Supporting Literacy in Out-of-School Time: OST Early Literacy Quality Tool

Prepared by Research for Action • Rachel Comly • October 2017
The OST Early Literacy Quality Tool is a decision-making tool for out-of-school time (OST) providers seeking to improve or create early literacy supports. The tool provides questions to consider for providers who currently offer early literacy programming or who may offer literacy programming in the future. These questions are meant to engage providers in understanding whether their program is “on track” with regard to the ingredients and conditions for high quality OST programming, as well as thinking about areas they can improve. It can also help providers in the planning phase to develop high-quality literacy programming. The areas this tool addresses are practices, approaches, and conditions which research indicates lead to positive outcomes for students. They are described in Research for Action’s literature review, Supporting Literacy in Out-of-School Time: Summary of Evidence (June 2017).

The tool begins with a conditions checklist for considering if the OST program has the conditions (e.g., positive relationships, connection to school) to be in a strong position to offer early literacy support. The tool has charts tied to program quality areas to support providers in understanding how their program aligns with the ingredients of high quality literacy OST programming. Finally, the tool offers a checklist for providers to consider if they have the ingredients to serve English Language Learners (ELLs). On page 14, providers can take notes about how their program aligns with the high quality program ingredients and conditions in order to identify areas to improve and to how to best support high quality literacy OST programming.
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Conditions

**OST Program Quality and Positive Relationships**

- Is there a positive and safe emotional climate in the OST program?
- Are there positive relationships between the staff and students in the program?
- Are there positive relationships between the program and the community it serves?

**Parent Involvement**

- Are parents involved in the OST program?

**Connection to School**

- Does the program connect to the school day and align with the school curriculum?
  - Does the program take place in the school building?
  - Is the program staffed by teachers from the children’s schools?
  - Is the program staff mentored by or does the staff coordinate with teachers from the children’s schools?
  - Are students recommended for the program by the students’ schools?
  - Is the school curriculum integrated into the OST curriculum or does the OST curriculum extend/fill in the gaps of the school curriculum?
  - Does the OST curriculum align with district, state, or national standards?

**Infrastructure for Volunteer Recruitment & Support**

- If the program uses volunteers, is there a system for recruiting, screening, training, and retaining them?
Staffing & Training

Are certified teachers the lead instructors of the program?

No
The lead instructors are volunteers and paraprofessionals.

Is the program a tutoring program that trains the tutors for at least an hour?

Yes
Does the program offer professional development or support at least monthly?

No
ON TRACK

Yes
ON TRACK

Yes, and it is an afterschool enrichment program

Yes, and it is a summer academic enrichment program

Yes, and it is a tutoring program

EXCELLING

No

Is the program an afterschool academic enrichment program that trains the lead instructors for at least 10 hours?

Yes
Does the program offer professional development at least monthly?

No
ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Yes
EXCELLING

Is the program a summer academic enrichment program that trains the lead instructors for at least 3 weeks?

Yes

EXCELLING

No

OFF TRACK

Move on to Literacy Expertise
Page 4

1Based on one program model identified in lit review.
Literacy Expertise

A. Literacy Expert Support

If the program uses paraprofessionals or volunteers, are they supported with literacy expertise*?

- Yes
  - They are supervised and/or coached by a literacy specialist.
    - ON TRACK
- Yes
  - They are trained to use an evidence-based curriculum.
  - Yes
    - They have lesson plans provided to them.
      - ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT
  - No
    - OFF TRACK

B. Literacy Expert on Staff

Does the program have a literacy expert* on staff?

- Yes
  - EXCELling
- No
  - Does the program have access to literacy expertise from an external agency (e.g., POSTLI or developer of the program model)?
    - Yes
      - ON TRACK
    - No
      - OFF TRACK

*Defined as a reading specialist or someone with an early literacy teaching certification.
Literacy Content: **Focus**

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**Does the program include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and/or comprehension?**

- **Yes**
  - The program targets specific components based on contact with school or other student needs assessments.
  - **ON TRACK**

- **Yes**
  - The program teaches a balance of all of these components and makes connections among them.
  - **ON TRACK**

- **No, but the program targets reading attitudes or writing.**
  - **ON TRACK**

- **Yes**
  - The program emphasizes some of these components without assessing student needs or coordination with school to ensure other needs are being met.
  - **ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- **No**
  - The program does not focus on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, or comprehension. The program also does not target reading attitudes or writing.
  - **OFF TRACK**

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**Consideration:** To assess outcomes, ensure that measures align to the program’s literacy focus.
Literacy Content: *Curriculum & Structure*

Does the OST program...

- ...have built-in planning time for trained staff or certified teachers?
  - Yes: ON TRACK
  - No

- ...use evidence-based curriculum lessons?
  - Yes: ON TRACK
  - No

- ...use lesson plans constructed by literacy experts*?
  - Yes: ON TRACK
  - No: OFF TRACK

*Defined as a reading specialist or someone with an early literacy teaching certification.*
If you are using a computer-based program, are you targeting phonics skills?

Yes

Are you using Fast ForWord, DaisyQuest, or Earobics?

Yes

ON TRACK

No

OFF TRACK

No

Are you targeting fluency skills?

Yes

Are you using Earobics?

Yes

ON TRACK

No

OFF TRACK

OFF TRACK
Literacy Content: *Books*

1. **Do participants engage with books at the OST program?**
   - **Yes**
   - **No**

   2. **Are the books engaging, culturally relevant, and appropriate for the ages and reading levels of participants served?**
      - **Yes**
        - *These books are available at the program.*
        - **ON TRACK**
      - **Yes**
        - *And participants are able to take books home.*
        - **EXCELLING**
      - **OFF TRACK**
Literacy Content: Use of Data

A. Data to Inform Instruction

Does the program use data (e.g., reading levels) to inform instruction?

- Yes, consistently to target instruction and monitor progress. (ON TRACK)
- Yes, sometimes to target instruction or monitor progress. (ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT)
- No (OFF TRACK)

B. Data to Monitor Program Quality

Does the program use data to monitor program quality?

- Yes, consistently to monitor program quality. (ON TRACK)
- Yes, sometimes to monitor program quality. (ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT)
- No (OFF TRACK)
Other OST Program Goals: Time Needed

Is the OST program...

...a one-on-one tutoring model that offers literacy instruction for 60–160 minutes per week?
- Yes
- No
  - OFF TRACK

Do most youth in the program receive 30 hours of tutoring per year?
- Yes
  - ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT
- No
  - OFF TRACK

...an afterschool academic enrichment model that offers literacy activities for at least 120 minutes per week?
- Yes
- No
  - OFF TRACK

Do most youth in the program receive 44–48 hours of literacy enrichment per year?
- Yes
  - ON TRACK
- No
  - ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

...a summer academic enrichment model that offers 6–15 hours of literacy activity per week?
- Yes
  - ON TRACK
- No
  - ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT
Other OST Program Goals: *Non-Academic Activities*

Does the OST program involve non-academic activities?

- Yes, the academic enrichment program involves community service, field trips, enrichment activities, and/or recreational activities. **ON TRACK**
- Yes, the tutoring program fosters healthy adult-youth relationships. **ON TRACK**
- No **OFF TRACK**
Promising Practices for Serving ELLs

- Program has small group or one-on-one tutoring opportunities.
- Program provides explicit instruction in the elements of English literacy, such as vocabulary.
- Program provides students with opportunities to practice speaking in a low-risk, inclusive environment.
- Program respects and is inclusive of students’ home language and culture.
- Program provides connection and collaboration between home and school.
This page serves as a place to keep track of how the program aligns with the high quality program ingredients and conditions in order to identify areas to improve and to how to best support high quality literacy OST programming.

Which conditions should be targeted to strengthen the program’s position to offer effective early literacy support? See the checklist on page 3 and take notes about the conditions upon which the program should focus.

How did the program align to each program quality area? Below, mark your ratings (i.e., on track, room for improvement, off track, or excelling) from pages 4-11 of the OST Early Literacy Quality Tool. Take notes about the program’s alignment to these areas in order to monitor your program’s early literacy program quality.

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If the program serves English Language Learners, does it use promising practices? In the space below, take notes about promising practices (p. 13) to implement in order to best serve ELL students.

Notes