



Youth Services Library Manager Hilary Verheggen leads two Salish Coast Elementary School students in a lesson on how to create snap circuits. The snap circuits have been so popular at the Salish After Hours program that organizers had to buy more sets, Port Townsend library director Melody Eisler said. (Port Townsend Public Library)

## Port Townsend School Board approves Salish After Hours program

The once pilot-program is now a mainstay for district and county library

By Zach Jablonski

Monday, January 6, 2020 7:10am | [NEWS](#) [JEFFERSON COUNTY](#)

**PORT TOWNSEND** — The Port Townsend School Board approved a year-long agreement with the Port Townsend Public Library to expand the district's pilot "Salish After Hours" program to the end of 2020.

The partnership agreement was approved during the school board's Thursday night meeting, after a presentation by Port Townsend Library Director Melody Eisler and Sandy Gessner, assistant superintendent of Port Townsend School District (PTSD).

Salish After Hours is an after-school program conducted at Salish Coast Elementary Library from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Wednesdays.

## **STEAM space**

It is a place for elementary-school-age students and their families to participate in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) activities, listen to presentations, read books and have a safe space to get together, Eisler said.

“It’s a great place for kids and families to gather and enjoy school,” Eisler said.

Students do not need to go to Salish Coast to participate in the program there, Eisler said.

The program began in fall and over the summer, the team hosted a pre-school story time on Tuesdays.

“Going to the Summer at Salish program was a wonderful way for [incoming kindergartners] to start to feel excited about their new school,” Eisler said.

When Salish Coast Elementary was opened in 2018, there was concern about after-school programs still being held at the uptown library location, so plans started to be made to bring the programs to the school, Eisler said.

“Expanding access to folks who cannot or do not come to the uptown library is exciting,” said Hilary Verheggen, youth services library manager for the city library.

“We see so many kids and families in the Castle Hill neighborhood come to the Salish After Hours program who rarely or never see come to the library in Uptown.

“Having the Salish Coast Library available to meet families where they are supports our work to remove barriers to getting to the public library. This is an important factor in the impact of our organization’s collaboration together is expanding access to truly promote a strong education community.”

Verhaggen, along with district librarian Joy Wentzel and school staff Derec Velez and Shannon Grewel oversee the program.

The pilot of the program in fall saw an average of 20 to 40 students and families attend the after-school sessions, with the largest crowd of 75 students and families attending a presentation by local illustrator and author Dana Sullivan, who talked about creating cartoons.

“It was a joyful day,” Eisler said.

One of the regular activities for students are snap circuit kits, which allow them to learn how to create electric circuits to make lights and other simple electronics. The library actually had to purchase more kits, Eisler said.

The library and district try to keep the cost of the program neutral (there is no charge for families/students who attend), by using supplies they have, but they appreciate donations from the community, such as a donation of \$500 from the Kiwanis Club.

Some clubs have also started to form during the after-school time, such as a chess club, Eisler said.

Salish After Hours also helps students and families get connected with the library system as a whole, as families can receive their library cards there. Notably, Eisler said, new Port Townsend city manager John Mauro and his family came in days after moving to the area to get their library cards.

“One of their first acts in Port Townsend was to get their library cards,” Eisler said.

The partnership between the school district and the library has been beneficial for the groups and the students, Eisler said.

“I think it’s been incredibly beneficial because we are working to promote a strong education culture through school district and the city library’s work and our city library is in uptown; we know a lot young families live in the Castle Hill neighborhood,” Eisler said.

“It’s so beneficial that we’re going to where the families are and we’re making an ease of access and removing barriers to able for kids and families

to experience a life-long love of learning together in the Salish Coast Elementary Library.”

Salish After Hours operates only when school is in session, and will not meet during summer, but organizers plan to have the Summer at Salish pre-school story time return this summer on Tuesdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Eisler said.

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