



Office of the Superintendent

DATE: October 8th, 2026

AGENDA TOPICS: Supplementary Novels for WHS

PRESENTER: Michelle O'Dell

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In accordance with all relevant Education Code and current Board Administrative Regulation 6161.1 and Board Policy 6161.11; following a review and selection process that included approval by the CIA Advisory Committee, and a period of public review; I am pleased to present our recommendation to the Board of the WUSD, the adoption of:

Supplementary Novels

1) Grade Level: English 9th-12th Grade (Willows High School)

Publisher: Knopf, 2018

Text/Novel: *There There* by Tommy Orange

"A wondrous and shattering award-winning novel that follows twelve characters from Native communities: all traveling to the Big Oakland Powwow, all connected to one another in ways they may not yet realize.

Among them is Jacquie Red Feather, newly sober and trying to make it back to the family she left behind. Dene Oxendene, pulling his life together after his uncle's death and working at the powwow to honor his memory. Fourteen-year-old Orvil, coming to perform traditional dance for the very first time. They converge and collide on one fateful day at the Big Oakland Powwow and together this chorus of voices tells of the plight of the urban Native American—grappling with a complex and painful history, with an inheritance of beauty and spirituality, with communion and sacrifice and heroism

A book with "so much jangling energy and brings so much news from a distinct corner of American life that it's a revelation" (*The New York Times*). It is fierce, funny, suspenseful, and impossible to put down—full of poetry and rage, exploding onto the page with urgency and force. *There There* is at once poignant and unflinching, utterly contemporary and truly unforgettable. ."¹

2) Grade Level: English 9-12th Grade (Willows High School)

Publisher: Vintage, 2020

Text/Novel: *The Nickel Boys* by Colton Whitehead

"This follow-up to *The Underground Railroad* brilliantly dramatizes another strand of American history through the story of two boys unjustly sentenced to a hellish reform school in Jim Crow-era Florida.

When Elwood Curtis, a black boy growing up in 1960s Tallahassee, is unfairly sentenced to a juvenile reformatory called the Nickel Academy, he finds himself trapped in a grotesque chamber of horrors. Elwood's only salvation is his friendship with fellow "delinquent" Turner, which deepens despite Turner's conviction that Elwood is hopelessly naive, that the world is crooked, and that the only way to survive is to scheme and avoid trouble. As life at the

¹ https://www.amazon.com/There-novel-Tommy-Orange/dp/0525520376/ref=tmm_hrd_swatch_0



Academy becomes ever more perilous, the tension between Elwood's ideals and Turner's skepticism leads to a decision whose repercussions will echo down the decades.

Based on the real story of a reform school that operated for 111 years and warped the lives of thousands of children, *The Nickel Boys* is a devastating, driven narrative that showcases a great American novelist writing at the height of his powers and "should further cement Whitehead as one of his generation's best" (*Entertainment Weekly*).²

Dates of Review

- Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Advisory (August 27th, 2026)
- Proposed Public Review (August 28th-September 28th, 2026)

Recommendation:

Adoption of supplemental novels:

1. *TThere There* by Tommy Orange
2. *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead

Thank you!