

## ENSURING EQUITY, ACCESS, AND QUALITY IN 21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS

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### ISSUE OVERVIEW

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program, authorized under the No Child Left Behind Act, provides U.S. Department of Education funding for afterschool programs. This funding, administered to grantees through state departments of education, is geared toward helping afterschool programs provide academic enrichment, tutoring, technology education, youth development activities, character education, drug and violence prevention, counseling, art and music, and recreation for children and youth in low-performing schools.

This edition of Policy Issues looks at the status of access, equity, and quality issues affecting the 21st CCLC afterschool initiative. The issue begins with background information on the 21st CCLC program, followed by an overview of grantee data on 21st CCLC program characteristics from the 21st CCLC Profile and Performance Collection Information System database developed by Learning Point Associates. The issue continues with a discussion of the research on afterschool programs and a focus on effective technical assistance that can improve afterschool instructional strategies to meet the needs of diverse student populations. The issue concludes with policy recommendations that can ensure access and equity in all systems supporting 21st CCLC programs. Specific examples of successful afterschool programs are included. In addition, a summary chart presents the key challenges, policy options, and technical assistance principles discussed.

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## INTRODUCTION

Students across the country attend school for approximately six hours a day during the school year, but what happens each day after they leave the classroom? Research indicates that on school days, students are most likely to engage in destructive behaviors—including cigarette and drug use, juvenile crime and violence, sexual activities, and vandalism—between the hours of 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. (Newman, Fox, Flynn, & Christeson, 2000). One goal of afterschool programs is to provide a safe and productive environment for students during the out-of-school hours, especially through academic enrichment opportunities and youth development activities. To reach this goal, issues of equity, access, and quality should be important considerations for afterschool programs. According to Laurie Olsen (2000), executive director of California Tomorrow, “While funding tends to be universal and non-needs based, the concerns addressed by after-school programs disproportionately impact poor children, immigrant children, and youth of color” (p. 5).

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program, reauthorized under Title IV, Part B, of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2002), requires states to award grants with absolute priority to afterschool programs serving high-poverty schools and competitive priority to programs serving low-performing schools. Although many afterschool programs have strengthened their academic focus and are having a positive impact on student achievement, there are still student populations that need to be reached and programs that need equitable resources and quality reinforcements.

A recent study conducted by Public Agenda and commissioned by the Wallace Foundation (Duffett & Johnson, 2004) found that parents in poorer families and those from minority backgrounds are far more dissatisfied with the availability and quality of afterschool program options. The study, based on two national random-

sample surveys, suggested that by wide margins, low-income and minority parents are considerably more likely to want afterschool activities and programs that emphasize academic learning. The study also reported that 67 percent of low-income families believe their children require additional help in school. In addition, the study found that 52 percent of low-income families (compared to 28 percent for higher income families) indicated that they would go out of their way to find an afterschool program that provides supervised homework time.

A survey conducted by the Afterschool Alliance (2004) found that 14 million (25 percent) of K–12 youth take care of themselves after school, with African-American and Hispanic students spending up to eight more hours per week unsupervised, compared to students in other ethnic/racial groups. Nearly 4 million (26 percent) of these children would likely be in an afterschool program if one were available (Afterschool Alliance, 2004).

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE 21ST CCLC PROGRAM

The 21st CCLC program provides funding for an extensive range of afterschool services and activities to complement students’ regular academic programs. These include academic enrichment, including tutoring; youth development activities; drug- and violence-prevention programs, technology education programs; art, music and recreation programs; counseling services; and character education. Tutorial services are centered on helping students meet state and local academic standards in subjects such as reading and mathematics. In addition, 21st CCLC programs offer the families of their students opportunities for literacy and related educational enrichment.

The NCLB Act requires states to give absolute priority for 21st CCLC grants to programs that will serve primarily students who attend schools with high concentrations of poor students, and

competitive priority to programs that serve students in low-performing schools. In addition, states also must give priority to programs that target services to students of low-performing schools. Between the years 2002 and 2004, 2,729 21st CCLC grants were awarded; currently, the program funds a total of 8,448 centers nationwide (Naftzger, Margolin, & Kaufman, 2005).

National policy toward afterschool programming has led to substantially increased funding between 1998 and 2002. Federal funding for the 21st CCLC program grew from \$40 million to approximately \$1 billion dollars during this time (Chung & Hillsman, 2005; Granger & Kane, 2004). Funding for 21st CCLC programs is provided to states through the U.S. Department of Education. States use their allocations to make competitive awards to eligible applicants, including local education agencies; community-based organizations; faith-based organizations; other public or private entities; and associations of two or more of such agencies, organizations, or entities. Specifically, funds are

targeted for areas and communities that have not had prior access to afterschool programs (California Tomorrow, 2003).

Although states have the authority under the NCLB Act to coordinate competitions, award grantees, and monitor the implementation of their programs, the U.S. Department of Education is required to report to Congress annually on the performance of each state's program. Table 1 highlights the objectives that 21st CCLC grantees must aim to achieve.

To ease the process of collecting, monitoring, and reporting data, the U.S. Department of Education contracted with Learning Point Associates to design and develop the Profile and Performance Information Collection System (PPICS) database. The PPICS database gathers information at the federal, state, and grantee levels to analyze and report on 21st CCLC afterschool programs. (For information found in an analysis of recent PPICS grantee data, refer to "Characteristics of 21st Century Community Learning Centers" on page 4.)

**TABLE 1. OBJECTIVES FOR 21ST CCLC GRANTEES**

<b>Objective 1—Participants in 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs will demonstrate educational and social benefits and exhibit positive behavioral changes.</b>	
<b>1.1</b>	<b>Achievement.</b> Increasing percentages of students regularly participating in the program will meet or exceed state and local academic standards in reading and mathematics.
<b>1.2</b>	<b>Behavior.</b> Students participating in the program will show improvements on measures such as school attendance, classroom performance, and decreased disciplinary actions or other adverse behaviors.
<b>Objective 2—21st Century Community Learning Centers will offer a range of high-quality educational, developmental, and recreational services.</b>	
<b>2.1</b>	<b>Core educational services.</b> More than 85 percent of centers will offer high-quality services in core academic areas, e.g., reading and literacy, mathematics, and science.
<b>2.2</b>	<b>Enrichment and support activities.</b> More than 85 percent of centers will offer enrichment and support activities such as nutrition and health, art, music, technology, and recreation.

Source: U.S. Department of Education (2003, p. 32)

# CHARACTERISTICS OF 21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS

*Adapted from 21st CCLC Analytic Support for Evaluation and Program Monitoring: An Overview of the 21st CCLC Program, 2003–04*

*By Neil Naftzger, Jonathan Margolin, Ph.D., and Seth Kaufman*

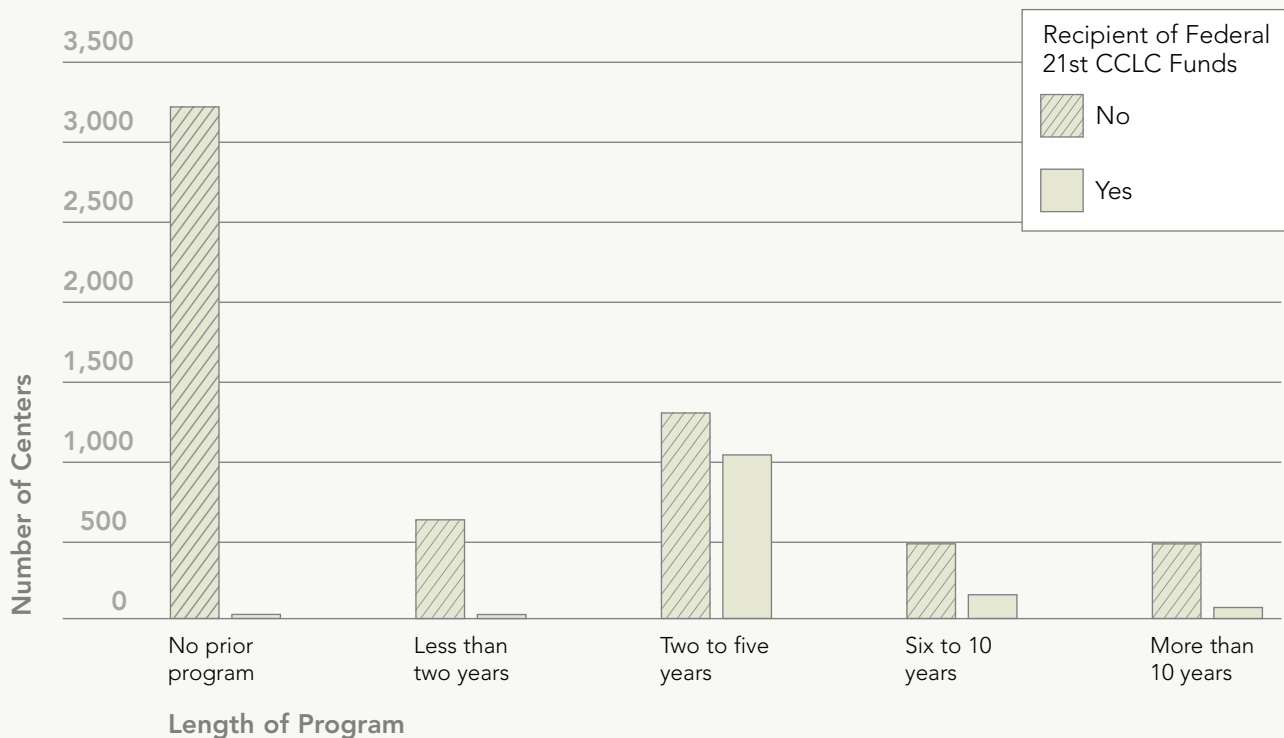
The Profile and Performance Information Collection System (PPICS) database defines 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLCs) as the physical location where grant-funded services and activities are provided to participating students and adults. A center offers academic, artistic, and cultural enrichment opportunities to students and their families during nonschool hours (before or after school) or periods when school is not in session (including holidays, weekends, and summer recess). A center is characterized by specified hours of operation; a dedicated staff that plans, facilitates, and supervises program activities; and an administrative structure that may include a position akin to a center coordinator. Each 21st CCLC grant must fund at least one such center.

The PPICS searchable database, providing information on state competitions for grants and programs run by 21st CCLC grantees, is available online ([www2.learningpt.org/ppics/public.asp](http://www2.learningpt.org/ppics/public.asp)). Data collected from the PPICS database was used to provide the following information.

## Centers Operating Afterschool Programs Before Receiving a State 21st CCLC Grant

Although the largest number of grantees receiving state-administered 21st CCLC grants began operating during the 2003–04 school year, many sites had been operating afterschool programs in some capacity prior to receiving their 21st CCLC grant. Figure 1 differentiates between centers that previously received federal 21st CCLC funds and those that did not.

**FIGURE 1. CENTERS OPERATING AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS BEFORE RECEIVING A STATE 21ST CCLC GRANT**



Note: Data based on 7,446 centers reporting (88 percent).

Source: Naftzger, Margolin, and Kaufman (2005, p. 23)

Most centers (82 percent) had not been funded as part of a federal 21st CCLC discretionary grant prior to receiving a state-administered 21st CCLC grant. Approximately half of all the centers (53 percent) that did not receive federal 21st CCLC funds had no program prior to receiving state-administered 21st CCLC funding in 2004.

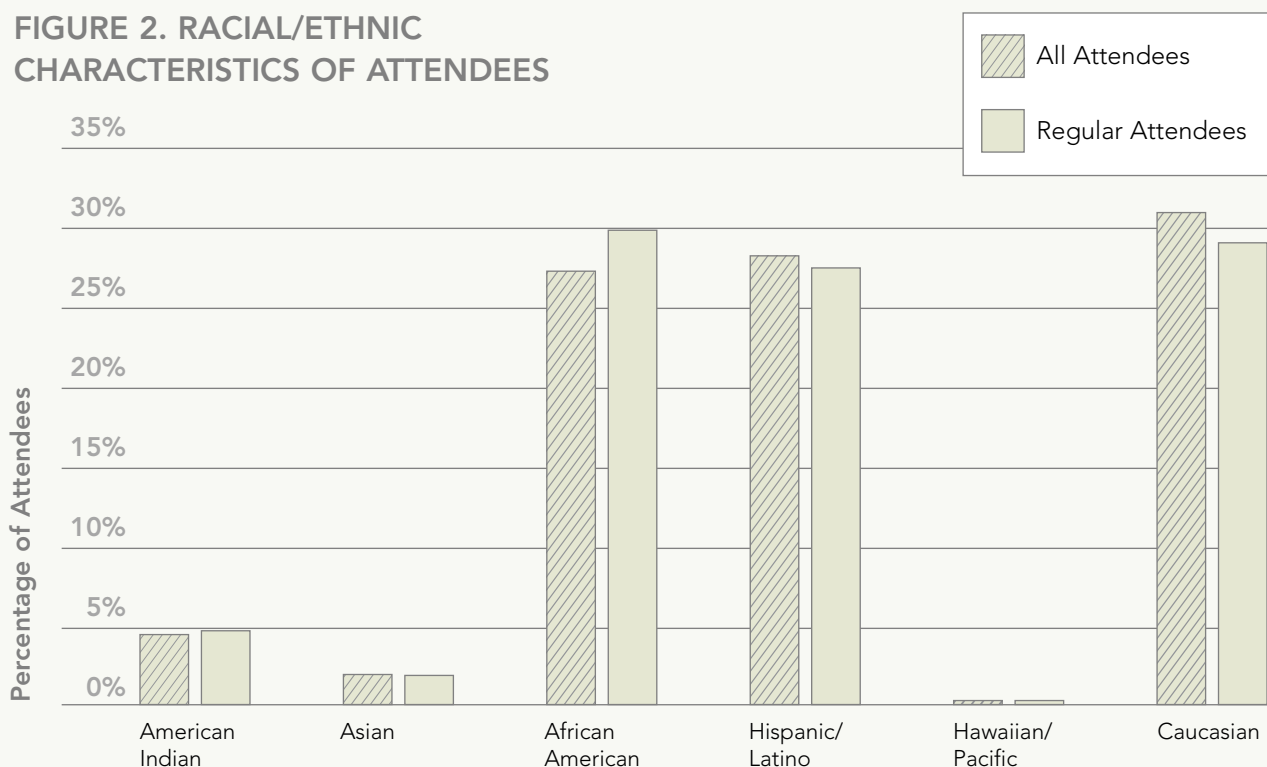
Forty-four percent of all the centers did not provide any afterschool services prior to receiving a state-administered 21st CCLC grant. Seventy-seven percent of the centers that received 21st CCLC funding under the federal discretionary grant reported being in operation between two and five years prior to receiving a state-administered grant. Thus, the 21st CCLCs are reaching school districts that had not previously offered an afterschool program.

### Racial/Ethnic Characteristics of Center Attendees

One way to examine access to the 21st CCLC program is to study the participation of students with different needs and backgrounds. Figure 2 shows the proportion of program attendees in different racial and ethnic categories.

As Figure 2 indicates, several ethnic minority groups are overrepresented in afterschool programs relative to their proportion of the general population. This representation reflects the 21st CCLC program's focus on economically disadvantaged populations.

**FIGURE 2. RACIAL/ETHNIC CHARACTERISTICS OF ATTENDEES**



#### Race/Ethnic Group

Note: Data based on 3,526 centers reporting (97 percent).

Key: "All attendees" indicates students who participated in the program at least once during the school year or summer within a calendar year. "Regular attendees" indicates students who participated in either summer or school days combined for at least 30 days within a calendar year.

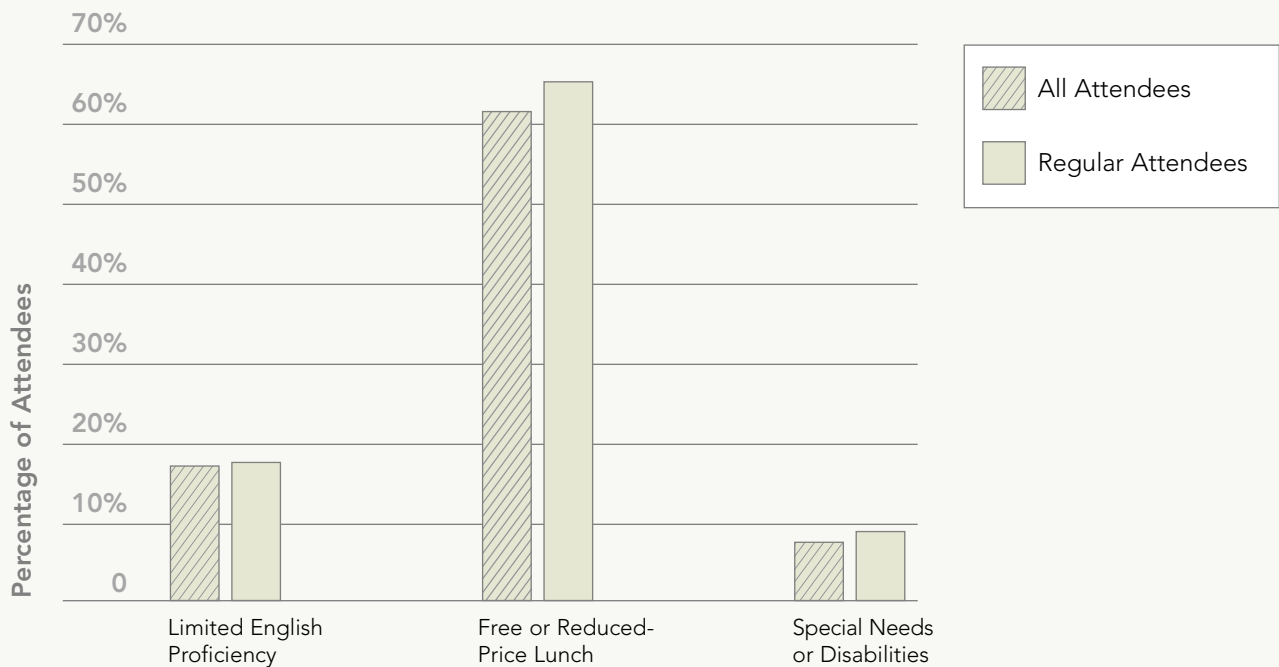
Source: Naftzger, Margolin, and Kaufman (2005, p. 37)

## Percentage of Attendees Eligible for Special Services

PPICS data indicate that 21st CCLC programs are serving some of the more economically needy families in the country, with 62 percent of attendees eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program. Likewise, PPICS data also indicate that a significant number of youth participating in state-administered 21st CCLC programs are academically at risk. In the 32 states submitting state assessment results for the 2003–04 school year, almost half of the regular attendees served by the centers during this period scored below proficient on the mathematics and reading/language arts portions of their state’s assessment: 49 percent of students scored below proficient in mathematics, and 45 percent of students scored below proficient in reading/language arts.

Each center reported the number of students in its program who participated in the following special services or programs: limited English proficiency, free or reduced-price lunch, and special needs or disabilities. Figure 3 indicates that approximately two thirds of the program’s participants qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. About 12 percent of participants have limited English proficiency, and 8 percent have special needs or disabilities.

FIGURE 3. PERCENTAGE OF ATTENDEES ELIGIBLE FOR SPECIAL SERVICES



### Special Services

Note: Data based on 3,138 centers reporting (86 percent).

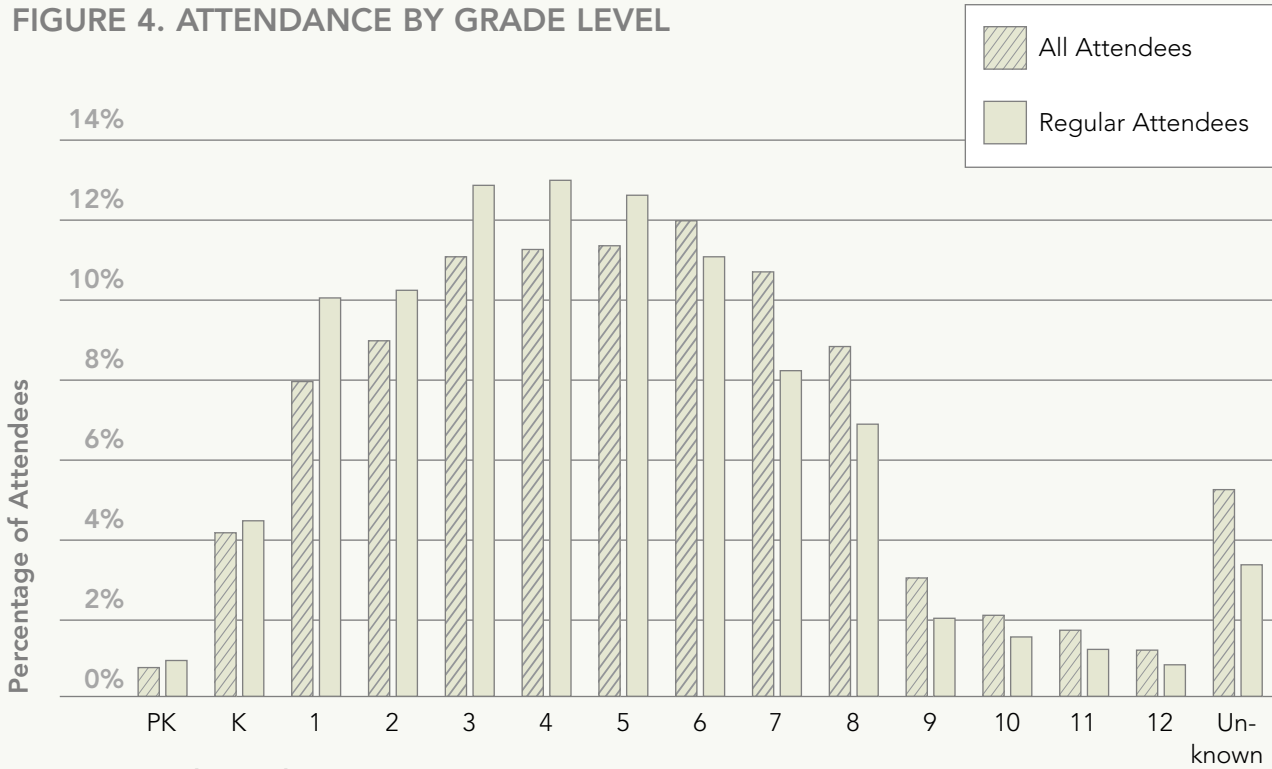
Key: “All attendees” indicates students who participated in the program at least once during the school year or summer within a calendar year. “Regular attendees” indicates students who participated in either summer or school days combined for at least 30 days within a calendar year.

Source: Naftzger, Margolin, and Kaufman (2005, p. 44)

### Attendance by Grade Level

The 21st CCLC programs have high concentrations of students at the elementary school level. Regular attendance in the program peaks in late elementary school, begins to drop off continuously through middle school, and then drops off drastically at the high school level (see Figure 4). The data indicate a need for younger students to stay under regular adult supervision after school. As students reach the high school grades, however, the need is significantly reduced. This reduction may reflect both the greater number of afterschool options for older students (employment, sports, family commitments) and their lower need for adult supervision.

FIGURE 4. ATTENDANCE BY GRADE LEVEL



**Grade Level**

Note: Data based on 3,513 centers reporting (96 percent).

Key: "All attendees" indicates students who participated in the program at least once during the school year or summer within a calendar year. "Regular attendees" indicates students who participated in either summer or school days combined for at least 30 days within a calendar year.

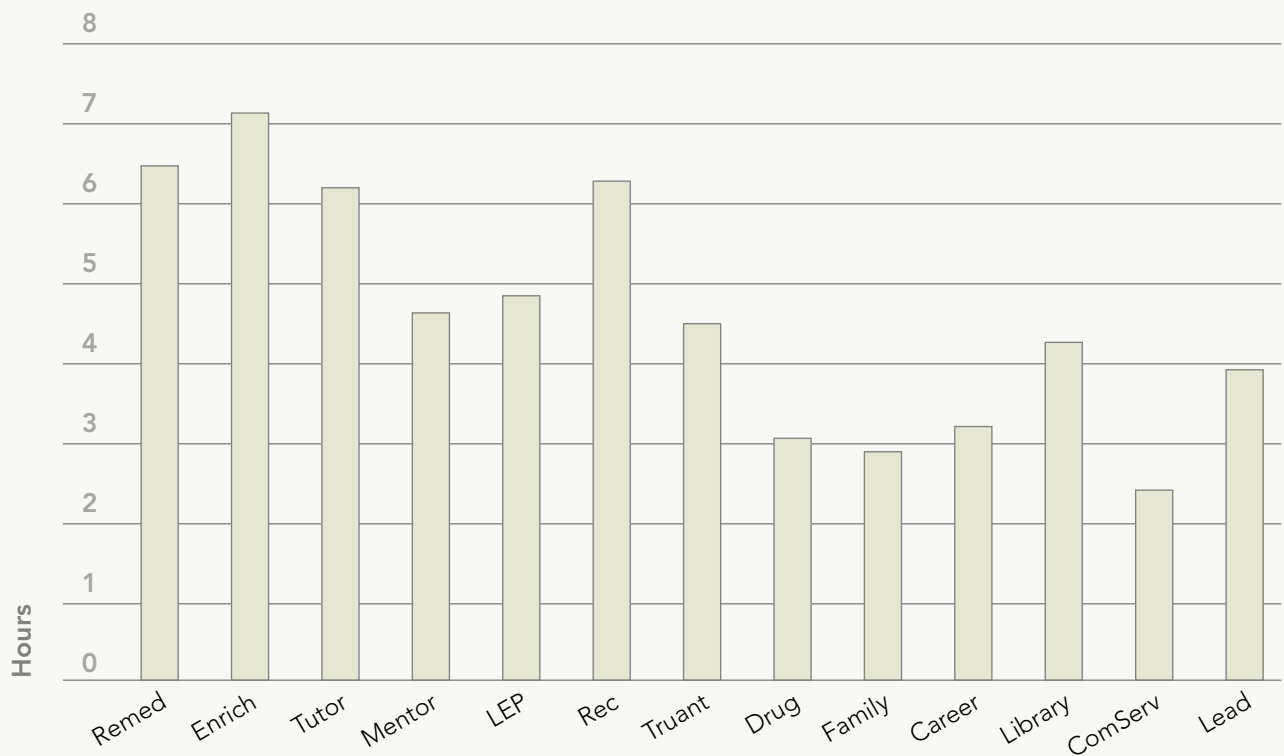
Source: Naftzger, Margolin, and Kaufman (2005, p. 45)

## Number of Hours Per Week for Service Provision

PPICS data yield information on the breadth and depth of academic and recreational programs provided by the centers. Figure 5 displays the average weekly number of program hours provided by each center according to category of service.

Services addressing academic needs are among the most intensely offered in afterschool programs. Academic remediation, enrichment, and tutoring are typically offered at least six hours per week. Recreational services also are among the most intensely offered type of programming, with an average of slightly more than six hours scheduled during a typical week. All other service activities are provided an approximate average of three to four hours per week.

**FIGURE 5. AVERAGE NUMBER OF WEEKLY HOURS FOR SERVICE PROVISION BY CATEGORY**



### Service Provision

Note: Percentages are based on total number of centers reporting Annual Performance Report (APR) activity data by category. There were 3,583 centers reporting.

Key: Remed=academic improvement and remediation programs; Enrich=academic enrichment learning programs; Tutor=tutoring and homework help; Mentor=mentoring; LEP=activities for limited-English-proficient students; Rec=recreational activities; Truant=activities that target students who have been truant, suspended, or expelled; Drug=drug and violence prevention, counseling, and character education programs; Family=programs that promote parental involvement and family literacy; Career=career or job training; Library=expanded library service hours; ComServ=community service or service learning programs; Lead=activities that promote youth leadership.

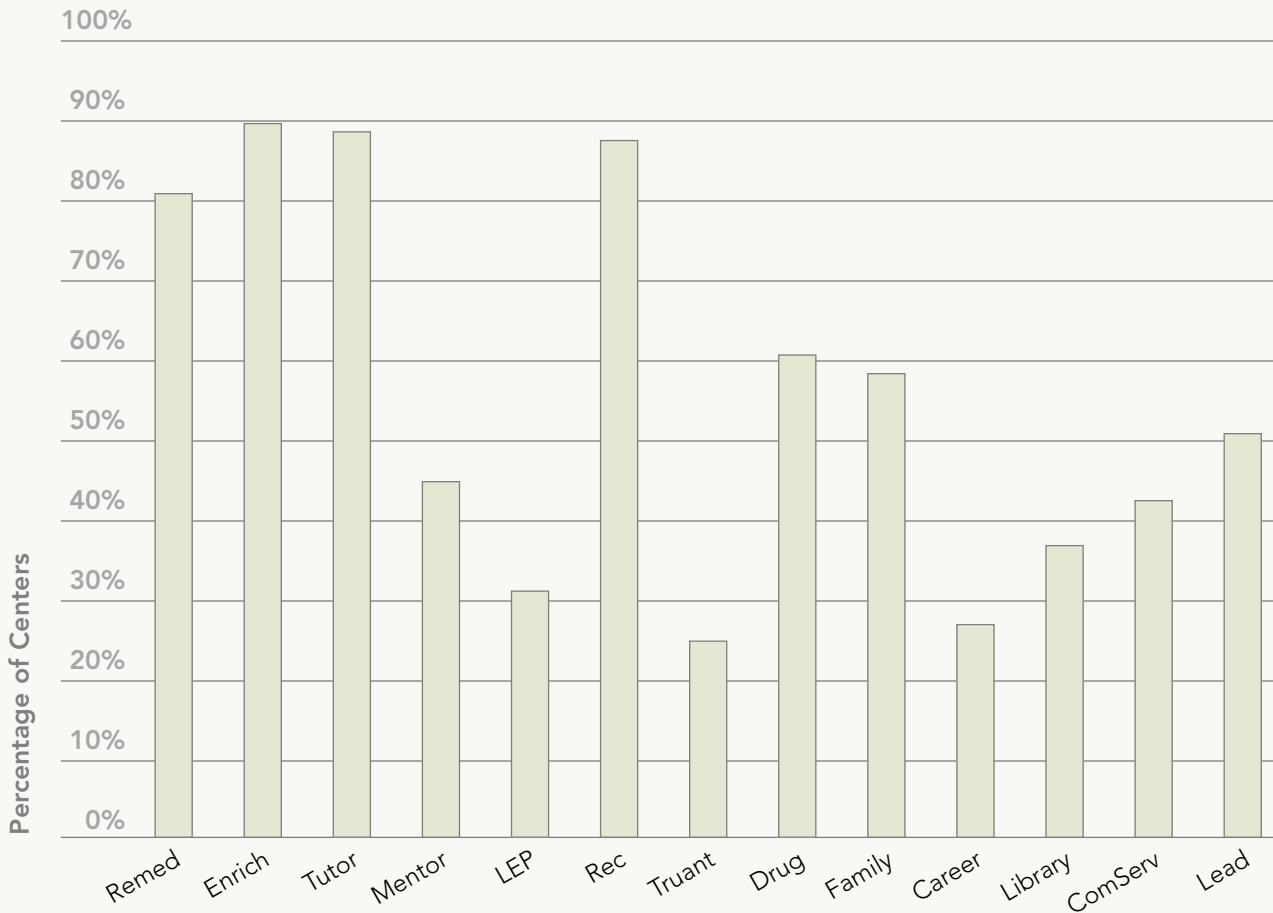
Source: Naftzger, Margolin, and Kaufman (2005, p. 39)



### Services Provided by Category

Figure 6 presents the percentage of centers providing services by category. More than 80 percent of the centers provided academic assistance in the form of remedial programs, academic enrichment, and tutoring. Recreational activities were offered by 87 percent of the centers. Programs involving drug prevention and parent involvement in children’s literacy were offered by approximately 60 percent of the centers.

FIGURE 6. PERCENTAGE OF CENTERS PROVIDING SERVICES BY CATEGORY



#### Categories of Activities

Note: Percentages are based on total number of centers reporting APR activity data by category. There were 3,583 centers reporting.

Key: Remed=academic improvement and remediation programs; Enrich=academic enrichment learning programs; Tutor=tutoring and homework help; Mentor=mentoring; LEP=activities for limited-English-proficient students; Rec=recreational activities; Truant=activities that target students who have been truant, suspended, or expelled; Drug=drug and violence prevention, counseling, and character education programs; Family=programs that promote parental involvement and family literacy; Career=career or job training; Library=expanded library service hours; ComServ=community service or service learning programs; Lead=activities that promote youth leadership.

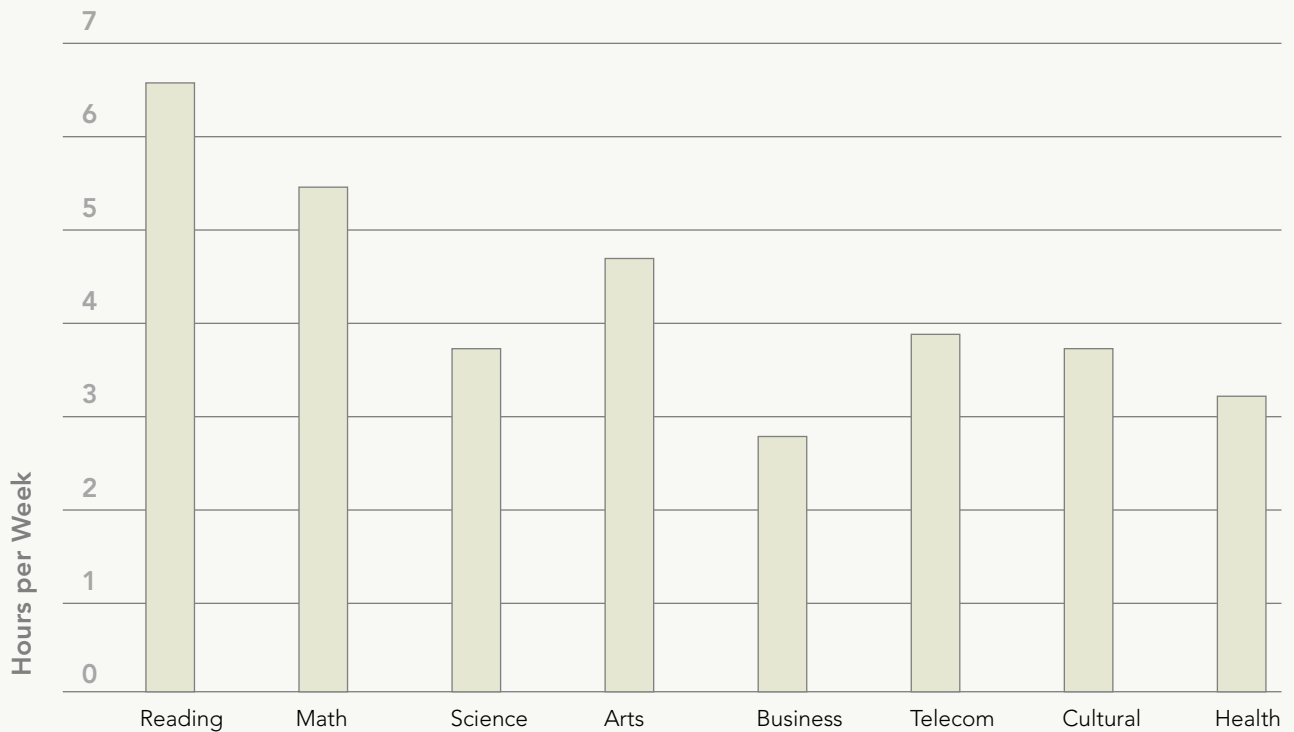
Source: Naftzger, Margolin, and Kaufman (2005, p. 37)

## Programming by Subject Area

Figure 7 displays the average weekly provision of programming related to subject area.

As Figure 7 indicates, reading and mathematics were subjects most often part of the academic programming, with an average of about 6-1/2 hours per week of reading and 5-1/2 hours of mathematics per typical week. Programming that included science, the other core academic subject, was offered less intensely—an average of almost four hours per week. The lesser amount of time spent on science may reflect a lack of qualified staff or less emphasis on this subject.

**FIGURE 7. AVERAGE NUMBER OF HOURS PER WEEK OF SERVICE PROVISION BY SUBJECT**



### Educational Subject Areas

Note: Percentages are based on total number of centers reporting APR activity data by subject area. There were 3,559 centers reporting.

Key: Reading=reading and literacy education activities; Math=mathematics education activities; Science=science education activities; Arts=arts and music education activities; Business=entrepreneurial education programs; Telecom=telecommunications and technology education programs; Cultural=cultural activities and social studies; Health=health- and nutrition-related activities.

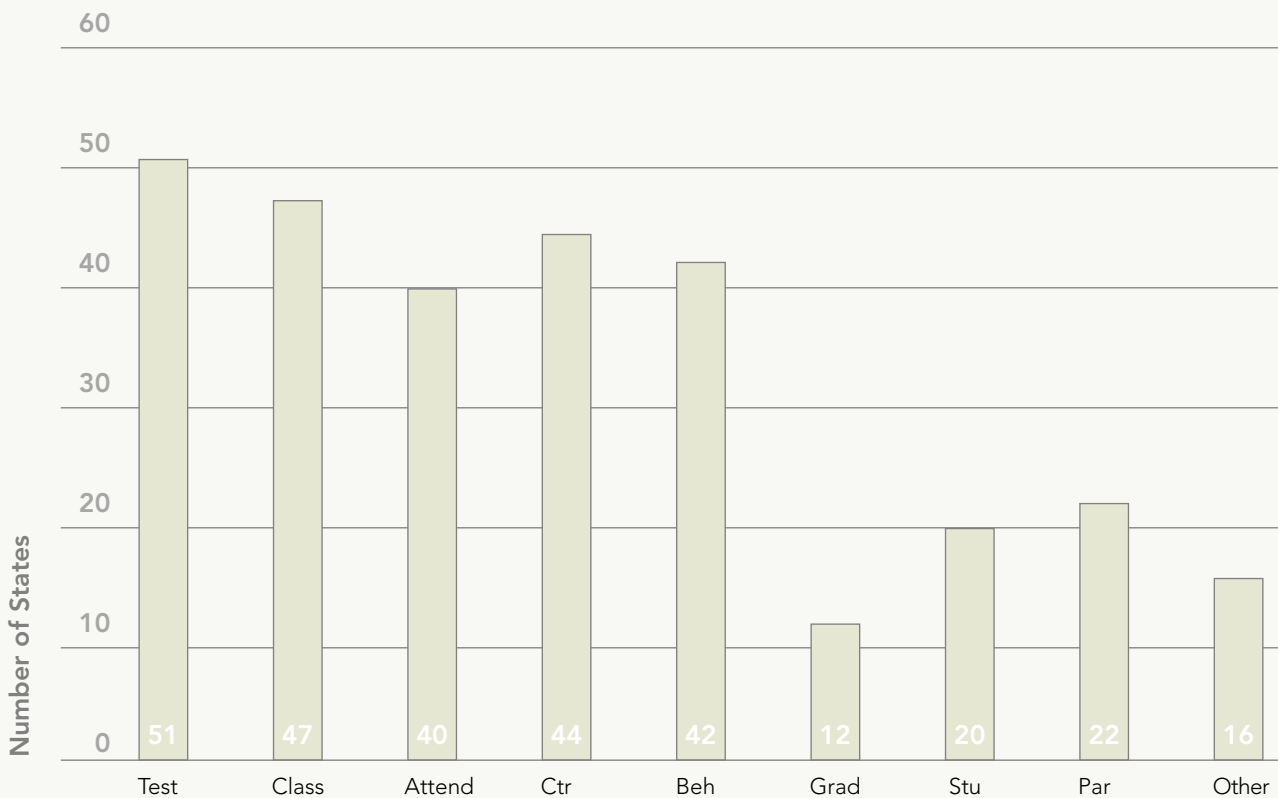
Source: Naftzger, Margolin, and Kaufman (2005, p. 40)

## State Adoption of Performance Indicators

Figure 8 indicates the extent to which states adopted the performance indicators that grantees receiving new 21st CCLC grants as the result of subgrant competitions in 2004 will be held accountable in the operation of their programs.

As Figure 8 indicates, the vast majority of states adopted some type of indicator of academic achievement, either achievement tests (specified in 51 of 59 subgrant competitions) or classroom performance (specified in 47 of 59 subgrant competitions). Most states adopted some measure of school behavior, either school attendance (specified in 40 of 59 of competitions) or discipline-related information (specified in 42 of 59 subgrant competitions). Two thirds of subgrant competitions adopted student attendance at center activities as an indicator. About one fifth of subgrant competitions indicated that grantees track the graduation rates of their attendees. About one third of all subgrant competitions adopted indicators of student and parent satisfaction with the program.

**FIGURE 8. FREQUENCY OF STATE ADOPTION OF PERFORMANCE INDICATORS OF VARIOUS TYPES**



### Performance Indicators

Note: Based on 59 competitions.

Key: Test=student achievement on standardized tests; Class=student classroom performance; Attend=student attendance during the regular school day; Ctr=student attendance at center activities; Beh=student behavior (e.g., decreased disciplinary actions and suspensions); Grad=graduation rates; Stu=student satisfaction with center activities and services; Par=parent satisfaction with center activities and services; Other=other.

Source: Naftzger, Margolin, and Kaufman (2005, p. 14)

## CURRENT RESEARCH ON AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

Current research on afterschool programs is based primarily on program evaluations. However, when educators and policymakers look at the academic effects of afterschool programming, they must keep in mind issues of access and equity by addressing two questions: Which students are being served? How equitable is the quality of the programs across centers? Although student achievement is based on many variables, including academic support offered in afterschool programs, afterschool centers that provide high-quality programming are more likely to show increased student achievement than centers providing poorer quality programming. Research on the academic effects of 21st CCLC programs focuses on the following three areas: academic achievement, access and equity, and quality of programming.

### Academic Achievement Measurements

One way to measure academic progress is through classroom grades and teacher perceptions of changes in student aptitude. Several meta-analyses have been conducted and provide a general sense of the academic impact of afterschool programs. In McComb and Scott-Little's (2003) review of 27 impact evaluations of afterschool programs, results on standardized achievement tests did not provide conclusive evidence of academic progress. However, the reviewers found evidence of greater effect sizes for limited-English-proficient (LEP) students as well as other students who were "low achievers" on the initial baseline. The results indicate that afterschool programs may help LEP students catch up to their peers if provided with the right types of assistance.

A study by Herrera and Arbreton (2003) indicated very positive feedback for the Boys and Girls Clubs program for older youth in New York City and Boston. The study identified student academic risk factors, such as poor grades (ranging from C's to E's and F's), at least one day of school skipped in the previous month, and grade retention. In

follow-up surveys, approximately 75 percent of the youth reported that the Boys and Girls Clubs had helped them improve their academic grades; they also indicated that at least one afterschool staff member knew how they were doing in school. However, the study contained only self-reports, so perceptions by teachers were not measured. Also, the Boys and Girls Clubs also have the advantage of many years of experience shaping their programs and have developed a solid reputation to help them recruit and retain participants, which can affect the study outcomes.

Even so, evidence regarding the achievement gap between center attendees and nonattendees is beginning to emerge. For instance, in a study by Child Trends (Guzman, Redd, Mathews, Moore, & Brointe-Tinkew, 2004), the baseline grades of students participating in afterschool programs were lower than the national sample of students from the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. Thus, afterschool centers may be recruiting students with lower academic achievement than some of their peers.

In a meta-analysis focusing on low-achieving students in reading and mathematics, Lauer, Akiba, Wilkerson, Apthrop, Snow, and Martin-Glenn (2004) analyzed 27 studies that met several criteria including disaggregating scores of students performing at a low achievement level. Lauer et al.'s definition of *low-achieving* included performance on standardized tests, classroom assessments, and classroom grades or teacher recommendations. The analysis found that afterschool programs provide positive effects for low-achieving or at-risk students in reading (especially at the lower elementary level, Grades K–2) and in mathematics (especially at the high school level, Grades 9–12).

On the other hand, the 21st CCLC evaluation conducted by Mathematica Policy Research (Dynarski, Moore, Mullens, Gleason, James-Burdumy, Rosenberg, et al., 2003) found mixed results when analyzing grades by subgroup populations. In the first year of the evaluation,

teachers reported increased student effort, less tardiness, and gains in mathematics scores for black students, while Hispanic students also showed gains in mathematics scores and less tardiness; in contrast, no effects were seen for white students. Across all subgroups, students with a baseline of fewer disciplinary problems improved their mathematics and social science grades. The second year of evaluation (Dynarski, James-Burdumy, Moore, Rosenberg, Deke, & Mansfield, 2004), however, provided results that did not show any significant differences for any subgroup. In essence, the 21st CCLCs have shown small differences nationally among various subgroups participating in the program. Thus, the data from PPICS supports the notion that 21st CCLCs are serving disadvantaged populations.

### **Access and Equity in Afterschool Programs**

Although the NCLB Act stipulates that 21st CCLC funds must be targeted to students most in need, there are still significant barriers to providing equitable resources and access to many of the law's intended population subsets. For example, children living in rural communities or on farms and Native Americans living on or off reservations are some of the most underrepresented populations in 21st CCLC programs, largely due to a lack of transportation to and from program sites. If the afterschool program does not provide transportation, many of these children have no access for participation (Martin, 2002).

Likewise, the issue of equitable resources is highlighted in the California Tomorrow (2003) survey. Even though the vast majority of afterschool programs included in the survey serve low-income and ethnically diverse populations, only a limited number of programs appear to have adequate resources and the capacity to properly serve the needs of African-American youth. California Tomorrow points out that lack of resources is more evident for programs serving African-American youth than any other group. Afterschool programs succeed when they

are designed and implemented to meet the specific and unique needs of the communities they are intended to serve. Inadequate funding, poor planning, and a lack of diversity in staffing are just a few of the barriers that afterschool programs must overcome as they address issues of access and equity.

In a study conducted by Mass Insight (2002) on afterschool programs across the state of Massachusetts, concerns were raised regarding the students who actually participated in the program and the effect of academic achievement measures for the subgroups. Mass Insight suspected that although students participating in the programs were reporting positive results, not all students in need of extra academic help were participating. The specific example cited was the Academic Support Services Program, which provides intensive programs in English and mathematics skills. A scheduling barrier existed in recruiting students most in need of these programs: Sessions were offered for only a few hours per week, which caused more difficulty for older students than for younger students who wanted to participate. For the students who did attend, 61 percent scored higher on an English posttest while 62 percent showed gains on a mathematics posttest (Mass Insight, 2002). Although these afterschool programs across Massachusetts have successfully raised test scores, a greater effort is needed to attract a larger percentage of those students who are in need of just such support.

Another study (Hudley, 2001) compared a group of students residing in public housing and participating in a 4H After-School Activity Program—a program focused on academic competence as one outcome—to students living in the same housing complex but not members of the 4H program. Upon completion of the program, participants—particularly the girls—indicated higher academic competence than nonparticipants. Teachers, however, did not report any difference between participants and nonparticipants. Hudley argues that the results are positive findings that support the anecdotal evidence that minority girls

are more likely than boys to continue in school, especially if they perceive themselves as academically competent.

A study of the L.A.'s Best afterschool program by Huang, Gribbons, Kim, Lee, and Baker (2000) showed evidence that afterschool programming is helping to close the achievement gaps. Initially, L.A.'s Best students had lower mathematics scores than their peers who were not involved in the program. These gaps had virtually disappeared by the end of the 1997–98 school year. In the L.A.'s Best program, 74 percent of the participants were Hispanic students and 20 percent were African-American students. In addition, Grades 4, 6, and 8 participants had higher rates of language redesignations as "English proficient" than did nonparticipants. However, the report also suggests that due to the population of English-speaking African-American students, L.A.'s Best students also had a lower baseline of non-English-speaking students. Even though this result suggests that the program can offer significant help for those non-English-speaking students, a large number of students with this need did not participate in the program.

### Quality of Afterschool Programming

High-quality afterschool programs have a strong link to the curriculum and instruction offered during the regular school day. Such programs emphasize not only core skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics but also problem solving, communication, teamwork, perseverance, and conflict resolution (Caplan & Calfee, 1998). Both researchers and practitioners agree that afterschool programs rich in academic, recreational, and cultural activities tend to have the most effective and highest quality programming. It is important for afterschool programs to encourage student interests and talents in a variety of areas.

Caplan and Calfee (1998) also draw a direct relationship between comprehensive and high-quality afterschool programs. Among the 16 categories they define as important components of high-quality

afterschool programming, Caplan and Calfee emphasize the following components as essential:

- A culturally sensitive atmosphere that is respectful of each student's home culture and offers opportunities for students to express their cultural heritage.
- Evaluation design focused on continuous improvement strategies.
- Highly qualified program staff.
- Ongoing staff training.

Programs paying the greatest attention to equity or diversity apply a similar set of promising understandings, strategies, and models. Laurie Olsen (2002), executive director of California Tomorrow, suggests that afterschool programs should foster a positive sense of identity; build upon the cultures of the students' families; and offer a curriculum that values and responds to the strengths, challenges, and needs of all the different kinds of youth in their communities. The programming should provide positive acceptance of all youth, regardless of ethnicity, class background, spiritual belief, gender, sexual orientation, and physical or cognitive ability.

The After-School Corporation (TASC, 2004a), a New York City-based organization that provides technical assistance and training to more than 300 afterschool programs across New York, used field research to arrive at 10 essential categories that define a quality afterschool program. Among these categories are well-rounded program activities; training for a diverse staff; and ongoing measurement of goal attainment in planning, improvement, and evaluation. TASC's 10 quality categories outline the New York State Network's Self-Assessment Tool. The organization promotes quality programming by assessing progress against the 10 essential categories as used to inform strategic planning and staff development activities.

Although there is no one "right" model for all schools, all effective afterschool programs do require careful planning and effective leadership

(Bruce, 2001). An afterschool program established with a clear, accountable organizational structure that considers the specific cultural, socioeconomic, and educational needs of the students it serves has a better chance of successfully incorporating the characteristics associated with high-quality afterschool programs.

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR 21ST CCLC IMPROVEMENT

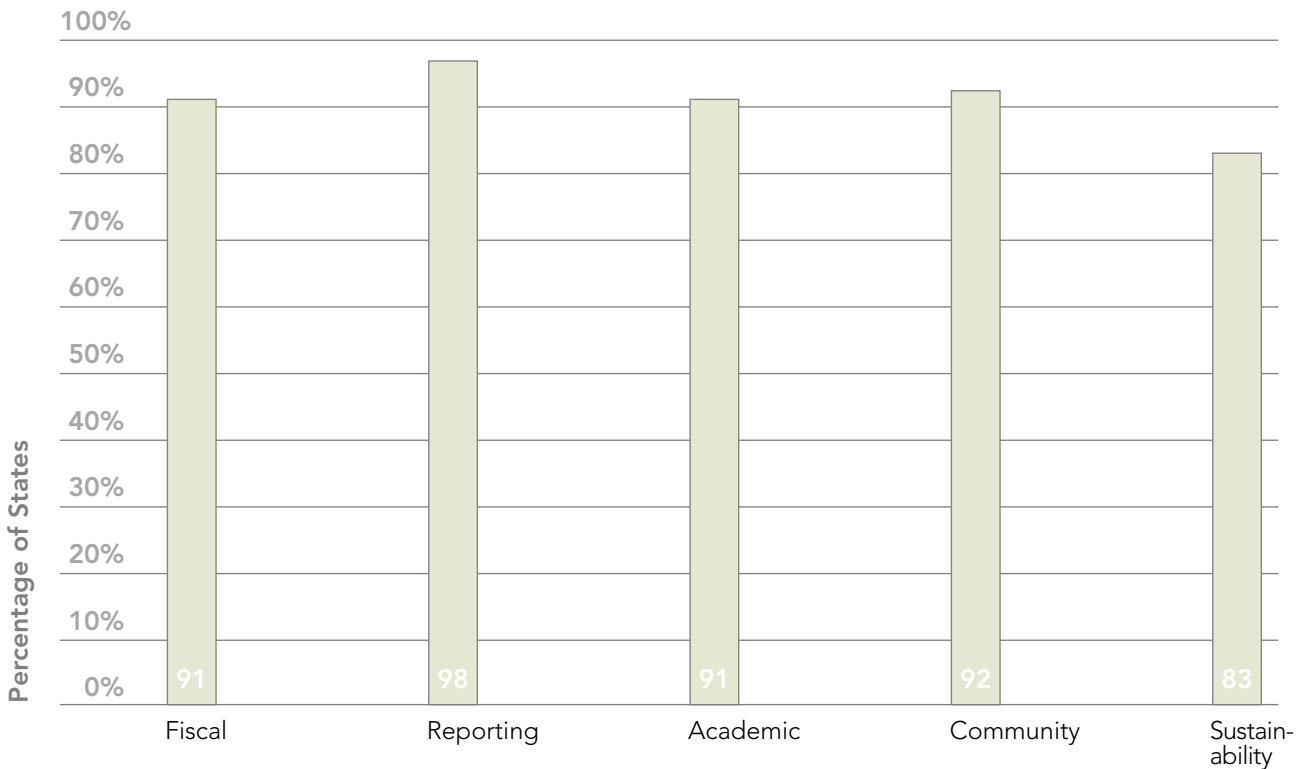
Afterschool programs generally are operated by an established school, with teachers, afterschool staff, parents, and community volunteers administering the curriculum and watching over the students. Despite this fact, many afterschool programs show mixed results in terms of their overall effectiveness. Afterschool staff and volunteers often do not receive proper training in how to bridge out-of-

school time with in-class learning. They often lack training in effective classroom management and student behavioral issues. Currently, a gap exists between training provided at local and state levels to schools and teachers for normal school hours versus training provided to centers and their staff for afterschool programming. To improve this situation, technical assistance could be better used in afterschool programming and management through program evaluations, site visits to schools, and assistance with curriculum alignment.

Figure 9 indicates the types of technical assistance and training that states offer to centers, according to data collected through PPICS.

According to Figure 9, at least 90 percent of all state education agencies (SEAs) reported that they offer training in fiscal management, reporting and evaluation of program requirements, academic

FIGURE 9. PERCENTAGE OF STATES PROVIDING TYPES OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND TRAINING TO GRANTEEES



### Types of Technical Assistance

Note: Data based on 53 state education agencies (SEAs).

Key: **Fiscal**=assisting with fiscal management and administration; **Reporting**=meeting state reporting or evaluation requirements; **Academic**=enhancing academic content; **Community**=enhancing community involvement and collaboration; **Sustainability**=promoting program sustainability.

Source: Naftzger, Margolin, and Kaufman (2005, p. 20)



content, and community involvement. Approximately 83 percent of SEAs reported that they offer training to promote program sustainability.

With the reauthorization of the 21st CCLC program under the NCLB Act, states have several responsibilities regarding these centers. States are responsible for administration and supervision of 21st CCLCs: They design and oversee local competitions for funding, provide training to grantees, and evaluate programs.

Technical assistance is being offered to afterschool programs in diverse ways throughout the country. For example, in December 2001, the national Afterschool Technical Assistance Collaborative (ATAC) was formed as a coalition of the Afterschool Alliance, the Finance Project, the Council of Chief State Officers, the National Conference of State Legislators, the National Governors Association, and the U.S. Department of Education. ATAC emphasized the importance of state afterschool networks in providing the following technical assistance:

- Coordinating multiple, currently funded, afterschool efforts.
- Providing, brokering, and coordinating training and technical assistance for programs within each state.
- Providing a support network for peer learning and best practice.
- Building public support and action in every community to provide afterschool programs in each state.
- Developing and maintaining partnerships, including those that will help create more comprehensive afterschool policies. (Afterschool Technical Assistance Collaborative, 2001)

### Staff Training and Professional Development

Afterschool staff members are the individuals who interact with the program participants on a daily basis. To be effective, they must not only have compassion for and understanding of the students

they work with but also must be aware of the students' specific issues and concerns. With the main focus of 21st CCLCs on student academic achievement, staff members must have a variety of instructional strategies to help students who are struggling during the regular school day. Therefore, one major component of the technical assistance offered to afterschool centers should be to provide staff training and professional development to improve program quality. Continuous and intensive professional development that covers a broad range of techniques to help staff work effectively with this population of students will help afterschool programs become more effective learning centers for all students. A Harvard Family Research Project brief (Bouffard & Little, 2004) offers several ideas for professional development, including the following:

- Higher education, such as continuing education courses and degree programs.
- Preservice training and new-staff orientation.
- Inservice training provided to current staff.
- Training seminars and resource centers provided by organizations outside the program setting.
- Local and national credentialing systems and programs.

### Training on Student Developmental Levels and Skills

One of the primary goals of professional development is to help staff deal with student age groups and diverse skill levels. Some programs may have students in various age groups spread over Grades K–12, while others may have attendees from only two or three grade levels. In a 21st CCLC program in Kansas, for example, center staff were trained in several child-development models, including the work of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky; they also learned about cultural issues, school-family relations, and Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences (Thompson & Tutwiler, 2001).



**Training on Diverse Cultures.** Afterschool programs also can be made more effective through technical assistance focused on helping afterschool staff understand the cultural communities and home environments of their students. “Knowing the powerful impacts of culture, race, language, community context, gender, and other aspects of identity in young people’s development, and creating programs responsive to a variety of specific populations are two of the central diversity and equity challenges facing afterschool and youth programs,” notes a report by California Tomorrow (2003, pp.12–13).

The report suggests the following strategies for improving the cultural aspects of afterschool programs:

- Use of culturally embedded programming.
- Identity support and development.
- Cross-cultural and/or anti-bias learning that teaches explicit principles of respect, inclusion, understanding, and cooperation and conflict resolution.
- Youth leadership and empowerment that support young people in challenging and working to eliminate injustices in communities and society.
- Hiring of staff who share and/or deeply understand young people’s backgrounds and experiences.

## Evaluation

The 21st CCLC program allows states to use up to 3 percent of their funds for evaluation. States have a variety of options. They can use their own SEA for the evaluation or can contract with an external evaluation provider. External providers can include private consultants, university-based researchers, state government departments, or nonprofit research organizations. Massachusetts, for instance, is using the evaluation instrument developed by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Institute on Out-of-School Time. Hawaii chose to use the Harcourt Educational Measurement Test, while Michigan contracted with Michigan State University.

## Assessment of Student Needs

There appear to be few existing tools and strategies available to assist the centers with better assessing the needs of their students. One place to start is to periodically examine attendance data to determine the activities or sessions in which students are more engaged and those that are not as popular among students. Information on participants can help afterschool staff determine if they are recruiting the target population they want to recruit and retain. Looking at student grades and standardized test scores over time can help centers evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of individual students as well as overall program goals. Collecting anecdotal data—both formally and informally—from students, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders also can help programs improve. A Harvard Family Research Project brief (Chaput, Little, & Weiss, 2004) suggests the following methods of collecting data for afterschool programs: surveys, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and observations.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations at the local and the state levels can help improve the equity, access, and quality of afterschool programs. Table 2 (on page 20) provides a summary of the discussion.

### Local-Level Recommendations

#### RECOMMENDATION 1

*Local education agencies (LEAs) should support districts in building afterschool programs that are more “holistic” in design rather than strictly programmatic.*

**Example:** A fifth-year report of the After-School Corporation (2004b) in New York highlighted various creative programming themes in its afterschool centers. Some of the sites have a Comic Book Project to increase literacy skills. Other sites in Brooklyn participate in the One-World After-School Project, where students study one nation intensely every 10 weeks.

**RECOMMENDATION 2**

*LEAs should support districts in using data to determine improvement strategies.*

**Example:** Keeping careful, in-depth attendance records is the key to determining what is working and what activities need to be improved. A Harvard Family Research Project brief (Chaput, Little, & Weiss, 2004) defined *attendance* in three different ways: intensity, duration, and breadth. Linking these attendance indicators together can help determine not only if attending the program has an impact on participants but also how the intensity and duration of the program and the breadth of activities offered affect the outcomes of participants. By collecting this attendance data, program managers also can analyze what students are coming to the program, what populations are missing, and what activities seem to attract and retain the most students.

**RECOMMENDATION 3**

*Program managers should consider and address all the barriers that prevent students from attending afterschool programs.*

**Example:** The Harvard Family Research Project brief (Chaput, Little, & Weiss, 2004) describes several barriers to student afterschool-program attendance and suggests incentives with the potential to increase attendance. For instance, programs can offer students more choices of activities or—for older students—workshops on resume writing.

**Example:** The Skills for Success afterschool program at Flowing Wells Junior High School in Tucson, Arizona, provides services to approximately 500 children. It offers a variety of enrichment activities, including a Lego robotics program conducted with students at the University of Arizona's College of Engineering, an aviation class offered by the Pima Air and Space Museum, a dance troupe, a percussion group, and an online mentoring program in which women employed at IBM coach girls interested in careers in mathematics and science.

**Example:** The Council of Chief State School Officers (Munford, 2000) profiled six state-sponsored extended learning programs in California, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Texas. Each profile included a section on lessons learned and barriers to success. Specifically, the Extended School Services afterschool program in Kentucky emphasized issues such as transportation costs, getting technical assistance early in the program for enrolling students, and instructional and program design. The report also found site visits to be very helpful to strengthen the individual programs as well as to publicize promising practices throughout the state.

**RECOMMENDATION 4**

*LEAs should provide afterschool staff with support and staff development to help them connect afterschool academic enrichment and tutoring to in-school classwork.*

**Example:** In linking afterschool programming to the school day, Noam (2004) suggests following the "Four Cs": collaboration, communication, content, and coherence. In the case study conducted by Noam, staff in one of the afterschool programs did not interact closely with the regular school-day teachers, and the program looked very much like a regular school day with some exceptions (such as fashion shows, dance, and theater productions).

**RECOMMENDATION 5**

*Programs should offer academic and enrichment activities that address the diversity of the students attending.*

**Example:** The Forest Grove Community Learner Center in Forest Grove, Oregon, works with approximately 150 white and Latino students from low- to middle-income families. Fifteen to 20 of these students participate in a summer "Transition to High School" group that offers a variety of academic and enrichment experiences focused on cultural awareness. A major activity of this group involves a workshop and group discussion on the meaning of culture. Students share their

definitions, receive a broadly inclusive definition, and examine how cultural diversity is reflected in the group itself. Additional information on the high school transition program can be found at the *Promising Practices in Afterschool* website ([www.afterschool.org/search/online/story.cfm?submissionID=429&log=direct](http://www.afterschool.org/search/online/story.cfm?submissionID=429&log=direct)).

**Example:** The Teen Educators Advocating for Community Health (TEACH) program targets immigrant students to help them with difficulties they may experience both academically and socially in the hopes of bridging social differences and tapping that diversity capital (Camras, 2004).

### State-Level Recommendations

#### RECOMMENDATION 6

*SEAs should provide guidelines to ensure program quality and foster creativity in afterschool programs. Each 21st CCLC program is unique in its own way because each must adapt to schools with different demographics, communities, and student ability levels. SEAs can partner with organizations to provide assistance to grantees on how to connect creativity and program standards.*

**Example:** The state of New York funds 236 21st CCLC projects in approximately 700 sites across the state. To ensure quality in these programs, the state requires that their academic curriculums adhere to New York State Learning Standards and that they complete an annual performance report. The state provides training assistance to grantees for completing these self-assessments, as well as a host of other workshop experiences to enhance the quality and diversity of these programs. Additional information on 21st CCLC programs in New York can be found at the website of the New York State Center for School Safety ([www.mhric.org/scss/21stcclc.html](http://www.mhric.org/scss/21stcclc.html)).

#### RECOMMENDATION 7

*SEAs and partnering organizations can develop strong quality standards for afterschool programs that include both academic and youth development criteria.*

**Example:** The DC Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation (n.d.) published *DC Standards for Out-of-School Time*, which focuses on both organizational and program standards and indicators. Sample surveys are available for programs to rank themselves and look for areas of continuous improvement.

**Example:** The Michigan State Board of Education (2003) has developed Out-of-School Time (OST) Model Standards with which afterschool centers align their work in accordance with state expectations for afterschool programs.

#### RECOMMENDATION 8

*SEAs should provide assistance to districts that are first-time grantees and new to the process of applying for grants and working with organizations as partners. SEAs may be able to find ways to partner with organizations to facilitate work with schools and districts in areas with limited resources, to help them gain and retain resources, and to enable the sustainability of their programs.*

**Example:** A review of out-of-school time literature was conducted by the RAND Corporation (2005) with an eye toward helping to improve afterschool program capacity and success. It suggested that providers and funders must collaborate and jointly plan programming material.

**Example:** A report of the Council of Chief State School Officers (Munford, 2000) profiled the California Afterschool Learning and Safe Neighborhood Partnership Program. In that program, finding stronger alignment among learning-based activities with state standards, assessment, and accountability became a priority. However, rural districts found the funding support to be insufficient.

TABLE 2. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FRAMEWORK TO ENSURE EQUITY, ACCESS AND QUALITY IN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

	Challenges	Policy Options	Key Principles for Technical Assistance	Examples
LOCAL LEVEL	1. Implement programs that are "holistic" rather than merely programmatic.	Survey students and parents to find out what they want in a program.	Provide technical assistance on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating collaborative partnerships with multiple stakeholders, including parents, students, and community leaders.</li> </ul>	The After-School Corporation provides creative programming—such as the Comic Book Project and the One-World After-School Project—in its afterschool centers in New York City and Brooklyn.
	2. Use data to determine improvement strategies.	Collect attendance data on what activities tend to attract more students.	Provide technical assistance on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collecting and maintaining accurate attendance records.</li> <li>• Developing solid evaluation plans that examine collected data to inform continuous program improvement.</li> </ul>	The Harvard Family Research Project emphasizes the attendance indicators of intensity, duration, and breadth to determine the impact and outcomes of afterschool programs on participants.
	3. Recognize potential barriers that prevent access to after-school programs, particularly for low-income and minority students.	Establish collaborative partnerships with school and community leaders to help students meet their outside responsibilities while getting needed academic support.	Provide technical assistance on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training afterschool staff to work better with diverse cultures and low-income populations.</li> <li>• Engaging the community early in the implementation process.</li> </ul>	The Harvard Family Research Project lists several potential barriers to participation in afterschool programs and various solutions for overcoming barriers.  The Extended School Services program in Kentucky overcame many barriers and challenges by considering transportation costs, getting technical assistance early in the implementation process on many programming issues, and providing site visits.
	4. Provide after-school staff with support and staff development in academic enrichment and tutoring.	Establish partnerships between schools and afterschool programs to ensure academic linkages between the school curriculum and afterschool programming and tutoring.	Provide technical assistance on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructional strategies.</li> <li>• Linkages with the school day.</li> <li>• Behavior management.</li> </ul>	Noam (2004) emphasizes collaboration, communication, content, and coherence in linking afterschool programming to the school day.
	5. Address the academic needs of a diverse group of students.	Offer professional development courses and training that cover a wide range of topics.  Hire highly qualified staff whose gender and ethnicity match that of attendees.	Provide technical assistance on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using appropriate instructional strategies and understanding cultural norms for all groups of students.</li> </ul>	The Forest Grove Community Learning Center's afterschool program offers students a workshop and discussion on the meaning of culture.  The Teen Educators Advocating for Community Health (TEACH) program targets immigrant students and assists them with the most common academic and social difficulties encountered.
STATE LEVEL	6. Implement standards for program quality and creativity.	Develop standards at the state level that can be followed by all afterschool sites within the state.	Provide technical assistance on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting standards that connect creativity and program quality.</li> </ul>	The state of New York requires 21st CCLC projects to align their academic curriculums to New York State Learning Standards and complete annual performance reports.
	7. Implement guidelines for academic enrichment and youth development activities.	Encourage all stakeholders to use a variety of resources to develop guidelines at the state level to be followed by all afterschool sites within each state.	Provide technical assistance on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following guidelines for academic enrichment and youth development.</li> </ul>	The DC Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation published <i>DC Standards for Out-of-School Time</i> . The standards include both organizational and program standards and indicators.  The Michigan State Board of Education developed Out-of-School Time (OST) Model Standards that are used as guidelines for afterschool programs.
	8. Provide new grantees with appropriate resources and advise them about positive and negative expectations for implementation.	Hold informational meetings for potential grantees at the beginning of grant cycle; hold kick-off meeting after grants have been awarded to help grantees begin their programs.  Start, at initial implementation, to form community partners and advisory groups to enhance sustainability.	Provide technical assistance on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting grant requirements for funding, including fiscal administration and reporting.</li> <li>• Working effectively with advisory groups.</li> <li>• Promoting program sustainability.</li> </ul>	In a Council of Chief State School Officers profile, the California Afterschool Learning and Safe Neighborhood Partnership Program made a priority of stronger alignment with state standards, assessment, and accountability.

## CONCLUSION

Although afterschool programs cannot solve all the issues faced by today's youth, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation (Miller, 2003) describes four positive effects of afterschool programs: (1) youth benefit from consistent participation in well-run, quality afterschool programs; (2) afterschool programs can increase engagement in learning; (3) afterschool programs can increase educational equity; and (4) afterschool programs can help students build key skills necessary for success in today's economy. Efforts to improve afterschool programming include the need to develop systematic program evaluations, disseminate standardized measures for participation levels, and consistently analyze data used in decision-making processes (RAND Corporation, 2005).

The issues of access, equity, and quality in afterschool programming continue to emerge as important factors in creating systems that will promote academic achievement opportunities during out-of-school time. Technical assistance at the state and local levels will play an important role in sustaining and developing effective afterschool programming. Organizations such as Learning Point Associates are committed to working closely with program and school staff, offering continuous professional development in terms of instructional strategies for successful afterschool programming, collecting and analyzing relevant program data, and working with SEAs to provide technical assistance.

The U.S. Department of Education, in conjunction with foundations and organizations around the country, is providing financial support at growing levels to improve and support afterschool programs for students attending high-poverty and low-performing schools. The 21st CCLC program continues to assist students in increasing their academic achievement by providing an afterschool environment conducive to both learning and enjoyment.



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## POLICY ISSUES

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## About Learning Point Associates

Learning Point Associates is a nonprofit educational organization with more than 20 years of direct experience empowering educators to transform student learning. We equip teachers, administrators, and policymakers with research-based strategies and services targeted to the unique needs of the field. Our professional staff continues to grow as our work expands both nationally and internationally, with offices in Naperville, Illinois; Chicago; and Washington, D.C. We create professional development services designed to improve educational practice, evaluate educational program data to determine the impact on student learning, and implement technology solutions to provide schools with data-driven decision-making processes.



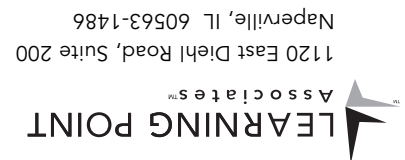
To order products and services, call **800-252-0283**. For general information, call **800-356-2735**. Visit our Web site at [www.learningpt.org](http://www.learningpt.org).

Ensuring Equity, Access, and Quality in  
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