

## Public Libraries Support Students, Parents, Entire Communities During Pandemic

Statewide Public Library Survey Results, Sept. 18, 2020

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Columbus — Most years, September marks Library Card Sign Up Month and packed public libraries for reading and learning programs. This year is different, and Ohio's public libraries are rising to the challenge.

A new Ohio Library Council (OLC) survey of Ohio's 251 public library systems documents a shift in services to better support students, parents, and entire communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Survey responses show that libraries are involved in community crisis response, working to meet the educational needs of students, and reporting increased use of digital services. More than 73% of Ohio's public libraries are partnering directly with schools to support remote learning by offering computer and internet access, free meals and tech support for students and their parents.



**COVID-19 crisis response:** The majority of libraries reported new partnerships, expanding WiFi access points, adding new resources for virtual learning, aiding job seekers and small businesses, addressing food insecurity, and making and distributing personal protective equipment (PPE).

For example, the Muskingum County Library System purchased 65 mobile WiFi hotspots for families to borrow and use at home. The library also leaves its WiFi on 24/7. The Parma-Snow Branch of the Cuyahoga County Public Library partnered with Baba's Yard to distribute five tons of fresh produce to those in need.

**Public demand for library services:** The survey finds that all libraries have established health and safety protocols for staff, social distancing requirements for patrons, and procedures for sanitizing materials. More than 95% are offering curbside pickup, delivery, and by-appointment services. Many are providing a completely contact-free experience.

For example, the Mercer County District Library transformed one of its two entrances into a pickup locker zone.

Libraries also report a spike in WiFi usage, digital downloads and virtual reference services (by phone, chat and email). They have also processed a record number of library e-cards since the pandemic hit. The Public Library of Steubenville and Jefferson County issued 600 e-cards in one day!

### **Meeting educational needs:**

Public libraries are working overtime to address the needs of remote learners, teachers, and parents. They are leading activities such as technology training and virtual homework help. Nearly three-quarters (74.9%) of Ohio's public libraries provide one-on-one technology assistance. And more than half have purchased new materials or created special programs for homeschooling and remote learning.



For example, the Cincinnati and Hamilton County Public Library hosted a session for parents on how to successfully launch their child's online learning. In Champaign County, the St. Paris Public Library installed new Study Hubs to offer students WiFi access and a quiet place to learn.

“A lot has changed in the last six months, but our libraries continue to find ways to provide impactful service,” said Michelle Francis, Executive Director, Ohio Library Council. “From partnering with schools and local food banks to loaning laptops and WiFi hotspots, Ohio’s public libraries are coming up with creative ways to help their communities through this difficult time.”

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## Ohio Public Library Survey

### Statewide Public Library Survey Results

[results collected Aug. 24-Sept. 8, 2020]

Offering curbside pickup, drive-through, delivery, and/or by-appointment services	95.2%
Loaning mobile WiFi hotspots	61.8%
Partnering with schools	73.6%
Providing one-on-one technology training and tech tutoring appointments	74.9%
Helping people find social services	60.4%

Adding resources for homeschooling and remote learning	62.4%
Providing job search assistance (including resume and interview help)	66.7%
Assistance with hunger relief efforts/working with food banks/providing free meals to students	22.8%
Providing online educational courses (Gale, LinkedIn Learning, Treehouse, Language learning, etc.)	85%
Offering Virtual Storytimes	84.9%
Providing Virtual Reference Services	80.3%
Installed self-serve pickup lockers	26.8%

Installed touchless door sensors	24.4%
Installed touchless restroom fixtures	50%
Installed new air filtration systems	42.1%
Installed water bottle filling stations	43.9%
Making and distributing PPE	37.1%

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Ohio has 251 public library systems and has the highest library use per capita in the United States.

To find a public library near you, please visit [olc.org/librarycard](http://olc.org/librarycard).



Ever wonder if Ohioans appreciate their libraries? Check out this note left at the Washington County Public Library.