

Afterschool Centers on Education

Cycle 9 Foundation Communities

Final Report 2020–2021



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) is the program administered through the Texas Education Agency (TEA) for the federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) grants authorized under Title IV, Part B, of the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (Public Law 114-95). ACE Foundation Communities received Cycle 9 21st CCLC funding to provide a comprehensive range of out-of-school-time (OST) academic assistance, academic enrichment, college and career readiness, and family engagement activities. Building on the existing infrastructure of evidence-based OST activities and partnerships, ACE Foundation Communities collaborates with a range of partners to provide a comprehensive menu of before-school, afterschool, and summer programming. ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 program exists to provide intentional afterschool program experiences that are high quality, are challenging, and inspire all program participants to improve their school outcomes. By serving students at Title I schools, ACE Foundation Communities strives to achieve the overarching goal of narrowing the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and students of more affluent families. Across activities and centers, the afterschool program focuses on three primary objectives:

- increase academic achievement
- decrease school-day attendance
- decrease in-school suspensions

Key Accomplishments

The ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 program is aligned with the campus needs assessments and goals identified in the campus improvement plans (CIP) of each center. The findings of this report were limited to the data available to measure student outcomes. The impact of the program on various student outcomes (e.g., academic achievement in reading and math, school-day attendance, and discipline) are not generalizable beyond this group of students because the low number of students attending the ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 program did not warrant statistical analyses. Summary data look at both regular participants (i.e., students who participated for 45 or more days) and nonregular participants (i.e., students who participated fewer than 45 days). Both groups achieved close to a B grade average for core courses (nonregular participants = 2.96 and regular participants = 3.07), and many students improved their grades over the course of the year. In reading, 59% of nonregular participants and 44% of regular participants improved; in math, 47% of nonregular participants and 44% of

regular participants improved. Slightly fewer students improved their attendance: 47% of regular participants and 41% of nonregular participants improved.

The majority of the parents and guardians agreed that their child's school provided adequate opportunities to participate in activities and programs after and before school. All ACE program staff agreed the ACE program helped students perform better in academic outcomes, attendance, behavior, college/career readiness, and social emotional learning. Additionally, the majority of the program staff indicated a desire to continue synchronous live virtual activities while half of them indicated a desire to continue asynchronous anytime activities in the future.

Many of the program staff identified the following three professional development needs: aligning with school-day academic goals, social emotional learning (SEL), and engaging with families. The majority of the teachers at ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 schools agreed that the ACE program benefited the students and families. Specifically, teachers across ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 campuses agreed that the ACE program helped students and families make connections to the school, develop SEL skills, turn in homework regularly, motivate school-day attendance, and mitigate learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the challenges faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 program remained committed to providing quality programming that was accessible, flexible, and supportive of the development of students' full potential. Table 1 summarizes the major key accomplishments, based on Texas 21st CCLC ACE component areas.

Table 1.

Summary of Key Accomplishments

Program measure and outcome	Result
Student population served	😊
Academics	
Reading	😐
Math	😐
Grade average	😊
School-day attendance	😊
Discipline	•
Family engagement	•
Program impact	
ACE staff perceptions	😊
Teachers' perceptions	😊

Note. Independent sample *t*-tests were conducted to compare program participants on each student outcome (i.e., reading and math grades, average grades, and school-day attendance rate) between regular participants and nonregular participants.

- 😊 Indicates a positive outcome for the measure
- 😐 Indicates a neutral or no change for the measure
- ☹ Indicates a negative outcome for the measure
- Indicates limited or no data available

Areas for Improvement

The ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 program staff remained committed to offering quality programming amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. As we strive to go back to normalcy, the ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 program staff continue to identify opportunities to assist students in maximizing the benefits of program participation. While we achieved a positive impact on many student outcomes this year, program managers, site coordinators, and program staff should continue to examine best practices to recruit and retain students in the program. Working collaboratively with parents, school-day campus teachers, and administrators is key to ensuring that students who need assistance are identified and are recruited into the program to take advantage of this free-of-charge, quality afterschool programming. Professional development opportunities to improve program effectiveness should be provided to ACE staff on areas deemed important.

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM

The Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) is the program administered through the Texas Education Agency (TEA) for the federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) grants authorized under Title IV, Part B, of the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (Public Law 114-95). ACE Foundation Communities received Cycle 9 21st CCLC funding to provide a comprehensive range of out-of-school-time (OST) academic assistance, academic enrichment, college and career readiness, and family engagement activities. Building on the existing infrastructure of evidence-based OST activities and partnerships, ACE Foundation Communities collaborates with a range of partners to provide a comprehensive menu of before-school, afterschool, and summer programming. The ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 program exists to provide intentional afterschool program experiences that are high quality, are challenging, and inspire all program participants to improve their school outcomes. By serving students at Title I schools, ACE Foundation Communities strives to achieve the overarching goal of narrowing the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and students of more affluent families. Across activities and centers, the afterschool program focuses on three primary objectives:

- increase academic achievement
- decrease school-day absences
- decrease in-school suspensions

The ACE program is at 32 schools across the district. ACE Foundation Communities was granted Cycle 9 CCLC funding to support three campuses at AISD during 2020–2021. At each center, activities are offered at least 15 hours per week for 30 weeks during the academic year and 16 hours per week for 6 weeks during the summer. All activities are in one or more of the four Texas 21st CCLC core component areas: academic assistance, enrichment, family engagement, and college and career readiness (Figure 1).

Figure 1.

ACE Foundation Communities Texas 21st CCLC Core Component Areas

Family engagement

ACE Foundation Communities staff partner with the AISD Adult Education Department and parent support specialists to provide family engagement activities that help connect families to schools and enable them to support their students' academic achievement.

College and career readiness

The ACE Foundation Communities participants are provided with activities to help them prepare for college and career. Students investigate careers, visit area colleges and universities, practice public speaking skills, and participate in service projects.



Academic assistance

ACE Foundation Communities offer activities designed to improve students' achievement by providing extra assistance and support through tutoring and homework help for students who are struggling in core subjects, including science, math, reading, and social studies.

Enrichment

ACE Foundation Communities offer skill-building enrichment activities to which some students would otherwise lack access, including fine arts, technology, games, health and fitness, outdoor and environmental education, and youth leadership and development.

EVALUATION STRATEGY

Expectations

The Department of Research and Evaluation (DRE) staff and ACE Foundation Communities program staff together reviewed the grant requirements and developed an evaluation plan and timeline for the program, which were published online, as part of the DRE work plan (https://www.austinisd.org/sites/default/files/dept/dre/docs/2021_DRE_Evaluation_Plans_2020-2021.pdf). Throughout the duration of the grant program, evaluators worked closely with program staff to collect and submit identified data in a timely fashion and met regularly to monitor progress and make any needed adjustments.

The evaluation plan was used to ensure continuous improvement for (a) program management, by monitoring program operation; (b) staying on track, by ensuring the program stayed focused on the goals, objectives, strategies, and outcomes; (c) efficiency, by streamlining service delivery and lowering the cost of services; (d) accountability, by producing evidence of program effects; and (e) sustainability, by providing evidence of effectiveness to all stakeholders.

The ACE Foundation Communities program staff used the TX21st student tracking system to track students' program attendance and other program data needed for TEA reports. The DRE evaluator extracted students' records from AISD's data warehouse and assisted program staff

with formatting and data entry into the TX21st student tracking system to ensure accurate reporting to TEA.

Measurement

Program participation files and AISD student records provided demographic information and input for each of the school-related outcomes. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, AISD kept its school buildings and facilities open at a limited capacity, following the national safety and state health precautionary guidelines and measures. A wide array of learning models and activities (i.e., in-person, synchronous “live” virtual learning, and asynchronous “anytime” virtual learning activities, and a hybrid model that combined two or more learning models) was offered to students and families to suit their individual needs for optimum learning and campus involvement, with safety and health at the core of every programming decision.

Similar to last year (de la Cruz, Andrews, and Christian, 2020), this year’s end-of-year outcome measures were limited to the available data. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the usual program surveys given to parents and students were not administered this school year so they could focus on matters deemed important and essential related to students’ learning and family life. Due to delays in test data availability from TEA at the time this report was written, State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) could not be used as an outcome variable this year. Due to very small numbers of students participating in the program, no targeting for student outcomes as done. In addition, very little campus discipline occurred, likely due to the majority of students attending virtually for much of the school year. This made using campus discipline as an outcome not possible. However, the ACE Foundation Communities Staff Survey was administered to gather feedback about staff’s experiences with the afterschool program. Additionally, data generated from the district-wide surveys, such as the AISD Family Survey and the End-of-Year Multi-Program Survey (formerly Employee Coordinated Survey), that were relevant to ACE programming were analyzed to support the grant’s reporting requirements.

Due to the very low number of students participating in the ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 program in school year 2020–2021, statistical data analyses were not conducted to examine the impact of program participation on student outcomes (i.e., academic achievement in reading and math, grades across all core subjects [English language arts, math, science, and social studies], and school-day attendance), based on participation status. However, descriptive statistics (e.g., frequency and percentage distributions) were used to report on the percentages of participants who showed improvement on each of the outcomes. Program participation status was categorized based on the total number of days students participated in the afterschool program during the 2020–2021 school year: regular participants were students who participated for 45 or

more days and nonregular participants were students who participated for fewer than 45 days. Table 2 presents a summary of the methodology used in this report, based on program objectives.

Table 2.

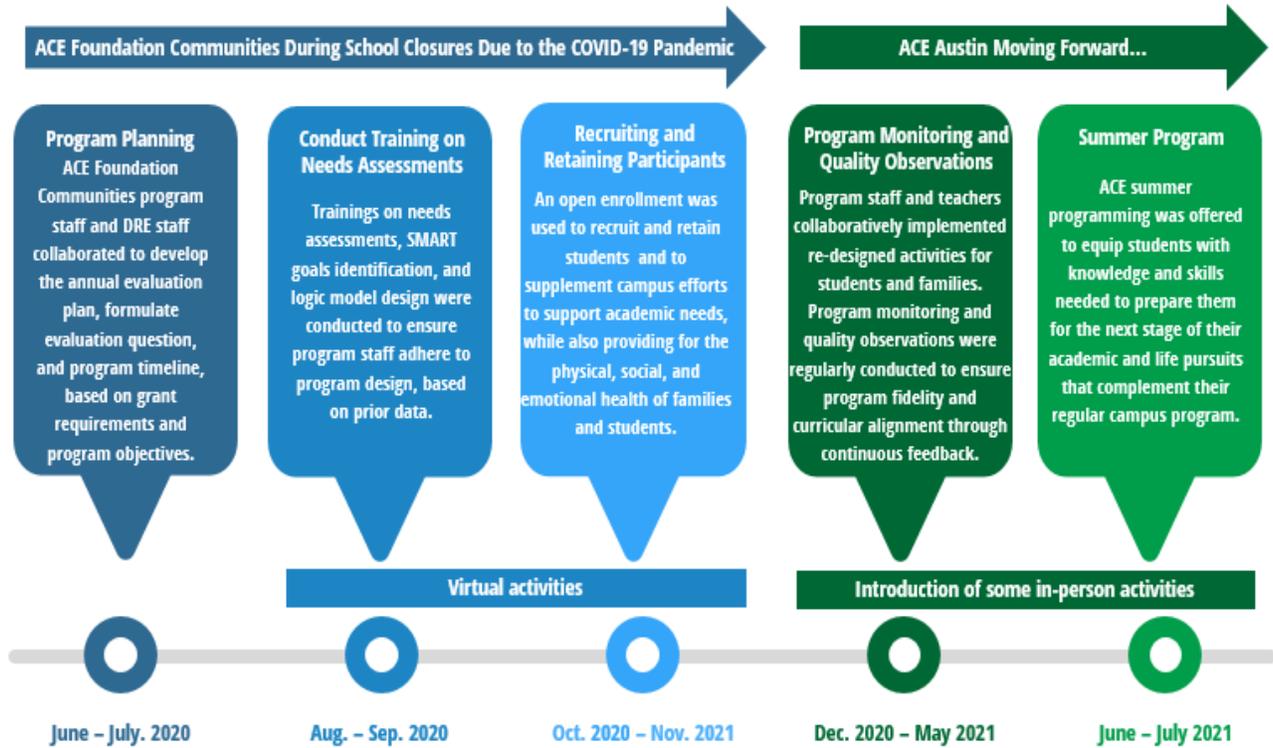
Summary of Program Methodology

Program objective	Data analysis	Data collection/ source
Improve participants' academic performance in reading and math	Descriptive statistics (e.g., frequency and percentage distributions) were used to describe regular and nonregular program participants' average grade changes in reading and math.	Program participation file; AISD student grades
Improve grade average	Descriptive statistics (e.g., frequency and percentage distributions) were used to describe regular and nonregular program participants' grade average.	Program participation file; AISD student grades
Improve participants' school-day attendance	Descriptive statistics (e.g., frequency and percentage distributions) were used to describe regular and nonregular program participants' changes in attendance.	Program participation file; AISD student attendance
Improve participants' discipline	Due to a very small percentage of students who experienced in-school suspensions, this outcome is not reported.	Data not available

PROGRAM TIMELINE

The ACE Foundation Communities calendar was full, even at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the opening of school year 2020–2021, DRE staff and ACE Foundation Communities program staff together reviewed the grant requirements and developed an evaluation plan and timeline for the program (Figure 2). Equipping program staff with knowledge and skills on afterschool program management and implementation (e.g., needs assessments, recruiting and retaining participants, program services monitoring) through continuing professional development opportunities is key to quality afterschool programming.

Figure 2.
ACE Foundation Communities Program Timeline



Goals that were specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time bound (SMART) were identified, and logic models were created for each campus. DRE staff helped program staff to pull data needed for the timely submission of required academic, attendance, and discipline data to TEA. For school year 2020–2021, an open enrollment was used to optimally recruit and retain students and to supplement campus efforts to support students’ academic needs, while providing for the physical, social, and emotional health of families and students. Additionally, program staff and teachers collaboratively redesigned lessons and activities to meet the unique needs of the students and families. Regular monitoring of program services and activities was conducted to ensure curricular alignment and fidelity to the core goal of the program through continuous feedback. ACE Foundation Communities offered a 6-week summer programming to equip students with knowledge and skills, based on students’ needs and campus assets. It is hoped that providing additional learning time through ACE Foundation Communities summer programming would enable students to cushion the potential cumulative effect of learning loss due to school building closures brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and would ultimately prepare them for the next stage of their academic and life pursuits.

ACE Foundation Communities in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Since the first stay-at-home orders were issued in mid-March 2020, individuals across the state of Texas and the nation have experienced the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their lives and livelihoods. As states enacted safety measures to combat this pandemic, families struggled with school building closures, job losses, food insecurity, and more. ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 program staff joined local and district efforts to address the urgent needs of children and families, while at the same time dealing with their own uncertain future.

In response to this crisis, the ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 program immediately switched gears and innovatively redesigned its afterschool programming to stay connected with students and their families and to keep them safe, healthy, and engaged in learning. Due to continuously evolving health and safety standards developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the reopening of schools—and consequently the ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 program—necessitated a radical rethinking of the way the program serves its students and families to meet their unique needs and circumstances. This required a collaborative approach that leans into community partnerships and builds on the campuses' strengths and assets.

The program areas remained the same. ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 continued to offer targeted academic support, a variety of enrichment opportunities, and family engagement. Centers were also encouraged to intentionally integrate social-emotional supports, both through activities designed for social emotional learning (SEL) and by embedding SEL skills into other areas. To support the program throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, ACE Foundation Communities staff adapted services and activities that normally are conducted in person, to meet the hybrid model.

GRANTEE AND CENTER OVERVIEW

ACE Foundation Communities has three on-site community learning centers at each of its housing communities in Austin. These centers provide services to students attending the three AISD neighborhood elementary schools and their families. The Trails at Vintage Creek Learning Center provides services to Andrews Elementary School students and families, M Station Learning Center provides services to Campbell Elementary School students and parents, and St. Elmo Neighborhood Learning Center provides services to St. Elmo Elementary School students and families. District data indicated that the percentage of students at Cycle 9 campuses who had low socioeconomic status (SES; i.e., qualified to receive free or reduced-price lunch) was above the district and state averages. The percentage of students who were considered at risk of dropping out of school and the percentage of students who were classified as emerging bilingual

were at least at or above district and state averages at two of the three ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 campuses (Table 3).

Table 3.
Cycle 9 Campuses Served and Relevant Demographics

School	Percentage low SES	Percentage at risk	Percentage emerging bilingual
Campbell Elementary School (M Station) (<i>n</i> = 175)	86%	40%	12%
St. Elmo Elementary School (St Elmo Center) (<i>n</i> = 341)	89%	68%	56%
Andrews Elementary School (Trails Center) (<i>n</i> = 379)	94%	82%	70%
AISD	53%	50%	28%
State	60%	51%	20%

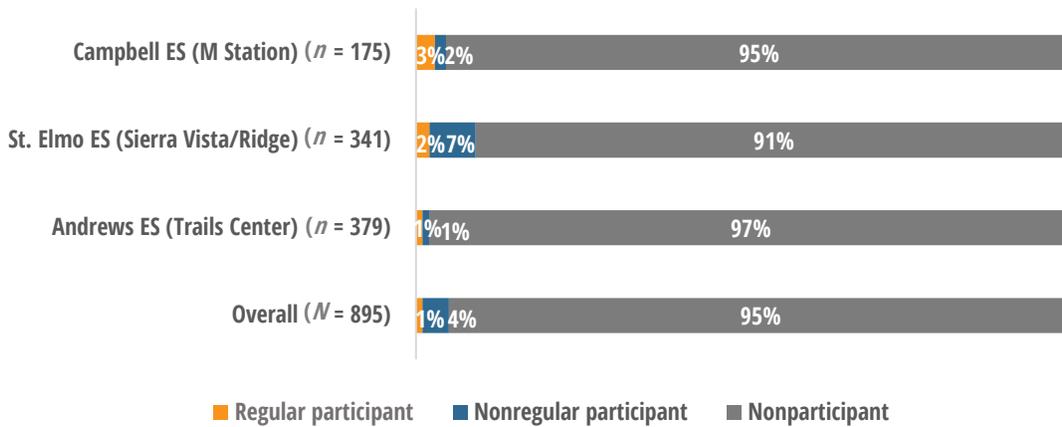
Source. 2020–2021 AISD student data; 2019–2020 TEA Academic Performance Report

Participants

During the 2020–2021 school year, the ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 program provided afterschool services to 48 students and hosted events or activities for 25 families at the ACE centers mentioned. Program participants were categorized as regular (i.e., attended the afterschool program for 45 days or more) and nonregular participants (i.e., attended the afterschool program for fewer than 45 days). Program participation across the three campuses was very low (*n* = 48), and represented a little more than 5% of the students enrolled at Cycle 9 campuses. Of the 48 students served, 16 were regular participants. The percentage of ACE Foundation Communities regular participants ranged from 1% to 3% of the student body (Figure 3). Campus-level demographics mirrored the cycle-level demographics, and all campuses served similar student groups (Appendix A).

Figure 3.

At the three campuses served, ACE regular participants ranged from 1% to 3% of the student body.



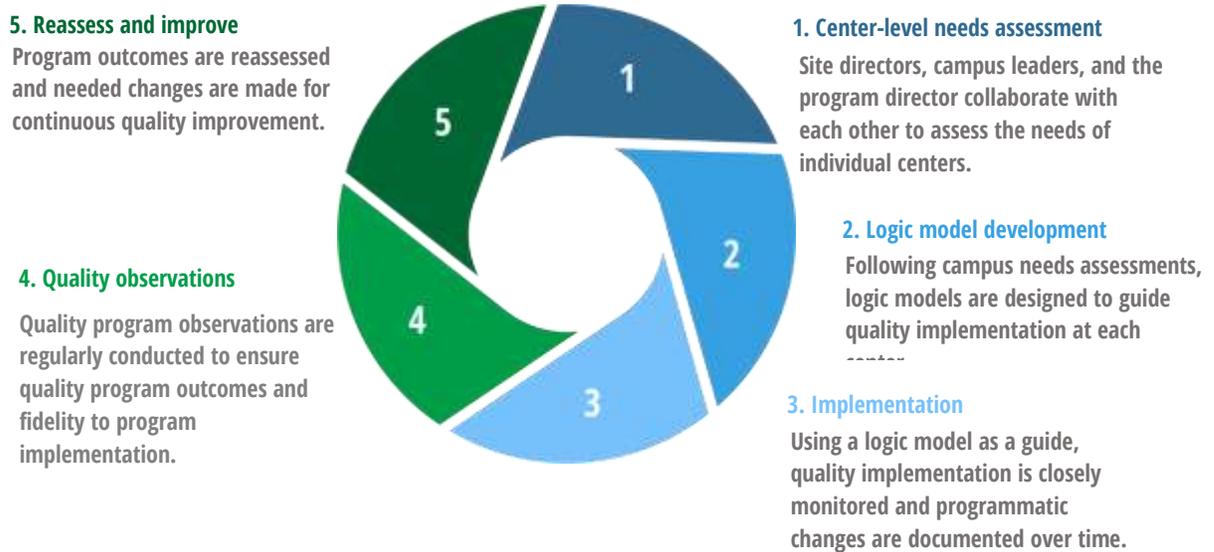
Source. TX21st student tracking system 2020–2021; AISD student records

PROGRAM QUALITY IMPLEMENTATION

Guided by the ACE Foundation Communities program quality implementation cycle, programming was developed based on the needs of each campus (Figure 4). Campus needs assessments were conducted at these schools through interviews with the principals, review of campus demographic information, surveys with parents, and (at St. Elmo only) an advisory council. The needs assessments indicated that students and their families had few options for OST programs that were affordable and met the needs of working parents. To address these needs, ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 sites provided free OST programming for children, both after school and during the summer months. The centers provided students with quality academic assistance through homework help. Adult staff who were familiar with diverse student backgrounds and family structures helped to bridge the gap for emerging bilingual students. The programs provided times for practicing standardized test skills in all subject areas as well as standards-aligned enrichment activities, allowing students to practice classroom skills that challenged and engaged them. ACE Foundation Communities afterschool programs offered students and their families additional support, providing them with stability to be successful in school and in life. Each learning center ran the following programming:

- academic assistance
- fitness (CATCH curriculum)
- green and healthy (environmental/health lessons created by the sustainability team)
- I-Ready (digital reading program)
- fun Friday activities/clubs

Figure 4.
ACE Foundation Communities Continuous Quality Improvement Cycle



Following campus needs assessments, logic models were designed to guide quality implementation at each center. Site directors, in collaboration with the project directors, developed the logic models, which also served as a tool for documenting programmatic changes over time. Each center logic model included six components: resources, implementation practices, outputs/activities, outputs/participation, intermediate outcomes, and impact.

OUTCOMES

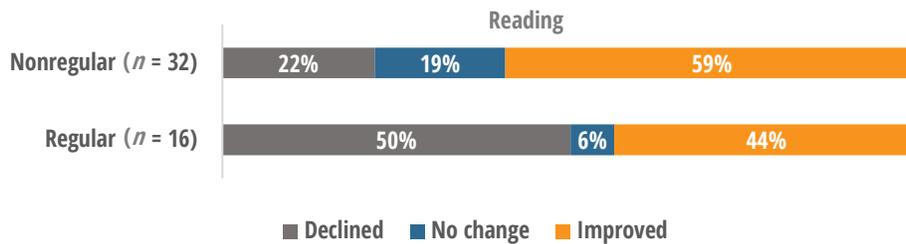
Across activities and centers, the ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 primary program goals were to: improve academic achievement, increase school-day attendance, and improve discipline. Guided by these goals, site coordinators examined prior data provided students with a wide range of programming activities to improve outcomes. Because we expected the program would have a greater positive impact on students who participated more in the program, we compared regular and nonregular program participants on the following outcomes: academic achievement in reading and math, average grades, and school-day attendance. Due to the limited participation in the program, we did not attempt to generalize results to a larger population through statistical analyses. Instead, descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage distributions were used to describe each of the outcomes for these particular groups of students.

Academic Achievement Outcomes: Grades in Reading and Math

One of the ACE Foundation Communities program goals was to have a positive impact on reading and math achievement. Site coordinators focused recruitment efforts and offered programming activities to help students who needed assistance in those subject areas. The grade change in both reading and math was calculated using students' first grading period grade and their last grading period grade for school year 2020–2021. Fifty-nine percent of nonregular participants and 49% of regular participants improved their reading grade (Figure 5). Additionally, 47% of nonregular participants and 44% of regular participants improved their math grade (Figure 6).

Figure 5.

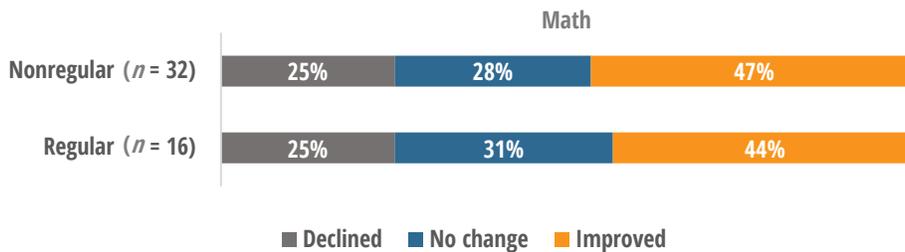
Fifty-nine percent of nonregular participants and 44% of regular participants improved grades in reading.



Source. TX21st student tracking system 2020–2021; AISD student records

Figure 6.

Forty-seven percent of nonregular participants and 44% of regular participants improved grades in math.



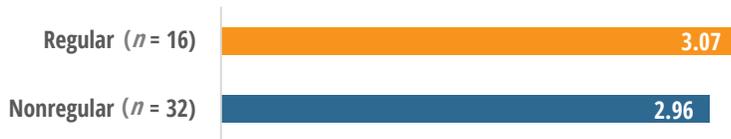
Source. TX21st student tracking system 2020–2021; AISD student records

Academic Achievement Outcome: Grade Average

Another program goal was to improve students' grade averages. In this report, only the core courses (i.e., English language arts, math, science, and social studies) were considered in computing the grade averages. As expected, regular program participants had greater grade averages (3.07) than those of nonregular participants (2.96) during the school year (Figure 7).

Figure 7.

Regular participants had a grade average of 3.07 while nonregular participants had a grade average of 2.96.



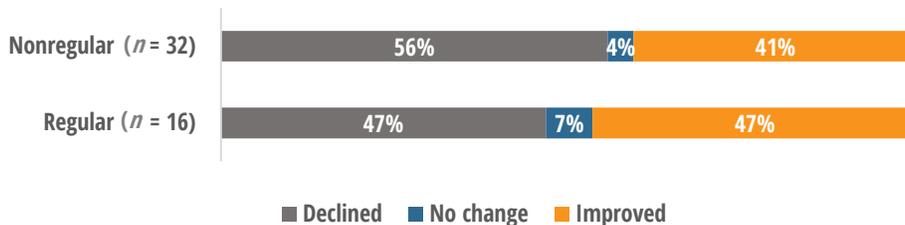
Source. TX21st student tracking system 2020–2021; AISD student records
All grades were converted to numeric grades (4-point scale) and were coded as follows: 100 = 4.00, 99 = 3.9, 98 = 3.8... through 70 = 1.0 and 69 <= 0

Student School-Day Attendance

Another program goal was to improve school-day attendance. We expected that ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 regular participants would show improvement over last year in their school-day attendance rate during 2020–2021. Forty-seven percent of regular participants and 41% of nonregular participants improved school-day attendance (Figure 8).

Figure 8.

Forty-seven percent of regular participants and 41% of nonregular participants improved school-day attendance.



Source. TX21st student tracking system 2020–2021; AISD student records

Student Discipline

Discipline (i.e., in-school suspension) was also one of the program goals. We expected students who attended the program would show improvement in their discipline. Since very few students attended school in-person across the district, there was very little discipline. In fact, none of the 48 program participants at the three campuses served by the ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 experienced any PEIMS reportable discipline (e.g., in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, removal to disciplinary school, etc.) during this school year. Therefore, there was not enough variance in discipline to examine this as an outcome for this year.

Family Engagement

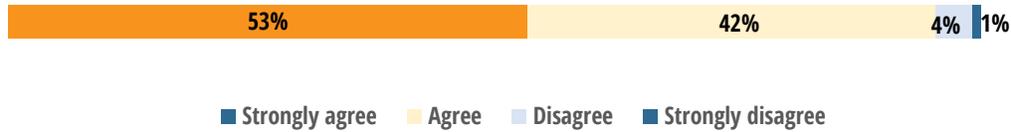
This school year, the ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 family engagement specialist served 25 families for 135 days throughout the 3 campuses. Families participated in one or more of the meaningful family activities that included family events, family BINGO, Loteria Art Project, and Mothers' Day photo booth. These family engagement activities were designed to provide opportunities for families to connect with their students' schools, spend quality time with their students, learn new skills, improve their students' social emotional skills, and support their students' education and life skills.

Both the ACE Student Survey and the ACE Parent Survey were not administered to provide students and families with the opportunity to focus their attention on other priorities, needs, and issues deemed important during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the ACE Foundation Communities Staff Survey, the district-wide Family Survey, and the End-of-Year Multi-Program Survey were conducted. Items from each survey that were relevant to ACE Foundation Communities programming were used and analyzed to support the grant reporting requirements.

The purpose of the AISD Family Survey is to gather information about parents' and guardians' attitudes on various topics at the campus where their child is enrolled. This survey is administered annually each spring and is offered in multiple languages. For this year, the overall response rate was 33% (district $N = 16,333$). At ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 campuses, the majority (95%) of the parents and guardians who responded ($n = 236$) agreed that their child's school provided adequate opportunities to participate in activities and programs after and before school (Figure 9).

Figure 9.

The majority of the parents and guardians agreed that their child’s school provided adequate opportunities to participate in activities and programs after and before school.



Source. AISD Family Survey, 2020–2021

STAFF’S PERSPECTIVES ON PROGRAM IMPACT

The ACE Staff Survey was administered to gather information and feedback about staff’s program experiences. From ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9, 12 staff responded to the ACE Staff Survey. All ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 staff respondents agreed that the ACE program helped students perform better in attendance, academic outcomes, behavior, college/career readiness, and social emotional learning (Figure 10). The majority of the program staff indicated a desire to continue synchronous live virtual activities while half of them indicated a desire to continue asynchronous activities in the future (Figure 11).

Figure 10.

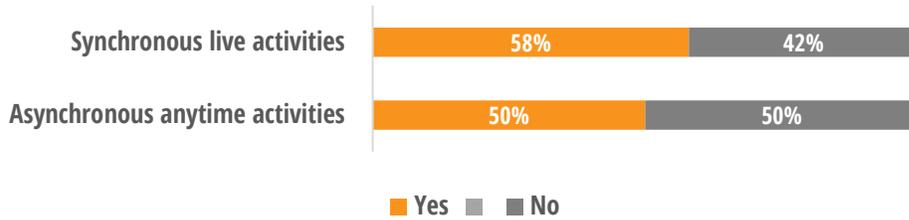
All ACE Foundation Communities staff agreed that the ACE program helped students perform better in academic outcomes, attendance, behavior, college/career readiness, and social emotional learning.



Source. ACE Staff Survey, 2020–2021

Figure 11.

The majority of program staff indicated a desire to continue synchronous live virtual activities while half of the program staff indicated a desire to continue asynchronous anytime activities in the future.



Source: ACE Staff Survey, 2020–2021

Recognizing the importance of professional development opportunities for program effectiveness and improvement, ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 program staff were also asked about the areas for professional opportunities. The top three areas of need that program staff reported were: aligning with school-day academic goals, social emotional learning, and engaging with families (Figure 12).

Figure 12.

ACE program staff indicated a high desire for professional development opportunities in: aligning with school-day academic goals, social emotional learning, and engaging with families.

Percentage of ACE staff who selected each professional development area...



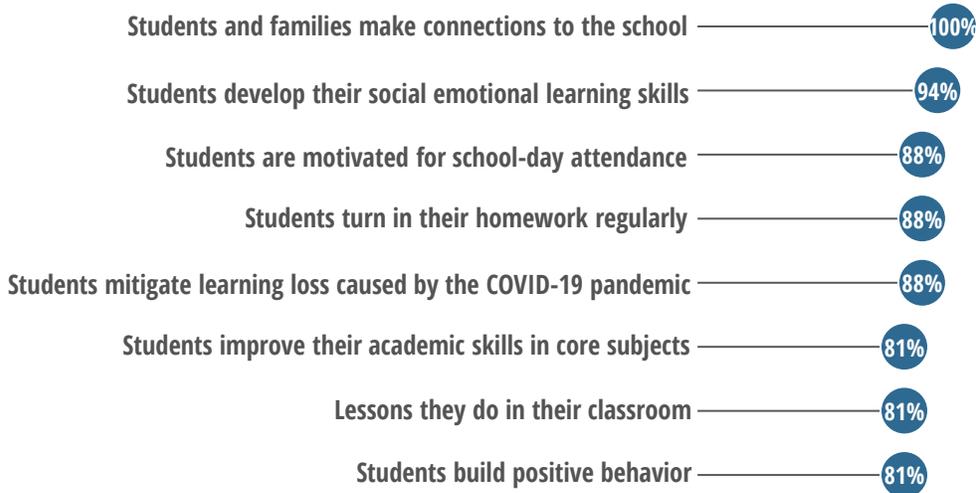
Source: ACE Staff Survey, 2020–2021

AISD is committed to understanding staff members’ feelings and perceptions about various work-related topics and district-wide programming aimed at improving employees’ well-being and program effectiveness. For this reason, DRE administered the End-of-Year Multi-Program Survey in Spring 2021. One of the programming areas for which district employees were asked to provide feedback was the ACE program. Specifically, teachers (16 out of 35, 46% response rate) at ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 campuses were asked about the benefits of the ACE program to students and/or families. The majority of the teachers reported that the ACE program benefited the students and families in many ways, such as making connections to the school (100%), developing social emotional learning skills (94%), turning in homework regularly (88%), motivating for school-day attendance (88%), and mitigating learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 13).

Figure 13.

The majority of the teachers at ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 schools agreed that the ACE program benefited students and families.

Percentage of teachers who agreed that the ACE program benefited ...



Source: End-of-Year Multi-Program Survey, 2020-2021

ACE FOUNDATION COMMUNITIES' CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Reopening campuses during the COVID-19 pandemic was unquestionably challenging in many ways. It was particularly challenging to implement and sustain the ACE Foundation Communities quality program that capitalized on whole child development, based on the unique academic and social-emotional needs of students. Challenges, however, also opened the door for some opportunities to refine and change program processes and structures to strengthen the ACE Foundation Communities quality programing and to creatively leverage campus and community assets.

1. Challenge: ACE Foundation Communities program participation was a major concern this school year. Some campuses struggled to recruit and retain participants.

When school started operating 100% virtually, some campuses struggled with students' attendance and retention during the school day. This translated into program participation issues during out-of-school time. Students were no longer interested in spending additional time online.

Opportunity: ACE Foundation Communities program staff offered numerous participation opportunities and utilized parents, school, and community partners to recruit and retain participants.

Taking advantage of the flexibility of program recruitment, ACE Foundation Communities program staff innovatively offered numerous participation opportunities (synchronous "live" and asynchronous "anytime" virtual activities, take-home packets, and in-person). While in-person activities were slowly reintegrated on a campus-by-campus basis, in all centers, at-home packets allowed students to learn from home with hands-on activities away from the screen. Program staff continuously recruited participants by making phone calls and referrals to residents to inform feeder schools of available slots. ACE Foundation Communities did not stop recruiting and getting out about their ever-evolving offerings through partnerships with parents, school, and community partners.

2. Challenge: The COVID-19 pandemic created both a public health crisis and an economic crisis that necessitated the ACE Foundation Communities program support students and families with an unprecedented range of direct resource assistance.

ACE Foundation Communities exists within the schools and communities. Due to the economic and health crisis, ACE Foundation Communities served as community resource and information hub (e.g., serving as a meal distribution site or delivering meals, offering mental health services to cope with trauma and stress, providing care to children of working families, distributing other

resources [e.g., technology], and offering the latest health updates). In addition, ACE Foundation Communities partnered with the Central Texas Food Bank on a new program of meal distribution for children zero to 18 years of age. The weekly meal boxes were filled with seven lunches and seven breakfasts, following United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) nutritional guidelines. While this undertaking was laudable, this approach expanded the scope of responsibility for program staff and resulted in additional social and emotional stress for some program staff, who were balancing taking care of the program while concurrently attending to their own personal and family needs.

Opportunity: The ACE Foundation Communities program created an opportunity to deepen its community relations built on trust and partnerships.

This crisis undoubtedly created opportunities to develop stronger and more long-lasting community alliances and partnerships to support the community with a range of direct services. Building a network of support system helped the ACE Foundation Communities program and its staff to support each other. With the community at the epicenter, the ACE Foundation Communities program not only legitimized its unique niche to assist students with academic needs, but more importantly, also was recognized as a critical agent and community partner to support social services and effect positive change. There is no doubt that ACE Foundation Communities created an opportunity to strengthen its program, which is built on community trust that promotes program relevance and sustainability.

SUMMARY

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 program remained committed to providing quality programming that was accessible, flexible, and supportive of the development of students' full potential. The ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 program offered a variety of high-quality activities and services that were designed to support students and families who experienced a negative impact from the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, the ACE Foundation Communities program provided programs and services that supported the holistic development of students they served.

Key Accomplishments

The ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 program is aligned with the campus needs assessments and goals identified in the campus improvement plans (CIP) of each center. The findings of this report were limited to the data available to measure student outcomes. The impact of the program on various student outcomes (e.g., academic achievement in reading and math, school-day attendance, and discipline) are not generalizable beyond this group of students because the low number of students attending the ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 program did not warrant statistical analyses. Summary data look at both regular participants (i.e., students who participated for 45 or more days) and nonregular participants (i.e., students who participated fewer than 45 days). Both groups achieved close to a B grade average for core courses (nonregular participants = 2.96 and regular participants = 3.07), and many students improved their grades over the course of the year. In reading, 59% of nonregular participants and 44% of regular participants improved; in math, 47% of nonregular participants and 44% of regular participants improved. Slightly fewer students improved their attendance: 47% of regular participants and 41% of nonregular participants improved.

The majority of the parents and guardians agreed that their child's school provided adequate opportunities to participate in activities and programs after and before school. All ACE program staff agreed the ACE program helped students perform better in academic outcomes, attendance, behavior, college/career readiness, and social emotional learning. Additionally, the majority of the program staff indicated a desire to continue synchronous live virtual activities while half of them indicated a desire to continue asynchronous anytime activities in the future.

Many of the program staff identified the following three professional development needs: aligning with school-day academic goals, social emotional learning (SEL), and engaging with families. The majority of the teachers at ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 schools agreed that the ACE program benefited the students and families. Specifically, teachers across ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 campuses agreed that the ACE program helped students and

families make connections to the school, develop SEL skills, turn in homework regularly, motivate school-day attendance, and mitigate learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the challenges faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 program remained committed to providing quality programming that was accessible, flexible, and supportive of the development of students’ full potential. Table 4 summarizes the major key accomplishments, based on Texas 21st CCLC ACE component areas.

Table 4.
Summary of Key Accomplishments

Program measure and outcome	Result
Student population served	
Academics	
Reading	
Math	
Grade average	
School-day attendance	
Discipline	.
Family engagement	.
Program impact	
ACE staff perceptions	
Teachers’ perceptions	

Note. Independent sample *t*-tests were conducted to compare program participants on each student outcome (i.e., reading and math grades, average grades, and school-day attendance rate) between regular participants and nonregular participants.

-  Indicates a positive outcome for the measure
-  Indicates a neutral or no change for the measure
-  Indicates a negative outcome for the measure
- .

Areas for Improvement

The ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 program staff remained committed to offering quality programming amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. As we strive to go back to normalcy, the ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 program staff continue to identify opportunities to assist students in maximizing the benefits of program participation. While we achieved a positive impact on many student outcomes this year, program managers, site coordinators, and program

staff should continue to examine best practices to recruit and retain students in the program. Working collaboratively with parents, school-day campus teachers, and administrators is key to ensuring that students who need assistance are identified and are recruited into the program to take advantage of this free-of-charge, quality afterschool programming. Professional development opportunities to improve program effectiveness should be provided to ACE staff on areas deemed important.

REFERENCES

dela Cruz, W., Andrews, M., & Christian, C. (2020). *Afterschool Centers on Education Foundation Communities Cycle Final Report 2019–2020*. Department of Research and Evaluation (Publication No. 19.36). https://www.austinisd.org/sites/default/files/dre-surveys/ACE%20Foundation%20Communties%20Cycle%209%20Final%20Report%202019-2020_0.pdf

APPENDIX

Appendix A: Campus-Level Participation

Table A.1.

ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 Campus-Level Participation

School	School enrollment	Number of participants	Number of regular* participants	Number of nonregular* participants	Average number of days of participation
Campbell Elementary School (M Station)	175	8	5	3	57
St. Elmo Elementary School (St Elmo Center)	341	31	7	24	40
Andrews Elementary School (Trails Center)	379	9	4	5	48
ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9	895	48	16	32	48

Source. 2020–2021 AISD student records; 2020–2021 ACE data file

Note. Regular participants are those who participated in the ACE Austin program at least 45 days; nonregular participants are those who participated in the ACE Austin program fewer than 45 days.

Table A.2.

ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 Campus-Level Participants' Demographics

School	Female	Low SES	ELL	At risk
Campbell Elementary School (M Station) (<i>n</i> = 8)	75%	77%	.	38%
St. Elmo Elementary School (St Elmo Center) (<i>n</i> = 31)	48%	74%	68%	68%
Andrews Elementary School (Trails Center) (<i>n</i> = 9)	22%	78%	67%	67%
ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 (<i>N</i> = 48)	48%	77%	56%	63%

Source. 2020–2021 AISD student records; 2020–2021 ACE data file

Table A.3.

ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 Campus-Level Participants' Grade Level

School	1	2	3	4	5
Campbell Elementary School (M Station) (<i>n</i> = 8)	25%	12%	38%	12%	12%
St. Elmo Elementary School (St Elmo Center) (<i>n</i> = 31)	13%	19%	29%	23%	16%
Andrews Elementary School (Trails Center) (<i>n</i> = 9)	11%	22%	33%	.	33%
ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 (<i>N</i> = 48)	15%	19%	31%	17%	19%

Source. 2020–2021 AISD student records; 2020–2021 ACE data file

Table A.4.

ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 Campus-Level Participants' Race

School	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic	Two or more race	White
Campbell Elementary School (M Station) (<i>n</i> = 8)	.	37%	37%	25%	.
St. Elmo Elementary School (St Elmo Center) (<i>n</i> = 31)	7%	85%	4%	4%	.
Andrews Elementary School (Trails Center) (<i>n</i> = 9)	67%	11%	11%	11%	11%
ACE Foundation Communities Cycle 9 (<i>N</i> = 48)	14%	14%	61%	9%	2%

Source. 2020–2021 AISD student records; 2020–2021 ACE data file

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