As we begin to survey the landscape the pandemic has left behind, our focus has been pulled to the impact made on our national education system. Nationally, children returned to the classroom with at least six to eight months of learning and educational development lost to time. The great pivot from in-person to online revealed how ill-prepared U.S. education systems were for such a massive shift in teaching and learning.

But it also uncovered a well of resilience, prompted a much-needed reevaluation of our educational systems nationwide, and strengthened and expanded digital portals to move us closer to access for all.

In all these aspects, your Library served as a knowledge leader, nimble mobilizer, and optimistic partner to the Herculean work of the educators in Mecklenburg County.

Meeting present and future challenges

In the short term, children and teens are playing catch up, while teachers strive to fill the gaps in learning while managing their own fatigue. As of early 2022, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) were still operating in survival mode, with approximately 50% of support staff absent during the peak of the Omicron wave of the pandemic. Administrators began filling in for teachers, pulling them away from their work in professional development and school growth.

The long-term impacts are equally as concerning. From a recent article in McKinsey & Associates, they report “(t)he fallout from the pandemic threatens to depress this generation’s prospects and constrict their opportunities far into adulthood. The ripple effects may undermine their chances of attending college and ultimately finding a fulfilling job that enables them to support a family.”

The pandemic also revealed the long-standing inequities that exist in the U.S. education system. While correcting these issues creates an opportunity to build the system back fairly and sustainability, it will require a large collaborative effort to do it right.
No better place

There is no better place to help meet this challenge than what’s already established in every neighborhood – the public library.

Charlotte Mecklenburg Library (CML) has long been a national model for providing integrated and supplemental services to students, teachers, and parents. CML was one of the first public library systems in the U.S. to go virtual during the pandemic – leading the way with online programming and one-on-one tutoring. They quickly scaled up their virtual services and created outreach kits to educate their patrons about the expanded virtual offerings. Library systems in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and Missouri reached out to Charlotte library staff during the pandemic for the strategies and workflows they developed to help meet the community need.

Before the pandemic hit, the Library had already established a strong partnership with CMS. Library staff work with neighborhood teachers and administrators to ensure the curriculum is supported and aligns with the Library’s collection and resources. In fact, each and every school has a public library staff member solely dedicated to them.

Through ONE Access, or “One Number Equals Access,” student ID numbers serve as seamlessly integrated Library accounts with access to everything the Library has to offer, putting the stacks right at students’ fingertips.

Librarians send monthly personalized communications to every CMS school, keeping them updated with the latest programming, support services and more.

Collaborations between the Library and schools are relational, not transactional – building a cohesive and beneficial partnership that organically fits the needs of the school and its students and teachers.

“Resilience in action

While it’s clear that the pandemic has impeded academic progress, some educators caution a doom-and-gloom mentality. Focusing on the social and emotional well-being of students and teachers may be just as important as the academic after this historic world-altering event.

“When we talk about learning loss, students are listening. Talking about them as permanently damaged learners? I think we need to convey some respect for what they have endured, what they have learned, and how they have developed despite the immense challenges of the last 18 months.”


As our libraries begin to make physical spaces available again, Library CEO Marcellus Turner reflects on how the environment itself can help motivate and support students. During the early days of the pandemic, he witnessed students sitting outside of a Taco Bell, using the restaurant’s Wi-Fi to access their remote classrooms and do homework.

“It’s amazing how much can happen when you offer a child a table and a chair…”

— Library CEO Marcellus Turner
One-on-One Sessions
The Library meets individual learners where they are and helps them continue their learning progress in one-on-one sessions. The student’s needs are identified, and they receive personalized support and access to helpful resources. This is extremely beneficial for students who struggle in traditional classroom settings. Every month your Library offers 300+ one-on-one sessions.

Online Programming
From literacy workshops to college and career programs, from reading times to maker events, your Library brought 7,587 programs into homes this past year, connecting tens of thousands of students to educational, inspiring and engaging content.

Summer Break
Typically, summer is the most critical time of the academic year because the 12-week lapse between school sessions presents a risk to academic success. This summer will be more important than ever for closing the learning loss created during the pandemic. Through programs like Summer Break, the Library and CMS are working together to provide programming for students who do not have access to summer learning opportunities.

Reading Buddies and the Active Reading Program
Active Reading is the practice of reading aloud a picture book with a child by asking questions, building vocabulary, and connecting to the child’s world. This research-based approach improves a child’s language skills, vocabulary, and ability to understand what they read on their own. The Library offers Active Reading Family Workshops and Active Reading Training. These programs teach adults how to share picture books with a child in a way that gets the child talking and thinking about the pictures, words and ideas in the book.

Free Tutoring
With a Library card and internet access, free homework help is available to all students from a live, online, qualified tutor through tutor.com. Students can access up to 10 free tutoring sessions each week from home, school and even the Library. tutor.com is available for K-12, college and adult learners.