

Strategies for Supporting Early Literacy and Learning in LEAP

Grounded in the Free Library's mission to "advance literacy, guide learning, and inspire curiosity" and commitment to being an open and accessible community resource, LEAP (Literacy Enrichment Afterschool Program) offers afterschool drop-in academic support and enrichment at libraries throughout Philadelphia. These promising strategies for supporting early literacy and learning are based on an evaluation of LEAP conducted by Policy Studies Associates.

Embed reading and literacy in activities

LEAP staff intentionally integrate literacy into fun and engaging activities, including art and STEM. For example, we observed activities in which LEAP participants:

- Read stories out loud to a therapy dog. Children and LEAP staff jointly selected a book to read to a visiting therapy dog, giving children the opportunity to practice and show-off their reading.
- Created "space slime" after children and staff read a book about Mae Jemison, the first African American woman to go to space.
- Made squares for a freedom quilt after participants read books honoring Black History Month.

We are trying to introduce reflective thinking and narrative thinking even into the art that kids are making. Kids building with Legos and blocks, it turns into a story.

- Afterschool Leader (ASL)

K-3 Participants' reasons for coming to LEAP



Source: LEAP Participant Survey, 2019.

Develop and reinforce self-efficacy

LEAP staff help children become more self-confident and self-reliant in their learning by providing individualized attention and support and by fostering a learning culture. LEAP staff stood out when they:

- Encouraged children to use positive self-talk when approaching homework or other challenging tasks.
- Helped participants to develop work plans for completing assignments.
- Modeled using library resources to find information and solve problems.
- Tailored support and activities to children's individual literacy level and interests.

[In LEAP, children find] a positive experience that you won't be judged on, in a comfortable, self-initiated learning environment rather than a classroom environment

- Librarian

Model literacy support for families

Across Philadelphia's diverse, multilingual neighborhoods, LEAP staff model strategies for encouraging literacy and connect families to additional supports and resources. We saw LEAP staff build capacity by:

- Including caregivers in homework assistance, intentionally modeling strategies for working with young learners.
- Connecting families with additional literacy resources, such as the Free Library's Literacy Lab.
- Helping non-native English-speaking caregivers navigate school forms and other communications.

Kids know that we are here to help with homework. Otherwise, for some the library is a nice, safe, warm, and cozy place to be.

- Librarian

Provide a safe and supportive environment

LEAP staff created environments that helped children to be ready to learn by:

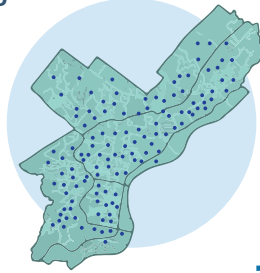
- Being flexible in program plans to respond to emotional needs before proceeding with learning goals.
- Establishing a "neutral" environment where participants feel safe and can be themselves, especially important in neighborhoods coping with upheaval or violence.
- Acting to defuse bullying and other negative behaviors while acknowledging and talking through children's feelings that may lead to those behaviors.

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

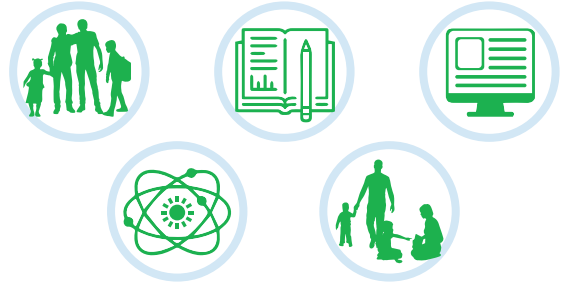


Regional and branch libraries offer

- 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

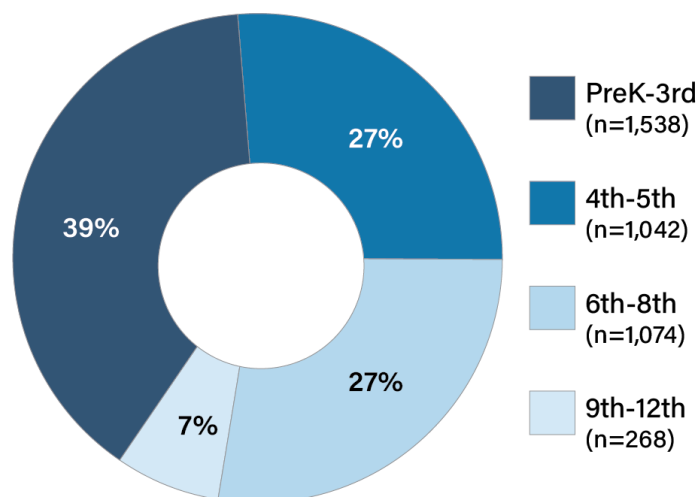
LEAP activities include:

- 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.