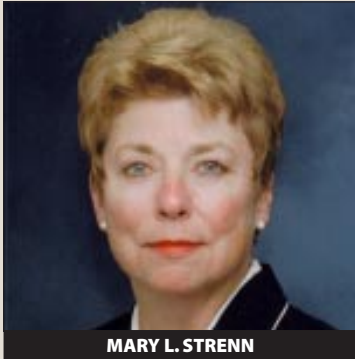


Program Excellence Award for Partnerships: Intergovernmental Cooperation

POPULATIONS OF 50,000 AND UNDER



MARY L. STRENN

ICMA's Program Excellence Award for Intergovernmental Cooperation recognizes outstanding programs developed out of cooperative actions or strategic partnerships between at least two jurisdictions or between a jurisdiction and a nonprofit agency established by a jurisdiction. This year's award in the 50,000-and-under population category goes to the city of El Segundo, California, and City Manager Mary L. Strenn for the city's program to revitalize its library system.

In the summer of 1991, the El Segundo Unified School District asked the city of El Segundo (pop. 16,424) to take over the operation of its three school libraries. The city library staff quickly surmised that such a partnership could result in a number of benefits, including the elimination of duplicate materials and resource sharing through a joint database.

In December 1991, El Segundo's city council adopted a library system affiliation agreement, which

specified the responsibilities of the city's library department and the school system. The city agreed to administer and coordinate the purchase of materials for school libraries through school district funding; order, catalog, and process materials centrally; hire, schedule, and supervise library employees at each site; develop procedures and hours of operation; and provide all expendable and consumable library services supplies. The school district, in turn, was responsible for all building maintenance and improvements, including facility remodeling and capital equipment.

Once the city had established the appropriate policies and hired staff, it didn't take long for them to realize that the library materials were in need of improvement. In some schools, more than 80 percent of the books were 30 or more years old—many dated back to the 1950s. The card catalog was not current. None of the libraries had computers for students or staff to access books, magazines, audiovisual materials, or textbooks. The high school library even lacked a microfiche reader to research articles in newspapers or periodicals.

Inadequate staffing was also a problem. The libraries' limited hours made class visits difficult, and there were no instructions on how to use the library, no story times for younger children, and no visual displays to make visitors feel welcome.

El Segundo's library staff confronted another obstacle: the school district's purchase ordering system was very different from that of the city. Creating a manageable ordering process with new practices and

procedures so that books ordered and paid for by the school district could be delivered to the city's main library for cataloging and processing required several meetings and extensive team effort.

The partnership between El Segundo and its school district has produced measurable results: data show significant increases in the circulation of materials, the number of questions handled by staff, and the number of visitors. The new purchases made with city, school, and community funds have created library collections that are valuable supplements to the curriculum. Additional city funding at \$4,000 per school library has kept reference materials—such as encyclopedias, atlases, and dictionaries—current. And a yearly grant of \$77,000 from the California State Board of Education helped replace the fiction and nonfiction collections.

El Segundo's library development plan also resulted in a systematic approach to upgrading each school's computer technologies, and students now flock to the libraries to complete their homework assignments. The school libraries are now fully networked and connected to the Internet.

Thanks to the partnership between the city and its schools, El Segundo's school libraries provide better materials and services, stay open longer hours, offer a more comfortable learning environment, and provide professional staff to support students and teachers. The result is a better library system and a more pleasant place to learn and grow. ♣



A student takes advantage of the new computer system in an El Segundo library.