

Teaming Up for Readers: Charleston County's School-Library Collaboration

Charleston County School District (CCSD) and Charleston County Public Library (CCPL) serve one of South Carolina's most diverse and expansive areas. With 18 library branches and 80 school buildings, the county is home to rural communities, urban centers, and the largest multilingual population in the state. As the region continues to experience rapid growth, both institutions face the challenge of addressing a range of evolving community needs.

What started as a shared summer reading program powered by Beanstack's Tandem Connection functionality has evolved into a partnership that supports library and school engagement year-round. Together, they have streamlined services and communication for families, fostering a unified approach to literacy across the county. As a result, they've seen consistent year-over-year increases in summer reading participation, averaging 20% growth annually.



Challenges

Through their partnership, CCSD and CCPL sought to:



Unify (and simplify!) school and library summer reading programs.



Address diverse community needs across Charleston County's mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas.



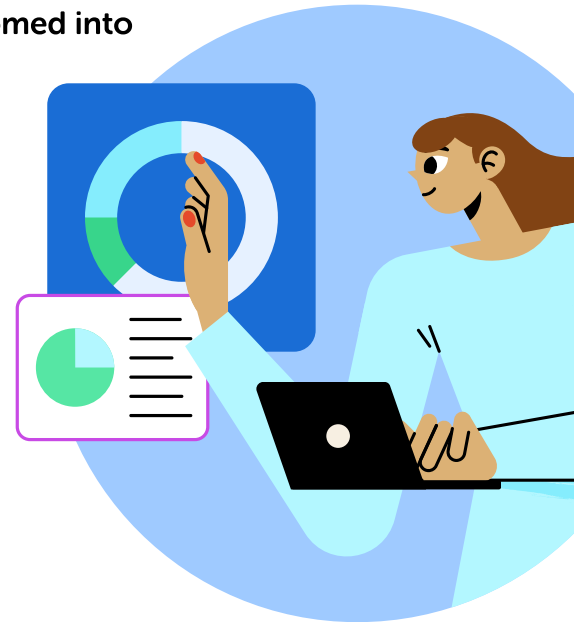
Increase accessibility to shared resources across schools and libraries.

Strategies

To tackle these challenges, Christy James, library and media services coordinator for CCSD, and Kathleen Montgomery, associate director of community engagement at CCPL employed a comprehensive, strategic approach that leveraged the strengths of Beanstack's Tandem Connection functionality. From there, the collaboration blossomed into a partnership that grew and strengthened year after year.

A New, Collaborative Approach to Summer Reading

After years of separate summer reading initiatives, CCSD and CCPL decided to join efforts. Together, they instated a data-sharing agreement, allowing both institutions to participate in the same reading program. This agreement enabled seamless collaboration and integration of student reading data, ensuring a streamlined experience for students and families.



Leveraging Beanstack's Tandem Functionality

By utilizing a shared system, students were only responsible for logging reading activities in one place. Automatic student registration at the school level eliminated logistical hurdles that had created confusion in previous years.

Streamlining Communication

A key component of the partnership was improving how families received information about summer reading. Consistent communication between the institutions ensured clarity and coherence for families and broadened communication channels for important messaging.



Year-Round Engagement and Library Cards For All

The shared summer reading program's initial success laid the groundwork for years of collaboration and growth for Charleston County schools and libraries.



Providing Library Access to All Students:

In 2020, they launched their “Limitless Learning” program, granting all students public library cards. This initiative provided additional digital resources to all students and families and was essential for educators as the community navigated the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Expanding Year-Round Initiatives:

Beyond summer reading, CCPL introduced initiatives like “100 Books Before Kindergarten” and “100 Books Before High School Graduation” to promote lifelong reading habits. These programs were seamlessly integrated into CCSD’s classrooms, ensuring that students became familiar with the platform during the school year and carried their engagement into the summer.

Outcomes

The collaborative efforts between Charleston County schools and libraries yielded remarkable results, showcasing the power of innovation and partnership:



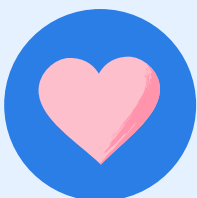
Increased Participation

Summer reading registration grew by 15% in 2024, while the program’s completion rate saw a 19% increase. Demonstrating sustained participation throughout the summer.



Continued Growth

Over the past four years, CCPL reported consistent year-over-year increases in summer reading participation, averaging 20% growth annually.



Positive Community Feedback

Families expressed appreciation for the platform’s ease of use, particularly when tracking progress in initiatives like “100 Books Before Kindergarten.” The shared platform made it simple for them to stay engaged throughout the year.



Lessons Learned

Reflecting on their journey, Christy and Kathleen shared key insights that can guide other communities aiming to implement similar partnerships:

Start with a Defined Project

“Having a clear-cut initial program goal made it feel more accessible and focused,” said Christy. Beginning with a specific objective, such as launching a shared summer reading program, allowed the partnership to build momentum for future projects.

Leverage Training and Support

Christy and Kathleen found Beanstack’s training sessions and on-demand instructional materials essential. These resources quickly brought school and public librarians up to speed and reinforced best practices to keep the program running successfully.

Collaborate for Community Impact

Christy highlighted the value of partnership: “Anytime that you can have common language, common programs, it just makes it easier...presenting a united program makes it so much easier for the community to jump on board.”

Conclusion

Charleston County School District and Charleston County Public Library have grown an incredible partnership that exemplifies the benefits of collaboration and community. Together, they have successfully removed barriers to resources, increased year-round engagement, and created an environment of learning that spans a region with a diverse landscape and population.

