

Overview of Program and State Evaluation for Michigan

WHAT IS THE 21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS PROGRAM?

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative is a federally funded program that offers out-of-school-time activities for K-12 students in high-poverty areas. The activities are designed to improve students' academic performance and offer enrichment opportunities in a safe environment outside of the regular school day.

The programs are evaluated at the federal, state, and local levels. In Michigan, the state evaluation is being conducted by Michigan State University's Community Evaluation and Research Center (CERC), a department of University Outreach and Engagement.

This Research Brief is the first in a series of evaluation reports about the 21st CCLC programs in Michigan. We present an overview of the program, the evaluation process in Michigan, and the current research on factors that lead to better outcomes for youth in after-school programs. Subsequent briefs in the series will examine these factors in more detail.



BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Michigan 21st CCLC programs offer homework help, tutoring, and academic enrichment activities to help students meet state academic standards in subjects such as reading and math. They also provide other enrichment activities focused on youth development, drug and violence prevention, technology, art, music, recreation, and character education to enhance the academic component of the program¹.

The program's intent and focus have changed since its inception. When originally authorized by Congress in 1996, it was designed to create "community learning centers" to open up schools for broader use by their communities and to more efficiently use school resources. In 1998, under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the program was refined to encourage school-based academic and recreational activities after school and at other times when schools were not in regular session.

When the program was reauthorized under Title IV, Part B of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001², the new legislation emphasized serving students who were academically at risk. It required that programs focus on expanded educational enrichment opportunities for children attending low-performing schools. States were allowed to define additional criteria for funding. The Michigan Department of Education specified that each school for which services





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are provided must have at least 30% of its student population eligible for free or reduced lunch, an indicator of low family income. All grantees met this standard, and in 2005-2006, 60% of sites served schools where at least three quarters of the students qualified as low income.

Funds are awarded by the Michigan Department of Education on a competitive basis. Successful applicants can receive up to 5 years of funding. The first cohort of grants in Michigan were awarded in January of 2003, and by January 2007, three cohorts had been funded. Between 2003 and 2006 a total of 52 grants were awarded to 32 different organizations, with some having multiple grants. In 2005-2006, these grantees offered programming at 186 sites, including schools and community centers. The majority of the grantees were local school districts (16). Other awardees were charter academies (6), community- or faith-based organizations (7), regional/intermediate school districts (2), and universities (1). From January 2003 to the end of the 2005-2006 school year, 48,870 students were served in Michigan 21st CCLC programs.

Grantees can offer programming before or after school, on weekends, and during the summer. All Michigan sites offer activities after school. In 2005-2006 many sites offered additional programming:

- 16% offered before-school activities
- 17% offered weekend activities
- 78% offered summer programs (this will be a requirement for programs funded in 2007)

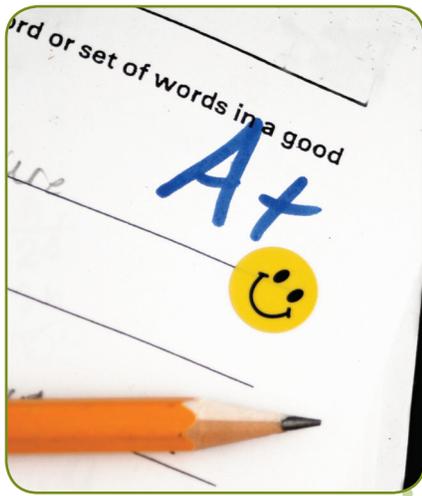
In program year 2005-2006, grantees offered an average of 13.5 hours of programming per week. A typical site was open 4.5 days per week for about 3 hours a day, with an average daily attendance of 35 students. The average yearly cost from 21st CCLC funds per student enrolled was \$978.

HOW IS THE PROGRAM EVALUATED?

The program is evaluated at three levels, each with a different evaluation focus (see Table 1).

Table 1: Levels of 21st CCLC Evaluation

| Level | Evaluation Focus |
|---------|--|
| Federal | Improved academic outcomes (grades, test scores, teacher ratings) |
| State | Improved academic and youth development outcomes plus associated characteristics of successful programs |
| Local | Improved academic and youth development outcomes plus information that will help with continuous program improvement |



Key questions of the state evaluation in Michigan are:

- Is Michigan meeting federal performance targets for student outcomes?
- How does the performance of Michigan 21st CCLC sites compare with the performance of sites nationally?
- Is the program more successful with some groups of students than with others?
- What are the key characteristics of more successful programs?
- What would make the programs even better?

The state evaluation uses data from both program records and school records, as well as from teachers, staff, parents, and students. School records and teacher ratings allow the initiative to track progress toward meeting the federal targets for academic performance and school adjustment. Data from other sources provide information from variety of perspectives about the program’s performance and help to identify characteristics of programs that are especially successful in meeting their goals. Table 2 lists the different sources of data and the types of information that we obtain from each source.

Table 2: Sources and Types of Data

| <i>Source</i> | <i>Data</i> |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Web-based program reporting system | Student characteristics, program attendance, activities, staff and provider information, program characteristics, and days and hours of participation overall and by activity |
| School records | Grades, test scores, attendance, suspensions, and expulsions |
| Student survey | Student perceptions of program quality and the extent to which they have benefited |
| Parent survey | Parent perceptions of the program, benefit to their child, and reasons for enrolling the child |
| Teacher survey | Teachers’ ratings of changes in student classroom behavior and performance |
| Staff survey | Staff perceptions of climate, job satisfaction, beliefs about quality, and practices |
| Administrator survey | Program and site administrator perceptions of climate, job satisfaction, beliefs about quality, and practices |
| Youth Program Quality Assessment | Site administrator and staff self-assessments of program and activity quality |
| Grantee Annual Report | Administrator reports of organizational and site successes, challenges, and program factors known to be related to high-quality programs |

Information about local programs will help grantees to identify strengths and weaknesses for program improvement.

As the state evaluator for the Michigan programs, CERC serves as a clearinghouse for program evaluation. CERC collects and compiles data from the local grantees for the federal evaluators. It also gives information about individual programs from the state evaluation to each of the grantees and their local evaluators in order to build evaluation capacity. Grantees and their local evaluators can use this information to identify strengths and weaknesses for program improvement.

WHAT LEADS TO BETTER OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH IN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS?

Because many working families have limited time or resources to support their children's education, after-school programs are becoming an important setting for informal or extended learning.

With more mothers entering the workforce, the need for after-school programs has grown. Michigan parents, particularly those from low-income families or families of color, have strongly endorsed the need for safe, enriching places for children to go after school³. The need is for more than a "safe place." Because many working families have limited time or resources to support their children's education, after-school programs are becoming an important setting for informal or extended learning. This is particularly true for low- and moderate-income children.

But do after-school programs actually have a positive influence on children's development or academic performance? A growing body of research suggests that participation in out-of-school-time programs can promote better school engagement, academic performance, and social adjustment. Low-achieving or "at risk" students in particular seem to benefit. However, the evidence has been mixed, with some studies showing no effect or even negative effects among students who participate.

What accounts for differences in results for after-school programs? A number of factors may play a role in making programs more effective.

Participation, or "dosage"



First, students must participate regularly over time if the program is to teach new skills or influence behavior. In many after-school programs, children attend irregularly or for only short periods of time. Student engagement in the program activities may be a key to obtaining good outcomes. What keeps students participating? Students may be more likely to participate if activities are of high quality, providing adult support and a variety of engaging and challenging activities. Participation patterns seem to be different for elementary and middle school students, so programs may need diverse plans for students at various grade levels.

Quality

Second, the quality of a program—how well it is implemented, by whom, and the kinds of activities offered—has received attention recently as an explanation for differences in program success. It makes sense that high-quality programs obtain better results, but how exactly do we identify quality? Evidence from research and practice has resulted in an emerging consensus about what quality is and how different factors come together to create positive learning environments for youth.

The quality indicators that have been identified fall into two general areas of practice:

- Program management and staffing
- Activities, interaction, and involvement



The most important program resource is a stable cadre of skilled, well-trained staff who are capable of conducting high-quality program activities.

Figure 1 illustrates a model of how quality indicators link to each other, to student participation, and to student learning. In our upcoming series of briefs, we will be discussing each aspect of this model in greater detail. At this point we briefly summarize some of the factors in each category.

High-quality program management and staffing

To achieve results, programs must maintain a focus on the intended outcomes and have the necessary resources to achieve them. High-quality programs have organizational policies, structures, and management practices that promote a positive learning environment. Effective leadership ensures that program objectives are directly linked to the intended outcomes, that activities are linked to each objective, and that all staff understand the program’s intended results. Programs that link directly with the schools and communities they serve are generally more effective and better able to achieve stability over time.

Programs also must have the resources needed to accomplish their goals. The most important program resource is a stable cadre of skilled, well-trained staff who are capable of conducting high-quality program activities. Adequate facilities, materials, and equipment are also needed to support a broad range of activities.

High-quality activities and interaction

Effective program management and staffing provide a foundation for diverse, interesting, and skill-building activities—the heart of any youth program. The National Research Council and others have proposed some processes that contribute to a positive developmental environment. These fall into three general categories:

- **Services.** Assistance provided *for* students to meet basic needs and provide a safe environment
- **Supports.** Relationships formed *with* students and *among* students that offer nurturing, standards, guidance, and a sense of belonging
- **Opportunities.** Activities offered *to* students to build their skills, try new roles, master challenges, have a voice, and contribute to the community

Services

First, programs must provide a foundation for learning by helping students and their families meet their basic needs. They must also provide a physically and psychologically safe environment in which students can learn and grow. Staff play a crucial role in creating this foundation by ensuring that students feel safe and that they receive any basic services needed.

Supports

Second, relationships with staff and other students provide the support, guidance, and sense of belonging that students need to learn and grow. Staff-student relationships are critical to making programs work. Effective staff are able to meet needs for nurturing, structure, and guidance, and to promote positive social norms for youth. Staff are better able to provide these supportive relationships in activities with higher staff-to-student ratios and

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with smaller total numbers of students. Peer relationships also affect student perceptions about program quality.

Opportunities

Finally, high-quality programs offer students opportunities—not only to be challenged and to build skills, but also to be leaders and participants in decision-making. The best programs offer a variety of activities in a rich learning environment. High-quality enrichment activities enable students to be active learners and to practice critical thinking and self-directed learning.

SUMMARY

Demand is growing for after-school programs that create a safe environment for youth when they are not in school. Because many parents lack time and resources to assist their children with schoolwork, these programs are also becoming an important setting for extended learning. The 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs focus on improving academic performance among low-income students attending low-performing schools.

Research and practice are beginning to reveal some factors that lead to successful outcomes in after-school programs. Figure 1 shows one model of how program quality factors may influence student participation and learning. In an upcoming series of briefs, CERC will use the extensive data set from the state evaluation of the Michigan 21st CCLC programs to further discuss these factors and to report on the effectiveness of Michigan programs.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Effects on academic performance

Dynarski, M., James-Burdumy, S., Moore, M., Rosenberg, L., Deke, J., & Mansfield, W. (2004, October). *When schools stay open late: The national evaluation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program—New findings*. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved February 28, 2007, from ies.ed.gov/ncee/pdf/20043001.pdf

Lauer, P. A., Akiba, M., Wilkerson, S. B., Apthorp, H. S., Snow, D., & Martin-Glenn, M. (2004, January). *The effectiveness of out-of-school time strategies in assisting low-achieving students in reading and mathematics: A research synthesis*. Denver, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning. Retrieved February 28, 2007, from mcrel.org/PDF/SchoolImprovementReform/5032RR_RSOSTeffectiveness.pdf

Effects on personal and social development

Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2007). *The impact of after-school programs that seek to promote personal and social skills*. Chicago: Collaborative for Academic, Social, & Emotional Learning (CASEL). Available from casel.org/home/index.php#pubs

After-school program quality

Eccles, J., & Gootman, J. A. (Eds.) (2002). *Community programs to promote youth development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Halpern, R. (2003, Fall). *Supporting the literacy development of low-income children in afterschool programs: Challenges and exemplary practices* (Afterschool Matters: Occasional Papers Series). New York: The Robert Bowne Foundation. Available from robertbownefoundation.org

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Michigan Department of Education, michigan.gov/mde/0,1607,7-140-6530_35090-39974--,00.html
- ² PL 107-110 of 2003. A description of the authorization of 21st CCLC programs is available online at kohl.senate.gov/21stcen.pdf
- ³ Afterschool Alliance, 2003. Findings from *America after 3 PM* household survey conducted by GE Consumer Finance and RTi-DFD for the Afterschool Alliance. Full reports available at afterschoolalliance.org

Pittman, K. J., Irby, M., Tolman, J., Yohalem, N., & Ferber, T. (2003, March). *Preventing problems, promoting development, encouraging engagement: Competing priorities or inseparable goals*. Washington, DC: Impact Strategies, Inc., Forum for Youth Investment. Available from forumfyi.org/store/prodpage.cfm?CategoryID=5

For details on evaluation measures, methods, and analyses, please refer to: 21st CCLC Michigan: Overview of Program and State Evaluation Technical Supplement. Available from outreach.msu.edu/cerc/21cclc.asp

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Briefs are available online at outreach.msu.edu/cerc/21cclc.asp

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