San Mateo County Libraries

Agenda Item VII.

To:	JPA Governing Board
From:	Anne-Marie Despain, Director of Library Services
Date:	October 28, 2025
Meeting:	November 3, 2025
Re:	Director's Report

This report summarizes significant library operations and program activities that have occurred since the last meeting of the Governing Board. Services and activities are aligned with our Strategic Plan Goals.

We listen to our community and create responsive services and spaces where everyone belongs

Mid-Autumn Festival

We honored a 3,000-year-old tradition celebrated across East and Southeast Asia, a time for family reunions, gratitude for the harvest, and appreciation of the full moon, which symbolizes unity. Our community came together to share stories, enjoy music, and create art through hands-on activities.

Families embroidered with local artist Tiffany Tzeng, enjoyed instrumental Chinese music and explored the festival's legends and customs at bilingual Mandarin–English storytime. Adults created glowing paper lanterns and textured moon art while learning festival-related Chinese characters. Together, these activities honored a festival cherished by our community, highlighted local artists and tradition-keepers, deepened cross-cultural understanding and welcomed new neighbors into the library. More than 1,160 people have participated in these experiences so far, with one attendee noting, " I never knew about the Mid-Autumn Festival meaning or about what the mooncakes meant. Through the different workshops... I was able to learn about the Mid-Autumn Festival and the culture. It really helped me understand what it was about. I also got to try my first mooncake, I loved it."

Lanterns Workshop Lights Up Mid-Autumn Festivities, M-A Chronicle, October 7, 2025

Diwali Celebrations

In October and November, we're honored to celebrate Diwali, also known as the Festival of Lights. Diwali is a major Hindu festival celebrated in India, across the world and within our communities at San Mateo County Libraries. It symbolizes the victory of light over darkness and good over evil. Our offerings this year include visits from local artist Swati, who will join us to apply beautiful Diwali henna designs, vibrant performances featuring storytelling from Indian mythology from Laya Arts Collective, and Pagrav Dance Studio's presentations of a classical Indian dance known as Bharatanatyam. With its upcoming adoption as a statewide holiday, we're more excited than ever to host these events in celebration of our community.

Expanding Adult Literacy Capacity

To meet literacy learning demand, we have begun recruiting new adult literacy tutors through two key strategies: volunteer information parties and a compelling new multimedia campaign. Volunteer information parties have been hosted in East Palo Alto, Foster City, Half Moon Bay, and San Carlos to provide an overview of our tutoring program, share success stories and create connections. The majority of the 83 summer attendees then took the next step of submitting volunteer applications, with some now tutoring learners. One participant shared: "I would like the opportunity to pursue service and dedicate myself to something. As a previous English language learner, I understand the importance of literacy in one's life."

To reach new audiences countywide, this autumn we initiated an exciting multimedia campaign. Audiences are invited to change a life by becoming adult literacy tutors, with messages such as "Community Grows Through Literacy" and "Building Community, One Word at a Time." Our communications are being broadcast online, over the radio, and on streaming audio, including platforms like Spotify, Pandora and iHeartRadio. Early indicators are promising, with 64 radio spots aired in the first week and 126,620 impressions already from digital ads, reflecting bold outreach aligned with the Board's direction to grow these services. Recruiting new literacy volunteers is of critical importance as we work to support every learner and expand our ability to serve the significant literacy needs in our communities.

Learning Side by Side: A Friendship Built Through Tutoring at the Half Moon Bay Library ~ You Could Tutor, Too?, Coastside Buzz, October 1, 2025

New Reading Tutoring Program

We have launched free after-school tutoring for 1st–8th graders in priority communities to strengthen literacy. With only 45% of San Mateo County third graders reading proficiently—disproportionately affecting historically under-resourced children—we are partnering with school districts to prioritize students with the greatest need.

This fall, students are meeting in small groups twice a week for 12 weeks with trained tutors to practice reading and writing. Demand for academic support is strong, with 180 families expressing interest in the first week. While tutoring sessions take place, families are spending time in the library, with many discovering our spaces and services for the first time. Several new families obtained library cards, including a first grader who celebrated getting theirs. A second round of tutoring will be offered in the winter to serve additional children.

Let's Read San Mateo County is an interactive, multilingual website from The Big Lift that helps families support children's literacy from birth through 5th grade. Available in four languages, it explains how reading develops and outlines age-based milestones using clear graphics and plain language. Caregivers and community partners can explore foundational skills—letter knowledge, phonological awareness, vocabulary, and comprehension—and find engaging, age-sorted activities and games aligned with California grade-level standards. The site also links to community resources, including library services.

This resource aligns closely with San Mateo County Libraries' role in early childhood development. Our storytimes, preschool family literacy events, and take-home activities reinforce the same milestones and strategies featured on the site, giving families consistent, practical tools to build strong reading skills at home and in the library. Empowering families in this way directly supports children's school readiness and long-term academic success.

Tech Talks for Older Adults

For library users who grew up with minimal technology and are learning to transition into today's tech-dominated world later in life, this fall San Mateo County Libraries offered a series of specialized tech talks for our 55+ community members across 10 of our 13 locations. Over 64 participants used these sessions to gain confidence with technology, get more from their smartphones, and learn about cybersecurity and fraud prevention. Examples of the community-driven classes include Sharpen Your Smartphone Skills, Introduction to Google Workspace, Fraud Prevention 101 and more. Led by Amy Culpepper of PepTech, a woman-owned business dedicated to supporting older adults with tech, these sessions aim to make technology more accessible and empowering for all. These events helped to demystify technology and foster participant confidence in navigating the internet safely.

We connect people and build partnerships to achieve shared goals

Blood Pressure Monitor Kits

Our Blood Pressure Monitor Kit lending program has been met with an enthusiastic response from the community. In partnership with the San Mateo County Health Department, these kits empower patrons to monitor their blood pressure from home using a battery-operated device, a multilingual instruction guide, and a personal tracking log. High blood pressure is common, often symptomless, and a leading risk factor for heart disease and stroke. Regular checks at home help people spot elevated readings early. Home monitoring is especially valuable for those with limited access to healthcare. Available at all of our libraries, the kits can be checked out for three weeks.

Each kit includes educational materials about blood pressure and hypertension in English, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, and Tagalog, supporting accessibility for our diverse community. As part of the health partnership, patrons are asked to complete a short, anonymous survey prior to checkout. This initiative not only expands access to critical health resources but also highlights the library's evolving role in supporting communities in various ways. We're encouraged by the strong demand so far and look forward to continuing to contribute positively to an important public health effort.

Press Release: Track Your Heart Health: Blood Pressure Monitor Kits Available at San Mateo County Libraries, September 16, 2025

San Mateo County libraries add high blood pressure monitors to collection, The Almanac, September 24, 2025

Blood pressure monitors for checkout at San Mateo County Libraries, The Daily Journal, September 25, 2025

Portable Power

The library remains committed to supporting community resilience during power outages. In collaboration with the Department of Emergency Management, each library is now equipped with a high-capacity portable battery station and solar panels. This infrastructure ensures emergency power supplies for library operations and the public during outages. The powerful battery units can charge multiple devices for up to 30 days, and the solar panels offer versatile charging options. With the inclement weather season approaching, these resources are crucial for preparing to navigate potential power disruptions effectively.

We engage our communities through meaningful outreach and expanded access to resources

Growing Social Connections

San Mateo County has led the nation in recognizing loneliness as a public health crisis, and at the library we are prioritizing belonging in our programs and partnerships. Earlier this year, we engaged Dr. Carla Perissinotto with UCSF, a national expert on social connection, to brief staff and spark ideas to foster authentic relationships. In September, we launched a monthly Parents & Babies Meetup at Coyote Point with the Parks Foundation—stroller walks, storytime, and yoga paired with time to connect. The first gathering drew 60 parents and infants who shared experiences and asked for more frequent meetups. Staff offered resources and invitations to additional library events that support social well-being. This program joins a monthly New Parent Meetup at Foster City Library in our growing lineup to help families build community. We will be expanding opportunities for diverse, welcoming experiences that reduce isolation for all ages throughout the year.

Print Collections Update

A recent shift in the book supply market may temporarily impact the timing of new print materials reaching San Mateo County Libraries. Baker & Taylor, a longtime primary vendor for our print materials, is in the process of winding down its operations, with the expectation that the company will cease its activities early in the new calendar year. While limited operations are still in place for the moment, we are proactively shifting our orders to other vendors to ensure continuity. As a result of this transition, there may be short-term delays in the delivery of new library materials. Staff are working closely with alternative vendors to minimize disruption and maintain service levels.

We champion a culture of continuous growth and discovery for all

Banned Books Week

October 5-11 was Banned Books Week, an annual reminder of how censorship divides us and how San Mateo County Libraries brings us together. This year's ALA theme was *Censorship Is So 1984*, inspired by George Orwell's dystopian novel 1984. Our Material Selection Policy aligns with the requirements of the California Freedom to Read Act (AB 1825) and explains our role in the freedom to read. This new law strengthens protections for all California libraries and their collections.

While efforts to censor books in schools and libraries have been around for a long time, they are on the rise across the nation. In 2024, 2,452 individual book titles were challenged in the United States, considerably more than the annual average of 273 between 2001-2020. We encourage everyone to read a banned book and help celebrate how lucky we are to have free and open access to information and ideas.

Personnel News

We are excited to share the following personnel announcements:

After an incredible 39 years with San Mateo County Libraries, Kelly Jones is retiring from her role as Library Assistant at the San Carlos Library. Over the years, she has been a steady and reliable presence, known for her commitment to excellent customer service and her willingness to support colleagues with her knowledge and experience. Her professionalism, attention to detail, and many contributions have been deeply appreciated by both staff and the community.

Kelly will wrap up her library career in December and plans to spend more time with family, reading, traveling and taking care of her health.

Please join us in celebrating Kelly's remarkable career and wishing her all the best as she begins this exciting new chapter.

Adrienne Gass has accepted a promotion to Community Library Manager at the San Carlos Library. Adrienne started her career at San Mateo County Libraries as a youth services librarian in Foster City where she led children's programming and outreach for five years. She was promoted to Senior Librarian at the North Fair Oaks Library in 2022 and held that role until last year, when she transferred to Portola Valley & Woodside Libraries. Adrienne also spent some time in Access Services where she helped with the Empower Card initiative and was a member of the inaugural LEAD cohort. Prior to joining us, Adrienne worked as a youth services librarian in Colorado, Dixon, California, and New Jersey.

Adrienne holds a Master of Library and Information Science and a bachelor's degree in English from Rutgers University. Adrienne started at San Carlos on October 27.

Hillary Ake has accepted the position of Community Library Manager at Pacifica Libraries. Hillary is currently the Branch Manager of the Visitacion Valley Branch at San Francisco Public Library, where she oversees a team to provide relevant and engaging services for the community. Hillary's 10 years as a librarian includes experience as a youth services librarian and the Early Literacy Coordinator for SFPL, where she honed her skills in developing broad community-based partnerships.

Hillary holds a Master of Library and Information Science from San José State University and a bachelor's degree in English Literature from the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. Hillary is excited to get started and will begin her new role on November 17.

Please join us in congratulating Adrienne, Hillary and Kelly!

Wellness Champions

Amy Selmi and Richard Moala, both members of our Employee Engagement Workgroup, were honored in October as Wellness Leaders by the County of San Mateo. They were nominated by their peers and were recognized for creating a culture that promotes employee health and safety among their teams.

In addition to her work on the Employee Engagement Workgroup, Amy models a healthy work culture every day at the Foster City Library. She trains all staff on emergency procedures, reminds staff to take their breaks, and regularly provides fun ways for staff to engage with each other. Since Richard joined the San Mateo County Libraries earlier this year, he has been an active member of the Employee Engagement Workgroup, co-led the most recent cohort of LEAD for staff and has implemented regular branch visits to better understand the needs of all library employees.

Both awardees were recognized at the Annual Wellness Leaders Luncheon and at the Board of Supervisors meeting on October 21, 2025. We're proud to acknowledge Amy and Richard for their wonderful and important work.

Quarter 1 Professional Development

In the first quarter of FY25-26, 79 staff members participated in training and development through our Learning Management System, resulting in 243 registrations across 144 different training and learning opportunities. Staff explored a wide range of topics, including leadership development, safety and emergency preparedness, equity and inclusion, technology skills, and management training.

We are especially proud that multiple staff participated in the County's Management Development Program (MDP 2025), designed to build leadership skills and strengthen organizational capacity. Staff also represented San Mateo County Libraries at national events such as the American Library Association (ALA) Annual Conference, one of the largest gatherings of library professionals in the world.

These efforts reflect our strong culture of continuous learning and our commitment to supporting staff growth while enhancing the services we provide to our communities.

Libraries in the News

- Boston Public Library aims to increase access to a vast historic archive using AI, NPR Morning Edition, August 11, 2025
- S.F.'s neighborhood libraries are recovering post-pandemic. Why can't the Main Library keep up?, San Francisco Chronicle, August 21, 2025
- How Getting a Library Card Is a Salute to Democracy, Nonprofit Quarterly, September 8, 2025
- Why Teens Love to Hang Out at the Library, KQED, September 23

2026 Library Holidays and Closures

Since 2003, San Mateo County Libraries has incorporated several additional days into the regular holiday closure schedule based on the calendar year and usage patterns. All library closures are posted for public notice well in advance of a scheduled closure. In 2005, the Governing Board determined that a permanent continuation of this practice was prudent and should be communicated through the Director's Report.

Based on current County holidays and operational hours, 2026 holiday and closure dates include:

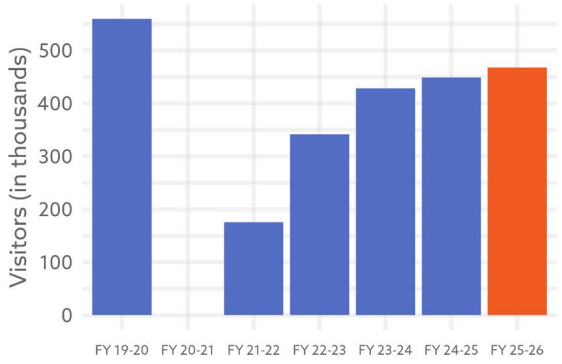
2026

Thursday, January 1	New Year's Day Holiday
Sunday, January 18	Library Closure
Monday, January 19	Martin Luther King, Jr., Holiday
Sunday, February 15	Library Closure
Monday, February 16	Presidents' Day Holiday
Tuesday, March 31	Cesar Chavez Day Holiday
Sunday, April 5	Library Closure
Sunday, May 10	Library Closure
Sunday, May 24	Library Closure
Monday, May 25	Memorial Day Holiday
Friday, June 19	Juneteenth Holiday
Sunday, June 21	Library Closure
Saturday, July 4	Independence Day Holiday
Sunday, July 5	Library Closure
Sunday, September 6	Library Closure
Monday, September 7	Labor Day Holiday
Sunday, October 11	Library Closure
Monday, October 12	Indigenous Peoples' Day Holiday
Wednesday, November 11	Veterans Day Holiday
Wednesday, November 25	Libraries close at 5 PM
Thursday, November 26	Thanksgiving Day Holiday
Friday, November 27	Day after Thanksgiving Holiday
Thursday, December 24	Libraries close at 5 PM
Friday, December 25	Christmas Day Holiday
Saturday, December 26	Library Closure – Winter Recess
Sunday, December 27	Library Closure – Winter Recess
Thursday, December 31	Libraries close at 5 PM

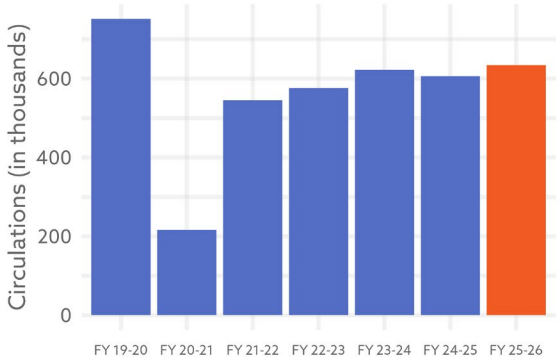
FY 2025-26, Quarter 1 Data Update

The following charts summarize systemwide totals through the first quarter for key library services from FY 2019-2020 through the current fiscal year.

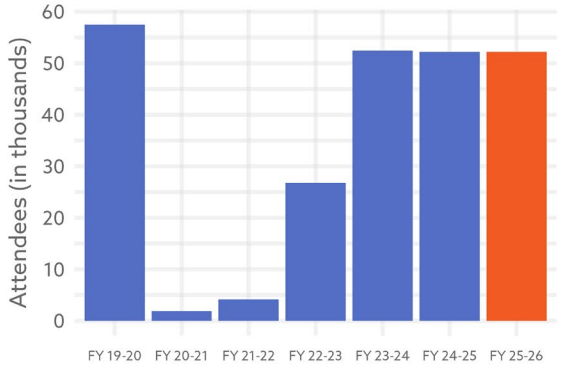
LIBRARY VISITORS



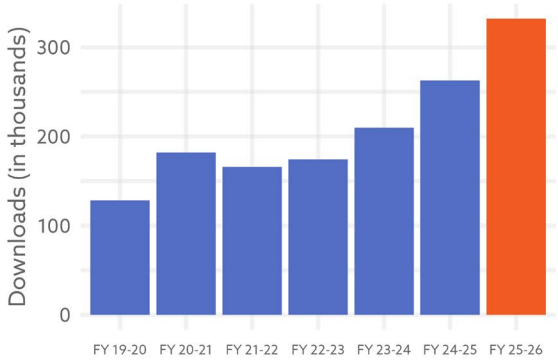
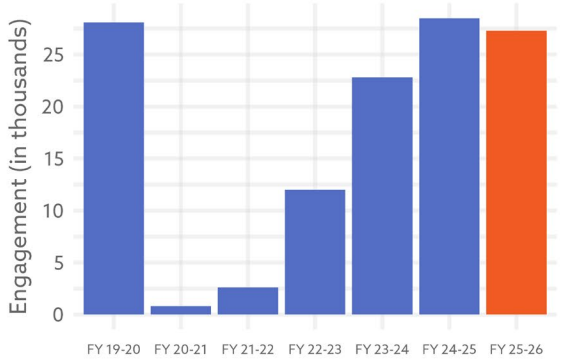
ITEMS CIRCULATED



PROGRAM ATTENDANCE



DIGITAL DOWNLOADS



OUTREACH ENGAGEMENT