

Designing Library-Based Out-of-School Time Programs

In 2019, Policy Studies Associates conducted an evaluation of the Free Library of Philadelphia's Literacy Enrichment Afterschool Program (LEAP), focused on identifying program strategies to support early literacy development. The recommendations that emerged from this evaluation for the Free Library can also inform the efforts of other public libraries hosting out-of-school (OST) programs.

The Free Library of Philadelphia is committed to delivering high-quality OST programming to young people in grades preK-12 through LEAP. The Free Library's Youth Services and Programs division makes significant investment of human and financial resources towards the program, including:

- Managing the hiring and onboarding of part-time Afterschool Leaders and Teen Leadership Assistants
- Offering monthly curriculum training
- Purchasing, developing, and disseminating activity kits and materials
- Hosting periodic all-staff meetings

Hire dedicated staff for OST programs

In Philadelphia, at each library LEAP is directed by a part-time Afterschool Leader or Maker Mentor who manages day-to-day programming supported by two or three Teen Leadership Assistants, high school students hired for between 4 and 10 hours per week. These LEAP staff work under the guidance and supervision of the librarian, with administrative management and professional development from the Free Library's Youth Services Division.

The presence of these dedicated staff—without additional library responsibilities—ensures that all children who come to LEAP are welcomed and supported by staff who actively engage with children on a personal level, instilling trust and bolstering young people's connections to the program. Creating a sense of community and an environment that can foster learning does not occur by happenstance: an important part of the role of LEAP staff is to forge connections with new and returning participants.

The number one thing is to make [a new participant] feel as welcome and included as someone who has been here 30 days. How are you, where do you go to school, what grade are you in? It's trying to be friendly and generous and giving. Help a kid become comfortable in learning in a new space.

– Afterschool Leader (ASL)

Provide training to bolster the instructional competencies of OST staff

Many part-time OST staff do not have a background in education or training in children's literacy to draw on when providing individualized homework help or delivering enrichment programming. LEAP staff were eager for more targeted training to build their capacity to support literacy and learning. Although the Free Library offers monthly curriculum trainings and biannual professional development meetings, 48 percent of LEAP staff and 53 percent of librarians said that too little training was provided in early literacy.

When I am helping a child read, I am going on my memory of learning phonics. It would be helpful to have a refresh on that ... I don't know a lot about that instruction.

– Afterschool Leader (ASL)

Design programs that intentionally promote learning for children and families

Library-based OST programs offer safe, literacy-rich environments, but environment is not enough to advance literacy and learning. The LEAP evaluation examined strategies used across Philadelphia libraries to support literacy competencies—including love of reading—for children in grades PreK-3.

Although LEAP, by design, is not a learn-to-read or literacy tutoring program, staff strive to “connect literacy to everything we do” and embed literacy in activities ranging from homework help to arts. Staff also:

- Regularly read with children, providing individual attention and encouragement to young readers.
- Integrate reading in fun arts and STEM activities, such as creating “space slime” after reading a book about Mae Jemison, the first African-American woman to go into space, or creating squares for a Freedom Quilt after reading books honoring Black History Month.
- Amplify the impact of the program by modeling homework assistance strategies for parents and caregivers accompanying children, and directing them to additional community resources.

The parents are also there to work with the kids. Creating that learning community and knowledge community is really important when talking about homework assistance and navigating the school system.

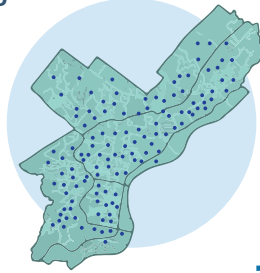
– Afterschool Leader (ASL)

LEAP and the City of Philadelphia's OST system

For more than 25 years, the Free Library of Philadelphia has offered academic support and enrichment through the Literacy Enrichment Afterschool Program (LEAP), a free, voluntary and drop-in program for students of all ages. LEAP operates within a comprehensive out-of-school time (OST) system in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia invests in and provides policy guidance to OST programs in the city, including LEAP.

- 2018-2026 strategic plan for OST
- A citywide OST vision and mission
- Oversight of the city's OST programs
- Supports for quality-improvement
- A data management system
- Alignment with city initiatives, including the Read by 4th campaign



The Free Library of Philadelphia provides a resource-rich environment for LEAP.

The Central Library provides

- Management of LEAP, the largest program operated through Youth Services and Programs
- Training to library and LEAP staff
- Curricula resources and guidance

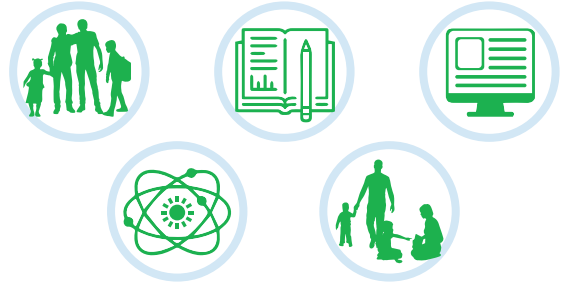


Regional and branch libraries offer

- Safe, welcoming environment
- Support and engagement from all library staff
- Access to books, electronic resources, and technology
- Programming tailored to community needs

LEAP Staffing, Design, and Activities

LEA offers OST programming 5 days a week at regional and branch libraries throughout Philadelphia.



LEAP staff, including Afterschool Leaders and Teen Leadership Assistants provide:

- Near-peer mentoring
- Passion and spark
- Participant-directed learning

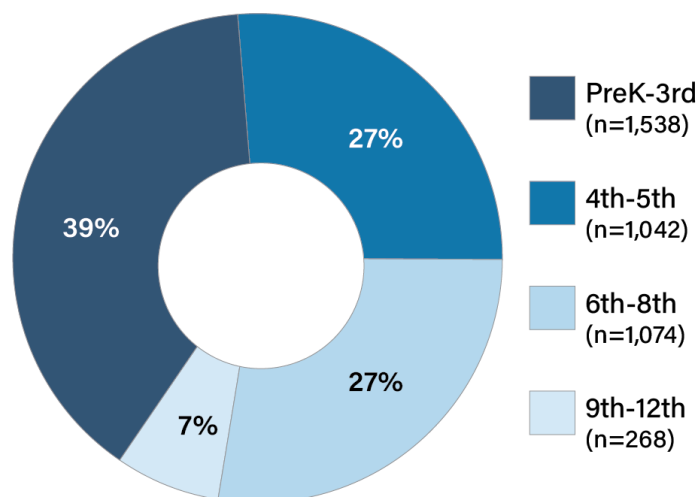
LEAP activities include:

- Literacy enrichment
- Homework assistance
- STEM and Maker programming
- Family literacy support
- Special events

LEAP by the numbers, 2018-19

Source: City of Philadelphia OST Cityspan data system as recorded by LEAP staff.

LEAP participants' grade-level, 2018-19



4,465 children participated in LEAP at 51 regional and branch libraries.

On an average day, **517** children participated in LEAP programs across the city.

For 28% of participants, LEAP was a regular afterschool activity:

1,269 came more than **20 days**
354 came more than **75 days**

72% came to LEAP when they needed assistance, or for a special event:

3,196 came less than **20 days**
including 969 who came to LEAP once

By design, LEAP welcomes both this core group of participants and occasional participants.