater, a children's area, an art gallery, an historical display area, a kitchen, and a hobby and meeting room.

#### North Dakota

The governor's advisory council in North Dakota recently commissioned a research team to study the concept of combining school

and public libraries for that state. They have been particularly concerned with sparsely populated areas of the state which have difficulty in providing citizens with any kind of library service. The team studied seven school/public libraries which were already functioning in that state. The results were not too optimistic. The libraries did not provide strong programs; they were school oriented; and services were limited to the school day. Most of these deficiencies, however, could be traced to insufficient tax bases. The committee did develop a document which includes guidelines to assist communities in building stronger programs. It is also available to communities who may wish to organize combined programs.

The community library in Oakes, North Dakota, serves a rural community with approximately 3,000 residents. The librarian, responding to the questionnaire, was quite enthusiastic about the program despite the fact it is weak or inadequate, as viewed by the state guidelines. The library was organized in 1925 as a combined facility. It is located in the high school, but also serves 360 elementary school students along with the 440 high school pupils. The grade school students are brought to the library once a week for browsing and selecting of books. The high school students utilize the facility as needed, often checking out materials for their parents. The public is encouraged to use the facility when it is open. (They may enter directly from the street.) Some adult patrons stop in while on shopping errands. Some sit down at study tables with the students while others browse, make their selections and leave.

#### Texas

The Olney Community Library and Arts Center was created through a federally funded program in connection with Title III ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act). The project was initiated by the citizens of Olney in 1971 as part of an overall community planning project. Olney, with approximately 3,625 residents, is located in the northern part of the state. Assistance in planning was

provided by a Health, Education, and Welfare research grant awarded to the North Texas State University. Funds for the operation have been provided by citizens and friends of the community, by a \$50,000 matching gift from a private foundation and from community development funds from HUD. The library is administered by a library coordinator under the direction of a nine member Olney Community Library Board. Salaries of one librarian, two paraprofessionals, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the salary of the children's librarian are paid with school monies. The remainder of the salary costs are provided with public library funds. Each organization shares other operating costs. All purchasing is coordinated to eliminate unnecessary duplication. A strong reference collection has been purchased and is available to all citizens for use in the library and for the telephone reference service.

One of the purposes of the project was to identify problems and potential solutions in the merging process and in the operation of combined libraries. The project further sought to develop a model that could be used by other communities desiring to develop combined facilities. It would appear that this project has contributed some very important information and data concerning combined school and public libraries. A number of benefits, advantages and problem areas have been identified by those working with the program.

#### Florida

In response to inquiries about combining school and public libraries in Florida, the state library in cooperation with members of the University of Tallahassee library faculty conducted a study to examine the concepts of cooperating and combined libraries. The study sought to determine which concept can best lend itself to a particular community in improving school and public library services. Findings of the study indicate that communities able to support separate school and public libraries would not be able to offer any better programs through combining. The combined library does, however, provide a possible solution for communities unable to support separate facilities

offering minimum services. But such programs are difficult to implement successfully and must be subject to special considerations, according to the authors of the report.

An additional result of this project was the development of a checklist that can be used by community leaders interested in developing improved library services at the local level. The document, included in Phase Three of the study, is in the form of a questionnaire designed to aid in assessing a community's ability to support library services.

#### Conference on Total Community Library Service

The report of the Conference on Total Community Library Service, held jointly by the American Library Association and the National Education Association in 1972, examines many aspects of the problems related to providing school and public library services. The report contains papers, critiques, and summaries of the discussions and recommendations which originated during the conference.

#### Combined Libraries Outside the United States

Australia, Canada and England also combine school and public libraries on occasion. A report issued by the Australian Schools Commission in 1978 identified a number of facilities, called joint school/community libraries. Many similarities exist between observations made in this report and with those made in studies originating in the United States.

A recent study entitled The Canadian School-Housed Public Library describes merged facilities located throughout the provinces and territories of Canada. Merging school and public libraries has become an acceptable means, and often the only feasible way, to provide any kind of adequate library service, particularly for small communities in Canada. Of the 127 libraries responding to a survey conducted prior to this report, 79% have been organized in 1970 or later. As in other studies, the results of this comprehensive survey and report confirm the importance and necessity of conducting a thorough needs assessment as a part of the planning process.

An extensive bibliography and copies of several agreements between participating agencies are included in this volume.

England and Wales have also conducted recent studies. Library advisors in the Department of Education and Science issued a report in 1973 which provided information helpful to those interested in implementing combined or "dual" libraries.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

It is my opinion that school and public libraries can be combined and can offer good programs in some communities under certain circumstances and conditions. The following matters are herewith offered as being of great importance and should be given serious consideration by those contemplating or planning merged school and public libraries.

- 1) Communities which already have adequate public and school programs are not apt to provide better service by combining already existing libraries.
- 2) Community size may have a bearing on the chances of achieving success. Evidence gathered in the course of my investigation would indicate that the optimum environment would be communities with 5,000 residents or less. Important to success in such a venture is the matter of communication. It would appear that it is easier to communicate in small towns and rural areas where the process is simpler and more direct. Usually a greater percentage of the residents of small communities are more involved in community life than are their counterparts in more urban or suburban communities. Community leaders in small towns are usually highly respected with the capabilities of pulling all resources together in order to achieve a goal that will benefit the entire community.

- 3) Financial resources can be extended by eliminating duplicate purchases for such items as reference tools, periodicals, and microforms, while at the same time providing a greater variety of these same materials. The only major savings that can be realized is in the areas of land acquisition and capital development.
- 4) Of prime importance, and perhaps the most critical issue, is the matter of governance and management of the combined library. The areas of responsibilities, the roles of all who have any relationship to the operation of the facility, including budgetary and financial considerations, must be well established and such responsibilities well defined. Boards, committees, and individuals may find it necessary to compromise or relinquish some authority in order to achieve a more orderly and efficiently organized administrative structure.
- 5) There should be an opportunity for representatives of all segments of the community affected by the merger, public library board and personnel, town or city officials, civic leaders, students, and just interested citizens, to be involved in the planning during the very early stages of the endeavor. The planning time should be sufficient to allow an assessment of community needs and for planning programs to meet these needs. To fail to include input from members of the community is inviting unnecessary friction and misunderstanding while at the same time neglecting a potentially effective public relations resource.
- 6) Planning a combined facility should not be based on the requirement or desire to effect great financial savings in the area of personnel, materials and space needs.

Too many communities have attempted to operate combined libraries with resources which may have been adequate for either a school or public library but not for both. If programs operate effectively and continue to grow and to serve a broader base of the community, more budgetary allocations may be required, not less.

- 7) The physical facility should be easily accessible to the public, but must also be adequate and satisfactory for students. It should have direct access from the outside, with no steps to climb. There should be adequate parking. It should be functional and large enough to accommodate quiet reading and research activities simultaneously with classroom and large activities. Provisions must be made for the security of the school plant during after-school hours, if the library is located in a school.
- 8) Sufficient staffing--professional and paraprofessional--to meet the minimum requirements as recommended by ALA and other crediting agencies is of great importance. The library administrator should have some orientation, including academic training, in both school and public librarianship. This person should have expertise in budgeting and in the law as it relates to finance and other legal requirements of public institutions. All personnel should be committed to the philosophy of combined school/public library programs.
- 9) A full range of programs and services should be provided and be offered to all patrons at all times while the facility is open. The separate functions of the public library and of the school media program must be included in the program. The hours should not be confined to the school day, but should also provide

opportunities for patrons to use the facility after school, in the evenings, on weekends, and during school holidays.

In conclusion, despite the opposition which is often expressed and demonstrated toward the development of combined school/public libraries, today's languishing economy will require school districts and communities to examine the concept with more openness than in the past. The fact that there are now a number of successful combined libraries in operation and that there is a body of literature and practical experience from which to draw should insure that the future will see the extension of library service to the people of all ages in the United States. Those who are willing to accept the challenge to innovate or try new or different approaches may find the results to be highly beneficial to all who are concerned with school and library facilities at the local level.



## REFERENCES

- Aaron, Shirley L. "Combined School Public Library Programs: An Abstract of a National Study." School Media Quarterly 7 (Fall 1978): 31-53.
- Aaron, Shirley L. and Sue O. Smith. A Study of the Combined School Public Library: Phase I. Tallahassee, Florida: Florida State University, 1977.
- Aaron, Shirley L. A Study of the Combined School Public Library: Phase II & III. Tallahassee, Florida: Florida State University, 1978.
- Amey, L. G., ed. The Canadian School-Housed Public Library. Halifax, Nova Scotia: Dalhousie University Libraries and Dalhousie School of Library Service, 1979.
- Dwyer, James G. Co-operation or Compromise: School/Community Libraries in Australia. Woden, Canberra: Australia Schools Commission, 1978.
- Garrison, Guy, ed. Total Community Library Service. Chicago: American Library Association, 1973.
- Graham, Mae and J. Maurice Travillian. "Merged Facilities: Potential and Constraints." In Media Center Facilities Design. Edited by Jane Anne Hannigan and Glenn E. Estes. Chicago: American Library Association, 1978.

Hunt, James. "Library Development in Hawaii." Wilson Library Journal 42 (April 1968): 810-11.

Isumo, Patsy M., et. al. Hawaii School Library Media Centers: A Manual for Organization and Services. Honolulu: School Libraries and Instructional Branch, Office of Library Services, Dept. of Education. ERIC Document Reproduction Service, Ed 148 375, June, 1976.

Jones, Arthur C. "Dual Purpose Libraries: Some Experience in England." The School Librarian 25 (December 1977): 311-18.

Kitchens, James A. The Olney Venture: An Experiment in Coordination and Merger of School and Public Library. Community Service Report #4. Denton, Texas: North Texas State University, 1975.

Kitchens, James A., et. al. A Community Cultural Arts Center Merging Public and School Library Services in Olney, Texas. Washington, D.C.: DHEW/OE, 1974.

Ramachandran, R. "The Community/School Library Concept in Hawaii." Bulletin for Libraries 28 (July-August 1974): 200-05.

Rudser, Ronald. A Study of Combination School/Public Libraries in North Dakota. Bismark: State Library Commission, 1977.

School-Community Library. The Olney Project. Olney, Texas, n.d. (Mimeographed).

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and Bureau of Public and Cooperative Services. School-Public Library Services Within a Community. Madison, Wisconsin: n.p., 1976.

Woolard, Wilma Lee Broughton. The School/Public Library Concept:  
Will It Work? ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 140  
805, November, 1977.