

Arkansas 21st CCLC

Findings from the 2014-2015 Statewide Evaluation Report

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) provide academic enrichment opportunities for students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools. Since 2002, the Arkansas Department Education (ADE) has utilized federal dollars to fund afterschool programs in a wide variety of school districts and community organizations. To date, ADE has awarded approximately 250 different grants serving approximately 12,000 youth per year.¹

In order to best serve awarded grantees, ADE sought an evaluation design that would not only meet federal compliance expectations, but would also support quality improvement at the site level across the ADE network.



The evaluation design includes two overarching components – Program Evaluation and Program Quality Improvement. Program Evaluation includes 1) support in the collection and submission of federally required data through Annual Performance Reporting, 2) collection of

¹ Afterschool Alliance, (2016)

statewide Leading Indicator Data at multiple levels from multiple sources² and 3) preparation of grantee level Leading Indicator Reports allowing for grantee level comparisons to statewide norms.

The program quality improvement process is aimed at embedding a culture of continuous assessment, planning, and improvement across the network. Grantees are expected to select a site team to conduct yearly program self assessment using the Youth or School-Age Program Quality Assessment³ (PQA). A detailed Program Improvement Plan including specific goals and a timeline for completion of these goals is then created based on the results of the assessments. Sites work toward achieving these goals over the course of the program year.

Why Afterschool? Why Quality?

Each day 15 million American children, over 1 million still in pre-school, are without supervision at home or on the street.⁴ Studies have shown that regular participation in high-quality afterschool programs is linked to significant gains in academic achievement and social emotional skills.⁵ Gains in these areas also

² The Leading Indicators measures include quality rating data collected using the Youth and the School-Age Program Quality Assessments as well as survey data from critical stakeholders including: Grantee or Program Directors; Program Staff; Youth Participants; and Parents.

³ Youth and the School-Age Program Quality Assessments are observation-based measures for older and younger students. Raters using the PQAs make observational notes to score rubrics describing the extent to which specific staff practices are happening within an observed session. The Youth PQA is composed of 60 items comprising 18 scales in four domains: Safe Environment, Supportive Environment, Interaction, and Engagement. The School-Age PQA is composed of 68 items comprising 20 scales in the same four domains. Evidence regarding the reliability and validity for the PQAs is available from the Weikart Center.

⁴ Alliance, A. (2009). America after 3pm: The most in-depth study of how America's children spend their afternoons. Washington, DC: Afterschool Alliance.

⁵ Vandell, D. L., Reisner, E. R., & Pierce, K. M. (2007). Outcomes Linked to High-Quality Afterschool Programs: Longitudinal

positively influence work habits and future employability, so it's no surprise that 80% of American families want their children in afterschool programs.⁶ Both taxpayers and policymakers want safe and engaging activities for young people while parents work, but not all programs achieve these positive effects, so focusing our collective energy on improving program quality is critical.^{7,8}



Filling a Void

A 2015 report from the University of Chicago identifies several key ingredients for success in young adulthood. These include an important range of academic, social and emotional skills and beliefs.⁹ Many children experience delayed or under-development of these essential beliefs and skills, leading to delay or under achievement

Findings from the Study of Promising Afterschool Programs. Policy Studies Associates, Inc.

⁶ Alliance, A. (2009). America after 3pm

⁷ Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2007). The Impact of After-School Programs that Promote Personal and Social Skills. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (NJ1).

⁸ Yohalem, N. and Granger, B. Improving the quality and impact of after- school and summer programs: Lessons learned and future directions. *Big Views Forward: A Compendium on Expanded Learning*.

⁹ Nagaoka, J., Farrington, C., Ehrlich, S.B., & Heath, R.D. (2015). Foundations for young adult success: A developmental framework. Concept paper for research and practice: The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.

on a wide range of critical outcomes, in particular school success.¹⁰

Quality Goals

ADE identified three major project goals and nine specific objectives to help guide quality improvement efforts. The three major project goals are:

1. Increase academic achievement in participants who regularly attend 21st CCLC programs;
2. Increase non-academic achievement in participants who regularly attend 21st CCLC programs;
3. Offer quality activities to all youth attending the program.

Highlights from the 2014-2015 program year include: 1) Improvement in grade-point averages of regularly attending high school students; and 2) High levels of student satisfaction, including student reports of positive academic habits, feeling challenged and feeling academically efficacious as a result of participation in ADE programs. Additionally, the Arkansas 21st CCLC network has also experienced growth in network-wide fidelity to the quality improvement process. This last item includes improvements in more than half of the overall mean scores of the Leading Indicators of Program Quality measures since 2012.

Overall Grade-Point Average Improvement for High School Students

Project Goal 1 includes two specific objectives designed to measure progress in academic achievement for regularly attending program participants:

¹⁰ Farrington, C., Roderick, M., Johnson, D.W., Keyes, T.S., Allensworth, E., Nagaoka, J., & Beechum, N.O. (2012). Teaching adolescents to become learners: The role of noncognitive factors in shaping school performance. The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.

- 1.1 Sixty percent (60%) of regularly attending program participants will show improvement in raw scores on benchmark exams in literacy and mathematics
- 1.2 Sixty percent (60%) of regularly attending program participants will show improvement in classroom academic performance as reported by the ADE state information system

Academic gains were measured for K-8 students, however changes in statewide tests made direct comparisons challenging. Grade data for regularly attending participants (attending 30 or more program days), collected over two program years (2013-2014 and 2014-2015) were drawn from the statewide data base and transformed by ADE staff for test equivalency across program years. We found 35% of K-8 students improved across measured program years in reading scores and 7% improved in math scores.

Progress against the second objective was measured using GPA, which is recorded by the state for students in 9-12th grades only. GPA was used because it represents a consistently recorded composite measure of student academic progress. Among 9-12th grade participants who attended the 21st CCLC program for 30 or more days (N=1935), overall GPA improved for 69%. Among regularly attending 9-12th grade students receiving free or reduced lunch (N=584), 71% demonstrated improved GPA by the end of the program year.



Improvement in Non-Academic Achievement

Project Goal 2 includes two objectives that measure growth in non-academic achievement:

- 2.1 Seventy-five percent (75%) of program participants report high levels (scoring 3.9 or above) of social emotional skills, as reported on the youth survey
- 2.2 Seventy-five percent (75%) of program participants report high levels (scoring 3.9 or above) of positive academic habits, as reported on the youth survey.

The majority of students (71% on average across items) reported the program helped them develop their social and emotional skills, specifically that the program helped them work well with other students, talk with people they didn't know, and tell other students what they thought, even if disagreed with them.

Youth were also asked to report on their overall academic habits. The majority of program participants (65%, on average) reported that the program helped them use their skills, and do things they had never done before. They also reported they felt that the program challenged them in a good way, and helped them to feel like they belonged and they mattered to the group. Students reported that the program helped them to feel academically efficacious and that they believed they had good work habits including; working well by themselves; keeping track of things at school; making good use of their time at school, and being careful and neat with their work.



Fidelity to the quality improvement process

Project Goal 3 includes five objectives.¹¹ This communications brief will report on the two objectives for which data is currently available:

- 3.4 All programs (100%) will fully engage and complete all elements of the Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI)
- 3.5 Seventy-five percent (75%) of programs will score a 3.9 or higher on the Instructional Total Score, as measured by the Youth or School-Age Program Quality Assessment (Youth or School-Age PQA)

All programs were asked to fully participate in the four elements of the YPQI process: program assessment; data-driven planning; continuous quality feedback loops; and aligned professional development. The majority of sites participated in these efforts. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of sites submitted program assessment data and 89% submitted program improvement plans.

¹¹ Data for objectives 3.1 All 21st CCLC programs will offer homework help time to 21st CCLC participants; 3.2 All 21st CCLC programs will offer academic (beyond homework help) and enrichment activities; and 3.3 Ninety percent (90%) of 21st CCLC programs will offer monthly quality activities to families of participating students is not currently available due to transition away from the Profile and Performance Information Collection System and into the new federal online data collection system. Archived data is expected to be released within the next year.

Overall, 49% of sites submitting PQA data scored a 3.9 or higher on the Instructional Total Score of the PQA measures.

This high level of fidelity to the YPQI process across the Arkansas 21st CCLC network is encouraging, and some sites still have work to do. One way ADE has been able to support sites in need of targeted professional development and other resources is through the use of a Risk Index. The Risk Index identifies struggling sites by summing the number of low scoring scales across the 22 Leading Indicator Scales. If a site scores in the bottom quartile on any of the scales, it is considered “at risk” for that scale. The more risk designations a site has, the greater the likelihood the site is in need of targeted resources.

Nine sites were identified for targeted improvement last year, all of the sites identified received targeted services, and only three of those sites were re-identified for improvement resources in the Risk Index this year.

One particularly encouraging finding of the Risk Index is that across the 22 measured scales¹², low quartile mean scores improved in 17 (77%) of the scales likely indicating that quality is improving overall among lower performing sites. Across the three years of the intervention, low quartile scores have improved every year in six (27%) of the scales. These six scales are: Continuous Improvement; Horizontal Communication; Growth and Mastery Skills; and all scales of the Family Satisfaction Domain (Confidence in Care; Convenience in Care; and Family-School Connection). This indicates that a continuous approach to improvement is likely providing lasting effects.

¹² Only 22 scales are used for the Risk Index. Omitted scales include: Homework Completion; Social Emotional Competencies (youth report); and five Academic Efficacy (youth report) scales.

Noteworthy among these improved scales is the Community Engagement Scale, having improved over half a scale point since last year. In terms of improved low quartile scores, while the Capacity Scale has remained consistently high throughout the life of the project, the low quartile mean score for this scale has improved over half a point since last year and the low quartile mean for the Youth Governance Scale has risen by 1.18 points, a statistically significant improvement. Both Capacity and Youth Governance were identified by 2013-2014 recommendations as areas of targeted professional development across the network.

The Arkansas 21st CCLC network has made considerable progress in developing a sustaining quality improvement system across the network. Longer term grantees are developing expertise around the quality work that may be shared with less experienced grantees. In the future it may be advantageous for Arkansas 21st CCLC to engage in a series of case studies with the goal of identifying high performing sites and best practices that may be shared with new grantees as the network continues to grow.