
INFORMAL STAFF REPORT TO MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

SUBJECT:

Provide City Council an overview of youth access to public library materials and facilities, along with the revelation of materials policy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Denton Public Library offers comprehensive services and resources, including a collection of 261,981 titles, catering to all age groups while adhering to established policies and procedures. The library ensures parental rights are upheld, delineating responsibilities and access guidelines clearly within its policies. These policies are regularly reviewed and approved by the Library Advisory Board, ensuring consistency and efficiency in service delivery. Denton Public Library policies are available on the library website:

https://library.cityofdenton.com/screens/dpl_policies.html.

DISCUSSION:

Denton Public Library serves residents of Denton across all age brackets, categorizing individuals as a minor (birth to 17 years of age), while those 18 and above are considered adults. Minors may also be referred to as youth, juveniles, children, or teens. Library cards, synonymous with library accounts, grant access to resources and materials.

The library's [Circulation Services Policy](#) clarifies how to get a public library account, what types of library accounts are available, and the circulation rules. An application for a youth library account must be submitted by the parent or legal guardian. The parent or legal guardian is the adult on record for the library account and is responsible for account activity, including checkout of materials and any fees accrued. This requirement is in place for the three types of library cards for minors: Youth Denton Resident, Youth Courtesy Card (non-resident), or Books2Go Denton ISD Student account type. The Circulation Services Policy also includes the following text regarding access to library materials by minors:

- The library staff cannot and do not act *in loco parentis*. [*In loco parentis* is “in the place of a parent” and refers to acting as a guardian of a child and having the responsibilities of a parent.]
- It is the policy of the Denton Public Library that parents or guardians, not library staff, are responsible for monitoring and approving the selection of materials made by their children.
- The parent or guardian authorizes the juvenile’s uses of the card and accepts the responsibility for the selection of materials borrowed and for the return of the materials and any charges incurred.
- Parents or guardians who wish their children not to have access to certain materials or services should so advise their children. The library cannot be responsible for enforcing such restrictions.

- Due to both the parent's and child's name being on the patron account, both have access to borrowing information.

Over 1.06 million items were checked out from Denton Public Library collections in 2023. Approximately 80% of items circulated were physical items (books, DVDs, CDs, audiobooks, or kits) and the remaining 20% of check outs were downloadable materials. Items checked out at library self-service kiosks make up 90% of the library's in-person check outs. The library's system does not have the ability to automatically restrict circulation of a list of particular titles for cardholders. While library software could potentially be configured to restrict access to entire collections for certain account types, it is not recommended by staff and is essential to consider the practical implications of such measures. Library collections are broken out into age and type and shelved together in a designated set of shelving, examples include Junior Fiction (fiction chapter books), Easy (picture books), Youth Nonfiction, Teen Fiction, Adult Fiction, Adult Nonfiction, Junior Graphic Novels, Adult CDs, etc. Restricting access would block check outs from every item in a designated collection. For example, a high school student restricted from checking out Adult Fiction materials could not check out school assigned literature like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Pride and Prejudice* or any of the other 48,341 items in Adult Fiction. Students restricted from Adult Nonfiction could not check out titles like Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, *Night* by Elie Wiesel, or any of the other 39,351 nonfiction books about science, math, history, art, technology, biography, or religion to support schoolwork without a parent requesting a staff override for each check out. Implementing blanket restrictions would lead to recurring parental requests to override blocks for youth access, especially for resources crucial for school or personal enrichment. This would impose significant customer service demands and compromise the efficiency of library operations.

The [Unattended Children Policy](#) describes age requirements regarding when a caregiver must accompany a minor visiting the library. Many families send older siblings to the library with younger family members. The policy also addresses these instances. Any child ages ten (10) and under must be accompanied by a caregiver. An adult caregiver may entrust a teenager (ages 13+) to accompany a child to the library. The temporary teen caregiver must demonstrate that they are willing and capable of supervising younger children. The policy also notes that:

Parents, guardians, teachers, and other designated caretakers of children—hereafter known as caregivers—are responsible for the behavior and supervision of their charges while in the library. Library staff does not serve “in loco parentis” (in place of a parent.).

The [Confidentiality of Library Customer Records](#) ensures privacy rights for patrons, allowing parents or legal guardians access to their minor's account information. As such, the parent or legal guardian can check the minor's account via the online catalog at any time or show their photo ID to access account information when speaking to a library staff member:

Regarding Parental Access to Records: Private information may be released to the parent or guardian indicated as the adult responsible for the account of an unemancipated minor age seventeen (17) or under. The parents or guardian on the account must provide an accepted form of I.D., as listed in the Circulation Services Policy.

The library's collection of 261,981 titles is selected and managed by professional librarians, following the library's [Collection Development Policy](#). The Collection Development Policy identifies collection priorities, selection criteria for different types of collections, types of materials that are not acquired, collection maintenance, and identifies the library's Reevaluation of Materials Policy as the process for reconsideration of resources. The policy also includes the following text regarding intellectual freedom and parent responsibilities:

The library refrains from taking sides on public issues or promoting particular beliefs or viewpoints through its collection. It does not endorse the opinions expressed in materials held, recognizing its obligation to provide resources representing various sides of contentious topics. Adults are the best and final arbiters of what is appropriate for themselves. It is the parent and/or legal guardian, and only the parent and/or legal guardian, who may restrict their children, and only their children, from access to library materials. Parents and/or legal guardians have sole responsibility for what their children read, view, or hear. Library staff and associated authorities do not serve in loco parentis (in place of parents.) Selection of materials for the library will not be restricted by the possibility that materials may inadvertently come into the possession of children.

The [Reevaluation of Materials Policy](#) provides an opportunity for residents to share concerns about an item in the library collection and ask that it be reevaluated as to whether it meets collection criteria. After sharing concerns with a librarian, a resident may request that a title is reviewed, initiating the review process with professional librarians and a review and final decision from the Director of Libraries. A written appeal for Library Advisory Board may be submitted within 30 days of the date of the Director of Libraries' decision letter.

CONCLUSION:

The library's commitment to serving individuals of all ages is supported by policies that require or encourage parental involvement in all aspects of library use by minors. These processes, regularly reviewed and updated, support the library's mission to transform lives, strengthen community, and inspire imagination.

ATTACHMENTS:

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