

***21st Century Community Learning Centers:
Stakeholder Perceptions of Program Benefits***

Executive Summary

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Since the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the state of Tennessee has awarded grants to school and community-based organizations to operate 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) programs. These programs offer academic and enrichment activities to students and their parents in grades K-12, with preference given to grantees in high-poverty areas.

Programs are evaluated on the federal, state and local levels. The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) partnered with the University of Tennessee Office of Research and Public Service (UT SWORPS) to conduct a statewide evaluation that comprised Implementation and Outcome Studies. This report is the first in the Outcome series. The Outcome Evaluation of the 21st CCLC afterschool programs examines the impact that 21st CCLC programs have on participants' academic and social development. This first step in the Outcome Evaluation focuses on the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the impact of the afterschool programs (ASPs) on various student outcomes. Intermediate and long-term outcomes that pertain to academics, social/behavioral interactions, and safety issues were identified.

Surveys were created and administered to students, parents, and teachers based on the students' grade levels. UT SWORPS evaluators sent out surveys to 2,392 elementary school students and their parents and teachers, to 2,482 middle school students and their parents and teachers, and to 831 high school students and their parents and teachers. The overall response rate was 49.6%. The response rates for the evaluation were 54.6% for the student surveys, 54.9% for the teacher surveys, and 39.2% for parent surveys.

The completed surveys showed a clear pattern of program satisfaction. All three stakeholders perceived that their ASPs are positively impacting students' academics, social skills, behavior, and safety. The results are presented based on how they answer the research questions that guide the Outcome Evaluation.

Do programs help students show improvement on measures such as school attendance, study habits, homework completion, etc.?

Students reported better attendance and parents reported that their children like school more since participating in the ASPs. Almost 80.0% of middle school students and over three fourths of the high school students completing the survey felt that their school attendance has improved since participating in the ASPs. Further, more than 70.0% of all parents responding to the survey felt that their child seems to like school more as a result of attending the ASP. It stands to reason that students who like school are less likely to be absent.

Teachers reported that the ASPs had an impact on students' study skills. This was strongest in the high school grades, where more than 75.0% reported improvement. However, about two thirds of middle and elementary school teachers also reported this outcome.

The majority of all survey respondents felt that the ASPs help students complete their homework. More than 80.0% of students in grades K-2 and almost 75.0% of students in grades 3-5 complete their homework at their ASPs. While more than half of all middle and high school students said they did not

always turn in their homework on time before attending the ASPs, after they attended, those figures flipped—more than 60.0% of middle schoolers and almost as many high schoolers reported always turning in their homework on time as a result of their participation in the ASPs.

Parents overwhelmingly reported that the ASPs helped their children complete their homework on time. More than 80.0% of parents with children from each grade level reported that the ASPs had a positive effect on this area of their children's academic life. Teachers also noted that the ASPs encouraged timely homework completion; at least two thirds of respondents from any grade level reported this outcome.

Do programs improve academic outcomes such as grades, test scores, etc.?

Across the board, teachers reported that the ASPs have helped students perform better in school overall. About 75.0% of middle and elementary school teachers and more than 80.0% of high school teachers perceived this benefit of participation.

Parents reported improvements in both their children's grades and test scores. More than three fourths of all parents responded that their children's grades had improved since participating in the ASPs; the high school parent group contained the largest percentage of respondents (88.8%) reporting this benefit.

Students also reported a turnaround in their grades as a result of attending the ASPs. About 40.0% of middle and high school students felt that their grades needed to improve. More than half of both groups felt that their grades have improved as a result of participating in the ASPs. Since attending the ASPs, more than 80.0% of both middle and high school students felt that their test scores have at least "kind of," if not definitely, improved.

Do programs enhance students' social/emotional development and sense of safety?

Across all grade levels, teachers reported that the students' social and emotional development has improved, and they attribute the improvement to the ASPs. Two thirds of all teachers felt that the ASPs have helped students take more responsibility for their actions. Kindergarten and high school teachers reported the highest levels of this outcome. More than 60.0% of all teachers felt that the ASPs have helped the students get along better with peers, and 70.0% felt that the students are more self-confident in their interactions with peers. More than half of the high school teachers have heard students talking about wanting to graduate from high school and about their career plans after finishing school.

Students reported having better peer relationships and higher personal aspirations as a result of attending the ASPs. A maximum of 14.0% of any group of students did not feel that the ASPs helped them get along better with their peers. Students reported learning how to "work out problems with others" and how to "stick to what they believe in, even if their friends don't agree." More than 80.0% reported that their ASPs help them think about what they want to do in the future, and more than 85.0% felt the ASPs helped them set goals for themselves. The most telling fact may be that two thirds of high school students and 78.0% of middle school students who participated in the 21st CCLC programs believed they will graduate from college.

Parents reported that their children demonstrate increased self-confidence and higher aspirations as a result of participating in the ASPs. On about 80.0% of the completed surveys, parents of high school students responded that their children want to graduate from high school and attend college. Further, 77.0% of all parents noted that their children’s self-confidence has increased since attending the ASPs.

A majority of teachers (79.2% overall) reported that their middle and high school students seem to feel safe in their home environments, and 84.0% reported that the students are not targets of bullying.

Students identified their ASPs as safe spaces. Almost 90.0% of the students who answered the survey reported feeling at least somewhat safer as a result of attending the ASPs.

Do programs help decrease disciplinary actions for students and at-risk behaviors in and out of the classroom (e.g., violence, use of drugs, smoking, contact with gangs, etc.)?

Teachers did not believe that students engaged in at-risk behaviors in or out of the classroom. Almost two thirds of all teachers reported that the ASPs have had a positive effect on student’s classroom behavior. Further, according to the middle and high school surveys, almost 87.0% of the students have not been involved in fighting, stealing, or vandalism; 94.0% are not involved with gangs; and over 90.0% do not use tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs.

Students and parents noted that the ASPs had an impact on behavior. More than 70.0% of all parents reported that their children’s behavior has improved. Conversely, fewer than 10.0% of all parents did not feel that their children’s behavior has improved. Almost half of the middle school students and more than 57.0% of high school students reported rarely getting into trouble since they started attending the ASPs.

Are all demographic groups of students affected by program activities the same? How do they differ? What is the role of program dosage, if any?

The students’ sex had some effect on outcomes, but not in a unilateral fashion. The one constant involved boys and computers/technology—boys in grades K-2 liked playing on computers more than girls, and middle and high school boys were more likely to report improved technology skills than girls in the same grade levels. Girls in grades K-2 liked doing their homework more than boys and were more likely to report completing their homework in the ASPs. Middle school girls got to know other kids and learned how to “stick to what they believe in” while attending the ASPs. Middle school boys improved their test scores, felt that their teachers pay attention to what is going on in their lives, and felt that they could choose their activities at their ASPs.

Race had a wide impact on the perceived benefits that students reported. For almost every item analyzed, middle and high school students identifying as “Black/African American” were more likely to report that the ASPs affected them positively than students identifying as “White” or “other.” For middle school students, a similar distinction appeared between the students identifying as “Hispanic/Latino” and those identifying as “White” or “other”; “Hispanic/Latino” students were more likely to report positive outcomes.

The frequency in which a student attended the ASPs significantly impacted their perceived outcomes.

In every instance, students who attended more days per week were more likely to report positive outcomes. For the middle school students, the more days the student attended, the more likely they were to report a positive outcome in every area analyzed. This included academic, social, and behavioral outcomes. Elementary school students in grades 3-5 attending more days per week noted benefits in several academic areas (math and reading skills, computer skills, and homework completion) and in one social area—making new friends. High school students reported that greater attendance affected social areas such as goal-setting, long-term planning, interpersonal skills, safety, and health choices. It is possible that all students attending high school ASPs participated in academic activities and, thus, experienced similar benefits in those areas. Further, students attending more days may do so to participate in enrichment or recreational activities and, thus, have the opportunity to experience social benefits.

Conclusion

Across the board, stakeholders perceive benefits to students as a result of their participating in the 21st CCLC afterschool programs. Both intermediate and long-term outcomes were reported by teachers, students, and their parents. While the statistical agreement across surveys never rose above a fair level when all stakeholders reflected on the same case, when they did agree, the respondents generally felt that the ASPs had a positive effect on student outcomes. Students' academics are improving, they are learning how to have stronger peer relationships, and they are making better and safer behavioral choices. This first phase in the 21st CCLC Outcome Evaluation has also revealed some significant differences in the benefits reported by students of various demographic groups. While quantitative analysis will examine these differences further, center staff may want to keep these findings in mind when designing activities. However, the overall conclusion from this report should be the great number of benefits reported by all groups. Clearly, they are experiencing the positive effects of the 21st CCLC afterschool programs.