



BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
Whatcom County Library System
September 15, 2026

Via Teams and Ferndale Library
2125 Main Street
Ferndale, WA 98248

WCLS Vision: *An engaged community where curiosity is cultivated, literacy flourishes and democratic ideals thrive.*

1. 9:00 a.m. **Call to Order.** Quorum determined. Land Acknowledgement.
2. 9:05 a.m. **Open Public Comment Opportunity**
This period is set aside for persons wishing to address the Board. Each person may have up to three minutes for this purpose. Written comments may be submitted to Allyson.McBride@wcls.org prior to the meeting.
3. 9:10 a.m. **Service Anniversary Recognition** – Sarah Nissell (Lavender) – 10 years
4. 9:15 a.m. **Consent Agenda**
 - a. Meeting Minutes
 - b. Expenditures
 - c. Resolution Authorizing the Reissuance of a Paycheck
5. 9:20 a.m. **Financial Report and Resolutions**
 - a. Finance Committee Report
6. 9:30 a.m. **Policy Update**
 - a. Program Policy 4.04
 - b. Safe Child and Children's Program Policy 6.03
 - c. Temporary Adverse Working Conditions Policy 12.45
7. 9:50 a.m. **Strategic Plan 2027 - 2031**
8. 10:05 a.m. **BREAK**
9. 10:15 a.m. **Blaine Library Update**
10. 10:30 a.m. **Staff Reports**
11. 10:50 a.m. **Performance Measures and Committee Reports**
12. 11:00 a.m. **Announcements and Adjourn**
 - a. Annual wage and benefit negotiations October 5 & 6 and backup day October 7
 - b. All Friends Gathering October 21 from 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. at the Lynden Library

Board of Trustees Meetings are open to the public in accordance with RCW 42.30. The Board is currently holding meetings with options for in-person or remote participation. Persons wishing to be provided with an internet link or telephone number to access the meeting are asked to please email Allyson.McBride@wcls.org before 4:00 p.m. Monday, September 14, 2026. Written comments may be submitted to Allyson.McBride@wcls.org prior to the meeting.



Board Meeting Agenda Item Cover Sheet

Meeting Date:	9/15/2026
Committee or Department:	Administration Department
Subject:	Consent Agenda – Board Meeting Minutes, Monthly Expenditures, Resolution to Reissue a Paycheck
Prepared By:	Jackie Saul
Impact upon Budget?	☒ Yes ☐ No
Supporting Documents:	☒ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation or Request: Approval of consent agenda items

Suggested Motion for Consideration: Move approval of consent agenda items as presented

Summary:

Meeting Minutes:

- August 18, 2026 Regular Board Meeting

Expenditures:

General Fund:

- July 16-31, 2026 payroll: check nos. 1048008620-1048008624 and voucher nos. 567270-567424 totaling \$278,477.02 and August 1-15, 2026 payroll: check nos. 1048156990-1048156994 and voucher nos. 567429-567588 totaling \$273,639.38.
- ACH transactions for employee benefits, payroll processing fees, telecommunication services and monthly sales/use tax filings totaling \$91,118.18; \$48,420.76 of this is for employee-funded contributions to dental and vision insurance premiums, Health Savings Accounts, and PERS and deferred compensation plans (made via payroll deduction).
- Claim 2026-31G: warrant nos. 1280893-1280917 totaling \$59,415.98
- Claim 2026-32G: warrant nos. 1281135-1281152 totaling \$128,045.73
- Claim 2026-33G: warrant nos. 1281455-1281477 totaling \$26,180.48
- Claim 2026-34G: warrant nos. 1282047-1282069 totaling \$36,600.72

Capital Fund:

- Claim 2026-20C: warrant nos. 1280918-1280919 totaling \$8,499.02
- Claim 2026-21C: warrant nos. 1281153-1281156 totaling \$109,465.68
- Claim 2026-22C: warrant nos. 1282070-1282072 totaling \$86,789.85

Authorization to Reissue a Paycheck

- Resolution 09/15/26-10 Authorizing Reissuance of a Paycheck

Alternatives: N/A

Fiscal Impact: Expenditures for approval paid from available 2026 budgeted funds.

Comments: The Finance Committee has reviewed the General and Capital Fund claims listed above. They reviewed that there were no General Journal entries made in August.

Library Board of Trustees Regular Meeting

August 18, 2026

Location

This meeting was held in a hybrid manner, with remote attendance via Microsoft Teams and in-person attendance at Administrative Services, 5205 Northwest Drive, Bellingham, WA 98226.

In Attendance

Trustees: Matthew Santos, Chair; Danielle Gaughen, Secretary and Jes Stugelmayer. Absent: John Miller, Vice Chair and Riley Sweeney.

Staff: Christine Perkins, Executive Director; Michael Cox, Deputy Director; Jackie Saul, Director of Finance and Administration; Mary Vermillion, Community Relations Manager; Mary Kinser, Collection Services Manager; Geoff Fitzpatrick, IT Services Manager; Ryan Cullup, Facilities Services Manager; Beth Andrews, Human Resources Manager; Dianne Marrs-Smith, Birch Bay and Lynden Library Manager and Friends of the Birch Bay Library (FOBBL) President; Jessica Burson, Foundation Development Director; Maggie Mae Nase, Learning Coordinator; Allyson McBride, Records Management Specialist & Executive Assistant; Theresa Morrison, Children's Service Coordinator; Carmi Parker, ILS Administrator/Librarian; Katrina Carabba, Deming Library Branch Manager; Hana Boxberger, Youth Services Librarian; Jonathan Jakobitz, Blaine Branch Manager; Alix Prior, Ferndale Branch Manager; Cynthia French, Communications Specialist; Tamar Clark, Teen Services Coordinator; Emma Radosevich, Collection Development Librarian.

Guest(s): Ed Trott

Call to Order

Matthew determined quorum and called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Open Public Comment

No public comment.

Matthew asked the Board to consider switching the Compensation Study Report to take place as agenda item 3, the Consent Agenda as item 4 and the Financial Report to take place as item 5.

Jes moved to approve the adjusted agenda. Seconded. Unanimous approval of the adjustment of the agenda.

Compensation Study Report

Christine reminded the Board about the Compensation and Classification study which is being spearheaded by Gallagher & Co. The Gallagher team joined the Board meeting to provide an executive summary of the study. The team presenting included Georg Krammer, Managing Director; Jaime Parker, Project Manager; Shiloh Venable, Consultant; and Lynda Guerra, Analyst.

Jaime provided an overview of the study, including data sources and survey methodology. She said that WCLS is closely aligned with the market. There were three structures proposed that will be brought to our annual union negotiation sessions in early October.

Jackie brought to attention to the Board that, because a lot of staff live in Bellingham, WCLS wants to be sure to factor cost of living in, as well, not just cost of labor. Danielle asked Jackie to create a spreadsheet to compare the options to see side by side. Jackie confirmed that she will work on this.

Next steps in the process will be to share this information with compensation study committee. In October, the information will be used during union negotiations. Once an agreement has been reached, both the union and the WCLS will have the opportunity to vote on it.

Matthew shared his appreciation of the thoughtful questions. He felt that the presentation was thorough. He thanked the Gallagher team and the team left the meeting.

Consent Agenda

The Consent Agenda included minutes of the July 21, 2026, Board of Trustees Regular Meeting, authorization to cancel a warrant, a resolution to declare a capital asset as surplus, and the following expenditures:

General Fund:

- June 16-30, 2026 payroll: check nos. 1047650517-1047650521 and voucher nos. 566943-567101 totaling \$273,295.85 and July 1-15, 2026 payroll: check nos. 1047808265-1047808268 and voucher nos. 567106-567265 totaling \$271,882.75.
- ACH transactions for employee benefits, payroll processing fees, telecommunication services and monthly sales/use tax filings totaling \$119,596.13; \$71,583.84 of this is for employee-funded contributions to dental and vision insurance premiums, Health Savings Accounts, state-paid family medical leave and long-term care fund premiums, and PERS and deferred compensation plans (made via payroll deduction).
- Claim 2026-27G: warrant nos. 1279394-1279417 totaling \$33,624.56
- Claim 2026-28G: warrant nos. 1279630-1279658 totaling \$148,426.95
- Claim 2026-29G: warrant nos. 1280261-1280287 totaling \$84,327.35
- Claim 2026-30G: warrant nos. 1280746-1280767 totaling \$101,327.73

Capital Fund:

- Claim 2026-17C: warrant no. 1279418 totaling \$1,022.50
- Claim 2026-18C: warrant nos. 1280288-1280290 totaling \$244,685.89
- Claim 2026-19C: warrant no. 1280768 totaling \$1,985.10

Matthew moved to accept the Consent Agenda as presented. Seconded. Unanimous board approval.

Financial Report and Resolutions: Finance Committee Report

Jackie reviewed her report, including the July Notes and Highlights section. Jackie highlighted that revenue currently stands at 55%. She noted that intergovernmental revenues (aka timber taxes) have dropped over the past few years, as reflected in the budget. This year's revenue, however, is running ahead of budget. The next big influx of property taxes will be seen in October.

Jackie is keeping an eye on expenses, particularly office supplies, fuel and utilities. Utility charges are currently at 58% but these months are generally the higher usage months.

Jackie is beginning to work on the 2027 budget. She is looking at the preliminary numbers that have been provided by Gallagher and will be scheduling meetings with Department Heads and Branch Managers to start discussing budget needs for 2027.

Matthew moved to amend the agenda to hear the Policy Review as item 6, the Amendment to MOU with Lynden School District as item 7, followed by the Break as item 8, and finally the Trustee Education as item 9. Seconded. Unanimously approved.

Policy Review

Collection Policy 3.01 – Christine and Mary Kinser shared that, due to an updated link to Access to Library Resources and Services for Minors, Policy 3.01 needs to include the May 29, 2025 date with that line.

Matthew moved to approve the updated Collection Policy 3.01, as presented. Seconded. Passed unanimously.

Disposal of Library Materials Policy 3.02 – The Board reviewed policy 3.02 and all agreed no changes needed.

Amendment to MOU with Lynden School District for ConnectED

Christine shared the amendment to the Memorandum of Understanding between Lynden School District and WCLS for the ConnectED program. Lynden School District requested that there be an amendment which includes clear information about how students and parents can monitor what is checked out on ConnectED accounts. Christine and Thom agreed that the amendment was acceptable and Christine will sign the agreement, if approved.

Danielle asked for clarification about the makeup of the ConnectED council. Theresa confirmed that the council is a group which includes a representative from each Whatcom County school district to communicate with WCLS staff.

Matthew moved to authorize the Executive Director to sign the First Amendment to Memorandum of Understanding By and Between Lynden School District and the Whatcom County Library System as presented. Seconded. Passed unanimously.

Break

Matthew adjourned for a break from 10:00-10:10 a.m.

Trustee Education: First 500 Picturebook Subscription Service

Theresa Morrison, Children's Service Coordinator; Carmi Parker, ILS Administrator/Librarian; and Katrina Carabba, Deming Library Branch Manager Parker introduced themselves to the Board. Theresa began the presentation by describing the reasons for beginning the First 500 Program. She shared that one of the main goals of the program is to teach the love of literature beginning at an early age. The program helps to promote and strengthen early literacy, library affinity and library advocacy in children. Theresa presented physical book examples that provide positive print association, print awareness, vocabulary, narrative skills, letter knowledge and phonological awareness. The program makes it easy for parents and children by having all their books pre-checked out, placed in a bag that is ready for pickup.

Carmi informed the Board that this program is currently being offered at the Blaine, Deming and South Whatcom branches. If a family is interested in the program, they will come to one of these three branches to fill out a short form and select the day of the week to have their pickup ready. If a family is gone on vacation or unable to pick up, they are welcome to pause the program until they return. If a bag pickup is missed 3 weeks in a row, the subscription is automatically paused, and a notice is sent to the family.

The Deming branch was the first branch to launch the First 500 program. Katrina and the Deming team were able to work through the steep learning curve. The first month of the program, there were about 5 subscribers. Having a lower number of subscribers helped behind-the-scenes workers finetune the process to ensure smooth deliveries. Katrina confirmed that staff do not curate bags for patrons, as to encourage a broader array of books being read. This practice may not work for every family; the team makes it clear that there will be a large variety of items received.

Jes asked if there is a limit to the total subscriptions at each branch. It was confirmed that it will depend branch by branch based on the size of the patron base, the physical size of the branch and the collection of picture books at the branch. For example, the South Whatcom branch will be limited to 12 subscribers. Carmi confirmed that they are currently working on the numbers to narrow in on the amount of subscriptions they will be able to honor.

The Board meeting was running ahead of schedule so there was time to view the First 500 Program video. The video can be found here: [The First 500 Program](#).

The Board thanked Theresa, Carmi and Katrina for their presentation. The group left the meeting.

Strategic Plan 2027 – 2031 DRAFT

Christine presented the draft of the 2027 -2031 Strategic Plan to the Board. She reminded the Board of the process beginning with the surveys that were sent out to stakeholders, cardholders, and non-users. All the feedback and input received were sifted through and used to prepare this draft.

For this Strategic Plan, the word G.R.O.W. (Galvanize, Read, Optimize and Welcome), has been chosen to represent the next 5 years. This year, staff from every department had opportunities to provide review and provide input. Overall, there seems to be quite a bit of support from staff.

Christine gave the Board and moment to review the document and asked if there were any questions. The Board did not have questions but agreed that the draft feels like a good start. Christine confirmed that any general impressions, questions, and input is welcome.

Jes said that she is taking it all in and noted that she would like to see each objective have a key result tied to it, as well as what department is responsible for making the result happen. This way each objective is able to be tracked. Matthew appreciated that many items are already on our radar. He does not feel that it is too much, given the feedback and that this is for a 5-year plan. Danielle said that she appreciates that there are many items that harken back to listening and planning sessions during the Levy Lid Lift.

Christine confirmed that she is planning on meeting with John and Riley, separately, to review and discuss the plan. She reiterated that this is just a draft and she will be working on a final version to be completed by September. She encouraged Board members to continue their review to make sure they are comfortable with approving a final version in September. She requested that if there are any questions, clarifications or changes, to please reach out to her within the next couple of weeks.

Staff Reports: Executive Director

In addition to her written report, Christine praised Dianne Marrs-Smith and Michael Cox for the amount of thought that was put into the Birch Bay construction kickoff event. She specifically noted the spoons designed as golden shovels for the treats provided by the Friends of the Birch Bay Library.

Christine also noted that she is excited about WCLS soon offering Whatcom Museum passes for checkout. Bellingham Public Library already offers this to patrons and Whatcom Museum has agreed to let WCLS piggyback onto their efforts. This is yet another reason why our partnership with BPL is beneficial to our patrons.

Christine finished her report by pointing out the article she included that spoke about the closing of the job training center in Goodwill.

Staff Reports: Deputy Director

Michael shared his report. He said that the North Fork Meeting Room is now available for reservations. He also shared that, with input from WCLS Cultural Liaison staff from Lummi and Nooksack tribes, the WCLS Land Acknowledgment webpage has been updated.

Michael also updated the Board on the Birch Bay renovations stating that they are well underway and are (as of this moment) still within the budget. With the older building, surprises are expected and there may be future change orders that go beyond the project contingency. Christine thanked Ryan for being the boots on the ground and in good contact with the architect. The group celebrated that there is progress being made.

Staff Reports: Youth Services Manager

Christine shared Thom's report on Thom's behalf. She said that there has been great feedback from participants regarding the Dungeons & Dragons camp for teens which was offered at all 10 locations.

Staff Reports: Community Relations Manager

Mary discussed her written report. She noted that September is library card sign up month and WCLS has new card designs. These designs were created by Keith Negley, who has also been featured in the *New Yorker*, and Lummi/Nooksack artist Sienum (Jason LaClair), who drew our land acknowledgement art. Mary shared her gratitude for both artists for allowing WCLS to showcase their designs.

Performance Measures & Committee Reports: Performance Measures

In addition to his written report, Michael shared that door counts are up July 2025 to July 2026. He mentioned that when talking with staff, they feel that the Summer Reading program has been working well and driving folks to the library.

Announcements and Adjourn

Christine reminded the Board that Branch Out is taking place on Friday, September 11.

It was also noted that September's Board meeting may have a location change due to the upcoming Administrative Services parking lot repair. Updates will be sent to all trustees and documents will be updated if necessary.

Matthew adjourned the meeting at 11:58 a.m.

Next Meeting

The next Board of Trustees meeting will be held on September 15, 2026, at 9:00 a.m. online via Microsoft Teams and at Administrative Services, 5205 Northwest Drive, Bellingham, WA 98226.

Danielle Gaughen, Board Secretary	09-15-2026 Date	Allyson McBride, Exec. Assistant



RESOLUTION NO. 09/15/26-10

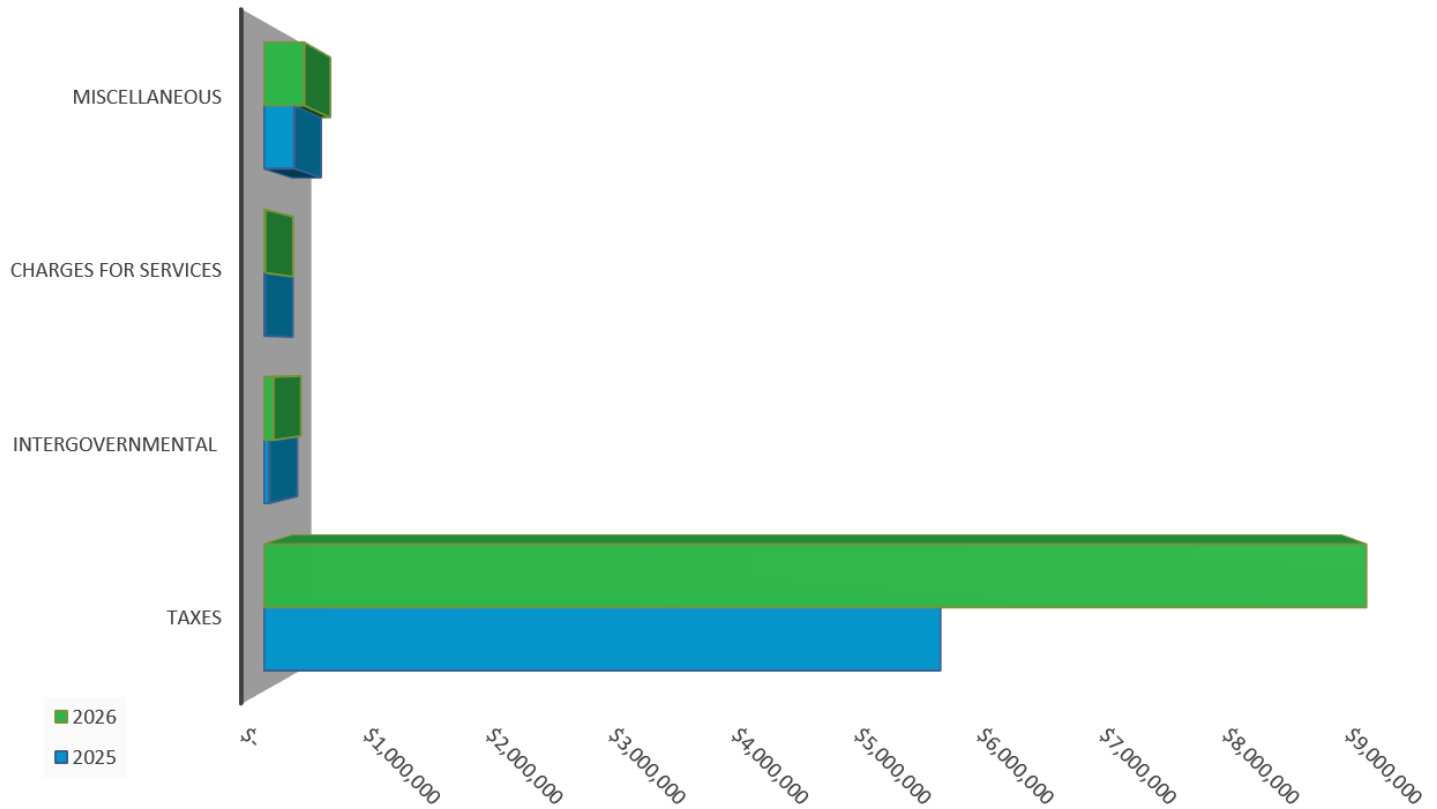
**A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE
WHATCOM COUNTY RURAL LIBRARY DISTRICT
AUTHORIZING THE REISSUANCE OF A PAYCHECK**

This page included in place of confidential information

**2026 Budget Revenues - Year-To-Date
August 2026 (67% of FY)**

Acct No	Description	Budgeted Revenues	Actual Revenues YTD	% of Actual Revenues YTD	% of Budgeted Revenues Received YTD	Budget Variance
310	TAXES					
311.10	General Property Taxes	\$ 16,816,085	\$ 9,317,354	95.63%	55.41%	\$ (7,498,731)
	TOTAL TAXES	16,816,085	9,317,354	95.63%	55.41%	(7,498,731)
330	INTERGOVERNMENTAL REVENUE					
337.1000	Local Grants, Entitlements & Other	45,000	49,027	0.50%	108.95%	4,027
337.2000	Leasehold Excise Tax	30,000	28,294	0.29%	94.31%	(1,706)
	TOTAL INTERGOV. REVENUE	75,000	77,321	0.79%	103.09%	2,321
340	CHARGES FOR GOODS & SERVICES					
347.2001	Printing & Duplication Services	7,000	6,721	0.07%	96.02%	(279)
347.2002	Library Use Fees	13,000	620	0.01%	4.77%	(12,380)
	TOTAL CHARGES FOR SERVICES	20,000	7,341	0.08%	36.71%	(12,659)
360	MISCELLANEOUS REVENUES					
361.1100	Investment Interest	404,800	239,530	2.46%	59.17%	(165,270)
362.1000	Rents & Leases	4,000	3,271	0.03%	81.77%	(729)
367.1000	Contributions & Donations	103,000	73,733	0.76%	71.59%	(29,267)
369.1000	Sale of Surplus	100	80	0.00%	80.00%	(20)
369.8100	Cashier's Overages or Shortages	-	(5)	0.00%	0.00%	(5)
369.9101	Other Misc. Revenue	24,750	15,508	0.16%	62.66%	(9,242)
369.9102	Reimburse Lost/Damaged Books	10,000	5,891	0.06%	58.91%	(4,109)
	TOTAL MISC. REVENUES	546,650	338,009	3.47%	61.83%	(208,641)
	TOTAL OPERATING REVENUE	17,457,735	9,740,025	99.97%	55.79%	(7,717,710)
390	OTHER FINANCING SOURCES					
395.1000	Proceeds from Sale of Capital Assets	-	2,728	0.00%	0.00%	2,728
	TOTAL OTHER FINANCING SOURCES	-	2,728	0.00%	0.00%	2,728
	TOTAL REVENUE	\$ 17,457,735	\$ 9,742,753	100.00%	55.81%	\$ (7,714,982)

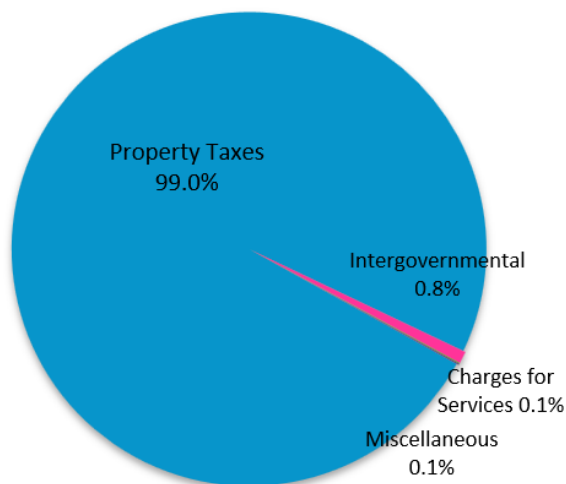
General Fund Operating Revenue to Date-Compared to Prior Year



Actual General Fund Revenue Year to Date Comparison

	2025	2026	% Change
Taxes	\$ 5,718,309	\$ 9,317,354	62.94%
Intergovernmental	44,632	77,321	73.24%
Charges for Services	5,684	7,341	29.15%
Miscellaneous	255,701	338,009	32.19%
Total Operating Revenue	6,024,327	9,740,025	61.68%
Other Financing Sources	-	2,728	0.00%
Total Revenue	\$ 6,024,327	\$ 9,742,753	61.72%

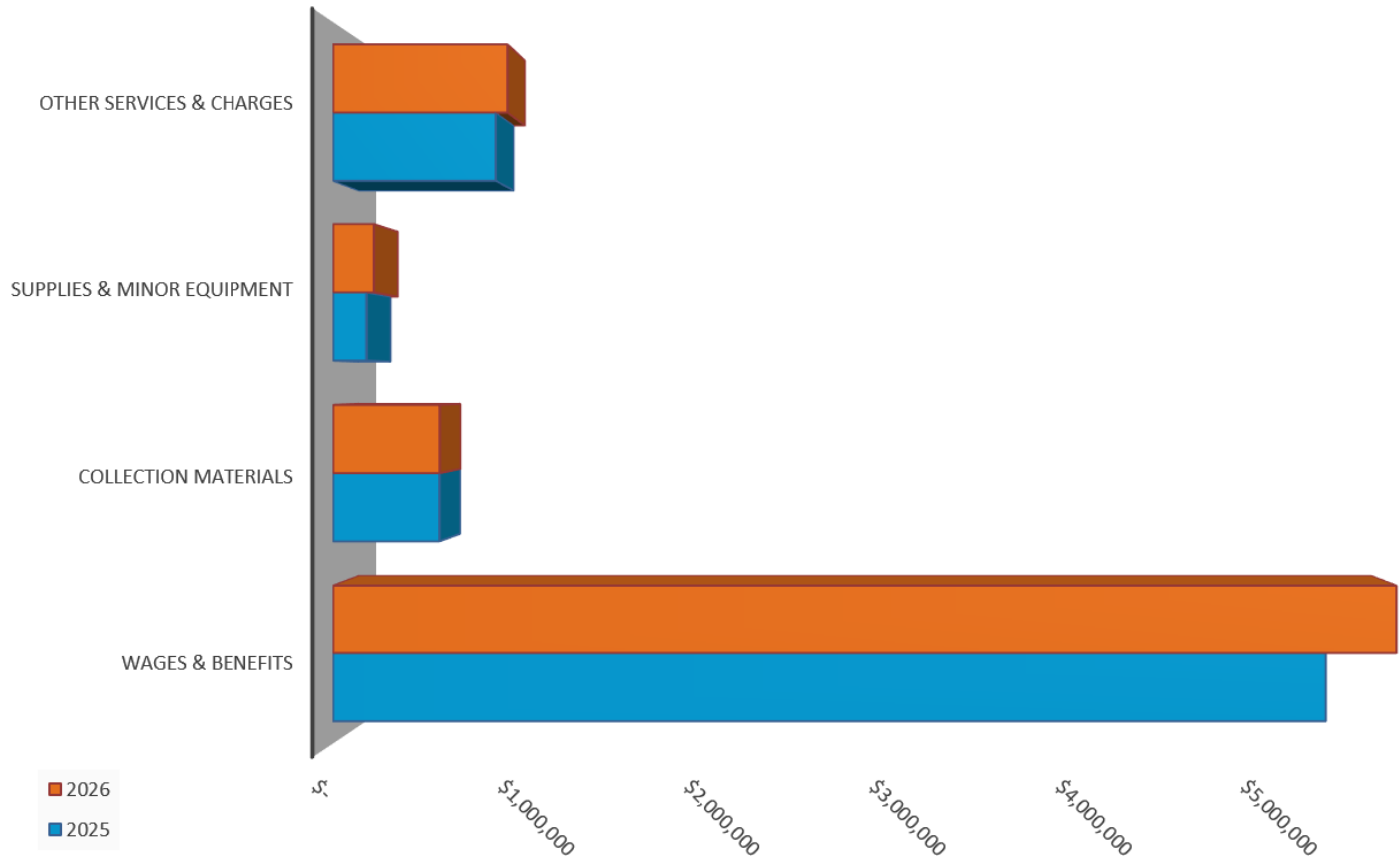
YTD Revenue by category



**2026 Budget Expenditures - Year-To-Date
August 2026 (67% of FY)**

Acct No	Description	Budgeted Expenditures	Actual Expenditures YTD	% of Actual Expenditures YTD	% of Budgeted Expenditures Spent YTD	Budget Variance
572	SALARIES, WAGES, & BENEFITS					
572.1000	Salaries and Wages	\$ 6,901,446	4,501,158	58.26%	65.22%	\$ (2,400,288)
572.2000	Benefits	2,203,925	1,432,523	18.54%	65.00%	(771,401)
	TOTAL SALARIES, WAGES, & BENEFITS	9,105,371	5,933,681	76.80%	65.17%	(3,171,690)
572.30	SUPPLIES & MINOR EQUIPMENT					
572.3031	Office & Operating Supplies	186,725	97,133	1.26%	52.02%	(89,592)
572.3032	Fuel	30,150	20,884	0.27%	69.27%	(9,266)
572.3034	Collection Materials	1,400,000	593,731	7.68%	42.41%	(806,269)
572.3035	Small Tools & Minor Equipment	239,800	109,128	1.41%	45.51%	(130,672)
	TOTAL SUPPLIES & MINOR EQUIPMENT	1,856,675	820,876	10.63%	44.21%	(1,035,798)
572.40	OTHER SERVICES & CHARGES					
572.4041	Professional Services	724,325	524,412	6.79%	72.40%	(199,913)
572.4042	Communication	140,450	74,199	0.96%	52.83%	(66,251)
572.4043	Travel	53,025	25,927	0.34%	48.89%	(27,098)
572.4044	Taxes & Operating Assessments	750	550	0.01%	73.35%	(200)
572.4045	Operating Rentals & Leases	32,447	16,366	0.21%	50.44%	(16,082)
572.4046	Insurance	122,634	89,466	1.16%	72.95%	(33,168)
572.4047	Utilities	186,066	120,088	1.55%	64.54%	(65,978)
572.4048	Repair & Maintenance	120,255	63,107	0.82%	52.48%	(57,148)
572.4049	Miscellaneous	118,965	57,207	0.74%	48.09%	(61,758)
	TOTAL OTHER SERVICES & CHARGES	1,498,918	971,321	12.57%	64.80%	(527,596)
	TOTAL OPERATING EXPENDITURES	12,460,963	7,725,879	100.00%	62.00%	(4,735,084)
590	OTHER FINANCING USES					
597.1000	Transfers to Capital	1,000,000	-	0.00%	0.00%	-
	TOTAL OTHER FINANCING USES	1,000,000	-	0.00%	0.00%	-
	TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 13,460,963	7,725,879	100.00%	57.39%	\$ (5,735,084)
	NET INCOME (LOSS)	\$ 3,996,772	2,016,875			\$ (1,979,897)
	FUND BALANCE SUMMARY					
	Beginning Fund Balance	\$ 9,115,981	9,115,981			
	Net Income	3,996,772	2,016,875			(1,979,897)
	Ending Fund Balance	\$ 13,112,753	11,132,855			\$ (1,979,897)

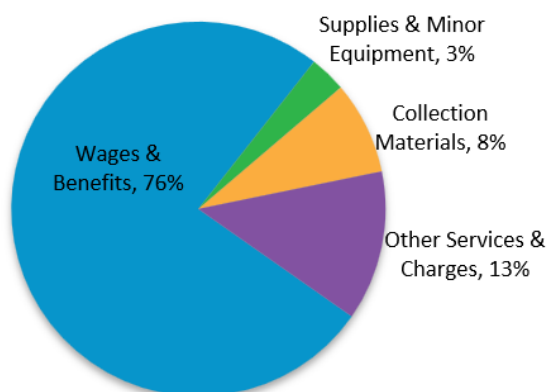
General Fund Operating Expenditures to Date-Compared to Prior Year



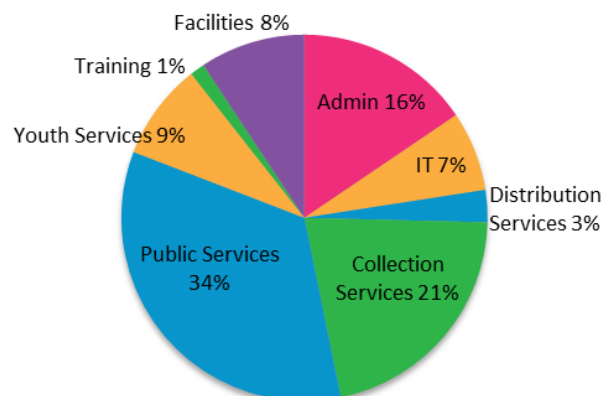
Actual General Fund Expenditures Year to Date Comparison

	2025	2026	% Change
Wages & Benefits	\$ 5,539,086	\$ 5,933,681	7.12%
Collection Materials	591,913	593,731	0.31%
Supplies & Minor Equipment	185,444	227,145	22.49%
Other Services & Charges	905,220	971,321	7.30%
Total Operating Expenditures	7,221,663	7,725,879	6.98%
Other Financing Uses	78,164	-	0.00%
Total Expenditures	\$ 7,299,827	\$ 7,725,879	5.84%
Net Operating Income	\$ (1,275,500)	\$ 2,016,875	258.12%

YTD Expense by Category



YTD Expense by Department



Fund Balance Summary	2025 Actual	2026 Budgeted	2026 Actual to Date
Beginning Fund Balance	\$ 9,932,448	9,115,981	\$ 9,115,981
Revenue	10,582,816	17,457,735	9,742,753
Expenditures	(11,399,284)	(13,460,963)	(7,725,879)
Ending Fund Balance	\$ 9,115,981	\$ 13,112,753	\$ 11,132,855

Ending Fund Balance Designation Detail	2025 Actual	2026 Budgeted	2026 Actual to Date
Designated Ending Fund Balance - Cash Flow	\$ 3,767,044	\$ 4,107,993	\$ 4,107,993
Designated Ending Fund Balance - Emergency	951,274	1,037,372	1,037,372
Designated Ending Fund Balance - Capital Transfer	78,164	1,000,000	1,000,000
Designated Ending Fund Balance - Unemployment Comp Reserve	15,560	17,254	17,254
Designated Ending Fund Balance - Birch Bay Operating Fund	600,000	505,000	600,000
Designated Ending Fund Balance - Facility Ownership & Library Svcs Fund	2,967,315	2,967,315	2,967,315
Designated Ending Fund Balance - Facility Maintenance Fund	550,000	550,000	550,000
Designated Ending Fund Balance - Levy Sustainability Fund	-	1,000,000	-
Total Designated Ending Fund Balance	8,929,357	11,184,933	10,279,933
Ending Unassigned Funds with no designation	186,623	1,927,819	852,922
Total Ending Fund Balance	\$ 9,115,981	\$ 13,112,753	\$ 11,132,855

August Summary

- As of the end of August we have received \$9,317,354 in property taxes (55% of the budget).
- Intergovernmental revenue (timber taxes, leasehold excise taxes) continue to perform ahead of budget, with 103% of budgeted revenues received to date.
- We received \$2,728 from the sale (via local auction) of a capital asset (a mini-van) that was declared surplus earlier this year.
- Total revenue is at \$9,742,753, which is 56% of budget.
- Operating expenditures at the end of August are \$7,725,879 (62% of budget), leaving us with a year-to-date net income of \$2,016,875. The fund balance at the end of August is \$11,132,855.
- 2027 Budget preparations continue. I'm meeting with branch managers and department heads, and reviewing this year's year-to-date costs to inform projections for next year. I'm also analyzing data provided by the Compensation Study consultants to help inform personnel costs before we begin negotiations with the Union.
- We've recently completed a physical count of capital and small and attractive assets (such as computers and printers) at all branches and Administrative Services, and reconciled it to our inventory spreadsheet and purchases made since last year's inventory.



Board Meeting Agenda Item Cover Sheet

Meeting Date:	9/15/2026
Committee or Department:	Public Services/Youth Services
Subject:	Update to Program Policy 4.04
Prepared By:	Thom Barthelmess
Impact upon Budget?	☐ Yes ☒ No
Supporting Documents:	☒ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation or Request: Approve update to Program Policy 4.04

Suggested Motion for Consideration: Motion to approve update to Program Policy 4.04 as presented.

Summary: The Program Policy defines the nature and scope of WCLS programs. This update affirms the library's commitment to provide programs to patrons of all ages, and expands the list of example programs to include some more contemporary offerings.

Alternatives: Leave policy as is.

Fiscal Impact: There is minimal fiscal impact expected from this policy update as the additional paid time is already included in the budget.

Comments: None



PROGRAM POLICY

POLICY NUMBER: 4.04

SCOPE

Presentations for the public which are sponsored by WCLS.

Programs that further initiatives of the WCLS Strategic Framework may be implemented by WCLS staff as documented and funded by the annual WCLS budget and other funding options, including grants.

A program is any planned event which introduces the group attending to any of the broad range of library services or activities or which directly provides information to participants. Programs may be presented to groups of any age and may cover use of the library, library services, or library tours. Programs may also provide cultural, recreational, or educational information, often designed to meet a specific social need. Examples of these types of programs include film showings; lectures; story ~~times~~hours; booktalks and information sessions at area schools; book discussions; literacy, English as a second language, and citizenship classes. This includes programs held off-site ~~that are sponsored or co-sponsored by the library~~ in partnership with other institutions and organizations.

RELATED POLICIES: ~~Safe Child – Children’s Program Policy 6.03; Services to Students and School Staff Policy 4.05; Meeting Room and Facilities Use Policy 7.03; Friends of the Library Policy 11.01; Volunteer Policy 11.02~~

APPROVALS AND UPDATES

Date	Action	Reviewer	Approved By	Approval Signature
January 14, 1986	Adopted.	-	Whatcom County Library System Board of Trustees	/s/
August 22, 1989	Revised.	-	Whatcom County Library System Board of Trustees	/s/
February 19, 2008	Revised.	-	Whatcom County Library System Board of Trustees	/s/ Amory Peck
September 16, 2014	Revised.	-	Whatcom County Library System Board of Trustees	/s/ Deb Lambert

4.04

REV. ~~September 16, 2014~~ September 15, 2026

Date	Action	Reviewer	Approved By	Approval Signature
September 15, 2026	Revised.	Thom Barthelmess	Whatcom County Library System Board of Trustees	/s/ Matthew Santos

DRAFT



Board Meeting Agenda Item Cover Sheet

Meeting Date:	9/15/2026
Committee or Department:	Youth Services
Subject:	Update to Safe Child and Children's Program Policy 6.03
Prepared By:	Thom Barthelmess
Impact upon Budget?	☐ Yes ☒ No
Supporting Documents:	☒ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation or Request: Approve update to Safe Child and Children's Program Policy 6.03

Suggested Motion for Consideration: Motion to approve update to Safe Child and Children's Program Policy 6.03 as presented.

Summary: This policy includes an addendum to cover an outdated practice that is no longer safe or suitable. This update removes that addendum.

Alternatives: Leave policy as is.

Fiscal Impact: None

Comments: None



SCOPE

This policy defines at what age children may be at the library unattended and applies to all patrons in every facility of the Whatcom County Library System.

CHILDREN ARE WELCOME IN THE LIBRARY

The Whatcom County Library System welcomes children of all ages. Serving children is a vital part of WCLS's mission. We strongly encourage families and children to make full and frequent use of the library. We're happy they're here.

CHILDREN'S SAFETY

The library is a public place. Anyone may enter and use the facilities. Children left alone in the building can be vulnerable and at risk. It is for the safety of each child that the Whatcom County Library System has adopted this Safe Child Policy.

PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY

The purpose of this policy is to inform parents and guardians that WCLS does not assume responsibility for their children as well as to provide guidelines to be used by staff if a child is found unattended in the library.

THE ROLE OF WCLS STAFF

WCLS staff cannot and do not assume parental or child care responsibilities for children at the library. Staff cannot monitor the behavior or welfare of every child.

PARENTS' RESPONSIBILITY

Parents and caregivers are responsible for monitoring their children's safety and supervising their children's behavior in accordance with the Conduct Policy Rules.

CHILDREN'S RESPONSIBILITY

Children, like all WCLS users, are required to respect WCLS property and to act in a manner appropriate to the use and function of the library. Children are subject to the same Conduct Policy Rules as other patrons and the same consequences, including being asked to leave the library.

LEVELS OF SUPERVISION REQUIRED

1. Children age seven and younger must be supervised by a parent or responsible caregiver age 12 or older at all times while in the library or on library grounds.
2. Children age four and younger must always be in close proximity and within sight of the person responsible for their safety.
3. Children of any age who demonstrate difficulty adhering to the Conduct Policy Rules may be required to have supervision by a parent or responsible caregiver.

6.03

REV. ~~September 20, 2016~~ September 15,

CHILDREN ALONE AT CLOSING

Parents, guardians, and designated adults are required to be familiar with WCLS's hours and to make advance arrangements to pick up or otherwise transport their children before the library closes. A minor left unattended at closing time may be deemed at risk. Every reasonable effort will be made by the staff to assist the child in contacting an appropriate adult. If no responsible adult is reached, or the child is not picked up within 15 minutes of library closing, WCLS personnel may notify the police to assume custody of the child. Two staff members will wait with the child until the parent, guardian, other designated adult, or the police pick her/him up. Staff will not transport children home or to any other destination under any circumstances.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Children are welcome in the library, and children age eight and older may visit the library on their own, without an accompanying adult. However, if a child of any age is left unattended at the library in circumstances that give WCLS staff cause for concern about the child's safety or welfare, staff may contact the child's family, or child protective or law enforcement authorities, if necessary.

~~WCLS CHILDREN'S PROGRAM POLICY~~

~~An addendum to the Safe Child Policy~~

~~Adopted by the Whatcom County Rural Library District Board of Trustees June 21, 2005.~~

~~PURPOSE OF THE ADDENDUM~~

~~The Safe Child Policy requires that children age seven and younger must be accompanied in the library by a responsible caregiver 12 or older. The purpose of this addendum is to create a limited exemption from this policy for WCLS after-school children's programs.~~

~~CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING IS INTEGRAL TO WCLS'S MISSION.~~

~~WCLS is dedicated to promoting the value and pleasure of reading and libraries, especially to children. By providing regularly scheduled activities for children in branch libraries, WCLS promotes literacy and lifelong learning.~~

~~AS A RURAL LIBRARY DISTRICT, WCLS MAKES SPECIAL EFFORTS TO BRING CHILDREN INTO THE LIBRARY.~~

~~To help overcome transportation and logistical barriers for school age children in the rural areas we serve, WCLS has arranged for local schools to transport children to our smallest libraries for after-school programs, by bus or on foot, with parental permission. These children are not accompanied by parents or caregivers and their parents are responsible for picking them up or arranging other transportation home.~~

~~EXEMPTION FROM THE SAFE CHILD POLICY~~

~~Children age five to eight attending a WCLS after-school program in a branch library are not required to be accompanied by a caregiver if they present a WCLS permission slip filled out and signed by a parent or guardian.~~

~~THIS EXEMPTION IS FOR THE DURATION OF THE PROGRAM ONLY.~~

~~Outside the hours of the after-school program the child is attending, all provisions of the safe child policy remain in effect. Parents must arrange for children seven and younger to be picked up promptly by a responsible caregiver age 12 or older.~~

WCLS CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS ARE NOT CHILD CARE

Parents should be aware that even during children's programs staff cannot take over parental or child care responsibilities for children who come into the library, and cannot guarantee that every child's whereabouts will be monitored at all times. Parents should instruct their children not to leave the program area during the program. Parents should discuss with their children what arrangements they have made for the children to go home after the program and instruct their children not to leave the building except as arranged.

RELATED POLICIES: [Conduct Policy 6.01.](#)

STATUTORY REFERENCE: [RCW 27.12.290 Violators may be excluded.](#)

APPROVALS AND UPDATES

Date	Action	Reviewer	Approved By	Approval Signature
January 18, 2005	Adopted.	-	Whatcom County Library System Board of Trustees	/s/
June 21, 2005	Revised.	-	Whatcom County Library System Board of Trustees	/s/
September 20, 2016	Revised.	-	Whatcom County Library System Board of Trustees	/s/ Marvin Waschke
September 15, 2026	Revised.	Thom Barthelmess	Whatcom County Library System Board of Trustees	



Board Meeting Agenda Item Cover Sheet

Meeting Date:	9/15/2026
Committee or Department:	Administration
Subject:	Update to Temporary Adverse Working Conditions Policy 12.45
Prepared By:	Jackie Saul
Impact upon Budget?	☐ Yes ☒ No
Supporting Documents:	☒ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation or Request: Approve update to Temporary Adverse Working Conditions Policy 12.45

Suggested Motion for Consideration: Motion to approve update to Temporary Adverse Working Conditions Policy 12.45.

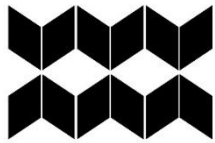
Summary: This policy update is intended to bring the Temporary Adverse Working Conditions Policy into alignment with the Emergency Closure Policy. Currently all staff are paid for scheduled hours lost during an Emergency Closure (resulting from weather or unexpected conditions), but only Bargaining Unit staff are paid for scheduled hours lost due to a closure related to temporary adverse conditions resulting from a planned Facilities project. Like with an Emergency Closure, an effort is made to first find alternative work locations for staff but when this is not possible all staff will be eligible for closure pay.

Additionally, this policy predates the Facilities Services Manager position, so this policy update also revises the process used to determine when temporary adverse working conditions may exist.

Alternatives: Leave policy as is.

Fiscal Impact: There is minimal fiscal impact expected from this policy update as the additional paid time is already included in the budget.

Comments: None



whatcom county
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TEMPORARY ADVERSE WORKING CONDITIONS POLICY

POLICY NUMBER: 12.45

SCOPE

This policy applies to all WCLS employees.

PURPOSE

The Whatcom County Library System (WCLS) will take all precautions to prevent employees and patrons from being exposed to any unsafe or adverse working conditions posed by planned WCLS facility projects. These precautions include mitigating the potential negative effects of the project to the extent feasible, ~~especially if the adverse condition will last more than two days.~~

FACILITY PROJECTS

WCLS realizes that planned facility remodel and construction projects can sometimes create temporary adverse working conditions. These projects can produce dust, fumes, and other irritants that may pose a problem for employees who are sensitive or allergic to the environmental by-products. These projects may include, but are not limited to, painting, carpet removal and installation, roofing removal and installation, parking lot repairs, facility additions, and other remodel or construction projects.

When a project is expected to result in adverse conditions, the Facilities Services Manager will consult with the Deputy Director and Human Resources Manager, or their designees, to determine what actions will be taken to mitigate the impact on staff and patrons, or if a temporary closure is necessary.

SAFETY COMMITTEE

~~The Safety Committee will determine the existence and duration of a temporary adverse working condition due to a facility project. Two members of the committee, one management and one elected, will review the project and bring a recommendation to the full committee. Based on the recommendation of the full committee, the chair of the committee will notify management if a temporary adverse working condition exists and if so the duration also.~~

TEMPORARY ALTERNATIVE WORK LOCATIONS

If adverse conditions result in a temporary closure of a work location, management will attempt to find temporary alternative work locations for affected employees. If a work location is to remain open throughout the project, management will attempt to find alternative work locations if needed. When such conditions exist due to planned facility projects, management will make every effort to remove employees who are sensitive or allergic to the physical effects of such projects from the impacted area. When feasible or possible, management will find alternative work locations for those employees. Alternative work locations may include the following: working at another branch, telecommuting (working from home or another location via computer), or finding another work station within the same facility that is not impacted by the project. Alternative work locations will be used through the duration of the temporary adverse working condition. Management will determine if an alternative work location is not feasible or possible.

PAID TIME OFF

If management determines that an alternative work location is not feasible or possible, ~~then Bargaining Unit affected~~ employees will ~~be granted paid time off~~ receive Closure pay for any scheduled time missed during the temporary adverse working condition. This paid time off will not be deducted from their ~~sick or vacation~~ leave balances.

If an ~~Bargaining Unit~~ employee cannot return to work after the ~~Safety Committee determines the~~ temporary adverse working condition ~~period has concluded is over~~, then they must begin using their leave balances or contact Human Resources to seek an accommodation.

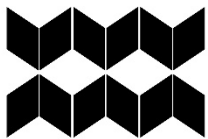
~~Non-Bargaining Unit employees will not receive paid time off; however, they can make up the time if arranged with their supervisor, or they can use discretionary time off.~~

The supervisor responsible for each location should notify the Payroll ~~Specialist~~ Administrator of a Closure as soon as possible and complete a Closure Form.

RELATED POLICIES: Emergency Closure Policy 12.35; Telework Policy 12.47-; Disability, Serious Illness and Accommodation Policy

APPROVALS AND UPDATES

Date	Action	Reviewer	Approved By	Approval Signature
May 15, 2007	Adopted.	-	Whatcom County Library System Board of Trustees	/s/ Amory Peck
May 15, 2018	Revised.	-	Whatcom County Library System Board of Trustees	/s/ Marvin Waschke
December 16, 2025	Revised to include Discretionary Time Off.	Jackie Saul	Whatcom County Library System Board of Trustees	/s/ Rodney Lofdahl
<u>September 15, 2026</u>	<u>Revised to be applicable to all staff and to update the process for determining if adverse conditions exist.</u>	<u>Jackie Saul</u>	<u>Whatcom County Library System Board of Trustees</u>	<u>/s/Matthew Santos</u>



whatcom county
library system

Executive Director's Report

September 2026

COMMUNITY

Nothing's more American than apple pie – or is it cherry pie? To celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, we're hosting a pie baking contest, with judging to take place October 15 at the Ferndale Library from 5:30 – 7:00 p.m. Which trustee would like to volunteer as judge?

ACCESS

Administrative Services' parking area is being repaired this week and next. Access to the building may be limited; staff who can work from home or elsewhere will be encouraged to do so.

RESOURCES

A [recent essay by local author Jessica Gigot](#) (attached) published in the *Salish Current* advocates for school libraries. Gigot references [an article by Natalie Wexler](#) (also attached) that supports the idea that the reading of "whole books" (as compared to excerpts) is necessary to make inferences, boost comprehension, and develop "cognitive patience". Our strategic plan is on target and we will be looking for ways WCLS can play a role in addressing this issue.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The [Fall edition of Explorations](#) features a number of programs presented by our Cultural Liaison staff. Attendees can make their own art in the Coast Salish style, watch the Salmon Stories Film Festival, and recognize Orange Shirt Day. Make a pinata during Hispanic Heritage Month, celebrate Diwali, the Festival of Lights, and enjoy flute music and storytelling by Peter Ali.

STEWARDSHIP

In order to allow non-union staff members to accept long-term substitute positions or address other staffing needs, the union proposed shifting union eligibility to 30 hours per week. We have put together a Memorandum of Understanding that documents this shift.

Christine Perkins, Executive Director

We must save our school libraries at all costs - Salish Current

Community Voices

We must save our school libraries at all costs

August 27, 2026

School libraries must be prioritized among budget cuts

Ed.: The essays, analyses and opinions presented as Community Voices express the perspectives of their authors on topics of interest and importance to the community and are not intended to reflect perspectives on behalf of Salish Current.

For our family, elementary school started online in the fall of 2020. If you lived in the Pacific Northwest at the time, it also happened to be a September covered in orange smoke from nearby forest fires. As a newer parent, I was inside and overwhelmed trying to keep everyone healthy and navigate this new reality. Then came a friendly note from the school librarian.

Even though children and parents were not allowed in the school building, we could still check out books. We made requests online and scheduled an appointment to get them outside the school. A sense of ease came over me on book pick-up day. It felt normal, in an otherwise abnormal time, and tethered us to the broader school community.

Since our daughters were born, we've maintained a nightly reading routine. However, I had a lot to learn about how children learn to read and write, let alone savor a good book. The podcast, [Sold a Story](#), offered insight into the science of reading as well as [Maryanne Wolf's](#) influential book, "Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain." More close to home, the school librarian was eager and ready with lists of books and book series to spark a love of reading at all levels.

Once parents were allowed back into the school, I was drawn to the school library — its large window looking out over mountains and farm fields. There are game carts and comfy chairs and students know this is a safe and interactive space. The wide variety of books and inviting displays seemed designed to bring kids closer to stories they might like to read. In Mac Barnett's new book, "[Make Believe: On Telling Stories to Children](#)," he reminds us that "kids are proudly unfinished. And when they encounter a story that makes demands of the reader — a story that requires thought and feeling and imagination in order to be fully understood — kids do what they do so well, so many times each day. They bravely work to comprehend the new."

I eventually asked if I could volunteer there for an hour or two a week as my time permitted. I initially refiled books. Later, I helped check out books, so the librarian could circulate with recommendations for the twenty-plus students. Through this process, I encountered a world of literature that had been missing and was reminded of how important library spaces are for creativity and learning, let alone the joy of discovery.

Last year, when the librarian asked if I wanted to organize the closet of book sets, I jumped at the chance. I was delighted to see old favorites, like Judy Blume’s “Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing,” while finding several new-to-me chapter books, such as “Holes” and “Tuck Everlasting.” In the article [“Beyond Excerpts: Teaching with Whole Books Boosts Comprehension and Engagement,”](#) educator and scholar Natalie Wexler writes that, “Reading whole novels can boost both students’ interest in reading *and* their reading comprehension scores.” School libraries are central to a whole book education, especially when teachers are already stretched thin by busy, daily schedules and rising classroom size.

To adapt to challenging budget constraints, many school districts have drastically reduced library staffing. According to [Save School Librarians](#), “Nationwide, public school districts have lost approximately 20% of their librarian and media specialist jobs since 2000.” Currently, our district can only afford a librarian on staff for three hours per day at both the middle and high schools and I worry about future reductions to elementary library time as well. By deemphasizing reading time and resources, what message are we sending to children about the opportunities to explore worlds and stories that are different than their own?

The Atlantic’s recent, viral article [“The End of Reading is Here,”](#) Rose Horowitch paints a bleak picture of literacy across all ages in the US, especially related to technology. In her newsletter, *Minding the Gap*, Wexler quickly [responded to this article](#) and noted that “there’s more going on in schools than Horowitch acknowledges, especially at the elementary level. [Literacy curricula](#) that incorporate whole books—and build the knowledge that actually fuels reading comprehension—are [gaining ground](#).” This gave me some relief.

Our nation is rich in libraries, a system that, in my opinion, epitomizes all this country has done right. However, what are we losing when start to scale back this system, especially school libraries solely dedicated to children’s and young adult literature? As parents, students and community members, we must support and advocate for school libraries, despite the threats of consolidation and tightening budgets. The tools of language, critical thinking, and discernment are born from books. We need to protect these important spaces — the heart of the school, I would argue — for generations to come.

—By Jessica Gigot

Jessica Gigot, PhD, MFA, is a poet, farmer and writing coach. She lives on a little sheep farm in the Skagit Valley. Her second book of poems, “Feeding Hour” (Wandering Aengus Press, 2020) was a finalist for the 2021 Washington State Book Award. Jessica’s writing and reviews appear in several publications, such as the New York Times, Seattle Times, Orion, Ecotone, Image, Terrain.org and Poetry Northwest. Her award-winning memoir, “A Little Bit of Land,” was published by Oregon State University Press in September 2022. The audiobook was recorded and released by Julia Whelan’s Audiobry in 2025.

Beyond Excerpts

Beyond Excerpts

Teaching with Whole Books Boosts Comprehension and Engagement

By Natalie Wexler



“The death of the novel arrived in my 9th grade English class some years ago,” a former English teacher who blogs under the name Cafeteria Duty has written.¹ That day, the class was about to discuss the dramatic courtroom scenes in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, when it is at last revealed what happened between Tom Robinson, a Black man in the South in the 1930s, and the white woman he is accused of raping.

Before launching into that discussion, the teacher decided to first ask students to review the major plot points and characters. This, according to the teacher, is the “astonishing” debate that ensued:

Tom Robinson was the sheriff, one student asserted.

No, that’s Lennie, corrected another.

Lennie’s from a book we read last semester, stupid, someone politely corrected. *Tom Robinson is the character who never leaves his house*.

The class erupted. *That’s Boo!* Above the din, someone shouted, *Tom is Scout’s classmate, the boy with no lunch!*

On it went.²

In shock and “not a little despair,” Cafeteria Duty berated the class for not having kept up with the reading, briskly summarized the plot of the book, and “never taught that novel again.” Realizing that students couldn’t be counted on to do any reading for homework, the teacher turned to increasingly shorter novels before ultimately abandoning teaching whole books altogether.

Cafeteria Duty is not alone. The novels that used to be staples of English classes—*The Great Gatsby*, *1984*, *The Scarlet Letter*—seem to have faded from the curriculum, often replaced by brief texts

and excerpts. Hard data are difficult to come by, but Cafeteria Duty, now an administrator, calls it an “obvious given” that “students are reading fewer books for school, and English teachers are assigning fewer books, most certainly at the high school level.”³

Many other observers concur.⁴ Three former teachers who now write guides and offer professional development on reading instruction say they’ve seen a dearth of whole books during their visits to hundreds of middle and high schools in recent years.⁵ Psychologist and author Jean Twenge has written that at her daughter’s high school, “regular English classes no longer assign books, only short stories and articles.”⁶ I’ve spoken with two brothers—one a recent college graduate and the other a freshman in college—who attended a highly selective public high school in Washington, DC. Aside from a couple of creation myths in ninth grade—and, for one of them, the short novel *Things Fall Apart*—they hadn’t been required to read an entire book during their high school careers.

The limited data available for earlier grades indicate that many children also aren’t reading whole books before they get to high school. A 2023 survey of English language arts teachers in grades three through eight found that only 17 percent relied primarily on whole texts, defined to include “complete poems, novels, plays, and articles.” Almost half said they use some whole texts combined with shorter pieces. Significantly, about a quarter primarily used basal readers, which generally don’t incorporate whole books, and/or text selections and excerpts.⁷

Brief Passages Are Failing Our Students

Lack of student interest is one of many justifications for the shift away from whole books. Another is lack of time in a world where, as Cafeteria Duty observed, many students simply don’t read outside class.⁸ That’s been especially true since the pandemic, when many schools lowered expectations because students were dealing with difficult or even traumatic situations. Even though the pandemic is long over, those looser standards are often still in place.

Teachers also cite shrinking attention spans. In the 2023 survey, 83 percent of teachers said their students’ reading stamina had decreased since 2019, including 53 percent who said it had decreased “a lot.”⁹ Experts say that screens, phones, and social media have accustomed students to skimming and reading only brief snippets. Students have also gotten used to the constant stimulation provided by digital media, making it harder for them to persevere through lengthier texts.¹⁰

In addition, I’ve heard English teachers say they’re under pressure to cover a range of genres—not just novels but short stories, poetry, plays, and nonfiction—as well as teaching skills like research and writing. The Common Core State Standards have been widely interpreted to require English teachers to include more nonfiction, even though the percentages of nonfiction in the standards were intended to apply across the curriculum.¹¹ In addition, the Common Core’s emphasis on “close reading” may have led to increased reliance on short texts, since it’s hard to conduct a close read of an entire novel.

Even before the Common Core became influential, the federal No Child Left Behind legislation contributed to the trend away from whole books by attaching high stakes to standardized reading tests. Those tests present students with brief passages or excerpts followed by comprehension questions. In an

effort to equip students for success on the tests, many schools have adopted that approach for reading instruction as well, despite the lack of evidence that it increases test scores—or comprehension.¹²

Consider a lesson, available online at go.aft.org/mgy,¹³ designed to teach third-graders the skill of identifying literal and nonliteral language in a story.¹⁴ The vehicle for teaching the skill is a story about Amelia Bedelia, the famously literal-minded fictional housekeeper. In the story, Amelia Bedelia’s employer asks her to get the spots out of a dress in the closet. Of course, she finds a polka-dotted dress—and proceeds to get the “spots” out by cutting them out with a pair of scissors.

In the lesson, students get only one paragraph from the book, followed by comprehension questions of the sort they would see on a standardized test—like “What is a different way that Mrs. Rogers could have asked Amelia Bedelia to do what she wanted?” Providing children with the entire book would not only be more engaging, it would also likely make it easier for them to grasp a complex concept like nonliteral language.

While standards and tests have contributed to this approach to reading comprehension, the fundamental impetus is a long-standing but mistaken assumption that pervades the education system. Reading comprehension has been seen as essentially a set of skills and strategies, like “making inferences” and “finding the main idea,” that can be taught and measured in the abstract.¹⁵ As a result of their training and materials,¹⁶ many literacy teachers see their job as teaching these comprehension skills rather than any particular content—or any particular books.

If comprehension skills are in the foreground, teachers who are under pressure to cover a lot of material are likely to opt for shorter texts as a means of teaching the skills. Education journalist Holly Korbey asked her son’s middle school teacher why the class was only reading excerpts or just the first half of a chapter book. His reply was that “it doesn’t matter whether it’s the entire book or an excerpt” because “the skills are the same.”¹⁷

It’s certainly important for students to be able to find the main idea or make inferences, but evidence from cognitive science indicates that these aren’t skills that can be taught in the abstract and applied generally. Unlike riding a bike, reading comprehension skills don’t “transfer.” If you know how to ride a bike, it doesn’t matter *which* bike you’re riding. But reading doesn’t work that way—which topic you’re reading about matters. It’s easy to make an inference about a text on a topic you know a lot about and difficult or impossible to do so with a text on a topic that’s unfamiliar.¹⁸

Prior knowledge about a topic isn’t the only component in the complex process of comprehension, but it’s a key factor and one that has been largely overlooked. And the more general academic or cultural knowledge and vocabulary people possess, the greater their chances of understanding anything they try to read.¹⁹ The most effective way to build that general knowledge and enable general reading comprehension is through a curriculum that builds knowledge of lots of topics systematically, beginning in the early grades.²⁰

Not only does skills-focused instruction fail to boost reading comprehension, it also turns reading into a joyless chore. When a nationally representative sample of 13-year-olds was asked in 2023 if they read for pleasure every day or almost every day, only 14 percent said yes. That’s a marked decline from 2012,

when 27 percent were in that category, and from 1994's 32 percent. The flip side is that in 2023, 31 percent said they never or hardly ever read for fun—a significant increase from 2012, when the percentage was 22, and 1994, when it was just 12.²¹

Of course, societal factors like social media have contributed to this trend, but it's a reasonable assumption that the way reading comprehension is taught in schools has led many adolescents to see it as something that has nothing to do with fun. And those societal factors only make it more urgent than ever for schools to show kids that reading books can be both a way of learning about the world and a source of pleasure. One way to do that is to introduce students, in school, to whole novels.

Whole Books Boost Comprehension



Reading whole novels can boost both students' interest in reading *and* their reading comprehension scores. One study,²² which took place in England, had students read two challenging novels, one classic and one contemporary, over the course of 12 weeks, with most of the reading done aloud by teachers (though students also read aloud, usually in small groups to make them more comfortable). The students, who were in the equivalent of seventh grade, attended 10 urban and rural schools and ranged from being 50 or more months behind in reading to performing above average.

According to the authors of the study, in England (as in the United States) struggling readers “are often regarded by teachers as unable to read whole narratives and given short, simplified texts, yet are expected to analyze every part in a slow laborious read-through.” The 20 teachers participating in the study were, in contrast, advised to move through the novels at a fairly brisk pace, pausing only when

needed (e.g., when students looked confused or at the end of a section) to make sure everyone was following the story.

At the beginning and end of the 12-week period, students were given standardized reading comprehension tests. On average, students made almost nine months of progress; weak readers made 16 months of progress. And even though the researchers weren't trying to spark a love of reading, the experiment appeared to have that effect. Students who had previously been reluctant readers couldn't wait for the next chapter, frequently coming to class excited to read. This study has given rise to a project based at the University of Sussex in England, called the Faster Read, that offers free guidance for teachers (see go.aft.org/so3 for details).

Why would novels boost reading comprehension so dramatically? The researchers weren't sure, but I have a theory. We're more likely to remember things when we're affected emotionally, and novels can engage us emotionally far more than brief texts or excerpts can. In addition, as cognitive psychologist Daniel Willingham noted, the human mind "seems exquisitely tuned to understand and remember stories" as opposed to expository texts.²³ Those factors may have helped students absorb and retain the language structures and vocabulary they heard in the novels, equipping them to better understand the unrelated passages on the standardized tests.

Still, it can be difficult to teach using novels and whole books in the current environment. Is it really worth the effort? For a number of reasons, the answer is "yes."

Students' Abilities Are Suffering

The trend toward brief passages and skills-focused instruction in the K–12 curriculum has consequences for what students are able to do once they graduate from high school. Anecdotal and some experimental evidence indicates that many college students, including some at highly selective institutions, struggle to make sense of 19th-century novels.²⁴ Some professors say that even contemporary works of literature are incomprehensible to their students.²⁵

I've spoken to a number of professors in various disciplines who say they've had to significantly lower their expectations, reducing the length of reading assignments and still devoting class time to summarizing them. There have always been students who don't do the reading, but they say this is a sea change.

Stuart Carroll, an experienced professor of elementary education at the College of New Jersey, told me his department used to have all students read the same book over spring and winter breaks, with positive results. But it became harder to get students to do the reading, and the program was discontinued in 2017. Carroll has seen a similar phenomenon in the freshman seminar he teaches. It covers five "interesting and readable books," and he says in the past, students "came out of the class with a more positive attitude toward reading." Now, he says, only a few students bother to read the books.

"I was kind of shocked this year at what my students thought was an onerous amount of reading," said an assistant professor of European history at a flagship state university who requested anonymity. He

eventually realized he couldn't assign more than 20 pages per class, "which extremely curtailed what I could do." Even then, he could tell that many students still weren't reading what he'd assigned.

Even when students do the reading, professors say, many are unable to understand or analyze it. "We are in new territory when even highly motivated honors students struggle to grasp the basic argument of a 20-page article," Adam Kotsko, who teaches at North Central College in Illinois, wrote recently.²⁶

These anecdotal observations are backed up by data: ACT scores have been declining over the past decade or so, including in the area of reading comprehension. In 2024, 57 percent of students scored "Below Proficient in Understanding Complex Texts," a marked increase from 2016, when only 23 percent fell into that category.²⁷ Likewise, scores on the most recent national test of 12th-graders' reading comprehension ability dipped to a historic low, with the average score in 2024 ten points lower than when the test was first given in 1992.²⁸

The combination of brief passages and skills-focused comprehension instruction in K–12 may also lead to a "check the box" approach to reading. Many students no longer see the value of diving into a complex text and extracting whatever meaning and nuance might be there. They often want professors to tell them what to look for—or just provide the key points. "Gone are the days when you could expect students to do the prep work," said Jackie Witkowski, an assistant professor of art history at Western Washington University.

If a professor doesn't provide a summary, students are increasingly likely to turn to generative AI (artificial intelligence) tools like ChatGPT to provide one. Various surveys have found that anywhere from a third to almost all undergraduates use AI, with more recent studies showing higher proportions.²⁹

But reading a summary of a novel is a far different experience from reading the novel itself. I ran the opening paragraphs of *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens through ChatGPT. Although the summary I got back was accurate, it lacked the charm and humor that made Dickens so popular in his own time and makes his prose worth reading today. Of course, the summary was easier to understand. But, crucially, that very lack of effort deprives the reader of important benefits.

As literacy researcher Maryanne Wolf has suggested, learning to parse denser prose may develop both cognitive abilities and the "cognitive patience" that enable deep reading.³⁰ In addition, evidence shows that in middle and high school, having students summarize a text can provide a powerful boost to their understanding.³¹

Recent studies suggest that when students subcontract that task (or others that require cognitive effort) to a bot, their ability to think critically and analytically decreases.³² Similarly, if teachers in middle and high school provide summaries of novels rather than requiring students to read whole books, as some are apparently doing,³³ students may be ill-equipped to engage in summarizing themselves and unaware that they're missing out on its potential cognitive benefits.

Reliance on summaries and shortcuts, whether provided by humans or AI tools, can lead to what some researchers have called "metacognitive laziness."³⁴ Rather than using the shortcut as a way to

supplement learning, students begin to depend on it as a crutch. That kind of dependence can make it difficult for students not only to read but to absorb and retain information.

Even at St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, a "great books" school that draws a self-selected group of students who want to immerse themselves in challenging texts, there's been a change. Brendan Boyle, the associate dean for graduate programs, says that the "bookish" students the school draws aren't arriving with the same ability to sit with a text and mine it for meaning. "Our graduates are no worse" than they used to be, he told me. "It's just that the amount of labor involved in getting them to that point is greater."

To be sure, K–12 schooling isn't solely responsible for the changes that college instructors are seeing. But the K–12 system is likely to be our best hope for addressing them. By immersing students in whole books and treating reading as an end in itself, rather than a means of developing discrete skills, teachers at all grade levels can foster the kind of reading stamina, sustained focus, and intellectual curiosity that all students deserve to enjoy.

Whole Books Are Rewarding

It's important to show students that reading can be fun, and reading novels—especially contemporary novels that are relatively easy to access—is a great way to do that. Reading for pleasure is associated with a host of positive outcomes, including cognitive development, academic achievement, and social and emotional well-being.³⁵

One study found that children and adolescents who read frequently for fun, especially those who read whole books, tend to experience more of a boost to reading comprehension than those who read less or engage in other kinds of reading.³⁶ Another found benefits even from "light" books like science fiction or thrillers.³⁷ Yet another found that, in adults, reading whole books is associated with greater longevity—greater even than reading newspapers and magazines.³⁸ So it's worth doing whatever we can to ensure that more students read for their own enjoyment.

It's also important that all students in a classroom have the opportunity to read and discuss the *same* book, as educator and instructional coach Doug Lemov and his coauthors explain in *The Teach Like a Champion Guide to the Science of Reading*.³⁹ Choice in reading material has its place, but making it the center of a literacy curriculum leads to a fragmented class experience. And, left to their own devices, students are likely to choose books that relate to topics that already interest them rather than having their horizons expanded by a teacher or curriculum designer who is aware of more options. Providing children with the experience of reading a book together, especially a novel, can transport the entire class into another world.

At an elementary school in Amarillo, Texas, where 39 languages are spoken and almost all students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, the practice of reading whole novels aloud together has had enormous benefits, according to faculty members. Describing teacher Lori Hughes's experience, Lemov said, "Each class feels like a community, and her students look forward to what book is coming next."⁴⁰ The school's principal, Genie Baca, notes that fluency scores for the classes that read whole

novels together have improved dramatically, as have behavioral issues. I've heard similar observations when visiting elementary schools using curricula that center on shared novel reading.

Another argument for having students read novels—especially literary ones—is that it helps develop empathy. That certainly resonates with the experience of many readers, and studies suggest that reading fiction can enable readers to understand what others are feeling and can reduce prejudice against stigmatized groups, especially when readers are “emotionally transported” into the story.⁴¹ Some studies have found that when people read fiction, regions of their brains become activated in ways that reflect the characters' feelings and actions.⁴² It's not yet clear, though, if those effects carry over to actual behavior.

Still, as Maryanne Wolf has written, the act of reading can change our consciousness, so that “we learn to feel what it means to be despairing and hopeless or ecstatic and consumed with unspoken feelings.”⁴³ And it's likely that the longer and deeper the story, the greater the benefits. Following a set of characters over a period of time can emotionally transport readers in a way that short fiction and excerpts can't.

Kyair Butts, a middle school English teacher, saw that happen when he taught sixth-graders the novel *Out of the Dust*. Butts was dubious that his students—Black kids in inner-city Baltimore—would be interested in a story about “a 13-year-old white girl from Depression-era Oklahoma.” But, he told me when I interviewed him for a podcast, “when students care about a character, and when they realize that Billie Jo lost her mom and her baby brother, they are hooked. They want to keep reading.”⁴⁴

For all these reasons, it's important to introduce students to, and regularly immerse them in, the enjoyable, emotionally transporting experience of reading a novel. But to fully equip students to be proficient readers, whether they go to college or not, teachers also need to guide them in making sense of challenging text, including nonfiction. Given the rampant distractions and unreliable information we all confront these days, students need to develop the capacity for sustained attention and complex thinking that immersion in complex, lengthier text can foster. That isn't always fun. Like all learning, it requires effort. At the same time, it can be immensely rewarding.

Overcoming Barriers to Whole Book Instruction



But what about the obstacles that Cafeteria Duty and other teachers say are standing in the way of teaching whole books? Those barriers can be overcome—but probably not by individual teachers alone. Schools and districts need to provide support, ideally beginning in the early elementary grades.

While the dominant elementary literacy curricula rely almost entirely on short texts and excerpts,⁴⁵ more recently developed knowledge-building curricula that incorporate whole books seem to be gaining traction across the country. One such curriculum, Bookworms K–5 Reading and Writing, has students read a total of 265 books across the elementary grades.⁴⁶ Although not as well-known as some other knowledge-building curricula, the evidence for its ability to increase general reading comprehension, especially for lower-performing students, is compelling.⁴⁷ And judging from my own observations of the curriculum in action and conversations with educators who have used it, it also boosts students' interest in reading.

Given the importance of exposing children to whole books, that should be one of the criteria states and districts use when approving or selecting curriculum. Shorter texts can of course have value as well, but a steady diet of them fails to supply children with the literacy nutrition they need. Some short texts, including nonfiction, can be taught in connection with a book, especially one set in a different time or place. If students are reading a novel that takes place during World War II, for example, a nonfiction article on rationing can enhance their understanding of the text while also exposing them to a different genre. Writing instruction can also be embedded in the content of a novel.

It may be more difficult to include whole books in the curriculum at higher grade levels, but it's not impossible—and it's crucial that students continue to read books at increasing levels of complexity. Doug Lemov and his colleagues have created an ELA curriculum for grades 5–8, *Reading Reconsidered*, that is built around novels, along with shorter texts that enhance students' understanding of them.⁴⁸ It includes routines designed to help students retain vocabulary and information, develop fluency, and build writing skills. Lemov and his team are also piloting a high school curriculum built around novels.

The middle grades curriculum is now used in about 500 schools, and “teachers are surprised by how much they enjoy teaching and the kids enjoy reading,” Lemov told me. “You have to develop the habit of attentional skills. You have to cause reading to happen and create the conditions for stamina.”

Reading Reconsidered combines teacher read-alouds, communal reading, and individual silent reading. The teacher can “read kids into” a chapter, Lemov says, modeling fluent reading and piquing their interest. “The idea is that in class, teachers will empower students to read outside class.”

Realistically, students do need to read outside class for the curriculum to include whole books at higher grade levels. Teachers can hold students accountable for assigned reading through mandatory note-taking and quizzes. In addition to ensuring that students are doing the reading, such activities help students understand and remember key points in the story, avoiding the kind of class dialogue that led *Cafeteria Duty* to abandon whole books. But if students are in the habit of not doing homework, it may require a shift in culture engineered by a whole school, or even a whole district, to reverse that.

Especially in schools where many older students face reading challenges, however, it may still be necessary to devote a good deal of class time to reading whole books. Former English teacher Meredith Coffey has suggested that high school administrators protect or even add time for in-class reading, perhaps through double periods for ELA.⁴⁹ They can also set expectations that, for example, students will read a complete novel or play during every unit.

One significant barrier to such a change in culture is the widespread assumption that brief texts are necessary to teach comprehension skills. Lemov says that teachers who use *Reading Reconsidered* often worry it won't prepare their students for state tests. To allay their concerns, the curriculum includes guides showing that a lesson relating to a novel *is* teaching students how to, for example, make an inference about a character even if that's not the lesson's main objective. As Coffey points out, not only *can* students practice comprehension skills using whole novels, understanding a literary device or gleaning the author's message may be easier with a longer text.

To enable all students to read at length and understand texts at a deep level, we need to change widely held assumptions about what reading comprehension is and how it can be fostered.⁵⁰ We have to recognize that limiting students to brief texts seen as vehicles for teaching comprehension skills is an illusory and self-defeating approach. Technology and other societal pressures present new and daunting challenges to students' abilities and attention spans, but our best chance of addressing those challenges is to center whole books in the K–12 curriculum.

Schools still have the potential to turn the United States into a “nation of readers,” to borrow the title of a landmark 1985 report.⁵¹ In the face of the temptations of screens, social media, and generative AI, that goal has only become more urgent than ever.

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Helping Students Navigate Screen Reading

One potential barrier to comprehending complex text is the shift toward digital rather than printed materials in classrooms.¹ In 2021, 90 percent of district leaders reported that all of their middle and high school students had their own devices for digital learning.² Perhaps not coincidentally, some professors say college students rarely come to class with hard-copy books, even in classes that rely heavily on textual analysis.³

But evidence indicates that when people read on screens, they understand and retain less than if they read printed text.⁴ Maryanne Wolf has said that the data we have suggest that “print advantages slower, deeper processes in the reading brain” and that too much screen reading diminishes the brain’s ability to use those processes.⁵ While Wolf hasn’t focused on the effects of reading different kinds of print text, the thrust of her argument is that whole print books are essential to counteracting the effects of digital media and developing the capacity for deep reading.

Still, reading from screens is inescapable in the modern world. Wolf advocates for a “biliteracy” approach that would teach children how best to use and negotiate each medium.⁶ Similarly, linguist Naomi Baron suggests explicitly teaching students how to read printed text in a slower, more focused way and then helping them transfer those skills to reading from a screen.⁷

One way to do that is to provide students with a template for taking notes. Having students turn in their notes—ideally in their own handwriting, to prevent them from using AI—can also help teachers spot comprehension problems. Teachers can tailor questions for notetaking to particular content or use generic questions, as David and Meredith Liben, experienced educators and consultants, suggest in their book *Know Better, Do Better: Comprehension*.⁸ Their approach, the Structured Journal, has students track their thoughts as they read, using four questions, including “What don’t I understand completely?” and “What are the most important ideas in this section?”⁹

Another possibility is to have students complete thoughtfully designed writing activities relating to their assigned reading—perhaps a sentence stem relating to a key point, which they need to complete using a word like *because*, *but*, or *although*. They might also write a summary of what they’ve read, with guiding question words like *who*, *what*, *where*, *why*, *when*, and *how*.

Many if not most students will need explicit instruction in these kinds of activities before being expected to engage in them independently, but the effort is worthwhile. In addition to boosting comprehension and retention, writing activities such as this can familiarize students with the complex sentence structures of written language, equipping them to understand more complex texts. In addition, students’ writing is likely to become clearer and more coherent.¹⁰

—N. W.

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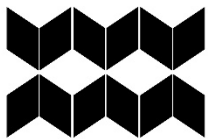
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September 2026

RESOURCES

Over the past year, one patron in particular has been very engaged with WCLS digital archives collections hosted via the [Washington Rural Heritage](#) community digital archives project. He is working on a book about the history of gathering places in Whatcom County, and he has worked with WCLS staff to request permissions to use several images in his work. In a recent article published on his blog, [Notes from the Fourth Corner](#), author Dan Bechtol shares a 1940 image of a Nessel family cabin. Unfortunately, he learned this historic cabin has since burned down. The story of how he found the site of this historic cabin and what he learned about its demise is interesting. It feels rewarding to learn how WCLS archives inform research and connect people to their community. WCLS hosts four collections with Washington Rural Heritage including Lummi Island Heritage, Mount Baker Foothills Heritage, Nooksack Valley Heritage, and WCLS 75th Anniversary. Items in these collections have been viewed over 12,000 times in 2026.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

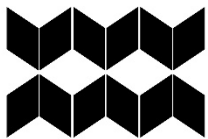
With support from a Washington State Library Learning Grant, our Lummi and Nooksack Cultural Liaison staff will attend the upcoming Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries and Museums Conference. This national conference will be held in Spokane this year from September 21-24. The theme of the conference is "Guided by Responsibility, Protected by Collective Strength."

STEWARDSHIP

In recent weeks, Distribution staff have made extra efforts to clean all WCLS book returns. With a network of 16 book returns not connected to bricks and mortar library locations, this is not a small task. Book returns are painted "WCLS blue" and include colorful branding elements. We know these units function just as well as engaging advertising as they do to provide library patrons with some convenience.

Michael Cox

Deputy Director



whatcom county
library system

Youth Services Report

September 2026

COMMUNITY

August is often a slower month for the Youth Services team, where programming is concerned. July is our busiest month (in July 2026 we put on 165 programs for early years, kids, tweens, and teens), and we give ourselves a break from most regular programming. This year, however, we did connect with a bunch of young people at our libraries and out in the community.

Programs at the library included the following:

We worked with Punjabi Cultural Liaison Harman Kaur at Ferndale on a Let's Make Rakhi Bracelets! Program for kids, celebrating the special traditions of the South Asian festival of Raksha Bandan.

The Friends of the Birch Bay Library sponsored a Pinewood Derby Race as part of the Derby Day celebration.

Our Dungeons & Dragons Camps extended into August at our Ferndale and Island locations, where even more teens experienced the creativity, storytelling, and friendship of this popular role-playing game.

Regular LEGO® Club and Off the Shelf Teen Hangout gatherings continued.

Programs off-site included the following:

Members of the YS team represented WCLS at the Irene Reither Elementary School Back to School fair, talking to hundreds of kids and parents about public library service, ConnectED, and how we can support their learning and growth in the coming year.

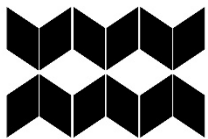
We also attended a similar Borderite Block Party put on by the Blaine School District to welcome back students and families and connect them to community supports and resources.

And we had a presence at the annual Pirate Daze family event at the Drayton Harbor Pirate Festival in Blaine, where we set up a pop-up library and put on storytimes for kids and families in attendance.

All in all, we made something quite busy of a typically slow month!

Thom Barthelmess

Youth Services Manager



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library system

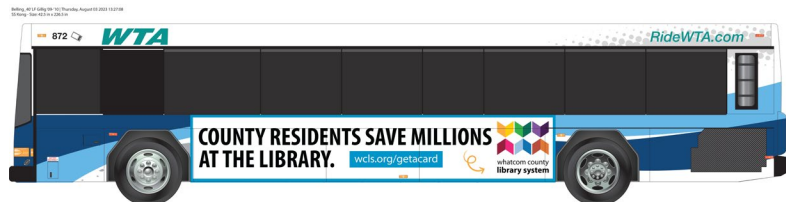
Community Relations Report

September 2026

COMMUNITY/RESOURCES

According to a key finding in our recent non-cardholder survey, a strong preference for digital materials and the perception that the library lacks items of interest are communication opportunities that could move non-cardholders to action. With this in mind, this month we will send a direct mail piece to households in Custer and Laurel/Meridian (areas of the county with lower card penetration) with a message that encourages residents to get a library card to instantly access best-selling eBooks and audiobooks. Distinct QR codes will enable us to track engagement.

During Library Card Sign-Up month, we're also repeating successful digital ads and bus boards that encourage people to save money by getting a library card. Streaming and social media placements include [video](#), display and native ads.



News Releases

- [WCLS hosts Deaf and hard-of-hearing community conversation Sept. 12 at Lynden Library](#)

Podcast: wcls.org/podcast or subscribe on your favorite podcast platform

- No. 61: [Mike and Kim Finger, Deming Library patrons](#)
- No. 62: [Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing community conversations with WCLS staff, Rosie Everson, Tasia Ross and Joy McGrath](#)

Book Reviews

- *Cascadia Daily News*, Aug. 10, 2026, [Review: 'The Place of Tides'](#)
- *Cascadia Daily News*, Aug. 28, 2026, [Review: 'St. Ulphia's Dead' by Scott Lambridis](#)
- *Bellingham Alive*, August 2026, clip below

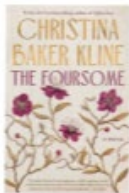
Book Reviews

WRITTEN BY MARY KINSER



"The Beheading Game"
by Rebecca
Lehmann

Think you've read every possible take on the sordid tale of Henry VIII? Think again. With this bold reimagining of the life of Anne Boleyn, author Rebecca Lehmann breaks all the rules to tell a completely new version of the story. "The Beheading Game" opens shortly after Anne's execution, when the doomed queen awakes in a fury, reattaches her head (!), and sets out to seek revenge on her husband. Of course, Anne cannot let anyone know her true identity, but finding her way as a commoner is harder than the former royal expects it to be. Ultimately Anne finds support for her quest in some unusual places and, in so doing, begins to examine her life at court in a different light. Blending magical realism with deeply researched history, this novel is vibrant and unique, an experience that will delight readers of fantasy and historical fiction in equal measures.



"The Foursome"
by Christina
Baker Kline

Chang and Eng Bunker were already famous when they landed in Wilkes County, North Carolina in 1839. Everyone had heard of the conjoined twins from Siam, their expansive tours and massive fortune. So when Sallie Yates and her sister Addie catch the brothers' eyes, it is especially thrilling. Addie falls quickly for Chang, but Sallie needs more coaxing before she agrees to marry Eng in a double wedding in 1843. The novel follows the couple through decades of joy and heartbreak. Their lives together, this foursome, are at once commonplace and extraordinary. Sallie and Eng experience problems like all couples, but ones that are strangely complicated by the ever-present extra person in their marriage. As a distant cousin of the Yates sisters, Christina Baker Kline crafted this historical fiction with a level of care that avoids sensationalism. In sharing Sallie's story, Kline brings a woman forgotten by history to vivid life, her choices and challenges resonant nearly two centuries later.

Media Coverage

- *Lynden Tribune*, August 4, 2026, [PHOTO GALLERY: Summer reading program finishes with a bang](#)
- *Cascadia Daily News*, August 5, 2026, [A guide to Bellingham-area book clubs, every day of the week](#)
- *Salish Current*, August 10, 2026, [Tracing jazz geography in NW Washington](#)
- *Ferndale Record*, August 11, 2026, [PHOTO GALLERY: Summer concert series serenades Ferndale](#)
- *Visit Bellingham*, August 11, 2026, [bellingham.org/pressreleases/birch-bay-derby-day-join-the-fun-august-29](#)
- *Lynden Tribune*, August 12, 2026, [COUNTRY LIFE: Barn Buddies hold Fair kickoff workshop](#)
- *The Northern Light*, August 13, 2026, [Blaine advances plans for housing, new downtown library](#)
- *Cascadia Daily News*, August 17, 2026, [Live music calendar: Aug. 21-30, 2026](#)
- *The Northern Light*, August 19, 2026, [Birch Bay Derby Day celebrates big crabs, little cars and racing rubber duckies](#)
- *Lynden Tribune*, August 25, 2026, [PHOTO GALLERY: Autism awareness event brings people together for a special cause](#)

- *The Northern Light*, August 27, 2026, [In the Garden with Kelle: How to get rid of these noxious weeds before they choke your plants](#)
- *The Northern Light*, August 27, 2026, [CAP Winter Coat Drive to accept donations starting Sept. 1](#)
- *All Point Bulletin*, August 2026, clips below

Advance Care Planning: Let's Get 'Er Done Workshop: 2 to 3:30 p.m., Sept. 15, library. Join us for an interactive workshop where a trained facilitator will walk you through completing a simple Washington state Advance Directive where you can choose your trusted medical decision maker (aka: health care agent or Power of Attorney for Healthcare) and write down your values, preferences for care and end-of-life wishes. There will be a Notary available at every class to help "seal the deal."

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Whatcom Grooves brings music to the library



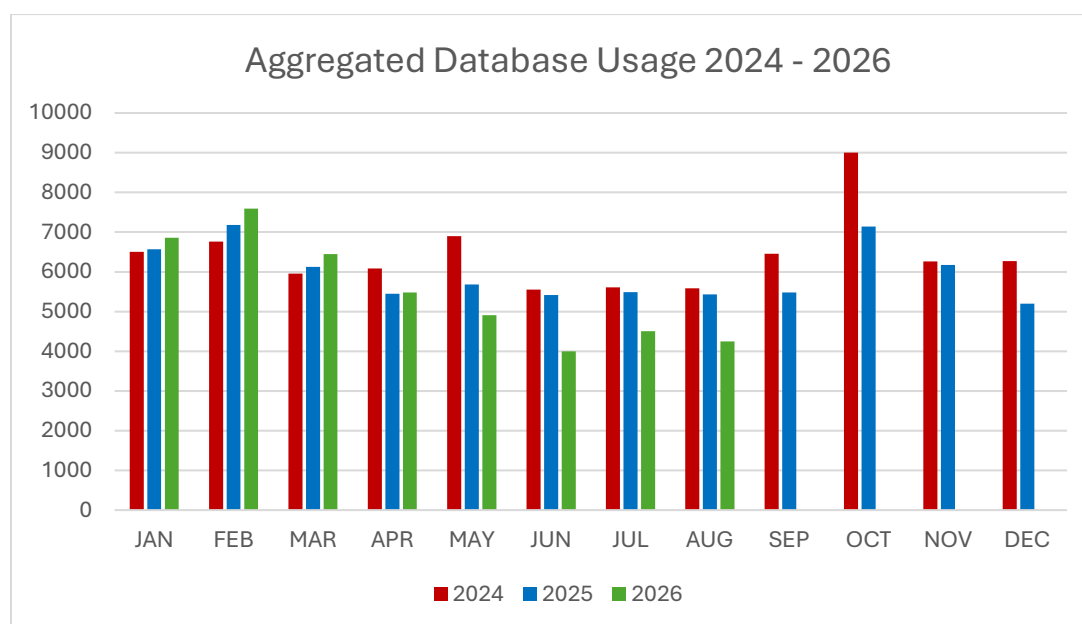
Mary Vermillion
Community Relations Manager

DATABASE USAGE

Database usage was lower in May, June, and July 2026 than in previous years. We typically see large summertime drops in resources that are used in classrooms during the school year, such as Britannica, Gale packages, and Culturegrams.

NewsBank saw the largest drop in usage by far, with a record low in June 2026. Searches for Bellingham Herald and Seattle Times held fairly steady, but searches for Cascadia Daily plummeted from 1665 in May 2026 to only 715 in June 2026. This dramatic change in readership also occurred during the time of the executive editor's firing. Since then, Cascadia Daily sessions on NewsBank have been creeping back up to normal.

Although summertime database usage is low overall, July marked Mango Languages' highest-performing month in 2026. Spanish was by far the most popular language being studied, with WCLS users spending a total of 60 hours learning Spanish this July. Japanese and French were not far behind, as the second and third most popular languages with WCLS patrons.



Collection Size	Physical	Electronic	Total
	298,044	450,875	748,919

Circulation	Aug 2025	Aug 2026	YTD 2025	YTD 2026	YTD % chg
Physical Circulation					
Blaine	12,359	13,207	107,030	95,713	-10.6%
Bookmobile & Outreach	6,984	6,179	44,266	48,658	9.9%
Deming	7,962	7,704	60,349	63,748	5.6%
Everson	8,553	8,565	67,701	70,225	3.7%
Ferndale	30,436	29,151	240,678	221,990	-7.8%
Island	1,983	1,868	14,254	13,852	-2.8%
Lynden	35,304	34,002	282,861	270,631	-4.3%
North Fork	3,744	3,348	27,783	26,729	-3.8%
NWIC	4	15	200	84	-58.0%
Point Roberts + PRX	3,633	2,877	19,833	17,526	-11.6%
Sumas + SLX	2,611	2,149	19,811	8,770	-55.7%
South Whatcom	9,482	9,306	65,785	70,556	7.3%
NDX	3,752	4,073	30,663	32,501	6.0%
Physical Circulation Total	126,807	122,444	981,214	940,983	-4.1%
Disc materials: DVDs, CDs	24,503	21,644	191,720	173,096	-9.7%
All other materials	98,904	98,220	765,707	746,504	-2.5%
Digital Circulation					
eBooks/eAudiobooks	37,340	39,190	298,101	306,095	2.7%
eMagazines	5,798	6,819	46,838	50,889	8.6%
eMusic	10,607	8,990	92,571	79,805	-13.8%
Streaming Video	2,977	3,071	26,188	23,491	-10.3%
Digital Circulation Total	56,722	58,070	463,698	460,280	-0.7%
Grand Total	183,529	180,514	1,444,912	1,401,263	-3.0%

Visitors (Door counts)	Aug 2025	Aug 2026	YTD 2025	YTD 2026	YTD % chg
Blaine	7,167	7,205	54,995	52,427	-4.7%
Deming	2,779	2,792	21,492	23,120	7.6%
Everson	3,728	3,777	28,235	28,652	1.5%
Ferndale	12,669	11,963	101,324	94,924	-6.3%
Island	2,561	2,651	14,798	15,526	4.9%
Lynden	11,423	11,861	94,238	96,575	2.5%
NDX	355	402	2,563	2,881	12.4%
North Fork	2,503	2,414	15,318	18,028	17.7%
Point Roberts + PRX	2,501	2,362	12,529	13,466	7.5%
Sumas + SLX	1,410	1,465	11,015	3,652	-66.8%
South Whatcom	4,557	3,975	27,312	27,944	2.3%
Total	51,653	50,867	383,819	377,195	-1.7%

New Borrowers	Aug 2025	Aug 2026	YTD 2025	YTD 2026	YTD % chg
	618	625	4,694	4,510	-3.9%

Interlibrary Loan	Aug 2025	Aug 2026	YTD 2025	YTD 2026	YTD % chg
Borrowed from BPL	11,094	10,236	93,458	83,439	-10.7%
Lent to BPL	21,931	22,337	175,413	172,136	-1.9%
Borrowed: other libraries	566	511	4,808	4,530	-5.8%
Lent: other libraries	435	655	4,653	4,671	0.4%

Electronic Resources	Aug 2025	Aug 2026	YTD 2025	YTD 2026	YTD % chg
WCLS.org Sessions	38,688	42,626	308,997	350,326	13.4%
Bibliocommons Sessions	92,329	83,853	740,991	708,242	-4.4%
Internet Sessions	4,404	4,398	32,877	33,027	0.5%
Wifi Clients / Sessions	8,380	8,298	62,998	63,376	0.6%

Activities	Aug 2025	Aug 2026	YTD 2025	YTD 2026	YTD % chg
Programs					
Adults	108	125	880	870	-1.1%
Teens	12	12	283	287	1.4%
Children	24	24	652	606	-7.1%
Total	144	161	1,815	1,763	-2.9%
Attendance					
Adults	877	1,190	9,239	10,174	10.1%
Teens	217	250	7,761	5,396	-30.5%
Children	412	1,260	21,107	22,786	8.0%
Total	1,506	2,700	38,107	38,356	0.7%

Notes/Corrections:

Birch Bay WiFi access discontinued for construction as of June 24, 2026