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Oregon 21st CCLC Evaluation: Key Findings

Introduction: Oregon’s 21st Century Community Learning Center programs aim to promote academic success and positive youth development through expanded learning opportunities for students in Grades K–12 throughout the state. In 2011, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) contracted with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to design and conduct a comprehensive evaluation of Oregon’s 21st CCLC programs in partnership with the Gibson Consulting Group, Inc. This brief presents key findings from this evaluation, which is representative of the 2010–11 academic year.

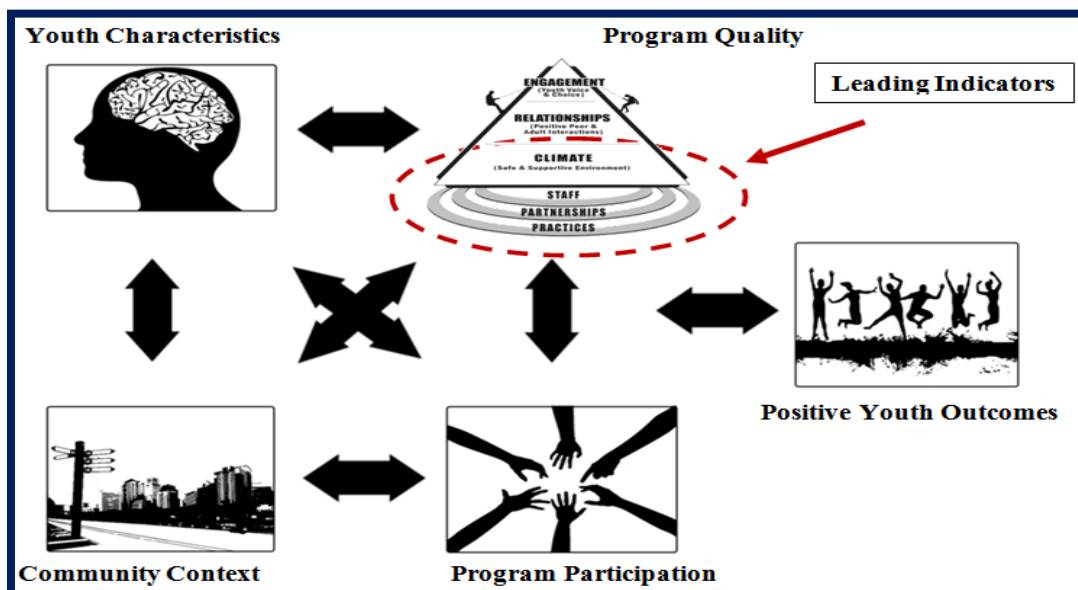
Evaluation Framework: The key objectives of the evaluation were to (a) measure 21st CCLC’s implementation of research-based best practices and approaches in afterschool programming and (b) assess the impact of 21st CCLC programming on participants’ academic and behavioral outcomes. Specifically, the evaluation addresses the following three research questions:

1. To what extent is there evidence that students participating in services and activities funded by 21st CCLC demonstrated better performance on the outcomes of interest compared with similar students not participating in the program?
2. To what extent is there evidence that students participating in services and activities funded by 21st CCLC more frequently demonstrated better performance on the outcomes of interest?
3. To what extent are 21st CCLC programs in Oregon aligned with the indicators of high-quality programming?

To address these questions, AIR utilized a theory of change (outlined in Figure 1) to depict the interrelated factors that influence youth outcomes in afterschool settings. The theory of change served as the guiding framework for the main evaluation components.

There were three main components to the evaluation, including (1) describing the grantee, center, and participating youth characteristics; (2) assessing how aligned 21st CCLC programs in Oregon are with indicators of high-quality programming; and (3) analyzing the impact of 21st CCLC programming on participant outcomes. The evaluation team collected data at multiple levels of program operations from multiple data sources (see sidebar on Data Collection Methods).

Figure 1. Theory of Change



Key Findings: Grantee, Center, and Youth Characteristics

Grantee Characteristics: There are a total of 44 active Oregon 21st CCLC grantees, which are largely school based (82 percent) and located in public schools (98 percent). A majority of grantees are mature (not in the first or last year of funding).

Center Characteristics: There are a total of 128 active Oregon 21st CCLC centers, serving an average of 209 total students and 85 regular attendees (those who attend 30 days or more of programming in the academic year). A majority (48 percent) of Oregon centers serves elementary students only, however; the tendency for centers to exclusively serve elementary students has been declining.

Compared with national trends, Oregon centers were slightly more likely to employ a mix of school day teachers, other school staff, and college students. Oregon centers tended to most often offer programming after school, as opposed to before or during school. Oregon offered slightly less summer programming compared with national trends. Activities offered in centers were most likely to include enrichment, homework help, or recreational activities. Centers were more likely to report focusing on content areas of reading, mathematics, and arts/music. Nearly all centers reported offering activities that specifically targeted students performing below grade level.

Youth Characteristics: A total of 26,719 students attended 21st CCLC programming for at least one day during the 2010–11 academic year, with 41 percent classified as regular attendees (attending 30 or more days in 2010–11). The average annual attendance rate in 21st CCLC programming was 65 days, with a median of 57 days (for regular attendees). Regular attendees were mostly white (50 percent) or Hispanic (35 percent). Approximately 73 percent of regular attendees qualified for the federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL) and 26 percent were classified as limited English proficient (LEP) in 2011. In 2010–11, between 12 and 13 percent of regular attendees were classified as special-needs status.

Key Findings: Alignment of 21st CCLC Programs in Oregon With Indicators of High- Quality Programming

Leading Indicators/Organizational Processes: Site coordinator surveys were distributed to centers to assess the degree to which centers aligned with indicators of high-quality organizational processes.

Centers were aligned with indicators of high-quality program communication and collaboration. High-quality indicators for program communication and collaboration are reflected by systematic, formal communication processes. Most programs were well aligned with indicators of collaborating with the school; centers offered structured times for homework assistance and aligning programming with the school day curriculum and standards. A majority of centers reported largely informal internal communication and collaboration, with formal communication and collaboration occurring a few times per year.

Most centers aligned with the quality indicators related monitoring staff performance. Staff performance monitoring was reported as informal in

Data Collection Methods

The evaluation framework collects data at multiple levels of program operations from multiple data sources.

Levels of Data:

- **Leading Indicators:** Organizational processes that reflect research-based practices. The leading indicators were jointly developed by AIR, ODE, and an advisory committee.
- **Point-of-Service Program Quality**
- **Center and Grantee Characteristics**
- **Participant Characteristics and Outcomes**

Data Sources:

- **Surveys to Assess Centers' Alignment With Leading Indicators**
- **Observational Measures of Program Quality**
- **Annual Performance Reports collected in the 21st CCLC Profile and Performance Information Collection System (PPICS), a Web-based data collection system**
- **State Assessment Scores and other Demographic Data for Participants and Nonparticipants**

nature, mostly through casual observations. More formal observations and methods of monitoring staff performance assure that staff are aware of and implement best practices for afterschool programming.

A majority of centers reported that they are developing staff capacity using a self-assessment process for program improvement efforts. However, there was a small portion of centers that did not align with this quality indicator; they reported never using a self-assessment process due to limited knowledge and/or time to implement it.

Centers were generally well aligned with the quality indicators related to intentional program offerings. Centers typically reported program objectives as supporting and improving the academic achievement of participants by offering targeted instructional time and tutoring for lower performing students. In addition, a majority of centers reported engaging in processes (e.g., action planning, logic models) to ensure that program strategies, activities, and content reflected program goals and expected outcomes. Centers also reported using student data to intentionally design program content and activities.

Last, centers were not typically well aligned with quality indicators of intentionality in family program offerings. Centers largely reported minimal communication with and involvement of parents or adult family members in program services; most interactions were limited to infrequent phone conversations.

Point-of-Service Program Quality: Observational measures at a small sample of 21st CCLC centers were used to assess point-of-service program quality.

Observations indicated that programs were well aligned with indicators of providing a supportive environment for participants. Observed program activities were typically characterized as well managed and positive in nature, with staff supporting participants through positive encouragement. However, sessions were less aligned with quality indicators of youth engagement—mainly associated with inconsistent staff use of strategies to encourage and maintain participant engagement.

Programs mostly demonstrated positive staff-participant interactions. In general, staff and participants engaged in middle- to-high-quality interactions that were characterized as positive in nature. However, staff sensitivity and participant sense of belonging was rated in the moderate range, with staff inconsistently demonstrating awareness of responsiveness to individual participant needs and/or problems. Observations were least aligned with items related to participant-led activities, with a portion

of program sessions scoring in the low range on opportunities for participant-led activities and/or content.

The final domain of point-of-service program quality relates to high levels of participant engagement. Observations indicated that programs were somewhat aligned with this quality domain, with global ratings of participant engagement in the middle- to high-quality range.

Key Findings: Impact of 21st CCLC Programming on Participants' Academic and Behavioral Outcomes

The AIR evaluation team conducted an impact analysis comparing a propensity-matched nonparticipant control group to regularly attending program participants to assess the impact of 21st CCLC programming on academic and behavioral outcomes.

Academic Outcomes: There was a significant positive impact of 30+ days of annual program participation on mathematics achievement, with participants attending 30+ days achieving an average of 0.567 points higher on state mathematics exams relative to nonparticipant comparison students. While this is a significant positive finding, the effect was very small. There was not a significant impact on regular attendees' reading achievement.

For 60+ day participants, there was a significant positive impact on Grade 9 mathematics scores, with participants scoring an average of 3.9 points higher than nonparticipant comparison students on state mathematics exams—a small effect size.

Behavioral Outcomes: For 21st CCLC participants attending programming for 60+ days, there was a statistically significant impact on the number of disciplinary incidents and number of disciplinary days. Participants attending 60+ days had a 5 percent decrease in disciplinary incidents; however, they also had a 6 percent increase in the number of disciplinary days relative to nonparticipant comparison students—a small effect. The discrepancy in these findings is not clear and should be explored in future work. When assessing the impact of 21st CCLC participation on behavioral outcomes within specific grades (Grades 4–12), the findings were largely mixed and inconclusive—with both small positive and small negative effects of 21st CCLC participation on particular grades. Again, the reason for the inconsistent findings is unclear and should be explored in future work.

Evaluation Summary: The findings of the evaluation suggest that Oregon 21st CCLC programs have made progress towards the goal of promoting academic and youth development as demonstrated by small but significant positive impacts on mathematics achievement and a decrease in disciplinary days. However, inconsistencies in other findings on youth outcomes demonstrate a need to ensure that grantees, centers, and staff are have the supports, resources and related opportunity to align themselves with leading indicators for program quality. Areas where Oregon’s 21st CCLC centers demonstrated strong alignment with the quality indicators and areas for further exploration are outlined in Figures 2 and 3—according to organizational and point-of-service quality indicators. A quality improvement process that builds on centers’ demonstrated alignments and works towards better alignment in the areas of improvement will enable programs to obtain more consistent and robust participant outcomes.

Figure 2. Demonstrated Strengths

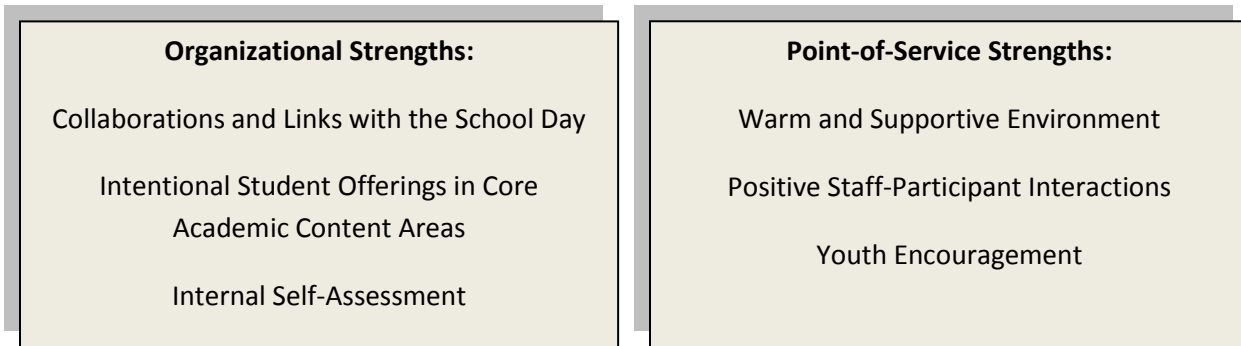


Figure 3. Areas for Further Exploration

