

CHANGE IN ACTION



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Riverkeepers: High-Leverage Strategies to Keep Vital Streams of Books Flowing

Third-grade teacher Liz Johnson puts a copy of *Dog Man: A Tale of Two Kitties* into Gabriel's hands just in time for Memorial Day weekend. Gabriel has been on the move since the original *Dog Man* unleashed a stream of voluminous reading, and Liz recognizes the need to maintain his momentum. The timely delivery of Gabriel's Next-Up book is the final link in a chain of deliberate actions taken by committed educators at every level of the organization. Just as riverkeepers protect precious waterways, effective school and district leaders make it their mission to keep steady streams of compelling books flowing continuously into every classroom by...

GENEROUSLY BUDGETING CLASSROOM LIBRARIES

- Riverkeeper leaders know the research on the benefits of voluminous, engaged reading. They cite it persuasively and advocate to establish and maintain robust book budgets for their districts and schools.
- These leaders monitor spending carefully and ensure that every penny earmarked for books is spent on books. They hold funds sacred and fend off requests for unprioritized materials.

ALLOCATING MONEY FOR BOOKS, GLORIOUS BOOKS!

- Riverkeeper leaders know that readers thrive on a diet of authentic literature of all kinds. They make sure that the entire budget is spent on real, irresistible texts—NOT on dollar-sucking programs or controlled texts.
- These leaders provide librarians and ELA teachers with steady annual allocations. Any dry spell in the flow of book money devastates school and classroom libraries and plunges readers into book deserts.
- Riverkeeper leaders distribute responsibility for book ordering. In Mamaroneck, for example, we budget as follows:
 - A substantial allocation directly to librarians and teachers at three points during the year in order for them to “build libraries for the children they expect and customize collections for the children they meet”
 - An allocation for school administrators to apply to building-specific priorities
 - An allocation at the district level administered by the literacy ambassador to ensure consistency and currency across collections

STREAMLINING AND DEMYSTIFYING THE ORDERING PROCESS

- Riverkeeper leaders work closely with business offices to understand the steps necessary to order specific titles rather than prepackaged collections of books.
- These leaders demystify ordering procedures for teachers. They explain how to procure hand-selected books. Knowing that additional monies sometimes become available with short turnaround time as the year unfolds, leaders encourage teachers to keep wish lists.
- Riverkeeper leaders identify passionate, knowledgeable book mavens and provide opportunities for them to support teachers in knowing and ordering the latest and greatest titles as well as books for children with niche interests.
- They familiarize teachers with reliable sources of new titles and include book-talking rituals at faculty and grade-level team meetings.

TRACKING SPENDING AND FOLLOWING UP

- Riverkeeper leaders audit teachers' purchases to track spending patterns. They highlight teachers who have purchased books with specific children in mind and follow up with teachers who have not spent their allocations. When book flows ebb, collections stagnate and kids suffer!
- Riverkeeper leaders look downstream daily. They peruse classroom libraries; they confer with children about what they're reading; they look in book boxes and backpacks. When classroom libraries are not vibrant and children are not reading voluminously, leaders identify and remove the obstacles that block flow (e.g., unreliable allocations, confusion with ordering procedures).

WEEDING ROUTINELY

- Just as rivers need to be dredged, books must be weeded out to make way for appealing new arrivals. Riverkeeper leaders encourage healthy turnover by ensuring books flow reliably into classroom libraries, clarifying weeding criteria and procedures, and providing time for teachers to discard MUSTIE books (books that are Misleading, Ugly, Superseded, Trivial, Irrelevant, and may be obtained Elsewhere; developed by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission).

Protecting and curating the flow of books into classrooms and kids' hands is an ongoing, vital responsibility. Even as they track every penny, riverkeeper leaders internalize Donalyn Miller's admonition that "It's better to lose a book than to lose a child." Whether a lost book is gathering dust under someone's bed or has become a dog-eared favorite, riverkeeper leaders channel Elsa and "let it go," budgeting for its replacement. They know it is penny wise and pound foolish to impose penalties for lost books or to curb children's borrowing privileges. Incidentally, Gabriel devoured *A Tale of Two Kitties* over the long weekend, and Liz cheerfully reported it was the second copy she had purchased for her class, using her allocation to fuel its viral popularity.