

VI. General (state funds), Miscellaneous Revenue, and Library Services Improvement Fund
B. Program – Bucks for Books Summary Report 2023-2024 – Information item

The Idaho Commission for Libraries has partnered with the Idaho Lottery Commission on the Bucks for Books program for five years. The program offers awards of up to \$3,000 to help Idaho’s elementary school libraries purchase books for their collections.

Access to high-quality children’s books is an essential element for students to become proficient readers. However, most elementary school libraries in Idaho have insufficient funds to provide high-quality, age-appropriate books for students to read at school or take home. The Bucks for Books program aims to address those gaps.

With \$50,000 from the Idaho Lottery Commission, the ICfL awarded funds to 20 elementary school libraries during the 2023-24 school year. The libraries purchased a combined total of 5,387 books. Awardees reported that students read more during the school year because the library was able to provide the titles they wanted to read.

Here are highlights from the 2023-24 Bucks for Books reports submitted to the ICfL:

- While most awardees did not report specific circulation numbers, all reported an increase in reading. Most credited the influx of new books for the boost in circulation, and many talked about new books breathing new life into the library. They told stories of students who had never shown interest in the library suddenly giving up recess time to come and check out a book.
 - West Ridge Elementary in the Post Falls School District reported: “Last year students had checked out 4,098 books as of April. This year 6,027 books have circulated as of April. 2,000 more books have been read so far this school year!” With about 415 students attending West Ridge, that’s an average of nearly 5 more books per student over the year!
 - The librarian at Fort Hall Elementary in the Blackfoot School District reported that many students were involved in the process of deciding which books to purchase: “I feel like I have had more students come up and ask me for recommendations on what to read since seeing the new books brought in. I have also had a couple of the teachers tell me that this is the most excited the kids have been about reading that they have seen. ... I think the kids have felt more enthused about reading because they feel that their interests have been heard and met.”
- Many librarians used Bucks for Books funding to complete popular series. The librarian from Chief Joseph Elementary in the West Ada School District reported: “Kids wanted to keep reading a series (in order) when they saw that I now had the complete set.”
- Several reports included stories about an individual student, like this one from the librarian at Dora Erickson Elementary in the Idaho Falls School District: “This one boy has been asking for one specific book for a long time. Every week he would come in and excitedly check the shelf, looking for this book. Before the grant I wasn’t sure I would be able to purchase it for him. Once we got the grant, I didn’t tell him that I was able to purchase this book, I just quietly put it onto the shelf. He came in the next week and did his usual search, and the joy on his face when he

found it was absolutely priceless. He ran around to all of his fellow students exclaiming his excitement. The whole class checked out more books that week because of his infectious joy.”

- The funding also allowed libraries to build opportunities for students to see themselves represented in stories. Many reported using grant funds to beef up their Spanish language collections and to support students from a variety of countries and cultures.
 - A librarian from Future Public School in Garden City recounted a student saying, “We have Ramadan books? Can I see them all?” Because of the grant, the library had several more books to share with that student, “including several series that feature Muslim characters without being about a holiday or about diversity – they just incorporate the representation the students crave and deserve.”

The Bucks for Books reports also provided helpful feedback on ways the ICfL can adjust the program to better address the needs of school libraries in the future. Specifically, the ICfL will review ways to make it easier for awardees to meet spending deadlines. Many school districts have adopted policies requiring titles to be reviewed by parties other than the librarian before purchase. This extra step slowed down the purchasing process for some awardees. Additionally, the time required to select, order, catalog, and process books is easy to underestimate. Many awardees cited time constraints as an obstacle to getting books on the shelves as quickly as they’d like.