EVALUATION OF THE LITERACY FELLOWS PROGRAM AND STAKEHOLDERS AT BAY BROOK AND CURTIS BAY ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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Acknowledgements

CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES & FIGURES

Executive Summary

Background

The Sherman Center for Early Learning in Urban Communities (Sherman Center) awarded a grant to Drs. Susan Sonnenschein at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) and Claudia Galindo at the University of Maryland (UMD) to evaluate the effectiveness of the Literacy Fellows Program (LFP) at Bay Brook and Curtis Bay Elementary schools in Baltimore City, Maryland. The evaluation began in September 2019 and continued through June 2022.

The Literacy Fellows Program (LFP) is a service-learning project designed by the Sherman Center in collaboration with the Shriver Center, to improve literacy outcomes for early elementary school students at two Title 1 Baltimore City Schools whose student populations are primarily low-income, and Black or Brown. The LFP assigns UMBC undergraduate students as fellows and volunteers to work in classrooms in the two focal schools. Both fellows and volunteers work in the classrooms on tasks within areas identified by the classroom teachers as being areas of need. For this evaluation of the LFP, literacy and literacy-related skills were identified by teachers at the two focal schools as areas of significant weakness for their students. Accordingly, the fellows/volunteers attended and participated in the English language arts (ELA) instructional period two days a week for 90 minutes each day during the academic year. In addition to their assignments within the classroom, fellows play a supervisory role over volunteers transporting them to the schools, making classroom assignments and so on.

At the time the evaluation contract was awarded in spring 2019, we expected to follow students from kindergarten through second grade. However, when the evaluation began in fall 2019, the teachers at the two participating schools identified first graders as having higher needs than those in kindergarten. Therefore, the LFP was implemented in first and second grade not in kindergarten. Accordingly, we planned on following the first and second graders through third grade.

A second modification in our evaluation plan was needed due to COVID-19. In March 2020 in-class sessions in schools in Maryland were suspended and redesigned as virtual classes because of the COVID-19 pandemic. We therefore needed to modify our evaluation questions to reflect the change in instructional modality. The modified evaluation questions were:

1	How is the LFP implemented?
2	What are the benefits?
3	What are the challenges?

Unfortunately, contrary to our original plans, we were not able to collect literacy and literacy-related outcome data from the elementary school students because of constraints due to COVID-19. In consultation with the former director of the Sherman Center, Dr. Mavis Sanders, we made one more modification. We agreed to use a cross-sectional design rather than a longitudinal one. That is, each year of the evaluation we included first and second grade children participating in the LFP at the two identified schools.

Method

To examine the *implementation and effectiveness* of the LFP at two Baltimore City schools, we conducted a mixed-methods, multiple case study. The information collected in this evaluation comes from several sources. Teachers and fellows/volunteers were observed several times a year during the English language arts lessons taking place in their classrooms. Observations focused on the nature of instruction, relations between the teacher and fellow/volunteer, and relations with the students in the class. Teachers and fellows/volunteers also were interviewed about their thoughts about the program once or twice each year. Questions addressed what was working well/not working well and how the fellows/volunteers were trained and used in the classroom.

Parents (typically mothers) of children in the LFP were interviewed during fall 2019 and winter 2020 to document the literacy resources, activities, and opportunities available at home for the children (e.g., how many books or reading materials did the child have at home). Such knowledge is important because they form the basis of children's early skills.

A subset of children in the LFP were interviewed during spring 2022 at the end of the evaluation to learn what the elementary school students thought about reading, the program, and their interactions with the fellows/volunteers (e.g., Did you like working with the volunteer?). Most of the data were collected by the two principal investigators. However, trained graduate students and advanced undergraduate students assisted as needed.

Key Findings

Teachers and fellows/volunteers were highly positive about the LFP. Both groups identified similar major strengths and weaknesses of the program. On the positive side, the fellows/volunteers enjoyed working with students on literacy tasks. Their assistance with the students allowed the teachers to give much needed individualized attention to more students than when they were not there. Fellows/Volunteers also helped manage behavioral issues, formed meaningful relationships with the students with whom they worked, and served as role models for the students. In addition, some fellows/volunteers reported that working in urban schools increased their awareness of issues faced by those working in such schools as well as by the families whose children attend these schools. The fellows/volunteers described the experience as an opportunity to give back to their community and they felt proud because of their commitment to urban education.

Despite teachers and fellows/volunteers being highly positive about the program, both groups reported there were significant weaknesses with the program. The teachers did not have time to train the fellows/volunteers. This was particularly critical because these fellows/volunteers were not teachers in training, and most did not have an educational background in teaching. In addition, both groups thought that the amount of time fellows/volunteers spent in the classroom (two days, 90 minutes per day) was not sufficient. Reliability of transportation to and from the schools also was an issue.

First and second graders in the LFP also were favorable about the program. They reported enjoying working with the fellows/volunteers and found it useful.

Conclusions

School-university partnerships, like the LFP, have the potential to improve elementary school students' educational experiences, provide teacher support in the classroom, and enhance service-learning opportunities for students in higher education. The results of this evaluation indicate that the teachers and fellows/volunteers were very positive about the benefits of the program for themselves and the elementary school students, even with the challenges experienced during COVID-19. Teachers and fellows/volunteers gave significantly more positive than negative comments about the program. The elementary school students were positive as well about their experiences working with the fellows/volunteers.

Teachers discussed how they benefitted from an extra set of hands that enabled the students to receive extra individualized attention and to improve their reading skills. Our observations indicated that some fellows/volunteers also provided important assistance with behavior management in the classroom as well as pedagogical instruction. In

addition, based on their reports and those of teachers, fellows/volunteers formed important positive relations with the students, served as role models for them, and helped with students' emotional development. Students reported liking working with the fellows/volunteers and believing they benefitted from it.

Fellows/Volunteers echoed the views expressed by the teachers. However, some also expressed what they viewed as important benefits for themselves of working as fellows/volunteers in LFP: learning about how the educational system works, expanding their knowledge of inequities in the system, and being able to give back to the community.

Although the teachers and fellows/volunteers were very positive about the LFP and their experiences with it, there also were some concerns expressed by the teachers and fellows/volunteers. Teachers reported not having enough time to train the fellows/volunteers or knowing their pertinent educational backgrounds even if they would have had time to train them. Relatedly, fellows/volunteers complained that the training they received from the teachers, the Sherman Center, and the Shriver Center was not sufficient. Teachers also would have liked for the fellows/volunteers to be there more days per week instead of only two. Moreover, some fellows/volunteers had difficulty accessing the van provided by the Shriver Center or from time to time had other commitments.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected students' education and our evaluation. In-school instruction was disrupted, and instruction was virtual for some of this evaluation. This form of instruction increased stressors on teachers who had to learn new forms of instruction, on fellows/volunteers who were bound by difficulties with access, and on students who also had difficulties accessing the internet.

We have five recommendations for the program developers based on our findings.

➢ **Increase formal training of the fellows/volunteers.** Most of the fellows/volunteers did not have formal coursework in education nor had they worked previously as teachers or teaching assistants. Not only were the teachers unaware of the fellows/volunteers' background but they also did not have the extra time to train them. Although the fellows/volunteers attended a pedagogical workshop each semester with UMBC experts starting the second year of the program, the amount of such training should be increased.

➢ **Increase the amount of time fellows/volunteers are in the classroom and the number of fellows/volunteers working at the schools.** The intensity of an intervention is positively related to its effectiveness. Several teachers recommended that fellows/volunteers come every day to the schools. Not only

would this allow for more hands-on instruction by the fellows/volunteers (presumably increasing effectiveness), but it would be less confusing for the students. That is, fellow/volunteer absences would be less disruptive. It also would increase fostering relations between the fellows/volunteers and students.

➢ **Look into more reliable means of fellows/volunteers getting to their assigned schools.** Many of the fellows/volunteers relied upon a van provided by the UMBC Shriver Center to get to the school. Unfortunately, this was not a reliable means of transport.

➢ **Consider ways to facilitate interactions between fellows/volunteers and students.** Forming positive relations between the students and fellows/volunteers was an important outcome of the program. Having adults whom the students can see as positive role models matters. And, working with someone one likes can increase the effectiveness of the English language arts program. Some of this happened naturally because of the nature of activity between fellows/volunteers and students (e.g., working in small groups). Teachers should consider this when assigning tasks to fellows/volunteers.

➢ **Outreach to homes.** The focus of this evaluation was the LFP. However, researchers and theorists (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Epstein, 2011) have long discussed the importance of collaboration between the home and school contexts. Students do best when there are positive relations between these two contexts. The students in this evaluation said they liked to read and did read at home. Ideally, it would be better if students were able to read more at home.

Introduction

The Sherman Center for Early Learning in Urban Communities (Sherman Center) awarded a grant to Drs. Susan Sonnenschein, University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) and Claudia Galindo, University of Maryland (UMD), to evaluate the effectiveness of the Literacy Fellows Program (LFP) at Bay Brook and Curtis Bay Elementary schools in Baltimore City, Maryland (Baltimore City Schools). Drs. Sonnenschein and Galindo have extensive experience conducting research on children's learning and evaluations of educational programs and working with minoritized students in urban schools.

The evaluation began in September 2019 and continued through June 2022. The Literacy Fellows Program, which started in 2018, was in its second year when this evaluation began.

Background

Many students in large urban school systems like Baltimore City Schools are denied equitable learning opportunities (Anyon, 2014; Payne, 2008) resulting in poor academic outcomes. For example, 81% of elementary students in Baltimore City Schools in 2018 did not meet expectations on the Language Arts Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) compared with 50% for the state (Maryland Report Card, 2019). Such statistics suggest the need for early interventions to improve educational outcomes for underserved students.

One such intervention is a school-university partnership which in the case of this evaluation existed between the Sherman Center and the Shriver Center, both at UMBC, and the Baltimore City Schools (see Galindo et al., 2022 for further information about the theoretical foundations of school-university partnerships). A key initiative of this partnership is the Literacy Fellows Program (LFP). The LFP is a service-learning project designed to improve literacy outcomes for early elementary students at Baltimore City Schools whose student populations are primarily low-income, and Black or Brown. The LFP assigns UMBC undergraduate fellows and volunteers to work in classrooms in the two focal schools. They work on tasks identified by the classroom teachers as being areas of need. For this evaluation, literacy and literacy-related skills in first and second grade were identified by teachers at the two partner schools as a significant weakness of students there.

Educational and developmental theorists have long discussed the need to consider the overlapping and interacting contexts in which students develop and the relations

between these contexts to optimize students' learning (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Epstein's (2010) theory of overlapping spheres of influence provides a theoretical perspective to better understand the transformative potential of school-university partnerships, in general, and the LFP, more specifically. Epstein's (2010) theory posits that the overlap between and among contexts of influence – the family, school, and community – enhances benefits for students' learning and overall well-being.

This evaluation focuses on a collaboration between two of these contexts, school and community, to improve the learning opportunities and outcomes of primarily low-income, Black or Brown students. The quality and degree of overlap between these contexts determine the success of the partnership. Instead of taking a top-down approach, successful partnerships place schools and their students at the center and identify common goals that are oriented toward facilitating academic success and other positive outcomes (e.g., social emotional development, improved attendance). Partners also share responsibilities and maintain positive collaborations that are based on trust to achieve common objectives (Griffiths et al., 2021). As noted above, teachers at the participating Baltimore City Schools and faculty and staff at the Sherman Center decided that improving first and second grade students' literacy and literacy-related skills was an agreed upon goal.

Original Evaluation Questions

The original purpose of this evaluation, agreed upon by faculty and staff at the Sherman Center and the evaluators, was to document the implementation and effectiveness of the LFP by following students in kindergarten in Fall 2019 through Fall 2021 when they entered second grade. We were going to document strengths and weaknesses in implementation to identify best practices.

The original evaluation questions were:

1. How is the LFP implemented? To what degree does implementation vary across schools and/or classrooms, and if so, why?

2. What are the challenges faced by the teachers and LFP fellows and volunteers in implementing the program?

3. What are the literacy and literacy-related outcomes for students who participated in the LFP?

To answer these questions, we intended to observe focal classrooms at the two participating schools (Bay Brook and Curtis Bay), interview or administer surveys to key stakeholders, and collect literacy and literacy-related outcome data from students. We

intended to start with children in kindergarten and follow them longitudinally. However, at the start of the 2019-2020 school year, the staff at the participating schools in consultation with faculty and staff at the Sherman Center decided the need was greater for the children in first and second grade than in kindergarten. Therefore, children who received the LFP during the 2019-2020 academic year were first and second graders.

Modified Evaluation Questions

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic affected all aspects of the educational system, as well as the broader environment. Because of the severity of the pandemic, Governor Hogan closed in-school classes in March 2020 and changed these to online instruction. Classes resumed in hybrid modality the following school year but there was significant inconsistency in how this was done across locales. Students in urban schools were the group most negatively affected because many lacked access to computers (e.g., did not have computers at home) and internet (Araque et al., 2013; Dubois et al., 2021; Mitchell, 2020). Schools provided students with computers, although families needed to complete extensive paperwork to receive the computers, thus making it inconvenient. Students also often had to rely upon access to "hot spots" to use the internet. Baltimore City Schools also temporarily discontinued standardized testing which limited our ability to consider the impact of LFP on the development of students' literacy skills.

We decided not to collect school-based literacy and literacy-related outcome data because these either were not available or would impose extra stresses on teachers during the pandemic. We therefore modified our evaluation questions. The finalized questions were approved by Dr. Mavis Sanders who then was the director of the Sherman Center (email, 11.23.2020).

The revised evaluation questions are:

1. How is the LFP implemented?

2. What are the benefits?

3. What are the challenges?

We addressed these questions using a mixed-methods multi-case study with observations in the focal classrooms, and interviews with teachers, fellows/volunteers, and, as appropriate, with students and parents. The major difference between our original and modified questions is that we were not able to collect literacy and literacy-related outcome data. We informally compared responses to questions across schools and classrooms but did not notice significant differences. Given the small sample, we did not conduct formal statistical tests of such differences. In the few instances where we conducted inferential statistical tests, typically t tests or ANOVAS, we report the significance level. We consider $p<.05$ to be statistically significant.

We also did not conduct a longitudinal study where students were followed over time. Instead, we limited the evaluation to first and second graders participating in the LFP during three different years.

Overview of Method

We present here a summary of the general method employed and describe specifics when topically appropriate. In keeping with bioecological theory (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) about children's development being influenced by the several contexts in which they reside (e.g., school and home) and the relations between these, we collected data from diverse contexts of influence, the school and home. In general, teachers and fellows/volunteers welcomed our visits and data collection. Even during COVID-19, they were supportive of our data collection efforts. We also experienced a similar welcoming reception from other key stakeholders and administrative personnel from the schools.

Teachers and fellows/volunteers were observed several times a year during the English language arts lessons taking place in their classrooms. All classrooms were part of the LFP. Observations focused on the nature of instruction, relations between the teacher and fellow/volunteer, and relations with the students in the class. Teachers and fellows/volunteers also were interviewed once or twice a year about their thoughts about the LFP program. Questions addressed what was working well/not working well and how the fellows/volunteers were trained and used in the classroom.

Parents (typically mothers) of children in the LFP were interviewed during fall 2019 and winter 2020 to document the literacy resources, activities, and opportunities available at home for the children (e.g., how many books or reading materials did the child have at home). Such knowledge is important because they form the basis of children's early skills.

A subset of children in the LFP program (those who attended an after-school program at Curtis Bay or Bay Brook) were interviewed during spring 2022 at the end of the

evaluation to learn what these elementary school students thought about reading, the program, and their interactions with the fellows/volunteers (e.g., "Did you like working with the volunteer?"). Most of the data were collected by the two principal investigators. However, trained graduate students and advanced undergraduate students assisted as needed.

Bay Brook and Curtis Bay Elementary Schools

Participants came from two Baltimore City Elementary schools located in the southwestern section of Baltimore City, Maryland. Table 1 includes information about the two school populations the year before the evaluation began. Due to COVID-19, it was not possible to update the table with more current information.

The two schools are located a few blocks from each other. Bay Brook enrolls students in prekindergarten through grade 8. The school was renovated during this evaluation. Students were in what is called a holding school at the outset of the evaluation while construction occurred. Curtis Bay enrolls students in prekindergarten through grade 5. The school is an older building. Both schools are Title 1 schools indicating that both have a large percentage of low-income students. As shown in Table 1, most students in both schools were Brown or Black and came from low-income families. Many students were chronically absent, and few were proficient in English language arts or mathematics.

Table 1

Students' Characteristics and Outcomes. School Year 2018-2019 (in percentages unless otherwise specified)

	Curtis Bay Elementary	Bay Brook Elementary
Size (number of students)	317	222
Racial/ethnic composition		
African American	44	68
Latinx	19	26
White	32	5
Other	5	1
English learners (ELs)	15	17
Students eligible for free and reduced-price meal (FARM)	61	67
Student Outcomes		
Proficient in Mathematics	4.5	4.1
Proficient in English language arts	5	6.6
Chronically absent	55	46

Note. Information comes from the AY 2018-2019 Maryland Public School Report Card. AY 2018-2019 is the latest year for which full data are available. Report data came from the elementary grades. Chronically absent students are considered those who missed school for 10% or more school days.

Description of Teacher and LFP Participants

Table 2 provides demographic information for teachers at Curtis Bay and Bay Brook. Thirteen teachers were interviewed between one and four times. All the teachers at both schools were female and had been teaching for a mean of 9.11 years (*SD* = 7.23, range 1-23 years). Four teachers participated in the LFP the year prior to the evaluation. Five participated with the LFP for at least two semesters (range 1-4 semesters) during the evaluation. As shown in Table 2, all the teachers had bachelor's degrees and some form of certification and half had master's degrees.

Table 2

***Demographic Information about Teachers at Curtis Bay Elementary School and
Bay Brook Elementary School***

	Degree	Certification
Curtis Bay Elementary School	Bachelors: 4 Masters: 5	Standard: 5 Provisional: 2 Other: 2
Bay Brook Elementary School	Bachelor's: 2 Master's: 2	Standard: 1 Advanced: 2 Other: 1

We gave an honorarium of $1500 to each school for their assistance and the inconvenience of having us observe in classrooms. To thank teachers for their time, we gave them $70 dollars for each interview.

Table 3 presents demographic information about the fellows/volunteers in the LFP. Two fellows/volunteers participated in LFP the year before the evaluation. To thank fellows/volunteers for their time, we gave them $30 dollars for each interview. Twenty-six fellows/volunteers were interviewed between one and three times during the evaluation. Their mean age was 19.23 years (*SD* = 1.42, range 18-22). Most participated only one semester in the LFP but 20% of them participated three or four semesters. Six of the fellows/volunteers said they wanted to become teachers (including one who changed their vocational goals after participating in LFP). Five had taken at least one education course and a few others were interested in doing so or earning an education certificate. Thus, most of the fellows/volunteers had no training in teaching students and, as we will discuss, the training received in the LFP was at best minimal or informal. However, during the second and third years of the evaluation, in response to concerns noted by us, Dr. Karrie Godwin, a Sherman Center research faculty with a doctorate in developmental psychology, provided four one- to two-hour seminars for the fellows/volunteers emphasizing ways to assist students' learning:

1. *Maintaining Attention in the Virtual Classroom: Emerging Strategies for Young and Adult Learners*

2. *Reading Instruction: Deploying Best Practices to Promote Engagement, a Love of Reading, & Learning*

3. *Decoding Detectives: How to Scaffold Beginning Readers' Decoding Skills*

4. *Leveraging Learning Science Research to Inform Educational Practice*

Table 3

Demographic Information for Fellows/Volunteers

Demographics	
Sex	Female: 23
	Male: 3
Race/Ethnicity	White: 9
	African American: 14
	Asian: 2
	Hispanic: 1
Major	Asian Studies: 1
	Biochemistry: 3
	Biology: 5
	Chemistry: 1
	Computer Science: 1
	Emergency Health Services: 2
	English: 1
	English Literature: 1
	Global Studies: 1
	Health Administration: 1
	Mathematics: 1
	Mechanical Engineering: 1
	Media and Communication: 1
	Political Science: 3
	Psychology: 2
	Public Health: 1

Before discussing relevant responses, we turn to how we collected data, particularly in interviews. Interviews were conducted individually either in person or on Zoom. The interviewer audio recorded the interview and took field notes or recorded the interview on Zoom. Interviews were transcribed either by a trained undergraduate or sent to a professional transcription company. The few Interviews conducted in Spanish were translated into English. The Zoom interview was downloaded after its completion and formatted. The written transcript from either the audio or Zoom format was then reviewed for accuracy by a member of the evaluation team. All errors were corrected. Further information about transcriptions is presented in subsequent sections.

In response to questions on the interviews, fellows/volunteers revealed why they chose to participate in the program ("...How did you become involved in the Literacy Fellows program? Appendix A.4). Some were fulfilling requirements of their academic programs,

others wanted experience working with students. Of those, some knew they wanted to teach in the future ("I love teaching. I've wanted to be a teacher since I was really young, and I used to help out in my elementary school.") whereas others wanted to see whether working with students would be a viable future career choice. For example,

> *I'm not exactly sure what I want to do. But it is possible that I will go to law school and then I might special in family law. So, I found a lot of similarities between working with children and trying to navigate through their issues and their problems and then having that problem solving skill. And that would help me when I go into that field of law. So, I thought it was a lot of good overlap for me. And then also a chance to also branch out because I don't necessarily want to go into teaching, but that would help me broaden my scope and see things from different perspectives.*

Others who came from affluent backgrounds wanted to give back or broaden their horizons. For example,

> *I feel like it also gives us [fellows/volunteers] a chance to meet different people and to see how others are living. I grew up in Affluent County; this was very different for me. I actually loved the experience [LFP] very much. I thought everyone received an education like the one I did. Now I am realizing that that is not the case; it gives me a different perspective. In the same way that the kids are learning from me, I am also learning from them.*

Student's Home Literacy Environments

Theorists such as Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994), Epstein (2010), and others have long discussed that children's development does not take place in a vacuum. Thus, it is important to consider the relation between the home and school contexts that support students' literacy development (see also Serpell et al., 2005; Sonnenschein & Sawyer, 2018). In other words, even though the focus of this evaluation was the LFP, it is important to know the literacy learning environment of students' homes. For example, Serpell et al. (2005) found that the frequency with which young students engaged in literacy activities at home predicted their literacy and literacy-related scores and increases in such scores.

In Fall 2019 we sent home questionnaires and consent forms to families of all the students in the first and second grade classes, all of whom were participating in the LFP. These forms were written in English and Spanish depending upon what the schools reported the primary language of the family was. We also telephoned all the

families to ask them to participate. We offered parents $15 for completing an orally administered questionnaire. Parents could do this in person or over the phone at a time mutually convenient for us and them. Eighty-four parents, typically mothers, participated (52 first grade parents, 32 second grade parents). Thirty-eight of the interviews were in English, 46 were in Spanish.

The measures were adapted from Get Ready to Read! and Sonnenschein et al. (2016), and have been used in other research with demographically diverse students. Measures addressed the frequency with which students read at home, the number and type of literacy artifacts at home (books, magazines), and parents as role models of literacy engagement because all three factors are related to students' engagement in literacy activities and students' literacy development (Serpell et al., 2005; Sonnenschein et al., 2016, 2018). See Appendix A.1 for parent interview.

Descriptively, students had a mean of 4.85 (SD = 1.89, range 1-7) literacy artifacts at home. Seventy percent of the parents reported that their children had at least 10 books at home, including at least 1 chapter book (54%), one rhyme book (66%), and other such texts. Out of a maximum possible reading frequency score of 25, students received a mean of 16.57 (SD = 3.18). That is, they reportedly read, on average, several times a week. And, of a maximum possible role model score of 15, parents reported being role models of literate behavior for their children a mean of 10.49 (SD = 3.03). That is, they served as role models of such behavior a few times a week. Thus, these students generally had exposure at home to activities and artifacts that foster literacy development. Nevertheless, Serpell et al. (2005) discuss the importance of more frequent engagement than occurred here.

Spanish-speaking parents reported significantly lower formal educational levels, fewer literacy artifacts at home, lower scores for parents as role models, and lower reading frequency than English-speaking parents (p<.05 respectively). Nevertheless, both groups of parents reported their children had access to literacy tools and experiences that can foster their literacy development. Spanish-speaking parents had books available in English and Spanish whereas English-speaking parents, not surprisingly, had books in English. Both groups of parents reported having mainly printed copies of text at home, although both groups reported having some digital texts.

In Spring 2022, students in first and second grade who participated in the LFP and who attended an after-school program at the school were asked about the frequency of their reading at home ("How often do you read at home?") and how much they enjoyed it ("How much do you like to read?" see Appendix A.5). They also were asked with whom they read at home. Fifty-one students (29 boys, 22 girls) completed the interviews. All

but one of the interviews were conducted in English. The remaining interview was conducted in Spanish.

Thirty-six students provided meaningful responses (see Appendix A.5 for questions). The most common response to how often they read was less than once a week (35%), however, there was a great deal of variability in responses. Twenty-nine percent said once a day. Eighteen percent responded several times a week. Other students said once a week (9%) or several times a day (9%). Students reportedly read at home by themselves (28%) or with their mothers (31%). Sixty percent responded they liked to read a lot to very much. Thirty-eight percent did not like to read (not so much/not at all).
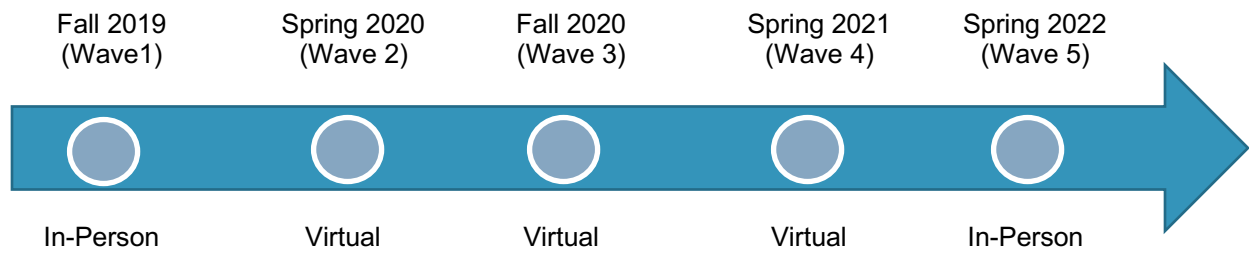
How is the LFP Implemented?

The Sherman Center and the Shriver Center (a service-learning center at UMBC) provided undergraduate fellows/volunteers for the LFP to assist with literacy at two Baltimore City schools. Early childhood teachers at these two schools identified the recruitment of classroom volunteers as a major challenge and indicated the need for "extra hands" to support their teaching and learning. Each school was assigned a team of undergraduate volunteers led by literacy fellows, one or two undergraduate students interested in education and community service who enrolled in the Shriver Center's Community Service & Learning Practicum (Leadership Section). Literacy fellows applied for the position and were interviewed and selected by Sherman Center and Shriver Center staff. Each literacy fellow received a stipend, worked a minimum of four hours per week, served as a literacy volunteer, and recruited and organized an additional three to five volunteers for their assigned school. Literacy fellows were also responsible for transporting volunteers to and from school sites using vans provided by the Shriver Center, managing the online volunteer service verification forms, and documenting volunteer hours and activities in end-of-semester reports. Literacy fellows and volunteers reflected UMBC's highly diverse student population.

Prior to COVID-19 they served as classroom helpers two days per week for 60-90 minutes during the first and second grade English language arts instructional blocks. The classroom teacher determined volunteer activities such as whole-class instruction activity, work with small groups, provide one-on-one support to individual students, or assist the classroom teacher with developing and preparing instructional materials. Each team of fellows/volunteers at a school received $500 per semester to purchase instructional materials or student incentives for their host classrooms. UMBC faculty and staff provide support, guidance, and professional development to facilitate volunteers' work and success.

During COVID-19, beginning in March 2020, instruction was either virtual through Zoom or hybrid. Figure 1 shows the type of instructional delivery during the evaluation. We first discuss the in-person observations and then aspects of the virtual ones.

Figure 1

Method of Instruction for Curtis Bay and Bay Brook Elementary Schools

Fall 2019 (Wave1)	Spring 2020 (Wave 2)	Fall 2020 (Wave 3)	Spring 2021 (Wave 4)	Spring 2022 (Wave 5)
In-Person	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	In-Person

Note. We did not conduct any classroom observations or interviews during Fall 2021. In Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 most of instruction was virtual but there were a few instances where instruction was hybrid.

The classroom observations were conducted by the two principal investigators (PIs). Reliability was established by having them simultaneously conduct the first classroom observation and then compare findings. Agreement in ratings was perfect: the two observers agreed on what they saw and how they interpreted what they saw. In addition to completing the ratings during the 60-minute observation of each class, the two observers wrote up a summary of their observations and interpretation after completing each observation. The protocols for all the observations and interviews (with students, parents, teachers, and fellows/volunteers) are available in Appendix A.

Table 4 shows the number of classroom observations (see Appendix A.2 for scoring protocols of observations). As noted above, in a few cases, a class was observed more than once in a semester. And some teachers participated for more than one year, so they were observed more than once. Similarly, some fellows/volunteers participated for more than one semester and were therefore interviewed more than one time.

Table 4

Total Classroom Observations

	Fall 2019 (Wave 1)	Spring 2020 (Wave 2)	Fall 2020 (Wave 3)	Spring 2021 (Wave 4)	Total
Teacher Observations	11	0	12	2	**25**
Fellow/Volunteer Observations	17	2	10	2	**31**
Total:	**28**	**2**	**22**	**4**	**56**

Note. It was often difficult to access the internet to conduct virtual observations which limited the number of observations possible when COVID-19 began.

There was much variability in what occurred during the classroom observations across classrooms and even within the same classrooms at different times. That is, based on the actual observations, teachers directed the fellows/volunteers to different tasks and in different ways. This is not surprising given that each teacher decided how to use the services of the fellow/volunteer or fellows/volunteers in her classroom. Most classrooms included a teacher and one fellow/volunteer; a few had two fellows/volunteers. In most classes, there was little to no discussion observed between the teacher and fellow/volunteer about what the fellow/volunteer should do with the students.

Consistent across classrooms, teachers and their fellows/volunteers interacted well with each other. That is, they seemed to have good rapport and their interactions, to the degree they occurred, were pleasant. The observers noted that the fellows/volunteers engaged in several different types of activities with students in their classes. The most common was that they worked in small groups with the students, typically, but not always, doing some form of phonics or other skill building activity. Another common small group activity was listening to students read for both accuracy and fluency. In general, the fellows/volunteers usually knew what to do without discussion with the teachers when we observed, suggesting that they had conferred on some prior occasion. In a few cases, the fellows/volunteers did very little but observe while the teacher taught the lesson to the whole class. One of the teachers used the fellows/volunteers mainly for reading to the entire class (at least prior to the onset of COVID-19) and asking questions about the book.

Information from the observations was confirmed in large part by teachers' (and fellows/volunteers') responses to interview questions. Fellows/Volunteers most

frequently reported working in small groups with the students, most typically the students with lower literacy skills (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Fellows/Volunteers' Involvement in Classroom Tasks (combining data from all waves of data collection)
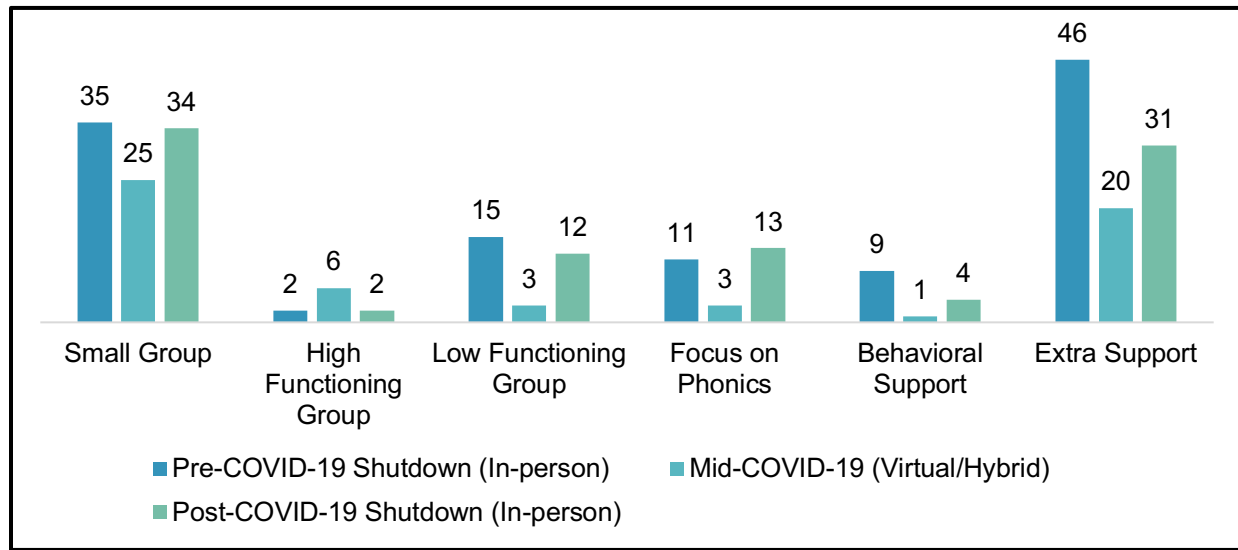
Note. The numbers refer to the total number of times teachers, within each interview and across all waves, mentioned an activity. Although the categories were mutually exclusive, teachers could mention more than one category of activity. This applies to numbers in all the figures in this report, unless otherwise indicated. Extra support tasks were defined as unspecified forms of extra help.

The type of instruction changed with the onset of COVID-19. Instruction for the most part was virtual in spring 2020, fall 2020, and spring 2021 (and in person before and after that). During virtual instruction, fellows/volunteers were not present in person but interacted virtually when possible. However, their ability to engage virtually varied because the fellows/volunteers could not always obtain the necessary internet links from Baltimore City Schools to access the classroom instruction. Even when they could, the connections were often less than optimal. Based on what we observed, the fellows/volunteers often served as back-ups to the teachers, watching what was occurring. They assisted students in breakout rooms for relatively few minutes during

the class. Regardless of the instructional modality, fellows/volunteers most frequently provided the teacher with extra support and worked with the students in small groups.

We also asked the teachers how they trained the fellows/volunteers (see Appendix A.3). As shown in Figure 3, training differed depending upon whether instruction was in-person or virtual. When instruction was in-person, training took place in class in the morning. When it was virtual, instruction took place via email. However, many teachers said they did not provide training or did not have the time to provide training.

Figure 3

How Fellows/Volunteers Were Trained as Reported by Teachers
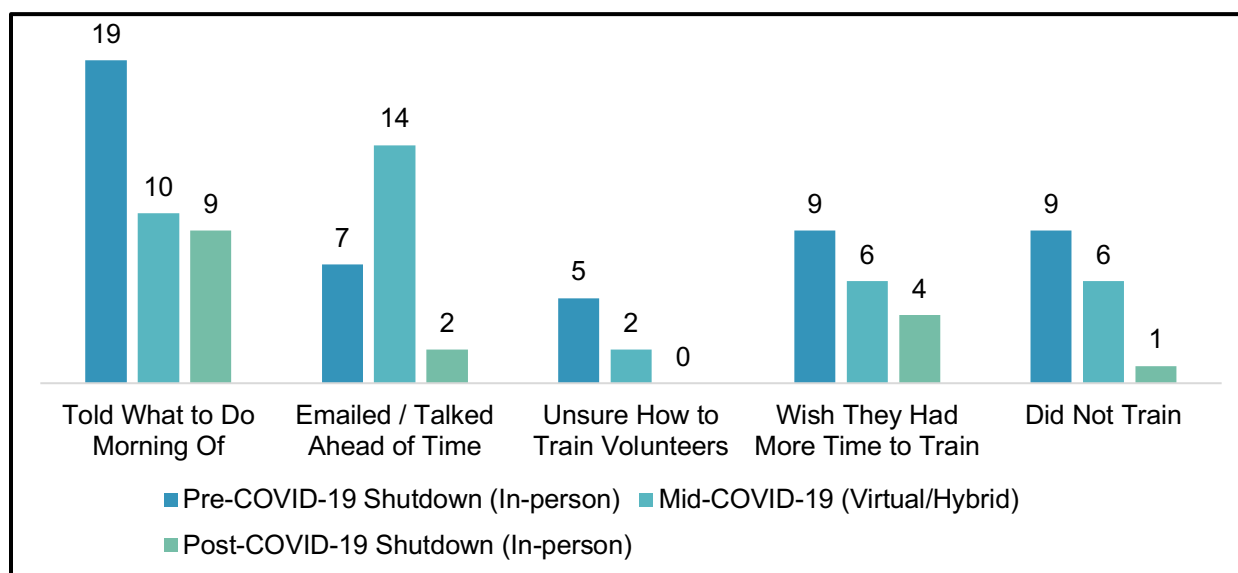
Note. Data are the number of times a type of training was mentioned by teachers within interviews and across waves. Teachers could mention more than one type of training.

What are the Benefits of the LFP?

Teachers

Interviews were conducted, either in person or virtually, by one of the two PIs at a time convenient for each teacher. Teachers were paid a $70 honorarium for participating in the interview, each time they participated. Because we interviewed all the first and second grade teachers who worked with the fellows/volunteers each semester, some teachers were interviewed more than once (see Table 5). Thirteen teachers participated from one to four times. We should note that we often asked the same or similar

questions on a topic in an interview. We also repeated some of the questions across interviews.

Table 5

Teacher Interview Data

ID	School	Grade	Fall 2019 (Wave 1)	Fall 2020 (Wave 3)	Spring 2021 (Wave 4)	Spring 2022 (Wave 5)	Total
101	Curtis Bay	1st	X	X		X	3
102	Curtis Bay	1st	X				1
103	Curtis Bay	1st	X	X		X	3
104	Curtis Bay	2nd	X			X	2
105	Curtis Bay	2nd	X				1
106	Curtis Bay	2nd	X				1
107	Curtis Bay	2nd		X			1
108	Curtis Bay	1st				X	1
109	Curtis Bay	2nd				X	1
301	Bay Brook	2nd	X				1
302	Bay Brook	1st	X	X	X	X	4
304	Bay Brook	1st	X	X	X	X	4
306	Bay Brook	2nd		X			1
TOTAL							**24**

As noted in a prior section, during in-school classes, the interviewer audio recorded the interviews and took field notes. The interviews either were transcribed by undergraduate students receiving course credit or by a transcription company. During virtual classes, interviews were conducted over Zoom. The written transcripts were then reviewed for accuracy and corrected as necessary by undergraduate students. Written transcripts were used to code responses. Trained research assistants (undergraduates or graduate students along with the principal investigators) reviewed responses. Reliability of coding was accomplished by having two reviewers read each of the coded responses and compare them. The few disagreements were resolved by discussion with the principal investigator.

We initially reviewed the entire set of interviews and coded them for whether the teacher made positive or negative remarks about the LFP and/or the fellow/volunteer. There were 148 positive comments about the program and fellows/volunteers, with many teachers making more than one positive remark. Teachers' comments included general

approval of the fellow/volunteer or the program (e.g., "I would give her all gold stars." "The program is awesome."). Teachers also often talked about how eager the fellows/volunteers were to help: "They're just like, I just want to help, what I can do to help." "She is very helpful." "I am ready and willing to help you in any way I can." A few comments focused on how the fellows/volunteers went beyond just addressing academics "They're engaging in conversation that's around academics, but it is also that relationship building." Finally, some teachers commented that any assistance was helpful to them, "Any extra help is always greatly appreciated."

Figure 4 highlights a few other important examples. Some teachers mentioned that having the fellow/volunteer assist allowed for *greater group equity*. For example,

> *I have 28 students this year and you know, it becomes an equity issue when we just don't have the time to help every group, so I really try to focus this year…I try to pull the lows as much as I can, but I have her now pull different levels so that every group gets some of that one-on-one.*

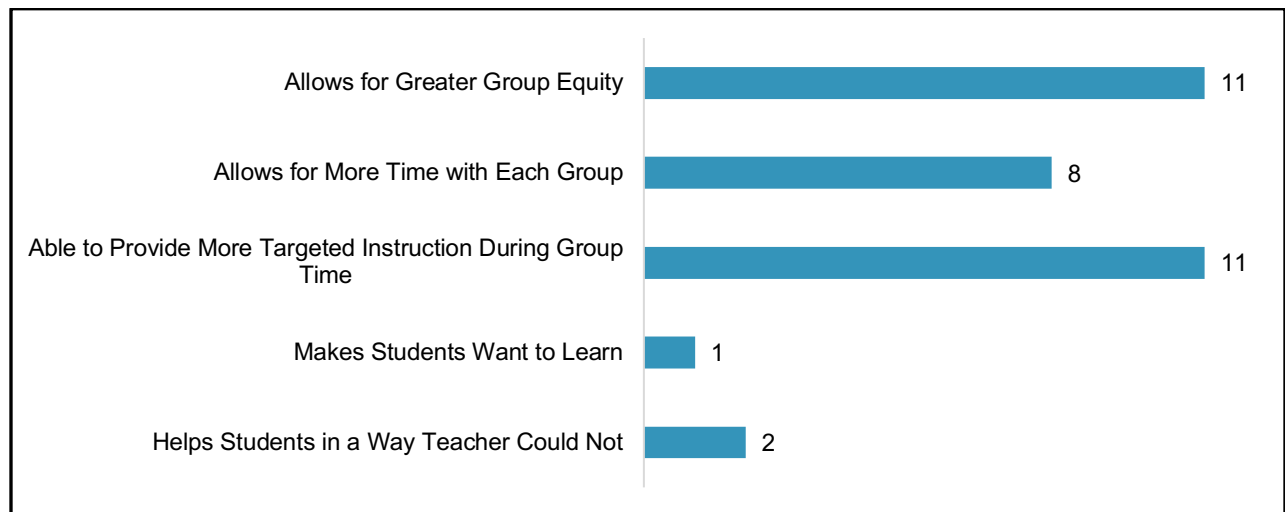One teacher mentioned that the fellow/volunteer *made learning fun for the students,*

> *She has made it fun, …they're into it, they want to stay.*

Another teacher said,

> *I usually provide her with the lower children because I know that the things are a little bit more simple in terms of what they need, and I know that she's able to do it without a lot of …coaching.*

Figure 4

Most Useful Contributions of Fellows/Volunteers as Reported by Teachers

Bar chart showing:
- Allows for Greater Group Equity: 11
- Allows for More Time with Each Group: 8
- Able to Provide More Targeted Instruction During Group Time: 11
- Makes Students Want to Learn: 1
- Helps Students in a Way Teacher Could Not: 2

Note. Responses were based on review of the entire corpus of teacher interviews across all waves. Teachers could give more than one type of contribution.

We also asked several questions about the benefits of the program for the elementary students. For example, one question we asked was, "What benefits, if any, does the Literacy Fellows Program bring to your students this semester?" The type of responses to this question are presented in Figure 5. As shown, there were fewer positive benefits mentioned during virtual instruction. Not surprisingly, perhaps, fewer teachers mentioned establishing positive relations with students as a benefit during virtual instruction. Pre-COVID-19, the most frequently mentioned benefits were allowing students extra time to practice and to receive individualized attention, helping the teacher which, in turn, helped the students, and establishing positive relations. Post-COVID-19, the most frequently mentioned benefit was helping the teacher.

Figure 5

Benefits for Students Reported by Teachers
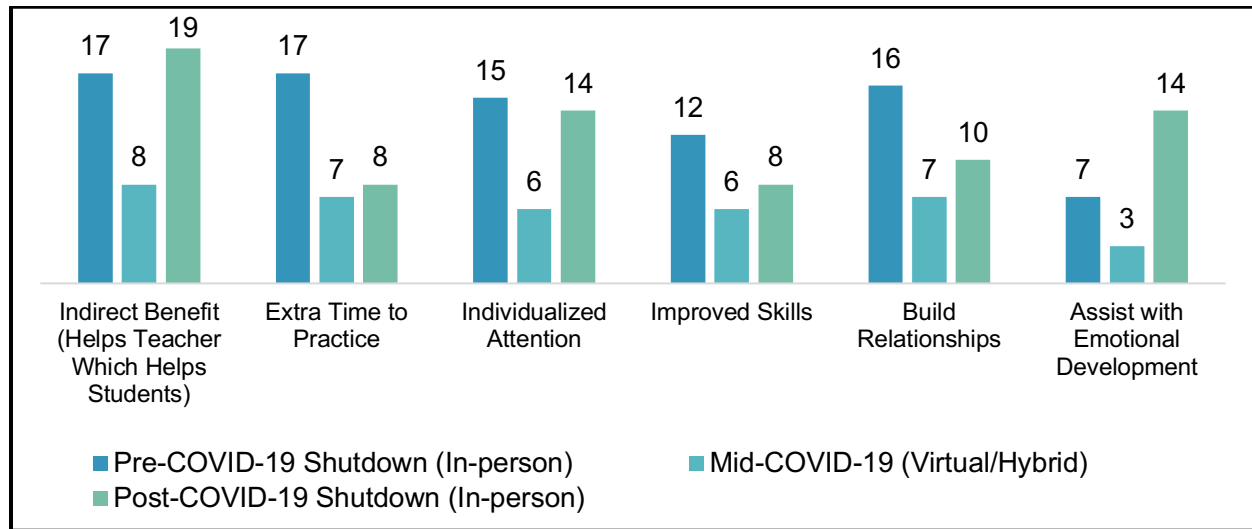
Note. Data are number of times a response was given by teachers within interviews and across all waves. Teachers could mention more than one type of benefit.

Fellows/Volunteers

The interviews were conducted, either in person or virtually, by one of the two principal investigators or a graduate student from UMBC or UMD at a time convenient for each fellow/volunteer (see Appendix A.4). Twenty-six fellows/volunteers were interviewed between one and three times. Each fellow/volunteer was paid a $35 honorarium for participating in the interview. As noted above, five of the 26 fellows/volunteers participated for more than one semester and therefore were interviewed more than once (see Table 6). Transcriptions and coding were handled in the same manner as described for the teachers. The interviewer either audio recorded the interviews or recorded them on Zoom and took field notes. The audio recorded interviews were transcribed by undergraduate students receiving course credit or by a transcription company. The written transcripts, either audio recorded or Zoom recorded, were then reviewed for accuracy, and corrected as necessary by undergraduate students.

Table 6

Fellow/Volunteer Interview Data

ID	School	Grade	Fall 2019 (Wave 1)	Fall 2020 (Wave 3)	Spring 2021 (Wave 4)	Spring 2022 (Wave 5)	Total
201	Curtis Bay	1st	X				1
202	Curtis Bay	2nd	X				1
203	Curtis Bay	1st	X				1
204	Curtis Bay	2nd	X				1
205	Curtis Bay	1st	X				1
206	Curtis Bay	2nd	X				1
207	Curtis Bay	2nd	X				1
208	Curtis Bay	1st		X	X	X	3
209	Curtis Bay	1st		X			1
211	Curtis Bay	2nd		X			1
212	Curtis Bay	1st				X	1
213	Curtis Bay	2nd				X	1
214	Curtis Bay	2nd				X	1
215	Curtis Bay	1st				X	1
401	Bay Brook	3rd	X				1
402	Bay Brook	2nd	X				1
403	Bay Brook	2nd	X	X	X	X	4
404	Bay Brook	2nd	X				1
405	Bay Brook	1st	X				1
406	Bay Brook	2nd	X	X	X		3
407	Bay Brook	2nd	X				1
408	Bay Brook	1st		X	X	X	3
409	Bay Brook	3rd		X			1
410	Bay Brook	1st		X	X	X	3
411	Bay Brook	2nd		X			1
413	Bay Brook	2nd				X	1
Total:							**37**

Consistent with our review of the teacher interviews, we initially reviewed each transcript of the interview with the fellows/volunteers and coded them for whether the fellow/volunteer made positive or negative remarks about the LFP. There were 375 positive comments made about the program across all the interviews from the fellows/volunteers. Comments included general satisfaction with and approval of the

program ("I think that is a good program,"; "I really like it and I want to come back and do it again. I think it's really helpful for the kids, helpful to teacher and it's a really good experience for the person volunteering.") Fellows/Volunteers also mentioned that the program helped make them feel connected to the community and help them improve the lives of others ("Knowing that I'm able to serve the community through doing the Sherman Literacy Program, it makes me feel whole and fulfilled because I'm doing something that helps improve the lives of others."; "Um, I, I think I am pretty effective, of course, some days are better than others are, but overall, I think it really does make a difference, and even just over the course of the semester.").

Fellows/Volunteers also talked about working on their leadership skills and learning how to teach ("Well, it's given me a lot of opportunities to work on my leadership skills, to work on my teaching, to work on how I want to be as an educator. I've learned a lot about how to manage a classroom, how to work with a wide variety of ages, and so that's been really beneficial for me because that's what I want my career to be ultimately."; "I think I've improved on my leadership skills… Like, having to communicate with the Sherman program, having to communicate with Bay Brook, our volunteers. And then, also being in a classroom setting and helping people that are younger than me. It gives me a sense of accountability to help them with what they need to work on. Because, I know at the end of the day, everybody wants to see them be successful. So, I go in every time that we go and I'm, 'Okay, this is what we're working on today.' So, I want to help improve them with that.")

We also asked the fellows/volunteers specific questions about the benefits of the program. For example, one such question focused on benefits to themselves, "How have you benefitted from being a Literacy Fellow/Volunteer?" As shown in Figure 6, the fellows/volunteers believed they experienced many benefits from their participation in the LFP. The most commonly reported benefit was that they sensed they were doing something good: "I think it's really important and impactful…"; "'Every volunteer I have worked with in three semesters has been very excited about the program, they feel like they're doing good." For many of the fellows/volunteers participating was a meaningful experience, "I found a sense of purpose being part of this program." "Overall, I think it was a great experience. "Yeah. I will cherish it for a very long time." Relatedly, fellows/volunteers mentioned that participating in the LFP gave them insights into broader issues involving social justice and inequities and related issues, ""I would say it's benefited me because it's given me a new perspective…"; "I see like how the problems arise and how, especially in the fall um how the literacy fellows identified with the situation."

Figure 6

Benefits of Program Reported by Fellows/Volunteers
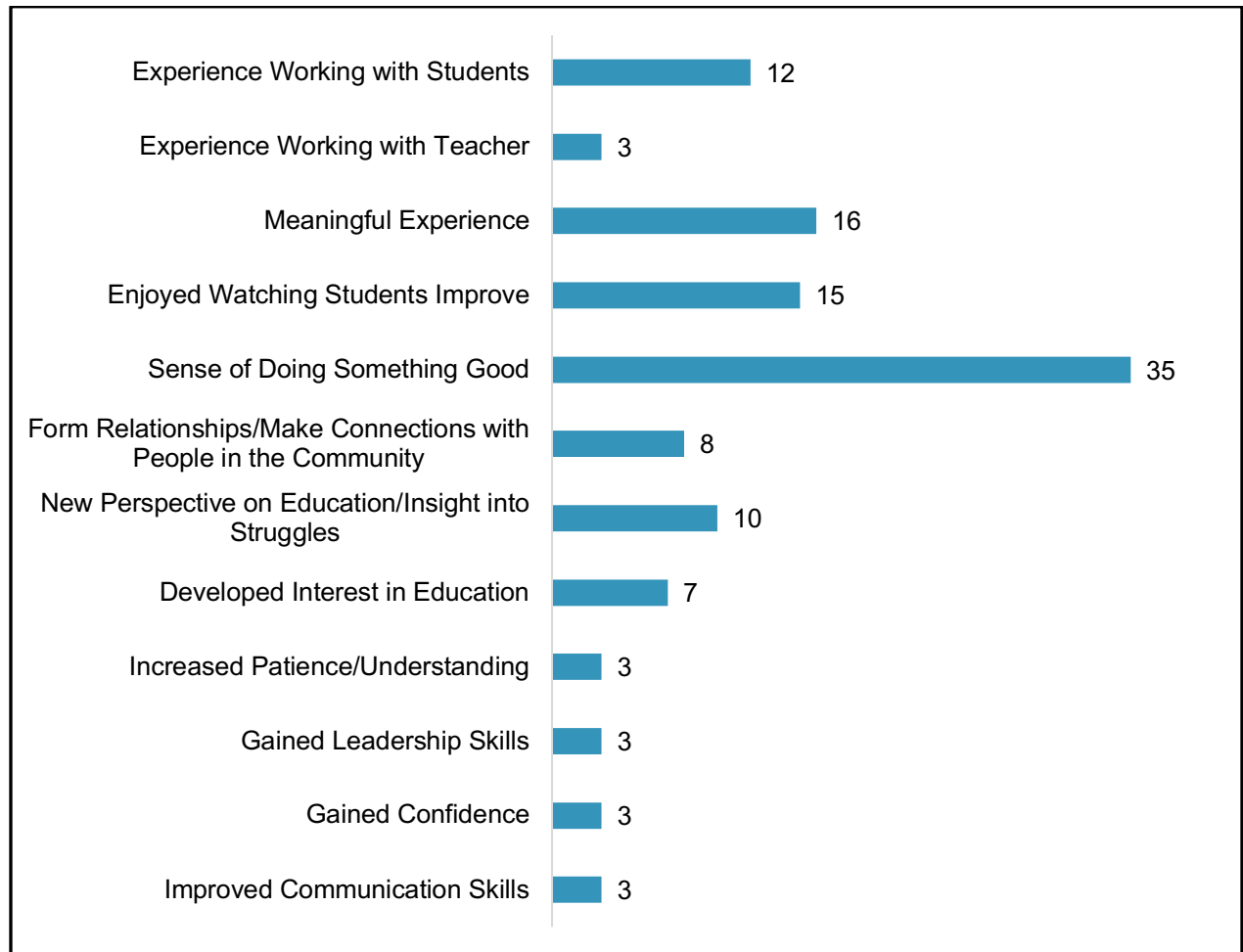
Note. Data are based on review of all interviews with fellows/volunteers where this question was asked across all waves. Fellows/Volunteers could mention more than one type of benefit.

Working with students and seeing them improve was also an important outcome for many fellows/volunteers, ""And then on top of that like, learning to work with children from different backgrounds." Relatedly, some fellows/volunteers talked about seeing students' literacy skills improve. ""We're seeing, I'm seeing changes in my classroom from like as weeks go by, and also from last semester to now, which I'm really, really impressed and happy about." "They're spelling mother and father, and I'm just, I... anytime I hear them or see them read or spell a word that I knew they couldn't do last week, it just, it makes me happy."

Some fellows/volunteers discussed that they developed an interest in becoming teachers based on their experiences in the program. ""I really want to go to Japan and teach English there for a couple years. Just seeing the small impact that me coming twice a week has had on one, or just a couple of the kids in my classes, really made me want to do some of this more. I want to do it later in life. I want to do it as part of my career."

Figure 7 shows the types of benefits fellows/volunteers reported was experienced by the students. Working with the fellows/volunteers gave students more opportunities to practice and hence develop their skills.

> *I think it's definitely beneficial to the students because they get to have like double exposure to the things that they're confused on, and they don't just get to like skip those things and go on to other things. It's just hard to, like it's hard to start writing sentences in a classroom when you don't even know your letters yet. So, definitely like being able to go back and get help on the things you don't know yet before you go forward, I think is really beneficial for them.*

Relatedly, it gives students more individualized attention, "And helping the students especially get that one-on-one work that they might be struggling to get in a giant homogenous room…"

Figure 7

Benefits for Students Reported by Fellows/Volunteers
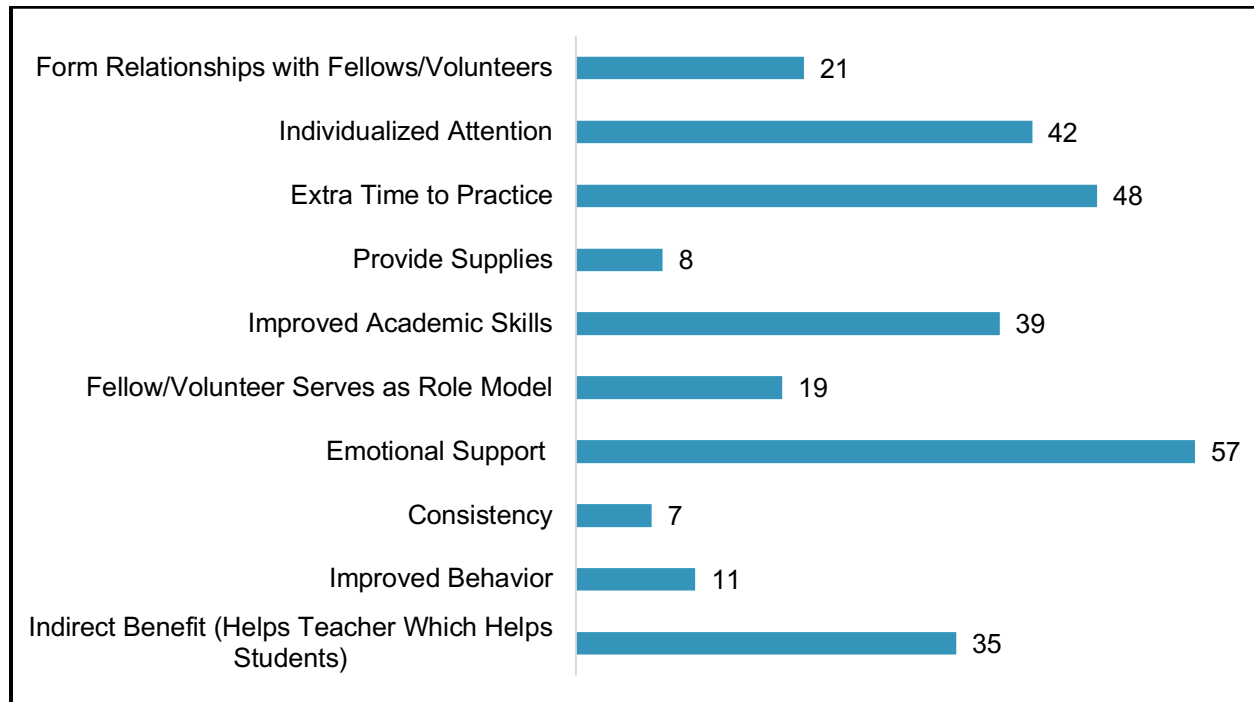
Note. Data are based on fellows/volunteers' responses to relevant question in all interviews across all waves. Each could mention more than one type of benefit.

Working with the elementary school students provided opportunities to form relationships with the fellows/volunteers, "Umm, you know, quality time. I think that's a big that's a big aspect of it. Like I said, they're dealing with things that they shouldn't be dealing with at such a young age. Just being able to speak with them, building the relationship, you know, building that closeness with the child." The fellows/volunteers provided emotional support, "I also noticed that giving them words of encouragement, um, made them feel better about learning. So that just made them overall feel more comfortable in the classroom." The fellows/volunteers believed they served as role models: "I feel like it's kind of like they look up to me a little bit and like I kind of give them advice and stuff like that. So, I feel like it's not only helpful with like, like their education but like with like who they're becoming and stuff and like growing to be. "

The various types of support provided by the fellows/volunteers led to improved academic outcomes for the students. "I think it really does make a difference, and even just over the course of the semester I can see like a significant difference with some of the students that I help regularly, in their reading levels." Some of the ways this

occurred was more indirect through providing assistance to the teacher, "I think that helps because it gives them like a bit of it because like it gives the teacher more time to focus on the students that need more help one day, compared to another because I'm there to help the other students so I think that's nice."

Elementary School Students

As previously mentioned, 51 students in the LFP, recruited from an after-school program in their schools, were interviewed in spring 2022 about how frequently they read at home and, how much they liked reading (see Appendix A. 5). They also were asked about their work with the fellow/volunteer (What do you like about having X in your class? "When you work with X, what at do you do with him/her?" "How does it help you when you work with X?"). Not every student answered every question. Typically, about 34 students responded to the questions. Of students who said they knew who the fellow/volunteer was in their classroom, there were two main categories of responses about what they liked working with them. The most common response was that the student found the fellow/volunteer to be helpful and made learning fun ($n = 25$). "He helps me learn.", "She makes me feel a lot smarter than I thought.", "He helps us learn in a fun way.". Other responses talked about characteristics of the fellow/volunteer ($n = 8$). "He is funny." She is fun."

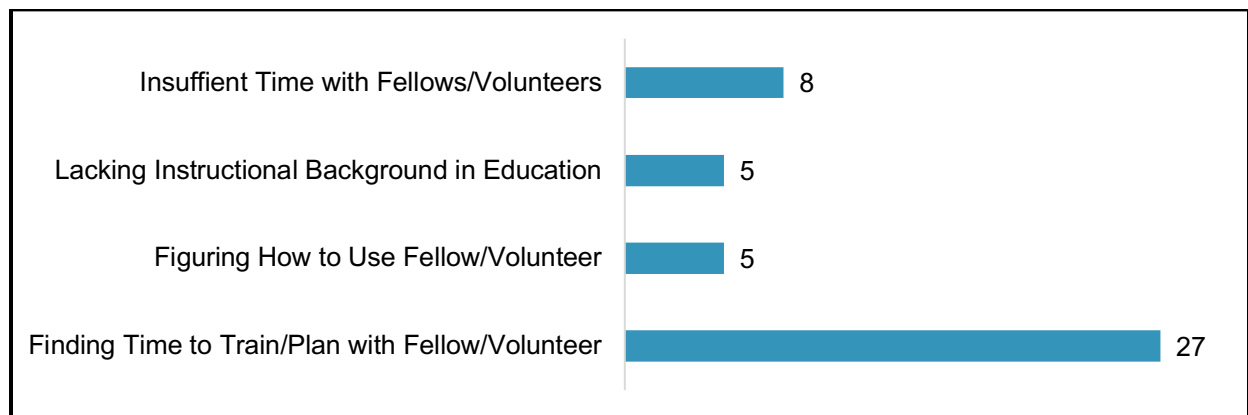## What are the Challenges?

Teachers

How interviews were conducted, and reliability handled was the same as was described in a prior section. We first reviewed the entire transcripts for negative comments made by the teachers. There were 18 negative comments given by the teachers. Some comments focused on the inconsistent schedule the fellows/volunteers had. For example, one teacher mentioned that students in her class need consistency, but the fellow/volunteer sometimes needed to miss class because of a need to study for an exam. In other words, this type of comment addressed things that the fellows/volunteers did or did not do. The other two categories of comments were about training opportunities or background knowledge that the fellows/volunteers ideally should have had. One category focused on the need for the fellows/volunteers to be more prepared or have more knowledge of how to intervene or what to do with the students. Relatedly, a third set of comments addressed that neither the teacher nor others in the school had sufficient time to teach or prepare the fellows/volunteers ("You can't just expect them to know what to do.").

In addition to what is reported above, teachers were asked about the challenges they experienced working with the fellows/volunteers. For example, "What are the things that

work the least about the program?" As shown in Figure 8, the most frequently mentioned challenge was finding time to train the fellows/volunteers or meet with them to plan what they would do. A related challenge was not knowing the fellow/volunteer's educational background or figuring out how to use the fellow/volunteer. And some teachers noted that they would have liked the fellow/volunteer to be there more time during the week instead of only two days because the students received English language arts instruction five days a week.

Figure 8

Challenges Reported by Teachers Working with the Fellows/Volunteers

| Challenge	Count
Insuffient Time with Fellows/Volunteers	8
Lacking Instructional Background in Education	5
Figuring How to Use Fellow/Volunteer	5
Finding Time to Train/Plan with Fellow/Volunteer	27

Note. Data are based on teachers' responses to this question in each interview across all waves. Teachers could mention more than one type of challenge.

Teachers interviewed during COVID-19 were asked several questions about the impact of the pandemic on their teaching and relations with the fellows/volunteers. For example, one of the questions was, "What are the things that work the least about the program with distance learning?" Figure 9 presents a summary of the types of comments they gave. The most commonly expressed challenge was difficulty using Zoom to teach online.

Figure 9

Challenges Experienced by Teachers During Online Learning
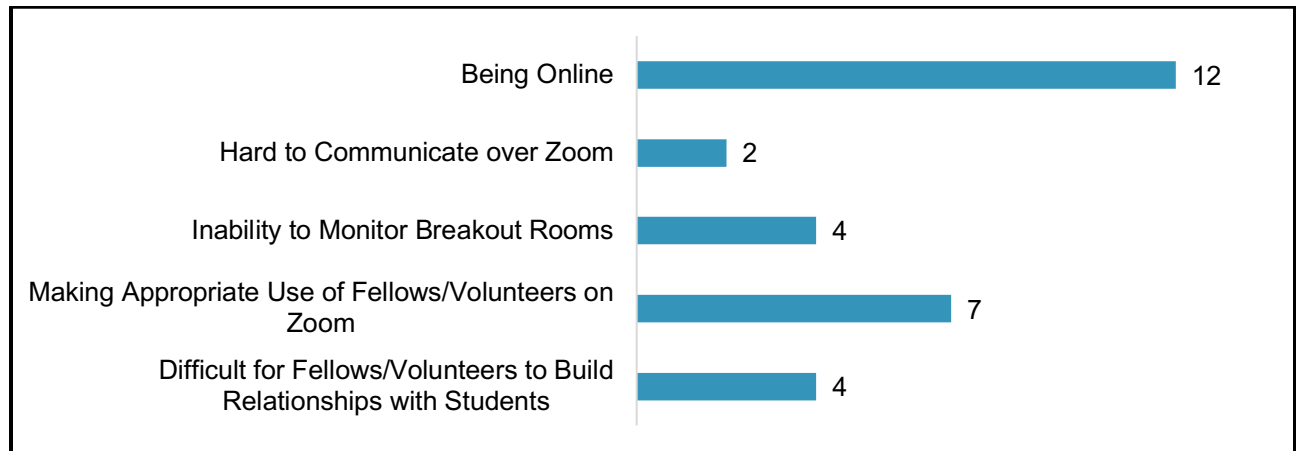
Note. Data are based on responses to a question on two interviews during COVID-19. Teachers could mention more than one challenge.

Teachers interviewed later in the evaluation, after students returned to school, also discussed how stressed they and their students were and how the young students did not have a history of attending school. Such comments seemed to focus on a general challenge more than directly on the LFP. However, if teachers were stressed, this could affect their availability to work well with the fellows/volunteers (Kush et al., 2022). Similar results were reported by preschool teachers in Sonnenschein et al. (2022).

Fellows/Volunteers

We first reviewed the entire transcripts for negative comments made by the fellows/volunteers. There were 112 negative comments given by the fellows/volunteers. The most common was the lack of available training activities. These included not receiving training in advance from the teachers or sufficient training by the Sherman Center. It also included teachers not interceding when the fellow/volunteer encountered a difficult situation (often behavioral) during class ("I didn't get any advice or she didn't tell me any of that beforehand, so I did have to figure that out on my own and figure out how to deal with it on my own."). Fellows/Volunteers also noted that the classroom materials lacked appeal for students with diverse ethnic/linguistic backgrounds. For example, many of the students did not speak fluent English so might have benefited from more books in Spanish which was these students' primary language.
The challenges experienced by the fellows/volunteers is further illustrated in Figure 10 which shows their responses to a question about the challenges. Consistent with what was mentioned above, as is apparent from Figure 10, by far the most commonly

mentioned challenge experienced by the fellows/volunteers was the lack of training they received: "…She has not given me much direction…"; "…I had to ask a lot of questions of like, what are we doing when we get here? I think that's the biggest problem." In addition to asking for more training and direction from the teachers, fellows/volunteers mentioned a need for Sherman to offer them more guidance.
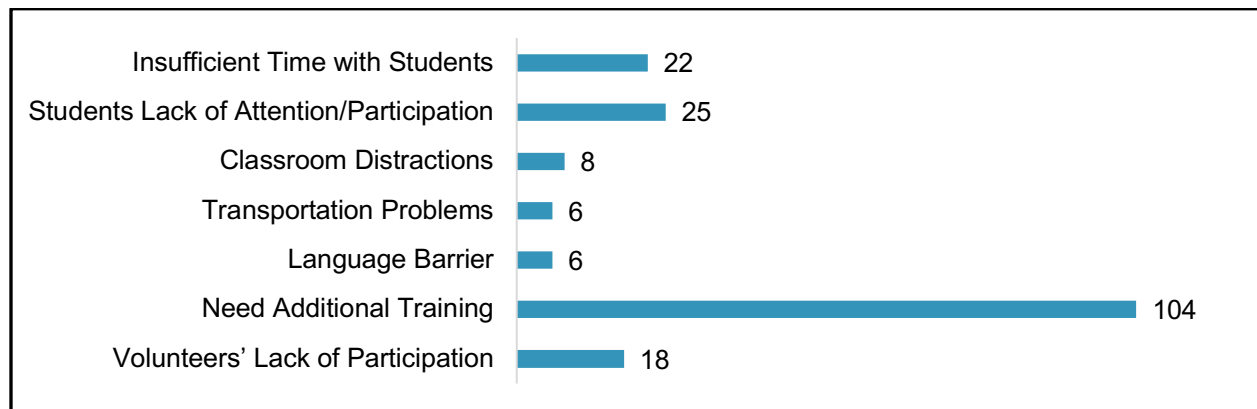
> *I do wish we had them more often, though. I feel, we should have two, at least. Maybe, one at the beginning of our volunteer ship and then one at the end. Because, by the time that we have the PD sometimes it's close to the end of the semester. So, it's not as useful, because already been helping the kids and everything and we're about to end.*

> *… having a little more training about how to talk or interact or just keep kids maybe focused or more interested on a topic, [inaudible] be interesting, because I'm kind of just going with what I see my teacher doing or what I feel like is probably the right way to get them interested. I don't actually have any formal training or anything at all about how this is how you attempt to keep kids interested, or this is one of the better ways to get their attention with anything.*

Not receiving sufficient training was especially an issue when students were unruly or exhibited behavioral issues. "…trying to pull them back in, get them to focus on like what we're doing rather than the big class activity I think does sometimes um, like minimize my effectiveness."

Figure 10

Challenges Reported by Fellows/Volunteers

Challenge	Count
Insufficient Time with Students	22
Students Lack of Attention/Participation	25
Classroom Distractions	8
Transportation Problems	6
Language Barrier	6
Need Additional Training	104
Volunteers' Lack of Participation	18

Note. Data are based on responses to a question about challenges which occurred on all interviews. Fellows/Volunteers could mention more than one type of challenge. Lack of participation meant that fellows/volunteers were not included in classroom activities as often as they would have liked.

Fellows/Volunteers also echoed teachers' views that they did not spend enough time in the classroom. "I think just spending an hour and a half or about an hour Mondays and Wednesdays is not enough for a volunteer." Consistent with what was noted in the classroom observations, fellows/volunteers were dissatisfied when teachers did not utilize them but instead just had them observe all or most of the time they were in the classroom.

> *…the teacher just plays like a couple of videos for the students to watch and we're there for about like an hour and fifteen I think, an hour fifteen, so we were just there present but like we weren't having very much action.*

> *I think, I don't know, I'd say 85 percent I end up just walking around doing nothing. And that's when I feel like I could be doing something.*

Transportation to and from the schools was a recurrent problem as has been noted before.

> *…having the transportation come through the Shriver Center has been a little difficult this semester, just because the Shriver Center doesn't open until eight thirty, but we have to leave by eight…*

Yeah, we have one of the student coordinators drives the Shriver Center van, but there was like a week and a half where he couldn't come, or something, and figuring out alternative driving and other stuff was... there was a challenge for a while.

An additional set of concerns occurred when instruction became virtual. As shown in Figure 11, a concern noted by many was just a general negative comment about the need to teach online and the difficulties with such instruction. "I think maybe just because since it's virtual and not in person like it is harder to get everything out in a short time span." The fellow/volunteer was referring to the teacher's ability to cover the full lesson each day when instruction was virtual. The most frequently mentioned issue was difficulty with technical issues, "…. yup it just took us a while to get going and then in the beginning we were waiting to see if I could get into the classroom, and so the first couple weeks was just me waiting."

Figure 11

Challenges Reported by Fellows/Volunteers During Virtual Learning
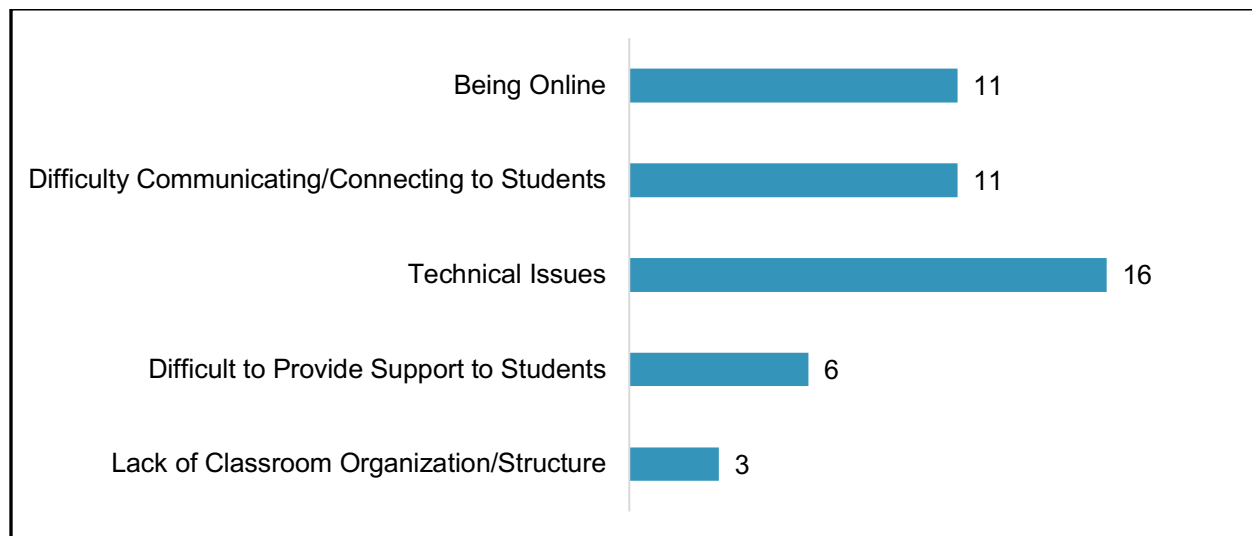
Note. Data based on responses to two interviews during COVID-19. Fellows/Volunteers could mention more than one type of challenge.

Another common complaint was that the accommodations for virtual instruction made it hard to communicate with students, "…especially when their mics are aren't on like their cameras off, uh that's the most verbal way I can talk to them through the chat box as

well to work. Um I would, I mean like talking them directly through like the chat box is probably like the most like form of direct contact with them." It also was difficult to provide support for students this way, ""…before that we didn't have as much interaction with them because both of the second-grade classes are combined together on Zoom so it's just everyone in one big Zoom but there were not very many one-on-one conversations happening."

Similarities and Differences in Views Expressed by Teachers and Fellows/Volunteers

The teachers and fellows/volunteers both expressed more positive views than negative ones about the program (Number Positive remarks: Teacher $M = 7.08$, Fellow/Volunteer $M = 9.70$; Number Negative remarks: Teacher $M = 1.21$; Fellow/Volunteer $M = 3.95$). However, the fellows/volunteers expressed proportionally more negative views than the teachers ($p<.05$). Strengths of the program were that the fellows/volunteers provided academic and behavioral assistance to the teachers by working with the students. They also were viewed as positive role models for the students.

Weaknesses of the program were insufficient training. Teachers said they did not have time, nor did they know the fellows/volunteers' pertinent backgrounds. Fellows/Volunteers voiced a need for more training; that which was provided by the Sherman Center was insufficient. Finally, teachers and fellows/volunteers thought it would be better to have more time in the classroom to be effective. Such time could come from one fellow/volunteer being there more days per week or adding additional days for extra fellows/volunteers.

Conclusions

School-university partnerships, like the Sherman Center's Literacy Fellows Program, have the potential to improve students' educational experiences, provide teacher support, and enhance service-learning opportunities for students in higher education. Our findings indicate that the teachers and fellows/volunteers were very positive about the benefits of the program for them and the students, even with the challenges experienced during COVID-19. As we reported, teachers and fellows/volunteers gave a significantly greater number of positive than negative comments about the program. The students were positive as well about their experiences working with the fellows/volunteers.

Teachers discussed how they benefitted from an extra set of hands that enabled the students to receive extra individualized attention and to improve their reading skills. Our observations indicated that some fellows/volunteers also provided important assistance with behavior management in the classroom as well as pedagogical instruction. In addition, based on their reports and those of teachers, fellows/volunteers formed important positive relations with the students, served as role models for them, and helped with student's emotional development. Students reported liking working with the fellows/volunteers and believing they benefitted from it. Fellows/Volunteers echoed the views expressed by the teachers. However, some also expressed what they viewed as additional important benefits for themselves of working as fellows/volunteers in LFP: learning about how the educational system works, expanding their knowledge of inequities in the system, and being able to give back to the community.

Although the teachers and fellows/volunteers were very positive about the LFP and their experiences with it, there also were some concerns expressed by the teachers and particularly the fellows/volunteers. Teachers reported not having enough time to train the fellows/volunteers or knowing what their educational backgrounds were if they would have had time to train them. Relatedly, fellows/volunteers shared that the training they received from the teachers and the Sherman Center was not sufficient. Teachers also would have liked for the fellows/volunteers to be there more than two days per week and to be more consistent in attendance and times of arrival. Some fellows/volunteers had difficulty accessing the van provided by the Shriver Center or from time to time had other commitments.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected students' education and our evaluation. In-school class instruction was disrupted, and instruction was virtual for some of this evaluation. This form of instruction increased stressors on teachers who had to learn new forms of instruction, on fellows/volunteers who were bound by difficulties with access, and

students who also had limits accessing the internet. As our results show, the various ways students were thought to benefit from working with the fellows/volunteers were less apparent to teachers when instruction was virtual. In particular, and perhaps not surprisingly, fellows/volunteers were less able to establish positive relations with students when their means of interaction was virtual.

Limitations

As with any research study or program evaluation, this one had some limitations. The major one is that we were not able to collect literacy or literacy-related outcome data from the students. The teachers and fellows/volunteers thought that the students' skills improved from the assistance they received. However, there is no way to know for sure without assessing the students' literacy skills. Two, the data on relations between fellows/volunteers and students came mainly from interviews with the teachers and fellows/volunteers. It would have been desirable to also be able to learn more from the students. We did talk with the students, but our probes were limited as were their responses which may not be surprising given their age.

Three, this evaluation was cross-sectional. That is, we only investigated first and second grade students. It would have been preferable to be able to follow the students as they proceeded through elementary school. Would any gains exhibited in first and second grade be sustained? Four, we attempted to assess students' reading motivations when they were in first grade and second grade. Unfortunately, despite piloting the measures, the psychometric properties of the measures with the Latinx students were not sufficiently strong to be able to use the results from this measure. Other research shows that students' reading motivations are positively related to the frequency with which they read and their reading skills (Serpell et al., 2005; Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002). Such research has typically been conducted with a diverse group of students but not those from Latinx backgrounds. Therefore, it would have been desirable to understand these students' reading motivations and how that related to their performance in the classroom and their relations with the fellows/volunteers. Five, it would have been preferable to obtain a better understanding of the relations between the home and school contexts such as how the nature of the home literacy environment is associated with students' learning in the classroom.

Despite the limitations noted above, these results provide important information about the LFP. Nevertheless, we do have several recommendations for improving the program.

Recommendations

- ➢ **Increase formal training of the fellows/volunteers.** This was an important issue noted by teachers and fellows/volunteers. Most of the fellows/volunteers did not have formal coursework in education nor had they worked previously as teachers or teaching assistants. Not only were the teachers unaware of the fellows/volunteers' background but they also did not have the extra time to train fellows/volunteers. The fellows/volunteers liked the seminars offered by Dr. Godwin at the Sherman Center and believed they learned a lot from them. However, they thought that offering such a seminar once a semester was insufficient. If possible, it would be preferable if fellows/volunteers could meet weekly with someone to learn more about students' learning and literacy development and how to facilitate it.

- ➢ **Many teachers mentioned that they were unaware of the fellows/volunteers' background.** Ideally, fellows/volunteers should complete a form about their formal and informal educational experiences with students. This should be given to the classroom teacher with whom they work.

- ➢ **Increase the amount of time fellows/volunteers are in the classroom and the number of fellows/volunteers working at the schools.** As Ramey and Ramey (1998) and others have noted, the intensity of an intervention is positively related to its effectiveness. Several teachers recommended that fellows/volunteers come every day to the schools. Not only would this allow for more hands-on instruction by the fellows/volunteers (presumably increasing effectiveness), but it would be less confusing for the elementary school students. That is, each day a fellow/volunteer would be able to handle the same tasks in a classroom. It also would increase fostering relations between the fellows/volunteers and students. If having any of the fellows/volunteers work in the classroom for four or five days per week is not feasible, the Sherman Center should consider having more fellows/volunteers assigned to the school so that there are fellows/volunteers in the class four or five days a week rather than only two days a week.

- ➢ **Look into more reliable means of fellows/volunteers getting to their assigned schools.** Many of the fellows/volunteers relied upon a van provided by the UMBC Shriver Center to get to the school. On the positive side, this meant that the fellows/volunteers did not have to have their own cars to participate. However, this proved not to be a reliable means of transportation: the key was not always available and sometimes the van did not work. Several teachers and

fellows/volunteers complained about the difficulties having a reliable means of transport.

➢ **Consider ways to facilitate interactions between fellows/volunteers and students.** Forming positive relations between the students and fellows/volunteers was an important outcome of the program. One way to do this is by having adults present whom the student can see as positive role models (e.g., the fellows/volunteers). And, working with someone one likes, such as the fellow/volunteer, can promote the establishment of positive bonds as well as increase the effectiveness of the language arts program. The students liked working with the fellows/volunteers. Teachers and fellows/volunteers mentioned the importance of the relationships. Unfortunately, during COVID-19 because of the nature of virtual instruction it was difficult to establish such positive relationships. Prior to COVID-19, most fellows/volunteers worked in small groups in the classrooms with the students. That was not as easily possible during COVID-19 when instruction was virtual.

Although we strongly believe that teachers should use the fellows/volunteers as they believe they need, we also think teachers should consider ways to facilitate the establishment of positive relations between the fellows/volunteers and students (e.g., having them work together in small groups). In addition, some teachers did not seem to use the fellow/volunteer services in an optimal manner. That is, they had the fellows/volunteers observe them conducting whole class activities. It may not be possible to restructure the activity to have the fellows/volunteers involved but it would be desirable. The fellows/volunteers used in this manner complained about it.

➢ **Outreach to homes.** The focus of this evaluation was the LFP. However, researchers and theorists (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Epstein, 2011) have long discussed the importance of collaboration between the home and school contexts. Students do best when there are positive relations between these two contexts. The students in this evaluation said they liked to read and did read at home. Ideally, it would be better if students were able to read more at home. If possible, teachers should try to reach out more to parents to enlist them as students' home teachers. Perhaps teachers can send information home to the families about the LFP and what students are doing in it. When we recruited families for the evaluation, very few families were aware of the program at school.

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Appendix A: Measures

A1. Parent interviews

      Year 1. Parent Interview

A2. Classroom Observations

      Year 1. Teacher Observation Protocol

      Year 2: Fellow/Volunteer Observation Protocol

Note. *The protocols remained the same or similar throughout the evaluation.*

A3. Teacher Interviews

      Year 1. Teacher Interview Protocol Fall 2019

      Year 2 Fall. Teacher Interview Protocol Fall 2020

      Year 2 Spring. Teacher Interview Protocol Spring 2021

      Year 3. Teacher Interview Protocol Spring 2022

A4. Fellow/Volunteer Interviews

      Year 1. Fellow/Volunteer Interview Protocol Fall 2019

      Year 2a. Fellow/Volunteer Interview Protocol Fall 2020

      Year 2b. Fellow/Volunteer Interview Protocol Spring 2021

      Year 3. Fellow/Volunteer Interview Protocol Spring 2022

A5. Student Interviews

      Year 3. Student Interview Spring 2022

Publications

Galindo, C., Sonnenschein, S., & Sanders, M. (2021). A case study of a school-university partnership focused on literacy and educational equity: Responding to COVID-19 in the early grades. *School-University Partnerships, 14*(3), 17-42.

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Presentations

Sonnenschein, S., Galindo, C., Brock, A., & Lahoury, H. (2023, March*). How school university partnerships can improve equitable learning opportunities for underserved children.* Poster to be presented at SRCD, Salt Lake City, UT.

Sonnenschein, S., & Galindo, C. (2022, August). *Teaching during challenging times: An evaluation of the Literacy Fellows Volunteer program*. Talk given at the Sherman Research Conference, Baltimore, MD.

Galindo, C., Waller, A., Mejia, N., & Sonnenschein, S. (2022, April). *Service-Learning through school-university partnerships: Undergraduate student volunteers' motivations and experiences.* Round Table Talk given at AERA, San Diego, CA. virtual.

Galczyk, S., Sonnenschein, S**.,** Brock, A., & Simons, C. (2021, April). *Urban English-speaking and Spanish-speaking first and second graders' home literacy environments.* Poster presented at SRCD, virtual.