



Administrative Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

Date: January 25, 2021
Time: 10:00 am

Location: Attala County Library

A regularly scheduled meeting of the Mid-Mississippi Regional Library System Board of Trustees was held on Monday January 25, 2021 at the Attala County Library. Trustees in attendance were: Rhonda Porter, Winston County (teleconference), Martha Ramzy, Leake County (teleconference), Flora Pilgrim, Holmes County (teleconference) and Terry Jones, Attala County. Also in attendance were staff members: Tammy Bell, System Business Manager; and Josh Haidet, System Executive Director.

CALL TO ORDER...

Rhonda Porter, Board Chair, called the meeting to order.

SETTING THE AGENDA...

Mrs. Porter asked if there were any additions to the agenda. As there were none, the agenda was set.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES. . .

Mrs. Porter asked if there were any additions or revisions to the minutes of the October 12, 2020, November 6, 2020 (called), or December 21, 2020 (called) board meetings. There were none. Martha Ramzy made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting as presented. Flora Pilgrim seconded, and all were in favor.

PUBLIC COMMENTS...

Mrs. Porter asked if there were any public comments. There were none.

REPORTS...

A. FY2020 MMRLS Audit Report: Kenny Dungan, CPA – Watkins, Ward and Stafford, PLLC

Mr. Dungan reviewed the draft audit with the board. After review and discussion, Terry Jones made a motion to accept the draft audit, and Martha Ramzy seconded. All were in favor. Martha Ramzy then voted to approve payment to Watkins, Ward and Stafford for this year's audit services. Flora Pilgrim seconded, and all were in favor.

B. Financial Report - Tammy Bell, MMRLS Business Manager

Martha Ramzy made a motion to approve the financial report, and Flora Pilgrim seconded. All were in favor.

C. Director's Report – Josh Haidet, MMRLS Executive Director

(See attached director's report)

OLD BUSINESS...

A. Board Attorney

Director Josh Haidet reported that the system had yet to find a board attorney, though with current circumstances it had not been made a high priority. He hoped to resume the search soon.

NEW BUSINESS...

A. Ramzy Fund

The Ramzy Endowment Fund is a bequest by Ms. Earline Fudge Ramzy to the Carthage-Leake County Library. Ms. Ramzy requested that the principle (\$60,000) be invested with the interest therefore to be used in supplementing salaries of library personnel. Mr. Haidet reported that, according to the original fund agreement signed in 1995, it is the responsibility of the administrative board to approve any expenditure of the interest gained from the principle of the fund. This year's interest was \$1,030.87. Terry Jones made a motion to disburse the funds, and Flora Pilgrim seconded. All were in favor. Mr. Haidet mentioned that the exact disbursement would now be approved by the endowment board at the next Leake County Advisory Board meeting in February.

B. Overdue Fines

(See attached presentation entitled "Eliminating Overdue Fines.")

Mr. Haidet next proposed to the board the elimination of overdue fines for the Mid-MS Regional Library System. The director mentioned that 11 other public library systems in the State of Mississippi (along with several academic libraries) had already made the change. For FY2019, the last full year that overdue fines were collected, the amount collected in overdue fines made up approximately 1% of the total MMRLS operating budget. Those funds that were collected were being used to pay for programming and supplies at the branch level, two categories where budgetary funds were already being diverted over the past several years. Mr. Haidet added that patrons who lost or damaged items would still need to pay the replacement cost of those items. Patrons with overdue, lost items, or other fines on their account would need to bring their accounts into order before being allowed to check out additional items.

After further review and discussion, Flora Pilgrim made a motion to eliminate the collection and charging of overdue fines for all Mid-MS Regional Library System items. Terry Jones seconded, and all were in favor. Director Haidet stated that he would work on making the relevant policy changes needed to implement this change, and report back to the board in April.

ADJOURNMENT...

Board Chair Rhonda Porter asked if there was any further discussion needed before the meeting was adjourned. As there was none, Terry Jones made a motion to adjourn the meeting, and Martha Ramzy seconded. All were in favor.

NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING:

Monday April 12, 2021 at the Attala County Library.



4/12/21

Josh Haidet, Administrative Board Secretary

Date

WINSTON COUNTY LIBRARY LIBRARIAN'S REPORT TO MMRLS SYSTEM BOARD OF TRUSTEES 1/25/2021

Mrs. Rhonda Porter – Chair; Mrs. Margaret Harris; Mrs. Martha Ramzy; Mrs. Terry Jones; Ms. Flora Pilgrim

All information is for October, November and December 2020:

- CIRCULATION: 5,973 or 1,991/mo.
- ATTENDANCE IN LIBRARY: 2,123 or 708/mo.
Curbside service: 139, or 46/mo.
- PUBLIC ACCESS COMPUTERS: 380 users for a total of 424 hours (for an average of 127 users per month – 141 hours per month)
- PUBLIC RELATIONS:
 - Newspaper Articles - 13
 - Internet Articles – 14
 - Radio Spots – 11
 - Supervisor/Aldermen Contact – 14
 - Home Book Delivery – 106
 - TV Spots – 2
 - Social Media Posts – 20
 - Social Media Views – 4,199
- UPCOMING EVENTS:
 - AARP Free Tax Preparations at our library by appointment only
 - Blood Drive – February 19th





Administrative Board of Trustees Director's Report

Date: January 25, 2021
Time: 10:00 am

Location: Attala County Library

Attala Flood 2021 Edition

- On Monday January 4th, the Attala County Library experienced another flood caused by the same issue (ruptured seal in boiler pipe located in the mechanical room) which caused the flood that occurred in December of 2019. In fact, this was nearly a mirror image of that event.
- Flooding occurred in the computer lab, IT services and marketing offices, as well as the DVD and fiction areas downstairs. There was approximately 5-6 feet of water in the bottom of the elevator shaft as well. The technical services and youth services offices upstairs were flooded, along with the mechanical room. The library was closed Monday January 4th, and reopened January 5th. The staff worked diligently around several messes and industrial fans.
- Servpro was called immediately, and they finished their work on Monday the 11th. Several walls and wall sections (about 8-10 in all) were removed which were not drying correctly. These walls and sections need to be replaced and painted.
- On Tuesday the 12th Attala County Board of Supervisors Chair Tim Pinkard came to tour the damage. He will be working on getting a contractor to come in and repair the walls.
- Also at Attala, two more roof leaks have developed, this time in the new children's area. It has never leaked before in this area.



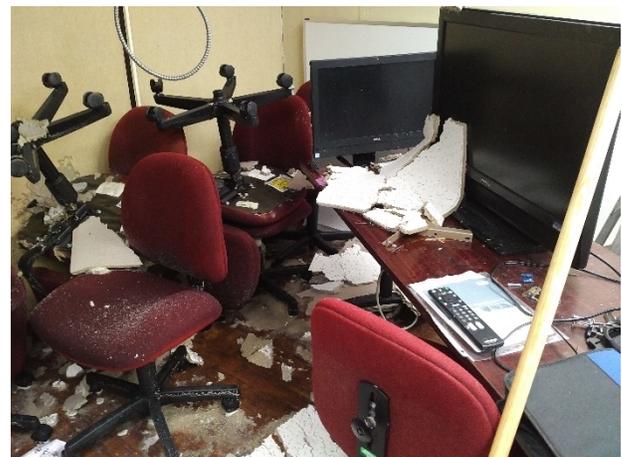
Myriam Gortney retrieves books among the water-logged shelves.

Library flooded

Karen Fioretti

Staff of the Attala County Library are beginning to dread long holiday weekends. A seal on the boiler for the facility blew over the New Year weekend, again flooding significant portions of the building — the exact same problem that occurred over the Thanksgiving holiday in 2019. "It's a mirror image of that event," Mid-Mississippi Regional Library System Director Josh Haidet said. "Water came from the same place and it went into all the same places."

See LIBRARY, Page A2



Attala Shelving

- The order for the new shelving, end caps, and canopy tops for the Attala County Library is proceeding. A representative from library interiors came on Friday the 8th to re-measure and ensure the order was correct. We are in the process of finalizing our color choices before the order is placed.

Carthage-Leake County Library Reset

- Work has begun on the reset of the Carthage-Leake County Library. Computers for that library will be moved towards the rear entrance, and the non-fiction collection will be relocated to the current location of the computers. This will allow for better separation of patrons, staff, and collections, and will eventually allow the stacks to again be browsed at the library.
- An electrician is coming on January 18th while the library is closed for a holiday to move the electrical outlets to where we need them. The library is covering the cost for this work as it is under our \$1,000.00 threshold.
- We are pricing a few shelves and some computer tables which will be needed for the reset.
- Library operations will be moved to the meeting room for about a week while the work is being completed.

Administrative Leave

- Two employees have already been granted administrative leave under our new policy due to COVID-19. These employees were very appreciative that the board established this leave policy.

Collection of Overdue Fines Resumed

- On January 4th MMRLS resumed the collection of overdue fines. Overdue fines for books due during 2020 have been waived or will be waived in the future as those books are returned.

MMRLS Promotional Schedule

- The month of December featured a Holiday Bag giveaway at all MMRLS branch locations, featuring a DIY craft ornament, a free children's book, and a candy cane. We are still gathering the final count, but several hundred bags were given away during the event.
- January is "Beyond Books" month, where we highlight all the items and services that MMRLS offers, beyond books.





Eliminating Overdue Fines

MMRLS Administrative Board Meeting

January 2021



FINES

BOOKS/AUDIO BOOKS:

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| * Charge For Overdue Books | 25 Cents Per Day |
| * Maximum Charge Per Book | \$ 5.00 |
| * Inter/Intra-library Loan Charge For Overdue Books | 25 Cents Per Day |

VIDEOCASSETTES/DVD:

- | | |
|--|----------|
| * Per Day Charge For Overdue Videocassette/DVD | \$ 2.00 |
| * Charge If Videocassette Is Not Rewound | \$ 1.00 |
| * Maximum Charge Per Videocassette/DVD | \$ 10.00 |

MMRLS will never be “Fine Free”

- Many libraries which eliminate overdue fines market the change as “fine free”
- This term is misleading to patrons, staff, local officials and pretty much everyone else
- If overdue fines are eliminated, patrons would still be responsible for fines related to damaged items, and replacement costs for lost items, for example
- We are only talking about the elimination of overdue fines



List of Public Library Systems in Mississippi Which Have Eliminated Overdue Fines (11 total systems)

- Carnegie-Clarksdale
- Covington County
- East MS Regional Library
- Greenwood-Leflore
- Kemper Newton
- Lamar County
- Long Beach
- Madison County
- Starkville-Oktibbeha (MLP Members)
- Tombigbee Regional
- Yalobusha County

Overdue Fine Research

- *Overdue Fines: Advantages, Disadvantages, and How Eliminating Them Can Benefit Public Libraries (April 2020)*
 - By Sabrina Unrein, Syracuse University School of Information Studies
 - <https://ischool.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Overdue-Fines-Advantages-Disadvantages-and-How-Eliminating-Them-Can-Benefit-Public-Libraries.pdf>
- *Fine Free Policies: Results from Published Reports and Data from Library Connection, Inc. Libraries (March 2019)*
 - Prepared By Sam Cook, Systems Librarian for Public Services, Library Connection, Inc. – Windsor, CT
 - https://libraryconnection.info/documents/fine_free_policies_report_SC-2019-10-15.pdf
- Mississippi Library Commission “Fine Free Survey” released December 2020

Library Overdue Fines

General Arguments in Favor of Keeping Fines

- Argument #1: Fines ensure that materials are returned on time

- This is the best and most obvious argument for maintaining overdue fines
- However, there is not much data to support this argument
- And in fact, there are several examples of libraries which saw an *increase* in returned books once overdue fines were eliminated:
 - Chicago Public Library saw a 240% increase in returned books in the month they eliminated fines
 - Salt Lake City Public Library saw late returns drop from 9% to 4% after fines were eliminated
 - High Plains Library District in Colorado saw and increase in circulation, and reported 95% of items were returned within one week of their original due date

Library Overdue Fines

General Arguments in Favor of Keeping Fines

- Argument #1: Fines ensure that materials are returned on time
 - Research also suggests that fines can discourage people from returning materials at all (of course because they don't want to pay it), as they in essence choose instead to just stop visiting the library altogether
 - In our library system, if you owe anything more than a penny, you can't checkout any items from the library

MMRLS Overdues

- As you may recall, MMRLS recently “forgave” about \$180,000 in fines accumulated prior to 2017
- There were 6,755 items associated with these fines which were marked as “lost”
- \$177,079.36 of what was waived were replacement costs for those items, and an additional \$52,109.27 were overdue fines
- Even after that purge of older fines, MMRLS still has 2,636 lost items, and \$14,730.15 in overdue fines remaining
- As of this writing, MMRLS has 3,307 items that are checked out in total (not overdue), as well as 1,062 items marked as overdue which are currently accumulating fines

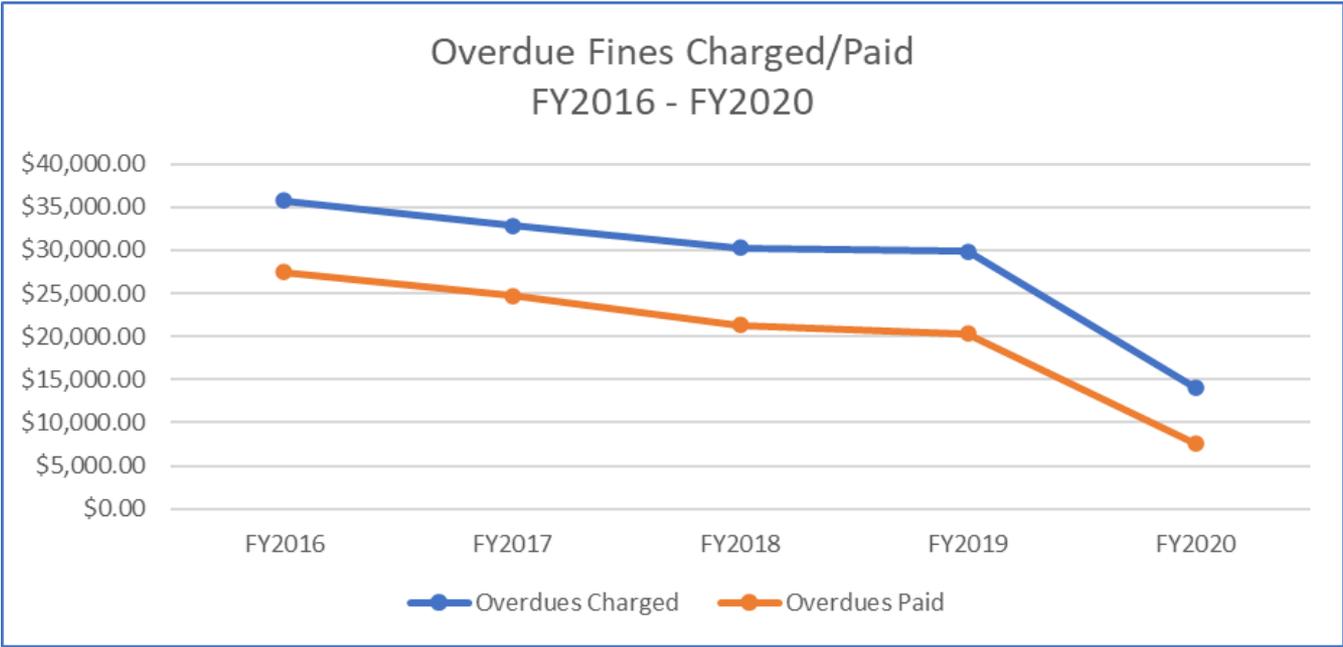
Library Overdue Fines

General Arguments in Favor of Keeping Fines

- Argument #2: Fines supplement the library's budget
 - MMRLS libraries use the vast majority of fine money to fund programming
 - Fines are also used to purchase cleaning supplies and other supplies that are needed at the branch level
 - So how much money are we talking about?

MMRLS Overdue Fines FY2016 – FY2020

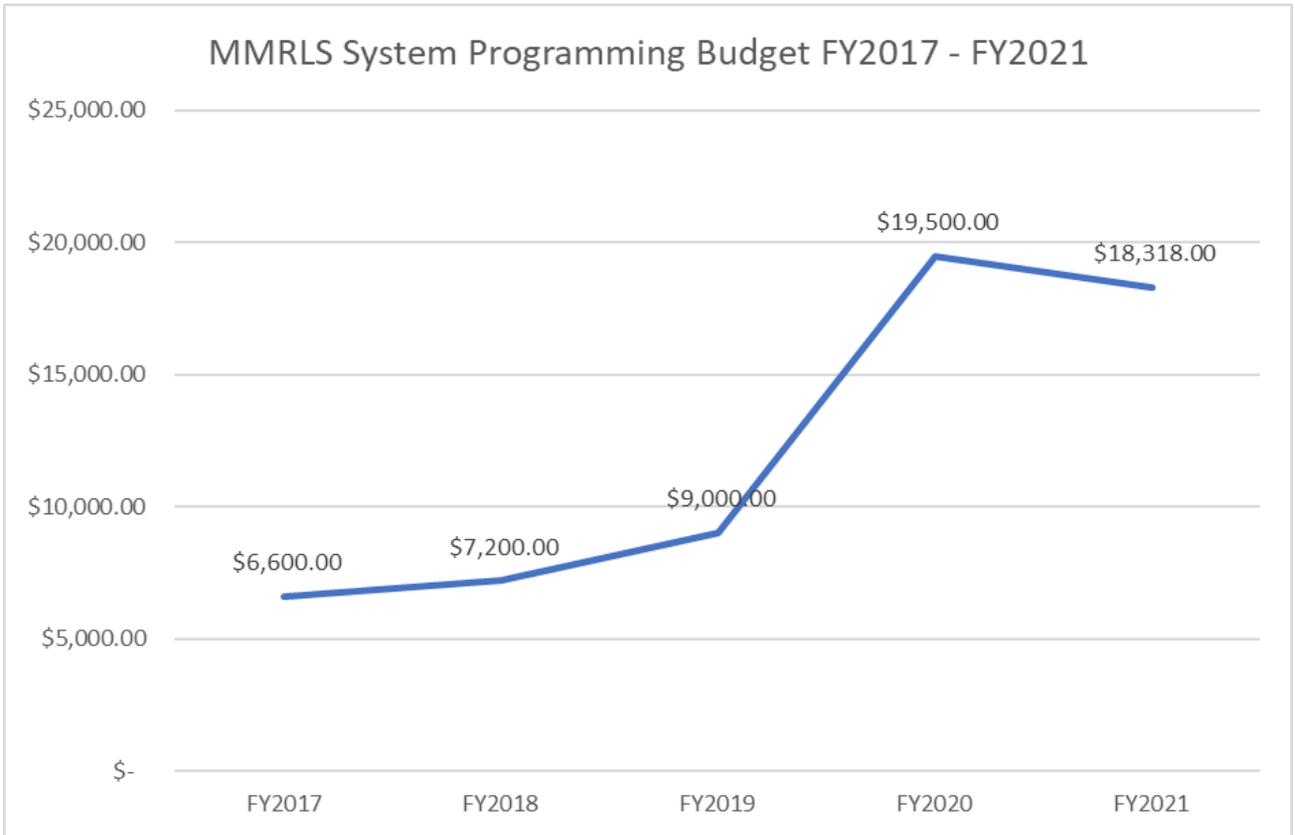
Fiscal Year	Overdues Charged	Overdues Paid
FY2016	\$35,738.50	\$27,433.80
FY2017	\$32,871.00	\$24,751.90
FY2018	\$30,281.00	\$21,312.70
FY2019	\$29,858.75	\$20,288.98
FY2020	\$14,019.40	\$7,506.70



Library Overdue Fines

General Arguments in Favor of Keeping Fines

- Argument #2: Fines supplement the library's budget
 - In FY2019, the overdue fine amount that was brought in (\$20,288.98) represented just 1% of the library system's overall operating budget
 - The number was also 1% in FY2018, and 1.3% in FY2017
 - We are now supplementing library programming budgets, and are spending more this year for supplies than ever before. After COVID-19, those funds can also be disbursed to the branch level



FY2017	\$ 6,600.00
FY2018	\$ 7,200.00
FY2019	\$ 9,000.00
FY2020	\$ 19,500.00
FY2021	\$ 18,318.00

Note: Programming funds were moved to the system level for FY21

Library Overdue Fines

General Arguments in Favor of Keeping Fines

- Argument #3: Fines teach patrons to be “civically responsible.”
 - In other words, fines serve as a reminder to patrons that there are consequences for bringing something back late. Without them, what incentive do patrons have to bring them back on time?
 - “A key misunderstanding in the discussion of eliminating (overdue) fines is the idea that it will eliminate all patron responsibility in kind.”
 - S.Unrein, *Overdue Fines: Advantages, Disadvantages, and How Eliminating Them Can Benefit Public Libraries* (April 2020)

Library Overdue Fines

General Arguments in Favor of Keeping Fines

- Argument #3: Fines teach patrons to be “civically responsible.”
 - If overdue fines are eliminated, MMRLS patrons who do not bring an item back within a certain time period, say 30 days, will be charged the replacement cost of that item, and will not be able to check out other items until the bill is paid or the item is returned
 - Though overdue fees would not be charged, a patron with an overdue book on their account, again, would not be able to check out additional items until the book is returned or renewed
 - MMRLS generally operated in this manner from June to December of 2020

Library Overdue Fines

General Arguments in Favor of Eliminating Fines

- Argument #1: There is a general lack of evidence that overdue fines work the way we intend
- Again, MMRLS recently waived fines on 6,755 lost items and still currently has **2,636** items which are marked as “lost,” **1,062** overdue items, and **2,186** patrons who are blocked for bills on their account
- So while we aren’t sure that fines work to motivate patrons to bring a book back, we can see evidence that under our current structure we are losing both patrons (who are blocked because of fines) and materials

Library Overdue Fines

General Arguments in Favor of Eliminating Fines

- Argument #1: There is a general lack of evidence that overdue fines work the way we intend
- The most recent studies conducted outside our system to prove the effectiveness of fines are from 1983 (*Hansel, P. (1983) Hard facts about overdues. Library Journal, 108(4), 350.*)
- Study stated that “libraries that don’t charge fines tend to get their books back more slowly, but ultimately get more of them back...” But also “the higher the daily fine, the faster the books come back.”
- Obviously, the way that public libraries operate have changed drastically since 1983, however even in those studies the authors did not take a “concrete stance on the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of library fines,” as we see from the above contradictory statements

Library Overdue Fines

General Arguments in Favor of Eliminating Fines

- Argument #2: Fines Disproportionality Affect Lower-Income Patrons
 - A fine may seem small to some, but for others it may be difficult to pay, or motivation enough to just keep the item and stop using the library
 - Many of our patrons are lower-income individuals or families who may not be able to purchase books, meaning that once these individuals are blocked from using the library, they may no longer have access to books at all
 - Obviously we can't solve this problem completely, as patrons would still be blocked for lost or damaged books
 - However, it seems counterproductive to our mission to block a patron for a fine after we have gotten the item back

Library Overdue Fines

General Arguments in Favor of Eliminating Fines

- Argument #3: Eliminating Fines may improve circulation
- Patrons who are no longer afraid of accumulating large fines may decide to check out more books. Similarly, patrons who fines have been forgiven may decide to give the library another try
- The High Plains Library District in Colorado saw increased circulation six months after making the change
- The Salt Lake City Library experienced an 11% increase in the number of users, and a 14% increase in circulation the year after they eliminated fines

Library Overdue Fines

General Arguments in Favor of Eliminating Fines

- Argument #4: Eliminating Fines may encourage patrons to bring back their overdue materials
 - This one is mostly common sense, if you are told you can bring back an item and owe nothing, even after a year, you would be more inclined to do so in order to regain access to the library than you would if you had to pay \$10, or the replacement cost of the item

Library Overdue Fines

General Arguments in Favor of Eliminating Fines

- Argument #5: Improved Patron/Staff Relationships
- Interactions/confrontations over late fees are uncomfortable for both patrons and staff. Confrontations sometimes occur for very small amounts like .10 or .25 cents
- Eliminating these interactions will not only help staff morale, but it will also free up staff to do other work (the phrase “stop spending dollars to collect dimes” was mentioned by one library director where late fines had been eliminated)
- Historically, many MMRLS policies have been less than user-friendly, often valuing materials over patrons
- Eliminating overdue fines may help continue to change the public perception of the library system in our communities

Conclusions - S.Unrein, *Overdue Fines: Advantages, Disadvantages, and How Eliminating Them Can Benefit Public Libraries* (April 2020)

- An extensive survey was completed by 15 different library systems in 12 states which eliminated fines from 2015 - 2019
- Two-thirds of libraries reported an increase in the total number of items borrowed in the year following the change
- 40% reported an increase in the total number of library visits
- 33% saw an increase in the number of new patrons
- Top Motivations for Eliminating Fines
 - Remove Barriers to Access
 - Improve Staff Morale
 - Improve Patron Relationships
 - Free Up Staff to Do Work
 - The Total Amount Collected from Fines Was Small

In Summary: Potential Disadvantages of Eliminating Overdue Fines

- Loss of revenue (again, around 1% of our total budget, but still, a loss)
- Three libraries of the 15 surveyed reported slightly longer hold times for materials
- Confusion over the term “fine-free” (which we would avoid altogether)
- Confusion over MLP items for those libraries that still charge fines
- More traditional staff, patrons, and even funding authorities may view the change negatively

In Summary: Potential Benefits of Eliminating Overdue Fines

- Policies are better aligned with the library's mission to provide equal access to information
- Staff able to focus more on providing excellent customer service, and less on negative interactions around fines
- Increase in returned items, even if they are late (because we value patrons more than materials)
- Good PR for the library system, helping to change negative perceptions of the library
- Less concern about borrowing limits
- Reduction in blocked patrons
- Increased circulation and visits over time