

Grant Proposal for Digital Reference Service in  
City of Dreams Public School District Library System

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## **I. Executive Summary**

The City of Dreams Public School District (CDPSD) Library System, located in Humble, Texas, proposes to install a digital reference service entitled *AskIt* in order to connect today's students, who are at the helm of the Digital Revolution, with the information that they need to succeed. Described as the "Net Generation" (Kern, 2009, p. 5), the current primary and secondary school students are more comfortable communicating via digital methods than traditional ones. This project will equip the school libraries with the tools and training necessary to provide reference services digitally via synchronous (chat) and asynchronous (email and web form) channels. CDPSD Library System is requesting a grant in the amount of \$177,000 to be used over the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years to implement and evaluate the *AskIt* digital reference service.

## **II. The City of Dreams Public School District Library System**

### **A. City of Dreams Public School Community**

City of Dreams is nestled in the hill country of the Texas frontier. It was founded in 1888 by oil pioneer Pleasant Smith Humble to provide housing and services to the workers of his oil company, Humble Oil. The public school system was established in 1905 at the request of the workers. In the last 105 years the public school system has grown from a one-room schoolhouse to a network of two high schools (Humble and Kingwood), three middle schools (Humble, Kingwood, and Atascocita), and four elementary schools (Humble, Kingwood, Atascocita, and Timbers).

CDPSD serves 10,389 students, based on 2010 – 2011 enrollment. The mission of CDPSD Library System is to actively support the successful education of these students. City of Dreams takes pride in its pioneering spirit: it was founded by a pioneer and continues that tradition with its education system, including the school library system.

## B. Library System

CDPSD Library System is comprised of nine campus libraries and an office at the school district administrative headquarters. Each of the libraries carries out the library system mission while also addressing the specific needs of their patrons. The collection development policies for the libraries maintain a high bar of learning but vary based on the type of school (high, middle, or elementary).

## C. Patrons

The 10,389 students enrolled in CDPSD are of a diverse ethnic background, with the Hispanic population growing faster than any other. The district is positioned in a mostly upper-socioeconomic environment, with the majority of the households employed in the professional services sector. This environment requires CDPSD to be a leader in education, including its library system.

A breakdown of the current enrollment volumes by school is available in the Appendix (Table 2).

## D. Staff

The administrator of the library system is Dorothy Gale, the District Librarian. She coordinates collection development, oversees the library system's mission, and manages all library system personnel. She reports directly to City of Dreams PSD Superintendent, Oscar Zoroaster. Both Mr. Zoroaster and Ms. Gale are actively involved in emerging library trends and advances: Mr. Zoroaster served on the American Library Association (ALA) Committee on Education (2007 – 2009); Ms. Gale is currently serving on the ALA Task Force on Electronic Member Participation (2009 – present).

Each school has an on-campus library with a full-time accredited librarian. These librarians are in charge of day-to-day operations, managing on-site library staff, coordinating library programs, and ensuring the needs of the specific school's population are met.

There is also a full-time information technology (IT) engineer reporting to the District Librarian. She is responsible for maintaining the software and hardware used in each library. She has two full-time

IT specialists reporting to her that are responsible for on-site maintenance, installations, troubleshooting, and system upgrades.

The high school libraries also have student aides – high school seniors that work in the library during one period of the school day in exchange for class credit. The middle school libraries share one library assistant. He divides his time between the three middle school libraries and is in charge of routine upkeep, ensuring the collections are organized, and coordinating repairs and replacements as necessary. The elementary school libraries share two library assistants; each assistant has responsibility for two of the libraries. They are in charge of routine upkeep, ensuring the collections are organized, and coordinating repairs and replacements as necessary.

Upholding the pioneering spirit of Mr. Humble, the community and CDPSD implement and maintain modern education methods, facilities, and technologies. This approach ensures that the student population is prepared for the rapidly changing “real world” with its increased mobility and digitalization.

### **III. Statement of Need**

CDPSD Library System has identified several issues that hinder the ability to effectively serve the student population via traditional, face-to-face reference services: The three largest are increased use of digital communication, growing class sizes, and gender and subject based learning biases.

The most significant issue is the increasing digitalization of communications and learning methods (Kern, 2009). Bobal (2005) found in Lenhart, Rainie, & Lewis’s study that, “The next generation of [students] (now in high school and junior high) use instant messenger and chat software on a regular basis” (p. 125).

The next challenge that the school system faces is growing class sizes, which result in less in-class time for one-on-one student/teacher interaction and less time to ask questions (Brookshire, 2005). In addition, the school system needs to provide increased flexibility for students with extended schedules

due to extracurricular activities; participation in multiple extracurricular activities has become a basic college entrance requirement. This need for flexibility is supported by analyses and case studies by Lankes (2003) and Bobal (2005) that found in order to capture the maximum population involvement various contact methods should be available, like instant reference requests (chat) and asynchronous reference requests (email and web form).

Finally, there are subject and gender based issues that CDPSD would like to improve. Of high importance is an effective way to encourage girls to ask more questions because they are not as vocal in class (Lankes, 2003). Based on the analyses by Henley (2004) and Lankes (2003) and the feedback presented by Brookshire (2005), this project should include tutoring/homework assistance, ready reference, and research methods assistance.

#### **IV. Proposed Program**

To address the issues with the current reference service, CDPSD Library System proposes to install a digital reference service to be named *AskIt*. The primary project goal is to determine if the student population responds positively to a digital reference service. CDPSD also wants to determine if *AskIt* is an effective way to promote certain subjects, specifically science, and promote information seeking by girls. Lankes (2003) found that most questions submitted to two AskA services by primary and secondary school students were science-related and were by girls. CDPSD will use the distribution and volume of questions to identify areas for lesson plan improvements as well as to identify any deficiencies at a particular school. More broadly, *AskIt* will be used to help students learn research techniques by guiding the students through the research process (Henley, 2004). The reference interview form will be youth-centric and will prompt the student for resources/websites already investigated. Based on this information and the question asked, the librarian will prompt the student with helpful cues like “try revisiting website ABC and using a variation of XYZ in the search box.”

The digital reference service software will be installed on the existing CDPSD network, but it will require network and hardware upgrades to support the additional service. In line with Wasik's (2003) finding that "some organizations may even benefit by setting up a tiered digital reference system, by offering chat reference for users needing rapid, less thorough responses, for example, and e-mail reference for those users seeking more detailed responses that involve additional research" (p. 3), both chat-based and email/web form based services will be installed. The chat-based service will be available Monday through Saturday, 7am – 8pm local time. During school hours, the librarians will answer the questions submitted at their respective schools. Outside of normal school hours, the librarians have arranged a rotating schedule for coverage. The option exists to configure the software such that chat questions are placed in a queue and answered by the first available librarian (system-wide), regardless of which school submitted the question. The email/web form based service will target a 24-hour response time, unless the question is submitted on the weekend, in which case it would be the next school day. Emails/web forms will be answered by the librarian at the school of submission.

In-depth training will be provided by the software vendor for the library system staff to ensure that everyone can use *AskIt* and can also help students when presented with questions about the service. For the teachers and student populations, there will be two main methods of training: 1) seminars conducted by each school's librarian in the school's auditorium during regularly-scheduled English class over the course of one week, which ensures that all English classes are included and 2) user guides that will be handed out at the end of the seminar, will be available in every classroom, and will also be posted on the library system website.

The *AskIt* system will be installed over Spring Break 2011, currently scheduled for March 22 – 26, 2011. The software installation and accompanying network/hardware upgrades will be completed during the first three days; the fourth day will be library staff training; and the fifth day will be a hands-on day for the library staff to practice using the software and answering mock questions (with the software vendor on-site to answer any questions and resolve any unforeseen issues).

Wasik's (2003) review found, "Organizational commitment to a set of agreed-upon quality criteria and processes, then, is essential to a service's success, and sets the stage for effective evaluation" (p. 3). As such, an evaluation plan will be developed and communicated at the beginning of the project. After reviewing methods of evaluation reported by Wasik (2003) and McClure, Lankes, Gross, & Choltco-Devlin (2002), CDPSD Library System decided on a mixture of numerical/volumetric analysis and satisfaction/survey based analysis. Using the guidelines in McClure et al. (2002, p. 5), the evaluation will focus on "Descriptive Statistics and Measures," like number of questions received by subject/class, number of questions answered successfully, and completion time/turnaround time; "User Satisfaction Measures," like service expectations, service satisfaction, and demographic data; and "Staff Time Expended," like percent of staff time spent in digital reference service. It is important to focus on a handful of specific measurements instead of trying to evaluate every aspect of the service (McClure et al., 2002). As much of the information as possible will be automatically collected (*e.g.*, via the reference interview form, computer logs, *etc.*) to provide consistent collection and to prevent additional workload for the staff. Two additional evaluation methods will include optional surveys that pop-up at the end of the chat/email/web form and mandatory, anonymous paper surveys handed out in each English class at the end of each semester for the duration of the project.

This grant will allow CDPSD Library System to explore the viability of *AskIt*, confirm the believed benefits, and develop a business case for continued funding by the tax payers (Wasik, 1998). The project will be evaluated at the end of each semester to determine if any tweaks are necessary or if any opportunities exist to make small but significant improvements. If the overall evaluation of *AskIt* is positive and the goals during the trial period are met, then CDPSD Library System will present the project to the School Board for inclusion in the strategic plan and annual budget, starting in 2013.

## V. Proposed Budget

CDPSD Library System has researched the funds necessary to implement and evaluate *AskIt* during the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years. Details of how the funds will be distributed are included in the Program Budget (Table 1), following guidelines developed by McClure et al. (2002).

**Table 1**  
***Program Budget***

<i>Salaries, Wages, and Benefits</i>		
Staff salary and benefits		\$125,000.00
Program training (staff)		\$20,000.00
<i>Operating Expenses</i>		
Dedicated high-speed network subscription		\$12,000.00
User training (teachers and students)		\$10,000.00
Software license		\$4,000.00
Technical support (third-party)		\$2,500.00
Program evaluation		\$1,000.00
<i>Materials and Supplies</i>		
Hardware upgrade		\$1,500.00
Network upgrade		\$500.00
<i>Other costs</i>		
Printed materials (manuals, evaluation forms, user guides)		\$500.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$177,000.00</b>

## VI. Conclusion

In the pioneering spirit of Pleasant Smith Humble, CDPSD Library System is seizing the opportunities presented by the Digital Revolution. The needs of the student population are changing significantly; the library system must adapt readily to ensure it continues to effectively connect students with the information they seek. *AskIt* will expand the library system's reference services to include the communication method that the student population engages in most – digital. This improvement is essential to the library system's mission of actively supporting the successful education of the student population.



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### **VIII. Appendix**

A. Table 2: CDPSD Enrollment, 2010 – 2011 School Year

B. Internet Public Library: Ask an ip12 Librarian Question Form, <http://www.ipl.org/div/askus/index.html>

## A. Table 2: CDPDSD Enrollment, 2010 – 2011 School Year

Table 2

*City of Dreams PSD Enrollment*

<u>School</u>	<u>School Type</u>	<u>Enrollment, 2010 - 2011</u>
Humble	HS	1,681
Kingwood	HS	2,814
Humble	MS	1,130
Kingwood	MS	1,032
Atascocita	MS	1,083
Humble	ES	577
Kingwood	ES	533
Atascocita	ES	678
Timbers	ES	861
TOTAL		10,389

B. Internet Public Library: Ask an ipl2 Librarian Question Form, <http://www.ipl.org/div/ask/index.html>

Ask an ipl2 Librarian: For Kids

<http://www.ipl.org/div/ask/index.html>

ipl2 is the result of a merger of the Internet Public Library (IPL) and the Librarians' Internet Index (LII).

## Ask an ipl2 Librarian Question Form

This form is intended for people **under 13 years of age**.

Ask an adult for help if you need it. If you are over 13 years old, please use our [adult reference form](#).

Review our [Privacy Statement](#) before sending us your question. You can also read [more about our service](#).

We usually need three days to answer questions.

If you need help before then, try visiting a local library or using the sites in [ipl2 For Kids](#).

This service runs 24 hours/day, 7 days/week during most of the year.

Our [Ask an ipl2 Librarian Holiday Closure Schedule](#) shows when this service is unavailable or limited.

**You MUST fill out questions that are in red.**

### I. Tell us about you: We need some information about you before we can answer your question.

What is your **first name**?

Enter email **once** here:

*youremail@youremail.com*

We respond to you by e-mail so we need your **REAL EMAIL** address. We have no way to respond to fake e-mail addresses.

Enter email **again** here:

*youremailagain@youremailagain.com*

City, State/Country

#### Hey, Kids! (and Parents)

If your parents have **email filters/controls** turned on, they will need to add [iplref@ipl.org](mailto:iplref@ipl.org) to your allowed mail list in order for us to send email to you.

Knowing your city and state (or country) helps us find information specific to your area.

What **grade** are you in?

What **subject** are you asking about?

When do you need it?†

(Dates set on current [U.S. Eastern time](#).)

#### † REMEMBER!

We usually cannot help you if you need an answer in **less than three days**.

### II. Your Question:

#### 1. Will you use this information for a school report?

☐ Yes ☐ No

We can't do your assignment, but we can help you get started and give you some places to look.

#### 2. Write **your question** in the following space.

B. Internet Public Library: Ask an ipl2 Librarian Question Form (continued),  
<http://www.ipl.org/div/ask/index.html>

Ask an ipl2 Librarian: For Kids

<http://www.ipl.org/div/ask/index.html>

Describe your question or problem. Be as specific as you can!

If you're doing an assignment, tell us about it.

A real person will read your question, so use complete sentences!

3. How long does your assignment need to be?

(Skip this question if it doesn't apply.)

- ☐ One Paragraph
- ☐ Half a Page
- ☐ One Page
- ☐ Two Pages
- ☐ Five Pages
- ☐ Other

4. Are there certain places your teacher **does NOT** want you to get the answer?

(Skip this question if it doesn't apply.)

- ☐ Encyclopedia
- ☐ Text book
- ☐ Web site
- ☐ Other




5. List any places **you have already looked** for the answer.

Don't forget to check your school or public library for answers too! Sometimes the best information isn't on the Internet.

Before you send this form...

- Look at your email address again to make sure it is correct and complete
- If you have not read our [Privacy Statement](#), please do so.

You will hear from us soon. Thanks for coming to the IPL!

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