



21st Century Community Learning Centers Stable Funding for Innovation and Continuous Improvement

ABOUT THE OST DATABASE & BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Out-of-School Time Program Research and Evaluation Database (OST Database) includes profiles of evaluations and research studies about OST programs, while the OST Bibliography contains citations for all of the OST program evaluations and research studies that we are currently tracking. These valuable and easy-to-use resources can help you learn about and improve OST research and evaluation. To learn more, visit www.hfrp.org/OSTDatabase.

The publications in this series each focus on a particular theme of interest to the out-of-school time field, related to the evaluations and research studies that are available in our Out-of-School Time Program Research and Evaluation Database and Bibliography.

As the only federal funding stream that provides dedicated funds for afterschool programs across the country, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative plays an important role in supporting the innovation that takes place in afterschool programs.¹ Social innovation has been defined as a “a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions.”² In the afterschool context, this kind of innovation can take the form of (1) learning approaches and curricula that promote academic achievement, (2) program practices that support continuous improvement, and (3) new research that sheds light on markers of program quality.

The funding provided by 21st CCLC is often crucial for innovations that develop and test new ways to support children’s learning and development, especially those that are informed by sound research and evaluation on what works and why. By providing a steady and reliable stream of funding, the 21st CCLC initiative can enable programs to move beyond survival mode and to think deeply about how to develop new and creative platforms for learning and incorporate them into their programming. The other major benefit of the initiative is the flexibility it allows—21st CCLC-funded programs are able to explore different ways of serving youth and do not have to be tied to a specific prescriptive model. This *Research Update* focuses on evaluations and research studies that showcase innovations in afterschool programs that are supported by 21st CCLC funding.

About 21st CCLC Programs

21st CCLC funding is awarded to state education agencies, which then distribute the monies to local education agencies and nonprofits to support the afterschool programs in their communities. The 21st CCLC initiative funds out-of-school time (OST) programs (operating before or after school, and/or during summers, holidays, and weekends) that provide academic enrichment opportunities and other activities to complement school-day learning and support positive development. Beyond these common features, however, 21st CCLC-funded programs take a variety of

forms. They can be stand-alone afterschool programs or part of more comprehensive initiatives, such as those linking school, afterschool, and summer programming to provide year-round learning opportunities.³ 21st CCLC-funded programs can also be part of other types of models providing learning supports, such as community schools, blended learning environments (combining online learning environments with in-person learning), or organizations providing family support services that include an afterschool component for youth.

TABLE 1. Research Studies and Evaluations of Innovative 21st CCLC-Funded Programs

<i>Program/Study</i>	<i>Youth Activities Offered</i>	<i>Population Served</i>	<i>Evaluation/Study Purpose</i>
Communities Organizing Resources to Advance Learning (CORAL)	Balanced literacy instruction, homework help, and enrichment programming (e.g., art, dance)	Elementary and middle school youth in California	To understand CORAL's outcomes, lessons learned, and promising strategies for boosting student achievement
Enhanced Academic Instruction in After-School Programs	Enhanced math and reading curricula	Elementary school youth across 13 states	To examine whether structured approaches to enhanced reading and math instruction in afterschool programs produce better academic outcomes than unstructured, regular afterschool programs
LA's BEST (Los Angeles Better Educated Students for Tomorrow) Program	A safe environment, educational support, educational enrichment activities, recreational activities, and self-esteem and interpersonal skills development	Elementary school youth in Los Angeles	To examine programs' implementation and outcomes, and how characteristics of program implementation relate to youth outcomes
Woodcraft Rangers Nvision Afterschool Program	Homework assistance, fitness activities, and enrichment activities centered on a selected theme	Elementary through high school youth in Los Angeles	To explore the connections between program site quality and youth outcomes
Common Practices in High Functioning Afterschool Programs Study	Academic enrichment opportunities and other activities that support school-day learning and positive development	Kindergarten through middle school youth nationally	To understand exemplary practices in 21st CCLC-funded programs' organization, structure, and content delivery
Cost of Quality Out-of-School Time Programs Study	A variety of academic activities and non-academic activities (e.g., drama, arts, music, sports, technology, leadership development, life skills)	Elementary through high school youth nationally	To understand the costs associated with operating mature, high-capacity OST programs

Overview of the Programs and Studies Featured

Table 1 (above) provides an overview of the six evaluation and research studies included in this review. Three are large-scale research studies that examine specific research questions of interest in a variety of OST programs across the country. The other three are evaluations of OST programs in California—two of which are based in Los Angeles, and one of which serves youth statewide—that have been evaluated over multiple years. The programs examined across these six studies and evaluations serve a wide range of youth, from elementary school to high school.

How 21st CCLC Supports Innovation in the OST Field

The six studies and evaluations in this brief illustrate innovative strategies used by 21st CCLC-funded programs to test and develop new approaches and to contribute to the field's growing understanding of three important questions: What does it take to support academic outcomes? How can large programs incorporate evaluation to support continuous improvement? What elements are associated with program quality? Specifically, the first two studies listed in Table 1 put a spotlight on understanding how 21st CCLC-funded programming can promote academic achievement;

the next two highlight how 21st CCLC can be a critical support for the refinement and improvement of the OST field's "flagship" programs; and the final two show how 21st CCLC funding can offer crucial support in understanding what it takes to run a high-quality OST program—an understanding that is key for both program sustainability and youth outcomes.

21ST CCLC FUNDING SUPPORTS INNOVATIVE EFFORTS TO PROMOTE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT.

Many OST programs, including those funded by 21st CCLC, have been charged with finding new and effective ways to support youth's academic abilities, especially in disadvantaged communities and low-performing schools. As such, 21st CCLC funds have supported many programs aimed at improving academic achievement, including a number of programs that are testing new strategies designed to help the field understand whether and how OST programs can "move the needle" on academic outcomes. This section highlights findings from two such efforts.

CORAL. Run by the James Irvine Foundation from 1999–2006, CORAL linked communities, institutions, and residents around the common goal of improving youth academic achievement through the provision of structured literacy programming and enriching OST opportunities. Although the Irvine Foundation spearheaded this initiative, four of the five CORAL cities also received funding from 21st CCLC for their programming. The evaluation of this initiative revealed that developing an integrated approach to staff monitoring, coaching, and training was one of several strategies that supported positive reading gains among participants.⁴ This integrated strategy provided a different approach to literacy that proved to be successful in supporting struggling students in the OST context.

Enhanced Academic Instruction. The evaluation of Enhanced Academic Instruction in After-School Programs, a two-year intervention that provided math and reading instruction in afterschool settings to children in grades 2–5 with below-grade-level achievement, also examined outcomes related to academic performance. In these programs, which took place entirely in 21st CCLC-funded centers, two curriculum developers adapted their school-day materials to be used as a structured enhanced model for math and reading. A two-year random assignment evaluation found that participating in the enhanced math programs was associated with positive impacts on youth's math test scores,

although participation in the enhanced reading programs did not seem to lead to such positive impacts.⁵ The math curriculum, Mathletics, supports an approach to learning that moves beyond traditional educational methods. Specifically, it allows youth to proceed at their own rate, and includes such elements as small group instruction, hands-on activities, opportunities to practice the skills learned, games to build math fluency, and computer-based activities. The results thus suggest that the innovative math curriculum model holds promise for improving youth math skills in the afterschool setting.

21ST CCLC FUNDING SUPPORTS THE CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF "FLAGSHIP" OST PROGRAMS.

The 21st CCLC initiative funds some of the largest, most well-known, and longest-standing OST initiatives. The 21st CCLC initiative helps these "flagship" programs by maintaining stable funding, thereby allowing programs to devote resources to evaluation in support of continuous learning and improvement in the ongoing quest to improve outcomes for participating youth. In the two examples below, the evaluations focused on determining what aspects of the programs were associated with positive outcomes, allowing programs to focus their efforts on the strategies that yield the most promising results.

LA's BEST. In operation since 1998, LA's BEST is one of the largest citywide afterschool programs in the nation, serving over 14,000 youth per year with an annual budget of approximately \$36 million. LA's BEST has been in operation for over 20 years, with numerous studies demonstrating results on a variety of academic and social outcomes, and the program continues to grow and develop. A recent evaluation explored the role that staff members' "social capital" plays in supporting the success of LA's BEST.⁶ Using measures of staff–youth relationships (i.e., the presence of trust, bonding, and support), researchers found that sites with stronger staff–youth relationships had higher levels of youth engagement in the programs, which in turn was associated with higher levels of engagement in school and higher values placed on education. The evaluators also found evidence for a key pathway linking the quality of staff–youth relationships to both youth engagement and youth outcomes. These findings suggest that programs should devote more resources to fostering and supporting staff relationships with youth participants.

Woodcraft Rangers. Woodcraft Rangers (WR) Nvision After School Program serves over 15,000 youth with funding of nearly \$9 million annually, partially from the 21st CCLC initiative. In recent years, WR has focused its evaluation efforts on exploring how the quality of program implementation is associated with youth outcomes. Innovative strategies that have been emphasized in recent research on afterschool—such as parent involvement with the program and communication with program staff, choice and leadership opportunities for youth, and programs’ relationships with schools—were strongly associated with positive youth outcomes at middle school WR sites.⁷

INNOVATIVE RESEARCH ON 21ST CCLC-FUNDED PROGRAMS PROVIDES EVIDENCE OF WHAT MAKES A HIGH-QUALITY OST PROGRAM.

Youth are most likely to benefit from OST programs when those programs are of high quality. But what does “high quality” entail and how are programs finding new ways to address the issue of quality? Studies such as the two highlighted below are helping the field to understand just what a high-quality OST program looks like, by examining markers of quality in 21st CCLC-funded programs.

Common Practices in High Functioning Afterschool Programs Study. This study was designed to understand exemplary practices in 21st CCLC-funded programs’ organization, structure, and content delivery.⁸ The study identified over 50 high-functioning 21st CCLC-funded programs and looked across these programs to identify common practices that embody a high-quality program. The study found a number practices that were clear indicators of a high-quality program. One of these practices involved using research-based strategies and establishing a routine and ongoing evaluation structure. Having a research-based strategy can help programs to ensure that they are learning from innovative approaches and building effective strategies into their activities.

Cost of Quality Out-of-School Time Programs Study. Looking at over 100 high-quality OST programs, many funded by the 21st CCLC initiative, this study addressed the question of what it costs to run a high-quality program. The study found that staff salaries and benefits are typically the biggest drivers of costs among high-quality programs, and that these high-quality programs rely on a variety of funding sources, including public funding such as the 21st CCLC initiative, foundation grants, and in-kind contributions.

It also found that approximately one third of the total program resources came from public sources (federal, state, or local).⁹ These findings suggest that sustaining innovative programs requires sufficient funding allocated to staffing, as well a diverse pool of funding sources.

Conclusion

The 21st CCLC initiative is more than just a funding stream for afterschool programs. It has also helped support innovation and evaluation in the broader OST field by providing a stable source of funding for a variety of OST programs. This brief highlights three such areas of innovation and learning: promoting academic achievement, evaluating and continuously improving major OST initiatives, and providing high-quality OST experiences for youth. Practitioners can—and are—building on these areas of innovation and learning to advance their goal of building a high-quality OST system that supports youth in the nonschool hours.

As the only federal funding source dedicated to out-of-school time programming, 21st CCLC is crucial to developing and supporting quality OST programming that, in turn, promotes youth learning and development. As policymakers continue to discuss the evolving role of 21st CCLC funds in OST and expanded learning environments, this research brief underscores the importance of federal support for innovation and continuous improvement across the growing OST and expanded learning arena. ■

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Related Resource

Research Update No. 4: 21st CCLC-Funded Afterschool Programs (Nov. 2010) focuses on the benefits of 21st CCLC funding for afterschool programs supporting children’s learning and development. The brief also features a comprehensive bibliography of research studies and evaluations of 21st CCLC-funded programs. Available at: <http://hfrp.org/21stCCLC>

Acknowledgments

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Notes

1. Many educators and youth development professionals consider the 21st CCLC initiative as a distinct component of the broader OST landscape. This perception is fueled by the fact that many programs draw most—if not all—of their funding from 21st CCLC, are funded specifically as “21st CCLC programs,” and even include 21st CCLC in their name. In practice, however, 21st CCLC funding supports a diverse and dynamic array of programming in the OST field, which includes, but is not limited to, 21st CCLC-branded programs.
2. Phills, J. A., Deiglmeier, K., & Miller, D. T. (2008). Rediscovering social innovation. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 6(4), 34–43.
3. Deschenes, S., & Malone, H. J. (2011). *Year-round learning: Linking school, afterschool, and summer learning to support student success*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. Online at: <http://hfrp.org/Year-Round-Learning>
4. Arbreton, A. J. A., Sheldon, J., Bradshaw, M., & Goldsmith, J., with Jucovy, L., & Pepper, S. (2008). *Advancing achievement: Findings from an independent evaluation of a major after-school initiative*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures. Online at: www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/225_publication.pdf. The OST database profile of this program can be found online at: <http://hfrp.org/CORAL>
5. Black, A. R., Doolittle, F., Zhu, P., Unterman, R., & Grossman, J. B. (2008). *The evaluation of Enhanced Academic Instruction in After-School Programs: Findings after the first year of implementation* (NCEE 2008-4021). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Online at: <http://ies.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=NCEE20084021>. The OST database profile of this program can be found online at: <http://hfrp.org/EnhancedAfterschool>
6. Huang, D., Coordt, A., La Torre, D., Leon, S., Miyoshi, J., Pérez, P., & Peterson, C. (2007). *The afterschool hours: Examining the relationship between afterschool staff-based social capital and student engagement in LA's BEST* (CSE Technical Report 712). Los Angeles: National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST), University of California–Los Angeles. Online at: www.cse.ucla.edu/products/reports/R712.pdf. The OST database profile of this program can be found online at: <http://hfrp.org/LAsBEST>
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8. Huang, D., Cho, J., Mostafavi, S., Nam, H. H., Oh, C., Harven, A., & Leon, S. (2010). *What works? Common practices in high functioning afterschool programs across the nation in math, reading, science, arts, technology, and homework—A Study by the National Partnership* (CRESST Report 768). Los Angeles: University of California, National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST). Online at: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.167.7663&rep=rep1&type=pdf>. The OST database profile of this program can be found online at: <http://hfrp.org/CPHFAPS>
9. Grossman, J. B., Lind, C., Hayes, C., McMaken, J., & Gersick, A. (2009). *The cost of quality out-of-school time programs*. Philadelphia & Washington, DC: Public/Private Ventures & The Finance Project. Online at: www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofFocus/Out-Of-SchoolLearning/Pages/The-Cost-of-Quality-Out-of-School-Time-Programs.aspx. The OST database profile of this program can be found online at: <http://hfrp.org/CostofQuality>

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ABOUT HARVARD FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECT

Since 1983, we have helped stakeholders develop and evaluate strategies to promote the well-being of children, youth, families, and communities. Our work focuses primarily on three areas that support children's learning and development—early childhood education, out-of-school time programming, and family and community support in education.

Building on our knowledge that schools alone cannot meet the learning needs of our children, we also focus national attention on complementary learning. Complementary learning is the idea that a systemic approach, which integrates school and nonschool supports, can better ensure that all children have the skills they need to succeed. Underpinning all our work is our commitment to evaluation for strategic decision making, learning, and accountability.



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APPENDIX: 21ST CCLC FUNDING FOR INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

This appendix features listings of the programs, evaluations, and research studies discussed in *Research Update No. 8, 21st Century Community Learning Centers: Stable Funding for Continuous Improvement*. All of the studies discussed have also been profiled in Harvard Family Research Project's Out-of-School Time Program Research and Evaluation Database. You can view the full profile by clicking on the "View Profile" links below, or visiting www.hfrp.org/OSTDatabase.

Bibliography of Programs/Studies Discussed in this Research Update

Common Practices in High-Functioning Afterschool Programs Study

[VIEW PROFILE](#)

The Common Practices in High Functioning Afterschool Programs study was designed to understand exemplary practices in 21st Century Learning Centers (21st CCLC) programs' organization, structure, and content delivery, in order to develop resources and professional development that address issues relating to the establishment and sustainability of afterschool programs.

Huang, D., Cho, J., Mostafavi, S., Nam, H. H., Oh, C., Harven, A., & Leon, S. (2010). *What works? Common practices in high functioning afterschool programs across the nation in math, reading, science, arts, technology, and homework—A Study by the National Partnership* (CRESST Report 768). Los Angeles: University of California, National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST). <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.167.7663&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

Communities Organizing Resources to Advance Learning (CORAL) Initiative

[VIEW PROFILE](#)

Begun in 2001, this initiative in California works to link communities, institutions, and residents around the common goal of improving youth academic achievement through the provision of structured literacy programming and enriching out-of-school time opportunities.

Arbreton, A. J. A., Goldsmith, J., & Sheldon, J. (2005). *Launching literacy in after-school programs: Early lessons from the CORAL Initiative*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures. www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/192_publication.pdf

Walker, G. (2007). *Midcourse corrections to a major initiative: A report on the James Irvine Foundation's CORAL experience*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures. www.irvine.org/assets/pdf/pubs/evaluation/Midcourse_Corrections.pdf

Arbreton, A. J. A., Sheldon, J., Bradshaw, M., & Goldsmith, J., with Jucovy, L., & Pepper, S. (2008). *Advancing achievement: Findings from an independent evaluation of a major after-school initiative*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures. www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/225_publication.pdf

Sheldon, J., Arbreton, A., Hopkins, L., & Grossman, J. B. (2010). Investing in success: Key strategies for building quality in after-school programs. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 45(3&4): 394–404.

Cost of Quality Out-of-School Time Programs Study

[VIEW PROFILE](#)

The Cost of Quality Out-of-School Time Programs Study assesses characteristics of various types of out-of-school time (OST) programs, their requirements, and their associated costs. The study includes OST programs across six cities: Boston, Massachusetts; Charlotte, North Carolina; Chicago, Illinois; Denver, Colorado; New York, New York; and Seattle, Washington.

Lind, C., Relave, N., Deich, S., Grossman, J., & Gersick, A. (2006). *The costs of out-of-school-time programs: A review of the available evidence*. Philadelphia & Washington, DC: Public/Private Ventures & The Finance Project. www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/after-school/quality-and-cost/Pages/Costs-of-Out-of-School-Time-Programs.aspx

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Enhanced Academic Instruction in After-School Programs**VIEW PROFILE**

This study examines two interventions that provide 45 minutes of formal academic instruction during afterschool programs to students who need help meeting local academic standards. The enhanced instruction was implemented in 2005 in 50 afterschool centers in 13 states.

Black, A. R., Doolittle, F., Zhu, P., Unterman, R., & Grossman, J. B. (2008). *The evaluation of Enhanced Academic Instruction in After-School Programs: Findings after the first year of implementation* (NCEE 2008-4021). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. <http://ies.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=NCEE20084021>

Black, A. R., Somers, M., Doolittle, F., & Unterman, R. (2009). *The evaluation of Enhanced Academic Instruction in After-School Programs: Final report* (NCEE 2009-4077). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20094077/index.asp>

LA's BEST (Los Angeles Better Educated Students for Tomorrow) Program**VIEW PROFILE**

Begun in 1988, this program serves elementary students in Los Angeles, California. It has five goals: providing a safe environment, enhanced opportunities through the integration of an educational support structure, educational enrichment activities to supplement and deepen the regular program, recreational activities, and interpersonal skills and self-esteem development.

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Woodcraft Rangers Nvision Afterschool Program

[VIEW PROFILE](#)

Woodcraft Rangers (WR) Nvision afterschool program consists of school-based afterschool “clubs” for youth in Los Angeles, California, designed to promote academic, social, and physical development. WR's goal is to extend schools' capacities to provide safe and supportive environments beyond the school day and to help youth improve social, behavioral, and learning skills that contribute to school achievement.

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