



Knology

Brooklyn Public Library's Center for Brooklyn History

Understanding Program Impact & Preparing for Remote Learning

November 6, 2020

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Executive Summary

In 2019, Brooklyn Connections hired Knology to provide additional insight into existing data collected from participating teachers and students, work with staff to redesign their evaluation tools, and collect new data to better understand how and why impact occurs. Brooklyn Connections, based out of the Brooklyn Public Library's Brooklyn Collection, offers resources that support New York City's educators and students. It is a partnership program designed to raise academic achievement in K-12 classrooms using a culturally responsive curriculum and access to archival materials.

Earlier this year, staff from both organizations participated in a planning workshop to devise an evaluation plan. They proposed an evaluation focused on two priority areas: **Archival Research** and **Identity**. Specifically, the partners wanted to understand whether educators and students, through cultivating an understanding of the archival research process, came to view the library as a fundamental Brooklyn institution. Furthermore, they wanted to know if students learned valuable research skills as part of Brooklyn Connections and if they could retain and apply them in other contexts and settings. Lastly, the partners sought to identify, characterize, and assess the ways through which Brooklyn Connections guides students from historical awareness to engagement with current social issues, and helps them cultivate new identities.

Knology and Brooklyn Connections staff had to put the original evaluation plan on hold as the COVID-19 pandemic swept the globe, shuttering both schools and libraries. With the effects of the pandemic likely to persist and influence decisions regarding in-person education well into 2021, we shifted the focus of the evaluation to best understand program impact over time, and help Brooklyn Connections prepare for the 2020-2021 school year. Through surveys and interviews, we explored teachers' perspectives on the learning affordances of current programming, and how these interactions and engagement shape students' identity, and the adaptability of Brooklyn Connections' programming and resources to online classrooms.

Overall, teachers continued to have positive perceptions of Brooklyn Connections. They liked the resources the program provides, and the opportunities for students to develop and apply research skills. A highlight of the program, as several teachers mentioned, was the opportunity for students to learn about Brooklyn's history through the lens of their neighborhoods and communities. Many of these historical lessons were tied to current issues to which students could relate, such as gentrification and the protests against systemic injustice. Another benefit of the program was students' exposure to the broader set of programs and services that their local library can offer including access to primary and secondary source materials for research purposes.

Overall, teachers also thought that Brooklyn Connections staff have transitioned well to an online programming format and many are enthusiastic about continuing the partnership. In fact, teachers suggested that including an online component would open the program to more participants and schools, further expanding the many benefits of participation.



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Introduction

Since 2007, Brooklyn Connections, based out of the Brooklyn Public Library's Center for Brooklyn History (formerly Brooklyn Collection), has supported New York City's educators and students through professional development workshops, after-school visits, and online resources. This partnership program aims to raise academic achievement in K-12 classrooms using a culturally responsive curriculum and access to original archival materials. The program uses local history to introduce students to archival research and inquiry-based learning.

Historically, Brooklyn Connections has used an anonymous exit survey completed at the end of the school year by both partner educators and students to measure program success and impact. Results of these evaluations have been consistently positive. In 2019, Knology was hired to help provide additional insight into existing data, assist Brooklyn Connections staff with a redesign of evaluation tools, and collect new data aimed at better understanding how and why impact occurs. This work aims to tell a more complete story of Brooklyn Connections and the difference it makes in empowering educators to effectively teach research methods, while also helping their students learn about their local history and build a sense of connection to their neighborhoods.

Exploring Existing Data

As described in *Brooklyn Connections: Analysis of 2012-13 to 2018-19 Data Looking Back to Plan Ahead* (Voiklis, Attaway, Norlander, & Ardan; 2020) Knology researchers reviewed and analyzed existing data that had previously been collected from participating teachers and students. We found that students' ratings related to their **experiences** and **skills** reliably predicted the probability of their ratings on two outcomes: changes in attitudes towards history and the valence of their overall experience with Brooklyn Connections. This report presented our analyses with the purpose of sparking conversation and planning in a workshop for the teams from Brooklyn Connections and Knology, held on February 5, 2020.

Developing the Evaluation Plan

Based on the brainstorming that occurred during the workshop, Knology developed an evaluation protocol explaining the research questions and a description of the data collection methods. Together, the teams prioritized two main areas to explore in future evaluation: **Archival Research** and **Identity**. For each of these, the Knology team articulated both "conceptual" and "research" questions. The conceptual questions were big-picture, overarching questions that emerged from the workshop. The research questions were the way we decided to operationalize the conceptual questions.

Topic #1 - Archival Research: Cultivating an understanding of the archival research process and an identification with the library as a key Brooklyn cultural (service) institution, rather than just a place to take out books.

- Conceptual questions
 - Library Connection: How does the community understand the connection between the program, collections, and library as a whole?
 - Skill development: Do students learn archival skills and are they able to retain/apply them in future context?
- Research questions
 - In what ways and to what extent does Brooklyn Connections help students learn transferable research skills?
 - In what ways and to what extent does Brooklyn Connections help students see the value of these research skills beyond historical/archival research?
 - In what ways and to what extent does Brooklyn Connections help students see the value of the archive and library beyond this one project?

Topic #2 - Identity: The purpose of this part of the evaluation is to identify, characterize, and assess the intermediate paths along which Brooklyn Connections guides students from historical awareness to contemporary engagement. Beyond its education benefits, the process of archival research may spark recognition of persons, places, and events from the past. This recognition may, in turn, spark affiliation with those persons, attachment to those places, and engagement with those events. By definition, this recognition connects persons, places, and events from the past to present persons, places, and events. Through this connection, archival research may amplify a Brooklyn (local) identity—affiliation, attachment, and engagement—that binds across time and other differences. This Brooklyn identity may motivate students to actions (or, at least, aspirations of future action) that serve the Brooklyn community.

Expressed symbolically, one can trace the *ultimate* impact of Brooklyn Connections along the following path:

Research → Recognition → Affiliation/Attachment/Engagement → Identity → Motivation → Aspirations/Actions

- Conceptual Questions
 - Identity Formation: What potential does participation in Brooklyn Connections have for cultivating the identities of teachers/students (in relation to Brooklyn's history)?
 - Catalyst for engagement: Does a closer connection with Brooklyn's history and a stronger identification with a contemporary Brooklyn identity offer distinct opportunities for social action or unique career paths?
- Research Question
 - In what ways and to what extent does Brooklyn Connections help students connect history to their own everyday lives?

The research questions were then used to inform instrument development. We originally decided on four different data collection activities, and created an instrument for each: attending classes' site visits to the library, convocation observations, student focus groups, and teacher interviews. In light of the school closures due to COVID-19 and predicting an atypical 2020-2021 school year, this report focuses only on teachers' responses to the

research questions. To completely answer these questions, we will need to conduct further evaluation with students directly to gain their perspective.

The COVID Shift

The reality of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures in March 2020 caused us to rethink our evaluation plan, as much of what we originally intended was no longer feasible. When schools went remote in March, so did the Brooklyn Connections program; however, the program staff sought to adapt and continue to engage with classes in various ways. To understand the program's impact over time, explore the atypical teacher experience during COVID-19, and prepare the Brooklyn Collections team to launch the program in the 2020-2021 school year, we decided to do a deep dive into teachers' perspectives on the program's learning affordances and how it shifts students' understanding of and connections to Brooklyn and the library. The conceptual and research questions articulated above continued to guide instrument development.

In This Report

Knology researchers designed and Brooklyn Connections distributed a short survey to all teachers who had participated in the Brooklyn Connections program (past and present) for whom contact information exists. The survey asked questions related to both the teachers' experience and their perceptions of the students' experience with the program. It also invited teachers to indicate interest in a follow up interview. These interviews further explored survey findings regarding program impact as well as ideas for adapting to a new virtual model. The findings from the survey and interviews are the focus of this report.



Survey of Partner Teachers – Past and Present

The Brooklyn Connections survey sought to gather data from teachers about current and previous participation, their experiences with the program, which activities and resources were most helpful for them and their students, and their plans for future participation. The sections that follow discuss their responses to the survey.

Methods

Data collection

Brooklyn Connections sent the survey by email to all teachers who had participated in the Brooklyn Connections program, where contact information was available, a total of 201 teachers. The questions differed slightly depending on whether the teacher was a current participant. Not all teachers saw all survey questions. The survey asked those who were no longer participating when they left the program and why. Teachers who said they had no interest in participating again were not asked in detail about program components or what they would like to see from Brooklyn Connections in the future. We received responses from a total of 55 teachers, or 27% of those who receive the request.

Analysis

We took a descriptive approach to the analysis, using tables and charts to report the numbers of teachers that selected each survey response option. We provide an R Notebook version of the present report that provides a tutorial for how to reproduce the descriptive data summaries and includes notes for how to perform inferential analyses when future conditions allow. Current conditions precluded an inferential approach here. This survey was new and addressed new circumstances; therefore, there was no prior data against which to compare (the present data can serve as hypotheses in future evaluations). The sample included insufficient numbers of people who contrasted on any between-subjects factor, and the one possible within-subjects factor—the three criteria for ranking program components — necessarily included different program components.

Results

We asked teachers about their partnership with Brooklyn Connections in the past year. A total of 11 teachers were participating for the first time while 21 had participated in previous years (Table 1). The majority of teachers who were not active partners in the past year wish to re-engage in the future (19 out of 23).

Table 1 Teacher reported years of participation in Brooklyn Connections Programming

Did you partner with Brooklyn Connections in 2019-2020	n
Yes; 2019/2020 was my first year	11
Yes, 2019/20 was not my first year (i.e., I've been a partner for 2 or more years)	21
No, but I am considering partnering in future	19
No, and no interest in partnering again	4

We also asked participants who said that they were no longer partnering with Brooklyn Connections about when they were last involved with the program. Teachers cited various reasons for why they stopped participating. Possible reasons included too much work for the teacher or their students, an unsupportive administration, a mismatch with their curriculum or teaching goals, etc. (for further details see the survey instrument in the Appendix for this report). Most teachers selected “Other” (n = 10). In their textual descriptions of the “Other” reason, several teachers mentioned that they had moved to schools in a different borough which prevented them from further program participation. Two teachers said that they had previously applied to participate but were not selected for the program.

Table 2 Teachers’ responses to a survey question about past participation

How many years ago did you stop participating in Brooklyn Connections?	n
1-2 years	9
3-4 years	7
5-6 years	6
7 or more years	1

Program Experience

We asked teachers a series of questions to understand how they felt about various parts of the program. Specifically, we asked them what parts they felt were most valuable, what program components were easiest to implement, and which ones they would be likely to use in other classes. Teachers selected and ranked up to three program components for each criterion. The results are shown in Figure 1 below.

Most teachers selected having a **classroom visit** from Brooklyn Connections staff in response to the questions *What do you consider to be the most valuable parts of the program* and *what were the easiest program components to implement in your classroom*. This was selected as the top option by teachers more times than any of the other options (n = 26 for “most valuable” and n = 30 for easiest to implement). When asked *“which program components are you most likely to use in other classes?”* the top choices were **Student Folder Materials** (n = 18) and **In-class Materials** (n = 19). Figure 1 summarizes how teachers felt about the core components of the Brooklyn Connections program. The color bars show the frequency with which teachers selected each program component, and the color gradations

show the frequency with which that component was ranked first (dark), second (medium), or third (light).

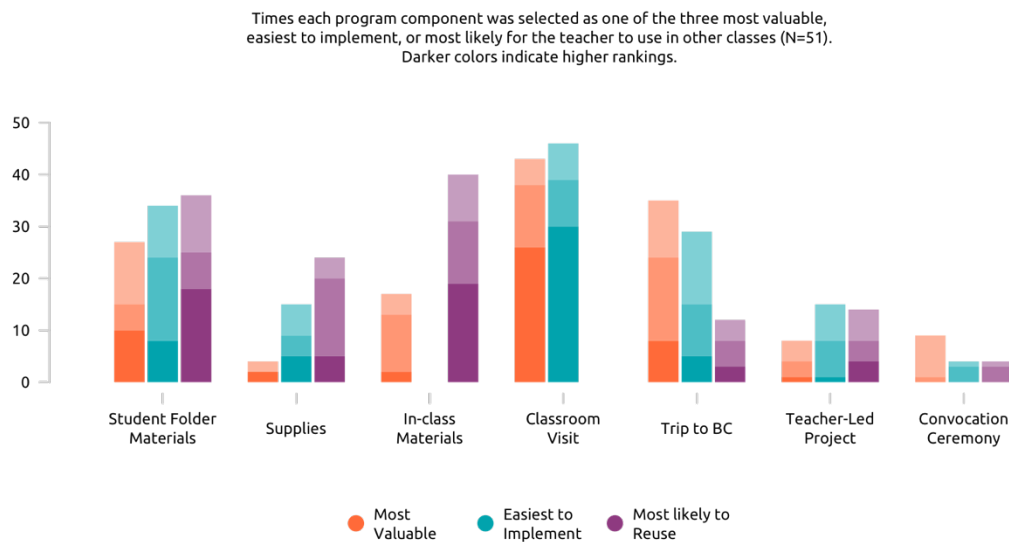


Figure 1. Participants were asked to sort the options provided for the questions in the order that best corresponded to their opinion.

Note: "In-class materials" was not an option for Easiest to Implement, and having a "Classroom Visit" from Brooklyn Connections staff was not an option for Use in Other Classes

We also asked teachers to identify which classroom activities were most helpful for them during the visit from the Brooklyn Connections staff. The results are presented in Figure 2 below. As above, the bars show the selection frequency, and the color gradations show the ranking frequency. Of all the options, teachers ranked "Bringing an outside perspective to students" first most often (n = 17).

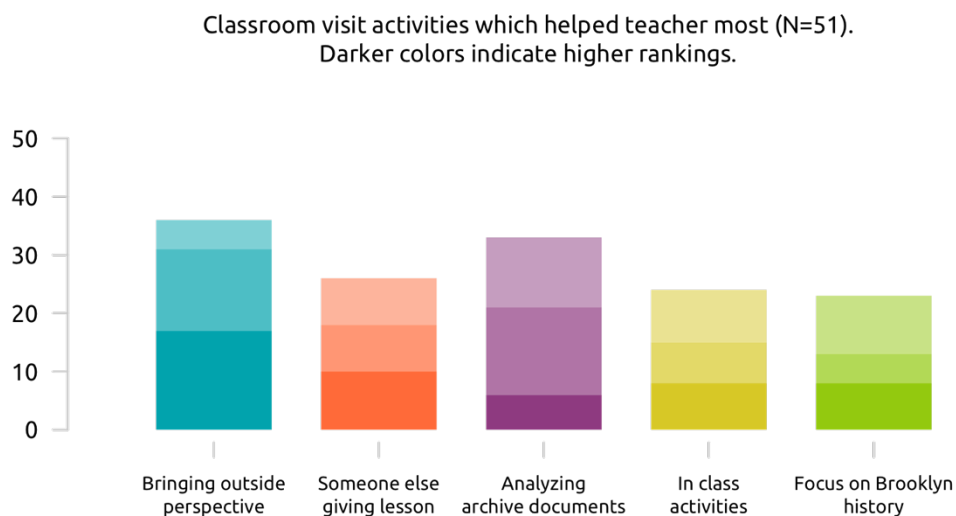


Figure 2 Responses to the survey question, "Which classroom activities during the classroom helped you most, as a teacher?"

Note. Teachers could select up to three options.

In response to a question about which field trip activities were most meaningful for their students, teachers said having students handle and work with the archival materials was highly meaningful. In addition to being the most-chosen options overall, “Examining and analyzing archival documents” was ranked first the most times (n = 15) followed by “Handling archival materials” (n = 10). Full results are provided in Figure 3 below. Again, the bars show the selection frequency, and the color gradations show the ranking frequency.

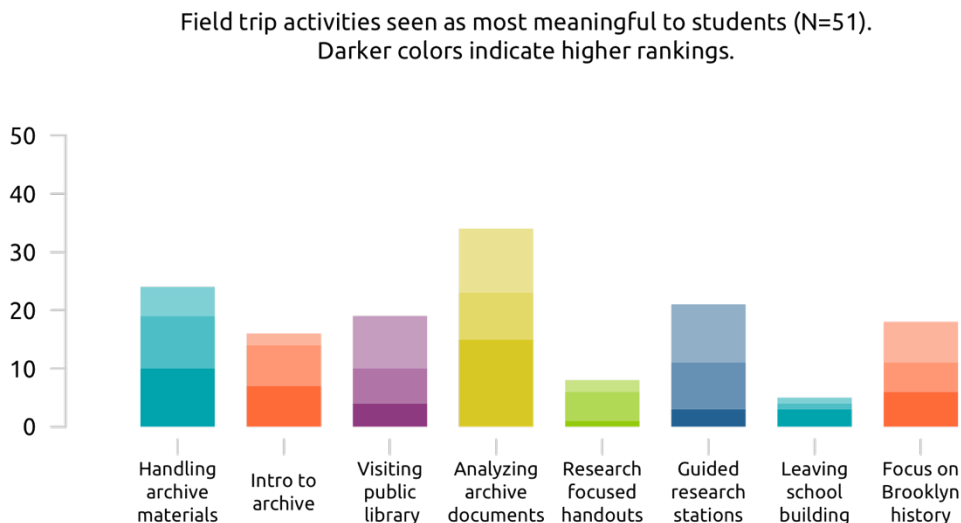


Figure 3 Responses to the survey question, “Which field trip activities do you believe were most meaningful for your students?”

Note. Teachers could select up to three options.

Teacher Responses to Open-Ended Questions

We asked all the teachers a series of open-ended questions to better understand their perceptions of Brooklyn Connections programming, and how it might fit into their plans for the 2020-2021 school year.

When asked to describe something that they had learned from participating in Brooklyn Connections, some teachers mentioned re-using primary source materials from the student folder, or lessons on research skills. Others said that participating in the program had helped them realize the value of teaching with primary sources, and/or including a local perspective when teaching.

Several teachers said that they were able to apply the research skills and strategies learned through the Brooklyn Connections program in other classes. For example, one teacher said, *“I was able to use what students learned with the Brooklyn Connections teacher in the classroom about internet research and apply it to remote learning.”*

In terms of changes, about half of the teachers had suggestions for ways to improve the program. These mostly focused on expansions to the existing aspects of Brooklyn Connections programming. Specifically, nine teachers said they would have appreciated additional chances to visit the library. Four teachers said they would have liked more

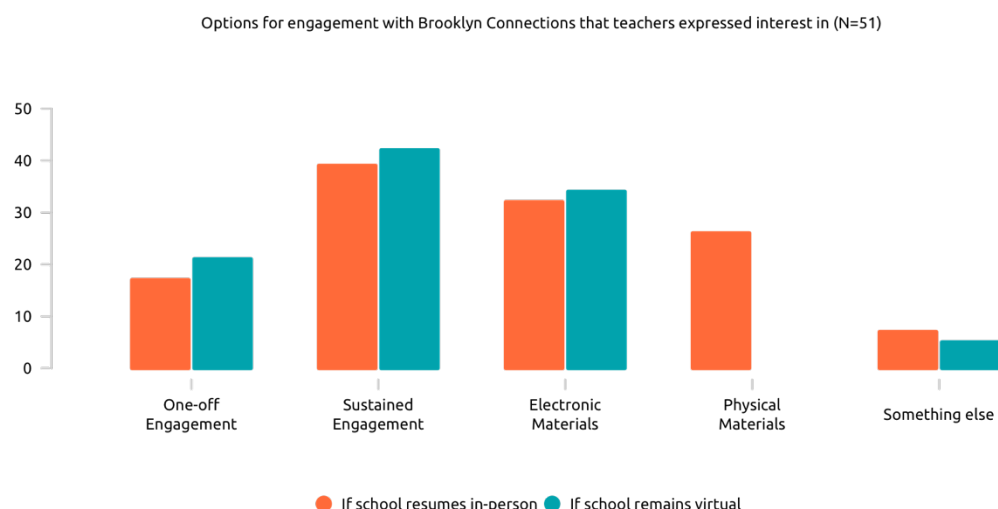


Figure 5 Responses to survey question, “If school resumes in-person in September 2020, we understand there may be limitations on field trips or outside visitors, such as Brooklyn Connections educators. If this is the case would you be interested in ...”

Note. Teachers could select all options that apply

Because of the move to remote learning for the 2020-2021 school year due to the COVID-19, teachers indicated interest in various support resources. Table 3 below list the support resources mentioned in the teacher survey and the number of teachers that selected each option.

Table 3 Teachers’ responses to a survey question about support resources

Which of the following additional resources would be helpful?	n
Locating relevant primary source material online	39
Ideas for developing engaging assignments online	32
Successfully adapting in-person lessons for online instruction	23
Developing engaging online presentations	34



Follow-up Interviews with Select Teachers

To get a deeper understanding of teachers' responses to the survey questions, Knology invited a subset of teachers to participate in follow up interviews with the research team. These interviews provided insights into teachers' experiences with the Brooklyn Connections program, their perceptions of student learning, and what kinds of support they would need to engage with the program virtually.

Methods

Recruitment and Participants

Based on their responses to the teacher survey, 42 teachers indicated interest in participating in a follow up virtual interview. Starting with this pool of teachers, Knology worked with Brooklyn Connections staff to identify 15 potential interviewees from the group that we felt could best provide useful feedback about the program. Various criteria were taken into consideration when selecting interviewees, including:

- Date and duration of partnership;
- Desire to continue partnership in the future;
- Grade level taught;
- Type of school where teacher worked;
- Location of school where teacher worked;
- Unique or otherwise interesting answers to open-ended survey questions; and
- Brooklyn Connections staff priorities and insights.

Brooklyn Connection's staff emailed the selected teachers to invite them to participate in the interview process. However, the continued shifts in timing for the start of a new school year and teachers' limited availability made it challenging for all of the selected interviewees to participate. We eventually reached out to the remaining teachers (from the original pool of 42) and extended the offer. The final sample included 15 teachers who, although they were not our original prioritized sample, represent a cross-section of Brooklyn Connections partnership types and Grades 4 through 12. This distribution attests to what we believe to be the generalizability of our findings. The grade breakdown by interviewee and their experience with Brooklyn Connections are indicated in the table below. Quotes used in the sections that follow have been edited slightly for clarity and readability, while retaining the intended meaning.

Table 4. Distribution of interviewed teachers according to grades taught and experience with Brooklyn Connections

Survey Response (N = 15)	Grade								
	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
I did not partner with Brooklyn Connections in 2019/2020, and no interest in partnering again in the future	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
I did not partner with Brooklyn Connections in 2019/2020, but I am considering partnering in the future	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	1
Yes, 2019/20 was not my first year (i.e., I've been a partner for 2 or more years)	0	2	0	4	2	0	0	1	1
Yes; 2019/20 was my first year of Brooklyn Connections	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1

Note: All grades are included, regardless of the year. Ex: If a teacher did Brooklyn Connections with 7th graders last year and 8th graders this year, both 7th and 8th are marked in this table, making the total greater than N.

Data collection

Interviews were conducted via Google Hangout or over the phone (as requested by the teachers). Two researchers were responsible for conducting and transcribing the interviews. For each interview, they switched roles - one researcher conducted the interviews and shared the audio recording with the other to transcribe using the transcription software Otter. Interviews ranged from 14 to 40 minutes.

Analysis

Themes for the analysis were derived from the goals of the interviews and aligned with the interview protocol. One researcher examined the interviews to identify how these themes were observed in the data. The themes reflected the ways that teachers had engaged with the Brooklyn Connections program and their perceptions of student learning and implications beyond their school life. Themes also covered teachers' expectations as well as the support they need to engage with the program virtually in the fall of 2020. In an iterative process, a second researcher reviewed these themes and incorporated additional ones that they observed during the interviews. The final refined set of themes are presented in the results section.

Results

General impressions of Brooklyn Connections

The teachers we interviewed shared overwhelmingly positive perceptions of Brooklyn Connections programming. One teacher referred to it as *“one of the best decisions I’ve made as an educator.”* Overall, teachers liked the way that the program introduced students to the library, helped them develop research skills, connected students to the history of the neighborhoods they live in, and improved their understanding of current social issues. They also liked the way the Brooklyn Connections materials could be used as they were or easily adapted for use with other lessons plans.

Teachers who were no longer participating in Brooklyn Connections typically ended their involvement for logistical reasons. These included transferring to a school that was too far from the Brooklyn Public Library, or in at least one case, moving to a new school with an administration that was less supportive of the teacher’s involvement in the program.

Only one teacher we interviewed did not plan to participate in Brooklyn Connections in the future. They explained that their students had lost interest over the years, and it became harder to get them to complete their projects. This teacher suggested that giving students more agency in selecting topics of interest, such as having them vote on what topics they would like to focus on, could help keep them interested in the program. As discussed in greater detail later in the report, topics that relate to current social issues or familiar locations for students seemed to be the most engaging.

Impacts on students

Teachers’ responses indicated the following themes in how they perceived the impact of the program on their students. These included impacts related to knowledge and skill development, as well as those related to students’ development as knowledgeable citizens. As one teacher summarized, *“I feel like the program opened the door, ... to connect students to the library which, beyond history, is an essential resource for kids to become comfortable and familiar with.”*

Developing and applying research skills

Teachers unanimously agreed that the research skills students developed through Brooklyn Connections would benefit them in their current school tasks and in the future. This was especially true for high school teachers who noted that their students would need these skills in college. However, elementary and middle school teachers also believed that the program helped their students develop useful skills. Learning how to use the internet for information, citing sources, avoiding plagiarism, and knowing the difference between primary and secondary sources were considered important skills across all age groups. One teacher said that they thought Brooklyn Connections filled in gaps in their school’s curriculum, specifically research skills that students need to succeed in higher education.

In interviews, teachers mentioned direct access to primary sources as a key benefit of participation in the program. One teacher said they were grateful that the library allowed their students to learn archival research skills because they would have been unable to

teach this due to other obligations. Another teacher described watching their students learning to use archival resources as seeing *“the wheels are turning in their brains as they're looking at [the primary resources], as they're trying to kind of put the pieces of the puzzle together. I think that's what I love the most seeing kids be able to do more active research with history rather than passive through a textbook. It's something that hopefully excites them more.”*

Teachers also said that the Brooklyn Connections program makes research more inviting and relevant, and that their students found engaging with the materials to develop the research skills *“less boring.”* One teacher referred to it as the perfect *“intro to research skills”* for middle schoolers or those beginning high school. Valuable research skills specifically noted by teachers included:

- Difference between inference vs observation;
- Using primary vs secondary sources;
- Writing skills (writing a thesis, crafting sentences);
- Citing sources;
- Avoiding plagiarism; and
- Using online search-engines effectively.

Teachers described the convocation ceremony as an opportunity for students to talk in front of an audience about how they had used their research skills in their projects. The four teachers who mentioned this said their students benefited by being able to share work with students from other Brooklyn schools, practice public speaking, and receive feedback from adults other than their teachers.

Gaining knowledge of Brooklyn

According to the teachers, students learned about history in an engaging way through the lens of a familiar place (the neighborhoods where they lived or frequented in their daily lives) through Brooklyn Connections programming. One teacher said that the program's emphasis on local history helps fill in the gaps in history curriculum that are not taught in the school system, which is driven by standardized testing and exams.

Teachers gave examples of historical figures and events important to Brooklyn culture that brought the history to life for students. Learning about Jackie Robinson's life, the historic neighborhood of Weeksville, the Prison Ships during the American Revolution, the Gowanus Canal, and the American Revolution sites in Prospect Park were all engaging topics for students. Comparatively, the role of Brooklyn Navy Yards in World War II was harder for teachers to connect to students' lives. Similarly, aspects of the American Revolution that were not specifically linked to a familiar place were more challenging for students to grasp.

Relevance to students' personal lives

Almost all teachers agreed that Brooklyn Connections programming helped students connect local historical events to their own lives. One teacher said, *“I think the most meaningful impact is the very fact ... that a child can actually see history ... not just as a subject, but as something that is real.”* For example, they had students that were learning about the life of Jackie Robinson who *“...got to realize that the Ebbets Field is just where the school is, and where the apartment buildings [of some of the students] lie.”*

The same was true for project topics that could be connected to current social issues. Most teachers felt that a deeper knowledge about the history of Brooklyn better prepared them to discuss current events like the pandemic; the protests against racial injustice, gentrification, and redlining; and even the pollution of the Gowanus Canal with their students. Teachers also said that relating historical events to the present can make them more vivid and relevant to students. For example, the American Revolution can feel like a very distant and difficult topic for students to imagine; however, learning that parts of it took place in a familiar location like Prospect Park, or seeing monuments like the Prison Ship Martyrs' Monument in Fort Greene Park can help students visualize some of the events that happened during the Revolution. Included below are specific examples of comments from teachers that demonstrate how they related the past to the present for their students. These quotes have been edited slightly to improve readability:

- **Gentrification** – *"The kids are seeing their neighborhood change, so we decided that we were focused on what the neighborhood was like in the past, what the streets were like."*
- **Social justice around COVID** – *"The materials were absolutely 100% relevant and useful ... some of the activities that we were doing around [topics such as] redlining ... and then the articles were coming out about how ... black and brown communities were disproportionately ... affected by COVID and housing, ... the moratoriums on rents, and all that stuff was coming into play. ... we've been talking about [these topics] all year, and here they are playing out in front of our eyes"*
- **Redlining** – *"I know that there was one girl in particular, her family owns a restaurant on Smith Street. And she was very taken with the redlining ... she understood that message. And then when we went to the Museum of the City of New York, ... she spoke some more about the redlining that she learned about in the Brooklyn Connections. ... [For] just even for one child to walk away with that kind of depth of knowledge, ... it gives you chills because it makes you realize that is a child ... that was really beginning to think critically... about the way that things were happening around her neighborhood."*
- **Black Lives Matter Protests** – *"[T]here's even one study, we did it very quickly with ... the Brooklyn Bridge, to know the history of the Brooklyn Bridge. And then you hear about the Black Lives movement and the people going across the Brooklyn Bridge, you can make that connection there. ... [A]nd then, being a citizen of Brooklyn ... it all ties in together."*

Learning about Brooklyn's history made some students frustrated about the consequences of some of changes that have been made in certain neighborhoods and communities (for example, learning about theaters that had been removed, or jails that had been recently built), and spurred conversations about social issues like incarceration and increases in crime, as well as gentrification. One teacher shared that learning the history of the neighborhood motivated some students to openly speak about wanting to be a *"positive change in their community."*

Sense of identity

Teachers described changes that they observed in students' identities in a few ways. According to the teachers, some students **developed a greater sense of pride** about living in Brooklyn after participating in the program. As one teacher put it, *"[I]t's giving them number one, ... pride in Brooklyn, and being from Brooklyn, ... and it's also giving them a sense of identity and just being knowledgeable of things that other Brooklynites or people are not aware of – facts and information that they don't know, they always love."*

Teachers who had students from immigrant families (e.g., from the Caribbean, China, the Middle East, Mexico) said that learning about Brooklyn's history helped these students feel like they were **part of a community**. The teachers also said that participating in the program helped create common ground between students from different backgrounds. *"Despite their differences from their backgrounds, ... I hope that maybe ... even though their parents weren't from here, or they weren't from here, [they have a] sense that we all live in the same area, and that ... [this] can be all of our history, even though we're not maybe originally born in Brooklyn. ... [S]o that could bring us all together, I would hope."*

Other teachers described identity indirectly **in terms of new roles** that students assumed. For example, one teacher said that their students seemed more devoted to current political causes because of their deeper understanding of the history of social movements in their specific neighborhoods, and in Brooklyn generally. Another teacher noted that learning more about the Gowanus Canal sparked their students' interest in protecting it and keeping it clean.

One teacher described the changes in their students' sense of identity in terms of how they **perceived themselves as skilled researchers**. They said that their students felt a sense of empowerment after learning how to do research through the program. *"I would definitely say that it did change that for them in terms of their identity in terms of like, I'm a researcher, I can do research."* Another teacher working in what they described as a "low-performing school" said that learning research skills, being video-recorded for the Brooklyn Connections promotion video, and getting to share their final projects with other schools made students feel confident and overcome stereotypes often associated with their neighborhood. This teacher also noted that traveling to the Brooklyn Public Library was one of the few times some of their students had ever left their neighborhood, which made the experience particularly meaningful.

Teachers with students in lower grades found it hard to reflect on students' identity, but overall felt that a deeper knowledge of Brooklyn history could help each student see themselves as *"a Brooklynite."* They also said that having schools located in close physical proximity to historical areas helped build students identity. For example, one teacher said that studying Weeksville, and learning about its significance for free Black communities in New York, was an impactful way to connect the past to present day New York for their students.

Transferability of skills and learning

Teachers overwhelmingly agreed that the research skills learned through Brooklyn Connections can be applied elsewhere. However, opinions varied in terms of whether students understood the broader value of the research skills they were developing. Teachers

thought it largely depended on the students' age. Unsurprisingly, older students were better able to grasp the value of the skills they were learning. It was easier for high school students, especially those nearing college, to see the importance of skills like knowing how to write a thesis and create a bibliography. As one teacher said, *"[I]t's a skill that they will absolutely need for any classes they take in terms of basic research skills, citation, making an annotated bibliography, developing a thesis, all of those are extremely important skills that they'll need later on."*

Teachers also offered examples of skills transfer between students. One teacher overheard students that had participated in Brooklyn Connections tell another student how to use Owl Purdue, and how to use the MLA reference style for another class. Two teachers shared that knowledge of the history of Brooklyn helped students work on the "Civics for All" program being implemented in their school and helped them gain a deeper understanding of social movements in their neighborhood.

Teachers of a variety of subjects (e.g., English, History, and Social Studies) mentioned that though they could not speak to use in other classes, the research skills that students learned as part of Brooklyn Connections would undoubtedly be beneficial in other subject areas as well.

Perceived value of Brooklyn Connections

Appreciation of staff and classroom visits

Having the Brooklyn Connections educator come into the classrooms was a highlight across the board for teachers. At least four teachers mentioned that the experience exposed their students to a different teaching style, and that even just hearing a different voice often helped the students get more excited about the sessions and value it as *"special."*

Teachers also said that regardless of the extent of materials shared with teachers, they were impressed with the Brooklyn Connections program staff, especially with their level of experience and preparation for the class. They also thought the Brooklyn Connections team could present material to students in new and interesting ways. For example, one teacher said, *"I can teach [students] how to read a map. But can I teach them how to read a map like a researcher?"*

Another teacher said they appreciated how the Brooklyn Connections educator modeled a way to help their students with research projects. They described it as an opportunity to assess their own teaching by having something to compare it to, and said they were considering ways to build on what the Brooklyn Connections team member taught in class, *"What have they said to the students that I need to continue? You know, what actions [did] I see them do? How did I see them ... like how they maneuvered the room?"* This teacher also appreciated *"the ownership that they left on the students like, this is your project, this is what you can do, you can create it."*

The in-class instruction also helped teachers learn new techniques to teach research that they could continue to practice with their students. One teacher said that they were now using some of the strategies they learned from the in-class visit including observation methods discussed, ways of asking questions, and note taking techniques that were shared

with students. As they explained, *“I tried to use that same process of observing, looking at a document, and making inferences from it.”*

Role and value of folder materials

Nearly all teachers that we spoke with used the folder materials and described them as a highlight of the program. All teachers agreed that the folder materials were useful for both students and teachers to gain hands-on experience and see tangible evidence of the historic events they were learning about.

Primary source materials, like maps and photos, were teacher favorites. Multiple teachers said the maps helped students understand social issues like redlining throughout the history of Brooklyn. They also said that their students were especially excited about seeing photos, maps, old newspaper clippings, and old menus. One teacher recalled the students’ excitement while looking through old phonebooks and seeing that people’s occupations used to be listed there. One teacher shared that the map provided by Brooklyn Connections still hangs on their classroom wall, and that their class has used it to discuss Brooklyn’s history. Teachers also said that the Graphic organizer was helpful for them and their students. At least two teachers said this was the most valuable material provided.

Teachers said that they used some of the folder materials in large projects to keep students engaged. Some of the project examples we heard about included building models of their neighborhoods, sewing a quilt where each student designed a patch inspired by symbols they learned about in primary sources about the underground railroad, and making a time capsule to show people in the future what it was like to be alive during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Several teachers said that the materials in the folder work well as supplements to existing lessons, or that they could be used independently. For example, teachers said that learning how to craft a research question and then going through the revision process for the question can be an entire lesson. Additionally, packet materials could also be assigned as homework, or used to track student learning or progress since all pages were already numbered and outlined. Multiple teachers said they appreciated how the artifacts had pre-written questions for the students, so that teachers did not have to make any changes to the materials.

Several teachers said during interviews that they use the folder materials for activities outside of Brooklyn Connections. One teacher liked the materials so much that they made photocopies and used them in classes that were not part of Brooklyn Connections. At least three others said they used the folder materials for lessons not connected to the program.

Teachers appreciated having resources that they could use to teach research skills. As one teacher said, *“the materials that I find ... interesting [are] not mainly the primary sources but the information, the PowerPoints that are put up on the various aspects of the research. ... [W]hen I’m doing my lesson planning [I think of] how I could use some information there to further simplify or further explain what I’m trying to teach.”* Some teachers said they used some lessons from the packet to help their students prepare for the Regents exam. For example, having their students practice document-based questions was a way to incorporate Brooklyn Connections programming with exam preparation.

Some teachers thought it could be challenging to incorporate Brooklyn Connections into their school or district's existing curriculum. One teacher said that if the topics were more closely aligned with the predesigned units of their grade level, they would prioritize using the materials in their classroom during the year. This teacher suggested that Brooklyn Connections could, for example, provide a lesson related to topics taught in their economics unit. They also noted that the time of year that the class participates in Brooklyn Connections may limit how much they can focus on program-related topics especially if these are not related to the predetermined unit for that time of the school year.

Value of the library and the archive

Overall, teachers said that visiting the archive at the Brooklyn Public Library was exciting and informative for their students, and noted that it had a positive impact on students' perceptions of the library. Some teachers mentioned their students were now more likely to visit the library compared to before. In multiple cases, during their visit, students got library cards.

According to their teachers, the visit broadened students' perceptions of what libraries are used for. A few teachers said that before Brooklyn Connections many students regularly visited their local library but thought of it only as a place to access computers, and were unaware of other services or opportunities it offered. One teacher said that many of her students did not realize that the Brooklyn Public Library building in Grand Army Plaza was a library.

Through Brooklyn Connections, students learned more about the breadth of services that libraries provide, and that they could check out media like comics and movies, in addition to books. One teacher shared that during a particular Brooklyn Connections lesson about using search engines for specific searches at the library they *"saw the little light bulbs turning on,"* as their students gained a deeper understanding of what libraries can provide. In addition, students *"learned how much of the process is already digitized and that they can use the library without even going to it,"* one teacher said in their interview.

The archive specifically captivated students, some of whom described it as a *"dungeon."* At least two interviewees thought that students were especially intrigued by the careful procedures involved in preserving artifacts, such as wearing white gloves while working with these items, or using mylar plastic to cover old documents.

Overall, teachers' responses suggest that the library visit was a highlight of the Brooklyn Connections program. One teacher summed the experience this way *"I think that was extremely rewarding to kids are able to see 'Whoa, this is more than just a space to write, you know, rent a book and get my homework done. This is a space that is trying to connect me to other parts of my community'."*

Adapting to support remote learning

Perceptions of value in an online format

All teachers interested in remaining involved with the program were satisfied, and more often than not impressed, by the way Brooklyn Connections handled the transition to virtual learning. In fact, most teachers interviewed were confident that the program would continue to be successful in an online format. Simultaneously, they expressed sadness about missing the in-person educator visits and the fieldtrip to the archive.

Teachers praised Brooklyn Connections educators' enthusiasm to join their class on online platforms, and their consistent communication with schools. Their positive experience during the initial transition to online learning made participating teachers confident in Brooklyn Connection's ability to provide virtual instruction this upcoming year. One teacher even thought their class benefited from switching to an online format because the Brooklyn Connections educator was able to join their Google Classroom and watch all the students' final presentations. The teacher thought that this would not have happened otherwise.

Almost all teachers were optimistic about the success of online format and the majority were eager to continue their participation. Overall teachers said that they would rather have an online version of Brooklyn Connections than not have it at all.

Suggested recommendations to the online program format

Interviews surfaced a number of specific suggestions teachers had to help Brooklyn Connections staff with the transition to virtual programming. They suggested offering **virtual tours of the library and the archives** so that teachers and their classes could continue engaging with Brooklyn Connections in a way that paralleled what was often a highlight of the in-person learning experience. Additionally, they recommended providing **pre-recorded or asynchronous lessons with the Brooklyn Connections educators** that teachers could use with their students, recognizing that remote schooling requires flexibility with regards to timing and scheduling. Another teacher noted that many of the **materials in the archive are already digitized**, making them easy to access for virtual use. Teachers also suggested providing **pre-recorded conversations with community members providing a local oral history of their neighborhood**, noting that this would bring more community voices into the program.

A few teachers pointed out some caveats to address with virtual lessons. They acknowledged that students already spend much of their days online. To avoid burn-out, they suggested making **the online lessons shorter**, and including **specific activities to ensure student participation**. For example, one teacher suggested that after students have an introductory lesson on how to read primary documents, additional online lessons could provide students with background information and sources for them to read in advance on their own, prior to coming together as a class for an interactive discussion.

To best suit the needs of teachers and students in a new online setting, one teacher suggested Brooklyn Connections **provide editable presentations**. This way, teachers can make changes to fit the needs of their student populations and make assignments that are compatible to various teaching and learning styles.

Teachers noted that the transition to virtual programming **could be an opportunity for more students to access the program**. Multiple teachers also said that one thing they would change about Brooklyn Connections is to **create ways to enable more classes to participate**. One teacher said that students who had already done the program would benefit from participating for a second year since the skills being developed needed to be reinforced over time. They said that the content of lessons could be adapted to avoid repetition. An expanded online format might make this feasible.

Concerns

Though teachers were optimistic about the prospect of video-based instruction, they still preferred in-person lessons with the Brooklyn Connections educators with one teacher explicitly stating *“the best parts are in-person.”* They expressed disappointment that these may not be feasible in the upcoming term. We heard a similar response about losing the opportunity for an in-person trip to the archive at the Brooklyn Public Library, and not having the convocation at the end of the year with other Brooklyn schools.

Some teachers were also concerned about losing the excitement associated with hands-on engagement with materials. For example, an English teacher said in their class, *“we do so much work with ... annotating ... absorbing the text physically ... it's a shift to think about how do we absorb a text?”* One suggestion was to incorporate TikTok or an artistic component to maximize student interest.

In general, teachers are still confident in the program's ability to be effective and successful in an online format. However, one teacher pointed out that if schools switched to an online format, students might have to work more independently on their projects. In this scenario, they anticipated needing additional support to help students complete large projects.



Discussion & Recommendations

Overall, teachers had very positive things to say about the experience of partnering with Brooklyn Connections. In general, they liked the way that the program **introduced their students to the library and its resources**. This was particularly beneficial for students who did not have much prior experience with the library and were unaware of the different services available to them. Teachers also liked the way that the program helped their students develop research skills using primary sources. Tasks such as searching for information on the internet, citing sources, avoiding plagiarism, and knowing the difference between primary and secondary materials were important skills for all age groups. Cultivating research skills was especially important for high school teachers who noted that these are necessary for their students' success in college.

Another highlight of the program for teachers was that it taught students about historical figures and events in Brooklyn. One teacher said that the program's emphasis on local history helped fill in the gaps in history curriculum that are not taught in the school system. Almost all teachers agreed that Brooklyn Connections helped **students connect local historical events to their own lives and current social issues**. They thought that learning about Brooklyn's history helped prepare students to discuss current events including the effects of the pandemic and the protests against racial injustice.

Teachers also described changes that they observed in students' identities. Some students developed a **greater sense of pride about living in Brooklyn**. Teachers who had students from immigrant families said that learning the local history helped foster a sense of community in these students. Several teachers said their students were motivated to make positive changes in their communities after learning about the history of social movements in their specific neighborhoods and in Brooklyn more generally. Lastly teachers said their students felt empowered after learning research skills through the program.

Several teachers talked about the experience of having a Brooklyn Connections educator come to their classrooms as a program highlight. This was also ranked as one of the most valuable parts of the program in surveys. In interviews, teachers said that they thought the Brooklyn Connections team presented material to students in new and interesting ways. Some teachers noted that the in-class instruction helped them learn **new strategies for teaching research skills** to their students that they would use in the future. Teachers also liked all of the materials that the Brooklyn Connections team provided including primary source materials as well as tools like the Graphic Organizer.

Another highlight was the visit to the public library and the library archive. Analyzing archival documents in particular was ranked as the most meaningful of all the field trip activities. Several teachers said that the visit broadened their students' perceptions of the library and many were **more likely to visit libraries** in the future than they were previously. One teacher noted that traveling to the Brooklyn Public Library was one of the few times some of their students had ever left their neighborhood, and that this made the experience particularly meaningful. Students also became more aware of the different services and programs that libraries offer including what kinds of materials they can borrow.

In light of COVID-19 and the shifting educational climate, about 80% of teachers said that they **were interested in sustained virtual engagement** with Brooklyn Connections, whether or not school resumed in-person. Those who want to continue the partnership suggested ways to adapt the program to work better for an online format. They were generally satisfied with how the Brooklyn Connections team has handled the transition to virtual learning and were confident that the program would be successful in the upcoming school year. Most of the suggestions focused on adapting existing programs to ensure that students' online experience of the program closely mimics the in-person version. The suggestions that they made included providing virtual tours of the library and the archives as well as providing pre-recorded lessons with the Brooklyn Connections educators. Teachers also asked for shorter lessons and more resources for students to work on at home.

In the future, teachers thought it would be valuable for Brooklyn Connections to continue with a hybrid model that includes an online component. They thought that it could be an opportunity for more students to participate in the program and learn new skills including how to conduct research at the library. At least one teacher thought it would be good to let students participate in the program for multiple years so that they have time to further develop the skills they are learning.

The original evaluation was intended to capture both student and teacher perspectives. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, as discussed in detail above, this evaluation focused exclusively on teachers, using teachers as key informants for student experiences. To more fully explore the research questions, we suggest conducting additional data collection directly with students.

Recommendations

Teachers had several suggestions for things that Brooklyn Connections could do to provide a valuable online learning experience through COVID-19 restrictions and beyond. These suggestions are highlighted in the preceding section focused on using a virtual program format to build on past successes and benefit greater numbers of students. We echo the recommendations that the teachers suggested in their interviews and we think implementing them will help ensure the success of Brooklyn Connections moving forward. We reiterate them here as a matter of priority in the 2020-2021 school year.

- Share strategies and techniques for teaching research skills with partnering teachers. Some teachers mentioned that this was something they wanted to continue reinforcing in their classrooms after the Brooklyn Connections visit.
- When planning programs, look for ways to explicitly link topics and projects to the school or district curriculum so that they align with teachers' existing lesson plans.
- Give students more agency in selecting project topics that they are interested in to help them stay engaged and involved in the program.
- Consider ways to use the virtual program experience to scale beyond what is possible with an in-person format.

References

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