Program Evaluation:

Behind the Book

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During the 2007-08 school year we conducted an evaluation of the Behind the Book education program. The principal objectives of the evaluation were to investigate: (1) overall program implementation and patterns of school participation, (2) the program’s impact on students’ engagement and motivation in reading (3) the program’s impact on students’ improvement in literacy skills, and (4) development of a culture of reading in the classroom.

We employed a mixed-method evaluation design with both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection. We used a combination of statistical and observational/interview methods, gathering data from different sources, and examining (or triangulating) the data looking for consistent or contradictory patterns. Data sources included:

• Interviews with Behind the Book participants, including school teachers, school liaisons, principals, and Language Arts or English administrators (n = 21). All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and analyzed with qualitative software.
• Descriptive observations of Behind the Book instruction, planning sessions, a Family Literacy Night, and other activities.
• Rating scales and open-ended questions from survey data from school teacher (n = 12) and administrator (n = 7) surveys.
PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND PARTNERSHIP

Behind the Book is an effective and well-run program that helps develop students’ interest in reading. Students learned about the process of writing from visiting authors. Teachers learned new ways to engage students in reading and the program helped develop a culture of reading in participating classrooms.

School teachers responded very positively to survey items about collaborating with Behind the Book. They overwhelmingly reported that Behind the Book “was an effective partner for their classroom.” They reported that authors were successful at engaging students, effective at working with the students’ age group, and that they aligned their activities with the teachers’ curriculum.

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<tr>
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<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<td>90.9%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
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<td>Behind the Book activities successfully aligned with my curriculum.</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>The author was effective at working with my age group.</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
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<td>The author was successful at engaging my students.</td>
<td>81.8%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
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Administrator Survey Question: Was Behind the Book an effective partner for your school? Please explain.

School administrators believed that the Behind the Book program was a strong and effective partner because it helped get students excited about reading and “brought literacy to life.”

- The program got students and teachers excited about reading. This excitement lasted beyond the normal day-to-day reading block.
- Definitely. Behind the Book is an essential component of our library/literacy program. The children are eager to read the books and excited to work with the authors and illustrators.
- Behind the Book is an extremely effective literacy partner for my school. Our partnership has been very beneficial to both the students and teachers.
- Behind the Book brought literacy to life by introducing the authors and the illustrators to our students.
- Most definitely! It gave our students exposure to contemporary authors and the opportunity to partake in literary discussions. The fact that the students received
their own personal copies of the books, with the opportunity to annotate as they pleased and the opportunity to share the book with family members and/or friends, helped to create, hopefully, life-long lovers of reading.

Administrator Survey Question: Would you recommend Behind the Book to other schools?

Administrators reported that they would strongly recommend Behind the Book to other schools. They believed the program was a positive and rewarding experience for teachers, parents, students and the school community.

- I do all the time.
- Yes, it has been a rewarding experience for all involved.
- Definitely!
- Absolutely. It’s been a tremendous asset to New York City public school children.

In interviews, teachers and administrators strongly endorsed the Behind the Book program.

I love the program. I just think it’s very beneficial for the students. – Principal

It was excellent. I would do it again, definitely. – Teacher

It was exciting because all my kids received a copy of the [author’s] book. They were really excited to read through it, and then to have the real life author come in and talk about how he wrote up the book. The kids loved that. – Teacher

I had a blast and I’m going to do it again. It was definitely worthwhile. – Teacher

They worked well with the kids. It was really an amazing experience to have them here. – Teacher

I enjoy working with the authors. I think they had a great rapport with the kids. I thought that they were able to give a completely different dimension to their work. It’s just such a nice tie-in for the reading and writing workshops that we’re doing. – Teacher

I wish every class, or every kid, would have this experience of working with a published author and illustrator…I mean, if they pick up a book and they know the author, I think it motivates them more to read and to write. – Teacher

Program Evaluation: Behind the Book – Page 6
We’ve been so satisfied with the program. We really feel blessed, because not every school has this opportunity. – Assistant Principal

Support for the Schools

Behind the Book was flexible in its implementation, coordinating with the schools’ schedule and aligning the authors’ work with teachers’ ongoing curriculum. Teachers and administrators reported that the books and authors were well matched with their classes, and that Behind the Book made an effort to accommodate teachers’ needs and interests.

One of the great things about Jo [Umans, Executive Director of Behind the Book], is whatever my vision is, Jo says, “Ah, we can do that.” One of the things that we’re beginning to consider this year is gender, and what types of books do our boys like and what types of books do our girls like. And how can we really engage boys around books, and how do we get books that they are really interested in and will pull them in? – Principal

One of the staff developers heard a presentation done by [Behind the Book] and called me and asked me if I’d be interested, and I said, “Sure.” It sounded like such a good idea. We started working on setting it up with Jo and everything happened just as she said it would. – Principal

Books and resources were made available to teachers and classrooms.

I think they’re doing a great job. They provide the books for us. They’re very friendly. They meet you on your terms. I like the program and I would regret it if they changed it. If they canceled it, I would be upset. – Teacher

School Leadership

Administrator Survey Question: What is most valuable about collaborating with Behind the Book?

Administrators reported that involvement with Behind the Book provided teachers with invaluable support and guidance.

• The most valuable component is the support we receive from Jo and the authors. Jo “watches out” for us and matches the authors with the students we have in our multicultural student body.

Administrators believed that Behind the Book provided a valuable opportunity for students to be more deeply involved in reading and writing, and to develop relationships with authors.
• The opportunity for the teachers to get involved with author choice, presentation, and writing component. Also, the opening of our children’s minds and the realization that writing a book is a strong possibility for them, too.
• The relationship that is built between the students and their authors and illustrators. The students also get a boost in their self-esteem seeing authors and illustrators that look like them.

Administrators told us they supported the program because it addressed English Language Arts standards and fit in with other initiatives, such as the TC Writing Workshop. Principals felt that the program offered their students a unique opportunity for self-expression and exposure to authors that they otherwise would not have.

When I met with Jo I instantly felt that this was something that I wanted to continue with, in terms of bringing authors into the building and getting children excited about reading and writing. I know what reading and writing did for me as a child. I really felt like it was an opportunity. – Principal

Behind the Book exposes my children to different experiences that they would never have had. – Principal

Our principal considers it just germane to our school. I mean, there are certain things that have impacted our school and made it what it is. And one is all the opportunities that we give kids to develop their talents and voices. – Teacher

**Authors and Student Engagement**

Behind The Book authors engaged students by sharing stories about their life and working process.

I think what made it really successful was that he made everything very personal. So in answering questions, he always went back to how he came up with ideas and telling stories. So by the end of the session the kids knew about his life and I think that’s what really pulled them in a lot more. – Teacher

I think she worked in a very easy manner with the children. I liked the interaction that I saw between [the author] and the students. They seemed to feel very comfortable working with [the author]. – Principal

Authors built relationships with students that helped engage them in the literature.
One of my girls had a suggestion for a character in his next book and he actually whipped out his little writer’s notebook and took notes and said, “Oh, this might end up being in my book.” And I think that was really effective because the kids were like, “Oh, I’m actually contributing to his writing.” – Teacher

I think [Jo] made an effort to bring people that the kids can relate to. So, [an author] was Dominican and the kids loved it. The girls were in love with her, and they could relate to her. – Teacher

A high school teacher pointed out that authors sometimes might have more authority than teachers when leading mature discussions about sensitive topics.

The last book we worked with was *Third Girl from the Left*, Martha Southgate’s book. It was a difficult book in terms of its treatment of sexuality, and I think it was a very mature book. And I thought it was really interesting how serious the conversation became. She modeled a mature attitude towards difficult material, and I thought that that was a really good experience for students, and something that an author has a lot of authority over, even more so than a teacher. – Teacher

## STUDENT PARTICIPATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Teachers responded very favorably to survey items about program effects on students.¹

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<tr>
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<th>Disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>Students gained new insight into books and stories through Behind the Book.</td>
<td>81.8%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
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<td>Students who were struggling with academic performance took on new roles in Behind the Book projects.</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
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<td>Students who were struggling with academic performance were helped by Behind the Book experiences.</td>
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<td>Students were better able to interpret and understand books and stories through Behind the Book.</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behind the Book helped struggling readers become more fluent readers.</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<td>Behind the Book helped fluent readers improve their reading.</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
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¹ Rows may not total 100% due to rounding.
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<td>My students better understand the meaning of books and stories due to</td>
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<td>Behind the Book.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My students are more verbally expressive due to Behind the Book activities.</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>My students are more engaged and motivated to read because of Behind the</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
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<td>Book.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My students improved their literacy skills because of Behind the Book.</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>My students improved their reading fluency because of Behind the Book.</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
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<td>36.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>My students improved their reading comprehension because of Behind the</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
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<td>Book.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My students enjoy reading more because of Behind the Book.</td>
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<td>27.3%</td>
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<td>9.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behind the Book improved my classroom environment.</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behind the Book helped develop a culture of reading in my classroom.</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
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<td>Students enjoy talking with each other about books and authors because of</td>
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- 91% of teachers reported that students gained new insight into books and stories through Behind the Book (when combining “strongly agree” and “agree” ratings.)
- 82% of teachers reported that students who were struggling with academic performance took on new roles in Behind the Book projects.
- 82% of teachers reported that students who were struggling with academic performance were helped by Behind the Book experiences.
- 91% of teachers reported that students were better able to interpret and understand books and stories through Behind the Book.
- 55% of teachers reported that Behind the Book helped struggling readers become more fluent readers.
- 73% of teachers reported that Behind the Book helped fluent readers improve their reading.
- 82% of teachers reported that their students better understand the meaning of books and stories due to Behind the Book.
- 82% of teachers reported that their students are more verbally expressive due to Behind the Book activities.
- 82% of teachers reported that their students are more engaged and motivated to read because of Behind the Book.
- 82% of teachers reported that their students improved their literacy skills because of Behind the Book.
- 55% of teachers reported that their students improved their reading fluency because of Behind the Book.
- 73% of teachers reported that their students improved their reading comprehension because of Behind the Book.
- 91% of teachers reported that their students enjoy reading more because of Behind the Book.
• 73% of teachers reported that Behind the Book improved their classroom environment.
• 82% of teachers reported that Behind the Book helped develop a culture of reading in their classroom.
• 80% of teachers reported that students enjoyed talking with each other about books and authors because of Behind the Book.

**Teacher Survey Question: If your students benefited from Behind the Book, please explain. What did your students say or write that indicated that they were learning?**

Students became more motivated to read, more deeply involved with books, and more willing to express themselves through writing.

• Student writing reflected extensions of the author’s style, especially during our poetry unit.
• In general, there was an enthusiasm about the authors’ visits. Many students read and wrote eagerly because the author represented a new audience.
• They were excited to learn what goes into creating a book. They now fully understand the parts of a book.
• The students were motivated to come up with their individual poetry book. They felt a sense of accomplishment with what they did.
• My students benefited tremendously from the program. Overall, it made them more careful and thorough readers because they really wanted to be prepared when the authors came to visit and work with our classroom. It was a very authentic way to help them become more engaged readers. They wanted to read carefully and discuss thoughtfully because they had a meaningful partner in this discussion: the author.

Students developed a greater appreciation for reading and writing through interaction with authors and illustrators.

• I think that the most valuable thing is that they saw themselves as authors, and that they saw an author as a real person. I think it changed how they viewed reading and writing books, and brought it to a personal level. Our author wasn’t just an author who came to our class. He’s this amazing, cool, fun person that they still refer to a year later, and he happened to write a book that they love.
• [The author’s] sense of humor allowed the children to open up and accept him into the classroom. He was hands-on and engaging. He explained and demonstrated what was expected and gave each child individual time to work on and share their project with him. He had excellent classroom management skills. He worked wonderfully with the children and they loved him.
• Students were able to develop insight into the writing process and author’s craft. Speaking directly with the author helped them deepen their understanding of their own lives as writers. This was evident in the level of questioning [by students].
Administrator Survey Question: Has Behind the Book had a positive effect on students’ engagement with reading or students’ literacy skills? If so, please explain.

Administrators reported that Behind the Book increased students’ motivation to read. Students learned to “explore higher levels of meaning.”

- The children still talk about authors and illustrators that they met several years ago.
- Instead of just appreciating the literal level of meaning, the students are analyzing and interpreting, thus exploring higher levels of meaning.

Students benefited from the personal interaction with authors. Meeting an author as “a human being behind the book” helped personalize and demystify the writing process.

- Students are offered the opportunity to meet an author, sometimes for the first time – an opportunity that many might not have had without the innovation of Behind the Book. Students understand that there is a human being behind the book. I truly believe that our students read more this year than ever before, as proven by our reading scores.
- Behind the Book had a positive effect as it has paired them up with the actual people that produce the products they have been exposed to. Putting a name and a face to literacy has an enormous impact on the students’ perceptions.

Interest in Reading and Writing

Meeting authors and learning about their lives inspired students and developed their interest in reading. Authors became “real people” that they felt they knew.

They definitely really took to [the author]. And so after that, if they’d see his name on something they’d be like, “Oh, that’s ______. We know him.” – Teacher

I think what helps the most is when the authors are able to…let them know where the ideas for the different story lines come from. – Teacher

It’s really a program about making sure that the kids can become lifelong readers. – Teacher

Students gained insight into the reasons why a book was written. They began to look beyond the end product of a written work, and to understand the process of writing.
Bringing an actual author who has published a book into the classroom really gets children to understand, “well, yeah…maybe that could be me one day.” That really brings a very unique element to the classroom. – Principal

They enjoyed Ms. ____ when she was reading the story or when she was talking about her own experience as a writer. They loved it. I could see that they were inspired to write more. – Teacher

I think it’s a great program. I think it really does encourage the students. It inspires them to write more, and they learn more about themselves as writers and artists. – Teacher

I have a student in fourth grade who sometimes says that she likes writing, whereas before, not much. – Teacher

They got to keep a copy of the book and they really cherished it. And months later they still have it, and read it, and talk about it, so it’s definitely supporting a love of reading across the board. It was really effective that way. – Teacher

High school teachers found that students learned to “value” books because they developed personal relationships with authors.

I think taking literature and valuing it is a big outcome…from their engagement with the author. A lot of students talked about how accessible [the author] was, or how real she seemed, how authentic, how genuine…With each author, I think that there is a real interesting amount of judgment…that goes on: measuring the author against their work, trying to understand the sincerity of the author, the artistic motivations of the author. – Teacher

Ask Me No Questions, which is the first book that we did in September, was accessible. The kids could identify with it, and they were willing to go through all the paces. With Tyrell – highly accessible, especially to non-readers and low-level-skilled kids – they ate the book up! I had kids who didn’t read who just really gobbled it! This may have been their first full book they’d ever read. – Teacher

High school teachers observed that the program stimulated interest in reading and writing, and that the students will continue to refer to, and write about, books they enjoyed.
I guarantee that when they take their Regents exams at the end of junior year – that’s two years after reading *Tyrell* – that most will still write about *Tyrell*. That book has meant that much to these kids, without a doubt. – *Teacher*

The program created a “buzz” among some high school students, leading to greater interest in reading by their friends.

The other kids are sometimes jealous [because] these kids are getting free books that they get to keep. Because then they talk about the books with other kids, or they see the books and the authors and [want to know] “How can I get a copy?”

– *Assistant Principal*

**Reading Comprehension**

Elementary and middle school students developed their understanding of written work. They learned elements of style and genre, vocabulary, characterization and interpretation. Teachers noticed development in vocabulary and writing skills.

They do a lot of post-it work when they’re reading the book. They have questions about characters or things that they notice that the writer did. Like, with *My Brother’s Keeper*, the kids [said], “Why did you use the little dots there?” It was interesting for the writer to explain that it just signified a long passing of time. It gave them some more strategies to use in their own work. – *Teacher*

They’ve really learned about how to read a piece of non-fiction work, how to pull out the important details, how to focus on a topic. –*Teacher*

I’ve seen growth in their writing as a result of it, extreme growth, [in building] vocabulary. – *Teacher*

They did learn formatting for different genres. They also learned point of view, punctuation. –*Teacher*

High school students delved more deeply into authors’ meaning and intent. They prepared for conversations about the books with their teachers.

[Students] usually ask questions that are aligned with issues or literary elements and techniques that we talk about. It could be the author’s use of voice, or the author’s point of view, and why did the author have the character speak in a particular voice, or why did the author choose a third person point of view as opposed to a first person point of view. – *Assistant Principal*
Self-Expression

Conversations about writing and books sometimes led to valuable discussion of difficult or sensitive topics. Students were “able to express their ideas in a respectful way” in their written work and in class discussions.

[The author] was really great with the kids. She had a lot of spirit. And she was able to connect to them. Her book is about a boy whose dad leaves the family and then he returns. A lot of children [in the class] didn’t have fathers and they would struggle with their own parent issues and the book really opened the doorway to talk about some of that. Because she was so down to earth, funny and warm they opened up to her. – Teacher

It just gave them the freedom to put their voice out there…And I think the topics really helped, because they were writing articles about things that were dear to them. – Teacher

The book, and having the author come in, really opened entry points of serious discussion for them. The book addresses name calling [and] one of the characters in there is actually homosexual, too. So these were topics that my students usually aren’t comfortable discussing. And the book actually brought out a lot of open and honest discussion, and [the author] helped facilitate that discussion, too. It was a surprise for me, because the kids were able to openly express their ideas in a respectful way. – Teacher

Students seemed more willing to take risks in their writing. They began to realize that the first draft doesn’t have to be perfect and they became less afraid to make “mistakes.”

In their approach, they’re more willing to take risks within their own writing and realize that it doesn’t have to be perfect. Because I think a lot of my kids are just stuck. They make one mistake and they rip the whole page up and it’s gone. Whereas after [Behind the Book] they’re a little bit more open to just experimenting and just seeing where it goes and where it takes them. – Teacher

Through working with an illustrator, students were able to explore their interest in visual art.

The kids who like to draw really enjoyed [the illustrator] coming, and they put more effort into their drawings than they would have if he wasn’t there. – Teacher

I think the program was great because when kids had certain talents it was brought out through the book-making process. You were able to see what kind of
artists they were. A little boy said to me, “I didn’t think I could draw until he showed that to me…Now I can draw!” – Teacher

There are some kids who are visually really strong, but their writing development is sort of behind schedule, so this was an opportunity for them to shine. – Teacher

The Writing Process

Students began to understand the effort that the authors made in conceptualizing, drafting and revising their work. Consequently, they began to put more time and effort into revising their own drafts.

They learned that you don’t just write something one time and it’s a finished product. It takes time. They have to learn how to revise and edit, [and] look for mistakes. And then the finished product is something that they can really be proud of because it took so much time to work on. – Teacher

That’s something that you can’t really teach on an overhead. That it’s hard for the writer who’s published and experienced to go through this. That it’s okay to feel a little confused when I begin my own process, or think about what it is I want to write about. – Teacher

I think the most memorable part, that really sticks out with them, is her discussing how long it takes – the editing process, and how many times that book has gone to someone, to the editor, and then given back to her for revision. – Teacher

I noticed that they understood more about the writing process, where they have to rewrite the drafts…Because my students, especially since they’re beginners, when they write something the first time they put so much effort into doing the first draft that when you tell them “Okay, you have to write it again” it’s such a big deal for them…But I noticed that they took it as a more positive thing, as in, “Okay, this is part of the writing process.” – Teacher

Students’ writing improved because students invested more time in editing and revision.

Some of their writing did improve because they wanted to spend more time to make it better. So they didn’t just write something really quickly. They thought about what they were going to write because they know it takes a lot of time to write something that is good. – Teacher

I think it encouraged the class to do more work and to really understand the whole writing process. – Teacher
I did talk to students about proofreading, drafting, all that. But when you have someone else that is not a teacher tell them, “This is what I do for my career. I’m a professional writer. I have to write again and again and revise.” So when they heard it from [the author] it was like, “Oh, this is something that we really need to do, not just because we’re in class.” – Teacher

Having learned about the editing process through the authors, students were more willing to stay engaged and follow through on writing projects.

Sometimes kids look at schoolwork as a chore. But now they’re listening to somebody say, “This is what I love to do, this is my life, this is how I live.” And they’re looking at [writing] in a different way – Principal

During our observations, students were fully engaged in the workshop projects, and teachers and administrators confirmed that most students were able to stay on task.

I did like the interaction that I saw when I was there between [the author] and the students. They seemed to feel very comfortable working with [the author]. When I stopped in when the illustrator was working, it was the same feeling. All the kids were busy because they were preparing these books. – Principal

Students practiced developing characterization through dialogue.

They worked on creative writing, learning how to make dialogue more realistic, how to define their characters through dialogue. – Teacher

Students developed an appreciation of the entire process of writing, from conceptualization through publication.

We’re beginning to develop our children as writers. Writers go through a process and that’s what Behind the Book does. It starts with a thumbnail sketch [and] it goes all the way through to publishing. – Principal

I think we talk a lot in school about the processes of writing and different types of writing, but I think the authors bring an authentic look at the process that the children may not be aware of, that the teachers may not be aware of. – Principal

Authors and Authentic Learning

Authors brought a rich and authentic learning experience to the classroom. Students’ personal contact with an author made learning “real” and developed their interest in reading and writing.
I think they’re more motivated to learn when they see a person actually in that field, telling them, “Look, this is how it is in the real world.” – Teacher

I think the main extra thing that he provided was that real life aspect of writing. – Teacher

The kids absolutely love it…We think of authors as these people who sort of exist in their own worlds, who write books. But to have a conversation and learn directly from the person who has written a book, or who has actually illustrated that book, is definitely something that excites our children. – Teacher

Talking with authors made the writing process less abstract and more genuine.

I think the most important thing is for the children to meet people who are in professions that they don’t necessarily see on a daily basis…For them to meet the [author] and actually see how they work, and for the person to talk about their own thinking while they were writing, is just so beneficial. – Principal

Teachers told us that the authors brought an authenticity to learning about reading and writing that they could not provide on their own.

I think the hardest thing to teach seventh grade middle schoolers is recognizing that there’s a craft behind the writing. That it’s not just somebody randomly putting words on a page. There is actual thought that goes into each word, each semi-colon, and each period that they use. And I think that when they meet the authors it helps them realize that there’s more to it than just sitting down and saying, “I’m going write a bestseller.”…It is a process. – Teacher

I’m not a published author, so I couldn’t teach them exactly what it’s like to publish a book. – Teacher

I think it becomes real – more authentic – to them because they see the teacher every day and we don’t make the connections to the real world. You think, “Okay, I have to do this, my Mother’s making me come to school, so I have to do this assignment.” And sometimes you think you’re writing for the teacher. And that’s why I really like their work published so that they’ll know, “You're not writing for me, you’re writing so that people could see this.” – Teacher

A high school administrator described how students learned to be better writers by understanding the process of writing instead of simply focusing on the end product.

It’s just a great value for our students to learn about the process that the writers use when they are writing a book, and the struggles and the frustrations that they
face when they’re writing. Because it’s important for our students to see that professional writers go through the same struggles that they go through as young writers just starting out. – Assistant Principal

Students were often excited to meet the authors. They identified with the authors who came from similar backgrounds.

The kids were really excited about the authors coming to visit. I think it gave them a new perspective on the books that they were reading. – Teacher

I think it’s very empowering for students to meet and interact with somebody who can serve as a role model. – Teacher

There’s one little girl that really fell in love with [an author]. I think she might have been more motivated to write because she could relate to her. She actually danced with her when she read a poem about dancing, and it motivated her to write her poems. – Teacher

Teachers commented about the connection between identifying with the authors and raising students’ confidence in themselves and their writing.

I think it was interesting for them to learn about the authors’ personal lives like [the author] from Harlem. That gave them the hope that just because we come from here doesn’t necessarily mean that’s where we’ve got to stay, and it doesn’t mean that we can’t use what’s around us as a powerful tool. – Teacher

I hope that the kids recognize that each of them has their own story to tell. And I think that for some of them it really touches home and gives them that extra inspiration. – Teacher

Working with the authors increased students’ motivation to succeed at reading and writing.

I remember at least one or two parents saying, “You know, my son or daughter has been talking about [the author]. They’ve been really excited and that’s all I’ve been hearing about.” – Teacher

I noted the enthusiasm in the class when I went in there. And after, when our guests had left, [students] were talking to me about what happened: “She was in our room and she showed us the book!” – Principal

Behind the Book authors provided new cultural experiences and different opportunities for presenting students’ work.
Just having Behind the Book exposes my children to different experiences that they would never have had. So for example, this year we’re having an Asian-American author come in, and then our kids are going to do a walking tour in Chinatown. And it’s not always apparent to everyone that, yes, we are in New York City, but some of my kids have never been outside of Bushwick. – Teacher

Our fifth graders are going to have their work on display at the public library. What an opportunity! They’re going to have the opportunity to visit The New York Times offices. What an opportunity! So just working with [the authors] really brings in a lot of new experiences, different experiences…And so I’m very excited about working with [Behind the Book] because I think it’s just another way of adding that element of experiential learning to children’s lives. – Principal

A Culture of Reading and Writing

Students worked collaboratively on writing projects and shared the presentation of their work.

I believe that they learned to work together. They partnered [on writing] some articles. At the publishing celebration, without me coercing them or anything, they got up and began to read their articles, taking turns with it, and that was sort of spontaneous. I think they learned the virtues of trust and sharing. – Teacher

It was just interesting to see…how nicely the class was able to conduct themselves…Asking questions and being respectful to each other and… just using [the publishing celebration] as an opportunity for themselves to shine. – Teacher

Students learned leadership skills through accomplishing tasks in teams.

I really felt that they learned leadership and taking initiative. Because they were given these press passes [for a journalism project], it gave them carte blanche to go interview certain people, whether it was a teacher or the principal. – Teacher

Students benefited from publishing, presenting and celebrating their written work. They were proud of their accomplishments and eager to share the experience with their families and peers.

One student came in a suit, so he took it as a very proud moment. And it wasn’t like his Mom forced him…It was a big accomplishment for them because they came in dressed up nicely. So I think that showed how they felt about it at the end. They were very proud of their work. – Teacher

Program Evaluation: Behind the Book – Page 20
They were more attentive simply because they knew that the goal was we were going be published, and that people would be reading our works. So therefore, [students feel], “I want to represent myself well and do a great job.” – Teacher

I like the process so much. We want to do it with every one of my classes. But I would like to continue working with [Behind the Book] because I think the product is very valuable for the children as well as the teacher. – Principal

The program established a classroom environment that valued thoughtful reading, questioning and rich discussion.

We were very well prepared….Jo had given us the books, all hardcover copies, and we had read pretty feverishly within three or four weeks…which is kind of a lot to ask of students here. But there was a lot of motivation to read and discuss the book. I gave the class time to read it, so we were well prepared and I think [the author] had a really good experience. The questions were all relevant, on point, and in-depth, and I think she really appreciated it. – Teacher

THE ROLE OF TEACHERS

Teacher Participation and Support

Most teachers responding to our surveys had over 6 years of teaching experience. About one-fourth of the teachers had less than 2 years of experience.

<table>
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<th>Years of teaching experience</th>
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<th>3 to 5 years</th>
<th>6 to 10 years</th>
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<td>27.3%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
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Teacher Survey Question: What was most valuable about collaborating with Behind the Book?

Teachers felt that the author visits were the most valuable aspect of Behind the Book. Students were more interested in reading books when they were associated with an author’s visit.

- By far, the most valuable aspect of our collaboration was bringing authors into our school and classroom. It was such a powerful experience for my students to be able to interact with two authors this year. They still reference their visits, and they were overall more engaged, excited, and accountable for the books we read through Behind the Book. As a teacher, I loved watching my students ask really...
thoughtful questions of the authors and respond to the text in a more meaningful way.

- The program demonstrated to the students that there are real live authors who write the books they read, and that the authors follow a writing process similar to theirs.
- Students had the opportunity to rub shoulders with famous authors. They were motivated to become real authors in the future.
- My children were very engaged in their work. They would always look forward to Wednesday, because that’s when the author or the illustrator would come to our classroom.

Behind the Book provided teachers with new ideas for teaching reading and writing. Teachers gained insights into how to engage their students.

- It opened my eyes to the way that I teach writing and made me consider other possibilities that I hadn’t thought of before.
- Behind the Book helped us take reading to a higher level. Instead of reading, retelling, and answering comprehension questions, Behind the Book facilitated comprehension by having the students experience the book-making process in the same way that the author did.
- This teacher/author collaboration helped me in the sense that active, meaningful, hands-on engagement keeps the students interested and on task. The students did not view the authors and illustrator as out of touch or out of reach because of their achievements. They viewed them as everyday people with different jobs. Additionally, before the author’s visits, I was able to engage the children in lots of shared reading in part because they knew the author and illustrator were coming, and they were really excited about that!

Administrator Survey Question: Was Behind the Book successful at engaging your teachers? Was it difficult to engage your teachers? Please explain.

Administrators were asked to describe teachers’ levels of engagement during Behind the Book. Many teachers were immediately interested in the program.

- Our teachers were engaged and have requested to work with Behind the Book again next year.
- There was no problem engaging teachers. The choice of authors provoked interest.

Administrators stated that some teachers were initially less involved as they attempted to juggle competing responsibilities. One administrator found the program difficult at first because teachers were unsure of their role.
• Different teachers demonstrated varied levels of involvement. The majority of teachers realized that the more you put into the program the more the children got out of it.

• Time is always an issue with teachers. They have so many day-to-day responsibilities with all of the data that is currently being used by our school for planning and setting goals. Teachers were chosen because they were known to go above and beyond their normal responsibilities.

• Initially, it was challenging for our teachers particularly as they were not certain about their role during the author’s visits.

**Administrator Survey Question: What is the best way for Behind the Book to get teachers engaged in the program?**

Administrators found that steady communication was most effective in engaging teachers. They also stated that additional contact with authors and allowing teachers to pick their authors enhanced the program.

• E-mail proved to be very effective this year. Also having the teachers pick the authors that would visit their classes helped create a greater sense of ownership.

• Invite them to literary readings/discussions by the authors either in our school or other venues where the authors may be speaking.

• Remain in constant contact with the teachers via telephone or email. Involve them in author choice, [and] provide more follow-up after the author’s visit.

Teachers told us they valued the program because the authors visit gave a personal perspective on the writing process, empowering students to develop their own skills.

The most valuable part of the authors coming in is just giving that personal perspective. Like, “I’m writing. This is how I come up with ideas.” Because often what my students struggle the most with is that they don’t view themselves as writers...Just hearing the author say, “Oh, I can do this. Here’s how you can do it too.” Giving them that pathway. – Teacher

Teachers also wanted their students to understand that books were written by real people and that their books reflected their personal experiences.

The impact that I hope it will have is that the kids might start seeing the life beyond the actual book. You know, realizing that writers are people that exist, that they get ideas from the world around them and incorporate that into the stories that they’re trying to tell. – Teacher

*Program Evaluation: Behind the Book – Page 23*
Some teachers collaborated with Behind the Book without specific expectations for their students.

I didn’t know what to expect…I heard about it, and I knew the kids got free books and some teachers spoke highly about the program. I wanted to do it also. Just the free books, I was like, “Wow.” But I didn’t know really what to expect. – Teacher

Teachers prepared students for the authors’ visits. Some did extensive preparation, while others made sure most of the students had finished the book.

I kind of felt nervous myself. But, you know, [the author] was pretty cool and…it turned out I was more anxious than I needed to be. So the second time around was a little bit easier. I feel more relaxed about working with them. – Teacher

We had a schedule to follow to make sure that we were on the right track so that we could have our [publishing] celebration when we had planned it. But I wouldn’t call it tedious work because we were having fun. – Teacher

I had them all start reading the book at the same time and gave them some background information. With [the book] we’re doing now…we’ll pay attention to the characters, start noticing the different tiers and start thinking about it from the writer’s point of view. Like, how does she know so much about being in a psychiatric ward? Or what are some of the questions that you might want to create for the authors? – Teacher

I did get a copy of both books a week or two before she came, so I introduced them. I read the books once to them, and set it up, and explained that this is an author that we’re going to meet. So they had an idea of what was going to be happening. – Teacher

Many teachers spent significant class time reading and analyzing the authors’ books before they visited their classroom.

[The teacher] frontloads the discussion before [the author’s visit] and facilitates discussions about the book, so that the students have done a close textual analysis and reflected upon some of the ideas expressed in the book. So that when the author comes they have a deeper grasp of the book. – Assistant Principal

Teachers showed their support by investing valuable time in Behind the Book projects.

It’s a challenge, because you’re trying to prepare the kids to make it meaningful and an effective workshop…You don’t want to just have the author come in, and
just plop them in the room with the kids…You have to structure it well. And then doing the writing, and doing all of the work is always a challenge, but that’s not because of Behind the Book. If anything, having met the author and having really invested in these great books just makes it easier, and makes it so much more meaningful and important to the kids. – Teacher

Teachers are overwhelmed these days. Sometimes they look at you skeptically but most of them embrace it and love it. – Program Liaison

We really had to push to get it together, which was tough…We had to revise things. So, yeah, it was tough, but it was definitely worth it. – Teacher

There were times when they were excited, and I had to make sure that they didn’t crash…I had to make sure that they followed through. – Teacher

The program sparked interest among other teachers in participating schools.

Some teachers would ask, “Oh, what’s going on?”…They would ask me because they were curious. And I said, “Oh, you know, it’s great. We get these authors to come in, illustrators, and [the students are] happy about it, they’re excited.”

– Teacher

### Professional Development

Teachers reported that Behind the Book improved their ability to teach reading comprehension and literacy skills. Almost all teachers were able to extend the work of Behind the Book into their regular classroom instruction. Most teachers reported that Behind the Book changed the way they taught. All responding teachers “would recommend Behind the Book to other teachers” and “would like to collaborate with Behind the Book again.”

<table>
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<th></th>
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<th>Agree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<td>0%</td>
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<td>36.4%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We were able to teach reading comprehension more effectively because of Behind the Book.</td>
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<td>36.4%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>18.2%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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</table>
I would recommend Behind the Book to other teachers.  

| Percentage | 90.9% | 9.1% | 0% | 0% | 0% |

I would like to collaborate with Behind the Book again.  

| Percentage | 90.9% | 9.1% | 0% | 0% | 0% |

Administrator Survey Question: Have teachers changed the way they teach because of Behind the Book? Please explain.

Administrators reported that participation in Behind the Book helped teachers provide more student-centered instruction and writing opportunities.

- Yes, rather than teachers conducting teacher-directed lessons, they are facilitating discussions in a seminar style.
- At my school, teachers are excited at the possibilities that Behind the Book offers. We have instituted “Book Talks” in our 8th Grade curriculum…We are committed to help students write more about the books they read, possibly in some kind of independent project which ties into the theme or genre related to the writing.
- The teachers have been exposed to various methods that can be used to engage their students.

A principal emphasized how professional development is essential to align the work of Behind the Book with other school objectives. Otherwise, teachers tend to see different programs as disconnected rather than part of an overall curriculum.

We have very defined curricula, and one of the areas that we really need to develop with teachers is to use the Behind the Book experience to enhance the work that we’re already doing. Some of our teachers see the work as separate entities. Behind the Book…should enhance the work that goes on in the reading and writing unit of study…And we really need to, through discussion and conversations, help teachers to realize that they don’t exist in these isolated vacuums, but they work together. And the strategies that you use in the Teachers College Reading and Writing [Project] are strategies that you can bring to Behind the Book, and vice versa. – Principal

Teachers incorporated instructional concepts they learned from authors and illustrators. For instance, a teacher described how she now taught sequencing.

From the authors, I still use a lot of “beginning, middle and end” whenever I do a story. Like, right now, we’re doing a study in African culture and I read them a folktale and said, “We’re going to write the beginning, middle and ending.”
The same teacher explained how she now has students depict the main idea of a story through illustration.

At the end, they did a cover, and I said, “Draw a picture. It was from the illustrator [that I borrowed the concept] that the picture should be the main idea.
– Teacher

Authors modeled effective classroom practice for engaging students in the process of writing.

I really think, for teachers, that professional development [is important]. Looking at the way the author brings children through their own thought process as they went through the process of writing the book – it’s a very transparent way for teachers to see what that process looks like. Seeing that first-hand gives my teachers strategies for when they go through the writing process with their children during another unit of study. – Principal

Collaboration

Teachers, authors and Behind the Book staff collaboratively planned the overall content and direction of the projects. The visits were most effective when there was good communication between teachers and authors and an atmosphere of mutual respect.

They have some set ideas that they want to do already, and then they bounce it off of me to see how it will work with my kids. And they’ll ask, “What kind of issues do you want to address?” and we hammer it out. – Teacher

We did communicate a lot [with the authors]… They would tell me, “Okay, for my next visit I would like them to finish their preliminary pictures” or “they should have the beginning of their first drafts.” So then I just made sure that they had it by that time. – Teacher

I would talk to her [author], and we would plan and brainstorm. And we always had a good idea of what we were going to do. It didn’t always turn out exactly like we planned, but we were prepared. – Teacher

Authors were responsive to teachers’ needs. Teachers let authors know about specific challenges in their classrooms and asked for help with individual students.

They were very supportive. We talked about any issues that we had. Like, if I would tell the author, “Oh, one of my students is struggling with adding details” she would try to talk to that student and try to go over the story and say, “Hmm, I don’t know, I’m having a hard time picturing that.” – Teacher
He was really great. He didn’t dictate to me what he wanted to do. So we were able to collaborate and work well together. I respected him as a reporter, and he respected me as a teacher. – Teacher

Curricular Connections

Behind the Book instruction aligned with the schools’ ELA curriculum and educational standards.

They revisit some of the skills that we did. For example, the author did drafting and revising. That’s something that is in my curriculum. So I was able to align [the authors’ work with our curriculum]. – Teacher

I thought about if it was going to interfere with the testing time, but it seemed like it just went along perfectly. – Teacher

I know one of the things that Jo and [the program liaison] worked on was aligning the New York State standards with some of the elements that Behind the Book brings into the classroom.” – Principal

Teachers told us that they were able to use the Behind the Book program to address standards and help prepare students for standardized tests.

You take things and you combine it…Once you have a novel to work with you can get a lot of teaching points in it. And I saw an opportunity…I could do essays with the students: persuasive essays, expository essays…that would not collide with my goal in terms of preparing them for the ELA tests. – Teacher

Behind the Book fits naturally into [the Teachers College] Writers’ Workshop, as far as meeting the standards. What we try to do with Behind the Book is align the projects with the state standards and the city standards. – Program Liaison

That’s what I like about Behind the Book – not only did it have vocabulary but they built upon it. It was a set curriculum. And I was able to use that curriculum [and meet] New York State standards. – Teacher

It fit in…they wanted to see which units we were working on…It was our personal narrative stories, so [Behind the Book] fit in perfectly. – Teacher

Sometimes the author visits and the projects did not match the teachers’ curriculum sequence, even though they addressed aspects of the standards.

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It fits into the curriculum, but it may not fit into the particular sequence…Writing is a big part of our curriculum in language arts, so it’s a good thing for us.

– Principal

Thinking back after the second workshop, I had a more clear idea of how things were working. I would have allotted more time during my actual curriculum planning…The skits aligned with that unit we were working on, but they weren’t actually part of the unit. So I gave them some time towards the end of our periods to work on it, but it wasn’t as aligned as it could have been. – Teacher

April is National Poetry Month. So it fit in well, but it went over a little bit. So I was a little behind in our writing schedule for the year, but it wasn’t a big deal because they had worked on something worthwhile. – Teacher

Challenges

Teacher Survey Question: What was most challenging about participating with Behind the Book?

A few teachers felt that it was difficult to align the program’s goals with their own curriculum. Some teachers were also concerned about their ability to fit in the program with an already overburdened schedule.

• Aligning it to my curriculum so that it did not become extra work, but a regular part of our unit of study.
• Coordinating with the curriculum.
• Sometimes meeting the scheduled author visits and having to read a book quicker than normal to be prepared can be a challenge.
• Trying to align the visits with the curriculum.

Some teachers found it difficult to engage students who were uninterested in reading and writing. However, they felt that ultimately they were successful at getting these students to participate.

• Getting the students to come up with creative stories for their own book. But they did it!
• Getting the students to work considering the students I have (Special Ed. Class). However, it was worth it.

In interviews, some teachers told us they found it challenging to devote enough class time to writing and revision.
The revisions [were challenging]. I would [have liked to] spend more time on the 
kids making their writing better, but by the end of the month all of their writing 
pieces are due so we really were pressed for time. – Teacher

A middle school teacher was not sure how much time should be devoted to editing. She 
wanted more guidance on how polished the final product should be.

The kids needed time to edit and [I wondered] “How long should this writing 
project take, and how good do you want it to be. Is it something quick and dirty, 
or is it something they put a lot of thought into?” – Teacher

A high school assistant principal mentioned that it would be better to have more contact 
time with authors because it was such a special opportunity for students.

It would be great if we could have the authors speak for two periods to our 
students. And we usually have a little reception afterwards so that the students can 
mingle with the author. And that’s very important for them, because this is an 
exciting opportunity, at such an early age, to meet a professional author. 
– Assistant Principal

It was challenging for some teachers to get students to read independently, outside of the 
classroom.

I have a real problem with reading a whole novel in class because it takes so long. 
But, unfortunately, our student body gets very little homework done, and rather 
than frustrate me and them we just do everything in class. So although [another 
teacher] is going the route of having them read at home she’s having a little bit 
less success than I am. – Teacher

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations by Participants

Teacher Survey Question: Do you have any recommendations for improving the 
program?

Some teachers requested more time with each author.

• I think it would be nice for students to explore more than one book by the author.
• More time with the authors.
Another teacher requested fewer author visits.

- I think that having three author visits per class is too much and I would rather that the program allowed for two author visits per class. This would allow more teaching of supplementary and related material.

One teacher would like to see younger authors visit her class.

- I would explore bringing more young authors into the classroom.

A teacher suggested adding a mentorship program for motivated students to work with authors and illustrators in a professional setting.

- I wish Behind the Book had a more sustained writing mentorship program, even if it was [only] with creative writing students. Another possibility might be to run some workshops with authors that students have to apply and travel to.

### Administrator Survey Question: Do you have any recommendations for improving the program?

Administrators had few recommendations, beyond increasing involvement of teachers, students and parents.

- If we could add another teacher to host authors, that would be great.
- I would only like to see more activities involving students and their parents in order to further promote literacy at home.
- No, I think it works well just as it is.

A middle school teacher suggested using authors that the students already know, and then building upon their growing interest in reading.

> We’re trying to get them to like reading, so meet them where they’re at for now. And then build on that love for reading where they can appreciate other cultures and other settings… I really would like to see some authors that the kids know, because if the goal is to get the kids interested in reading you have to meet them where their interests are – Teacher

A first grade teacher suggested more planning time with the author.

> It would have been nice if we had more of an opportunity to really set it up and to make sure that the activities that we were doing were going to fit and meet the
needs of a diverse set of students…I mean, she’s an author, so she’s learning about the education piece. – Teacher

A high school teacher suggested developing a mentorship program so that serious young writers can talk and work with authors on a regular basis.

I would like to see or establish some sort of mentorship program that would not be too onerous for the writer, for those really amazing kids to have something a little bit more lasting. – Teacher

A high school administrator suggested including authors whose work has been adapted for film.

Students could learn what problems arise in trying to change a book into movie form and get the author’s perspective on the transition. Because there’s a lot of letting go by the author when he has to turn it over to a director and the actors, who may give it a different interpretation than the author originally had in mind. – Assistant Principal

Inter-visitations could help new Behind the Book teachers learn how to collaborate with authors by observing experienced teachers.

We would certainly open up our school for teachers from other schools to come in to see how it works so that they wouldn’t feel as apprehensive about starting something like this. – Assistant Principal

Evaluator Recommendations

• Continue the current planning process with teachers and strengthen it where possible. The planning sessions we observed were successful. However, some teachers we interviewed still seemed unsure of their roles or uncertain of when, or how, they should finish projects. Some teachers likely need extra help to successfully incorporate the authors’ visits.

• Support inter-visitations between new Behind the Book teachers and experienced teachers. Consider this as the beginning of a larger Behind the Book network of participating teachers with understanding of how the program works best. Some teachers/schools might grow into demonstration sites for professional development or funder visits.

• Consider strengthening relationships with other professional development initiatives in participating schools. This could help relieve pressure on teachers are required to participate in potentially competing initiatives.

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• Allow some high schools to have only two author visits, instead of three. Establish baseline requirements for these schools to ensure that the experience is of sufficient depth and that teachers fulfill related classroom activities.

• A Family Night we observed in an elementary school was successful in generating interest and support for the program among parents and teachers. There was an unexpectedly large turnout, which led to some organizational challenges. Future Family Nights could conduct workshops in shifts, have families pre-register, and orient teachers and other adults who volunteer to help facilitate the event.