New Jersey 21st Century Community Learning Centers

Year 1 Evaluation Report Descriptive Data for 2018–19 and 2019–20

SEPTEMBER 2021

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New Jersey 21st Century Community Learning Centers

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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 2018–19 and 2019–20, with data provided by 64 subgrantees (152 centers) for 2018–19 and 63 subgrantees (148 centers) for 2019–20. 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 brief 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 and 2019–20 school years was meant to answer two primary evaluation questions related to the implementation of the New Jersey 21st CCLC program:

1. What were the primary characteristics of programs funded by 21st CCLC, along with the characteristics of the students served?
2. How did centers perform on the leading indicators defined for the program, and how is this level of performance relevant to thinking about what additional supports, training, and professional development the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) should potentially invest in?

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 the course of 2018–19 and 2019–20:

- **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. The staff survey data are primarily used in creating 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 primarily used in creating values for the program leading indicators.

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 appearing on the staff and youth surveys and that 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 on a given area of practice or facet of afterschool implementation (e.g., practices that support linkages to the school day). An example is 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?	○	○	○	○
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; 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 (e.g., for use in analyzing youth survey data) or averaged to the center, grant, or state level (e.g., staff survey data). AIR used Rasch scale scores in calculating many of the leading indicator values and for analyzing outcomes relating to the youth survey results.

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 plurality of grantees (38%) were in their fifth year of program operation during 2018–19, while a similar percentage (also 38%) were in their first year of program operation during 2019–20. This is not surprising, reflecting the 5-year duration of subgrants in New Jersey and New Jersey's award cycles.

Center Characteristics

- By far, the most common staff type reported by grantees was school-day teacher; 1,164 school-day teachers (47% of all staff) were reported for the 2019–20 school year (1,207 for 2018–19, or 46% of all 2018–19 staff). The next highest category was program staff;[1] 555 program staff were reported (or 22% of all staff) for 2019–20 (579 or 22% for 2018–19).
- Centers on average had 17 staff members (median 14) for 2019–20 (with an average of 17 and a median of 16 for 2018–19), which is the same as in previous years.
- The average student-to-staff ratio was about 13 students for each program staff member during 2019–20, which was similar to 2018–19 (also 13) but slightly higher than 2017–18 (with a mean value of 12).
- Centers mainly served children in elementary and middle schools (88% of centers in 2019–20 and 87% in 2018–19, or about the same as in previous years).
- Approximately 28% of all centers chose career awareness as their theme during both 2018–19 and 2019–20, whereas 44% of centers in 2019–20 and 51% of centers in 2018–19 chose science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Another 18% of centers in 2019–20 and 15% of centers in 2018–19 chose visual and performing arts as their central theme, while only 5% of centers in 2019–20 and 3% of centers in 2018–19 chose civic engagement.

Student Characteristics

- A total of 20,446 students attended 21st CCLC programming for at least one day in 2018–19, compared with 19,129 in 2019–20. Both years were slightly higher than previous years.
- A majority of 21st CCLC participants were Hispanic/Latino (44% in 2018–19 and 45% in 2019–20) or Black (38% in 2018–19 and 36% in 2019–20). Most attendees (74% in 2018–19 and 75% in 2019–20) qualified for free or reduced-price lunch.
- Comparing 2019–20 with 2018–19, significantly more students attended between 30 and 59 days in 2019–20 (26%, compared with 17% the previous year) and between 60 and 89 days (27%, compared with 12% the previous year). However, significantly fewer students participated for 90 or more days (20%, compared with 2018–19's 38%). It may be the case 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.
- About a third % of students attended 21st CCLC programming for two consecutive years or more (true for both 2018–19 and 2019–20)

[1] "Program staff" is a category of staff reported in PARS21.

- On average, students spent about 19% of their time in tutoring or homework help during 2018–19, compared with 25% in 2019–20. Students spent about 23% of their time in academic enrichment during 2018–19, 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 4 hours in tutoring/homework help, 12 hours in academic enrichment, and about 6 hours in youth development/learning activities for 2018–19. 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.
- A total of 52% of all youth in 2018–19 and 47% in 2019–20 participated in at least 10 hours of academic enrichment across the year. Comparable figures for youth development/learning activities were 46% for 2018–19 and 47% for 2018–19; for recreation, 43% (2018–19) and 41% (2019–20); and for tutoring, 46% (2018–19) and 50% (2019–20).
- 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, representing significant drops (with drops presumably associated, at least partially, with the COVID-19 pandemic).

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[2] are adopting research-supported best practices.
- Allow 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.

[2] 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.

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 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 both 2018–19 and 2019–20 (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).
- For both 2018–19 and 2019–20, 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 2.8 in both years (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 both 2018–19 and 2019–20.

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 34.9% of activity sessions in 2018–19 and 34.2% of activity sessions in 2019–20 had either a mathematics or a language arts focus (Leading Indicator 5).
- Statewide, about three quarters of regular attendees participated in mathematics or language arts activities for at least half their activity time in both years (Leading Indicator 7). Note that the proportion of students meeting this criterion was higher in 2019–20, at about 77.1%, compared to 72.0% for 2018–19.
- Frequent intentionality was used in the design of activity sessions in terms of the skills and knowledge staff were trying to impart to participating youth (Leading Indicator 6). This was true for both years.
- Statewide, an average of approximately 94.3% of activity sessions offered in 2018–19 and 93.1% of activity sessions offered in 2019–20 infused components that were meant to support youth development–related behaviors and social and emotional learning (SEL) (Leading Indicator 8).
- An average of about 97.9% of regular attendees in 2018–19 and 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 (52.2% of sites falling within the sometimes range of the scale during 2018–19, and 67.3% during 2019–20) as opposed to never (3.8% of sites in both 2018–19 and 2019–20) or frequently (17.0% and 19.5% in 2018–19 and 2019–20, respectively).
- Only a very small percentage of programs' participants (6.2% in 2018–19, 4.1% in 2019–20) had parents or other adult family members attend activities during the school year. Overall, only 28 centers (20.6%) reported activities of this sort in 2018–19, compared with 25 centers (17.2%) in 2019–20.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Overall, the 21st CCLC program in New Jersey seems to be serving the population intended and offering activities in keeping with New Jersey's 21st CCLC goals. Notable year-over-year shifts were observed. First, a plurality of subgrants were in Year 1 of program operations during 2019–20, rather than Year 5 (2018–19). This is expected, however, given the cyclical nature of subgrant awards. Second, there was a drop in terms of overall number of youth served between 2018–19 and 2019–20, from 20,446 to 19,129. Third, attendance patterns for these youth appeared to shift in terms of overall days attended: For 2019–20, a higher proportion of youth attended 30 to 59 days (26%) or 60 to 89 days (27%) than did in 2018–19 (17% and 12% respectively), while a lower proportion of youth attended 90 days or more (20%, compared with 38% for 2018–19). This seems likely to be a result of program closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which could have pushed 2019–20 youth out of the 90-days-or-more group and into lower attendance brackets.

In terms of leading indicator values, most indicator values for 2018–19 and 2019–20 were similar to the values observed in previous years. However, in terms of mathematics and English language arts activity provision, a higher proportion of centers in 2018–19 did offer activities led by a certified teacher meant to support student growth in either mathematics or English language arts than was the case in previous years (89.7%, compared to approximately 80%). Relatedly, a higher proportion of youth in 2019–20 participated in programming meant to support youth growth in English language arts and mathematics achievement (77.1%, compared with 72.0% for 2018–19 and 72.9% for 2017–18).

AIR's recommendations for NJDOE follow from these observations, and from the context of the COVID-19 pandemic more broadly. First, further exploration of attendance trends should be conducted concerning 2020–21 data, given 2020–21's overlap with school closures related to the pandemic. In the next report, three years of data should be included (as was the case for some charts in this report) to enable comparing of pre-pandemic (2018–19), early-pandemic (2019–20), and mid-pandemic (2020–21) attendance levels. 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 quantify disruption caused by the pandemic, at least in terms of basic attendance levels.

Second, AIR and NJDOE should revisit the leading indicators to assess whether they warrant revision. Most of the indicators have remained steady for several years; this information in itself may be useful, but a close review is warranted given this general stability. There may also be opportunities to streamline or tailor the leading indicators as AIR discusses construction of a set of key performance indicators with NJDOE in fall 2021.

Section 1. Introduction

For two decades, 21st *Century Community Learning Centers* (21st CCLC) operating across New Jersey have 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, which 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 and 2019–20 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 considered for this report—the 2019–20 school year—was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated school closures. Schools in New Jersey closed and shifted to virtual formats in March 2020 (early to mid-March), which undoubtedly affected 21st CCLC programs serving youth at those schools. It is uncertain exactly how many 21st CCLC programs continued operations in New Jersey between March 2020 and June 2020, shifting to virtual formats. Because of this, comparisons between the two program years shown in this report are not "apples to apples" comparisons, but may highlight shifts associated with the pandemic. Again, however, this report does not attempt to uncover causal connections; the disruption to the 2019–20 school year should merely be kept in mind while comparing numbers from the two 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,[3] and youth participant characteristics. Section 4 presents the leading indicator values associated with 2018–19 and 2019–20, and concludes with a short description of common program strengths or weaknesses as conveyed through the indicators. Section 5, the conclusion, provides a high-level summary of important findings and briefly discusses next steps.

[3] 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 and 2019–20, 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 three and four address EQ1, while section five addresses EQ2.

Data Sources

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

- **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 2018–19 and 2019–20. Completed surveys were obtained from 116 centers active during the 2018–19 school year, and 144 centers active during 2019–20 (averaging approximately 8.9 and 9.8 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.

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 appearing on the staff surveys and that 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 on 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 0 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 and 2019–20—limitations intrinsic to the methods employed to support the evaluation. Without attempting to be exhaustive, the primary limitations are as follows:

- **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.
- **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 response is perceived as socially undesirable). The staff survey results presented in this report as part of the leading indicators should therefore be interpreted with some caution.
- **Closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic likely affected data reported for 2019–20.** As stated above, it is highly likely that the data for 2019–20 were affected by school and program closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is unclear to what extent this is true.

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 2018–19 and 2019–20 school years. Overall, 64 grantees in 2018–19 and 63 in 2019–20 operated 152 and 148 centers, respectively (compared with 130 centers during 2017–18). In all, the 152 centers in 2018–19 served 20,446 youth, and the 148 centers in 2019–20 148 served 19,129 youth (compared with 18,382 during 2017–18).

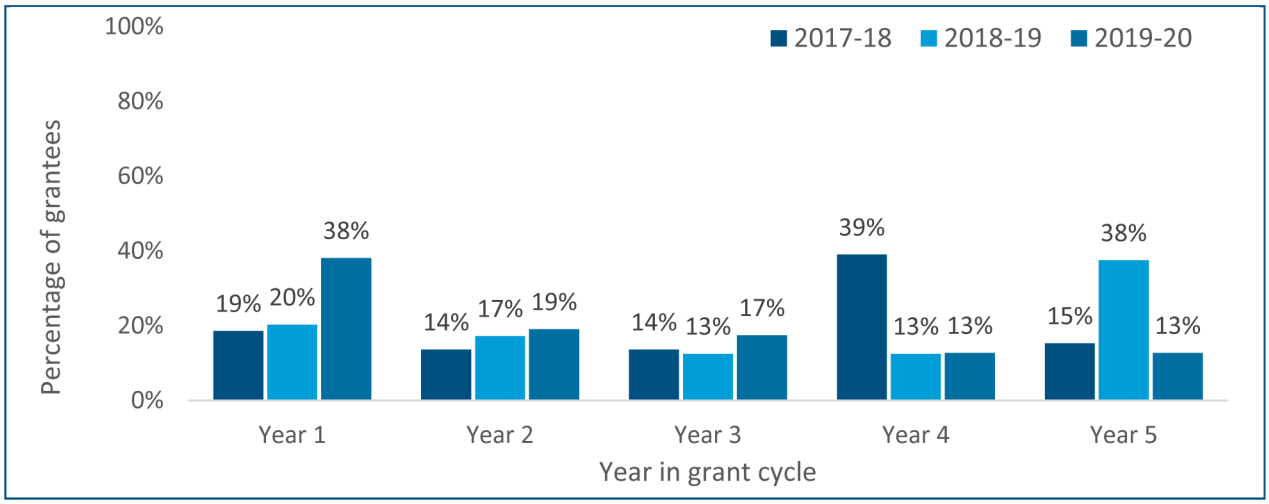
Grantee Characteristics

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 be learning 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 2019–20 school year were in Year 1 of funding, which is not surprising given the five-year grant cycle and the fact that a plurality of grants for the 2018–19 school year were in Year 5.

Exhibit 2. Number of Grantees by Year of Operation, 2017–18, 2018–19, and 2019–20

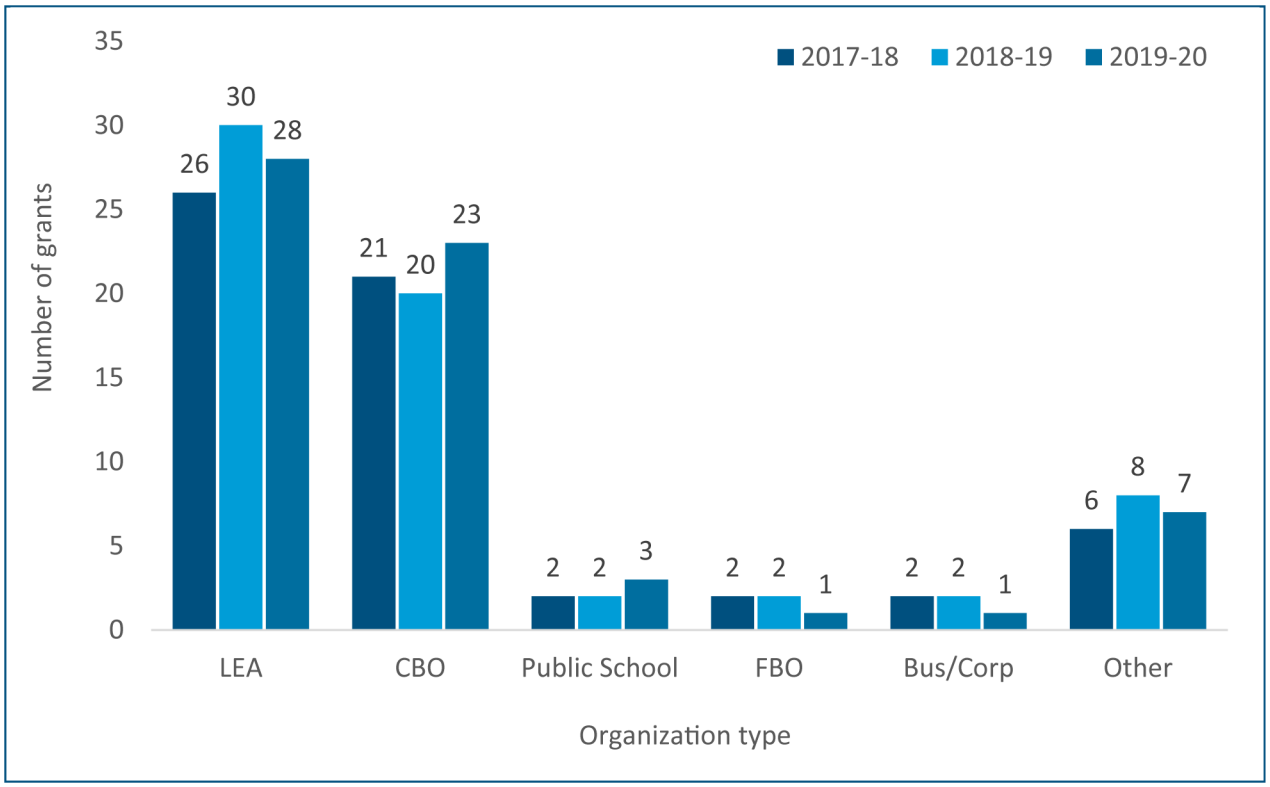


Source. PARS21.

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, 44% of grants active during the 2019–20 school year were held by school districts (a slight decrease from 47% the previous year), whereas community-based organizations accounted for 37% of the grants active during this period (up from only 31% the previous year). Public schools and faith-based organizations in 2019–20 accounted for only about 5% and 2% of grants, respectively, as compared to 3% for both in 2018–19. All other categories accounted for roughly 13% of grants in 2019–20 and 16% in 2018–19.[4] Grant types remained about the same between 2018–19 and 2019–20, with minor changes year to year.

Exhibit 3. Number of Grantees by Organization Type



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

[4] 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.

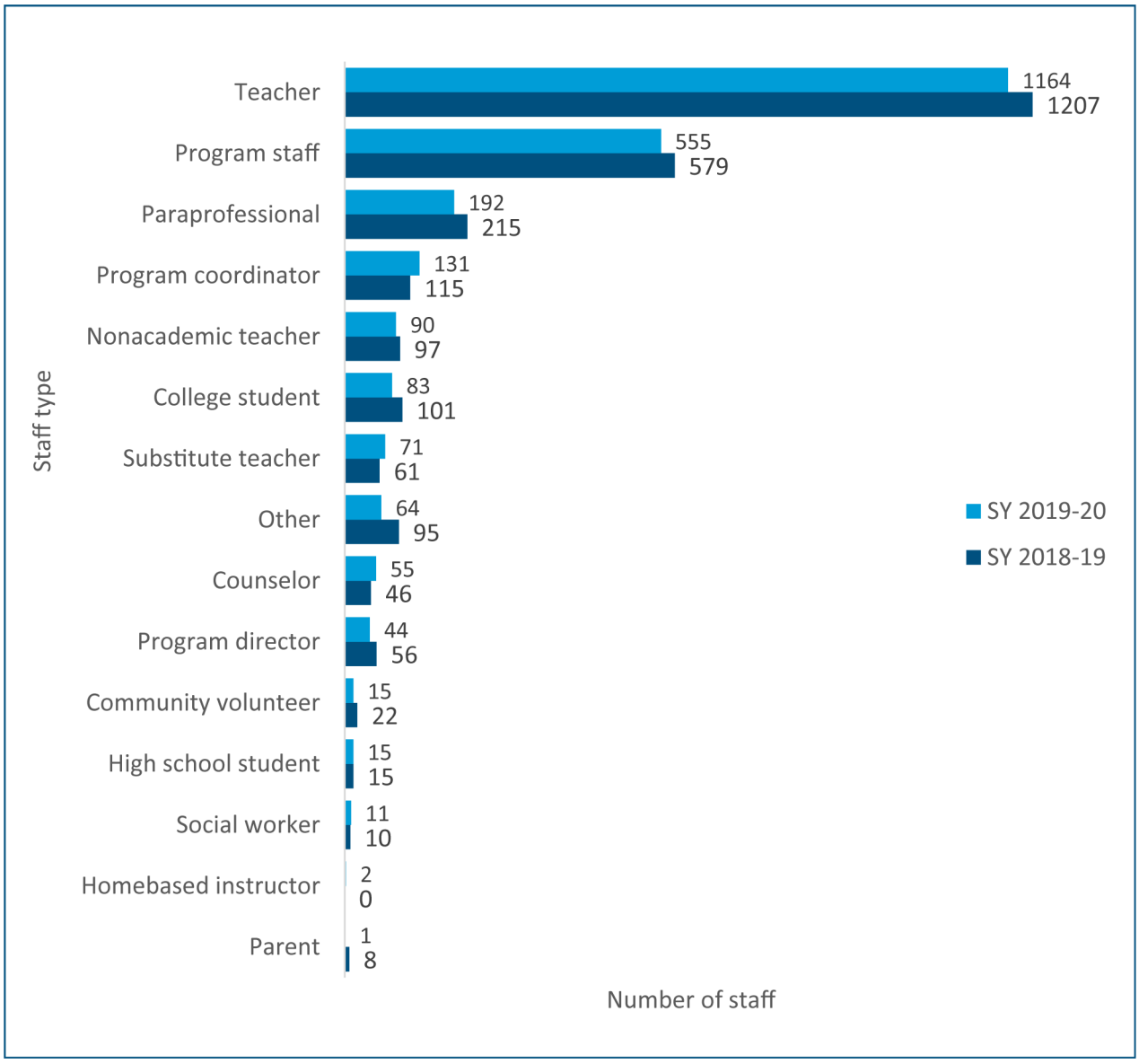
Center characteristics can be described as indicative of research-supported best practices or as innate attributes of the center in question without a strong connection to the afterschool quality practice literature. The latter category of center characteristics might include the grade level served, 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 2,493 staff were reported by grantees for school year 2019–20 across all programs, down from 2,627 staff in school year 2018–19. In terms of classification of these staff, by far the most commonly reported staff types were “teacher” (46.7% of all staff) and “program staff” (22.3% of all staff), with a distant third being “paraprofessional” (7.7%), followed by “program coordinator” (5.3%) and “nonacademic teacher” (3.6%). 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 2018–19 and 2019–20.

Exhibit 4. Total Number of Staff by Staff Type, 2018–19 and 2019–20



Note. Based on activity staff data for 152 centers in 2018–19 and 148 centers in 2019–20.

Overall, centers had an average of 17.3 total staff in 2018–19, down slightly to an average of 16.8 total staff for the 2019–20 school year, with a median of 16 and 14 staff in 2018–19 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 11.3 and 10.2 staff members in 2018–19 and 2019–20, respectively.[5]

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
2018–19	152	17.3	16	1	65	11.3

In addition to exploring the number of staff employed by centers during the 2018–19 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 13 or so youth participating in activities in 2018–19 and 2019–20 (compared to approximately 12 in 2017–18), although across centers, the span of ratios was quite broad, ranging from just under one student to approximately 70 in school year 2019–20. These mean ratios are quite similar across the past three years, as the exhibit shows for ease of comparison.

Exhibit 6. Average Student–Teacher Ratio per Center, 2017–18 Through 2019–20

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
2017–18 student/staff ratio	130	1.05	51.62	12.27	6.44
2018–19 student/staff ratio	152	1.22	54.70	13.12	8.43
2019–20 student/staff ratio	148	.65	70.32	13.26	7.91

Source. PARS21.

[5] 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

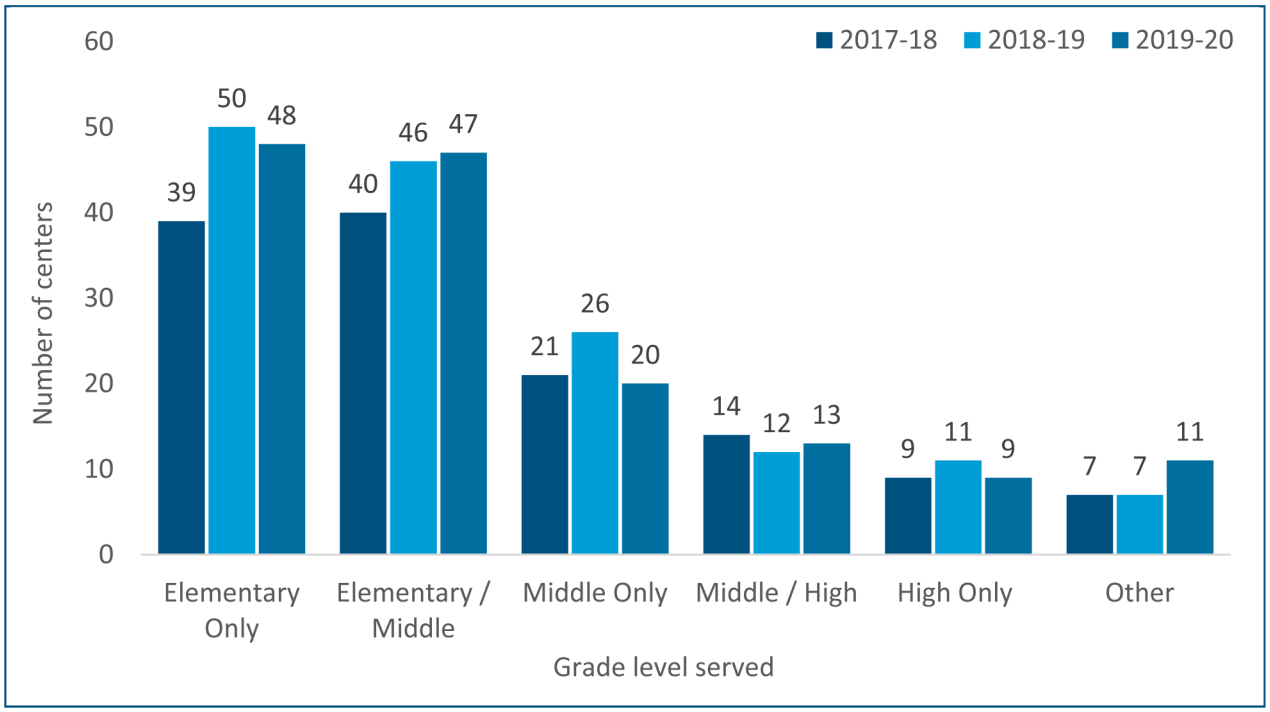
The grade levels served by a program play a role in (a) how 21st CCLC programs should structure their operations and program offerings, and (b) the domain of outcomes they should be accountable for through performance indicator systems. Using student-level data on the grade levels of students attending centers, centers active during the 2018–19 and 2019–20 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 one of the five categories and includes 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 2018–19 and 2019–20 school years served elementary or middle school students in some capacity (constituting 88.2% of all sites in 2018–19 and 86.5% of all sites in 2019–20), whereas not quite two thirds of all sites served elementary students in some capacity (63.2% and 64.2% of all sites in 2018–19 and 2019–20, respectively). Compared to 2017–18, the proportion of elementary and middle school students served increased slightly, as did the overall center count, as Exhibit 7 shows.

Exhibit 7. Number of Centers by Grade Level Served



Note. Based on 148 centers for 2019–20, 152 centers for 2018–19, and 130 centers for 2017–18.

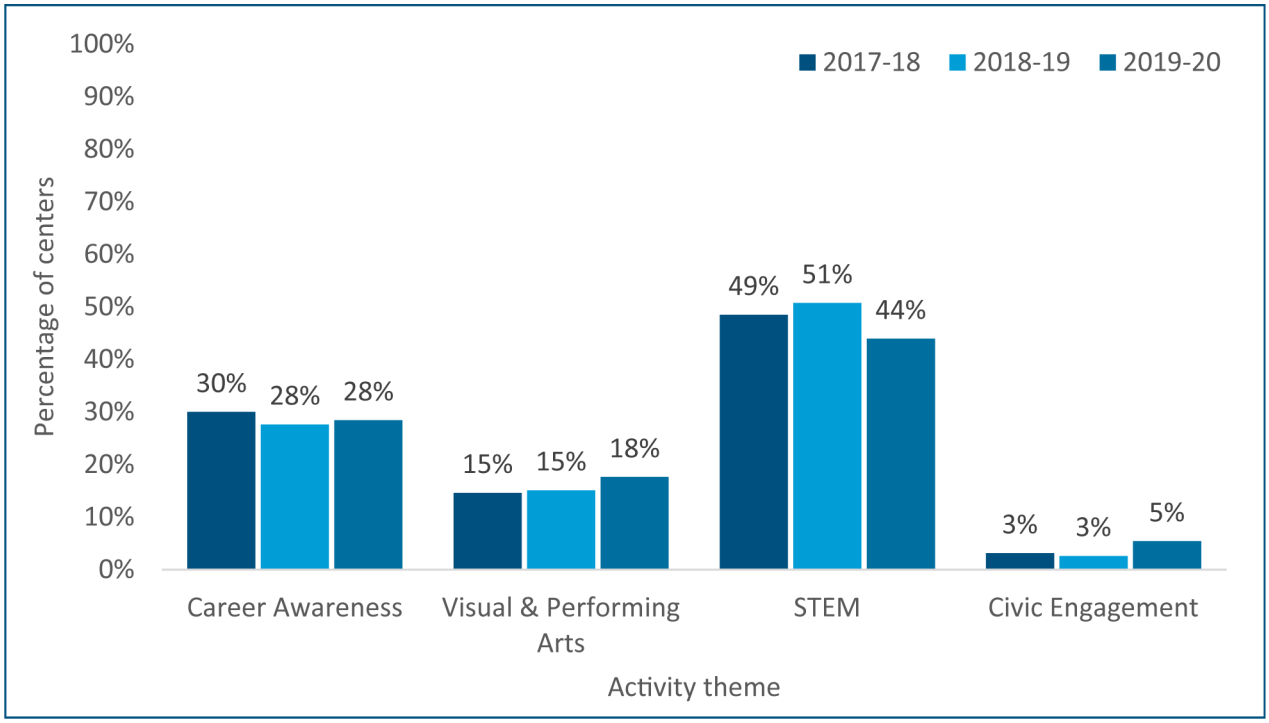
Activity Themes

For the 2018–19 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 2018–19, 28% of centers reported a career awareness theme, 15% visual and performing arts, 51% STEM, and 3% civic engagement. These percentages are roughly in keeping with prior-year values, although a greater proportion of centers chose either a STEM theme or career awareness theme in 2018–19 than in the three prior years. During the school year 2019–20, there was a substantial decrease in STEM (to 44% from 51%) and slight increases in visual and performing arts (to 18%, from 15%) and civic engagement (to 5%, from 3%) from the prior year. 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

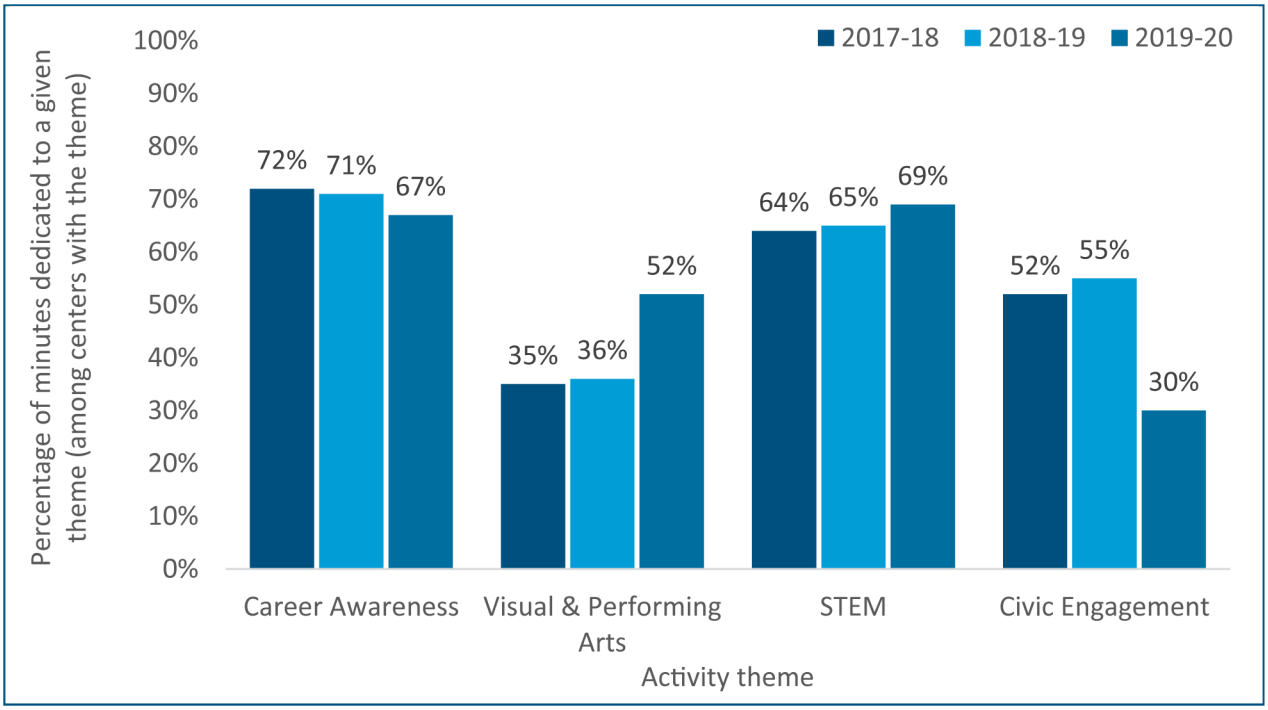


Source. PARS21.

As Exhibit 9 shows for school year 2018–19, centers with a career awareness theme spent, on average, about 71% of their total activity minutes on career awareness. Centers with a visual and performing arts theme spent 36% on such activities. Centers focusing on STEM spent about 65% of their time on such activities, and centers with a civic engagement focus spent about 55% of their time on the theme. The biggest changes year to year were observed in civic engagement (an increase in percentage time). However, for school year 2019–20, some of the changes from prior years were dramatic. While there was a slight increase for centers focusing on STEM, spending 69% of their time on such activities, and a slight decrease in centers

focusing on career awareness, spending 67% of their time on that theme, there was a massive decrease in centers focusing on civic engagement (only spending 30% of their time on that theme), and a massive increase in centers focusing on visual and performing arts (spending 52% of their time on that theme).

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



Source. PARS21.

Attendee Characteristics

During the 2018–19 and 2019–20 school years, respectively, 20,446 and 19,129 students participated at some level (i.e., attended programming for at least one day during the school year) in 21st CCLC programming at 152 and 148 active centers for which the researchers had data during this period.[6] This population was diverse in terms of ethnicity, gender, grade level, and economic level, as Exhibit 10 shows. Generally, students served during the 2018–19 and 2019–20 school years were Black and Hispanic/Latino, were enrolled in elementary or middle school, especially in Grades 4–7, and were eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch programs. In terms of year-to-year changes, most statistics remained stable year to year; only modest changes were evident.

[6] During the 2018–19 and 2019–20 school years, 152 and 148 active centers 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, 2018–19 and 2019–20

	Demographic Category	2018–19		2019–20	
		Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage
Race/ Ethnicity	White	2,370	11.6%	2,303	12.0%
	Black	7,836	38.3%	6,944	36.3%
	Hispanic/Latino	8,957	43.8%	8,657	45.3%
	Asian	539	2.6%	495	2.6%
	Native American	37	0.2%	54	0.3%
	Pacific Islander	41	0.2%	32	0.2%
	Unknown	666	3.3%	644	3.4%
Gender	Male	10,073	49.3%	9,518	49.8%
	Female	10,373	50.7%	9,611	50.2%
Grade Level	2	15	0.1%	6	0.0%
	3	1,601	7.8%	1,764	9.2%
	4	4,137	20.2%	3,467	18.1%
	5	3,238	15.8%	2,777	14.5%
	6	3,233	15.8%	2,984	15.6%
	7	2,221	10.9%	2,125	11.1%
	8	1,723	8.4%	1,577	8.2%
	9	1,680	8.2%	1,916	10.0%
	10	739	3.6%	744	3.9%
	11	511	2.5%	556	2.9%
	12	258	1.3%	370	1.9%
Free or Reduced-Price Lunch	Reduced-Price	1,781	8.7%	1,578	8.2%
	Free	13,417	65.6%	12,711	66.4%
	Not Available	5,248	25.7%	4,840	25.3%

Source. PARS21.

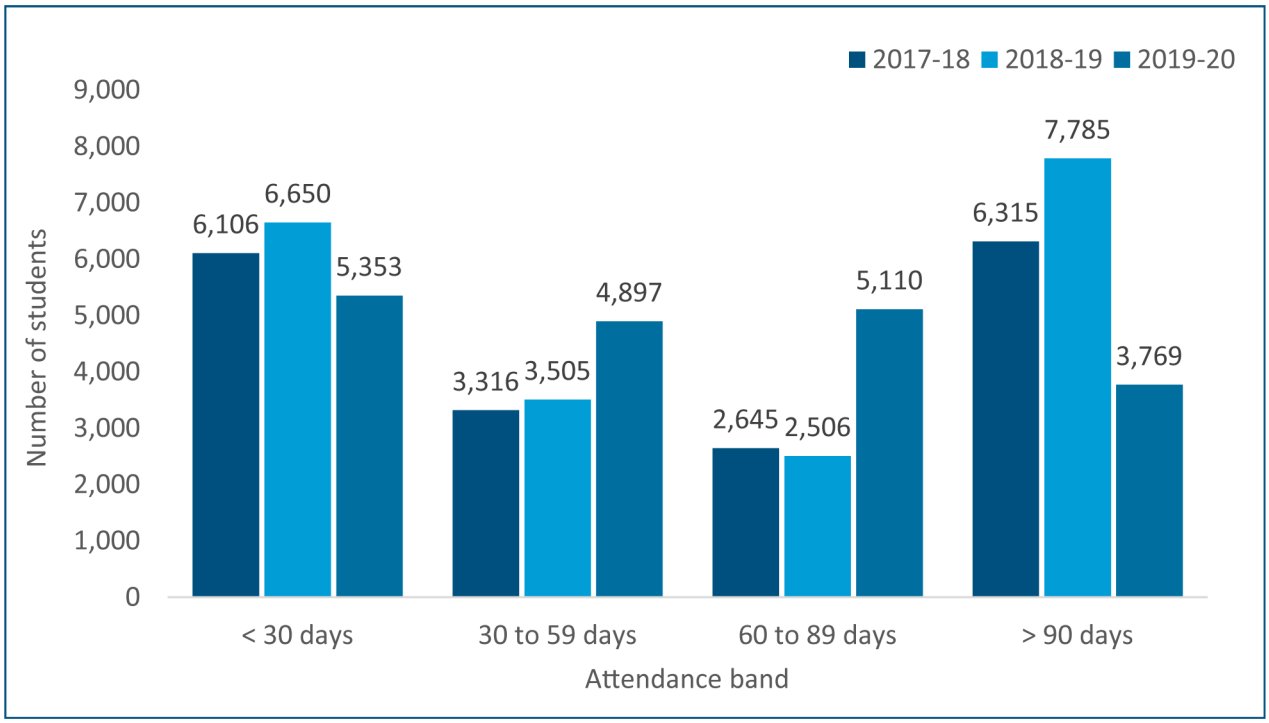
Student Attendance Levels

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.

Among students participating in activities during the 2018–19 school year, the average number of days attending 21st CCLC programming was 67.2—up slightly from 2017–18 (64 days). Exhibit 11 shows the student population served during the 2018–19 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 fewer than one third of the students (32.5%, compared with 33.2% the previous year) attended fewer than 30 days. This level is consistent with previous years. Slightly more than one third participated for 90 or more days (38.1%, slightly more than 2017–18's 34.4%). These attendance levels are fairly consistent with previous-year attendance levels. A larger total number of attendees was reported in 2018–19 than in 2017–18, but the relative distribution of attendees by attendance level did not greatly change.

During the 2019–20 school year, among students participating in activities, the average number of days attending 21st CCLC programming dropped dramatically to 55.2 from 67.2 the previous year. The most likely cause of this drop is owing to safety precautions being taken in the face of the 2020 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). More in keeping with expectations, significantly fewer students participated for 90 or more days (19.7%, compared with 2018–19's 38.1%). It may be the case 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.

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



Source. PARS21.

In addition to levels of program attendance during the 2018–19 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, around two thirds of students were in their first year of participation during the 2018–19 and 2019–20 school years. Approximately 22% were in their second year of participation during either school year, and about 8% were in their third year of participation. Five or more years of continuous participation was found to be relatively rare. These patterns are very similar to those observed in prior years.

Exhibit 12. Continuous Years of Student Participation, 2018–19 and 2019–20

Years of Participation	2018–19		2019–20	
	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage
1 years	12,470	64.6%	12,820	67.6%
2 years	4,395	22.8%	4,053	21.4%
3 years	1,717	8.9%	1,457	7.7%
4 years	593	3.1%	493	2.6%
5 years	115	0.6%	111	0.6%
6 years	18	0.1%	25	0.1%
7 years	4	0.0%	4	0.0%
8 years	0	0.0%	3	0.0%
9 years	1	0.0%	0	0.0%
10 years	0	0.0%	1	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.

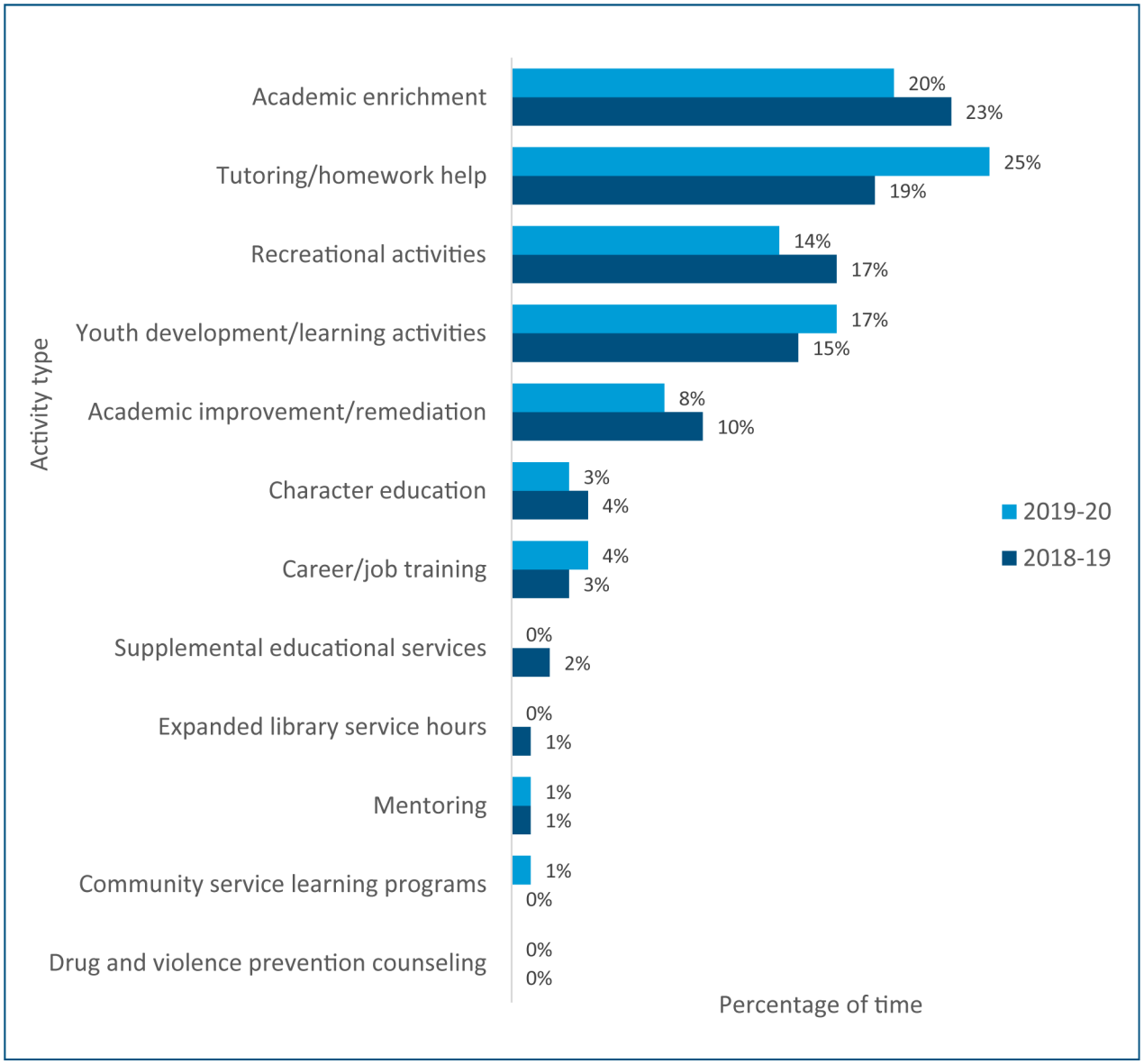
Student Attendance by Activity Types

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.

Exhibit 13. Percentage of Time Each Participant Spends on Activities of a Given Type (Average) for 2018–19 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 2018–19 school year, academic enrichment was highest in terms of the average number of total hours, with 35.4 school-year hours, followed closely by tutoring/homework help, with 34.7 school-year hours. In terms of median values, academic enrichment had the most hours (11.5 hours), followed distantly by youth development/learning activities (6.0 hours) and recreational activities (5 hours). Note that in 2017–18, tutoring/homework help had the highest mean and median.

As noted earlier, the 2019–20 school year's total participant hours by activity type were likely affected by the pandemic, so it is hard to compare the data between years. However, notably, tutoring/homework help slightly dropped off in mean hours (32.2, compared to 34.7 the previous year) and the median tutoring hours increased from 4 hours to 10 hours. Academic enrichment, which was highest in terms of average number of total hours in 2018–19, dropped off the most, with only 24.3 average school-year hours in 2019–20. There were no increases year over year in average hours for any activity between 2018–19 and 2019–20.

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

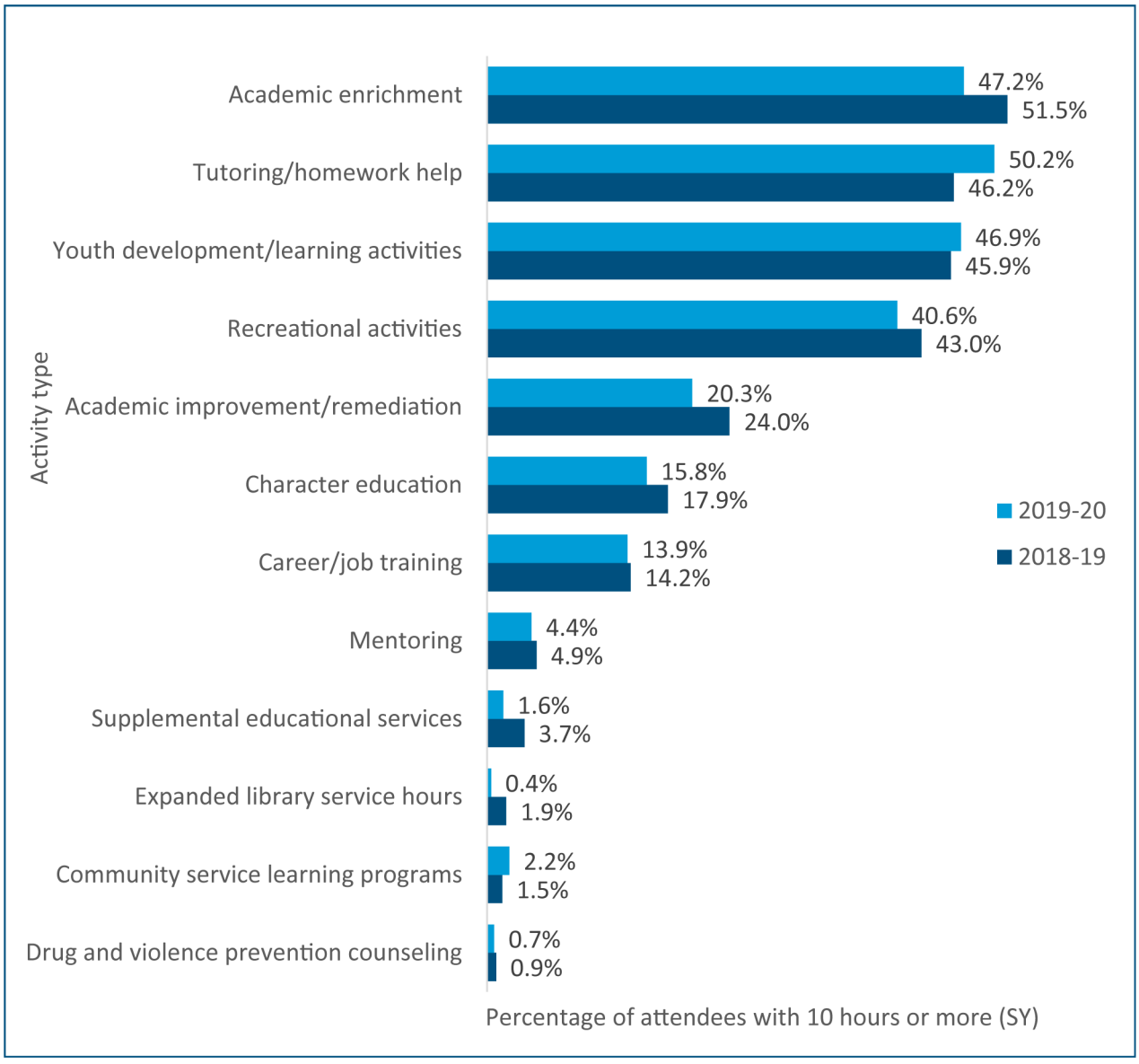
School Year	2018–19		2019–20	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
Academic improvement/remediation	15.92	0.0	9	0.0
Academic enrichment	35.39	11.5	24.34	8.0
Tutoring/homework help	34.73	4.0	32.18	10.0
Mentoring	1.66	0.0	1.19	0.0
Drug and violence prevention counseling	0.25	0.0	.23	0.0
Expanded library service hours	0.9	0.0	.09	0.0
Recreational activities	23.17	5.0	16.73	4.0
Career/job training	4.8	0.0	4.43	0.0
Supplemental educational services	1.78	0.0	.67	0.0
Community service learning programs	.71	0.0	.67	0.0
Character education	6.61	0.0	4.76	0.0
Youth development/learning activities	25.36	6.0	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 in 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 2018–19, academic enrichment

activities was the highest, with nearly 52% of all youth participating for 10 hours or more during the year, followed closely by tutoring/homework help (46.2%) and youth development/learning (about 45.9%). 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), 2018–19 and 2019–20



Source. PARS21.

Participation in Reading and Mathematics Activities

Another approach to examining students' participation in 21st CCLC programming offered during the 2018–19 reporting period is to explore the extent to which students participated in activities meant to support skill building in mathematics and reading, regardless of activity type (e.g., enrichment, tutoring, 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 68 hours of reading/literacy programming during the 2018–19 reporting period and 65 hours of mathematics programming. In comparison with 2017–18, these hour averages are modestly higher. However, the 2019–20 hours for reading/literacy (*mean* = 56.3) and mathematics (*mean* = 51.5) were substantially lower. As mentioned before, the likely reason for this is the reduction in program use owing to precautions around the pandemic affecting the latter half of the 2019–20 school year.

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

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
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
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

Note. ELA is 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, as was the case in 2017–18.

Source. PARS21.

Section 4. 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 (like PARS21 data, for example). 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.

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 17.

Overall, the results presented in Exhibit 17 show the following:

- The average statewide scale score for internal communication fell within the once-a-month response category for both 2018–19 and 2019–20 (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).
- For both years, 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 2.8 in both years (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 both years.

Exhibit 17. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on General Program Indicators

Leading Indicator	Description and Calculation	Source	Indicator Value, 2018–19 and 2019–20
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 2.49 for 2018–19 and 2.51 for 2019–20, both of which were 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 youth 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 1.92 in 2018–19 and 1.86 in 2019–20, 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.	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 2.78 for 2018–19 and 2.79 for 2019–20, which meant the following: • Staff *agree* that linkages to the school day exist.
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 3.01 for 2018–19 and 3.05 for 2019–20, which was within the *agree* portion of the scale, indicating that staff believe their peers largely provide these opportunities to participating youth.

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:

1. Indicators related to mathematics and language arts
2. Indicators related to social and emotional development
3. 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 34.9% of activity sessions in 2018–19 and 34.2% of activity sessions in 2019–20 had either a mathematics or a language arts focus (Leading Indicator 5).
- Statewide, about three quarters of regular attendees participated in mathematics or language arts activities for at least half their activity time in both years (Leading Indicator 7). Note that the proportion of students meeting this criterion was higher in 2019–20, with about 77.1%, compared with 72.0% for 2018–19.
- Frequent intentionality in the design of activity sessions in terms of the skills and knowledge staff were trying to impart to participating youth (Leading Indicator 6). This was true for both years.

See Exhibit 18 for complete indicator results relating to mathematics and ELA activities.

Exhibit 18. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on Activity-Related Indicators Associated With Mathematics and Language Arts

Leading Indicator	Description and Calculation	Source	Indicator Value, 2018–19 and 2019–20
Mathematics and ELA			
Leading Indicator 5: 21st Century Skills—A meaningful level of activity sessions delivered during the first semester of the school year are intentionally meant to support youth growth and development in either mathematics or ELA and are led by a certified teacher.	Using data collected in PARS21 in relation to student attendance in activities with either a mathematics or reading/English focus, 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?	Activity detail and attendance pages in PARS21.	Statewide, 34.9% of activity sessions offered during 2018–19 met these criteria, compared with 34.2% in 2019–20. A total of 122 centers in 2018–19 and 116 centers in 2019–20 (89.7% and 79.6% of centers in each year 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 youth growth and development in mathematics and ELA.	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 2.85 for 2018–19 and 2.89 for 2019–20, 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 ELA 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, 72.0% of students participating in programming during the 2018–19 school year and 77.1% of students participating in programming during the 2019–20 school year for more than 30 days met these criteria.

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 19, the sites operating 21st CCLC programs during the course of the 2018–19 school year were characterized by the following levels of performance on the indicators associated with social and emotional development:

- Statewide, an average of approximately 94.3% of activity sessions offered in 2018–19 and 93.1% of activity sessions offered in 2019–20 infused components that were meant to support youth development–related behaviors and SEL (Leading Indicator 8).
- An average of about 97.9% of regular attendees in 2018–19 and 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 19 for leading indicator values.

Exhibit 19. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on Activity-Related Indicators Associated With Social and Emotional Development

Leading Indicator	Description and Calculation	Source	Indicator Value, 2018–19 and 2019–20
Leading Indicator 8: SEL—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, 94.3% of activity sessions offered during the 2018–19 school year met these criteria, as did 93.1% of 2019–20 school year activity sessions. All programs in 2018–19 (136, or 100% of 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 20% of their total time in the program.	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, 97.9% of students participating in programming during the 2018–19 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 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 2.81 in 2018–19 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.

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 the 21st CCLC program. 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 the cultivation of 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 (52.2% of sites falling within the sometimes range of the scale during 2018–19, and 67.3% during 2019–20) as opposed to never (3.8% of sites in both 2018–19 and 2019–20) or frequently (17.0% and 19.5% in 2018–19 and 2019–20, respectively).
- Only a very small percentage of programs' participants (6.2% in 2018–19, 4.1% in 2019–20) had parents or other adult family members attend activities during the school year. Overall, only 28 centers (20.6%) reported activities of this sort in 2018–19, compared with 25 centers (17.2%) in 2019–20.

See Exhibit 20 for a summary of Leading Indicators 11 and 12.

Exhibit 20. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on Activity-Related Indicators Associated With Family Involvement

Leading Indicator	Description and Calculation	Source	Indicator Value, 2018–19 and 2019–20
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 2.11 in 2018–19 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, 6.2% of all program participants had at least one parent or adult family member participate in at least one activity in 2018–19, compared with 4.1% in 2019–20. Only 28 programs (20.6%) in 2018–19 and 25 programs (17.2%) in 2019–20 reported activities of this sort.

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.

Generally, two indicators show consistent room for growth and have for several years:

- 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 higher than what was observed for 2017–18, however (32.7% of activity sessions met these criteria, with 99 of centers [or 78.6% of centers with indicator data] offering 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.)

These indicators have been identified as areas for growth for several years. Judging from the last three years, Indicator 5 shows some evidence of modest upward movement, while Indicator 12 appears more range bound.

Section 5. Conclusions and Next Steps

Overall, the 21st CCLC program in New Jersey seems to be serving the population intended and is offering activities in keeping with New Jersey's 21st CCLC goals. Notable year-over-year shifts were observed. First, a plurality of subgrants were in Year 1 of program operations during 2019–20, rather than Year 5 (as in 2018–19). This is expected, however, given the cyclical nature of subgrant awards. Second, there was a drop in terms of overall number of youth served between 2018–19 and 2019–20, from 20,446 to 19,129. Third, attendance patterns for these youth appeared to shift in terms of overall days attended: For 2019–20, a higher proportion of youth attended 30 to 59 days (26%) or 60 to 89 days (27%) than did in 2018–19 (17% and 12% respectively), while a lower proportion of youth attended 90 days or more (20%, compared with 38% for 2018–19). This seems likely to be a result of program closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which could have pushed 2019–20 youth out of the 90-days-or-more group and into lower attendance brackets.

In terms of leading indicator values, most indicator values for 2018–19 and 2019–20 were similar to the values observed in previous years. However, in terms of mathematics and English language arts activity provision, a higher proportion of centers in 2018–19 did offer activities led by a certified teacher meant to support student growth in either mathematics or English language arts than was the case in previous years (89.7%, compared to approximately 80%). Relatedly, a higher proportion of youth in 2019–20 participated in programming meant to support youth growth in English language arts and mathematics achievement (77.1%, compared with 72.0% for 2018–19 and 72.9% for 2017–18).

AIR's recommendations for NJDOE follow from these observations, and from the context of the COVID-19 pandemic more broadly. First, further exploration of attendance trends should be conducted concerning 2020–21 data, given 2020–21's overlap with school closures related to the pandemic. In the next report, three years of data should be included (as was the case for some charts in this report) to enable comparing of pre-pandemic (2018–19), early-pandemic (2019–20), and mid-pandemic (2020–21) attendance levels. 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 quantify disruption caused by the pandemic, at least in terms of basic attendance levels.

Second, AIR and NJDOE should revisit the leading indicators to assess whether they warrant revision. Most of the indicators have remained steady for several years; this information in itself may be useful, but a close review is warranted given this general stability. There may also be opportunities to streamline or tailor the leading indicators as AIR discusses construction of a set of key performance indicators with NJDOE in fall 2021.

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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!

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