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Book Deserts of Litlandia: A Case Study of Book Deserts in the Literary City of Portland, Oregon in Relation to Book Waste from it's Largest Independent Bookstore

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Book Deserts of Litlandia:

A Case Study of Book Deserts in the Literary City of Portland, Oregon in Relation to
Book Waste from it's Largest Independent Bookstore

By Megan Jessop
Master of Science in Book Publishing
Spring 2022

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Research Question

How can book waste be shifted in order to help alleviate book deserts in Portland, Oregon?

Abstract

The goal of this project was to look at book waste from a local independent bookstore, Powell's Books, in Portland, Oregon and compare local donation and literacy programs—such as Little Free Libraries (LFL), Children's Book Bank, and programs with the Multnomah County Library (MCL) to see if there were books or print materials that were being thrown away, recycled, and/or turned into pulp that could have been utilized in other ways towards literacy efforts. Through a process of interviews with staff at Portland's largest local independent bookstore, MCL, a LFL steward, and Children's Book Bank, as well as analysis of book desert maps, census data, and lit reviews I attempted to map out gaps in book access and literacy, what efforts were already being made, and where there was still lack in spite of those efforts. Then looking at data from those same methods, I compared and analyzed how much book waste, which is defined here as books that were damaged, stripped, or otherwise deemed unsellable, such as Advanced Readers Copies (known throughout the industry as ARCs), could still be utilized towards literacy efforts and minimizing book deserts. Through my findings, it would seem there is some missed opportunity to rehome some of these books before they end up being stripped and/or thrown out, inevitably ending up in landfills. However, it seems monetary donations are often viewed as more effective in aiding in literacy programs and their efforts than book donations alone.

Introduction

As a child, I was raised below the poverty line and have spent most of my life either below or near that low income mark. See Figure 1 for how the poverty line is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as of 2022.¹ Studies have shown that children of poverty or near-poverty upbringings are more likely to experience trauma and other impacts to their overall wellbeing and abilities. Low income homes often have higher stressors for parents which increases the likelihood of environments where children feel unsafe. In addition to this, poverty limits access to books. Many low-income children are read to relatively infrequently with many families below poverty level having fewer than 3 children's books in their homes.² I was no exception. As soon as I had learned to read and write, both became simultaneously a source of escape and an outlet for the stressors and experiences I had as a child in such environments. I was lucky enough to have both parents and teachers encourage my hunger for books.

¹ "Federal Register Document Issue for 2022-01-21." Annual Update of the HHS Poverty Guidelines. Department of Health and Human Services and Office of the Secretary, January 21, 2022. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/01/21>.

² Gary W. Evans, "The Environment of Childhood Poverty.," *American Psychologist* 59, no. 2 (2004): pp. 77-92, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.59.2.77>.

Even so, my access to books was limited to school—Scholastic book fairs and libraries—and thrift stores or other used and low-cost books, usually given to me from extended family members.

The first book that I ever personally owned was a 1954 copy of *The Wind in the Willows*, donated from the Grantsdale Elementary Library in Hamilton, Montana when I was eight years old. The book was part of a Christmas box for low income families that my mother had signed up for through the WIC (Women’s Infants and Children) program at a time when my family’s sole income was from my father’s \$7.50 an hour wages supporting our family of eight—my two parents and their six children. About a year later, my grandmother gave me a Precious Moments™ Bible that she purchased at the local Kmart. When I entered middle school, my mother signed me up for the *Goosebumps* books, which happened to be my first subscription box through the Scholastic School Catalog. My public high school gave me an endless amount of reading options for what I knew at the time with a wonderful librarian who noticed up and coming titles for teens and YA. As it was, I don’t believe I had entered a real bookstore until I was seventeen and that was a Christian bookstore with limited options. When I moved away and went to college it opened up so many more opportunities for books and bookstores and a much more diverse and robust reading experience.

Statistically speaking, those who live in rural areas such as where I grew up, have very little access to books and “neighborhoods of concentrated poverty constitute ‘book deserts,’ which may seriously constrain young children’s opportunities to come to school ‘ready to learn.’”³ Even in Missoula, Montana—the city where I attended my undergrad program—there was limited access to books, compared to many other cities. According to the Book Desert Map only 33% of homes in Missoula County have access to 100 books or more and 32% in Ravalli County, which is where I spent the majority of my life before moving to Portland in 2019. See Figures 2 and 3.⁴ In my personal experience, I have found that the urban and suburban areas generally have had more access to books; yet even in those regions, poverty and low-income can limit the options available to them. Given my current residency in Portland, Oregon and witnessing both the literary world around me and the impacts of poverty, I have decided to look at what resources are available to those with limited access to books and what can further be done to fulfill those needs.

By definition, Book Deserts are “a geographic area (country, state, county, city, neighborhood, home) where printed books and other reading material are relatively hard to obtain, particularly

³ Susan B. Neuman and Naomi Moland, “Book Deserts: The Consequences of Income Segregation on Children’s Access to Print,” NYU Scholars (SAGE Publications Inc., January 1, 2019), <https://nyuscholars.nyu.edu/en/publications/book-deserts-the-consequences-of-income-segregation-on-childrens-2>.

⁴ Condon, Mark. “Are You Living in a Desert?” Unite for Literacy, June 25, 2014. <http://about.uniteforliteracy.com/2014/06/are-you-living-in-a-desert/>

without access to an automobile or other form of transportation.”⁵ Portland, Oregon has a total population of 639,387 people within an area of 133.42 square miles, giving it a population density of 4,792.3 per square mile.⁶ Looking at the website Unite for Literacy who coined the term ‘Book Desert’, there are maps which are curated from census data, showing the percentage of homes with access to more than a hundred books, as shown in Figure 4. The neighborhoods in red are the homes with ten or less books. While this data does not show explicitly whether or not these neighborhoods have access to books as the book desert definition suggests, one can deduce if there are little to no books within the homes, there are likely factors at play that limit the accessibility to obtaining those books. Those limitations could be the distance from a bookstore or library or income levels, among other factors. Borrowing from Desiree Wilson’s research regarding Little Free Libraries (LFLs) in Portland, their maps in Figures 5 and 6, show not only the location of LFL throughout the city, but also show the educations and income levels of the different neighborhoods. Many of those LFL are located in affluent neighborhoods. This gives a clearer picture regarding some of the factors that are at play in low book numbers inside the households from the map in Figure 4. This map indicates that 39.1% of the households in Portland earn under \$50k annually, and 19.6% of that is below the poverty line. Contrasting that with the 31.5% of households in Portland that earns above \$100k annually. The maps show that those with higher incomes generally live in more affluent areas with less concern for book access, while the lower income households reflect a higher level of concern for book access. Education levels do not seem to reflect the income levels since Portland ranges at 43.1% of its population having obtained a high school diploma and 49% having a Bachelor’s degree or higher. Only 7.8% of Portland residents have less than a high school education. These numbers are more balanced than the numbers regarding the income gaps and low income neighborhoods as the maps indicate.

Looking at other aspects that might play a role in limitations to accessibility could be that these households have limited or no access to internet to purchase books, prices of books, limited access to diverse representation in books, censorship, language barriers, or even distrust from libraries or other government institutions (primarily among BIPOC communities) which could occur for a variety of reasons.⁷ One such reason could be that the families or individuals are undocumented and fearful of obtaining a library card due to the need to provide an address or personal information that is potentially incriminating. Or even not having an address or form of identification, as is the case with many houseless individuals. It is important to note that many of these limitations are as a result of systemic issues that have been in place within the structure of the United States as a whole for years

⁵ Susan B. Neuman and Naomi Moland, “Book Deserts: The Consequences of Income Segregation on Children’s Access to Print,” NYU Scholars (SAGE Publications Inc., January 1, 2019), <https://nyuscholars.nyu.edu/en/publications/book-deserts-the-consequences-of-income-segregation-on-childrens-2>.

⁶ Desiree Wilson (Portland, Oregon, June 5, 2020).***

⁷ Sherri Williams, “Book Deserts Leave Low-Income Neighborhoods Thirsty for Reading Material,” NBCNews.com (NBCUniversal News Group, December 29, 2017), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/book-deserts-leave-low-income-neighborhoods-thirsty-reading-material-n833356>.

starting with the implications of **Caste systems that began as far back as the first in the colonization in the Americas.**⁸ Although there are clear factors that we can point to that affect Book Deserts, when it comes to determining or measuring the actual need for book access and print materials in Portland, it is far more difficult. According to an Interview with the Children’s Book Bank, a nonprofit organization based in Portland, Oregon that holds book drives and disperses those books to children in need, there is no way for them to be able to determine those numbers.⁹

What is apparent, however, is that there is, in fact, a need. As far as book deserts go within Portland and other areas in the United States, demographics generally include lower income levels, minorities, English as second language, employment, distance from bookstores, undocumented individuals or lack of address, such as houseless individuals—this, in particular, could affect ability to even utilize online bookstores, such as Amazon (as well as limited access to internet). Organizations, such as Children’s Book Bank, Little Free Libraries, and Multnomah County Library all endeavor to help alleviate the lack that occurs within Book Deserts. Even book stores, such as the Portland local independent bookstore, Powell’s Books, provide opportunities for these neighborhoods to gain access to books. Arguably, however, many of today’s book prices and growing inflation rates make it difficult for low income households to have the same opportunity to purchase books as other more affluent households. While Powell’s books does hold its own annual book drive, as well as partnering with programs and organizations such as Brown Hope, Central City Concern, KiarosPDX, and SMARTReading¹⁰—the latter of which is merging with Children’s Book Bank in order to expand their reach¹¹—there are perhaps more opportunities available for Powell’s and other bookstores to further aid in minimizing or eliminating book deserts.

Methods

As a former employee of Powell’s Books, I noticed large quantities of books that were stripped and placed in large bins waiting to be pulped. As many book lovers can imagine, it hurt my heart to see it. Given my past experiences with my own limited access to books, it made me wonder about the potential that these stripped and discarded books, which I will refer to throughout this report as “book waste”, might hold in regards to limiting book deserts. In undertaking this research, I decided to interview representatives of Powell’s Books, Children’s Book Bank, and Multnomah County Library, as well as Melinda Crouchley—a member of the Portland community and a steward of the Little Free

⁸ Isabel Wilkerson, *CASTE: The International Bestseller*. (S.L.: Penguin Books, 2021).

⁹ Jessop, Megan D., and Brittany Bookhart Brock. Children’s Book Bank Donations and Programs. Personal, 2022.

¹⁰ New Used, “Partner Program,” Used, New, and Out of Print Books - We Buy and Sell - Powell’s Books, accessed March 14, 2022, <https://www.powells.com/partner-program>.

¹¹ Jessop, Megan D., and Brittany Bookhart Brock. Children’s Book Bank Donations and Programs. Personal, 2022.

Library project. Then, I looked at a combination of qualitative data from the interviews and quantitative data collected from peer reviewed articles, census reports, and other previous research on the topic of book deserts. In doing so, I hope to provide a survey of what is currently being done in order to help alleviate book deserts within Portland as well as some insight regarding other opportunities that might be available through shifting book waste. I also hope to address some of the nuances that influence book deserts and limited book access within these communities. It is important to note that all my methodology and questions went through the human ethics process at Portland State with IRB.

Current Findings and Analysis

Children's Book Bank

Through an interview with Children's Book Bank (CBB), I learned that their organization donated over 100,000 books annually prior to the Covid pandemic. While Covid-19 impacted the operation of many businesses, CBB is still able to obtain and donate somewhere between 45,000-75,000 books which then get donated to Head Start. In joining forces with SMART, a nonprofit that has been around for decades and operates state-wide in Oregon, they are able to focus on early childhood literacy by pairing young readers with volunteers, as well as distributing new books to the kids that participate in the program. CBB also holds book fairs based on reading levels in the highest needs schools in Portland and estimates that they are able to impact over 10,000 children each year. When asked about any books that were deemed unusable, CBB stated that they recycled any books that could not be restored or had water damage. For the other books that are a little too used, they try to distribute them to Little Free Libraries, food banks, and other community spaces. They term these specific books as *community books* because they are not meant to be owned but shared in public spaces, like waiting rooms, etc.¹²

Multnomah County Library

I also asked library workers at Multnomah County Library (MCL) about their efforts in reaching these communities. In their interviews, I found that MCL has 19 neighborhood locations throughout Portland. Each curated collection housed within these locations, are tailored to the size of the library, community interests, and cultural makeup. They work to ensure their collections are able to contain several languages, including Chinese, Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese, which are the top

¹² Jessop, Megan D., and Brittany Bookhart Brock. Children's Book Bank Donations and Programs. Personal, 2022.

languages in Portland with a Low English Proficiency rate, or LEP.¹³ In terms of language, there are at least sixteen different languages represented as LEP languages within Portland residents, much of which is due to a large immigrant population.¹⁴ When it comes to book access MCL makes it a point to include as many books and resources as possible to meet those needs and demographics. In curating the collections, they consider community demand, accuracy of information provided, objectivity, contemporary or historical significance, diversity of viewpoints, artistic excellence, and the suitability of format for library use.¹⁵ Like most libraries they receive their funding from a combination of donations and state funding. The Library Full Year 2022 Adopted Budget¹⁶ is currently \$96.5 million which is a \$4.2 million, or 4.6%, increase from the Full Year 2021 Adopted Budget. Their budget allocates for \$13,676,281 to be used for their collections and technical services and a total of \$58,432,043 goes towards public services which are divided up between each location and the different services based on their needs. See Figure 7 for an idea of how MCL allocates these funds. When asked about the demographics of MCL users, I was supplied general demographic information based on the Census Bureau's profile of Multnomah County¹⁷ and Data USA's Multnomah County Profile,¹⁸ both of which break down households, income, education, age, race, employment, health, safety, etc. of those living in Multnomah County. See Figure 8 for a breakdown of those demographics. MCL also uses resources such as the Community Opportunity Map (see Figure 9), which features economic, social and health risk factors across the county so that they can focus resources in those areas where they're most needed.¹⁹ The metrics are made up of data from Eight American Community Survey (in other words, census data from that past eight years). The site includes additional data layers, such as total population, schools, libraries and active library cardholders.

Little Free Libraries

Currently throughout Portland there are an estimated 50 Little Free Library locations.²⁰ Many of those located within Portland are found within affluent neighborhoods as research from Desiree Wilson suggests.²¹ In addition, because LFL is a trademarked non-profit organization, it does require that stewards register their book depository boxes. That doesn't mean every LFL is registered. Even if a

¹³ Jessop, Megan D., with Lisa Regimbal and Erin Sims. Multnomah County Library Interview. Personal, 2022.

¹⁴ Uma Krishnan, "City of Portland Language List and Guidance," Office of Equity and Human Rights, February 25, 2020, <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/oehr/article/754396>.

¹⁵ Shannon M. Oltmann (2016) Public Librarians' Views on Collection Development and Censorship, *Collection Management*, 41:1, 23-44

¹⁶ "TAB 5 - FY 2022 Library - ADOPTED.pdf" (Portland, n.d.).

¹⁷ "Census Bureau Multnomah County, Oregon." *Explore Census Data*, U.S. Department of Commerce, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=0500000US41051>. ***

¹⁸ "Multnomah County, Or." *Data USA*, <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/multnomah-county-or/>. ***

¹⁹ "Opportunity Mapping," Portland.gov, accessed March 14, 2022, <https://www.portland.gov/phb/opportunity-mapping>.

²⁰ "Little Free Library Map," Little Free Library, March 8, 2022, <https://littlefreelibrary.org/ourmap/>.

²¹ Desiree Wilson (Portland, Oregon, June 5, 2020)

similar-looking book depository uses a different name, it would risk legal action from the trademarked company.²² While the fee required to register is small, this also has the potential to limit which neighborhoods might be able to provide such a resource to the homes within them, especially among the low-income. Not only are there restrictions due to the company trademark but there seems to be limits to the level of diverse options available within many of those LFL as well. With a general observation of a few LFLs within my own neighborhood I have found that the boxes are often quite small, usually containing 20 books or less, and most contain such books as mass-market harlequin romances, religious books, cookbooks, car manuals, or other such books that are questionable in terms of how much they help their neighborhoods in terms of access, diversity, and literacy. On occasion I do find a YA title or two but more often than not, the options are limited. While there is something to be said about the benefits of having print material of any form available,²³ it is important for children, especially, to have access to books within their reading levels and genres. This is most important during the summer when children are not in school where their libraries and classrooms might otherwise provide some of those reading options.²⁴

Melinda Crouchley, a local LFL steward, has combined her writing, publishing, library, and other nonprofit backgrounds in effort to meet the needs in her neighborhood through her book depository setup. Her LFL location was initially located in the Powell Butte neighborhood in SE Portland but has since moved to Salem, Oregon. In both locations, the vision remains much the same. She built her book depository box out of an old broom closet and set it out on a vacant corner on her street. When she started her LFL it coincided with many of the closures of schools and libraries due to the Covid-19 pandemic which increased the need for the LFL in her community. Crouchley noted that using a larger cabinet has allowed her to not only carry more books than the average steward, but to have more space for the larger kids books, which is the majority of what she provides (including YA and middle grade), in addition to a few adult books. Crouchley saw this as an opportunity to provide not only books, but nonperishable food items, and hygiene supplies—including face masks and hand sanitizer for those in her community that might not have access otherwise. She also has had school supplies, CDs, video games, and other media items donated. Media items can be costly so she only provides those upon donation. Overall, she tries to keep a nonpartisan mentality about the books she curates but she will remove any books that she feels perpetuates any sense of hate.

²² Claire Kirch, “Little Free Library, Founder’s Family Clash over Organization’s Direction,” *PublishersWeekly.com*, October 29, 2019. See also “Desiree Wilson (Portland, Oregon, June 5, 2020)”

²³ Susan B. Neuman and Naomi Moland, “Book Deserts: The Consequences of Income Segregation on Children’s Access to Print,” NYU Scholars (SAGE Publications Inc., January 1, 2019)

²⁴ See 19.

Crouchley's LFL is unique, however, in the sense that she has focused on providing access to diverse books (in other languages, by or about BIPOC, queer, or other underrepresented individuals) as well, due to the demographics of her neighborhood.²⁵ See Figure 10 for Centennial School District demographics. In addition, by placing her own books she's written and other ARCs from local authors, bookstores, and publishers in her LFL, she feels it gives kids the opportunity to see their lived experience reflected in the books they read. With Crouchley's library background, she approached her LFL attempting to be nonpartisan but also hopes to inject that diverse angle and use what is happening in our society as an opportunity for people to read a book, learn more, and get a new perspective. She says that approximately 75% of these books are the ones that get picked up. She has even considered placing a suggestion box nearby, in order to better cater to the neighborhood's needs and desires. Her experience with other LFL in her neighborhood have been similar to my own, with a somewhat small number of books, with mostly adult mass market paperbacks, religious books, or how to manuals. Few other LFL are doing what Crouchley does and even fewer have looked at much data regarding the influences they have within their communities.

Generally speaking, she obtains her books to stock her LFL through nonprofit organizations such as First Book and doing birthday campaigns to raise funds to purchase items.²⁶ Every six months or so, usually in the event that someone in the neighborhood is moving, she would get about 50-60 books donated. Besides donations she receives from her peers and community, Crouchley estimates that she spends about \$100 each month on books, food, and other items for her LFL. Most of the costs factored in are for food items and in implementing "themed books" for such events as Banned Books Week, Hispanic Heritage Month, Pride Month, and other significant occasions. One small local bookstore donates about 1-3 ARCs each month and the publisher, Celadon Books, also donates ARCs asking only that she takes pictures of them to cross-promote on social media. Most books and items obtained are utilized in the LFL but if they are too damaged or not getting picked up for extended periods of time, then the damaged books get recycled and others get donated to secondhand stores or sometimes other LFLs in nearby neighborhoods.²⁷

Powell's Books

In an interview with a Powell's representative, the main focus seemed to be "figuring out how to be the best community partner possible within [their] bandwidth."²⁸ Powell's stated that they "choose and vet

²⁵ USA News, "Centennial School District 28J - U.S. News Education," USAnews.com, 2018, <https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/oregon/districts/centennial-sd-28j-110405>.

²⁶ Jessop, Megan D., and Melinda Crouchly. Little Free Library Stewardship. Personal, 2022.

²⁷ See 25

²⁸ Jessop, Megan D., and Emily B. . Powell's City of Books Book Waste and Donations. Personal, 2022.

nonprofit partners carefully, focusing on local nonprofits doing work related to education, literacy, free speech, and/or human rights.”²⁹ While they provide support where they can, they tend to focus the bulk of their community partnership funds and bandwidth on a small number of close partnerships to maximize the good they can do in the community. They believe that the missions of the nonprofits they work with resonate with their customers and community just as much as they resonate with Powell’s. They feel that with a close value and mission fit it makes individuals more likely to donate. This may involve donations of books, but it also may involve more general fundraising, days of donation on the Powell’s website, support of the partner organization’s donation drives, or joint awareness raising projects. Most often it seems that Powell’s goes the route of monetary donations, because “most partners are looking for donations of specific titles rather than bulk books brought in through book drives.”³⁰ In that case, monetary donations or special orders seem to be more appropriate responses. When Powell’s does make a monetary donation it is usually from the sales of specific books or a specific percentage of sales during certain days on the website. To incentivize donations to nonprofits providing essential services during the early days of the pandemic, Powell’s raffled off \$200 shopping sprees in their downtown location (which was otherwise closed to customers). That program brought in more than \$60,000.³¹ Part of the benefit of Powell’s being such a big name in Portland and in the literary/book world at large is that they are able to offer their nonprofit partners earned, paid, and owned media support to help their message reach the widest possible audience.

It seems that Powell’s focuses more on community partnership than it does on doing any programs or literacy events themselves, which makes sense given the number of programs within Portland who are already doing the work. Street Books and Street Roots are two such examples. According to Powell’s, “over the years we have also worked with writing groups to provide space and event programming, but we are still waiting to see what that will look like in the post-pandemic world (if we all ever get to the post-pandemic world).”³² Powell’s has also worked with Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO) to support their literary arts festival. In addition, they work with librarians and teachers to donate free sets of Oregon Battle of the Book (OBOB) books to public schools across the Portland area each year. While every year tends to look different, particularly the past couple years during the Covid-19 pandemic, Powell’s tries to stay open to what they are able to do to help with the needs of the community.

When it comes to books and book waste, Powell’s has a partner they work with who takes rejected books from them in bulk and either sells them, repurposes them, or recycles them. Powell’s will generally only sell or donate books that are in good used condition, which usually means that the covers, pages, and spine are intact, there is no mildew or water damage, and there isn’t more than minor highlighting or underlining within the pages. Powell’s generally gets hundreds of ARCs sent to them from various publishers annually and according to the recent interview, the number is down significantly from pre-pandemic times. Powell’s book

²⁹ See 39.

³⁰ Jessop, Megan D., and Emily B. . Powell’s City of Books Book Waste and Donations. Personal, 2022.

³¹ See 29

³² Jessop, Megan D., and Emily B. . Powell’s City of Books Book Waste and Donations. Personal, 2022.

buyers estimate about 75% less, largely due to a shift towards digital ARCs through Edelweiss.³³ While digital ARCs are good news for the climate and reducing book waste, it does make those books harder to gain access for those living in book deserts or might otherwise not have access. However, when Powell's does receive physical ARCS, they encourage their employees to take them and read them and then stuff LFLs in their neighborhoods or pass them along to friends.

Conclusion and Recommendations

When looking at what bookstores could do in order to further aid in these efforts, it is important to consider what it might mean for low-income or poverty level families to have access to books that are generally priced around \$15-\$20 on average.³⁴ Income levels and family size might limit the number of books a family can provide for their children. While the definition of Book Deserts is focused primarily on the distance and availability of bookstores, it is only part of the problem. Many bookstores do offer discount prices on used books or remainder books and many second hand shops (not necessarily specific to books) also help these families gain access to books at a lower price which is generally the option my family opted for when I was a child. To a certain degree, bookstores have their hands tied as far as how much they are able to do regarding book prices. Often times the pricing is determined by the publisher,³⁵ who determines the price based on trim size, pages, and general cost of printing as well as such considerations as marketing and author royalties.³⁶ So what happens to those books when they can't sell? As mentioned before, some books are able to be sold at a discounted price and others are often returned to the publishers for credit.³⁷ Some publishers, however, do not accept returns and others still prohibit bookstores from donating their books to charities.³⁸ In those cases, these books end up being thrown away or recycled. When it comes to pulping books, however, many recycling companies will not recycle them because of their high glue content.³⁹ If books are unable to be recycled, then it creates quite the problem for our already dire climate crisis.⁴⁰ There is the complexity of the profit and loss margins for both the publishers, as well as the bookstores in these cases. However, if they are already planning to strip and pulp the books, which will ultimately just end up in landfills, the losses are likely already factored in.⁴¹

³³ See 31.

³⁴ "How to Set the Retail Price of Your Book," Mill City Press (Mill City Press Inc, October 9, 2020).

³⁵ Lynn Neary, "Publishers Push for New Rules on Unsold Books," NPR (NPR, June 13, 2008). See also Tatiana Zarnowski, "Unsold Books Tossed out, Recycled," *The Daily Gazette*, April 4, 2008.

³⁶ "How to Set the Retail Price of Your Book," Mill City Press (Mill City Press Inc, October 9, 2020).

³⁷ Lynn Neary, "Publishers Push for New Rules on Unsold Books," NPR (NPR, June 13, 2008).

³⁸ Tatiana Zarnowski, "Unsold Books Tossed out, Recycled," *The Daily Gazette*, April 4, 2008.

³⁹ See 28.

⁴⁰ Senjuti Patra, "The Cost of Reading: The Book Industry's Carbon Footprint," *BOOK RIOT*, February 11, 2022, <https://bookriot.com/carbon-footprint-of-publishing/>. See also Rachel Done et al., "Can Book Printing Become Carbon Neutral by 2050?" (Portland, Or: Portland State University, 2022), pp. 1-18.

⁴¹ Nicole Taft, "Where's the Cover? Finding Stripped Books for Sale," *Speculative Chic*, March 2, 2017.

Advanced Reader Copies (or ARCs) that publishers often send to booksellers, reviewers, and awards programs are other books that many bookstores obtain that are unsellable. Because Advanced Reader Copies are for marketing purposes and are unfinished, uncorrected copies of books, they cannot be sold, so donating seems like an option that could benefit those without the opportunity to purchase those books on their own. Powell's, for instance, gets hundreds of ARCs each year and they often give them to their employees to enable them to read and review those books in order to aid them in selling the books to their patrons once the sales copies are released. As a former employee that took advantage of this benefit, I was encouraged by other staff members to donate unwanted ARCs to LFLs or give them as gifts to friends or family members when I was finished with them. These ARCs allowed me to be able to give each of my family members Christmas gifts this past year when I was otherwise unable to do so because of financial hardship. I would imagine other low-income families would benefit in similar ways.

While selling stripped books may hold ethical implications akin to book piracy,⁴² these books, along with old ARCs could potentially be donated to low-income families or schools and perhaps using them as write offs may be a step forward in order to help alleviate book deserts. In fact, some awards advise similar practices. The Teens' Top Ten awards through the Young Adult Library Services Association (a division of the ALA), encourages libraries that receive ARCs to give them away or use them as prizes after the year is over.⁴³ In terms of stripped books—books with the covers removed—Crouchley informed me that those were often the untouched books in her book depository. Stripped books were something she couldn't get off the shelf because people either get books from LFL for their own shelves or to share with others and stripped books aren't conducive to that. Stripped books usually ended up getting recycled or donated to second hand stores. That challenges the idea of using stripped books for book accessibility as well as the concept of having any print material at all to encourage reading. Unless these books were somehow restored or rebound with new covers, there seems to be minimal interest in them even among LFL and community spaces.⁴⁴ But what about donating the books *before* they get stripped?

One bookstore employee from a small northwest bookstore noted that she would receive books labeled “donate or destroy” from publishers and the bookstore was somewhat able to choose what to do with those. If the books were in decent condition, the store would often keep them and sell

⁴² Rachel Noorda and Kathi Inman Berens, “Immersive Media and Books 2020 Consumer Behavior and Experience with Multiple Media Forms, Short Version” (Portland, OR: Panorama Project, 2021), pp. 2-3.

⁴³ Admin, “Teens' Top Ten (TTT) FAQ,” Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), July 19, 2018.

⁴⁴ Jessop, Megan D., and Melinda Crouchly. Little Free Library Stewardship. Personal, 2022.

them at reduced prices. However, if they did decide to recycle them, this bookseller still grabbed a few with minor damage to restore and then donate or keep for herself. On average, she says that they recycled about 15 books a month, after taking ones that could still be used or restored. That number did tend to fluctuate depending on the month and seemed to increase and get worse from 2019 on due to damages in shipping or transport.⁴⁵ Powell's Books, however, is a much larger bookstore. While there was no way to get specific numbers on the books that were donated or recycled due to the sensitive nature of that information being public, personal experience from working in the warehouse shows that it is much more than 15 books per month, judging by the refrigerator box size of the discard bins.

There is, however, a lot that Powell's is doing to partner with the community and local literacy efforts. Based on the data and the interviews, the best courses of action would be to partner with literacy programs through monetary donations or asking what specific needs they have for donations and finding ways to fulfill those. Apart from the literacy nonprofits and libraries, it seems that Little Free Libraries hold the most potential in reaching specific low income communities and demographics. However, the majority would need to get on board with following Crouchley's model or others like it. Donating ARCs and used books to these efforts, whether a publisher, bookstore, or individual would help keep already printed books in circulation without contributing to waste. While there is still some opportunity to find ways to shift book waste in order to aid in these efforts, it is difficult to gain specific data on how much book waste occurs annually based on my research. Future research could look at smaller local bookstores in Portland and analyze all bookstores, rather than just one as a case study, in order to minimize incriminating data. Doing so would also give a much clearer picture of Portland's book waste as a whole. Finding more specifics on what books are being pulped and/or recycled would also help to determine the best options for where those books ultimately end up.

⁴⁵ Jessop, Megan, and Anonymous Bookseller. Bookseller Experience. Personal, May 4, 2022.

Appendix

Figure 1. This Table compares the income amount against the persons in each household or family. For families or households with more than 8 persons, add \$4,720 for each additional person.

Persons in family/household	Poverty guideline
1	\$13,590
2	18,310
3	23,030
4	27,750
5	32,470
6	37,190
7	41,910
8	46,630

“Federal Register Document Issue for 2022-01-21,” Annual Update of the HHS Poverty Guidelines (Department of Health and Human Services and Office of the Secretary, January 21, 2022), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/01/21>.

Figure 2. Shows Montana as a state with specific data shown in the white box for Missoula County. (Condon, Mark. “Are You Living in a Desert?” Unite for Literacy, June 25, 2014. <http://about.uniteforliteracy.com/2014/06/are-you-living-in-a-desert/>). Accessed June 4th, 2022.

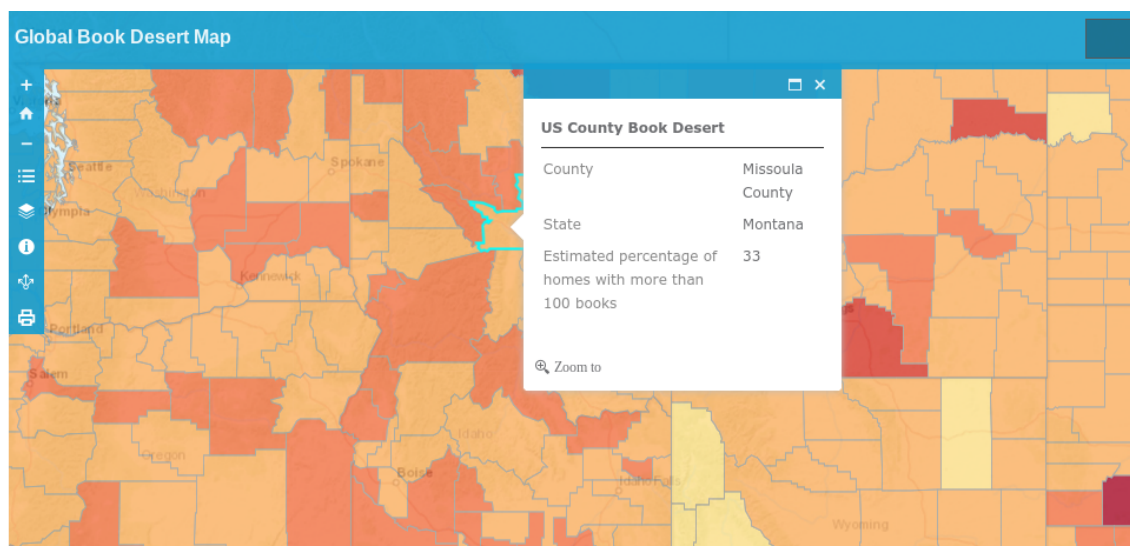


Figure 3. Shows Montana as a state with specific data shown in the white box for Ravalli County.

(Condon, Mark. "Are You Living in a Desert?" Unite for Literacy, June 25, 2014.
<http://about.uniteforliteracy.com/2014/06/are-you-living-in-a-desert/>). Accessed June 4th, 2022.

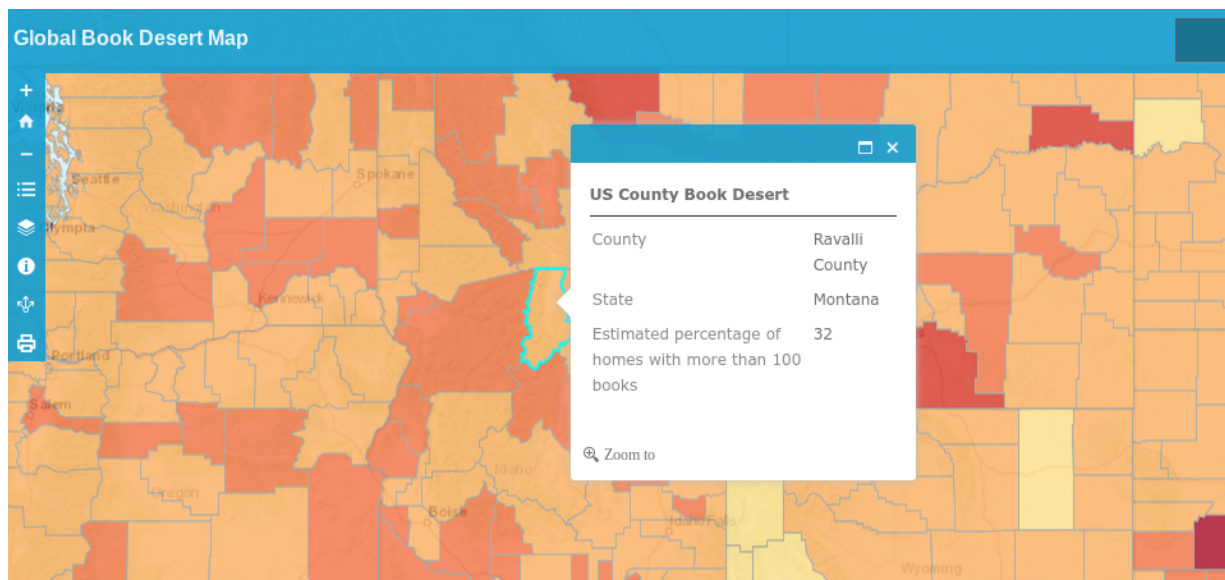
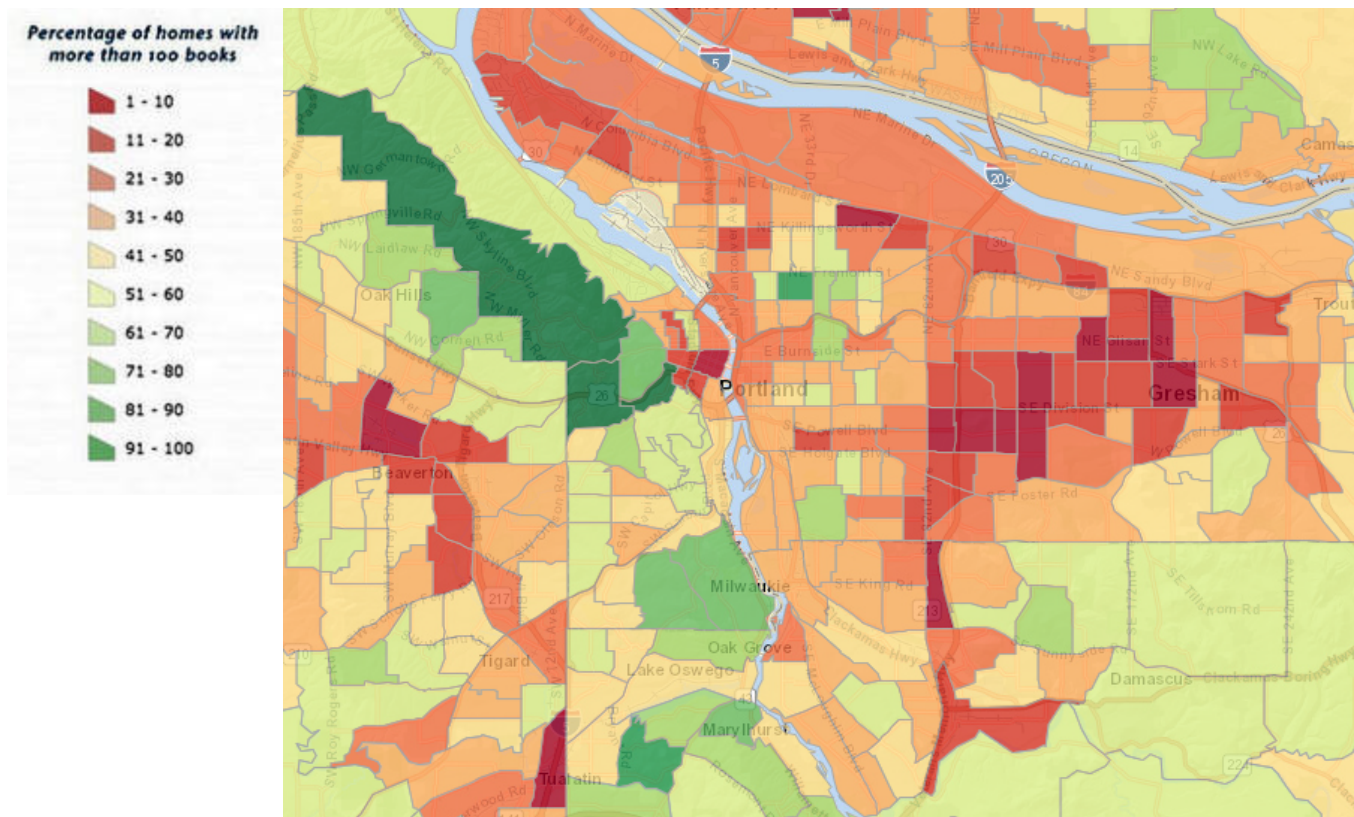


Figure 4. (Condon, Mark. "Are You Living in a Desert?" Unite for Literacy, June 25, 2014.
<http://about.uniteforliteracy.com/2014/06/are-you-living-in-a-desert/>). Accessed June 4th, 2022.



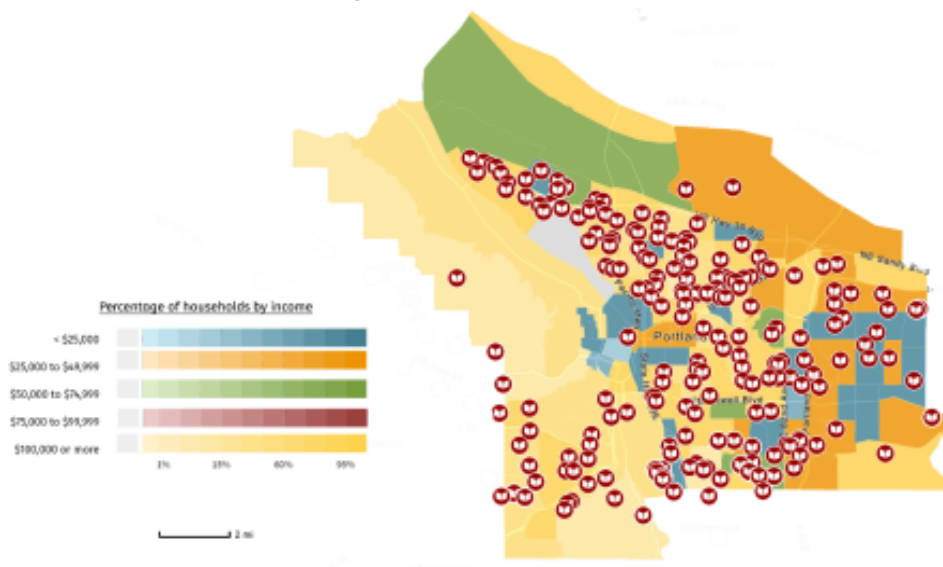
Figures 5 and 6. Wilson, Desiree, "Spatial Politics and Literacy: An Analysis of Little Free Libraries and Neighborhood Distribution of Book-Sharing Depositories in Portland, Oregon and Detroit, Michigan" (2020)

HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME (IN 2018 INFLATION ADJUSTED DOLLARS)

Total Number of Reported Households: 264,428

Less than \$25,000	51,829	19.60%
\$25,000 to \$49,999	51,429	19.50%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	43,873	16.60%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	33,953	12.80%
\$100,000 or More	83,344	31.50%

Figure 5.



EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR POPULATION 25 YEARS AND OVER

Less than High School	36,928	7.80%
High School Diploma	203,553	43.10%
Bachelor's Degree or Better	231,385	49.00%

Figure 6.

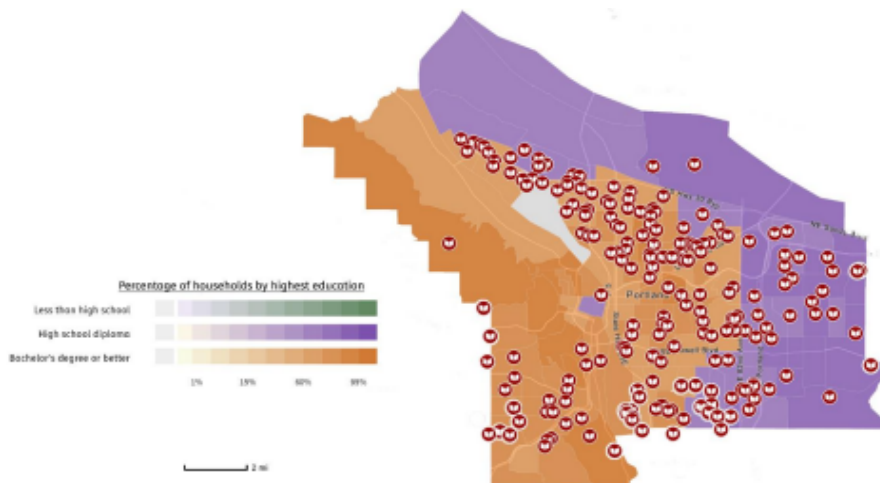


Figure 7. "TAB 5 - FY 2022 Library - ADOPTED.pdf" (Portland, n.d.).

Multnomah County Library

The following table shows the programs that make up the department's total budget. The individual programs follow their respective divisions.

Prog. #	Program Name	FY 2022 General Fund	Other Funds	Total Cost	FTE
Department Administration					
80010	Library Director's Office	\$0	\$1,075,083	\$1,075,083	4.00
80019	Marketing and Communication	0	1,569,661	1,569,661	9.50
80024	Library Building Bond Administration	0	0	0	6.00
Operations					
80012	Operations	0	2,834,106	2,834,106	15.75
80014	Facilities	0	5,138,043	5,138,043	17.25
80017	Human Resources	0	2,854,199	2,854,199	15.75
Content Strategy					
80018	IT Services	0	10,392,618	10,392,618	7.00
80020	Collections and Technical Services	0	13,676,281	13,676,281	34.00
Public Services					
80001	Central Library	0	14,046,291	14,046,291	102.00
80002	North County Libraries	0	9,907,204	9,907,204	80.00
80003	South and West County Libraries	0	11,144,146	11,144,146	86.50
80004	East County Libraries	0	11,079,804	11,079,804	83.00
80005	Community Information	0	1,488,927	1,488,927	13.50
80006	Education Services	0	3,494,793	3,494,793	19.50
80008	Programming and Events	0	2,579,159	2,579,159	15.00
80009	Intergenerational Services	0	1,044,646	1,044,646	7.25
80022	Public Services Division Management	0	2,350,311	2,350,311	10.00
80023	Community Engagement	0	1,296,762	1,296,762	8.00
COVID-19 & American Rescue Plan					
80099	ARP - Library Tech Mobile	0	500,000	500,000	0.00
Total Library		\$0	\$96,472,034	\$96,472,034	534.00

Figure 8. Demographics of Multnomah County based on US Census Data.

US Census Bureau, "U.S. Census Bureau Quickfacts: Multnomah County, Oregon," US Census Bureau Quick Facts (US Census Bureau, July 2021), <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/multnomahcountyoregon>.

Population Estimates, July 1 2021, (V2021)	803,377
PEOPLE	
Population	
Population Estimates, July 1 2021, (V2021)	803,377
Population estimates base, April 1, 2020, (V2021)	815,428
Population, percent change - April 1, 2020 (estimates base) to July 1, 2021, (V2021)	-1.5%
Population, Census, April 1, 2020	815,428
Population, Census, April 1, 2010	735,334
Age and Sex	
Persons under 5 years, percent	5.1%
Persons under 18 years, percent	18.4%
Persons 65 years and over, percent	13.9%
Female persons, percent	50.5%
Race and Hispanic Origin	
White alone, percent	79.0%
Black or African American alone, percent (a)	6.0%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent (a)	1.4%
Asian alone, percent (a)	8.1%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent (a)	0.7%
Two or More Races, percent	4.7%
Hispanic or Latino, percent (b)	12.0%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent	69.1%
Population Characteristics	
Veterans, 2016-2020	36,468
Foreign born persons, percent, 2016-2020	13.8%
Housing	
Housing units, July 1, 2019, (V2019)	359,778
Owner-occupied housing unit rate, 2016-2020	54.4%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2016-2020	\$410,800
Median selected monthly owner costs -with a mortgage, 2016-2020	\$1,989
Median selected monthly owner costs -without a mortgage, 2016-2020	\$693
Median gross rent, 2016-2020	\$1,309
Building permits, 2020	2,709
Families & Living Arrangements	
Households, 2016-2020	334,849
Persons per household, 2016-2020	2.36
Living in same house 1 year ago, percent of persons age 1 year+, 2016-2020	82.5%
Language other than English spoken at home, percent of persons age 5 years+, 2016-2020	19.9%
Computer and Internet Use	
Households with a computer, percent, 2016-2020	95.1%
Households with a broadband internet subscription, percent, 2016-2020	90.1%
Education	
High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2016-2020	92.0%
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2016-2020	46.5%
Health	
With a disability, under age 65 years, percent, 2016-2020	9.0%
Persons without health insurance, under age 65 years, percent	8.3%
Economy	
In civilian labor force, total, percent of population age 16 years+, 2016-2020	69.8%
In civilian labor force, female, percent of population age 16 years+, 2016-2020	66.5%
Total accommodation and food services sales, 2012 (\$1,000) (c)	2,506,213
Total health care and social assistance receipts/revenue, 2012 (\$1,000) (c)	7,703,673
Total manufacturers shipments, 2012 (\$1,000) (c)	10,278,074
Total retail sales, 2012 (\$1,000) (c)	9,982,933
Total retail sales per capita, 2012 (c)	\$13,148
Transportation	
Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16 years+, 2016-2020	26.7
Income & Poverty	
Median household income (in 2020 dollars), 2016-2020	\$71,425
Per capita income in past 12 months (in 2020 dollars), 2016-2020	\$41,612
Persons in poverty, percent	11.2%

BUSINESSES	
Businesses	
Total employer establishments, 2020	27,656
Total employment, 2020	460,467
Total annual payroll, 2020 (\$1,000)	25,871,419
Total employment, percent change, 2019-2020	1.5%
Total nonemployer establishments, 2018	75,048
All firms, 2012	85,366
Men-owned firms, 2012	42,283
Women-owned firms, 2012	33,046
Minority-owned firms, 2012	13,825
Nonminority-owned firms, 2012	67,269
Veteran-owned firms, 2012	6,676
Nonveteran-owned firms, 2012	74,013
GEOGRAPHY	
Geography	
Population per square mile, 2010	1,704.9
Land area in square miles, 2010	431.30
FIPS Code	41051

Figure 9. Multnomah County Opportunity Map shows locations of all MCL buildings, online map features locations of schools, library card holders, population demographics, health care facilities and other potential need factors.

Clark County et al., “Multnomah County Community Opportunity Map,” ArcGIS web application (esri, 2019), <https://multco.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=040c7fab40394d5ca34bf427711dc9b8>.

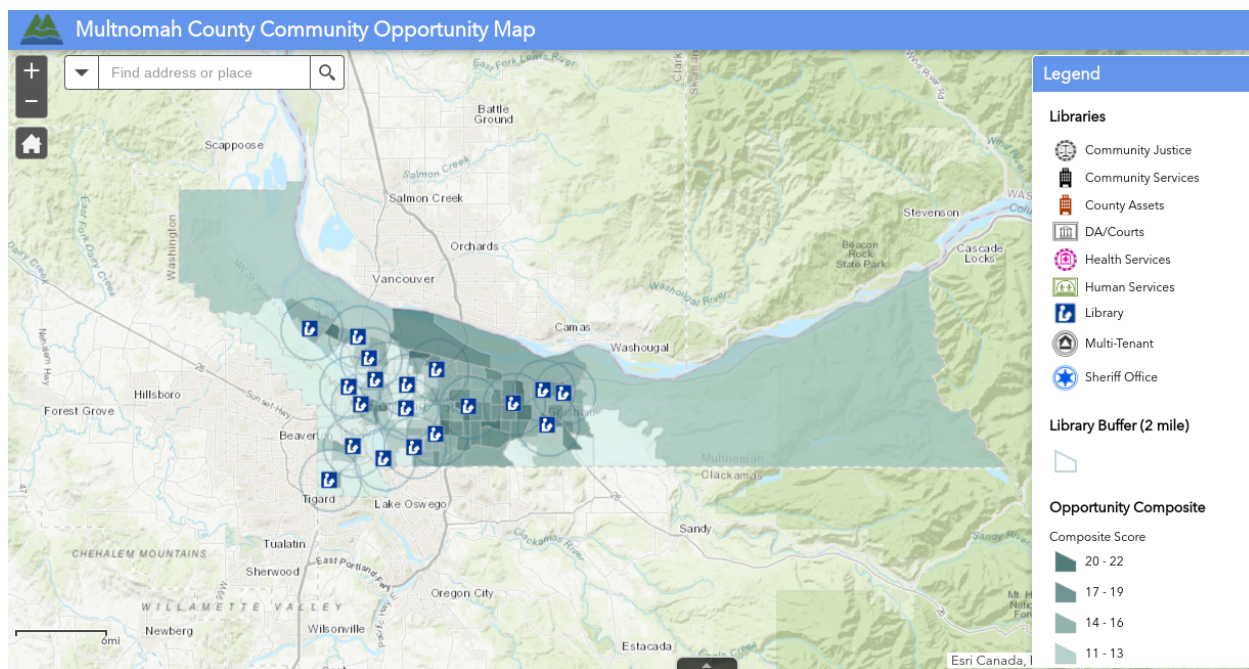


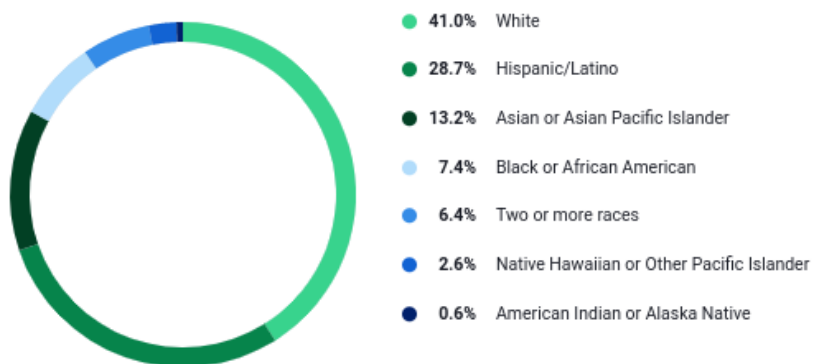
Figure 10. Demographics of School District in SE Portland, Powell Butte Neighborhood.

USA News, “Centennial School District 28J - U.S. News Education,” USAnews.com, 2018,
<https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/oregon/districts/centennial-sd-28j-110405>.

Enrollment by Gender



Enrollment by Diversity



Students on free or reduced price lunch **44.6%**

Students learning English (average) **24.8%**

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