



**Little Free Library
Program Evaluation Report**

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Research Team

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Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a multi-site observational study that examined the influence of Little Free Library (LFL) book boxes on children's access to books and reading frequency, particularly among underserved communities. The study, conducted from September to November 2024, captures the experiences of 768 children in Baltimore County, Maryland. The study found that 92% of children report greater access to books and 88% of children report keeping more books at home because of LFL book boxes. Children report reading more because of their access to books through LFL book boxes, with children reading an average of 1.1 additional days per week when they visit a LFL book box and half of surveyed children increasing their reading frequency since they began visiting a LFL book box.

By providing access to books, Little Free Library increases the amount of time children spend reading.

LFL's influence on book access and reading habits is especially pronounced among key target demographics. In low-income schools, where 65% or more of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, the proportion of children who read more is double that of children in higher-income schools - 62% vs 32% of children read more when they visit a book box. English Language Learners (ELL) report the largest increase in reading frequency, with 72% of ELL children reading more frequently in weeks when they visit a LFL book box. The LFL book boxes reach many children who don't regularly use public libraries, with about 60% of LFL users reporting they visit public libraries a few times per year or less. The main barriers to public library access were identified as transportation, location, and operating hours, highlighting the value of LFL's accessible neighborhood-based approach.

Evaluation Objective and Methodology

Little Free Library has strongly influenced access to reading materials through its library box donation programs: Impact Library, Indigenous Library, and Read in Color. Historically, LFL's influence has been quantified primarily through its output, including the number of libraries donated and registered. Through this evaluation, we designed and implemented an evaluation to capture a clear picture of the downstream effects of the LFL book boxes.

To inform the study design, the research team held key informant interviews with LFL staff, board members, and community partners, completed a desk review of existing LFL evaluation and program materials, and conducted an environmental scan of existing research from key donors and industry-adjacent nonprofits. The research team interviewed 7 program partners, 7 Board members, and 7 staff members for the key informant interviews.



Themes and key findings from the key informant interviews and environmental scan were provided to LFL in a report to inform and guide the development of an organizational logic model and focus on the essential research question most needed to measure LFL's downstream effects and to communicate those effects to a broad audience. The organizational logic model was developed through an iterative process with review and feedback from LFL staff to ensure alignment of the study with the organization's evaluation priorities. The research team then worked with LFL staff to refine and focus the logic model, and from it, prioritize one key research question to guide this study, described below.

Using the logic model and LFL's research goals, we developed the following **core research question**: By providing access to books, does Little Free Library increase the amount of time children spend reading?

Data Collection

Pier Partners conducted an observational study from September to November 2024, collecting quantitative and qualitative data on the experiences and reading habits of children and youth who use Little Free Library through a brief survey. During this period, the survey was administered in 11 schools and 2 community library boxes in Baltimore County, Maryland. This region was selected because of the density of its Little Free Libraries, the diversity of geography and demographics served, and the strength of Little Free Library's partner, The Education Foundation of BCPS (Baltimore County Public Schools). The survey was deployed within Baltimore County schools and communities with active LFL book boxes.

Pier Partners surveyed children ages 0-18 with an emphasis on capturing the experiences of elementary school-aged children from low-income households and communities who are users of at least one Little Free Library (LFL). We collected responses from youth aged 12 to 18 and the parents or guardians of youth under 12. Parents completing the survey were asked to answer for their oldest child in the home who is 12 or younger.

Survey respondents were asked to self-report on the following:

Intermediate Outcome Measures:

1. Number of books borrowed (LFL influence on access)
2. Alignment of books borrowed with reader preferences (LFL influence on book choice)
3. Attitudes about owning books vs. borrowing books (LFL influence on book ownership)
4. Understanding of the ability to own books from LFL
5. Attitudes toward reading

Primary outcome measure: Time spent reading (or being read to)

1. The amount of time they spend reading during a week they visit a LFL, compared to a week they are unable to visit a LFL
2. Average reading habits before and after they began accessing LFL

The survey instrument is included with this report as Appendix B.

Analytic Methods

This observational study employed descriptive analysis of original survey data collected by the research team from September to November 2024 across 13 LFL book box sites in Baltimore County, Maryland. The analyses included descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, sub-group analyses, and correlation to summarize and interpret the survey data collected. Multiple researchers cleaned and checked the data for completeness to ensure accuracy. Surveys completed in Spanish were professionally translated into English prior to analysis.

The final analytic sample (n=768) includes children with experience using a LFL book box and completed 100% of the required survey questions. Of 768 completed responses, 741 completed the survey in English and 27 completed the survey in Spanish. The research team collected complete surveys from 807 children and determined 39 of these responses to be ineligible. 3 surveys were determined to be ineligible and dropped from the analytic sample because respondents indicated they had never used a LFL book box, and 36 responses were dropped from the analytic sample because of inconsistencies in the provided responses.

Initial analyses examined descriptive statistics for the full sample (n=768) with subsequent analyses examining subgroups of interest in alignment with the logic model and purposes of the research study. The subgroups examined include:

- School Level
 - Income: Children who attend low-income schools, defined as schools where 65% or more of children qualify for free or reduced-price lunch
- Child Level
 - Race and Ethnicity: Children who identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC)
 - Age: Children who were elementary ages (5-11)
 - English Language Learner: Children who identify a language other than English as the primary language spoken in their home

Full sample and subgroup analyses included a review of key intermediate outcomes (books borrowed, alignment with reader preferences, attitudes toward reading) and the primary outcome measures of book access and time spent reading. The primary outcome measure of time spent reading was captured using two distinct metrics: 1) the difference in time spent reading in weeks children visit a LFL book box compared to weeks they do not visit a book box; and 2) the change in average reading habits since children began visiting a LFL book box. Analyses of quantitative survey data on these key outcome measures were complemented with qualitative analyses of open-ended survey questions that captured children's experiences and feedback on the LFL book box in their community. The research team developed and implemented a qualitative coding scheme and coded open-ended responses to capture key themes.

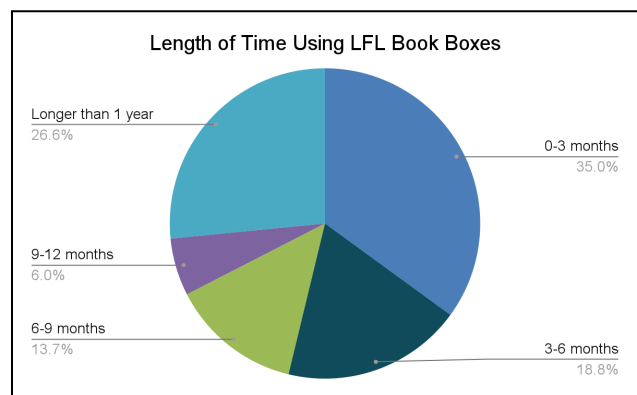
Survey Sample

The survey sample includes 768 responses from a diverse audience of Little Free Library book box users. The respondents were predominantly parents of elementary school children (91%), with a fairly even split between urban (46%) and suburban (54%) locations. The survey covered 11 schools and 2 community spaces, with strong representation from underserved communities:

- 8 of the schools were classified as "low-income" (meaning 65% or more of enrolled students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch)
- 6 schools had majority BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) student populations
- 3 schools had large English Language Learner (ELL) populations (20%+ of students)
- 6 schools had substantial special education populations (15%+ of students)

Respondents represent a distribution of new and established users:

- 54% were newer users (35% for 0-3 months and 18.8% for 3-6 months)
- 46% were longer-term users (13.7% for 6-9 months, 6% for 9-12 months, and 26.6% for longer than 1 year)



In Tables 1-3, please find a summary of key respondent demographics, including site-level characteristics (Table 1), site-level race and ethnicity composition (Table 2), and survey respondent characteristics (Table 3).

Table 1: Site-Level Characteristics

| Site | Responses (n, %) | Locality | Grades | Free and Reduced-Price Meals | English Language Learners |
|------------------|------------------|----------|---------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Chadwick ES | 74, 9.6% | Urban | PK to 5 | 72% | 24% |
| Charlesmont ES | 1, 0.1% | Urban | PS to 5 | 69% | 16% |
| Milbrook ES | 98, 12.8% | Urban | PK to 5 | 69% | 45% |
| Oakleigh ES | 13, 1.7% | Suburban | PS to 5 | 73% | 14% |
| Orems ES | 37, 4.8% | Urban | PS to 5 | 66% | 17% |
| Rodgers Forge ES | 96, 12.5% | Suburban | KG to 5 | 9% | 5% |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------|----------|---------|-----|-----|
| Highfields Community HOA | 26, 3.4% | Suburban | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Carney Run Neighborhood | 15, 2.0% | Suburban | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Victory Villa ES | 100, 13.0% | Suburban | PS to 5 | 74% | 15% |
| Pinewood ES | 98, 12.8% | Suburban | PS to 5 | 15% | 6% |
| Dundalk MS | 100, 13.0% | Urban | 6 to 8 | 71% | 35% |
| Middle River MS | 5, 0.7% | Urban | 6 to 8 | 66% | 10% |
| West Towson ES | 105, 13.7% | Suburban | KG to 5 | 18% | 4% |
| Total: | 768 | | | | |

Notes: ES=Elementary School, MS= Middle School; data from 2024-2025 school year.

Source: Data from [public data published by Baltimore County Public Schools](#) and accessed by Pier Partners in December 2024

Table 2: Site-Level Race and Ethnicity Composition

| Site | Response (n/%) | Asian | Black | Latino | White | 2+ Races | Small Group |
|--------------------------|----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----------|-------------|
| Chadwick ES | 75, 9.8% | 33.50% | 46.10% | 11.28% | 6.47% | N/A | 2.65% |
| Charlesmont ES | 1, 0.1% | N/A | 16.35% | 29.22% | 43.70% | 9.38% | 1.34% |
| Milbrook ES | 99, 13% | 8.75% | 39.54% | 47.53% | N/A | 4.18% | N/A |
| Oakleigh ES | 16, 2.1% | N/A | 53.98% | 24.34% | 10.40% | 6.19% | 5.09% |
| Orems ES | 46, 6% | 6.22% | 23.38% | 29.60% | 34.58% | 5.22% | 1.00% |
| Rodgers Forge ES | 101, 13.2% | 8.01% | N/A | 5.34% | 70.87% | 8.50% | 0.24% |
| Highfields Community HOA | 27, 3.5% | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Carney Run Neighborhood | 17, 2.2% | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Victory Villa ES | 103, 13.5% | N/A | 46.90% | 23.20% | 19.12% | 7.68% | 3.10% |
| Pinewood ES | 104, 13.6% | 22.07% | 7.02% | N/A | 59.20% | 7.19% | 4.52% |

| | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|------------|-------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| Dundalk MS | 65, 8.5% | N/A | 23.58% | 43.14% | 22.41% | 9.36% | 1.51% |
| Middle River MS | 5, 0.7% | N/A | 45.13% | 21.41% | 22.14% | 7.18% | 4.13% |
| West Towson ES | 105, 13.7% | 6.97% | 15.51% | 8.09% | 62.25% | 6.74% | 0.45% |

Notes: ES=Elementary School, MS= Middle School; data from 2024-2025 school year.

Source: Data from [public data published by Baltimore County Public Schools](#) and accessed by Pier Partners in December 2024

Table 3: Survey Respondent Characteristics (Age, Race and Ethnicity, Language Spoken at Home)

| Characteristic | Category | Frequency (n) | Percent (%) |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Age | 0-4 years old | 42 | 5.5% |
| | 5-7 years old | 234 | 30.6% |
| | 8-11 years old | 401 | 52.5% |
| | 12-14 years old | 79 | 10.3% |
| | 15-18 years old | 8 | 1% |
| Race and Ethnicity | Asian | 59 | 7.7% |
| | Black or African American | 125 | 16.4% |
| | Hispanic or Latino | 83 | 10.9% |
| | Native American or Indigenous | 5 | 0.7% |
| | Pacific Islander | 1 | 0.1% |
| | White or Caucasian | 351 | 45.9% |
| | Multiracial | 15 | |
| | Other | 4 | 0.5% |
| Prefer not to say | 64 | 8.4% | |
| Primary Language Spoken at Home | English | 569 | 74.5% |
| | Spanish | 88 | 11.5% |
| | Other | | |

Findings

LFL's Influence on Children's Reading Habits

Influence Among Full Study Sample (n=768)

This study provides compelling evidence that Little Free Library (LFL) book boxes substantially increase both book access and reading frequency among children. **Nearly all children reported having greater access to books through their LFL book box (92%), and maintaining more books in their homes as a result of the program (88%).**

92%

of children have access to more books because there is a LFL book box in their community

The reported increase in reading frequency associated with use of an LFL book box is particularly noteworthy. When children visit LFL book boxes, they read an average of 1.1 additional days per week, 4.1 days compared to 3.0 days per week in the weeks they do not visit a LFL book box. Half of children read more frequently during the weeks they visit a book box, and one-third of children add two or more reading days to their weekly routine when they visit a book box.

Average Days of Reading per Week



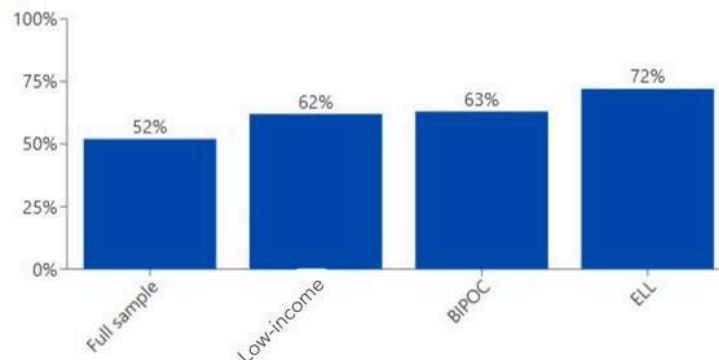
Influence Among Prioritized Groups The research findings reveal a particularly strong positive influence of LFL book boxes among key sub-groups of children that LFL has prioritized for outreach and engagement. Data show that LFL has a larger influence on reading habits among three key demographic groups: children from low-income schools, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) children, and English Language Learners (ELL). **The differences for these three subgroups (e.g., students in low-income schools compared to their counterparts in high-income schools) are statistically significant.**

72%

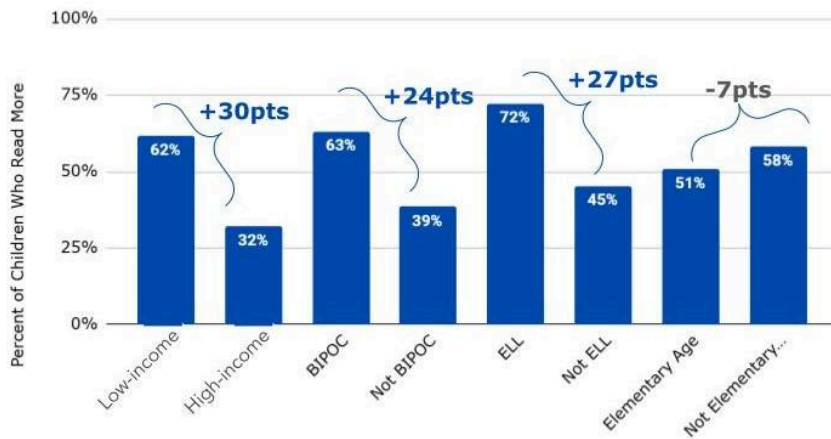
of children learning English report reading more when they access a LFL book box

Looking at the specific numbers, 72% of ELL students report reading more when they access a LFL book box - the highest proportion among all studied groups. In addition, a larger proportion of children who attend low-income schools report reading more when they visit a LFL book box compared to their counterparts at higher-income schools: 62% of children from low-income schools read more frequently with LFL access, compared to just 32% from high-income schools, representing a substantial 30 percentage point difference.

Percent of children who read more in weeks they visit LFL



Percent of Children Reading More in Weeks They Visit a LFL Book Box



This trend is further reinforced when examining the average number of reading days per week in low-income schools. Children who don't visit LFL book boxes read an average of 1.9 days per week, while those who do visit read 3.3 days per week - an increase of 1.4 days. These data strongly suggest that LFL book boxes are supporting increased reading among populations that traditionally experience barriers to accessing books and reading materials.

Average days of reading per week in low-income schools



These findings indicate that LFL is successfully reaching and positively influencing its target audiences - the communities that often have the most to gain from increased access to books and reading opportunities.

Children’s Experiences with LFL Book Boxes

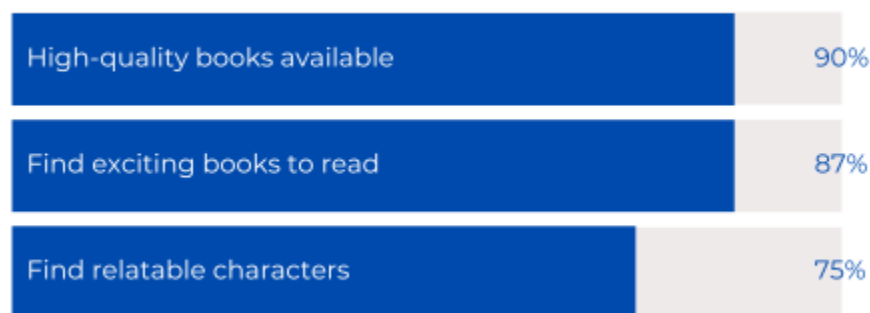
The study also provides insights into how LFL influences children’s access to high-quality and relevant books that they may not otherwise have access to and usage patterns for LFL book boxes. In addition to examining the primary outcomes of interest described above (book access and reading habits), the study was designed to capture key intermediate outcomes aligned with the LFL logic model, including experience with the content and quality of books accessed through a LFL book box, length of use and frequency of visits to a LFL book box, borrowing patterns, and the influence of LFL on children’s ability to own books.

Influence on Access to High-Quality and Relevant Books

The study found that the majority of children (86%) indicate that having access to a LFL book box makes them more excited to read. As shown in the figure below, children report that the LFL book box provides access to high-quality books, books that are exciting to read, and books with relatable characters. LFL and their stewards make a concerted effort to ensure the book boxes have diverse, quality books that will excite and engage readers of all backgrounds. This is reflected in children’s reports of their experiences accessing books through a LFL book box and captures that, in the studied sites, LFL is influencing the targeted intermediate outcomes of aligning book box content with reader preferences.

“The LFL book box shows different cultures. When students read them, they feel welcomed and are interested to read more books.” -LFL Patron

Experience with LFL Book Box



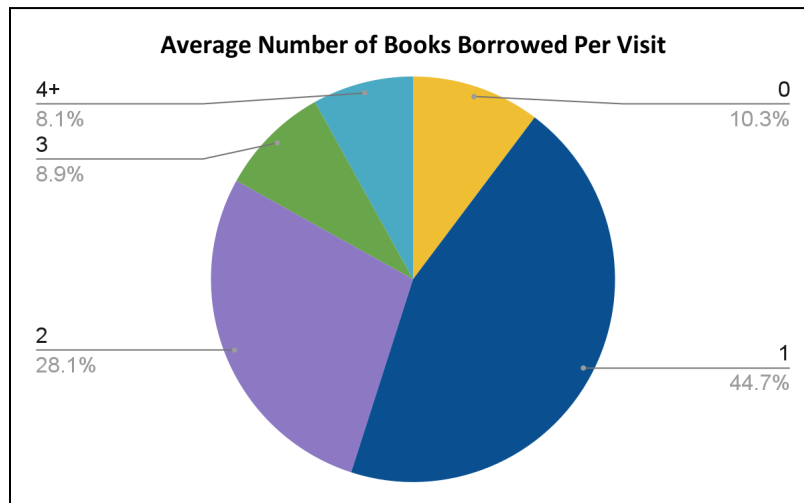
The study also indicates that LFL boxes are helping children build home libraries, with the majority (88%) of children reporting that access to a LFL box has enabled them to keep more books in their home. These data suggest that LFL boxes are not only providing access to books but are doing so in a way that meets users' needs in terms of both quality and representation, while helping families build their own book collections.

Usage Patterns: Length of Use, Visit Frequency, and Borrowing Patterns

The study also examines how long children in this sample have been using a LFL book box, how frequently they visit a book box, and how many books they typically borrow at each visit to provide LFL with insights into how children access book boxes in their communities and their borrowing patterns. Among the analytic sample, about half (54%) of children were new users, defined as using a LFL book box for less than 6 months, and about half (46%) indicated they had been using a LFL book box for more than 6 months. Notably, **children who have been using a LFL book box for longer than 3 months report visiting their book box more frequently** (more than one time per month) when compared to children who are newer to using a LFL book box.

“We find books we have never heard of before or books we haven’t found at the public library.” -LFL Patron

As shown in the figure below, the majority (90%) of children borrow books when they visit a LFL book box, with 3 out of every 4 children picking up one or two books. The most common pattern is borrowing one book per visit (44%), followed by two books per visit (29%).



Findings Summary and Study Limitations

This observational study was designed to capture children's experiences using LFL book boxes, with a focus on the primary outcomes of LFL's influence on children's book access and reading habits. The study demonstrates that in a large and diverse sample of children (ages 0-18), children have access to more books, keep more books in their home, and increase the amount of time they spend reading. Further, the study shows that the influence of LFL is larger for certain demographic groups, including children from low-income schools, BIPOC children, and children who are ELL. This study captures self-reported data from children and their parents about the influence of LFL on the key outcomes of interest (book access and reading habits). These self-reported data on book access and reading habits are complemented with analyses of quantitative and qualitative data demonstrating strong themes of LFL providing convenient access to books, diversity of books, and facilitating community connection associated with books and reading.

The study did not employ a quasi-experimental or experimental design to establish causality. In other words, the study does not employ a comparison group to examine the difference in outcomes between children who use and do not use a LFL book box. As such, the study findings cannot be described in terms of LFL impacting reading habits or resulting in a statistically significant increase in reading among children.