



Recent Evaluations of 21st Century Community Learning Centers Illustrate Wide Range of Benefits

From coding to cooking classes and from meals to mentorship, 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) are providing essential supports before school, after school, and during the summer months.

These programs complement students' school-day lessons, introduce them to new areas of interest, help spark passions that could be the inception point of a future career path, and foster an environment where students feel supported, heard, and valued. These supports are ever more critical today, with recent studies finding that students are struggling academically and are experiencing increased levels of anxiety, depression, loneliness, stress, and aggression.¹

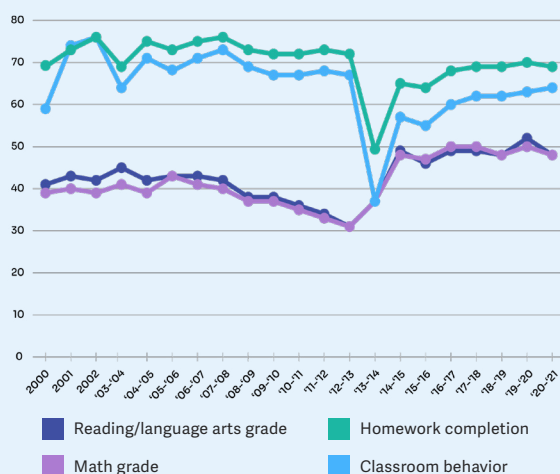
21st CCLC programs are locally driven, with programming tailored to the specific needs of their students and the community. During the 2020-2021 school year, 10,652 centers across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, staffed by supportive and caring adults and mentors, provided academic enrichment to more than 1.1 million K-12th grade students and their families.² In addition to the most recent national Department of Education report on the 21st CCLC initiative that found that students participating in the program showed academic gains and improved their engagement in school and behavior in class, there are an overwhelming number of statewide evaluations that further confirm and reinforce the positive benefits of 21st CCLC programs for students and their families. This brief highlights a cross section of recently conducted statewide evaluations on 21st CCLC programs to illustrate the impacts of this initiative, which is helping students thrive both in school and out.



21ST CCLC TURNS 25

2023 marks the 25th anniversary of funding for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. Although 21st CCLC was introduced into Congress in 1994, the first discretionary grant was not administered until 1998. In 2002, the funding transitioned into a state-run competition, which now supports programming at more than 10,600 centers serving over 1.1 million children and families. Throughout the years that national assessments of 21st CCLC have been made available, evaluations show that students participating in programs see improvements in their academic performance, engagement in school, and behavior in the classroom.

Percentage of students improving in the following areas:



Data for 2000, 2001, and 2002 were reported out by calendar year, rather than by school year, by the Department of Education.



Accelerating academic growth

Evaluations of 21st CCLC programs have found that students regularly participating in programs attend school more often, are more engaged in school, and see improvements in their academic performance.

→ **Improving school-day attendance:** A 2021 evaluation of California’s After School Education and Safety (ASES) and After School Safety and Enrichment for Teens (ASSETs) programs found that on average, students attending the afterschool programs had higher rates of school-day attendance, up to 1.5 percent more school days than their non-participating peers.³ Researchers estimated that improved student school-day attendance could result in more than \$38 million in gains to schools. These findings mirror those from a 2018 evaluation of the ASES and ASSETs programs that found students regularly participating in programs attended school more days than students not in programs. Additionally, the evaluation reported statistically significant differences when looking at school-day attendance among high school English language learners (ELL), where ELL ASSETs participants attended school up to seven days more than their non-participating peers.⁴ Another evaluation found that the higher the participation in the program, the greater the impact. A 2019 statewide evaluation of Ohio’s 21st CCLC program found that in addition to participants having a statistically significant lower unexcused absence rate than their matched non-participating peers, students attending programs more frequently—for 60 days—had even lower rates of unexcused absences than those who attended for 30 days.⁵

→ **Enhancing engagement and motivation in school:** A number of statewide evaluations of 21st CCLC programs have found that teachers, students participating in programs, and their parents report improvements in attitudes toward school. A 2022 evaluation of Colorado’s 21st CCLC programs found that teachers reported that among students in need of improvement attending programs, an overwhelming majority improved their participation in class (80 percent), attentiveness in class (75 percent), and motivation to learn (71 percent).⁶ Students who attended the programs in both the fall and spring made significantly more improvement than other students in the areas of academic performance, homework completion, class participation, and motivation.

Additionally, students and their parents report that their 21st CCLC program helped with engagement in school. A 2022 evaluation of Montana’s 21st CCLC programs found that most students agreed that the program helped them with their motivation to do well and stay in school (71 percent), and 78 percent of parents agreed that the program had a positive influence on their child’s attitude toward school.⁷ In a 2021 evaluation of North Dakota 21st CCLC programs, more than 8 in 10 parents said that the program offers a variety of activities that helps their child learn (86 percent) and nearly 3 in 4 said that their child’s attitude toward school had improved as a result of participating in the program (73 percent).⁸ Among students in the program, an overwhelming majority said that the program’s activities help them do better in reading (82 percent) and math (77 percent), as well as help them learn new things (91 percent). Eighty-three percent of students reported that they like school better because of their afterschool program.

SCHOOL LEADERS VALUE AFTERSCHOOL

School-day staff also see the benefits of students participating in 21st CCLC programs. In a 2022 evaluation of Oregon’s 21st CCLC programs, more than 9 in 10 school-day staff agreed that programs provided valuable academic supports.⁹

Agree that 21st CCLC programs support academic success

96% of school administrators

93% of teachers

Agree that 21st CCLC programs are an integral component of the school

100% of school administrators

93% of teachers





→ **Providing beneficial academic supports:** The Oklahoma Department of Education found that parents with a child in a 21st CCLC program appreciated the academic support provided by programs. During the 2020-21 school year, an overwhelming majority of parents surveyed reported that the programs helped their child complete their homework (93 percent) and provided useful academic supports (84 percent).¹⁰ Similarly, a 2022 evaluation of Oregon's 21st CCLC programs found that school-day staff, students, and parents agreed that programs provided valuable academic supports. More than 9 in 10 school administrators and teachers agreed that the programs supported students' academic success (96 percent and 93 percent, respectively) and that the programs were an integral component of the school (100 percent and 93 percent, respectively), while 70 percent of students in programs felt academically supported and 76 percent of family members said that the program had a positive impact on their child's academic performance.⁹

→ **Boosting reading and math performance:** A 2022 evaluation of Indiana's 21st CCLC programs found that in addition to a majority of students participating in the program either earning a B or better or improving their grades in English language arts and math, the more regular the program attendance, the higher the percentage of students demonstrating academic growth. In English language arts, 62 percent of students attending

the program less than 30 days saw improvement, compared to 67 percent of students attending the program 30 to 59 days, 72 percent of students attending the program 60 to 89 days, and 78 percent of students attending the program for at least 90 days. For math, 58 percent of students attending the program less than 30 days saw improvement, compared to 65 percent of students attending the program 30 to 59 days, 70 percent of students attending the program 60 to 89 days, and 77 percent of students attending the program for at least 90 days.¹¹ In a 2022 evaluation of South Carolina's 21st CCLC programs, researchers found that compared to their peers not in the program, students who regularly participated in programming for two consecutive years had higher percentile rankings in math.¹²

→ **Supporting on-time grade promotion and graduation:** A 2020 evaluation of the Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE)—the state's 21st CCLC programs—found that students attending the program for at least 60 days across two years had a 42 percent higher chance of being promoted to the next grade level compared to non-participants, with high schoolers having a 470 percent chance of being promoted to the next grade.¹³ In evaluations of Indiana's and South Carolina's 21st CCLC programs, both found that more than 9 in 10 high school seniors in the program graduated on time (94 percent and 97 percent, respectively).¹⁴



Fostering well-being

Evaluations of 21st CCLC programs find that they are playing an essential role in supporting the healthy development of young people.

Recent studies describe a rise in young people experiencing feelings of anxiety, depression, loneliness, stress, and aggression.¹⁵ 21st CCLC programs are responding to the holistic needs of young people and are serving as a safe space that cultivates a sense of belonging, develops supportive relationships with peers and adult mentors, and encourages healthy behaviors.

→ **Cultivating a sense of belonging:** Belonging—a feeling of connectedness, acceptance, and being included and supported by those around them—is a protective factor associated with better physical and mental health.¹⁶ Multiple studies of 21st CCLC programs that evaluate how students feel about their program find that students report that their programs do make them feel like they belong. For example, a 2022 evaluation of Missouri’s 21st CCLC programs found that on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is “almost never true” and 5 is “almost always true”, students rated highly that they were treated fairly by the staff at the afterschool program (4.3), they felt safe in the program (4.17), they enjoyed attending their program (4.16), and they felt like they belong (4.04) and matter at the program (3.97).¹⁷ In a 2022 evaluation of Montana’s 21st CCLC programs, 85 percent of students said that they feel they belong in the program, 89 percent look forward to going to their program, and 90 percent agree that being in the program had helped them to feel good about themselves.¹⁸

→ **Developing supportive relationships:** A 2022 evaluation of Nebraska’s 21st CCLC programs found that more than 8 in 10 students in the program agreed that “adults in this program treat kids with respect” (89 percent) and that “I have friends in this program” (87 percent).¹⁹ Among students surveyed who were participating in Idaho’s 21st CCLC programs, a 2021 evaluation found that 85 percent agreed that the adults in the program care about them and 80 percent said that they feel safe in their program, while a 2022 evaluation of Washington’s 21st CCLC programs found that more than 2 in 3 students said that the program helped them to feel connected to adults who cared about them (69 percent) or other youth (67 percent) most or every day.^{20, 21}

→ **Increasing confidence and self-esteem:** A 2022 evaluation of Indiana’s 21st CCLC programs found that among regularly attending students reported by teachers as needing to improve their self-confidence, teachers said that they saw improvements in a majority of students (59 percent).²² Additionally, a 2022 evaluation of New Mexico’s 21st CCLC programs found that overwhelming majorities of K-6th graders and 6th–12th graders agreed that they feel better about themselves because of the program (79 percent and 66 percent, respectively).²³

→ **Encouraging a positive mindset:** In a 2022 evaluation of the 21st CCLC programs in Massachusetts, according to teacher surveys, the majority of youth who participated in programming showed growth in their perseverance (83 percent) and self-regulation (66 percent).²⁴ A 2020 evaluation of Michigan’s 21st CCLC programs found that approximately 9 in 10 students agreed or strongly agreed that their program helped them get better at being responsible for their actions (91 percent), try new things (90 percent), work together (89 percent), and solve problems (88 percent), and more than 7 in 10 agreed that the program helped them to manage their emotions (72 percent).²⁵





Promoting future success

Participation in 21st CCLC programs provides opportunities for students to build the skills and competencies that not only serve them well in school, but will set them up for future success, such as developing foundational workforce readiness skills, helping to set goals, and connecting present day activities to potential future pathways.

→ **Building foundational skills, such as the ability to work well with others, communicate effectively, and think critically:** A 2022 evaluation of Montana’s 21st CCLC programs found that more than 8 in 10 students said that their program has helped them to get along with others (89 percent) and work collaboratively with others (82 percent), and 3 in 4 students (75 percent) said that the program has helped them to handle problems.²⁶ Teachers also reported positive changes, saying that 71 percent of students improved their conflict resolution skills. Additionally, a 2022 evaluation of Massachusetts’ 21st CCLC programs found that teachers reported that more

than two-thirds of students participating in programming improved their communication skills (67 percent) and more than half improved their critical thinking skills (56 percent).²⁷ More than 7 in 10 students who regularly participated in Virginia’s 21st CCLC programs agreed that the program helped them learn the knowledge and skills needed to be ready for a job or career (76 percent) or helped them learn what is necessary to be prepared for trade school or college (71 percent) in a 2020 statewide evaluation of 21st CCLC.²⁸

→ **Connecting to potential future career pathways:** A 2022 evaluation of New Mexico’s 21st CCLC programs found that middle and high schoolers agreed that their program has helped them understand that goal setting is important (76 percent) and how to make career choices (63 percent).²⁹ In a 2022 evaluation of Washington, D.C.’s 21st CCLC programs, 71 percent of students said that they could see themselves using what they learned in the program in other areas of their life and in a 2020 evaluation of Ohio’s 21st CCLC programs, 80 percent of students said that their program helped them to learn things that will be important for their future and 77 percent said that the program helped them find out what is important to them.^{30,31}

As 21st CCLC celebrates 25 years of supporting youth, families, and communities, this review offers ample evidence of the value of this critical federal investment. It’s notable that the evaluations cited here are all within the past several years and cover a wide cross-section of our nation, offering a thorough illustration of how essential 21st CCLC programs are in communities across the country today.



Endnotes

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