

Our reality:

- 76% free and reduced lunch
- 22% of students speaking and understanding no or very limited English
- 80% of our students do not hear or speak any English in their homes
- Limited library experience and how to navigate the social situations it presents
- Over \$500 paid in overdue fines alone in the 2018-2019 school year. Including replacement and damaged materials fines, the figure doubles. Many student accounts have outstanding balances of library fines. As of July 14, 2019, \$1139.19 is outstanding for lost materials and \$777.24 in overdue fines are currently unpaid.

What research shows:

- Library fines do not increase responsibility. Instead students make negative correlations with all libraries, and fines create barriers to access for people who need libraries the most.
- Positive relationships with the library/librarian are just as effective - sometimes more! - than overdue fines.

My proposal:

I would like one full school year to eliminate overdue fines and discuss lost or missing materials with students before choosing whether or not to assess a replacement fine or require the student to assist in school beneficial activities instead. During this time, I would like to especially focus on newcomers and freshmen students understanding what the library is, how it works, what to do when your book is due and you're not ready to get it back, etc by regularly and purposefully collaborating with their teachers. In the time I historically have spent preparing and delivering overdue notices, I would now be building relationships, visiting students in their classrooms, at lunch, etc rather than them just receiving an overdue notice. It is in SCHS's best interest for students to know the library/librarian are safe advocates to come to when they make mistakes or need help from a trusted adult. It is in the SCHS library's best interest to have positive relationships with our students - especially as they are learning to speak English and learning what libraries are. We want to create lifelong users of libraries and information.

What would we do instead?

1. Weekly email reminders of due dates continue
2. At 1-2 weeks overdue, a personal visit with the student from the librarian/library aide depending on language spoken. Opportunity for growth, positive relationships, renewal on the spot with our iPad app, etc.
3. At 4 weeks overdue, items are considered lost unless the student indicates otherwise. We will attempt to personally talk to the student again to see what the issue is and resolve it with the student. Again, opportunity for growth, positive relationships, renewal on the spot. If the item is lost, we work with the student to formulate a plan of how to not lose materials in the future and what to do if they find it. We will also touch base with parents via telephone, email, or US Postal Service to make sure they are aware of the title and its lost status, plus any fines or fees.

It works!

- Columbus Public Schools has eliminated overdue fines at their schools.
- Omaha Public Schools has eliminated overdue fines and gives their librarians discretion regarding lost and damaged fines opting to use those instances as learning and growth opportunities.
- Brigham Young University has eliminated overdue fines for their patrons.
- Denver Public Libraries has eliminated overdue fines for all children's and young adult books.
- There are many more libraries at all levels making this decision.

What we need to consider:

- What do we do with habitual "losers"?
  - Limit check outs in the future.

What do we do with current overdue fines in accounts?

- Many opportunities for fine forgiveness via acts of service, kindness, reading, etc. Focus on making the school and library a better place.
- It will be more time consuming to handle things this way, but it will be worth it.
- After one year, we can examine our data and anecdotal evidence and decide what the future will hold.

## Resources for further reading:

DeFaveri, A. (2015). Breaking barriers: Libraries and socially excluded communities. *Information for Social Change*, 21.

On library fines: Ensuring civic responsibility or an easy income stream? (2010). *Library Review*, 59(2), 78-81. doi:10.1108/00242531011023835

Reed, K., Blackburn, J., & Sifton, D. (2014). Putting a sacred Cow Out to pasture: Assessing the removal of fines and reduction of barriers at a small academic library. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 40, 275-280.

Sung, J. S., & Tolppanen, B. P. (2013). Do library fines work?: Analysis of the effectiveness of fines on patron's return behavior at two mid-sized academic libraries. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 39, 506-511.

Wilson, D. (2014). Why can't they keep the book longer and do we really need to charge fines? Assessing circulation policies at the Harold B. Lee library: A case study. *Journal of Access Services*, 11(3), 135-149.