#SaveOurLibrary

A Collaborative Model of Youth Library Services in Chicago

BESS P. COHEN, AB'16

For Prince, who, among his many great gifts, anonymously donated $12,000 to save Louisville's Western Branch Library, the first public library in the United States to serve African Americans, from closing in 2001 (Cueto 2016).

Introduction

On December 11, 2015, over two hundred students at DuSable Campus, a Chicago public school in the South Side neighborhood of Bronzeville, staged a sit-in to protest the Chicago Public Schools' decision to lay off their school librarian. At 9 AM, the beginning of second period, teachers turned a blind eye as students streamed out of their classrooms. One by one the students checked out books from the school's library, sat in the halls, and read for the rest of the day (Watson 2015). They sat under handmade banners: "Out of 25 Schools with Predominantly Black Students Only 3 Have a Library!" and "Budget Cuts, Yeah Right!" (fig.1 and 2). They circulated a petition in the school:

> We, the students of the DuSable Campus, petition against the closure of our library and forced leave of the librarian Sara Sayigh.

> We have gathered to take a stand and use our signatures to protest the closing down of the DuSable Campus Library. In hopes of stopping the unfair closure, we sit in protest in the hopes that there will be change, and that CPS will allow the students of our campus to keep their sanctuary of learning and preparatory tool for life as a college student. As we sign our names we implore CPS to save the library and Mrs. Sayigh from leaving our school. As protesters, we ask you to spread the word of the closure and evoke principals, teachers, parents and soon Chicago Public School officials to preserve the essential element of learning and keep this historical library in our midst.
>
> We demand that our library remain open, with Mrs. Sayigh presiding as head librarian
>
> (Chitownteach2 @DulceNoelia7533, Dec. 15, 2018).

An online version of the petition gained 3,002 signatures (Winter 2015). The students' efforts spread through the local and national news media and over social media, most notably on Twitter, where students, teachers, activists, and Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) members shared the students' message (fig. 3). Students from other Chicago high schools contacted DuSable students to see how they could help. Though Chicago Public Schools (CPS) officials instructed the school not to allow reporters into the building, a school official at the campus allowed Lauren Fitzpatrick of the *Chicago Sun-Times* to visit, telling Sayigh that if anyone asked, Fitzpatrick was Sayigh's friend (Sara Sayigh, pers. comm., Jan. 25, 2016).

The protest was led by Sabaria Dean, a seventeen-year-old senior at Williams[1] (Watson 2015). Dean started using #SaveOurLibrary on

1. DuSable Campus includes Daniel Hale Williams Preparatory School of Medicine, Bronzeville Scholastic Institute, DuSable High School, and DuSable Leadership Academy (a separate charter school that closed in 2015). The schools share a single building and a single school library.

Figure 1. DuSable Sit-in
(Watson 2015)

Figure 2. Student Signs
(Photograph by Bess P. Cohen, Jan. 25, 2016)

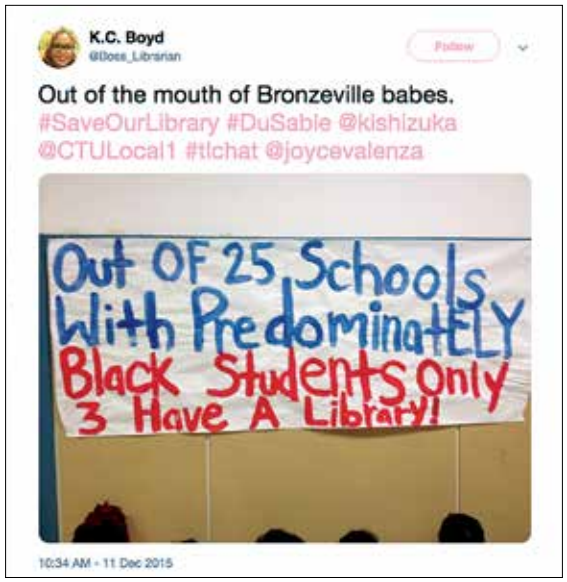

Figure 3. Twitter Supporter of Sit-in

(KC Boyd @Boss_Librarian Dec. 11, 2015)

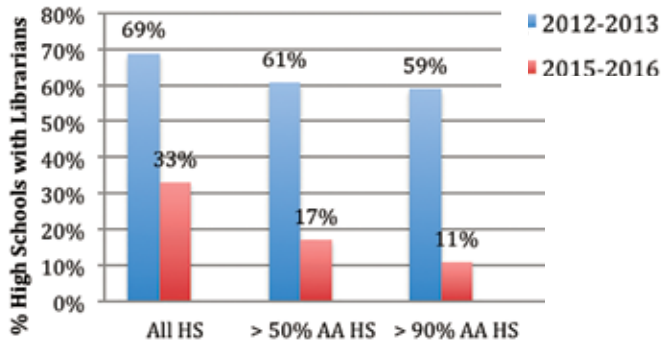

Figure 4. CPS High Schools with Librarians

(Courtesy of Pavlyn Jankov, education policy analyst, Chicago Teachers Union, Nov. 2015)

Twitter to broadcast CPS' decision to lay off Sayigh. Dean, an outspoken member of the school's basketball team, a self-described leader, and "not the biggest bookworm," which Sayigh confirmed, had many friends for whom the closing of the library would be heartbreaking: "You just can't do that to certain kids who are emotionally attached to the library" (pers. comm., Jan. 25, 2016). In an unprecedented move, CPS officials came to the school and negotiated directly with Dean and other student leaders; the officials proposed bringing in parent volunteers to manage the library in Sayigh's place, an offer that Dean called more "an insult to [Mrs. Sayigh] than to us" (pers. comm., Jan. 25, 2016).

Sayigh has served as the librarian to all schools in the Dusable Campus, with a total of 745 students, for thirteen years. The librarian had "zero" to do with the students' protest (Sabaria Dean and Sara Sayigh, pers. comm., Jan. 25, 2016). "I think the English teachers probably told some of the kids and it just spread like wildfire" (Sara Sayigh, pers. comm., Jan. 25, 2016). But as a member of the CTU's Librarians Committee, known informally as Chi School Librarians, Sayigh's own activism has focused upon the widespread closure of school libraries and loss of librarians in Chicago Public Schools.

Between 2012–13 and 2015–16 the number of school librarians in all CPS high schools has dropped 36 percent, and predominantly black high schools saw a drop of 48 percent during the same period (fig. 4), as the DuSable students highlighted in their banner. Chicago is not alone; school librarians are disappearing nationwide. In 2013, 20 percent of US public schools did not have a full- or part-time librarian, which the American Library Association called "a national crisis" (Ravitch 2014). The Los Angeles Unified School District laid off eighty-five librarians in 2011; the district held weeks of hearings in which they grilled the librarians on their competence to return to new positions as classroom teachers, despite the fact that the librarians already possessed teaching certificates (Goldberg 2011; Tobar 2011). Philadelphia has only eleven school librarians for 218 schools (Graham 2015).

Less than a week after the DuSable protest, CPS reinstated Sayigh,

thanks to "a generous anonymous gift" (Inklebarer 2015). The CPS did not say how large this "gift" was or how long funding would last, and a spokeswoman stress that "while we are glad that this [gift] will restore a valued position that supports students across these schools, we remain concerned that the current financial realities will continue to put our schools in a challenging position as they try to prevent classroom cuts. This is why we will continue to work with our state leaders to fix an unfair funding system that gives Chicago only 15 percent of state funding despite having 20 percent of the enrollment—a disparity that forces schools to make tough choices" (Inklebarger 2015).

The situation at DuSable was unusual for a number of reasons. Despite an exciting upswell of activism by Chicago's African American youth in recent years (Vivanco 2016), students do not usually organize in the way that Dean and other students did: "A lot of students here, they're willing to sacrifice not saying anything at all, rather than being an outcast and speaking up for what's actually right" (Sabaria Dean, pers. comm., Jan. 25, 2016). Further, CPS administrators do not generally negotiate with students, whose voice is absent from CPS' decisions. Finally, the anonymous gift was unprecedented. Chicagoans often view their government agencies, and Chicago Public Schools especially, as inadequate, and the resources to support city agencies continue to decline; in April 2016 Governor Rauner proposed an additional $74 million cut to state aid for CPS (Hinz 2016).

This paper concerns what is at stake when CPS librarians and libraries fall victim to budget cuts and how CPS can make up for those losses by working with the Chicago Public Library (CPL). I investigate whether students receive the same resources at their public library after their school libraries close and offer recommendations of how these two public institutions can best support K–12 students. Do young people need both school and public libraries? What different purposes do they serve? How can they collaborate at the local and district levels?

This paper is part of a small body of research that examines the recent trend of school library closures (LRS n.d.). It reveals that the distribution

of public resources in Chicago continues to benefit flourishing institutions while resources are extracted from those that struggle the most. It is imperative that resources for promoting literacy be a policy priority in Chicago where only 25 percent of third through eighth graders read proficiently and 53 percent of adults have limited literacy skills (CLA n.d.; Fitzpatrick 2016). Finally, this paper's insights may prove applicable for other large urban school districts, such as Los Angeles and Philadelphia, where school librarians are becoming obsolete.

Methodology

This paper's content, research methods, and writing style are informed by my four years reporting on Chicago Public Schools and youth-support initiatives for the *Chicago South Side Weekly* newspaper. It is as much an in-depth journalistic project as an academic research paper. Though I focus on school libraries and public libraries in Chicago, I draw upon my experiences at community hearings and CPS board meetings, as well as interviews and research I've conducted since 2012. Journalism has taught me that the experiences of individuals creates richer, more compelling stories than those driven only by data analysis. The whole truth about schools, communities, and local organizations like libraries can only be told fully with student and teacher voices in conjunction with quantitative data.

Bronzeville Case Study

At the center of the paper is a case study of the operations within and relationship between a public library branch and a public school in the Bronzeville neighborhood on Chicago's South Side. Hall Branch (4801 S. Michigan Avenue) is two blocks away from DuSable (4934 S. Wabash Avenue). Christopher Crotwell, Hall's children's librarian, is the principal contact for Sara Sayigh, DuSable's librarian. There are nine public schools within five blocks of the library, which serve a total of 4,121

students each month out of a total average of 5,859 visitors each month (CPS n.d., "School Profiles"; CDP 2014). The CPL designated DuSable as Hall Branch's partner school. Crotwell's programs target DuSable students, as well as students from nearby Irvin C. Mollison Elementary. My observations of these libraries and interviews with Crotwell, Dean, and Sayigh were conducted from October 2015 through January 2016.

The DuSable students' protest drew me to this case study initially, but I found that the issues raised at DuSable and Hall were illustrative of broader trends in public schools and public libraries. I was interested in DuSable because it has long been a leader in school library development: it houses a celebrated collection of books on African American history (Rebuild Foundation 2016) and was the first Chicago public school connected to the Internet with a 1995 NASA seed grant (York et al. 1998). Hall and DuSable's community has many characteristics in common with other South Side communities. Bronzeville grapples with abandoned buildings, vacant lots, a lack of commercial development, school actions,[2] and losses in other social services. Bronzeville also has a strong group of activists who rally around these issues. In September 2015, for example, parents and activists staged a successful thirty-four day hunger strike to protest the closure of Bronzeville's Walter H. Dyett High School (Adams 2015).

Hall and DuSable are important parts of Bronzeville's rich cultural legacy. Hall was the meeting place for the writers Gwendolyn Brooks, Lorraine Hansberry, Langston Hughes, and Richard Wright (CPL n.d., "About Hall Branch"). Renowned for its music program, DuSable counts among its alumni Nat King Cole, Don Cornelius, Johnny Griffin, and Dinah Washington, as well as Chicago Mayor Harold Washington, historian Timuel Black, and others (Cholke 2013; History Makers 2000). A common refrain at events I have attended in South Side communities, often led by now ninety-eight-year-old Black, is a call to cherish DuSable's historical legacy, to celebrate African American culture, and

2. "School actions" includes school closures, phase outs, and consolidations.

to remember the historical and current racism and oppression from which that culture emerged. This is a legacy that policy tends to ignore. With this in mind, my paper attempts to weave this history together with the politics and policy of today, as well as the emotional repercussions from the loss of services like schools and libraries in South Side communities.

Other Data Sources

Together with interviews with librarians Christoper Crotwell and Sara Sayigh and student Sabaria Dean, I also interviewed CPL and CPS administrators. Ethnographic methods and interviews are suited for research of children's programming because there are many elements of libraries, such as the relationships between librarians and visitors and quality of programming, that are not easily quantifiable and for which survey data is not available. It is important that the perspective of those who implement programming inform evaluations and policy recommendations. Numbers and trends do not capture fully how these systems work. Interviews also give a sense of the enthusiasm (and the limitations) of program administrators to innovate in their fields. I also analyzed CPL annual reports and strategic plans, CPS budgets, and Consortium on Chicago School Research reports for the years when widespread school library closures occurred.

Literature Review

As I stepped back into a library that held many memories,
it was quiet.
No mumbles.
No shouts.
No laughter.
Nothing.
Coming back to a place that was once
the brightest place in the school,
only to see nothing. It didn't feel right.

— Jennifer N.[3]

The Value of Literacy

Early reading is the single skill that can improve success in school and beyond. Recent economics research demonstrates large benefits in investing in early childhood learning, particularly as a means of overcoming the achievement gap between disadvantaged and advantaged youth. This body of research advocates for early intervention in emotional and skill development for poor children (Heckman 2013). Poor children on average may hear between 4 million and 30 million fewer words than children from higher-income families by the time they are three years old (Gilkerson et al. 2017; Hart and Risley 1995), giving low-income youth a disadvantage in developing literacy skills before they start formal schooling. Children's early experience with literacy is a strong predictor of success in reading, in other areas of school, in overall knowledge acquisition, and in non-dropout rates (Stanovich 1986). In addition, people who read more are able to learn more quickly (Cunningham and Stanovich 1998).

3. One of three poems by students in Mr. Collins's eight-grade class at Brighton Park Elementary School, which were inspired by observations of the school's closed library.

Children who have greater access to books have higher reading achievement (Lindsay 2010). The number of books in a child's home predicts academic success almost as well as a child's socioeconomic status (Krashen et al. 2010; Schubert and Becker 2010). A child who lives in a home with more than five hundred books is likely to stay in school for three years longer than one who lives in a home without books (Evans et al. 2010). Interest in reading is important in developing strong readers; students who select reading materials for themselves are likely to have higher reading outcomes (Krashen 2004). Children who live in poverty have less access to books in their homes and often fewer libraries and fewer bookstores in their communities (Neuman and Celano 2001). About 86 percent of CPS students are economically disadvantaged (CPS n.d., "Stats"), suggesting that a significant portion of Chicago's youth rely on schools and public libraries for much of their exposure to books. Unfortunately, schools with high concentrations of students living in poverty are less likely to have school libraries or to have libraries with restricted hours and smaller staffs (Pribesh et al. 2011). These schools more often use the library for unrelated activities, such as health clinics or special events, often close the library at the beginning and end of the school year, and add new books to the collection at a slower rate than wealthier schools, resulting in fewer and outdated books (Pribesh et al. 2011).

Cultural Implications of Literacy

The case of African Americans after the Civil War is an example of one of the slowest rates of literacy acquisition in human history. In 1870, 81 percent of African Americans were illiterate, compared to 11 percent of white Americans. By 1890, 57 percent of African Americans were illiterate, compared to 8 percent of whites. In addition to factors like lower average family income and parental education, this gap represents "the effects of prejudice, cultural alienation, discouragement, and differential aspirations, all related to race" (Kaestle et al. 1993).

Kaestle et al. define four categories of reading: entertainment, self-

improvement, culture, and critical thinking (1993). For the purposed of this paper the final two categories and their implications for African American youth are most relevant. Literacy is the first means by which children become acculturated: "To some degree, the institutions of literacy—schools, libraries, and publishing companies—are instruments of cultural consolidation. In other regards, however, literacy is used to reinforce the distinctive traditions, cultures, and interests of subgroups" (Kaestle et al. 1993, 245). People who cannot read or lack books lose a connection with mainstream culture, their own history, and their own community. These connections are part of what is at stake when youth lose their access to library resources.

The Digital Divide and Information Literacy

Computer access has become a necessity, and though 70 percent of Americans have computer access in their homes this rate decreases in lower-income homes (Simpson 2015). The prevailing emphasis on the use of the Internet and digital resources expands the divide between those who have access to resources for accruing informational capital and those who do not. Observations of children's library computer use suggest that more advanced readers have more opportunities to become knowledge creators rather than just knowledge consumers (Neuman and Celano 2012). Students need information literacy—the ability to find, evaluate, and use information found in digital and print resources—to become knowledge creators and to think critically. A 2016 report found that the majority of students could not evaluate information for research and learning: 75 percent of students could not locate sources for research, 60 percent could not confirm the accuracy of sources, and 44 percent could not synthesize information from different sources (Scholastic 2016). Young people need both access and guidance in how to use information resources in order to take their knowledge beyond comprehension to the kind of creativity that is necessary for higher-level learning and careers.

The School Library and Librarian

Though Benjamin Franklin recommended school libraries in 1740, they only became common in the early twentieth century (ALA 2011). The first trained school librarian was appointed in 1900 in Brooklyn, New York (ALA 2011).

All librarians add books to their library's collection and create programs that respond to the needs of their community. The public librarian fosters a general love of reading and life-long learning, while the school librarian must also connect books to curriculum and school needs. A comprehensive study defines the school librarian's role broadly: "Provide collaborative programs for reading instruction; select and provide resources to meet the learning needs of all students; assure seamless integration of technology, teaching, and learning; provide resources to support state and national standards; offer resources that enhance classroom collections; [and] encourage students to independently seek, access, and use information" (Scholastic 2016, 2).

When a school loses a librarian, the library loses its value, as the poems by Brighton Park students highlight, the library becomes just a room full of books, rather than a place to learn and for students to form a community. Student achievement in English Language Arts (ELA) suffers when librarian staff is reduced. One study shows that fourth-grade students' ELA scores were higher in states where the numbers of school librarians increased over the course of four years than in states that lost librarians in that time period. The difference was most dramatic for Latino/a and African American students, English-language learners, and students living in poverty. Another study found that in schools with a full-time librarian and an assistant librarian a higher percentage of students did well on writing and ELA tests (Scholastic 2016).

Recent Trends in Library Services

Both public and school libraries are navigating and catching up with trends towards digital literacy and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering,

Arts, and Math) education. Librarians are called "media specialists" in many districts, and in Tacoma, Washington, the school district's library department is now the informational technology department (ALSC n.d.). For librarians, digital advances means that "libraries are louder than they used to be" (Christopher Crotwell, pers. comms., Oct. 18, 2015; Sara Sayigh, pers. comms., Jan. 25, 2016; WBEZ 2015).

The president of the American Librarian Association says that libraries have undergone a "larger transformation" and have "become active learning centers for their communities by offering services like classes in English as a second language, computer skills and career counseling" (Hu 2015). Individual librarians and entire library systems must navigate the tension between focusing on their field's main focus—promoting literacy and reading—and being a community institution that responds to contemporary needs. Unfortunately, at a time when libraries have become a more critical public need, library services to minorities and lower-income communities are affected first by federal funding cuts to libraries (Jones 2004).

The School and Public Library Relationship

Public schools and public libraries are interconnected by history and goals. In the United States the solidification of public education and an increasingly literate public enabled the emergence of public libraries (Martin 2003). The institutions developed together over the course of the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In Chicago, for example, the Board of Education was established in 1872, a year before the first public library opened (CPL n.d., "History"; Rury 2004). Early youth services in US libraries assume that young people entered the library with an ability to read and an interest in continued self-development (Martin 2003).

The relationship between schools and libraries became fraught in the nineteen sixties and seventies, when increased population and demand for public library services overwhelmed librarians and responsibility for

their services shifted onto school librarians, confusing both groups about their roles in educating young people (Ziarnik 2002). The rapid rise of technology since the eighties has encouraged school and public librarians to share digital resources in an unprecedented way, although this has not been the case in Chicago. The rise of homework help centers in public libraries across the country, including Chicago, suggests another level on which the two institutions have come to share responsibilities in recent years (Simpson 2015; Ziarnik 2002). The public library is now an extension of the public school: "The school [teaches] the skill of reading, the library [shows] what the skill [is] for" (Martin 2003, 55).

Chicago Policy Context

The odd thing about this place is that
there were trophies, lost their luster,
gathering dust. What is this place?
A library, the trophies are like misfits,
they're not supposed to be where they are.

— Eduardo G., Brighton Park Elementary School

Despite modest gains in recent years, literacy rates for Chicago's youth are lower than throughout the state and nation. In 2015 only 25 percent of third- through eighth-grade CPS students met or exceeded reading standards on the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) and only 20 percent of African American students in CPS scored proficient. This compares to 37.7 percent of students statewide (Fitzpatrick 2016). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, 24 percent of CPS eighth graders were proficient in reading compared to 35 percent nationally. Overall 27 percent of CPS students reached proficiency, a 7 percent increase from 2013, making CPS one of only three large districts in the country that saw improvement (NAEP 2015).

In Chicago, as is the case nationally, African American and Latino/a students in fourth and eighth grades have made no significant gains in reading. Since 2003 the achievement gap between white students and students of color and between high- and low-income students has widened in Chicago, more than in any other district (Belsha 2015). About 40 percent of CPS students are African American, 45.6 percent are Latino/a, and about 81 percent of all CPS students live below the federal poverty line and qualify for free or reduced-cost lunch (CPS n.d., "Stats").

In May 2013 the Chicago Board of Education voted to close fifty elementary schools—selected from a list of over three hundred—predominantly in lower-income, African American neighborhoods on the South and West Sides. The board decided to address a $1 billion budget deficit by closing schools deemed underutilized; officials promised that students would be transferred to higher performing schools nearby.[4] The closures affected about forty thousand students in closed or welcoming school and 80 percent were African American (Vevea 2013). Many families chose a new school based on proximity to home, because friends or staff from the closed school relocated to the new school, or based on the new school's perceived strong academics. "For many families academic quality meant having after-school programs, certain curricula and courses, small class sizes, positive and welcoming school environments, and/or one-on-one attention from teachers in classes" (Torre et al. 2015, 3). Family definitions of academic quality "was different from the official markers of quality represented by the district's performance policy rating," which resulted in 64 percent of displaced students attending new schools with lower academic performance ratings, by CPS standards, than their designated welcoming schools (Torre et al. 2015, 3). Proximity to home, familiar adults, after-school programs, welcoming

4. Closure of underperforming and underutilized schools has been a prevalent reform strategy since 2002, when former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan headed CPS (Vevea et al. 2013).

environments, and more individualized attention can all in theory be provided by school and public libraries. I will pay particular attention to how school and public libraries can create these opportunities, both separately and by working together.

The Decline of Chicago School Libraries

Over two-thirds (69 percent) of all Chicago public high schools had librarians in 2012–13 and only one-third (33 percent) had librarians in 2015–16. The situation is worst for high schools with a 90 percent African American student population. Only 59 percent of these high schools had librarians in 2012–13 and 11 percent (three schools) had librarians in 2015–16 (fig. 4). The three predominately African American high schools are Dusable Campus, Morgan Park High School, and Chicago Vocational Career Academy; at these schools, 95.1 percent, 85.3 percent, and 93.8 percent of students, respectively, are low income (CPS n.d., "Stats").

As with many policy that take resources away from school communities, school library closures disproportionately hurt low-income students of color. Illinois public schools are not required to have school libraries by law, but CPS has acknowledged their value: in 2013, the CPS promised families affected by school closing that their children's welcoming schools would have libraries; however thirty-one out of the fifty welcoming schools did not have libraries (WBEZ 2015). Since 1991, CPS has stopped centrally funding school libraries, "forcing schools to use discretionary funds to maintain them" (Kelleher 2015). In the mid-2000s the district provided funds to be split between a part-time gym teacher and a part-time librarian and offered matching grants of up to $5,000 for library resources. A 2002 district survey found that only fifty schools (9 percent) had "exemplary" or "excellent" collections (Kelleher 2015).

CPS continues to disinvest in school libraries, with funding shifting away from librarians towards online resources. In 2011 CPS designated $1,445,038 to support librarians' salaries, educational technology,

instruction in literacy and research skills, and "reading enrichment opportunities for students" (CPS 2011). In 2014 CPS designated $2,800,804 for the Department of Education Tools and Technology & Library Media to cover education technology, instructional resources, and library media. The 2014 goals—focused on "core subject instruction" and a "Library Automation system" that circulates print and digital resources between schools, which reduced funds for librarian salaries and eliminated the need for them (CPL 2014, 70–71). The projected budget for 2016 makes no explicit mention of library resources (CPL 2016).

In 2014 CPS switched to a budget model in which each school receives a lump sum, based on how many students are enrolled, to be spent on "core staff, educational support personnel, supplies, and additional instructional programs" (CPS 2014). When a school is low on funds the principal and Local School Council may decide that cutting non-teaching staff is the best option. Because Illinois requires school librarians to have teaching certifications (Vevea 2014), if a school need additional teachers, the school librarian can be reassigned to a classroom; even before implementing the model, CPS had already shifted fifty-eight librarians into non-librarian positions in 2013 (Jankov 2015). The number of CPS librarians dropped 44 percent between 2012 and 2016: 454 (2012); 313 (2013), and 254 (2014) (Vevea 2014). According to the Chicago Teachers Union's education policy analyst, there are currently 210 full-time librarians for 503 schools (Pavlyn Jankov, pers. comm., Nov. 2015).

Public Library Funding

In contrast to the Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Public Library's youth services are part of a stable institution with growing financial support and consistent approval from constituents. In 2014 the Chicago Public Library was named the best urban public library in the United States by an international study of library services (*Huffington Post* 2014). A CPL survey found that 72 percent of respondents thought the library

was very important in their lives, 95 percent of patrons had used CPL for books in the past year, and 93 percent said they had used library buildings (CPL 2014).

CPL's operating budget rose from $96,597,297 for seventy-four libraries in 2011 (Kniffel 2010) to $126,121,248 for eighty libraries in 2014 (CPLF 2014a). Approximately 40 percent of the budget is dedicated to children and teen programming. CPL's funding has remained relatively the same since 2013, with the portion of the budget from the city increasing $4 million in 2015 (CPLF 2013; CPLF 2014a; CPLF 2015), compared to CPS, whose budget was cut by $55 million between 2014 and 2015 (CPS 2014; CPS 2015). In 2014, 64 percent of CPL's budget came from the City of Chicago; the majority of the rest was from the state and federal governments and private donations (CPLF 2014a). Since 2008, the MacArthur Foundation has awarded CPL nine grants, ranging in size from $50,000 to $2 million, with seven grants to support the YOUmedia digital lab (MacArthur Foundation n.d.). The Chicago Public Library Foundation's corporate sponsors include the Allstate Corporation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Kraft Foods Foundation, BMO Harris Bank, Google, and Polk Bros. Foundation (CPLF 2014b). Bruce Rauner donated over $25,000 to Chicago's public library in 2014; in April 2016, after becoming governor of Illinois, he proposed cutting funding to Chicago's public schools by $74 million (CPLF 2014b; Hinz 2016). Philanthropic support for the Chicago Public Schools is markedly less than for the Chicago Public Library.[5] CPS teachers and schools must often organize local fund-raisers, and the amount of donations will vary drastically depending on the school's community. (Anecdotally, the annual book fair for an elementary school in affluent Hyde Park can raise up to $10,000 compared to $800 in nearby South Shore.)

5. Editor's note: In the last years for which figures are available, the Children First Fund: The Chicago Public Schools Foundation raised approximately $1.7 million compared to the Chicago Public Library Foundation, which raised $7.4 million (CPS 2017; CPLF 2016).

Strong financial support for the public library and diminishing financial support for public schools are a common paradox in Chicago's distribution of resources; a stable and financially secure institution continues to receive resources while a struggling institution continues to lose resources. Given its robust public and private support, can the public library meet the needs of young people without a library in their school?

Discussion

Walk into a room.
It's abandon with
chairs, tables, books
that collected dust.
You've been here before
but that was a long ago.
You feel excited because
it brings back memories.
You hear the vent turn on.
You remember the sound from before.
You have to go
but you don't want to leave.

— Ciera S., Brighton Park Elementary School

Chicago schools and public libraries must change to respond to society's increased reliance on technology and to respond to the needs of children for educational and social supports, especially in low-income communities. This is an enormous undertaking, especially in the context of ongoing disinvestment in Chicago's public schools. Despite overlaps in what public schools and public libraries each provide, there are certain things that only school libraries can offer Chicago's youth, and there are others that only public libraries can provide (fig. 5). This section discusses these offerings in greater depth.

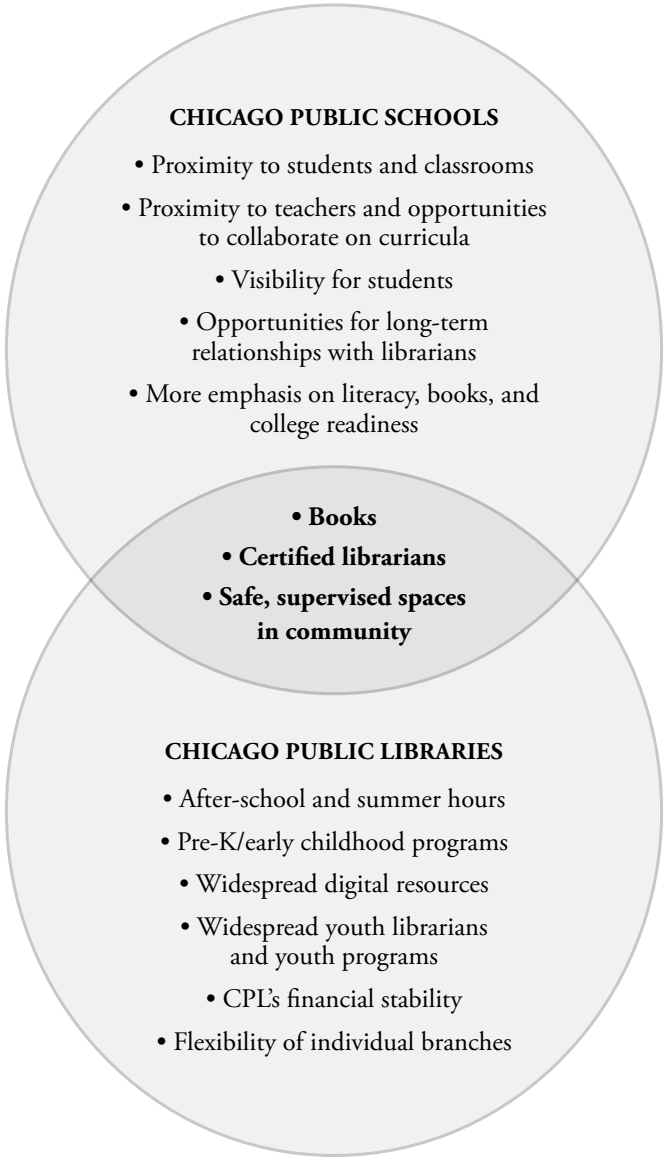

Figure 5. Duties of Librarians
(Diagram by Bess Cohen, 2016)

Accessibility: Safe Spaces and Sustained Relationships

After CPS closed fifty schools in 2013, families were concerned for student safety when traveling to and from their new schools. The difference of a fraction of a mile could force children to cross gang lines. In response to parents' outcry, CPS expanded its Safe Passage program, which establishes routes around schools patrolled by civilian guards. Despite these efforts, there were 133 shootings and thirty-eight murders near Safe Passage routes between January and August 2013, comprising 16 percent of the shootings and murders across the city in that period (Ramos and Keefe 2013). A similar concern for safety applies to public libraries. Although Chicago's library branches are relatively evenly distributed throughout the city (fig. 6), not all youth are comfortable traveling to their local branch (Sabaria Dean, pers. comm., Jan. 25, 2016).

The accessibility of the local library is complicated by school choice. A child's school is not necessarily in close proximity to the family's local library, which means that even when local schools and public libraries work together, they do not support all children in their neighborhoods. According to Crotwell, "Most kids that go to the library here, live around here, [but] they don't go to school around here. Nobody goes to school in their neighborhood anymore…. School choice just makes things very confusing. Everybody's all over the place" (pers. comm., Oct. 18, 2015). At Mollison, Hall's closest elementary school, only 38 percent of the students live nearby; at Beethoven, the second closest school to Hall, only 17 percent live nearby (Hagan and Lutton 2014). Assigning a CPL librarian to a handful of nearby schools will not reach all the schools' students—paired with the lack of public school librarians means that a significant portion of South Side youth lack contact with any librarian.

When a school library is located within a school, then the librarian is part of the curriculum and the life of the school, teachers are more like to collaborate with the librarian, and students are aware of and able to take advantage of the library's resources. Dean said that she valued

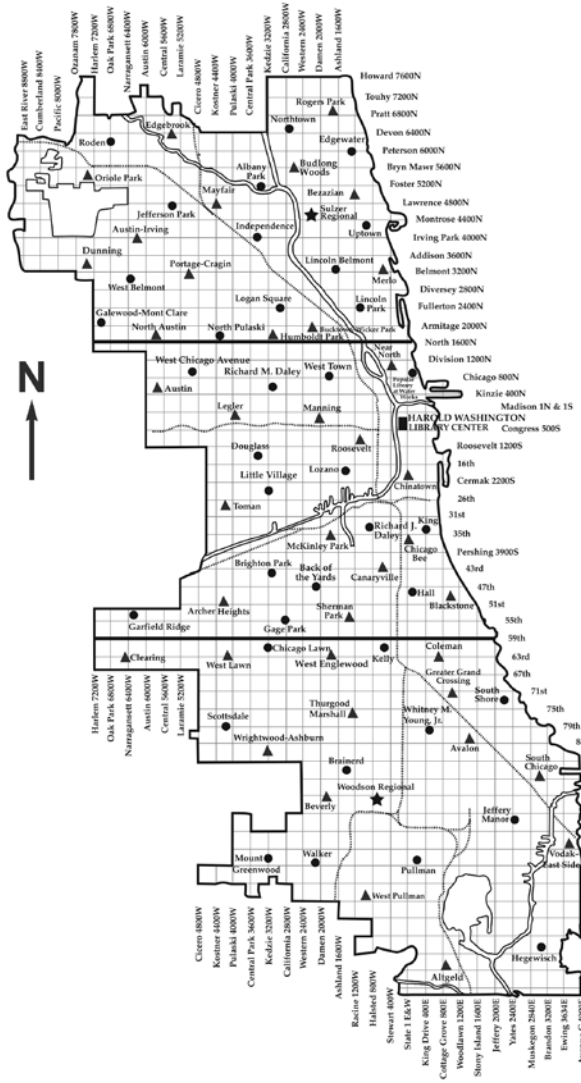

Figure 6. Chicago Public Library Locations
(CPL 2014)

the school library because she had had a library in her elementary school and assumed that a library was a given in a school. She made the point that if students don't know that a library should be or might be available to them, they are unlikely to seek it out, let alone fight for it (pers. comm., Jan. 25, 2016).

A sustained relationship between the librarian and students is the reason students are drawn to the library and use its resources: "It is a hard sell to get the kids to go to the public library. (*Dean nods in agreement.*) I know they come sometimes after school [to the school's library] and they start whining, 'No, I need to go. I've been here since seven.' I'll say, 'but two blocks away there's a public library. I'll call!' It's hard to get them to go, because they don't know the people. It's all about relationships" (Sara Sayigh, pers. comm., Jan. 25, 2016). School librarians—like other adults in children's lives who mentor, teach, and motivate—provide benefits beyond a parent's or teacher's role, which often involves evaluating and correcting behavior (Southwick et al. 2007). School librarians don't grade students but are part of a student's network of teachers, administrators, and families that ideally communicate about the child's well-being (Sara Sayigh, pers. comm., Jan. 25, 2016).

Family engagement is part of CPL's strategic plan (CPL 2014), and children's librarians can provide adult mentorship and connections to families that are similar to school librarians: "One of the great things about the [public] library as a learning space, is we're all carrot, no stick. You come to participate because it's fun, you absolutely don't have to, you don't have to do anything that you don't want to" (Christopher Crotwell, pers. comm., Oct. 18, 2015). Hall was without a children's librarian for ten months before Crotwell joined the branch. The absence of a sustained relation to a librarian is evident in a lack of parental connection: "I know [all the children], but I don't know what people in the world they're attached to. It seems like they just sprang unbidden from the earth and just wandered in here, as young as six and seven, they'll just wander up here" (pers. comm., Oct. 18, 2015). Crotwell is now "rebuilding the formal programming, because [the last librarian] had a great group, but people find somewhere to be in [ten month's] time" (pers. comm., Oct. 18, 2015).

Collaboration between CPL and CPS

Each public library branch is paired with nearby elementary and high schools, and public librarians target their programming and outreach to those schools' students. Connecting to the target public schools can prove difficult: "Principals and vice principals are exhausted. You can't call teachers during the day, because they can't be on the phone…. It can be really hard to get in, unless you have a previous relationship from when CPS was having sunnier times" (Christopher Crotwell, pers. comm., Oct. 18, 2015). Newer librarians, like Crotwell, lack existing relationships in the community or in their targeted schools. CPL does not consider a candidate's experience or community connections in hiring or assigning librarians, so librarians must often build those networks from the ground up. Crotwell's outreach is limited to a few school visits, word of mouth, and existing CPL partnerships. For example, he used a contact at the Big Shoulders Fund (a partner for CPL's Summer Reading Challenge) to put him in touch with school administrators at local Catholic schools. Crotwell often asks Sayigh to spread the word about his programs. When these two librarians cooperate, they together reach more students and create a safety network around students—a phone call between Sayigh and Crotwell means that one more adult knows where a child is at a given time.

System wide, CPL administrators have found it difficult to make the most of partnerships with CPS. For example, according to CPL's director of children's services, a 2015 CPL-CPS initiative to sign up students for public library cards was unsuccessful and disbanded (Elizabeth McChesney, pers. comm., Nov. 1, 2015). On the other hand, a successful program is Teacher in the Library, in which local teachers help students with homework after school. Now in its seventeenth year, teachers receive extra pay, which is funded by the Chicago Public Library Foundation

(Rothstein 2017). The program's success proves that collaboration between CPS and CPL works if it does not add to the day-to-day burden of school teachers and administrators and carries incentives.

CPL's Unique Capacities

The American Library Association has been encouraging libraries across the country to increase early childhood literacy programs for over a decade (Hu 2015), and CPL's strategic plan for 2015–19 does focus on early childhood literacy, as well as STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) learning in early childhood (CPL 2014). CPL's priorities meet some needs that school libraries are not able to meet on their own. For example, CPL's early childhood programs serve a population that schools do not: "The hardest population to get ahold of is pre-K, because there isn't a structured place where you can find them" (Christopher Crotwell, pers. comm., Oct. 18, 2015). Only 41 percent of children attend neighborhood public schools for preschool (Ehrlich et al. 2013), which places local public libraries in a unique position to teach reading to very young children, particularly in low-income communities where free programs like evening story times may be more accessible to working parents. Crotwell holds his story times every Tuesday, one for infants and toddlers in the mornings and a family story time in the evening for older kids that includes structured play with parents (pers. comm., Oct. 18, 2015).

CPL is also well placed to provide STEAM learning, which may be beyond public schools' limited budgets. Jeremy Dunn, director of teen services for CPL, says there is "a clear mandate out of the current administration that both CPS and the city find ways to encourage youth to have a better understanding of opportunities that are available in science, technology, engineering, and math, because of need for that in future areas of growth for US jobs. It's aligned to the national priority being driven out of the White House and out of the science community" (pers. comm., Nov. 10, 2015).

STEAM learning, including computer literacy, pervade current educational priorities and is realized with mixed results within CPL. Youth in lower-income neighborhoods may only have access to computers at their local library, but getting youth away from the limited number of computer screens and participating in other activities is a challenge (Christopher Crotwell, pers. comm., Oct. 18, 2015). At many branches, a CPL library card limits computer sessions to two hour each day, in order to ensure wide access to this finite resource. Eager to take advantage of the Internet, many youth memorize the names and library card numbers of friends and relatives to extend their computer access. "They'll have five numbers memorized; they'll have eight sixteen-digit numbers in their head" (Christopher Crotwell, pers. comm., Oct. 18, 2015). Crotwell observed that most youth at Hall branch use the computers to play video games, rather than for learning or homework (pers. comm., Oct. 18, 2015). Together with providing computer access, CPL's STEAM education priority has led librarians like Crotwell to create "really hands-on, maker-oriented programming," such as his Monday chess club and Wednesday science club, "which is all about being engaged, physically and mentally, with the task or the subject" (pers. comm., Oct. 18, 2015).

Hall is one of twelve branches with a YOUmedia lab for teenagers (CPL n.d., "About YOUMedia"). Since 2009, high-school students have pursue their own projects in music recording, video filming and editing, or graphic design in YOUmedia labs, which are supplied with 3D printers, design programs, vinyl cutters, or robotics supplies (CPL n.d., "YOUMedia"). A 2013 study found that participants in YOUmedia felt mentally and physically safe in the program, that they were more involved in their interests than before, and that they had improved at least one digital media skill; many reported that participation improved their writing, schoolwork, and ability to communicate with adults; and almost 75 percent reported that YOUmedia had increased their awareness of post–high school opportunities. Participants were 77 percent African American or Latino/a, and 54 percent lived on the South Side. (Sebring et al. 2013). YOUmedia uses connected learning, which

incorporates teens' interests, peer culture, and academics in an environment that is partially unstructured, student led, and relies on relationships between students and library staff (Sebring et al. 2013). YOUmedia is culturally relevant and appeals to teenagers; they feel connected for example to Chance the Rapper who, as a South Side teenager, produced his music at Harold Washington Library's YOUmedia lab and who remains a champion of the program (Tardio 2015).

CPL story times, computers, YOUmedia, and other programs make libraries a safe, supervised, and stimulating space for children and youth to go after school, at night, on weekends, and in the summer when schools are closed. Public libraries also address the needs of parents and schools; in the summer, library branches provide additional programs for all ages and volunteer opportunities for middle- and high-school students. Youth librarians, who are freedom to tailor their programs to local interests and needs, can offer personalized support to young people.

Administrative Culture and Librarians

The circumstances surrounding the lay off and rehiring of Sara Sayigh highlights a lack of transparency, communication, and trust between CPS officials and schools (students, teachers, and school leaders). CPS' student-based budgeting system gives principals the power to allocate resources and determine hiring and firing. As reported in the media and corroborated by a DuSable Campus leader, Sayigh, and CPS officials, the district decided to lay off and to rehire Sayigh. Two former CPS officials, a CTU representative, and a long-time Chicago education reporter[6] could not explain why the district took this decision despite student-based budgeting (pers. comm., Mar. 2016). Though unfamiliar with Sayigh's case, one former CPS administrator[7] posited that the principal did fire

6. Interviews were conducted in confidentiality, and the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

7. Interview was conducted in confidentiality, and the name of interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

Sayigh and conspired to blame the decision on CPS; the administrator criticized the district's decision to reinstate Sayigh, because it sends a message to schools and students that shouting loud enough will get them what they want (pers. comm., Mar. 2016). This unwarranted suspicion demonstrates the (mutual) distrust that exists between CPS district officials and teachers, school administrators, and even students.

In contrast, all CPL youth librarians report directly to a small youth-services administrative staff. The administrators appears to be on a first-name basis with all of the youth librarians, and librarians have opportunities for promotion within the library system. For example, Crotwell's predecessor, a much celebrated veteran librarian, was promoted to be an early literacy specialist, which supports early childhood learning initiatives across the library system. CPL's small size allows for personal relationships across all levels of the organization, which fosters a sense of agency and opportunity for those working on the ground. As Crotwell emphasized, individual librarians are given autonomy and administrators are open to supporting their programming as long as it aligns with CPL's strategic goals: "With a little bit of creativity and support of administrators, we [librarians] can do pretty much whatever we want" (pers. comm., Oct. 18, 2015). Based on my research, there is an energy within CPL and an openness to progress and creativity that simply doesn't exist within CPS.

As CPL continues to grow, it receives the support and funding to improve, and as CPS continues to fail students, it loses the ability and resources to improve. This is how much of our educational system functions: districts want schools to improve but do not give them the resources. In the same way, disadvantaged youth should have access to the same resources, if not more resources, as their more privileged peers; our city must give our less successful institutions access to the resources that our more successful institutions have. Chicago's public libraries are not as politicized or rife with controversy and their staff is not as overburdens as the public schools. Public libraries do not serve everybody and only serve those who overcome barriers to access (safety, limited

programming locations). In light of school library closures, the question becomes if and how public libraries can improve access.

Policy Recommendations

I recommend investing in people rather than digital resources, developing a shared support network between schools and libraries on a local level, increasing access to literacy resources across the city, and building upon the successful YOUmedia model. None of these recommendations replace the need for school librarians. Ideally, all schools should have a school librarian and a robust relationship with its local library branch. These recommendations attempt to make the most of CPL and CPS resources as they exist now.

A People-Driven Approach

The most vital resource for providing youth library services is the very thing that schools are losing— people. Despite moves towards automation and digital resources by CPS and CPL, I advocate for more trained librarians to provide library services to children and youth.

A shift towards people will help CPS and CPL better support the work and relationships between existing school librarians. CPS and CPL administrators must also find ways to strengthen the ties between libraries and schools regardless of whether or not the schools have librarians. Setting a tone that is open to collaboration between the systems is critical. On the local level, school librarians need to understand the difficulties that public librarians face in their work, and vice versa. Both groups have a vested interest in finding some common ground. CPS and CPL may want to consider joint professional development opportunities for school teachers, school librarians, and public librarians. They might also develop incentives to share programming, such as small grants to fund trips to public libraries or ongoing collaboration between school teachers and public librarians.

CPL can improve branch librarians' effectiveness with local schools by hiring locally. It is important that CPL hire people who are familiar with the resources, relationships, and challenges that already exist in the communities they serve. Initiatives to encourage local college graduates to become certified youth librarians could be helpful. When local librarians are replaced they should share their local knowledge and neighborhood relationships with their replacement. Then, new librarians will not have to reinvent programs and relationships with children, parents, and colleagues in local schools.

Collaborative Outreach

CPL branches should work more closely with their local schools to benefit from the schools' existing social networks with parents and educators in the area. Librarians should also form partnerships with Local School Councils, which comprise engaged parents and teachers who work with the principal to make certain school-wide decisions. These kinds of local partners can also help librarians reach parents who may also have pre-K children, the hardest group to reach.

Librarians can also engage with local nonprofits and community organizations. Open Books, which makes large donations of book and runs literacy programming for all ages, and Turning the Page, which emphasizes family-engaged reading programming, are just two of many Chicago-based nonprofits whose expertise and partnership could support local librarians' work. Community leaders from churches, private preschools, and local organizations are valuable partners for local librarians. In Bronzeville, for example, the Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization is active in school issues and has a robust network in the community.

Increasing Access to Library Resources

CPL should allocate funds to initiatives that support schools directly, rather than allowing that money to reach children only if they get to the

library individually. YOUmedia is a very successful and celebrated initiative, but it only benefits self-selecting youth who go to one of the twelve library branches with a YOUmedia lab. Initiatives that create a direct line between schools and public libraries are critical for reaching more of Chicago's youth.

MyLibraryNYC, a collaboration between the New York Public Library, Brooklyn Public Library, the Queens Library, and the New York City Department of Education, presents a compelling model for public libraries to work more closely with the school district. Now in its fourth year, the initiative reaches over five hundred schools and over five hundred thousand students in the five boroughs (Barack 2015). My LibraryNYC provides (1) students and teachers with fine-free library cards that provide access to all public libraries and participants' school library; (2) book deliveries to teachers' schools, which removes the burden of going to the library after work; (3) centralized access to the digital resources in all three library systems; and (4) teacher training on integration of library resources into curricula (NYPL n.d.).

Citibank provided a pilot grant of $5 million to fund MyLibraryNYC's first three years; MyLibraryNYC is now part of the operating budget of the three library systems and the Board of Education; it is also supported by a $650 annual fee from participating schools (Barack 2015). Such a private-public partnership is necessary to reach as many schools and students as possible in a large school district. Although New York City's multiple library systems makes a collaboration like this more viable than it might be in cities with a single library system like Chicago.

MyLibraryNYC only works with schools that have school librarians or a teacher assigned to the library, which is frequently not possible in most Chicago public schools. To have the most impact, implementation of an initiative like MyLibraryNYC in Chicago would have to be accessible and perhaps targeted at schools that lack librarians. An accessible online platform might allow educators to interact directly with the public library, without the school librarian as a facilitator.

Building Upon YOUmedia

YOUmedia is an incredibly successful model for engaging teenagers, but it has a relatively small reach and does not address the critical literacy skills with which this paper is mainly concerned. CPL should consider developing initiatives that replicate YOUmedia's connected-learning environment, which appeal to Chicago's youth, into literacy skills programming. Such initiatives should also serve a broader range of age groups and at more locations throughout the city, and particularly on Chicago's South Side.

Conclusion

Despite the demonstrated benefits of school libraries with credentialed school librarians, Chicago's public schools has seen a sharp decline in the number of libraries and librarians that exist in its schools. This is a trend that, like school closures and other repercussions of budget cuts, disproportionally affects low-income and minority communities, whose students most need the literacy and critical-thinking skills that school libraries and librarians provide. As the Chicago Public Schools system continues to reduce its library resources for students, the Chicago Public Library continues to expand its offerings for youth. The public and school libraries share a similar mission but reach different populations. The two systems can and must work toward a collaborative model of youth library services in light of the decline of school libraries.

The loss of school libraries not only affects institutions, but is also of historical and cultural significance. "Knowing where you come from to get where you're going" is a refrain that resonates in African American schools and churches on the South Side, but does not often make it to city hall. For example, only after protests by a South Side community group in 2013 did CPS comply with a 1991 state law that requires a African American history curriculum in all public schools (CPS 2013; Hutson 2013). A Eurocentric canon and curriculum prevail in the school

district despite the fact that less than 10 percent of students in the district are white (CPS n.d., "Stats"). The DuSable students' protest was as much an ode to the historical importance of their school in Chicago's African American history as it was an attempt to provide for the future of both the school and themselves. Their protest resonated across the South Side—Chicago's artistic and activist communities rallied behind the students—and highlights the tremendous energy in South Side communities to change how resources are distributed in Chicago. The protest also inspired two exhibits. The first, at the Stony Island Arts Bank, drew upon books that Sara Sayigh had retired from DuSable's vast collection of African American history and the second, at the Dorchester Art + Housing Collaborative, looked at the decline of school libraries in Chicago (Rebuild Foundation 2016).

The poems by Brighton Park Elementary School students illustrate the emotional consequences of closing school libraries. Children form significant attachments to places and people. They need stability, they need safety, they need unstructured spaces where they can play and learn, and they need adults who look out for them. This is particularly true for youth in communities that grapple with widespread poverty and violence, for whom instability and isolation are the status quo. By disinvesting in these communities, city leaders harm their most fragile constituents. If this trend of disinvestment in school libraries continues, children will continue to lose the resources that they need to succeed in "an economy that is increasingly dependent on expert thinking and complex communication" (Neuman and Celano 2012). In addition to struggling to accomplish basic tasks that are necessary in daily life, they will lack the skills necessary to be the thinkers, innovators, and leaders of the next generation; because this trend harms African American and low-income communities the most, it will continue to perpetuate inequality in who does and does not have knowledge and power in our society.

At seventeen, Sabaria Dean recognizes this: "Even before we had the read-in, we'd been doing research…. Rahm's kids have tons of librarians, and that's just weird to me, how you wouldn't support the South Side

of Chicago, but where your kids go everything is supplied" (pers. comm., Jan. 25, 2016). But it is not simply "weird," it is unjust, and it is part of a larger trend in how resources are allocated in Chicago. School libraries, the people who run them, and the books and lessons within them are resources that I, and most of my readers, had when we were growing up. There is no reason why young people growing up in resource-starved areas of Chicago, and of the country, should not have access to those resources too.

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