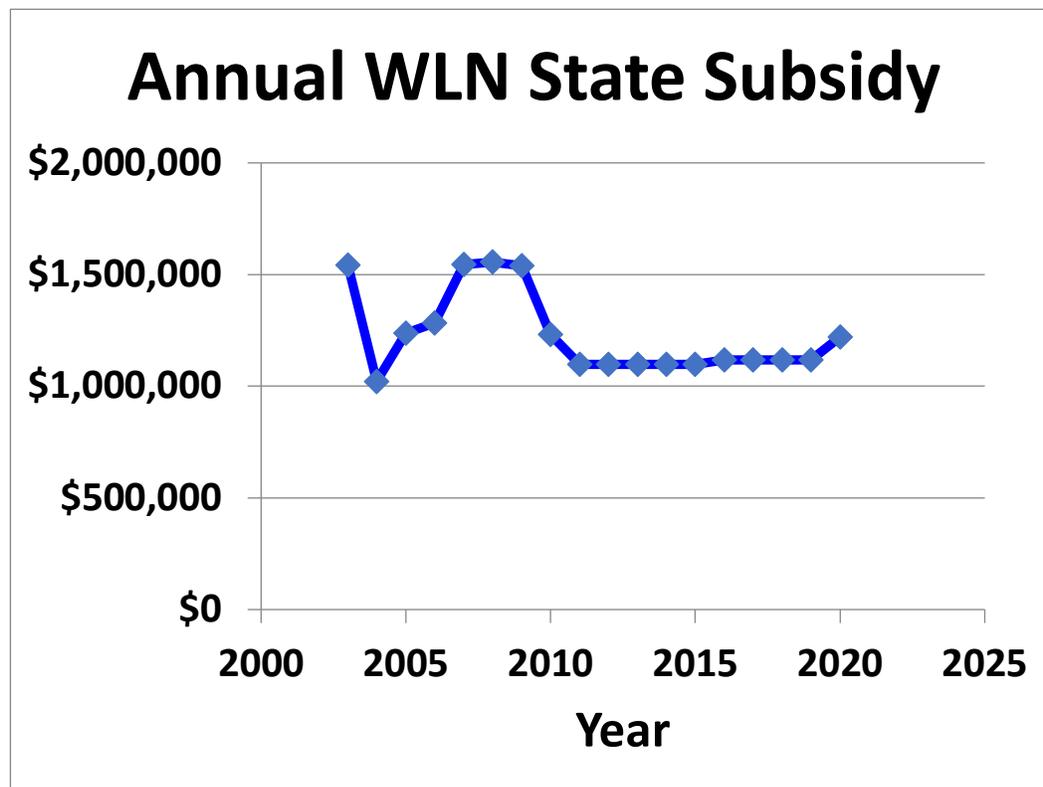


Rising Above Budget

The Westmoreland Library Network™ (WLN), or WLN District Center, receives the majority of its funding from the PA Department of Education, Office of Commonwealth Libraries. It is received in two categories: (1) a library subsidy, which is distributed according to a formula each January to the member libraries that qualify for state aid, except for about 15% that is retained for certain services provided by the WLN headquarters; (2) direct WLN operating budget funding, received after mid-year, according to the state fiscal year, generally for support services expected of all District Centers in the state, such as the van delivery of books and certain salaries.

We only have to look at the pattern of WLN subsidy funding over time to see the overall problem for libraries.



This is not a pretty budget story, especially as no account is made of dollar buying power over time. Nevertheless, this column is not about whining. Up to now it has shown you both adaptation and re-invention of libraries. Here is a recount of important examples of both, separately, though the line between adaptation and re-invention is sometimes blurred.

With respect to adaptation:

- Joined and shared collection of items (books, DVDs et al.) countywide that are accessible to all patrons through an on-line catalogue, the Polaris Integrated

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Library System (ILS), which is regularly upgraded: an on-line, 24/7 catalogue with fiberglass-based broadband

- Centralized technical support of the ILS, such that no library needs its own technical support staff
- Shared programming and purchasing power across the county
- Shared ongoing staff professional development
- Wide variety of key, empowering collaborations, such as with the Carnegie Science Center and the AIU3 Math & Science Collaborative
- Success in getting grants for shared, major initiatives

With respect to re-invention:

- Promotion and lending of e-books as part of an overall, shared collection
- Countywide arts, music and author programming (Pittsburgh Ballet Theater; Westmoreland Symphony)
- Active staff training and patron promotion for informed, standards-based programming, as a complement to formal learning in schools
- PreK-4, standards-based STEM programming for Summer Reading Club and other seasons (Storytime-STEM-packs™)
- Power Library as a resource for 6th to 12th-graders doing science fairs
- Virtual programming in the time of COVID-19

I tend to look at all of this as process and product development, just as I did in the for-profit corporate world. Successful for-profit new products are so because they lower cost, sometimes even accompanied by downgrading of an attribute(s), and/or because they bring appealing added value to the customer, acceptable even at higher cost. We have examples of both above, and that is what, at least in part, has kept our WLN libraries relevant and open, even with less operating income than in peak times. That is a significant accomplishment and a lesson.

Charles B. Greenberg
WLN Board President