

21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS: Evaluation of Projects Funded During the 2004-2005 School Year



Evaluation Project Staff

Andrew Moellmer
Amie Rapaport
Eishi Adachi
Jessica Sievert

Program Staff

Gina Day
Geraldine Kidwell
Kristen Stohl



**Office for Planning, Grants and
Evaluation**

Texas Education Agency

February 2007

Executive Summary

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program is authorized under Title IV, Part B, of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. The purpose of the program is to create or expand community learning centers that provide academic enrichment activities to economically disadvantaged and other students in at-risk situations. In addition to academics, other valuable services and activities are included (e.g., drug and violence prevention, character education, technology, art, music, recreation) that are intended to complement the students' regular academic program during non-school hours (e.g., after school, weekends, summer).

It is important to note that 21st CCLCs are not intended solely for academic improvement, but also to provide a safe place after school where students can go to receive academic assistance if needed and participate in a range of enrichment activities. While academic improvement is certainly the key long-term goal, researchers and others interested in programmatic impacts should keep in mind the value of shorter-term, non-academic benefits when evaluating these programs.

One innovative feature of the program is the provision of academic and enrichment activities targeted at students' adult family members and young siblings. For example, the 21st CCLCs offer a material benefit to working parents by providing a safe, supervised environment for their children during after-school hours and other periods when school is not in session (e.g., weekends, summer recess).

Previous research studies on the effectiveness of after-school programs conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, The Harvard Family Research Project, The National Institute on Out of School Time, and other entities have shown that such programs can have a positive impact on students' classroom and out-of-school behavior, as well as academic performance.

Although the program has been in existence for a number of years, it was during the 2003-2004 program year that grant funds were first subject to program enhancements contained in the NCLB Act of 2001, including a requirement that the program be continuously evaluated using

federally- and state-determined performance measures. In 2004, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) conducted its first annual evaluation of 21st CCLC programs based on the first round of data submitted by Cycle 1 grantees to fulfill this requirement. This report constitutes the second statewide evaluation of 21st CCLC programs in Texas, and examines the effect of program participation on various academic performance metrics during the 2004-2005 school year. By that school year, three cycles of grant funding were awarded to 122 grantees, with a total of nearly 116,000 students receiving services in 493 community learning centers. The findings presented in this report are a follow-up from last year's report and inform the direction that future longitudinal and comparison group studies may take once more data become available.

Overall, the data show that the 21st CCLC program is reaching the intended population. Examination of student demographic information shows that a majority of 21st CCLC participants during the 2004-2005 school year were economically disadvantaged, Hispanic, and enrolled in elementary school. Less than 13% of students were enrolled in a middle/high school. Approximately one in three 21st CCLC students in 2004-2005 were limited English proficient. These results are consistent across all three grant cycles.

Student participation rates in Cycle 1 and Cycle 3 programs were consistent, with 41% to 43% of students attending more than 50% of available program days during the school year. Student participation was somewhat lower in Cycle 2, with 34% of students attending more than 50% of available program days.

The majority of activities (52% or more in every grant cycle) implemented at Texas community learning centers provided instruction in the core academic areas of reading/language arts and mathematics, and in fine arts and youth development. Services offered by community learning centers were provided by certified teachers (60% or more of paid staff in every grant cycle) working in collaboration with an average of five to seven community-based partners per center.

The findings presented in the report indicate that participation in 21st CCLC funded activities during the 2004-2005 school year was associated with improved student performance in several key areas, for some student populations:

Middle/high school students who regularly attended the 21st CCLC program performed better than middle/high school students from 21st CCLC feeder schools who did not attend the program on the following metrics:

- Regular school day reading grades
- Regular school day mathematics grades
- Retention rates (i.e., program participants had lower rates of being retained in grade than non-participating students)

Similarly positive results were not observed for TAKS reading outcomes.

Elementary school-aged 21st CCLC participants did not show improved performance over non-participant students on the following metrics:

- TAKS reading and mathematics scores
- Regular school day reading grades
- Regular school day mathematics grades
- Retention rates

Having at least one adult family member participating with them in community learning center activities was universally beneficial, as these students participated in an average of 15% to 23% more activities than students with no family members participating.

Overall, these results indicate that participation in 21st CCLC funded activities is associated statistically with improvement in some key measures of student performance for middle/high school students, but that this beneficial impact is not yet being observed among elementary school participants. It is also not being observed for TAKS reading and mathematics scores. And, though significant findings were observed, differences were small in size. Further research is needed to ascertain long-term academic outcomes, but as noted above, academic achievement is only one facet of the 21st CCLC program.

The fact that only a small proportion of 21st CCLC students were enrolled in middle/high school suggests that there is room for improvement in encouraging these students to increase their time spent in community learning center activities. Additionally, given that less than half of all 21st CCLC students participated in a more than 50% of available activities, encouraging all

participating students to spend more time in a community learning center is an area of focus for program improvement.

The positive finding that students engage in more center activities if they have adult family members participating indicates that encouraging family participation in center activities may positively impact students' experiences. Previous research shows that less than half of the targeted adults (49%) actually participated in community learning center activities during the 2003-2004 school year. The data showed that once they did participate, approximately two-thirds (66%) of adult family members returned to participate again the following school year.¹ Improving family member recruitment strategies could be an important means to increase student participation, and by extension lead to improved academic performance among the students in at-risk situations targeted by the 21st CCLC program.

¹ See Texas Education Agency, 21st Century Community Learning Center: Evaluation of Projects Funded for the 2004-05 School Year (http://www.tea.state.tx.us/opge/progeval/OutOfSchoolLearning/21cclc_03_04_eval.pdf).