We need to focus more of California's innovation and creativity on our public libraries

SACRAMENTO - *State Librarian Greg Lucas sent the following message to California's 1,112 libraries calling for getting a library card into the hands of every kindergartner, working to ensure every Californian can read at more than a 5th Grade level, and creating a system where every Californian can use their library card anywhere in California.*

Benjamin Franklin is credited with creating America's first fire department and its first lending library. Both institutions have changed a lot in 280 years but, fundamentally, they're the same.

Firefighters still put out fires but they provide far more emergency medical care. Libraries are still information hubs for their communities but they supply that information in many more ways than books.

"Without the library, you have no civilization," says Ray Bradbury, one of the most ardent advocates of public libraries, which he insists were where he got his education.

California's 1,112 libraries – the most of any state – mirror our unique diversity. They're enriched by thousands of librarians who exemplify the innovation and generosity California is recognized for around the world.

California's students get help achieving their dreams from on-campus libraries and teacher-librarians. Our public and private universities operate world class research libraries.

Each day, 21 million Californians – from preschoolers to 100-year-olds – use their library cards to open windows on the limitless realm of ideas and knowledge. Libraries are vital, thriving 21st Century institutions that literally change lives.

Libraries are the most welcoming place to our most disenfranchised. They're on the front line of improving the reading skills of all Californians. And there's absolutely no investment in human capital that's more cost-effective than teaching someone to read.

Libraries invigorate our workforce. They're an essential part of our education system, offering safe havens for homework and preventing academic "summer slide."

Spend time in the children's section and see toddlers getting rowdy over a book at Storytime. Visit the Young Adult section and see parents sneaking off with books written for their teens that happen to be some of the most thought-provoking, page-turning fiction being written.

Today, library bookshelves are interspersed with banks of computer terminals, usually with lines of persons waiting for a vacancy. The state is working to improve the connectivity at every public library from Alturas to National City.

We're an Information Economy and the library is where many Californians – some 25 percent of the state doesn't have Internet at home – plug into the information they need to succeed or survive.

More and more branches offer "maker spaces" and 3D printers that allow Californians to create what they envision – on the spot. Sometimes that's jewelry, robot parts, a model of a California mission for school (forget sugar cubes!) or even prosthetic hands.

Databases, streaming video and E-Books are becoming the norm.

Ben Franklin and Ray Bradbury would be proud. But they'd expect more. So should we.

Let's challenge ourselves to focus more of California's innovation and creativity on our public libraries.

Let's make this a state where every Californian entering kindergarten has a library card, every Californian reads at more than a Fifth Grade level and every Californian can use their library card anywhere in California.

About the California State Library (www.library.ca.gov) Founded in 1850, the California State Library is the central reference and research library for the Governor's office, Legislature, state employees, and the general public. The State Library leads and promotes innovative library services by providing and managing state and federal funding programs to ensure all Californians have access via their libraries to information and educational resources.

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