Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers

Interim Evaluation Report: Executive Summary

Prepared for: Texas Education Agency

AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH®

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List of Acronyms

21st CCLC	21st Century Community Learning Center
ACE	Afterschool Centers on Education
AIR	American Institutes for Research
AEIS	Academic Excellence Indicator System
APT-O	Assessment of Afterschool Practices Observation Tool
CSF	Critical Success Factor
CSM	Critical Success Model
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
HLM	Hierarchical Linear Modeling
MRFM	Multi Facet Rasch Measurement
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
OCE	Observation of Child Engagement
PAMS	Profile Analysis via Multi-dimensional Scaling
PEIMS	Public Education Information Management System
PPICS	Profile and Performance Information Collection System
PQA	Program Quality Assessment
SEA	State Education Agency
TAKS	Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills
TEA	Texas Education Agency
TX21st	TX21st CCLC Student Tracking System

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Executive Summary

For the past eight years, Texas afterschool and summer learning programs funded by the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLCs) / Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) program have provided students in high-poverty communities the opportunity to participate in academic enrichment programs and other youth development and support activities which aim to enhance their academic well-being.[1] The federal government awards grants to state education agencies, which in turn, make competitive awards to eligible grantees to establish and operate afterschool and summer learning programs. (Eligible grantees include local education agencies, non-profits, for-profit organizations, institutions of higher education, and city or county government agencies.) In July 2002, the federal government awarded the Texas Education Agency (TEA) $24.5 million to fund TEA's first cohort of grantees for the 2003–04 school year. As of 2009–10, initial and subsequent federal funds have resulted in 241 grants, awarded over six funding cycles.

With 21st CCLC funds, the ACE grantees deliver programs and services designed to meet five primary objectives where students participating in the program demonstrate improvement in their academic performance, school attendance, school behavior, promotion rates, and graduation rates.[2]

To ensure that grantees funded by the 21st CCLC program are positioned to achieve each of these objectives, TEA has developed a research-based Critical Success Model (CSM).This model includes four Critical Success Factors (CSFs) which represent behavioral changes that must be demonstrated by students and families enrolled in the program, or by the adults working on their behalf, to ensure success in meeting the programmatic goals and objectives. The CSFs and corresponding milestones (key strategies that establish the foundation on which critical success factors are built) are as follows:[3]

- CSF1 emphasizes both student and family engagement. Student engagement and family engagement are not necessarily achieved together, because they require different strategies and activities. The milestone for this CSF is for the program to use research-

[1] In Texas, the 21st CCLC program has its own brand, which articulates the characteristics of the Texas program and creates awareness that individual programs are part of a larger statewide system of programs. While 21st CCLC is the federal funding source, the programs in Texas are referred to as Afterschool Centers on Education, or Texas ACE. The term ACE will be used throughout the report to refer to the programs in Texas unless reference is made to the federal funding source, in which case the term 21st CCLC will be used.

[2] For more information review the authorizing legislation as part of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (2001), Title IV, Part B at http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg55.html

[3] Beginning in 2009–10, with the sixth funding cycle, program guidelines were revised to require grantees to develop and implement programs in alignment with TEA's research-based CSM. Cycle 6 grantees were required to use this model to establish program goals and implement their programs. In addition, Cycle 6 grantees must collect and report performance measure data to TEA based on milestones and CSFs. Cycle 5 grantees are not subject to these requirements, although they were made aware of the CSM when Cycle 6 was first implemented and are encouraged to use the model as a guide for improving programs.

based, innovative instructional techniques and include opportunities that encourage student and family engagement.

- CSF2 addresses student involvement in school, exemplified through more participation in extracurricular activities, and more students becoming mentors. The milestone for this CSF emphasizes the role of adults as advocates for students.
- CSF3 addresses the use of assessment data to re-evaluate and revise student services. A milestone program strategy is for program staff to conduct ongoing and continuous assessments to identify student needs and ways program activities and services might be improved.
- CSF4 addresses staff professional development. The milestone program strategy is for programs to provide all staff the "required training opportunities," which are then implemented in the afterschool program.

To gain a better understanding of how well ACE grantees are implementing programs that are consistent with the CSM, TEA contracted with American Institutes for Research (AIR) and its partners, Gibson Consulting Group, Inc. (Gibson Consulting) and the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality (the Weikart Center), to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the ACE programs, beginning with programs that were awarded grants during funding Cycles 5 and 6.[4] The evaluation began in January 2011 and will continue through August 2012, with the possibility of additional funding through August 2015.[5]

The overarching goal of the evaluation is to determine which program strategies and approaches (milestones) are most effective within particular contexts in encouraging student and adult behaviors (CSFs) that lead to improvement in student performance. The evaluation is designed to address two primary research objectives:

- **Research Objective 1.** To conduct a statewide assessment of ACE programs, operations, participation, and student achievement;
- **Research Objective 2.** To identify and describe innovative strategies and approaches implemented by successful Cycle 5 and Cycle 6 grant-funded programs.[6]

With respect to the first objective, the findings in this interim report indicate student participation in ACE programs is associated with higher scores on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) in reading and mathematics. All students who participated in the 2009–10

[4] A cycle represents a cohort of grantees that receive funding for five years. Cycle 5, for example, represents the fifth such cohort to receive funding since TEA has began funding for this grant. Cycle 5 and Cycle 6 programs are the focus of the evaluation because they have been introduced to and/or required to consider (Cycle 5) or implement (Cycle 6) the CSM.

[5] TEA has conducted several statewide evaluations of the Texas 21st CCLC programs with the assistance of contractors. Statewide evaluation began one year after the federal government awarded funding to TEA in July 2002 for the first cohort of the grant, Cycle 1, which began implementation in July 2003. Statewide evaluations have been conducted annually; reports have been made available to the public on the TEA website http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=2908&menu_id=949

[6] These research objectives may be expanded to include new grantees in later years of the evaluation.

program year (no matter by which cycle the ACE program attended was funded) were included in the impact analyses.[7] When compared with non-participating students, ACE student participants had fewer assigned disciplinary days during the regular school day, fewer disciplinary incidences in Grades 9–12, and fewer absences during the regular school day. It is important to note that while the findings are statistically significant,[8] the effect sizes are quite small.[9] However, they are still consistent with what would be expected for afterschool programs of this type (Kane, 2004).

Initial efforts to identify and describe innovative strategies and practices related to the second research objective focused on the variation in program quality among the ACE programs funded in Cycles 5 and 6. The two cycles were provided the CSM, with the Cycle 5 programs asked to consider the CSM in their implementation, and the Cycle 6 programs required to implement the CSM. Analyses of programs operating in 2010–11 showed that across the state, the spectrum of program quality was quite broad, although some trends and relationships between program quality and program characteristics were identified:

- Centers staffed mostly by school-day teachers were more apt to engage in practices supportive of academic skill-building, including relying on externally-developed curriculum to guide activities, developing linkages to the school day, and using student data to inform programming. However, there has been a trend in recent years for ACE programs to rely less on school-day teachers and more on other types of non-certified staff to provide program services. This has implications for the orientation, induction, training, professional development, and scaffolding site coordinators will need, particularly as it concerns linking the after school program to the school day classes. TEA may want to consider this when assessing how best to support grantees with training and technical assistance.
- Programs serving high school students exclusively demonstrated a lower degree of intentionality in program design and weaker linkages to the school-day classes than other programs, even when staff consisted of mostly school-day teachers. However, high school program activities had higher levels of academic content and climate than activities of programs serving other grade levels. This indicates that activities were focused on academic objectives, but not necessarily as a result of efforts to align sessions with specific class objectives.

[7] While programming year in this report includes any programs offered during the summer following the school year, such extended programming has no relevance for this report. Summer programs were not observed, and student data are associated with the school year.

[8] Throughout this report, statistical significance refers to the probability that a result or relationship is random is 5% or less (p-value<0.05).

[9] Effect size refers to the magnitude of the relationship between two variables, in this case program participation and outcome. A small effect size indicates a somewhat weak relationship. Participation in the program, for students in Grades 4 through 12, had an effect size of .027 on TAKS-ELA/Reading and of .032 on TAKS-Mathematics effect sizes are presented in standard deviation units. This is a small effect size, which indicates that on mathematics, for example, students participating in ACE programs scored higher than non-ACE students by half of one question. In general, effect sizes in educational research do not exceed 1.0.

- Youth ownership—that is, youth having a role in selecting and shaping program activities—was more evident in the high school programs than other programs, and student-reported engagement in program activities was higher. There is particular interest among the evaluation team in further understanding the relationship between youth ownership and student engagement.
- Academic content and academic climate were found to be higher in academic enrichment and tutoring activities than in non-academic enrichment and homework help activities. Non-academic activities were not necessarily designed to build academic knowledge and skills (though they may). Homework help was an activity that was responsive to students' daily assignments and needs; therefore, academic content was not planned. The finding in relation to homework help suggests that more could be done to enhance the supportive and interactive elements of homework help activities.
- Practices likely to foster youth development were more frequently embedded in academic enrichment activities than other program activities, including non-academic enrichment, homework help, and tutoring. This is important because the provision of these types of activities is seen as the primary service delivery mechanism for 21st CCLC. There was evidence to suggest that the more staff adopted practices to support youth development, the higher the engagement reported by students on post-activity student surveys. TEA may want to consider how training and technical assistance provided to ACE programs might enhance the capacity of staff to engage in practices and create opportunities that support positive youth development (CSF4).
- Low staff-to-student ratios were shown to be important for facilitating meaningful and substantive interactions between students and adults during an activity. (This is related to CSF1.) On the other hand, low staff-to-student ratio may be less of a factor relative to these interactions if center staff have made a substantial investment in planning the activity.
- Among 15 high-quality programs, which were identified for further analysis based on observation data and ratings on the Program Quality Assessment (PQA) tool,[10] teacher knowledge of individual student needs, interests, and personal lives, and teachers' instructional responsiveness were effective in engaging students. (Note that determining student need is addressed in CSF3.)The presence of shared norms guiding the casual interactions among staff and students, typically made activities more enjoyable and helped students focus on tasks. These characteristics were present across many of the activities, even homework help, in the programs assessed as high quality.
- Among the high-quality activities for elementary students, structured, whole-group instruction, in which all students were focused on the same task, facilitated active student engagement (addressed in the CSF 1 milestone). The activities were fun and engaging, the climate was positive, and leadership opportunities were provided.

[10] The Youth PQA is a validated instrument for observing program activities that serve youth in Grades 4–12, and the School-Age PQA is used to observe activities that serve youth in Grades K–6. The tools were developed by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation and currently are supported by the Weikart Center, a partner on this project.

- In the observed high-quality activities serving secondary students, active engagement (aligned to CSF1) was facilitated by providing students with choices, responsibilities, and relatively sophisticated tools and materials.

The information in this report serves as a starting point from which to identify and describe innovative and effective practices that might be adapted by ACE programs. In 2011–12, the evaluation team will conduct site visits to 40 centers to collect information that will enable the evaluators and TEA to better understand the strategies and procedures employed by ACE programs to deliver quality afterschool programming. From this sample of 40, as well as a sample of centers visited in 2010–11, 15 of the highest quality programs will be identified. These programs will be the focus of an in-depth study which will examine research-based innovative, effective practices. The selection of programs in the sample of 15 will be based on a re-analysis of outcomes using assessment and other outcome data as well as student and center characteristics data tracked in the 21st CCLC Tracking and Reporting System for Texas (TX21st) for the 2010–11 school year. Additionally, the analysis of site coordinator survey data and program data collected in the spring and fall of 2011 and center attendance data from TX21st will be included in the selection criteria for these 15 sites. A report summarizing findings from the site visits will be presented to TEA in August 2012.

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