

## 2018 LGFCU Excellence in Innovation Award Project Evaluation

<b>Project ID</b>	IGC-1
<b>Title of Program</b>	NC Kids Digital Library: Statewide Children's Digital Library
<b>Program Category</b>	
<b>Submission Date</b>	5/30/2018 9:07:17 AM
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<b>Implementation Date</b>	1-Feb-17
<b>FLSA Designation</b>	Exempt
<b>Project Team Members</b>	Ruth Ann Copley, Davidson County Library Director and manager of the NC Kids Digital Library; Jennifer Sackett, Lincoln County Library Director and NC Public Library Directors Association President, Jane McAllister, Davie County Library Director and Treasurer of NCPLDA

### Description of Productivity Improvement

The creation of the first of its kind state-wide e-book consortium available through all public libraries that offers content specifically targeted to children from pre-K through 4th grade. The content aligns with summer reading camps across the state as well as the state's 3rd grade reading initiative: "Read to Achieve," and provides a significant boost to the many library-school partnerships already in existence. A well-documented report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation has shown: "A student who can't read on grade level by 3rd grade is four times less likely to graduate by age 19 than a child who reads proficiently by that time... Add poverty to the mix, the report concludes, and a student is 13 times less likely to graduate on time than... a wealthier peer."

The digital materials have a high concentration of fiction, because it is less well-represented in the schools and individual school media centers have very limited budgets. Reading fiction increases empathy, improves social behavior and interactions, increases the ability to handle complex situations. Having these resources available through the public libraries which are open year-round and hours schools are not open mean North Carolina children have 24/7 access to this online library. Also having titles available digitally and with many having unlimited access (titles available to all who

wish to borrow and read at once) makes it easier for children to access them at any time. These simultaneous use titles encourage close reading and peer discussion with groups of readers, a uniquely valuable and important part of literacy instruction.

NC Kids Digital Library launched on February 1, 2017 and has continued to grow and expand in content and usage since then. With assistance of OverDrive's President and CEO Steve Potash, NC Kids Digital Library has been able to negotiate first time simultaneous use agreements with publishers like Lerner, Candlewick, Sleeping Bear, and Open Road for their content. In addition to other publishers who were already willing to allow always available use to public libraries and public library consortium.

### **Description of why this project was initiated**

The crisis in reading literacy in North Carolina and across the nation has long been of interest of public libraries and library directors from across the state. Libraries have been involved in Early Literacy Programs like Every Child Ready to Read, the Campaign for Grade Level Reading for a number of years. Public libraries' "brand" and major reason for being is to support reading and literacy for an enlightened and educated citizenry. Reading and reading skills are the fundamental building blocks for developing other necessary skills for math and science constructing the framework for future job skills.

Stimulating the joy of reading and discovery are at the core of the public library's mission and promoted through lifelong learning, active and engaging story times, and books and audiobooks whether they are physical or digital in nature. Public libraries are the ideal partner in North Carolina's Read to Achieve law.

As one media coordinator from Gaston County Public Schools put it: "Today's school and public Library environment calls on mentors and leaders who are able to collaborate in creative endeavors, innovate and inspire, and contribute to literacy and education. It is this extraordinary innovation and collaboration that NC Kids brings. With funding from the North Carolina General Assembly, the Library Services and Technology Act, and contributions from every public library institution in the State of North Carolina, as well as the dedicated oversight by the North Carolina Public Library Directors Association, this unique digital library service is making a huge impact in providing online access to high-quality children's literature to every child in the state."

Lead Media Coordinator for Davidson County Schools, Sedley Abercrombie stated: "Today's libraries, whether school, public, or academic, require leadership that is able to collaborate in innovative ways to bring the most cutting edge resources available to stakeholders in order to keep up with the ever-changing information technology landscape. It is this extraordinary innovation of a free digital library accessible to children across the state that NC Kids brings."

The wonderful thing about offering digital materials through <https://nckids.overdrive.com> through the OverDrive platform is the availability of the proprietary dyslexic font to assist struggling readers. This font is formulated so each letter is unique, weighted at the bottom, spacing between letters varied, and capital letters accentuated to help distinguish words and sentences. The font offers a discreet, personalized reading experience eliminating some of the stress of learning to read well. Also the use of audiobooks with an ebook as well as read-along ebooks provides a different sensory experience that aids those with visual, language and processing challenges.

**Quantifiable results (sustainability, cost savings, cost avoidance and/or a higher level of service).**

**Indication of what resources were used and what was done with any accrued time savings**

Since this is a statewide project we have been able to leverage federal, state, and local funding to have an impact across the state. Each local public library throughout the state has contributed money to pay for the annual platform fee and addition funds for content. All monies received thus far from the General Assembly \$200,000 for each of the last two budget cycles 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 have been spent on digital content including two federal Library Services and Technologies Act grants of \$100,000 each.

Alamance County Public Library Director, M. J. Wilkerson, wrote of the importance of the impact of NC Kids in her community in these terms: "Literacy rates in our county are below the state average... .Being able to participate in NC Kids, we are able to offer access to electronic materials to children who might not otherwise have that access. In addition, local funding is limited and we do not have the resources to dedicate to electronic resources that are in demand. For the first year of the program, Alamance County had the second highest use of this service, behind Charlotte/Mecklenburg... it is a source of pride that we were ranked up there with one of the top library systems in the state!"

Michael Taylor, Library Director of Pender County Public Libraries, talked about NC Kids Digital Library in these terms: "... As a member of the NC Public Library Directors Association (NCPLDA), I supported the creation of NC Kids Digital Library, and lobbied our local state representatives for funding along with other NCPLDA members. Since its launch in January(February) 2017, NC Kids has helped promote literacy in Pender County by substantially increasing the variety of books available to children in our county. ... NC Kids has served the cornerstone of a recently launched partnership between Pender County Public Libraries (PCPL) and Pender County Schools (PCS) that allows students and teachers to access the library's digital resources."

At the end of calendar 2017, NC Kids Digital Library owned 1,346 simultaneous use titles in ebooks and audiobooks, around 10% of the collection, and 13,566 titles, many with multiple copies, that were one copy/one user in ebooks, audiobooks, and streaming video. 169,709 digital items were borrowed averaging 15,428 items a month. In 2018, that number has increased to 30,000-35,000 per month. The averages are becoming such that it as if every title owned is circulating twice a month. In a physical library, that makes it as if every title has left the shelf at least twice a month--a phenomenal average. Today, the platform offers over 1,500 simultaneous use titles and 15,549 ebooks, 11,862 audiobooks and 814 movies for free.

**Other descriptive information**

OverDrive has submitted a nomination to the Library of Congress Literacy Awards on behalf of NC Kids Digital Library. This is a portion of the nomination:

•Innovation

Children today have grown up surrounded by technology and it's become an integral part of their daily lives. NC Kids Digital, North Carolina's first children's e-book consortium, is a platform that offers kids quality information and reading materials through a channel they are already prone to using. By targeting children specifically grades kindergarten through third, NC Kids provides a brand-new digital platform for students to access reading materials. By simply inputting their library card or student ID, children can instantly access 30,000 e-books from their own home. Many kids in rural, underserved areas don't have great access to reading materials because there aren't many libraries around with

available content, so NC Kids is a completely new way to ensure that all kids are given equal opportunity.

The strength of NC Kids Digital lies in its ability to offer unlimited access to particular titles within its collection. Schools across the state are struggling to afford 30 books when they actually need 200, and most digital reading platforms only have the rights to a specific number of books. NC Kids Digital is changing that by offering students simultaneous access to over 1,500 titles anytime, anywhere. By eliminating the time students have to wait for a book, schools can now offer the same resources to every kid across the state with unlimited availability and no wait time.

- Sustainability

The NC Kids Digital program allows teachers and students to use and read books countless times while reducing the cost of schools and libraries needing to purchase print books over and over. Working together with the North Carolina Public Library Directors Association (NCPLDA) and OverDrive, NC Kids Digital has created a relationship with North Carolina state representatives to develop the support they need to create awareness of the platform.

By lobbying to secure the first round of non-recurring funding for \$200,000, NC Kids Digital was able to get the resources required to develop the platform. Through this funding and a variety of additional grants, NC Kids funded over 1,500 simultaneous titles in the collection. By working with publishers that have granted unlimited rights to their titles, these ebooks will always be offered on the NC Kids Digital platform - no matter how much funding they receive each year.

- Replicability

NC Kids Digital began as an initiative confined to North Carolina, though the platform certainly isn't confined to the state. By utilizing OverDrive's universal device compatibility, NC Kids Digital can be created into a platform that can reach students nationwide.