21st Century Community Learning Centers: Texas Afterschool Centers on Education

Executive Summary: 2016–17 to 2018–19

JULY 2021

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Submitted to the Texas Education Agency

Funding Statement

This project was funded in its entirety from the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Title IV, Part B, Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant through a contract with the Texas Education Agency. The ESEA was reauthorized in 2015 by the Every Student Succeeds Act.

List of Abbreviations

21st CCLC	21st Century Community Learning Centers
AIR	American Institutes for Research
APT-O	Assessing Afterschool Program Practices Observation Tool
CTE	career and technical education
ED	U.S. Department of Education
ES	executive summary
EOC	end-of-course
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
ESL	English as a second language
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
HLM	hierarchical linear modeling
KPI	key performance indicator
LEAG	Local Evaluation Advisory Group
LESI	Local Evaluation Support Initiative
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
NIOST	National Institute on Out-of-School Time
NYSAN	New York State Association of Neuropsychology
PEIMS	Public Education Information Management System
PQA	Program Quality Assessment
PSM	propensity score matching
RFA	request for applications
SAYO	Survey of Academic Youth Outcomes
SACERS	School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale
SAPQA	School-Age Program Quality Assessment
STAAR®	State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness®
STEM	science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
TAPR	Texas Academic Performance Report
TEA	Texas Education Agency
Texas ACE	Texas Afterschool Centers on Education
Tx21st	Texas 21st Student Tracking System
YPQA	Youth Program Quality Assessment

Executive Summary

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program, funded by Title IV, Part B of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as renewed by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), provides grant funding to states to support "academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours for children, particularly students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools" (U.S. Department of Education [ED], 2018). By means of state-level subgrant competitions, states allocate this funding to schools, community-based organizations, faith-based institutions, and other agencies to provide this programming in their communities. Community learning centers are meant to "offer students a broad array of additional services, programs, and activities that are designed to reinforce and complement the regular academic program of participating students" (ED, 2015, p. 233).[1]

Since 2002, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) has provided 21st CCLC funding to hundreds of grantees and supported thousands of community learning centers, also known as Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (Texas ACE), across the state. This evaluation report focuses on a sample of 60 Texas ACE centers that the evaluation team visited in spring 2017, spring 2018, and spring 2019. The focus of this report is to examine how key center characteristics associated with the 60 Texas ACE centers represented in the site visit samples were associated with Texas ACE program attendance and school-related outcomes.

Evaluation Objectives

This report is the culminating product of a 4-year evaluation of the Texas ACE program undertaken by the American Institutes for Research (AIR), in collaboration with the Gibson Consulting Group and the Diehl Consulting Group. The evaluation of the Texas ACE program was designed to address the following six objectives:

- **Objective 1.** *Conduct an evaluation of the implementation of the Texas ACE program statewide.* This part of the evaluation involved providing a descriptive profile of Texas ACE program implementation based on administrative data captured in the state's tracking system (i.e., TX21st Student Tracking System [TX21st]) and information on program design and delivery obtained from site visits conducted at a sample of programs. In this report, examination of this objective also involves comparing centers represented in the site visits with the full domain of centers funded in the same grant cycle for the programming period in question.
- **Objective 2.** *Conduct an evaluation of the impact of the Texas ACE program on a series of school-related outcomes.* This part of the evaluation involved a quasi-experimental design to explore how youth participating in Texas ACE at various levels of attendance performed on key outcomes relative to similar youth not participating in Texas ACE. This objective included an analysis of how various center characteristics and practices may relate to youth achievement of various outcomes.
- **Objectives 3–5.** *Explore how the impact of the Texas ACE program may relate to various approaches to design and delivery and synthesize that information to identify potential best practices*

[1] "The term 'community learning center' means an entity that—
(A) assists students to meet the challenging State academic standards by providing the students with academic enrichment activities and a broad array of other activities (such as programs and activities described in subsection (a)(2)) during non-school hours or periods when school is not in session (such as before and after school or during summer recess) that—
(i) reinforce and complement the regular academic programs of the schools attended by the students served; and
(ii) are targeted to the students' academic needs and aligned with the instruction students receive during the school day; and
(B) offers families of students served by such center opportunities for active and meaningful engagement in their children's education, including opportunities for literacy and related educational development" (ED, 2015, p. 234). Activities offered by centers may include youth development activities, service learning, nutrition and health education, drug and violence prevention programs, counseling programs, arts, music, physical fitness and wellness programs, technology education programs, financial literacy programs, environmental literacy programs, mathematics, science, career and technical programs, internship or apprenticeship programs, and other ties to an in-demand industry sector or occupation for high school students.

to share with the Texas ACE community more broadly.[2] Addressing this objective largely relied on qualitative and quantitative data collected from centers included in the site visit samples.

- **Objective 6.** *Provide support and assistance to Texas ACE grantees and centers on how to undertake effective and meaningful local evaluation activities.* This part of the evaluation involved the design and implementation of the Local Evaluation Support Initiative (LESI), which involved guiding a sample of centers through an intentional process of local evaluation design and implementation.[3]

This report primarily addresses evaluation Objectives 2–6, with particular attention given to the identification of center characteristics and approaches found to be positively associated with Texas ACE attendance and school-related outcomes. Such practices and approaches may warrant consideration on the part of ACE grantees in terms of how to best design and deliver Texas ACE programming.

Evaluation Questions

The content of this report focuses on answering the following set of evaluation questions:

Chapter 2

- To what extent were the sampled Texas ACE centers representative of all active centers during the programming period in question?

Chapter 3

- What characteristics were found to be significantly related to levels of Texas ACE program attendance among centers represented in the site visit samples?[4]
- How are students' experiences in Texas ACE programs related to program attendance?
- What characteristics were found to be significantly related to positive center-level effects among centers represented in the site visit samples?

Chapter 4

- What effect does the program have on students attending Texas ACE programming for 60 days or more at centers with high adoption of Assessing Afterschool Program Practices Observation Tool (APT-O) mathematics practices relative to similar students not participating in programming or participating for less than 30 days?
- What effect does the program have on students attending Texas ACE programming for 60 days or more at centers with high adoption of practices that employ active forms of learning relative to similar students not participating in programming or participating for less than 30 days?

Chapter 5

- What is the status of efforts to support the local evaluation efforts of Texas ACE grantees?

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[2] Objective 5 specifically refers to best practice briefs based on various data gathered during data collection and from information gleaned while working with Texas ACE programs through the LESI. The briefs are stand-alone, separate handouts that are not part of the current evaluation report but are cited in this report summary to emphasize their role as part of a broad strategy to inform centers of lessons learned during the evaluation years in question.

[3] These six objectives summarize those specified in TEA's Request for Proposals: Evaluation of the Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program (released in 2016).

[4] In this report, the word *significant* refers to statistical significance when the null hypothesis (i.e., the chance explanation) can be rejected so that no relationship exists between variables, and any observed relationship is only a function of chance (Ary et al., 2010). The level of significance, or the probability that a Type I error (i.e., rejecting a true null hypothesis) will occur, used in this report is typically reported at the .05 and .01 levels. In addition, the term moderately significant refers to a level of significance at the $p<.10$ or the 90 percent confident interval, which means that in hypothesis testing 90 out of 100 times the decision is reached to not reject the null hypothesis (Shavelson, 1996).

- What has been learned through the development and deployment of local evaluation tools and processes?
- What steps are being taken to help codify local evaluation tools and processes?

Summary of Evaluation Findings

Chapter 2: Representation of the Site Visit Samples

In this chapter, steps were taken to examine differences in the full domain of Texas ACE centers over the 2016–17 to 2018–19 period, as well as variation between the sample of 20 centers visited in each of the 3 years and all Texas ACE centers operational in those years. Some important differences in key characteristics (e.g., the locale of the Texas ACE center, race/ethnicity of students served, number of days of program attendance, and how students spend their time during regular school year and summer Texas ACE programs) between the site visit sample and the full domain of Texas ACE centers operational in each year are evident.

For example, substantive differences in the locale of centers between the site visit sample and all centers in the state are among the largest. In spring 2017, the evaluation team visited a higher proportion of Texas ACE centers that were located in cities (58% versus 43% statewide) and a lower proportion of centers in suburban (16% versus 25% statewide) and rural locations (16% versus 21% statewide) when compared to the full domain of centers. The 2018 site visit sample contained a larger proportion of centers from suburban areas (50% versus 34% statewide), and it contained no rural centers (compared to 12% for the statewide domain). Meanwhile, the 2019 site visit sample contained a smaller proportion of centers from suburban areas (5%) than the full domain of centers across the state (28%) and a larger proportion of rural centers (35% versus 17% statewide).

Major differences in the racial/ethnic makeup of the spring 2019 sample and the full domain of centers in the state was also noted, while differences are much more modest in 2017 and 2018 samples. Hispanic students were overrepresented in the 2017 site visit sample (71% versus 64% statewide) and underrepresented in the 2019 sample (52% versus 70% statewide). African American (24% versus 14% statewide) and White students (21% versus 13% statewide) were also overrepresented in the 2019 site visit sample relative to the full domain of centers in the state.

The differences observed between the site visit samples and the full domain of centers in the state and across the 3 years of samples is not surprising. These findings are especially true for the spring 2018 and 2019 site visit samples, which were based on data that targeted lower and higher implementing centers for inclusion in the sample. Although variation between samples and the full population of centers and across the 2017 to 2019 site visit samples were observed, it is important to recognize that there was also a lot of similarity on a wide variety of characteristics, including socioeconomic status, at-risk status, English learner status, and many center-level program-related characteristics. Because of the differences observed between centers in the site visit sample and all centers statewide, some caution should be used when attempting to generalize the site visit sample to the full population of centers in a given year or pooled results across years and interpreting findings related to data collected from sampled centers.

Chapter 3: Center-Level Characteristics and Texas ACE Program Attendance and School-Related Outcomes

This chapter explores the correlation between center characteristics and youth outcomes as theorized by a conceptual framework used to guide the evaluation of the Texas ACE program. The goal in presenting the findings described in this chapter was to conduct an initial and preliminary examination of what center characteristics may be positively related to student attendance in Texas ACE programming and desirable school-related outcomes.

Center Characteristics Examined

A series of variables was constructed in the following five primary categories based on data obtained from the Texas ACE centers represented in the site visit samples:

- **Observed Quality.** Center characteristics in this group represented measures of process quality and content-specific practices derived from the Program Quality Assessment (PQA) and APT-O observation tools, respectively.
- **Organizational Processes.** Organizational processes included variables related to program goals, school community engagement, continuous quality improvement, and staffing and operational attributes.
- **Activity Practices.** Variables related to activity practices assessed the types of learning opportunities and attributes associated with Texas ACE activities students attended during the site visit period.
- **Youth Experiences.** Center characteristics in this group represented measures of the quality of interactions students participating in Texas ACE had with adult activity leaders and other youth in the program, opportunities to experience a sense of agency and autonomy, and key facets associated with motivation and engagement in learning environments.
- **Intermediate, Youth-Reported Outcomes.** Variables in this category represent those outcomes that are more likely to be directly impacted by Texas ACE program participation. That is, growth in these areas has a tendency to happen within the confines of the program and often can be observed directly by the staff leading afterschool activities. These outcomes included areas like supporting interest development, helping youth to think about their future, helping youth feel good about themselves, and boosting confidence.

Texas ACE Attendance Outcomes

Analyses conducted in relation to Texas ACE attendance outcomes were designed to answer the following question: What characteristics were found to be significantly related to Texas ACE program attendance among centers represented in the site visit samples? To answer this question, the following student-level, program attendance metrics were calculated:

- The total number of Texas ACE programming hours attended during the school year in question (hours).
- The duration of student participation in Texas ACE programming represented by the number of days between their first and last day of participation during the school year (duration).
- The total number of Texas ACE activities the student participated in during the school year (# of activities).
- Whether the student was a returning participant to the program after being enrolled in the program during the preceding summer or school year (sustained attendance).

To assess whether there was evidence of a significant relationship between center characteristics and each of the aforementioned Texas ACE attendance metrics, a series of hierarchical linear models (HLM) were constructed, with students nested in centers. The goal of these analyses was to explore how various center characteristics were related to each of the aforementioned Texas ACE program attendance outcomes. Center-level characteristics found to be significantly and positively associated with a given Texas ACE program attendance outcome are outlined in Figure ES.1. It is important to note that the analyses resulting in these findings were correlational and descriptive and should not be interpreted as a given characteristic causing a program attendance-related outcome. In this report, statistical significance occurs when a *p* value is less than .05. Moderate significance is defined as a *p* value greater than .05 but less than .10. Moderately significant findings represent a greater probability that a Type I error (i.e., incorrectly rejecting a true null hypothesis that there is no relationship between the variables being examined) will occur. Most tables and figures include findings that are both significant and moderately significant, including Figure ES.1.

Figure ES.1. Center Characteristics Found to Be Significantly and Positively Associated with Texas ACE Program Attendance Outcomes

ACE Attendance Hours	ACE Attendance Duration	Number of ACE Activities Attended	Sustained Attendance in ACE
Process Quality • PQA Interaction **Content-Specific Practices** • APT-O Writing Practices • APT-O Mathematics Problem-Solving Practices – Youth-based **Program Goals** • Build social and emotional learning skills • Address behavioral issues • Provide academic and creative enrichment opportunities **Data Use and Evaluation** • Periodic review of program data **Staffing or Operational Practice** • High summer programming hours **Youth Experiences** • Challenge **Youth-Reported Outcomes** • With my confidence • Support new interest development	**Process Quality** • PQA Interaction • PQA Engagement **Content-Specific Practices** • APT-O Writing Practices • APT-O Verbal Practices – Staff-based • APT-O Mathematics Problem-Solving Practices –Youth-based **Program Goals** • Build social and emotional Learning skills • Provide academic and creative Enrichment activities **Data Use and Evaluation** • Periodic review of program data **Advisory Board Practices** • Programming input **Staffing or Operational Practice** • High summer programming hours • Activity practices • Working alone on tasks	**Process Quality** • PQA Supportive Environment **Content-Specific Practices** • APT-O Reading Practices **Data Use and Evaluation** • Obtaining youth input on programming **Advisory board practices** • General guidance and feedback **Activity Practices** • Working alone on tasks • Working in small groups • Exploration and discovery **Youth Experiences** • Opportunities for agency • Positive perceptions of other youth • Learned something	**Content-Specific Practices** • APT-O Reading Practices **Program Goals** • Provide academic and creative enrichment activities **Activity Practices** • Working alone on tasks • Students planning future activities **Youth Experiences** • Positive perceptions of other youth • Challenge • Engagement **Youth-Reported Outcomes** • School-related outcomes • Think about the future

Note. ACE – Afterschool Centers on Education. Exhibit includes both statistically significant ($p<.05$) and moderately significant ($p<.10$) findings.

School-Related Outcomes

To examine how center characteristics were related to school-related outcomes, steps were first taken to calculate center-level effects in relation to the following school-related outcomes:

- Performance on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)-Mathematics assessment
- Performance on the STAAR-Reading assessment
- Percentage of school days attended
- Number of disciplinary incidents

To calculate center-level effects, propensity score matching (PSM) was used to match Texas ACE program participants with similar nonparticipants at the center level. That is, for each center, students were matched to non-attending students who were enrolled in the school or schools affiliated with the center. This approach allowed the evaluation team to explore more carefully how participation in Texas ACE may be related to school-related outcomes by controlling for preexisting differences between students that would otherwise influence analysis results. This process resulted in each center having a specific effect estimate of how Texas ACE participation was associated with school-related outcomes. It is important to note that this approach to calculating center-level effects does not control for some student characteristics such as student interest or motivation to attend programming or certain family characteristics like parent involvement. In this sense, there may be some key differences between students attending programming and those who opted not to attend that are not controlled for in these models, which could be biasing the results.

Two sets of center-level effects were calculated. For one set, students attending the program for 60 days or more during the school year in question were matched with students attending the same schools served by the center but not participating in the program. For the second set of analyses, students attending Texas ACE for 60 days or more in both the current and preceding school year were matched with nonparticipating students.

Center-level characteristics found to be significantly and positively associated with a given school-related outcome are outlined in Figure ES.2. The results highlighted in Figure ES.2 involve both significant and moderately significant findings. If a given characteristic was positively associated with the school-related outcome after 1 year of participation in Texas ACE programming for 60 days or more (1 year) and/or 2 years of participation at this level (2 years), it is noted in parentheses. It is important to note that the analyses resulting in these findings were correlational and descriptive and should not be interpreted as a given characteristic causing a school-related outcome.

Almost all of the variables in Figures ES.1 and ES.2 have a basis in the youth development and afterschool literature as being associated with positive youth outcomes and/or have some representation in the Texas ACE Blueprint. As a result, although the findings highlighted in this chapter are correlational and descriptive, there still may be some value in Texas ACE programs considering these practices, processes, youth experiences, and intermediate outcomes in the design and delivery of Texas ACE programming.

Figure ES.2. Center Characteristics Found to Be Significantly and Positively Associated with School-Related Outcomes

STAAR-Reading	STAAR-Mathematics	School-Day Attendance	Disciplinary Incidents
Content-Specific Practices • APT-O Writing Practices (2 years) • APT-O Writing Practices – Youth-based (2 years) • APT-O Mathematics Practices (2 years) • APT-O Mathematics Communication and Reasoning Practices – Youth-based (2 years) **Program Goals** • Build social and emotional learning skills (1 year, 2 years) **Data Use and Evaluation** • Periodic review of program data (2 years) • Obtaining youth input on programming (1 year) **Advisory Board Practices** • Planning input (2 years) **Target Population** • Broader target population (2 years) **Activity Practices** • Working in small groups (1 year) **Youth Experiences** • Relevance (2 years)	**Process Quality** • PQA Interaction (1 year) **Content-Specific Practices** • APT-O Mathematics Practices (2 years) **Data Use and Evaluation** • Obtaining youth input on Programming (1 year) **Activity Practices** • Working alone on tasks (1 year) **Youth-Reported Outcomes** • With my confidence (2 years)	**Process Quality** • PQA Supportive Environment (1 year) **Content-Specific Practices** • APT-O Writing Practices (1 year) • APT-O Writing Practices – Youth-based (1 year) **Activity Practices** • Planning future activities (1 year) • Exploration and discovery (1 year) **Youth Experiences** • Positive perceptions of other Youth (1 year) • Relevance (1 year) • Learned something (2 years)	**Process Quality** • PQA Supportive Environment (2 years) **Data Use and Evaluation** • Obtaining youth input on Programming (2 years) **Activity Practices** • Planning future activities (1 year) • Learning or practicing nonacademic skills (2 years) • Direct instruction (2 years) • Engaged in discussion (2 years) • Designed to make a contribution (2 years) **Youth-Reported Outcomes** • School-related outcomes • Think about the future

Note. Exhibit includes both statistically significant and moderately significant findings. Indications of *1 year* represent significant or moderately significant findings after students had participated in Texas ACE programming for 60 days or more over 1 year, and indications of *2 years* represent significant or moderately significant findings after students had participated in Texas ACE programming for 60 days or more over 2 years.

Chapter 4: The Impact of Texas Afterschool Centers on Education on Youth Outcomes

This chapter explores how centers characterized by two types of center-level practices that were associated with a specific school-related outcome in Chapter 3 were found to be associated with positive program effects when adoption of that practice exceeded a specific threshold. There are two types of center-level practices examined in this chapter:

1. **APT-O Mathematics Practices.** The evaluation team hypothesized that greater adoption of these practices would be associated with positive program effects in STAAR-Mathematics specifically and potentially STAAR-Reading. Positive, center-level effects were especially noteworthy when centers were found to have adopted 15 or more APT-O mathematics practices across the Texas ACE activities observed during the site visits. A total of 36 centers in the site visit samples met or exceeded the 15-practice threshold.
2. **Activities That Represent Active Forms of Learning.** Results from Chapter 3 also demonstrated that activities that offer more active forms of learning were associated with fewer disciplinary incidents. Three specific types of activities were found to be associated with fewer disciplinary incidents: activities during which (1) youth planned future activities or projects; (2) youth participated in whole-group discussions facilitated by staff; and (3) youth participated in an activity that was designed to make a contribution or be helpful to others or the community.

   For example, one threshold for which center-level effects seemed to tilt toward greater reduction in disciplinary incidents occurred when 38% or more of the activities involved youth spending most of their time planning future activities. In centers at or above this threshold, students participating in Texas ACE for 60 days or more over a year had a disciplinary rate that was 19.5% lower on average than that for similar nonparticipating youth. In centers below this threshold, students participating at the 60 days or more threshold only had a disciplinary rate that was 3.9% lower on average than that for similar nonparticipating youth. In addition, greater reduction in disciplinary incidents appeared to occur when 29% or more of the activities involved youth spending most of their time engaging in discussion and 54% or more of the activities involved working to make a contribution. Collectively, a total of 26 centers across the site visit samples exceeded the threshold level on one or more activity practices associated with active forms of learning.

A series of analyses using PSM and HLM were undertaken with those centers that were found to have adopted 15 or more APT-O mathematics practices in relation to STAAR-Mathematics outcomes and those centers adopting more active forms of learning in relation to disciplinary incidents. The goal in undertaking these analyses was to create effect estimates that could be compared with the effectiveness analyses conducted in previous evaluation reports employing similar methods to determine whether there was an indication that program effects would be greater in centers that had adopted these specific practices.

In terms of centers with higher adoption of APT-O mathematics practices, no significant program effects were found across any of the analyses conducted. However, most of the analyses related to higher adoption of practices reflective of active forms of learning were found to result in significant findings, indicating an association with fewer disciplinary incidents. These results may suggest that greater adoption of these practices was associated with fewer disciplinary incidents among students participating in Texas ACE programming for 60 days or more; however, the analyses that were undertaken did not result in evidence of a direct link between adoption of practices that support active forms of learning and a reduction in disciplinary incidents among Texas ACE participants.

The results from analyses examining the effect of centers more aggressively adopting active forms of learning on disciplinary incidents are among the most notable from the effectiveness analyses undertaken by the evaluation team over the past 4 years. In the preceding two evaluation reports, analyses examined the effect of participating in Texas ACE programming for 60 days or more for 2 years across all centers active during a given programming period. These results also demonstrated that participation in Texas

ACE programming for 60 days or more for 2 years was associated with a significant reduction in disciplinary incidents relative to similar students not participating in programming. However, the results of these analyses demonstrated that sustained participation in Texas ACE programming at the 60 days or more level was associated with a disciplinary rate that was 6% to 36% lower than the rate for similar nonparticipating youth.

When limiting the treatment group to include only students attending centers adopting more active forms of learning, participation in Texas ACE programming at the 60 days or more threshold was associated with a disciplinary rate that was 51% lower than the rate for similar nonparticipating students. For students in Grades 1–5 participating in Texas ACE for 60 days or more over 2 years, the disciplinary rate was 70% lower than the rate for similar nonparticipating students.

Chapter 5: Local Evaluation Summary

One of the guiding objectives of the statewide evaluation of the Texas 21st CCLC program is to provide support and assistance to Texas ACE grantees and centers on how to engage in effective and meaningful local evaluation activities. To accomplish this objective, the statewide evaluation team has supported a LESI for the last 3 years.

Meaningful Local Evaluation Key Principles. The purpose of the LESI is to support centers' capacity to engage in and conduct relevant, meaningful local evaluations that direct program improvement and support sustainability in a tangible way. The vision for this work was based on several key principles that drove the development and use of meaningful local evaluations: (1) collaborative processes, (2) intentional program design, (3) assessment of implementation, (4) locally informed and accessible measures, and (5) a focus on center capacity.

Local Program Evaluation Concept. In 2017–18, up to 32 Cycle 9 centers were invited to participate in LESI if they met the requirements related to their center's capacity to participate in the process and met all expectations. Participants attended five training webinars on principles of local evaluation and submitted items (e.g., logic models, evaluation plans, actions plans, and evaluation report [optional]) to the evaluation team for feedback throughout the year. During that same year, a local evaluation advisory group (LEAG) was created to provide input on a new Local Evaluation Guide and accompanying Local Evaluation Toolkit, which replaced the original Texas ACE Independent Evaluation Guide. The guide walks Texas ACE programs through a step-by-step process to plan and conduct an evaluation, while providing a toolkit of templates, tools, and measures to support implementation.

A similar model was implemented in Year 2 of LESI with 19 grantees and 31 centers from Cycles 9 and 10 in 2018–19. An updated Local Evaluation Guide and Toolkit was also produced in Year 2 to reflect additional input from centers and stakeholders. In Year 3 (2019–20), the statewide evaluation team proposed a new more personalized coaching approach for LESI that included working with fewer centers to provide more frequent, individualized feedback to centers and grantees throughout the year to gain a deeper understanding and implementation by centers. Nine Texas ACE centers were initially recruited in the fall of 2019; however, only six stayed throughout the initiative, as one grantee with three centers withdrew due to competing responsibilities. In Year 3, the statewide evaluation team updated the Local Evaluation Toolkit with a local evaluation capacity checklist that Texas ACE centers can use to reflect as a team on their center's capacity to engage in meaningful local evaluation in various areas. From November 2019 to July 2020, a total of 64 coaching support contacts were made between LESI liaisons and participants through email or phone conversations. The coaching support typically focused on providing feedback on logic models, evaluation plans, action plans, or evaluation reports. The coaching approach taken in Year 3 of the initiative was more labor intensive, as it was intended to provide individualized support; however, the process was not fully implemented due to disruptions prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Perspectives and feedback were gathered both formally and informally from LESI participants through a reflection survey and email communications. Five themes emerged from the participants about the success or challenges of the initiative:

Local Evaluation Plans helped Texas ACE programs make program improvements. Also, the feedback process provided to programs on logic models and evaluation plans by LESI liaisons was noted as particularly useful. Challenges with the process included finding time to organize evaluation teams around busy schedules.

Quality Assessment Trainings were noted as some of the most significant successes as Texas ACE programs gained new ideas from trainings and progressed toward quality assessment goals. Centers noted challenges implementing a quality assessment process, including conducting multiple observations when a variety of activities are offered.

Action Planning was highlighted by some participants for helping to facilitate collaboration better between school-day and Texas ACE staff. However, some Texas ACE programs noted that challenges included lack of awareness among new [school-day] teachers' understanding of ACE and how students could be identified and connected to the program.

Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic in early spring 2020 led to school closures and a move toward virtual learning, which also led to less frequent contact between LESI liaisons and Texas ACE participants. Survey participants reported general challenges with the transition to virtual learning and being disconnected from staff, which affected communication, and LESI liaisons also saw a decrease in coaching contacts in the spring of 2020.

Overall Value of Participation in LESI was noted by survey participants or noted by those in contact with LESI liaisons. Specifically, participants reported that LESI helped them gain a different perspective on data collection and how to use the information in planning and program improvement. As with all aspects of LESI, participation in coaching was voluntary. As a result, levels of participation varied across grantees. There was some evidence that grantees saw the value of the work through follow-up correspondence and requests to review materials.

Local Evaluation Resources. Another initiative during the 2019–20 academic year focused on producing a set of resources on local evaluation to sustain the initiative beyond the 21st CCLC evaluation grant and to reach the broader set of Texas ACE grantees. The resources include five short tutorial training videos related to key concepts from the Texas ACE Local Evaluation Guide and Toolkit as well as a LESI technical assistance process guide. The 15- to 20-minute tutorials focus on the main takeaways from the guide and toolkit to appeal to a wide range of adult learners and to engage centers in ways the written documents might not. Topics included logic models, process and outcome evaluation, PQA, action planning, and evaluation reporting.

The individual coaching aspects of LESI during the 2019–20 school year provided an additional layer of support to grantees participating in LESI that was different from the process from Years 1 and 2. Coaching contacts served to individualize information shared with participants, provide a consistent contact throughout the experience, and provide continuity for the review of submitted materials. Although there was some evidence of the overall value of a centers' participation in the experience, LESI liaisons reported some challenges with communication, which contributed to variance in the level of support provided to specific centers. In addition, because there was no collaboration between the LESI evaluation team and the 21st CCLC technical assistance team, the activities across the two areas might not always have been clear in their distinction and intent to LESI participants.

Chapter 6: Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Figure ES.3 outlines those practices, processes, and youth experiences and intermediate outcomes that were found to be positively associated with more than one Texas ACE attendance or school-related outcome based on the results summarized in Chapter 3. Again, the goal in conducting these analyses was to identify those variables that may warrant additional attention when considering the design and delivery of Texas ACE programming. Almost all of the variables highlighted in Figure ES.3 have a basis in the youth development and afterschool literature as being associated with positive youth outcomes and/or

have some representation in the Texas ACE Blueprint, particularly in sections related to strategic planning, community engagement, and internal quality assurance.

- Portions of both the PQA and APT-O were found to be positively associated with Texas ACE program attendance and school-related outcomes. Use of these types of observation-based instruments are representative of the internal quality assurance processes described in the Texas ACE Blueprint, as are processes used to conduct a periodic review of program data and obtain youth input on programming. The evaluation team also took steps to support grantees in engaging in these processes through the LESI described in Chapter 5.
- The focus on social and emotional learning and youth having positive perceptions of other youth attending Texas ACE programming was also found to be associated with several of the ACE attendance- and school-related outcomes. There is meaningful evidence in the youth development and afterschool literature that programs like Texas ACE can have a substantive impact on social and emotional outcomes and that the types of process quality-related practices described in the PQA can help support the achievement of these outcomes as well (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Durlak, Weissberg et al., 2010; Payton et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2016). Findings related to student perceptions of other youth attending programming suggested that this was one area in which there was an opportunity for growth on the part of Texas ACE centers.
- Obtaining youth input on programming, providing youth with opportunities to plan future activities, and affording them the opportunity to participate in activities through which they can independently explore and discover support youth in experiencing a sense of agency by allowing choice and autonomy in program offerings. As noted by Larson and Dawes (2015), this sense of agency is particularly important starting in early adolescence, enabling youth to use emerging cognitive skills, such as higher order reasoning and greater executive control of their own thought processes, to more effectively solve problems and take the steps needed to achieve goals they are pursuing. This approach provides youth with feedback about what they can accomplish and their ability to solve problems and overcome challenges, enhancing an underlying sense of self-efficacy and competence. This factor may also be part of the reason why youth reporting that the program helped them with their confidence was found to be positively associated with some of the outcomes examined.
- Youth experiencing challenge, relevance, and a sense they were learning something or getting better at something while participating in Texas ACE programming was also associated with multiple Texas ACE and school-related outcomes. Each of these experiences are supported by the literature on student motivation and engagement (Assor et al., 2002; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000; Larson & Dawes, 2015; Shumow & Schmidt, 2014). Youth experiencing challenge in particular was one experience that was not commonly associated with student participation in Texas ACE programming. More work could be done in this area to help programs provide additional levels of challenge in the activities they offer, although the evaluation team strongly recommends this be coupled with activities designed to provide youth with an opportunity to experience a sense of agency and autonomy. Larson and Angus (2011) provide especially helpful insights into connecting challenge in youth development programming with positive student outcomes.
- One center-level characteristic that was not hypothesized by the evaluation team to be associated with either Texas ACE attendance or school-related outcomes was related to students working alone on tasks associated with the ACE activity. It seems likely that this activity in particular is associated with student skill-building, particularly in academic content areas like STAAR-Reading and STAAR-Mathematics.
- Finally, high levels of Texas ACE summer programming (defined as offering 150 hours or more of programming) was found to be positively associated with outcomes related to Texas ACE program attendance during the following school year. This finding would seem to suggest that keeping students engaged in programming may help promote continued attendance in programming during the following school year.

Although these findings are correlational, there still may be some value in Texas ACE programs considering practices, processes, youth experiences, and intermediate outcomes in the design and

delivery of Texas ACE programming, particularly because almost all of these considerations are reinforced as effective practices in both the Texas ACE Blueprint and the youth development and afterschool literature.

Recommendations

Most of the center-level characteristics found to be related to Texas ACE program attendance and school-related outcomes are consistent with practices described both in the Texas ACE Blueprint and youth development and afterschool literature. In light of this, it seems that the primary way that TEA can capitalize on the results highlighted in this report is to engage in dialogue with the Texas ACE grantee community about whether some of the practices outlined in this report could be elevated to a greater degree when ACE programs go about the process of designing and delivering programming. For example, TEA may want to explore how existing program infrastructures can be leveraged to communicate about these types of practices:

- Are there ways to further elevate some of these practices in the professional development opportunities provided to Texas ACE grantees?
- Are there ways that the Texas ACE Blueprint, quality assurance process, and local evaluation guidelines can be modified to help Texas ACE grantees further reflect on their efforts to adopt practices found to be related to program attendance and school-related outcomes?

Given the evaluation findings, TEA may want to consider elevating active forms of learning given the association found between the presence of these activities and fewer disciplinary incidents in particular. It may also be appropriate to take additional steps to study these types of activities as part of future evaluation efforts with the goal of validating the efficacy of these approaches, while collecting additional contextual data on what constitutes effective practice when undertaking such offerings.

In addition, TEA may consider the ways in which it will continue to sustain local evaluation efforts on the part of Texas ACE grantees and centers that began under LESI and as part of the development work to create the Texas ACE Local Evaluation Guide and Toolkit. There is a range of support options for TEA to consider as well as whether those options should offer less hands-on support by continuing to make the Local Evaluation Guide and Toolkit and associated learning tutorials available to grantees and centers statewide. Other options to consider include a coaching model to support local evaluation efforts by an external provider based on elements and lessons learned from Year 3 of LESI implementation or bringing together a LEAG periodically to understand whether the Local Evaluation Guide and Toolkit need to be updated or whether resources should be added as programs continue to evolve in their programming and services.

Figure ES.3. Variables Found to Be Significantly and Positively Associated with More Than One Texas ACE Program Attendance and/or School-Related Outcome

Point-of-Service Quality Area	Organizational Processes	Activity Practices	Youth Experiences	Intermediate Youth-Reported Outcomes
• PQA Interaction • PQA Supportive Environment • APT-O Reading Practices • APT-O Writing Practices • APT-O Writing Practices – Youth-based • APT-O Mathematics Practices	• Build social and emotional learning skills • Provide academic and creative enrichment opportunities • Obtain youth input on programming • Periodic review of program data • High summer programming hours	• Working alone on tasks • Planning future activities • Working in small groups • Exploration and discovery	• Positive perceptions of other youth • Challenge • Relevance • Learned something	• Increased confidence

Note. ACE – Afterschool Centers on Education. Exhibit includes both statistically significant and moderately significant findings.

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