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OUSD and Friends of the Oakland Public School Libraries Create Digital Library for All Oakland Students

Oakland -- United For Success Academy 8th grader, Brenda C., uses Sora, an app used to access the District's new Digital Library, which has transformed her ability to read whenever she wants. "What I like about Sora is that you get to read books and you explore," she said. "You are also able to track how long you read and your streak. It also gives you achievement awards for something you did. It is a really good place to read and you just have to explore more to find out more about it." Now every student in Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) has access to the district wide Digital Library through Sora.

Friends of the Oakland Public School Libraries (FOPSL) announced it has agreed with OUSD to provide funding, as well as strategic and promotional support for the OUSD Digital Library. FOPSL is a nonprofit dedicated to ensuring every Oakland public school student has access to quality school library services.

"Not only is the OUSD Digital Library a great way to keep our students reading during distance learning, but it also has been a wonderful tool for teaching. Our Sora collection curated by our librarians is rich in diverse and current titles that can complement curriculum in all grades and subjects," says Samia Khattab, teacher-librarian at Franklin Elementary who piloted the Digital Library with her students this fall.

OUSD and FOPSL estimate it will cost \$540,000 to create a digital library to serve the nearly 36,000 students in District-run schools. OUSD made an initial investment of \$400,000 in the 2020-21 school year, including CARES Act funds. FOPSL has already raised \$50,000 toward the project. FOPSL and OUSD are providing annual support to sustain the Digital Library.

The District launched the Digital Library as part of the Rooted in Reading campaign, which was created to foster a love of reading among students and provide equitable access to literacy by building partnerships among educators, students, families and community organizations. "Considering the ways that the pandemic and school closures have limited students' access to reading materials, it is critical that we develop new ways to circulate books from our libraries," said Wesley Jacques, Executive Director of Academics and Instructional Innovation for the District. "OUSD is excited to partner with FOPSL to build the Digital Library to leverage the significant investments that have been made in computers and internet access and provides all students access to rich, interesting, and culturally relevant books."

FOPSL and OUSD agreed that the OUSD Digital Library will be curated by the District's professional library staff. The Digital Library provides the same function as a physical library collection by supporting and enhancing classroom curriculum and promoting literacy through independent reading.

"The OUSD Digital Library will ensure that students attending District-run schools will be able to read and listen to great books anytime they like, on any device," FOPSL Executive Director, Dagmar Serota, said. "OUSD's library staff are experts in selecting high quality, engaging books, suitable for students that are fun to read and support the curriculum. The Digital Library will address an issue facing many OUSD students -- summer reading loss, which can negatively affect academic achievement. We are very happy to be partnering with the District on a project that will expand access to books, year-round.

The OUSD Digital Library was piloted by library staff in the fall to provide students with reading materials during distance learning. "Getting students access to eBooks and audiobooks right now means that we can start to thoughtfully reintegrate pleasure reading into the school routine," said Sam Solomon, teacher-librarian at Life Academy and United for Success. "From a social-emotional standpoint, great books can be an escape, a solace, and an adventure. As they say, books give us somewhere to go when we have to stay where we are."

Students are taking full advantage of the digital library. Arturo, a 4th grader at Franklin Elementary School, said, "I like Sora, because it has all my favorite books like the Dog Man series and Cat Kid." Jia, a 5th grader at Franklin added, "I like Sora because you don't have to go out, you can just type in the name of the book and read it. I like comic books, because they're fun and exciting and I can find lots of good ones on Sora."

The OUSD Digital Library is supported by the Oakland Literacy Coalition, and FOPSL has secured major funding from the Oakland Rotary Club, Temple Sinai's People of the Book Project, The Peter Sherris, M.D. & Astrid Lacitis Charitable Foundation, as well as funding from Matson, Village Market, Orinda Woman's Club, Ken Betts Suds Machine, and many individual donors. To contribute to the OUSD Digital Library, please visit the [OUSD Digital Library Donation page](#) or fopsl.org. 100% of all funds donated will support the OUSD Digital Library.

About FOPSL

Friends of the Oakland Public School Libraries (FOPSL) is dedicated to ensuring that every Oakland public school student has access to quality school library services, an important element in building student literacy. FOPSL provides funding to support school library collections, library programming, and professional development. Since 2012, FOPSL has provided OUSD libraries with more than \$140,000 in funding, thousands of books and skilled volunteer support. FOPSL has helped reopen 24 libraries. For more information visit fopsl.org.

About OUSD

In California's most diverse city, Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) is dedicated to creating a learning environment where "*Every Student Thrives!*" More than half of our students speak a non-English language at home. And each of our 81 schools is staffed with talented individuals uniting around a common set of values: Students First, Equity, Excellence, Integrity, Cultural Responsiveness and Joy. We are committed to preparing all students for college, career and community success.

To learn more about OUSD's Full Service Community District focused on academic achievement while serving the whole child in safe schools, please visit [OUSD.org](https://www.ousd.org) and follow us @OUSDnews.