Acknowledgements
Chapin Hall would like to acknowledge the significant time, energy and support provided by the Strategic Initiatives Department at the Free Library of Philadelphia. Their efforts to manage connections, answer questions, provide context, and to inform the project were instrumental in the completion of the evaluation. Further, we would like to thank the staff and customers who participated in the evaluation activities over the past four years. We also would like to acknowledge Kimberly Bolan & Associates and Georgia Brown who collaborated on the design and implementation of the post-occupancy evaluation. Additionally, we thank Jennifer Axelrod, Matt Brenner, Uranbileg Enkhtuvshin, Anne Farrell, Elissa Gitlow, Cara Karter, Melissa Kull, Forrest Moore, Krista Thomas, and Carolyn Winje for their contributions to the design and implementation of this study and to our reports. Finally, we appreciate the support of the William Penn Foundation and the Free Library of Philadelphia who funded this effort.

The views reflected in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of our funders or partners.

Contact
Angeline Spain, Researcher
773.256.5185
aspain@chapinhall.org
Contents

Executive Summary ................................................................. 1
Introduction and Literature Review ................................................ 1
   Building Inspiration: 21st Century Library Initiative Background .......... 1
Strategy 1: Renovating Libraries to Pilot the 21st Century Library Model ............ 6
   Sample and Methods ............................................................ 6
   Selected findings ............................................................... 7
   Factors influencing the experiences of staff and customers in renovated libraries .... 12
      Facilitators .................................................................. 12
      Barriers ..................................................................... 13
      Summary .................................................................... 13
Strategy 2: Community Organizing to Develop 21st Century Library Branches as Community Hubs .................................................. 15
   Methods and sample ......................................................... 15
   Selected findings ............................................................. 15
   Factors influencing the integration of the community organizer role ............ 19
      Facilitators .................................................................. 19
      Barriers ..................................................................... 20
      Summary .................................................................... 21
Strategy 3: Bringing Libraries and Schools Together Project to Test a Model for Sustainable and Effective School and Library Partnerships .................................................. 22
   Methods and sample ......................................................... 22
   Selected findings ............................................................. 23
   Factors influencing implementation ........................................ 25
      Facilitators .................................................................. 25
      Barriers ..................................................................... 26
      Summary .................................................................... 27
Findings from 2016 and 2019 School Partnerships and Family and Community Engagement Surveys ................................................................. 28
Methods and sample.................................................................................................................................................. 28
Characteristics of school partnerships ................................................................................................................ 29
FLP staff preparation for developing school partnerships ........................................................................... 31
Facilitators and barriers to school partnerships .......................................................................................... 32
  Facilitators ............................................................................................................................................................. 35
  Barriers ................................................................................................................................................................... 37
  Summary ............................................................................................................................................................... 38
Discussion and Recommendations ....................................................................................................................... 39
  Renovating libraries to pilot the 21st Century Library model................................................................. 41
  Community organizing to develop 21st Century libraries as community hubs................................. 42
  Bringing Libraries and Schools Together project to test a model for sustainable and effective
  school and library partnerships ......................................................................................................................... 43
  Conclusion ................................................................................................................................................................. 44
References....................................................................................................................................................................... 47
Tables
Table 1. Post-occupancy evaluation data types and sources........................................................................7
Table 2. Community organizer roles and examples..................................................................................18
Table 3. BLAST evaluation data types and sources ................................................................................23
Table 4. Lesson completion in Cycles 1 and 2..........................................................................................24
Table 5. Implementation of lesson components in Cycles 1 and 2..........................................................25
Table 6. Respondent roles and years of service at FLP and current branch ..........................................29
Table 7. How respondents reported working with schools .....................................................................30
Table 8. Promising resources for strengthening school partnerships ......................................................34
Table 9. Most commonly reported barriers to building partnerships with schools ...........................35
Table 10. Resources marked as potentially helpful for family and community engagement ..........37
Table 11. Most commonly reported barriers to family and community engagement ..................38
Table 12. Summary of recommendations.................................................................................................41

Figures
Figure 1. Evaluation timeline....................................................................................................................4
Figure 2. Program attendance at 21st Century librariesa ......................................................................9
Figure 3. Customer satisfaction with staff assistance at the 21st Century libraries ............................10
Figure 4. Customer satisfaction with the ease of using technology at renovated libraries ..........12
Figure 5. Sense of preparedness to develop school partnerships, 2016 and 2019 ..........................31
Figure 6. Grade levels for which respondents felt most comfortable providing programming, 2016 and 2019 ........................................................................................................................................31
Figure 7. Most frequently reported facilitators of school partnerships.............................................33
Executive Summary

Public libraries can serve as critical “third spaces” in local communities by providing access to a variety of resources and responding to community interests and needs. Yet, as publicly funded institutions, libraries have increasingly been asked to account for the value they add to their communities. While some library systems have more established infrastructure than others to collect data, all face the significant challenge of using their data to inform and improve the services they offer. In the face of these challenges, the Free Library of Philadelphia (FLP) articulated its innovative 21st Century Library model. This model envisions neighborhood branches as robust community hubs that connect customers to technology and specialized services. These branches also partner effectively with communities and schools to advance literacy, guide learning, and inspire curiosity.

As part of the FLP’s Building Inspiration: 21st Century Libraries Initiative, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago evaluated three strategies that were piloted as part of this initiative:

1. renovate libraries to implement the 21st Century Libraries model;
2. use community organizing to develop 21st Century Library branches as community hubs; and
3. use the Bringing Libraries and Schools Together project to test a model for sustainable and effective school and library partnerships.

Methods

We conducted a separate study of each of the three strategies: a post-occupancy evaluation of five renovated library branches, an analysis of the newly-created community organizer role, and a process and impact evaluation of the Bringing Libraries and Schools Together project. Each study included a mix of methods—interviews, surveys, and observations—and respondents, including staff and community members. Wherever possible, we cross-checked emergent findings against other data we gathered.

Key Findings

Strategy 1: Renovate library branches to pilot the 21st Century Library model

We found that renovations resulted in dramatic changes to the look and feel of the five 21st Century library branches. Customers described the renovations as creating libraries that were welcoming, comfortable, and airy. The new flexible and functional furnishings contributed to staff being able to deliver new and more diverse programming. Observations and customer comments also demonstrated that many customers used library spaces to gather and relax or to participate in programs, in addition to coming to access materials. At the same time, customers and staff noted that collection sizes had decreased and become more standardized in the renovated libraries. In addition, signage was not adequate for helping people locate materials.
These concerns suggested the importance of obtaining input from customers and staff throughout the design and development of future library renovations. Such an approach will help FLP promote a more consistent look and feel across library branches, achieve more cost-effective purchasing for furnishings, and give community members greater opportunities to customize their library experiences.

**Strategy 2: Use community organizing to develop 21st Century Library branches as community hubs**

To support the reopening of the 21st Century libraries, FLP created a community organizer position. The person in this position helped library staff elicit customer input and integrate community member perspectives into their service plans, thereby expanding the role that the library could play as a community hub and third space. Piloting this innovative role in several FLP branch libraries helped to clarify the role of community organizers in the public library and their specific external and internal responsibilities in relation to library staff and community members. For example, the community organizer assessed community needs and promoted the library reopenings, while also working to build capacity in the community and to support library staff implementing effective community outreach and engagement strategies. The evaluation identified opportunities for FLP to further enhance the role through increased communication with library staff about how to support both groups.

**Strategy 3: Use the Bringing Libraries and Schools Together project to test a model for sustainable and effective school and library partnerships**

Coinciding with the renovations, FLP articulated a new conceptual theory for school partnerships and piloted a fourth-grade information literacy and library science curriculum module in partnership with the School District of Philadelphia. Librarian-teacher pairs cotaught the six-session curriculum in the 2016–17 and 2017–18 school years. Findings from the second year of implementation revealed continued high levels of student engagement, improved ease of implementation and coherence supported by the revised curriculum, and the continued growth of productive working relationships between school and library staff. Barriers included logistical delays that lead to starting implementation late in the school year and limited guidance around how to develop robust partnerships. Building from these experiences, FLP articulated a framework for sustainable and effective school partnerships and developed a School and Library Partnerships team to provide leadership around partnership development, promote access to library resources that align with grade-level learning standards, and enhance the visibility of FLP resources and services to educators.

**Recommendations**

Looking across these findings we offer the following recommendations for consideration.

**Strategy 1: Renovating libraries to pilot the 21st Century Library model**

- Routinely examine the utilization of library spaces.
• Continue to elevate responsiveness to community interests and needs as an FLP value.
• Prepare and support library staff to leverage the benefits of the new spaces.

Strategy 2: Community organizing to develop 21st Century libraries as community hubs

• Continue to invest in community-organizing staff and other professional development resources to support effective community engagement.
• Support branches in developing sustainable partnerships with community organizations to address community-specific interests and needs.
• Establish a process to encourage branch staff to conceptualize other innovations in community engagement, and document the results.

Strategy 3: Use the Bringing Libraries and Schools Together project to articulate a framework for sustainable and effective school and library partnerships

• Continue to invest centrally in the design and piloting of school partnership strategies.
• Continue to facilitate a school partnerships professional learning community that includes both central and branch staff.
• Continue to cultivate working relationships with SDP staff at multiple levels.

We encourage FLP leadership and staff to continue to pursue the ambitious aims outlined for the Building Inspiration: 21st Century Libraries Initiative and to develop FLP’s capacity as a learning organization. Taken as a whole, our findings highlight the promise of expanding the 21st Century Library model while flexibly responding to local library capacity and community interests and needs. To support this expansion, FLP should articulate the collaborative process to be used by the Strategic Initiatives Department and other leadership staff to support the scale-up of successful pilot innovations. Identifying opportunities to better integrate data use into routine library service decision making will also support future library renovations and the community and school partnerships launched with this initiative.
Introduction and Literature Review

Libraries promote literacy and information access, offer residents a safe space to spend time in their local communities, and provide services that many people would have trouble finding elsewhere (Becker et al., 2010; Horrigan, 2015; Sikes, 2019). Libraries often also represent important, socially responsive “third spaces” in local communities because they are trusted and perceived as neutral (Cabello & Butler, 2017). According to a recent nationally representative survey, 90% of Americans reported that their communities would be negatively impacted by the closure of their local library (Horrigan, 2015). To strengthen libraries’ role as a critical link in efforts to strengthen communities, an increasing number of public library systems are investing in partnerships to connect people to services (such as social workers and health literacy specialists). These library systems are designed to respond to the interests and needs of seniors, families with young children, immigrants, veterans, and other groups of community members (see, for example, Cabello & Butler, 2017).

Yet, despite their many assets, libraries have struggled to demonstrate their value in the current era of increased accountability for public institutions (see, for example, Town, 2011). Traditional measures of library effectiveness have centered on collecting data about their programs and services (e.g., program attendance, circulation numbers) but not on how children, youth, and adults benefit from library services. Over the past two decades—and especially during and after the recession of 2008, a period of reduced funding and increased accountability (Horrigan, 2015)—public libraries increasingly have been asked to show impacts of their programs and services. For example, a recent 5-year effort of the Public Library Association sought to expand libraries’ collection and use of outcome data, including data on community needs, patron satisfaction, and circulation and program numbers (Public Library Association, 2018). Such outcome data can help demonstrate a library’s value and benefits for customers, as well as guide improvements in services and community partnerships and attract additional funding.

The Free Library of Philadelphia (FLP) has long recognized the importance of collecting information to inform its programming and services. This recognition is reflected in its annual collection of data on programs and services, but also in its investment in periodic evaluations of the library or aspects of the work led and facilitated by library staff (Morgan et al., 2016; Costello, Whalen, Spielberger, & Winje, 2001). It has also sought to build its capacity as a learning organization: an organization that continuously transforms itself and whose leaders and staff thrive on change and innovation (Senge, 2006).

Building Inspiration: 21st Century Library Initiative Background

FLP’s Building Inspiration: 21st Century Libraries Initiative (21st Century Libraries Initiative) sought to transform the position of Philadelphia’s neighborhood branches to one that not only serves community members but also engages community members in meeting the branches’ evolving needs. This initiative advanced FLP’s vision of transforming Philadelphia public libraries
into 21st Century libraries that serve as “a portal to learning, public services, economic opportunity, recreation, and community engagement” (Free Library of Philadelphia, 2014). As part of this effort, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago conducted an evaluation that focused on three distinct, but interrelated, strategies, with the goal of testing and generating evidence to inform the articulation of sustainable and effective approaches to community and school partnerships. This report describes and presents selected findings for each of the three strategies used in this initiative:

1. renovating libraries to pilot the 21st Century Libraries model;
2. creating the Community Organizer role to develop 21st Century libraries as community hubs; and
3. developing Bringing Libraries and Schools Together (BLAST) as a sustainable and effective framework for school and library partnerships.

We also summarize results from a school partnerships and family and community engagement survey conducted with librarians in 2016 and 2019. These surveys were intended to inform recommendations to develop FLP’s capacity as a learning organization.

**Strategy 1: Renovate libraries to pilot the 21st Century Libraries model.** Libraries have increasingly become a place for community building, social interaction, and civic engagement. The physical design of library spaces influences their capacity to fulfill these new roles (Feinberg & Keller, 2010). Recent major transformations of public library spaces in cities such as Seattle, Salt Lake City, and San Francisco have aimed to enhance the role libraries play in their communities by integrating technology and remodeling library spaces to improve accessibility and appeal (Cranz, 2013; Jochumsen, Skot-Hansen, & Rasmussen, 2012; Salt Lake City Public Library System, n.d.; Office for Metropolitan Architecture, n.d.).

Consistent with these trends, one of the goals of FLP’s 21st Century Libraries Initiative was to increase community engagement and use of libraries by redesigning libraries to be “flexible, functional, and welcoming” (Free Library of Philadelphia, 2014). The priority of this redesign was to shift from a traditional library service model to a progressive model, including self-service checkout and returns, increased accessibility, and innovative programming. In addition, the redesign of five FLP library branches—Lillian Marrero, Logan, Lovett Memorial, South Philadelphia, and Tacony—focused on creating bright, accessible, communal spaces, and providing more and different types of programming like concerts and yoga classes in these spaces.

Evaluations of library redesigns are limited, but post-occupancy evaluations are a common method for studying the strengths and limitations of spatial transformations. In library settings, post-occupancy evaluation results can yield important insights about the extent to which customers and staff use the renovated spaces as anticipated, as well as identify design limitations that can inform future renovation plans (Cranz & Cha, 2006; Cranz, 2013; Schneekloth & Keable, 1991). In an effort to understand the value and implications of the 21st Century Library renovations, FLP commissioned Chapin Hall, in partnership with Kimberly Bolan & Associates, to conduct a post-occupancy evaluation of the five renovated library branches.
**Strategy 2: Use community organizing to develop 21st Century Library branches as community hubs.** As libraries have sought to respond to changing community demographics, assets, and needs, their leaders have identified the need for staff to be able to serve a variety of functions that have not traditionally been in the librarian’s domain. FLP has been at the forefront of this vision, grappling with the trade-offs inherent in either training library staff or partnering to increase community access to social workers, health care specialists, and supports for families with young children (Cabello & Butler, 2017; Knight, 2010; Luo, Estreicher, Lee, Thomas, & Thomas, 2017; Reardon, 2016). As renovations of 21st Century libraries got underway, FLP created a staff position to support community outreach and engagement as part of reopening these branches. These new community organizer positions were envisioned as a means to train and empower both librarians and community members to encourage relationship building and civic engagement. With librarians, community organizers were to provide supports and skill building, such as group facilitation with both community members and library staff. With community members, community organizers focused on conducting needs assessments, cultivating friends of libraries groups, and developing capacity to elicit community input to inform library service decision making.

FLP’s addition of community organizers to branch staff is quite innovative. We consulted the broader literature that evaluates the effectiveness of community organizing. The scholarship on community organizing notes that formal evaluations are not always suited for such work because such efforts are constantly being evaluated (Christens, 2012; Stoecker, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000). For example, community organizing involves reflecting on one-on-one meetings or community events to be responsive to new information and changing dynamics; it also often involves short-term campaigns rather than sustained initiatives (Coombe, 1997). Nevertheless, key aspects of community organizing include the development of strong, mutually supportive relationships and the empowerment of community members. To understand the early implementation of this new position, FLP asked Chapin Hall to examine the role of community organizers as developed at four of the 21st Century library branches. Chapin Hall examined their role using existing documents and data collected through the post-occupancy evaluation.

**Strategy 3: Use the Bringing Libraries and Schools Together project to test a model for sustainable and effective school and library partnerships.** Beyond transforming physical spaces, the *Building Inspiration* initiative sought to increase library engagement by enhancing partnerships with local schools and neighborhoods. Public libraries are unique in that they offer free sources of information, technology, and resources (Gorham & Bertot, 2018). Strengthening library collaboration with other neighborhood systems can only enhance libraries’ ability to meet the needs of the community (Van Den Hoogen & Parrot, 2012). As such, strong partnerships with schools and the community are vital to FLP’s mission.

School and library partnerships have traditionally been structured around either public librarian-school librarian partnerships (Bogel, 2012; Squires, 2009) or school librarian-teacher partnerships (Cooper & Bray, 2011). Consequently, FLP’s design and testing of a model for sustainable and effective school partnerships brings together a different set of implementers than traditional
school and library partnerships. For FLP’s Bringing Libraries and Schools Together (BLAST) project, public librarians were paired with local teachers in a strategic effort to create sustainable partnerships that involved coteaching and partnership building. This effort aimed to test a model for partnering system wide with the School District of Philadelphia (SDP). It also sought to derive lessons that could be applied to partnering with other school systems serving Philadelphia communities, including understanding the internal capacity and resources needed to partner effectively with K-12 educators.

**Evaluation Design and Methods**

In 2015, FLP partnered with Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago to evaluate the 21st Century Libraries Initiative. Over the past 4 years, the original design has been refined to reflect FLP’s evolving conceptualization of the 21st Century library model. We have also refined the design to reflect our understanding of facilitators and barriers to developing robust community and school partnerships. Evaluation activities included conducting a post-occupancy evaluation to assess library design and transformation, providing technical assistance to develop and incubate a fourth grade information literacy curriculum, and evaluating the early implementation of the community organizer role. Figure 1 displays the timeline for this 4-year evaluation.

**Figure 1. Evaluation Timeline**

In addition, to support FLP’s growth as a learning organization, we administered an online survey in 2016, and again in 2019, to document librarian experiences with school partnerships and family and community engagement. We originally designed this 10-minute survey to gather baseline information about school partnerships developed by librarians across FLP branches and identify factors influencing implementation. In 2019, we updated the survey. We also invited community organizer and community initiatives staff, along with librarians, to participate. The survey was designed to understand trends over time and inform ongoing efforts and decision
making about supports and resources most vital to achieving sustainable and effective school partnerships.

**Purpose of this Report**

This report synthesizes high-level findings from the evaluation of the three strategies described above. We also summarize results from a school partnerships and family and community engagement survey conducted with librarians in 2016 and 2019. This survey contributed to developing FLP as a learning organization.

---

1 See Spain, et al., 2019; Spain, Koch, & Chrisler, 2019; and Spain, Koch, Spielberger, & Brown, 2019.
Strategy 1: Renovate Libraries to Pilot the 21st Century Library Model

In this study, we conducted a post-occupancy evaluation. This evaluation helped us understand how customers and staff used library spaces after the renovations and document the ways in which renovated libraries achieve the aims of the 21st Century Library model. We also used the results of the evaluation to look for opportunities to improve usability. A post-occupancy evaluation systematically evaluates the performance of buildings after renovations to assess functionality and efficiency, safety, aesthetic quality, comfort, and satisfaction (National Academy Press, 2001). The following sections describe the evaluation methods and sample, and then present selected findings. We highlight critical successes and challenges to design and process to consider in future library renovations.

Methods and Sample

In collaboration with Kimberly Bolan & Associates, we conducted a mixed-methods post-occupancy evaluation of five renovated 21st Century library branches: Lillian Marrero, Logan, Lovett Memorial, South Philadelphia, and Tacony. We structured this evaluation around three major topics: library utilization; community perceptions, expectations, and needs; and staff and customer satisfaction. We conducted surveys, focus groups, interviews, and observations to capture how customers and staff members used and interacted in library spaces, as shown in Table 1. We also conducted selected data collection activities with 10 contrast neighborhood libraries that served communities with similar demographic and socioeconomic characteristics and had similar building architecture and layout to the renovated libraries. The team also analyzed FLP administrative data to understand use patterns at the 21st Century and contrast libraries.

We conducted thematic analyses of the interviews and focus groups and explored the extent to which themes were consistent across the five 21st Century libraries and respondent roles (e.g., library staff and customers). We used descriptive statistics with survey and FLP administrative data to characterize patterns of responses or trends over time. Where possible, we triangulated across types of data to identify overarching findings.

Contrast libraries include Blanche A. Nixon/Cobbs Creek, Charles Santore, Holmesburg, Independence, McPherson Square, Ramonita G. de Rodriguez, Richmond, Roxborough, Wyoming, and Wynnefield.
Table 1. Post-occupancy Evaluation Data Types and Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>21st Century libraries (n = 5)</th>
<th>Contrast libraries (n = 10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Customers (n)</td>
<td>Staff members (n)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group interviews</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured observations</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walkthrough observations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative data</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circulation data</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer computer use</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programming</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Selected Findings**

**Space and Furnishings**

Customers enthusiastically described the 21st Century Libraries as “bright,” “spacious,” and “inviting” spaces, suggesting that FLP accomplished one of its primary goals with the 21st Century Libraries Initiative. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of customers surveyed said they were “very happy” with the lighting in renovated libraries, compared with only one-quarter of respondents who reported being “very happy” with the lighting prior to the renovations. Several customers used the words “clean” and “comfortable” to describe the spaces in their renovated library and how it feels to be there. One individual said, “The library feels like a second home for a lot of people.”

Spaces that were new additions to the 21st Century libraries—notably, the living room and study rooms—were especially popular with customers. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of respondents also said they were “very happy” having spaces to sit after the renovations, compared with one-quarter in the contrast libraries group. The new study rooms also received high marks; 69% of customers said they were “very happy” with these spaces. Additionally, a full three-quarters of respondents reported they were “very happy” with the meeting rooms, up from 22% prior to the renovations. However, observations indicated that the living room tables were too small to accommodate more than two people and did not have enough chairs for customers.

The children’s areas were the most frequently used spaces at all 21st Century libraries. Researchers found these spaces were clean and inviting. However, given the volume of use, four out of five renovated children’s areas were not large enough to accommodate customers comfortably. Across all five renovated libraries, space allocation focused primarily on early literacy. These spaces included educational toys and seating for very young children, but furnishings and interactive elements for older children and preteens were limited to tables,
chairs, and computers. Additionally, there was limited or no seating for parents and caregivers at all locations. We observed several parents attempting to sit in child-size chairs.

Renovations included a designated teen area in each of the 21st Century libraries. Unfortunately, these spaces were too small to support interactions among groups of teens, were located in public areas where noise could carry easily, and were not clearly defined or labeled. Customers, including teens, reported being unaware that there were dedicated teen spaces. During observation periods, teen spaces were often unused or used by adult customers. Customers expressed concerns about the lack of adequate space for teens. One said:

I had the impression when they were renovating it that there was going to be a space for teenagers where they wouldn't get yelled at for goofing around and being teenagers. And they could just be themselves. . . . It's sorely missing.

Programming

FLP administrative data indicate that program attendance increased at all five 21st Century libraries after the renovations, and increased by more than double at three out of five libraries (from 102% to 160%; see Figure 2). Customers spoke enthusiastically about the programmatic offerings at renovated libraries and how they reflect community interests. To these customers, the renovated libraries had become more like community centers, with various activities for people of all ages. One customer observed:

The activities that are here, you know, food trucks and outdoor movies and celebrations of different kinds, and all the different programs that happen here are . . . symbolic of the community and the diversity.

Another said, “It’s amazing. Like they have jazz one day, they’ll have cooking class one day. Everything is going on.” Besides programs for adults, staff and customers also highlighted the programs targeting young children as being very successful in engaging the library community.

New modular furniture, selected to enhance the flexibility and functionality of library spaces, proved very popular with staff and customers in the 21st Century libraries. Being able to move the furniture allowed library staff to offer programs that targeted a wider variety of interests, demographics, and audience sizes. For instance, being able to move the living room furniture enabled libraries to offer programming like jazz shows and yoga classes to a much larger number of customers than could have been accommodated by the libraries’ more traditional layouts.
Figure 2. Program Attendance at 21st Century Libraries before and after Renovations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lillian Marrero</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>757</td>
<td>+10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logan</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>1,007</td>
<td>+114%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lovett Memorial</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>939</td>
<td>+102%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Philadelphia</td>
<td>737</td>
<td>1,918</td>
<td>+160%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tacony</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>+79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The period before renovation was July 2012 to June 2013 for South Philadelphia and July 2012 to June 2015 for Lillian Marrero, Logan, Lovett Memorial, and Tacony. The period after renovation includes the totals from July 2016 to December 2018 for South Philadelphia, and January 2018 to December 2018 for Lillian Marrero, Logan, Lovett Memorial, and Tacony.

Customer Service

Customer service points, including self-checkout machines, were intentionally located near the main entrance at renovated libraries, which supported customer access to self-service holds, checkouts, and returns. Additionally, this increased visibility made customer service points easier for customers to find, facilitating more effective staff assistance. Among customers who reported using at least one of the 21st Century libraries both before and after the renovations,
they reported being “very happy” with staff assistance. Overall satisfaction with staff assistance rose from less than half (45%) to more than three-quarters (76%; see Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Customer Satisfaction with Staff Assistance at the 21st Century Libraries**

![Customer Satisfaction Chart]

Note: We collected pre-renovation and post-renovation data collected from the same sample of respondents (n = 112 customers who reported using the 21st Century libraries before and after the renovations).

**Accessibility**

Observations indicated that all 21st Century libraries were highly accessible for those with disabilities, compared with no observed accommodations at the contrast libraries. Surveyed customers reported having an easier time reaching shelved materials after the renovations; on a scale of 1 (very unhappy) to 4 (very happy), mean customer satisfaction with reaching shelved materials rose from 3.0 pre-renovation to 3.8 post-renovation. However, the design of the shelving created some accessibility challenges: staff at multiple libraries expressed concerns about customers reaching the lowest row of books. One staff member said, “We were told that the bottom shelves [would] be pitched at an angle . . . [instead] they are parallel to the floor, so you’ve got to get down on the floor to browse the bottom shelves.” Additionally, staff at 21st Century libraries consistently described customers leaning on shelves as a safety issue, as the shelves can flip over.

Replacing turnstiles with radio frequency identification (RFID)-equipped gates resulted in wider paths at the entrance, allowing customers to enter and exit more easily, especially those using mobility aids or pushing strollers. In focus groups, customers reported they appreciated not having to go through turnstiles as part of entering the library building. One customer reflected on the changes, “It’s a lot easier to get in and out of the building compared to how it was before.”
Materials

Customers surveyed at the 21st Century libraries reported increased satisfaction with the number and selection of materials after the renovations, perhaps helped by an improved ability to reserve materials from other libraries online. However, comments written in surveys and shared during interviews suggest a more nuanced picture, with both customers and staff expressing concerns about the significant reduction of available materials. “Great material, albeit it seems thin in terms of books,” wrote one surveyed customer, while another said, “Very disappointing to see how few books there are now.” Staff described the limited collections as the “number one complaint,” citing children’s, teen, and nonfiction as collections with particularly limited materials. In addition, staff and customers noted that specialized collections of high interest to community members—urban fiction in one library, materials in languages spoken by community members in other libraries—were significantly reduced.

Technology.

Customers expressed great satisfaction with the technology enhancements included in the renovations. Some of the updated library furniture included built-in power outlets, making it easier for customers to charge their personal devices. On a scale of 1 (very unhappy) to 4 (very happy), mean customer satisfaction with power outlets rose from 2.6 prerenovation to 3.7 postrenovation (see Figure 4). Customers also indicated increased satisfaction postrenovation on the number of computers, access to wireless internet, and their ability to reserve materials online.
Figure 4. Customer Satisfaction with the Ease of Using Technology at Renovated Libraries

FLP significantly upgraded the computer areas in the renovated libraries, setting aside more space and outfitting them with updated technology. Seventy-two percent of staff surveyed said that most or all of the computers were high quality after the renovations, whereas just 33% of staff said this was the case prior to the renovations. Customers in focus groups at the two libraries with dedicated computer labs reported they enjoyed using the computer lab and would like this space to be open during all library hours. Staff at these libraries noted that customers preferred to use the lab because it was less crowded and allowed them more time than when they accessed computers in the main library or children’s area.

Factors Influencing the Experiences of Staff and Customers in Renovated Libraries

In this section, we highlight the most important factors that influenced how staff and customers experienced the five renovated 21st Century libraries.

Facilitators

*FLP staff assistance contributed to an improved customer experience in the renovated libraries.*

Though staff were not specifically trained or prepared to assist library users after the renovations, customer survey responses and comments consistently indicated that staff...
assistance was a key factor in the post-renovation success of the 21st Century libraries. One customer exclaimed, “The librarians and staff . . . are incredibly patient and knowledgeable!” Another said, “The staff are willing to help in any way necessary.” Additionally, staff in renovated libraries have developed strategies to ensure that the meeting and study spaces remained accessible to neighborhood groups, a necessity if the library is to serve as a community gathering place.

FLP staff capitalized on the increased flexibility of renovated spaces to broaden the scope of program offerings. While the open-concept floor plans and modular furniture afford more possibilities for the size and types of programs, this potential must become reality for it to have any effect on program implementation. The expansion of program offerings and increased numbers of attendees indicate that staff members were receptive to input from customers, able to work collaboratively in thinking and planning “outside the box,” and committed to expanding program offerings as a way to transform the renovated libraries into community hubs.

Barriers

Staff and customer engagement and input about renovation planning and execution was limited. Although library staff and community stakeholders were invited to provide preliminary input, they were not engaged in the development of the building plans, overall facility designs, or interior designs. This lack of involvement hindered staff and customer buy-in and constrained FLP leadership’s access to feedback that could have provided invaluable insights regarding what was missing, confusing, or unhelpful.

A clean design aesthetic impeded customer navigation of the library and made some spaces appear less inviting. Minimizing signage may have supported a clean look, but it also made it difficult for customers to find the rooms and library resources they were looking for. During observations, customers unfamiliar with the layout of the renovated libraries often struggled to locate particular materials, rooms where programming was being held, and other library spaces. Additionally, the modern furnishings in most of the children’s areas lacked child-friendly décor that would appeal to their target population.

The location and configuration of staff workspaces hindered efficient workflow. All staff work rooms lacked sufficient space for deliveries, and most had narrow and crowded walkways. In two renovated libraries, the work room and service points were located on different floors of the library, which exacerbated workflow challenges. Walking long distances between library spaces reduced the amount of time staff were available to provide customer service, a particular concern for libraries with minimal staffing. Additionally, staff members at several renovated libraries reported not having a designated workspace.

Summary

In summary, the post-occupancy evaluation demonstrated multiple ways in which the renovations contributed to the physical and programmatic transformation of the 21st Century
The 21st Century Library model influenced the overall look and feel of the libraries, increased accessibility for all library users, and made improvements with regard to the physical layout and interior designs of these libraries. The evaluation also uncovered some shortcomings, such as the implementation of the minimalist design aesthetic. The minimalist design reduced access to some library materials and made it difficult for customers to find their way to particular library spaces or resources. Feedback from staff and customers suggested that future library renovations should integrate opportunities for input and feedback throughout the design process. This integration will ensure that future library renovations advance the goals of the 21st Century Library model while also reflecting community interests and needs.
Strategy 2: Use Community Organizing to Develop Library Branches as Community Hubs

When FLP added community organizers to help transform the 21st Century libraries into community hubs, concrete roles and responsibilities for the new position had not been fully defined. The hired community organizers were key players in how their positions took shape over time, drawing on the vision for the position cast by FLP leadership, their backgrounds and skills related to organizing, and their own assessment of community needs. The following sections describe the methods and sample used for the process evaluation of the early implementation of this role at four of the 21st Century libraries and present selected findings.3

Methods and Sample

Chapin Hall reviewed documentation provided by FLP about the development and implementation of the community organizer position. We used FLP’s job description to categorize and describe the community organizers’ various job responsibilities. We also drew on publicly available demographic data describing the communities served; monthly reports of community organizers’ activities (n = 7); data collected in the summer of 2018 from a group interview with community organizers (n = 3); group interviews with other library staff at the renovated branches that were assigned community organizers (n = 16); and a focus group conducted with teen customers at one branch (n = 5). We conducted thematic analyses of these data and validated emergent findings with FLP staff knowledgeable about the implementation of the community organizer position.

Selected Findings

Community organizers translated the vision for the community organizer position into concrete practices by implementing a mix of outward-facing and inward-facing activities. (See Table 2 for examples of the types of activities implemented by the three community organizers between July 2017 and May 2019.) At first, monthly reports indicated that the community organizers prioritized their outward-facing roles. They began by assessing social needs in the community and getting the word out to the community about libraries reopening. Then they organized Friends groups, worked with community ambassadors, and established regional coalitions.

3 Community organizers were assigned to Lillian Marrero, Logan, Lovett Memorial, and Tacony. At South Philadelphia, FLP assigned a health literacy specialist to support implementation of the branch’s health literacy emphasis.
Community organizers invested significant time in creating and establishing Friends groups. First, community organizers identified potential members who could collectively represent the neighborhoods surrounding the renovated libraries. After establishing these groups, community organizers helped the Friends group members articulate a shared vision for the library’s role in the community. Community organizers helped Friends groups carry out community outreach and engagement activities.

Community organizers supported their Friends groups in a variety of ways—for example, by developing communications tools and executing various programming and civic engagement efforts—with a consistent emphasis on helping members take on more responsibility. Ultimately, community organizers sought to prepare the Friends groups to lead the design and implementation of their own community-driven initiatives with limited support.

Throughout 2017, community organizers focused heavily on external-facing activities. In early 2018, the community organizers began to prioritize inward-facing activities to support library staff and sustain branch momentum in building community partnerships and coalitions. “It’s been a lot of encouraging staff to take things on,” one community organizer reflected. Community organizers described training staff on organizing skills (e.g., building contact sheets and writing newsletters), developing youth outreach teams, and providing professional development on topics such as cultural competencies, how to work with young people, and de-escalation tactics.

Community organizers also sought to strengthen communication and collaboration between library staff, many of whom had not worked at the branch or with one another before the renovations. Community organizers assisted library staff with articulating shared principles and facilitating the development of systems for communication and accountability. Much of the community organizers’ work with staff happened in groups; however, community organizers also held regular meetings with individual staff members to discuss current and future projects. Community organizers invested time in developing working relationships with library staff to encourage staff professional development and learning and practicing new skills.

Building upon these external and internal implementation experiences, the community organizer team articulated the work and value of the organizer position with respect to three distinct roles: community outreach; community engagement; and capacity building. The team defined these roles as follows:

- **Community outreach**: Sharing information and promoting awareness about programs, resources, and services.
- **Community engagement**: Building relationships with staff and surrounding communities to empower them to take ownership of the library and its resources.

---

4 As outlined in FLP’s (2018) curriculum to promote community-centered librarianship.
• Capacity building: Supporting the development of skills and resources that enable an individual, organization, or community to achieve their goals more efficiently and effectively, so they can take on new, greater, and more complicated endeavors.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community organizer roles</th>
<th>Examples&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outward-facing roles</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1. Building long-term relationships between the library and neighborhood stakeholders | • Represented FLP at community events and identified new opportunities for the library to host community gatherings  
• Met individually with business owners, nonprofit leaders, and other community stakeholders  
• Convened and facilitated meetings with representatives of multiple community groups to plan events and build meaningful connections  
• Helped create coalitions with neighborhood organizations around topics of shared interest (e.g., English language learning services) |
| 2. Developing and supporting Friends groups within their neighborhoods | • Identified and recruited Friends’ group members who could represent the community and make unique contributions to the group  
• Partnered with Friends’ group members to develop vision for the library’s role and plan, recruit, and fundraise for programming  
• Facilitated collaborative work between Friends groups and other neighborhood organizations  
• Helped Friends groups plan and carry out advocacy efforts with city officials to meet community needs  
• Began developing a communications manual with tools and templates for Friends groups |
| 3. Providing targeted outreach to nonlibrary users to understand how the library can better serve neighborhood needs | • Talked to community members using a variety of outreach techniques (e.g., door-to-door, talking to people in public places)  
• Coordinated and staffed local events to promote the library’s reopening  
• Explored the interests of community members and local organizations to identify opportunities for library partnerships and programming |
| 4. Identifying and working with neighborhood community ambassadors | • Supported the community ambassador hiring process, including developing job descriptions and providing input on their role |
| **Inward-facing roles**    |                     |
| 5. Working with library staff to create and implement a neighborhood-specific engagement plan | • Cataloged existing neighborhood community-building strategies  
• Articulated and coordinated outreach plans with library staff and other stakeholders (e.g., coalition members)  
• Developed flyers and other materials to support outreach efforts |
| 6. Training and supporting staff in their community engagement work | • Developed and delivered training to library staff on community engagement, outreach, and cultural competence  
• Helped library staff develop skills and ideas around programming; supported staff team building  
• Trained and supported staff to communicate with community members from diverse backgrounds, with a specific focus on teen customers |
| 7. Supporting library staff and administrators in their work to create a regional coalition of stakeholders working to improve their communities | • Provided input on processes and practices for starting up the cluster community council, including the creation of a listserv and internet-based shared documents folder  
• Supported the community council to develop processes that build their capacity to serve the library community |

<sup>a</sup> We drew illustrative examples from the community organizers’ monthly activity reports; the specific activities implemented by each community organizer varied.
In interviews, library staff reported that the community organizers contributed to shifting community members’ attitudes and expectations about the libraries. They described the community organizers’ “hands-on” approach to their communication and engagement with community members, which differed from the approach of traditional library employees, as one positive factor in improving the community’s engagement with the library. Library staff also reported that the community organizers helped expand how people thought about the library as a resource and partner in neighborhood improvement efforts. In their role, community organizers promoted the library as a place to link people to resources, only some of which were directly supported by the library. For example, through the community organizers’ efforts, Lillian Marrero played a significant role in coordinating services in the wake of Hurricane Maria.

Community organizers described a critical piece of their work as building the skills of community members and library staff to deepen and sustain how the community and library work together. By mid-2018, community organizers had intentionally shifted toward coaching community members and supporting library staff to lead community outreach and engagement work themselves. For instance, when one community organizer received a request that they do a community survey, they responded by emphasizing the supporting role they would play: “No, you need to do the survey. . . . I will support you to do that, but no, I’m not doing it.” This transformation is part of the model for how community organizers transfer skills, build social capital, and support the development of communities (Gittell & Vidal, 1998).

**Factors Influencing the Integration of the Community Organizer Role**

In this section, we highlight findings regarding important facilitators and barriers that affected the integration of the community organizer role into the four 21st Century Library branches.

**Facilitators**

*Community organizers leveraged unique skills in their efforts to develop the 21st Century libraries into community hubs.* As new library staff, community organizers brought expertise in strategies to support community members to take ownership of the new library spaces. They also provided skills in developing consensus among people and establishing coalitions—unique strengths typically associated with community organizing (Hardina, 2012). Both community organizers and library staff noted that these experiences with community capacity building, training, and facilitation were central to helping the 21st Century libraries develop as community hubs. Community organizers also led needs assessments and organized service providers to position the library to serve as a resource for addressing identified community needs.

*Community organizers’ flexibility allowed them to function as ambassadors who helped build bridges between the library and the broader community.* With more latitude than other staff to log work hours outside of the library, community organizers spent substantial time in the community, making connections and gathering information from various stakeholders about community needs. Community organizers reported using a host of “low-tech, high-touch” strategies to build awareness of libraries reopening and bring community members into the renovated libraries. These strategies included door-to-door outreach, phone banking, spending
time on street corners, and going into schools. Library staff noted that their community organizers represented the library at community events, which they felt was important to build relationships in the community.

Community organizers found opportunities to build capacity among FLP staff and increase the sustainability of community engagement. Community organizers intentionally sought to develop the leadership skills of community members and staff. This allowed the library and the communities to work together to implement and sustain activities that allowed libraries to serve as community hubs. As with other library partnerships, limited library staff capacity can constrain the integration of successful one-off activities into sustained partnerships and ongoing programming. One example of how community organizers facilitated this transition toward sustainable library–community partnerships was Lillian Marrero’s weekly food distribution program. The community organizers trained several individuals, who consistently attended the program, to coordinate the event, making it a more sustainable partnership. As another example, the community organizer assigned to Logan created and trained a youth outreach team in community organizing techniques. The organizer planned to place these young people in leadership roles to make the new library spaces and programming more welcoming and responsive to young people.

Barriers

FLP staff and leadership did not have a clear understanding of expectations for the community organizer position or the skills that community organizers brought to the library. In interviews, library staff commented positively on the impact of the community organizers. However, they also noted they had limited understanding of FLP’s overarching vision for the position, or the details of the community organizers’ responsibilities. The community organizers sensed this as well, indicating that their roles and unique skillsets were not always well understood. One commented, “Even now, I don’t think anybody still knows, really, what we do, why we do it.” This likely protracted the process for community organizers to become integrated into the libraries.

Community organizers did not have a clear model for leading community outreach and engagement and building community capacity in the public library setting. Community organizers had multiple external-facing roles, including convening community-based organizations, developing connections with service providers, leading needs assessments, and identifying services and programs to address community needs. However, community organizers reported that, these roles notwithstanding, their work in the libraries had a more focused scope than what is traditionally involved in community organizing. Community organizing typically includes and prioritizes a broader emphasis on political mobilization and advocacy, activities that have not traditionally been emphasized within the public library setting.
Summary

The addition of community organizers to the library staff as part of the 21st Century Libraries Initiative was a new experience for FLP. Community organizers’ roles and responsibilities were not clearly defined at first. However, over the 2-year implementation period, roles and responsibilities took shape and became clearer. The community organizers provided a wide range of activities, including direct outreach to community members and internal support to develop the skills of librarians working with the community. These activities were designed to increase community engagement and position neighborhood libraries as community hubs. Community organizers tended to focus on external activities in the first year: assessing community needs, letting the community know about library reopenings, organizing Friends groups, establishing coalitions, and empowering community members to take ownership of the library and its resources. In the second year, they also focused on building internal capacity—for example, training staff on organizing skills, developing youth outreach teams, providing relevant professional development, and helping staff develop systems for communication and accountability. Overall, librarians saw the community organizing role as shifting community members’ attitudes and expectations about the libraries. They saw this role as being valuable and felt it should be sustained.
Strategy 3: Use the Bringing Libraries and Schools Together Project to Test a Model for Sustainable and Effective School and Library Partnerships

In 2015, FLP initiated the Bringing Libraries and Schools Together (BLAST) project to pilot a new conceptual approach to school partnerships. This project produced the BLAST curriculum module to pilot a structure for school partnerships with the School District of Philadelphia (SDP). The curriculum module included five lessons focused on different information literacy topics and culminated in students completing a final project. This effort had two primary aims. First, implementing the curriculum would support fourth grade students in SDP classrooms to develop information literacy and library science skills necessary to become informed consumers of information. Second, FLP leadership sought to understand facilitators and barriers to school partnerships that were structured as cotaught content and delivered in both the library and classroom settings. This chapter highlights the methods, sample, and findings across FLP’s two years of BLAST implementation.

**Methods and Sample**

Chapin Hall designed a mixed-methods process evaluation to assess BLAST implementation across two school years. Librarian–teacher pairs implemented BLAST between January and May 2017 (Cycle 1) and again between January and May 2018 (Cycle 2). For our evaluation of Cycle 2, we also integrated an impact component, which examined students’ information literacy skills before and after their participation in BLAST. Table 3 describes the multiple types of data analyzed in the BLAST report.
Table 3. BLAST Evaluation Data Types and Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of data</th>
<th>Source of data</th>
<th>Cycle 1 n</th>
<th>Cycle 2 n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fidelity forms(^a)</td>
<td>Completed by librarians, teachers, or both together</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson observations</td>
<td>Conducted by FLP central staff members using standardized observation form</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit slips(^b)</td>
<td>Completed anonymously by students</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Conducted with librarians, teachers, principals, cluster leaders, and FLP central staff in Cycle 1; conducted with teachers in Cycle 2</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group</td>
<td>Conducted with 5 librarians in Cycle 2 only</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRAILS pre-assessment</td>
<td>Completed by students before participating in the curriculum in Cycle 2 only</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRAILS post-assessment</td>
<td>Completed by students after participating in the curriculum in Cycle 2 only</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Fidelity forms included information about whether each lesson component was completed, the roles played by the librarian and teacher in implementations, and adaptations that were made or might be considered in future implementation.

\(^b\) Exit slips were short surveys that asked students about their confidence in the skills that were the focus of the lesson and what they had learned.

The research team quantitatively analyzed fidelity forms, lesson observations, and student exit slips to reveal patterns in how librarians and teachers worked together and what elements of the lessons were completed. We thematically analyzed qualitative interview and focus group transcripts. Our analysis included both inductive and deductive coding to identify common themes across the interviews, such as barriers and facilitators of partnership between FLP and SDP.

At the close of both Cycles 1 and 2, we invited FLP leaders and participating librarians and teachers to attend a presentation highlighting emerging findings and to discuss recommendations to enhance future implementation.

### Selected Findings

FLP staff designed the pilot curriculum for fourth grade social studies classes in consultation with the SDP Office of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. SDP staff recommended focusing on fourth grade social studies because the social studies standards aligned with FLP’s priorities in promoting information literacy. In addition, since the district had not adopted a specific social studies curriculum, this focus represented an opportunity to support teachers through the development of a new set of social studies resources.

More librarian–teacher pairs completed each lesson in the revised BLAST curriculum in Cycle 2 as compared with Cycle 1, according to the fidelity form and observation data results. According to fidelity form data from Cycle 2, all 9 pairs (100%) completed the first 4 lessons and 8 pairs (89%) completed the final lesson (see Table 4). (In Cycle 2, FLP eliminated the lesson “How to be
a super synthesizer!” and incorporated some of this material into the other lessons.) In contrast, Cycle 1 results indicated a linear decrease in lesson completion across the 6 weeks. All 16 librarian–teacher pairs completed the first lesson, and all but 1 pair (94%) completed the second and third lessons. Notably fewer pairs completed the fourth (81%), fifth (69%), and final (50%) lessons.

Table 4. Lesson Completion in Cycles 1 and 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson topic</th>
<th>Cycle 1 completion</th>
<th>Cycle 2 completion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oh! The information you will find in the</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library technology 101</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to be a super searcher!</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to be a note-taking superstar!</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to be a super synthesizer!</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be a great presenter!</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers and librarians in Cycle 2 indicated that they implemented the lesson components as planned at a much higher rate than in Cycle 1 (see Table 5). The revised curriculum reduced the number of lesson components from five to three, likely making it easier for implementers to cover all lesson components within the time allocated. In Cycle 2, implementers reported high levels of full or partial implementation (90% or more) for each of the three components of each lesson: introductory activity, main activity, and closing activity. Staff observers concurred, reporting full or partial implementation of all three lesson components in 100% of observed Cycle 2 lessons (n = 35).
Table 5. Implementation of lesson components in Cycles 1 and 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson topic</th>
<th>% full or partial implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductory mini-lesson (Cycle 1) or introductory activity (Cycle 2)</td>
<td>Cycle 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main activity</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing activity</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative findings suggest that improved lesson materials contributed to this increase in implementation fidelity. In Cycle 2, returning BLAST participants reported that the revised curriculum was easier to understand and implement, with clearer goals than in Cycle 1. Teachers said that revisions made the curriculum more accessible to new implementers. While teachers in Cycle 1 felt that the curriculum did not adequately describe their role, implementers in Cycle 2 reported that curriculum changes helped them gain a clearer sense of expectations.

In Cycle 2, participating teachers asked students to complete an online information literacy assessment online twice: once before the first lesson, and once following completion of the curriculum. In total, 170 students in 8 classrooms completed a pre-assessment and 109 students in 5 classrooms completed a post-assessment. State assessment data suggest that these schools did not differ in important ways from those that did not complete the assessment. For the 84 students with both a pre- and post-assessment, scores increased (77% of students). For these students, scores increased by 4 percentage points on average, from 58% to 62%. This represents a small but statistically significant improvement in literacy knowledge. These results, when considered in tandem with student and teacher reports of their participation in BLAST, suggest not only positive learning gains but also high engagement in and enjoyment of this educational experience.

Factors Influencing Implementation

In this section, we describe facilitators and barriers that significantly influenced BLAST implementation across the two cycles.

Facilitators

Respondents reported that the substantive revisions made to the BLAST curriculum for Cycle 2 increased the ease of implementation of individual lessons and coherence of the curriculum overall. They also highlighted the importance of strong working relationships to the quality of implementation, both among individual librarian–teacher pairs as well as through librarians’ support for each other’s implementation work.
The revised curriculum in Cycle 2 provided more detail and better pacing. FLP included a broader range of suggested activities to serve as additional resources for implementers, and templates to help guide the cumulative final project. Librarians reported that having handouts and activity suggestions made planning less time-consuming, while teachers appreciated having the flexibility to customize the lessons in response to student interests and skills. At the same time, in order to improve implementation fidelity, FLP pared down the curriculum from six lessons to five, and included a smaller number of lesson components.

Returning teacher-librarian pairs experienced stronger connections that facilitated planning in Cycle 2. Participants returning to BLAST for their second year had greater familiarity with the curriculum in Cycle 2, which made them more effective in their implementation. They leveraged working relationships built during Cycle 1 and spent more time planning upfront in Cycle 2, allowing them to proactively address some challenges experienced the previous year. One participant commented, “We anticipated some of the things that [students] struggled with and were able to ride those bumps out a little smoother this year.”

A community of practice emerged among librarian implementers in Cycle 2. Some librarians belonging to the same cluster met in person at the start of Cycle 2 and then continued sharing resources throughout implementation through email and informal meetings. These peer librarians reported that sharing their materials and ideas collectively helped them gain implementation insights and strengthened their delivery of the curriculum. For instance, since those who participated in Cycle 1 had experienced challenges keeping the materials organized when they were handed out one at a time, Cycle 2 librarians gave each student a BLAST folder containing all materials needed for the current lesson, including pencils, questionnaires, and worksheets.

Barriers

Qualitative data suggested that several barriers hindered the implementation of the BLAST curriculum in Cycle 2. Importantly, unlike in Cycle 1, implementers did not identify aspects of the BLAST curriculum itself as barriers to implementation. Instead, barriers across both implementation cycles were related primarily to planning and logistics.

Implementation began too late in the school year and was delayed by scheduling, communication, and policy challenges. Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 both started in January. Participating librarians and teachers reported weather issues and the need to work around academic testing and school events significantly constrained implementation. Some BLAST participants described additional delays due to limitations in library and school schedules. For librarians, schedules limited when they could be away from their branches. Teachers indicated that they faced limitations due to when they had time to prepare for lessons or had substitutes available to cover for them. Implementers reported that their partners sometimes took too long to respond to emails. Librarians also reported needing extra time to work with teachers and their principals to develop strategies for getting permission slips signed and returned in time for the scheduled library field trips. Rescheduling a trip sometimes required parents to sign multiple slips.
Librarians and teachers wanted more balance and collaboration in their implementation responsibilities. Fidelity forms indicated that teachers taught most lessons, perhaps because teachers felt more confident in delivering the lessons, although both partners contributed to planning. Conversely, several librarians reported taking the lead on implementation because they perceived their teacher partners as being overwhelmed. Both librarians and teachers reported that they felt their partners would have had more to contribute if they had been able to dedicate more time to planning. One teacher commented, “I really—I led the whole thing. And I felt like. . . if we were able to share a little more [it would have been stronger] because he had a lot of good insight, too.” This suggests it would be helpful to provide explicit support on dividing tasks, such as sample agendas or checklists to guide planning discussions.

More time was needed to support fourth graders’ information literacy skill building. Implementers suggested that scheduling BLAST lessons every two weeks (rather than weekly) would allow more time for students to practice and further develop the skills targeted in each lesson. In addition, they suggested that breaking some lessons into two or three sessions might also support skill building for fourth-grade students. These suggestions reflect the importance of continuing to refine the overall structure of the curriculum. This task should include input from both librarians and teachers to ensure that a refined curriculum achieves its goals for building students’ skills while staying within the logistical constraints of both public library and school systems.

Summary

Developing and implementing the BLAST curriculum represented an ambitious effort to forge a new approach to library–school partnerships. The high levels of student engagement reported by teachers and librarians, as well as librarians’ positive perceptions of the value of having centrally developed materials that they could customize, highlight the importance of FLP’s continued investment in this work. At the same time, the human resources needed to implement the curriculum, negotiate scheduling constraints, and consistently build buy-in beyond individual classrooms all posed important barriers to sustainability that should inform how FLP invests in future library–school partnership strategies.
Findings from 2016 and 2019 School Partnerships and Family and Community Engagement Surveys

In this section, we highlight findings from the 2016 and 2019 school partnerships surveys. Only librarians completed the 2016 survey, while both librarians and community organizers/community initiatives specialists completed the 2019 survey. We first examine respondents’ reports about current or recent school partnerships. We then summarize findings regarding respondents’ preparation for developing school partnerships and facilitators and barriers to this work. Finally, we present findings regarding respondents’ perceptions of facilitators and barriers to family and community engagement.

Methods and Sample

In 2016, the Chapin Hall team designed and administered a brief online survey with librarians (n = 76) about their experiences with school partnerships. The purpose of this survey was for FLP to generate a baseline of how librarians establish and maintain partnerships with schools, the range of existing practices librarians implement as part of school partnerships, and librarian perceptions of current facilitators and barriers to partnering with schools. The results of this survey were intended to support FLP’s development as a learning organization. We revised and administered the survey with librarians and community organizers/community initiatives specialists (n = 75) in Fall 2019 to understand how patterns related to establishing and maintaining school partnerships may have changed over time. While the survey was not designed to evaluate BLAST or other school partnerships work initiated during the evaluation period, we did adjust some items in the postsurvey to capture school partnerships activities more accurately.5

In the 2016 survey, approximately half of respondents identified as children’s librarians while the other half identified as adult/teen librarians. In the 2019 survey, approximately half of respondents identified as children’s librarians, nearly a third identified as adult/teen librarians, and the remainder consisted of community initiative specialists, community organizers, and other designations (see Table 6). Sixteen respondents skipped this question. Because the survey was otherwise anonymous, we do not know how much overlap there was between the two samples.

---

5 For example, we revised the response “in-person visits” in the 2016 survey to allow respondents to separately endorse “school visits” and “library visits.”
Table 6. Respondent Roles and Years of Service at FLP and Current Branch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016 respondents</th>
<th>2019 respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 76)</td>
<td>(n = 75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role(^a), %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's Librarian</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult/Teen Librarian</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Organizer/Community Initiative Specialist</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of service at FLP(^b), %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–2 years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or more years</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of service at current branch, %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–2 years</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or more years</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) 71 2016 respondents and 59 2019 respondents provided information about their role.

\(^b\) 71 2016 respondents and 66 2019 respondents provided information about their years of service at FLP and current branch.

We also asked survey respondents to report how long they had served at their current branches. Over two-thirds of both the 2016 and 2019 samples worked for the FLP for 3 or more years. The 2019 sample had more respondents who had served for 3 or more years than the 2016 sample.

Consistent with the number of librarians implementing BLAST, 16% of the 2019 survey respondents reported involvement with this school partnership model. Larger proportions reported being involved in two other literacy initiatives, Building Bridges with Books (29%) and Skills for Community-Centered Libraries (51%).

**Characteristics of School Partnerships**

Most respondents who completed the school partnerships surveys reported being involved in current or recent school partnerships (84% in 2016, 79% in 2019).\(^6\) They also reported that they perceived school partnerships as an expected part of their role (86% in 2016, 81% in 2019). A majority of the FLP staff engaged in current or recent school partnerships reported that they communicate informally with school staff, supply information and materials, and participate in special events as part of their school partnerships (see Table 7). Almost half of the respondents also reported providing library-based programming during the school day. The percentage of

---

\(^6\) Most respondents reported that their school partnerships included SDP schools: 84% in 2016 and 75% in 2019. Notably, many respondents also partner with non-SDP schools and early childhood and education programs.
each type of work was lower in 2019 than in 2016, which might reflect either differences in respondents for the two surveys or the new leadership role taken on by the School and Library Partnerships Team in the Youth Services and Programs (YSP) department. Other explanations may be that library staff feel better prepared or that they received more requests to do so in 2019.

Table 7. How Respondents Reported Working with Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016 respondents (n = 76)</th>
<th>2019 respondents (n = 75)</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal communication</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide information/materials</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about library services for families and teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in special events/family nights/back-to-school events</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide library-based programming during the school day</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide library materials on particular topics</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide library-based out-of-school time programming</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide ongoing school-based programming during the school day</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Respondents could select multiple responses for this item.

Cultivating a relationship with one or more school staff members is crucial to developing school partnerships. To describe how FLP staff approach the work of developing school partnerships, we asked respondents to identify with whom they worked in developing school partnerships. Overwhelmingly, respondents reported working with teachers most closely (77% in 2016 and 72% in 2019). More respondents also reported working closely with administrative staff (29%, compared with 22% in 2016) and parent liaisons (19%, compared with 9% in 2016). On the other hand, fewer respondents reported working closely with school principals (15% in 2019 compared with 25% in 2016). Possible contributors to these shifts include work supported by

---

To evaluate these differences, we assigned numerical values to different levels of preparation (not prepared = 0, slightly prepared = 1, moderately prepared = 2, and very prepared = 3) and then carried out a Mann–Whitney U test to check for statistically significant differences in sums across years.
community organizers/community initiatives specialists, as well as partnership development work led by YSP.

**FLP Staff Preparation for Developing School Partnerships**

Overall, most respondents reported feeling moderately or well prepared overall to develop school partnerships in 2016 and 2019, as displayed in Figure 5. While it seems counterintuitive that staff reported feeling less prepared to develop school partnerships in 2019, this pattern is broadly consistent with literature examining the moderating role of knowledge on self-efficacy (see, for example, Hess, Teti, & Hussey-Gardner, 2004). Namely, as people gain greater knowledge, they have a more nuanced understanding of the difficulty of the task at hand and the challenges they are likely to encounter, which may reduce their sense of efficacy. Also important for interpreting these data, 32% of respondents completing the survey in 2019 had less than three years of experience at FLP. One clear and notable finding is that staff felt less prepared to interact directly with students than other aspects of school partnerships. We found a statistically significant difference in levels of preparation reported by 2016 and 2019 respondents (p < .05) with respect to establishing partnership with school leadership and working with students in classrooms.

![Figure 5. Sense of Preparedness to Develop School Partnerships, 2016 and 2019](image)

Respondents also indicated the grade levels for which they felt most comfortable providing programming. In both 2016 and 2019, respondents reported feeling most comfortable working with younger students (see Figure 6). In general, the proportion of respondents who are most comfortable working with a specific grade level drops off as the grade level increases.

![Figure 6. Grade Levels for which Respondents Felt Most Comfortable Providing Programming, 2016 and 2019](image)
Facilitators and Barriers to School Partnerships

Respondents identified proximity to schools, personal relationships, and community groups as top facilitators of school partnerships, as shown in Figure 7. These were also the top factors identified in the 2016 survey. We found a small but statistically significant association between reporting community groups as facilitators and working at a library that was assigned a community organizer or community initiatives specialist in 2019 ($p < 0.10$).
Respondents highlighted two distinct supports when asked about what had been the most helpful resources for developing school partnerships.

**Supportive and invested colleagues.** First, they described having supportive and invested colleagues both at FLP and at their partner schools. As one respondent wrote, “Support from the other librarian at my location and enthusiastic teachers who want to bring their classes to the library.” Another respondent commented, “The teachers themselves—allowing their curriculum to drive the nature of our visits.” Respondents also noted FLP’s investment in centrally supporting school partnerships For example, one respondent said: “Having a liaison to the school district who is coordinating the Library’s efforts.”

**Aligned materials and technological resources.** Second, respondents commented on the value of having materials and technological resources that were aligned with the goals of their school partnerships. Respondents specifically referenced the online resources, like the databases available on FLP’s website. Further, they cited materials prepared by FLP staff to support school partnerships, including kits developed by YSP and “presentations prepared by librarians that are easy to scale up or down.” Respondents described the specific resources that they used to coordinate their school partnerships work. For example, one respondent explained that they stored a reference collection of materials in a carry bag for use during sessions and maintained a dedicated notebook to track their contacts with school groups.

Across the board, 2019 respondents were more likely than their 2016 counterparts to mark various resources and trainings as potentially helpful for strengthening partnerships for schools,
as displayed in Table 8. In addition, we found statistically significant differences between the 2016 and 2019 surveys for five response options (p < .05): behavior management strategies, strategies for designing and sustaining collaborative partnerships, trauma-informed practices for library programming, approaches for checking student understanding, and strategies for codesigning programming with afterschool providers.

Table 8. Promising Resources for Strengthening School Partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>2016 respondents</th>
<th>2019 respondents</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 76)</td>
<td>(n = 75)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior management strategies</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for designing and sustaining collaborative</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partnerships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective outreach strategies for partnering with</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for engaging families of school-age</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for codesigning programming with teachers</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma-informed practices for library programming</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for engaging the neighborhood community</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning frameworks used by SDP</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches for checking student understanding</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific content areas</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative practices in library science</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for codesigning programming with</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>afterschool providers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies used by schools to assess student learning</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Statistically significant at p < .05

In terms of barriers to school–library partnerships, scheduling and staffing limitations were the most cited barriers (see Table 9), consistent with findings from 2016. Other notable barriers were lack of interest, issues with transportation, and competing demands on staff time. In order to give us a sense of the most pressing issues, this survey question asked respondents to select up to three factors, rather than selecting all that apply.
Table 9. Most Commonly Reported Barriers to Building Partnerships with Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016 respondents</th>
<th>2019 respondents</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 76)</td>
<td>(n = 75)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling times that work for both the library and the school</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of coverage (staff) at the library</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools are not interested in partnering</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation of students to the library</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competing demands on my time</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>-18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factors Influencing Family and Community Engagement

Finally, we asked respondents about facilitators and barriers influencing their community and family engagement efforts to support their work with children and young people.

Facilitators

Survey write-in responses suggested that respondents perceived a combination of specific centralized supports and resources with the flexibility to be responsive to local community context, assets, and need as supporting their efforts to engage communities and families benefit from s.

Guidance on organizing outreach and programming. Respondents described the importance of having guidance on organizing outreach and programming. Respondents commented that they valued the professional development opportunities that FLP provided in this area, but noted that trainings had been “sporadic.” They also cited the importance of being able to connect with colleagues who have expertise in this area. For example, one respondent wrote, “Opportunity to observe successful community organizer” when asked about most helpful strategies for supporting their family and community engagement work. Another explained benefiting from “conversations with colleagues who have experience working with families and community members.” As one component of this guidance, respondents noted the benefit of being able to access tip sheets and icebreaker activities prepared by other staff.

Being able to partner with local community groups and SDP departments. Respondents also commented on the value of being able to partner with existing groups, both local community organizations and SDP, as well as other public agency departments. Notably, respondents cited experiences with Building Bridges with Books and SDP’s Family Academy Courses and Training.
resources (supported by SDP’s Office of Family and Community Engagement). They also discussed groups directly connected to their own branches. For example, one respondent noted “using LEAP as a starting point and creating connections through those attendees.” Another mentioned Friends groups’ members, explaining that, as community members, these individuals “have a good sense of what people want in their library programming.”

**Flexibility to be responsive to local community context.** Further, respondents stressed the importance of having the flexibility to be responsive to local community cultures and needs. As stated by one respondent:

> Being a consistent presence has allowed me to get to know and form relationships with community members. They know they can turn to me for assistance and I know more about the culture of the schools to understand who to contact for conducting outreach, etc.

Respondents also highlighted the importance of conversations with individual community members to identify what kind of programming they want. Further, they noted that a critical component of developing strong partnerships—both with nearby schools and the community—was “being culturally aware and respectful of the school population.” One respondent described using strategies like open houses and book giveaways to encourage community members to come into the library and, in so doing, help to strengthen connections between the library and community.

The 2019 survey respondents indicated multiple resources as potentially being helpful in building partnerships with families and community members (see Table 10). For the most part, the results from 2019 are consistent with those from 2016. The one exception is the item on trauma-informed practices that can be incorporated into library programming. In 2016, 22% of respondents indicated this resource was helpful. In 2019, 37% indicated it was helpful. This is a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$).
Table 10. Resources Marked as Potentially Helpful for Family and Community Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>2016 respondents (n = 76)</th>
<th>2019 respondents (n = 75)</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for engaging socioeconomically and linguistically diverse community members</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods for bringing groups together to inform the design of library programming that responds to family and community needs</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for strengthening the role of libraries in the local community</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>-16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about existing family engagement groups in the local community</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other staff with expertise in community engagement or community organizing</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma-informed practices that can be incorporated into library programming</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Models for leading conversations with community groups and partners</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>-12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Barriers

Consistent between the 2016 and 2019 surveys, respondents identified scheduling times that worked for both the library and families/community members, lack of library staff coverage, and competing demands on their time as the most common barriers (see Table 11). Notably, the percentage of respondents that perceived losing or not returning library materials as an engagement barrier decreased, possibly reflecting the influence staff participating in training on community-centered libraries.
Table 11. Most Commonly Reported Barriers to Family and Community Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016 respondents (n = 76)</th>
<th>2019 respondents (n = 75)</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling times that work for both the library and families/community members</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>-22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of coverage (staff) at the library</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>-21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competing demands on my time</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>-9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of training on effective ways of engaging and presenting materials to community</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough time to develop programming that responds to family or community needs</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families or community members are not able to access library materials due to fines</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>-7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families or community members lose or do not return materials</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>-14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

In summary, the pre/post survey about library staff’s school partnerships offers some promising indicators of change over the past three years. For example, between 2016 and 2019, we found a statistically significant difference in staff’s feeling of being prepared to work with school leaders and working with students in classrooms. Similarly, while some perceived barriers remain and haven’t changed (for example, scheduling constraints on the part of both libraries and schools, lack of staff coverage at libraries), fewer 2019 respondents perceived schools’ lack of interest in partnerships, transportation to the library/school, or competing demands on their time as significant barriers. These are some areas in which to provide professional development and centralize the work of school–library partnership development. Overcoming these barriers will help promote effective experiences for both librarians and their partner educators.
Discussion and Recommendations

At its core, the Building Inspiration: 21st Century Libraries Initiative sought to transform the role of libraries in the communities they serve. This initiative envisioned welcoming spaces and new community-driven uses of the library as levers for increasing the value of libraries as neighborhood institutions. It also saw an opportunity to use innovative approaches to developing school and library partnerships. Librarians and teachers could reimagine how branches might enhance students’ access to library resources and guide students’ learning in ways that were enriching and engaging while also advancing the priorities of both FLP and SDP. FLP further sought to leverage this initiative to enhance its capacity to collect and apply data and further develop its capacity as a learning organization. In this multicomponent evaluation of the 21st Century Libraries Initiative, the Chapin Hall team has developed findings specific to each of three strategies.

**Strategy 1: Renovate libraries to pilot the 21st Century Libraries model.** We highlighted notable changes to the look and feel of the five branches, along with the ways in which the more flexible and functional furnishings contributed to new and more diverse programming offerings. At the same time, post-occupancy findings suggested the importance of integrating customer and staff feedback throughout the design and development process. This would help ensure that the future 21st Century libraries better reflect the interests and needs of the communities they serve.

**Strategy 2: Use community organizing to develop 21st Century Library branches as community hubs.** We described the development of the community organizer position. We also examined ways in which implementation experiences increased clarity about the specific external and internal implementation responsibilities carried out by the initial group of community organizers assigned to four 21st Century libraries. We pointed out opportunities to enhance the role by increasing communication with library staff about the benefits of adding a community organizer to branch staffing. These could include supporting community outreach and engagement and supporting library staff.

**Strategy 3: Use the Bringing Libraries and Schools Together project to test a model for sustainable and effective school and library partnerships.** We presented overarching findings drawn from the 2-year implementation of the fourth-grade BLAST curriculum developed and implemented in partnership with SDP. We also discussed the process used to define a school partnership model that would address priorities held by both institutions. Participants reported a high level of engagement by students and teachers. They also said improvements made to the curriculum based on the first year’s implementation findings had contributed to ease of implementation and overall coherence. Ultimately, FLP determined that the six-lesson curriculum, module-based partnership model was too resource intensive to sustain on an annual basis. Nevertheless, experiences and lessons gained through this work informed FLP’s commitment to support school partnerships centrally through a dedicated School Partnerships Team starting in 2017.
Results from the school partnerships survey administered in 2016 and 2019 offered further insights into the most common factors influencing library staff’s development of school partnerships. Results also highlighted the importance of centralized support around some aspects of partnerships, coupled with flexibility to be responsive to local community culture, assets, and needs.

This evaluation represents one of multiple examples of FLP’s commitment to collecting and using evidence to understand the outcomes of innovative strategies, identify facilitators and barriers to implementation, and apply this information to library decision making about scaling promising efforts and prioritizing services that advance the library’s mission of promoting learning and curiosity. However, advocating for the collection and use of outcome data is easier than actually implementing these activities. Lack of library resources and staff time are common barriers, as is a lack of staff knowledge about how to integrate the collection of outcome data into their regular activities. There are also challenges in defining expected outcomes of the use of library resources or participation in programs, a crucial lens in assessing whether to attempt to bring a promising pilot to scale. Data can and should play a central role in testing and refining models for library partnerships with communities and schools, particularly when city budgets shape library capacity.

Based on our findings, and also with the knowledge that some of these suggestions would require additional resources, we offer recommendations in four areas (see Table 12).
### Table 12. Summary of recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Area</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Strategy 1: Renovate libraries to pilot the 21st Century Libraries model | • Routinely examine the utilization of library spaces  
• Continue to elevate responsiveness to community interests and needs as an FLP value  
• Prepare and support library staff to leverage the benefits of the new spaces |
| Strategy 2: Use community organizing to develop library branches as community hubs | • Establish a process to encourage branch staff to conceptualize innovations and document the results  
• Continue to invest in community organizing staff and other professional development resources to support effective community engagement  
• Support branches in developing sustainable partnerships with community organizations to address community-specific interests and needs |
| Strategy 3: Use the Bringing Libraries and Schools Together project to test a model for sustainable and effective school and library partnerships  
Continuing to develop FLP as a learning organization | • Continue to invest centrally in the design and piloting of school partnership strategies  
• Continue to facilitate a school partnerships professional learning community that includes both central and branch staff  
• Continue to cultivate working relationships with SDP staff at multiple levels  
• Prioritize expansion of the 21st Century Library model while being flexible within the model  
• Articulate the process to be used by Strategic Initiatives staff to support the scale up of successful pilot innovations  
• Identify opportunities to better integrate data into routine library service decision making |

### Renovating Libraries to Pilot the 21st Century Library Model

*Routinely examine the utilization of library spaces.* For the post-occupancy evaluation, we employed multiple data collection methods to capture how library spaces are being utilized by customers and staff. As FLP continues to refine and expand implementation of the 21st Century Library model, it is critical that the libraries access evidence relevant to decision making about library spaces. In particular, several of the methods adapted for the post-occupancy evaluation require little formal training or technology and could be implemented by staff or members of Friends groups. These approaches would complement staff’s informal observations and support branch staff in systematically identifying opportunities for improvement, such as spaces that tend not to be used widely by their intended populations. It is difficult to predict future needs...
and these methods can generate evidence to help identify important course corrections, as well as lay the groundwork for broader design planning.

*Continue to elevate responsiveness to community interests and needs as an FLP value.* Findings showed that community members valued the role of each of the 21st Century libraries as an anchor institution in their neighborhoods. They appreciated the welcoming look and feel of the renovated spaces, as well as the public investment in their communities. While the 21st Century model emphasized standardization in the look and feel of the five libraries, library staff and community members identified relatively easy fixes that could further strengthen the capacity of the library to respond to community interests and needs. These fixes could include multilingual or symbolic signage and bulletin boards for postings from community groups. Central staff could also support branches in conducting needs assessments related to library resources and programming. For example, central staff could engage branch staff and community members when analyzing branch circulation and online reservation data. Staff could use this analysis to identify and prioritize particular collections for augmentation, which would strengthen the alignment between community interests and library resources. FLP should consider integrating strategies to engage staff and customers throughout the design and implementation process in future renovations.

*Prepare and support library staff to leverage the benefits of the new spaces.* Evaluation findings demonstrated positive perceptions of customer service at the 21st Century libraries compared to the contrast libraries. Findings further suggested increased customer engagement with the more diverse types of programming offered at the renovated libraries. On the other hand, several respondents suggested that certain aspects of the renovations impeded workflow or did not reflect community interests and needs. Because changes in library spaces do not automatically lead to changes in staff and customer behavior, it is crucial that FLP prepare and support staff to realize the potential of the revamped spaces. It is also critical to ensure that staff have the skill sets and capacity to lead larger group programming to take advantage of the investments in flexible furnishing at the 21st Century libraries.

**Community Organizing to Develop 21st Century Libraries as Community Hubs**

*Maintain a process for encouraging branch staff to conceptualize innovations and document the results.* Throughout the initiative, FLP continued to refine the 21st Century library model. These adjustments included adding community organizing staff and articulating a structure to support staff and community member engagement throughout the design process. Additionally, FLP created an innovation fund that was used to pilot promising ideas, including the purchase of technology to support non-English-speaking library customers. Maintaining a formal “request for applications” process through which staff can apply for seed funding could yield innovations that further inform the 21st Century Library model. Documenting the results of these innovations could help FLP identify where additional investments would strengthen the role of libraries as community hubs or support the engagement of particular groups, such as young people or recent immigrants. This documentation can also help FLP leadership to understand
facilitators and barriers experienced during the pilot phase and assess the utility of expansion to other libraries.

*Continue to invest in community organizing staff and other professional development resources to support effective community engagement.* Findings demonstrate that the work undertaken by community organizers helped facilitate the development of 21st Century libraries as community hubs. Community organizers focused on the community, working to develop relationships with individual community members and build community coalitions. They also focused internally, working to support library staff to engage community members more effectively and stimulate community input into library functionality. With the shift of the initial community organizers to the regional cluster level and the addition of new community organizer staff, FLP is positioned to expand the community organizer aspect of the 21st Century library model so that an individual with community organizing skills and expertise serves each of FLP’s nine regional clusters. These investments are important for scaling approaches to elicit customer input and apply this information in library service decision making. These investments will also bolster efforts to prepare library staff to partner effectively with their communities, including developing strategies to more effectively engage the populations that most heavily use their branch.

*Support branches to develop sustainable partnerships with community organizations as a strategy to address community-specific interests and needs.* FLP neighborhood branches are uniquely positioned to respond to community interests and needs. That said, it is important to acknowledge that library staff are not trained, prepared, or expected to respond to every opportunity to strengthen their communities. As library staff identify gaps or participate in needs assessments, FLP should look to leverage assets that already exist rather than trying to replicate them within the library. Findings showed that community organizers lead important work to develop coalitions of community organizations and foster more robust connections to the library. Continuing to cultivate these partnerships will help FLP balance tensions between being responsive to communities and maintaining a focus on the library’s mission of advancing literacy, guiding learning, and inspiring curiosity.

**Use Bringing Libraries and Schools Together Project to Test a Model for Sustainable and Effective School and Library partnerships**

*Continue to invest centrally in the design and piloting of school partnership strategies.* Prior to the development of BLAST, FLP stakeholders partnered with the Chapin Hall research team to articulate a conceptual theory for school partnerships. They revised the theory in 2018. This group identified a number of areas needing internal direction and leadership. For example, expectations for library outreach to neighborhood schools at the beginning of the school year were unclear. In addition, there was not an established mechanism for cluster leaders or central staff to track school partnership activities. Many librarians also had only passing familiarity with Pennsylvania Core State Standards. This lack of familiarity limited their ability to provide schools with library resources and expertise in areas such as information literacy. These resources could further enrich students’ learning experiences and supplement the existing curriculum. Central staff can play a critical role by helping to develop library-based content that supports educators
in using the library to deliver enriching, engaging learning experiences to children and young people. In addition, for librarians, having a centralized set of resources they can access would reduce the level of preparation needed to partner with schools.

Continue to facilitate a school partnership professional learning community that includes both central and branch staff. As part of the process of developing what became the BLAST curriculum, FLP staff now participate in a bimonthly School Partnerships Working Group. This work was initiated by the Strategic Initiatives Department. It then transitioned to YSP. This working group pilots new strategies and provides leadership around scaling a promising strategy and materials developed at one branch into guidance and materials needed to replicate the activity more broadly. Sustaining this type of professional learning community will foster consistent opportunities for librarians to discuss and deepen their expertise in school partnerships, as well as strengthen formal and informal networks among librarians.

Continue to cultivate working relationships with SDP staff at multiple levels, including district central office and school leadership. At the beginning of the initiative, FLP had few established relationships with school district staff below the executive level. While branch staff partnered with some neighborhood schools, they had limited interactions with school administrators or others in leadership roles. FLP has made demonstrable progress at multiple levels to forge a partnership with SDP, including developing insights into what constitutes a sustainable level of commitment for each institution.

Conclusion

We encourage FLP leadership and staff to continue to pursue the ambitious aims outlined for the Building Inspiration: 21st Century Initiative. We also encourage them to continue developing FLP’s capacity as a learning organization. Taken as a whole, our findings highlight the promise of expanding the 21st Century Library model while being flexible with regard to local library capacity and community interests and needs. FLP’s mission is to advance literacy, guide learning, and inspire curiosity. We close with suggestions to support FLP’s continued implementation and refinement of the 21st Century Library Model and help accomplish its mission.

Prioritize expansion of the 21st Century Library model while being flexible within these standards. Findings from across the three initiatives demonstrate customers find the 21st Century Libraries model to be valuable. The findings also show opportunities to further articulate the actions that FLP leadership and central staff can take to strengthen community and school partnerships. To support system-wide library staff partnership development, FLP should clearly articulate the standard components and activities that advance its vision for 21st Century Libraries. At the same time, branches, communities, and FLP departments need flexibility to adapt to specific local contexts, serving the public as a dynamic institution across shifts in neighborhood demographics, changes in the economy, and the evolving ways people engage in learning. For example, FLP might articulate a community engagement process that should be incorporated into pilots. They also might recommend adjustments to library services. Efforts to structure such
a process would need to be flexible to reflect local community interests and needs and library capacity, such as whether it takes place in person or online, or whether a standing Friends group or specific task force would be created to support the process.

**Articulate how FLP will coordinate the scale-up of successful pilot innovations.** The Strategic Initiatives Department plays a critical role in supporting FLP leadership and branches to capitalize on funding opportunities that can advance the overall mission of the library. Grants offer FLP opportunities to pilot innovation. Further, a philosophy of starting small and incubating innovations within the Strategic Initiatives Department supports the early identification of strengths and weaknesses in new strategies. It also allows leadership to determine what adjustments might be needed. However, there is also the need to articulate FLP’s strategies to support the scale up of promising pilots supported by standalone grants and their integration into library budgets to influence a broader group of FLP customers and Philadelphia communities.

Just as it will be important to engage staff and customers throughout future renovation processes, findings suggest the value of articulating a similar set of expectations for supporting the scale-up of successful pilot innovations. With school partnerships, training librarians in a standard set of activities that they can then implement will promote consistency across branches. In turn, this will streamline how school partnerships are developed and educators’ understanding of how library resources can promote their students’ learning. With community partnerships, continuing to develop the vision for how community organizers support community outreach, engagement, and capacity-building will support the expansion of these activities across libraries in each of FLP’s nine clusters.

**Assess the alignment of FLP’s data investments with its current priorities.** Measuring performance and outcomes helps public libraries assess the needs of their communities, allocate scarce resources, and understand the benefits of their programs and services to customers. Understanding benefits and outcomes of services is especially important during times of fiscal and personnel limitations. However, this requires tracking individual patrons’ use of library resources or the frequency with which they participate in programs. In an increasingly outcomes-driven environment, FLP leaders are navigating tensions between a philosophy of not collecting data about customers and being able to demonstrate the impact and value of library services and spaces to their communities.

An important part of aligning data investments and priorities is to consider how existing library data might be transformed to inform the management of library operations. For example, for its community partnerships, FLP collects monthly narrative reports at the cluster level for each community organizer. It also collects administrative data routinely reported by branches. The data points reflect a combination of ideas about the vision for the position and metrics that have been requested—or are likely to be requested—by library or city leadership. At almost two years into implementation, the time is right to assess the utility of the indicators being collected against FLP’s goals for demonstrating impact, along with any mandatory reporting. In addition, the school partnerships and family and community engagement surveys administered in 2016
and 2019 provide a further example of how FLP can monitor progress toward specific institutional goals over time.

Implement strategies to integrate data interpretation into routine library service decision making. FLP has engaged in surveys, focus groups, and other methods to understand the benefits of their programming. It also has routinely engaged external evaluators as part of formal grant-based initiatives. But it does not appear that these efforts are embedded into ongoing library operations. This limits FLP's ability to routinely collect and analyze data in ways that can inform its improvement efforts. We recommend that reviews of circulation, foot traffic, program attendance, and other administrative data become a standing agenda item at staff meetings to help inform immediate library service decision making. This type of regular interpretation of data for patterns can also help to surface changes in customer engagement, highlight issues with data quality, or suggest opportunities to consider longer term. This work can also support the professionalization of staff with respect to goals of evidence-driven decision making and demonstrating the outcomes of FLP investments.
References


