

LIFELONG LEARNING

Building a community of lifelong learners—and helping Californians enjoy the social and economic benefits that learning brings—starts with the library.

Public libraries foster fundamental learning and life skills through storytime sessions, art and music, and science-based programs for early learners and their caregivers. They support children and teens with homework help, study spaces, book clubs, and diverse book collections. They help youth develop social-emotional and workforce-readiness skills through afterschool and summer programs.

For adults, the library is a classroom for life. Thousands of adult learners rely on the library as a place to build basic reading and writing skills, explore new technologies, develop health and financial literacy skills,

earn a high school diploma, prepare for college or graduate school, and get job-related training.

Nearly 2,000 adults have a high school diploma through the Career Online High School program available at 66 California public library jurisdictions and 750 branches, and another 1,500 are currently enrolled.^a

Technology labs, makerspaces, citizenship corners, storytime nooks, study rooms, performance spaces, career centers, book collections, bookmobiles, and pop-up libraries keep Californians of all ages learning—in the library and out in the community.

EARLY STARTS HAVE LASTING IMPACTS

- Parents who read to their children regularly from an early age help increase their children’s vocabularies, understanding of language, and cognitive skills.¹ Family literacy programs, which are commonly offered in public libraries, support early literacy and reading as a shared household activity, and help to close the school-readiness gap.²
- Access to reading materials—especially the free and varied access that libraries provide—is a key factor in developing and maintaining reading habits. When adults and children choose and read books together, they describe reading as “*an escape valve, a way to envision a different future for themselves.*”³



The South San Francisco Library is hosting “learning pods” that provide a safe, emotionally supportive learning space for 40 students in the most economically disadvantaged communities of the southern Peninsula. At the end of the school day, the pods transform into out-of-school-time learning spaces with a focus on STEAM education.^b

LITERACY AND LEARNING GROW STRONGER, HEALTHIER INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES

- Over 15,000 adults received tutoring in reading, writing, and math skills in a California public library during the 2018–2019 fiscal year.⁴ A landmark report from the National Commission on Adult Literacy says that adults with higher literacy skills have higher rates of employment, more access to workplace training, and higher weekly and lifetime incomes. Higher education correlates with lower incarceration rates and better self-reported health.⁵
- Those with higher educational attainment are more likely to break generational cycles of poverty, single parenthood, and emotional or behavioral problems.⁶ By supporting literacy, learning, and access to reliable health information, libraries have a positive impact on the health of their users. Those healthy users, in turn, contribute to stronger, more resilient communities.⁷



Oakland Public Library is delivering art instruction in 20 elementary schools in low-income communities. During the pandemic, the project is providing take-home kits for students, and the art instructor incorporates social-emotional learning into classes to help students manage their stress.⁸

MAKING IT EASY FOR EVERYONE TO LEARN

- Eighty-seven percent of people see the library as a place that creates educational opportunities for people of all ages. Nearly half of all Americans regard the library as having an important role in sparking young people’s creativity.⁸
- The Harvard Family Research Project asserts that library programs such as computer literacy, English as a Second Language, and General Educational Development (GED) classes “contribute to lifelong learning and lead to reductions in stress, real savings in time and money, and the acquisition of important job skills.”⁹
- With 52 percent of American adults categorized as “relatively hesitant” to trust technology, go online for information, or use digital tools for personal learning,¹⁰ the technology training and resources that libraries deliver provide “*structural, often community-wide, workforce development training and support.*”¹¹

Tulare County Library hires teen interns to help build the library’s makerspace and develop and carry out online programming. The project helps teens develop their project planning and public performance skills—both important in an information economy.^d



NOTES

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 11. Urban Libraries Council. 2007. *Making Cities Stronger: Public Library Contributions to Local Economic Development*. Washington, DC: Urban Libraries Council. https://www.urbanlibraries.org/assets/MakingCitiesStronger_Full_Report.pdf.
- a. Data is current as of December 2020.
 - b. Project results reported by South San Francisco Public Library to the California State Library, 2020–2021.
 - c. Project results reported by Oakland Public Library to the California State Library, 2020–2021.
 - d. Project results reported by Tulare County Library to the California State Library, 2020–2021.
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