

LITERACY CAPACITY ASSESSMENT TOOL (LitCAT)

FOR SCHOOL-AGE PROGRAMS



Created by Build the Out-of-School Time Network (BOSTnet)



In partnership with:
United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley
Version 2.0, 4/30/13



INTRODUCTION

This school-age program self-assessment tool was created by BOSTnet with the support of the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley. With too many children falling behind in their reading skills by third grade, it has become increasingly clear that school-age programming can and must play a key role in providing high-quality enrichment and helping close the achievement gap.

The purpose of this tool is to help programs assess the underlying foundations that must be in place in order for literacy enrichment to have the maximum benefit for the children in the program. Best Practices were identified through key research in the field of literacy and OST.

In the seminal report *Turning the Page* (Strategies for Children), five key strategy areas were identified as essential for literacy support. These areas are:

1. Program design and implementation for impact
2. Ongoing assessments of children and settings
3. Redefined adult capacity-building models
4. Language-rich, rigorous, and engaging curricula
5. Partnerships with families focused on language and learning

We have organized this tool to align with these five strategies. Our only modification has been to add “schools” to the fifth key strategy area, as strong partnerships with schools are an important component of whole-child enrichment and support.

Throughout this tool, the word *staff* is used to refer to all adults who are regular employees of the program and who either work with children, or are in a supervisory, management, or directorial role.

Each section of the assessment tool is divided into foundational, intermediate, and independent. For information about these tiers and about scoring the tool for use in program improvement planning, please see the “SCORING” section.

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SCORING

Each section of the assessment tool is divided into foundational, intermediate, and independent. For items at the foundational tier, programs will need training, coaching, or other supports in order to show efficient increases to program quality. These are core structures, skills, policies and resources essential to an effective literacy program.

For items at the intermediate tier, the program will need to focus on developing internal capacity to share expertise, with experienced staff mentoring new staff. Programs will also need to develop an ongoing organizational cycle of evaluation, goal-setting, planning, implementation, evaluation, and so on. These are the central features of a successful model of continuous quality improvement. Programs working on intermediate level goals will strongly benefit from training or coaching to support the development of these new structures and models.

For items at the independent tier, programs and their staff are competent to identify goals and seek out key resources to accomplish those goals without requiring formalized coaching or training from outside of the organization. The internal cycle of evaluation, goal-setting, planning, implementation, evaluation, and so on is firmly established and embedded into the program's culture. While staff will still benefit from regular training, external supports are no longer necessary in order to assure that the program continues on the path to ongoing quality improvement.

The division of items into these tiers is based on best practices and research as well as outcomes from the Summer Learning Collaborative (2010-present).

To complete and score this assessment:

1. Complete the entire assessment. Be blunt and honest.
2. If any foundational items score a **3 or below**, these items should be addressed prior to working on any other items within this tool.
 - a. Choose 3 goals from those foundational items scoring 3 or below.
 - b. If only one or two foundational items are 3 or below, choose other foundational items for your other goals.
3. Once all foundational items are scoring a 4 or 5, beginning to work on items in the intermediate tier is appropriate.
4. If all foundational items are at a 4 or 5, you may choose goals from any foundational goal scoring a 4 or any intermediate goal scoring a 3 or below.
5. If all foundational and intermediate items are at a 4 or 5, you may choose goals from any tier.

It is recommended that this tool be used with the LitCAT Planning Form, which guides users through the goal-setting and planning process, resulting in a program improvement plan.

A resource toolkit for foundational goals is available, and binders for the other tiers are in development.

Note: it is beneficial to have multiple staff members complete the assessment so that it is possible to compare the responses across the organization, both to identify common themes, and also to note areas where there is a gap between leadership perceptions of programmatic functioning and staff perceptions. This will help your program create an effective ongoing dialog on quality improvement.

SECTION 1: PROGRAM DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION FOR IMPACT

Foundational Tier

Evaluate these statements and determine the extent to which they are true in your program right now

| | | | | |
|----|---|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. | A clear, consistent, program-wide strategy for positive behavior management is used by all staff: | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |
| 2. | The leadership of the program (site supervisors, program directors, etc.) consider literacy a high priority, talking about it frequently and including it in planning and strategy. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |
| 3. | Staff actively work to build positive relationships with all children. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |
| 4. | During the summer, every child in the program receives at least one hour per day where the primary focus of the lesson is literacy. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |
| 5. | The program space includes books, posters, displays, games, and interactive stations that promote exploration, inquiry, and learning. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |
| 6. | Books and learning materials are culturally relevant and reflect the diversity of the students in the program | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |
| 7. | Age-appropriate books and learning materials are readily available and within reach of children, are in good condition, and are organized. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |
| 8. | The program has a library or dedicated reading area with appealing displays, comfortable furniture, and interactive stations. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |

How many Foundational items on this page scored a 3, 2, or 1:

Intermediate Tier

| | | | | |
|-----|--|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 9. | Program space includes interactive displays such as community art, question and answer boards, tactile stations, etc. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |
| 10. | The program has a staff person with expertise in family and school engagement who coordinates building and strengthening connections to schools, planning family events and family outreach efforts, and holding regular meetings with both families and schools. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |
| 11. | The program has a staff person with expertise in literacy who is responsible for supervising the implementation of literacy throughout the program, including regular observations, lesson planning meetings, and assessments. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |
| 12. | 100% of lessons and activities contain active or passive literacy learning elements. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |

How many Intermediate items on this page scored a 3, 2, or 1:

Independent Tier

| | | | | |
|-----|--|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 13. | All children are fully engaged during lessons and activities throughout the day and behavior issues are very rare. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |

How many Independent items on this page scored a 3, 2, or 1:

SECTION 2: ONGOING ASSESSMENTS OF CHILDREN & SETTINGS

Foundational Tier

Evaluate these statements and determine the extent to which they are true in your program right now

| | | | |
|--|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. Informal strategies for <i>parent</i> feedback (such as a feedback box, emails, conversations about program quality during pick-up or drop-off, etc.) are used. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | 4 | 5 | |
| 2. Staff and leadership actively encourage use of informal <i>parent</i> feedback strategies through incentives, responsiveness to feedback, etc. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | 4 | 5 | |
| 3. Staff share their opinions at least once a year through an anonymous program quality questionnaire. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | 4 | 5 | |
| 4. Leadership actively encourages <i>staff</i> to give informal feedback (emails, comments to supervisors, a feedback box, dialog in meetings, etc.) through incentives, responsiveness to feedback, and other strategies. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | 4 | 5 | |
| 5. Staff actively participate in an ongoing dialog about program quality. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | 4 | 5 | |

How many Foundational items on this page scored a 3, 2, or 1:

Intermediate Tier

| | | | |
|--|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 6. Families are asked to complete an evaluation of the program at least once a year and most families respond. <i>(Score = 1 if the program does not ask families to complete a program evaluation at least once a year)</i> | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | 4 | 5 | |
| 7. The program uses one or more reliable, research-based tools to measure children's literacy skills (such as DIBELS, Ohio Word Test, etc.) and results are used to guide program and lesson planning. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | 4 | 5 | |
| 8. The program uses a self-assessment tool such as SACERS or APT yearly to set program improvement goals, and significant progress is made toward goals each year. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | 4 | 5 | |
| 9. Informal opportunities for children to provide feedback on lessons and activities are provided (voting, activity star charts, etc.). | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | 4 | 5 | |
| 10. Parent, child, and staff feedback are used to inform program assessment and creation of a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) at least annually. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | 4 | 5 | |

How many Intermediate items on this page scored a 3, 2, or 1:

Independent Tier

| | | | |
|---|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 11. Scores on child assessment tools (DIBELS, SRA, Ohio Word Test, etc.) are shared between the program and sending schools or districts. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | 4 | 5 | |
| 12. Child outcome data from assessments and evaluations is used regularly by staff to adjust curricula and inform lesson planning. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | 4 | 5 | |

How many Independent items on this page scored a 3, 2, or 1:

SECTION 3: ADULT CAPACITY-BUILDING MODELS

Foundational Tier

Evaluate these statements and determine the extent to which they are true in your program right now

| | | | | |
|----|---|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. | All staff receive annual training on behavior management and are skilled, knowledgeable, and consistent in behavior management. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 4 5 |
| 2. | All staff receive annual training on lesson planning and support for diverse children and families and are skilled, knowledgeable, and consistent in respectful and inclusive practices. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 4 5 |
| 3. | All staff receive annual training on lesson planning and support for English language learners and are skilled, knowledgeable, and consistent in supporting learning and language development for learners of English. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 4 5 |
| 4. | All staff receive annual training on lesson planning and support for children with special needs and are skilled, knowledgeable, and consistent in respectful and inclusive practices that promote learning. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 4 5 |
| 5. | Staff engage in programmatic culture of literacy (i.e. staff book recommendation posters, staff theme days to support literacy themes, Drop Everything and Read, etc.). | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 4 5 |
| 6. | Staff have Individual Professional Development Plans in place that include support in literacy instruction and lesson planning. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 4 5 |
| 7. | Staff understand and consistently implement strategies to build beneficial adult-child relationships. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 4 5 |

How many **Foundational** items on this page scored a 3, 2, or 1:

Intermediate Tier

| | | | | |
|----|---|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 8. | Experienced staff model lesson planning and implementation for newer staff with a focus on infusing literacy enrichment. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 4 5 |
| 9. | Staff meet at least monthly to talk about behavior management strategies and discuss particular challenges and successes. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 4 5 |

How many **Intermediate** items on this page scored a 3, 2, or 1:

Independent Tier

| | | | | |
|-----|---|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 10. | Experienced staff actively mentor newer staff. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 4 5 |
| 11. | There is a staff person or an available expert to consult with staff at least monthly on instruction strategies, interventions for children who are struggling, understanding learning needs, lesson planning, etc. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 4 5 |

How many **Independent** items on this page scored a 3, 2, or 1:

SECTION 4: LANGUAGE-RICH, RIGOROUS, & ENGAGING CURRICULA

Foundational Tier

Evaluate these statements and determine the extent to which they are true in your program right now

| | | | | |
|----|--|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. | New staff are made aware that Literacy is an important focus areas for the program. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |
| 2. | Lesson plans are created at least a day in advance. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |
| 3. | At any given time, there are at least three choices for what activity a child may be doing. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |
| 4. | Lesson planning forms include fields to identify the Literacy component of every lesson or activity, as well as an introduction, lesson implementation, and discussion/reflection/reinforcement. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |
| 5. | The program has an annual budget for sustainable materials purchases such as books, supplies, costumes for plays, etc. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |

How many Foundational items on this page scored a 3, 2, or 1:

Intermediate Tier

| | | | | |
|-----|---|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 6. | The program either uses thematic curricula or has a learning theme each week, and lessons are planned to connect with these themes. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |
| 7. | Lesson plans include visual (seeing), auditory (hearing), and tactile/kinesthetic (moving and touching) learning elements. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |
| 8. | Lesson plans are recorded in a formal manner and retained in the program for re-use. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |
| 9. | Staff infuse their own interests into their literacy focused lesson plans. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |
| 10. | Lesson plans are linked to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |

How many Intermediate items on this page scored a 3, 2, or 1:

Independent Tier

| | | | | |
|-----|--|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 11. | Lesson planning draws on a variety of external resources such as purchased or donated curricula, web resources, library books, and books and materials available in the program. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |
| 12. | Child leadership groups, volunteerism, clubs, and other opportunities extending beyond the program exist. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |
| 13. | Activities for children to do at home that build on the learning in the program are shared with families regularly. | Not at All True | Somewhat True | Completely True |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | 4 | 5 | |

How many Independent items on this page scored a 3, 2, or 1:

Foundational Tier

Evaluate these statements and determine the extent to which they are true in your program right now

| | | | | | | |
|----|--|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---|---|
| 1. | Program staff communicate at least monthly with the schools program children attend (via phone, texting, skype, email, or face-to-face meetings): | Not at All True 1 | Somewhat True 2 | Completely True 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | Program staff meet with sending school teachers or district personnel to identify learning goals, teaching strategies, themes, etc. | Not at All True 1 | Somewhat True 2 | Completely True 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | Literacy is an element of all family events at the program. | Not at All True 1 | Somewhat True 2 | Completely True 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. | Parents are aware that literacy is a key priority in the program. | Not at All True 1 | Somewhat True 2 | Completely True 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. | There is a system in place to support ongoing formal communication with parents about their child's progress (i.e. progress reports, conferences, etc.). | Not at All True 1 | Somewhat True 2 | Completely True 3 | 4 | 5 |

How many **Foundational** items on this page scored a 3, 2, or 1:

Intermediate Tier

| | | | | | | |
|-----|---|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---|---|
| 6. | The program has multiple family events each year; most families attend most events. | Not at All True 1 | Somewhat True 2 | Completely True 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. | School staff (including teachers) and OST staff participate together in at least two activities or events per year (at program or at school). | Not at All True 1 | Somewhat True 2 | Completely True 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. | Program staff share lesson plans with school teachers and school teachers share lesson plans with program staff. | Not at All True 1 | Somewhat True 2 | Completely True 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. | Learning plans are created in collaboration with teachers and parents for children that are struggling academically. | Not at All True 1 | Somewhat True 2 | Completely True 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. | Program staff communicate with parents formally or informally at least weekly, and all parents receive good news more often than bad news. | Not at All True 1 | Somewhat True 2 | Completely True 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. | Most days, most parents have informal conversations with staff regularly about their child's learning. | Not at All True 1 | Somewhat True 2 | Completely True 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. | Program staff frequently send home books, activities, games, and other fun opportunities for children and parents to learn and play together. | Not at All True 1 | Somewhat True 2 | Completely True 3 | 4 | 5 |

How many **Intermediate** items on this page scored a 3, 2, or 1:

Independent Tier

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---|---|
| 13. | The program has a vibrant and robust parent volunteer program. | Not at All True 1 | Somewhat True 2 | Completely True 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. | Staff contact teachers at sending schools at least once a week to talk about children who are struggling. | Not at All True 1 | Somewhat True 2 | Completely True 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. | Learning opportunities such as parenting classes, adult literacy, financial planning, etc. are offered to parents on an ongoing basis. | Not at All True 1 | Somewhat True 2 | Completely True 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. | Staff collaborate with other local agencies (libraries, museums, CPCE's, mental health providers, etc.) regularly. | Not at All True 1 | Somewhat True 2 | Completely True 3 | 4 | 5 |

How many **Independent** items on this page scored a 3, 2, or 1: