

Policy Supports for Drop-in Out-of-School Time Programs

With more than 25 years of experience providing library-based out-of-school time (OST) programming to Philadelphia children and youth in grades preK-12, LEAP (Literacy Enrichment Afterschool Program) offers insights into the distinct operations and contributions of drop-in programs. A 2019 evaluation of LEAP, conducted by Policy Studies Associates, yields three recommendations for policymakers and funders investing in a comprehensive OST system.

1. Recognize the added value of drop-in programs to a citywide OST system

- Consistent with its mission, the Free Library of Philadelphia is committed to making LEAP a resource that is “readily, equally, and equitably accessible to all library users.” By design, there is no expectation for daily attendance in LEAP.
- This drop-in design distinguishes LEAP from most other OST programs. It ensures that services are accessible to families who do not want to—or cannot—commit to enrolling their child in a daily afterschool program (e.g., because of high mobility or nontraditional work hours), but who need additional resources and assistance on occasion.

It's a free and voluntary program that you can attend as much or as little without any penalty whatsoever. You don't have to work your life around it. There's no mandatory activity that you must do. It's all up to the child and whoever brings them.

– Afterschool Leader (ASL)

Location of LEAP and Other OST Programs in Philadelphia



Source: LEAP Participation data and City of Philadelphia, 2018.

2. Leverage the role of trusted public community institutions in an OST system

LEAP pays particular attention to providing welcoming and inclusive environments for the children and families served, in neighborhood libraries throughout Philadelphia. Indeed, libraries are often viewed as safe havens for communities. This positions the OST program as a trusted, safe resource that can help young people process the challenges in their lives or communities that can create barriers to learning.

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

– Librarian

For example, LEAP staff describe:

- Bringing together young people of diverse backgrounds in a safe and enriching environment
- Offering a “neutral” environment that is removed from violence that young people may experience or witness in the community
- Defusing bullying and other negative behaviors, providing space for participants to talk through what they are experiencing and giving time and support to adjust attitudes and behaviors.

3. Ensure that policies and expectations reflect the context of program operations

Data tracking and performance metrics for OST systems typically rely on capturing daily program participation for individual children, with an underlying assumption that regular participation is both an indicator and predictor of program success. Lessons learned from the LEAP evaluation point to the need to adjust expectations for drop-in programs.

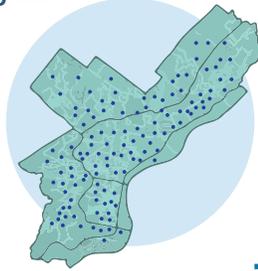
- Patterns of LEAP utilization—with both a core group of regular participants and a significant group of occasional participants (see reverse side) are reflective of its unique goals and expectations as a drop-in program. The assumptions underlying metrics of daily attendance are inconsistent with program design and contribution to a comprehensive OST.
- In addition, in alignment with American Library Association values of confidentiality and privacy, LEAP does not require families to complete enrollment materials for their child to participate, as most OST programs do. Rooted in these library values, many staff are reluctant to collect demographic data or to ask participants to sign in, yielding counts in data management systems that likely undercount engagement with the program.

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

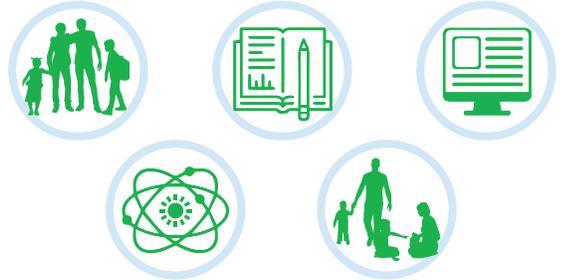


Regional and branch libraries offer

- 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

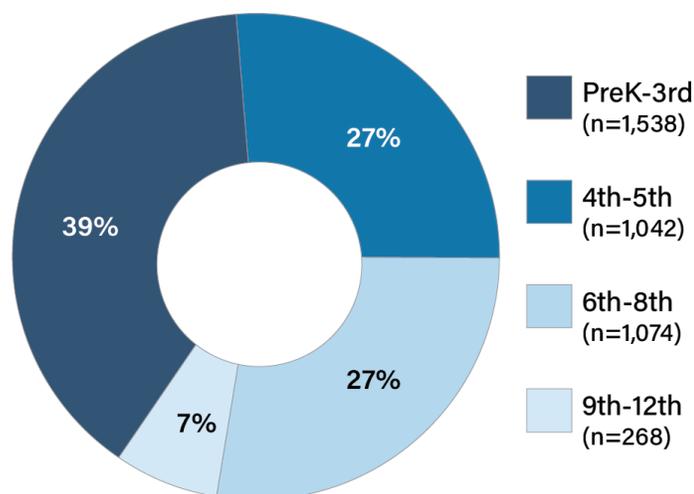
LEAP activities include:

- 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.