



Expanding the Imagination Library Early Literacy Program Statewide

2023–25 Biennial Operating Budget Decision Package

Recommendation Summary

Early exposure to books and reading has a proven impact on high achievement in literacy, learning, and strong educational outcomes. The Imagination Library of Washington program provides age-appropriate, high-quality books each month to children ages birth to five at no cost to families. To increase equitable access to books and support early literacy and kindergarten readiness among Washington’s children, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) requests \$5 million in the 2023–25 biennium and \$5.2 million in the 2025–27 biennium to provide a 50% match of state funds to local funds to make the Imagination Library of Washington available to all households with children under the age of five across all 39 counties.

Fiscal Details (Funding, FTEs, Revenue, Objects)

Operating Expenditures	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027
Fund 001	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000	\$2,600,000	\$2,600,000
Total Expenditures	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000	\$2,600,000	\$2,600,000
Biennial Totals	\$5,000,000		\$5,200,000	
Staffing	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027
FTEs	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Average Annual	0.0		0.0	
Revenue	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027
	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Total Revenue	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Biennial Totals	\$0.00		\$0.00	
Object of Expenditure	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027
Obj. C	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000	\$2,600,000	\$2,600,000

Package Description

What is the problem, opportunity, or priority you are addressing with the request?

Literacy is a foundational skill and a key access point for engagement in all areas of learning, but not all families are able to give their children the early exposure to books and reading that is a proven link to high achievement in literacy, learning, and strong educational outcomes. This gap is even more problematic in a post-COVID environment, as all children experienced impacts on their learning, and many children experienced a delayed entry into school as a result of the pandemic. To improve pandemic literacy recovery and to increase equitable access to books and early literacy among Washington’s children, the 2022 Legislature created the Imagination Library of Washington program which provides age-appropriate, high-quality books each month to children ages birth to five at no cost to families.

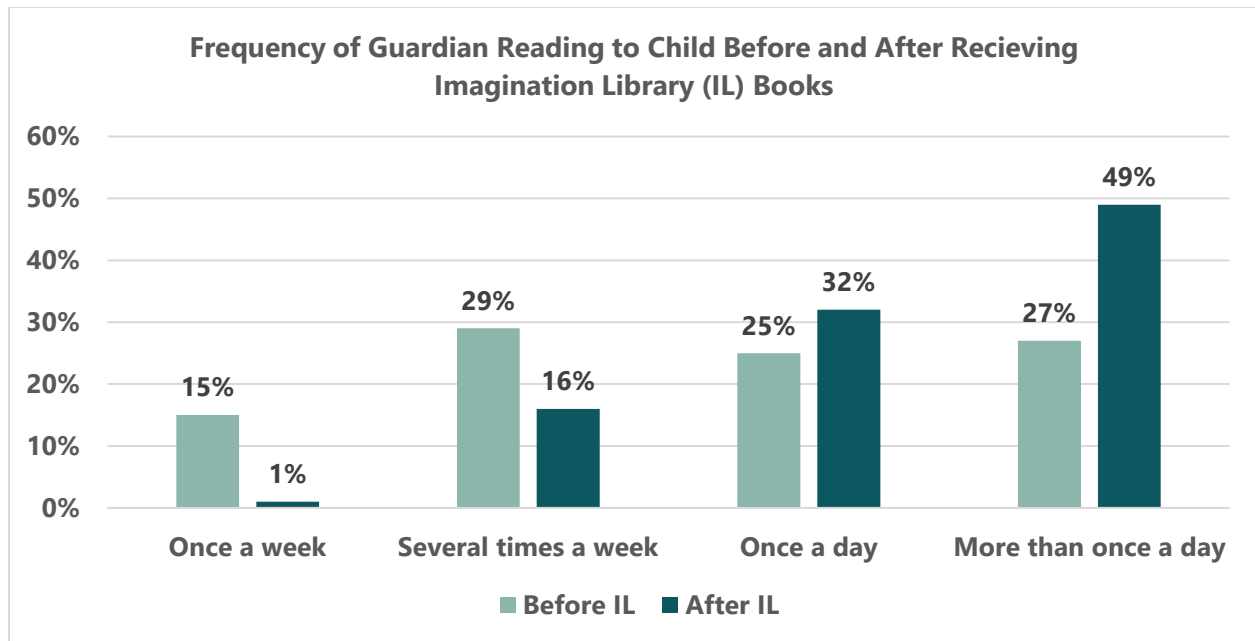
What is your proposed solution?

OSPI requests \$5 million in the 2023–25 biennium and \$5.2 million in the 2025–27 biennium to provide a 50% match of state funds to local funds to make the Imagination Library of Washington available to all households with children under the age of five across all 39 counties. The Imagination Library of Washington team estimate about 65% of eligible households will participate.

What are you purchasing and how does it solve the problem?

This proposal would purchase a 50% state match to local funds raised by all 39 Washington counties. The funds will pay for the cost of the books sent to Washington children from birth to age five, as well as for a statewide nonprofit organization to administer the Imagination Library of Washington program, as required by The Dollywood Foundation.

As an example of the impact of the Imagination Library on family engagement in early literacy, the table below is taken from a [2007 study conducted in Hawai’i](#) showing the frequency of parents/guardians reading to children before and after participating in the Imagination Library program. The study is based on a survey of over 700 respondents.



What alternatives did you explore and why was this option chosen?

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is an early literacy program and strategy that is unmatched. Drawing on research from across the U.S. and around the world, The Dollywood Foundation advances early literacy and places books directly into the hands of young children by mailing a book a month to their homes until their fifth birthdays. These books are chosen by a specially selected panel of early childhood literacy experts, and the program receives overwhelmingly positive feedback from families, communities, and government partners. The Dollywood Foundation is also fully funded for the next 100 years, offering a long-term, stable literacy partner for Washington state.

The program, as laid out in state law ([RCW 43.216.200](#)), is designed to be supported through local partnerships and private donations. While state funding is not required to be provided to the nonprofit organization, lack of a 50% state match will require the program to cut existing service by half and will prevent the program from expanding into additional counties.

The state could rely on communities to raise the missing 50%, however this will lead to an unreliable and inequitable Imagination Library of Washington program, as the ability of communities to make up that gap will vary by community and year. A 50% state match will ensure the program is made available to all Washington families by 2024 and will reinforce the Legislature's investment in equitable access to early literacy and literacy recovery opportunities for children from birth to age 5.

Performance Measures

Performance outcomes:

Fully funding this proposal will make the Imagination Library of Washington program available to all families in all 39 counties by 2024, getting books into the hands of an estimated 65–73%

of Washington children from birth to age 5. This funding will result in these books being available for future children by supporting a healthy and well-funded program.

Assumptions and Calculations

Expansion or alteration of a current program or service:

This request supports funding for the program established under [RCW 43.216.200](#).

Detailed assumptions and calculations:

OSPI assumes an interagency agreement contract would be executed with the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to support a contract with a Washington state-based qualified 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization physically located in Washington state to create and operate the program and further expand the Imagination Library efforts. The estimated cost is \$2.5 million in FY24 and FY25 and \$2.6 million in FY26 and FY27. This covers program administration costs of \$440,000 per year, increasing 10% each year. It also covers the cost of books acquired through The Dollywood Foundation. The Foundation has a 100-year sustainability plan, so the cost of books will remain stable.

Cost Breakdown by Fiscal Year

	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY27
Program Administration	440,000	484,000	532,400	585,640
Books	2,060,000	2,016,000	2,067,600	2,014,360
Total Cost	2,500,000	2,500,000	2,600,000	2,600,000

Workforce assumptions:

N/A

How is your proposal impacting equity in the state?

This request will drive pandemic literacy recovery and lead to achievement of early literacy across all communities, groups, and populations in the state by ensuring all children from birth to age five are provided with free, age-appropriate books. By securing a 50% state funding match alongside local funds, this request will enhance access to the Imagination Library of Washington program, and not be limited to an individual community's ability to raise funds. This will ensure that the existing early literacy gap is not exacerbated by a lack of resources in communities with large numbers of individuals experiencing poverty. The program also provides two books in Spanish per age group per year.

Strategic and Performance Outcomes

Strategic framework:

Early literacy is an essential component of OSPI's Strategic Goal #1: Ensuring Equitable Access to Strong Foundations.

Other Collateral Connections

Intergovernmental:

The Imagination Library of Washington program is run through the Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

Stakeholder response:

This request is supported by Dolly Parton's Imagination Library and the United Ways of the Pacific Northwest, who have partnered with OSPI separately to support the program through federal relief dollars.

Legal or administrative mandates:

N/A

Changes from current law:

N/A

State workforce impacts:

N/A

State facilities impacts:

N/A

Puget Sound recovery:

N/A

Other Documents

Reference documents:

[Choosing Our Books - Dolly Parton's Imagination Library](#)
[Research - Dolly Parton's Imagination Library](#)