Promising Practices in Planning and Implementing COMPASS Literacy Programming

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September 2015

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The New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) recognizes the role that its Comprehensive After School System (COMPASS) programs can play in supporting the educational success of youth, including literacy development. Since 2011, DYCD has required COMPASS programs to offer at least two hours a week of either literacy or science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) enrichment activities, and to engage an education specialist in designing and supporting the implementation of program activities. In addition, as part of agency-wide improvement and learning efforts, DYCD has worked to understand the factors that contribute to high-quality learning experiences for participants. Evaluation studies have suggested that DYCD's policies requiring academic programming and the support of an education specialist during afterschool hours have helped COMPASS programs to strengthen their efforts to coordinate with school partners and encouraged them to be more intentional in their selection and design of program activities (Butler & Russell, 2014; Mielke, Butler, Russell, & Orozco, 2013). As a next stage in its evaluation efforts, during the 2014-15 school year, DYCD asked Policy Studies Associates (PSA) to explore approaches to literacy programming in elementary-grades COMPASS programs.

The goal of this study is to help DYCD and the community-based organizations that operate COMPASS programs develop and strengthen strategies for planning and implementing literacy programming during the afterschool hours, by documenting promising practices in:

- Program content
- Alignment to school-day instruction
- Staffing
- Training and professional development
- Assessment of participant needs

In addition to exploring promising practices from current COMPASS programs, the report integrates reflections from COMPASS host school principals on the opportunities and challenges in supporting youth's literacy development, and reviews best practices identified in the research literature. The appendix includes brief profiles of five COMPASS programs and their varied approaches to supporting the development of youth literacy skills. Each profile offers a glimpse into the assessment of student needs, staffing structure and staff training, and the selection of curriculum and design of program activities. The programs highlighted in the report and profiles are not representative of all COMPASS programs nor inclusive of all approaches. However, because the report focuses on the rationale for program design and planning, we believe that the practices examined can provide insight across program contexts.

Study Approach

The study unfolded over several stages, each described below. The initial phase generated context about literacy programming in COMPASS elementary-grades programs throughout New York City, and provided a scan of the various approaches to literacy programming. Additional data were collected to identify five COMPASS programs to explore in depth. These sites were

selected because the early phases of data collection suggested that they engaged in practices that were both replicable and considered promising in the out-of-school time field.

Principal interviews. In fall 2014, the PSA team interviewed 12 elementary-grades principals to gain a better understanding of their perspectives on the role of COMPASS programs in promoting literacy. For these interviews, we identified principals who viewed the development of literacy skills as an immediate priority and who were familiar with the literacy programming at their school's COMPASS program, so that they could provide feedback and share their vision for their afterschool program's literacy activities. Specifically, principals were selected based on responses to a 2013-14 survey on which they reported that English Language Arts (ELA) should be an academic priority during afterschool, that ELA/literacy skills are the most important skills to improve over the summer, and that they interacted frequently with their school's COMPASS program.

Program director questionnaire. In early winter 2015, we administered a short voluntary questionnaire to 309 elementary COMPASS program directors. The questionnaire administration was a combined effort with another PSA study of social-emotional learning (SEL) approaches in COMPASS programs. Respondents were given the option to provide information about either their literacy or SEL approaches, and 125 directors chose to provide information about literacy programming. Responses to the questionnaire offered a scan of how COMPASS programs approached their literacy programming, and helped us to identify sites for follow-up phone interviews. We selected programs for follow-up interviews with two primary goals in mind: identifying programs with replicable approaches, and with varied approaches.

Phone interviews with educational specialists. After reviewing responses to the questionnaire and considering DYCD recommendations of additional programs with promising practices, we identified eight COMPASS programs for follow-up phone interviews. The goal of the phone interview was to learn more detail about each program's approach to supporting literacy development and the rationale behind that approach. Because of his or her role in lesson planning and curricula selection for COMPASS programs, we aimed to interview the education specialist. If the education specialist was not available or the program did not have an education specialist, we interviewed the program director. Based on these interviews, we identified five programs for in-depth site visits. Programs were selected based on the replicability of the strategies and the ability of respondents to articulate the intentionality and rationale of their strategies.

> **Education Specialist**
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> DYCD requires COMPASS programs to have an education specialist whose role is to identify appropriate curricula, help staff create lesson plans, oversee implementation of program activities, foster continuous quality improvement, and build productive relationships with the schools attended by program participants.

Site visits. We conducted one-day site visits in spring 2015 to five COMPASS programs. We interviewed the program director, education specialist, and key school staff, as well as conducted observations of literacy activities. Data collected from these visits served as the foundation for the COMPASS promising practices presented in this report.

Perspectives on the Role of Afterschool Programs in Supporting Literacy Development

Research on the role of out-of-school time opportunities in supporting academic performance posits that programs can support student performance directly (e.g., through homework help and tutoring) and indirectly (e.g., by supporting positive youth development which, in turn, supports academic success) (Noam, Biancarosa, & Dechausay, 2003; Hall, Yohalem, Tolman, & Wilson, 2002).

Research Perspectives

Understanding the ways in which afterschool programs approach literacy instruction and the effectiveness of those practices first requires an understanding of perspectives about what role programs should play in supporting academic achievement. The role and extent to which academics should be a primary focus of afterschool programs is routinely debated. For some, afterschool programs should serve as an extension of the school day. Pressures that emerged in response from state and federal accountability systems, for example, have led some stakeholders to promote more academically-focused afterschool programs. For these stakeholders, afterschool programs should be guided by structured lessons and include regular assessment; essentially, as described by Ryan, Foster, and Cohen (2002): "The afterschool provider acts as an extended teacher." In contrast, others have noted a potential danger in that an emphasis on academic support or tutoring in afterschool programs may result in the loss of alternative learning spaces that approach academics using instructional strategies that are distinct from those that occur in the school (Hull & Schultz, 2001).

A middle-ground position related to the role of out-of-school time programs involves a balance of academic support, enrichment, and social-emotional learning. For example, Noam et al. (2003) discuss bridging school and afterschool learning while emphasizing that the learning that occurs in afterschool programs should feel different from the learning that occurs in the school day. In particular, Noam distinguishes extended learning (e.g., tutoring and homework help) from enriched learning (e.g., project-based learning and hands-on activities), the latter being one strategy afterschool program providers can use to differentiate the learning that occurs outside of school from the regular school day.

This middle-ground position appears most reflective of the view embodied by the COMPASS program leaders and The After-School Corporation (TASC), a DYCD contractor providing technical assistance and coaching to COMPASS programs. Technical assistance materials developed by TASC encourage programs to help youth develop reading, writing, listening, and language skills by engaging them in literacy activities that promote critical thinking, problem solving, research investigation, discussions with open-ended questions, presentations, and meaningful connections to books and participants' lives.

Promising Instructional Practices in the Literature

Research on literacy instruction in afterschool has identified a variety of instructional approaches that can support the effective development of literacy skills, which can apply to COMPASS settings.

Real-world application of literacy. The Afterschool Alliance's issue brief on literacy education (2011) argues, "Some of the best afterschool programs encourage enhanced literacy by helping children see how and why reading and writing might be useful and relevant to their lives and futures." Indeed, several studies have examined how programs emphasize the real-world application of literacy skills. In their study of literacy programs, Spielberger and Halpern (2002) found that exemplary literacy programs share several characteristics, including strategies for teaching literacy skills that highlight the personal, social, and cultural uses for these skills. In their view, afterschool programs have the potential to expose participants to broader forms of literacy and provide opportunities for youth to apply literacy skills to their interests.

Read-alouds and independent reading time. Examining the literacy practices used by three afterschool providers in Boston, Ryan et al. (2002) found that the use of school-based instructional strategies can have positive influences on student achievement. The researchers suggest incorporating read-alouds and independent reading blocks into afterschool activities; they argue that these school-day practices in particular can be easily adapted for out-of-school contexts and require little staff training. Read-alouds are traditionally observed for younger students but, as the researchers argue, they can also have benefits for older readers. For new readers, read-alouds can model the practices of a proficient reader; for older readers, read-alouds can strengthen listening and reading comprehension skills.

Similarly, Britsch et al. (2005), in their review of the literature related to literacy instruction in out-of-school time programs, highlight the use of read-alouds, book discussions, and literature circles as promising practices for literacy-based afterschool initiatives. Read-alouds in afterschool programs provide models of fluency in reading, expose participants to new concepts, and enhance students listening comprehension and critical thinking skills. Several of the programs highlighted in their research, including the Foundations, Inc. Afterschool Enrichment Program and LA's BEST, incorporated read-alouds into literacy activities; these programs, among others, showed positive results in the literacy achievement of participants.

Enrichment activities. Spielberger and Halpern (2002) argue that literacy can be incorporated into activities using a variety of strategies, including self-directed literacy activities and incorporating literacy skills into other activities. For example, several afterschool programs they observed included a "Peace Table" activity, which is designed to mediate conflicts between students. One program incorporated a writing component into the Peace Table process in which youth are required to describe their conflict and resolution in writing.

The researchers also found that several programs used the arts (e.g., dance, movement, photography) to support literacy instruction. In several programs, participants were challenged to make connections between creative expression and language. They wrote, "Since each art form has its own vocabulary and grammar, children can be challenged to make connections between

expression and language, learning correspondences such as movement sentences, jazz notion and writing, and narrative structure" (Spielberger & Halpern, 2002). Examples of these strategies include combining drawing and writing in journaling activities, using literacy materials in play, and linking activities to events in reading materials.

The research also showed that participants can develop and reinforce literacy skills in theater, crafts, or cooking activities. Within the context of a study of the Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth (DUSTY), a collaboration aimed to address the digital divide between East and West Oakland, Hull & Zacher (2010) argue that afterschool programs can provide spaces for participants to gain familiarity with a range of communicative tools, including oral and written modes of communication; thus, supporting the development of participants' literacy skills extending beyond the ability to read and write academic texts.

Though not necessarily a skill limited to the out-of-school time context, using alternative texts–such as newspapers, graphic novels, and series books–may engage participants and support literacy skill building. In their ethnography of two students who participated in afterschool tutoring, Piazza and Duncan (2012) suggest that use of alternative texts may encourage students to try new reading strategies and navigate more complex texts. Students' interactions with alternative texts may encourage them to develop personal connections to reading that encourage them to explore additional opportunities to develop literacy skills. "When students engage with texts as a social practice, it allows them to ask questions, play with, challenge, negotiate, and take risks with their understanding of texts and the worlds they life in" (Piazza & Duncan, 2012).

Tutoring and homework help. In their review of the role of literacy in afterschool programs, Spielberger and Halpern (2002) found, through observations and surveys, that the most common literacy activities were homework help and independent reading. Surveyed afterschool programs most often structured literacy activities to include opportunities for children to read to themselves, for adults to read to children, or for adults to tutor children. Tutoring and homework help are two strategies afterschool programs can use to support literacy instruction.

According to Saddler and Staulters (2008), literacy-focused tutoring can supplement or enhance school-day reading instruction. In their descriptive study of the Regional Partners afterschool-literacy program, the researchers found that program participants improved in reading ability on measurable objectives, gaining an average of one grade level in reading ability. Similarly, Lauer et al. (2003) identified positive effects among programs that supported literacy instruction through one-on-one tutoring. Their analysis of the effects of afterschool programs on reading and mathematics achievement found, for example, that the largest average positive effect sizes arose from programs that used one-on-one tutoring, which may confirm other research demonstrating the positive influence of tutoring and individualized support for program participants.

Principal Perspectives

The school principal's vision for the afterschool program has a strong influence on the role of COMPASS programs in supporting literacy. While 52 percent of school leaders whose school hosts a COMPASS program agree that ELA/Literacy should be the primary academic focus of the afterschool program (Turner & Russell, 2014), they have varying opinions on how COMPASS programs should approach literacy, reflecting the dissent in the research literature.

School-day extension. When asked in interviews about their vision for COMPASS programs' approach to supporting youth literacy development, some principals believed that their COMPASS program should extend the school day by duplicating or reinforcing the instructional strategies taught by school-day teachers. At one school, for example, the principal explained that the majority of students were not meeting the state standards in literacy and therefore, the COMPASS program should focus on increasing students' performance on the ELA exams. The principal stated, "In order for a school to actually start to show the gains necessary, it has to be a whole school approach in which everything that is done in the building is around the same goals and the same vision."

Enrichment activities. We also interviewed COMPASS host principals who wanted their program's literacy programming to look very different from the school day. They viewed their COMPASS program's role as supporting literacy by integrating reading and writing into other enrichment activities. For instance, one principal supported her COMPASS program's incorporation of literacy in performing arts activities because it provided an opportunity for students to succeed in an informal and alternative environment. She explained:

> *I think sometimes it should be very different because if you're sitting in class, and you're struggling, and you already almost have this [mental] block of, 'I'm not learning this, and I'm not getting this,' or whatever […] the afterschool may provide another opportunity where the pressure's not on you in a classroom type setting, because it is more informal, and the structures are not the same structure that you have during the day, maybe, in the classroom. It may lead to all of a sudden, "Oh, my goodness, now I get it."*

Other principals who encouraged their COMPASS program to focus on enrichment programming thought it was important to focus on project-based literacy activities to reinforce learning. As one principal described, "You need to vary it, so project-based [learning] is really important. They mix the children, and the teachers. All of that is positive. The children need a fresh start in the afterschool."

Tutoring and homework help. Offering homework help and tutoring as an approach to literacy instruction also appealed to principals mainly because of the needs of their students and school community. Some of the principals emphasizing this viewpoint noted that the majority of their students were English Language Learners (ELL) or were generally struggling with literacy. According to them, parents agreed that it was important to provide direct educational assistance after school.

Staff capacity. Regardless of whether COMPASS programs support literacy development in a way that looks similar to the school day or through enrichment activities, a major challenge is staff capacity. Principals reported that programs often hired college-age students as front-line staff to implement activities, and felt that many of these college-age students do not have the credentials and experience to teach literacy. Principals urged more training of COMPASS staff to equip them with the knowledge and teaching practices that can help support youth in developing literacy skills. A few principals interviewed for this study trained COMPASS staff themselves or relied on the education specialist and/or teachers to provide training through school-based sessions or school staff meetings. Other principals stated that it was "impossible" for the afterschool program to align with their school's literacy curriculum because it was "too complex" and required "specific training" that they were unable to offer.

Promising Practices for Implementing Literacy Programming

This section draws on promising practices used in five programs visited for this study, our review of the literature on literacy in afterschool programming, and knowledge of best practices in out-of-school time programs, to offer recommendations for elementary-grades COMPASS programs. Recommendations are organized under the following areas of program planning: program content and connection to the school day, staffing, and staff development.

Recognizing that program context is important, we believe that the promising practices described here represent replicable strategies on which provider- and program-level staff can draw as they plan and deliver literacy activities. Some of these practices are already encouraged in the expectations laid out by DYCD for COMPASS programs, but are not consistently implemented effectively.

> **Planning for Literacy Programming**
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> COMPASS programs should consider the following as they work to implement high-quality literacy programming:
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> - Goals of the partner school and mission of the COMPASS program
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> - Available information about the literacy needs of participants, to guide program decisions
>
> - Staffing capacity and qualifications to lead the COMPASS literacy programming
>
> - Ongoing professional development needs of staff

Staff at all levels must think strategically and creatively about each of the areas of program planning to provide high-quality literacy activities to participants. To facilitate that process, this section presents key decision points that can guide COMPASS programs in developing approaches that reinforce participants' literacy development and bring together the resources that align with school day goals and the needs of participants while working within their capacity.

Literacy Content

Five key questions are at the core of programmatic decisions about afterschool literacy, including program content and curriculum:

- How does literacy fit into this COMPASS program?

- What literacy-specific goals does this program seek to promote?

- What are the instructional approaches of this COMPASS program's host or feeder schools?

- How can the COMPASS program support participants' literacy learning, as informed by the host or feeder school's goals?

- What curricula or activities will help move participants toward learning goals?

Planning and implementing quality literacy activities requires that program staff think intentionally about the relationships among the COMPASS program's goals for participants, participants' needs, and the needs and instructional goals of its host school. This section presents promising approaches to determining literacy content and curricula.

Work deliberately with principals to determine how the program can support school-day learning. Coordination and collaboration with school principals to determine whether and how the COMPASS literacy programming will support participant learning is critical. Conversations with school leaders and key instructional staff can inform decisions about program content and curricula. In addition to discussion about the school's instructional approaches, participants' needs, and goals for the afterschool program, program staff and school leaders can discuss how the school can contribute to literacy instruction during the afterschool hours, such as through support of school-day staff or curricular resources to support literacy instruction. These conversations between program staff and school leaders must be ongoing, extending beyond initial conversations at the start of a partnership.

For the programs included in this study, early conversations with host school principals helped program staff define the approach to school alignment. For Program A,[1] close collaboration with school leaders was an agency-wide goal. At the start of the partnership, the program director met with the school principal to determine how the program would support the host school's goals for participants. In that early meeting, the principal expressed that the academic components of the COMPASS program should be an extension of the school day; in particular, the program director and principal decided together that the program should emphasize academic content that school-day teachers do not have time to address during school hours. For literacy, the program director and program staff worked closely with teachers to determine which areas they were unable to address during the day.

At Program B, the program director and education specialist have ongoing conversations about participants' needs with the school's leadership team. The goals of these conversations are to discuss the school's study units for each grade and how the program can support school-day instruction. Our interviews revealed that principals had varying perspectives on the extent to

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[1] Site profiles are included in the appendix to this report.

which afterschool programming should connect to the school day; thus, having an initial conversation and ongoing check-ins about the role that the COMPASS programs should play in the host school can inform programs about participants' needs and how they can best support the host school's vision for student learning. Both Program A and Program B intentionally aligned afterschool content with school-day instruction.

Identify strategies for the afterschool program to complement school-day learning. In the previous examples, close collaboration and extension of school-day content into afterschool programming were priorities. However, if the explicit alignment of school-day instructional strategies and curriculum are not priorities for a program and its host school, staff can complement the school day while using instructional approaches and materials traditionally found in afterschool environments, such as project-based learning and the integration of instructional games. In those cases, program staff weigh the goals and priorities of their programs, participants' needs, and instructional goals for participants. As the programs included in our study demonstrated, program staff can integrate opportunities to strengthen literacy skills (e.g., reading comprehension, writing) across content areas.

Three of the programs studied did not *explicitly* align program content by extending school-day instructional strategies and content but made efforts to complement the school day by reinforcing literacy skills using intentionally different approaches. Program C, for example, established a goal to support participants' reading comprehension and fluency using the Reader's Theater curriculum, a reading program that uses drama to support literacy. The program's education specialists, employed by the host school, explained that during the afterschool hours their goal is to balance the school's goals of supporting literacy development while keeping afterschool activities "fun." The education specialists modified the Reader's Theater lesson plans so that the activities include at least one school-day learning goal; for example, they add at least one Common Core[2] learning standard to each activity, focusing on foundational skills such as reading with accuracy and purpose.

Program D similarly supports school-day instruction without explicit alignment. In an interview, the principal explained that he trusts program staff to run literacy programming based on their expertise in out-of-school learning strategies. In general, the program took a holistic approach to participants' academic and social-emotional development; program staff explained that they do not want afterschool activities to resemble the school day. Program staff selected curricula designed to support literacy skill development, including comprehension and fluency, through an array of activities including mock trials.

Finally, Program E's literacy leader, who was responsible for planning and implementing activities, explained that the program has used the Comic Book Project, a well-established literacy initiative that engages youth in designing comic books. The activity focuses on writing, illustrating, and publishing comics, and the literacy leader stated that the initiative is aligned with the Common Core State Standards, including the Grade 3 Reading standard for using information gained from illustrations and the words to demonstrate understanding of a text. The integration of

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[2] The Common Core State Standards are academic standards in math and English Language Arts that outline the skills and concepts students should master by the end of each grade level.

the Common Core State Standards allowed the program to complement skills addressed during the school-day through a project that combines both literacy and artistic skills.

Select curricula and instructional materials that will move participants toward the program's learning goals. Implementing high-quality literacy requires that program staff select appropriate instructional materials that move participants toward the learning goals established for their program. Program leaders, then, must think intentionally about the targeted learning goals for participants and how various curricula can support those learning goals. Participant goals may be informed by a combination of the provider organization's priorities for participants and the host school's priorities for participants.

Among the five programs visited, program staff selected a variety of curricula aimed to support participant outcomes, with program staff describing specific learning goals and how the selected materials help participants achieve those goals. As previously described, Program C used Reader's Theater, a leveled reading program published by Reading A-Z. According to the education specialists, the curriculum allows participants to engage with texts for an extended period of time, which allows participants more time to practice reading accurately and quickly, reading with emotion, and thinking about what they have read. Additionally, as the education specialists explained, Reader's Theater allows participants to engage in literacy activities in a way that is distinct from school-day learning. One of the education specialists stated, "We were trying to find something fun; something that the kids will have fun doing rather than a tedious reading and writing task."

Program A selected curricula to meet learning goals for each grade level. For the early grades, for example, the program emphasized foundational literacy skills, such as vocabulary and comprehension. As such, literacy for this group of participants focused on a storytelling activity during which literacy staff read to participants and used questioning strategies to check comprehension and to help participants think critically about what they heard. For older participants, test preparation was a spring semester focus. In order to provide an opportunity to become familiar with the state ELA tests, literacy staff used workbooks and practice test items to structure activities designed to help participants build and strengthen tested literacy skills. Literacy staff also integrated literacy games to maintain participants' interest in afterschool activities.

Staffing Literacy Programming

Successful literacy programming requires building and maintaining staff capacity to implement high-quality activities. Recognizing that COMPASS programs have varying resources and capacity to hire certain types of afterschool program staff (e.g., certified teachers and specialists), program leaders must decide what types of staff are available to support their program's literacy goals; how existing staff can be used strategically to support literacy, both in terms of oversight and implementation; what additional staff are needed; and how to build staff capacity to implement literacy activities.

When considering how to staff literacy in COMPASS programs, program staff must consider:

■ What are the qualifications of existing staff, and what staff qualifications are necessary to support literacy activities?

■ Does the program have resources to hire a certified teacher or other specialized staff to implement literacy activities?

This section describes two approaches to staffing structures, including hiring specialized staff to focus on literacy instruction and using the education specialist strategically to support program oversight.

Determine whether and how a literacy leader can support activity implementation. Dedicated staff members who focus solely on literacy programming position COMPASS programs to provide high-quality literacy activities. Programs can designate a literacy leader to plan and oversee the implementation of activities. The literacy leader position complements the program director and/or education specialist position, bringing specialized focus and knowledge. The literacy leader can be a certified teacher, although other staff can fill this role as well. Programs unable to include certified teachers in their staffing structures may appoint an experienced group leader (e.g., a college student or recent graduate) with literacy content knowledge and a demonstrated ability to plan and deliver activities.

Literacy Leader

A literacy leader is a content specialist responsible for the COMPASS program's literacy programming. This role is defined by responsibilities rather than qualification. A literacy leader plans lessons and investigates literacy concepts and methods to shape the program's literacy activities.

A literacy leader can be the sole person responsible for implementing literacy or can take the lead in supporting other staff in integrating literacy into the program activities.

A literacy leader, while not needing to be a certified teacher or literacy expert, should have an interest and ability to focus on literacy instruction. The literacy leader works directly with the education specialist in most programs.

Three of the programs studied appointed a literacy leader. For Program A, the literacy leader position emerged after the program could no longer hire certified teachers to deliver academic content. After observing one experienced group leader implement a high-quality literacy activity, the program director saw an opening to maintain the quality of instruction provided by certified teachers through the role of a literacy leader. The program director considered the literacy leader as second-in-command at the program, and the literacy leader was responsible for planning lessons, assessing student progress, and coordinating with school-day staff. While she did not come to the program with specific skills in teaching literacy, she received training from DYCD's technical assistance provider, TASC, and ongoing feedback from the program director to support her work as the literacy leader. For the program director, the value-added of this role was the reduction of burden for the program director and education specialist; a skilled literacy specialist, for example, can focus on the content area which, in turn, allows the program director and education specialist to address other areas of program planning.

At Program E, the literacy leader served in a similar capacity. The position was a relatively new position created in response to feedback the program received from a DYCD program manager. The literacy leader was promoted from group leader and was responsible for planning and delivering literacy activities as well as developing a program-wide curriculum that will help other group leaders implement literacy skills across content areas.

Program D took the approach of hiring literacy-specific staff to deliver all literacy programming. These staff were college graduates with extensive teaching and youth development experience; the program director recruited these staff from local teacher training programs, including Teachers College, Columbia University and Hunter College. Literacy leaders worked closely with the program's education specialist and were responsible for planning and implementing activities. This allowed the program to achieve in-depth content and instructional capacity. The education specialist explained that this staffing structure contributes to quality programming because experienced staff are then responsible for literacy implementation: "We have group leaders who are truly front-line staff. Some are college students, some are high school students.… They come in with an interest and passion for working with kids, but they don't necessarily come in with teaching experience. As a program, we felt that [implementing quality literacy] would be a lot to ask of [our group leaders]." Instead, hiring and relying on literacy leaders to implement the more specialized programming alleviated concerns about staff capacity and ensured a higher quality of literacy implementation.

Training and Professional Development

Successful delivery of literacy activities in an afterschool context requires that staff receive ongoing training and support. Both specialized staff (e.g., literacy leaders, certified teachers) and traditional group leaders need knowledge of key literacy skills and pedagogical approaches, including knowledge of literacy standards (i.e., Common Core State Standards), instructional approaches used during the school day, and approaches to implementing published curricula. Key to providing training and professional development is an understanding of the types of staff programs employ and the unique training needs of each type of employee. Programs that hire more certified teachers, for example, may not need to provide in-depth training on behavioral management; instead, trainings for certified teachers may emphasize strategies to integrate out-of-school time instructional strategies, such as project-based learning, into literacy activities. In contrast, less-experienced staff (e.g., college students) may need training that addresses instructional approaches and classroom management. Questions to consider include:

- What content knowledge and skills do staff bring to the literacy program, and what content knowledge and skills do staff need?

- How can the program meet staff's professional development needs (e.g., in-house versus external trainings)?

This section describes approaches to staff training and professional development, with examples from the five programs studied.

Use the education specialist strategically in supporting literacy. Education specialists can play a key role in strengthening academic content for programs through both program planning and implementation. To support literacy activities, education specialists, for example, can provide targeted training and coaching to program staff, especially when staff have limited teaching experience. In deciding whether to use the education specialist in this capacity, program leaders must understand the existing capacity and needs of program staff and determine how the education specialist can support program staff. The role and responsibilities of the education specialist can look very different depending on staff members' experience and capacity.

In programs that primarily employ high school- or college-age adults with limited teaching experience, the education specialist can write lesson plans, adapt published curricula to meet participants' needs, and focus training to support activity implementation. At Program C, where group leaders were college students, for example, the education specialists adapted the Reader's Theater curriculum for group leaders. For each session, the education specialists integrated at least one Common Core skill into activities and identified supplemental reading materials to support participants' learning. Additionally, since the education specialists were teachers at the host school, they were responsible for meeting with host school teachers, as necessary, to discuss participants' needs and progress. Before the start of each program day, the education specialists met with staff to review the lesson plans and provided staff an opportunity to ask any questions they had about the material. Because the group leaders had limited teaching experience, the education specialists wanted to make activity implementation as easy as possible. One explained, "[The group leaders] aren't teachers so we want to make sure that they're clear on what they're supposed to do."

In contrast, in programs in which staff have more teaching experience, the education specialists can provide more oversight to support the planning and delivery of literacy activities. In this capacity, the education specialist may identify curricular materials, review lesson plans developed by the literacy leader and program staff, assess participants' progress, and support the continuous improvement of the program. At Program D, which hired specialized staff to implement literacy activities, the education specialist reviewed lesson plans developed by literacy staff, observed staff, and provided feedback aimed at helping staff strengthen instructional skills. Similarly, at Program E, the education specialist played a critical role in helping the literacy leader, a new position at the time of our visit, develop curricula and support group leaders as they implement literacy activities. Finally, the education specialist at Program A provided training to help the certified teachers on staff deliver activities using instructional strategies that differ from those used during the school day. In particular, the education specialist expects certified teachers to incorporate hands-on, project-based instruction into afterschool activities.

Offer multiple modes of training to support staff development. In addition to determining staff training needs, program leaders must also determine which training modes will be most effective in building staff capacity. DYCD's technical assistance providers offer resources to support program implementation. However, the time and location of these trainings may be prohibitive to staff. For example, program staff who are enrolled in college courses may be limited in their ability to attend external trainings during class hours. When staff cannot attend trainings offered by external vendors, program leaders can offer a variety of on-site training opportunities for program staff. Program leaders can share information gained from off-site

trainings during on-site staff meetings or workshops. The program's host or feeder school may also be a source of training and support. Program leaders, including the director and educations specialist, can provide direct coaching to staff to support their development. Again, program leaders must know and understand their staff's training needs and make intentional decisions about the types of training and support provided to staff. For many programs, determining training needs will rely on the following question: "Who are my staff?" As described above, staff with less formal teaching experience may need more targeted training focused on planning activities, instructing participants, or managing student behavior.

Program leaders, however, can be creative about the ways they deliver training; for example, program leaders can go beyond the workshop model and offer direct coaching and modeling to staff. Group leaders at Program C, who are college students, received training in the form of workshops (usually three per year) and direct coaching from the education specialists. Annually, one of the program's education specialists leads literacy activities for each grade group in place of the group leader. During the session, group leaders are expected to observe the education specialist as she implements the activity; this allows group leaders to see in action strategies discussed in trainings. The education specialists explained that they believe that modeling instructional strategies has been especially helpful for building staff capacity to implement literacy activities, particularly because program staff have limited instructional experience.

Measurement and Assessment

Use of measurement and assessment data is integral to planning and implementing effective literacy programming. By using available information about participants–which may range from formal assessment data to informal conversations with school staff–program staff can plan effective programming to meet participants' needs. Program measurement and assessment can look different depending on program context. Program staff may choose to develop their own assessments or use resources available from their host school. When determining how best to measure and assess the effectiveness of literacy programming, program staff must answer the following questions:

- ■   What information do I need to determine participants' needs and progress?

- ■   What, if any, school-level data (e.g., assessment scores, report cards) can I access to inform program planning?

- ■   How will I use the information gathered to inform program planning?

Select a method to determine participants' needs. Determining participants' needs is an integral part of program planning. Knowing where participants are in their literacy skill development can help program staff plan effective lessons that help bridge knowledge or skill gaps and move participants toward learning and developmental goals. Needs assessment, however, can look very different depending on programs' contexts, especially when considering the resources available to programs and what data are most important for programs to understand

participants' needs. Program staff, therefore, must define both their data needs and how they will use data to plan literacy programming. Programs included in the study sample used one or a combination of approaches to determining participants' needs, including (1) diagnostic assessments, (2) reviews of participant grades and test scores, and (3) conversations with host school principals and staff. The approaches used by the sites have individual merits. Regardless of the method used to determine participants' needs, it is important that program staff determine their data needs, their program and host school's capabilities, and how data will be used to inform program planning.

Only Program B reported using diagnostic software to assess participants' literacy skill levels. The program uses i-Ready, a web-based diagnostic tool, to assess participants' reading levels. The program's host school used the same tool to measure students' reading progress; because of the program's strong connection to the school day, program staff explained that they selected the i-Ready program based on the principal's recommendation. Participants completed the assessment multiple times throughout the year to measure progression. Program staff used this information to determine the types of support participants would receive for literacy. Participants who did not appear to make progress were identified for one-on-one tutorials with the certified teachers on staff or placed in small groups for targeted support.

Staff at Programs B, C, and E all reported that they used school data, including report cards and ELA test scores, to determine participants' needs. The education specialists at Program C, both teachers, used participants' ELA test scores to inform literacy needs. The education specialists decided to use ELA test scores because, as teachers, they could easily access the data through school-based systems. The education specialists reported that the data helped the education specialists choose appropriately-leveled reading material to supplement the Reader's Theater materials. At Program E, the program director and education specialist reviewed participants' report cards at the start of the year to determine participants' needs. The program director and education specialist used participant grades to identify participants who needed extra support in literacy; these participants received one-on-one support from group leaders during homework help.

Finally, two programs relied on conversations with host school staff to inform their understanding of participants' needs. At Program A, for example, program staff frequently met with the program's principal and had informal conversations with school staff to gain insight into participants' literacy needs. As described in the Literacy Content section above, the program's provider has set a goal of strong program-school collaboration; informal conversations with school staff help program staff to determine the literacy content for activities to address (e.g., test prep for older participants).

Recommendations for COMPASS Programs

Both prior research and new evidence from this study suggest that afterschool programs can take a range of approaches to implementing promising literacy programming. They can incorporate instructional strategies and activities that mirror the school day. They can integrate

elements of literacy, such as vocabulary, research investigation, and presentation, in enrichment and project-based activities that help youth to make connections between literacy and everyday life. The research suggests that afterschool programs can also offer one-on-one tutoring to help support youth's literacy development. COMPASS programs should decide on the approach that works best for them in collaboration with their school partners. In doing so, COMPASS programs also should consider:

- The needs of the partner school, the mission of the COMPASS program, and the literacy materials that will advance participants towards the identified learning goals

- The capacity and qualifications of staff to lead the COMPASS literacy programming

- The ongoing professional development needs of staff to implement literacy programming

- The information that is available about the literacy needs of participants to guide program decisions

Recommendations for DYCD

DYCD is well-positioned to support COMPASS programs as they work to integrate high-quality literacy activities into their program structure. DYCD can help support literacy programming by recognizing that context factors into a program's approach, by clarifying expectations, by continuing to push programs to focus on specific literacy skills and components when selecting activities, and by helping programs that offer homework help or tutoring to maximize those opportunities for the development of literacy skills.

In particular, COMPASS programs would benefit from the following guidance from DYCD to support literacy programming:

Clarify that approaches to literacy implementation can include either a self-contained block or integration into other activities. Literacy implementation varied across interviewed and visited programs. COMPASS programs offered literacy activities in distinctive activity blocks or integrated literacy skills and content across activities. However, interviewed staff were unclear as to which approach they were required by DYCD to take, and those that integrated literacy in other activities were unsure if their approach satisfied DYCD's literacy requirement. We recommend that DYCD communicate to COMPASS programs that they can take the approach that works best for their program context, either infusing literacy into activities or offering a stand-alone literacy activity.

Offer ongoing guidance on core components of literacy programming. The literacy activities that COMPASS programs implement should support participants' reading, writing,
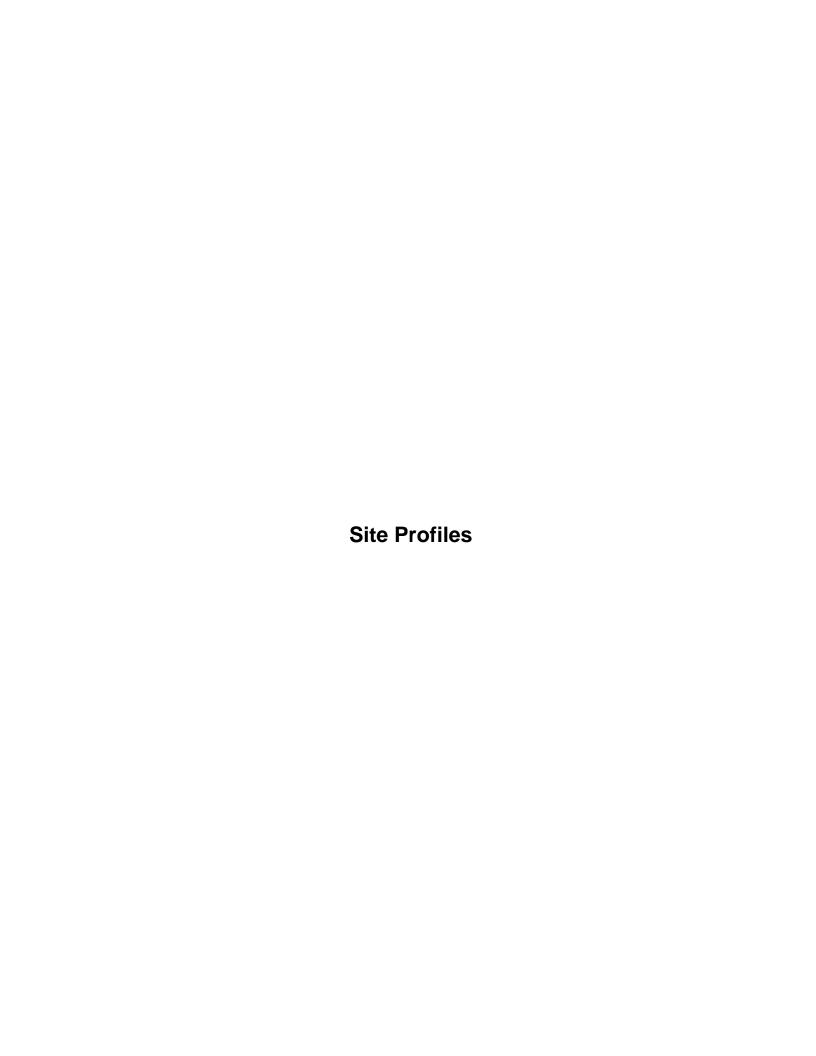
listening, and language development. The activities should also promote problem solving, research, presentations, open-ended questions, and meaningful connections to books and participants' lives, as emphasized by COMPASS technical assistance provider, TASC. Theater, STEM, and other activities can incorporate literacy components; however, COMPASS programs do not always fully explore the potential of integrating literacy in enrichment activities because staff may have a one-dimensional view of literacy as solely a reading and writing activity. Therefore, programs need continued support and training in understanding, for example, that a reading comprehension workbook may not be an ideal literacy activity if it does not engage youth beyond the worksheet, while an art activity may be considered literacy programming if the process of the activity includes, for instance, background research and presentation communicating the meaning of the final product of an art project. This ongoing guidance to COMPASS programs about the core components, regardless of the activity content, can better position programs to integrate components of literacy instruction throughout enrichment activities.

Help programs structure homework help or tutoring opportunities to maximize literacy skill development. Homework help and tutoring opportunities can provide an opportunity to reinforce literacy skills while filling an important need for program participants, as reported by some COMPASS principals in interviews with evaluators and suggested in the research literature. Program staff can use this time to help participants develop specific skills or practice what they have learned during the school day. To do so successfully, program staff need additional guidance on how to structure homework help to support literacy skill development. Additionally, professional development specifically related to literacy and homework help could benefit program staff. DYCD should support programs in efforts to use this time as an opportunity to maximize literacy skill development, while continuing to communicate to programs that DYCD's vision of COMPASS literacy programming extends beyond homework help.

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Site Profiles

Program A

At a glance

Grades served: K-5

Number of participants served: 87

Curriculum: Activities developed by literacy leader (K-2); ELA test preparation materials (3-5)

Frequency of literacy programming: One day per week for 30 minutes (all participants)

Number of literacy staff: Literacy leader (1)

Literacy skills targeted:

- Comprehension
- Vocabulary
- ELA test preparation

Connection to school-day learning: The COMPASS program extends school day learning. The program offers a core set of literacy activities to reinforce skills targeted and to teach new content that could not be covered during the school day.

Promising approaches to literacy:

- Differentiates activities by grade level
- Uses a literacy leader to implement programming

How do staff determine participants' learning needs?

The program has a strong partnership with the host school. While the program does not formally assess participants, reports from school-day staff inform activity planning.

Who plans and delivers literacy activities?

Literacy leader: The program director created the literacy leader position for a group leader with seven years of experience working for the program. The literacy leader works closely with the program director to plan and implement literacy instruction across grades. She is responsible for developing lesson plans, which are reviewed by the program director, and working with school staff to incorporate school-day content into afterschool activities. During activities, group leaders support the literacy leader by managing student behavior.

How are staffed trained?

The literacy leader has attended TASC trainings on literacy programming. The program director also provides feedback to the literacy leader to support activity implementation. Sample feedback has included how to delegate tasks to group leaders, integrating hands-on activities, and shortening activity plans.

Why differentiate activities?

Close alignment and collaboration between the host school and afterschool are agency-wide priorities. The host school's principal expects that the afterschool is a seamless continuation of the school day. Activities are differentiated by grade to support the school's priorities for participants, which includes ELA test preparation for participants in the tested grades,

Sample Activity

Third grade: Participants continue practice for state ELA exam

To prepare for state assessments, the literacy leader organized an activity to practice skills including reading for information, grammar, and vocabulary. During the observed session, participants read passages and responded to questions to check whether they could identify the main idea. Then, to keep the activity engaging, the literacy leader led participants in a game that was designed to reinforce the parts of speech. The literacy leader labeled bags with each part of speech; during the game, the leader instructed participants to write words for each part of speech and then place their word in the correct bag. Participants would revisit this material in a subsequent lesson.

Program B

At a glance

Grades served: K-5

Number of participants served: 150

Curriculum: Reading A-Z, a package of online teaching resources from Learning A-Z

Frequency of literacy programming: One per week for 45 minutes (all participants)

Number of literacy staff: Education specialist (1), certified teachers (3), group leaders (14)

Literacy skills targeted:

- Comprehension
- Phonological awareness
- Vocabulary

Connection to school-day learning: Program staff view afterschool literacy as an extension of the school day. The school's curriculum and instructional software are used to plan activities.

Promising approaches to literacy:

- Promotes continuity between the school-day learning and afterschool
- Provides significant professional development to group leaders, who have limited formal teaching experience

How do staff determine participants' learning needs?

Program staff assess participants' learning needs using: i-Ready, a web-based K-12 reading diagnostic tool used by the school, state ELA test scores, and participants' progress in culminating activities. Program staff use data gathered to plan activities, measure student progress, and make changes to program curricula.

Who plans and delivers literacy activities?

Education specialist: The education specialist is responsible for developing program curricula and lesson plans for staff.

Certified teachers: Certified teachers serve in an advisory capacity. They assist the educations specialist in developing lesson plans, observe group leaders, and provide guidance and feedback to group leaders.

Group leaders: Group leaders are responsible for delivering literacy instruction.

How are staffed trained?

Group leaders receive significant professional development from the certified teachers on staff. Certified teachers observe staff, provide feedback, and model instructional strategies. Teachers meet with group leaders twice per week.

Why continuity between school and afterschool?

Strong school partnerships and collaboration are agency-wide goals. At the beginning of the partnership, program staff met with the host-school's principal to discuss the school's needs and strategies for the program to support those needs. As the program and school's relationship grew, the program became an extension of the school day.

Sample Activity

First grade: Using read-alouds to build vocabulary and comprehension skills

Program staff used a multi-layered approach to planning and delivering literacy activities, including melding A through Z Library, a purchased curriculum, with the host school's instructional materials. In one observed activity, the group leader used the read-aloud strategy to build participants' vocabulary and strengthen comprehension skills. While reading to participants, the group leader asked questions to check understanding and encourage participants to think critically about the text. After reading, participants completed a worksheet to check vocabulary.

Program C

At a glance

Grades served: K-5

Number of participants served: 116

Curriculum: Reader's Theater Scripts, a leveled reading program published by Reading A-Z

Frequency of literacy programming: Two days per week for one hour (all participants)

Number of literacy staff: Education specialists (2), group leaders (12)

Literacy skills targeted:

- Fluency

- Comprehension

Connection to school-day learning: Reinforces skills targeted during the school day using the arts as a vehicle for instruction

Promising approaches to literacy:

- Provides frequent and targeted professional development to college-age group leaders

- Education specialists supplement or modify Reader's Theater materials to meet participants' needs

How do staff determine participants' learning needs?

Education specialists assess participants' needs using ELA test scores, reports from host school teachers, and assessments they designed for the program. Program staff use this information to determine students' academic needs and, if necessary, make adjustments to reading material.

Who plans and delivers literacy activities?

Education specialists: Both education specialists are teachers from the host school. Each education specialist is responsible for one grade band (K-2) and (3-5). They are responsible for adapting Reader's Theater lesson plans to meet participants' needs, training group leaders to implement lessons, assessing youth participants, and evaluating staff.

Group leaders: The program recruits college students to serve as group leaders. All group leaders are responsible for delivering Reader's Theater lessons.

How are staffed trained?

Education specialists provide targeted and frequent training to group leaders throughout the year. They organize a minimum of three training sessions designed build instructional skills, coach staff directly, and model instructional strategies.

Why Reader's Theater?

Program staff reported that they chose the Reader's Theater approach because they wanted a curriculum that would teach literacy using fun and engaging strategies. According to program staff, the curriculum allows students to engage with text by taking on character roles. Program staff reported that they believe afterschool pedagogy should differ from school day instruction.

Sample Activity

First grade: Participants are introduced to the play "When I Grow Up"

Reader's Theater activities center on developing fluency and comprehension through drama. At the start of each activity, the group leader communicates the goals and objectives for the session. In the activity observed, these goals were (1) to develop fluency and expression while reading, (2) to understand the motives, actions, and feelings of characters and portray them authentically, and (3) to relate to the characters. Group leaders and participants read through the play multiple times, which gave participants an opportunity to practice targeted skills. During one read-though, the group leader encouraged participants to read with emotion and modeled this skill while reading. The group leader also checked comprehension and encouraged participants to make connections to the characters in the play. In subsequent sessions, participants will write their own plays that draw on the themes of "When I Grow Up."

Program D

At a glance

Grades served: K-5

Number of participants served: 275

Curriculum: KidzLit (K-3), developed by Collaborative Classroom, and Real Stories (4-5), developed by Youth Communication and Development Without Limits

Frequency of literacy programming: Twice per week for one hour

Number of literacy staff: literacy leaders (5), education specialist

Literacy skills targeted:

- Reading comprehension and fluency

- Using evidence from text to make arguments

Connection to school-day learning: Program staff use curricular materials that are unconnected to material covered during the school day. Program staff do not integrate content addressed during the school day.

Promising approaches to literacy:

- Uses literacy leaders (who hold at least a bachelor's degree and have extensive teaching experience) to plan and deliver literacy activities

How do staff determine participants' learning needs?

The education specialist relies on reports from literacy leaders to gauge participants' literacy skills and knowledge. Staff frequently review homework and observe participants as they read and communicate. Program staff use participants' homework and observations to measure progress.

Who plans and delivers literacy activities?

Literacy leaders: Literacy leaders are responsible for planning lessons for each literacy session and delivering literacy content. Activities are drawn from the KidzLit and Real Stories curricula, and literacy leaders select reading material from the curricula and plan enrichment activities around the texts.

Education specialist: The education specialist reviews lesson plans submitted by literacy leaders.

How are staffed trained?

The education specialist observes and provides feedback to literacy leaders monthly. At bi-weekly staff meetings, she provides mini-trainings to build pedagogical skills to help staff implement literacy activities.

Why does the program use literacy leaders to deliver literacy programming?

In order to achieve a desirable participant to staff ratio and support high-quality instruction, the program director hired a small number of literacy-focused staff with teaching experience. Literacy leaders received tailored training and support from the education specialist, who oversees programming

Sample Activity

Fifth grade: Participants read "Is My Father Innocent or Guilty?" and participate in a mock trial.

Real Stories uses texts written by middle- and high-school-aged youth to support literacy skill development. Typically, activities are self-contained. In the observed activity, youth read a child's perspective of his father's negligence. To build reading fluency, participants read portions of the selection aloud and helped peers who struggled as they read. Participants built vocabulary related to the judicial system and were divided into groups for a mock trial. The literacy leader encouraged participants to evidence from the text to build their arguments for the trial; participants later presented their arguments orally.

Program E

At a glance

Grades served: K-4

Number of participants served: 150

Curriculum: Activities developed by the literacy leader

Frequency of literacy programming: Five days per week for one hour (all students)

Number of literacy staff: Education specialist, literacy leader

Literacy skills targeted:

- Reading comprehension

- Vocabulary

- Writing

Connection to school-day learning: Literacy activities are designed to complement the school day by reinforcing skills taught during the day

Promising approaches to literacy:

- Integrates literacy skills development activities across content areas, such as STEM

How do staff determine participants' learning needs?

The program director and education specialists review students' report cards annually to assess what participants know and what progress, if any, they have made between years in the COMPASS program. Reports from school-day staff also help staff determine participants' needs.

Who plans and delivers literacy activities?

Literacy leader: The literacy leader is a newly created position. The literacy leader is responsible for planning and delivering literacy during scheduled activity blocks throughout the week. Additionally, he trains group leaders to integrate literacy skills (e.g., vocabulary, writing) into other content areas, such as STEM.

How are staffed trained?

Program staff use a "train-the-trainer" model. The literacy leader, education specialist, or program director attend literacy-focused trainings provided by TASC and PASE. Staff share information learned at these trainings with group leaders during staff meetings. In addition, the provider organization provides staff training and support.

Why does the program integrate literacy skills into other content areas?

The program integrates literacy into all content areas to reinforce skills and content addressed during the school day. The education specialist explained that the program adopted this strategy from information provided by TASC. This is typically accomplished through short activities at the start of sessions, called "Do Now." "Do Now" involves a range of activities (e.g., written assignments, games) but each is designed to help participants strengthen at least one literacy skill. Program staff also integrate broader literacy-related skills, such as writing and vocabulary throughout activities.

Sample Activity

Second grade: Participants build literacy skills during a STEM activity focused on the American Plains, which is part of the program's Wildlife and Nature theme for the month

A STEM activity incorporated literacy skills to support participants' development. In an activity built around the program's theme-of-the-month, the literacy leader helped participants build vocabulary needed to describe habitats of the American plains. To support reading comprehension and writing, participants read a selection about one animal living in the plains; then, the literacy leader instructed participants to write facts about their assigned animal and present their facts to the group.