Providing guidance for leaders dedicated to children's literacy development, birth to age 9

PROGRAM DESIGN FOR IMPACT

The Issue: Educators devote much time and effort to literacy supports and programs that reach many children, but we aren't making a difference in literacy rates. We need to focus on programs that result in a measurable impact on children's literacy, and then find a way to increase the number of children served by those programs.

What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

Common Pitfalls	What We're Learning
1. Success is defined by number of children served and/or reported child and family satisfaction.	1. Many programs reach large numbers of children and can report anecdotal stories of success and program satisfaction, but do not impact literacy rates program-wide.
2. Children receive well-designed literacy supports, but the sessions do not last long enough, or meet frequently enough, to make a difference.	2. Finding the right dosage– amount of time on task needed to improve literacy skills– is vital. At-risk or struggling children need intensive literacy support early (Memo 2).
3. Programs without measurable impact are brought to scale; focusing on "reach" – serving as many children and/or families as possible – before quality.	3. We cannot expect real improvements in children's literacy outcomes unless we first verify that programs are effective, and then bring those effective programs to scale.
4. A high quality and targeted program is brought to scale, but only parts of the program are used, or the program is watered down.	4. Even a model program quickly loses its impact if not implemented correctly.

What Are Key Decisions and Strategies for Impact?

Identify Key Ingredients

Conduct ongoing evaluation to:

- understand whether a program or support is working, for whom it works, and under what conditions
- inform adjustments and mid-course corrections

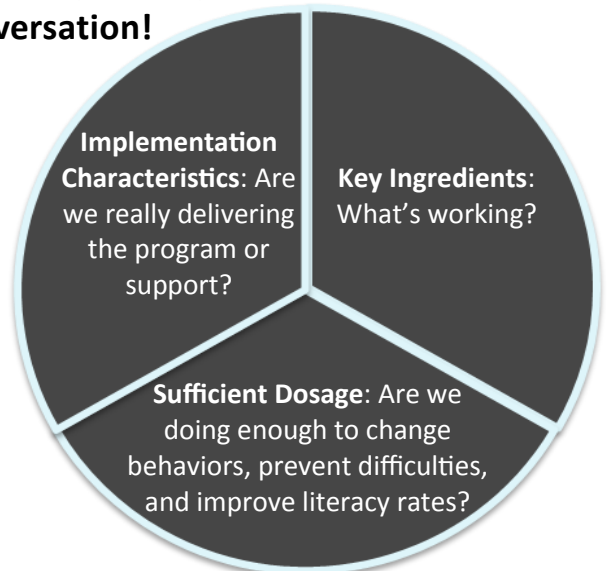### Provide Sufficient Dosage of High-Quality Programs

Determine if an increase in any of the following would advance children's literacy:

- how much time is spent in the program,
- how often it happens, or
- the frequency of contact with participants

Support High-Quality Implementation

- provide ongoing professional development (Memos 8 & 9)
- continually monitor quality, ensuring services implemented match the characteristics of the tested program design

Self-study for Impact: Lead the Conversation!

Implementation Characteristics: Are we really delivering the program or support?

Key Ingredients: What's working?

Sufficient Dosage: Are we doing enough to change behaviors, prevent difficulties, and improve literacy rates?

Find this memo and others at http://langlit.gse.harvard.edu