New Jersey 21st Century Community Learning Centers

Year 2 Evaluation Report: Descriptive Data for 2020–21

June 2022

American Institutes for Research® | AIR.ORG

AIR®
Advancing Evidence.
Improving Lives.

New Jersey 21st Century Community Learning Centers

Year 2 Evaluation Report: Descriptive Data for 2020–21

June 2022

AIR® Headquarters
1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor
Arlington, VA 22202-3289
+1.202.403.5000 | **AIR.ORG**

16348_10/YR

Funding Statement

This project was funded in its entirety from the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Title IV, Part B, 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) grant through a contract with the New Jersey Department of Education. The ESEA was reauthorized in 2015 by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Contents

Exhibits

Executive Summary

Information summarized in this report is based on data collected and analyzed by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) as part of a statewide evaluation of the New Jersey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) programs. The data in this report are primarily from school years 2019–20 and 2020–21, with data provided by 63 subgrantees (148 centers) for 2019–20 and 66 grantees (147 centers) in 2020–21. Data from 2018–19 are also presented in several charts to enable pre-pandemic comparisons. The purpose of this executive summary is to outline applicable evaluation questions, describe the methods AIR used to address these questions, and summarize key findings. The executive summary concludes with a description of conclusions and next steps.

Note that this report is strictly a descriptive report. That is, nothing in this report should be understood as an assessment of 21st CCLC program impact in New Jersey; it should instead be interpreted as a presentation of 21st CCLC characteristics.

The information collected and analyzed in relation to the 2018–19, 2019–20, and 2020–21 school years was meant to answer two primary evaluation questions related to the implementation of the New Jersey 21st CCLC program:

1. **EQ1:** What are the primary characteristics of 21st CCLC programs in New Jersey and the populations they serve?
2. **EQ2:** How are New Jersey 21st CCLC subgrantees performing in terms of the leading indicators defined for the program?

These questions are in keeping with the descriptive nature of this report.

Data Sources

To address the evaluation questions, data were collected from the following sources during 2018–19, 2019–20, and 2020–21:

- **Program Activity and Review System (PARS21).** PARS21 is a web-based data collection system developed and maintained by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE). PARS21 collects data directly from grantees on a broad array of program characteristics, along with individual student information in the form of demographics and 21st CCLC program attendance (including activity session-level participation data). Notably, the system collected state student identifiers that can be linked to state warehouse outcome data (i.e., NJ SMART data, detailed later).

- **Staff Survey.** The purpose of the online staff survey was to obtain information from staff members working directly with youth in programs funded by 21st CCLC about the extent to which they engage in practices suggested by the afterschool research literature as likely to support both positive academic and youth development outcomes. The staff survey data are used primarily to create values for the program leading indicators.
- **New Jersey 21st CCLC Evaluation Template and Reporting System (ETRS).** The 21st CCLC ETRS is a web-based data collection application designed to obtain center-level information about the characteristics and performance of afterschool programs funded by 21st CCLC, based on information garnered from local evaluation efforts. The system is designed to collect information midyear through a given school year. ETRS data are used primarily to create values for the program leading indicators.
- **Youth Survey.** AIR collected a youth survey during fall 2020. This survey focused on youth experience in 21st CCLC programming specifically with respect to COVID-19 pandemic conditions. This pandemic-specific survey replaced AIR's standard social-emotional outcomes and youth experiences pre- and post-surveys.

Methods of Analysis

The findings in this report are purely quantitative, with methods as follows:

1. **Descriptive analyses.** Data related to grantee, center, and student characteristics obtained from PARS21 were analyzed descriptively.
2. **Analyses to create scale scores.** Many questions that appeared on the staff surveys and were represented in the ETRS reports were part of a series of questions designed to assess an underlying construct/concept, resulting in a single scale score summarizing performance in a given area of practice or facet of afterschool implementation (e.g., practices that support linkages to the school day). An example is shown Exhibit ES-1, which outlines the questions making up the *Intentionality Program Design* scale that appeared on the staff survey.

Exhibit ES-1. Example of a Survey Scale Calibrated Using Rasch Techniques

How often do you lead or participate in program activities that are...	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
a. Based on written plans for the session, assignments, and projects?	O	O	O	O
b. Well planned in advance?	O	O	O	O
c. Tied to specific learning goals?	O	O	O	O
d. Meant to build upon skills cultivated in a prior activity or session?	O	O	O	O
e. Explicitly meant to promote skill building and mastery in relation to one or more state standard?	O	O	O	O
f. Explicitly meant to address a specific developmental domain (e.g., cognitive, social, emotional, civic, physical, etc.)?	O	O	O	O
g. Structured to respond to youth feedback on what the content or format of the activity should be?	O	O	O	O
h. Informed by the expressed interests, preferences, and/or satisfaction of participating youth?	O	O	O	O

For scales like this, Rasch scale scores were created using responses to the whole series of questions to create one overall score. These scale scores ranged from 1 to 4; higher scores indicate a higher level or more frequent adoption of a specific quality practice or set of practices. Depending on the type of survey data involved, these scores could be left as individual scores or averaged to the center, grant, or state level. AIR used Rasch scale scores to calculate many of the leading indicator values.

Program Characteristic Summary

The following is a summary of key evaluation findings.

Primary Characteristics of Programs Funded by 21st CCLC and the Students Served

Grantee Characteristics

- A total of 66 grantees actively operated 147 centers during 2020–21.
- A plurality of grantees (36%) were in their second year of program operation during 2020–21, while a similar percentage (38%) were in their first year of program operation during

2019–20. These percentages are not surprising, given that they reflect the 5-year duration of subgrants in New Jersey and New Jersey's award cycles.

- Grantees were split between the categories of school-based (46% in 2020–21 and 44% in 2019–20) and non-school-based (54% in 2020–21 and 56% in 2019–20) grantees. These percentages are similar to those in previous years.

Center Characteristics

- A total of 1,944 staff were reported by grantees for school year 2020–21 across all programs, down significantly from 2,493 staff in school year 2019–20. This decrease is very likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- By far, the most common staff type reported by grantees was school-day teacher; 994 were reported for the 2020–21 school year, or 51.1% of all staff (compared with 1,164 school-day teachers in 2019–20, or 47% of all staff). The next highest category was program staff;[1] 350 program staff were reported for 2020–21 (or 18% of all staff), compared with 555 program staff reported for 2019–20 (or 22% of all staff).
- Centers on average had 13 staff members (median 11) for 2020–21, compared with an average of 17 staff members (median 14) for 2019–20. This decrease reflects the overall decrease in total staff, as noted above.
- The average student-to-staff ratio also decreased in 2020–21 compared with 2019–20, at about seven students per teacher compared with about 13 students for each program staff member during 2019–20. (The student-to-teacher ratio was also about 13 in 2018–19.)
- Centers mainly served children in elementary or middle school (89% of centers in 2020–21 and 88% in 2019–20, or about the same as in previous years).
- Approximately 32% of all centers chose career awareness as their theme during 2020–21 (compared to 28% in 2019–20). About 44% of centers in 2019–20 and 43% in 2020–21 chose science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Another 18% of centers in 2019–20 and 12% of centers in 2020–21 chose visual and performing arts as their central theme, and only 5% of centers in 2019–20 and in 2020–21 chose civic engagement.

Student Characteristics

- A total of 11,686 students attended 21st CCLC programming for at least 1 day in 2020–21, a significant decline compared with 20,446 in 2019–20. This decline is very likely due to school closures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.[2]

[1] "Program staff" is a category of staff reported in PARS21.
[2] A student counted as an attendee if and only if there was at least one associated activity session attendance record available for that student.

- A majority of 21st CCLC participants were Hispanic/Latino (47% in 2020–21 and 45% in 2019–20) or Black (33% in 2020–21 and 36% in 2019–20). Most attendees (74% in 2020–21 and 75% in 2019–20) qualified for free or reduced-price lunch.
- Comparing 2020–21 with 2019–20, a greater proportion of students attended less than 30 days in 2020–21 (36%, compared with 28% the previous year), while about the same proportion attended 30 to 59 days (27% for 2020–21 and 26% for 2019–20). A much smaller proportion of students attended between 60 and 89 days, however (14%, compared with 27% the previous year), while a slightly higher proportion attended 90 days or more (24% compared with 20% the year before). However, significantly fewer students participated during 2020–21 than during 2019–20, as indicated above. These attendance shifts are likely pandemic related.
- In 2020–21, about 39% of students were in their second (or higher) consecutive year of 21st CCLC programming, compared with about 32% for 2019–20. Again, this apparent increase is likely driven by the pandemic.
- On average, students spent about 18% of their time in tutoring or homework help during 2020–21, compared with 25% in 2019–20. Students spent about 23% of their time in academic enrichment during 2020–21, compared with 20% in 2019–20.
- Taking the median total student hours spent in each type of activity (instead of the average) showed that students spent a median of 0 hours in tutoring/homework help, 2 hours in academic enrichment, and about 0 hours in youth development/learning activities for 2020–21. For 2019–20, students spent a median of 10 hours in tutoring/homework help, 8 hours in academic enrichment, and about 7.5 hours in youth development/learning activities. The lower median values for 2020–21 are likely due to the pandemic. Even if this is so, however, the lower values could be a result of activity attendance changes, activity-offering changes, or data-reporting changes.
- A total of 25% students in 2020–21 and 47% students in 2019–20 participated in at least 10 hours of academic enrichment across the year. Comparable figures for youth development/learning activities were 16% for 2020–21 and 47% for 2019–20; for recreation, 11% (2020–21) and 41% (2019–20); and for tutoring, 17% (2020–21) and 50% (2019–20). These findings presumably show the impact of the pandemic on youth participation levels. However, the proportion of youth attending academic improvement/remediation activities for at least 10 hours remained the same between 2020–21 and 2019–20, at 20% in both years.
- For 2018–19, the typical student attended an average of 68 hours of reading and 56 hours of mathematics activities (average of total hours across the reporting period). In 2019–20, the figures were 56 and 51 hours, respectively, while in 2020–21 the same figures were 54

and 52 hours, respectively. The significant drop between 2018–19 and 2019–20 presumably shows the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Youth Survey Results Summary

During fall 2020, AIR administered a youth survey asking youth about their experience in 21st CCLC programming during the pandemic. The survey asked youth about their perceptions of programming offered during fall 2020 and about technological challenges to participating in virtual activities. AIR received a total of 3,117 responses to the survey. However, 160 youth indicated that they had not participated in 21st CCLC programming during the fall, leaving 2,957 survey responses. A total of 64 grantees reported youth survey data, representing 134 centers. Note that some grantees (the exact number is unknown) combined multiple centers into single virtual centers to more efficiently use staff during school closures; therefore, the total number of centers represented in the data may actually be higher than 134.

Overall, results from the COVID-19 youth survey suggest that youth tended to participate in virtual programming (and, to a lesser extent, in-person programming) at modestly high levels during the pandemic, at least during fall 2020. Although youth reported technological challenges with respect to online participation, they also tended to report that the activities in which they participated were engaging and relevant and helped them to learn. Areas for improvement may include designing activities that present appropriate challenges to youth participants while requiring them to concentrate: Only 62% of respondents indicated that they *had to concentrate* in their activities "most days" or "every day," while only 63% of respondents indicated that activities were *challenging* either "most days" or "every day."

Frequency of attendance as reported on the survey was somewhat lower among youth who indicated that they participated either "mostly online" or "both online and in-person," with about 54% and 61% of respondents, respectively, indicating they participated "several times a week" (compared with 72% to 74% of respondents for only online, mostly in-person, or only in-person groups). If hybrid program models (virtual and in-person programming) continue in the future, this finding may be worth exploring further.

The top technological challenge identified by respondents was "My internet connection is too slow" (about 61% of respondents indicated this was at least "sometimes" a challenge), followed by "My internet connection is unstable/I get disconnected" (about 57% of respondents indicated this was at least "sometimes" a challenge). Solutions to these challenges are not immediately clear, given that each participant's internet speed and stability are driven by a host of equipment and software factors, but this finding does highlight an important topic for consideration by NJDOE if online participation continues in the future.

Leading Indicators Summary

A primary goal of the statewide evaluation was to provide 21st CCLC grantees with data to inform program improvement efforts regarding their implementation of research-supported best practices. Building from the quality framework, AIR and NJDOE worked collaboratively to define a series of leading indicators predicated on data collected as part of the statewide evaluation. The leading indicators were meant to enhance existing information and data available to 21st CCLC grantees regarding how they fared in the adoption of program strategies and approaches associated with high-quality afterschool programming. Specifically, the leading indicator system was designed to do the following:

- Summarize data collected as part of the statewide evaluation in terms of how well the grantee and its respective centers[3] are adopting research-supported best practices.
- Enable grantees to compare their level of performance on leading indicators with similar programs and statewide averages.
- Facilitate internal discussions about areas of program design and delivery that may warrant additional attention from a program improvement perspective.

General Program Indicators

General program indicators relate to program practices at the general or program level but may have a strong effect on participant experience. Programs characterized by a supportive and collaborative climate enable staff to engage in self-reflective practice to improve overall program quality. As reported by Smith (2007); Glisson (2007); and Birmingham, Pechman, Russell, and Mielke (2005), an organizational climate that supports staff in reflecting on and continually improving program quality is a key aspect of effective youth development programs. Furthermore, research has suggested that youth achievement outcomes can be improved simply by paying attention to *how* programming is delivered (Birmingham et al., 2005; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). These indicators therefore provide information on program internal communication, links to the school day, collaboration with school partners, and staff commitment to quality at the point of service.

- The average statewide scale score for internal communication fell within the once-a-month response category for 2020–21 (scale response options included *never*, *a couple of times per year*, *about once a month*, and *nearly every week*), suggesting that the assessed collaborative efforts were frequently implemented during both programming periods (Leading Indicator 1).

[3] Throughout this report, the term *center* is used to refer to the physical location where 21st CCLC programming is delivered. Each grantee operates at least one center, although it is more common for a given grantee to operate multiple centers. Most, but not all, centers are located in public schools. The term *site* also is commonly used to refer to an individual center.

- Centers tended to have at least some access to school-based data on youth academic functioning and needs (Leading Indicator 2).
- In terms of program staff collaborating with school personnel to adopt practices that support academic skill building, including linkages to the school day and using data on youth academic achievement to inform programming, the statewide average was three staff in 2020–21 (about the same as for prior years), which indicates that staff agree that linkages exist (Leading Indicator 3).
- In terms of activities provided at the point of service meant to support youth development, statewide averages on the *Staff Capacity to Create Interactive and Engaging Environment* scale (the source for Leading Indicator 4) suggest that staff adoption of such practices is more common than not. This was true for prior years.

Activity-Related Indicators

Activity-related indicators provide data on both activity provision and activity participation, with indicators addressing mathematics and language arts, social and emotional development, and parent or guardian involvement. Overall, these indicators showed the following:

- A statewide average of about 33.3% of activity sessions in 2020–21 and 34.2% of activity sessions in 2019–20 had either a mathematics or a language arts focus (Leading Indicator 5).
- Statewide, slightly under two thirds of regular attendees participated in mathematics or language arts activities for at least half their activity time in 2020–21 (Leading Indicator 7). Note that the proportion of students meeting this criterion was higher in 2019–20 (77.1%).
- The design of activity sessions frequently targeted the skills and knowledge that staff were trying to impart to participating youth (Leading Indicator 6). This was true in prior years.
- Statewide, an average of approximately 85.2% of activity sessions offered in 2020–21 infused components that were meant to support youth development-related behaviors and social and emotional learning (SEL; Leading Indicator 8).
- An average of about 89.4% of regular attendees in 2020–21, down from 94.7% of regular attendees in 2019–20, participated for at least 20% of their time in activities meant to support youth development-related behaviors and SEL (Leading Indicator 9).
- The *Practices Supportive of Positive Youth Development* and *Opportunities for Youth Ownership* scales of the staff survey (the sources for Leading Indicator 10) suggest, as in previous years, that staff adoption of such practices is more common than not.

- In terms of engaging in practices to support and cultivate parent involvement and engagement (Leading Indicator 11), most sites were found to do so sometimes or frequently, with a statewide mean scale score of 2.22 in 2020–21.
- Only a very small percentage of program participants (4.4% in 2020–21, 4.1% in 2019–20) had parents or other adult family members attend activities during the school year. Overall, only 29 centers (20.1%) reported activities of this sort in 2020–21, compared with 25 centers (17.2%) in 2019–20.
- Leading Indicator 5, "Offering activities meant to support student growth in either mathematics or language arts that are led by a certified teacher." Statewide, 34.9% of activity sessions offered in 2018–19 targeted mathematics or ELA, compared with 34.2% in 2019–20. As in previous years, most centers did offer at least *some* activities of this sort: 122 in 2018–19 (89.7% of all centers with indicator data) and 119 in 2019–20 (82.1% of all centers with indicator data). These values are also higher than the values in 2017–18, when 32.7% of activity sessions met these criteria and 99 of centers (or 78.6% of centers with indicator data) offered at least some activities of this type.
- Leading Indicator 12, "Parent or family member involvement in activities." Statewide, 6.2% of youth program participants had a parent or family member participate in an activity in 2018–19, compared with 4.1% in 2019–20. Overall, only 28 centers (or 20.6% of centers with indicator data) reported activities of this sort during 2018–19, compared with 25 centers (or 17.2% of centers with indicator data) in 2019–20. (For comparison, 5.5% of youth participants in 2017–18 had a parent or family member participate, with 35 centers, or 27.6%, reporting activities of this sort.)

Conclusions and Next Steps

As in previous years, the 21st CCLC program in New Jersey appears to be serving the population intended and is offering activities in keeping with New Jersey's 21st CCLC goals. However, 2020–21 attendance levels were well below prior-year attendance, both in terms of total youth served and participation hours. This was expected given the pandemic, but will be important to watch in 2021–22 as programs seek to return to in-person operation. The post-pandemic period is likely to host new challenges that warrant close examination and consideration in future evaluation work.

In terms of youth-reported program experience during the pandemic, youth generally indicated positive experiences in virtual programming. The level of challenge presented by virtual programming, however, was somewhat low, and youth reported having at least some technical issues when trying to participate. These may be temporary issues linked only to programming

hosted during the 21st CCLC pandemic but are worth monitoring in the future, especially if virtual programming (in any capacity) continues in the future.

In terms of leading indicator values, most indicator values for 2020–21 and 2019–20 were similar to the values observed in previous years. However, values for Leading Indicators 8 and 9 have declined modestly, which may bear investigation. These indicators concern social and emotional activity content ("Staff infuse components that are meant to support the social and emotional development of participating youth" and "Youth enrolled in the program participate in a meaningful level of activities designed to support youth development and social and emotional competencies"). Additionally, Leading Indicator 6 ("Staff design and deliver intentional and relevant activities designed to support student growth and development in mathematics and reading/language arts") increased slightly, while Leading Indicator 7 ("Youth enrolled in the program participate in a meaningful level of activities designed to support youth growth in reading and mathematics achievement") declined. Whether these trends hold during 2021–22 will be important, since it is unclear to what extent these changes are connected to the COVID-19 pandemic.

AIR's recommendations for NJDOE follow from these observations and from the context of the COVID-19 pandemic more broadly. First—and similar to the recommendation presented last year—exploration of attendance trends should be conducted concerning 2020–21 data, given the overlap of 2020–21 with pandemic-related school closures. The next report should include up to 4 years of attendance data so that pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic attendance periods can be compared. Analysis of activities offered and attended would also be valuable to assess any changes in activity types across years covered by the pandemic. These analyses would help further quantify disruption caused by the pandemic and would show whether the disruption persists in the post-pandemic period.

Second, AIR should discuss parameters for a 2022–23 parent survey. Such a survey could be useful in identifying post-pandemic family needs and challenges and, therefore, could help guide ongoing program improvement efforts. This type of work will be especially important given the host of challenges faced by families in the post-pandemic period. Additionally, it may be beneficial to assess staff stress levels and staffing stability, given the challenges encountered by staff due to changes resulting from the pandemic.

Section 1. Introduction

For 2 decades, the 21st *Century Community Learning Centers* (21st CCLC) program operating across New Jersey has provided youth in high-poverty communities the opportunity to participate in academic enrichment programs and other development and support activities designed to enhance their academic well-being. The primary purpose of this report, one in a series of evaluation reports, is to provide a descriptive picture of the 21st CCLC program across New Jersey.

The information presented in this report is the result of data collected and analyzed as part of a statewide evaluation of New Jersey's 21st CCLC program that the American Institutes for Research (AIR) is currently conducting. The results outlined in this report are associated with 21st CCLC–funded activities and services delivered during the 2018–19, 2019–20, and 2020–21 school years.

Evaluation Context

This report is entirely descriptive, providing only an overview of the programming during the school years in question. The data shown in this report do not show program impact. While AIR will be conducting impact analyses in future reports, this report does not make use of analytic methods robust enough to attribute *cause*.

Further note that the second year and third years considered for this report—the 2019–20 and 2020–21 school years—were both affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated school closures (with 2020–21 affected in its entirety). Schools in New Jersey closed and shifted to virtual formats in March 2020 (early to mid-March) and continued in virtual programming through 2020–21, which undoubtedly affected 21st CCLC programs serving youth at those schools. Because of this, comparisons across the program years shown in this report are not "apples to apples" comparisons but presumably highlight shifts associated with the pandemic. Again, however, this report does not attempt to uncover causal connections; the disruption to programming caused by the COVID-19 pandemic should merely be kept in mind while comparing numbers from the 3 years.

Report Organization

This report is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the research questions we set out to answer in this report, along with descriptions of all data sources and the methods. Section 2 concludes with a description of known limitations. Section 3 provides an overview of grantee,

site,[4] and youth participant characteristics. Section 4 presents the results of AIR's youth survey, tailored for pandemic conditions. Section 5 presents the leading indicator values associated with multiple years of data and concludes with a short description of common program strengths or weaknesses as conveyed through the indicators. Section 6, the conclusion, provides a high-level summary of important findings and briefly discusses next steps.

[4] In this report, the terms *site* and *program* are used to refer to the physical location where 21st CCLC–funded services and activities take place. Sites are characterized by defined hours of operation, have dedicated staffs, and usually have positions similar to site coordinators. Each 21st CCLC grantee in New Jersey has at least one site; many grantees have more than one site.

Section 2. Research Questions and Evaluation Approach

Section 2 presents the research questions addressed in this report. Additionally, we present all data sources and analytic methods used to address the research questions, along with important limitations.

Research Questions

Using data from 2018–19, 2019–20, and 2020–21, this descriptive report seeks to address two of the seven evaluation questions:

1. **EQ1:** What are the primary characteristics of 21st CCLC programs in New Jersey and the populations they serve?
2. **EQ2:** How are New Jersey 21st CCLC subgrantees performing in terms of the leading indicators defined for the program?

Sections 3 and 4 address EQ1, while Section 5 addresses EQ2.

Data Sources

To address the evaluation questions, data were collected from the following sources during 2018–19, 2019–20, and 2020–21:

- **Program Activity and Review System (PARS21).** PARS21 is a Web-based data collection system developed and maintained by NJDOE. PARS21 collects data directly from grantees on a broad array of program characteristics, along with individual student information in the form of demographics and 21st CCLC program attendance (including activity session–level participation data). Notably, the system collected state student identifiers that can be linked to state warehouse outcome data (i.e., NJ SMART data, detailed later).
- **Staff survey.** The purpose of the online staff survey was to obtain information from staff members working directly with youth in programs funded by 21st CCLC about the extent to which they engage in practices suggested by the afterschool research literature as likely to be supportive of both positive academic and youth development outcomes. Scales appearing on the survey included the following:
  - Collective staff efficacy in creating interactive and engaging settings for youth
  - Intentionality in activity and session design
  - Practices supportive of academic skill building, including linkages to the school day and using data about student academic achievement to inform programming
  - Practices supportive of positive youth development

  - Opportunities for youth ownership
  - Staff collaboration and communication to support continuous program improvement
  - Practices supportive of parent involvement and engagement

  Staff members were selected as part of the survey sample if they were actively providing services at the site that directly served students participating in the program. The 21st CCLC project directors were instructed to select staff members who worked in their program the most frequently and delivered activities that were most aligned with their centers' objectives for student growth and development. The goal was to have project directors identify a minimum of 12 staff members per center to take the survey. In cases in which centers had fewer than 12 active staff members, all staff members working with students at the center were directed to take the survey. This data collection took place during the first three months of each school year. Completed surveys were obtained from 116 centers active during the 2018–19 school year, 144 centers active during the 2019–20 school year, and 129 centers active during the 2020–21 school year (averaging approximately 8.9, 9.8, and 6.7 completed surveys per site, respectively). Note that, for this report, these data are presented as part of the leading indicators (many leading indicator values are based on the staff survey data).

- **New Jersey 21st CCLC Evaluation Template and Reporting System (ETRS).** The 21st CCLC ETRS is a Web-based data collection application designed to obtain center-level information about the characteristics and performance of afterschool programs funded by 21st CCLC, based on information garnered from local evaluation efforts. The system is designed to collect information midyear through a given school year. ETRS data are primarily used in creating values for the program leading indicators.
- **Youth Survey.** AIR collected a youth survey during fall 2020. This survey focused on youth experience in 21st CCLC programming specifically with respect to COVID-19 pandemic conditions. This pandemic-specific survey replaced AIR's standard social-emotional outcomes and youth experiences survey (pre and post).

Methods

The findings in this report are purely quantitative. The methods are as follows:

1. **Descriptive analyses.** Data related to grantee, center, and student characteristics obtained from PARS21 were analyzed descriptively. This includes basic statistics such as overall totals, averages, median values, percentages, and so on.
2. **Analyses to create scale scores.** Many questions that appeared on the staff surveys and were represented in the ETRS reports were part of a series of questions designed to assess

an underlying construct/concept, resulting in a single scale score summarizing performance in a given area of practice or facet of afterschool implementation (e.g., practices that support linkages to the school day). An example is shown Exhibit 1, which outlines the questions making up the *Intentionality Program Design* scale that appeared on the staff survey.

Exhibit 1. Example of a Survey Scale Calibrated Using Rasch Techniques

How often do you lead or participate in program activities that are...	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
a. Based on written plans for the session, assignments, and projects?	○	○	○	○
b. Well planned in advance?	○	○	○	○
c. Tied to specific learning goals?	○	○	○	○
d. Meant to build upon skills cultivated in a prior activity or session?	○	○	○	○
e. Explicitly meant to promote skill building and mastery in relation to one or more state standard?	○	○	○	○
f. Explicitly meant to address a specific developmental domain (e.g., cognitive, social, emotional, civic, physical, etc.)?	○	○	○	○
g. Structured to respond to youth feedback on what the content or format of the activity should be?	○	○	○	○
h. Informed by the expressed interests, preferences, and/or satisfaction of participating youth?	○	○	○	○

For scales like this, Rasch scale scores were created using responses to the whole series of questions to create one overall score. These scale scores ranged from 1 to 4, where higher scores indicated a higher level or more frequent adoption of a specific quality practice or set of practices. Depending on the type of survey data involved, these scores could be left as individual scores (e.g., for use in analyzing youth survey data) or averaged at the center, grant, or state level (e.g., staff survey data). AIR used Rasch scale scores in calculating many of the leading indicator values.

Limitations and Challenges

It is important to note that there are limitations associated with the types of data collected by AIR during 2018–19, 2019–20, and 2020–21. Without attempting to be exhaustive, the primary limitations are as follows:

- By far the most important consideration for all results shown in this report is the **effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on 21st CCLC programming and participation.** The shift from in-person programming to virtual was, very likely, the primary driver for the reduced participation levels shown in this report, while the impact of pandemic-related stress on participants, parents, and program staff was undoubtedly profound and complex. This pandemic context, with all its associated unknowns, is essential to the interpretation of the data presented throughout this report.
- **Attendance and participation data are self-reported by grantees.** In New Jersey, 21st CCLC grantees are responsible for collecting and tracking youth attendance and participation data using New Jersey's PARS21 system. How well grantees do this likely varies. Some grantees may have provided more accurate data than others did. Further, in the context of the pandemic, where programming was often virtual and programs were frequently combined into a single virtual "center," program activity and participation data reporting likely varied even more than usual.
- **Surveys can be subject to bias.** Survey data are subject to a number of limitations, including bias (such as recency bias) and social desirability response (i.e., providing socially acceptable but untrue responses in cases where the true responses are perceived as socially undesirable). The staff survey results (as included in the leading indicators) and youth survey results presented in this report should therefore be interpreted with some caution.
- **Fewer youth surveys and staff surveys were collected than in previous, non-pandemic years**. This is unsurprising but suggests that the results may not be representative of all programming across New Jersey.

Finally, and as stated previously, no findings in this report should be interpreted as findings of program effect. The results are all descriptive; that is, no inferences concerning cause and effect are warranted by the data shown.

Section 3. Program Characteristics

Programs funded by 21st CCLC grants are often characterized by a wide diversity of approaches, student populations, and types of organizations involved in providing 21st CCLC programming. This chapter summarizes the characteristics of grantees, centers, and students associated with 21st CCLC programs active during the 2020–21 school year. Overall, 66 grantees in 2020–21 operated 147 centers. In all, the 147 centers in 2020–21 served 11,689 youth (compared with 19,129 youth during 2019–20), likely showing the effect of the pandemic on overall participation rates (granting that closures related to the pandemic began in late 2019–20).

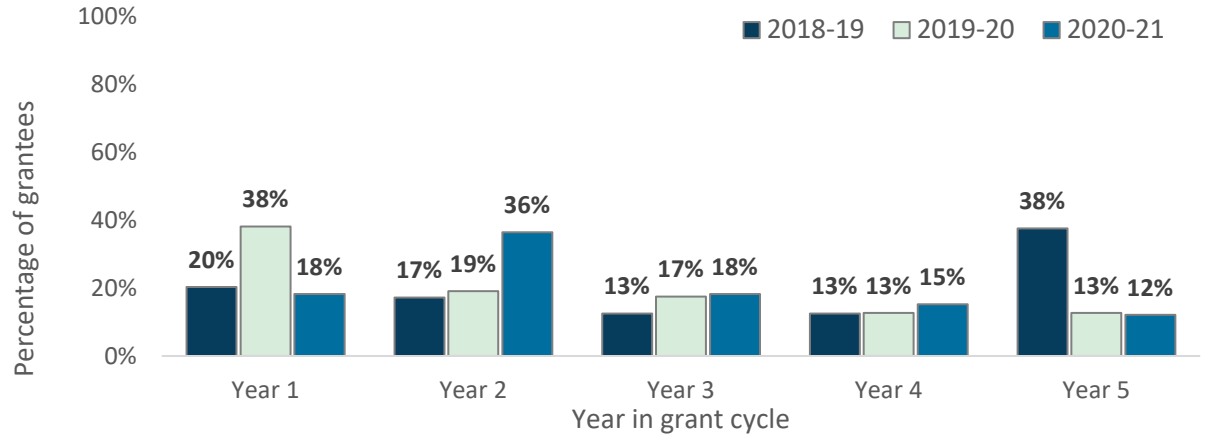
Grantee Characteristics

This section contains information on key grantee characteristics. In this report, the term "grantee" refers to the organization that serves as the fiduciary agent on the grant in question, whether it is a school district, community-based organization, or other entity and whether it is ultimately responsible for administering grant funds at the program level.

Grantee Maturity

Programs evolve across the grant period. For example, grantees may find themselves needing to emphasize some elements of their programs and reducing or eliminating others in response to changes in the students served. In addition, it would be optimal for grantees, over time, to learn how to (a) provide more effective and engaging programming for youth and (b) more meaningfully embed academic content in their program offerings in ways that address the needs of the students they are serving. As Exhibit 2 shows, the plurality of the grants active during the 2020–21 school year were in Year 2 of funding, which is not surprising given the 5-year grant cycle and the fact that a plurality of grants for the 2019–20 school year were in Year 1 of funding.

Exhibit 2. Number of Grantees by Year of Operation, 2018–19, 2019–20, and 2020–21

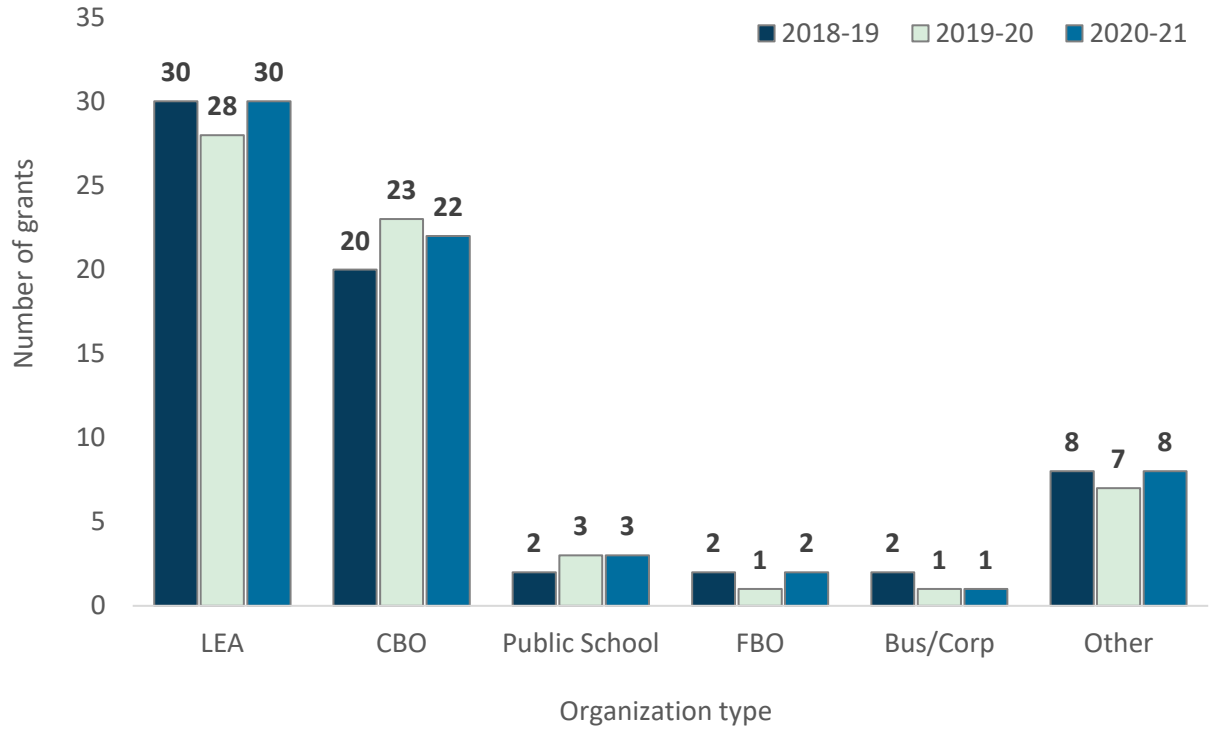


Source. PARS21.

Grantee Organization Type

An important element of the 21st CCLC program is that all types of organizations are eligible to apply for and receive 21st CCLC grants. As Exhibit 3 shows, 46% of grants active during the 2020–21 school year were held by school districts (a slight increase from 44% the previous year), whereas community-based organizations accounted for 33% of the grants active during this period (down from 37% the previous year). Public schools and faith-based organizations in 2020–21 accounted for about 5% and 3% of grants, respectively, as compared to 5% and 2% of grants in 2019–20. All other categories accounted for roughly 13% of grants in 2020–21, similar to the roughly 13% in 2019–20.[5] Grant types remained about the same between 2019–20 and 2020–21, with minor changes year to year.

Exhibit 3. Number of Grantees by Organization Type



Note. LEA = local education agency; CBO = community-based organization; FBO = faith-based organization; Bus/Corp = business/corporate. LEA and public school are separate categories within the PARS21 data reporting system.
Source. PARS21.

[5] School districts and public schools are separate categories for grant entities as recorded in PARS21.

Center Characteristics

This section presents key center characteristic data. In this report, the term "center" refers to the physical location where 21st CCLC–funded services and activities take place. Each center has defined hours of operation, dedicated staff members, and a site coordinator to manage operations. Each 21st CCLC grantee in New Jersey has at least one center; many grantees have more than one center.

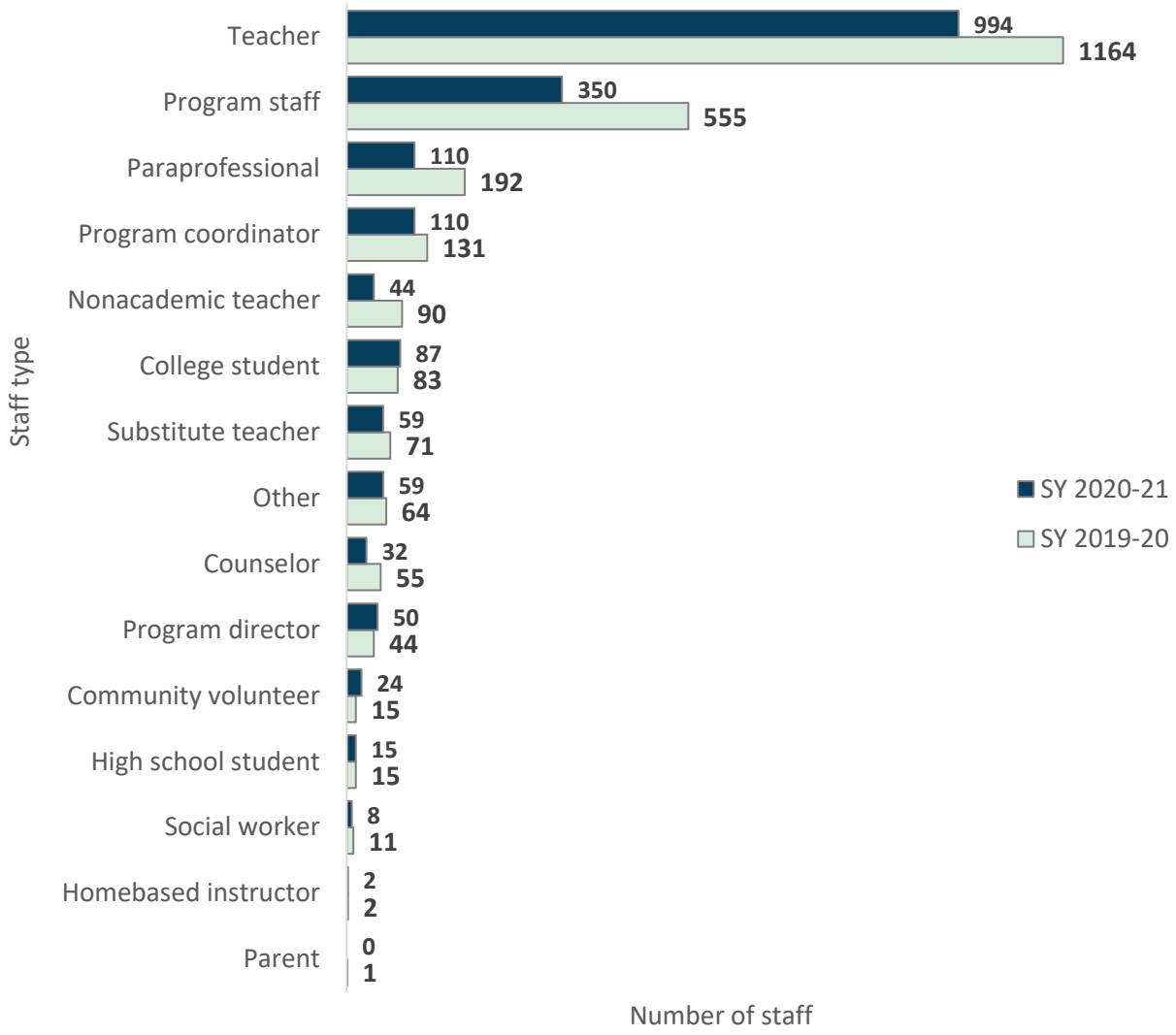
Center characteristics can be described as indicative of research-supported best practices or as innate attributes of the center in question without a strong connection to the afterschool quality practice literature. The latter category of center characteristics might include the grade level served, program maturity, and organizational type. For example, identifying a program as one that serves only elementary students says nothing about the quality of that program.

Other characteristics of a site, such as the staffing model, are somewhat ambiguous when viewed from a quality practice standpoint; the literature is unclear on the superiority of certain staffing approaches. From a policy standpoint, NJDOE considers certain approaches to staffing for certain types of activities to be appropriate from a quality standpoint—namely, that certified teachers should staff academic programming provided in the afterschool program.

Staffing

Grantees in New Jersey report staff information in PARS21, linking each staff member to activities provided during 21st CCLC programming. Staff can be categorized in a number of different ways, such as "parent" and "college student." Counting only those staff who were in some way associated with the provision of actual activities, a total of 1,944 staff were reported by grantees for school year 2020–21 across all programs, down significantly from 2,493 staff in school year 2019–20. In terms of classification of these staff, by far the most commonly reported staff types were "teacher" (51.1% of all staff) and "program staff" (18% of all staff), with distant thirds being "paraprofessional" (5.7%) and "program coordinator" (5.7%), followed by "college student" (4.5%). A notable decrease was the number of "non-academic teachers" on staff, dropping from 90 (3.6%) in 2019–20 down to only 44 (2.3%) in 2020–21. Exhibit 4 shows the total number of staff across New Jersey by staff type. Distribution of staff type and total number of staff did not change substantially between school years 2019–20 and 2020–21.

Exhibit 4. Total Number of Staff by Staff Type, 2019–20 and 2020–21



Note. Based on activity staff data for 147 centers in 2020–21 and 148 centers in 2019–20.

Overall, centers had an average of 13.2 total staff in 2020–21, down significantly from an average of 16.8 total staff for the 2019–20 school year, with a median of 11 and 14 staff in 2020–21 and 2019–20, respectively (again, only counting staff who actually participated in activity offerings). However, as Exhibit 5 shows, there was some variation in total staff, with a standard deviation of 8.9 and 10.2 staff members in 2020–21 and 2019–20, respectively.[6]

Exhibit 5. Overall Statistics on Number of Center Staff

Total staff	*N*	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Standard deviation
2019–20	148	16.8	14	1	61	10.2
2020–21	147	13.2	11	1	51	8.9

In addition to exploring the number of staff employed by centers during the 2020–21 and 2019–20 school years, researchers calculated the average student-to-staff ratio associated with activity sessions provided during the span of the school year in question. As Exhibit 6 shows, the average student-to-staff ratio was approximately one staff member for every seven or so youth participating in activities in 2020–21 (compared to approximately 13 in 2019–20), although across centers, the span of ratios was quite broad, ranging from just under one student to approximately 41 in school year 2020–21. The mean ratio was lower for 2020–21 than for 2019–20, as the exhibit shows for ease of comparison. This makes sense given reduced attendance levels during the pandemic.

Exhibit 6. Average Student–Teacher Ratio per Center, 2019–20 Through 2020–21

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
2020–21 student/staff ratio	147	.42	41.09	7.08	6.68
2019–20 student/staff ratio	148	.65	70.32	13.26	7.91

Source. PARS21.

[6] In a normal distribution, this would mean that approximately 68% of centers would have between six and 28 total staff—a fairly broad range.

Grade Levels Served

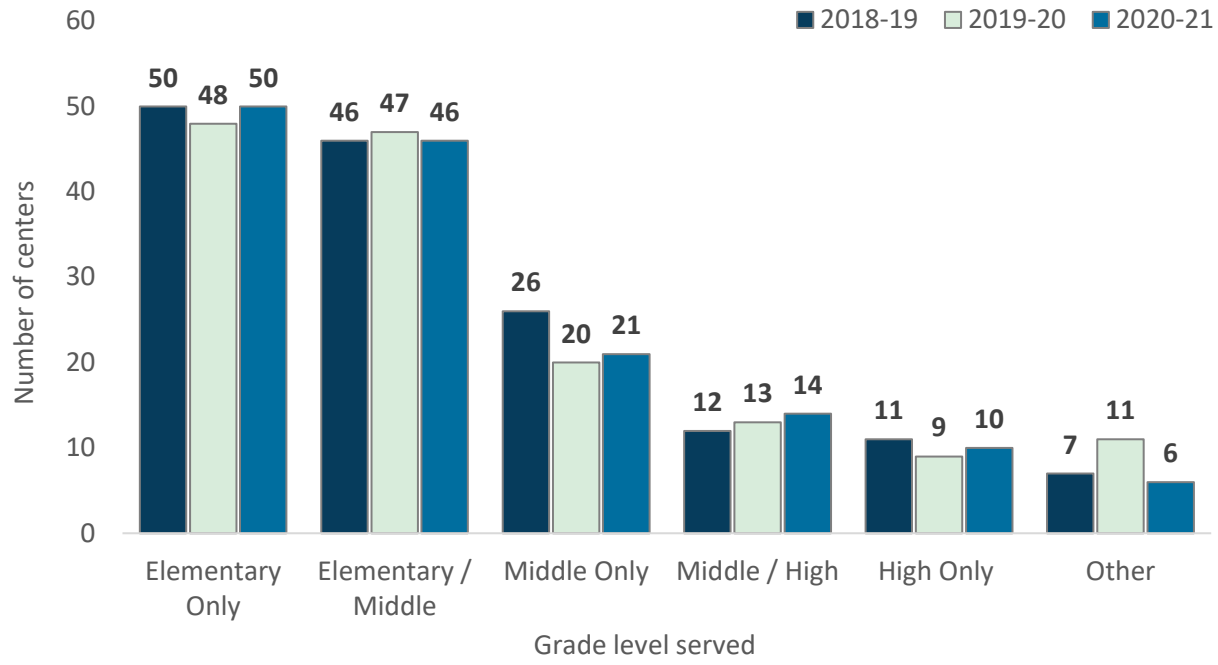
The grade levels served by a program play a role in (a) how 21st CCLC programs should structure their operations and program offerings and (b) the domain of outcomes they should be accountable for through performance indicator systems. Using student-level data on the grade levels of students attending centers, centers active during the 2019–20 and 2020–21 school years were classified as follows:

- Elementary Only, serving students up to Grade 6
- Elementary/Middle, serving students up to Grade 8
- Middle Only, serving students in Grades 5–8
- Middle/High, serving students in Grades 5–12
- High Only, serving students in Grades 9–12

A sixth category, called Other, includes centers that do not fit into one of the five categories, such as centers that serve students across all three grade levels or some other combination of grade levels.

The High Only category is especially important to analyze because afterschool programming for older students often looks considerably different from programming for elementary or middle school students. In addition, high school students have different needs from younger students, and they often have other afternoon obligations, such as jobs or extracurricular activities. The bulk of the centers active during the 2019–20 and 2020–21 school years served elementary or middle school students in some capacity (constituting 89.1% of all sites in 2020–21 and 86.5% of all sites in 2019–20), whereas not quite two thirds of all sites served elementary students in some capacity (65.3% and 64.2% of all sites in 2020–21 and 2019–20, respectively), as Exhibit 7 shows.

Exhibit 7. Number of Centers by Grade Level Served



Note. Based on 147 centers for 2020–21, 148 centers for 2019–20, and 152 centers for 2018–19.

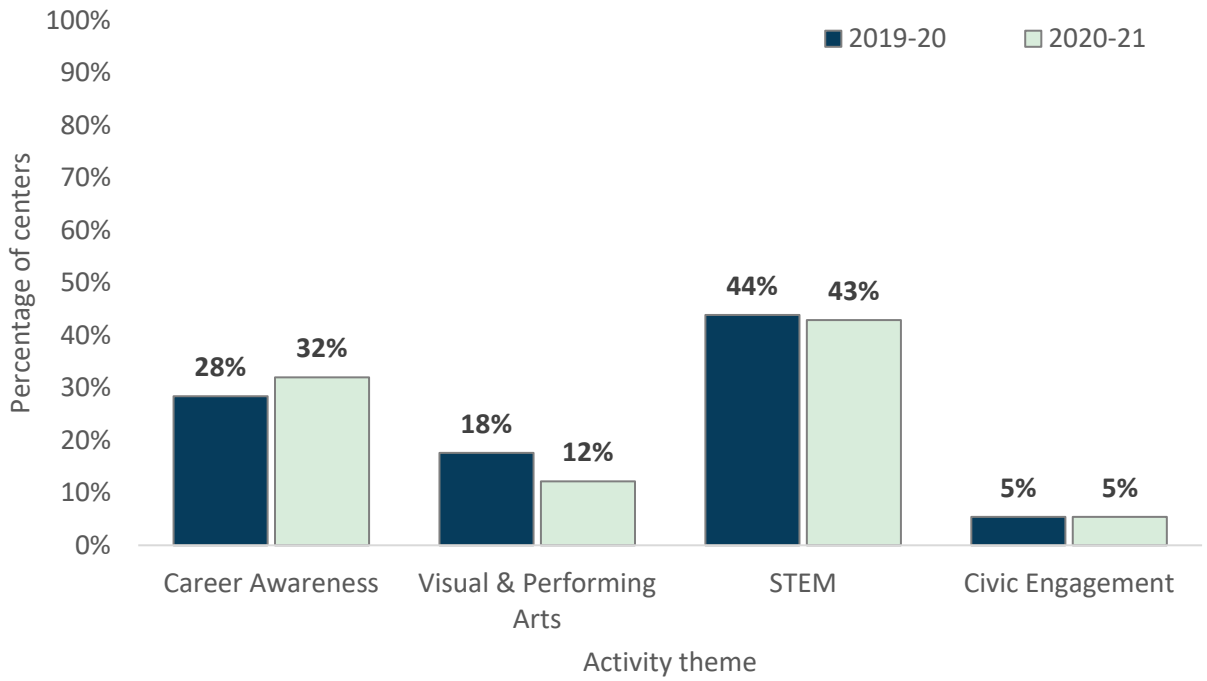
Activity Themes

For the 2020–21 school year, grantees were required to adopt one or more themes when providing activities. The grantees were to select a theme based on the students' needs, interests, and developmental age and were meant to further support targeted skill building and development through the provision of activities youth would especially find engaging. Themes included the following:

- Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)
- Career awareness and exploration
- Civic engagement
- Visual and performing arts

As Exhibit 8 shows, in school year 2019–20, 28% of centers reported a career awareness theme, 18% a visual and performing arts theme, 44% a STEM theme, and 5% a civic engagement theme. During the school year 2020–21, there was a slight decrease in STEM (to 43% from 44%), a decrease in visual and performing arts (to 12% from 18%), and an increase in career awareness (to 32% from 28%) from the prior year. There was no change in the percentage of centers reporting a civic engagement theme (5%). Note that themes were derived for centers based on (a) whether they offered any activities associated with a given theme and (b) how many total activity minutes were associated with each theme the center reported (with the theme designation going to the theme that had the highest minutes).

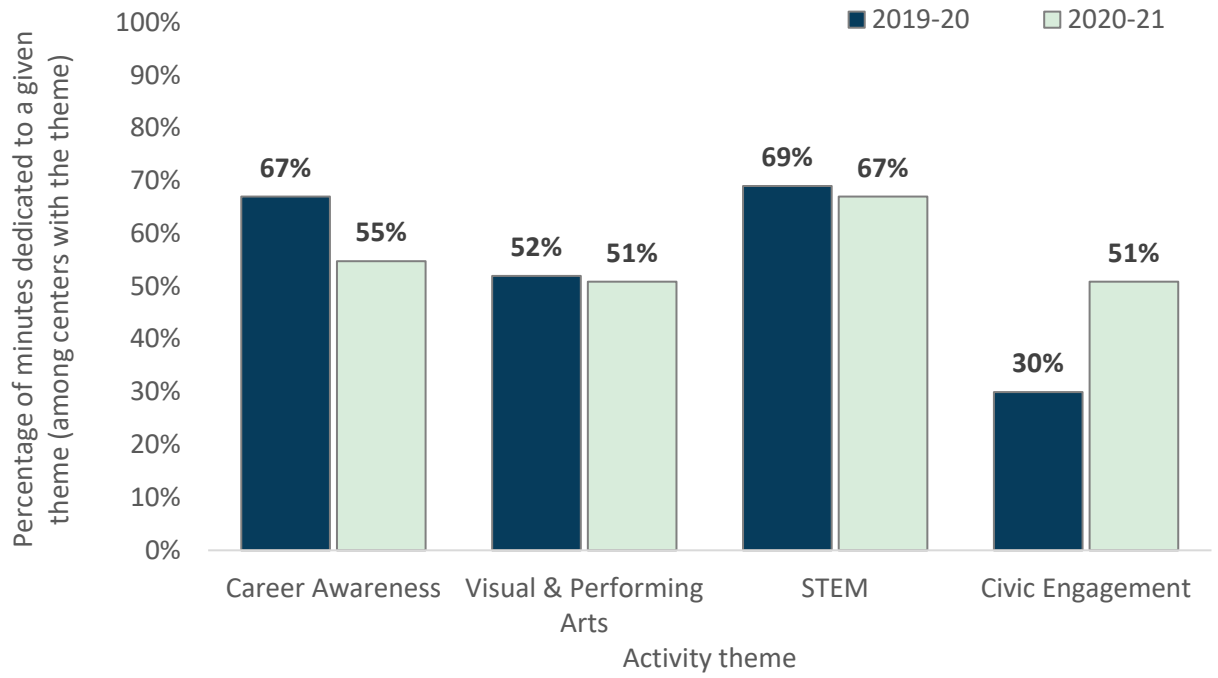
Exhibit 8. Percentage of Centers Offering Activities Linked to a Given Theme



Source. PARS21.

As Exhibit 9 shows, in school year 2020–21, centers with a career awareness theme spent, on average, about 55% of their total activity minutes on career awareness, down significantly from 67% in 2019–20. Centers with a visual and performing arts theme spent 51% on such activities, consistent with 2019–20. Centers focusing on STEM spent about 67% of their time on such activities, similar to 2019–20, and centers with a civic engagement theme spent about 51% of their time on that theme, up from 2019–20 but more in line with years prior to 2019–20. Whether the changes observed for career awareness and civic engagement are related to the COVID-19 pandemic is unclear, but this issue bears watching in future reports.

Exhibit 9. Percentage of Total Activity Minutes Dedicated to Activity Themes Among Centers With Each Theme



Source. PARS21.

Attendee Characteristics

During the 2020–21 and 2019–20 school years, 11,689 and 19,129 students, respectively, participated at some level (i.e., attended programming for at least 1 day during the school year) in 21st CCLC programming at 147 and 148 active centers for which the researchers had data for this period.[7] This notable drop is almost certainly due to the pandemic and is expected. The attendee population was diverse in terms of ethnicity, gender, grade level, and economic level, as Exhibit 10 shows. Generally, students served during the 2020–21 and 2019–20 school years were Black and Hispanic/Latino; were enrolled in elementary or middle school, especially in Grades 3–7; and were eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch programs. In terms of year-to-year changes, most statistics remained proportionally stable year to year; only modest changes were evident.

[7] During the 2018–19 and 2019–20 school years, 152 and 148 active centers, respectively, had student-level attendance records in PARS21, confirming participation in actual activity sessions during the span of the school year.

Exhibit 10. Summary of Demographic Information for Students, 2019–20 and 2020–21

	Demographic category	2020–21		2019–20	
		Number of students	Percentage	Number of students	Percentage
Race/ Ethnicity	White	1,642	14.0%	2,303	12.0%
	Black	3,848	32.9%	6,944	36.3%
	Hispanic/Latino	5,432	46.5%	8,657	45.3%
	Asian	430	3.7%	495	2.6%
	Native American	42	0.4%	54	0.3%
	Pacific Islander	20	0.2%	32	0.2%
	Unknown	273	2.3%	644	3.4%
Gender	Male	5,615	48.0%	9,518	49.8%
	Female	6,072	52.0%	9,611	50.2%
Grade Level	2	2	0.0%	6	0.0%
	3	1,434	13.0%	1,764	9.2%
	4	2,066	18.7%	3,467	18.1%
	5	1,492	13.5%	2,777	14.5%
	6	2,056	18.6%	2,984	15.6%
	7	1,378	12.4%	2,125	11.1%
	8	944	8.5%	1,577	8.2%
	9	794	7.2%	1,916	10.0%
	10	415	3.7%	744	3.9%
	11	288	2.6%	556	2.9%
	12	203	1.8%	370	1.9%
Free or Reduced-Price Lunch	Reduced Price	795	6.8%	1,578	8.2%
	Free	7,898	67.6%	12,711	66.4%
	Not Available	2,994	25.6%	4,840	25.3%

Source. PARS21.

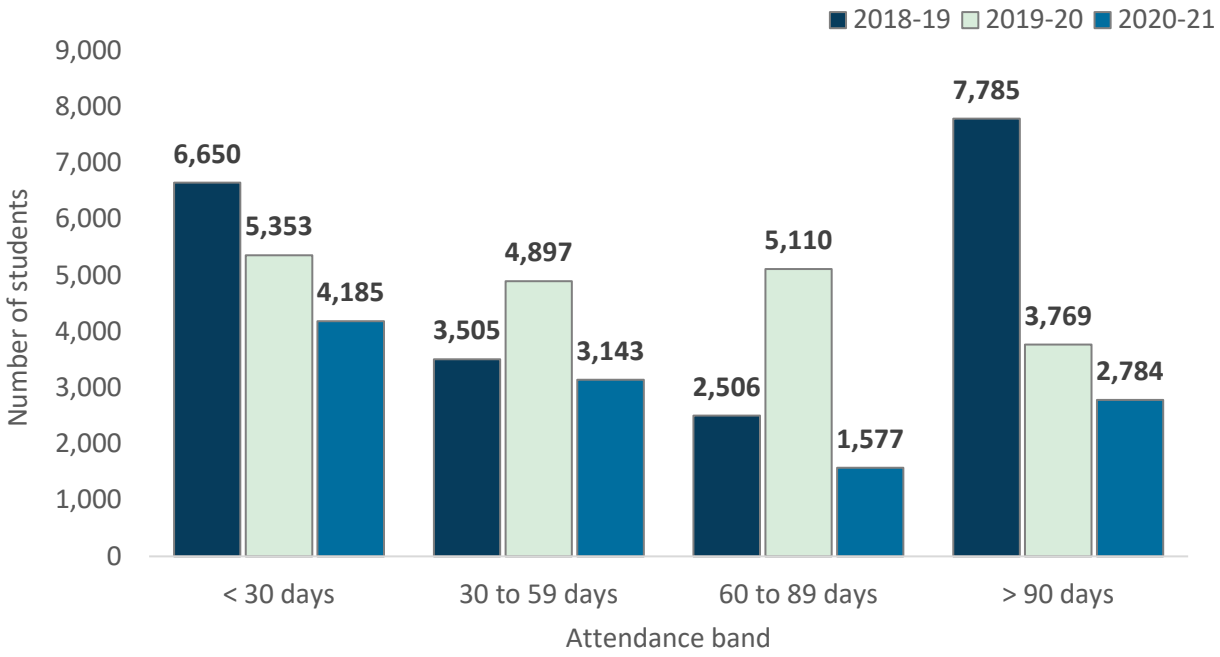
Student Attendance Levels

Attendance is an intermediate outcome indicator that reflects the potential breadth and depth of exposure to afterschool programming. In this regard, attendance can be considered in terms of (a) the total number of students who participated in the center's programming throughout the course of the year and (b) the frequency and intensity with which students attended programming when it was offered. The former number can be used as a measure of the breadth of a center's reach, whereas the latter can be construed as a measure of how successful the center was in retaining students in center-provided services and activities. As a result of the pandemic, of course, it is expected that both numbers will be low compared to prior years.

Among students participating in activities (including virtually) during the 2020–21 school year, the average number of days attending 21st CCLC programming was 54.4—down slightly from 2019–20 (55.2 days). Exhibit 11 shows the student population served during the 2020–21 school year broken into four attendance gradations: the number of students attending fewer than 30 days, students attending 30 to 59 days, students attending 60 to 89 days, and students attending 90 or more days. As Exhibit 11 shows, slightly more than one third of the students (35.8%, substantially more than the previous year's figure of 28%) attended fewer than 30 days. Slightly fewer than one quarter participated for 90 or more days (23.8%, slightly more than the previous year's 19.7%). These past two years' attendance levels are relatively lower than previous-year attendance levels.

During the 2019–20 school year, among students participating in activities, the average number of days of attending 21st CCLC programming dropped to 55.2 from 67.2 the previous year. Again, the most likely cause of this drop consists of program closures and changes related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, however, as Exhibit 11 shows, slightly fewer than one third of the students (28%, compared with 32.5% the previous year) attended fewer than 30 days. This level is lower than in previous years. Significantly more students attended between 30 and 59 days (25.6%, compared with 17.1% the previous year) and between 60 and 89 days (26.7%, compared with 12.3% the previous year). Significantly fewer students participated for 90 or more days (19.7%, compared with 2018–19's 38.1%). This pattern is expected, as it seems likely that youth who were on track to meet the 90-day threshold were instead counted in the 30–59 day and 60–89 day categories due to program disruptions caused by the pandemic. Note that Exhibit 11 shows 3 years of data in order to show the changes across pre-pandemic to pandemic years.

Exhibit 11. Number of Students Served in 21st CCLC by Attendance Gradation



Source. PARS21.

In addition to levels of program attendance during the 2020–21 and 2019–20 school years, the research team explored the extent to which students participating during this period had been attending the program at a given center beyond the school year in question. As Exhibit 12 shows, slightly fewer than two thirds of students were in their first year of participation during the 2021–21 school year, compared to the slightly greater than two thirds of students during the 2019–20 school year. Approximately 27% were in their second year of participation during the 2020–21 school year, compared to 21% in the 2019–20 school year, and about 8% for both school years were in their third year of participation. Five or more years of continuous participation was found to be relatively rare. These patterns are similar to those observed in prior years.

Exhibit 12. Continuous Years of Student Participation, 2020–21 and 2019–20

Years of participation	2020–21		2019–20	
	Number of students	Percentage	Number of students	Percentage
1 years	7,128	61.0%	12,820	67.6%
2 years	3,143	26.9%	4,053	21.4%
3 years	916	7.8%	1,457	7.7%
4 years	366	3.1%	493	2.6%
5 years	100	0.9%	111	0.6%

Years of participation	2020–21		2019–20	
	Number of students	Percentage	Number of students	Percentage
6 years	20	0.2%	25	0.1%
7 years	9	0.1%	4	0.0%
8 years	4	0.1%	3	0.0%
9 years	2	0.0%	0	0.0%
10 years	0	0.0%	1	0.0%
11 years	1	0.0	0	0.0%

Note. Prior-year records were matched to current-year records using participant identifiers. One year of continuous participation, for example, indicates that a given student is either in his or her first year of programming during the 2018–19 school year or that there was an interruption in participation prior to the 2018–19 school year.
Source. PARS21.

Student Attendance by Activity Type

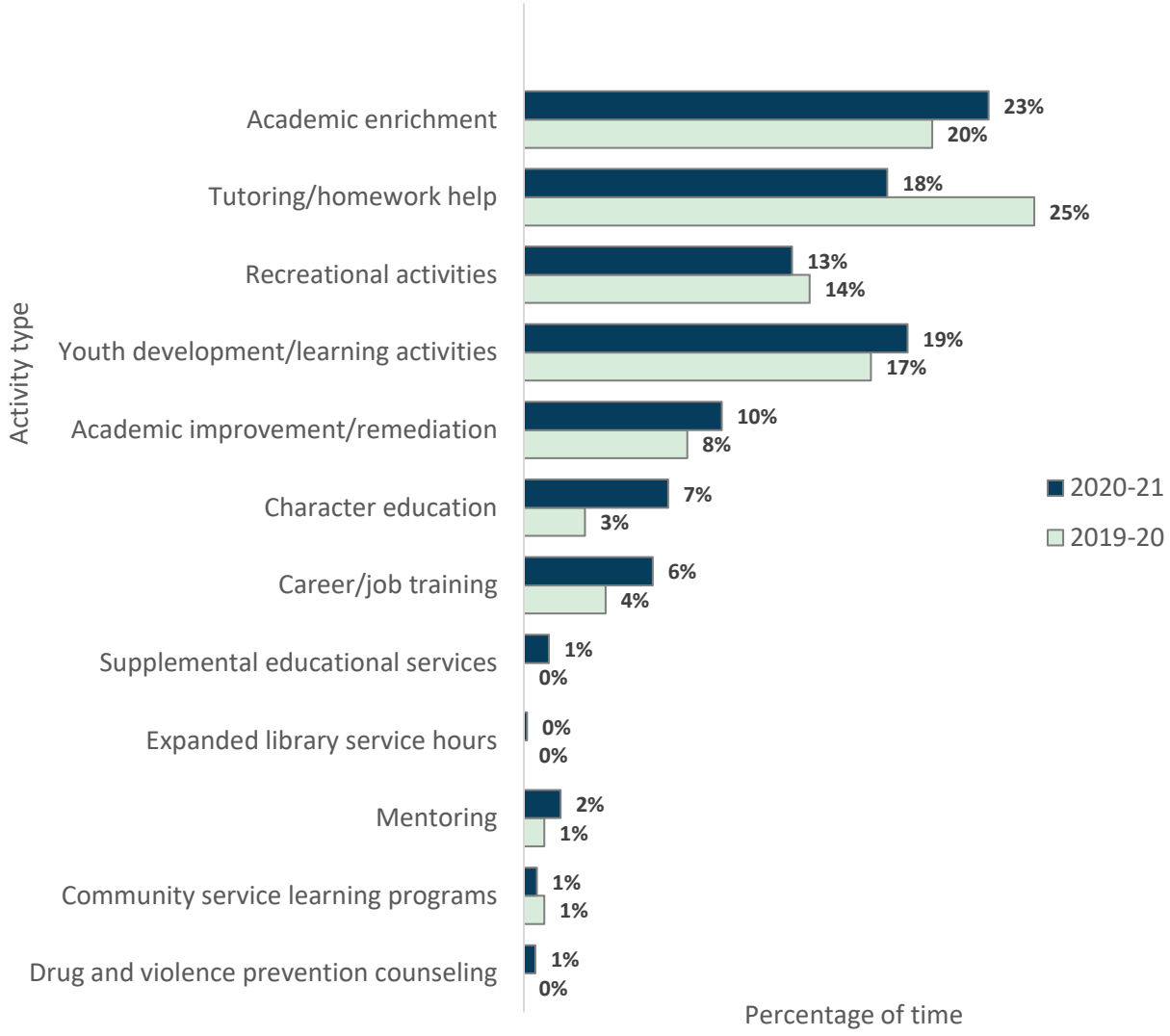
An effort was made to determine how much time 21st CCLC participants spent in activities of different types. Within PARS21, activities in which attendees participated can be classified according to the following different types:

1. Academic improvement/remediation
2. Academic enrichment
3. Tutoring/homework help
4. Mentoring
5. Drug and violence prevention counseling
6. Expanded library service hours
7. Recreational activities
8. Career/job training
9. Supplemental educational services
10. Community service learning programs
11. Character education
12. Youth development/learning activities

Using these activity categories, participant attendance records, and activity session duration data, a total number of minutes for each activity type was calculated for each participant. This information was then used in conjunction with total participation minutes to derive student-level percentage statistics concerning each attendee's time spent in each type of activity. Averages of these percentages were then taken to determine, on average, how much time participants spent in each activity category. Exhibit 13 shows the results. The clearest result shown is that students spent a smaller proportion of their time in tutoring or homework help

during the 2020–21 pandemic year than they did in the year prior, with modestly more time (proportionally) spent on academic enrichment, character education, and career/job training.

Exhibit 13. Percentage of Time Each Participant Spends on Activities of a Given Type (Average) for 2020–21 and 2019–20



Source: PARS21.

General statistics were also run for total participant hours (school year) by activity type, calculating the average and median number of total hours for each type of activity (see Exhibit 14). In the 2020–21 school year, academic enrichment was highest in terms of the average number of total hours, with 36.09 school-year hours, followed by youth development/learning activities and then tutoring/homework help, with 22.76 and 22.08 mean school-year hours,

respectively. In terms of median values, the low number of hours meant that only academic enrichment had median hours above 0 (2 hours).

The 2019–20 school year's total participant hours by activity type were substantially different, being affected by the beginning of the pandemic. However, tutoring/homework was much higher in mean hours (32.2, compared to 22.08 hours in 2020–21), and median tutoring hours decreased from 10 hours to 0 hours. Academic enrichment was higher in 2020–21 than in 2019–20, with mean hours increasing from 24.34 to 36.09 between the 2 years.

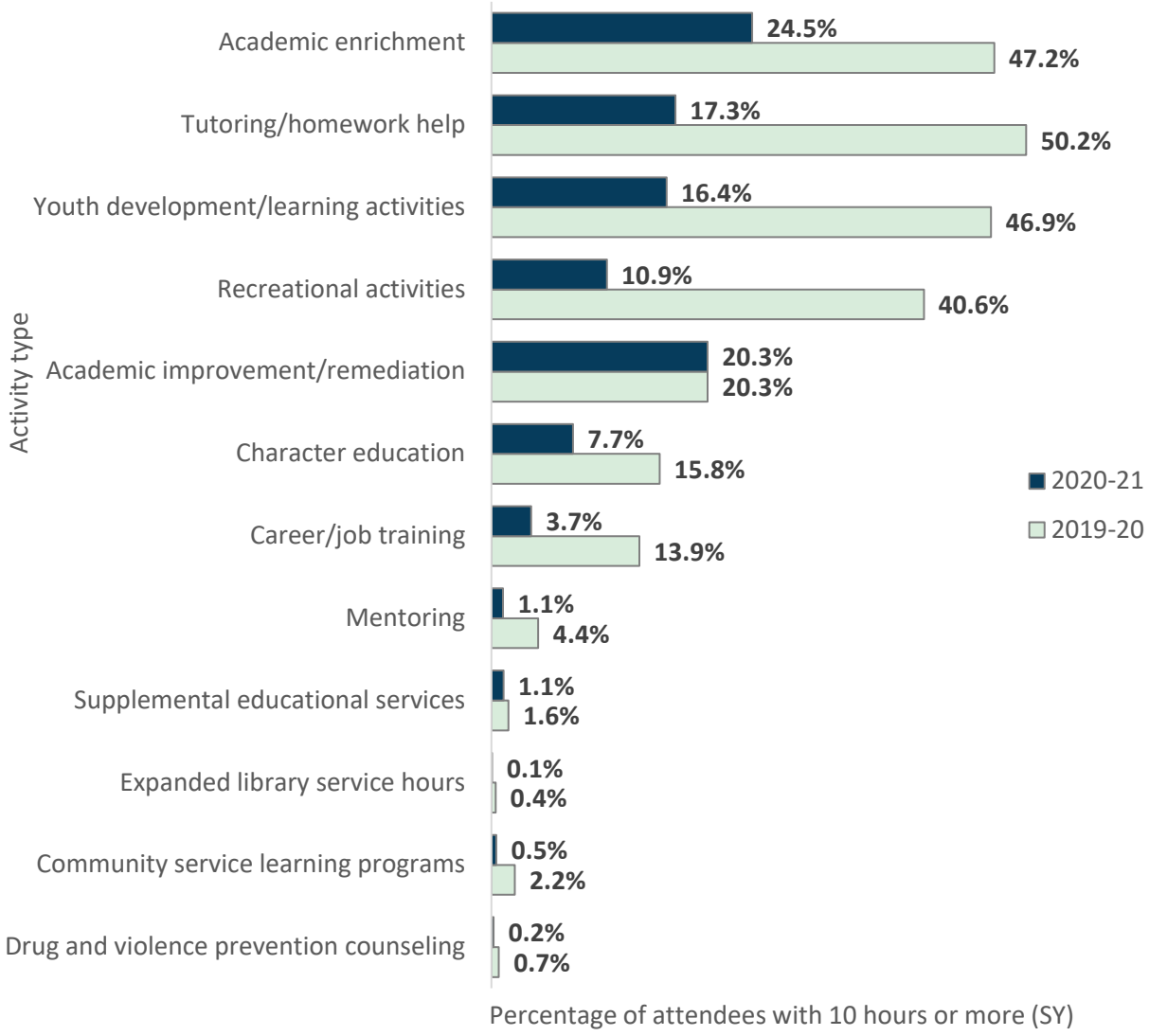
Exhibit 14. Total School-Year Hours of Attendee Participation by Activity Type

School year	2020–21		2019–20	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
Academic improvement/remediation	8.82	0.0	9	0.0
Academic enrichment	36.09	2.0	24.34	8.0
Tutoring/homework help	22.08	0.0	32.18	10.0
Mentoring	1.57	0.0	1.19	0.0
Drug and violence prevention counseling	0.6	0.0	.23	0.0
Expanded library service hours	0.41	0.0	.09	0.0
Recreational activities	12.26	0.0	16.73	4.0
Career/job training	5.7	0.0	4.43	0.0
Supplemental educational services	.91	0.0	.67	0.0
Community service learning programs	.41	0.0	.67	0.0
Character education	5.22	0.0	4.76	0.0
Youth development/learning activities	22.76	0.0	21.89	7.5

Source. PARS21.

To explore the intensity of youth participation in each activity category type, a simple calculation was made to identify youth participating for at least 10 hours in each activity type (again, counting total hours for the entire school year). Exhibit 15 shows the percentage of youth participating for at least 10 hours. As indicated, in 2020–21, academic enrichment was the highest, with about 24% of all youth participating for 10 hours or more during the year, followed by tutoring/homework help (17%) and youth development/learning (about 16%). In 2019–20, tutoring was the highest, with approximately 50% of youth participating for 10 hours or more during the year, followed closely by academic enrichment (47.2%) and youth development/learning (about 46.9%).

Exhibit 15. Percentage of Attendees With 10 or More Hours in a Given Activity Type (School Year), 2020–21 and 2019–20



Source. PARS21.

Participation in Reading and Mathematics Activities

Another approach to examining students' participation in 21st CCLC programming offered during the 2020–21 reporting period is to explore the extent to which they participated in activities meant to support skill building in mathematics and reading, regardless of activity type (e.g., enrichment, tutoring, or academic remediation). As mentioned, a central goal of the 21st CCLC program is to support student growth and development in reading and mathematics. As Exhibit 16 outlines, students on average participated in approximately 54 hours of reading/literacy programming during the 2020–21 reporting period and 52 hours of mathematics programming. In comparison with 2019–20, these hour averages are similar, with a slight decrease in the reading/literacy programming. These relatively similar mean levels of participation in reading and mathematics are interesting, given the drop in overall attendance; however, this may simply indicate that programs placed emphasis on academic enrichment even in virtual programming as a way to help students during school closures. However, mean hours of participation in both reading/literacy and mathematics were lower in 2019–20 and 2020–21 than in the 2018–19 pre-pandemic year, as shown in Exhibit 16 for ease of comparison.

Exhibit 16. Average Number of Hours in Reading and Mathematics per Student, 2018–19 and 2019–20

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
2020–21 ELA education activities	11,660	0	1,058[a]	54.3	104.68
2020–21 mathematics education activities	11,660	0	917[a]	51.7	105.75
2019–20 ELA education activities	18,978	0	479.5[a]	56.3	63.2
2019–20 mathematics education activities	18,978	0	401.5[a]	51.5	57.8
2018–19 ELA education activities	20,232	0	570.8[a]	67.7	80
2018–19 mathematics education activities	20,232	0	538.8[a]	64.5	73.5

Note. ELA = English language arts. The method of activity data reporting changed in 2015–16 to allow for activity records to target multiple subjects.

[a] These values are fairly extreme outliers.

Source. PARS21.

Section 4. Youth Survey

This section presents results of a youth survey conducted during fall 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the pandemic, the survey focused on youth experiences with 21st CCLC programming under COVID-19 pandemic conditions. This survey replaced AIR's social-emotional outcomes and experience youth survey, which is typically administered to New Jersey 21st CCLC grantees by AIR every fall and spring.

The results shown in this section were first presented to NJDOE in a report brief published in summer 2021. They are re-included here to make data associated with 2020–21 available within a single comprehensive report.

Survey Background

On an annual basis, AIR collects pre-post youth surveys at 21st CCLC sites. These surveys are intended to capture information about social-emotional outcomes among youth and data about their experiences with the program. The survey data are primarily intended for use in correlational models designed to assess whether participation in 21st CCLC is associated with positive program experiences and positive changes in social-emotional outcomes (e.g., in terms of youth academic identity or mindset).

However, the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic posed a problem for the pre-post survey in terms of the planned uses of the data: Any interpretation of social-emotional or experience data would be compromised by confounding factors, extreme changes to the program, and significant unknowns. Further, matching pre to post surveys would likely prove difficult, given increased obstacles to participation and attendance. As a consequence, AIR—in consultation with NJDOE—opted to forego use of the original youth survey in favor of a shorter, simpler, one-time survey that would collect targeted information about virtual programming under pandemic conditions. The resulting survey asked youth about their participation in 21st CCLC program activities during the pandemic, specifically about virtual versus in-person participation; participation frequency; participation experience (whether the activities were challenging or engaging, etc.); and, for virtual participation only, the technological challenges that youth experienced while participating or attempting to participate in online 21st CCLC activities.

Survey Administration

The primary purpose of the COVID-19 youth survey was to increase our understanding of youth participation in and perception of 21st CCLC programming under pandemic conditions. More specifically, we had three main objectives:

- We wanted to gather data about the **extent to which youth participated in 21st CCLC activities virtually versus in person in fall 2020.**
- We wanted to **obtain youth's perspectives about the quality of the activities provided by the program during fall 2020.** Given necessary shifts in programming when changing from in-person to virtual, and given general challenges associated with the pandemic (for staff, participants, and participants' families), we wanted to find out whether youth found the activities to be engaging and relevant, whether youth built relationships with adults and with each other, and whether youth felt they were learning something from the activities.
- Third, we sought to **uncover common technology challenges** facing youth who sought to participate virtually in 21st CCLC activities.

Note that these three purposes were constrained by an overriding interest to keep the COVID-19 youth survey as short and manageable as possible. We knew that youth respondents would be more likely to be complete a short survey, and we also wanted to keep data-reporting burdens low for program staff and youth alike, given the added stress of operating under pandemic conditions.

Survey Administration and Response Rates

In November 2020, AIR sent center-specific links to the COVID-19 youth survey to the directors of all active 21st CCLC grantees. Because the survey opened late in fall 2020 and many programs had difficulty obtaining youth responses until early spring 2021, the survey remained open for grantees until March 2021. In all, we collected 3,117 responses from 134 centers (out of 161 centers, for an 83% center-level response rate). An average of 23 responses were submitted per center (with a median of 14 responses). Note that the total number of surveys received was lower than what AIR typically obtains for the standard pre or post survey, which usually yield over five thousand responses.

Of the 3,117 individual survey responses, 160 indicated that they had not participated in 21st CCLC programming during fall 2020 (leaving 2,957 survey responses). Additionally, the center-level response rate of 83% is somewhat misleading; several grantees indicated that, during virtual programming, all center-level staff and activities were grouped together as a single "virtual center," meaning the responses received may reflect more than 134 center-level programs (i.e., the center-level response rate of 83% may be artificially suppressed). It is not clear to what extent this is the case. Out of 65 total grants (operating 161 centers), 64 centers provided at least some data for the youth survey. The mean number of responses per grant was 31 (median 22 responses).

Participation Patterns

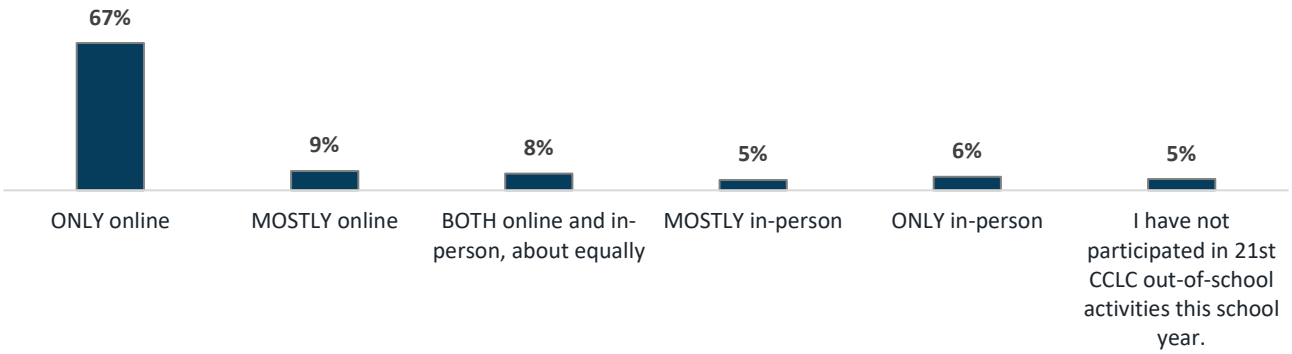
The first two questions on the survey asked about participation in 21st CCLC activities during fall 2020. First, we asked youth about online versus in-person participation:

> "During fall 2020, in what ways have you participated in 21st CCLC out-of-school-time programming?"

Response options included "only online," "mostly online," "only in-person," "mostly in-person," and "both online and in-person, about equally." Respondents could also indicate that they did not participate in fall 2020 activities, as noted above.

Roughly two thirds of respondents indicated participating only online (67%), and 9% responded that they participated "mostly online," meaning slightly more than three quarters of respondents participated mostly or entirely online during fall 2020. Eight percent responded that they participated in online and in-person activities about equally, 5% noted "mostly in-person," and 6% chose "only in-person." About 5% indicated that they had not participated in any programming during fall 2020 (Exhibit 17).

Exhibit 17. Most Participants Indicated Participating Virtually During Fall 2020



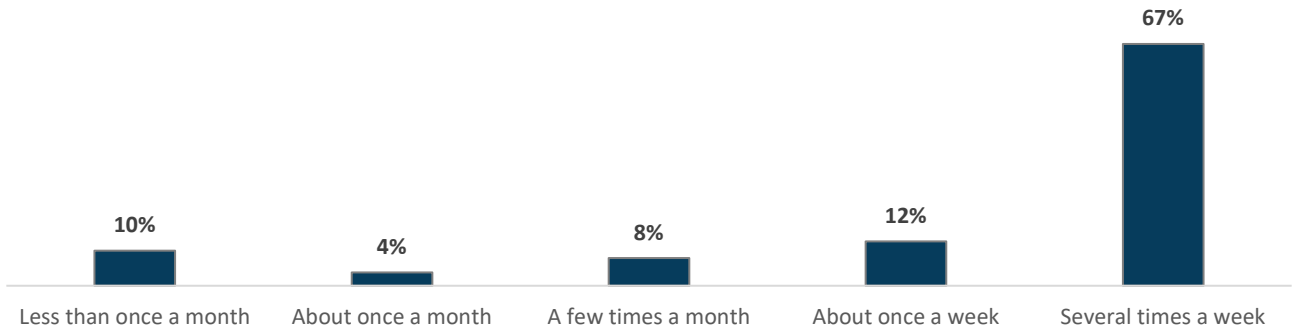
Note: Based on 3,117 total surveys received. About two thirds of all grantees (42 out of 64 grantees) had at least one respondent who selected "only in-person" or "mostly in-person." However, nine grantees accounted for more than three quarters of all "mostly in-person" and "only in-person" responses.

The second question on the survey concerned participation frequency:

> "Whether in person or online, about how often have you participated in 21st CCLC out-of-school-time activities this fall?"

Approximately two thirds of respondents indicated participating "several times a week" during fall 2020, and 12% indicated participating "about once a week," meaning about 79% of respondents participated at least once a week. Approximately 14% responded that they participated once a month or less (Exhibit 18).

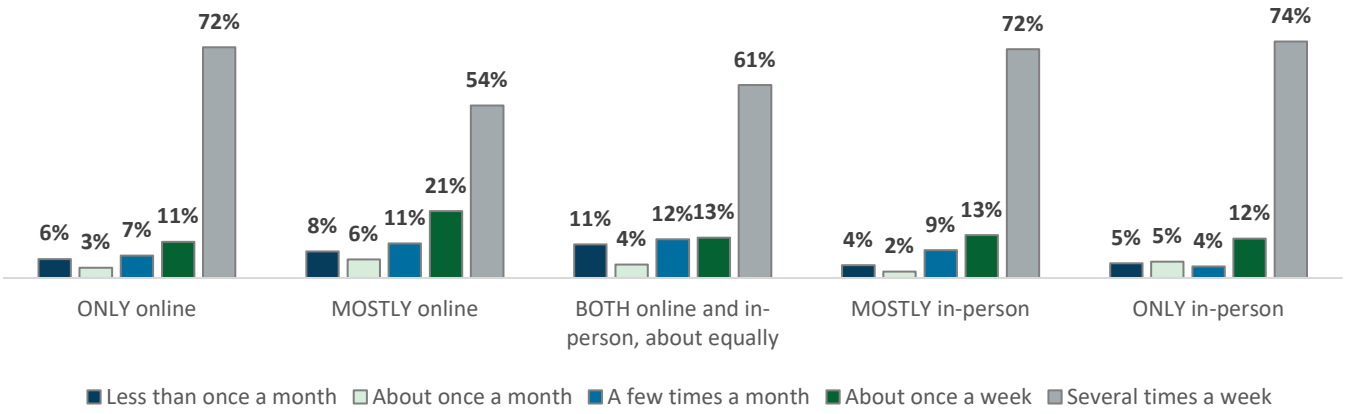
Exhibit 18. About 79% of Respondents Participated Once a Week or More



Note. Based on 2,957 total surveys received.

Cross-referencing the first two questions reveals patterns of attendance based on type of attendance (i.e., online versus in-person). Interestingly, nearly three quarters of respondents in the "only online" group, the "mostly in-person" group, and the "only in-person" group indicated that they attended "several times a week." However, only 54% of the "*mostly* online" group (emphasis added) indicated participating "several times a week," and only 61% of the "both online and in-person, about equally" group indicated participating "several times a week" (Exhibit 19).

Exhibit 19. Youth Who Indicated Participating "Mostly Online" or "Both Online and In-Person, About Equally" Also Reported Having Attended Programming Less Frequently Than Other Groups



Based on 2,957 total surveys received.

Why attendees participating either "mostly online" or "both online and in-person, about equally" attended less frequently is not clear. It is possible that such attendance patterns may be associated with hybrid program models in some way (i.e., those with both virtual and in-person activities) or that such attendance patterns are specific to the programs offering both in-person and online activities. With the data available, it is not possible to determine a final answer to this question; however, if virtual programming continues to be of interest to programs post pandemic, it may be worth exploring associations between attendance patterns and programming delivery modes.

Youth Perceptions of 21st CCLC Activities

After asking youth about their participation, we asked them to provide their views about the activities. Specifically, we asked nine questions that were aligned to five scales: Engagement, Relevance, Belonging, Challenge, and Learned Something. Exhibit 20 highlights the scales and questions relating to youth experiences with the 21st CCLC program, with each question starting with this stem:

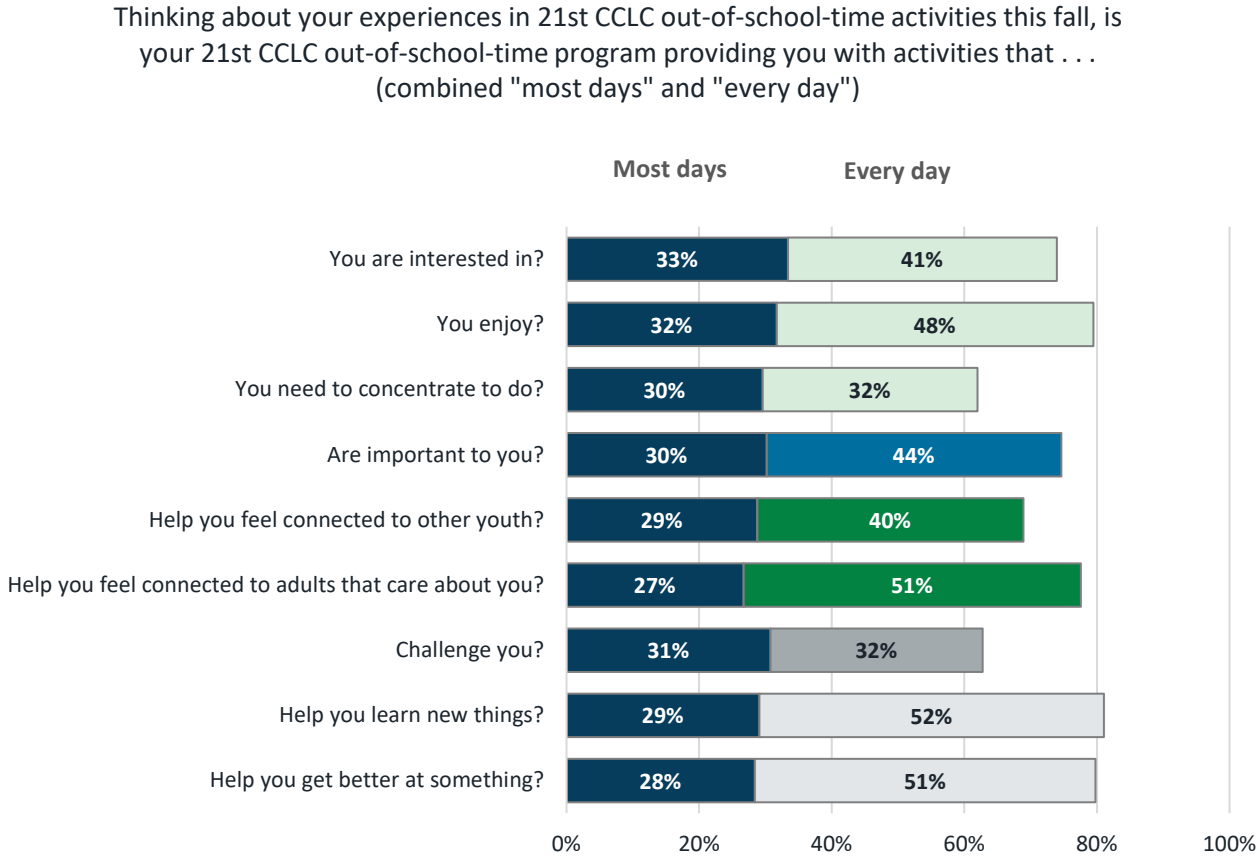
> "Thinking about your experience in 21st CCLC out-of-school-time activities this fall, is your 21st CCLC out-of-school-time program providing you with activities that . . ."

Exhibit 20. Scales and Questions About Youth Experiences With the 21st CCLC Program

Scale	Question
Engagement	You are interested in? You enjoy? You need to concentrate to do?
Relevance	Are important to you?
Belonging	Help you feel connected to adults that care about you? Help you feel connected to other youth?
Challenge	Challenge you?
Learned something	Help you learn new things? Help you get better at something?

Response options to these questions included "not at all," "some days," "most days," and "every day." We first analyzed responses to these items by looking at the proportion of responses that were either "most days" or "every day," with items arranged according to the scales shown in Table 1. This analysis revealed two items for which youth were less likely to answer "every day": "*You need to concentrate to do"* and "*Challenge you."* The scale with the highest proportion of "most days" and "every day" responses was the Learned Something scale (Exhibit 21). Note, however, that the pattern of responses may not necessarily be due to the pandemic and may simply reflect general youth perceptions of 21st CCLC activities.

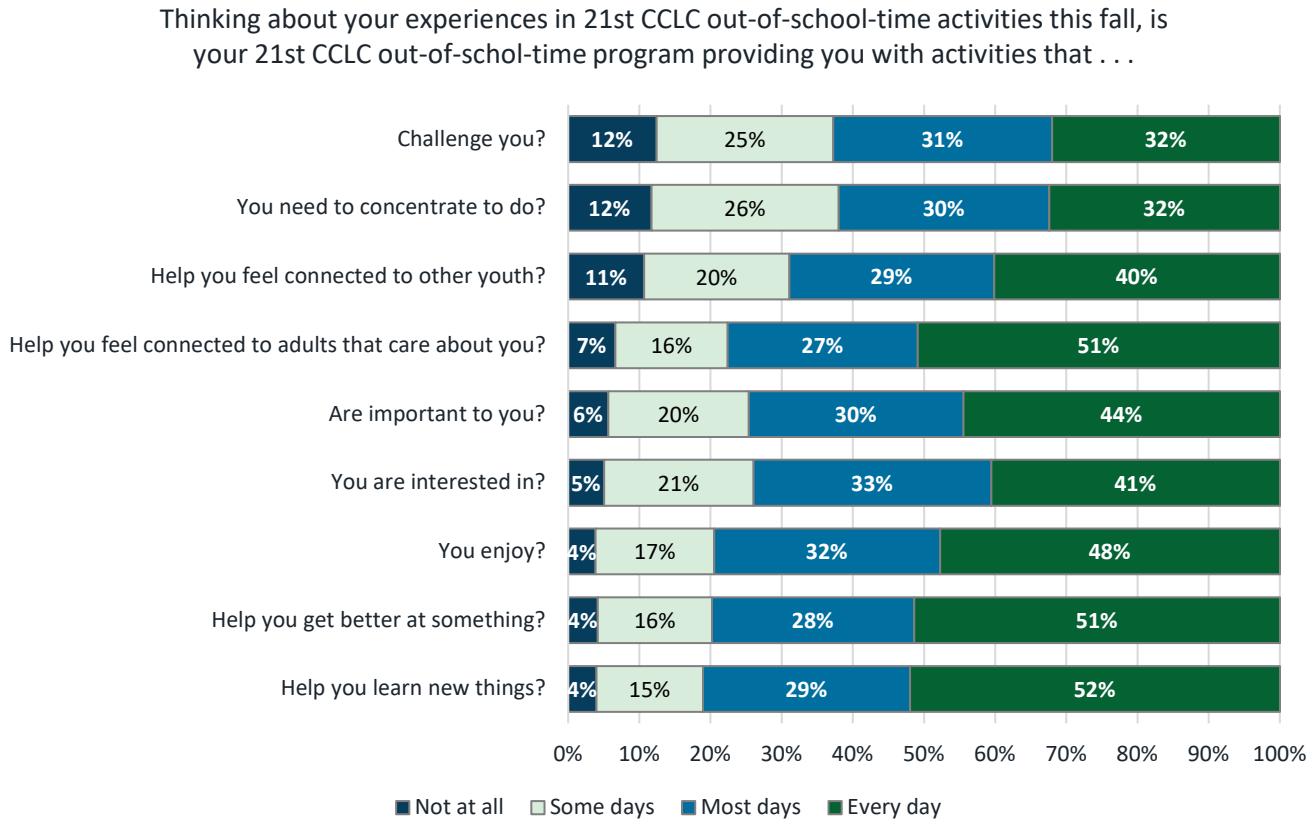
Exhibit 21. Youth Least Likely to Say Activities Required Concentration or Were Challenging



Note. Based on 2,957 total surveys received. Color sets correspond to the different question scales. Each data bar shows responses of "most days" at left and of "every day" at right.

Exhibit 22 shows the same data as Exhibit 21, only with all response categories for all items. Here, the items are arranged from highest proportion to lowest of "Not at all" responses, revealing that the item *"Challenge you"* received the highest proportion of negative responses, followed by *"You need to concentrate to do,"* which is consistent with Exhibit 22. The items *"You enjoy," "Help you get better at something,"* and *"Help you learn new things"* had the lowest proportion of "not at all" responses.

Exhibit 22. Providing Activities That Challenge Youth, That Youth Need to Concentrate to Do, and That Help Youth Feel Connected to Other Youth Were Experiences That Youth Were Most Likely to Report Happening "Not at All"



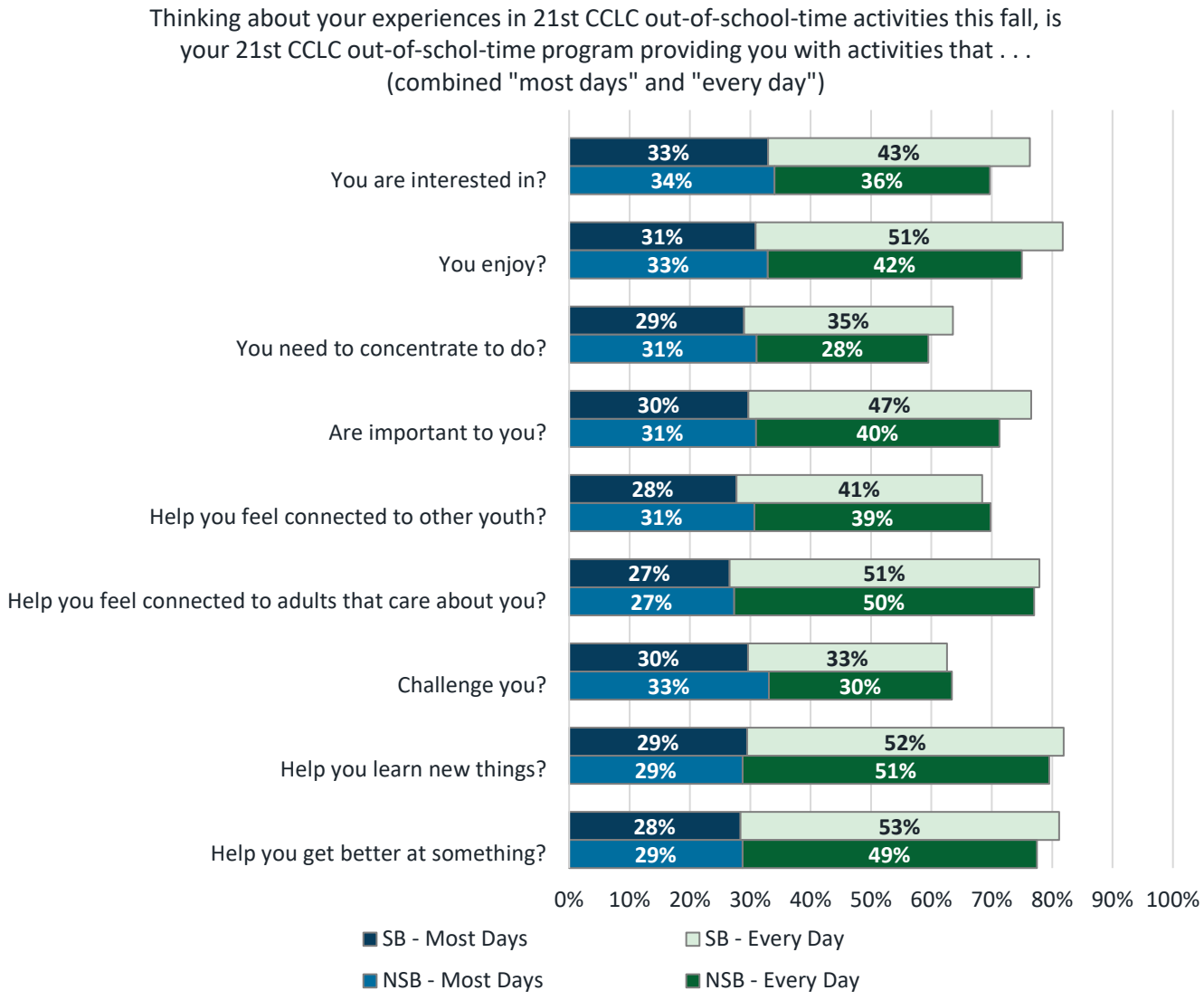
Note. Based on 2,957 total surveys received.

Overall, youth respondents generally reported that the activities in which they participated during fall 2020 were enjoyable, helped them get better at something, and helped them learn new things. However, youth generally reported that the activities were not always challenging and did not always require concentration. These are broad generalizations, but overall, youth tended to respond positively to all these items.

To further explore youth's answers to these questions, we also compared two subgroups. First, we explored answer patterns by grouping surveys according to school-based or non-school-based grantee status. Second, we explored responses according to youth answers to the first survey question about mode of participation, grouping "only online" together with "mostly online" and grouping "only in-person" with "mostly in-person" (excluding the middle group, "both").

Several items differed in comparisons between school-based and non-school-based grantees, notably in relation to Engagement, Relevance, and Learned Something scales. Generally, youth attending school-based grantees were most likely to respond "every day," and youth attending programs associated with non-school-based grantees were slightly more likely to respond "most days" (Exhibit 23).

Exhibit 23. Youth Attending Programs Associated With School-Based Grantees Were Somewhat More Likely to Answer "Every Day" to Questions About Perceptions About Activities Than Were Youth Attending Programs Associated With Non-School-Based Grantees



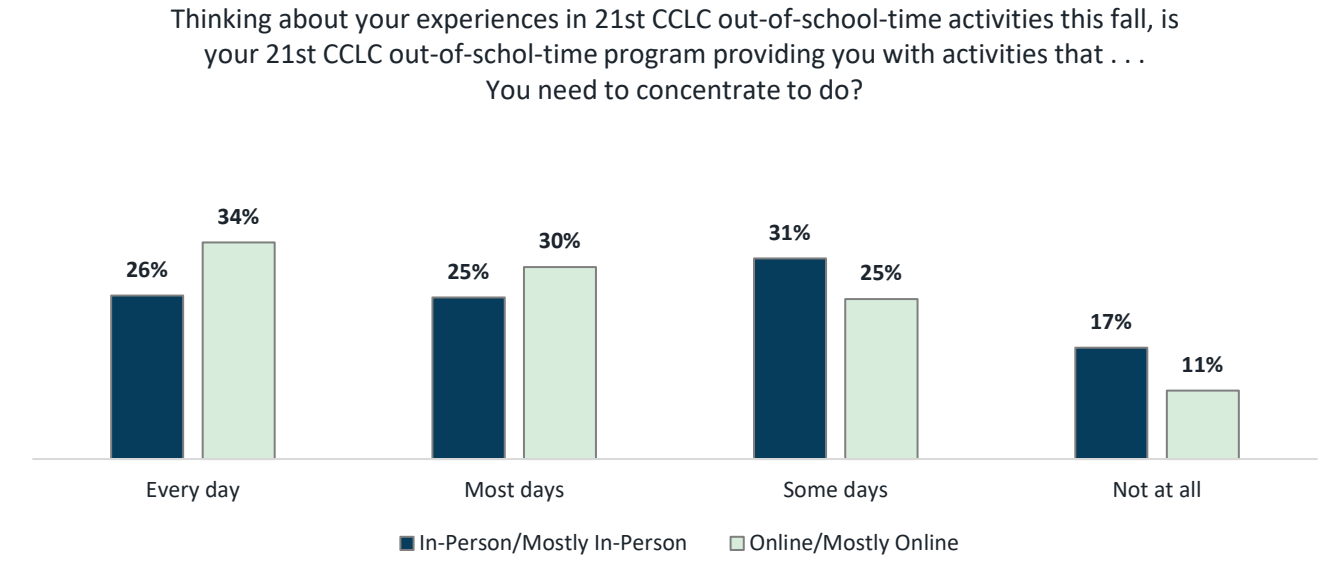
Note. Based on 1,836 surveys received from 32 school-based grantees and 1,079 surveys received from 33 non-school-based grantees. Differences that were not statistically significant (tested via chi-square association using a *p* value threshold of .05) are grayed out.

Why this difference between school-based and non-school-based grantees should exist is not clear. School-based grantees may have had readier access to resources, to school records, or even to the youth themselves,[8] any one of which might have enabled programs associated with school-based grantees to better tailor their activities to the interests and needs of youth. Program delivery mode may also factor into this difference: Although the survey responses indicated nearly identical levels of participation between the two groups (in terms of weekly or monthly attendance frequency), participants associated with school-based grantees were more likely to indicate that they attended "only online" or "mostly online' than were participants associated with non-school-based grantees. Fully 86% of respondents associated with school-based grantees responded that they attended "online" or "mostly online," compared with 70% of respondents associated with non-school-based grantees. Similarly, only 7% of the school-based group indicated that they participated "mostly in-person" or "only in-person," compared with 21% of the non-school-based group. Viewed another way, non-school-based grantees served 64% of all "in-person or mostly in-person" respondents, meaning non-school-based grantees accounted for nearly twice as many in-person responses as did the school-based grantees despite accounting for fewer survey responses overall.

Looking at the response data by attendance modes—"online or mostly online" versus "in-person or mostly in-person"—we observed some differences in response patterns. The most notable examples have to do with the two items *"You need to concentrate to do"* and *"Challenge you."* In each case, a higher proportion of the "online or mostly online" group responded to each item with "every day" or "most days" compared with the "in-person or mostly in-person" group (Exhibits 24 and 25).

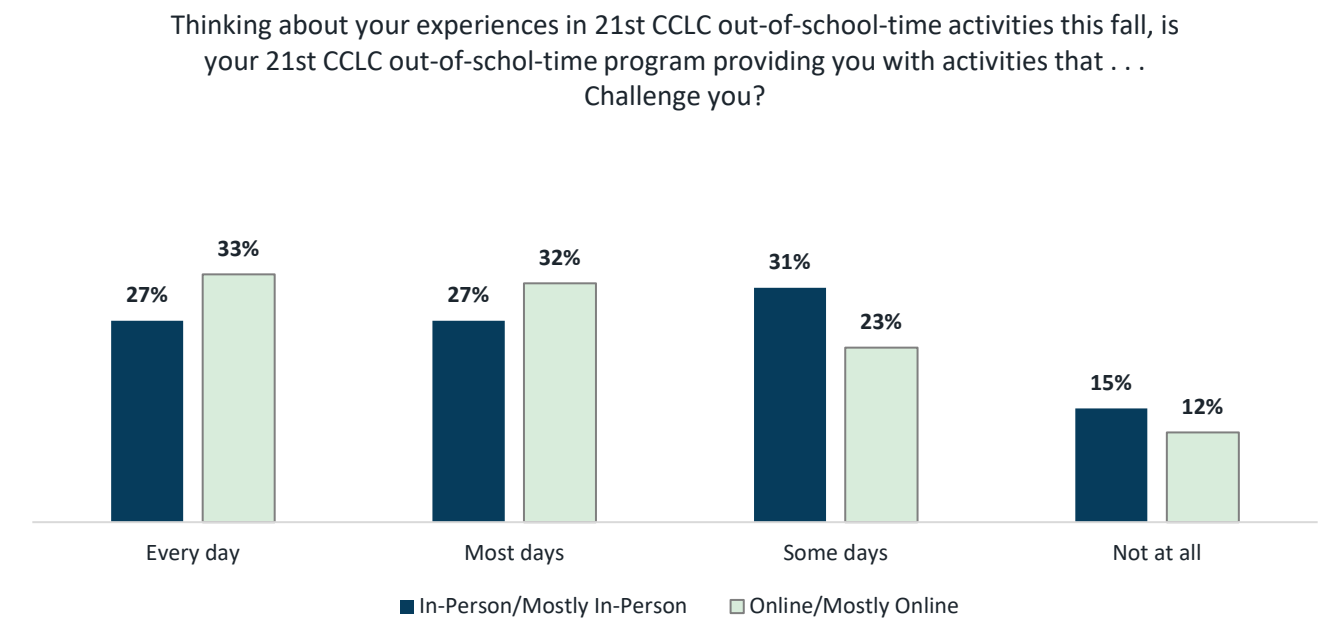
[8] Note that school-based grantees provided 1,836 surveys from 32 grants, while non-school-based grantees provided 1,079 surveys from 33 grants.

Exhibit 24. A Higher Proportion of Youth in the "Online or Mostly Online" Group Responded That the 21st CCLC Activities Required Them to Concentrate "Every Day" or "Most Days" Compared With Youth in the "In-Person or Mostly In-Person" Group



Note. The differences shown were statistically significant according to a chi-square association test ($p < .05$).

Exhibit 25. A Higher Proportion of Youth in the "Online or Mostly Online" Group Responded That the 21st CCLC Activities Challenge Them "Every Day" or "Most Days" Compared With Youth in the "In-Person or Mostly In-Person" Group



Note. Based on 343 surveys received for the "in-person or mostly in-person" group and 2,376 surveys received for the "online or mostly online" group. Also see note in Exhibit 24.

At least three caveats are required with respect to Exhibits 24 and 25. First, the in-person group was small compared with the online group (343 surveys vs. 2,376 surveys, respectively). Second, as already indicated, most in-person surveys came from nine grantees (despite nearly two thirds of all grantees having at least one "in-person" or "mostly in-person" respondent). What this means is that any comparison of response patterns between online or mostly online participants, on the one hand, and in-person or mostly in-person participants, on the other hand, may reflect youth, center, or grantee differences—not necessarily differences between modes of activity delivery. Third, because of the overlap between activity delivery mode and school-based grantee status, it is unclear whether participation mode or school status (in some way) is driving these differences, whether these school-based status and participation modes are related (which seems plausible), or whether there is some other unidentified factor or set of factors driving these results.[9]

Youth-Reported Technical Challenges to Participation

The last set of questions on the survey focused on challenges related to online participation, using the stem:

> "Thinking about out-of-school-time activities ONLINE, please indicate if any of the following challenges are true for you."

These questions were given only to youth who indicated that they participated online at least some of the time; youth who responded that they participated in 21st CCLC programming "only in-person" during fall 2020 did not see these questions.

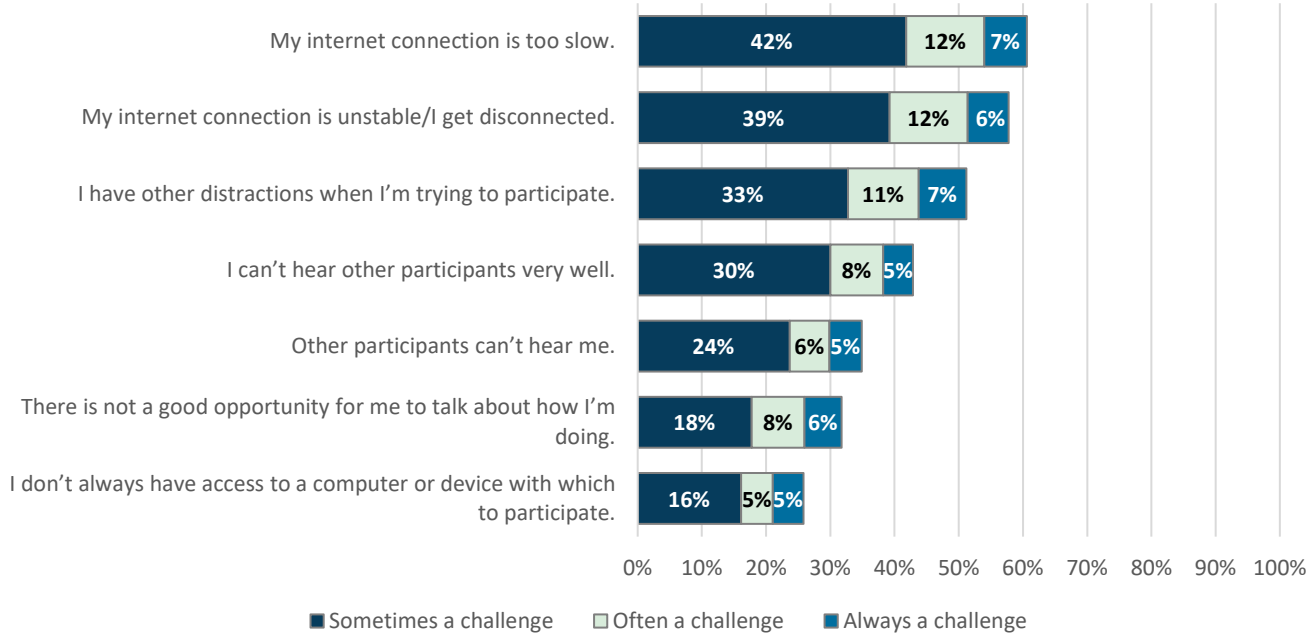
The purpose of these questions was to identify major barriers, as perceived by youth, to participation. Youth were presented with a short series of questions about either technology or their general experiences participating in online activities. As shown in Exhibit 26, the top challenge identified by respondents was "My internet connection is too slow" (61% of respondents), followed by "My internet connection is unstable/I get disconnected" (57% of

[9] As a final note on the responses from youth about their perceptions, we also investigated responses based on grantee locale (rural, town, suburban, and urban). Although this comparison showed that responses associated with urban grantees were a little more likely to fall in the "every day" or "most days" categories for perceptions of most activities, the comparison was highly questionable: Nearly three quarters of New Jersey's grantees are urban, and most of the rest are suburban. In all, only 135 surveys were associated with five rural grantees, 576 surveys were associated with suburban grantees, and 2,073 surveys were associated with urban grantees. There were only two town-based grantees, and one grant was classified as suburban/town. Additionally, we explored using program funding level as another split factor, but grantees across New Jersey are fairly similar in overall levels of funding.

respondents). The third highest challenge was "I have other distractions when I'm trying to participate" (51% of respondents).

Beyond these top-cited challenges, it bears highlighting that audio-related issues (hearing others or being heard) were noted as at least a frequent challenge ("sometimes") by 26% of all respondents. Although most youth indicated that finding opportunities to share how they were doing was not a challenge, 8% of youth responded that finding opportunities to share how they were doing was "often" a challenge, and 6% indicated that it was "always" a challenge. Lastly, the challenge "I don't always have access to a computer or device with which to participate" may be artificially low, as youth without access to a computer would presumably not have had a chance to take this survey and, therefore, would not be reflected in the overall response pool (Exhibit 26). Asking the grantees about the extent of the issue might be useful for NJDOE, notably if virtual programming continues in the post-pandemic period.

Exhibit 26. The Top Three Challenges Identified by Youth Respondents Involved Audio-Related Issues and Insufficient Opportunities to Talk About How They Were Doing



Note. Based on 2,763 total survey responses.

We also analyzed responses to the challenge questions based on school-based versus non-school-based grantee status. Overall, response patterns were similar for both groups, but participants associated with non-school-based grantees were slightly more likely than participants associated with school-based grantees to respond that most challenges were at least sometimes an issue. However, the difference was relatively small and was not observed

among respondents who reported internet connection issues. Perhaps the most notable difference had to do with the last challenge-related item, "I don't always have access to a computer or device with which to participate": About 24% of respondents associated with school-based grantees, compared with 31% of respondents associated with non-school-based grantees, indicated that this was at least "sometimes" a challenge. One possible explanation for this modest difference is that programs associated with school-based grantees may have greater access to computer labs or school-provided computers than programs associated with non-school-based grantees.

Survey Results Summary

Overall, results from the COVID-19 youth survey suggest that youth tended to participate in virtual programming (and, to a lesser extent, in-person programming) at modestly high levels during the pandemic, at least during fall 2020. Although youth reported technological challenges with respect to online participation, they also tended to report that the activities in which they participated were engaging and relevant and helped them to learn. Areas for improvement may include designing activities that present appropriate challenges to youth participants while requiring them to concentrate, but even in these areas youth responses tended to be positive. That said, fewer youth completed the COVID-19 youth survey than typically complete AIR's annual 21st CCLC youth surveys, suggesting that the results paint an incomplete picture of youth's experiences with the 21st CCLC program during the pandemic.

In terms of attendance, frequency of attendance was somewhat lower among youth who indicated that they participated either "mostly online" or "both online and in-person, about equally" than it was among those who indicated that they participated "only online," "mostly in-person," or "only in-person." If hybrid program models continue in the future (i.e., online alongside in-person programming), this finding may be worth exploring further.

In terms of program experiences, youth were more likely to answer "not at all" or "sometimes" in response to the items "*You need to concentrate to do"* and "*Challenge you";* however, it is not clear whether this is due to intrinsic characteristics of virtual versus traditional in-person 21st CCLC activities. For these same two items, youth who participated "mostly in-person" or "only in-person" were also more likely to endorse "not at all" or "sometimes" than were youth who participated "online or mostly online." Additionally, youth attending programs associated with school-based-grantees were most likely to respond "every day" to items related to the Engagement, Relevance, and Learned Something scales, and youth attending programs associated with non-school-based grantees were slightly most likely to respond "most days" instead. Note again, however, that there was significant overlap between school-based grantee status and participation mode (online vs. in-person). If virtual programming or hybrid

programming models continue in the future, it will likely be worth exploring systematically the differences across participation modes and types of grantees.

The top technological challenge identified by respondents was “My internet connection is too slow,” followed by “My internet connection is unstable/I get disconnected.” Solutions to these challenges are not immediately clear, given that each participant’s internet speed and stability will be driven by a host of equipment and software factors, but this finding does highlight an important topic for consideration by NJDOE if online participation continues in the future. The third highest challenge noted was “I have other distractions when I’m trying to participate.” Again, if virtual programming continues in the future (in any fashion), it may be worth exploring this further. Finding out more about the broad nature of what qualifies as a distraction, perhaps through a needs assessment, could be useful for NJDOE under such circumstances.

Section 5. Leading Indicators

A primary goal of the statewide evaluation was to provide 21st CCLC grantees with data to inform program improvement efforts regarding their implementation of research-supported best practices. Building from the quality framework, AIR and NJDOE worked collaboratively to define a series of leading indicators predicated on data collected as part of the statewide evaluation. The leading indicators were meant to enhance existing information and data available to 21st CCLC grantees regarding how they fared in the adoption of program strategies and approaches associated with high-quality afterschool programming. Specifically, the leading indicator system was designed to do the following:

- summarize data collected as part of the statewide evaluation in terms of how well the grantee and its respective sites are adopting research-supported best practices;
- allow grantees to compare their level of performance on leading indicators with similar programs and statewide averages; and
- facilitate internal discussions about areas of program design and delivery that might warrant additional attention from a program improvement perspective.

Predicated on the data collected from staff surveys, the ETRS midyear reports, and PARS21, the leading indicator system is focused on *quality program implementation* as opposed to youth or program outcomes. The midyear report is designed to consolidate and report on the data collected as part of the basic operation of the program (e.g., PARS21 data). The report also provides information on program evaluation efforts regarding the adoption of research-supported best practices. More consistent implementation of research-supported best practices will theoretically support the attainment of desired youth and program outcomes.

In the following sections, statewide levels of leading indicator performance are summarized. The indicators are divided into two general domains: general program operation and specific activity offerings at each center. The indicator values shown in each section are based on center-level indicator values, aggregated to the state level. The hope is that these aggregate values will provide useful information concerning areas of common strength or weakness. Indicator values across the past 5 years are also presented as a way of showing indicator change or stability over time, notably between pre-pandemic and pandemic years.

General Program Indicators

General program indicators relate to program practices at the general or program level, but may have a strong effect on participant experience. Programs characterized by a supportive and collaborative climate permit staff to engage in self-reflective practice to improve overall program quality. As noted by Smith (2007), Glisson (2007), and Birmingham and colleagues (2005), an organizational climate that supports staff in reflecting on and continually improving program quality is a key aspect of effective youth development programs. Furthermore, research has suggested that youth achievement outcomes can be improved by simply paying attention to *how* programming is delivered (Birmingham et al., 2005; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). These indicators therefore provide information on program internal communication, links to the school day, collaboration with school partners, and staff commitment to quality at the point of service. The indicator values are presented in Exhibit 27.

Overall, the results presented in Exhibit 27 show the following:

- The average statewide scale score for internal communication fell within the once-a-month response category for 2020–21 (scale response options included *never*, *a couple of times per year*, *about once a month*, and *nearly every week*), suggesting that the assessed collaborative efforts were frequently implemented during both programming periods (Leading Indicator 1).
- Centers tended to have at least some access to school-based data on youth academic functioning and needs (Leading Indicator 2).
- In terms of program staff collaborating with school personnel to adopt practices that are supportive of academic skill building, including linkages to the school day and using data on youth academic achievement to inform programming, the statewide average was 3 in 2020–21 (about the same as for prior years), which indicates that staff agree that linkages exist (Leading Indicator 3).
- In terms of activities provided at the point of service meant to support youth development, statewide averages on the *Staff Capacity to Create Interactive and Engaging Environment* scale (the source for Leading Indicator 4) suggest that staff adoption of such practices is more common than not. This was true for prior years.

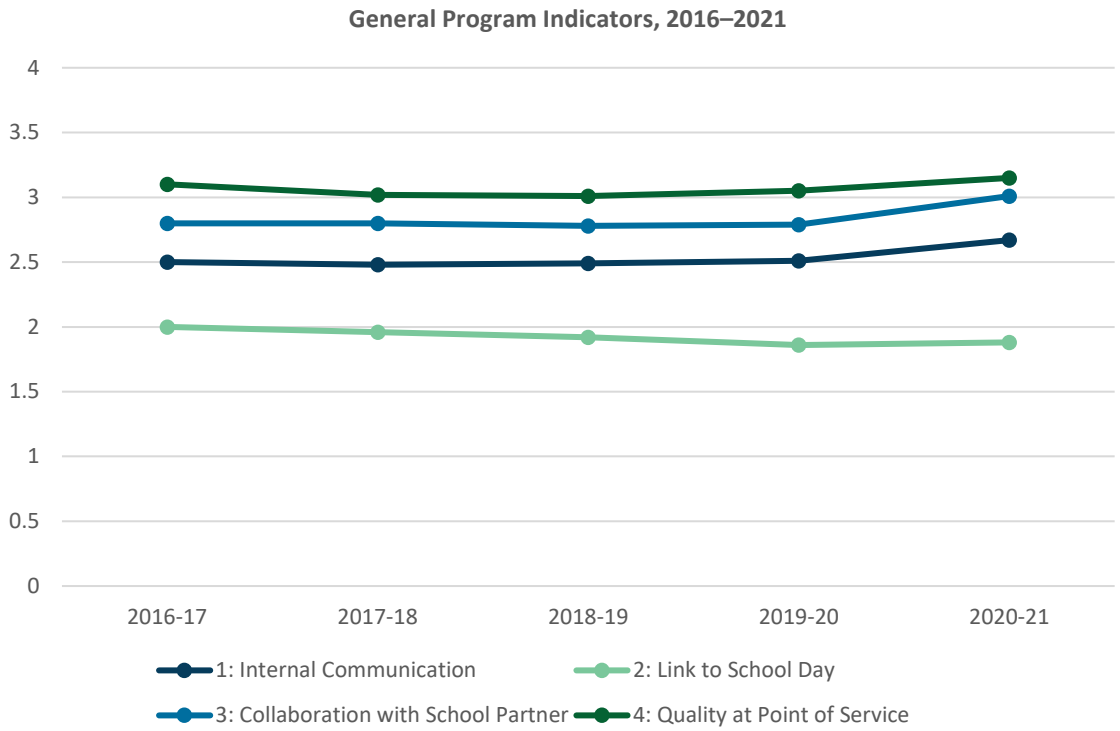
Exhibit 27. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on General Program Indicators

Leading indicator	Description and calculation	Source	Indicator value, 2020–21
Leading Indicator 1: Internal Communication—Staff communicate with other program staff to enhance internal collaboration toward continuous program improvement.	Each site received a score on a 1 to 4 scale, based on mean responses provided to questions related to the degree of communication and collaboration reported in relation to questions on the staff survey.	Responses to questions that appear in the *Internal Communication and Collaboration* scale of the staff survey.	The statewide mean scale score was 2.67 for 2020–21, which is within the *once-a-month* portion of the scale.
Leading Indicator 2: Link to School Day—Program staff take steps to establish effective linkages to the school day that inform the design and delivery of program activities meant to support student academic growth and development.	Each site received a score on a 1 to 4 scale, based on responses provided to questions related to the degree to which strategies were adopted to support the academic development of participating youth that appeared on the midyear version of the evaluation template.	Responses to the following questions, which appeared in the *Improve Student Academic Achievement* section of the ETRS: • How did the program obtain student information? How accessible was this information, and how often was it used? • What strategies did you use to link the program to the regular school day? • What strategies were your staff members using to communicate with classroom teachers, and how frequently were they being used?	The statewide mean scale score was 1.88 in 2020–21, which meant the following: • Information on student academic performance was rarely or occasionally used. • Linking with the school day was somewhat of a strategy to a major strategy. • Communication with school-day teachers occurred once per grading period to monthly.
Leading Indicator 3: Collaboration With School Partners—Program staff collaborate with school personnel to adopt practices that are supportive of academic skill building, including linkages to the school day and using data on student academic achievement to inform programming.	Each site will receive a score on a 1 to 4 scale, based on mean responses provided to questions related to linkages to the school day to inform programming that appeared on the staff survey.	Responses to questions that appear in the *Linkages to the School Day* section, to inform programming scales of the staff survey.	The statewide mean scale score was 3.01 for 2020–21, which meant the following: • Staff *agree* that linkages to the school day exist.

Leading indicator	Description and calculation	Source	Indicator value, 2020–21
Leading Indicator 4: Quality at Point of Service—Staff are committed to creating interactive and engaging settings for youth.	Each site received a score on a 1 to 4 scale, based on responses provided to questions related to the degree of staff capacity to create interactive and engaging settings for youth.	Responses to questions that appear in the *Staff Capacity to Create Interactive and Engaging Environment* scale of the staff survey.	The statewide mean scale score was 3.15 for 2020–21, which was within the *agree* portion of the scale, indicating that staff believe their peers largely provide these opportunities to participating youth.

In terms of indicator changes across time, the results presented in Exhibit 28 below show that the general program indicators have varied only slightly over the last 5 years, with a slight increase in the "Internal Communication" and "Collaboration with School Partners" indicators and a slight decrease in the "Link to School Day" indicator.

Exhibit 28. General Program Indicators, 2016–17 to 2020–21



Activity-Related Indicators

Activity-related indicators relate to actual activity provision and therefore relate directly to participant experience in 21st CCLC programming. These indicators are subdivided into three groups:

3. Indicators related to mathematics and language arts
4. Indicators related to social and emotional development
5. Indicators related to parent or guardian involvement

The state-level indicator results are presented in this section according to these categories, with an exhibit and summary points provided for each subset.

With respect to mathematics and language arts activity provision, each program funded by a 21st CCLC grant of course has the express goal of improving youth achievement outcomes. As already noted, general program practices are important to achieving this goal, but program sites will be more apt to accomplish this goal if the 21st CCLC staff working directly with youth provide activities intentionally meant to support academic learning in some way and if youth actually attend such activities on a consistent and ongoing basis. The indicators in this section, therefore, focus on provision of and participation in these activities.

- A statewide average of about 33.3% of activity sessions in 2020–21 and 34.2% of activity sessions in 2019–20 had either a mathematics or a language arts focus (Leading Indicator 5).
- Statewide, slightly under two thirds of regular attendees participated in mathematics or language arts activities for at least half their activity time in 2020–21 (Leading Indicator 7). Note that the proportion of students meeting this criterion was higher in 2019–20 (77.1%).
- The design of activity sessions frequently targeted the skills and knowledge staff were trying to impart to participating youth (Leading Indicator 6). This was true in prior years.

See Exhibit 29 for complete indicator results relating to mathematics and ELA activities.

Exhibit 29. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on Activity-Related Indicators Associated With Mathematics and Language Arts

Leading indicator	Description and calculation	Source	Indicator value, 2020–21
Mathematics and ELA			
Leading Indicator 5: 21st Century Skills—A meaningful level of activity sessions	Using data collected in PARS21 in relation to student attendance in activities with either a	Activity detail and attendance pages in PARS21.	Statewide, 33.3% of activity sessions offered during 2020–21 met these criteria, compared

Leading indicator	Description and calculation	Source	Indicator value, 2020–21
delivered during the first semester of the school year are intentionally meant to support youth growth and development in either mathematics or reading/language arts and are led by a certified teacher.	mathematics or reading/English language focus and what proportion of activity sessions delivered during the school year were intentionally meant to support student growth and development in either mathematics or ELA and are led by a certified teacher?		with 34.2% in 2019–20. A total of 119 centers in 2020–21, compared to 116 centers in 2019–20 (82.6% and 79.6%, respectively, of centers with indicator data), had at least some activities that intentionally targeted mathematics or language arts.
Leading Indicator 6: Common Core—Staff design and deliver intentional and relevant activities designed to support student growth and development in mathematics and reading/language arts.	Each site received a score on a 1 to 4 scale, based on mean responses provided to questions related to the degree of intentionality in activity and session design that appeared on the staff survey.	Responses to questions that appeared in the *Intentionality in Activity and Session Design* scale of the staff survey.	The statewide mean scale score was 3.09 for 2020–21, which was in the *frequently* portion of the scale, indicating that the adoption of these practices by staff is common.
Leading Indicator 7: Common Core Skills—Youth enrolled in the program participate in a meaningful level of activities designed to support youth growth in reading and mathematics achievement.	Using data collected in PARS21 in relation to student attendance in activities with either a mathematics or ELA focus; students participating in 21st CCLC programming for more than 30 days during the school year will have participated in activities that were intentionally meant to support student growth and development in mathematics and ELA for at least 50% of their total time in the program.	Activity detail and attendance pages in PARS21.	Statewide, 65.07% of students participating in programming during the 2020–21 school year and 77.1% of students participating in programming during the 2019–20 school year for more than 30 days met these criteria.

In terms of indicator values across years, the results presented in the Exhibit 30 show that the activity-related indicators associated with Common Core Skills and 21st Century Skills have varied somewhat over the last 5 years, with a slight increase in the "21st Century Skills" indicator and a noticeable decrease in the "Common Core Skills" indicator. Exhibit 31 shows an increase in 2020–21 relative to Indicator 6, "Staff design and deliver intentional and relevant activities meant to support student growth and development in mathematics and

reading/language arts." This is interesting given the pandemic context and will be important to watch in 2021–22.

Exhibit 30. Activity-Related Indicators 5 and 7 Associated With Common Core Skills and 21st Century Skills, 2016–17 to 2020–21

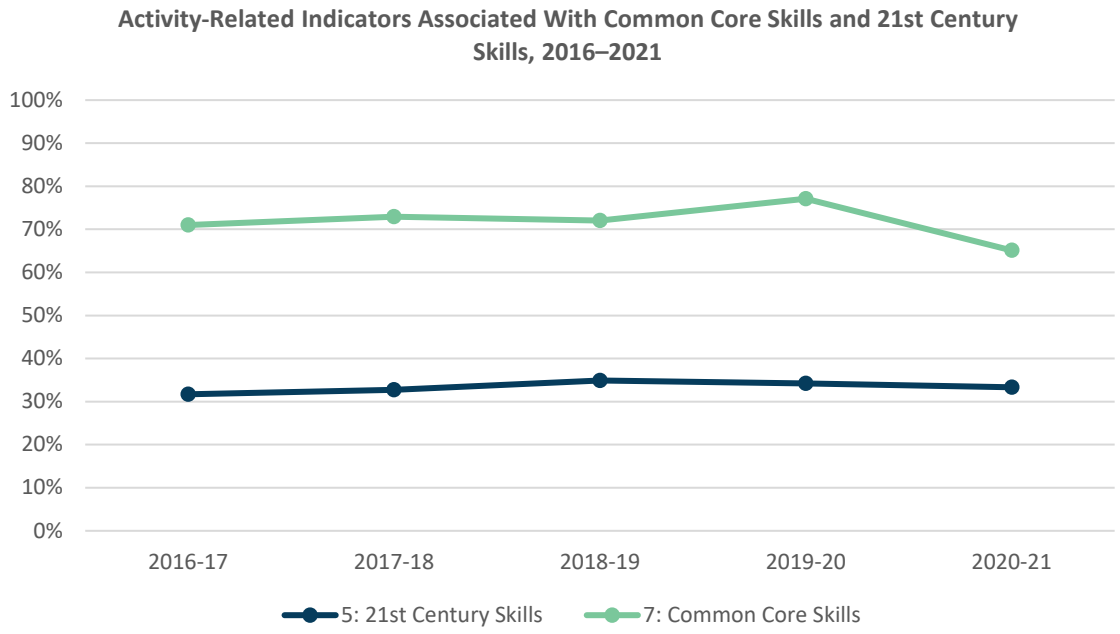
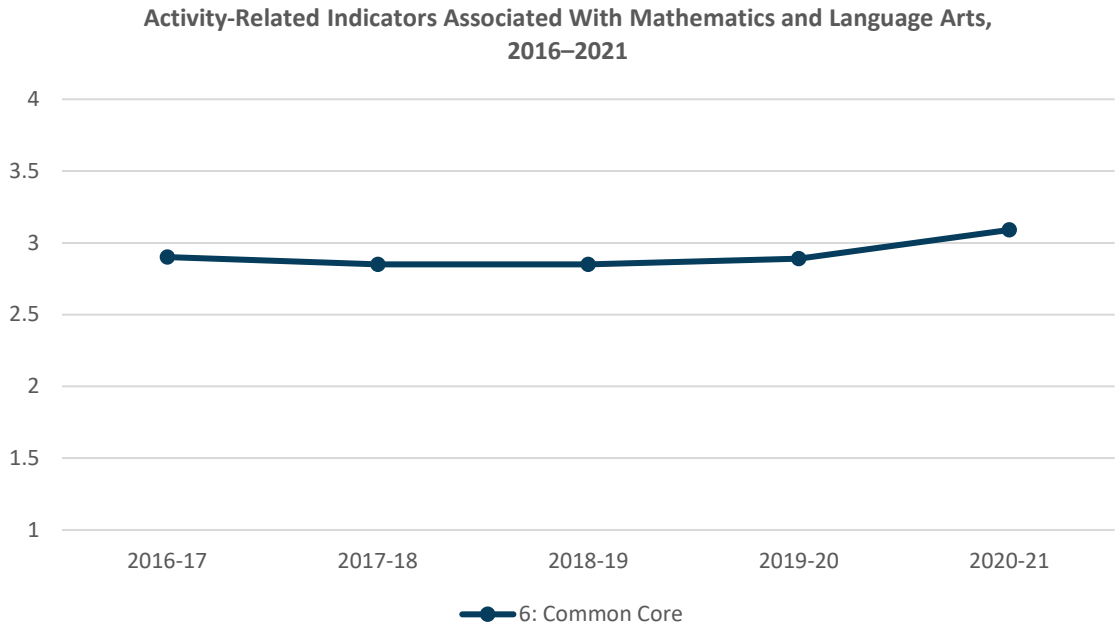


Exhibit 11. Activity-Related Indicator 6 Associated With Mathematics and Language Arts, 2016–17 to 2020–21



The second set of activity-related indicators has to do with social and emotional youth development. Youth development is a multifaceted construct consisting of a series of positive developmental experiences youth have when key supports and opportunities are afforded throughout their participation in youth-serving programs. In high-quality programs, environments are supportive and interactive, and they provide youth with opportunities to experience engagement and ownership of the setting (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Smith & Hohmann, 2005). In addition, social and emotional learning (SEL) is also an integral component of youth growth and achievement that has been shown to be positively impacted in afterschool settings that promote the development of these skills through the creation of specific conditions for learning (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Afterschool programs that have been shown to be successful in supporting the development of SEL skills integrate opportunities for participants to build on their social and emotional competencies through sequenced activities that are actively engaging and focused on the development of social skills. Ideally, these strategies are based on an understanding of participants' assets and needs garnered through ongoing formal and informal assessment.

As shown in Exhibit 32, the sites operating 21st CCLC programs during the course of the 2020–21 school year were characterized by the following levels of performance on the indicators associated with social and emotional development:

- Statewide, an average of approximately 85.2% of activity sessions offered in 2020–21 infused components that were meant to support youth development–related behaviors and SEL (Leading Indicator 8).
- An average of about 89.4% of regular attendees in 2020–21, down from 94.7% of regular attendees in 2019–20, participated for at least 20% of their time in activities meant to support youth development–related behaviors and SEL (Leading Indicator 9).
- The *Practices Supportive of Positive Youth Development* and *Opportunities for Youth Ownership* scales of the staff survey (the sources for Leading Indicator 10) suggest, as in previous years, that staff adoption of such practices is more common than not.

See Exhibit 32 for leading indicator values.

Exhibit 32. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on Activity-Related Indicators Associated With Social and Emotional Development

Leading Indicator	Description and calculation	Source	Indicator value, 2020–21
Leading Indicator 8: Social and Emotional Learning—Staff infuse components that are meant to support the social and emotional development of participating youth.	Fields exist in PARS21 that allow users to specify whether an activity is characterized by an infusion of components that are meant to support youth development–related behaviors and SEL functioning. Users specify what areas of youth development and SEL functioning are being targeted, if any. The goal is to have 20% of activity sessions delivered during the school year be characterized by an infusion of components that are meant to support youth development–related behaviors and SEL.	Responses to the following field in PARS21: Is this activity intentionally designed to support the improvement of youth development–related behaviors and social-emotional functioning in any of the following areas (check all that apply)?	Statewide, 85.23% of activity sessions offered during the 2020–21 school year met these criteria, compared to 93.1% of 2019–20 school year activity sessions, and 96.5% of programs in 2020–21 (139 centers with indicator data) and all but one program in 2019–20 (144, or 99% of centers with indicator data) had at least some activity sessions relating to youth development–related behaviors and SEL.
Leading Indicator 9: 21st Century Skills—Youth enrolled in the program participate in a meaningful level of activities designed to support youth development and social and emotional competencies.	Using data collected in PARS21 in relation to student attendance in activities that infused youth development–related and social-emotional components, 50% of students participating in 21st CCLC programming for more than 30 days will have participated in activities infused with components that are meant to support youth development–related behaviors and social-emotional functioning for at least	Responses to the following field in PARS21: Is this activity intentionally designed to support the improvement of youth-development-related behaviors and social-emotional functioning in any of the following areas (check all that apply)?	Statewide, 89.4% of students participating in programming during the 2020–21 school year and 94.7% of students participating in programming during the 2019–20 school year for more than 30 days met these criteria.

Leading Indicator	Description and calculation	Source	Indicator value, 2020–21
	20% of their total time in the program.		
Leading Indicator 10: Youth Development—Staff develop activities that are meant to support youth ownership and other opportunities for positive youth development.	Each site received a score on a 1 to 4 scale, based on responses provided to questions related to the degree to which staff reported adopting practices designed to support youth development and ownership.	Responses to questions that appear in the *Practices Supportive of Positive Youth Development* and *Opportunities for Youth Ownership* scales of the staff survey.	The statewide mean scale score was 2.99 in 2020–21 and 2.84 in 2019–20, which meant the following: • Select opportunities for youth development were made available *regularly*. • Staff largely *agree* that youth ownership opportunities are provided.

In terms of changes over time, the results presented in the Exhibit 33 show that the activity-related indicators associated with social and emotional activity content have dropped somewhat over the last 5 years, with a slight decrease in values for both indicators 8 and 9 ("Staff infuse components that are meant to support the social and emotional development of participating youth" and "Youth enrolled in the program participate in a meaningful level of activities designed to support youth development and social and emotional competencies," respectively). On the other hand, indicator 10 ("Staff develop activities that are meant to support youth ownership and other opportunities for positive youth development") increased slightly in 2020–21 compared to previous years (Exhibit 34).

Exhibit 33. Activity-Related Indicators 8 and 9 Associated With Social and Emotional Development, 2016–17 to 2020–21

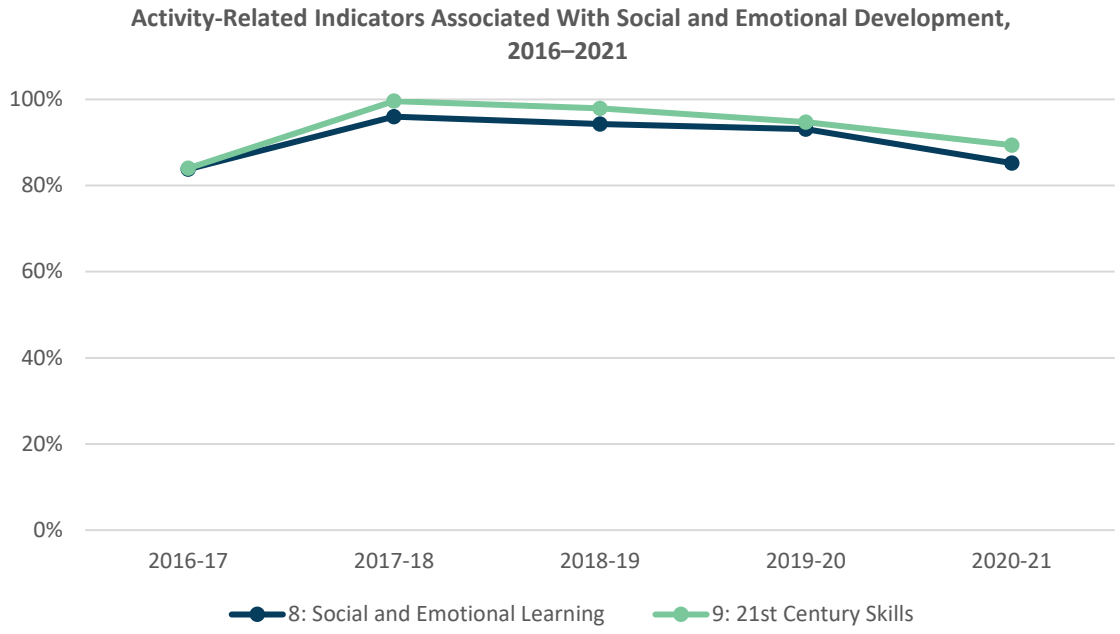
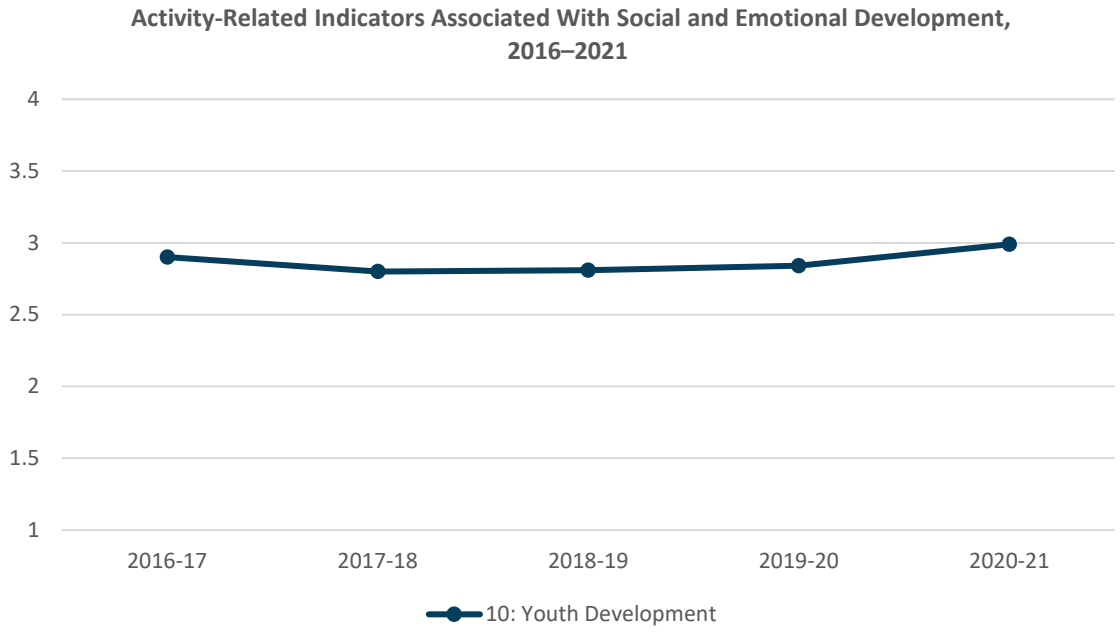

Activity-Related Indicators Associated With Social and Emotional Development, 2016–2021
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
2016-17
2017-18
2018-19
2019-20
2020-21
8: Social and Emotional Learning
9: 21st Century Skills

Exhibit 34. Activity-Related Indicator 10 Associated With Social and Emotional Development, 2016–17 to 2020–21



The third set of indicators relating to activity provision has to do with parent or guardian involvement. Engaging families in programming and providing family learning events is an important component of 21st CCLC programming. Programs can engage families by communicating with them about site programming and events, collaborating to enhance their child's educational success, and providing intentional activities meant to both support family involvement and cultivate family literacy and related skills. Historically, 21st CCLC programs have witnessed some of their greatest challenges in getting parents and adult family members meaningfully engaged in program offerings and events (Naftzger et al., 2011). Indicators 11 and 12 relate to programs' efforts to involve parents or guardians in 21st CCLC programming.

- In terms of engaging in practices to support and cultivate parent involvement and engagement (Leading Indicator 11), most sites were found to do so sometimes or frequently, with a statewide mean scale score of 2.22 in 2020–21.
- Only a very small percentage of programs' participants (4.4% in 2020–21, 4.1% in 2019–20) had parents or other adult family members attend activities during the school year. Overall, only 29 centers (20.1%) reported activities of this sort in 2020–21, compared with 25 centers (17.2%) in 2019–20.

See Exhibit 35 for a summary of Leading Indicators 11 and 12.

Exhibit 35. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on Activity-Related Indicators Associated With Family Involvement

Leading indicator	Description and calculation	Source	Indicator value, 2020–21
Leading Indicator 11: Staff and Family Connections—Staff actively engage in practices supportive of parent involvement and engagement meant to support youth growth and academic development.	Each site received a score on a 1 to 4 scale, based on mean responses provided to questions related to the extent to which staff engage in practices supportive of parent involvement and engagement.	Responses to questions that appear in the *Practices Supportive of Parent Involvement and Engagement* scale of the staff survey.	The statewide mean scale score was 2.22 in 2020–21 and 2.12 in 2019–20, both of which were within the *did sometimes* portion of the scale.
Leading Indicator 12: Family Involvement—Parents and family members of enrolled youth participate in activities designed to support family engagement and skill building.	Using data collected in PARS21 in relation to parent and adult family member attendance in activities, 15% of youth attending programming during the school year had at least one parent or adult family member participate in at least one activity meant to support parental or adult family member involvement or skill building.	Activity detail and attendance pages in PARS21.	Overall, 4.8% of all program participants had at least one parent or adult family member participate in at least one activity in 2020–21, compared with 4.1% in 2019–20. Only 29 programs (20.1%) in 2020–21 and 25 programs (17.2%) in 2019–20 reported activities of this sort.

Over time, the results presented in Exhibits 36 and 37 show that the activity-related indicators associated with parent involvement have varied only slightly over the last 5 years.

Exhibit 36. Activity-Related Indicator 11 Associated With Staff and Family Connections, 2016–17 to 2020–21

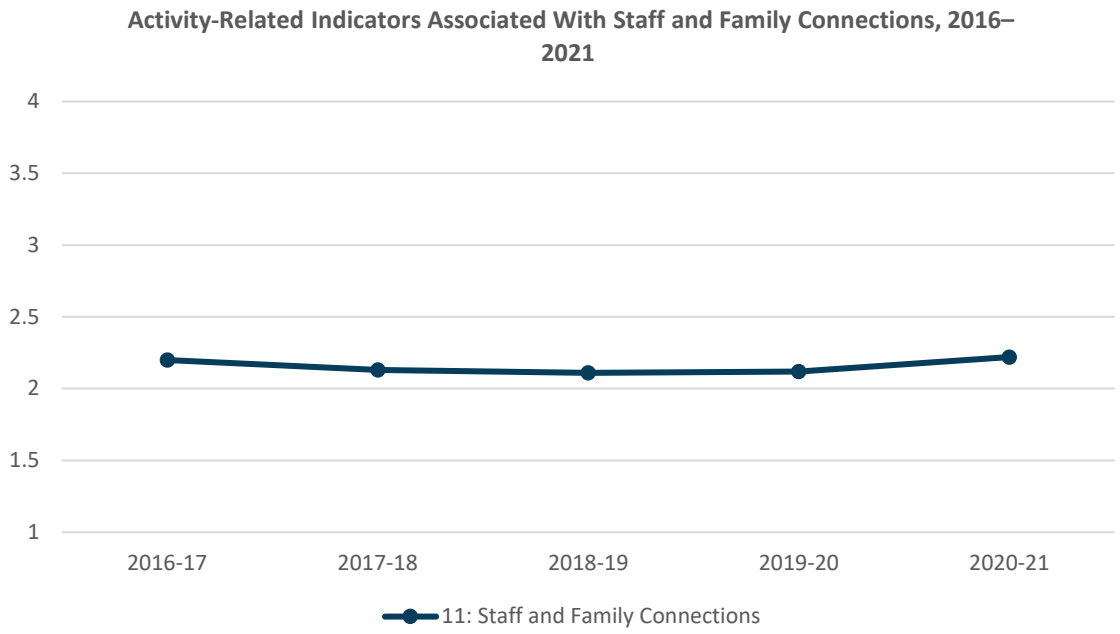
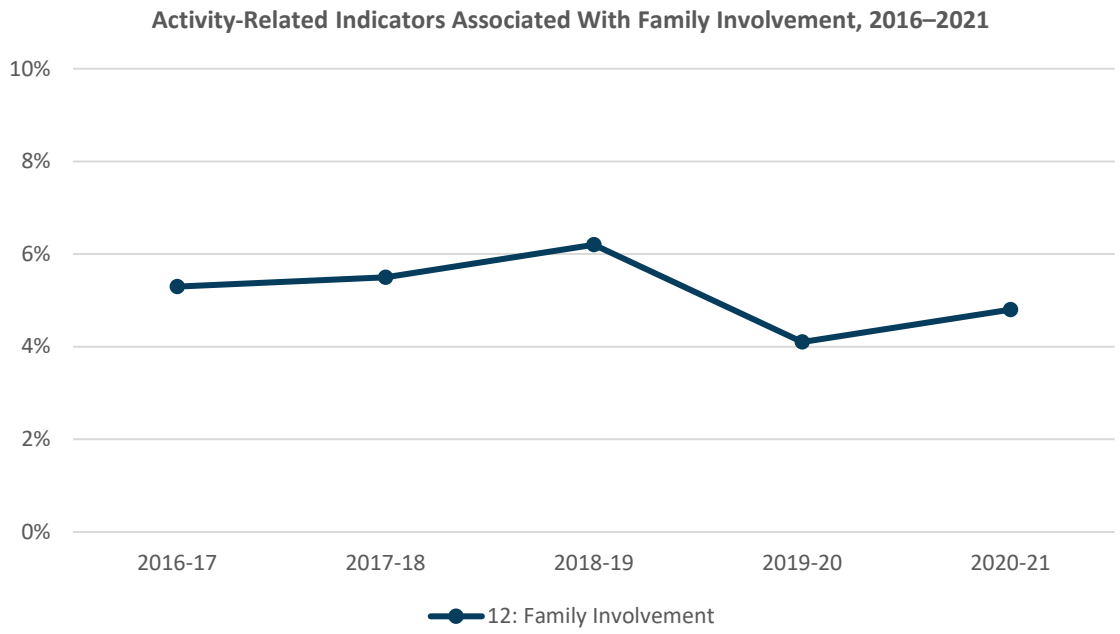


Exhibit 37. Activity-Related Indicator 12 Associated With Family Involvement, 2016–17 to 2020–21



Determining Program Improvement Priorities From the Leading Indicators

One goal of the leading indicator system is to help NJDOE determine where efforts should be invested to support programs in the adoption of quality afterschool practices. This section therefore focuses on areas where it seems there is room for growth, based on overall percentages or averages.

As in past years, two indicators show consistent room for growth:

- Leading Indicator 5, "Offering activities meant to support student growth in either mathematics or language arts that are led by a certified teacher." Statewide, 34.9% of activity sessions offered in 2018–19 targeted mathematics or ELA, compared with 34.2% in 2019–20. As in previous years, most centers did offer at least *some* activities of this sort: 122 in 2018–19 (89.7% of all centers with indicator data) and 119 in 2019–20 (82.1% of all centers with indicator data). These values are also higher than the values in 2017–18, when 32.7% of activity sessions met these criteria and 99 of centers (or 78.6% of centers with indicator data) offered at least some activities of this type.
- Leading Indicator 12, "Parent or family member involvement in activities." Statewide, 6.2% of youth program participants had a parent or family member participate in an activity in 2018–19, compared with 4.1% in 2019–20. Overall, only 28 centers (or 20.6% of centers with indicator data) reported activities of this sort during 2018–19, compared with 25

centers (or 17.2% of centers with indicator data) in 2019–20. (For comparison, 5.5% of youth participants in 2017–18 had a parent or family member participate, with 35 centers, or 27.6%, reporting activities of this sort.)

In terms of changes over time, there seem to be two noteworthy trends that bear consideration, especially given the pandemic context:

- There have been recent declines in values for indicators 8 and 9, which concern social and emotional activity content ("Staff infuse components that are meant to support the social and emotional development of participating youth" and "Youth enrolled in the program participate in a meaningful level of activities designed to support youth development and social and emotional competencies").

- Leading indicator 6 ("Staff design and deliver intentional and relevant activities designed to support student growth and development in mathematics and reading/language arts") has increased slightly, while leading indicator 7 ("Youth enrolled in the program participate in a meaningful level of activities designed to support youth growth in reading and mathematics achievement") has declined.

In both cases, it will be important to observe values in 2021–22 to see to what extent these changes are a result of the pandemic, and to what extent these changes reflect longer term trends. In the meantime, these may warrant at least some discussion between NJDOE and the grantees to explore underlying drivers for these changes.

Section 5. Conclusions and Next Steps

As in previous years, the 21st CCLC program in New Jersey appears to be serving the population intended and is offering activities in keeping with New Jersey's 21st CCLC goals. However, 2020–21 attendance levels were well below prior year attendance, both in terms of total youth served and in terms of hours of participation. This was expected given the pandemic context, but will be important to watch in 2021–22 as programs seek to return to in-person operation. The post-pandemic period is likely to host new challenges, challenges which warrant close examination and consideration in future evaluation work.

In terms of youth-reported program experience during the pandemic, youth generally indicated positive experiences in virtual programming. The level of challenge presented by virtual programming, however, was somewhat low, and youth reported having at least some technical issues when trying to participate. These may be temporary issues linked only to programming hosted during the 21st CCLC pandemic, but are worth monitoring in the future, especially if virtual program (in any capacity) continues in the future.

In terms of leading indicator values, most indicator values for 2020–21 and 2019–20 were similar to the values observed in previous years. However, values for indicators 8 and 9 have modestly declined, which may bear investigation. These indicators concern social and emotional activity content ("Staff infuse components that are meant to support the social and emotional development of participating youth" and "Youth enrolled in the program participate in a meaningful level of activities designed to support youth development and social and emotional competencies"). Additionally, leading indicator 6 ("Staff design and deliver intentional and relevant activities designed to support student growth and development in mathematics and reading/language arts") increased slightly, while leading indicator 7 ("Youth enrolled in the program participate in a meaningful level of activities designed to support youth growth in reading and mathematics achievement") declined. Whether these trends hold during 2021–22 will be important, since it is unclear to what extent these changes are connected to the COVID-19 pandemic.

AIR's recommendations for NJDOE follow from these observations, and from the context of the COVID-19 pandemic more broadly. First—and similar to the recommendation last year—exploration of attendance trends should be conducted concerning 2020–21 data, given 2020–21's overlap with school closures related to the pandemic. The next report should include up to four years of attendance data so that per-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic attendance periods can be compared. Analysis of activities offered and attended would also be valuable to assess any changes in activity types across years covered by the pandemic. These analyses

would help further quantify disruption caused by the pandemic, and show whether the disruption is persisting in the post-pandemic period.

Second, AIR should discuss parameters for a 2022–23 parent survey. Such a survey could be useful in identifying post-pandemic family needs and challenges, and therefore help guide ongoing program improvement efforts. This type of work will be especially important given the host of challenges facing families in the post-pandemic period. Additionally, it may be beneficial to assess staff stress levels and staffing stability, given the difficulty presented to staff by changes resultant from the pandemic.

References

Birmingham, J., Pechman, E. M., Russell, C. A., & Mielke, M. (2005). *Shared features of high-performing after-school programs: A follow-up to the TASC evaluation.* Policy Studies Associates.

Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2007). *The impact of after-school programs that promote personal and social skills*. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.

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

Glisson, C. (2007). Assessing and changing organizational culture and climate for effective services. *Research on Social Work Practice, 17*(6), 736−747.

Naftzger, N., Vinson, M., Manzeske, D., & Gibbs, C. (2011). *New Jersey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) impact report 2009–10*. American Institutes for Research.

Smith, C. (2007, March). *Predictors of quality at the point-of-service provision: Empirical and methodological background for the YPQA field trial*. Presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Boston, MA.

Smith, C., & Hohmann, C. (2005). *Full findings from the Youth PQA validation study*. High Scope Educational Research Foundation.

Appendix. Youth Postadministration Survey

AIR administered a postadministration survey in spring 2018. This survey included youth program experience questions, which are analyzed in Section 4 of this report. Note that, in the survey shown on the following pages, items associated with Question 1 are the youth outcome questions that appeared on both a preadministration and the postadministration version, whereas items associated with Questions 2 through 5—the experience questions—appeared only on the postadministration survey. Items associated with Question 1 are not covered in this report, given this report's descriptive character.

Youth Survey for Middle and High School (4th–12th Grades)
New Jersey 21st Century Community Learning Centers

Instructions: The purpose of this survey is to find out more about 21st CCLC out-of-school programs in New Jersey. Our goal is to help make out-of-school time programs better for you and other young people. This survey should take about 15 minutes. Below are questions that ask about you and some of the things you think and feel about yourself and your out-of-school-time program. **This is not a test**. There are no "wrong" answers. Please choose the answer that is most true or most like you.

This survey is completely voluntary. You do not have to answer any of the questions if you don't want to, and you can stop taking this survey at any time. This survey is confidential to the extent permitted by law, which means that no one (not your parents, teachers, school staff or other students) will be allowed to know how you answer these questions.

[NOTE: Question 1 appeared on both the preadministration and postadministration versions of the youth survey.]

1. **Young people might describe themselves in many ways. We have listed some things youth might say or think about themselves. How true is each statement for you? Choose the answer that is most true for you for each statement**.

	Not at all true	*Somewhat true*	*Mostly true*	*Completely true*
Doing well in school is an important part of who I am	o	o	o	o
Getting good grades is one of my main goals	o	o	o	o
I take pride in doing my best in school	o	o	o	o
Getting a college education is important to me	o	o	o	o
I am a hard worker when it comes to my schoolwork	o	o	o	o
It is important to me to learn as much as I can	o	o	o	o
I finish whatever I begin	o	o	o	o
I stay positive when things don't go the way I want	o	o	o	o
I don't give up easily	o	o	o	o

	Not at all true	*Somewhat true*	*Mostly true*	*Completely true*
I try things even if I might fail	o	o	o	o
I can solve difficult problems if I try hard enough	o	o	o	o
I can do a good job if I try hard enough	o	o	o	o
I stay focused on my work even when it's boring	o	o	o	o
I can stop myself from doing something I know I shouldn't do	o	o	o	o
When I'm sad, I do something that will make me feel better	o	o	o	o
I can control my temper	o	o	o	o
I can handle stress	o	o	o	o
I can calm myself down when I'm excited or upset	o	o	o	o
When my solution to a problem is not working, I try to find a new solution	o	o	o	o
I think of my past choices when making new decisions	o	o	o	o
I listen to other people's ideas	o	o	o	o
I work well with others on group projects	o	o	o	o
I feel bad when someone gets their feelings hurt	o	o	o	o
I respect what other people think, even if I disagree	o	o	o	o
I try to help when I see someone having a problem	o	o	o	o
When I make a decision, I think about how it will affect other people	o	o	o	o

[NOTE: Questions 2 through 5 appeared ONLY on the postadministration version of the youth survey.]

2. Now think about this program in particular. When you are at this program, how often…

	Never	*Rarely*	*Sometimes*	*Often*
Do you get to choose how you spend your time?	o	o	o	o
Can you suggest your own ideas for new activities?	o	o	o	o
Do you get to choose which activities you do?	o	o	o	o
Do you get to help plan activities for the program?	o	o	o	o
Do you get the chance to lead an activity?	o	o	o	o
Do you get to be in charge of doing something to help the program?	o	o	o	o
Do you get to help make decisions or rules for the program?	o	o	o	o

3. Thinking about the adults in this program, how true are these statements for you? In this program, there is an adult here…

	Not at all true	*Somewhat true*	*Mostly true*	*Completely true*
Who is interested in what I think about things.	o	o	o	o
Who I can talk to when I am upset.	o	o	o	o
Who helps me when I have a problem.	o	o	o	o
Who I enjoy being around.	o	o	o	o
Who has helped me find a special interest or talent (something I'm good at).	o	o	o	o
Who asks me about my life and goals.	o	o	o	o
Who I will miss when the program is over.	o	o	o	o

4. At this program, how do kids get along? Indicate how true each statement is based on your own experience in this program.

	Not at all true	*Somewhat true*	*Mostly true*	*Completely true*
Kids here are friendly with each other.	o	o	o	o
Kids here treat each other with respect.	o	o	o	o
Kids here listen to what the teachers tell them to do.	o	o	o	o
Kids here don't tease or bully others.	o	o	o	o
Kids here support and help one another.	o	o	o	o

5. How has this program helped you specifically? For each line, indicate how true each statement is for you. This program has helped me…

	Not at all true	*Somewhat true*	*Mostly true*	*Completely true*
Feel good about myself.	o	o	o	o
With my confidence.	o	o	o	o
To make new friends.	o	o	o	o
Find out what is important to me.	o	o	o	o
Find out what I'm good at doing.	o	o	o	o
Find out what I like to do.	o	o	o	o
Discover things I want to learn more about.	o	o	o	o
Learn things that will help me in school.	o	o	o	o
Learn things that will be important for my future.	o	o	o	o
Think about the kinds of classes I want to take in the future.	o	o	o	o
Think about what I might like to do when I get older.	o	o	o	o
Learn about things that are important to my community or the environment.	o	o	o	o
Feel good because I was helping my community or the environment.	o	o	o	o

Thank you!

About the American Institutes for Research

Established in 1946, with headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts behavioral and social science research and delivers technical assistance to solve some of the most urgent challenges in the U.S. and around the world. We advance evidence in the areas of education, health, the workforce, human services, and international development to create a better, more equitable world. The AIR family of organizations now includes IMPAQ, Maher & Maher, and Kimetrica. For more information, visit AIR.ORG.

AIR® Headquarters
1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor
Arlington, VA 22202-3289
+1.202.403.5000 | **AIR.ORG**