

New Jersey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) Summary of Findings from the Second Year of the Statewide Evaluation

For the past eight years, 21st Century Community Learning Centers across the state of New Jersey have provided students in high-poverty communities the opportunity to participate in academic enrichment programs and other youth development and support activities designed to enhance their academic well-being. In order to understand how well afterschool programs funded by 21st CCLC have fared relative to the goals and objectives specified for the program in terms of supporting student growth and development, the New Jersey Department of Education contracted with the American Institutes for Research and its partners to conduct a statewide evaluation of the 21st CCLC program oriented at assessing how well grantees are meeting the goals and objectives specified for the program and what impact participation in 21st CCLC programming is having on student achievement outcomes.

Generally, the evidence examined in this report suggests that 21st CCLC programs in operation during the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years on the whole made progress in providing programming that contributed to student growth and development from both an academic and behavioral standpoint. The strongest evidence for such a conclusion was the small but positive and significant impact the program had on the mathematics state assessment results for students that participated in the program regularly, especially for 70-days or more during the school year as compared to a comparison group made up of students from the same schools that did not participate in 21st CCLC programming. This finding was found in relation to 21st CCLC programs operating during both the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years. Similar findings were not found in relation to student performance on reading state assessment results.

In addition, analyses examining the impact of program and student characteristics on student outcomes found a positive and significant relationship existed between a higher number of days of attendance in 21st CCLC programming and improvement in student *motivation and attentiveness, pro-social behaviors, and homework completion and quality* as well as performance on state assessment results in mathematics. In addition, multiple years of participation in 21st CCLC was also found to be positively associated with student performance on state assessment outcomes in both reading and mathematics. In this regard, finding ways to retain students in 21st CCLC across multiple programming years would seem to further facilitate efforts by centers to achieve the domain of desired academic outcomes associated with the program.

Theoretically, programs may find more success in retaining participants the more actively they take steps to adopt practices supported by the youth development literature. Based on center and staff performance on some of the newly developed leading indicators related to incorporating youth development and social-emotional learning into programming, there are opportunities for growth and development in this regard, including the adoption and use of measures in this area that would help programs better assess how students are functioning on these constructs and what they might want to target for growth and development through the provision of intentional programming.

The issue of obtaining and using student data to inform program staff about the needs of participating students and using this knowledge to design and deliver programming is also potentially relevant to helping the state meet the one summative indicator which was not met in 2009-10 in terms of having a positive impact on reading state assessment results when comparing program participants with non-participants. Here again, leading indicator results suggested there was opportunities for growth in this area.