Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant Evaluation:

Texas Afterschool Centers on Education

Descriptive Study of Site Coordinator Perspectives on Strategic Planning, Partnerships, and Engagement (2023–24)

Keisha Bailey, Danielle Midgyett, Alex Bishop, and Matt Vinson

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Acronyms

American Institutes for Research (AIR)

English as a Second Language (ESL)

Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs)

Parent self-serve (PSS)

research question (RQ)

social-emotional learning (SEL)

science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)

State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)

Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (Texas ACE)

Texas Education Agency (TEA)

21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC)

Executive Summary

The Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program addresses the needs of students who attend schools struggling in their efforts to fully support students, located largely in communities that experience poverty. The Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (Texas ACE), funded by the federal 21st CCLC grant program, provide a wide array of academic enrichment and youth development activities during non-school hours, primarily after school, and during the summer. These activities are designed to enhance students' academic, social, and emotional well-being and cultivate skills and interests that will help them become college and career ready.

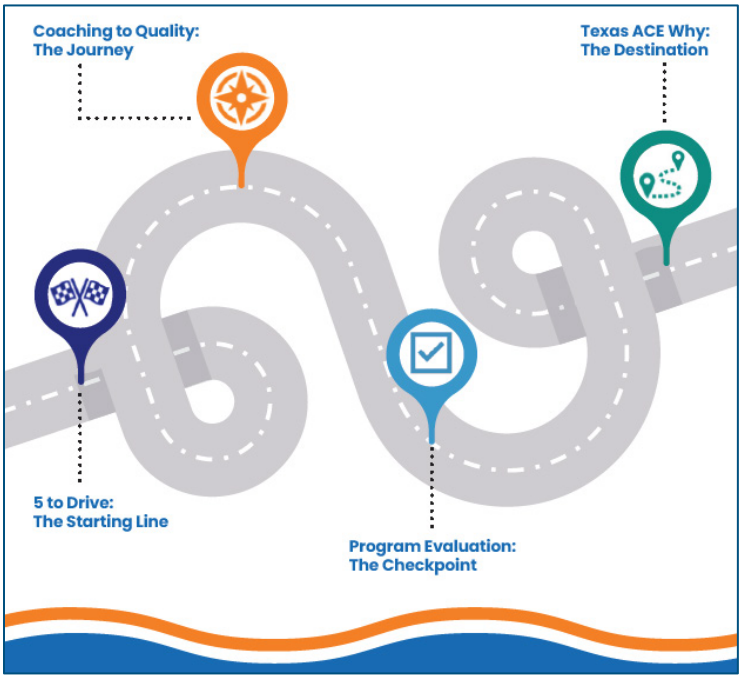
As a condition of receiving federal 21st CCLC funding for this program, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) is required to conduct a statewide evaluation of Texas ACE. In early 2022 TEA contracted with the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) to conduct this evaluation, with work continuing through summer 2026. The evaluation comprises a series of data collection activities and attendant reports covering program characteristics, program implementation, exploration of the relationships between program characteristics and student outcomes, and program impact.

This report presents survey and interview data concerning program **strategic planning**, **partnerships**, and **engagement**. The surveys were collected from site coordinators overseeing Cycle 11 and Cycle 12 centers during spring 2024. At that time, the Texas ACE program was operating at **671 centers** (348 in Cycle 11 and 323 in Cycle 12) that are mostly school campuses. The programs were managed by 96 subgrantees (46 in Cycle 11 and 50 in Cycle 12) that were awarded funding in 5-year cycles. Cycle 11 will end July 21, 2026, and Cycle 12 will end July 31, 2028, if funding remains available.[1] The interviews, which were designed as exploratory follow-up to the survey, were conducted with site coordinators between November 2024 and January 2025. In total, 10 site coordinators from Cycle 11 were interviewed, and nine site coordinators from Cycle 12 (which began operating in fall 2023).

[1] Cycle 11 began operating in July 2021, and Cycle 12 began operating in August 2023. The number of centers and grants active during spring 2024 is based on TX21st System data.

Evaluation and the Texas ACE Roadmap

Key findings, best practices, and emergent themes from this report are presented in this summary. The findings are framed with reference to the ***Texas ACE Roadmap to High-Quality Out-of-School Time*** (Texas ACE Roadmap), which presents TEA's comprehensive framework for ensuring program quality. Framing the findings in terms of the Texas ACE Roadmap will therefore situate the findings in terms of program quality, but will also make the findings more useable for both statewide and grant-level program improvement purposes. This is in keeping with the intention of the Texas ACE Roadmap, which encourages grantees "to review state evaluations and consider the findings for continuous improvement at the local level."[2]



Findings Highlights: Strategic Planning

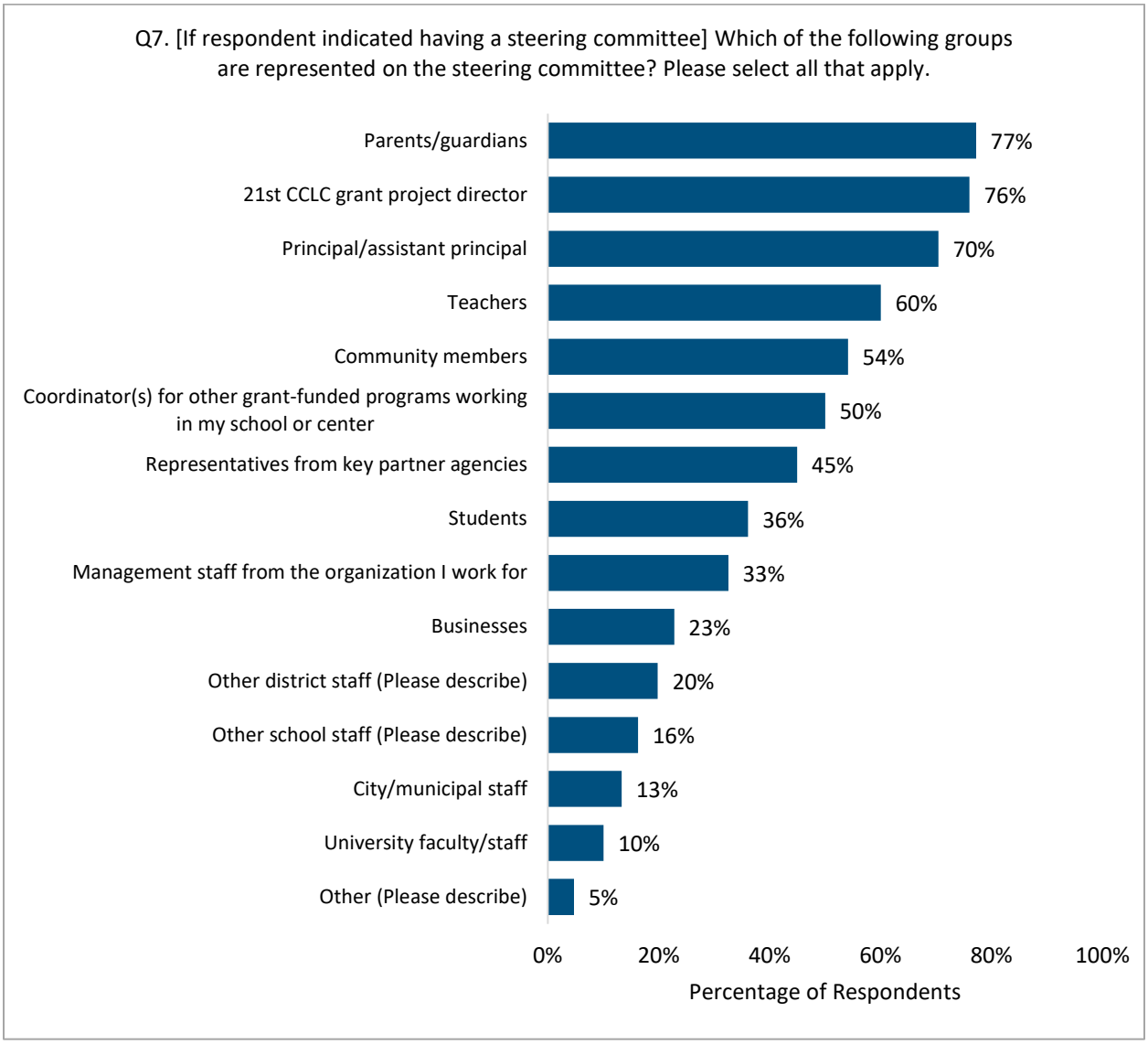
The Texas ACE Roadmap begins with "5 to Drive," a set of five key areas aligned to grant assurances that ground ongoing compliance and monitoring efforts. The first of these areas, "One Texas ACE Community," emphasizes strategic planning via reference to an "active steering committee" and regular engagement with a "variety of stakeholders." Along these lines, the site coordinator survey included questions about steering committees and stakeholder involvement in planning. Overall, 64% of site coordinator survey respondents said that their program had a steering committee, while 20% were "not sure" and 16% said they do not have a steering committee. Of those reporting that they had a steering committee, 38% said the committee "serves a larger role at the school, center, district, or organization," while another 36% said the committee was specific to the 21st CCLC program but supported multiple sites. Twenty-one percent said the steering committee was specific to their site.

In terms of stakeholder involvement in steering committees, 77% of survey respondents said that parents or guardians were steering committee members, while 70% said that the principal

[2] Texas ACE Roadmap to High Quality Out-of-School Time, page 10.

or assistant principal was a member. Sixty percent said teachers were members. See Exhibit ES1 for an overview of the stakeholders involved in steering committees across the state.

Exhibit ES1. Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Steering Committee Representation



Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.

Note. N = 338. The original question language asked about "advisory committee, group, or council" instead of "steering committee."

The site coordinator interviews further explored steering committee structures, and how steering committees are formed. Based on the interviews, centers located within larger school districts, multi-campus systems, or networks with centralized planning personnel seemed more

likely to have district-level committee structures, while more rural or less densely populated districts were more likely to have a site-specific steering committee. Additionally, steering committee structure overall seemed less an intentional choice than an outgrowth of preexisting conditions, with four general types of steering committee emerging: mere informational, consultative, collaborative, and strategic. These types represent increasing involvement and decision-making authority, with informational being the lowest tier.

Both the survey and the interviews sought to further explore strategic planning through questions about needs assessment and data use for program development. In terms of needs assessment, only 53% of survey respondents said their Texas ACE center had conducted a formal needs assessment to inform programming. However, another 32% said that they conducted a needs assessment as part of a school needs assessment. However, these responses may simply represent a knowledge disconnect; Texas ACE grant applicants are required to submit a formal needs assessment as part of their competitive grant application and must submit needs assessment updates annually as part of their continuation applications. This could suggest that a sizeable minority of site coordinators are simply not involved in conducting these needs assessments, or in writing applications. In contrast to the survey data, all 19 site coordinators who were interviewed described using multiple methods to conduct needs assessment (noting that these sites were intentionally selected to find best practices), with 16 saying they conducted multiple needs assessment activities across the school year. Notably, these site coordinators said they involved parents, students, and teachers in the needs assessment process.

Interview Findings: Responding to Needs

Fifteen site coordinators who were interviewed described providing academic supports in response to needs assessment findings, while 13 said they also integrated life skills, character education, and social-emotional learning. Some needs were identified but generally left unmet, however: Thirteen site coordinators identified adult education, financial literacy, and workforce development as adult family member needs, while eight coordinators identified a need for broader student assistance relating to challenges such as food security, transportation, and access to safe spaces.

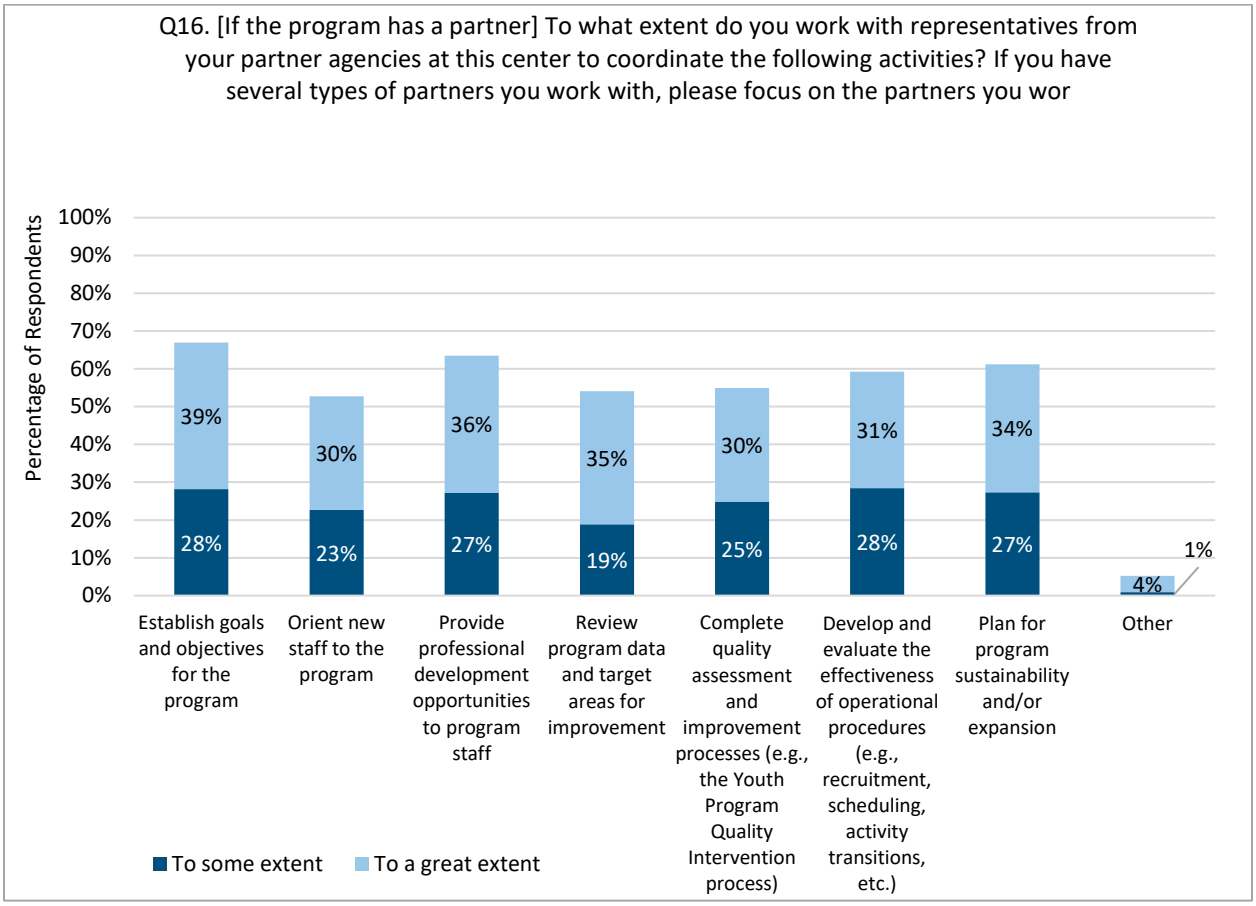
In terms of using data to inform programming, 76% of survey respondents said that student school-day attendance data were “very important for informing activities.” Grades or grade point averages were marked as “very important” by 69% of respondents, and behavioral data was selected as “very important” by 64% of respondents. Seventy-five percent of survey respondents also said that site visit observations were “very important” for informing activity

offerings, while 82% said student surveys were "very important for informing activities." Seventy-one percent said parent surveys were "very important."

Findings Highlights: Partnerships

Another "5 to Drive" area outlined in the Texas ACE Roadmap is "Three Key Strategies," which explicitly includes community involvement through partnerships. Along these lines, 70% of survey respondents said they work with a partner (other than the school district or school) to support the 21st CCLC program. Of these, 77% said they work with a community-based organization or not-for-profit organization, while 53% said they work with a college or university partner. In terms of what these partners help program do, about two-thirds of those with partners said they help "establish goals and objectives for the program," while 63% said partners "provide professional development opportunities to program staff." See Exhibit ES2.

Exhibit ES2. Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Coordination of Activities with Partners



Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.

Note. N = 369.

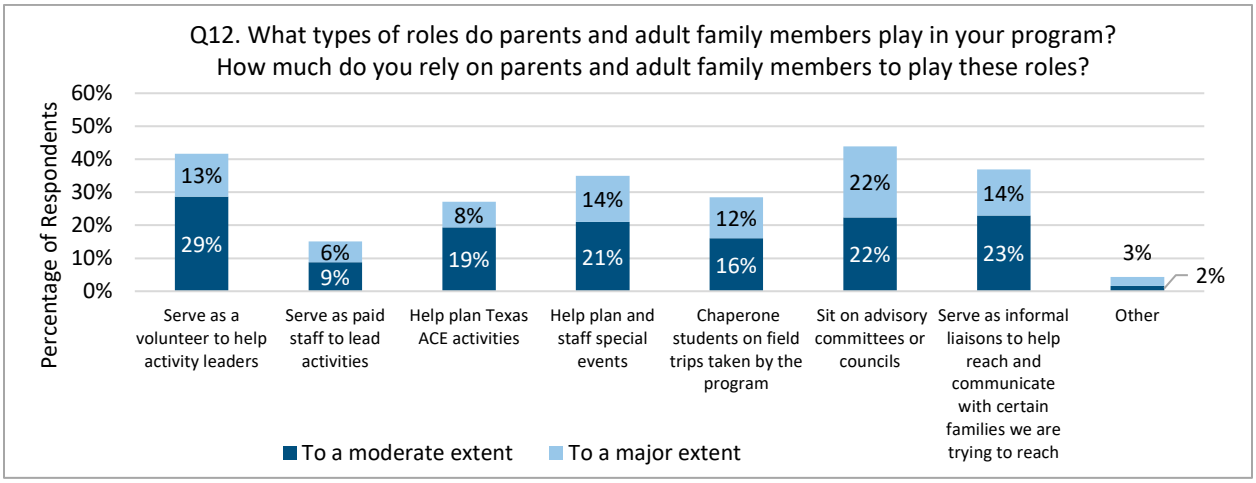
Additionally, fifteen site coordinators who were interviewed said that partnerships provide a key way to expand or extend program services. This included provision of academic enrichment, career exploration, family engagement activities, and staff development. These partnerships included a mix of formal and informal working arrangements, with formal partnerships being characterized by a defined scope, terms, and expectations, and typically involving institutes of higher education, government agencies, and established community organizations. Site coordinators described informal partnerships as more dynamic and need driven, allowing programs to quickly mobilize to meet needs or interests.

Findings Highlights: Engagement

Finally, the Texas ACE Roadmap's "5 to Drive" highlights the importance of engaging family and students. Specifically, the fourth "5 to Drive" area is "Four Activity Types," which includes explicit reference to "student interest-based enrichment" and "family engagement." Additionally, while the fifth key area aligned to grant assurances is "Five Measurable Goals," which includes student engagement in learning as one goal and family engagement as another. Given this, and given that engagement is theoretically necessary for program impact to take place, both the surveys and the interviews sought to explore how programs engage adult family members and students in programming.

As determined through an open-ended item on the survey, nearly all programs said they try to engage parents or adult family members through some type of parent night, family activity, or similar event. Additionally, some site coordinators reported involving parents and adult family members in a variety of roles, notably as volunteer activity leaders (42% combined "moderate" or "major extent"). See Exhibit ES3 for more information about parent and adult family roles in Texas ACE programming.

Exhibit ES3. Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Parent Roles in Programming



Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.
Note. *N* = 523 to 524.

Of note, site coordinators associated with suburban programs were more likely than other locales to say parents served as volunteers to help lead activities (58% indicating to a "moderate" or "major" extent, compared with 31% to 40% for other locales). They were also more likely to say adults helped plan Texas ACE activities (38%, compared with 21% to 26% for other locales), and help plan and staff special events like wellness fairs or family nights (45%, compared with 24% to 37% for other locales).

The site coordinator interviews sought to further explore parent and adult family member engagement in Texas ACE. Twelve site coordinators who were interviewed highlighted the importance of parental involvement in planning activities for ensuring parental engagement (though other site coordinators reported challenges with limited adult family member participation, as noted below). Overall, sites that solicit parent input through advisory groups, structured feedback sessions, and surveys seemed to report higher engagement levels. Beyond intentional inclusion of parents and adult family members in planning and feedback provision, however, seven coordinators mentioned that flexible scheduling was key to enabling adult family members to participate, while nine of the interviewed site coordinators stressed the importance of using multiple communication methods to engage parents or adult family members (including personal invitations via email, phone call, or text).

In terms of student engagement, the surveys included a single set of questions concerning student roles in programming. Seventy-three percent of surveyed site coordinators said that students do provide informal feedback on activity content "to a major extent." Another 21% said students did so to a "moderate extent," suggesting that the vast majority of programs use student feedback to guide activity planning.

Challenges

In order to help TEA better assist programs as they work to improve their programs, both the survey and the interviews included questions about challenges that programs face in terms of steering committees, partnerships, and engagement. Notable challenges are presented below.

Challenges to Steering Committees. In terms of steering committees, six site coordinators who were interviewed noted that scheduling conflicts posed a challenge for having effective steering committees since it was difficult to find times for the committee to meet. Also, ten site coordinators said that it was challenging getting parents, teachers, or community members to participate in their steering committee, which limits effectiveness of decision making.

Challenges to Partnerships. Thirty-three percent of survey respondents said they were looking for a partner to help with "rental assistance for families/supports for homeless families," but could not find one. Twenty-nine percent said they were looking for a partner to help with "job training and placement support for parents/adult family members," but could not find one. Sixteen interviewed site coordinators also said they were actively looking for new partnerships to fill service gaps or to expand their program options, suggesting that targeted guidance on how to find partners could be useful for some programs.

Challenges to Engagement. Fifty-five percent of survey respondents said that competition with other activities during their program constituted a "major" or "moderate" challenge. Additionally, thirty-eight percent reported that "students turned off by a focus on academics in the program" constituted a "moderate" or "major" challenge. In terms of adult participation, six interviewed site coordinators said that parent work schedules and obligations limit adult participation in activities.

Challenges Faced by Rural Programs

Rural site coordinators were more likely than site coordinators associated with other locales to say that they experienced "moderate" or "major" challenge in terms of "school day staff do not see the importance of Texas ACE participation" (29% compared with 14% to 19% for other locales); that "parents/ caregivers do not see the importance of Texas ACE participation" (25% compared with 12% to 19% for other locales); and had "concerns about student safety when it starts getting dark early" (36% compared with 14% to 18% for other locales).

Best Practices

Related to the findings associated with strategic planning, partnerships, and engagement, below are presented best practices derived from the site coordinator interviews. These are skewed toward strategic planning, given that strategic planning has downstream effects on both partnerships and engagement.

Best Practices based on Interviews

- Site coordinators who were interviewed described a **needs assessment process that is an ongoing, data-driven process in a continuous feedback loop**. These site coordinators find out what stakeholders need and want, use a variety of approaches to succeed in that effort, and then base subsequent programming decisions around these needs and wants. Attendance and outcome data also play key roles in this type of needs assessment, in the sense that such data indicate whether identified needs are truly being met or still constitute active needs.

Best Practices based on Interviews
• Related to steering committees, three interviewed site coordinators stressed the **importance of well-defined roles for steering committee members, along with the committee having a clear mission and purpose**. With clearly defined member roles and functions, it becomes easier to recruit additional members. It also enables site coordinators to avoid recruiting individuals who may be able to provide useful feedback but do not have time to participate.
• Also related to steering committees, five site coordinators stressed the importance of **mutual respect, open communication, and shared problem-solving** as key components to success.
• One site coordinator said that **continuously evaluating and refining committee practices** has helped to make their committee more effective.
• Site coordinators who were interviewed identified **program visibility** as a key component to engagement success. They mentioned intentionally embedding themselves into school and community discussions, advocating for their program's role in student success and long-term sustainability, and so on. They also noted showcasing student successes at parent/adult family events as a way to engage more parents.
• In interviews, site coordinators said key facets of effective program visibility include **communication of program impact**, with a focus on those outcomes of greatest importance to each individual stakeholder. Another facet is that visibility must be based on relationships established over time. The third facet is that visibility is more likely to be meaningful to stakeholders if ongoing formal and informal needs assessments are regular practices of a program.
• Interviewed site coordinators said **being adaptable** is also important for engagement to take place. Even if students, parents, or community members are excited about particular program offerings, they will not come if they have a scheduling conflict, or cannot get to the program site due to lack of transportation or child care.
• Six site coordinators said that eng**aged school leadership can be effective at helping programs find partners, provide logistical assistance, and advocate for program initiatives**. Program visibility also helps with finding new partners, as do active networking and leveraging personal connections.
• To increase partner engagement, site coordinators who were interviewed noted the importance of **communicating partner impact back to the partners**. Providing partners with performance metrics and success stories help reinforce the value of partner contributions and helps sustain engagement.

Discussion and Recommendations

Based on the findings and best practices outlined in this executive summary, several important themes emerge. First, **steering committees and site coordinators need to be intentionally involved in conducting needs assessments, and in using the results for program improvement**. Ongoing needs assessment plays a foundational role in successful programming, so those responsible for program planning need to be involved in these efforts. With respect to steering committees, a robust, multipronged approach to needs assessment that incorporates both formal and informal data-gathering clarifies program goals, which in turn solidifies steering committee purpose and function. When a steering committee knows the specific goals of the

program and knows the needs underlying those goals, it will more effectively advise and guide program staff as they seek to improve programming. Likewise, involving site coordinators in this process better ensures use of needs assessment results in program improvement decisions, which will help programs serve the needs identified through the needs assessment process. Such involvement will also facilitate creation of partnerships, both in terms of highlighting specific needs that partners could best address and in helping program staff approach potential partners.

Second, the best practices outlined above clearly highlight themes of **communication, adaptability, and visibility**. These themes are bound together and are difficult to separate, because all share aspects of both knowledge-sharing and relationship-building. This appears to be a foundational component of Texas ACE program success, especially when combined with effective needs assessment practices and strategic use of data.

Finally, site coordinators who were interviewed stressed the **importance of trust and mutual respect**. This is critical for needs assessment success, for data-gathering, for steering committee member selection, for parent engagement, and for establishing or deepening partnerships. Strong communication, adaptability, and visibility obviously facilitate creation of trust. This trust is essential for long-term engagement with partnerships. However, stable staffing configurations in the Texas ACE program, the schools, and partner agencies may dictate the ways and extent to which such trust can be built and maintained.

Based on all these findings, AIR has two recommendations for TEA, as shown below.

Recommendations
1. It may be worth further investigating the ways in which Texas ACE programs conduct needs assessment, both formally and informally, and developing guidance for those grantees who do not know how to do this well. This could perhaps be done in conjunction with site visit observations already planned by TEA, through informal discussion at conferences, or other more formal data collection means. Best practices guides or facilitation of communities of practice could also be considered, with the goal of helping grantees progress toward ongoing, robust needs assessment practices.
2. Steering committee formation clearly varies across Texas ACE sites, both in terms of basic structure (district versus site-specific, for example) and membership (e.g., volunteers, application process, selection). Similar to Recommendation 1, it may be worth discussing these approaches with grantees and creating guidelines for establishing and maintaining effective steering committees. These could consider the roles of students and parents/adult family members in steering committees, and whether or how the inclusion of these stakeholders affects engagement.

Introduction

The Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program addresses the needs of students who attend schools that are struggling in their efforts to fully support students; these schools are located largely in communities that experience poverty. The Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (Texas ACE), funded by the federal 21st CCLC grant program, provide a wide array of academic enrichment and youth development activities during non-school hours and during the summer. These activities are designed to enhance students' academic, social, and emotional well-being and cultivate skills and interests that will help them become college and career ready.

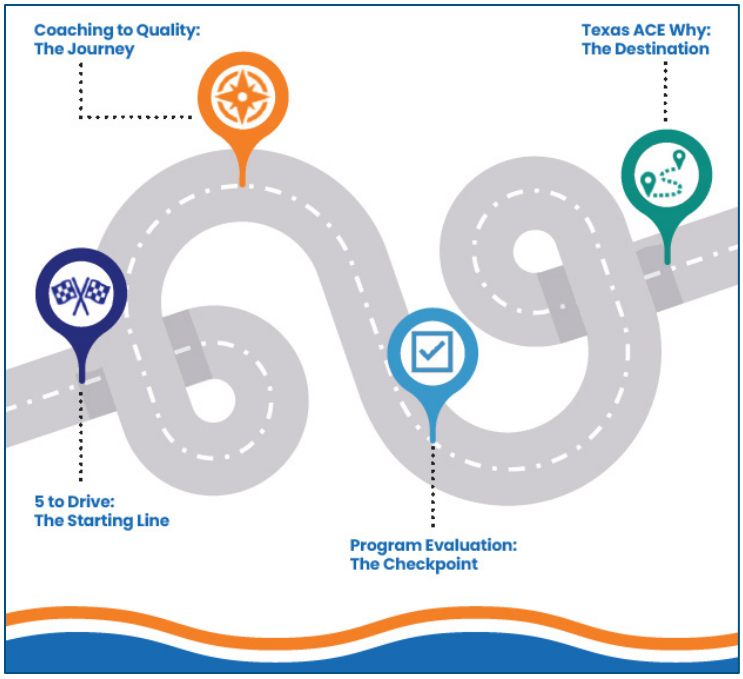
As a condition of receiving federal 21st CCLC funding for this program, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) is required to conduct a statewide evaluation of Texas ACE. In early 2022 TEA contracted with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to conduct this evaluation, with work continuing through summer 2026. The evaluation comprises a series of data collection activities and attendant reports covering program characteristics, program implementation, exploration of the relationships between program characteristics and student outcomes, and program impact.

This report presents survey and interview data concerning program strategic planning, partnerships, and engagement. The surveys were collected from Cycle 11 and Cycle 12 centers during spring 2024. At that time, the Texas ACE program was operating at **671 centers** (348 in Cycle 11 and 323 in Cycle 12) that are located mostly on school campuses. The programs were managed by 96 subgrantees (46 in Cycle 11 and 50 in Cycle 12) that were awarded funding in 5-year cycles. Cycle 11 will end July 21, 2026, and Cycle 12 will end July 31, 2028, if funding remains available.[3] The interviews, which were designed as exploratory follow-up to the survey, were conducted with site coordinators between November 2024 and January 2025. In total, 10 site coordinators from Cycle 11 were interviewed, along with nine site coordinators from Cycle 12 (which began operating in late summer 2023).

[3] Cycle 11 began operating in July 2021, and Cycle 12 began operating in August 2023. The number of centers and grants active during spring 2024 is based on TX21st System data.

Evaluation as Part of The Texas ACE Roadmap

The findings, best practices, and themes presented in this report are best understood within the framework of the ***Texas ACE Roadmap to High-Quality Out-of-School Time*** (Texas ACE Roadmap). The Texas ACE Roadmap presents TEA's comprehensive continuous improvement system. Framing the findings in terms of the Texas ACE Roadmap not only properly situates the findings in terms of program quality, but also makes the findings more useable for both statewide and grant-level program improvement purposes. This is in keeping with the intention of the Texas ACE Roadmap, which encourages grantees "to review state evaluations and consider the findings for continuous improvement at the local level."[4]



Critical to understanding the Texas ACE Roadmap are the key areas aligned to grant assurances outlined as part of TEA's "5 to Drive." The "5 to Drive" key areas are:

- **One Texas ACE Community.** Of particular relevance for this report, this key area notes that Texas ACE grantees should "regularly engage a variety of stakeholders to support continuous improvement and plan for sustainability," and show "evidence of active steering committees." This key area is especially relevant for findings related to strategic planning, including findings related to needs assessment and steering committees.

- **Two Crucial Times.** This key area specifies that "more time engaged with high-quality learning experiences enables students to accelerate learning, particularly when using evidence-based design principles." Texas ACE programs must therefore operate, at minimum, afterschool and during summer. This report does not present findings directly aligned with this key area, but does address broad issues related to student and family engagement along with program schedules.

[4] Texas ACE Roadmap to High Quality Out-of-School Time, page 10.

- **Three Key Strategies.** These strategies include strong program operations, alignment with the school day, and community involvement. The last strategy is especially important here, referencing "partnerships and engagement opportunities."

- **Four Activity Types**. The four activity types are targeted academic support, student interest-based enrichment, college and career readiness, and family engagement. Findings in this report related to student and family engagement briefly address this "5 to Drive" key area.

- **Five Measurable Goals.** The goals are to improve academic performance in reading and math (two separate goals), improve school attendance, improve student engagement in learning, and improve family engagement. The findings in this report concerning engagement relate to these last two goals.

Finally, the Texas ACE Roadmap points out that program evaluation—both statewide and local—constitutes a "checkpoint" for exploring how program characteristics and practices are associated with outcomes. That is, evaluation is a key component of ongoing quality improvement efforts.

Along the lines of the "5 to Drive" outlined above, this report provides answers to three specific research questions (RQs), which follow. The first two specifically reference the Texas ACE Roadmap, while the third implicitly assumes the Texas ACE Roadmap as context.

- **RQ 2.1.** How are Texas ACE centers approaching the adoption of practices and approaches that reflect the quality components detailed in the Texas ACE Roadmap?
- **RQ 2.2.** How does adoption of key practices and approaches related to the quality components detailed in the Texas ACE Roadmap vary across different types of centers?[5]
- **RQ 2.3.** What especially innovative or robust practices and approaches are being employed that may warrant consideration as best practices for the Texas ACE community more broadly?

Although this report is organized by theme rather than by RQ, notations are included to indicate which questions and aspects of "5 to Drive" are addressed by each section.

[5] Research questions 1 and 2 have been adjusted from versions in the *2021–22 Perspectives on Staffing Report* to reflect TEA's new emphasis on the Texas ACE Roadmap.

Overview of Data Collection

This report relies on two sources of data: site coordinator surveys and site coordinator interviews. This subsection presents a short description of each of these data types, along with notes concerning response rates and data limitations.

Site Coordinator Surveys (Spring 2024)

During May, June, and July 2024, AIR collected surveys from Texas ACE site coordinators associated with Cycle 11 and Cycle 12 grantees. The purpose of the survey was to ask site coordinators about their strategic planning, partners, and engagement.

Overall, AIR invited all 671 site coordinators associated with Cycle 11 and Cycle 12 to take the survey. A total of 516 complete surveys were collected (77% response rate), along with 24 partial surveys (80% response rate total). Of these, 288 were Cycle 11 respondents (53%) and 252 were Cycle 12 respondents (47%). All surveys were administered online. A copy of the survey is included in Appendix A. Additional information about survey respondent characteristics is presented in Appendix B.

Role Definition for Site Coordinator

A site coordinator is responsible for program administration at a single center location. This individual is typically in charge of staffing the center and oversees day-to-day activity offerings. Each site coordinator reports to a project director (who oversees administration of Texas ACE grant funds), although sometimes the same person can hold these roles.

Site Coordinator Interviews (Winter 2024–25)

Based on the spring 2024 site coordinator survey data, AIR identified 20 site coordinators associated with Cycle 11 and Cycle 12 programs (10 each) for follow-up interviews. The primary goal of these interviews was to further explore the topics covered by the site coordinator survey. Site coordinators were selected for interviews based on survey responses indicating innovative, promising, or effective practices in relation to strategic planning, partnerships, or engagement.

The data used to guide sample selection were therefore primarily obtained from the responses to the site coordinator survey. Criteria were based on an examination of key forced-choice responses to items appearing on the survey. Additionally, members of the Texas ACE program team at TEA specified criteria they wanted included in the sample selection process (e.g., adequate representation of both cycles, program locales, and grade levels served).

The survey items used in this sampling effort, along with notes concerning the specific sampling criteria for both Cycle 11 and Cycle 12 site coordinators, are included in Appendix C.[6] A copy of the interview protocol is included in Appendix D. All interviews were conducted during November 2024, December 2024, or January 2025.

Limitations of the Data

The findings in this report are predicated on survey responses and interview data, both of which are limited in important ways. Both types of data are limited by respondent memory recall; more recent events are likely to figure prominently in respondents' answers, as are events that, for whatever reason, had a greater impact on the individual responding (regardless of impact on the program). Additionally, respondents may have provided answers based not on their memory but rather on the perceived social acceptability of the response (that is, social desirability bias).

Additionally, the interview data are based on a sample of programs, a sample intentionally selected to increase the likelihood of finding best or promising practices. The interview sample was therefore not intended to be representative. It is helpful to keep this intention in mind when reviewing interview findings.

[6] One of the originally recommended site coordinators declined to participate and was replaced with another site coordinator recommended by the same project director.

Presentation of Findings

This section presents findings from the spring 2024 site coordinator survey and winter 2024–25 interviews, organized by theme:

- Strategic Planning and Operations
- Steering Committee
- Community, Family, and Youth Engagement
- Partnerships and Coordination of Services
- Challenges

Exploration of each theme includes presentation of data from both the site coordinator surveys and from the interviews. Additionally, significant subgroup differences in survey response patterns are presented where relevant (with all statistically significant differences presented in Appendix E, with significance determined via chi square at $p < .05$). Subgroups analyzed included program cycle, locale (i.e., rural, town, suburban, or urban), grade levels served (elementary only vs. non-elementary only), and grant type (i.e., whether the entity that applied for and received the 21st CCLC grant is a school district or another type of entity).

Strategic Planning and Operations

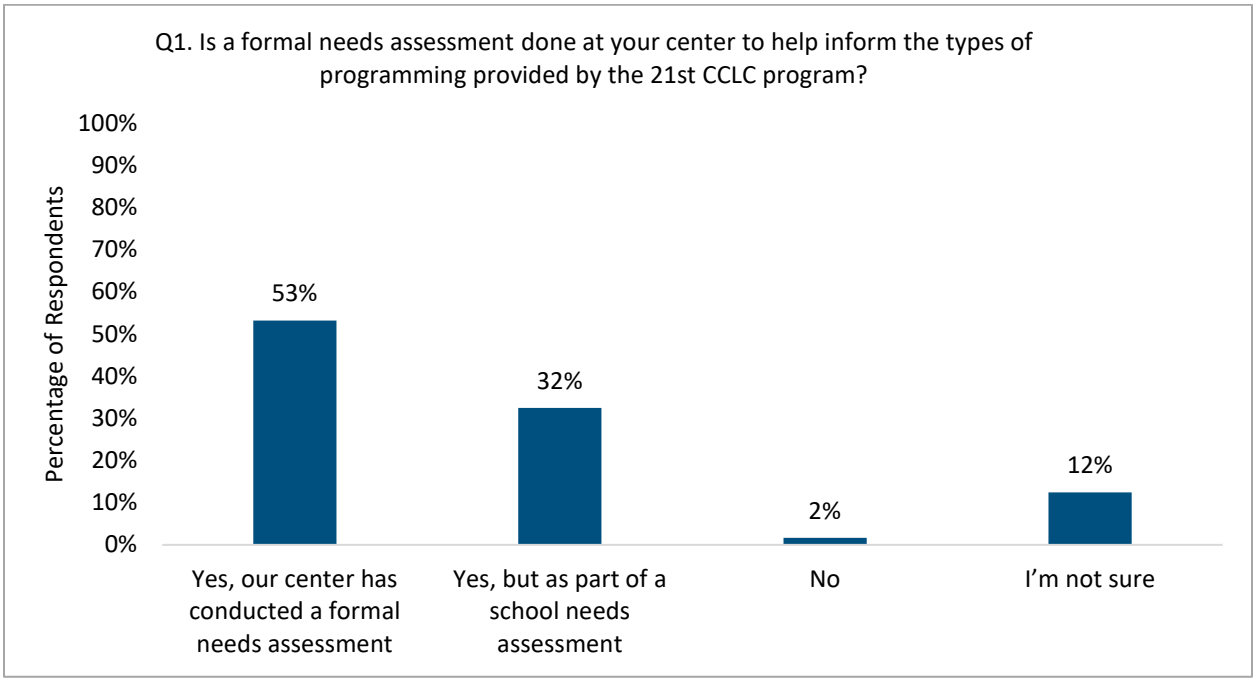
This section addresses RQs 2.1 and 2.2: How are Texas ACE centers approaching the adoption of practices and approaches that reflect quality components detailed in the Texas ACE Roadmap? How does adoption of key practices and approaches related to the quality components detailed in the Texas ACE Roadmap vary across different types of centers?

Aligned "5 to Drive" Key Areas: One Texas ACE Community. Additionally, topics in this section overlap with the Texas ACE Roadmap's Coaching to Quality section, which outlines the TEA process by which programs move beyond mere compliance to quality.

As part of the spring 2024 surveys and the subsequent winter 2024–25 interviews, site coordinators were asked about their sites' use of needs assessment to inform program offerings. Based on the survey responses, 85% of coordinators responded that their sites conducted some type of needs assessment, 53% reported assessments specific to their center and 32% reported needs assessment for their center was part of the schoolwide assessment. Two percent of coordinators reported their sites had not done a needs assessment, while 12%

of coordinators responded that they were not sure if a needs assessment had been conducted. See Exhibit 1.

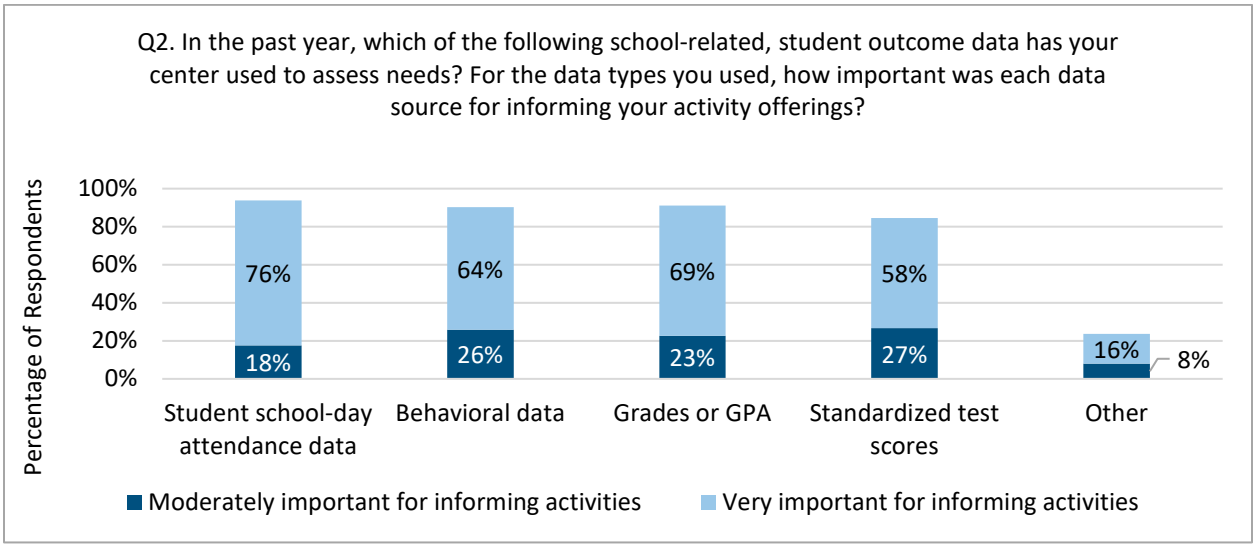
Exhibit 1. Needs Assessment at Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Programs



Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.
Note. N = 539.

Survey respondents were also asked about the types of data they have used in the past year to assess needs, regardless of whether the data were used in formal needs assessments. In terms of school-related data, school-day attendance was identified as the most important, with 76% of respondents reporting that school-day attendance was "very important for informing activities." Grades or grade point average data were next highest, with 69% reporting that these data were "very important," followed by behavioral data (64% indicating "very important"). See Exhibit 2. Note that site coordinators associated with grants held by school districts were more likely to respond that school-day attendance and test scores were "very important" than were coordinators with non-school-district grants (80% versus 69% for attendance, and 63% versus 49% for test scores, respectively) (statistically significant at $p < .05$ using a chi square test) (see Exhibit E2).

Exhibit 2. Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Use of Student School Outcome Data for Assessing Needs

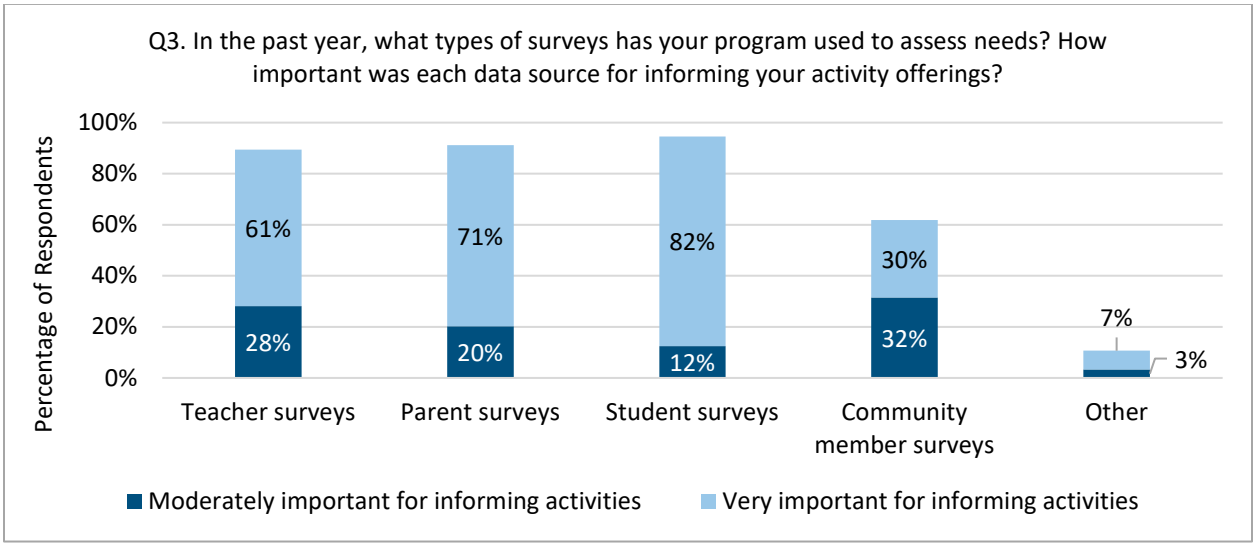


Source. Texas ACE site coordinator surveys administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.

Note. N for non "Other" data types ranged from 530 to 532; *N* for "Other" = 485.

In terms of survey use, student surveys were identified by nearly all site coordinator survey respondents as "very important for informing activities" (82%), while over two-thirds selected that parent surveys were "very important" (71%), and over half selected teacher surveys were "very important" (61%). See Exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3. Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Use of Surveys for Assessing Needs

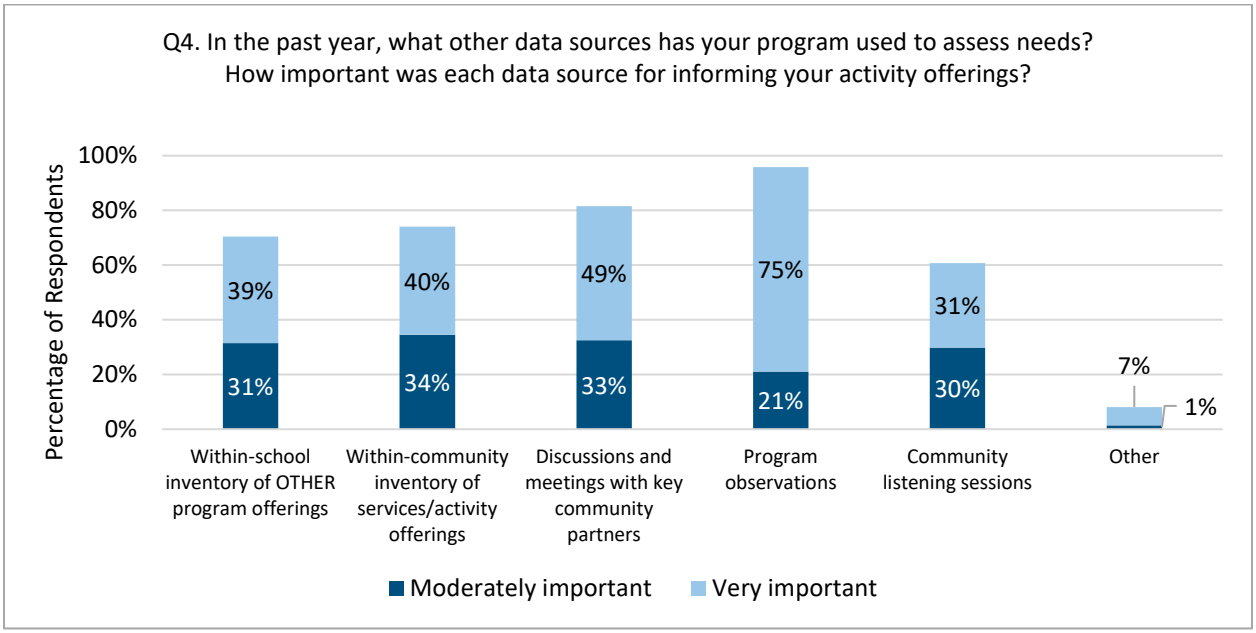


Source. Texas ACE site coordinator surveys administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.

Note. N for non "Other" surveys ranged from 529 to 530; *N* for "Other" = 488.

Finally, survey respondents were asked more broadly whether alternative program offerings, inventories of existing community services, partner meetings, observations, or listening sessions had been important for them in assessing needs. The highest proportion of "very important" responses was "program observations," with 75%. Other response options generally received a mix of "moderately important" and "very important" responses. See Exhibit 4.

Exhibit 4. Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Use of Other Data Sources for Assessing Needs



Source. Texas ACE site coordinator surveys administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.

Note. N for non "Other" data sources ranged from 526 to 528; *N* for "Other" = 492.

To gain further insight into needs assessment procedures, the site coordinator interviews included questions about the type of needs assessment conducted (formal vs. informal), who was involved in the needs assessment process, what the needs assessment process revealed, and how programming decisions were informed by the needs assessment results.

Formal and Informal Needs Assessment. Noting again that all 19 site coordinators selected for an interview were intentionally chosen to highlight best practices, all described using a variety of methods to assess community and student needs. Nearly all (18) said they conducted a formal needs assessment using structured surveys, focus groups, and school data to inform programming priorities. These site coordinators emphasized that formal assessments provided

a clear foundation for program planning and ensured alignment with school and district goals. These responses fit with the survey data shown in Exhibits 1–3.

> **"We have a formal needs assessment. We take data from their MAP Growth testing aside from STAAR [State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness], and so we monitor how the students do at the beginning, middle, and end of the year." – Site Coordinator, Middle School Site**

Additionally, 11 site coordinators said they relied on informal needs assessment methods, including direct conversations with students and families, staff observations, and ongoing feedback from teachers and school personnel. These informal approaches allowed coordinators to identify emerging needs quickly but lacked structured data collection. These responses fit with the survey data shown in Exhibit 4, though a smaller proportion of interviewees mentioned observations compared with survey respondents.[7]

> **"I would say just communication with the teachers would be a really informal way. We send out a finalized student list to all teachers and let them know to flag students struggling with behavior or academics so we can provide additional support." – Site Coordinator, Elementary Site**

Frequency of Needs Assessment. In terms of needs assessment frequency, 13 site coordinators said that they implemented an iterative needs assessment process, integrating multiple feedback loops through recurring staff meetings, quarterly reviews, or stakeholder consultations to refine programming and ensure responsiveness. Three additional site coordinators indicated needs assessment procedures that were less integrated but occurred at multiple points in the year. Only three site coordinators said they conducted their needs assessment as a one-time event during program initiation or on an annual basis, with the assessment serving as the primary tool for long-term planning.

> **"We review campus improvement plans, STAAR data, and instructional specialists' feedback to align monthly and weekly academic needs with our programming." – Site Coordinator, Elementary Site**

> **"We surveyed families when we started, but we haven't done much since then. We just adjust based on what we see day to day." – Site Coordinator, Middle School Site**

[7] This difference could be due to sample selection, respondent understanding of "observation" as used in the survey instrument, or recall limitations among interviewees.

Stakeholders Involved in Needs Assessment. Beyond the general type of needs assessment and frequency, the interviews included questions about the different types of stakeholders involved in needs assessment activities. Seventeen site coordinators said they engaged multiple stakeholders (notably parents, teachers, and students) in identifying and prioritizing program needs. Fourteen site coordinators mentioned involving school-day staff in needs assessment, including teachers, administrators, and school counselors. Collaborating with these groups, according to these site coordinators, enables stronger alignment of the program with school-day priorities and needs. Finally, nine site coordinators mentioned that they intentionally incorporate student voice in programming decisions, with students actively shaping extracurricular offerings, though student participation in broader strategic planning remained limited. Regardless of the specific stakeholders involved, however, 17 site coordinators said that stakeholder collaboration in needs assessment is a key factor in successful strategic planning.

Tailoring Needs Assessment for Stakeholder Engagement

Depending on the specific community being served by the Texas ACE program, the needs assessment process may need to be adapted. Two site coordinators who were interviewed said they have adopted needs assessment strategies that ensure that non-English-speaking families and underrepresented groups could meaningfully participate in needs assessments—notably through bilingual surveys, multilingual focus groups, or other forms of tailored outreach.

> **"I have a really good school admin, really good. Whatever I've needed, they've supported. They've allowed me into meetings that were to discuss students. We have what we call a child study team here, which is made up of administrators, teachers, and they bring a list of students to that table and say, 'This student is having issues. What can we do to support this student and be successful?' And I'm invited to that meeting. I'm part of that team." – Site Coordinator, Elementary Site**

> **"I know as far as who's involved in the needs assessment, it's really the entire school. We meet with the counselors. We meet with staff daily. We meet with lunch [staff]. We meet with pretty much almost everybody who's on campus."**
> **– Site Coordinator, Grade 6 Site**

As indicated by the survey and interview findings outlined so far, stakeholder involvement in the needs assessment process often involves, at minimum, completion of surveys and regular communication with school-day staff. Beyond this, however, 15 site coordinators said they have defined stakeholder roles in program development, with some relying on structured advisory boards or steering committees for guidance while others gathered feedback through informal consultation. (More on the topic of steering committees will be provided in the next

subsection.) Six site coordinators said that they partnered with external organizations for program planning, including local businesses, nonprofits, and community leaders, though this collaboration appears to primarily involve expanding program capabilities—such as resources and services—and providing additional enrichment opportunities, career exposure, and family engagement initiatives that strengthened community ties. Note that student stakeholder involvement also seemed broadly limited to input concerning activity offerings (e.g., based on interest) rather than strategic planning, though some site coordinators did mention inclusion of students in their steering committees.

Identified Needs and Use of Results. Regardless of exact needs assessment procedures and stakeholders involved, site coordinators who were interviewed were asked about the results of their needs assessments, and how they used those results. In general terms, all 19 site coordinators said that their programs assessed and responded to a broad range of student and community needs, which shaped their programming priorities and resource allocation. Seventeen site coordinators further explained that needs assessment findings directly shaped program modifications, helping them identify gaps, adjust strategies, and align services with evolving student and community needs.

More specifically, 15 site coordinators identified academic improvement as a primary need, implementing tutoring, mentoring, and college and career readiness initiatives to address gaps in student learning. Some of these site coordinators emphasized the importance of structured academic interventions, particularly for students performing below grade level. Additionally, 13 site coordinators identified needs associated with social-emotional development, with the result that they integrated life skills, character education, and social-emotional learning (SEL) into their programming. SEL was often prioritized for middle and high school students to support their ability to manage stress and engage positively with peers.

> **"And then for SEL, we've incorporated a lot of our SEL activities with the kids to get them more able to talk about their feelings and just different things like that. We've started journals with the kids. If they're having a bad day or whatever, we have a journal that the kids will write in if they necessarily don't want to talk about it."**
> **– Site Coordinator, Grade 6 Site**

Thirteen site coordinators also said that they identified family and community needs, offering services such as adult education, financial literacy, and workforce development. These programs sought to engage families beyond their child's participation in afterschool activities. Eight site coordinators said that they saw a need for broader student assistance beyond the school day, relating to challenges such as food security, transportation, and access to safe spaces. Only some programs addressed these challenges through direct 21st CCLC services, however.

"So we partner with this company called […] and it'll teach parents how to manage their finances or how to handle child behavioral issues."
– Site Coordinator, Middle–High School Site

"The lack of the kids having no food at home, because I've heard so many of our kids say, 'Miss, we don't have any food. We always getting chips or something like that.' You have a box meal for that day, depending on if you came. Or if you're in another club within our 21st Century program, you get a box lunch to take home. And some of our kids are able to take additional plates home for their mom, their sisters or grandparents or whoever's there." – Site Coordinator, Elementary–Middle Site

"We started a Junior Medical Academy after noticing a lot of students were taking care of younger siblings or grandparents. The academy teaches first aid, how to stay calm in emergencies, and introduces students to medical careers. We brought in EMS [Emergency Medical Services] and local health professionals to train them."
– Site Coordinator, Middle School Site

Along these lines, many of the site coordinators said that they identified more needs than their program could meet, forcing them to prioritize. Twelve site coordinators said that they prioritized specific needs based on resource limitations, focusing on academic interventions rather than extracurricular enrichment.

The Role of Trust in Needs Assessment

Four site coordinators emphasized that direct engagement, transparency, and proactive outreach to school officials, community members, and parents help establish and maintain trust. According to these site coordinators, programs that actively involve parents, encourage open discussions, and maintain a visible presence in school and community activities have stronger relationships with families. This generally aids the flow of communication, including information about needs. Two site coordinators noted that staffing consistency helps build this kind of trust.

"We realized a lot of kids needed extra math and reading support, so we adjusted our program. We meet with counselors to go through student data and match students to tutors. It's not just about fun activities, it's about making sure they are ready for the next grade." – Site Coordinator, High School Site

Five site coordinators also said that their Texas ACE programs adjusted services in response to emerging needs such as increased demand for technology access or mental health resources.

Steering Committee

This section addresses RQs 2.1 and 2.2: How are Texas ACE centers approaching the adoption of practices and approaches that reflect quality components detailed in the Texas ACE Roadmap? How does adoption of key practices and approaches related to the quality components detailed in the Texas ACE Roadmap vary across different types of centers?

Aligned "5 to Drive" Key Area: One Texas ACE Community. Additionally, topics in this section overlap with the Texas ACE Roadmap's Coaching to Quality section, which outlines the TEA process by which programs move beyond mere compliance to quality.

Each Texas ACE program is required to have a steering committee. The steering committee, which generally includes a variety of Texas ACE program stakeholders, helps in program planning and program improvement efforts. This can look very different program to program, so the survey and the interview protocols included questions to explore steering committee variation. These included basic questions on committee membership, how members are selected, what roles the committee plays, and how often they meet.

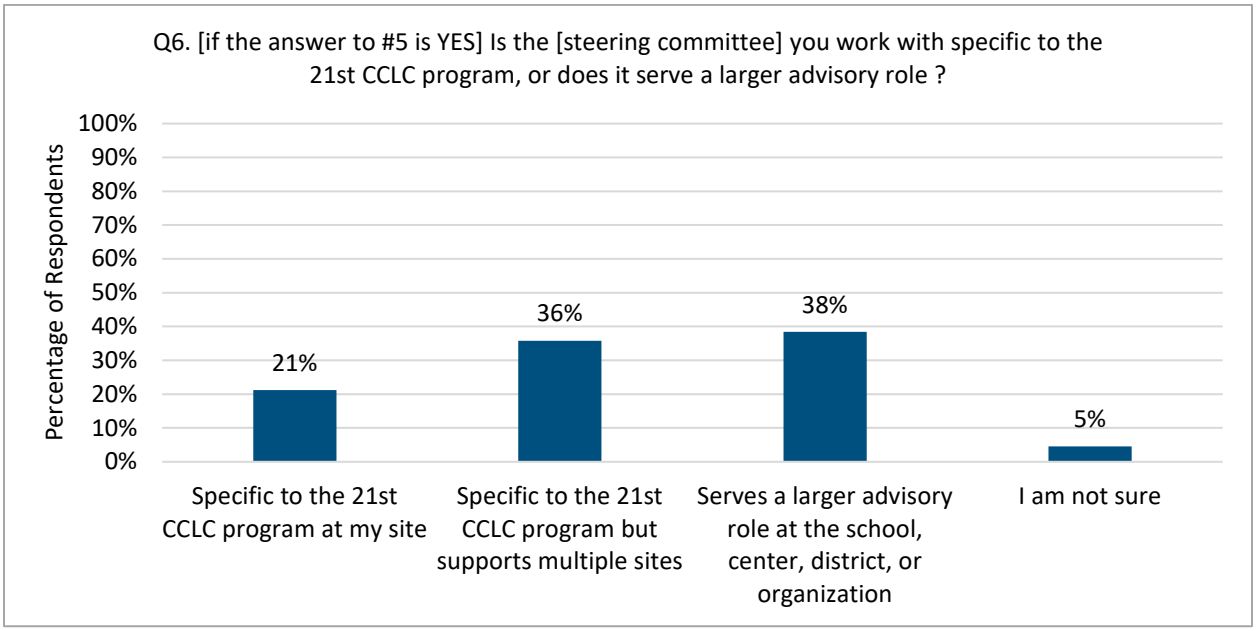
Note that survey questions relating to the steering committee used the terminology "advisory committee, group, or council." The Texas ACE Roadmap standardized committee references to "steering committee," however, so survey references to advisory committees, groups, or councils have been standardized to "steering committee." The survey shown in the appendix preserves the original question terminology.

Steering Committee Existence and High-Level Structure. The site coordinator surveys first asked respondents to indicate whether they have a steering committee. This question was asked because some site coordinators may not be aware of the steering committee (for example, if the committee works mostly with grant-level staff rather than center-level staff), or the grantee may not have been able to establish a steering committee by the time of the survey (presumably more likely for Cycle 12 programs who were just getting started at the time of data collection). A total of 527 responses were provided to this question, with 64% of site coordinators selecting "yes." Twenty percent selected that they were "not sure" whether they had a steering committee, and 16% selected "no." It bears mentioning that Cycle 12 respondents were indeed more likely to select "no" in response to this question, 20% compared with 13% (with nearly equal percentages of "I don't know" for both cycles), but this result was not statistically significant (p = .053, chi square test).

For the 64% of survey respondents who said their program had a steering committee, the survey went on to ask whether the committee was specific to the Texas ACE program at their site, specific to the Texas ACE program but serving multiple sites, or a more general committee serving a larger advisory role. About 57% indicated that the steering committee was specific to the Texas ACE program (that is, whether to the site in particular or to multiple sites), while a plurality indicated that the steering committee serves a larger role. See Exhibit 5.

In terms of statistically significant subgroup differences, school district grantees were more likely to select that the steering committee "serves a larger advisory role at the school, center, district, or organization" than were non-school-district grantees (44% versus 27%, respectively). Non-school-district grantees were more likely to indicate that the steering committee was specific to the site than were school-district grantees (31% versus 16%, respectively). This was the only significant subgroup difference observed. See Exhibit E9.

Exhibit 5. Program-Specific Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Steering Committee versus General Steering Committee



Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.

Note. N = 349. 21st CCLC = 21st Century Community Learning Centers. The original question language asked about "advisory committee, group, or council" instead of "steering committee."

To gain insight into steering committee structures, the interviews also covered questions about the ways in which steering committees are organized, focusing on program-level versus district-

level committee organization. At the time of the interviews, 18 of the 19 site coordinators reported having a steering committee. Of these:

- Six sites had both center-based and district-level steering committees, indicating a dual-layered advisory system that engages both site-specific and broader district stakeholders.
- Seven sites had district-based committees, where advisory structures were managed at the district level rather than at individual centers.
- Five sites had center-based committees, meaning all decision-making and engagement occurred at the site level.

How Is Steering Committee Structure Determined?

While the interviews did not include direct questions concerning the development and selection of a steering committee structure, patterns were evident from the interview responses. Centers located within larger school districts, multi-campus systems, or networks with centralized planning personnel appear more likely to adopt a district-based or dual steering committee structure (i.e., coordination of efforts between site-level and district-level groups). Site coordinators at these types of centers often referenced districtwide leadership roles, and shared both planning responsibilities and efforts to standardize engagement and resource allocation across campuses. In rural or less densely populated districts—especially those hosting a single Texas ACE site—site coordinators tended to describe school-based steering committees that focused on localized collaboration with principals, teachers, and community members. Site coordinators at these types of sites rarely referenced broader district governance structures.

In either case, steering committee structure did not always seem to be an intentional choice, but rather the outgrowth of preexisting conditions. Several site coordinators placed emphasis on relationships, routines, or roles rather than on structures, implying that committee structures developed from these relationships and ongoing operational norms rather than from intentional strategic selection. In other cases, continuity of staff or preexisting collaborations influenced how steering committee functions developed.

Of note, none of the coordinators who were interviewed mentioned TEA or grant requirements as influencing their committee structure. Similarly, no coordinator mentioned that their site looked at different steering committee models before making a decision.

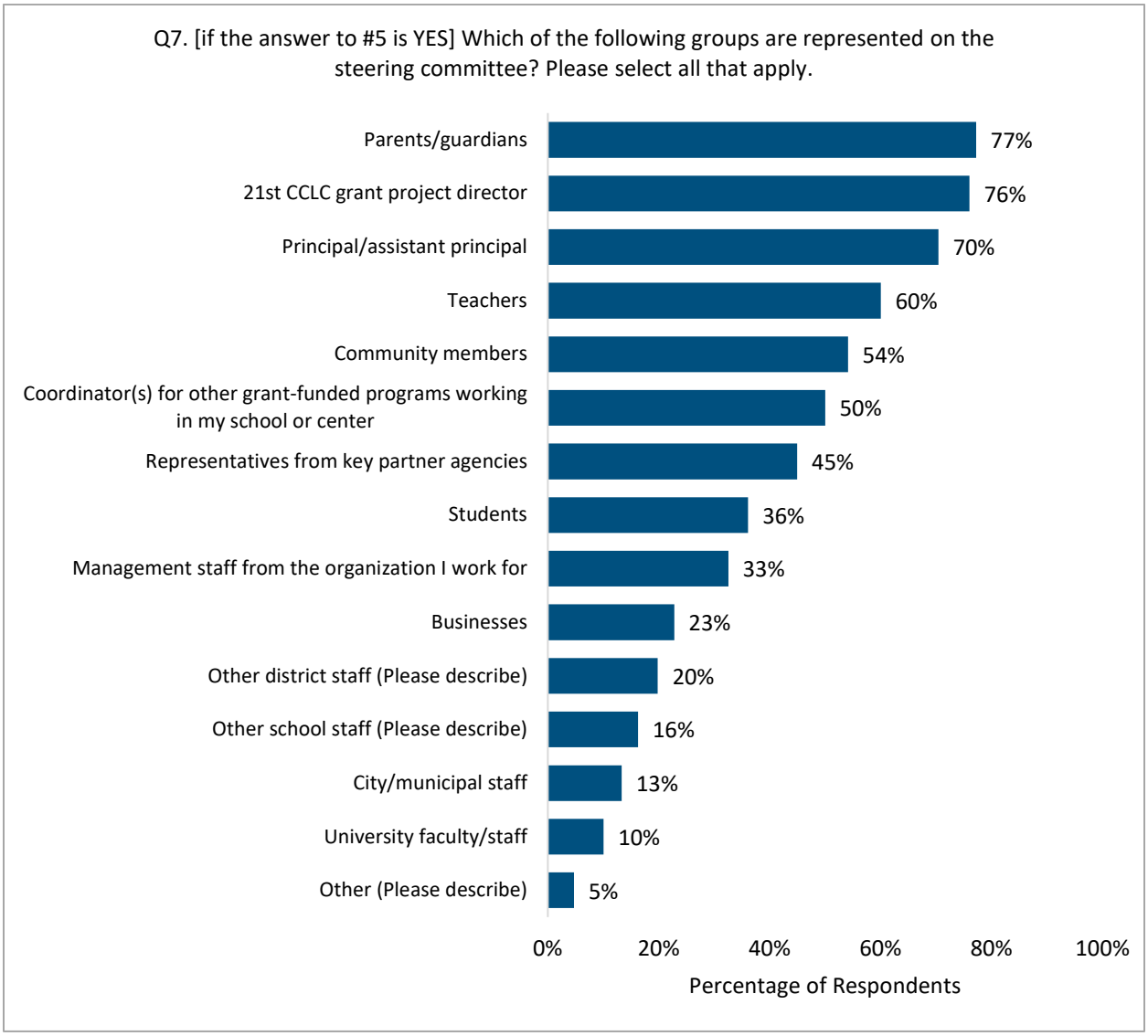
Ensuring steering committee organization variety was an important consideration for the interview sample, so this is not a random selection from surveyed site coordinators. Also note that the one site coordinator who reported not having a steering committee said the site was still developing a steering committee, and it was facing challenges with respect to parent participation because of time constraints.

Steering Committee Membership. For those survey respondents indicating that their program has a steering committee, the survey continued to ask about the types of groups represented

on the committee. The most common response was “parents/guardians” (77%), followed closely by “21st CCLC grant project director” (76%) and “principal/assistant principal” (70%). About 60% of respondents also answered that “teachers” were represented on the steering committee. See Exhibit 6.

In terms of subgroup differences, city-based site coordinators were significantly less likely to indicate that “parents/guardians” were represented on the steering committee (66%) than were suburban, town, or rural site coordinators (83%, 81%, and 81%, respectively). Site coordinators from elementary-only sites were less likely to indicate that “teachers” are represented in steering committees than were site coordinators from other programs (55% compared with 67%, respectively). Additional statistically significant subgroup differences are presented in Appendix E (Exhibits E10 to E13).

Exhibit 6. Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Steering Committee Representation



Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.

Note. N = 338. The original question language asked about "advisory committee, group, or council" instead of "steering committee."

The findings associated with Exhibit 6 naturally raise a question concerning how steering committee members are selected. While this was not an explicit topic during the interviews, the survey included an open-ended item asking about this. A total of 271 responses were received (although many were "I'm not sure" or similar). In high-level terms, over a quarter of these responses (26%) indicated that steering committee members are "selected" in some fashion, whether by the grant director, school administrators, or district staff. Conversely, about 14% of the responses indicated that steering committee members "volunteer," with

statements similar to "all are welcome." A small percentage of responses mentioned using surveys to help identify steering committee members (about 3%).

The quotes in the text box that follows convey the broad range of approaches used to form steering committees, noting that clear quotes with rich detail were given priority over terse or unclear responses.

Selection of Steering Committee Members: Examples from the Site Coordinator Surveys

"A survey is provided to parents and staff based on interest, as well as inclusion of our school-wide leadership team and other organizations within the school. Considering all of us interact with the community, parents, and student[s] at various capacities, all opinions and insight are valued." – Site Coordinator

"Administration helps us to figure out who would have good feedback. We choose students based on who actually attends our program. We try to use teachers that both work for ACE and then others that are not [a] part of our program in order to get unbiased feedback. We really just look for people from very different groups so we can get a wide variety of information." – Site Coordinator

"The teachers are elected and served for 2 years. The PTA [Parent Teacher Association] president, the principal, and the parent liaison are automatically on the committee. We also select parents that volunteer for various events, as well as a representative from our community sponsor." – Site Coordinator

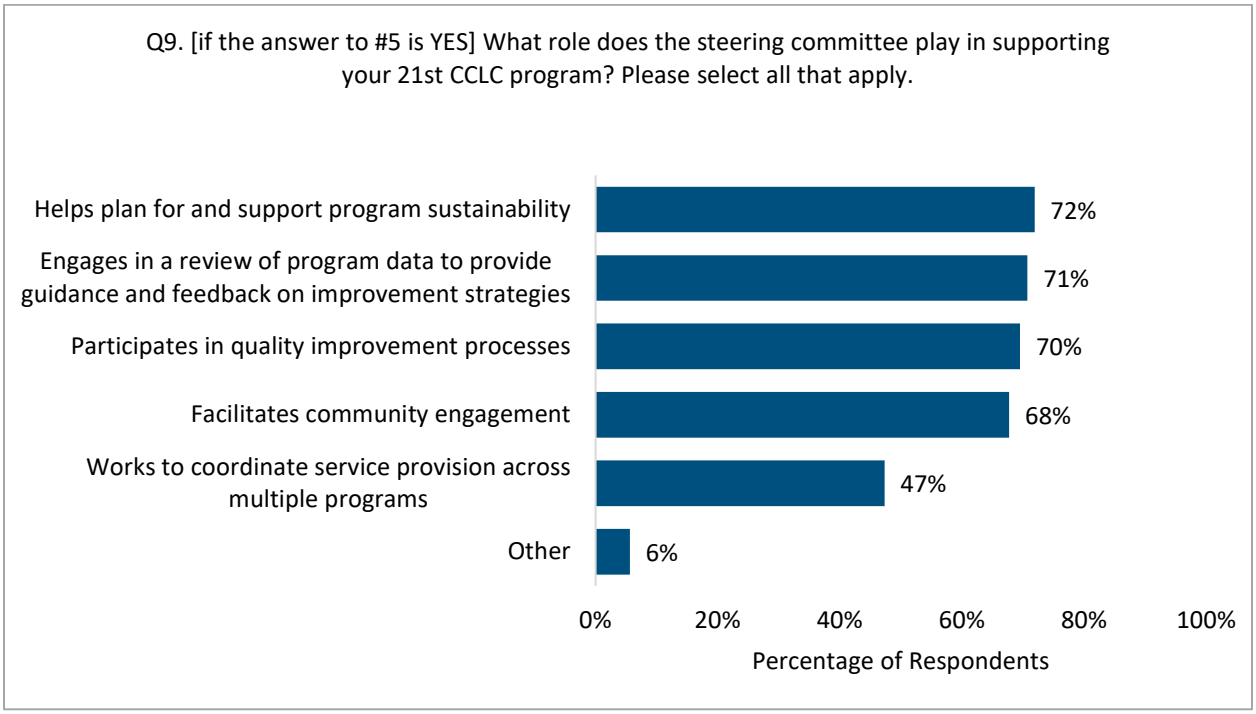
"The ISD [Independent School District] Principal, ISD Superintendent, 21st CCLC Director, Site Director, Teacher, Parent, Family Engagement Specialist, and a Student. The Site Director and Family Engangemen[t] Specialist choose a parent and student to represent the council and ask one of [our] teachers that tutor to represent the program." – Site Coordinator

Steering Committee Functions. A basic question about steering committees concerns their function: What exactly do they do? The survey included a question about this, with follow-up questions asked in the interviews.

In terms of the survey results, 72% of respondents who indicated they had a steering committee endorsed a checkbox stating that the committee "helps plan for and support program sustainability." This was closely followed by "engages in a review of program data to provide guidance and feedback on improvement strategies" (71%) and "participates in quality improvement processes" (70%). See Exhibit 7. Only one subgroup comparison yielded a statistically significant result: Site coordinators associated with non-school district grants were less likely to say that their steering committee "works to coordinate service provision across multiple programs" than were coordinators associated with school district grants (40%

compared with 52%, respectively) (see Exhibit E14). This makes sense given the more comprehensive view school districts tend to have when it comes to school programs.

Exhibit 7. Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Steering Committee Roles



Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.
Note. N = 338. The original question language asked about "advisory committee, group, or council" instead of "steering committee."

During the interviews, site coordinators were further asked about steering committee function in terms of their general influence over programming and their specific areas of work. With respect to general influence, site coordinators who were interviewed indicated four distinct levels, clearly suggesting different tiers of involvement and oversight, progressing from minimal and tangential involvement to integrated strategic planning:

- Three site coordinators noted having limited ***informational*** committees, in which members received updates but did not contribute to program decisions. For example, one site coordinator said, "They're getting more information on what's going on in our program and our current data ... but they are not involved in decision-making." Another said, "We give them updates, but they don't have a role in setting policies or making decisions."

- Four sites had ***consultative*** committees, in which members provided input but had no decision-making power. For example, one site coordinator said, "Parents and stakeholders give input, but we make final decisions internally."
- Nine sites had ***collaborative*** committees, in which members actively participated in co-decision-making regarding programming and operations. For example, one site coordinator said, "We meet weekly to present updates, discuss challenges, and seek input on new initiatives."
- One site had a ***strategic*** committee that played a direct role in goal setting, sustainability planning, and funding decisions. For example, the site coordinator said, "Our committee engages with district and community stakeholders to ensure the program's long-term success." Another said that their committee review "grant goals, program needs, and funding sources at the start of each year."

In terms of steering committee function, 18 of the 19 interviewed site coordinators said they had steering committees that addressed up to six different types of work. These are presented in Exhibit 8.

Exhibit 8. Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Site Coordinator Descriptions of Steering Committee Work

Program Offerings. Thirteen site coordinators said that their steering committees help shape the range of academic, recreational, and cultural programming by determining available services, recommending new programs, refining existing offerings, and ensuring alignment with student interests and needs.

> "We ask our advisory board to suggest ideas or connect us with people who can offer new programs." – Site Coordinator, High School Site
>
> "My students are the biggest advocates of this program. They push for what they want, whether it's civic engagement events or culinary arts classes."
> – Site Coordinator, High School Site

Operating Procedures. Seven site coordinators said that their steering committees participate in discussions on attendance policies, behavior expectations, and logistical operations, focusing on ensuring consistency in attendance tracking, refining program policies, and improving daily site operations.

> "We go over safety drills, parent contracts, and reporting procedures to make sure everything is aligned across sites." – Site Coordinator, Elementary–Middle Site

Quality Improvement. Ten site coordinators said that their steering committees play a role in identifying areas for improvement and recommending program enhancements, notably by reviewing student participation patterns, gathering stakeholder feedback, and suggesting refinements to program structure and delivery.

> "Parents and students tell us what's working and what's not. If something needs to be changed, we act on it." – Site Coordinator, Elementary Site
>
> "We use feedback surveys after every event to see what we can improve."
> – Site Coordinator, Middle–High School Site

Review of Program Data. Related to quality improvement, 12 site coordinators said that their steering committees participate in discussions on program data, focusing on attendance trends and participation levels rather than academic performance, using engagement metrics to inform program adjustments.

> "We have meetings every other Thursday, and we do look at attendance numbers as part of our discussions on what's working and what needs improvement." – Site Coordinator, Middle School Site

Community Partnerships. Seven site coordinators said that their steering committees contribute to establishing and strengthening external partnerships, focusing on identifying community partners, leveraging external resources, and aligning partnerships with program goals to enhance available student opportunities.

> "We rely on our advisory board to introduce us to community partners who can bring resources to our students." – Site Coordinator, Elementary Site

> "They help us identify businesses and organizations willing to support student programming." – Site Coordinator, Middle School Site

Sustainability and Funding. Five site coordinators said that their steering committees participate in discussions on sustainability and funding, focusing on identifying funding sources, assessing grant timelines, and addressing resource needs.

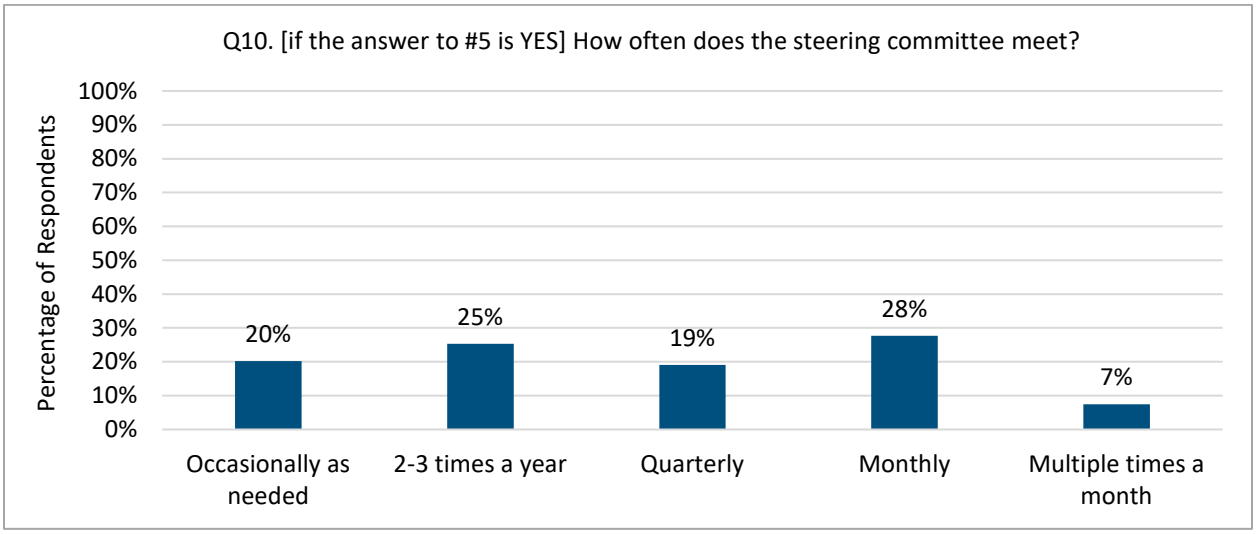
> "We openly discuss grant timelines and how we plan to secure funding for the future." – Site Coordinator, Elementary Site

> "Our committee is actively working on securing resources in case grant funding changes." – Site Coordinator, Grade 6 Site

Source. Texas ACE site coordinator interviews conducted by the American Institutes for Research during winter 2024–25.

***Steering Committee Meeting Frequency and Communication*.** Finally, site coordinators were asked on the survey to indicate how often their steering committees meet. The answers varied from "occasionally as needed" (20%) to "monthly" (28%). Only 7% said they met more than once a month. See Exhibit 9.

Exhibit 9. Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Steering Committee Meeting Frequency

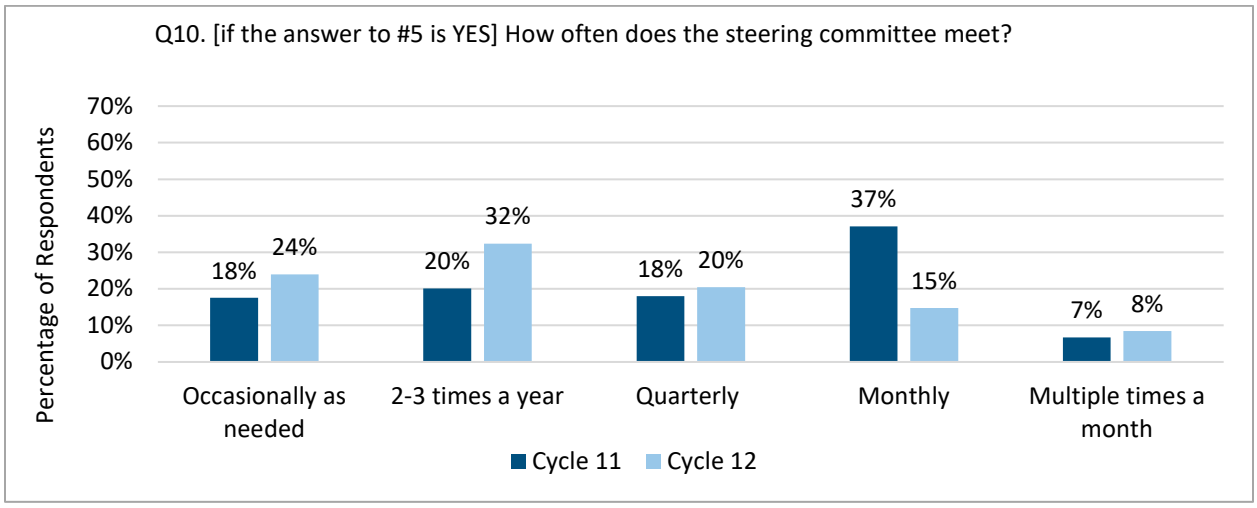


Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.

Note. N = 336. The original question language asked about "advisory committee, group, or council" instead of "steering committee."

Some subgroup differences were evident, notably for Cycle 11 and school district grant status. Cycle 11 site coordinators were much more likely to say their steering committees meet "monthly" (37%) than were Cycle 12 site coordinators (15%), with Cycle 12 site coordinators selecting options reflecting less frequent meetings. This could simply reflect Cycle 11's earlier award date, which would potentially allow for better steering committee organization. See Exhibit 10. Site coordinators associated with school districts were also more likely to report frequent steering committee meetings, as shown in Exhibit 11.

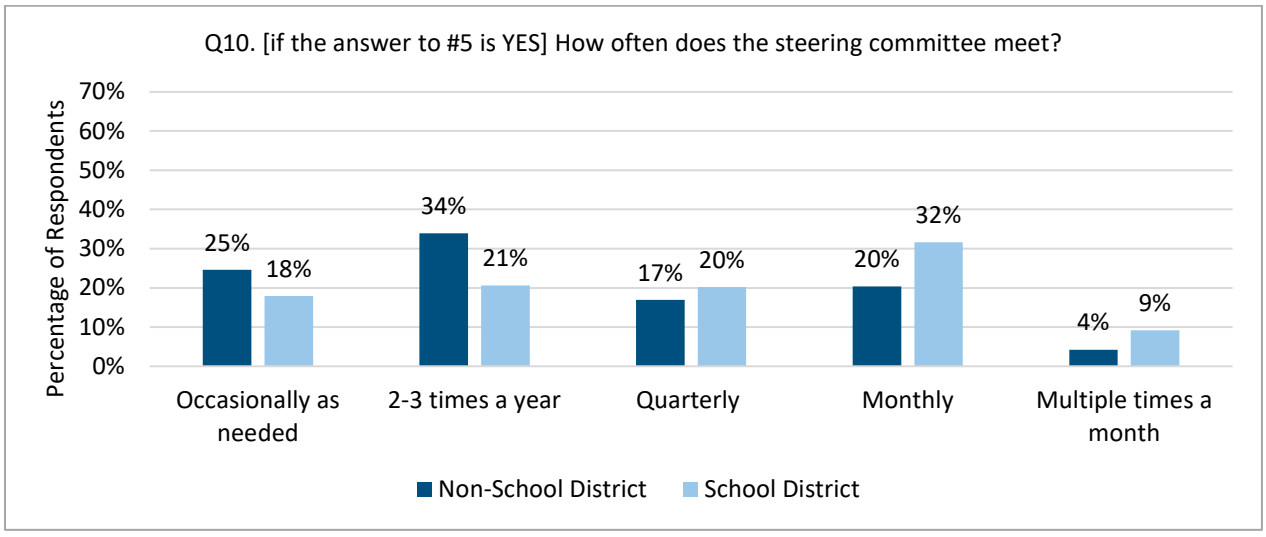
Exhibit 10. Texas Afterschool Centers on Education Steering Committee Meeting Frequency, By Cycle



Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.

Note. *N* for Cycle 11 = 194, *N* for Cycle 12 = 142. Subgroup differences statistically significant ($p < .05$) using chi square tests. The original question language asked about "advisory committee, group, or council" instead of "steering committee."

Exhibit 11. Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Steering Committee Meeting Frequency, by School District Status



Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.

Note. *N* for non-school district grants = 118, *N* for school-district grants = 218. Subgroup differences statistically significant ($p < .05$) using *chi* square tests. The original question language asked about "advisory committee, group, or council" instead of "steering committee."

During the interviews, site coordinators were asked whether they meet regularly with their steering committees, and how they tend to communicate with the steering committees. A plurality of interviewees (nine) said they do hold planned, regular meetings with their steering committees (though "regular" spanned weekly, biweekly, monthly, or quarterly). Eight more site coordinators said they also hold regular meetings and also quick Zoom calls, or conduct informal updates between meetings. In terms of communication approaches, seven site coordinators indicated that they rely on a mixed communication strategy using multiple communication modes (e.g., email, phone calls, texting, virtual meetings). This was the most common type of response. Two site coordinators said they primarily rely on phone calls, while three more indicated text messaging was their primary strategy.

> **"We talk weekly, and in some cases daily, because, again, my teachers, they are the after-school staff, and so we're meeting after school. A lot of times, before they leave, we may have a quick meeting. I may say, 'Hey, can we, guys, get together real quick, pull up everybody else on Zoom?'" – Site Coordinator, Middle School Site**

> **"We meet monthly. And that feels like a good cadence, frequent enough. … And then if there is something pressing via text, we'll text. But I feel like that once a month is really good because we are getting to the grit and bone of things."**
> **– Site Coordinator, High School Site**

Community, Family, and Youth Engagement

This section addresses RQs 2.1 and 2.2: How are Texas ACE centers approaching the adoption of practices and approaches that reflect quality components detailed in the Texas ACE Roadmap? How does adoption of key practices and approaches related to the quality components detailed in the Texas ACE Roadmap vary across different types of centers?

Aligned "5 to Drive" Key Area: One Texas ACE Community; Three Key Strategies; Four Activity Types; Four Measurable Goals.

The Texas ACE Roadmap's "5 to Drive" "Four Activity Types" category highlight the importance of activities that increase involvement of parents and adult family members in Texas ACE programming. Aligned with this, the site coordinator survey and the interview protocols included questions concerning engagement, focusing especially on recruitment and engagement of parents or adult family members of participating students. This section presents findings related to those questions, with additional data concerning student involvement in program delivery.

Parent or Adult Family Member Recruitment. The site coordinator survey asked respondents to provide open-ended descriptions of the processes that their programs used to "support parent/adult family member recruitment and participation." A total of 523 responses were received, nearly all of which made reference to family events, general "family engagement" activities, parent nights, or similar events; the exceptions were responses that were extremely short or vague. About 13% of coordinators mentioned using flyers to communicate with families (to enhance engagement), while 14% mentioned using parent/adult family member surveys to gauge adult interest and need. A selection of quotes from the survey open-ended responses is provided in the text box that follows.

Parent Recruitment and Engagement: Examples from the Site Coordinator Surveys

"Based on needs assessment we provide training that are in need in our community. We also use Parents Voice and Choice, GED [General Education Development], Adult Literacy Program, The 3 C's, the Texas Department of Health Training, Cyber Bullying Training and Vaping Education for students and parents[8]." – Site Coordinator

"Every year, our program utilizes parent surveys. From this data, there is often a need expressed. We take this concern and create support resources to address it. These support measures can be family events, learning activities, or classes to address their needs. By doing so, family recruitment and participation increases and is often supported by the community." – Site Coordinator

"I haven't had much success getting parents to come to campus on my own. So, [to] participate in school-wide events, I email out flyers and information to parents, I try and collaborate with the PSS [Parent Self-Serve] on family events. I help recruit parents for the ACE ESL [English as a Second Language] class." – Site Coordinator

"Our afterschool program offers one family event each month. Our family events have varied throughout the school year, from Grandparents Day, gingerbread houses, family bingo night, [city] food bank, and yoga. Our variety in the events has allowed several family members to come out and join us at our events." – Site Coordinator

The site coordinator interviews also included questions about parent and adult family member recruitment and engagement. Twelve site coordinators who were interviewed highlighted the importance of parental involvement in planning activities, noting that involved parents were more likely to contribute ideas. Five site coordinators reported that after selecting activities that parents requested, they saw higher engagement. To involve parents in planning, some site coordinators said they relied on parent meetings (six site coordinators), meetings with their steering committee (six site coordinators), or parent surveys (four site coordinators).

[8] The 3 C's of Behavior Management are Connection, Communication, and Choices for Students with Complex Access Needs.

"Yeah, that's what I do during the PTO [Parent–Teacher Organization] meetings. I'll have a little segment where it's me coming in and saying, 'Hey, guys, what do you want things to look like this year?'"– Site Coordinator, Elementary–Middle Site

Twelve site coordinators said that offering dynamic activities increased adult family engagement. Dynamic activities ranged from cultural events to hands-on learning experiences that parents could enjoy alongside their children. (See text box.) Providing parents with ways to contribute, according to these site coordinators, helped to ensure that their involvement extends beyond attendance at events.

Dynamic Activities to Engage Adult Family Members

During the interviews, site coordinators gave examples of dynamic activities that were more likely to engage adults. These included:

- Culinary classes
- Holiday crafting
- Lego STEM night
- Civic engagement night
- Lifeguard certification
- Swimming time
- Career fairs
- Walking club
- Día de los Muertos night
- Painting nights
- Trick or Treat
- Mum night
- Grandparents Day

"We will have a night where parents can come up here to do the Lego robots with the kids. We celebrate Lights On for Afterschool that parents can come to that they really like." – Site Coordinator, Elementary–Middle Site

Seven site coordinators mentioned that flexible scheduling helps in recruiting and engaging adult family members, particularly for families with work or who have childcare constraints. Two site coordinators said that providing childcare and inviting all family members to events helped encourage more adults to participate, though this is likely not an option for some programs.

Communication and Feedback in Adult Engagement. Implicit in the foregoing discussion is the importance of communication and feedback for recruiting and engaging adult family members. In terms of communication specifically, site coordinators who were interviewed emphasized the importance of using multiple communication methods, with nine coordinators saying they use at least two types of methods to reach families. These included flyers, the Remind app, social media, phone calls (both English and Spanish), email, or in-person discussion (e.g., during drop-off or pick-up times). Notably, nine site coordinators said that personal invitations sent via email, phone call, or text were often most effective for increasing attendance. Five site coordinators said that communication via family-preferred modes was important, noting that this is especially true for bilingual families.

Acting on feedback from parents and adult family members can increase engagement. Fourteen site coordinators said they adjusted programming based on adult family member feedback, with the most common adjustments being event timing and workshops offered: Eight site coordinators said they changed event schedules (often to offer morning and evening options), and four said they introduced Science, Technology, Engineering Mathematics (STEM) nights or literacy workshops based on parent requests. Intuitively, adapting programming to the needs and interests of adult family members helps encourage (or enable) them to attend and participate.

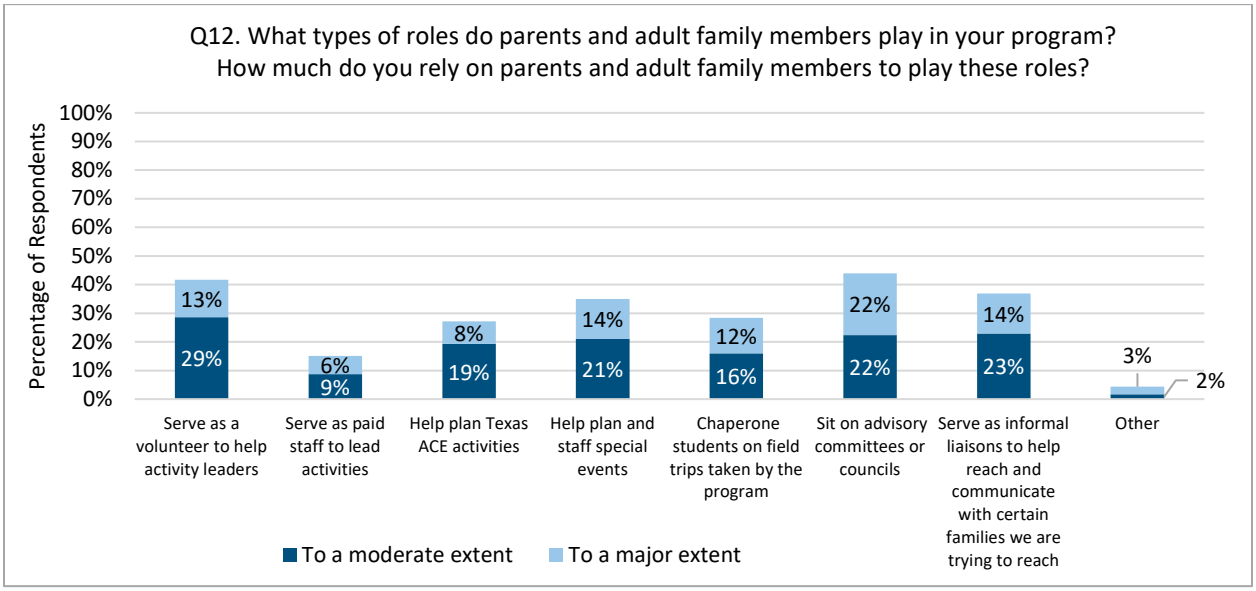
Engaging Parents through a Child Showcase

"I think parents, essentially they do want to hear these important topics, but obviously their priority is their child, so they want to see how they are in the data, how they're doing in the afterschool programs. They want to see these videos, they want to see these pictures. They love when we share pictures of what they're doing in the center."
– Site Coordinator, K–12 Site

Parent and Adult Family Member Roles in Texas ACE Programs. Beyond simple participation in Texas ACE activities, the Texas ACE Roadmap's "Four Activity Types" references offering "family engagement that empowers adult family members and connects them to the school community." The site coordinator survey therefore included questions designed to assess the extent to which adult family members have specific roles in programming. As shown in Exhibit 12, participation in steering committees ("advisory committees") was the most selected response (22% of respondents selected that adult family members participated in steering committees "to a major extent," and another 22% selected "to a moderate extent").[9] About 42% of respondents selected that they relied on parents or adult family members to serve as "a volunteer to help activity leaders" (13% "major" and 29% "moderate"), and about 37% selected that they relied on parents or adult family members to serve as "informal liaisons to help reach and communicate with certain families" (14% "major" and 23% "moderate"). Site coordinators also reported relying on parents or adult family members to "help plan and staff special events" at relatively high levels (14% "major" and 21% "moderate").

[9] As shown in Exhibit 6, 77% of survey respondents indicated that parents or adult family members participate in steering committees; however, that percentage is based on a denominator inclusive only of those respondents answering that they have a steering committee (i.e., who answered Question 5 "yes"). Comparing raw numbers, 261 respondents indicated that parents or adult family members were represented on their steering committees (represented in Exhibit 6), while 230 indicated that they relied on parents or adult family members as part of steering committees to a "moderate" or "major" extent (represented in Exhibit 12).

Exhibit 12. Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Parent Roles in Programming

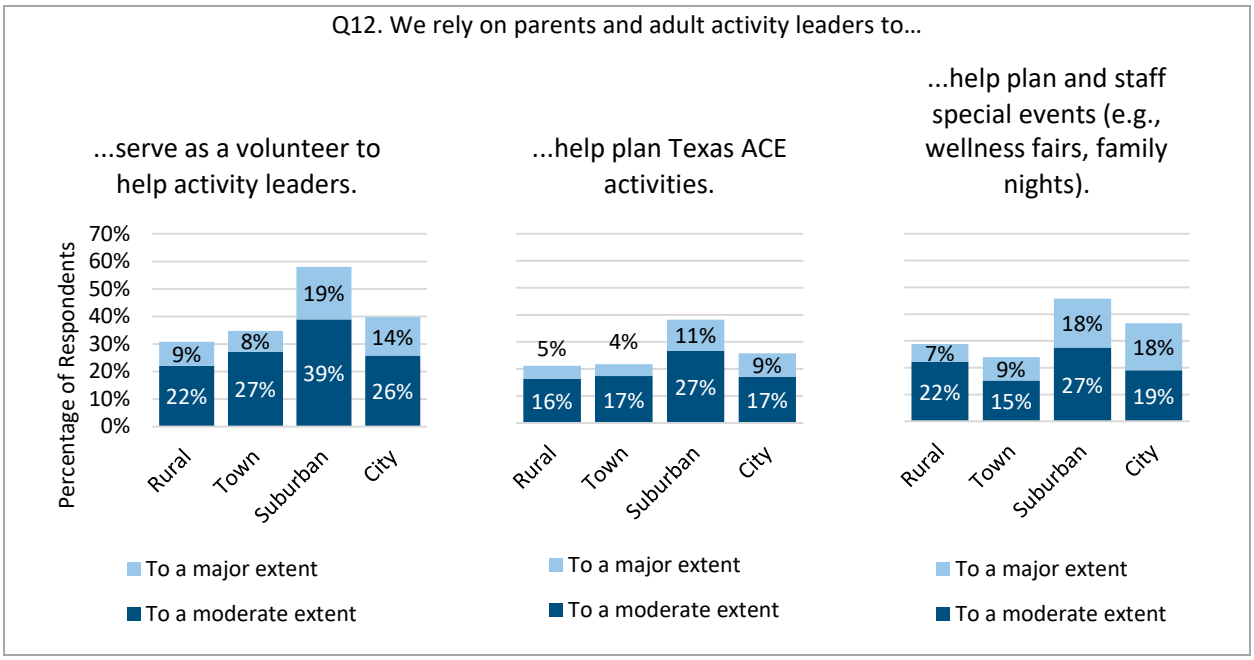


Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.

Note. N = 523 to 524.

In terms of subgroup differences, site coordinators associated with suburban programs responded somewhat differently compared with site coordinators from other locales, notably with respect to adult family members serving as volunteers to help activity leaders plan activities and/or staff special events. In each case, site coordinators from suburban programs were more likely to respond that they relied on adults to a "major" or "moderate" extent than were site coordinators from other programs (by 9-18% overall), though site coordinators from city-based programs showed more similarity of response patterns than did rural or town-based coordinators. See Exhibit 13.

Exhibit 13. Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Parent Roles in Programming, by Locale



Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.

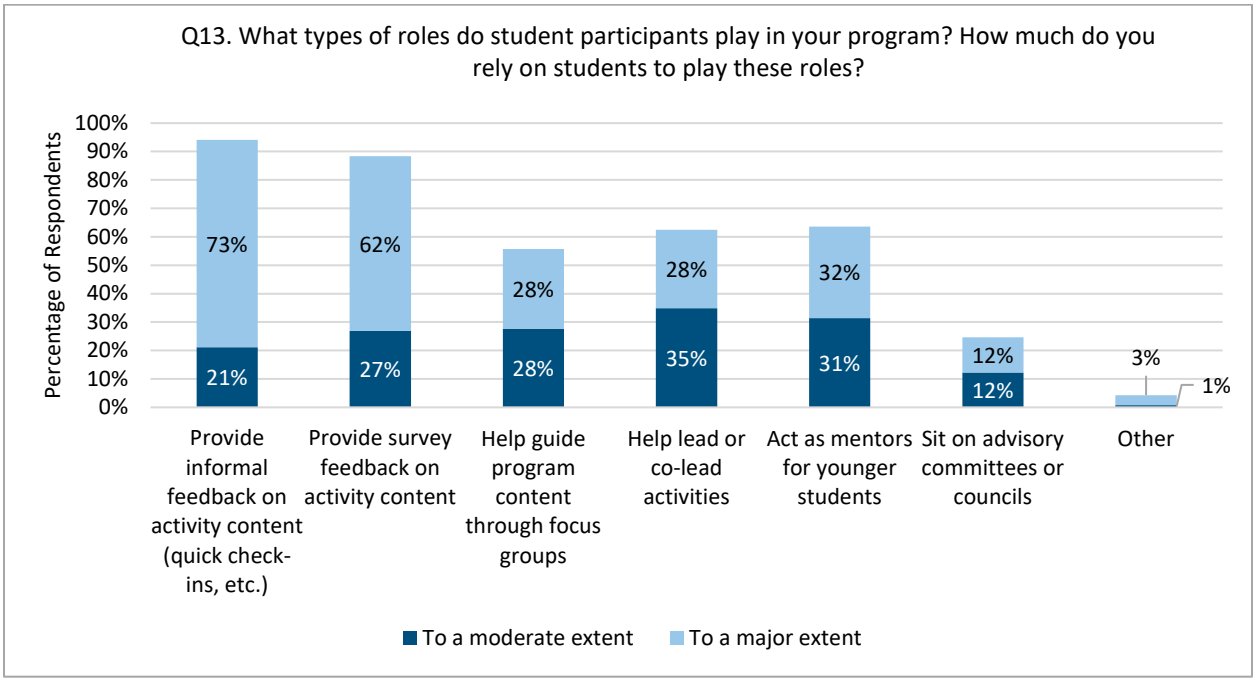
Note. For all three charts, *N* = 104 for rural, *N* = 92 for town, *N* = 131 for suburban, and *N* = 194 for city. Subgroup differences statistically significant ($p < .05$) using chi square test.

Student Roles in Texas ACE Programming. Finally, the survey included a similar question concerning the roles of students in Texas ACE programming. As with the question concerning adult family member roles, this question asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they rely on students for specific roles within the program. As shown in Exhibit 14, the response receiving the most replies was to "provide informal feedback on activity content" (73% selecting "to a major extent," and 21% selecting "to a moderate extent"), while the response receiving the second-most replies was to "provide survey feedback on activity content" (62% selecting "to a major extent," and 27% selecting "to a moderate extent"). This is consistent with the interview findings.

There were statistically significant subgroup differences as well (shown in Exhibits E19 to E24 in Appendix E), notably for responses associated with non-elementary-only compared with elementary-only programs. Non-elementary-only site coordinators were more likely to indicate that they rely on students to "help lead or co-lead activities" (71% "major extent" and "moderate extent" combined) compared with elementary-only site coordinators (58% "major extent" and "moderate extent" combined), and non-elementary-only coordinators were also more likely to indicate that they rely on students to "sit on advisory committees or councils" (31% "major extent" and "moderate extent" combined, compared with 21% "major extent" and

"moderate extent" combined for elementary-only site coordinators). Neither of these differences is unexpected, however, given that it is presumably easier for programs to involve older youth in leadership and advisory roles.

Exhibit 14. Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Student Roles in Programming



Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.
Note. N = 487 to 525.

Beyond adult family member and student engagement, engaging with the community at large is also important. While community engagement was not addressed as comprehensively as was the topic of family adult engagement—either by the survey or in the interviews—partnerships are a key component of such outreach, and were addressed in a series of questions on both the survey and the interview protocol. The topic of partnerships is therefore explored in the next subsection.

Partnerships

This section addresses RQs 2.1 and 2.2: How are Texas ACE centers approaching the adoption of practices and approaches that reflect quality components detailed in the Texas ACE Roadmap? How does adoption of key practices and approaches related to the quality components detailed in the Texas ACE Roadmap vary across different types of centers?

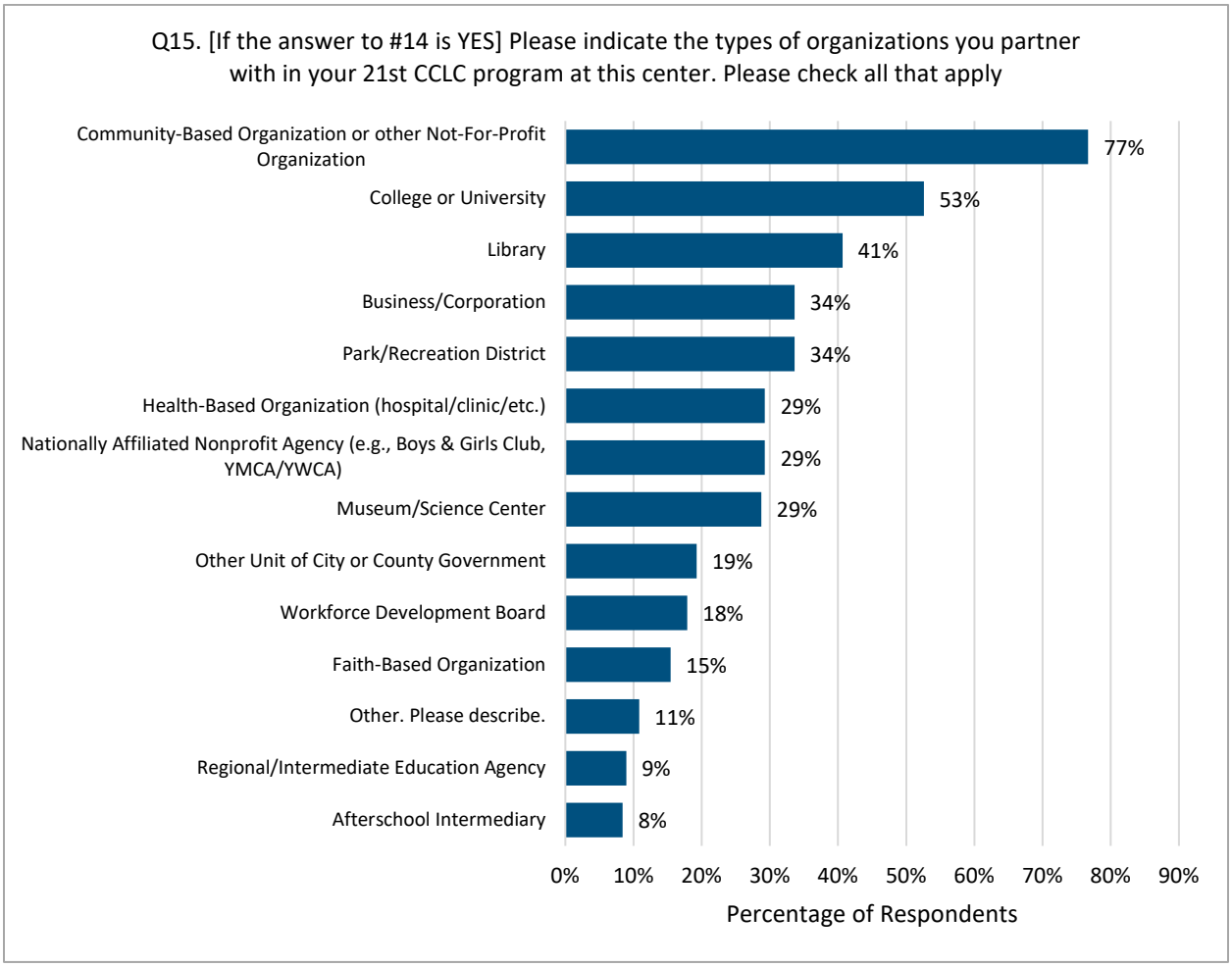
Aligned "5 to Drive" Key Areas: One Texas ACE Community; Three Key Strategies. Four Activity Types and Five Measureable Goals are also affected via partnerships.

The Texas ACE Roadmap's "5 to Drive" begins with "One Texas ACE Community," which emphasizes meaningful engagement with "a variety of stakeholders to build a strong Texas ACE community." Involving the community through partnerships is also one of the "Three Key Strategies." Given this, both the survey and the interview protocol included questions concerning Texas ACE program partnerships.

To begin, the survey asked site coordinators whether they work with any partners to support the 21st CCLC program. Note that the question specifically asked them not to consider the school or school district as a partner when answering. In response to this question, 70% of site coordinators answered "yes," while 30% answered "no." Cycle 11 site coordinators were more likely to select "yes" than were Cycle 12 site coordinators (74% compared with 66%, respectively), though this stands to reason given the longer time that Cycle 11 programs had to find partners before taking the survey. Site coordinators associated with school district grants were also more likely to answer "yes" than were site coordinators associated with non-school district grants (75% compared with 61%, respectively).

Types of Partners and their Contributions. For those respondents answering that they do work with partners, the survey continued to ask about the types of partners they work with. Respondents were presented with a checklist of partner types, and were instructed to select all that apply. As shown in Exhibit 15, the most commonly selected partner type was "community-based organization or other not-for-profit organization" (77%). This was followed by "college or university" (53%) and "library" (41%).

Exhibit 15. Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Partner Types



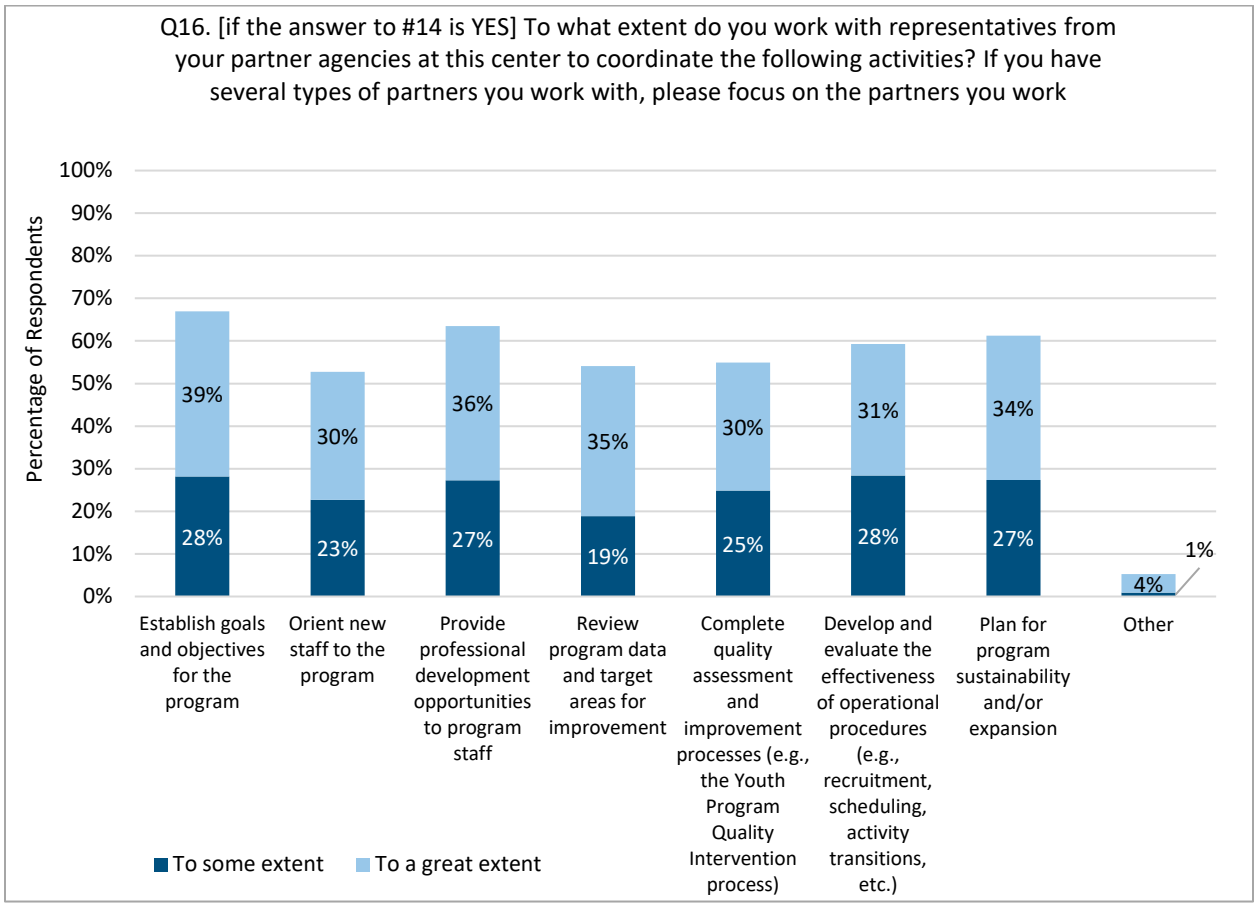
Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.
Note. N = 369.

In terms of subgroup differences, there were multiple statistically significant differences observed, but most are unsurprising given the grade ranges they serve. For example, elementary-only site coordinators were more likely than other site coordinators to respond that they partnered with museums or science centers (32% compared with 21%, respectively), and less likely to say they partnered with workforce development boards (13% compared with 26%, respectively). Cycle 11 site coordinators were more likely than Cycle 12 coordinators to respond that they partnered with faith-based organizations (19% compared with 10%, respectively). Additional subgroup differences are presented in Appendix E (Exhibits E27 to E30).

For respondents indicating that they had partners, the survey also asked how those partners are working with the Texas ACE program. Respondents were presented with a series of possible

services or contributions and asked to indicate the extent to which they work with partner agencies to do those things. Responses of "to some extent" and "to a great extent" were most common for "establish goals and objectives for the program" (67% combined), "provide professional development opportunities to program staff" (63% combined), and "plan for program sustainability and/or expansion" (61% combined). See Exhibit 16.

Exhibit 16. Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Coordination of Activities with Partners



Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.
Note. N = 369.

There were several statistically significant subgroup differences observed in terms of coordination of activities with partners, but most were differences in the allotment of "to some extent" and "to a great extent," with the sum proportion of answers in these two categories being nearly equal. An exception to this were responses for "plan for program sustainability and/or expansion" when viewed by school district grant status. Site coordinators associated with non-school district grants were more likely to select "to some extent" than were site

coordinators associated with school-district grants (40% compared with 21%, respectively), and only slightly less likely to select "to a great extent" (31% compared with 35%, respectively). This suggests that non-school district grantees are, on the whole, modestly more likely to work with partners to plan for program sustainability than are school-district grantees. Additional subgroup differences are presented in Appendix E (Exhibits E31 to E34).

Site coordinators who were interviewed were also asked about the types of partnerships they have, and how those partners work with them. In general, the partnerships were in line with the survey results (as shown in Exhibit 15). For example, fifteen site coordinators said they work with nonprofits or community-based organizations, typically to expand program offerings or secure resources, while seven site coordinators mentioned partnering with local businesses that tend to contribute financial support, services, or in-kind materials. Five site coordinators said they work with religious institutions or faith-based organizations to secure services, donations, or to expand community engagement opportunities, while four coordinators said they work with medical or mental health institutions such as hospitals, clinics, or wellness organizations. However, interviewed site coordinators seem to rely more on partnerships with government agencies than do Texas ACE programs generally, with a little under half of interviewees (eight of 19) saying they partner with a government agency—federal, state, or local—to access funding or to obtain policy guidance, compared with 19% of site coordinators saying they partner with government entities per the site coordinator survey. Note that eight site coordinators also said they coordinate with their school districts to align program goals, access facilities, or receive administrative support.

Formal or Informal Partnerships?

Of the 19 site coordinators interviewed, all reported working with partners. However, 15 reported having *formal* agreements (i.e., agreements that outline scope, terms, and expectations), and the remaining four site coordinators said they engage in more informal or ad hoc partnerships. Formal agreements commonly included Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), provisions for free resources and services, and recurring funding or in-kind support. These types of partnerships seem to be established with local universities, businesses, religious or faith-based groups, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations, demonstrating a broad network of structured collaboration to enhance program offerings. The informal or ad hoc partnerships are primarily needs-driven and provide short-term resources, often emerging from networking, direct outreach, or event-based engagement. These types of partnerships include collaborations with local businesses, community organizations, city councils, and professional groups that contribute supplies, financial support, career exposure opportunities, or event-based programming. While these partnerships offer valuable resources, they require ongoing communication and coordination to sustain engagement and maximize their impact.

In more general terms, and more aligned with the language of the survey question concerning how site coordinators work with partners, nearly all site coordinators (17) said they work with partners to offer afterschool and summer programming, expanded learning, and enrichment opportunities for students, while 16 said that partners are involved in providing activities, services or opportunities for adult family members. Fourteen coordinators said that partners provide financial support, in-kind donations, or other resources, and 11 coordinators said that partners help orient new staff by providing background on program expectations, available resources, and community connections. Other contributions included assistance with goal or objective setting (eight site coordinators), support connecting students and families with services or resources not otherwise funded by Texas ACE (13 site coordinators), or providing professional development (12 site coordinators). Less common partner services included program monitoring and quality assurance (four site coordinators each).

Thirteen site coordinators, however, reported partnership contributions that are not as easy to categorize, either due to the nature of the partner agency itself or the type of value brought by the partner. These partnership contributions included collaborations with professional sports organizations, corporate outreach programs, and local businesses providing industry-specific supports (e.g., certifications in workforce training or health education). Several sites also partner with specialized service providers for environmental education, STEM and financial literacy programming, and health-focused initiatives. Additionally, some programs leverage internal school-based partnerships, integrating staff, student clubs, and extracurricular programs to expand learning opportunities such as career training, media production, and technical education. Other partnerships include collaborations with justice system outreach programs or local government representatives (i.e., individuals) who support school initiatives. These diverse collaborations demonstrate how programs adapt to secure resources and services beyond more conventional partnership structures.

As a final note, several interviewed site coordinators emphasized that strong partnerships are built on three things:

- **Effective communication** (four site coordinators). These site coordinators emphasized clarity and consistency of communication, along with responsiveness and transparency. They also noted that regular meetings were important for sustaining strong partnerships.
- **Collaborative leadership** (three site coordinators). These site coordinators emphasized shared responsibility, joint decision-making, and mutual accountability among their center and partners.
- **Trust** (five site coordinators). These site coordinators emphasized that building mutual trust and respect contributes to effective collaboration over the long-term.

These components shape how partnerships function, influence engagement, facilitate problem-solving, and engender long-term partner-provided support. These three aspects reinforce and build on one another. Several key quotes presenting these themes are provided next.

> **"That trust and communication. As you can see, I'm a talker. And I love to talk. And if you have a good product and you're truthful with your product, and you let people know what it is that you're doing, how could they not want to support you and what you're doing? And especially when it's coming from the heart."**
> **– Site Coordinator, Elementary Site**

> **"Usually our partners are really good to provide support when we need it because we do have that mutual trust with them. If they need anything, we'll be able to support them with [it]. If we need anything, it's like vice versa." – Site Coordinator, K–12 Site**

> **"So being able to not only have the partners engaged in an event, but let them know that, 'We hear what you're providing. We really appreciate it and we want to make sure that everyone knows what's available.'" – Site Coordinator, Elementary–Middle Site**

Challenges

This section does not directly address the research questions or "5 to Drive" key areas but instead provides information about the kinds of obstacles site coordinators face with respect to planning, partnerships, and engagement.

The preceding subsections presented the ways in which site coordinators conduct strategic planning, promote engagement, and work with partner agencies, as conveyed through the site coordinator surveys and interviews. Many site coordinators, however, also reported challenges within each of these areas. This subsection describes those challenges, focusing on working with steering committees, recruiting and retaining students in programming, and finding or working with partners.

Challenges Related to Steering Committees. While the site coordinator surveys did not include questions concerning steering committee challenges, the interviews did. Site coordinators who were interviewed identified several important challenge areas that affect steering committee function. First, the meetings themselves were cited as sources of potential challenge. Site coordinators at six sites reported that scheduling conflicts and irregular meeting times hindered participation in the meetings and diminished their program's ability to maintain stakeholder alignment on key initiatives.

"If it was up to me, I would like to try to meet with them at least once a month. But if I could, at least twice. We may set up a meeting, let's say, for instance, after school, but then short notice there was a football game, or a basketball game, or volleyball game that was scheduled for Friday. But you know what? Guess what? They moved it to Wednesday." – Site Coordinator, Elementary Site

"Yeah, I think just growing it. Just trying to find that sweet spot of a time that really just is going to be the best bet for our parents and our staff and everybody. It's hard when we have program[ming] going on from 3:30 to 5:30 to do anything that—because then you're pulling from the program operations. But then sometimes that's the only time that works for these other people." – Site Coordinator, Elementary Site

Finding people willing to serve on the steering committee can also present a challenge. Site coordinators at 10 sites highlighted difficulties in securing active participation from parents, teachers, and community members, which they said limited the effectiveness of discussions and decision-making. Site coordinators at four sites specifically reported that low parent turnout and limited community involvement made it difficult to gather meaningful input and sustain engagement.

"We have great parent participation in events but getting them to commit to regular advisory board meetings has been difficult." – Site Coordinator, Elementary Site

"I think just expanding, bringing in more voices to be heard, because I know there's a lot of people that would like to, they're afraid to. But I think they're just as important as the ones that we have now, just being able to expand to be able to reach out to those people as well." – Site Coordinator, Elementary Site

"So let's just say… if we don't have that great of a turnout for one of our meetings, what we do is we try to push our site coordinators to really push for more parent participation to show up. That's something that we're still working on improving so we can get more families involved. Then one thing that the parents did provide feedback on is that they would love to have some sort of activity tied in with the meeting, like a student performance or for them to do maybe a craft with their child before the meeting starts or something like that." – Site Coordinator, K–12 Site

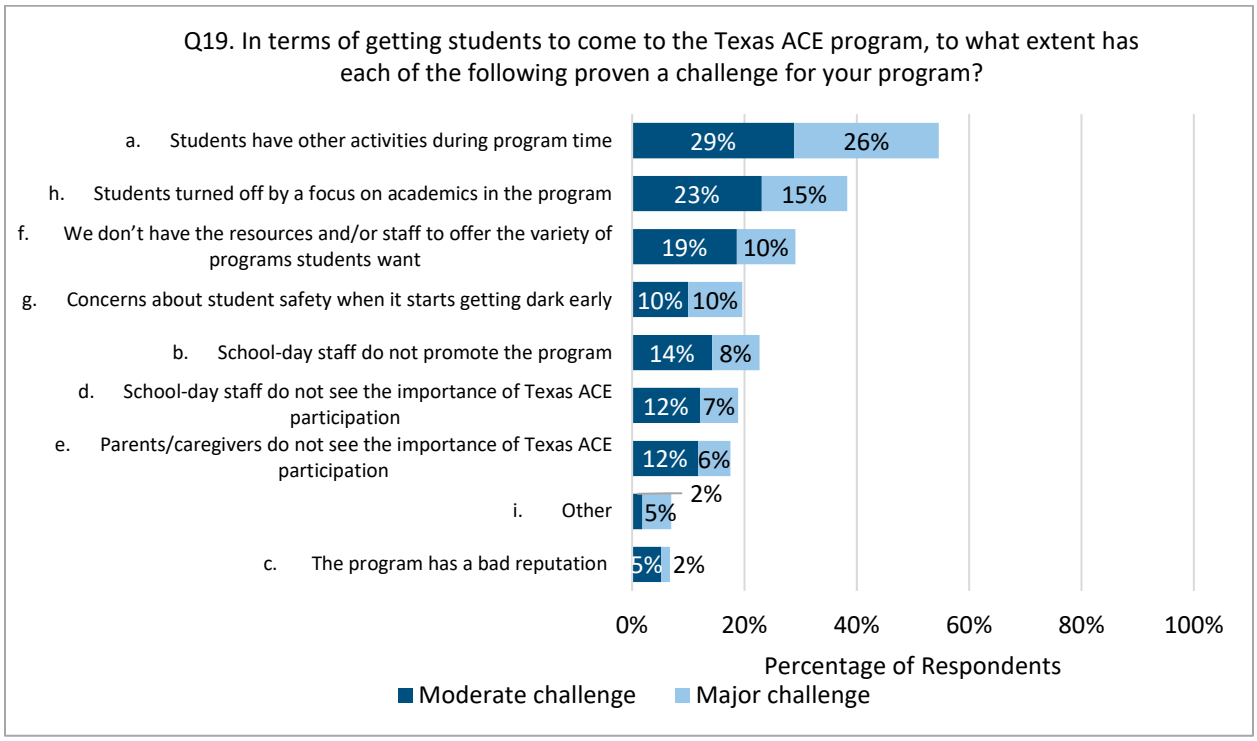
Beyond meeting times and getting stakeholders to commit to steering committee participation, site coordinators at two sites described how vague objectives and a lack of clear direction led to misalignment and inefficiencies within the steering committee. Additionally, site coordinators at two other sites noted that, while their steering committee does provide feedback, there is a gap in ensuring that suggestions are acknowledged and implemented. Another site coordinator

noted that not all steering committee members participate equally, or always say what they were thinking.

> **"Yes, I wish the advisory committee would just give us more feedback. I think it is a rather large group typically, and I think perhaps maybe some of them don't feel comfortable speaking up in a group setting, but we would love for them to say more so we got to figure out how to make that happen." – Site Coordinator, Elementary–Middle Site**

Challenges Related to Student and Adult Family Member Engagement. The site coordinator survey included questions concerning challenges to recruiting and retaining students in the Texas ACE program. Respondents indicated that competition from non-Texas ACE programming was a challenge, with 55% of site coordinators responding that "students have other activities during program time" constituted a "moderate" or "major" challenge. The second-most reported challenge was "students turned off by a focus on academics in the program" (38% reporting this as a "moderate" or "major" challenge combined). A lack of resources or staff constituted a third challenge (29% "moderate" or "major" challenge combined), leading to lack of variety. See Exhibit 17.

Exhibit 17. Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Challenges to Student Attendance



Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.

Note. N = 520.

There were subgroup differences in terms of these challenges. Site coordinators associated with elementary-only programs were less likely to say that "students have other activities during program time" was a "major challenge" than coordinators from non-elementary-only sites (14% compared with 47%, respectively), as were site coordinators associated with Cycle 11 than Cycle 12 site coordinators (21% versus 31%, respectively). Site coordinators associated with rural programs were more likely to say competition for activity time was a "major challenge" than were city, suburban, and town-based coordinators (37% rural site coordinators compared with 21–25% for city, suburban, and town-based site coordinators, respectively). This may have to do with the number of students at rural programs, as suggested by the quote below.

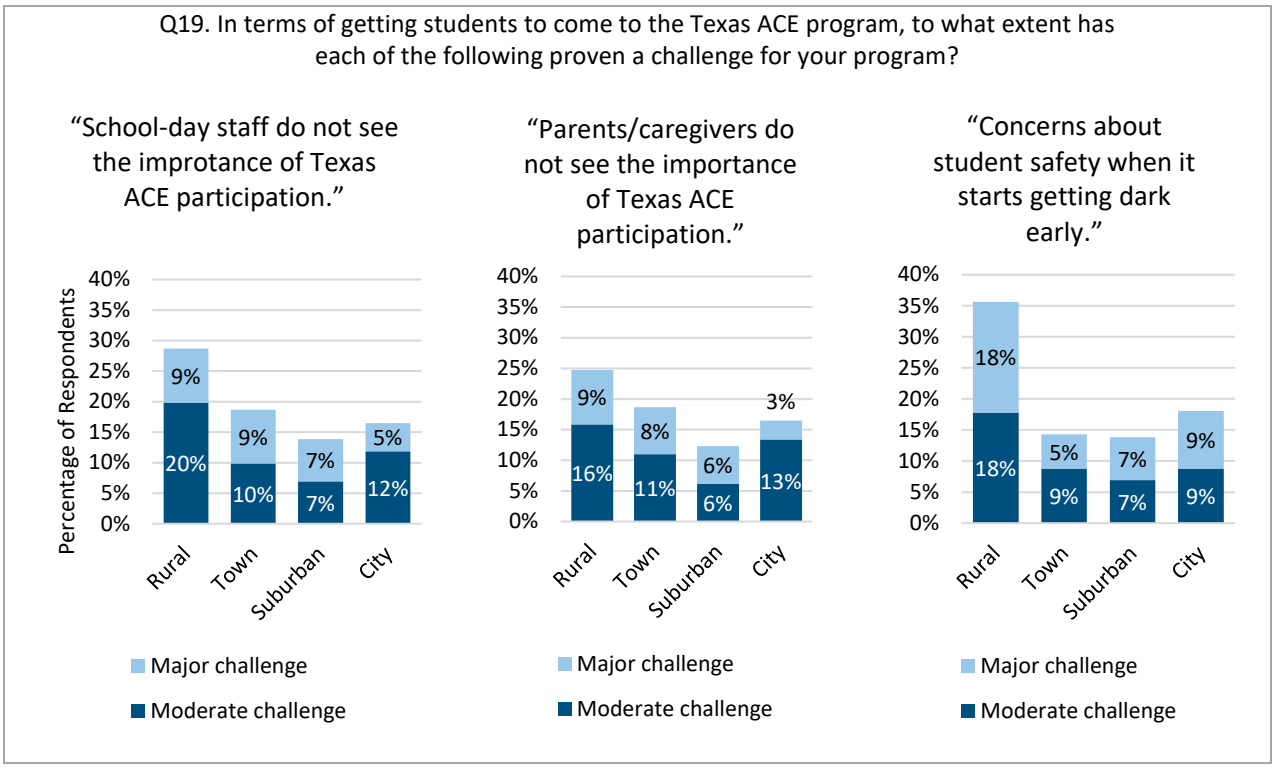
Students Bored with Academic Content

"Over the years we have focused on academic improvement for students especially since the end of the pandemic and students are starting to show signs of disinterest in activities that they are academically targeted for [*sic*]. I have asked staff to incorporate student interests and to add more physical activities in their lessons." – Site Coordinator

> ***"They want to be part of our program, but they also want to be in [another school program]. We don't have very many students, so we have to learn to share their availability."*** **– Site Coordinator, Elementary School Site**

Site coordinators from rural programs were also more likely than other coordinators to respond that they experience challenges with school-day staff or parent/caregivers not seeing the importance of Texas ACE participation and with student safety when it starts getting dark early. See Exhibit 18. Additional statistically significant subgroup differences are presented in Appendix E (Exhibits E43 to E54).

Exhibit 18. Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Challenges to Student Attendance, by Locale



Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.

Note. For both charts, *N* for rural = 101, *N* for town = 91, *N* for suburban = 130, and *N* for city = 194. Subgroup differences statistically significant ($p < .05$) using chi square test.

Site coordinators who were interviewed also discussed challenges relating to participation in programming, talking about both student and adult family member participation. In terms of students, three site coordinators noted overlapping events as a challenge, while two mentioned student safety concerns (aligning with the survey response data). In terms of safety, one site coordinator noted that the lack of a pedestrian bridge made travel to and from the afterschool program questionable in terms of safety, while another noted that there was ongoing hesitancy about in-person events related to concerns about transmissible disease. Safety concerns were further compounded by transportation challenges; four site coordinators reported that unreliable or unsafe transportation limited family engagement. Additionally, one site coordinator noted that families often share a single car primarily for work, meaning students had limited transportation options to attend programs, while another site coordinator said that location constraints limited program offerings.

"We had to move a planned event because the district suddenly rescheduled sports tournaments, making it impossible for families to attend."
– Site Coordinator, Middle–High School Site

"A student was killed crossing train tracks near our school. We are petitioning for a bridge to make it safer for kids coming from after-school programs."
– Site Coordinator, High School Site

In terms of barriers to parent or adult family member engagement, site coordinators who were interviewed mentioned challenges that were similar to those identified for steering committee participation. For example, six site coordinators reported that parents' work schedules and obligations limited participation in program activities, with one site coordinator also noting that a lack of childcare prevents adult family members' attendance at events. Additionally, four site coordinators said that language differences constituted a significant obstacle, limiting parents' ability to engage in both meetings and activities. Along these lines, two site coordinators reported mistrust between the community and the school, citing language barriers as the primary reason for that mistrust. Another site coordinator observed that some parents simply are not committed to attending events, and three mentioned lack of response to surveys as a challenge for engaging adult family members.

"I think the only thing would be the standard, the time. Our parents work, or they're taking care of family members, so sometime that affects their ability to be involved."
– Site Coordinator, Middle School Site

"At first, they feel maybe we can't relay the message to them in their language, but we adjust. We make sure that we provide those services for our students and parents so that they feel welcomed and comfortable coming to our events and just being here for them." – Site Coordinator, Middle School Site

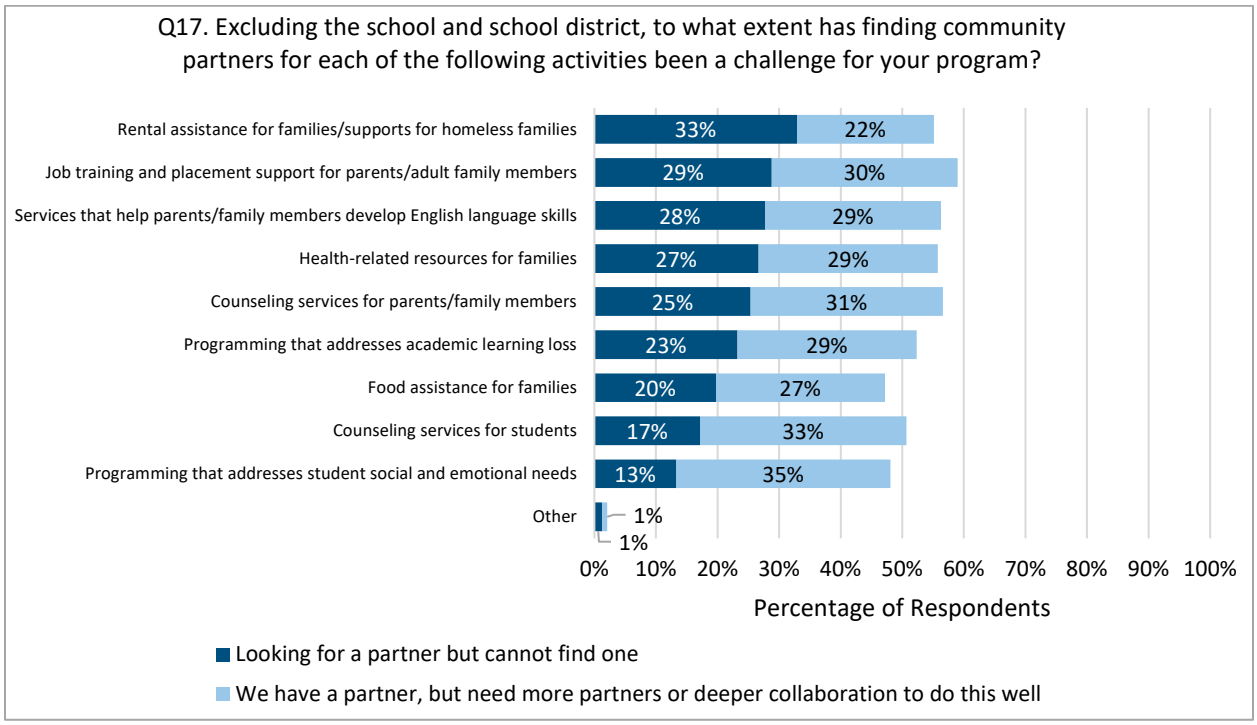
"We sent out surveys, and the response was not what I was hoping for. ... I went back and looked at social media comments to gather feedback."
– Site Coordinator, K–12 Site

Finally, one site coordinator mentioned that some parents simply feel uncertain about their ability to contribute meaningfully to their child's education, noting that parents hesitate to participate because of perceived limitations compared with program staff. Another site coordinator said that some parents feel unequipped to support student learning at home.

"And so when we started inviting them to the school, they looked at it as always being something wrong. ... And so, you have some parents that don't feel welcome. They don't feel like they have anything to offer." – Site Coordinator, Middle School Site

Challenges Related to Partners. The site coordinator survey included a question about partner-related challenges. The question provided respondents with a list of specific types of supports, and, for each, asked the respondents to indicate whether they needed a partner. Options of "looking for a partner but cannot find one," "we have a partner, but need more partners or deeper collaboration to do this well," and "we have the partnerships we need to do this well" were provided, along with "we do not need a partner to do this." The support posing the greatest challenge for site coordinators, according to this question, is finding "rental assistance for families/supports for homeless families," with 33% saying they needed a partner but could not find one. "Job training and placement support for parents/adult family members" was the second-most selected challenge (in terms of needing a partner but being unable to find one) (29%), while "services that help parents/family members develop English language skills" was third (28%). See Exhibit 19.

Exhibit 19. Challenge Finding Partners for Specific Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Services

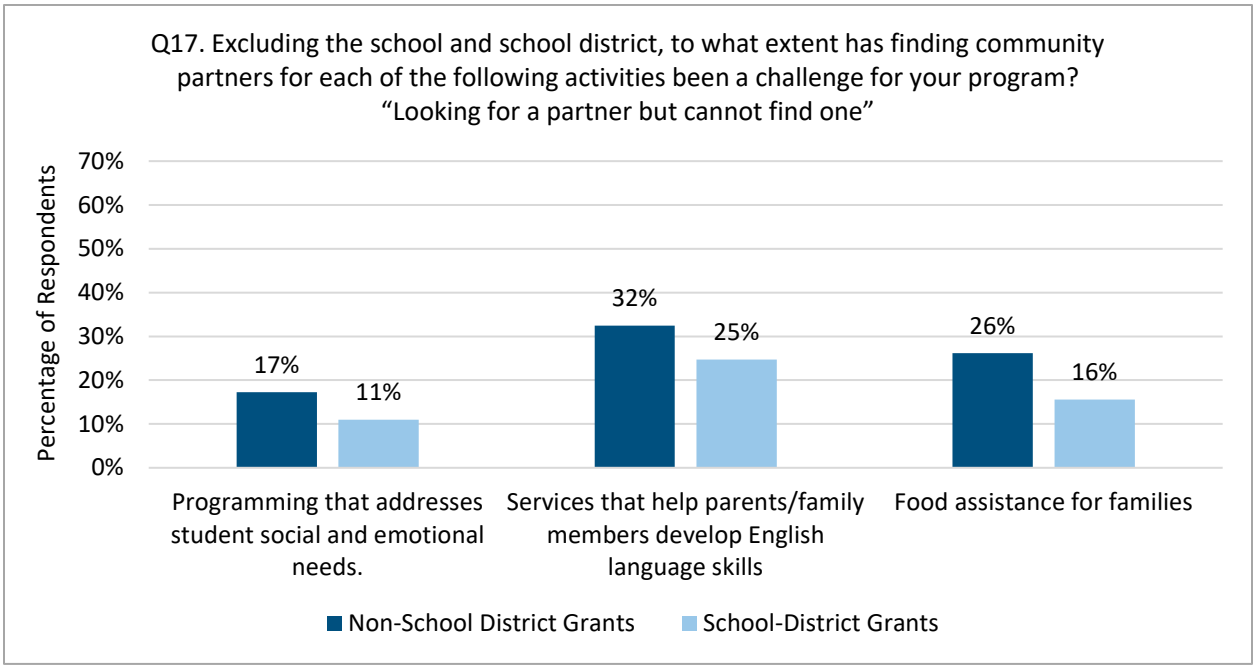


Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.

Note. N = 481 to 519.

Statistically significant subgroup differences related to partner challenges were evident for school district status, and for Cycle 12 grantees in particular. Site coordinators associated with non-school district grants were more likely to say that they were "looking for a partner but cannot find one" in terms of "programming that addresses student social and emotional needs" (17% versus 11%), "services that help parents/family members develop English language skills" (32% versus 25%), and "food assistance for families" (26% versus 16%). See Exhibit 20. Additionally, Cycle 12 site coordinators were more likely to report difficulty finding a partner ("looking for a partner but cannot find one") than were Cycle 11 site coordinators in terms of providing "rental assistance for families/supports for homeless families" (37% compared with 29%, respectively). Additional statistically significant subgroup differences are presented in Appendix E (E35 to E42).

Exhibit 20. Challenge Finding Partners for Specific Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) Services, by Grantee School-District Status



Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by the American Institutes for Research during spring 2024.

Note. N = 191 non-school-district grants, N = 328 school-district grants. Subgroup differences are statistically significant ($p < .05$) using chi square tests.

Site coordinators who were interviewed also spoke about partner-related challenges, at least in the sense of needing to look for them to enhance program supports. Sixteen site coordinators said they were looking for new partners to help fill service gaps or expand programming, highlighting the need to connect with businesses, healthcare providers, and community

organizations to create more opportunities for career exploration, enrichment activities, and resource access.

> **"I do want to partner with more of our local communities as far as businesses and different career pathways that we're offering at the high school level. My goal is to do a career fair for all my students so they can get exposed to different opportunities." – Site Coordinator, Middle School Site**

> **"Sometimes it's hard to find resources for younger kids. We see so many programs for older students, but younger kids also need support. Whether it's food security, academic help, or behavioral support, finding the right partners can be a challenge." – Site Coordinator, Elementary Site**

Ten of the site coordinators also said they want to strengthen relationships with current partners by expanding their involvement. Some coordinators hope to move partners from occasional event participation to offering ongoing programming, or to deeper engagement in family support services. Nine site coordinators said they were focused on securing long-term commitments from their partners, whether through multiyear agreements, recurring program funding, or diversifying resources. Coordinators see strong community relationships as key to keeping programs running, especially when other funding shifts.

> **"We have partners that support us, but I'd like to see them offer more. Whether it's expanding certifications for parents or increasing the variety of programming, there's a need to build on what's already there." – Site Coordinator, High School Site**

> **"If the funding stops tomorrow, it's going to be our partnerships that sustain the program. We need those connections to keep offering opportunities without relying solely on grants." – Site Coordinator, Elementary–Middle Site**

Finally, four interviewees said that they are working to increase partner involvement in planning meetings, community events, and program evaluations. These coordinators emphasize that regular communication and recognition are essential to keeping partners engaged and invested.

> **"For me, communication and trust are key to sustaining partnerships. If we keep saying no to partners when they ask for support, they won't be as invested when we need them. It has to be a two-way relationship." – Site Coordinator, K–12 Site**

Best Practices

This section addresses RQ 2.3. What especially innovative or robust practices and approaches are being employed that may warrant consideration as best practices for the Texas ACE community more broadly?

The challenges presented in the preceding subsection may not be resolved simply or easily. Every program is different, and solutions to such challenges will likely need to be tailored to local contexts and will likely require ongoing work. However, as revealed in the site coordinator interviews, there are practices that may help overcome some of these challenges. This section presents promising or best practices aligned to each of the primary findings subsections. The findings in this section rely solely on the interview data, given that the interview sites were selected specifically to discuss such practices.

Best Practices: Strategic Planning

Site coordinators from 15 sites shared how they assess both school-related needs and other priorities of the wider community beyond the school, emphasizing a combination of formal and informal approaches, as noted previously. In terms of formal approaches, site coordinators from 11 sites said they rely on structured tools such as standardized assessments, surveys, and progress reports. Attendance records, grade tracking, and benchmark assessments are also commonly used at these sites.

> **"Every Monday we have grade check Monday. So we require the students to pull out their Chromebooks. They have a form that they fill out. They fill in their grades. We know exactly where they are from week to week."**
> **– Site Coordinator, Middle–High School Site**

These types of data, reviewed in a regular ongoing fashion, help program staff keep track of current student needs.

Additionally, 11 site coordinators said that they assess community needs through surveys and formal collaboration with external organizations. Events are subsequently designed based on demographic considerations and observed needs, such as transportation barriers or food insecurity.

In terms of informal needs assessment approaches, observational feedback and anecdotal reports play key roles in assessing program success (eight sites). Staff members at these sites noted that student enthusiasm, participation in events, and interactions with parents are

indicators of impact and that programs are meeting needs. Social media feedback also served as an informal approach to assess whether programs are truly meeting community, adult family member, and student needs.

> **"Not really so much so then it doesn't seem as formal as a survey. I like to start with the survey, but if I don't get those responses, these families, they have my cell phone number, they text me. You know what I mean? They call me, so I reach out and I call them and I speak with them." – Site Coordinator, Elementary–Middle School Site**

As suggested in the foregoing quote, interviewed site coordinators described a continuous, multipronged approach to needs assessment that was not intended to be a mere exercise in data-gathering. Rather, these site coordinators described ongoing efforts to find out what stakeholders need and want, using a variety of approaches to succeed in that effort, and then basing subsequent programming decisions around these needs and wants. Attendance and outcome data play key roles in this type of needs assessment, in the sense that such data indicate whether identified needs are truly being met or still constitute active needs. As described by these site coordinators, **needs assessment is an ongoing, data-driven process in a continuous feedback loop**.

> **"It's a constant review. So you're looking at attendance, you're talking to the kids. If your attendance drops, why is your attendance dropping?" – Site Coordinator, Middle School Site**

Being in Position to Hear about Needs

Two site coordinators described being "embedded" into school structures via participation in child study teams, faculty meetings, and professional development sessions. This helped them improve coordination with school-day staff and thereby helped them align Texas ACE programming with school needs and priorities.

Finally, a key facet of this ongoing approach is redundancy; with multiple approaches to collecting needs assessment data—from review of formal data to listening to informal stakeholder reactions—it is more likely that stakeholder needs and wants will be heard, can be addressed in planning, and will actually be addressed via program offerings.

Best Practices: Steering Committees

As previously discussed, some of the most basic challenges concerning steering committees had to do with time availability and member commitment. There are no simple solutions to these challenges, but site coordinators who were interviewed provided descriptions of their approaches to their steering committee that may provide useful guidance in these respects.

First, site coordinators at three sites stressed the importance of clear role definitions for steering committee members. These site coordinators described how clearly defining expectations and duties for committee members was key to ensuring accountability and efficiency.

> **"Being knowledgeable in their role so that they can actually bring us suggestions and bring us information or feedback or suggestions on how we can improve our program." – Site Coordinator, Elementary Site**

It becomes easier to recruit members when there are clearly defined steering committee roles and expectations. It also becomes easier to avoid recruiting steering committee members who may be able to provide useful feedback but who do not have time to participate. Akin to this, two site coordinators said that establishing a shared vision for their steering committee's purpose and mission was essential for effective collaboration and goal alignment.

> **"We want it to be intentional. We want their feedback to be intentional, to be there. And so we don't want to just cover a lot of things and then we don't really get anything, so we want them to have a specific assignment."– Site Coordinator, High School Site**

Establishing continuous needs assessment procedures, as described previously, also implies regular and systematic communication between site coordinators and stakeholders and may thereby help site coordinators identify potential steering committee members and ensure that all relevant stakeholder groups are involved. Along these lines, site coordinators at four sites said that successful steering committees tended to include members from varied backgrounds, perspectives, and roles, which ensured that feedback reflected multiple stakeholder viewpoints. One site coordinator also noted the importance of considering personalities and work approaches when inviting stakeholders to participate in a steering committee.

> **"A good mixture of staff, admin, and community, and parents. Just having a good mix. You can have meetings where one or two people take over the whole meeting, and everybody else is sitting back, or you can get a meeting where nobody wants to say anything. So I try to get people who are a mix of some."**
> **– Site Coordinator, Middle School Site**

Of course, some site coordinators are not part of the steering committee or do not oversee committee membership (as discussed previously with respect to the site coordinator survey results). In these cases, staying in regular communication with those who do oversee the steering committee or who have oversight over membership may be the best, or only, approach. It may be possible in such instances to make recommendations for steering committee membership or to provide feedback about steering committee focus and scope.

Overall, site coordinators who were interviewed noted that steering committees work best when they have members who are actively engaged and dedicated to the Texas ACE program. This is not surprising, but this may not be a sufficient condition for steering committee success. Aside from clarity around scope and goals, already described, five site coordinators noted that mutual respect, open communication, and shared problem-solving are also essential for creating an effective steering committee. Mutual respect clearly involves intentional listening, with opportunities for open feedback and idea sharing from all members. Open communication should be considered expansively, to include not only all standard forms of communication but also aspects of transparency and regularity. One site coordinator mentioned making use of a PowerPoint presentation and showing videos at steering committee meetings to showcase program activities, suggesting that creativity in communication also plays an important role.[10]

> **I think what makes it good is having people that are really just invested in the program." – Site Coordinator, Elementary Site**
>
> **"The mutual respect that they've shared with not only the site coordinator, especially our family engagement specialist, but it's with all our team. And when I say all our team, including our director and our program specialist, but also with our staff." – Site Coordinator, Elementary Site**
>
> **"Pretty much they give me feedback, especially the students and the parent [sic] because [they are] involved in the program. So to me, if the students that are in the advisory committee are happy and love the program and the parent [sic] loves the program, and then the community members that are in the advisory board see that, then I feel like my program has been successful." – Site Coordinator, Elementary–Middle School Site**

Finally, one site coordinator said that regularly evaluating and refining committee practices and processes has improved the committee's effectiveness. That is, bringing a data-driven improvement mindset to analysis of the committee itself has enhanced the committee's impact over time.

Best Practices: Community, Family, and Student Engagement

Site coordinators in interviews described multiple strategic efforts to increase engagement. Of key importance, however, was visibility. In this respect, one site coordinator said that a key engagement strategy was intentionally embedding the Texas ACE program into school and community discussions, advocating for its role in student success and long-term sustainability. Another said that leveraging school board meetings to showcase Texas ACE program success

[10] Any use of program images or video would, of course, have to be allowed under program permissions.

was helpful, saying that doing this created opportunities to engage school decision makers. Three site coordinators said that they carefully balance Texas ACE-specific family events with broader community gatherings, which ensures both targeting engagement with family members and broadening and strengthening program connections beyond students' families. Use of video was again brought up as a strategy, with two site coordinators saying they use highlights videos to help broadcast program success and showcase student involvement. Posts on social media were further mentioned as a way to increase visibility.

> **"I just make sure that I've invested myself into all these different parts of the school, the community, so that they are well aware of what Texas ACE is. And it's always in their mind like, 'Yeah, I know exactly what that is. That lady shows up to our meetings and she reaches out to us.'" – Site Coordinator, Elementary–Middle Site**

> **"We usually take the opportunity to showcase what we're doing in August. We kind of make a video, we present it, we share with them what we've done. And if they see something like on our Facebook page that they want to know about, they'll call us as needed to go present to them about what's going on in the ACE program."**
> **– Site Coordinator, Elementary Site**

> **"We put together a video where students got to describe why they love afterschool programs, and staff talked about why they work in afterschool [programs]. It was just such a beautiful way to hear things we wouldn't have known otherwise."**
> **– Site Coordinator, K–12 Site**

Several aspects about visibility are implicit in the foregoing quotes and deserve to be made explicit. First, it is clearly not sufficient for a program to be merely known to exist. Engaging stakeholders requires communication of program impact, with a focus on those outcomes most important to the stakeholder in question. In this respect, outcomes such as student enjoyment of programming should not be ignored (as suggested by the videos and

Visibility, but also Adaptability

Visibility is clearly important for garnering community, family, and student engagement. Adaptability, however, is also important. Seven site coordinators said that they have adapted scheduling practices by offering events at varied times (e.g., morning, evening, and weekends) to accommodate working parents. Some also provided childcare to reduce participation barriers. Two coordinators noted that they have translated outreach materials to overcome language barriers that were preventing engagement. Simply, engagement will not be possible if families are prevented by other barriers, whether related to time, language, transportation, or something else. As one site coordinator noted in an open-ended comment on the site coordinator survey: "We've found that offering flexible scheduling options, such a such as rotating workshops or virtual sessions, accommodates parents' diverse schedules and increases their ability to participate."

social media posts mentioned in the quotes). Second, visibility is not only about being seen but also about building relationships. This implicitly involves creating trust through ongoing, transparent communication. As described in the preceding subsection, working closely with steering committees is a good place to focus these efforts, should strong relationships among the steering committee members have not already been established. Third, engagement will be more likely to occur when ongoing formal and informal needs assessments become regular program practices.

What draws all these components together, of course, is interest, understood both in the sense of excitement about activity offerings and alignment with needs. Several examples around increasing parent engagement help to illustrate this point:

- Twelve site coordinators have integrated parent involvement into programming by gathering input through surveys, their steering committees, and informal conversations. Using these means, they can align events with family interests.
- Nine site coordinators have implemented multiple communication methods into their outreach to increase parent engagement, including direct phone calls, bilingual messaging, flyers, and social media. Multiple site coordinators noted that personalized outreach helped parents feel more connected to their programs.
- Five site coordinators designed activities based on parent requests, leading to high participation in events such as holiday crafting, career fairs, and hands-on enrichment activities.
- Two site coordinators highlighted the importance of showcasing student progress during parent–teacher nights, using data presentations, videos, and displays of student work to reinforce their program's impact and maintain engagement.
- Four site coordinators used informal interactions at drop-off, pick-up, and school events to build relationships with parents. They described these moments as opportunities to foster trust and encourage greater family involvement.

Partners in Action

Partners can be involved in supporting Texas ACE programming in a variety of ways. Site coordinators at six sites noted that partners enhance their program capabilities by improving staff and student skills, introducing new resources, or strengthening overall program quality.

Of course, there is no replacement for offering activities that the youth themselves find interesting. This quote illustrates this point well:

> **"Well, the 4-H partnership that we have has been successful. And I know this because my eighth graders, the numbers in eighth grade have always been low based off the data that I've seen. But recently it has tripled because this [partnership] program targets only eighth grade and up. So my numbers have grown in that aspect because they are now learning that we take these field trips. We have our family nights, your parents come, you have free dinner, they get to visit colleges." – Site Coordinator, Middle School Site**

Engrained within this quote is the idea that students will come based on excitement about the activity offerings, and that this excitement can be leveraged to increase opportunities for both parents and students. Also, this quote shows the effective use of a partnership, the topic of the next and final Best Practices subsection.

Best Practices: Partnerships

Successful partnerships, according to three site coordinators, are driven by effective ongoing needs assessment. This makes intuitive sense. If community needs are clearly identified, it becomes easier to identify specific partners who may be able to assist in filling that need, and it also becomes easier to encourage partners to get involved because the need can be clearly articulated. Similarly, four site coordinators stressed the value of regularly engaging with partners, such as businesses and community organizations, through steering committee meetings, planning sessions, and surveys. Involving partners in meetings or planning sessions enables partners to hear about needs first-hand and then respond based on realistic capability; meanwhile, including partners in surveys helps to clarify ways that partners are willing to contribute. These efforts ensure that partnerships are not only aligned with student and program needs but also balance partner contributions with partner strengths and resources.

In terms of finding partners, site coordinators at six sites emphasized that engaged school leadership can play a critical role in fostering partnerships. Administrators who actively support collaboration help facilitate partner participation, provide logistical assistance, and advocate for program initiatives. Program visibility also presumably helps in this respect; a highly visible program with many stakeholder advocates is more likely to find new partnerships than a program that is relatively unknown. Related to this, a few site coordinators mentioned networking as a way to find partners, notably by attending local events or leveraging existing relationships to establish meaningful collaborations. Coordinators from five sites highlighted the importance of proactive outreach and personal connections in forming successful partnerships, regardless of the mechanism by which a potential partner is identified. One site coordinator noted researching potential partners as a way to ensure new partner meetings start off well.

"I research people before meetings. If I'm meeting with someone important, I want to know what they care about. I met the VP of a local organization because my cousin played soccer with them. Those personal connections make a difference."
– Site Coordinator, High School Site

After a potential partner has been found, approached, and engaged, it remains important for Texas ACE programs to continually assess partnership roles in light of ongoing needs assessment. Three site coordinators reported that adaptability in response to feedback, local expectations, and evolving student interests is a key factor in sustaining effective partnerships.

"It really helps to bring back partners that understand the district and the community. They've learned what works here, and they want to be here. That makes sustaining a consistent program much easier." – Site Coordinator, Elementary Site

Continual reassessment of partner contributions and partner roles supports continual program improvement and ensures that partners' strengths and interests are being leveraged as effectively as possible.

Two final points bear mentioning. First, it is important for partners to hear about the effects of their contributions, even if the effects are indirect. For example, two site coordinators noted that their programs regularly share student impact data. Providing partners with performance metrics and success stories reinforces the value of their contributions and thus sustains partner engagement.

"We share student data every year with partners. We compare Texas ACE students with non-ACE students to show where they improve—attendance, behavior, academics. That's why we want partners involved, so they can see the impact."
– Site Coordinator, Elementary–Middle Site

Second, it is important to recognize that partner agencies themselves can benefit from partnerships with Texas ACE programs. As noted by five site coordinators, successful partnerships bring value to both the center and the partner organization. A key example is the enhanced *partner* visibility that such partnerships can readily bring.

Discussion

This report has focused on questions relating to Texas ACE site-level strategic planning, engagement, and partnerships. Based on these findings, and drawing from the best practices in particular, several important themes emerge. First, as discussed throughout this report, **ongoing needs assessment plays a foundational role in successful programming**. A robust, multipronged approach to needs assessment that incorporates both formal and informal data-

gathering clarifies program goals, which in turn solidifies steering committee purpose and function. When a steering committee knows the specific goals of the program and knows the needs underlying those goals, it will more effectively advise and guide program staff as they seek to improve programming. Additionally, clear understanding of student, family, and community needs will facilitate creation of partnerships, both in terms of identifying specific needs that partners could best address and in helping program staff approach potential partners. Combined with strong data literacy, as discussed in a previous evaluation report (see the text box), a continuous needs assessment process will help programs not only track needs but also prioritize, plan, measure, and improve.

Second, themes around **communication, adaptability, and visibility** are discussed in the best practices described in this report. These themes are bound together and are difficult to separate, because all share aspects of both knowledge-sharing and relationship-building. This appears to be a foundational component of Texas ACE program success, especially when combined with effective needs assessment practices and strategic use of data. These themes overlap with previously reported findings concerning both communication and data literacy. The following quotes, which are responses to an open-ended question on the site coordinator survey asking for best practices, illustrate this theme well:

> **"To address challenges, we implemented these strategies: Enhanced Communication: Regular newsletters and social media updates keep families informed. Flexible Scheduling: Events at various times, including evenings and weekends, accommodate family schedules. Parent Feedback: Surveys and meetings tailor activities to family needs. Community Partnerships: Collaborations provide additional resources."**

> **"School staff does not see the importance of ACE and see us as a daycare. To help with that challenge, we have sent emails to staff, showing activities our students do. Through out [*sic*] the year we hang student work around the school and make things for the teachers."**

Aligned Finding from a Previous Report: Importance of Data Literacy

In a previous AIR evaluation report available on TEA's website, **data literacy** was discussed as an important facet in building a successful Texas ACE program. Specifically, the report noted: "Site coordinators who effectively communicate with school-day staff are also more likely to obtain the school-day data they need and are more likely to be able to talk through that data with knowledgeable school-day staff. This kind of side-by-side learning is essential for interpreting and using school-day data effectively, and is a powerful tool for planning activities and establishing stakeholder buy-in."

Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant Evaluation: Texas Afterschool Centers on Education Descriptive Study of Site Coordinator Perspectives on Program Goals, Recruitment, Activity Provision, School-Day Linkages, and District Support (2022–23) (Vinson et al., 2024).

Finally, a theme appearing throughout this current report is the **importance of trust and mutual respect**. This appears throughout the quotes included in this report, from needs assessment data-gathering to steering committee member selection to parent engagement and to establishing or deepening partnerships. Strong communication, adaptability, and visibility obviously creates trust. This trust is essential for long-term engagement with partnerships. However, stable staffing configurations in the Texas ACE program, the schools, and partner agencies may dictate the ways and extent to which such trust can be built and maintained.

Aligned Finding from a Previous Report: Importance of Communication

In a previous AIR evaluation report available on TEA's website, **establishing effective communication** was identified as a foundational best practice. Specifically, the previous report stated: "Interviewed site coordinators stressed the importance of establishing effective communication strategies with stakeholders, noting that 'stakeholders' includes school district staff, school-day staff, students, caregivers, and community partners. It is also important to regularly assess communication strategy effectiveness relative to each stakeholder type. This is a foundational best practice; with effective communication it is easier to recruit and retain students, establish linkages to the school day, obtain and interpret data, form activities that are relevant to student need and interest, and establish buy-in from the school and stakeholders." See *Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant Evaluation: Texas Afterschool Centers on Education Descriptive Study of Site Coordinator Perspectives on Program Goals, Recruitment, Activity Provision, School-Day Linkages, and District Support (2022–23)* (Vinson et al., 2024).

Recommended Next Steps

Based on the findings of this report, AIR has two recommendations for TEA's consideration:

1. Further investigation of the ways in which Texas ACE programs conduct needs assessment, both formally and informally, to then develop guidance for those grantees who do not know how to do this well. This could be done in conjunction with site visit observation work already

planned by TEA, through informal discussion at conferences or more formal data collection means. Best practices guides or facilitation of communities of practice, with the goal of helping grantees progress toward ongoing, robust needs assessment practices, are also suggested.

2. Across Texas ACE sites, steering committee formation varies both in terms of basic structure (district vs. site-specific, for example) and membership (volunteers, application process, selection, etc.). Similar to Recommendation 1, discussing these approaches with grantees and creating guidelines for establishing and maintaining effective steering committees is suggested. These should consider the roles of students and parents/adult family members in steering committees, and whether or how the inclusion of these stakeholders affects engagement.

Additionally, it may be worthwhile to explore whether and how partnerships are facilitated or strengthened as needs assessment and steering committee practices are more thoughtfully considered and developed at the site level.

References

U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers program description*. https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-formula-grants/school-support-and-accountability/21st-century-community-learning-centers/

Vinson, M., Bishop, A., & Fales, R. (2024). *Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant evaluation: Texas afterschool centers on education descriptive study of site coordinator perspectives on program goals, recruitment, activity provision, school-day linkages, and district support (2022–23).* American Institutes for Research. https://tea.texas.gov/reports-and-data/program-evaluations/program-evaluations-out-of-school-learning-opportunities/tx-ace-implementation-report-2-22-23.pdf

Appendix A. Site Coordinator Survey (Spring 2024)

The survey you are being asked to complete is part of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) evaluation being conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR). Texas Education Agency has contracted with AIR to evaluate the 21st CCLC programs (also known as Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (Texas ACE) program) in order to assess programs, student participation and outcomes, and to learn more about the activities and supports of high-quality programs. The purpose of the project is to better understand how centers funded by 21st CCLC support positive youth outcomes and the role program quality and different approaches to program design and delivery play in this process.

This survey asks about issues related to **community engagement** in your Texas ACE program. The survey therefore includes questions about student, parent/adult family member, school-day teacher, and broader community involvement in your Texas ACE program.

It is important to note that this effort is not an evaluation of you or your program specifically. All responses you provide in taking this survey will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. No identifiable survey results will be provided to anyone outside the study team at AIR.

There are no foreseeable risks to you based on your participation in this survey. The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The survey is voluntary. You can opt not to answer any question and can stop participating at any time.

The answers you provide in response to this survey will be used by AIR only for this evaluation project. Upon completion of the evaluation, a survey dataset with all identifiers removed will be provided to TEA as a project record. After delivering this deidentified survey dataset to TEA, AIR will then destroy all remaining survey response data. That is, no data will remain that could link you to your responses.

Any questions about the study should be addressed to Matt Vinson at mvinson@air.org. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact AIR's Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is responsible for the protection of survey participants, at IRB@air.org, toll-free at 1-800-634-0797, or c/o IRB, American Institutes for Research, 1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor, Arlington, VA 22202.

Indicate whether you agree to take the survey by selecting an option below and clicking on the *submit* button. Note that, by selecting "I agree to take this survey," you are indicating that you agree to the terms as described above and agree to take the survey.

☐ I agree to take this survey.

☐ I do not agree to take this survey. *(Skip to the end of the survey.)*

[SUBMIT]

A. STRATEGIC PLANNING

1. Is a formal needs assessment done at your r center to help inform the types of programming provided by the 21st CCLC program?
    - ○ Yes, our center has conducted a formal needs assessment
    - ○ Yes, but as part of a school needs assessment
    - ○ No
    - ○ I'm not sure

2. In the past year, which of the following **school-related, student outcome** data has your center used to assess needs? For the data types you used, how important was each data source for informing your activity offerings?

	Not used for assessing needs	**Used to assess needs, and…**		
		A little important for informing activities	**Moderately important** for informing activities	**Very important** for informing activities
a. Student school-day attendance data	○	○	○	○
b. Behavioral data	○	○	○	○
c. Grades or GPA	○	○	○	○
d. Standardized test scores	○	○	○	○
e. Other (please describe)_____	○	○	○	○

3. In the past year, what types of **surveys** has your program used to assess needs? How important was each data source for informing your activity offerings?

		Used to assess needs, and…		
	Not used	**A little important** for informing activities	**Moderately important** for informing activities	**Very important** for informing activities
a. Teacher surveys	○	○	○	○
b. Parent surveys	○	○	○	○
c. Student surveys	○	○	○	○
d. Community member surveys	○	○	○	○
e. Other (please describe) _____	○	○	○	○

4. In the past year, what **other data sources** has your program used to assess needs? How important was each data source for informing your activity offerings?

	Not used	A little important	Moderately important	Very important
a. Within-school inventory of OTHER program offerings	○	○	○	○
b. Within-community inventory of services/activity offerings	○	○	○	○
c. Discussions and meetings with key community partners	○	○	○	○
d. Program observations	○	○	○	○
e. Community listening sessions	○	○	○	○
f. Other (please describe)_____	○	○	○	○

B. ADVISORY GROUP

5. Does your program have an advisory committee, group, or council (whether specific to your program or school-wide)?
   - ○ Yes
   - ○ No
   - ○ I'm not sure

6. [if the answer to #5 is YES] Is the advisory committee, group or council you work with specific to the 21st CCLC program, or does it serve a larger advisory role ?
   - ○ Specific to the 21st CCLC program at my site
   - ○ Specific to the 21st CCLC program but supports multiple sites
   - ○ Serves a larger advisory role at the school, center, district, or organization
   - ○ I am not sure

7. [if the answer to #5 is YES] Which of the following groups are represented on the advisory committee, group or council? Please select all that apply.
   - ☐ 21st CCLC grant project director
   - ☐ Principal/assistant principal
   - ☐ Representatives from key partner agencies
   - ☐ Teachers
   - ☐ Parents/guardians
   - ☐ Students
   - ☐ Community members
   - ☐ Coordinator(s) for other grant-funded programs working in my school or center
   - ☐ Management staff from the organization I work for
   - ☐ City/municipal staff
   - ☐ Businesses
   - ☐ University faculty/staff
   - ☐ Other school staff (Please describe:_____)
   - ☐ Other district staff (Please describe:_____)
   - ☐ Other (Please describe:_____)

8. [if the answer to #5 is YES] How are members of the advisory committee, group, or council selected?

9. [if the answer to #5 is YES] What role does the advisory committee, group, or council play in supporting your 21st CCLC program? Please select all that apply.
   - ☐ Provides input on what programming should be offered
   - ☐ Engages in a review of program data to provide guidance and feedback on improvement strategies
   - ☐ Participates in quality improvement processes
   - ☐ Works to coordinate service provision across multiple programs
   - ☐ Facilitates community engagement
   - ☐ Helps plan for and support program sustainability
   - ☐ Other (Please describe:_____)

10. [if the answer to #6 is YES] How often does the advisory committee, group or council meet?
    - ○ Occasionally as needed
    - ○ 2-3 times a year
    - ○ Quarterly
    - ○ Monthly
    - ○ Multiple times a month

C. COMMUNITY, FAMILY, AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

11. What processes has your program used to support parent/adult family member recruitment and participation?

12. What types of roles do parents and adult family members play in your program? How much do you rely on parents and adult family members to play these roles?

We rely on parents and adult members to…	Adult family members do not act in this role	To a minor extent	To a moderate extent	To a major extent
a. Serve as a volunteer to help activity leaders	○	○	○	○
b. Serve as paid staff to lead activities	○	○	○	○
c. Help plan Texas ACE activities	○	○	○	○
d. Help plan and staff special events (e.g., wellness fairs, family nights)	○	○	○	○
e. Chaperone students on field trips taken by the program	○	○	○	○
f. Sit on advisory committees or councils	○	○	○	○

We rely on parents and adult members to…	Adult family members do not act in this role	To a minor extent	To a moderate extent	To a major extent
g. Serve as informal liaisons to help reach and communicate with certain families we are trying to reach (e.g., newcomer families, families that speak another language at home, etc.)	○	○	○	○
h. Other (please describe) _____	○	○	○	○

13. What types of roles do student participants play in your program? How much do you rely on students to play these roles?

We rely on students to…	Students do not act in this role	To a minor extent	To a moderate extent	To a major extent
a. Provide informal feedback on activity content (quick check-ins, etc.)	○	○	○	○
b. Provide survey feedback on activity content	○	○	○	○
c. Help guide program content through focus groups	○	○	○	○
d. Help lead or co-lead activities	○	○	○	○
e. Act as mentors for younger students	○	○	○	○
f. Sit on advisory committees or councils	○	○	○	○
g. Other (please describe) _____	○	○	○	○

D. PARTNERSHIPS AND COORDINATION OF SERVICES

14. Aside from the school(s) and school district your 21st CCLC program serves, does your program at this center have any other partners you work with to support your 21st CCLC program?
    - ○ Yes
    - ○ No

15. [If the answer to #14 is YES] Please indicate the types of organizations you partner with in your 21st CCLC program at this center. Please check all that apply.

21st CCLC Program Partners	Select All That Apply
a. Community-Based Organization or other Not-For-Profit Organization	☐
b. Nationally Affiliated Nonprofit Agency (e.g., Boys & Girls Club, YMCA/YWCA)	☐
c. Faith-Based Organization	☐

21st CCLC Program Partners	Select All That Apply
d. College or University	☐
e. Afterschool Intermediary	☐
f. Regional/Intermediate Education Agency	☐
g. Health-Based Organization (hospital/clinic/etc.)	☐
h. Library	☐
i. Museum/Science Center	☐
j. Park/Recreation District	☐
k. Workforce Development Board	☐
l. Other Unit of City or County Government	☐
m. Business/Corporation	☐
n. Other. Please describe: _____	☐

16. [If the answer to #14 is YES] To what extent do you work with representatives from your partner agencies at this center to coordinate the following activities? If you have several types of partners you work with, please focus on the partners you work most closely with and who are involved in the provision of programming to students and families. You can consider multiple partners in choosing your answers, however.

Coordination Activities	Not at all	To a limited extent	To some extent	To a great extent
a. Establish goals and objectives for the program	○	○	○	○
b. Orient new staff to the program	○	○	○	○
c. Provide professional development opportunities to program staff	○	○	○	○
d. Review program data and target areas for improvement	○	○	○	○
e. Complete quality assessment and improvement processes (e.g., the Youth Program Quality Intervention process)	○	○	○	○
f. Develop and evaluate the effectiveness of operational procedures (e.g., recruitment, scheduling, activity transitions, etc.)	○	○	○	○
g. Plan for program sustainability and/or expansion	○	○	○	○
h. Other (please describe) _____	○	○	○	○

17. Excluding the school and school district, to what extent has finding community partners for each of the following activities been a challenge for your program?

Coordination Activities	We do not need a partner to do this	Looking for a partner but cannot find one	We have a partner, but need more partners or deeper collaboration to do this well	We have the partnerships we need to do this well
a. Programming that addresses student social and emotional needs	○	○	○	○
b. Counseling services for students	○	○	○	○
c. Counseling services for parents/family members	○	○	○	○
d. Programming that addresses academic learning loss	○	○	○	○
e. Job training and placement support for parents/adult family members	○	○	○	○
f. Services that help parents/family members develop English language skills	○	○	○	○
g. Food assistance for families	○	○	○	○
h. Rental assistance for families/supports for homeless families	○	○	○	○
i. Health-related resources for families	○	○	○	○
j. Other (please describe) _____	○	○	○	○

18. In addition to activities and services supported directly by 21st CCLC funding, are there other initiatives at your school or center that provide out-of-school time and related supports/opportunities to students and families? If so, please list them below. Additionally, for each initiative you list please tell us if you have a role in staffing the initiative and whether you actively coordinate 21st CCLC activities with that initiative.

E. CHALLENGES TO ENGAGEMENT

19. In terms of getting students to come to the Texas ACE program, to what extent has each of the following proven a challenge for your program?

	Not a challenge	Minor challenge	Moderate challenge	Major challenge
a. Students have other activities during program time	○	○	○	○
b. School-day staff do not promote the program	○	○	○	○
c. The program has a bad reputation	○	○	○	○
d. School-day staff do not see the importance of Texas ACE participation	○	○	○	○
e. Parents/caregivers do not see the importance of Texas ACE participation	○	○	○	○
f. We don't have the resources and/or staff to offer the variety of programs students want	○	○	○	○
g. Concerns about student safety when it starts getting dark early	○	○	○	○
h. Students turned off by a focus on academics in the program	○	○	○	○
i. Other (Please describe)_____	○	○	○	○

20. In terms of keeping Texas ACE students engaged while they are participating, to what extent has each of the following proven a challenge for your program?

	Not a challenge	Minor challenge	Moderate challenge	Major challenge
a. Students are bored	○	○	○	○
b. Students are tired	○	○	○	○
c. Students are hungry	○	○	○	○
d. Students are distracted	○	○	○	○
e. Other (Please describe)_____	○	○	○	○

21. In terms of getting parents/adult family members to participate in Texas ACE programming geared for adults, to what extent has each of the following proven a challenge for your program?

	Not a challenge	Minor challenge	Moderate challenge	Major challenge
a. They do not have time to participate, even if they want to.	○	○	○	○
b. They do not see the value in participating.	○	○	○	○

	Not a challenge	Minor challenge	Moderate challenge	Major challenge
c. It's difficult knowing what activities adults would like or need.	○	○	○	○
d. We do not have complete contact information for adults.	○	○	○	○
e. Adults do not respond to communication attempts.	○	○	○	○
f. Other (please describe) _____	○	○	○	○

22. Consider the challenges you identified in the preceding questions. What particularly helpful solutions or strategies have you implemented that you would like to share with your 21st CCLC peers?

F. RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

23. What grade levels does your center PRIMARILY serve? Select all that apply.

- □ Elementary
- □ Middle
- □ High school

24. How many years have you worked in the afterschool program at this site in any capacity?

- ○ Less than 1 year
- ○ 1 to 2 years
- ○ 3 to 4 years
- ○ 5 years or more

25. How many years have you worked in your current position for the afterschool program at this site?

- ○ Less than 1 year
- ○ 1 to 2 years
- ○ 3 to 4 years
- ○ 5 years or more

26. Have you previously worked for the school district with which your Texas ACE program is associated?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Prefer not to say

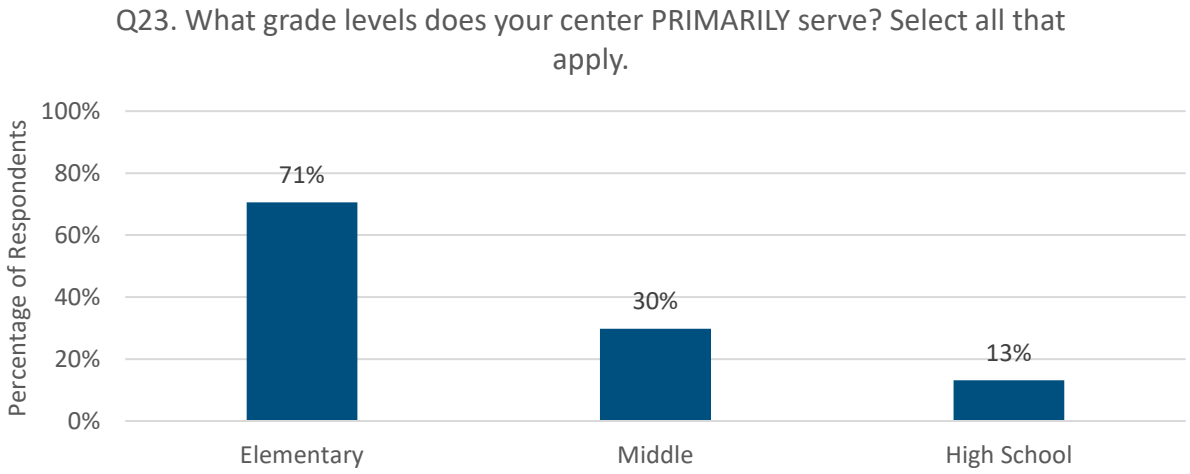
27. Do you live in the community served by the school(s) that your program participants attend?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Prefer not to say

Appendix B. Site Coordinator Survey (Spring 2024) Respondent Characteristics

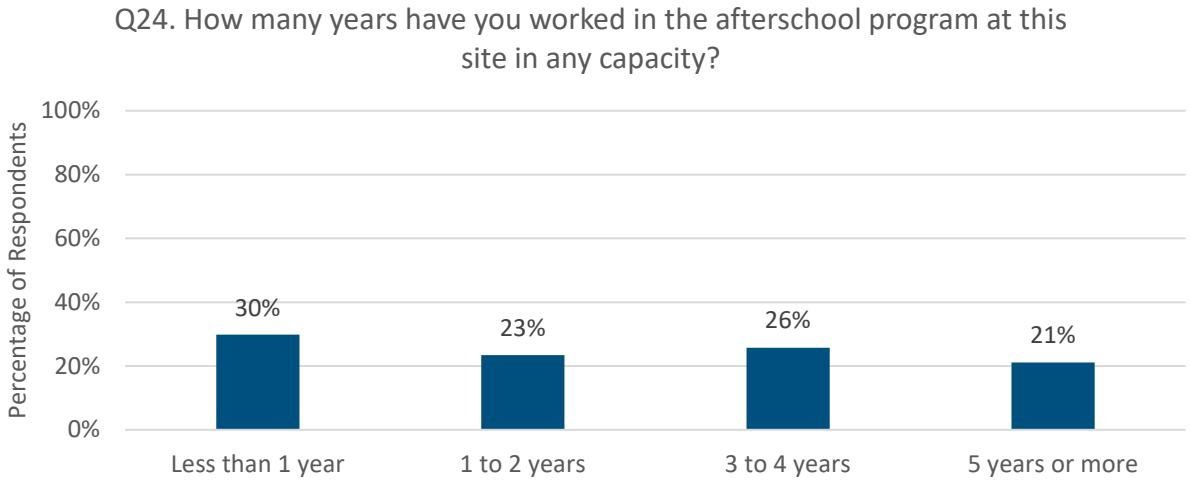
This appendix presents site coordinator survey responses to basic demographic questions. Note that subgroup differences are included in Appendix E (Exhibits E70 to E75).

Exhibit B1. Grade Levels Served by Texas ACE Programs as Reported by Site Coordinator Survey Respondents



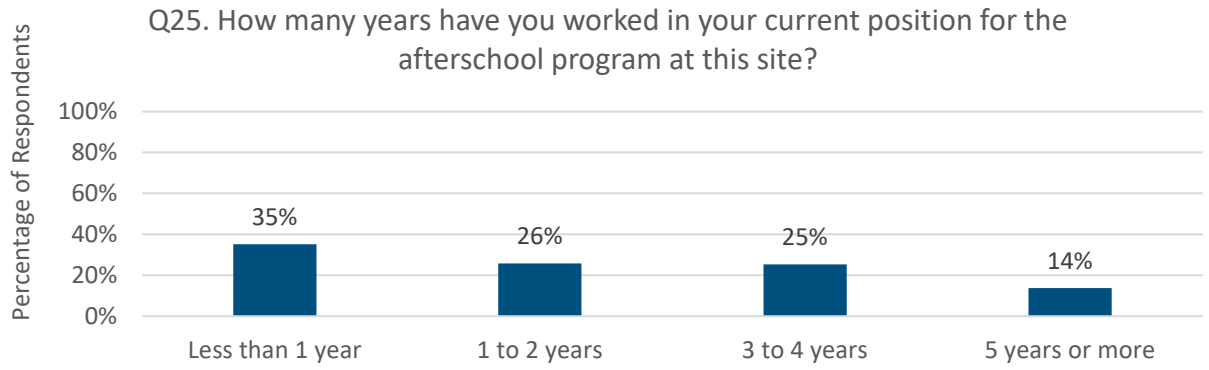
Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by AIR during spring 2024. N = 517.

Exhibit B2. Site Coordinators' Years of Experience at Current Texas ACE Program



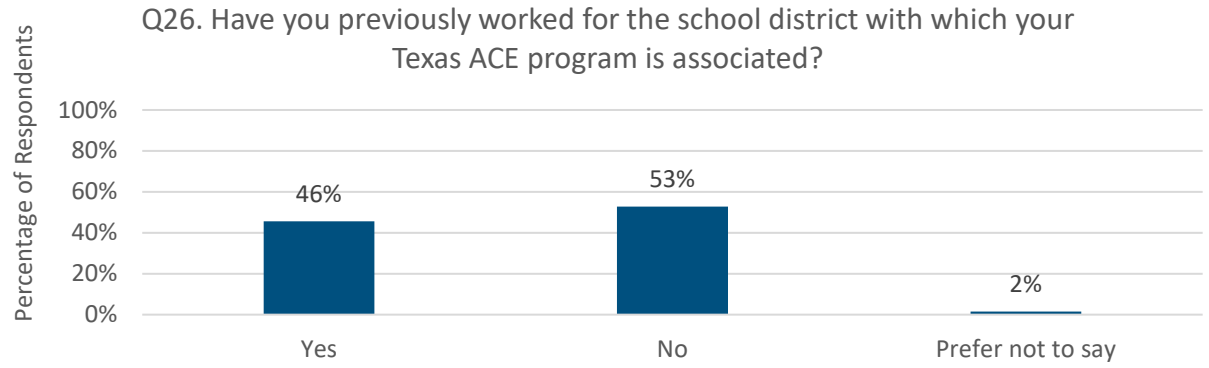
Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by AIR during spring 2024. N = 517.

Exhibit B3. Site Coordinators' Years of Experience as Site Coordinator at Current Texas ACE Program



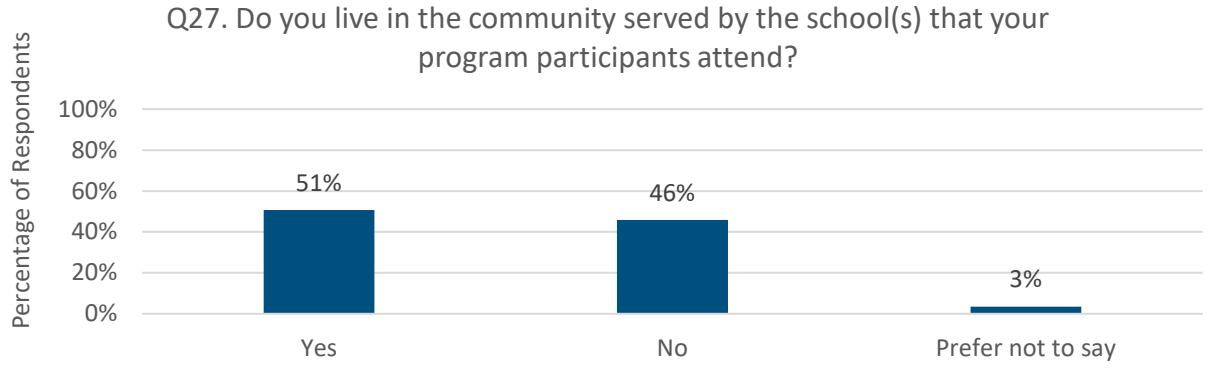
Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by AIR during spring 2024. N = 517.

Exhibit B4. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Prior School District Experience



Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by AIR during spring 2024. N = 517.

Exhibit B5. Texas ACE Site Coordinators Living in the Community Served by the School Attended by Program Participants



Source. Texas ACE site coordinator survey administered by AIR during spring 2024. N = 517.

Appendix C. Center Sampling for Interviews

The purpose of this document is to outline the criteria AIR plans to use to select a sample of Texas ACE grantees represented in Cycles 11 and 12 for inclusion in interviews slated for fall 2024 related to the topics of **program planning; use of a steering committee; community, family, and youth engagement; program partnerships and service coordination; and engagement challenges**. The primary goal of the fall 2024 interviews is to identify and explore innovative, promising, or effective practices in relation to these topics, with a secondary goal of identifying areas of general challenge related to these topics. Ultimately, the sample selection process should result in the identification of 20 Texas ACE programs to target in the fall 2024 interviews, with approximately 10 of those being from Cycle 11 programs and ten from Cycle 12.

The data used to guide sample selection will stem from two sources:

1) Administrative data sent to AIR by TEA, including:
   a. Grant and center names
   b. Grant type
   c. Locale (rural, town, suburban, urban)
   d. Grade levels served (serving elementary or not)

2) Site Coordinator survey response data collected in late spring 2024

As noted, the primary goal of the interviews is to identify promising practices. Because of this, the first step in identifying a sample will involve the creation of a pool of 30 potential interview candidates based on non-open-ended survey responses concerning all topics *except* challenges. This set of 30 candidates will be split evenly between Cycles 11 and 12. This initial sample will then be narrowed based on open-ended survey responses, administrative data, and TEA feedback. Generally, AIR will seek to ensure representation within the sample in terms of Cycle, school type, and locale, but will oversample programs serving elementary-age youth given prior TEA feedback and the overall proportion of programs serving this age group.

Once an initial sample of 20 candidates has been identified, the sample will be reviewed in terms of responses to the *challenge* questions on the survey. The goal is to ensure that the sample includes 2-4 centers per Cycle that report relatively high levels of challenge, and that also report at least some strategy for overcoming those challenges (in the open-ended item concerning strategies). If too few sample centers indicate experiencing challenge, the sample will be reviewed with runner-up candidates to ensure at least some interviewees are able to talk about challenges they have experienced.

Exhibit 1 presents AIR's initial selection criteria related to the site coordinator survey. When creating these criteria, preference was given to those items that yielded varying responses. Exhibit 2 presents AIR's approach to scoring the challenge-related questions.

Exhibit C1. Criteria Used to Identify Site Coordinator Responses from Forced Choice Items that may be Indicative of Adoption of Promising Practices

Concept	Selection Criteria	Points Assigned
Program Planning		
Use of outcome data for needs assessment	Q2. Add one point for each data type that the respondent said was "very important," up to four points total. There are five data types listed (student school-day attendance data, behavioral data, grades or GPA, and standardized test scores, plus "other").	Up to 4
Use of surveys for needs assessment	Q3. Add one point for each survey type administered by the center that was marked as "very important," up to four points. Survey types include teacher surveys, parent surveys, student surveys, community member surveys, and "other."	Up to 4
Use of other data for needs assessment	Q4. Add one point for each data source marked as "very important" for needs assessment, up to four points total. The survey listed six data sources (including other).	Up to 4
Use of Advisory Group		
Texas ACE specific advisory committee	Q5 is answered "yes" (they have an advisory committee) and, per Q6, the committee is specific to the 21st CCLC program (whether specific to the site or for multiple sites).	4
Broad representation on the committee	Q7 asks which groups are represented on the committee, with 12 checkbox options presented along with three additional lines for "other." Add all checked boxes, for a max possible of 8 points. (Note that roughly 4-12% of respondents endorsed each checkbox.)	Up to 8
Advisory Committee role	Q9 asks about the roles that the advisory committee plays, providing respondents with seven check-box items (one of which is "other"). Each check-box endorsed counts as one point, up to four points possible.	Up to 4
Community, Family, and Youth Engagement		
Engaging adults	Q12 asks the extent to which the program relies on adults. The question comprises eight items, such as "serve as paid staff to lead activities." One item is merely "other." Each response of "to a major extent" is worth one point, "to a moderate extent" is worth half a point. Up to eight points possible.	Up to 8
Engaging students	Q13 asks the extent to which the program relies on students. The question comprises seven items, such as	Up to 7

Concept	Selection Criteria	Points Assigned
	"help guide program content through focus groups." Each response of "to a major extent" is worth one point, "to a moderate extent" is worth half a point. Up to seven points possible.	
Program Partnerships and Service Coordination		
Variety of partner agencies	Q15 asks respondents to select all the non-school/non-district partners with which they are working. A total of 14 partner types are listed, with instruction to "check all that apply." Count one point per partner type, up to four points possible.	Up to 4
Collaboration with partners	Q16 asks respondents to indicate the extent to which they work with their partners on different activities (e.g., "review program data and target areas for improvement"). There are eight items in this question. Score one point for each answer of "to a great extent," and half a point for each answer of "to some extent," up to a possible total of four points.	Up to 4

Exhibit C2. Items Used to Identify Centers with High Levels of Reported Challenge

Concept	Selection Criteria	Points Assigned
Challenges		
Difficulty finding partners	Q17 asks respondents to indicate whether they are having difficulty finding partners for different types of coordination activities. Score one point for each response of "looking for a partner but cannot find one" or "we have a partner, but need more partners or deeper collaboration to do this well."	Up to 4
Student attendance challenges	Q19 concerns challenges related to getting students to come to the Texas ACE program. There are nine items for this question. Score one point for each "major challenge" selection, and half a point for each "moderate challenge" selection, with up to four points possible.	Up to 4
Student engagement	Q20 asks about challenges engaging students in programming. There are five items (including "other"). Score one point for each selection of "major challenge," and half a point for each selection of "moderate challenge," up to four points possible.	Up to 4
Adult engagement	Q21 asks about challenges engaging adults in programming. There are six items. Score one point for each response of "major challenge," half a point for each response of "moderate challenge." Score up to four points.	Up to 4

** Note. Role of program in district education strategy not included, since items were not conducive to selection around best practices (i.e., strictly informational).*

Ultimately, the final selection of Cycle 11 and Cycle 12 interview candidates will be based on the following process:

1. Point values for all programs will be calculated according to Exhibits 1 and 2.
2. Treating Cycle 11 and Cycle 12 separately, the list of programs will be sorted in descending order by total *promising practices* points (i.e., totals predicated on Exhibit 1). Programs with the highest point value sums will be considered for inclusion before other programs. Where center scores are identical, centers will be considered in blocks. Selections within these blocks will be based primarily on program locale, grade levels served, and grant type as deciding factors, though reference to open-ended items will also be included.
3. Programs will be added to the sample by starting at the top of each Cycle's sample list and working down. Selection will proceed as follows:
    a. Only one center per grant will be chosen, regardless of score. Other high-scoring centers for a grant will be considered alternates for the included center.
    b. Once 30 centers from different grants have been identified (15 from each Cycle), the resultant combined sample will be assessed in terms of grade levels served, program locale, and grant type. The desired sample will include a majority of elementary centers, a mix of programs by locale, and at least some variation by grant type (grant type variation may be difficult to achieve since most grants are school-based).

        If the sample does not include sufficient centers of a given grade level, locale, or grant type, lower-scoring centers in the sample will be replaced with the highest-scoring *non-sample* centers with that characteristic. For example, if there are not enough rural centers but an overrepresentation of city-based centers, the lowest-scoring city-based center within the sample will be replaced with the next-highest non-sample center that is rural based. Note that the goal is not to achieve perfect representation of the larger center pool, but to ensure at least some level of variation within the sample in terms of these characteristics.
    c. The sample will be reviewed in terms of overall *challenge* score (per Exhibit 2). If 2-4 candidates within each Cycle have at least 8 total challenge-related points, the final sample will be accepted. If not, alternate interview candidates from the full sample list will be considered for inclusion, starting with centers with higher promising-practices point totals.
    d. If higher-challenge candidates are added to the sample, the sample will be re-reviewed in terms of overall characteristics (i.e., step *b* will be revisited).

This process will be used to identify the final 20 candidates, with alternates. The resultant list will be discussed with TEA and revised as needed to derive a final sample.

Appendix D. Site Coordinator Interview Protocol (Fall 2024)

Prior to starting the interview and recording, please read the following:

Thank you for taking the time to join us for today's interview. TEA has contracted with AIR to study Texas ACE programs to explore program implementation, identify approaches and practices that appear to support effective programs, and document program outcomes and impact.

The purpose of this interview is to understand your thoughts and perceptions of how the Texas ACE program is being implemented at your center, with a particular focus on school community engagement and operations in your Texas ACE program. You were nominated as someone who might be able to share some insights related to this topic. During this 90-minute interview, we will ask about strategic planning, community engagement, family engagement, and partnerships.

Your responses in this discussion will only be used to help inform our understanding of centers like yours and will not be used to evaluate your program specifically. We want to learn from you and share insights related to challenges and possible promising practices you've implemented.

Your participation in the interview is completely voluntary, and you have the right to pass on answering any questions or to withdraw from the discussion at any time.

Information from this interview and other data we collect from your Texas ACE program will be included in a written report. That said, your responses to my questions will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. In our reports, none of the respondents will be identified.

Lastly, we would like to record this conversation so we can be sure that we have an accurate record of our discussion. We will not share this recording with anyone outside the research team, and we will delete the recording after the study is complete.

Do I have your permission to record this interview?

I am going to begin the recording now. [TURN ON THE RECORDING.] Today is [STATE FULL DATE, E.G., FRIDAY, October 11, 2024].

Please state your name, title, role, how many years you've worked at your center, and if you feel comfortable sharing, what aspect of afterschool programming you're most passionate about.

[Note to interviewers: school community is defined as principals, school day staff, non-school day staff, students, parents/guardians, center staff. Outside the school community is defined as business or organizations that are not directly employed by or involved in everyday school operations.]

To start, I am going to ask you a few questions about strategic planning and the process that feed into your needs assessment and how you perceive the role of the broader community in shaping activity design and delivery of activities.

Strategic Planning and Operations

1. What are the most prominent examples of **school community** needs that you are currently working to address through activities and support delivered through your center?

2. How do you assess the needs and priorities of the school community when developing a program plan for your center (e.g., a formal needs assessment)? What does this process look like?
    a. Who is involved in this assessment?
    b. What is an example of a meaningful insight you learned from this process and how did you apply that learning?

3. Can you provide an example of how you have successfully collaborated with different types of stakeholders to plan programming? Stakeholders might include school community members such as principals, school day staff, students, and guardians; external stakeholders such as community organizations or businesses; or center staff members.
    [Note to interviewer: Interviewer should probe for each group broadly, but the interviewee does not need to provide an example for every stakeholder group.]
    a. What role do stakeholders play in your collaboration? What decisions do they help make?

4. How do you assess the needs and priorities of the wider community beyond the school community?
    a. What are the most prominent examples of the **wider community needs** that you are currently working to address through activities and supports delivered through your center?

5. How do you know what aspects of your program planning/assessment are successful? [interviewers—we're getting at how they know their evaluation efforts/formal assessments are collecting useful information they can use]

6. How do you address potential challenges or barriers that may arise during the implementation of your assessment process?
    a. Are there any issues of trust between the school and members of the school community that make planning or needs assessment activities more difficult?

Next, I'd like to discuss community engagement, especially related to the role of the Texas ACE advisory group or steering committee in supporting your center.

Community Engagement

(Note to interviewer: Skip questions 8 through 10 if the respondent answers "no" to question seven. If the respondent answers "yes" to question 7, the interviewer should listen for mention of the contribution types listed below, and prompt the interviewee about ones they don't mention.)

7. Do you have an advisory group or steering committee? If yes, how do you engage your advisory group or steering committee in decision-making processes related to:
    a. Goal and activity development?
    b. Programming offerings?
    c. Operating procedures?
    d. Review of program data?
    e. Involvement in quality improvement processes?
    f. Making connections with community partners?
    g. Assisting with sustainability, identifying other sources of funding?
    h. Other?

8. How do you maintain regular communication and collaboration with your advisory group or steering committee members?
    a. *Probe for how they communicate with members, sufficiency of how often they meet, what comes out of their meetings*

9. What have you found makes a successful advisory group or steering committee? How do you know?

10. Are there aspects of the advisory group or steering committee you would like to improve?

Next, I'd like to ask you about family engagement to get a better sense of what part families play, processes for recruitment and participation, and opportunities for leadership and shared decision-making.

Family Engagement

11. Can you provide examples of the most successful strategies or activities you have implemented to foster family involvement in your programming?

12. Do **families** have the opportunity to engage in planning, delivery, or evaluation of programming at your center? *(probe for each)*

13. What challenges or barriers has your center experienced with engaging families? Students?
    a. What strategies have you implemented to address engagement challenges?

14. What adjustments to programming have you made based on the feedback received from families (e.g., parent surveys)?

Next, I'd like to ask you some questions about partnerships—the role they play, how engaged they are in different processes, and any needs for partnerships to fill service gaps.

Partnerships

[Note to interviewers: we're defining partnerships as formal supports provided by organizations or groups outside of the school community]

15. Does your center have any formal partnership agreements?

16. Can you provide examples of the types of partners you typically collaborate with and the specific contributions they make? (examples below)

    (Note to the interviewer: The interviewer should listen for mention of the contribution types listed below, and prompt the interviewee about ones they don't mention.)
    a. Establishing goals and objectives for the program
    b. Orienting new staff to program
    c. Providing after-school and summer programming for students
    d. Providing activities, services, and programming for adult family members
    e. Providing access to other services and support needed by your students and families that cannot be supported with Texas ACE funding
    f. Planning programs
    g. Professional development/training opportunities
    h. Monitoring programs (e.g., how it's working, youth/family engagement, identifying unmet needs)
    i. Quality assurance processes of programming

17. Are there other organizations involved in providing resources and supports in the school(s) you serve that you frequently coordinate and collaborate with (e.g., Communities in Schools, After School All Stars)? What does this coordination and collaboration look like?

18. Can you share any challenges or barriers you have encountered when working with partners?
    a. Have school administrators been supportive of partnerships? Any challenges related to value, buy-in?
    b. Have you been able to address those challenges? If so, how?

19. Can you describe a specific example of a successful partnership that significantly impacted your center's programming and the outcomes for the children and/or families involved?
    a. How did you know the partnership was successful? What were the key ingredients that made the partnership successful?

20. Do you have any goals for this school year in relation to:
    a. identifying new partners?
        i. Are there service gaps for which partners are needed but you have difficulty finding?

    And/or

    b. sustaining existing partnerships?
        i. How does sustaining partnerships help your center's planning for its own sustainability (the ability to continue operating and serving children)?

Wrap-Up

21. Is there anything else we need to know about how school community engagement and operations function in your Texas ACE program that we have not discussed today?

Appendix E. Significant Chi Square Test Results: Survey Subgroup Differences

Chi square tests were used to examine subgroup differences in terms of survey question response patterns. Subgroups examined included locale (rural, town, suburban, and city), grade levels served (elementary only compared with programs serving older youth, whether exclusively or in addition to elementary), grant school-based status (i.e., whether the grant entity managing the grant funds is a school district, or is some other entity such as a community-based organization), and grant program cycle (Cycle 11 versus Cycle 12).

All statistically significant results are shown in this appendix (based on chi-square, $p < .05$).

A. STRATEGIC PLANNING

Q1. Is a formal needs assessment done at your center to help inform the types of programming provided by the 21st CCLC program?

Exhibit E1. Needs Assessment at Texas ACE Programs, by School-District Grant Status

	Non-School District	School District
Yes, our center has conducted a formal needs assessment	54%	53%
Yes, but as part of a school needs assessment	26%	36%
No	3%	1%
I'm not sure	17%	10%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for non-school district = 198, N for school district = 340.

Q2. In the past year, which of the following school-related, student outcome data has your center used to assess needs? For the data types you used, how important was each data source for informing your activity offerings?

Exhibit E2. Texas ACE Program Use of Student School-Day Attendance Data for Needs Assessment, by School-District Grant Status

	Non-School District	School District
Not used for assessing needs	3%	3%
Used to assess needs, and a little important for informing activities	5%	2%
Used to assess needs, and moderately important for informing activities	24%	14%
Used to assess needs, and very important for informing activities	69%	80%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for non-school district = 193, N for school district = 338.

Exhibit E3. Texas ACE Program Use of Standardized Test Scores for Needs Assessment, by School-District Grant Status

	Non-School District	School District
Not used for assessing needs	12%	6%
Used to assess needs, and a little important for informing activities	8%	7%
Used to assess needs, and moderately important for informing activities	30%	25%
Used to assess needs, and very important for informing activities	49%	63%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for non-school district = 193, N for school district = 338.

Q3. In the past year, what types of surveys has your program used to assess needs? How important was each data source for informing your activity offerings?

Exhibit E4. Texas ACE Program Use of Parent Surveys for Needs Assessment, by Grant Cycle

	Cycle 11	Cycle 12
Not used for assessing needs	2%	6%
Used to assess needs, and a little important for informing activities	7%	3%
Used to assess needs, and moderately important for informing activities	17%	24%
Used to assess needs, and very important for informing activities	74%	67%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Cycle 11 = 285, N for Cycle 12 = 245.

Exhibit E5. Texas ACE Program Use of Student Surveys for Needs Assessment, by Grant Cycle

	Cycle 11	Cycle 12
Not used for assessing needs	2%	4%
Used to assess needs, and a little important for informing activities	5%	0%
Used to assess needs, and moderately important for informing activities	11%	14%
Used to assess needs, and very important for informing activities	82%	82%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Cycle 11 = 285, N for Cycle 12 = 245.

Exhibit E6. Texas ACE Program Use of Student Surveys for Needs Assessment, by Center Locale

	Rural	Town	Suburban	City
Not used for assessing needs	1%	3%	2%	4%
Used to assess needs, and a little important for informing activities	2%	2%	2%	4%
Used to assess needs, and moderately important for informing activities	22%	15%	8%	9%
Used to assess needs, and very important for informing activities	75%	80%	87%	83%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for rural = 104, N for town = 93, N for suburban= 133, N for city = 197.

Q4. In the past year, what other data sources has your program used to assess needs? How important was each data source for informing your activity offerings?

Exhibit E7. Texas ACE Program Use of Program Observations for Needs Assessment, by School-District Grant Status

	Non-School District	School District
Not used	1%	1%
A little important	5%	2%
Moderately important	25%	19%
Very important	68%	78%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for non-school district = 193, N for school district = 334.

Exhibit E8. Texas ACE Program Use of Program Observations for Needs Assessment, by Center Locale

	Rural	Town	Suburban	City
Not used	0%	1%	3%	1%
A little important	6%	3%	1%	3%
Moderately important	30%	14%	17%	23%
Very important	64%	82%	80%	74%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for rural = 104, N for town = 93, N for suburban = 132, N for city = 195.

B. ADVISORY GROUP

Q5. Does your program have an advisory committee, group, or council (whether specific to your program or school-wide)?

No chi-square analyses for this item were statistically significant.

Q6. [Only answered if the respondent indicated existence of a 21st CCLC advisory group in Question 5.] Is the advisory committee, group or council you work with specific to the 21st CCLC program, or does it serve a larger advisory role?

Exhibit E9. General versus Specific Texas ACE Program Advisory Group, by School-District Grant Status

	Non-School District	School District
Specific to the 21st CCLC program at my site	31%	16%
Specific to the 21st CCLC program but supports multiple sites	34%	37%
Serves a larger advisory role at the school, center, district, or organization	27%	44%
I am not sure	7%	3%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for non-school district = 124, N for school district = 225.

Q7. [If the answer to Question 5 is YES] Which of the following groups are represented on the advisory committee, group, or council? Please select all that apply.

Exhibit E10. Advisory Group Representation, by Elementary-Only Status

	Non-Elementary Only	Elementary Only
Teachers	67%	55%
University faculty/staff	15%	7%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for non-elementary only = 109, N for elementary only = 340.

Exhibit E11. Advisory Group Representation, by Cycle

	Cycle 11	Cycle 12
Principal/assistant principal	64%	77%
Parents/guardians	80%	70%
Coordinator(s) for other grant-funded programs working in my school or center	43%	57%
University faculty/staff	7%	14%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Cycle 11 = 198, N for Cycle 12 = 146.

Exhibit E12. Advisory Group Representation, by School District Grant Status

	Non-School District Grant	School District Grant
Community members	42%	59%
City/municipal staff	7%	16%
Businesses	16%	26%
Other district staff	12%	23%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for non-school district grant = 122, N for school district grants = 222.

Exhibit E13. Advisory Group Representation, by Center Locale

	Rural	Town	Suburban	City
21st CCLC grant project director	69%	81%	83%	67%
Parents/guardians	81%	81%	83%	66%
City/municipal staff	18%	19%	15%	6%
Businesses	34%	22%	25%	14%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for rural = 62, N for town = 59, N for suburban = 95, and N for city = 126.

Q8. [If the answer to Question 5 is YES] How are members of the advisory committee, group, or council selected?

This item was open-ended and therefore excluded from chi-square analysis.

Q9. [If the answer to Question 5 is YES] What role does the advisory committee, group, or council play in supporting your 21st CCLC program? Please select all that apply.

Exhibit E14. Advisory Group Roles, by School District Grant Status

	Non-School District Grant	School District Grant
Works to coordinate service provision across multiple programs	40%	52%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for non-school district grant = 118, N for school district grant = 217.

Q10. [if the answer to #6 is YES] How often does the advisory committee, group or council meet?

Exhibit E15. Advisory Group Meeting Frequency, by Cycle

	Cycle 11	Cycle 12
Occasionally as needed	18%	24%
2-3 times a year	20%	32%
Quarterly	18%	20%
Monthly	37%	15%
Multiple times a month	7%	8%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Cycle 11 = 194, N for Cycle 12 = 142.

Q11. What processes has your program used to support parent/adult family member recruitment and engagement?

This item was open-ended and therefore excluded from chi-square analysis.

Q12. What types of roles do parents and adult family members play in your program? How much do you rely on parents and adult family members to play these roles?

Exhibit E16. Parent and Adult Family Member Volunteers in Texas ACE Programs, by Locale

We rely on parents and adult members to **serve as a volunteer to help activity leaders.**	Rural	Town	Suburban	City
Adult family members do not act in this role	34%	40%	17%	27%
To a minor extent	35%	25%	25%	32%
To a moderate extent	22%	27%	39%	26%
To a major extent	9%	8%	19%	14%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for rural = 104, n for town = 92, n for suburban = 131, n for city = 194.

Exhibit E17. Parent and Adult Family Member as Activity Planners in Texas ACE Programs, by Locale

We rely on parents and adult members to **help plan Texas ACE activities.**	Rural	Town	Suburban	City
Adult family members do not act in this role	54%	63%	34%	48%
To a minor extent	25%	15%	27%	25%
To a moderate extent	16%	17%	27%	17%
To a major extent	5%	4%	11%	9%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for rural = 104, n for town = 92, n for suburban = 131, n for city = 194.

Exhibit E18. Parent and Adult Family Member Helping to Plan and Staff Special Events in Texas ACE Programs, by Locale

We rely on parents and adult members to **help plan and staff special events (e.g., wellness fairs, family nights).**	Rural	Town	Suburban	City
Adult family members do not act in this role	41%	55%	24%	38%
To a minor extent	30%	20%	31%	25%
To a moderate extent	22%	15%	27%	19%
To a major extent	7%	9%	18%	18%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for rural = 104, n for town = 92, n for suburban = 131, n for city = 194.

Q13. What types of roles do student participants play in your program? How much do you rely on students to play these roles?

Exhibit E19. Student Participants Providing Informal Feedback in Texas ACE Programs, by Locale

We rely on students to **provide informal feedback on activity content (quick check-ins, etc.).**	Rural	Town	Suburban	City
Students do not act in this role	4%	2%	1%	2%
To a minor extent	5%	2%	3%	5%
To a moderate extent	20%	35%	18%	17%
To a major extent	71%	61%	79%	77%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for rural = 104, n for town = 92, n for suburban = 131, n for city = 194.

Exhibit E20. Student Participants Providing Survey Feedback in Texas ACE Programs, by Locale

We rely on students to **provide survey feedback on activity content.**	Rural	Town	Suburban	City
Students do not act in this role	5%	5%	3%	2%
To a minor extent	7%	8%	3%	13%
To a moderate extent	28%	36%	26%	23%
To a major extent	61%	51%	68%	63%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for rural = 104, n for town = 92, n for suburban = 131, n for city = 194.

Exhibit E21. Student Participants Helping Lead or Co-Lead Activities in Texas ACE Programs, by Grade Levels Served

We rely on students to **help lead or co-lead activities.**	Non-Elementary Only	Elementary Only
Students do not act in this role	12%	12%
To a minor extent	18%	30%
To a moderate extent	43%	31%
To a major extent	28%	28%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Non-Elementary Only = 173, N for Elementary Only = 345.

Exhibit E22. Student Participants Sit on Advisory Committees or Councils in Texas ACE Programs, By Grade Levels Served

We rely on students to **sit on advisory committees or councils.**	Non-Elementary Only	Elementary Only
Students do not act in this role	53%	59%
To a minor extent	16%	19%
To a moderate extent	19%	9%
To a major extent	12%	12%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Non-Elementary Only = 173, N for Elementary Only = 345.

Exhibit E23. Student Participants Sit on Advisory Committees or Councils in Texas ACE Programs, by School District Grant Status

We rely on students to **sit on advisory committees or councils.**	Non-School District Grant	School District Grant
Students do not act in this role	54%	59%
To a minor extent	15%	20%
To a moderate extent	18%	9%
To a major extent	14%	12%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Non-School District Grant = 192, N for School District Grant = 332.

Exhibit E24. Student Participants in Other Roles in Texas ACE Programs, by School District Grant Status

We rely on students for **other roles.**	Non-School District Grant	School District Grant
Students do not act in this role	82%	92%
To a minor extent	1%	0%
To a moderate extent	1%	1%
To a major extent	5%	2%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Non-School District Grant = 192, N for School District Grant = 332.

D. PARTNERSHIPS AND COORDINATION OF SERVICES

Q14. Aside from the school(s) and school district your 21st CCLC program serves, does your program at this center have any other partners you work with to support your 21st CCLC program?

Exhibit E25. Proportion of Texas ACE Programs that have Partners Other than Schools or School Districts, by Cycle

	Cycle 11	Cycle 12
Yes	74%	66%
No	26%	34%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Cycle 11 = 284, N for Cycle 12 = 240.

Exhibit E26. Student Participants in Other Roles in Texas ACE Programs, by School District Grant Status

	Non-School District Grant	School District Grant
Yes	61%	75%
No	39%	25%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Non-School District Grants = 192, N for School District Grants = 332.

Q15. [If the answer to #14 is YES] Please indicate the types of organizations you partner with in your 21st CCLC program at this center. Please check all that apply.

Exhibit E27. Proportion of Texas ACE Programs with Partners of a Given Type, by Grade Levels Served

	Non-Elementary Only	Elementary Only
Museum/Science Center	21%	32%
Workforce Development Board	26%	13%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Non-Elementary Only = 120, N for Elementary Only = 252.

Exhibit E28. Proportion of Texas ACE Programs with Partners of a Given Type, by Cycle

	Cycle 11	Cycle 12
Nationally-Affiliated Nonprofit Agency (e.g., Boys & Girls Club, YMCA/YWCA)	34%	21%
Faith-Based Organization	19%	10%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Cycle 11 = 215, N for Cycle 12 = 160.

Exhibit E29. Proportion of Texas ACE Programs with Partners of a Given Type, by School District Grant Status

	Non-School District Grant	School District Grant
Community-Based Organization or other Not-for-Profit Organization	68%	79%
College or University	43%	56%
Health-Based Organization (hospital/clinic/etc.)	21%	32%
Library	33%	43%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Non-School District Grant = 122, N for School District Grant = 253.

Exhibit E30. Proportion of Texas ACE Programs with Partners of a Given Type, by Locale

	Rural	Town	Suburban	City
Regional/Intermediate Education Agency	11%	20%	2%	6%
Library	42%	59%	37%	32%
Park/Recreation District	41%	52%	30%	23%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for rural = 71, N for town = 61, N for suburban = 99, and N for city = 142.

Q16. [If the answer to #14 is YES] To what extent do you work with representatives from your partner agencies at this center to coordinate the following activities? If you have several types of partners you work with, please focus on the partners you work most closely with and who are involved in the provision of programming to students and families. You can consider multiple partners in choosing your answers, however.

Exhibit E31. Texas ACE Program Coordination with Partner Agencies to Provide Professional Development, by Cycle

"Provide professional development opportunities to program staff"	Cycle 11	Cycle 12
Not at all	21%	19%
To a limited extent	14%	19%
To some extent	22%	34%
To a great extent	42%	28%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Cycle 11 = 210, N for Cycle 12 = 15.

Exhibit E32. Texas ACE Program Coordination with Partner Agencies to Provide Professional Development, by School District Status

"Provide professional development opportunities to program staff"	Non-School District Grant	School District Grant
Not at all	16%	23%
To a limited extent	22%	13%
To some extent	31%	25%
To a great extent	31%	39%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Non-School District Grant = 118, N for School District Grant = 248.

Exhibit E33. Texas ACE Program Coordination with Partner Agencies to Complete Quality Assessment and Improvement Processes, by Cycle

"Complete quality assessment and improvement processes (e.g., the Youth Program Quality Intervention process)"	Cycle 11	Cycle 12
Not at all	31%	24%
To a limited extent	14%	22%
To some extent	20%	31%
To a great extent	35%	23%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Cycle 11 = 210, N for Cycle 12 = 156.

Exhibit E34. Texas ACE Program Coordination with Partner Agencies to Plan for Program Sustainability and/or Expansion, by School District Status

"Plan for program sustainability and/or expansion"	Non-School District Grant	School District Grant
Not at all	13%	21%
To a limited extent	17%	22%
To some extent	40%	21%
To a great extent	31%	35%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Non-School District Grant = 118, N for School District Grant = 248.

Q17. Excluding the school and school district, to what extent has finding community partners for each of the following activities been a challenge for your program?

Exhibit E35. Need among Texas ACE Programs for Partners to Provide Programming that Addresses Social and Emotional Needs, by School District Status

"Programming that addresses student social and emotional needs"	Non-School District Grant	School District Grant
We do not need a partner to do this	17%	16%
Looking for a partner but cannot find one	17%	11%
We have a partner, but need more partners or deeper collaboration to do this well	39%	32%
We have the partnerships we need to do this well	26%	41%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Non-School District Grant = 191, N for School District Grant = 328.

Exhibit E36. Need among Texas ACE Programs for Partners to Provide Job Training and Placement Support for Parents/Adult Family Members, by Cycle

"Programming that addresses student social and emotional needs"	Cycle 11	Cycle 12
We do not need a partner to do this	17%	30%
Looking for a partner but cannot find one	29%	29%
We have a partner, but need more partners or deeper collaboration to do this well	31%	28%
We have the partnerships we need to do this well	22%	13%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Cycle 11 = 283, N for Cycle 12 = 236.

Exhibit E37. Need among Texas ACE Programs for Partners to Provide Services that Help Parents/Family Members Develop English Language Skills, by Cycle

"Programming that addresses student social and emotional needs"	Cycle 11	Cycle 12
We do not need a partner to do this	16%	26%
Looking for a partner but cannot find one	28%	28%
We have a partner, but need more partners or deeper collaboration to do this well	27%	31%
We have the partnerships we need to do this well	29%	16%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Cycle 11 = 283, N for Cycle 12 = 236.

Exhibit E38. Need among Texas ACE Programs for Partners to Provide Services that Help Parents/Family Members Develop English Language Skills, by School District Status

"Programming that addresses student social and emotional needs"	Non-School District Grant	School District Grant
We do not need a partner to do this	21%	20%
Looking for a partner but cannot find one	32%	25%
We have a partner, but need more partners or deeper collaboration to do this well	30%	28%
We have the partnerships we need to do this well	16%	27%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Non-School District Grant = 191, N for School District Grant = 328.

Exhibit E39. Need among Texas ACE Programs for Partners to Provide Food Assistance for Families, by Cycle

"Food assistance for Families"	Cycle 11	Cycle 12
We do not need a partner to do this	13%	19%
Looking for a partner but cannot find one	18%	22%
We have a partner, but need more partners or deeper collaboration to do this well	28%	26%
We have the partnerships we need to do this well	40%	33%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Cycle 11 = 283, N for Cycle 12 = 236.

Exhibit E40. Need among Texas ACE Programs for Partners to Provide Food Assistance for Families, by School District Status

"Food assistance for Families"	Non-School District Grant	School District Grant
We do not need a partner to do this	15%	16%
Looking for a partner but cannot find one	26%	16%
We have a partner, but need more partners or deeper collaboration to do this well	30%	26%
We have the partnerships we need to do this well	28%	42%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Non-School District Grant = 191, N for School District Grant = 328.

Exhibit E41. Need among Texas ACE Programs for Partners to Provide Rental Assistance for Families/Supports for Homeless Families, by Cycle

"Rental Assistance for Families/Supports for Homeless Families"	Cycle 11	Cycle 12
We do not need a partner to do this	24%	33%
Looking for a partner but cannot find one	29%	37%
We have a partner, but need more partners or deeper collaboration to do this well	25%	19%
We have the partnerships we need to do this well	21%	11%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Cycle 11 = 283, N for Cycle 12 = 236.

Exhibit E42. Need among Texas ACE Programs for Partners to Provide Other Activities, by School District Status

"Other"	Non-School District Grant	School District Grant
We do not need a partner to do this	82%	91%
Looking for a partner but cannot find one	2%	1%
We have a partner, but need more partners or deeper collaboration to do this well	2%	0%
We have the partnerships we need to do this well	4%	2%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Non-School District Grant = 191, N for School District Grant = 328. Note that 20 respondents associated with Non-School District Grants left this row blank, as did 19 respondents associated with School District Grants (10% and 6% respectively).

Q18. In addition to activities and services supported directly by 21st CCLC funding, are there other initiatives at your school or center that provide out-of-school time and related supports/opportunities to students and families? If so, please list them below. Additionally, for each initiative you list please tell us if you have a role in staffing the initiative and whether you actively coordinate 21st CCLC activities with that initiative.

This item was open-ended and therefore excluded from chi-square analysis.

E. CHALLENGES TO ENGAGEMENT

Q19. In terms of getting students to come to the Texas ACE program, to what extent has each of the following proven a challenge for your program?

Exhibit E43. Challenge Getting Students to Come to Texas ACE Programs Due to Competing Activities, by Grade Levels Served

"Students have other activities during program time"	Non-Elementary Only	Elementary Only
Not a challenge	12%	27%
Minor challenge	11%	30%
Moderate challenge	29%	28%
Major challenge	47%	14%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Elementary Only = 171, N for Non-Elementary Only = 342.

Exhibit E44. Challenge Getting Students to Come to Texas ACE Programs Due to Competing Activities, by Cycle

"Students have other activities during program time"	Cycle 11	Cycle 12
Not a challenge	25%	18%
Minor challenge	23%	24%
Moderate challenge	30%	28%
Major challenge	21%	31%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Cycle 11 = 283, N for Cycle 12 = 236.

Exhibit E45. Challenge Getting Students to Come to Texas ACE Programs Due to Competing Activities, by Locale

"Students have other activities during program time"	Rural	Town	Suburban	City
Not a challenge	10%	16%	23%	30%
Minor challenge	19%	16%	28%	27%
Moderate challenge	35%	42%	25%	22%
Major challenge	37%	25%	24%	21%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for rural = 101, N for town = 91, N for suburban = 130, N for city = 194.

Exhibit E46. Challenge Getting Students to Come to Texas ACE Programs Due to Non-Promotion by School-Day Staff, by Grade Levels Served

"School-day staff do not promote the program"	Non-Elementary Only	Elementary Only
Not a challenge	37%	61%
Minor challenge	30%	21%
Moderate challenge	21%	11%
Major challenge	12%	7%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Elementary Only = 171, N for Non-Elementary Only = 342.

Exhibit E47. Challenge Getting Students to Come to Texas ACE Programs Due to Bad Program Reputation, by Grade Levels Served

"The program has a bad reputation"	Non-Elementary Only	Elementary Only
Not a challenge	74%	87%
Minor challenge	15%	8%
Moderate challenge	8%	4%
Major challenge	2%	1%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Elementary Only = 171, N for Non-Elementary Only = 342.

Exhibit E48. Challenge Getting Students to Come to Texas ACE Programs Due to Bad Program Reputation, by Locale

"The program has a bad reputation"	Rural	Town	Suburban	City
Not a challenge	72%	78%	88%	86%
Minor challenge	17%	19%	9%	5%
Moderate challenge	9%	2%	2%	7%
Major challenge	2%	1%	1%	2%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for rural = 101, N for town = 91, N for suburban = 130, N for city = 194.

Exhibit E49. Challenge Getting Students to Come to Texas ACE Programs Due to School-Day Staff Not Seeing Importance of Participation, by Locale

"School-day staff do not see the importance of Texas ACE participation"	Rural	Town	Suburban	City
Not a challenge	47%	49%	55%	60%
Minor challenge	25%	32%	31%	23%
Moderate challenge	20%	10%	7%	12%
Major challenge	9%	9%	7%	5%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for rural = 101, N for town = 91, N for suburban = 130, N for city = 194.

Exhibit E50. Challenge Getting Students to Come to Texas ACE Programs Due to Parents/Caregivers Not Seeing Importance of Participation, by Grade Levels Served

"Parents/caregivers do not see the importance of Texas ACE participation"	Non-Elementary Only	Elementary Only
Not a challenge	42%	60%
Minor challenge	34%	26%
Moderate challenge	16%	9%
Major challenge	8%	5%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Elementary Only = 171, N for Non-Elementary Only = 342.

Exhibit E51. Challenge Getting Students to Come to Texas ACE Programs Due to Parents/Caregivers Not Seeing Importance of Participation, by Locale

"Parents/caregivers do not see the importance of Texas ACE participation"	Rural	Town	Suburban	City
Not a challenge	46%	37%	65%	58%
Minor challenge	30%	44%	23%	25%
Moderate challenge	16%	11%	6%	13%
Major challenge	8%	8%	6%	3%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for rural = 101, N for town = 91, N for suburban = 130, N for city = 194.

Exhibit E52. Challenge Getting Students to Come to Texas ACE Programs Due to Concerns about Student Safety when it Starts Getting Dark Early, by School District Status

"Concerns about student safety when it starts getting dark early"	Non-School District	School District
Not a challenge	60%	60%
Minor challenge	14%	24%
Moderate challenge	14%	8%
Major challenge	13%	8%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Non-School District = 191, N for School District = 328.

Exhibit E53. Challenge Getting Students to Come to Texas ACE Programs Due to Concerns about Student Safety when it Starts Getting Dark Early, by Locale

"Concerns about student safety when it starts getting dark early"	Rural	Town	Suburban	City
Not a challenge	46%	66%	59%	66%
Minor challenge	19%	20%	27%	16%
Moderate challenge	18%	9%	7%	9%
Major challenge	18%	5%	7%	9%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for rural = 101, N for town = 91, N for suburban = 130, N for city = 194.

Exhibit E54. Challenge Getting Students to Come to Texas ACE Programs Due to Students Being Turned Off by a Focus on Academics, by Grade Levels Served

"Students turned off by a focus on academics in the program"	Non-Elementary Only	Elementary Only
Not a challenge	20%	38%
Minor challenge	25%	32%
Moderate challenge	31%	19%
Major challenge	24%	11%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Elementary Only = 171, N for Non-Elementary Only = 342.

Q20. In terms of keeping Texas ACE students engaged while they are participating, to what extent has each of the following proven a challenge for your program?

Exhibit E55. Challenge of Students Being Bored in Texas ACE Programs, by Grade Levels Served

"Students are bored"	Non-Elementary Only	Elementary Only
Not a challenge	28%	44%
Minor challenge	44%	42%
Moderate challenge	23%	11%
Major challenge	5%	3%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Elementary Only = 171, N for Non-Elementary Only = 342.

Exhibit E56. Challenge of Students Being Tired in Texas ACE Programs, by Grade Levels Served

"Students are tired"	Non-Elementary Only	Elementary Only
Not a challenge	20%	23%
Minor challenge	32%	40%
Moderate challenge	30%	27%
Major challenge	18%	10%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Elementary Only = 171, N for Non-Elementary Only = 342.

Exhibit E57. Challenge of Students Being Tired in Texas ACE Programs, by Cycle

"Students are tired"	Cycle 11	Cycle 12
Not a challenge	26%	17%
Minor challenge	39%	35%
Moderate challenge	23%	34%
Major challenge	11%	14%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Cycle 11 = 283, N for Cycle 12 = 236.

Exhibit E58. Challenge of Students Being Hungry in Texas ACE Programs, by Grade Levels Served

"Students are hungry"	Non-Elementary Only	Elementary Only
Not a challenge	29%	59%
Minor challenge	25%	22%
Moderate challenge	28%	12%
Major challenge	18%	7%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Elementary Only = 171, N for Non-Elementary Only = 342.

Exhibit E59. Challenge of Students Being Hungry in Texas ACE Programs, by Cycle

"Students are hungry"	Cycle 11	Cycle 12
Not a challenge	54%	42%
Minor challenge	24%	23%
Moderate challenge	14%	22%
Major challenge	8%	14%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Cycle 11 = 283, N for Cycle 12 = 236.

Exhibit E60. Challenge of Students Being Hungry in Texas ACE Programs, by School District Status

"Students are hungry"	Non-School District	School District
Not a challenge	40%	54%
Minor challenge	25%	23%
Moderate challenge	21%	15%
Major challenge	14%	9%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Non-School District = 191, N for School District = 328.

Exhibit E61. Challenge of Students Being Hungry in Texas ACE Programs, by Locale

"Students are hungry"	Rural	Town	Suburban	City
Not a challenge	39%	35%	59%	54%
Minor challenge	24%	31%	19%	22%
Moderate challenge	19%	24%	12%	18%
Major challenge	19%	10%	10%	7%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for rural = 101, N for town = 91, N for suburban = 130, and N for city = 194.

Exhibit E62. Challenge of Students Being Distracted in Texas ACE Programs, by Grade Levels Served

"Students being distracted"	Non-Elementary Only	Elementary Only
Not a challenge	15%	32%
Minor challenge	40%	44%
Moderate challenge	29%	16%
Major challenge	16%	7%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Elementary Only = 171, N for Non-Elementary Only = 342.

Q21. In terms of getting parents/adult family members to participate in Texas ACE programming geared for adults, to what extent has each of the following proven a challenge for your program?

Exhibit E63. Challenge of Parents/Guardians Not Having Time to Participate in Texas ACE Programming, by Grade Levels Served

"They do not have time to participate, even if they want to"	Non-Elementary Only	Elementary Only
Not a challenge	15%	20%
Minor challenge	17%	37%
Moderate challenge	44%	28%
Major challenge	25%	15%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Elementary Only = 171, N for Non-Elementary Only = 341.

Exhibit E64. Challenge of Parents/Guardians Not Having Time to Participate in Texas ACE Programming, by Cycle

"They do not have time to participate, even if they want to"	Cycle 11	Cycle 12
Not a challenge	19%	17%
Minor challenge	25%	36%
Moderate challenge	34%	33%
Major challenge	22%	14%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Cycle 11 = 283, N for Cycle 12 = 235.

Exhibit E65. Challenge of Parents/Guardians Not Having Time to Participate in Texas ACE Programming, by Locale

"They do not have time to participate, even if they want to"	Rural	Town	Suburban	City
Not a challenge	18%	19%	25%	13%
Minor challenge	32%	26%	33%	29%
Moderate challenge	41%	31%	29%	33%
Major challenge	10%	24%	12%	24%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for rural = 101, N for town = 91, N for suburban = 130, and N for city = 193.

Exhibit E66. Challenge of Parents/Guardians Not Seeing the Value in Texas ACE Program Participation, by Grade Levels Served

"They do not see the value in participating"	Non-Elementary Only	Elementary Only
Not a challenge	24%	40%
Minor challenge	38%	33%
Moderate challenge	23%	18%
Major challenge	15%	9%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Elementary Only = 171, N for Non-Elementary Only = 341.

Exhibit E67. Challenge of Not Knowing What Activities Adults Would Like or Need, by Grade Levels Served

"It's difficult knowing what activities adults would like or need"	Non-Elementary Only	Elementary Only
Not a challenge	37%	49%
Minor challenge	32%	35%
Moderate challenge	23%	11%
Major challenge	8%	5%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Elementary Only = 171, N for Non-Elementary Only = 341.

Exhibit E68. Challenge of Not Having Complete Contact Information for Adults, by Grade Levels Served

"It's difficult knowing what activities adults would like or need"	Non-Elementary Only	Elementary Only
Not a challenge	68%	79%
Minor challenge	19%	16%
Moderate challenge	12%	3%
Major challenge	1%	2%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Elementary Only = 171, N for Non-Elementary Only = 341.

Exhibit E69. Challenge of Adult Not Responding to Communication Attempts, by Grade Levels Served

"It's difficult knowing what activities adults would like or need"	Non-Elementary Only	Elementary Only
Not a challenge	24%	35%
Minor challenge	32%	38%
Moderate challenge	27%	18%
Major challenge	17%	9%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Elementary Only = 171, N for Non-Elementary Only = 341.

Q22. Consider the challenges you identified in the preceding questions. What particularly helpful solutions or strategies have you implemented that you would like to share with your 21st CCLC peers?

This item was open-ended and therefore excluded from chi-square analysis.

Q23. What grade levels does your center PRIMARILY serve? Select all that apply.

Exhibit E70. Texas ACE Centers Primarily Serving Middle School, by School District Grant Status

	Non-School District	School District
"Middle"	34%	25%
"High school"	17%	10%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Non-School District = 199, N for School District = 340.

Exhibit E71. Texas ACE Centers Primarily Serving Middle School, by Grant Cycle

	Cycle 11	Cycle 12
"High school"	9%	17%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Cycle 11 = 287, N for Cycle 12 = 252.

Q24. How many years have you worked in the afterschool program at this site in any capacity?

Exhibit E72. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Years of Experience at their Site in Any Capacity, by Grade-Level Status

	Non-Elementary Only	Elementary Only
Less than 1 year	39%	25%
1 to 2 years	21%	24%
3 to 4 years	24%	27%
5 years or more	16%	24%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for non-elementary only = 170, N for elementary only = 340.

Exhibit E73. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Years of Experience at their Site in Any Capacity, by Grant Cycle

	Cycle 11	Cycle 12
Less than 1 year	19%	43%
1 to 2 years	29%	17%
3 to 4 years	35%	14%
5 years or more	16%	26%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Cycle 11 = 282, N for Cycle 12 = 234.

Q25. How many years have you worked in your current position for the afterschool program at this site?

Exhibit E74. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Years of Experience at their Site in Any Capacity, by Grant Cycle

	Cycle 11	Cycle 12
Less than 1 year	23%	50%
1 to 2 years	33%	18%
3 to 4 years	36%	12%
5 years or more	8%	21%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for Cycle 11 = 282, N for Cycle 12 = 234.

Q26. Have you previously worked for the school district with which your Texas ACE program is associated?

No statistically significant subgroup differences were observed for this question.

Q27. Do you live in the community served by the school(s) that your program participants attend?

Exhibit E75. Texas ACE Site Coordinators Living in the Community Served by the School Program Participants Attend, by Locale

	Rural	Town	Suburban	City
Yes	58%	75%	38%	44%
No	40%	24%	58%	51%
Prefer not to say	2%	1%	4%	5%

Source. Texas ACE Site Coordinator Survey administered by AIR in Spring 2024. N for rural = 101, N for town = 91, N for suburban = 130, and N for city = 193.

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AIR® Headquarters
1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor
Arlington, VA 22202-3289
+1.202.403.5000 | **AIR.ORG**

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