When Closed Doors Aren't Closed:
Pandemic OverDrive Digital Collection Research Project

Final Report
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Executive Summary

What happens when a library's physical doors are closed to the public? The primary goal of this project was to answer this question through a focus on one specific resource: digital collection holdings. The research design for this project was created to determine any correlations between the COVID-19 health pandemic and digital collection usage through two specific state-wide case study examples – the Wisconsin Public Library Consortium (WPLC) and the Wisconsin Schools Digital Library Consortium (WSDLC). The findings in this report should be viewed as preliminary research into the value of leveraging digital collections as a resource during both unprecedented and unexpected events that lead to wide-spread business and organizational closures and other social distancing requirements. However, even as preliminary research, key takeaways can be used in future planning and advocacy efforts around the value of digital collection holdings in a variety of contexts from pleasure reading when spending increased time at home to supporting transitions to remote learning for K-12 students during a pandemic. Additional considerations and recommendations for future research are included at the end of this report.

The key overarching finding is that usage of digital collections increased on every metric analyzed for this report – checkouts, new and unique users, as well as holds. While the pandemic continues as of the completion of this project in December 2020, analysis of data from both WPLC and WSDLC showcased a demonstrable correlation between both library and school closures and digital collection metrics. Highlights from the analysis included the following:

- **Checkouts increased** notably for both WPLC and WSDLC. For WSDLC, checkouts increased by 278% when comparing September 2019 to September 2020.
- **New user enrollments increased** for both WPLC and WSDLC. For WPLC, when comparing the early 2020 low in February to the high in April, there was a 113% increase in monthly new users. For WSDLC, there was an increase of 276% in September 2020 when compared to the previous high in April 2020.
- **Unique users increased** for both WPLC and WSDLC and have remained elevated into December 2020.
- **Patrons were more engaged** with the collections and checked out a higher number of items on average after the pandemic began in March 2020.
- **Holds increased** along with the increase in checkouts; however, increased funding and strategic spending to decrease holds during the pandemic appeared to be successful and helped offset this effect.
- Most new users (66%) indicated **the COVID-19 pandemic was a factor in their decision to sign up** for and access the WPLC collection; the majority of new users indicated they heard about the collection either from library staff or through word of mouth.
- WPLC serves the general population in Wisconsin with a public library card while WSDLC specifically serves K-12 students from participating schools/school districts. This project highlighted that each collection was impacted in unique ways based on these two audiences. **WPLC users were largely accessing the collection for themselves for pleasure while WSDLC teachers and staff leveraged the collection mainly in support of literacy and student learning.** For WSDLC, school librarians and media specialists play an important role in supporting school faculty, staff, and students.
- **Seasonal fluctuations in digital collections vary with the primary patron audience for the collection**. While the WPLC's largest impacts came in April and May 2020, WSDLC did not see increases until the start of the 2020-2021 school year in September 2020.
- Most of these **metrics remain elevated** over time indicating a lasting impact even as restrictions loosen.

Pandemic OverDrive Digital Collection Research Project

The Project

The COVID-19 outbreak had unprecedented impacts on people's lives and led to sudden and unexpected closures of many public facilities including schools, cultural institutions, as well as many other businesses in March 2020. Libraries were not exempt from closure and many turned to their electronic collections to fill needs in their communities. WiLS partnered with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), the Wisconsin Public Library Consortium (WPLC), and the Wisconsin Schools Digital Library Consortium (WSDLC) to assess the impact of a variety of public closures on digital collection usage on the OverDrive platform. OverDrive is a digital reading platform used by over 50,000 libraries and schools around the world and is the host for both WPLC's and WSDLC's digital libraries. This project has utilized a mixed-method research design pairing OverDrive data with a patron survey.

WPLC and WSDLC were selected as two state-wide case studies for this project. WPLC and WSDLC serve two distinct communities. WPLC's digital library – named Wisconsin's Digital Library – services anyone in Wisconsin with a public library card while WSDLC's services K-12 students from participating Wisconsin schools, therefore their data was analyzed separately and in a manner reflective of their unique patrons. Analysis immediately revealed that both collections were impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak and the associated closures, but the impacts occurred in different ways for each collection. Part 1 of this report focuses on WPLC while Part 2 highlights impacts solely on WSDLC. These findings provide a preliminary look at the relationship between a health pandemic and digital collections, indicating a correlation between the two. While the pandemic continues to impact and shape physical services, the findings from this report indicate that digital services like eBook and audiobook collections are a robust avenue for continuing to serve the community.

It is of important note, however, that these findings should be viewed through a preliminary lens; it is unknown what the future impacts of an event like the COVID-19 health pandemic will have long term. Initial findings show that digital collections are impacted in significant ways by closures and stay-at-home orders, showcasing that libraries provide valuable services that go well beyond their physical building(s) and material collections. While these two consortia serve diverse representation – demographically and geographically – from across the entire state, this report functions as an avenue for providing data on what occurred in support of advocacy and future planning. Additional research in the future will provide further nuance about the digital collection holdings as a resource and service.

This report and the content therein were completed by WiLS and commissioned by Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction (DPI) in support of the work of both WPLC and WSDLC. For additional information:

- *On the report, please contact Kim Kiesewetter, Data Analyst with WiLS – kim@wils.org*
- *On the WPLC, please visit www.wplc.info*
- *On the WSDLC, please visit www.wsdlc.org*

Part 1: The WPLC's Wisconsin's Digital Library Data

The first consortium included in this project as a case study was the Wisconsin Public Library Consortium (WPLC). WPLC was formed in 2001 as an organization in Wisconsin where library systems could partner on projects that move libraries forward through experimentation and research and development (R&D). The main and most popular service the consortium has developed is the Wisconsin's Digital Library, which is available to all Wisconsin residents with a public library card. The digital library provides access for library patrons to digital audio and eBooks as well as other e-content on a wide range of subjects through the digital platform, OverDrive. In 2020, over 235,000 people accessed Wisconsin's Digital Library as users at least once with approximately 75,000 of that number being new users to the collection.
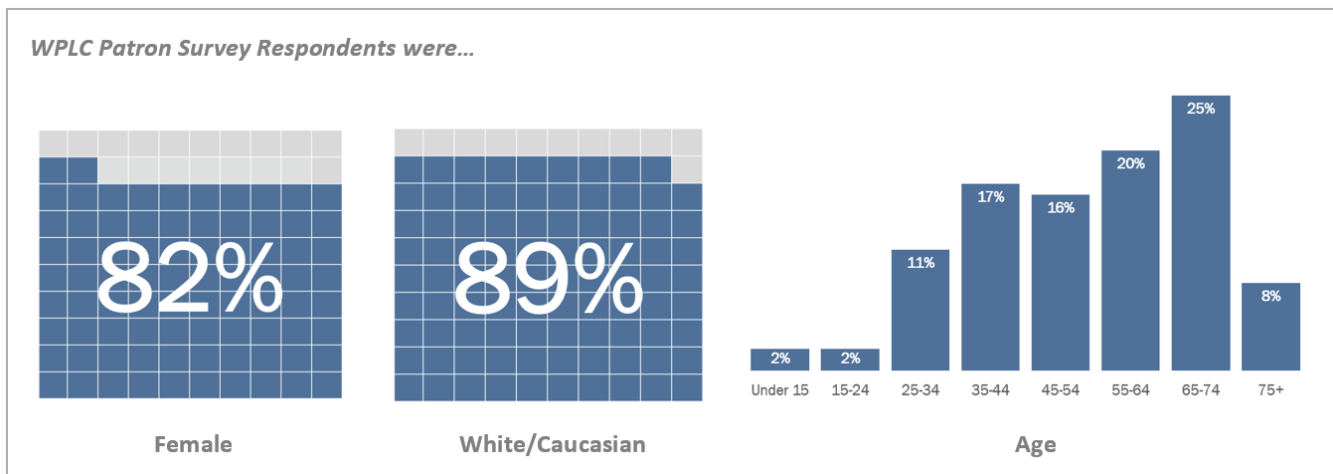
Wisconsin's Digital Library data was analyzed through a two-pronged approach:

1. OverDrive data, including data on metrics such as checkouts and users, and
2. A patron survey to the collection's users.

OverDrive data was analyzed for two different time frames to create a differentiation between normal yearly fluctuations and any potential impacts due specifically to COVID-19 and subsequent building and/or business closures. Yearly fluctuations were documented by examining data for a two-year period spanning 2018 to 2020. COVID-19 impacts were examined by looking at "pandemic period" data for specifically February 1, 2020 through November 30, 2020.

It is important to note that at the time of this report, the COVID-19 pandemic continues with increases in positive cases and the potential for continued or increased restrictions. It is possible the continuation of this pandemic may result in additional and unexpected changes that could impact digital collection usage. The initial findings in this report should be viewed as preliminary and used to inform future considerations about the ways in which libraries can leverage digital collection holdings during unexpected events such as a health pandemic or other events which limit patrons' access to library's physical spaces and collections; however, this data should not be viewed as predictive of what all digital collections experienced. There is also the potential for other variables to have influenced these findings beyond solely library and other facility closures related to the health pandemic.

The WPLC Patron Survey was conducted in November 2020 and made available to Wisconsin's Digital Library users through a link on the website, as well as additional sharing out through participating WPLC libraries via social media. Almost 3,500 people responded to the survey, 16% of which were new users who indicated accessing the collection for the first time in the previous year. Most survey respondents were female, White/Caucasian, and age 55 or older. It is unclear if this is due to a survey selection bias or an inherent skew in who uses the Wisconsin's Digital Library collection since OverDrive does not collect and share patron demographic data.

WPLC Patron Survey Respondents were...

82% Female

89% White/Caucasian

Age: Under 15: 2%, 15-24: 2%, 25-34: 11%, 35-44: 17%, 45-54: 16%, 55-64: 20%, 65-74: 25%, 75+: 8%
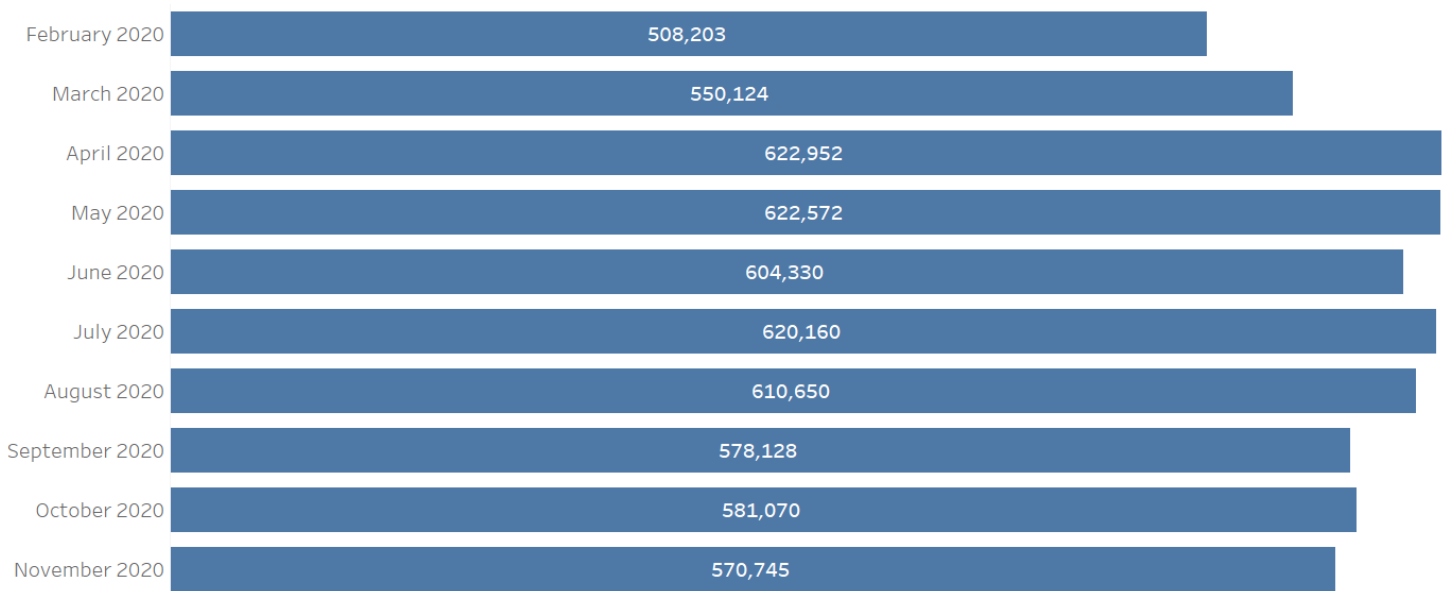
Zip code data provided by WPLC patrons displayed user representation from across the state of Wisconsin. The top five most represented zip codes from the WPLC Patron Survey were: 53711, 53704, 53705, 53719, and 53188 showcasing that the most concentrated number of users come from the Madison and Waukesha areas.
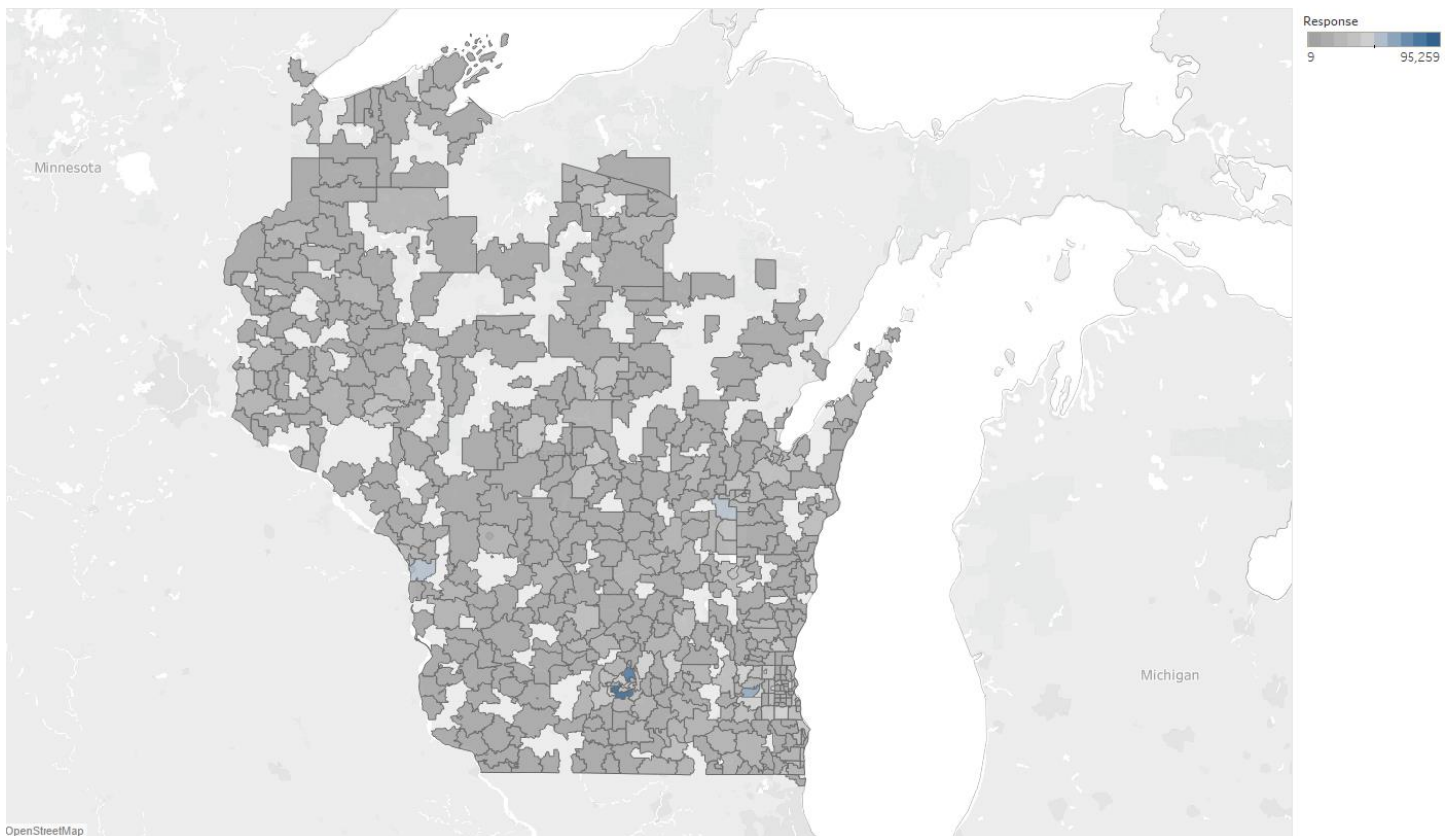
WPLC Checkouts

On March 25, 2020, a "Safer at Home" order was put into effect in Wisconsin. This ordered stipulated that "all individuals present within the State of Wisconsin are to stay at home or at their place of residence" with some exceptions for activities deemed essential as well as some governmental functions. This order meant that public libraries and both public and private K-12 schools were closed, barring access to essentially all physical library spaces. Almost immediately, the WPLC collection saw a significant increase in checkouts. When examining February through November 2020, there was a 23% increase in checkouts between a low in February and a high in April. While checkouts have decreased from the high in April, they have remained elevated as of November 2020 when compared to pre-pandemic data.

Monthly WPLC Checkouts – Pandemic Period

| Month	Checkouts
February 2020	508,203
March 2020	550,124
April 2020	622,952
May 2020	622,572
June 2020	604,330
July 2020	620,160
August 2020	610,650
September 2020	578,128
October 2020	581,070
November 2020	570,745

To ensure this increase was not part of a regular, yearly cycle in the collection, a two-year trend in monthly checkouts was calculated. While this trend indicates some level of normal fluctuation from month to month, there was a notable upward tick in checkouts beginning in March 2020 while Fall 2020 levels remained higher than prior to the pandemic. This trend indicated a correlation between the COVID-19 pandemic and digital collection checkouts that has persisted even as businesses began to open back up. (*Note: The y-axis has been adjusted on this graph to make visualizing the trend easier.*)

Monthly WPLC Checkouts – Two-Year Trend

As of November 2020, the WPLC collection was composed of 95,386 titles and 277,599 copies. Most of the collection is composed of eBooks and audiobooks with a small holding of videos.

200,886

eBook Copies

75,751

Audiobook Copies
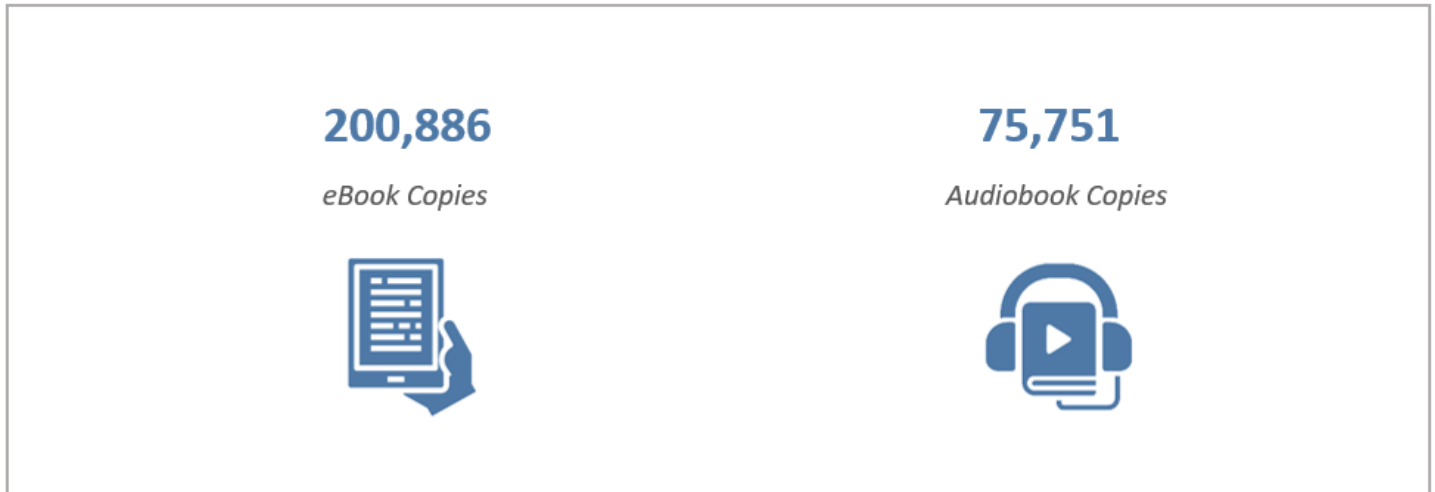
There has been a consistently higher demand for eBooks than other digital formats throughout the life of the WPLC digital collection. However, the pandemic led to notably higher circulation of eBooks in comparison to audiobooks which highlighted that much of the increase in checkouts from March 2020 forward came from the eBook collection. This trend was reinforced in the WPLC Patron Survey. Both new and existing users indicated a preference for eBooks over audiobooks – 60% of new users indicated they preferred eBooks while 55% of legacy users reported the same preference.

Weekly eBook versus Audiobook Checkouts Trend – Pandemic Period
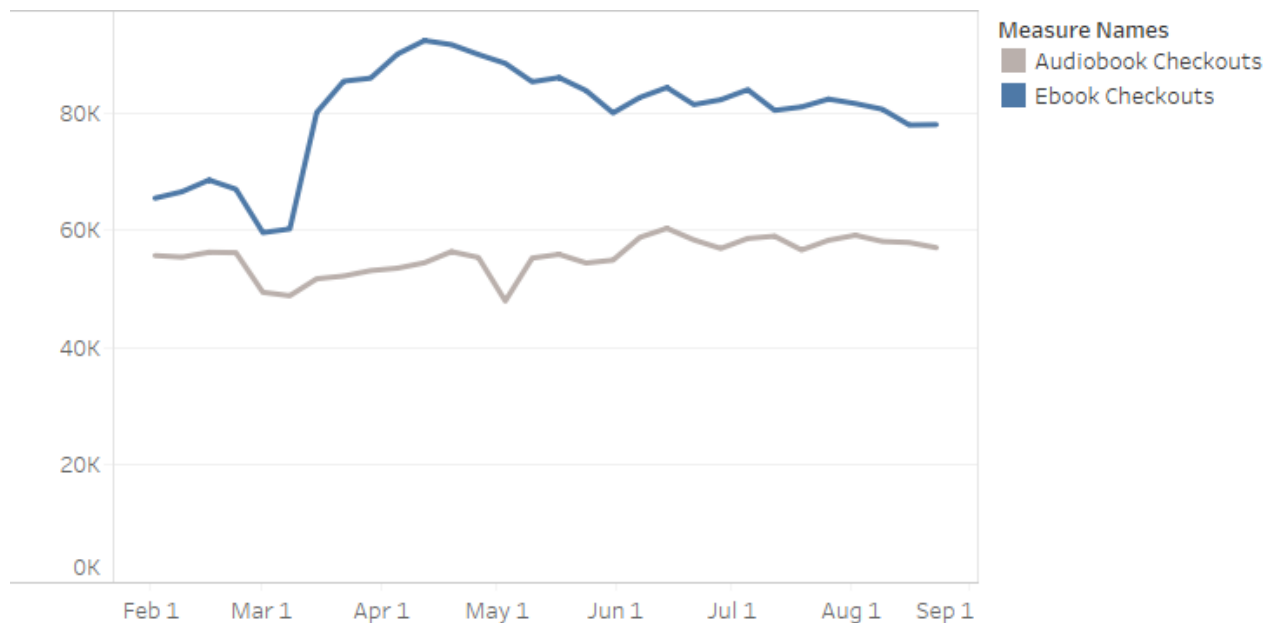
97% of WPLC Patron Survey respondents indicated that they accessed the collection for personal enjoyment rather than other reasons like academic research or professional work. While anecdotal in nature, patron comments on this question indicated that the high hold times made the collection more appropriate for pleasure versus more time-sensitive academic or professional work. It does appear that what types of pleasure reading patrons engaged in is impacted by outside events like the COVID-19 pandemic.

The WPLC collection includes items from over 130 subject areas ranging from general fiction to psychology, romance, and suspense. While most subjects saw an increase in checkouts that coincided with the Safer at Home order in March 2020, there were unique trends by subject throughout the pandemic period. The following chart shows, out of the top twenty

most checked-out subjects, the three subjects with the greatest increases and the three subjects with the greatest decreases in checkouts when compared to the previous month. (*Note: There were no subjects with a decrease in April 2020 so the subjects with the lowest increase were included for that month*.) The subjects listed in the table below were the most impacted either positively or negatively.
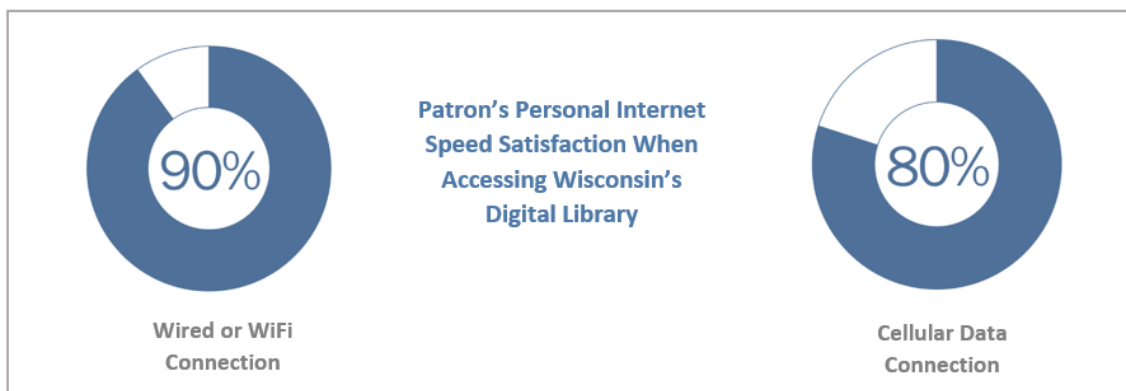
MONTH	SUBJECT	PERCENT INCREASE/DECREASE
MARCH 2020	Juvenile Fiction	+21%
	Juvenile Literature	+21%
	Sociology	+19%
	Nonfiction	-2%
	Christian Fiction	-3%
	Self-improvement	-12%
APRIL 2020	Juvenile Literature	+42%
	Juvenile Fiction	+31%
	Young Adult Literature	+13%
	Nonfiction	+6%
	Sociology	+4%
	Self-improvement	+1%
MAY 2020	Literature	+8%
	History	+5%
	Historical Fiction	+3%
	Sociology	-14%
	Juvenile Fiction	-15%
	Juvenile Literature	-23%
JUNE 2020	Sociology*	+52%*
	Self-improvement	+20%
	Nonfiction	+7%
	Suspense	-7%
	Juvenile Literature	-7%
	Christian Fiction	-7%
JULY 2020	Biography/Autobiography	+7%
	Humor (Fiction)	+5%
	Christian Fiction	+5%
	Juvenile Fiction	-1%
	Erotic Literature	-4%
	Juvenile Literature	-5%
AUGUST 2020	Historical Fiction	+6%
	Mystery	+3%
	Thriller	+2%
	Self-improvement	-11%
	Young Adult Literature	-12%
	Sociology	-25%

While not the focus of this report, anti-racism and social justice protests in the US began in late May 2020 following the viral video of the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020. It appears that this event may have led to the increase in sociology checkouts as many of WPLC's titles on this topic fall into that subject, some of which were featured on the landing page for the Wisconsin's Digital Library in June 2020. While anecdotal, this data point highlights the potential that current events paired with strategic showcasing on a digital reading platform landing page can lead to higher checkouts.

A final consideration with checkouts was how people accessed the collection. WPLC's collection has been available on multiple platforms: the OverDrive app, the OverDrive website (accessed via a web browser), Libby (OverDrive's preferred app for borrowing and reading items from the collection), as well as through local library catalogs. The majority of respondents (62%) reported that they accessed Wisconsin's Digital Library through the OverDrive app, however, there were notable differences when collection access was broken out by new and legacy users. When compared to legacy users, new users were more likely to use Libby, the OverDrive website, and local library catalogs. It is of note that the WPLC Patron Survey was not linked to on Libby so that may have contributed to a selection bias in respondents' preferred avenue for accessing the collection.

	New Users	Legacy Users
OverDrive App	49%	65%
Libby	30%	23%
OverDrive Website URL	33%	28%
Local Library Catalog	13%	8%
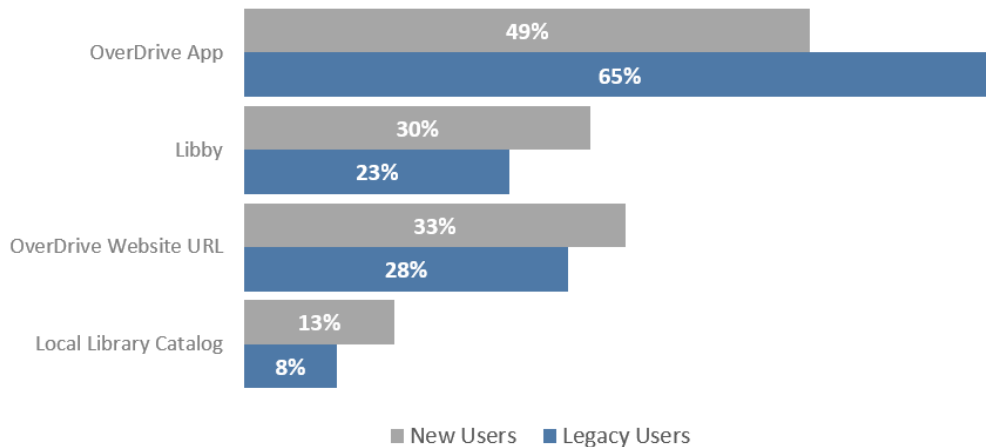
Since Wisconsin's Digital Library is a digital collection, community internet access was also important to account for since a patron's experience with the collection could be impacted based upon internet speed and reliability. Most respondents to the WPLC Patron Survey (90%) accessed the collection through either a wired or WiFi connection such as a personal home or work internet connection. Those who accessed the collection through cellular network data reported lower satisfaction with their internet speed when compared to those using WiFi or a wired connection. Due to the potential for selection bias in the WPLC Patron Survey which skewed toward users over the age of 55, it is possible that a greater portion of WPLC patrons access the collection via cellular data based upon findings from the Pew Research Center that indicated "reliance on smartphones for online access is especially common among younger adults, non-whites, and lower-income Americans."

Patron's Personal Internet Speed Satisfaction When Accessing Wisconsin's Digital Library

90% — Wired or WiFi Connection
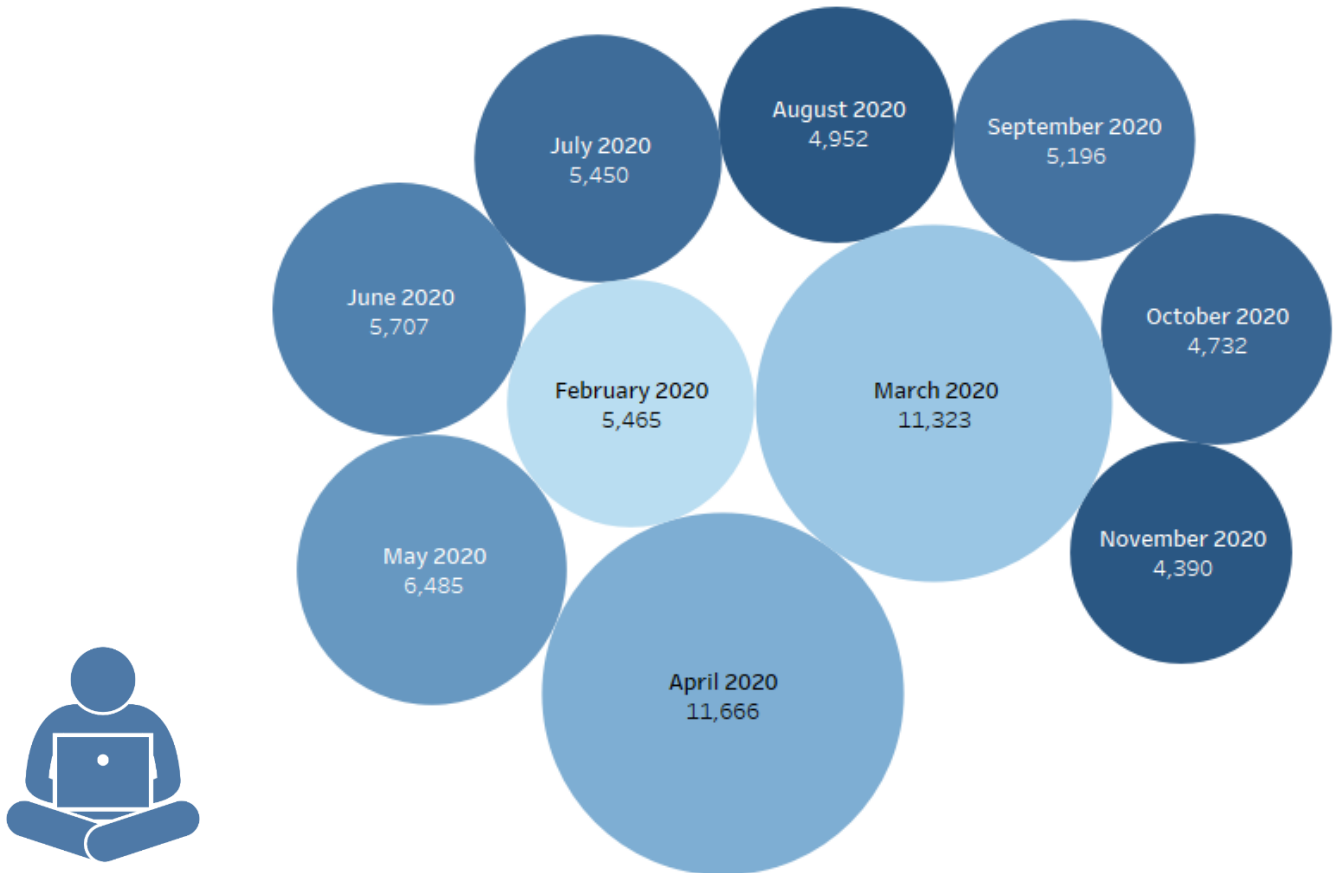
80% — Cellular Data Connection

With the increase in checkouts in mind, the next piece of data to consider was: were existing users checking out more items from the collection during the pandemic, were new users signing up at a higher rate and contributing to the higher number of checkouts, or was it a combination of multiple factors?

WPLC Users

Like checkouts, the number of new users increased notably beginning in March 2020. While checkouts remained higher than pre-pandemic levels, as of September 2020 new user registration appeared to have returned to levels comparable to pre-COVID-19.

Monthly New WPLC Users – Pandemic Period

July 2020
5,450

August 2020
4,952

September 2020
5,196

June 2020
5,707

February 2020
5,465

March 2020
11,323

October 2020
4,732

May 2020
6,485

November 2020
4,390

April 2020
11,666

Looking at data for the previous two years, the pandemic led to a dramatic increase in new users to the WPLC digital collection. When comparing the early 2020 low of 5,465 new users in February to the high of 11,666 in April, there was a 113% increase in new users. Since May, there was a decline of new users to levels like before the pandemic and more in line with the general yearly trend prior to the Safer at Home order. This data indicated that unexpected closures drive new users to digital collections initially, but that this surge is temporary.

66%

of New Users joined because of COVID-19

New user data was further examined through the WPLC Patron Survey. Of the over 500 new users who responded to the survey, 66% indicated that they accessed the collection for the first time because of library and/or other facility closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of these users indicated they discovered Wisconsin's Digital Library through their physical library's electronic communications (56%) or via word of mouth (33%). The responses to this question indicate that physical libraries – more specifically library staff – are key drivers to getting new users onto and accessing the Wisconsin's Digital Library collection.

Monthly New Users – Two-Year Trend
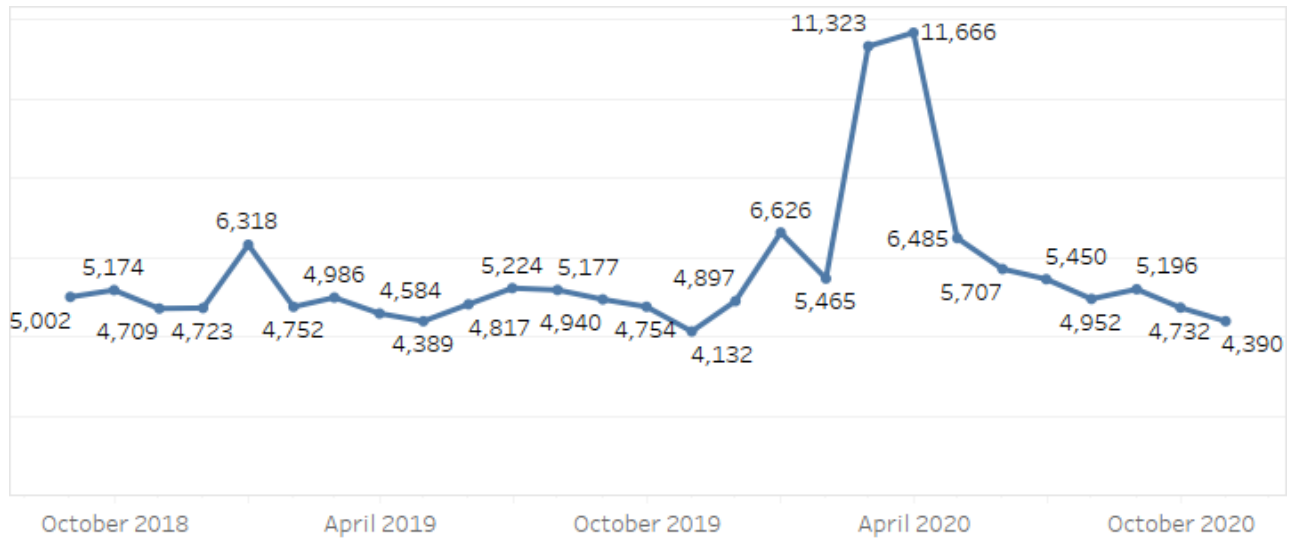
In addition to new users, OverDrive also tracks "unique users." Unique users are the distinct count of people accessing OverDrive during any given period – in other words, it only counts the user once even if they check out multiple items for the specified date(s). During the pandemic, the number of unique users also increased. When comparing monthly unique users in February 2020 to the high in April 2020, unique users increased by 15%. While this increase is more modest than the increase in new users, this impact appears to be more sustainable over time with the number of unique users in Fall 2020 remaining elevated when compared to pre-pandemic data.

Monthly Unique Users – Pandemic Period
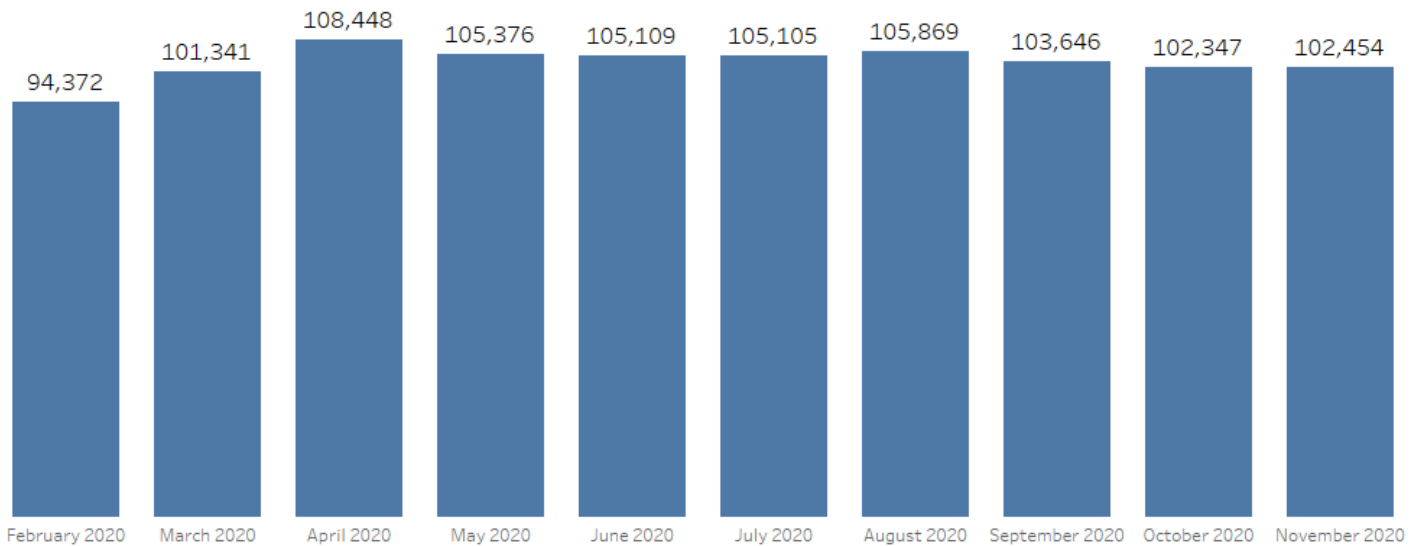
When examining the two-year trend for unique users, there was a gradual increase over time with an accelerated uptick coinciding with the pandemic. Unlike new users, the number of unique users remained elevated after April when compared with pre-pandemic usage.

Monthly Unique Users – Two-Year Trend
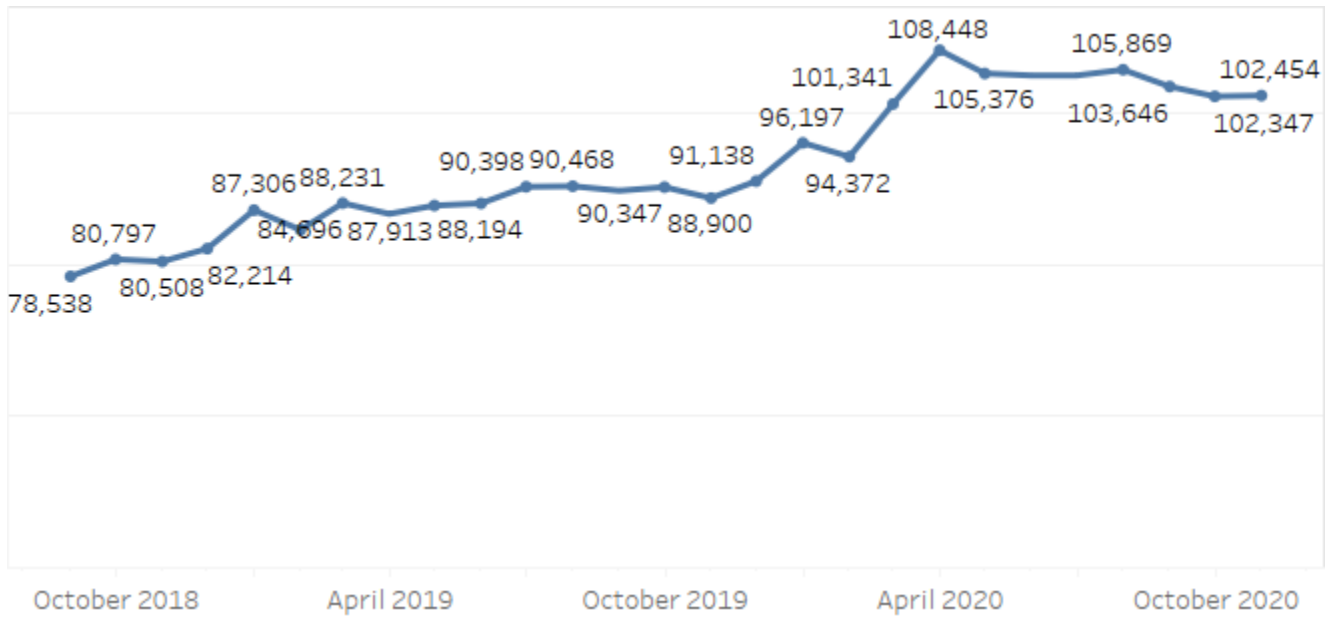
Both new and unique user data highlighted that there was a demonstrable increase in the number of users accessing the WPLC digital collection – this increase of users appeared to be a notable factor contributing to the increase in checkouts. To determine if the pandemic led users to check out more materials, monthly circulations numbers were compared to the number of unique users.

Between March and April 2020, the average number of checkouts per unique user increased from 5.4 to a high of 5.9 in May and July. This indicates that individual users of the WPLC collection were checking out an increased number of items from the collection following the Stay at Home order. As of Fall 2020, the average number of checkouts remained elevated.

Average Number of Monthly Checkouts per Unique User – Pandemic Period
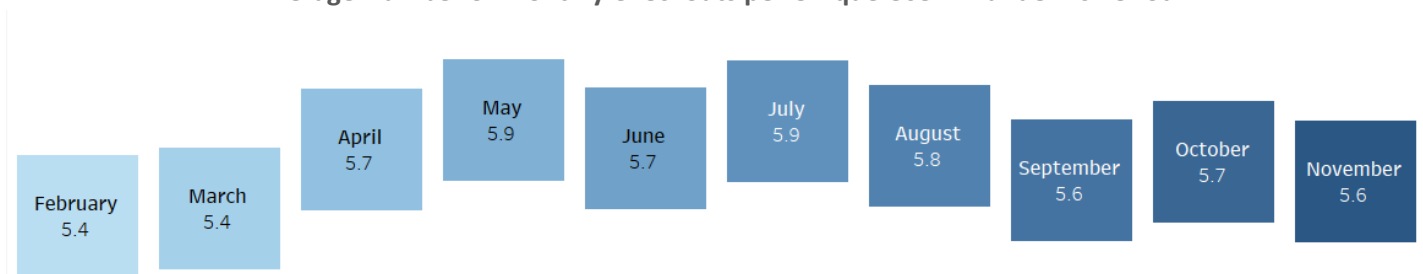

This increase in average number of monthly checkouts was further examined through the WPLC Patron Survey in which respondents were asked to self-report if their usage of the collection increased, decreased, or stayed about the same due to the COVID-19 health pandemic. 35% of existing users indicated their use increased while 62% indicated their use stayed about the same. Only 2% of users believed their usage had decreased.

The WPLC collection is a high circulation collection – 58% of the collection is typically checked out at any given time leading to a high number of holds for the collection. To fully understand the impact of the pandemic and associated library closures, it is important to consider the impact of holds on circulation and user experience.

WPLC Holds

As of December 2020, the current average wait time for all holds was 37 days. While the number of monthly holds did increase 56% from February 2020 to April 2020, the number of total monthly holds decreased from a high of 358,450 to 274,243. This may be due, in part, to an investment of significant funding from DPI made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, LS-00-19-0050-19, and strategic spending on curated titles by WPLC Project Managers and Selection Committee Members.

**Monthly Holds and Checkouts – Pandemic Period**
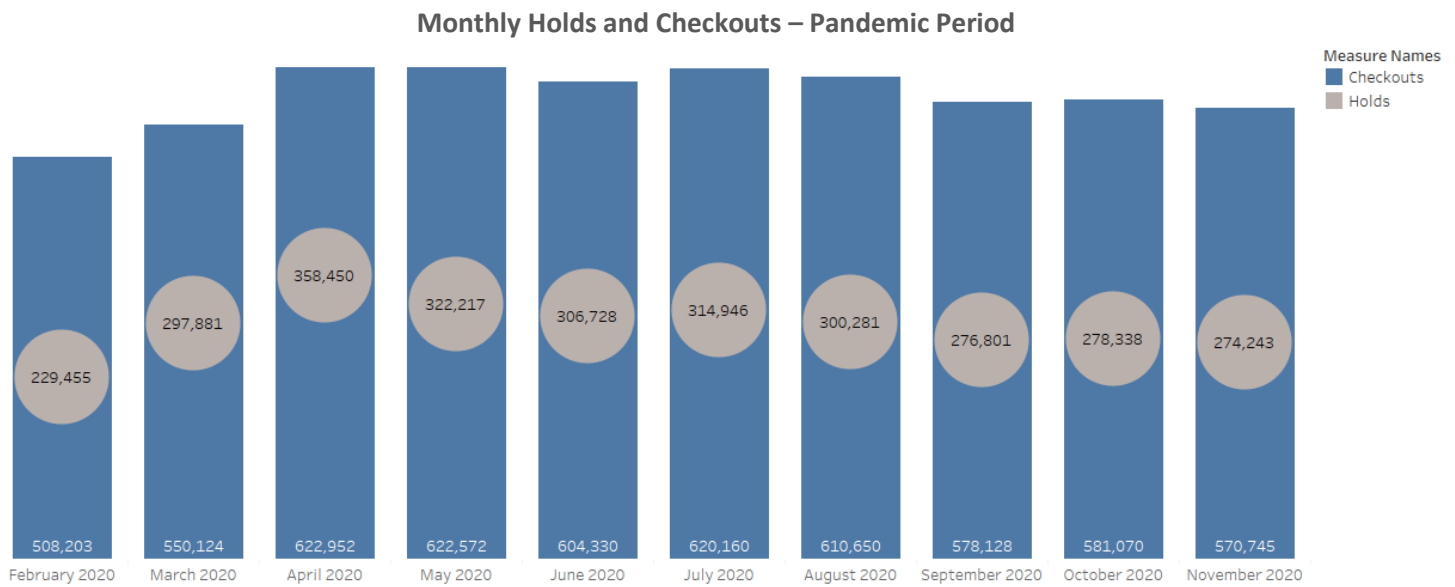
As with checkouts, yearly hold trends were analyzed to see if there were unique changes beyond any normal, season fluctuations. Beginning in March 2020, there was a unique increase in holds that coincided with the increase in checkouts. While holds have remained higher than pre-pandemic, it appeared that the increased funding investment in the collection contributed in part to a decrease in the number of monthly holds despite the increased circulation demand for the same time period.

**Monthly Checkouts and Holds Comparison – Two-Year Trend**
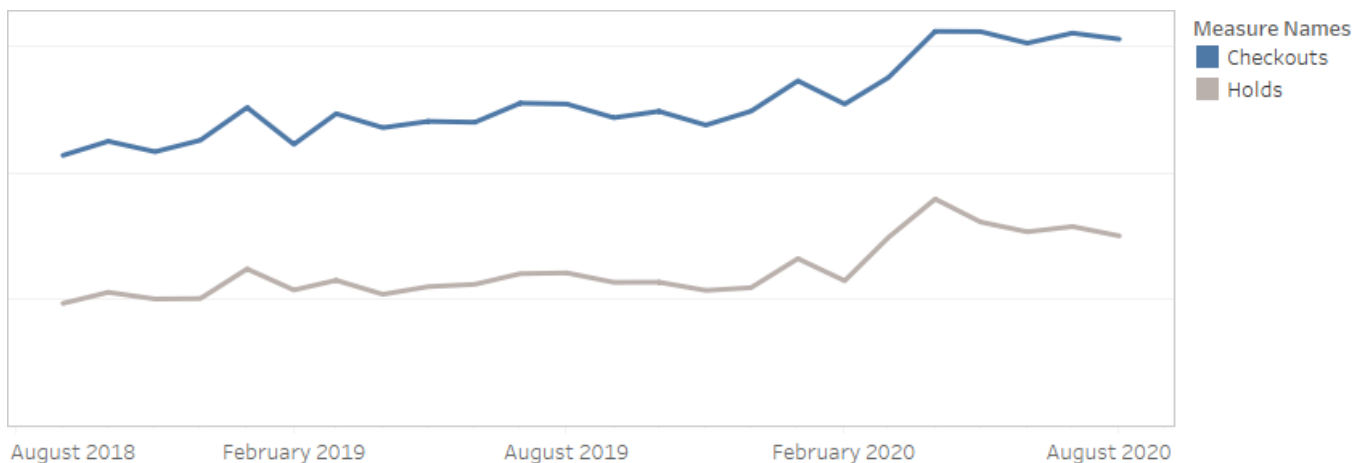
As noted previously, there was a surge in eBook checkouts beginning with the pandemic while audiobooks increased more modestly. This trend in format was reflected similarly in holds data for the same period with eBook holds increasing significantly more than audiobooks.

Weekly eBook versus Audiobook Holds Trend – Pandemic Period
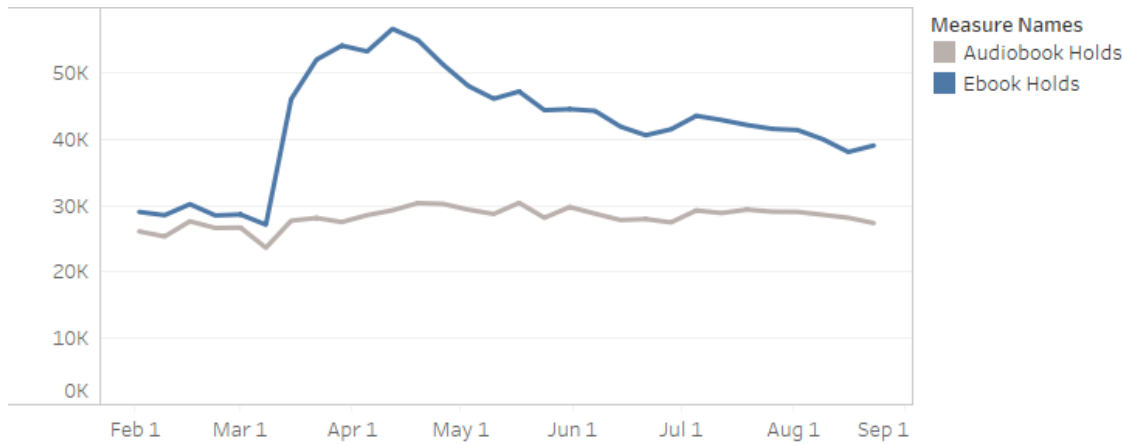
Future Planning

Forecasting indicated that monthly holds and new users will likely hold relatively steady at current levels, with monthly checkouts and unique users continuing in an upward trajectory through at least June 2021.
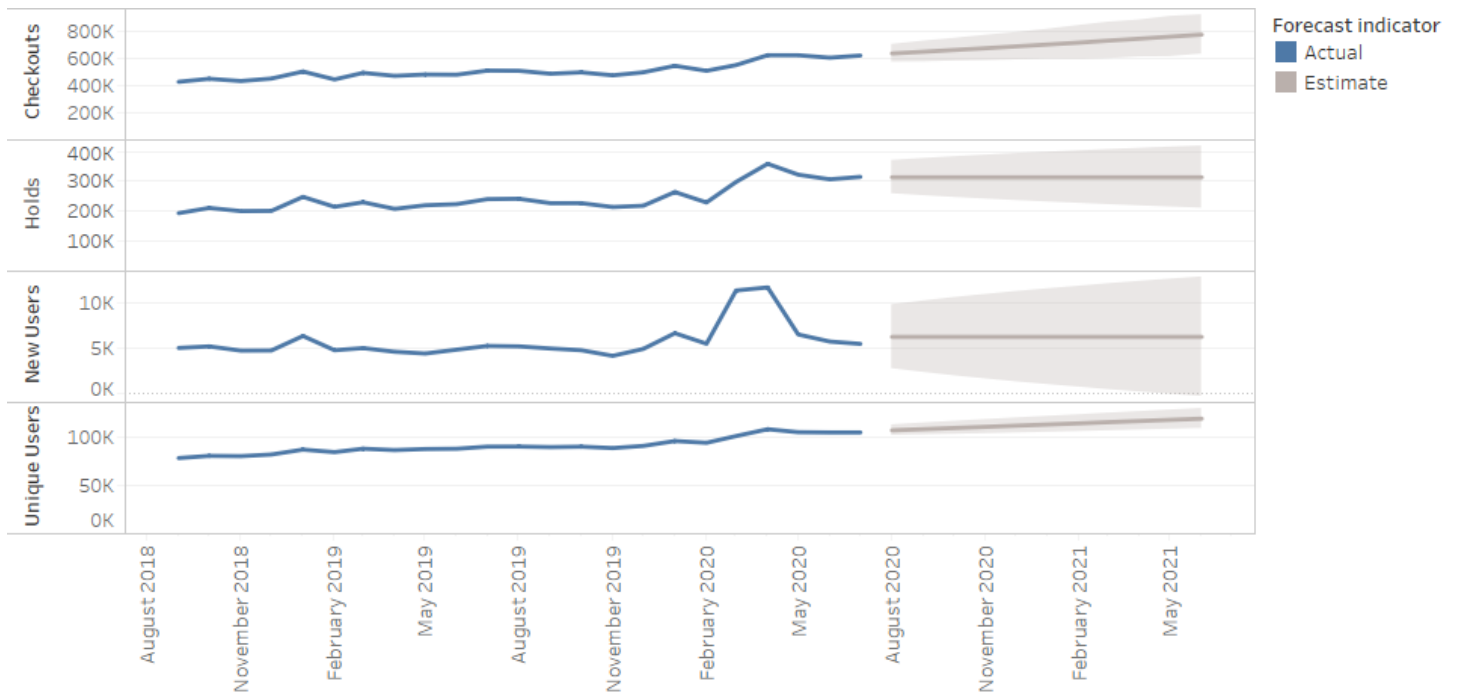
Part 2: The WSDLC Data

The Wisconsin Schools Digital Library Consortium was developed through a partnership between the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA), CESA Purchasing, and WiLS. These partners created an infrastructure that supports a shared eBook and digital audiobook collection for Wisconsin K-12 students. The collection is self-supported through member districts and schools that pay a fee to join the consortium. The WSDLC is governed by a board consisting of members of the consortium and representatives from the partners (CESA Purchasing, CESA Statewide Network, DPI, and WiLS). The consortium members either represent a specific CESA geographic area or are at-large representatives. In 2020, over 65,000 people accessed the WSDLC collection at least once, approximately 52,000 of these people were new users during 2020.

Like WPLC, WSDLC's digital collection was analyzed through a two-pronged approach using:

1. OverDrive data, including data on metrics such as checkouts and users, and
2. Interviews with select library staff working in member school(s).

Since the WSDLC collection serves K-12 schools, yearly trends looked different when compared to the WPLC collection. Historically, the collection has had a natural dip during periods of time students are not in school, most notably during the summer months from June through August. It appears from initial analysis that the impacts of COVID-19 on WSDLC were delayed in comparison to WPLC. While WPLC saw an immediate and clear uptick in usage beginning in March 2020, WSDLC's collection did not. However, the collection's usage has grown significantly with the start of the 2020-2021 academic school year in September. Because of this, the time periods included in the following charts are uniquely tailored to this collection:

1. 2-Year Trend Charts will display data from September 1, 2018 through November 30, 2020
2. Pandemic Period Charts will display data from January 1, 2020 through November 30, 2020

On March 25, 2020, a state-wide mandate went into effect which closed all public and private schools in Wisconsin through the end of the 2019-2020 school year. The start of the 2020-2021 school year has involved a patchwork of teaching and learning approaches ranging from traditional, in-person learning to hybrid and virtual options. Many of these approaches have been subject to change due to impacts of COVID-19, such as the need for exposed individuals to quarantine for 14 days.

WSLDC District Enrollments

WSDLC was serving 190 school districts in Wisconsin as of September 2020. The number of enrolled districts has increased consistently over the last two years. The WSDLC membership year begins on September 1 of each year and goes through August 31; interested schools or school districts can enroll at any time for a prorated fee. Enrollments in September 2018, 2019, and 2020 showed an approximately 50% increase each year in total number of districts enrolled.
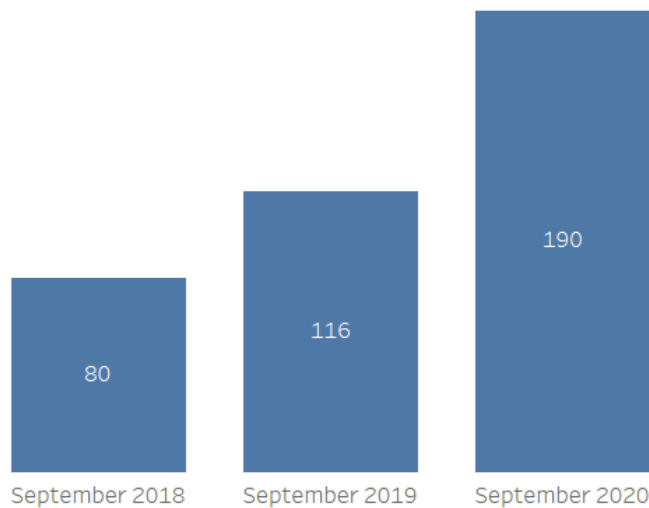
WSDLC Checkouts

Initial school closures due to COVID-19 in March 2020 had no clear nor immediate impact on the checkouts from the collection. However, there was a large increase in September 2020 that coincided with the start of the school year that persisted through the Fall 2020 semester. In three months (September-November 2020), WSDLC had more total checkouts than the previous eight months of the year combined.

Monthly WSDLC Checkouts – Two-Year Trend
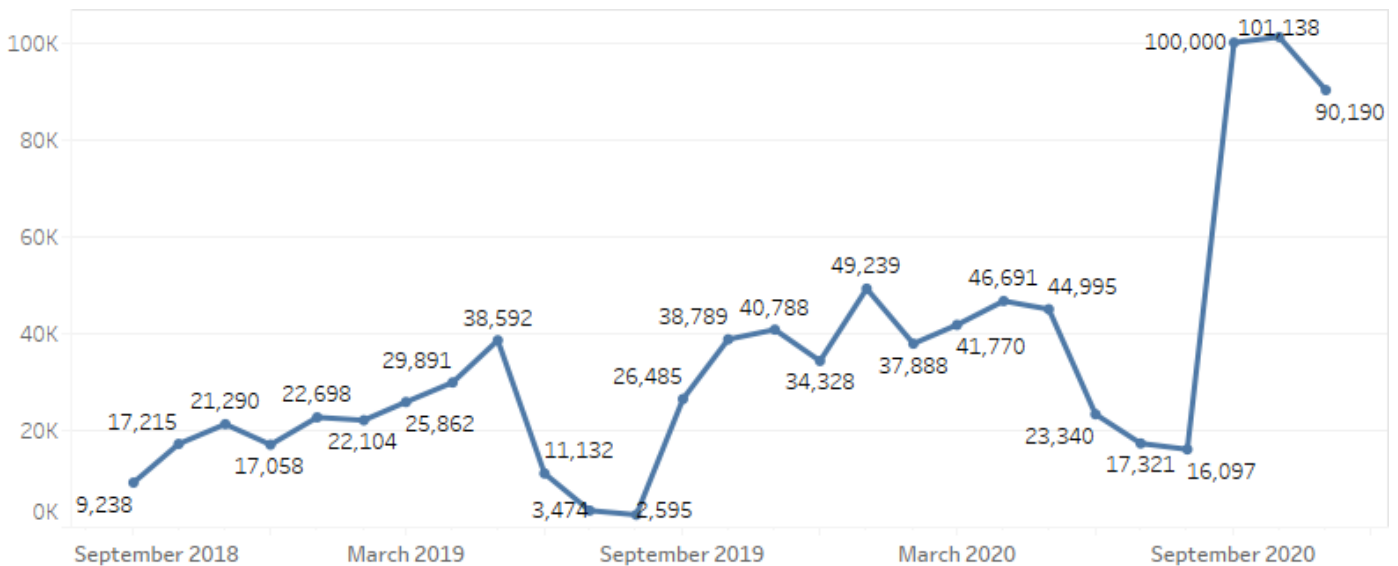
While the collection has had a seasonal increase in checkouts associated with the start of each new semester, the increase in September 2020 was a much higher increase when compared to start of the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years. Total yearly checkouts increased 89% between the 2018-2019 school year and 2019-2020 (221,149 checkouts versus 417,731 checkouts). Since the 2020-2021 school year was just beginning at the time of this report, a snapshot of September data indicated that the WSDLC collection was on track for significantly higher checkouts in 2020-2021 than
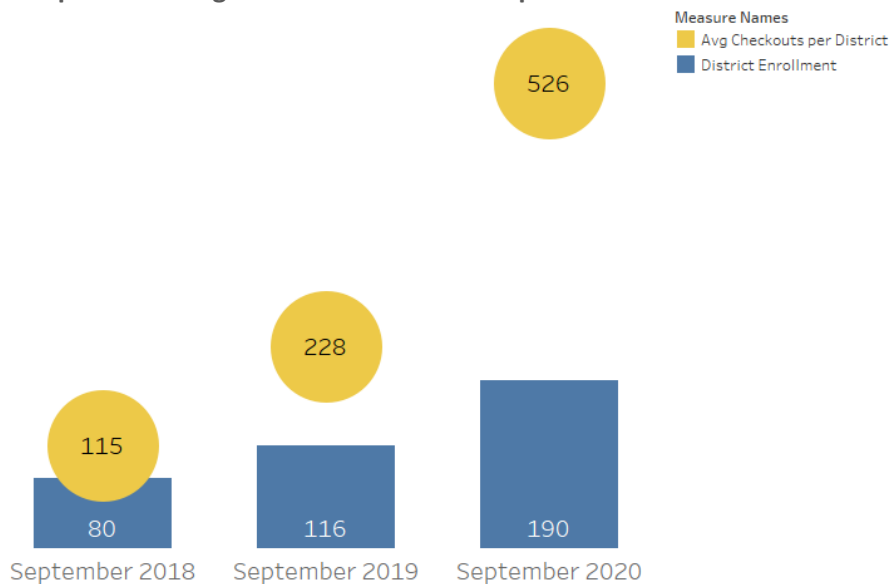
the two previous school years. A comparison of September 2018 to September 2019 showcased that checkouts increased by 187%; a comparison between September 2019 and September 2020 showed checkouts increased by 278%.

September Snapshot: Checkouts

September 2018
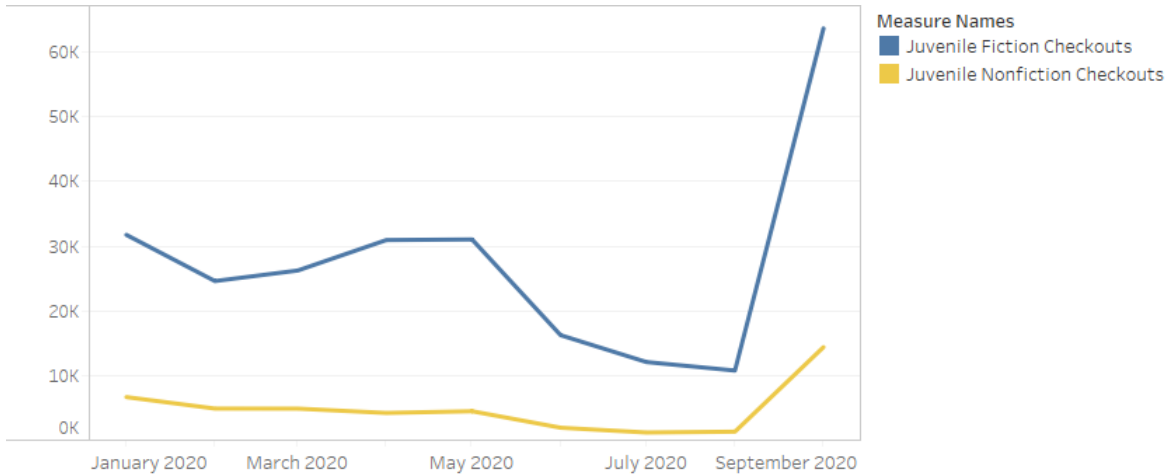9,238

September 2019
26,485

September 2020
100,000
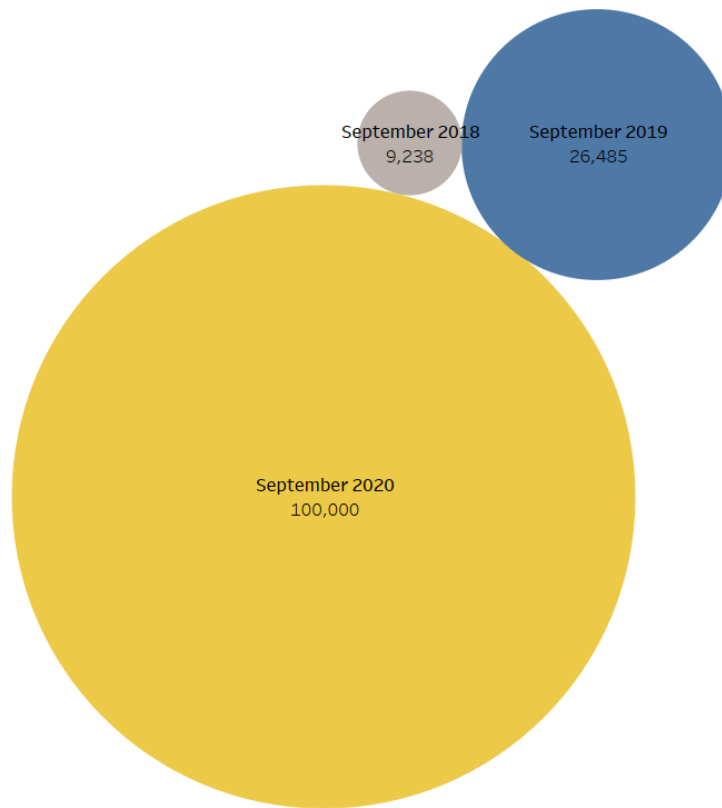
Since district enrollments have increased in a relatively stable pattern, the increase was due to higher usage levels by member districts and not because of a uniquely high influx of member districts. A September comparison snapshot showed an increase in the average number of checkouts per enrolled school district. Increased usage at the start of the 2020-2021 school year was confirmed through interviews with a variety of library staff from participating WSDLC schools who indicated increased interest and reliance by teachers on digital content to support the transition to remote and virtual learning.

September Snapshot: Average Number of Checkouts per School District

Measure Names
Avg Checkouts per District
District Enrollment

526

228

115

80

116

190

September 2018   September 2019   September 2020

Fiction books were checked out more often than nonfiction from the collection and juvenile fiction is significantly more in demand when compared to the other categories. For each audience, there was an uptick in fiction checkouts in March and/or April 2020 that coincided with the Safer at Home order; however, the largest increase came in September 2020 with the start of the academic year. (*Note: The y-axis on each graph has been adjusted proportionate to the size of the category to facilitate ease in visualizing the trend.*)
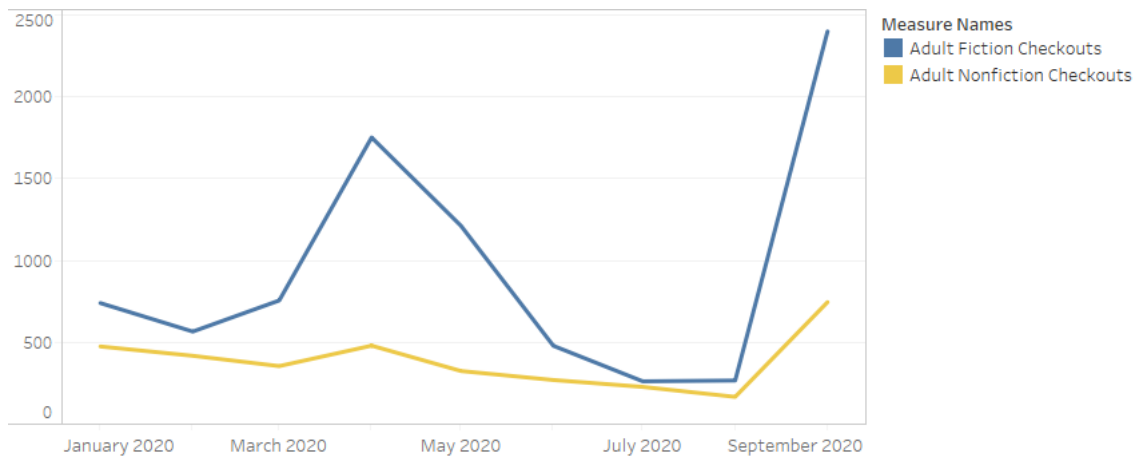
2020 Monthly WSDLC Juvenile Checkouts

Measure Names
- Juvenile Fiction Checkouts
- Juvenile Nonfiction Checkouts

2020 Monthly WSDLC Young Adult Checkouts

Measure Names
- YA Fiction Checkouts
- YA Nonfiction Checkouts
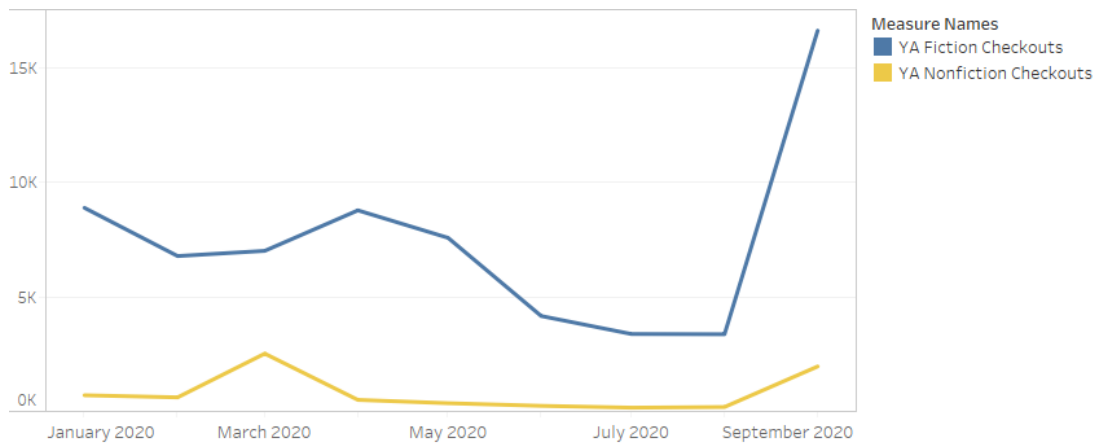
2020 Monthly WSDLC Adult Checkouts

Measure Names
- Adult Fiction Checkouts
- Adult Nonfiction Checkouts
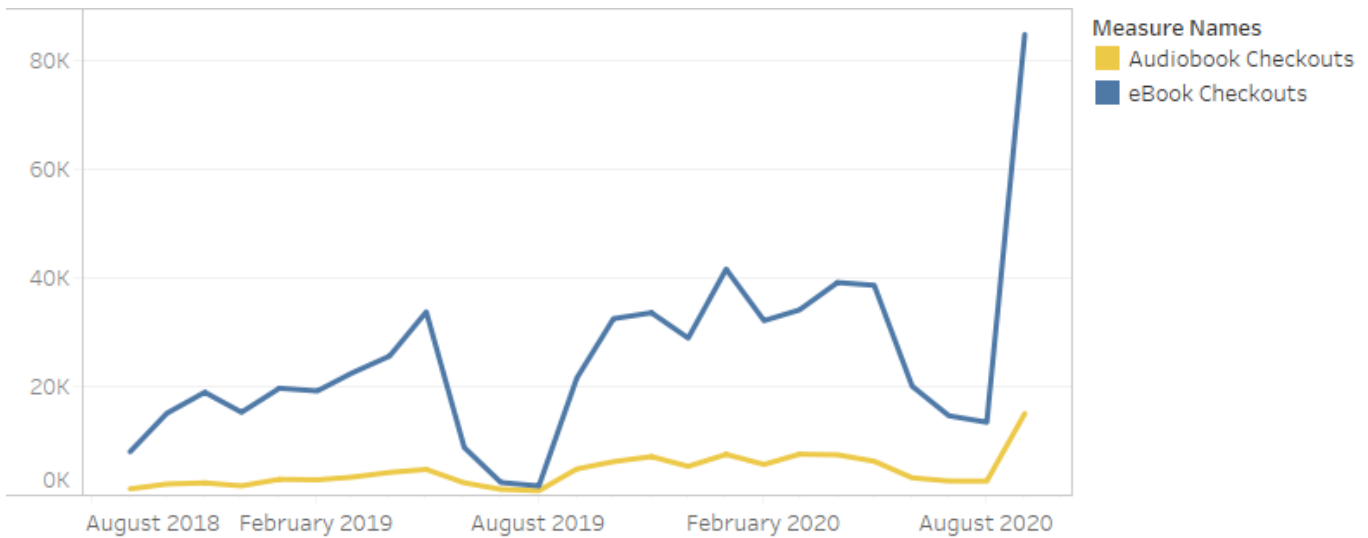
Finally, when considering item format, eBooks were checked out at a significantly higher rate when compared to audiobooks from the collection.

Monthly eBook versus Audiobook Checkouts – Two-Year Trend

WSDLC New Users

Monthly new users increased through April 2020 before a lull during the summer months. However, the number of new users in September 2020 was dramatically higher – an increase of 276% when compared to the previous high of April 2020. While October and November 2020 saw a decrease in new user enrollments, they remained elevated significantly when compared to the previous two years. Interviews with select participating schools' library staff indicated that they were either responsible for or involved in supporting a notable increase in student enrollments at the start of the school year so that teachers could utilize or recommend items from the WSDLC collection to students in anticipation of virtual and remote learning. These interviews highlighted that the WSDLC collection is a valuable resource to both teachers and students during an event like the COVID-19 health pandemic that required moves to either full or partial virtual learning modes.

Monthly WSDLC New Users – Two-Year Trend
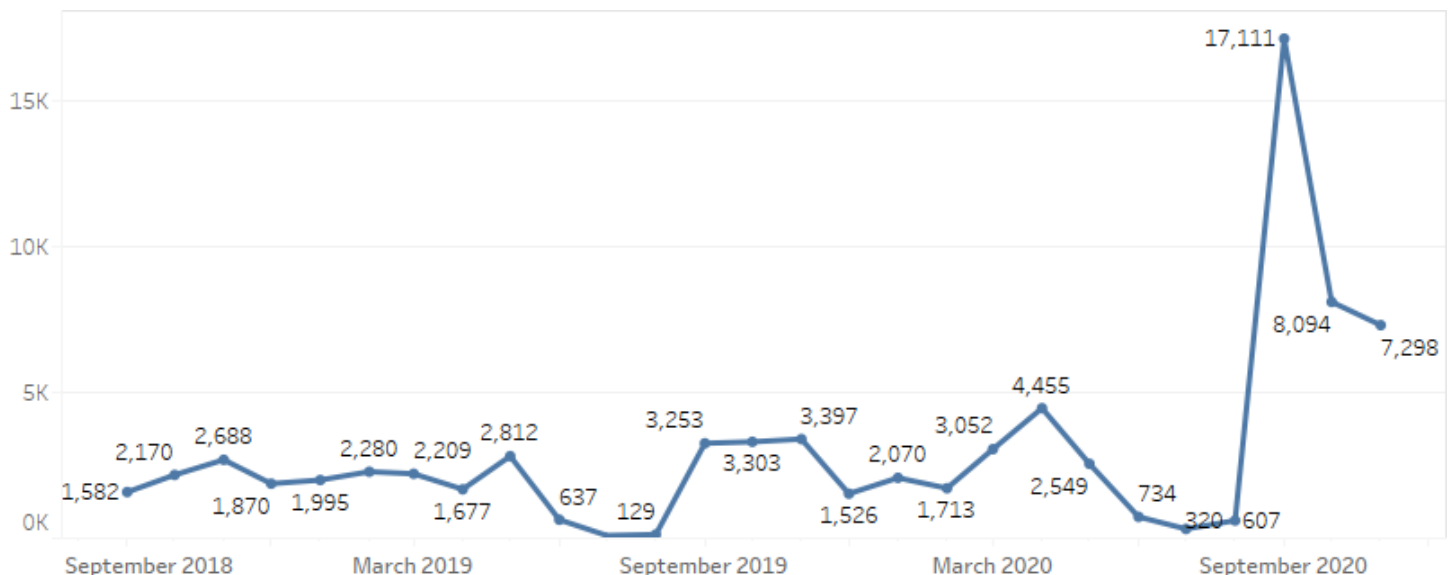
A daily snapshot of new users of the WSDLC collection indicated a slowly declining weekly pattern in the volume of new users throughout September 2020. Almost exclusively, new users accessed the collection from Monday through Friday and not on the weekends, which was expected given that the users are K-12 students gaining access through their school's participation in the consortium. Based on this graph, it is likely that new user enrollments will continue to decrease through the fall semester following the initial surge of enrolling students at the start of the school year. This pattern was also indicative of the fact that the collection is accessed primarily during days school is in session and not during summer months, weekends, or holidays.

September Snapshot: Daily New Users

When considering the increase in new users to WSDLC, it was important as a consortium of many members to examine if most members were accessing the service or if a smaller number of members were driving the increased usage. New users in September 2020 came from 379 different schools and/or school districts and ranged from a low of one new user to a high of 454. This indicated that new user enrollments were coming from a diverse representation of schools that participated in the consortium.

WSDLC Unique Users
Like new users, unique users increased slightly beginning in March 2020 followed by a summer lull and a large increase in September 2020. Over half of unique users in September 2020 were new users enrolled during the same month. In October and November, unique users to the collection continued at unprecedented rates.

**Monthly Unique Users – Two-Year Trend**
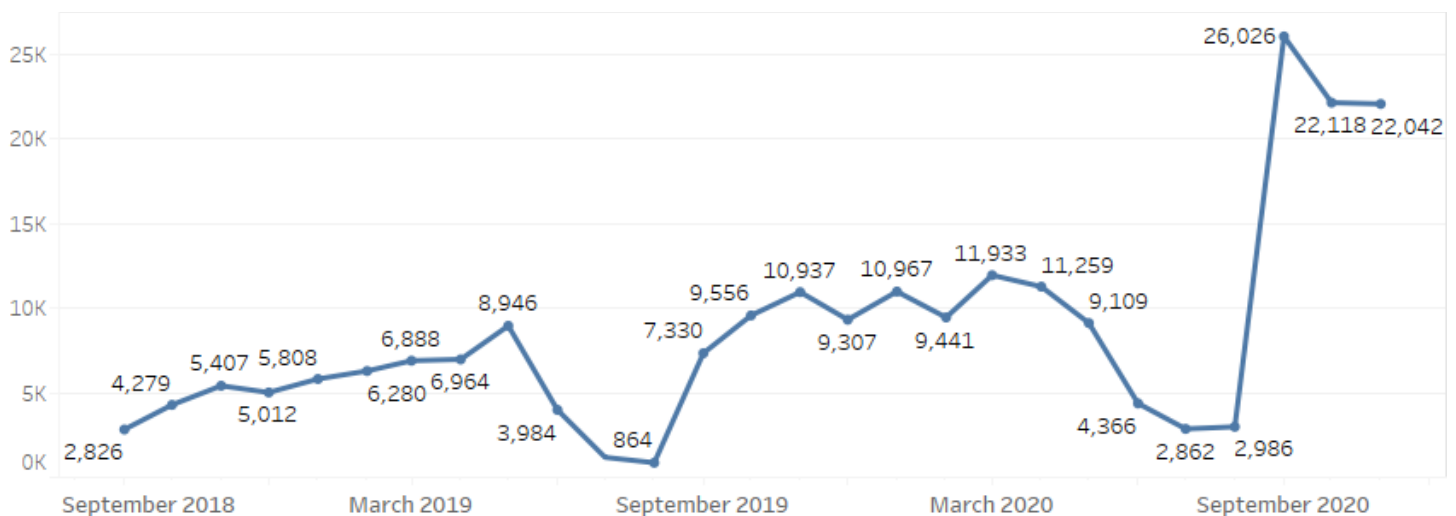
As with new users, it was important as a consortium to examine if most members were accessing the service or if a smaller number were driving the increased usage. Unique users in September 2020 came from 432 different schools and/or school districts. 83 schools had at least 100 unique users which indicated robust and diversified representation from participating consortium members. Unique user numbers ranged from a low of 1 to a high of 961.

WSDLC Holds
With the large increase in checkouts, there was a similar increase in monthly holds reflected in the Fall 2020 data. When compared to the previous two-year high of 16,067, holds increased 130% to a new high of 37,019 in September 2020.

Monthly Holds – Two-Year Trend
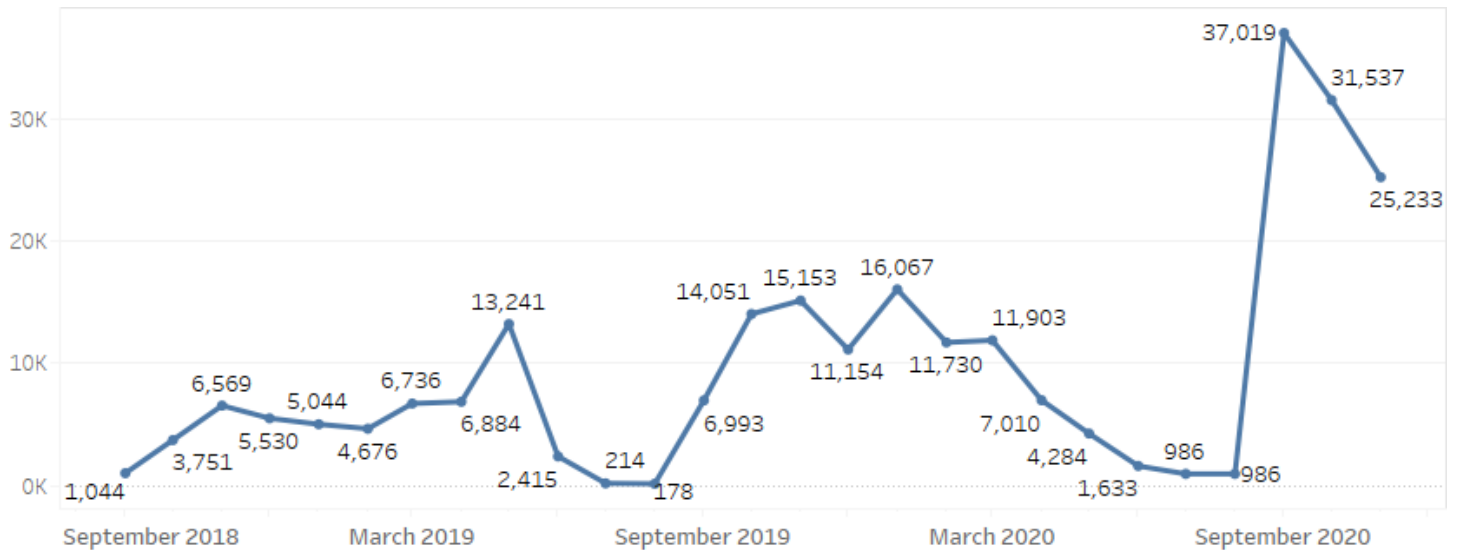
While holds remained elevated in Fall 2020, hold reduction efforts were successful at decreasing holds while checkouts remained elevated. Checkouts decreased approximately 10% between September and November 2020, while holds decreased by 32% during the same time period. Like WPLC, this may be due, in part, to an investment of significant funding from DPI made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, LS-00-19-0050-19, and strategic spending on curated titles by WSDLC Project Managers and Selection Committee Members. The current average wait time as of December 2020 for a hold was 16 days.

2020 Monthly Checkouts with Holds
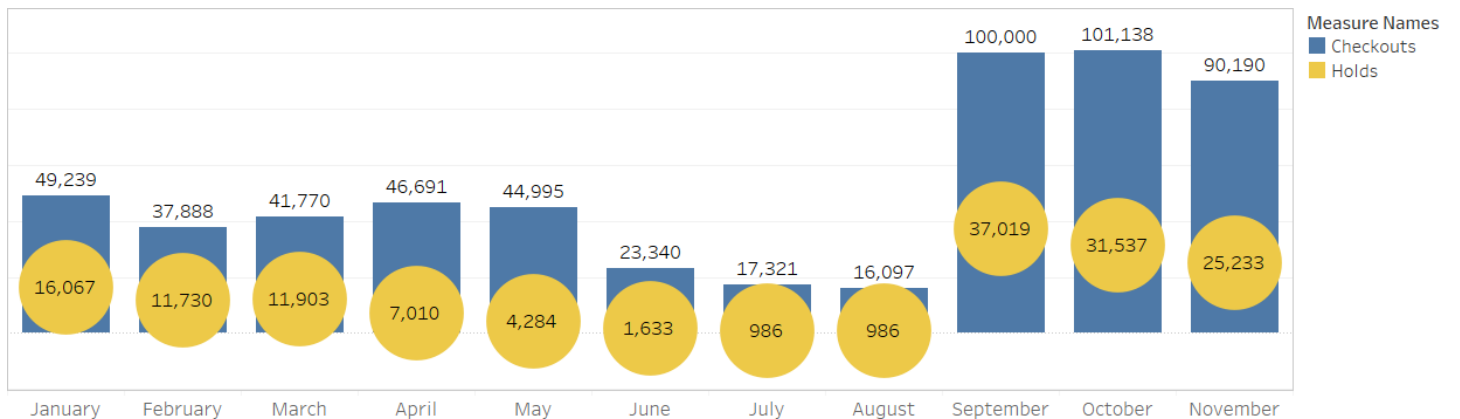
Conclusion and Future Considerations

In sum, digital collections are a valuable resource to the community at large and are an asset that can be leveraged by libraries when access to their physical spaces and collections are limited. In other words: when library's physical doors are closed, digital collections provide a robust avenue for staying "open" to the broader community. The distinctive nature of WPLC from WSDLC provided insights into the ways digital collections can potentially serve unique purposes for different patron groups. While both collections saw unprecedented increases in usage that coincided with the pandemic, these increases came almost immediately for WPLC where patrons indicated using the collection for pleasure; WSDLC's increases came in September 2020 with the start of the traditional academic school year. A key challenge for both WPLC and WSDLC with these increases has been (and will continue to be) the strategic management of holds that coincide with elevated usage. Preliminary efforts in this realm were successful when considering how great the increased traffic to both collections had been since March 2020.

The findings from this report support several future considerations:

- Physical space closures are a motivating factor for people to access digital collections. The nature of this project did not involve additional research into any digital collection marketing efforts by libraries during the pandemic; however, this would be a valuable future consideration since the majority of new users indicated that they heard about WPLC from either library staff via electronic communication (e.g. library website, social media, etc.) or by word of mouth.
- Increased usage of digital collections has the potential for increased holds and wait times for high-circulation collections. The significant investments to the Wisconsin collections from DPI during the pandemic helped offset this effect; this highlighted that strategic investments paired with curated selections in digital resources is one avenue for managing increases in holds related to unexpected increases in usage.
- Demographic data for this project was limited to self-reported, optional information gathered from the WPLC Patron Survey. As such, there is a real potential for a selection bias effect in the WPLC Patron data. With that being noted, it would be valuable to conduct additional research into demographic information of digital collection patrons to encourage diverse and equitable representation of community members utilizing this service and that their unique perspectives and insights are considered in future planning.

In addition, as preliminary research, the findings from this report also provide the opportunity for additional research into digital collections. While the scope of this project did not allow for these questions to be fully answered, these are items that could potentially be explored through additional research, data collection, and analysis:

- For WSDLC, district size, budget, and geographic location could all influence digital collection access and usage. Not all schools/school districts in Wisconsin participate in WSDLC. Many larger districts can afford their own OverDrive accounts. Do data from large, urban districts who do not participate in WSDLC show similar trends to WSDLC's for the same time period? Additional OverDrive data from non-WSDLC schools could provide further nuance to the trends highlighted in this report.
- Both WPLC and WSDLC have collections that are composed of a greater number of titles and copies of eBooks than audiobooks. Preliminary data indicate some differences in checkout and hold patterns based on the title's format. Does the data support any consistent, specific considerations or indicators to examine when making purchases for the collection? Are there other factors (e.g. having a robust collection, accessibility, etc.) that should be considered as well when making purchasing decisions by format?
- It would be helpful to understand the overlap and/or interplay between WPLC and WSDLC users, specifically in relation to K-12 students who might have access to both collections. For just one example, are K-12 students whose families are WPLC users more likely to access digital resources from one digital collection over another? How similar or different are the items in the two collections especially when it comes to juvenile and young adult selections?
- While this report focused on two discrete digital collections, what impact did the pandemic have on digital resources as a whole (e.g. scholarly databases, digital cultural heritage resources, streaming video, etc.)?

- This report found a relationship between funding investments in the collections and a reduction in hold times. However, this does not indicate what, if any, "best practices" exist in how funding was applied. Additional research into how funding was spent during 2020 for both WPLC and WSDLC could provide additional insights into the development of strategic spending frameworks.