

Name of Event/Activity:

Library Journal's Design Institute, Columbus Metropolitan Library, Columbus, OH – May 4–5, 2017

Name:

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I had the opportunity to attend the Library Design Institute, a two-day event created by Library Journal and hosted by the Columbus Metropolitan Library (CML) System in Columbus, Ohio.

The first day was a bus tour to four different locations throughout the Columbus Metropolitan area. Three of the locations were operated by CML, the fourth was part of another nearby system. The focus of the event was getting to see trends in design for libraries as they seek to transform into Libraries of the 21st Century. On each tour, our guide addressed questions about balancing the size of the collection with the need for people space, the changing customer-service model, as well as the changing role of the library in the community.

In listening to staff and leaders at Columbus Metropolitan Library, I heard our story. We (Metropolitan Library System) are where they were about five years ago. They underwent a strategic planning process to hone their mission and vision and develop a focus for their priorities. They have spent the past five years transforming their workforce, collection, programs, initiatives, and physical environments to reflect their new strategic plan—and it shows.



As you walk into each CML location, you are greeted by a staff member at an **Info Station** (size varies depending on location).



Interior and Exterior book returns pass directly into the work rooms allowing staff on the public floor to focus on customer interaction.



Self-checkout stations are located near the info desk for convenience. Staff encourage customers to use the self-checks, assisting them as needed.



Giant touchscreen **Discovery Stations** (at every location) help customers navigate their trip.



Interior and Exterior signage is standardized throughout the system – so you get the same message no matter where you are.



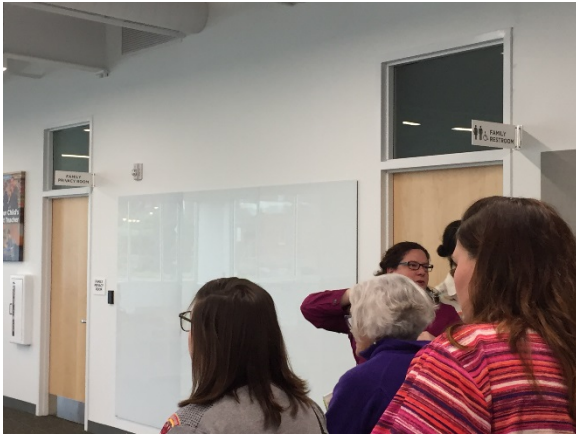
End panels and end panel signage are the same at each location; it is easy to move shelving between locations as collections change.



CML has two **branded environments** that go into every location “**Ready for Kindergarten**” and “**Homework Help**”. All Children’s Areas (Ready for Kindergarten) include a custom school bus and an out-in-the-open program area.



The “**Homework Help**” area has dedicated computers, a printer, and reference collection and is limited to students (no parents or paid tutors allowed). It is staffed by the Library during after school hours.



Every location has a **Family Restroom** and a **Family Privacy Room**. The Family Privacy Room has a sink, babychanging station, and comfortable lounge chair. It is meant to be a place for families to take a little break if they need to. It can also be used for nursing or pumping.



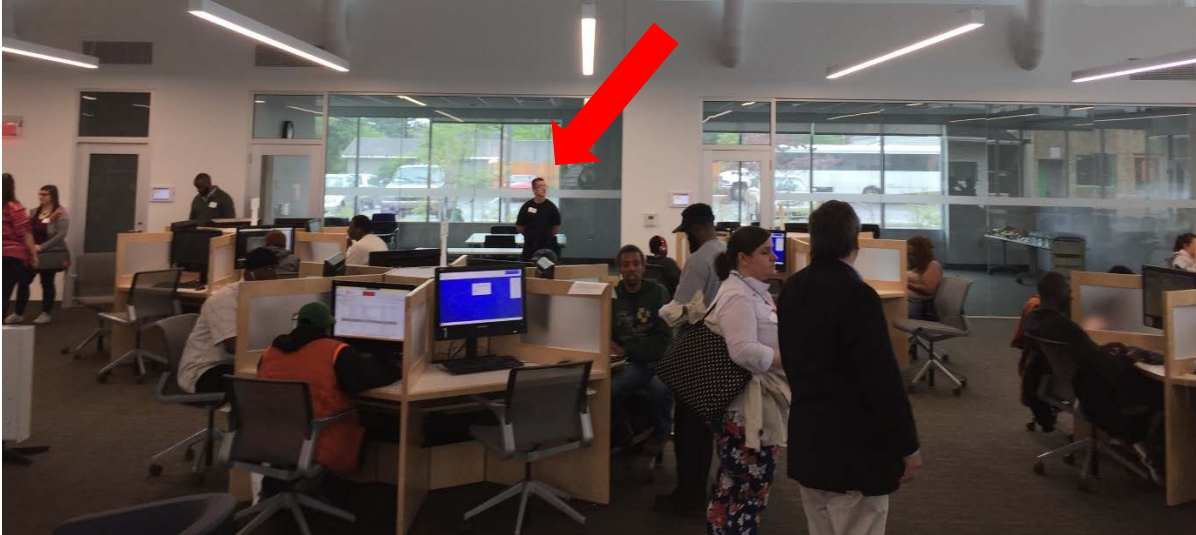
The Collection is **displayed well**. Each location has unique display elements, but they all share a similar design aesthetic. Many of the display pieces are on casters for easy reconfiguration.



Staff are located strategically throughout the building(s) to assist customers. They are stationed at custom-made podiums.



Most staff stand on cushioned gel mats, but some are seated on perches based on physical need.



I had a chance to speak to some of the frontline staff during my tours; I wanted to hear from them about the transition to the new customer service model and its reception by members. One staff member who had been assigned to rove near the public computers (no staff podium in that area) said that it was uncomfortable the first couple of times he was assigned to stand near the computers, but now he is used to standing around. More often than not, someone will flag him down for assistance so he's not standing there too long anyway.

CML is near the completion of their efforts to refresh all 23 of their locations in order to support their new strategic plan. What struck me, is that despite their standardization on everything from shelving to carpet, signage to staff podiums, each location still felt unique to its neighborhood through its architecture and staff's familiarity with the local community.

My hope (and expectation) is that through our Needs Assessment and Benchmarking activities this fall, we will establish a picture of how we want our physical environments to support our Strategic Plan. Once we've set our "yardstick", we would then begin the process to renovate and update our locations to meet those environmental branding expectations and that in 5 years we would be able to host a Library Journal Design Institute to show other library systems what we've accomplished.