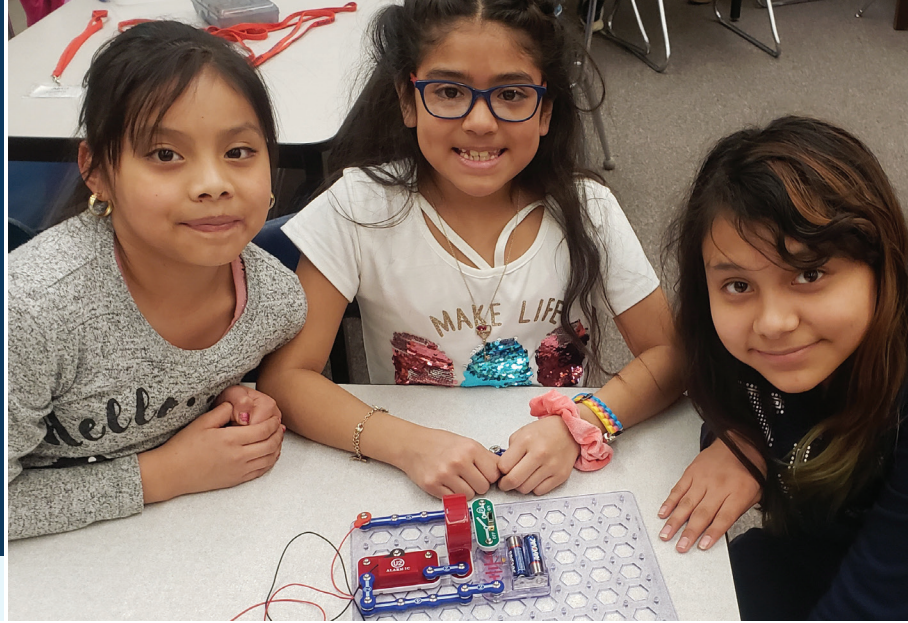


Two Decades of 21st Century Community Learning Centers: Providing afterschool and summer opportunities to millions of young people and families

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The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative is the only federal funding source dedicated exclusively to supporting local afterschool, before-school, and summer learning programs. Since its inception in 1994, the program has supported local school and community based organization partnerships that provide a safe and supervised environment for youth, while inspiring students to learn and providing supports to their families.

Over the years, the program has evolved to become a local afterschool model — serving students attending high-poverty, low-performing schools in an effort to help address the opportunity and achievement gaps present in these communities. 21st CCLC programs engage students in hands-on learning activities aimed at supporting their academic growth; provide a variety of enrichment activities (ranging from service learning to physical fitness and health) to complement school day learning; and offer educational and support services to the families of participating children.¹ Evaluations of 21st CCLC programs have found that students who regularly participate see improvements in their school-day attendance and engagement in school, as well as academic gains. Throughout the course of the initiative's more than 25 years, millions of students have taken part in a program that has helped them explore and find new areas of interest, connect with positive adult mentors, and build their academic, social, and emotional skills and competencies so they can grow and thrive in and out of school.

As a national initiative with state leadership focusing on quality and professional development and built-in local flexibility to meet community needs, the infrastructure of 21st CCLC serves as a model that leverages federal, state, and local efforts. Through coordinated investment at the federal level, to states that direct funding to local priorities, technical assistance, best practices, and innovative programs, 21st CCLC continues to help move the afterschool field forward.

What 21st CCLC looks like today



More than 8 in 10 programs are located in public school districts



Each grantee has on average 9 partner organizations



Programs stay open on average: 13.8 hours per week, 5 days per week, and 32 weeks per year



On average, programs receive \$1,495 per attendee



Programs serve 68 percent of students from households with low-income and 14 percent with limited English proficiency

Sources:

Learning Point Associates. Profile and Performance Information Collection System (PPICS). Data retrieved May 1, 2014.

U.S. Department of Education. (2020). *21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) analytic support for evaluation and program monitoring: An overview of the 21st CCLC performance data: 2018-2019 (15th report)*. Retrieved from https://oese.ed.gov/files/2020/03/18-19_apr_21st_cclc_2020_03_12_clean-002-003.pdf

The evolution of 21st CCLC

Prior to the 1990s, the responsibility of afterschool care and enrichment fell largely on families and community organizations, and funding for programs was primarily from local sources. However, in the late 20th century, cultural shifts began to take place that prompted federal involvement in the afterschool space. As more women entered the workplace and both parents were working outside the home, children were unsupervised in the hours after school.² This left parents worrying about the safety and well-being of their children during this time; as a Department of Education and Department of Justice report found, “latchkey” children are more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as drug and alcohol use.³ In response, the “21st Century Community Learning Centers Act” was introduced to Congress in 1994 with bipartisan support. Ultimately, the bill was incorporated into the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as the “Improving America’s Schools Act” and received an appropriation of \$750,000 in 1995.⁴

21st CCLC grew rapidly in the late 1990s—including an increase in funding for the initiative, the number of students served by programs, and the number of grant requests due to the high demand for programs. As education reforms began to focus exclusively on achievement gaps, afterschool programs were viewed as a solution to help address the problem by combatting a contributing factor: the opportunity gap, which refers to the “unequal or inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities,” such as access to afterschool and other enrichment programs.⁵ With this new widespread attention on achievement, 21st CCLC made a shift toward providing academic supports, which today remains a primary goal of the program.

Prior to 2002

- Programs applied directly to the Department of Education
- Grant length: 3 years
- Average grant: \$500,000 (2000)

Now

- State-run competition based on a state’s share of 21st CCLC funds (allocated by Title I formula)
- Grant length: 3-5 years
- Average grant: \$373,000 (2020)*

Sources:

McCallion, G. (2002). 21st Century Community Learning Centers: A History of the Program. Congressional Research Service. Retrieved from https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20020122_RL30306_657b7ac638cf585415393902173335dd01c5a5a6.pdf

*An Afterschool Alliance calculation based on the amount appropriated to the 21st CCLC initiative through the FY2020 Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 and the total number of currently funded 21st CCLC grantees reported by State Education Agencies. State Education Agency data were collected between January and March 2020.

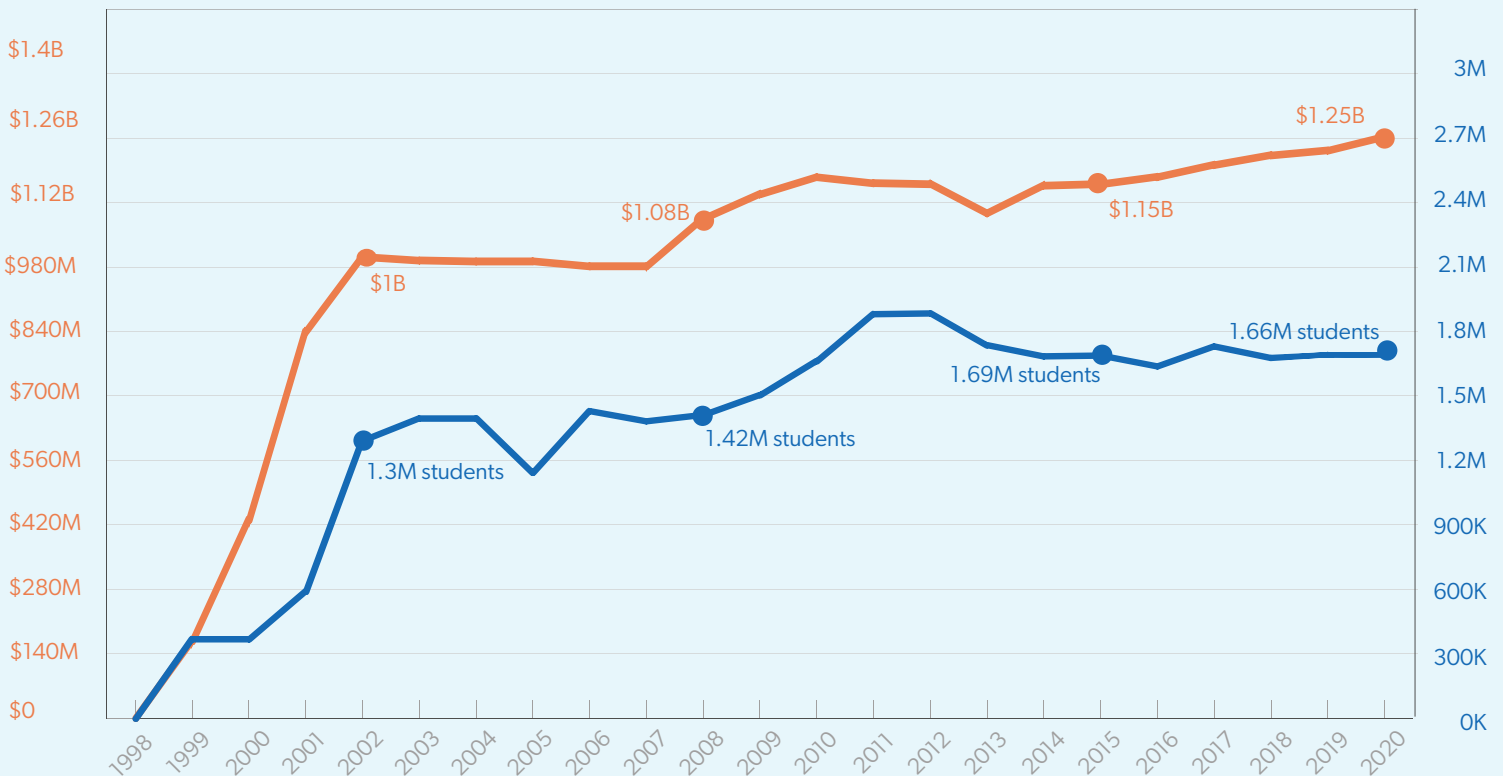


Narrowed focus on academic supports for students

Initially, the 21st CCLC initiative was designed to support all members of the community, not only students, by providing grants for “educational, recreational, health, and social service programs for residents of all ages within a local community.”⁶ At the time, the grant money could be used to provide a variety of activities and resources, and each center that received money was required to offer at least four community supports that would benefit different members of a community, such as literacy education programs, parenting skills education, and senior citizen programs.⁷ However, following the 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), 21st CCLC’s broad community learning center model—that previously provided afterschool and summer programming for youth as well as social services to all members of a community—shifted to a more narrowly defined afterschool program model aimed at providing academic supports to students.⁸ Specifically, 21st CCLC provided students in high-poverty, low-performing schools with “opportunities for academic enrichment” to help them meet state and local academic achievement standards.⁹ To complement the academic supports to students, 21st CCLC programs under NCLB could provide enrichment activities and educational opportunities for families of participating students.¹⁰ Today, 21st CCLC programs continue to serve these students, as well as their families.¹¹



21st CCLC Funding and Students Served Over the Years



*The 2020 number of students served is based on the U.S. Department of Education’s report, *21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) analytic support for evaluation and program monitoring: An overview of the 21st CCLC performance data: 2018-2019 (15th report)*.

— \$ Amount Appropriated
 — Number of Students

Allowable uses of 21st CCLC funds through the years

	Original uses of grant money (1994-2002)	NCLB uses of grant money (2002-2015)	ESSA uses of grant money (2015-Present day)
Academic focused supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanded library service hours Telecommunications and technology education Literacy education programs Summer and weekend school programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanded library service hours Telecommunications and technology education programs Remedial education activities and academic enrichment programs Tutoring services and mentoring programs Mathematics and science education activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanded library service hours Telecommunications and technology education programs Literacy education programs, including financial and environmental literacy Academic enrichment, mentoring, remedial education, and tutoring programs Programs that build skills in STEM, including computer science, and foster innovation in learning
Health/wellness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education, health, social service, recreational, or cultural programs Nutrition and health programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recreational activities Drug and violence prevention, counseling, and character education programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programs that support a healthy lifestyle, including nutritional education and regular physical activity programs Drug and violence prevention and counseling programs
Parent/adult supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parenting skills education programs Services for those who leave school before graduating from secondary school Senior citizen programs Employment counseling, training, and placement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programs that promote parental involvement and family literacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parenting skills programs that promote parental involvement and family literacy
Supports for vulnerable populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services for individuals with disabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programs that provide academic assistance to students who have been truant, suspended, or expelled Programs for limited English proficient students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services for individuals with disabilities Programs that provide assistance to students who have been truant, suspended, or expelled Programs for English learners
Day care services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children’s day care services Support and training for day care providers 		
College and career readiness		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entrepreneurial education programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programs that partner with in-demand local workforce fields or build career readiness skills, such as internships, apprenticeships, and entrepreneurial programs Well-rounded education activities, including credit recovery or attainment
Other enrichment		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arts and music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arts and music Service learning Cultural programs

Change to a more comprehensive evaluation system

NCLB also resulted in state administration of 21st CCLC, which came with a new emphasis on technical assistance, professional development, and evaluation, as well as linkages to state education priorities. State education agencies began investing in their own quality improvement and evaluation systems, but also had to gather data from their grantees to meet federal reporting requirements. Because academic achievement was of primary importance at the time, 21st CCLC programs were required to collect and report data on students who regularly attended the program (30 days or more) to assess changes in grades, state assessment scores, and homework completion and class participation. The individual grantee data is reported to State Education Agencies who in turn share it with the U.S. Department of Education via an annual performance report system. U.S. Department of Education annual performance reports have consistently found gains in areas such as math and reading/English language arts achievement and standardized test scores.

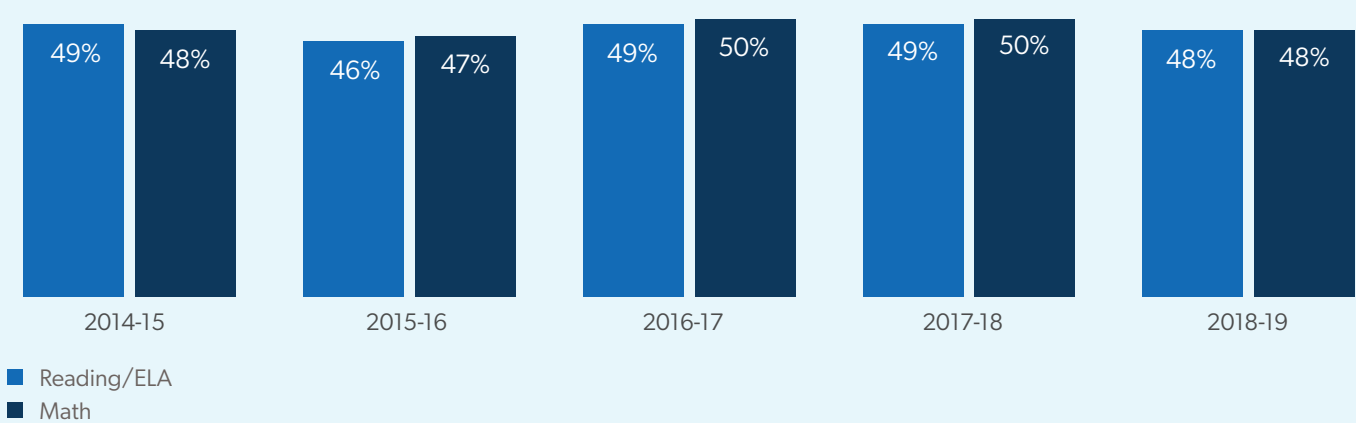
The annual performance report system now also includes data from teachers regarding student improvement in classroom behavior, and annual performance reports have largely found majorities of students making positive gains. However, research institutions such as RAND and the Government Accountability Office have recommended additional behavioral indicators to better capture the wide range of supports provided by 21st CCLC programs, such as social and emotional skills and competencies, as well as broader performance measurements, like programs' benefit to parents.¹²

Currently, the Department of Education is in the process of revising the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) indicators for the 21st CCLC program to update the indicators to better align with current day goals and activities of programs. Overarching changes to the indicators include greater attention to improvements in student engagement in learning and more accurately reflecting student growth. The new indicators and an updated performance report system will go into effect for the 2021-22 school year.



Department of Education annual performance reports have shown students in 21st CCLC programs are making consistent gains in math and reading

% of regularly attending 21st CCLC students improving in their math or reading grades



A return to its roots

Subsequent to the 2015 passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization, known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), 21st CCLC began to redefine what afterschool could look like. With a broader understanding of what supports young people need to thrive, there is now a greater emphasis on whole child development and incorporating physical activity, nutrition, and overall wellness into programs. Part of this includes social and emotional learning. In recent years, embedding a social and emotional learning approach into practice has expanded rapidly in the education field as more research has emerged on its importance to children's development and overall wellbeing. Currently, helping children build their social and emotional skills and competencies is a part of many 21st CCLC programs, as well as mental health and trauma informed learning. Additionally, ESSA emphasizes a well-rounded education and increased attention in 21st CCLC is on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and workforce development, as they are critical areas to prepare youth for 21st century jobs.¹³ With these new changes and wider reaching supports to youth, 21st CCLC today is not only concentrated on academics, but has returned to more of a comprehensive support system for students and families that need it the most.

21st CCLC programs today

Based on the most recently available data, there are more than 10,000 21st CCLC programs across the country reaching approximately 1.7 million students during the school year and 381,000 adults and family members.¹⁴ Through opportunities such as STEM programming, social and emotional supports, and academic enrichment, 21st CCLC programs benefit high-need students in more ways than one: boosting academic performance, promoting positive behaviors, and providing a safe, structured environment for kids to go after school. As research has shown, 21st CCLC programs help students make gains in math and reading grades and test scores, as well as improve classroom behavior, school engagement, and school day attendance.¹⁵ For example, Hawai'i's statewide evaluation found that 82 percent of regular 21st CCLC participants improved their homework completion and class participation.¹⁶ In addition, many 21st CCLC programs have demonstrated strong or moderate evidence of effectiveness based on the ESSA tiers of evidence, in which, based on experimental and quasi-experimental studies, regular afterschool participation is correlated with higher positive outcomes.¹⁷

Keeping kids safe

Through the years, various aspects of the 21st CCLC grant program have changed, including who they serve, what they provide, and how programs are evaluated. However, 21st CCLC has always remained true to its original intent—keeping kids safe in the hours after school. Recently, research has shown that while juvenile crime rates have declined, they are still highest between 2 and 6 p.m., the hours after school and before parents return home from work, when children are more likely to be left unsupervised.

Fight Crime, Invest in Kids. (2019). From Risk to Opportunity: Afterschool Programs Keep Kids Safe. Council for a Strong America. Retrieved from <https://www.strongnation.org/articles/930-from-risk-to-opportunityafterschool-programs-keep-kids-safe>



Evolving to meet changing community needs

Throughout the course of the 21st CCLC grant initiative, 21st CCLC programs have always put student needs first. **Project EXTRA** at Laconia School District in Laconia, New Hampshire, has been operating since 2002, and during its 18 years has grown to become an integrated part of the district, enabling the program to best serve its students. The program has an advisory board made up of community members, including the superintendent, principals, parents, businesses, the mayor, and students, which allows them to hear directly from the community so they can meet their needs. Since the start of the program, academics has been a central focus, and in the last 10 years, they have incorporated a project based learning framework to better engage students and help build social and emotional competencies. This skill-building is intended to better prepare youth for life after high school, as more jobs are looking for 21st century skills that can be applied across fields. They have also placed a greater emphasis on social and emotional learning due to the increase in students in their programs with adverse childhood experiences, where the program now uses restorative practices and staff are trained to handle these situations. More recently, in response to a community needs assessment and the need to better engage students at the middle school level, the program instituted their REAL Initiative. Through this, the program created a middle school student leadership team to guide programming and career and college readiness activities, such as bringing in local chefs to teach their signature dishes, and running mock trials assisted by lawyers and police officers. Middle school attendance rates have since greatly improved and they now operate a robust middle school program.



Reaching students most in need

21st CCLC programs provide academic help, social and emotional supports, and meals in a safe space after school to some of our country's most vulnerable children. For example, the **Hornets of Character** program in rural Colcord, Oklahoma, serves a community of concentrated poverty, a community where a high percent of the population lives below the federal poverty line. As the only afterschool program in the area, Hornets of Character is vital in the community, supporting students' skill development and overall well-being in hopes that those students can give back to their community in the future. The program provides their students with meals, positive adult mentorship, youth development, cultural programs, and additional supports such as health and wellness classes, substance abuse counseling, and other social services. Located in the heart of Cherokee Nation, Hornets of Character ensures that their programming is culturally sensitive and responsive to their Native American students. The curriculum includes learning and practicing native language through a Cherokee

word of the day, language bowls, and a Cherokee club that meets twice a week. The Colcord county sheriff praised the afterschool program for engaging the children with constructive activities, and the afterschool program has also seen remarkable academic growth in its students, with Colcord Elementary improving from an F-rated school to a B-rated school since the start of the program.

Another program, **Raiders ARK** in Arcadia, Wisconsin, serves a small, rural town with limited resources available in the community. Not only does the program serve a community of concentrated poverty, 80 percent of its students are English language learners (ELL) and 14 percent are students with disabilities. As many of the students in the program have experienced trauma, Raiders ARK takes a social and emotional learning (SEL) approach to best support its students. Each table in the classroom is set up as a “family” unit to help foster a sense of belonging, and each day starts and ends with student check-ins so teachers can offer the necessary supports for that day. This SEL approach, and particularly the family tables, is especially helpful for the ELL students. The tables are intentionally set up with students of different language ability, where students can learn from one another and practice their English. The program notes improved confidence, social skills, and gains in English skills and language acquisition.



Partnerships allow for unique programming opportunities

One of the critical aspects of 21st CCLC programs is their partnership network. Partnerships enable programs to offer unique opportunities and a broad array of additional services, programs, and activities that students otherwise might not have access to. The **BREAD Center**, in Birmingham, Alabama, for example, has several partners around the nation, including a unique partnership with NASA that provides career readiness opportunities in STEM fields. Through this partnership, students participate in Zero Robotics, a programming competition where students program SPHERES (Synchronized Position Hold Engage and Reorient Experimental Satellites) to solve challenges, such as navigating obstacles and picking up objects all while conserving fuel, charge, and other resources. Finalists have the unique opportunity to compete aboard the International Space Station, where an astronaut conducts the competition through a live broadcast. Other partners, such as local bank representatives, the Fire Department, and the Cooperative Extension System, come into the program to lead activities for students and parents, including Money Making Cents to teach financial literacy; fire safety classes; and health and nutrition lessons. In addition, the City of Birmingham Division of Youth Services provides youth workers during the summer to serve as aides in the program. These partners are key to the overall success of the program. In a survey of program students, 84 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they liked the afterschool program, and according to teacher surveys, more than half of participants increased their overall academic performance (54 percent). Teachers noted that most students in the program did not need to improve.

Engaging older youth

21st CCLC programs also engage older youth and provide high school students with unique opportunities that can help support college and career readiness. For example, **Lathrop After the Bell** at Lathrop High School in Fairbanks, Alaska, concentrates on academics, especially among freshmen, to ensure students stay on track to graduate. The program offers daily tutoring, test preparation, and a variety of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) based enrichment courses. Lathrop After the Bell also offers “LAB time” for students to receive help in developing resumes, filling out job applications, practicing interview skills, and applying for colleges, tech, or trade schools with help from the school counselor. Since first serving high school students in 2004-05, the program has continually grown and evolved to meet the needs and interests of their teens. They have strengthened their partnership with their local university to provide students the opportunity to connect with college students, learned about student interests and passions to incorporate them into the curriculum, and put on career readiness workshops with local leaders. For example, through their Delta GEMS group, a program of the Delta Sigma Theta Service Sorority, girls worked on resumes and practiced interview skills with local professionals, some of whom included a school principal, nurse, social worker, local assemblywoman, NAACP president, and a military family specialist. These connections have led to successful post-high school endeavors with acceptance to a nursing program and social work internship. As a result of their efforts, the program has noted an increase in academic achievement and improved behavior over time. More than half of regular program attendees at Lathrop High School improved on state assessments in math (51 percent) and reading (59 percent), and among those who had below-average attendance rates the prior year, 57 percent increased their attendance.



Introducing kids to STEM and building employability skills

Many 21st CCLC programs offer STEM curriculum that helps prepare youth for 21st century jobs in the STEM fields that are driving today’s global economic growth. **Safe Harbor** in Michigan City, Indiana, has become primarily a STEM program for students in grades K-12. Initially, Safe Harbor was geared more toward general college and career readiness, and with the growing emphasis on STEM careers nationwide, transitioned to become STEM-focused. Today, Safe Harbor works as a feeder system, where starting in elementary school, the program exposes kids to age-appropriate STEM curriculum to help build foundational skills that they will continue to expand upon as they reach older grades. By the time they reach high school, students are well versed in basic STEM skills, allowing them to take part in more advanced projects. At the elementary level, the program offers afterschool manufacturing academies where youth learn about engineering; how to use the program’s machinery, which includes laser cutters and 3D printers; and can utilize their problem solving skills by identifying a problem and figuring out a solution. For example, kids designed and produced a product to stop their chairs from squeaking using their 3D printers. At the middle and high school levels, students learned how to build 3D printers, which they then used in other schools. In the 2019-20 school year, 89 percent of K-6th grade regular program participants at one elementary school maintained or improved their English language arts (ELA) from fall to spring, and 91 percent maintained or improved their math grade. Teachers reported that 75 percent improved classroom behavior and “getting along well with others”. These results were similar across other elementary, middle, and high school programs.

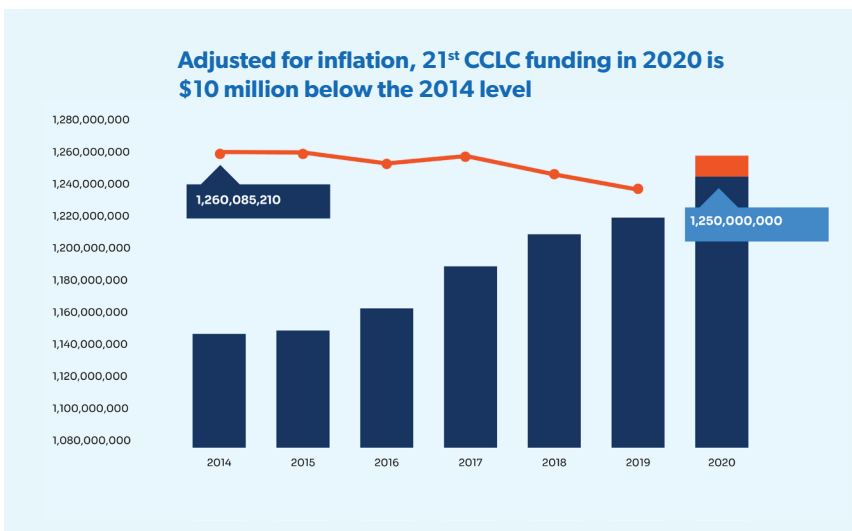


Conclusion

21st Century Community Learning Centers play an essential role in communities across the country, offering unique opportunities for academic and enrichment activities to youth who otherwise might not have them. Since the start of the grant, 21st CCLC programs have kept kids safe in the hours after school, and today, the program has grown to become a more whole child-focused afterschool model that provides academic, social and emotional, behavioral, and overall health and wellness supports to youth and their families. 21st CCLC programs are intentional in their offerings to students and provide an expanded set of activities and supports, where both keeping kids safe and providing enrichment are priorities. Additionally, 21st CCLC programs, through school-community partnerships, offer supports that complement and build on, but do not replicate, school day lessons.

As a result of 21st CCLC funding, many communities have been able to open up afterschool programs or expand upon services and increase accessibility. While 21st CCLC programs creatively combine multiple funding streams and partnerships to serve the children and families in their community, the funding they receive through the 21st CCLC initiative is imperative. For example, in interviews with 21st CCLC programs, many expressed the sentiment that both the services and number of students served would be dramatically impacted if they were to lose 21st CCLC funding. One program, Community Education Partnership in West Valley City, Utah, will be entirely shut down when their current grant cycle ends because their community lacks enough resources to support the programming without the federal investment. In just four years, they will have gone from serving 10,000 students in 26 programs throughout the community to completely shutting their doors.

As a national initiative, with state investments in quality and professional development, and local flexibility to meet community needs, the 21st CCLC program is continuously improving and serves as a model of the synergy that is created when federal, state, and local efforts are aligned. Many states have created or adopted (and continue to update, per new research) afterschool quality standards, observational tools, and professional conferences in connection with their 21st CCLC programs. While not every program is yet lucky enough to access 21st CCLC grant funding, programs across states and the country have been able to learn from and utilize these tools and examples. The 21st CCLC programs are often seen as a standard for quality, innovation, and best practices, and continue to move the field forward.



21st CCLC programs provide many benefits for youth and their families, and fortunately, the growth in funding throughout the years has enabled more children and families to be served by 21st CCLC programs. However, much more investment is needed to ensure that all children who want to participate in an afterschool program are afforded that opportunity. While more than 17 million youth are in low-income settings that would qualify them as eligible to attend 21st CCLC programs, funding currently only allows for 1.7 million children to participate. Over the last decade, public investments in afterschool programs have largely stalled and not kept up with

the cost of inflation or the growing demand. After adjusting for inflation, 21st CCLC funding in 2020 is \$10 million below the 2014 level. Additionally, on average in each grant cycle, only 1 in 3 applications is awarded.¹⁸ In order for 21st CCLC programs to serve more students in need, meet the changing needs of youth and their families in the 21st century, and continue on its trajectory of success and standard for quality in the field, greater investment is urgently needed.

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