MEETING MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MARY RILEY STYLES PUBLIC LIBRARY
Held in City Hall East Wing 2nd Floor – Oak Conference Room.
Falls Church, VA 22046
February 19, 2020

1. CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Chairperson Stephanie Oppenheimer called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

Attendance:
Stephanie Oppenheimer
Chet DeLong
Kathleen Tysse
Molly Novotny
Chrystie Swiney
Jeff Peterson
Don Camp

Others in attendance:
Director Jenny Carroll
Administrative Assistant Claudia Gutierrez

Guests:
Councilwoman Liaison Marybeth Connelly
Councilman Phil Duncan

Non-in attendance:
Planning Commission Liaison Rob Puentes
Councilman Ross Litkenhous

Councilwoman Connelly announced to the Board that she will be the City Council liaison starting tonight.

2. RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

No petitions

3. APPROVAL OF JANUARY 19, 2020 MEETING MINUTES

There was a discussion on whether to include in the first agenda item the names of library Board liaisons, who were not present at the meeting, or to only mention their names when attending the Board meeting. The Board decided to change the format in the next Board meeting minutes, but for now, they approved the January 19 minutes as presented.

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the Library Board unanimously approved the January 19, 2020 Meeting Minutes with minor changes.

4. LIBRARY REPORT AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Council approved the Library project. The library started moving in earnest. Local History materials were moved to a conditioned storage space in Richmond, including IT equipment. The Technical Services and Administration Departments moved to Gage House. The library collection prepared to be moved to the temporary location and to storage.

- The Director expressed her appreciation to all the support given by the Superintendent of Public Works Robert Goff and his crew. They completed tasks to ensure the trailers will be operational including moving furniture to the temporary location. Tentatively, the opening for the temporary location is March 9. It has been posted on social media, brochures, flyers, schools announcements, and banners both at the trailers and at the current library at 120 N Virginia Ave. The Falls Church News Press had an article with information about it as well. The Director is very pleased with the moving company, Kloke and the supervisor, Pat King who is working on the logistics.. Kloke has commented that they are impressed with the organization of the library staff.

5. LIBRARY FOUNDATION REPORT

On February 12, the Library Foundation development committee organized a successful open house at the library with activities such as mini golf, raffles, and prizes. The Foundation Board will be meeting on February 25 to discuss the next steps in supporting the library. The Director remarked that both the library Board and library staff are exceptional; she thanked the Board for their dedication to the library and their support in making this renovation happen.

6. COUNCIL LIAISON REPORT

Ms. Connelly informed the Board that on Monday February 24 Council will approve an oversight committee for the library project. It will include two Council members, two Library members, a Planning Commission member, the Library Director, City Manager Wyatt Shields, and a Community member. Council will interview citizens that are interested in being part of this oversight committee. This committee will meet monthly to review the progress of the library project, the timing, budget, etc. The library Board will be asked to appoint two members to be part of the committee as well. Councilman Dan Sze will be a part of the committee and Council will decide who the second representative will be.

The Director added that Library Project Manager Lionel Millard will present a monthly report to the Board about the library project. Ms. Connelly suggested that the Director contact the Principal of Thomas Jefferson Elementary, Paul Swanson, to give him updates to inform parents about the logistics of the library moving process. The library will be opening at 9:30am after the school buses are gone. The library will open Wednesday at 1pm before early release. Story time will happen in the mornings except for Tuesdays, when it will occur in the afternoon. Staff will evaluate the schedule moving forward.

7. ARTS AND HUMANITIES COUNCIL REPORT (CATCH)

Since Ms. Oppenheimer's term attending this meeting is coming to a close, she asked if another Board member could replace her on it and attend these meetings as a representative when necessary.

Ms. Chrystie Swiney volunteered to attend. Ms. Oppenheimer will forward her name to Corey Janicelli, Arts and Humanities Council liaison.

8. DISCUSSION OF ELIMINATING FINES FOR OVERDUE ITEMS

The Director informed the Board that eliminating overdue fines had become a hot topic locally in Virginia and nationwide. The Director provided the document *Removing Barriers to Access* in the Board packet. This document is specific for children's materials, but it can be applied to all overdue fines. The research found that fines are a barrier to those who need access to the library the most. In addition, fines are not an incentive to return books, in fact libraries with no fines saw an increase in circulation. Dealing with fines can become a negative interaction between patrons and staff. In addition, the administrative and staff time spent collecting fines often costs more than is collected. Nationwide several large systems have eliminated overdue fines such as Chicago and San Francisco; and in Virginia several systems have elected to eliminate all overdue fines or pilot eliminating fines on children's materials.

The Director informed the Board that the money collected for fines is allocated in the City's general fund. The total fines collected in Fiscal Year 2010 were $63,000. By FY2018 they were at $34,000, and in FY2019 they were down to $29,000. So far, in FY2020, $13,000 has been collected and the Director doesn't expect that the total will reach $20,000 by the end of the fiscal year. Some of the reasons for the drop in fines could be the migration to Apollo, which is the new ILS (Integrated Library System). This added Gabbie, a new 2-way texting feature, that allows patrons and staff to communicate and for patrons to renew their books. Another reason could be auto-renewal which was implemented last year. Also, all fines were set to $0.30 per item in 2018. The Director talked to Finance Director Kiran Bawa and City Manager Wyatt Shields about eliminating fines for the library and they approved it. If this policy gets approved by the Board, Mr. Shields will include it in his FY2021 budget presentation to Council.

The Director requested a motion from the Board to support the changes in the policy; she will bring it back to the Board for its first and second reading. She recommended eliminating overdue fines for all items except ILL materials. Patrons are billed for lost materials not returned 60 days after their due date.

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the Library Board unanimously moved to accept the Director's recommendation to proceed with developing appropriate changes to the library's fine policy and have it ready for first and second reading in March and April. The policy would go into effect in FY 2021 on July 1, 2020.

Mr. Peterson requested an annual report on the change in the fine policy, either to improve it or make any changes. She should provide the report to the Board by early FY2022. Mr. Peterson also asked if other libraries who have eliminated overdue fines present an option to patrons to donate money to the library when returning books late. He suggested having that practice at the library. The Director will look into it.

Board Member Molly Novotny left the meeting at 7:50 pm.

9. CBC STUDENT LIAISON DISCUSSION

Ms. Oppenheimer informed the Board that she had a conversation with Nancy Brandon, Sally Ekfelt, and Hal Lippman from CBC (Citizens for a Better City). She informed them that the Library

Board is interested in adding some structure to the student liaison experience to help the students learn more when they participate at the Library Board meeting instead of only being a resume builder. CBC were pleased that the Library Board is interested; they mentioned that some Boards give the students projects and ideas to work with. Ms. Oppenheimer asked the Board to think about what projects these students might do related to library subjects.

Spring is the time when the students apply to CBC. They start participating with Boards and Commissions in the fall. The Director suggested that one Board member partner with each student to help them get motivated and feel encouraged. The Board discussed having two students, so they can feel more comfortable and can work together on the projects. CBC extended an invitation to any Board member who wants to be included in the interviewing process to select student liaisons.

10. BUSINESS NOT ON AGENDA

The Contract with Centennial has been executed and construction will start on March 16. The Director will coordinate with Project Manager Millard and Centennial on when the groundbreaking will take place. Once the construction starts, there will be periods during the day when a lane from Virginia Avenue will be affected. There will be cranes when Centennial brings the steel in and when the RTU units are placed on the roof.

Ms. Connelly suggested painting a crosswalk across Virginia Ave near the north side exit of the Liberty Barbecue parking lot to accommodate the potential lack of sidewalk on the library's side while the building is under construction, or putting up a sign directing pedestrians to another crosswalk for safety purposes. The Director will mention that to Mr. Millard.

City's Green Space Manager, Jeremy Edwards, removed some of the plants from the library and they are being distributed around the City. The Director of Communication, Susan Finarelli, will put a note about it on the City's website. The memorials that were outside the library were taken to the property yard to be stored until the construction is over.

Mr. Camp asked how the e-Resources are performing, including Kanopy. The Director mentioned that she allotted $8,000 in the library budget for Kanopy and so far, 70 % has been spent out. She will have a meeting with a Kanopy representative to evaluate their resources; deciding if they will drop the service or if they will add some limitations to it. Alexandria library dropped their Kanopy service due to the expense. The Director is monitoring all of the e-Resources and will decide which ones should be kept.

Mr. Chet DeLong started volunteering for the library in April 1994 and began serving an expired term for the library Board in October of 1994. This will be his 26th year working with the library.

11. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, upon a motion duly made and seconded, the Board of Trustees voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jenny Carroll
Library Director

Approved:

Stephanie Oppenheimer, Chairperson

Copies: Board of Trustees, City Manager, Library Reference Desk, Staff Bulletin Board, City Clerk, Library Web Page

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Sign In Sheet

Library Board of Trustees

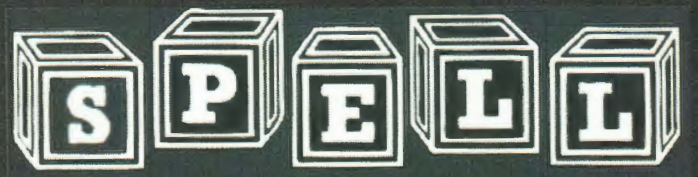
February 19, 2020

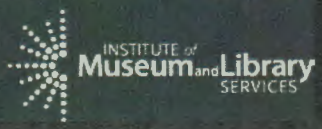
Name	Adress	Email
Maybeth Connelly		
PHIL DUNCAN		

Removing Barriers to Access:

Eliminating Library Fines and Fees on Children's Materials

MEG JOHNSON DEPRIEST, MLIS, MSSW
PREPARED FOR THE COLORADO STATE LIBRARY





Abstract

The Supporting Parents in Early Literacy through Libraries (SPELL) research revealed that library fines and fees for overdue, damaged, and lost materials are barriers that prevent low-income parents and caregivers of young children from using public libraries. After reviewing the academic and professional literature regarding library fines and fees, including qualitative research, quantitative studies, and editorial pieces, as well as using finding from the two studies with parents and public libraries in Colorado, the Colorado State Library (CSL) recommends public libraries eliminate fines and fees on children's materials. The scant research on the value and impact of library fines and fees does not indicate a clear benefit of administering these policies, and they may be costly to enforce. Library governing authorities that develop policies to remove fines and fees on juvenile material find it effective in building a positive relationship with families with young children.

Introduction

Public libraries play a vital role in the development of early literacy skills of children and families in the communities they serve; storytimes and other programming give librarians an opportunity to teach parents of young children the importance of reading, writing, singing, talking and playing with their children. Thoughtfully developed children's collections are available for borrowing by families, particularly those that might not have the household income needed to purchase them. Unfortunately, while children's librarians encourage all parents and their children to avail themselves of the collection, the policies of many libraries are doing just the opposite.

The threat of accumulating fines for overdue materials and the fees associated with damaged or lost books is keeping low-income families away from libraries, or from checking out items to take home (Zhang, 2013). Whether the intended function of library fines and fees is to encourage the prompt return of materials, to supplement the library budget, or to teach patrons responsibility, overdue fines and replacement fees on children's materials can negatively affect the borrowing habits of members of our community who need the library the most (Zhang, 2013).

This white paper reviews the scant research on the costs and benefits of library fines and fees, summarizes the professional editorials on the subject, and asserts that these financial costs, particularly for children's materials, may be

more detrimental than beneficial to libraries with goals of meeting community literacy needs. Early evidence from Colorado libraries that have changed policies to be more accommodating of late, lost, and damaged materials offers additional evidence to justify these recommendations.

Literature Review

Librarians have been discussing, and in some instances debating, the propriety of charging fees for late, lost or damaged materials for decades. A review of the professional and academic literature reveals only a handful of small-scale studies of the effect of library fines on the borrowing behavior of library users (Breslin & McMenemy, 2006; Hansel, 1993; Burgin & Hansel, 1984; Burgin & Hansel, 1991; Reed, Blackburn & Sifton, 2014; Smith & Mitchell, 2005). In absence of empirical proof of the effectiveness of fines and fees, there exists a largely philosophical conversation in the literature with many authors in favor of eliminating fines and fees--at the very least for children's materials--and focusing on the inequitable access to materials for low-income families (Caywood, 1994; Chelton, 1984; DeFaveri, 2005; Holt & Holt, 2010; Livingston, 1975; Venturella, 1998).

Library Fines and Circulation Rates

While it is challenging to study the effect of library fines and fees on circulation patterns, a few researchers have attempted to do so. In 1981, Hansel and Burgin (1983) sent a survey to all public libraries in North Carolina to discern which circulation activities affected overdue rates over three years. They found no significant difference in overdue rates between libraries that charged fines and those that did not; and libraries that did not charge fines tended to have higher overdue rates in the short run, but lower overdue rates in the long term. Reflecting on their research, the authors stated "with overdues, as with so many aspects of librarianship, there are no easy answers--that seems to be the primary finding of the study" (Hansel & Burgin, 1983, p. 350).

Perhaps unsatisfied with the "no easy answers" conclusion in their first attempt, Burgin and Hansel replicated their study in 1983 and 1990. The 1983 study revealed much the same data as the 1981 survey, but added a new result: the amount of the fine charged by a library had a significant correlation with the overdue rate--low fines did not reduce overdue rates, but steep ones did (Burgin & Hansel, 1984). In the third study, the authors concluded "In short, it appears that few strategies used by the libraries in the present survey had any significant effect on overdue rates" (Burgin & Hansel, 1991, p. 65). As diligent as they were, in three research projects over fifteen years, these authors could not uncover data to support the assumption held in the profession that the existence of nominal fines is a successful incentive to patrons to return materials

on time; and only very steep fines seem to have had any significant effect on overdue occurrences.

While not conducted in a public library environment, Mitchell and Smith's (2005) experiment in an academic library is worth noting. They attempted to determine whether rewards, rather than punitive fines, affected the timely return of academic library materials. Even the presence of rewards as incentives did not influence the promptness, or lack thereof, of students in returning materials. Also in academia, librarians at Vancouver Island University removed fines to determine if this might improve use of the physical collection by their student population of non-traditional, adult and first generation students (Reed, Blackburn & Sifton, 2014). The authors reported the removal of overdue fines did not increase circulation, but the collection wasn't "pillaged," and there was no increase in overdue items. The authors believe "fines are a contentious topic among librarians, with many strongly held beliefs about their effectiveness backed by little evidence" (p. 275).

In seeking to determine why borrowing rates were down in libraries in the United Kingdom, Breslin and McMenemy (2006) conducted a survey of patrons and found that library rules, restrictive hours and "not feeling welcome" were all factors in the decline. Clayton and Chapman (2009) reported on a survey of public libraries in England and Wales. Like Burgin and Hansel, these authors found a lack of published research on the attitudes toward, and the effectiveness of, fines and fees in public libraries. Instead, they highlighted a

lack of consensus in the profession as to the effectiveness of charging fines. They reported that over 81% of the libraries responding to the survey did not charge fines for children's materials and concluded "it is difficult to reach any definite conclusion as to the impact of fines on library usage and image. There is an urgent need for more research in this field, particularly studies which investigate the opinions of library users and nonusers" (Clayton & Chapman, 2009, p. 15).

Colorado State Library's (CSL) SPELL research (Zhang, 2013), funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, included distribution of surveys in 2013 to caregivers of young children in low-income urban and rural areas of Colorado. In addition to learning about library habits among this group, CSL was interested to learn what barriers prevented low-income families with young children from visiting the library. Along with transportation and scheduling issues, respondents to the survey identified library fines as a one of the "things that get in the way" of their use of the library (Zhang, 2013, p. 17). Further anecdotal stories in focus groups with low-income parents in the study reveal that both fines for late items and fees for lost or damaged books make parents reluctant to check out books and to have their children enjoy library books at all.

Neuman and Celano (2004) conducted a study examining the influence of school and public libraries on young children's literacy skills. They found libraries in economically disadvantaged areas of the community had significantly lower circulation rates than middle class neighborhoods. Using

ethnographic research methods, including interviews and observation, they discovered "many families in low-income areas did not own a library card, or if they did, family members were reluctant to check out books because they feared having to pay overdue fines" (p. 83). The traditional practice of charging late fees has left a lasting impression on the very people who most need libraries: community members who are economically disadvantaged, many with young children at home.

In summary, the library profession lacks data to support the argument that the presence of fines for overdue materials positively influences return rates on materials. In addition, a few research studies conclude that circulation rates among low-income families are lower due to the presence of library fines and fees. With such inconclusive evidence of the value of fines and indicators of the negative effects, the 1984 *Library Journal* editorial titled "What Are Fines for?" could have been written today:

> In the absence of circulation, delinquency, collection turnover, and collection loss rates by age group, it is impossible to say whether any particular library is achieving this goal or not, especially if there are no data showing trends in these rates prior to the implementation of a fine system. Discussion of the spurious issues seems to rise in direct proportion to the absence of data to examine the third (Chelton, 1984, p. 868).

One is left to conclude that policy decisions surrounding the collection of late fees from patrons cannot be supported by hard data. Policies surrounding overdue materials, especially children's materials, must be based on careful consideration of the role of libraries in the community and the lives of its

members. There is no shortage of articles, editorials and other opinion pieces on this subject in the library profession's literature.

Professional Discussion on Fines and Fees

Library Fines and Civic Responsibility

Some community members, including librarians, staff, administrators, and users of libraries, believe that fines for late materials function to provide equal access to materials by encouraging patrons' sense of civic responsibility. Their philosophy is that the threat of fines teaches borrowers to return material on time so that others may access the collection. In his *Library Review* editorial "On Library Fines: Ensuring Civic Responsibility or an Easy Income Stream?", McMenemy (2010) examined both sides of the argument, and he concluded "It seems to me they serve a vital function for any library that requires efficient and equitable circulation of stock" (p. 81). Jerome (2012) addressed the issue with passion in "Occupy the Library. Fines: A Manifesto." When she was a younger librarian, she believed that libraries should not charge fines, but she now believes that not charging for late material, or adjusting them for certain portions of the population, has lead to a sense of entitlement in patrons. By waiving fines for some borrowers, libraries are denying other community members access to those materials that are late. She asks "How 'right' is it to let

a few essentially take advantage of the rest?" (p. 7). Both authors emphasize that the collection is for all members of the community, and the threat of fines serves as an incentive for the prompt return of materials that can then be used by other community members.

Many opponents to library fines disagree with the socialization argument. They believe it is the job of parents, not libraries, to socialize children, and charging fines on children's materials is punitive and a barrier to access. In her article "Penny Wise, Pound Foolish," Caywood (1994) emphasized this point:

> Some librarians argue that fines teach children responsibility. This is an ironic view since it often is the parent--if not the child--who decides if they can return to the library by the due date. I have watched some parents become so incensed over a child's fines that they forbade library use. I don't know whether these kids are learning responsibility, but I'm certain they are not learning to regard the library as a welcoming place (p. 44).

In an analysis of this topic, faced with a hypothetical situation in which a librarian feels uncomfortable about collecting late fees from an adolescent borrower, Galloway (1984) asked "Since when is it the duty of librarians to teach kids responsibility?" (p. 869). In the same discussion, Chelton (1984) cast doubt at the "predictable, spurious socialization arguments" with the query: "if the purpose of fines is socialization, how does one justify fines for adults, who are presumably already socialized?" (p. 869).

At a time when the role of libraries in the community is under examination, it is time to move away from the traditional notion of libraries as quiet institutions with authoritarian rules of behavior where children learn to fear incurring

fines. Instead, library staff can leave the socializing of children to parents, and provide the tools parents need to foster literacy skills in their children without threat of financial retribution for small infractions to rules.

Fines, Fees and the Library's Budget

In some library systems, funds generated by fines and fees supplement library budgets. McMenemy (2010) highlights income generation lessening the tax burden on the community as one of the reasons people advocate for these charges (p. 79). Those who disagree with this notion argue that administrative costs associated with collecting fines and fees can surpass the revenue they generate. Vernon Area Public Library (Illinois) is just one library that has eliminated overdue fines and fees that amounted to less than one percent of their budget and cost far more to collect (Pyatetsky, 2015).

High Plains Library District (Colorado) eliminated late fines on library materials and found the financial repercussions to be "neutral" because they were able to eliminate costly credit card technology on their self-check machines (J. Reid, personal communication, April 26, 2016). Staff time and money-collecting technology are expensive, and when the amount generated by charging fines is compared to the costs associated with collecting them, it becomes clear charging fines for revenue may not make sense.

Fines, Fees, and Low-income Populations

In 2012, the ALA issued a policy statement, "Library Services to the Poor," that called upon libraries to acknowledge the important role they can play in "enabling poor people to participate fully in a democratic society" (ALA, 2012, para. 1). Libraries are encouraged by the ALA to promote "the removal of all barriers to library and information services, particularly fees and overdue charges" (para. 2). The ALA joins many members of the library community in the opinion that charging library fines for materials, while equal treatment, is not fair because the practice disproportionately affects low-income members of our society.

The idea that charging fines is unfair to children, especially those who are from low-income families, is not new. In 1975, the King County Library System's Children's Services Department Committee on Fines presented a proposal to eliminate fines for overdue materials to the King Country (Washington) administration. They advocated for removing fines on children's materials, discussed other libraries that had removed fines without negatively affecting circulation patterns, and they were adamant about the negative effect on borrowing among low-income families:

> We feel that fines are not justifiable theoretically or practically for either adults or children, however we feel that they are particularly damaging to children's attitudes to and use of the library. We believe that children have a right to use the library independent of

> their parents' financial pressures and that fines discourage library use particularly among children (Livingston, 1975, p. 80).

The administration rejected the proposal, despite the passionate support of committee members and librarians.

Over forty years later, the library profession is still divided on fines (and fees) on children's material, and the policies of many institutions still include these practices. For example, in San Jose, California, libraries raised their fines to 50 cents per item, per day. In poor neighborhoods, almost one-third of the residents were barred from using the library because of unpaid fines (Pogash, 2016). An elementary school principal interviewed about the San Jose libraries' policy stated that fines are a "slap on the wrist" for middle income families, but if forced to choose between paying library fines "and putting food on the table and a roof over the children's heads, it's a no-brainer: it's better not to check out library books" (para. 18). Thus, treating all library patrons equally by assessing a fine for late materials is inequitable: it disproportionately affects low-income families.

With regard to fees for lost items, in "Breaking Barriers: Libraries and Socially Excluded Communities," DeFaveri (2005) described a situation in which a mother was charged $25.00 for a lost picture book. The author asks members of our profession to contemplate the long-term consequences of choosing to collect $25 in the short term:

> Will this family be comfortable returning to the library?

> If the library does not charge for the damaged book, it loses about $25.00. When the library fails to recognize situations where charging replacement costs means losing library patrons, it loses the opportunity to participate in the life of the patron and patron's family. By choosing to make a $25 replacement cost more significant than the role the institution can play in the social, developmental, and community life of the family, the library forfeits its role as a community and literacy advocate and leader.
>
> It will cost the library more than $25.00 to convince this mother to return to the library. It will cost the library more than $25.00 to persuade this mother that the library is a welcoming community place willing to mount literacy programs aimed at her children, who will not benefit from regular library visits and programs. And when these children are adults, it will cost the library more than $25.00 to convince them that the library is a welcoming and supportive place for their children (DeFaveri, 2005, para. 20-22).

DeFaveri also discussed the ingrained nature of fines, and she called for librarians to understand that they affect different populations differently:

> Fines, replacement costs and processing fees are affordable for the middle class, but represent significant and often overwhelming costs for poor people. As a result, poor patrons with fines over $10.00 who cannot pay the fines are excluded from accessing library resources. This barrier to library use has short and long-term consequences for the library and the community it serves" (para. 17).

In agreement with DeFaveri, Venturella (1998) emphasized the leadership and advocacy roles of libraries. She argued that overdue fines are a burden to low-income library users, and she insisted "It is a moral imperative that we be responsive to the needs of the community" (p. 33).

The ALA urges libraries to play a significant role in supporting low-income users as valued members of our society. Children's librarians encourage parents to use the library and teach them how to grow early literacy skills in their young

children. Yet, as Holt and Holt (2010) observed, "Reacting to fines and the cost of lost books, or just fearing such expenses, parents and caregivers in poor families may make a rational decision to not allow their children to a get a library card or to check out books that might get lost" (p. 51). The SPELL research (Zhang, 2013) confirms this assertion.

Removing Fines and Fees in Public Libraries

Some public libraries across the United States are changing their policies and seeing little difference in their circulation statistics and, more importantly, improving the library experience of community members. In Pyatetsky's (2015) opinion piece "The End of Overdue Fines?" she suggested the act of eliminating library fines is becoming more widespread and accepted. Algonquin Public Library (Illinois) removed fines; at the one year anniversary of the policy change, they saw no negative effects. Witnessing this, Vernon Public Libraries in the northwest Chicago suburbs followed suit (Pyatetsky, para. 2, 2015).

After determining that charging fines was costing more than the revenue it brought in, Gleason Public Library (Illinois) stopped charging fines and saw no significant difference in the amount of time people were keeping materials (West, 2012). The library director, Angela Mollet, said having a "fine-free" policy was in keeping with the library's mission: "What role do fines play in a library? I want to encourage people of all ages to read, to discover, to be curious, and it doesn't make sense to put up any barriers that might prevent that" (West, 2012,

para. 29). The staff and trustees at Gleason Public Library placed emphasis on removing obstacles to accessing materials, especially for children.

Some libraries offer innovative programming along with policy changes. For example, The New York Public Library, which does not charge fines for late children's books, waived the outstanding fees for lost materials on children's accounts as part of their summer reading program on the condition that children participate in the program and read. The library subtracted one dollar off of their fines for each 15 minutes each child spent reading (Allen, 2011, para. 2). Another creative program can be found at the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County. While this system does charge fines, the rate is five cents per day for children and 20 cents for adults (The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, 2016). Regardless of the status of their accounts, children and teens in this system could ask for their own cards, issued immediately upon request, that allow them to check out a set number of books at a time during the summer. When one book was returned, they could check out another. "The timing on these new cards was key to encouraging and enabling kids and teens whose regular cards have been blocked because of fines or losses, or whose parent were too worried about them running up fines and fees to be able to participate in the Summer Reading program, and to keep up their reading skills over summer break" (Keller, 2011, p. 14). The staff and governing entities of both of these libraries recognized the importance of

removing barriers for young children and developed innovative programs and policies to address the library fines problem for children.

The High Plains Library District (Colorado) participated in a second SPELL research project in which recommendations for the initial research, including removing fines and fees on children's materials, were tested in eight communities. Upon learning that parents and guardians of young children reported library fines to be a barrier to visiting the library, the district eliminated fines on all late returns of materials (excluding DVDs). The main objective of the policy was to increase circulation of children's materials, and the board and administration wished to bring new users into the library. Six months after fines were eliminated, overall circulation was up, and 95% of their materials were returned within a week of the due date (J. Reid, personal communication, April 26, 2016). Staff members of libraries are pleased with the policy change, as they have far fewer unpleasant interactions with patrons about fines, and have more time to accomplish their other duties. The financial effect on the institution, as indicated earlier, has been labeled "neutral." In order to determine if late return of items was affecting the experience of patrons waiting for items, the district examined circulation data and found no increase in "patron disappoints." While patrons might be slightly slower at returning items, this is not negatively affecting the experience of other users of the library.

Other Colorado libraries participating in the second SPELL project have policies regarding children's materials that support early literacy in their

community. Pueblo City-County Library District does not charge fines on picture books and board books, and Denver Public Library has no fines for juvenile and young adult items. Guided by SPELL research findings, Garfield County Public Library District no longer charges fines on picture books, waives fees for damages to board books, and has become more lenient about damages to picture books in the interest of encouraging families to make full use of the materials. According to the library's director, Amelia Shelley, "The library district believes the financial impact will be small, but the impact on children will be immeasurable" (Shelley, 2014, para. 4). There are no fines charged for overdue materials checked out from the Montrose Regional Library District's bookmobile:

> The reasoning for this is two-fold. First, these patrons can struggle to have consistent access to the library, so getting materials returned on time can be a real challenge and we want to make using the library as easy as possible for these patrons. Secondly, many of our target families are low-income and having library fines could prevent continued use of the Bookmobile if they weren't able to pay them off (Lizz Martensen, personal communication, May 26, 2016).

Moving away from the traditional practice of charging library users for late, lost or damaged children's materials has allowed libraries participating in the second SPELL project to focus on nurturing early literacy skills development in low-income households. Removing the financial barrier to library use aligns them with their missions and the ALA's position regarding library services to economically disadvantaged members of our community.

Conclusion and Position

The Colorado State Library recommends public library administrators and governing bodies eliminate library fines, and reconsider fees for lost or damaged items, on children's materials, and other items as deemed appropriate for local service. Fines are punitive, not educational incentives. Damaged and lost material is an inevitable aspect of library use, particularly with very young children, and needs to be considered the cost of doing business with the library's young patrons.

The profession has little empirical evidence that charging fines results in greater circulation of library materials, or indeed the return of items in a timely manner. The administrative costs, including equipment rental, collection contracts, and staff time associated with collecting funds from patrons, often equals or exceeds the revenue earned from library fines and fees. At a time when libraries struggle to remain relevant and increase library use, it may be counterproductive to enforce policies that are punitive in nature and further the stereotype of libraries as authoritarian institutions to be feared.

Librarians have an opportunity to play a meaningful role in the lives of children and families in their communities. By eliminating library fines and fees, particularly on children's materials, public libraries become more welcoming to

children and families. Early literacy skills are crucial to school readiness, so it is important that parents and caregivers from all income-levels in our society have access to materials they can use daily in the home to practice reading, singing, talking, writing, and playing with their children. Children's librarians are thrilled when they see families checking out a stack of picture books, and families should be encouraged to do so, rather than be fearful of the late fines and book damage fees that might accrue. Based on the research, these user-friendly policies will bring more community members into the library, especially the low-income populations who need libraries the most.

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COLORADO
Department of Education
Colorado State Library

INSTITUTE of Museum and Library SERVICES

Colorado State Library
201 E. Colfax, Room 309
Denver, CO 80203
303.866.6900
www.ColoradoStateLibrary.org

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