

New Jersey 21st Century Community Learning Centers

Year 4 Evaluation Report:
Descriptive Data and Attendance Study
for 2022–23

June 2024



Funding Statement

This project was funded in its entirety by the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Title IV, Part B, 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) grant, through a contract with the New Jersey Department of Education. The ESEA was reauthorized in 2015 by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Contents

	Page
Executive Summary.....	v
Section 1. Introduction	1
Report Organization.....	1
Section 2. Evaluation Questions and Approach.....	2
Evaluation Questions	2
Data Sources	2
Methods.....	4
Limitations and Challenges	6
Section 3. Program Characteristics	7
Grantee Characteristics	7
Center Characteristics.....	9
Attendee Characteristics	14
Section 4. Youth Survey	23
Questions Relating to Youth Choice	23
Questions Relating to Relationships With Adults and Youth	25
Questions Relating to How 21st CCLC Programming Has Helped Youth	29
Year-to-Year Changes	31
Section 5. Parent/Caregiver Survey	32
Section 6. Leading Indicators	37
General Program Indicators.....	38
Activity-Related Indicators.....	40
Determining Program Improvement Priorities From the Leading Indicators	45
Section 7. Student Program Attendance Level and School-Related Outcomes	46
Quasi-Experimental Method of Analysis	46
Correlational Method of Analysis	50
Section 8. Conclusions and Next Steps	54
References	56
Appendix A. Staff Survey.....	57
Appendix B. Youth Postadministration Survey	63
Appendix C. Inverse Probability of Treatment Weighting.....	69

Exhibits

	Page
Exhibit ES1. Example of a Survey Scale Calibrated Using Rasch Techniques.....	vii
Exhibit 1. Example of a Survey Scale Calibrated Using Rasch Techniques	4
Exhibit 2. Number of Grantees by Year of Operation, 2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23.....	7
Exhibit 3. Number of Grantees by Organization Type	8
Exhibit 4. Total Number of Staff by Staff Type, 2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23	10
Exhibit 5. Overall Statistics on Number of Center Staff.....	11
Exhibit 6. Average Student–Teacher Ratio per Center, 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23.....	11
Exhibit 7. Number of Centers by Grade Level Served.....	12
Exhibit 8. Percentage of Centers Offering Activities Linked to a Given Theme.....	13
Exhibit 9. Percentage of Total Activity Minutes Dedicated to Activity Themes Among Centers With Each Theme	14
Exhibit 10. Summary of Demographic Information for Students, 2022–23 and 2021–22.....	15
Exhibit 11. Number of Students Served in 21st CCLC by Attendance Gradation	16
Exhibit 12. Continuous Years of Student Participation, 2022–23 and 2021–22.....	17
Exhibit 13. Percentage of Time Each Participant Spent on Activities of a Given Type (Average) for 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23	19
Exhibit 14. Total School-Year Hours of Attendee Participation by Activity Type	20
Exhibit 15. Percentage of Attendees With 10 or More Hours in a Given Activity Type (School Year), 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23	21
Exhibit 16. Average Number of Hours in Reading and Mathematics per Student, 2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23	22
Exhibit 17. Youth Responses to Questions Concerning Opportunities for Choice	24
Exhibit 18. Percentage of Youth Respondents Answering <i>Sometimes</i> or <i>Often</i> in Response to Each Question Related to Opportunities for Choice	25
Exhibit 19. Youth Responses to Questions Concerning Relationships With Adults in the Program.....	26
Exhibit 20. Percentage of Youth Respondents Answering <i>Mostly True</i> or <i>Completely True</i> in Response to Each Question With the Stem, “In This Program, There Is an ADULT...”	27
Exhibit 21. Youth Responses to Questions Concerning Relationships Among Participants	28
Exhibit 22. Percentage of Youth Respondents Answering <i>Mostly True</i> or <i>Completely True</i> to Each Question Related to Youth Relationships in the Program	28
Exhibit 23. Youth Responses to Questions Concerning How the Program Has Helped Them	29

Exhibit 24. Percentage of Youth Respondents Answering <i>Mostly True</i> or <i>Completely True</i> in Response to Each Question With the Stem, “This Program Has Helped Me...”	29
Exhibit 25. Parent Survey Respondents by Their Child’s Grade Level	32
Exhibit 26. Parent Perceptions of Child Benefit From Participation in 21st CCLC Programming	33
Exhibit 27. Parent Perceptions of Communication Effectiveness	34
Exhibit 28. Parent Perceptions of Program Impact	34
Exhibit 29. Parent Programming Priorities	36
Exhibit 30. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on General Program Indicators	39
Exhibit 31. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on Activity-Related Indicators Associated With Mathematics and Language Arts	41
Exhibit 32. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on Activity-Related Indicators Associated With Social and Emotional Development	43
Exhibit 33. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on Activity-Related Indicators Associated With Family Involvement	44
Exhibit 34. ELA Score Outcome Among Students, Higher Attendance Participants Versus Lower Attendance Participants.....	48
Exhibit 35. Mathematics Score Outcome Among Students, Higher Attendance Participants Versus Lower Attendance Participants.....	48
Exhibit 36. Mathematics Score Outcome Among Students, Higher Attendance Participants Versus Lower Attendance Participants.....	49
Exhibit 37. Associations Between Pre-to-Post Changes on Youth Outcome Scales With Attendance and Program Experience Scales	51

Executive Summary

The information presented in this report is the result of data collected and analyzed as part of a statewide evaluation of New Jersey's 21st CCLC program that the American Institutes for Research (AIR) is currently conducting. The results outlined in this report are primarily associated with 21st CCLC-funded activities and services delivered during the 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23 school years. The primary focus of this report, however, is the 2022-23 school year, with prior-year data used for comparison purposes.

The statewide evaluation effort is organized around seven evaluation questions. This report addresses three of the seven:

- **EQ1:** What are the primary characteristics of 21st CCLC programs in New Jersey and the populations they serve?
- **EQ2:** How are New Jersey 21st CCLC subgrantees performing in terms of the leading indicators defined for the program?
- **EQ5:** Do youth with higher attendance display better academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes than youth with lower attendance?

Data Sources

To address the evaluation questions, data were collected from the following sources.

- **Program Activity and Review System (PARS21).** PARS21 is a web-based data collection system developed and maintained by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE). PARS21 collects data directly from grantees on a broad array of program characteristics, along with individual student information in the form of demographics and 21st CCLC program attendance (including activity session-level participation data).
- **New Jersey Standards Measurement and Resource for Teaching (NJ SMART) Data Warehouse.** In early 2023, the research team obtained access to New Jersey assessment test scores and unexcused absence data for the 21st CCLC participants served during the 2022-23 school year. These data came from the NJ SMART data warehouse maintained by NJDOE for students in Grades 3 through 12. The research team used these data to conduct an analysis of the program's impact on school-related outcomes.
- **Staff survey.** The purpose of the online staff survey was to obtain information from staff members working directly with youth in programs funded by 21st CCLC about the extent to which they engaged in practices that the afterschool research literature suggests are likely

to support positive academic and youth development outcomes. The staff survey data were used primarily to create values for the program’s leading indicators.

- **New Jersey 21st CCLC Evaluation Template and Reporting System (ETRS).** The 21st CCLC ETRS is a web-based data collection application designed to obtain center-level information about the characteristics and performance of afterschool programs funded by 21st CCLC, based on information garnered from local evaluation efforts. The system is designed to collect information midyear through a given school year. ETRS data were used primarily to create values for the program’s leading indicators.
- **Youth survey.** AIR collected a preadministration youth survey during the fall of 2022, and a postadministration youth survey during the spring of 2023. Both surveys included identical questions relating to youth academic identity, self-management, interpersonal relationships, and mindsets. The postadministration survey also included questions about youth experience in 21st CCLC programming relating to youth choice, relationships with adult staff members, and relationships with other youth. Questions included on both the preadministration and postadministration versions are used in the outcome analysis, while program experience questions are used as predictor covariates in the correlational analysis.

Methods of Analysis

The findings in this report are purely quantitative. The following methods were used to analyze the data:

- **Descriptive analyses.** Data related to grantee, center, and student characteristics obtained from PARS21 were analyzed descriptively. This includes basic statistics such as overall totals, averages, median values, percentages, and so on.
- **Analyses to create scale scores.** Many questions that appeared on the staff survey and were represented in the ETRS reports were part of a series of questions designed to assess an underlying construct or concept, resulting in a single scale score summarizing performance in a given area of practice or facet of afterschool implementation (e.g., practices that support linkages to the school day). An example is shown in Exhibit 1, which outlines the questions that make up the *Intentionality Program Design* scale that appeared on the staff survey.

Exhibit ES1. Example of a Survey Scale Calibrated Using Rasch Techniques

How often do you lead or participate in program activities that are...	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
a. Based on written plans for the session, assignments, and projects?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Well planned in advance?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Tied to specific learning goals?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Meant to build upon skills cultivated in a prior activity or session?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Explicitly meant to promote skill building and mastery in relation to one or more state standard?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Explicitly meant to address a specific developmental domain (e.g., cognitive, social, emotional, civic, physical, etc.)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. Structured to respond to youth feedback on what the content or format of the activity should be?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. Informed by the expressed interests, preferences, and/or satisfaction of participating youth?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For scales like this, Rasch scale scores were created using responses to the whole series of questions to create one overall score. These scale scores ranged from 1 to 4, where higher scores indicated a higher level or more frequent adoption of a specific quality practice or set of practices. Depending on the type of survey data involved, these scores could be left as individual scores (e.g., for use in analyzing youth survey data) or averaged at the center, grant, or state level (e.g., staff survey data). AIR used Rasch scale scores to calculate many of the leading indicator values.

- **Correlational Multilevel Modeling Techniques.** Multilevel models were run to explore the relationship between, on the one hand, participation levels (in terms of days) or youth program experiences and, on the other hand, student outcomes as measured by pre-to-post youth survey changes (using Rasch scale scores). Note that this method is not sufficient to indicate *cause*.
- **Inverse Probability of Treatment Weighting.** In contrast to the multilevel modeling techniques just described, inverse probability of treatment weighting was employed to estimate the causal impact of higher levels of 21st CCLC program participation versus lower levels of participation in terms of achievement (reading and mathematics) and unexcused absence outcomes. Given that 21st CCLC program participants were not randomly assigned to high-attendance versus low-attendance groups, the problem of selection is paramount. It is likely that students who participated in 21st CCLC programming at high levels were

different from those students attending the same schools and programs who attended at lower levels. These differences can bias estimates of program effectiveness because they make it difficult to disentangle preexisting differences between high and low attenders from program impact. Inverse probability of treatment weighting is a technique that can help to mitigate selection effects by balancing treatment and comparison groups on observable characteristics.

Summary of Program Characteristics

The following is a summary of key evaluation findings.

Primary Characteristics of Programs Funded by 21st CCLC and the Students Served

Grantee Characteristics

- A total of 65 grantees actively operated 155 centers during 2022–23.
- A plurality of grantees (37%) were in their fourth year of program operation during 2021–22. About 18% were in their first year, 18% in their third year, and 18% in their fifth year. Only 8% were in Year 2.
- Grantees were split between the categories of school-based grantees (43% in 2022–23) and non-school-based grantees (57% in 2022–23). These percentages are similar to those in previous years.

Center Characteristics

- A total of 2,242 staff were reported by grantees for school year 2022–23 across all programs, up from 1,788 in 2021–22 and closer to the pre-pandemic level of 2,493 staff in 2019–20.
- By far the most common staff type reported by grantees was school-day teacher; 1,008 were reported for the 2022–23 school year, or 45.0% of all staff. The next largest category was program staff; 451 program staff were reported for 2022–23 (21.1% of all staff).¹
- Centers had an average of 14.5 staff members (median: 12) for 2022–23, which was higher than in 2021–22 (with an average of 12.9 and a median of 11).
- The average student-to-staff ratio decreased in 2022–23 compared with 2021–22, reaching about 11.8 students per teacher in 2022–23, compared with about 13.2 students per teacher in the previous year.
- Centers mainly served children in elementary or middle school (85.2% of centers in 2022–23; about the same as in previous years).

¹ “Program staff” is a category of staff reported in PARS21.

- Approximately 23% of all centers chose career awareness as their theme during 2022–23 (compared with 32% in 2020–21 and 25% in 2021–22). About 50% of centers in 2022–23 chose science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, the same as in 2021–22. Another 17% of centers in 2022–23 chose visual and performing arts as their central theme, while only 7% of centers in 2022–23 chose civic engagement as their theme.

Student Characteristics

- A total of 19,355 students attended 21st CCLC programming for at least 1 day in 2022–23, an increase over the 15,772 in 2021–22, 11,689 in 2020–21, and 19,129 in 2019–20. This suggests that total student attendance has rebounded from pandemic-related lows.²
- A majority of 21st CCLC participants were Hispanic/Latino (49.1% in 2022–23) or Black (32.1% in 2022–23). Most attendees (75.6% in 2022–23) qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. These proportions are in line with previous years.
- About 34.0% of students attended fewer than 30 days of programming in 2022–23, 19.2% attended 30 to 59 days, 11.4% attended 60 to 89 days, and 35.4% attended 90 days or more. On average, students attended 64.8 days.
- In 2022–23, about 29% of students were in at least their second consecutive year of 21st CCLC programming, compared with about 36% in 2021–22 and 39% in 2020–21. This lower proportion is likely due to the lower numbers of participating students during the pandemic, combined with a resurgence in overall attendance during 2022–23.
- On average, students spent about 21% of their time in academic enrichment, compared with 17% in 2021–22 and 23% in 2020–21. About 19% of their time on average was spent in youth development/learning activities, compared with 15% in 2021–22 and 19% in 2020–21.
- Observing the median total student hours spent in each type of activity (instead of the average) showed that students spent a median of 7.5 hours in academic enrichment, 6.3 hours in youth development/learning activities, 4.0 hours in recreational activities, and 2.0 hours in tutoring/homework help.
- A total of 48% of students in 2022–23 participated in at least 10 hours of academic enrichment, while 46% of students participated in at least 10 hours of youth development/learning activities across the year. About 43% participated in at least 10 hours of tutoring/homework help, with the same percentage participating in 10 hours of recreational activities. These percentages are within about 6 percentage points of the

² A student was counted as an attendee if (and only if) there was at least one associated activity session attendance record available for that student.

2021–22 values, but much higher than percentages for 2020–21 (as expected given pandemic closures).

- In 2022–23, the typical student attended an average of 76 hours of reading activities and 71 hours of mathematics activities (average of total hours across the reporting period). In 2021–22, the figures were 66 hours and 54 hours, respectively.

Youth Survey Results Summary

During spring 2023, AIR collected survey data from 21st CCLC participants in New Jersey concerning youth experiences in the program. A total of 4,370 completed surveys were collected. However, centers serving more than 100 youth were asked to survey a representative sample of 100 youth, rather than all attendees. This sampling reduced the data-reporting burden for centers serving a large number of youth. The 2023 data were considered alongside data from similar surveys collected during spring 2019 and spring 2022.

Generally, survey responses showed that youth thought they *sometimes* or *often* had choices in their programs (with *often* or *sometimes* responses accounting for 50% to 79% of responses for items on this scale). Youth responded with *mostly true* or *completely true* to items about positive relationships with program adults (72% to 85% of responses), and with *mostly true* or *completely true* to items about positive youth relationships (56% to 67% of responses). Students also tended to agree that the program had benefited them in a variety of ways, with approximately 74% to 82% indicating *mostly true* or *completely true* in response to a series of items about how the program had helped them.

Despite these generally positive findings, student responses regarding opportunities for choice, relationships with other youth, and relationships with adults were less positive in spring 2023 than they were in spring 2022 or spring 2019 (though spring 2023 values were closer to spring 2019 levels). However, response patterns concerning youth perceptions of how the program had helped them showed a year-over-year downtrend, with the proportion of spring 2023 responses of *mostly true* and *completely true* lower than that of spring 2022, and spring 2022 lower than that of spring 2019.

Parent Survey Results

AIR administered a one-time parent survey during fall 2023. While this survey technically falls outside the time period of focus for this report (school year 2022–23), this report includes those results in order to avoid an overly lengthy delay in results reporting.

In all, 2,226 parents provided survey data in fall 2023, about 82% of whom provided complete responses. These surveys were associated with 111 centers, representing about two thirds of all centers active during fall 2023. Findings from the parent survey include:

- Over two thirds (68%) of respondents indicated that the 21st CCLC program had benefited their child “a lot,” while another 21% indicated that the program had helped their child “a moderate amount.” Another 5% indicated that they were not sure whether the program had helped their child.
- In general, parents find in-person communication, flyers sent home with youth, and emails to be effective modes of communication, with about two-thirds of respondents saying these methods were used by their child’s program and that these methods were “very effective.”
- A little more than two thirds of parent respondents think the program has helped their child improve at least “to some extent” in terms of youth getting along with each other, doing better in school, being calmer and more relaxed, being happier, being more outgoing, and being more motivated to go to school. For each of these outcomes, about a quarter of respondents said their child did not need to improve in these ways; less than 6% of parents indicated that their child needed to improve but did not.
- When asked to rank order program-change priorities, parents expressed strongest interest in more individual child tutoring/academic support, increasing homework help, and more fun activities that incorporate learning.

Leading Indicators Summary

A primary goal of the statewide evaluation was to provide 21st CCLC grantees with data to inform program improvement efforts regarding their implementation of research-supported best practices. AIR and NJDOE worked collaboratively to define a series of leading indicators predicated on data collected as part of the statewide evaluation. The leading indicators were meant to enhance existing information and data available to 21st CCLC grantees about how they fared in adopting program strategies and approaches associated with high-quality afterschool programming.

Specifically, the leading indicator system was designed to do the following:

- Summarize data collected as part of the statewide evaluation in terms of how well the grantee and its respective centers³ were adopting research-supported best practices.

³ Throughout this report, the term “center” is used to refer to the physical location where 21st CCLC programming is delivered. Each grantee operates at least one center, although it is more common for a given grantee to operate multiple centers. Most centers, but not all, are located in public schools. The terms “program” and “site” are also commonly used to refer to an individual center.

- Enable grantees to compare their level of performance on leading indicators with similar programs and statewide averages.
- Facilitate internal discussions about areas of program design and delivery that may warrant additional attention from a program improvement perspective.

General Program Indicators

General program indicators relate to program practices at the general or program level, but they may have a strong effect on participant experience. Programs characterized by a supportive and collaborative climate enable staff to engage in self-reflective practice to improve overall program quality. As reported by Smith (2007), Glisson (2007), and Birmingham and colleagues (2005), an organizational climate that supports staff to reflect on and continually improve program quality is a key aspect of effective youth development programs. Furthermore, research suggests that youth achievement outcomes can be improved simply by paying attention to *how* programming is delivered (Birmingham et al., 2005; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). These indicators therefore provide information on program internal communication, links to the school day, collaboration with school partners, and staff commitment to quality at the point of service.

- The average statewide scale score for internal communication fell within the once-a-month response category for 2022–23 (scale response options included *never*, *a couple of times per year*, *about once a month*, and *nearly every week*). This suggests that the assessed collaborative efforts were frequently implemented during both programming periods (Leading Indicator 1).
- Centers tended to have at least some access to school-based data on youth academic functioning and needs (Leading Indicator 2).
- In terms of program staff collaborating with school personnel to adopt practices that are supportive of academic skill building, including linkages to the school day and using data on youth academic achievement to inform programming, the statewide average was 2.90 in 2022–23 (about the same as in previous years). This indicates that staff agreed that linkages exist (Leading Indicator 3).
- In terms of activities provided at the point of service to support youth development, statewide averages on the *Staff Capacity to Create Interactive and Engaging Environment* scale (the source for Leading Indicator 4) suggest that staff adoption of such practices is more common than not. This was also the case in previous years.

Activity-Related Indicators

Activity-related indicators provide data on both activity provision and activity participation, with indicators addressing mathematics and language arts, social and emotional development, and parent or guardian involvement. Overall, these indicators showed the following:

- A statewide average of about 28.6% of activity sessions in 2022–23 and 28.2% of activity sessions in 2021–22 had either a mathematics or a language arts focus (Leading Indicator 5).
- Statewide, nearly three fourths of regular attendees participated in mathematics or language arts activities for at least half of their activity time in 2022–23 (Leading Indicator 7).
- The design of activity sessions frequently targeted the skills and knowledge staff were trying to impart to participating youth (Leading Indicator 6). This was also the case in previous years.
- Statewide, an average of approximately 90.7% of activity sessions offered in 2022–23 infused components that were meant to support youth development–related behaviors and social-emotional learning (SEL) (Leading Indicator 8).
- An average of about 93.4% of regular attendees in 2022–23 (comparable to the 92.6% of regular attendees in 2021–22) participated for at least 20% of their time in activities meant to support youth development–related behaviors and SEL (Leading Indicator 9).
- The *Practices Supportive of Positive Youth Development and Opportunities for Youth Ownership* scales of the staff survey (the sources for Leading Indicator 10) suggest that, as in previous years, staff adoption of such practices is more common than not.
- In terms of engaging in practices to support and cultivate parent involvement and engagement (Leading Indicator 11), most centers were found to do so sometimes or frequently, with a statewide mean scale score of 2.08 in 2022–23, compared to 2.66 in 2021–22.
- Only a very small percentage of program participants (5.9% in 2022–23, 3.5% in 2021–22, 4.4% in 2020–21, and 4.1% in 2019–20) had parents or other adult family members attend activities during the school year.

Similar to previous years, two indicators showed room for growth:

- Leading Indicator 5, “Offering activities meant to support student growth in either mathematics or language arts that are led by a certified teacher.” Statewide, 28.6% of activity sessions offered in 2022–23 targeted mathematics or ELA, compared with 28.2% in 2021–22 and percentages in the low 30s in prior years. As in previous years, most centers

did offer at least *some* activities of this sort, but there is a lot of room to increase these offerings.

- Leading Indicator 12, “Parent or family member involvement in activities.” This indicator value has almost returned to its previous high (6.2% of youth program participants having a parent or family member participate in an activity in 2018–19), with 5.9% in 2022–23. This is an increase from 3.5% in 2021–22. However, given this indicator’s persistently low value, this seems to be a growth area.

Program Impact Summary

Using a quasi-experimental design, AIR conducted impact analyses comparing high-attending participants versus low-attending participants. High-attending treatment was defined three ways: participants attending 30 days or more in 2022–23; participants attending 60 days or more in 2022–23; participants attending 30 days or more in both 2022–23 and 2021–22. “Low attending” was defined as attending less than 15 days in 2022–23. For all three treatment definitions, AIR used inverse probability of treatment weighting (IPTW) to balance treatment and comparison groups in terms of prior-year outcomes, demographics, and school characteristics. AIR also ran multiple types of correlational models involving youth attendance levels, as well as correlational models using youth survey data.

Impact Analyses

The impact analyses concerning English language arts (ELA) and mathematics assessments showed no statistically significant results. However, all three treatment conditions showed lower unexcused school-day absence rates than the comparison group (statistically significant, $p < .001$). The observed difference was not large (about 0.4% lower rate for the treatment groups), but most youth have low unexcused absence rates, and these results are group-wide. This reduced rate translates to about three quarters of a day across a school year.

Correlational Analyses

AIR found statistically significant correlations between youth relationships scales, as reported by youth on AIR’s postsurvey (both relationships with adults and with peers), and increases in terms of academic identity, mindsets, self-management, and interpersonal skills (as measured on pre-post youth surveys). The stronger the reported relationships, the more the pre-post scores increased for each survey outcome. Further, increases on the youth choice scale were also associated with increases in all four of these survey outcome areas. Note, however, that these results are not causal.

Conclusions and Next Steps

The 2022–23 data presented in this report seem to show that the 21st CCLC program in New Jersey is rebounding from COVID-19-era lows. In 2022–23 there were a total of 19,355 student attendees reported across the state, compared with 15,772 in 2021–22 and 11,689 in 2020–21. This attendance level is in keeping with pre-pandemic attendance levels. Further, these youth attended an average of 64.8 days, up from 62.8 days in 2021–22 and 54.4 days in 2020–21. Average total hours spent in activities targeting reading and mathematics increased compared with prior years as well, with average totals of 76 and 71 hours respectively (versus 66 and 54 hours respectively for 2021–22, and 54 and 52 hours respectively for 2020–21). Staffing levels likewise seemed to be returning to pre-pandemic levels, with 2,242 total staff reported for 2022–23, compared with 1,788 in 2021–22 and 1,944 in 2020–21.

Survey results also indicated that youth participating in the 21st CCLC program are having positive experiences, and are witnessing growth on an array of outcomes. Based on the youth survey data, youth more often than not do have opportunities for meaningful choices in their programs. Further, a majority of youth respondents indicated having positive relationships with other youth attendees, while a larger majority said they have positive relationships with adults. The parent surveys collected in fall 2023 also suggest that participants are witnessing growth in terms of happiness and motivation to go to school (among other outcomes), though these results are properly associated with school year 2023–24.

Impact and correlational analyses conducted by AIR also tend to support this positive picture, albeit with some mixed results. Comparing high-attending youth with low-attending youth, statistically significant impacts of 21st CCLC were found for each of three different “high attendance” definitions in terms of unexcused school-day absence reduction. This finding is consistent with results of analyses conducted for the 2016–17 report. However—and this is also consistent with the 2016-17 results—no statistically significant impacts were found related to mathematics and ELA state assessment test results. This suggests that mere attendance in 21st CCLC (as measured via AIR’s three treatment definitions) is not sufficient to cause observable improvement in test scores. Further, assessment test scores are likely to be difficult outcomes to “move” given the typical dosage levels in 21st CCLC programming, as noted above.⁴

That said, the correlational analyses undertaken by AIR resulted in a series of significant findings. Youth who reported having strong relationships in the program—whether with other

⁴ Hill, Bloom, Black, and Lipsey (2008) found that, on average, the effect of a whole year of learning—including school-day learning—on assessment results averaged 0.31 standard deviation units for reading and 0.42 standard deviation units for mathematics. That is, even if a program did have an effect on assessments, the effect is likely to be very small given the amount of time youth attend 21st CCLC programs relative to all their time spent in education. Even if there is an impact, it simply may be too small to detect.

youth or with adult staff—also improved in terms of academic identity, mindsets, self-management, and interpersonal skills.⁵ Higher scale scores in terms of youth choice were also significantly correlated with higher scores in terms of these four survey outcomes. This suggests that the quality of experience in 21st CCLC matters when it comes to growth on intermediate outcomes such as academic identity. This fits with other research on program quality more broadly, which suggests that program quality can have an impact on youth outcomes (Auger et al., 2013; Naftzger et al., 2014; Naftzger & Sniegowski, 2018; Pierce et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2018; Tracy et al., 2016). Given this, AIR plans to more deeply investigate the role of program quality relative to youth outcomes in next year’s evaluation report, notably by analyzing data from youth surveys, staff surveys, self-assessments, leading indicators, key performance indicators, and parent surveys relative to youth outcomes.

⁵ This fits with other research on out-of-school-time programming concerning the importance of building relationships for achieving youth outcomes (Auger et al., 2013; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Kauh, 2011; Miller, 2007; Naftzger & Sniegowski, 2018; Traill et al., 2013).

Section 1. Introduction

For more than 2 decades, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program operating across New Jersey has provided youth in high-poverty communities the opportunity to participate in academic enrichment programs and other development and support activities designed to enhance their academic well-being. The primary purpose of this report—one in a series of evaluation reports—is to provide a descriptive picture of the 21st CCLC program across New Jersey, while also investigating how program attendance levels are correlated with student outcomes.

The information presented in this report is the result of data collected and analyzed as part of a statewide evaluation of New Jersey’s 21st CCLC program that the American Institutes for Research (AIR) is currently conducting. The results outlined in this report are primarily associated with 21st CCLC-funded activities and services delivered during the 2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23 school years. The primary focus of this report, however, is the 2022–23 school year, with prior-year data used for comparison purposes.

Report Organization

This report is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the evaluation questions (EQs) we set out to answer in this report, along with descriptions of all data sources and methods. It concludes with a description of known limitations. Section 3 provides an overview of grantee, center, and youth participant characteristics.⁶ Section 4 presents the results of AIR’s youth survey. Section 5 presents the parent survey results based on a survey administered by AIR in fall 2023. Section 6 provides data on all statewide leading indicator values for 2022–23, and concludes with a short description of common program strengths and weaknesses as conveyed through the leading indicators. Section 7 presents results based on a dosage study (quasi-experimental design), as well as correlational results exploring outcomes related to the youth surveys. Section 8 concludes the report, providing a high-level summary of important findings and briefly discussing next steps.

⁶ In this report, the terms “center” and “program” are used to refer to the physical location where 21st CCLC-funded services and activities take place. Centers are characterized by defined hours of operation, have dedicated staffs, and usually have a dedicated center coordinator. Each 21st CCLC grantee in New Jersey has at least one center; many grantees have more than one center.

Section 2. Evaluation Questions and Approach

This section presents the evaluation questions addressed in this report. Additionally, we present all data sources and analytic methods used to address the evaluation questions, along with a discussion of important limitations.

Evaluation Questions

The statewide evaluation is organized around seven evaluation questions. Using data from 2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23, this report seeks to address three of the seven:

- **EQ1:** What are the primary characteristics of 21st CCLC programs in New Jersey and the populations they serve?
- **EQ2:** How are New Jersey 21st CCLC subgrantees performing in terms of the leading indicators defined for the program?
- **EQ5:** Do youth with higher attendance display better academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes than youth with lower attendance?

Sections 3, 4, and 5 address EQ1; Section 6 addresses EQ2; and Section 7 addresses EQ5.

Data Sources

To address the evaluation questions, data were collected from the following sources.

- **Program Activity and Review System (PARS21).** PARS21 is a web-based data collection system developed and maintained by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE). PARS21 collects data directly from grantees on a broad array of program characteristics, along with individual student information in the form of demographics and 21st CCLC program attendance (including activity session–level participation data).
- **New Jersey Standards Measurement and Resource for Teaching (NJ SMART) Data Warehouse.** In early 2023, the research team obtained access to New Jersey assessment test scores and unexcused absence data for the 21st CCLC participants served during the 2022–23 school year. These data came from the NJ SMART data warehouse maintained by NJDOE for students in Grades 3 through 12. The research team used these data to conduct an analysis of the program’s impact on school-related outcomes.
- **Staff survey.** The purpose of the online staff survey was to obtain information from staff members working directly with youth in programs funded by 21st CCLC about the extent to which they engaged in practices that the afterschool research literature suggests are likely

to be supportive of positive academic and youth development outcomes. Scales appearing on the survey included the following:

- Collective staff efficacy in creating interactive and engaging settings for youth
- Intentionality in activity and session design
- Practices supportive of academic skill building, including linkages to the school day and using data about student academic achievement to inform programming
- Practices supportive of positive youth development
- Opportunities for youth ownership
- Staff collaboration and communication to support continuous program improvement
- Practices supportive of parent involvement and engagement

Staff members were selected as part of the survey sample if they were actively providing services at the center that directly served students participating in the program. The 21st CCLC project directors were instructed to select staff members who worked in their program most frequently and delivered activities that were most aligned with their centers' objectives for student growth and development. The goal was to have project directors identify a minimum of 12 staff members per center to take the survey. In cases where centers had fewer than 12 active staff members, all staff members working with students at the center were directed to take the survey. This data collection took place during the first 3 months of each school year. Completed surveys were obtained from 142 centers that were active during the 2021–22 school year (averaging approximately 8.4 completed surveys per center). In this report, note that these data are presented as part of the leading indicators (many leading indicator values are based on staff survey data). A copy of the staff survey is included in this report as Appendix A.

- **New Jersey 21st CCLC Evaluation Template and Reporting System (ETRS).** The 21st CCLC ETRS is a web-based data collection application designed to obtain center-level information about the characteristics and performance of afterschool programs funded by 21st CCLC, based on information garnered from local evaluation efforts. The system is designed to collect information midyear through a given school year. ETRS data were primarily used to create values for the program leading indicators.
- **Youth survey.** AIR collected a preadministration youth survey during fall of 2022, and a postadministration youth survey during spring of 2023. Both surveys included identical questions relating to youth academic identity, self-management, interpersonal relationships, and mindsets. The postadministration survey also included questions about youth experience in 21st CCLC programming relating to youth choice, relationships with adult staff members, and relationships with other youth. Questions included on both the

preadministration and postadministration versions are used in the outcome analysis, while program experience questions are used as predictor covariates in the correlational analysis presented in Section 7. A copy of the postadministration youth survey is included as Appendix B.

Methods

The findings in this report are purely quantitative. The following methods were used to analyze the quantitative data:

- **Descriptive analyses.** Data related to grantee, center, and student characteristics obtained from PARS21 were analyzed descriptively. This includes basic statistics such as overall totals, averages, median values, percentages, and so on.
- **Analyses to create scale scores.** Many questions that appeared on the staff survey and were represented in the ETRS reports were part of a series of questions designed to assess an underlying construct or concept, resulting in a single scale score summarizing performance in a given area of practice or facet of afterschool implementation (e.g., practices that support linkages to the school day). An example is shown in Exhibit 1, which outlines the questions that make up the *Intentionality Program Design* scale that appeared on the staff survey.

Exhibit 1. Example of a Survey Scale Calibrated Using Rasch Techniques

How often do you lead or participate in program activities that are...	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
a. Based on written plans for the session, assignments, and projects?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Well planned in advance?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Tied to specific learning goals?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Meant to build upon skills cultivated in a prior activity or session?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Explicitly meant to promote skill building and mastery in relation to one or more state standard?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Explicitly meant to address a specific developmental domain (e.g., cognitive, social, emotional, civic, physical, etc.)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. Structured to respond to youth feedback on what the content or format of the activity should be?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. Informed by the expressed interests, preferences, and/or satisfaction of participating youth?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For scales like this, Rasch scale scores were created using responses to the whole series of questions to create one overall score. These scale scores ranged from 1 to 4, where higher scores indicated a higher level or more frequent adoption of a specific quality practice or set of practices. Depending on the type of survey data involved, these scores could be left as individual scores (e.g., for use in analyzing youth survey data) or averaged at the center, grant, or state level (e.g., staff survey data). AIR used Rasch scale scores to calculate many of the leading indicator values.

- **Correlational Multilevel Modeling Techniques.** Multilevel models were run to explore the relationship between, on the one hand, participation levels (in terms of days) or youth program experiences and, on the other hand, student outcomes as measured by pre-to-post youth survey changes (using Rasch scale scores). Note that this method is not sufficient to indicate *cause*.
- **Inverse Probability of Treatment Weighting.** In contrast to the multilevel modeling techniques just described, inverse probability of treatment weighting was employed to estimate the causal impact of higher levels of 21st CCLC program participation versus lower levels of participation in terms of achievement (reading and mathematics) and unexcused absence outcomes. Given that 21st CCLC program participants were not randomly assigned to high-attendance versus low-attendance groups, the problem of selection is paramount. It is likely that students who participated in 21st CCLC programming at high levels were different from those students attending the same schools and programs who attended at lower levels. These differences can bias estimates of program effectiveness because they make it difficult to disentangle preexisting differences between high and low attenders from program impact. Inverse probability of treatment weighting is a technique that can help to mitigate selection effects by balancing treatment and comparison groups on observable characteristics.

Additional information concerning use of inverse probability of treatment weighting, including lists of the variables used, is included in Appendix C.

Limitations and Challenges

There are limitations associated with the types of data collected by AIR during the 2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23 school years. Without attempting to be exhaustive, the primary limitations are as follows.

- **Attendance and participation data are self-reported by grantees.** In New Jersey, 21st CCLC grantees are responsible for collecting and tracking youth attendance and participation data using New Jersey’s PARS21 system. How well grantees do this likely varies. Some grantees may have provided more accurate data than others. Further, in the context of the pandemic, where programming was often virtual and programs were frequently combined into a single virtual “center,” the reporting of program activity and participation data likely varied even more than usual.
- **Surveys can be subject to bias.** Survey data are subject to a number of limitations, including bias (such as recency bias) and social desirability response (i.e., providing socially acceptable but untrue responses in cases where the true responses are perceived as socially undesirable). The staff survey results (as included in the leading indicators) and youth survey results presented in this report should therefore be interpreted with some caution.
- **Inverse probability of treatment weighting is limited to observable characteristics.** Weighting treatment and comparison groups on observable characteristics—such as prior-year test scores, demographics, and school-level data—is far superior to a simple comparison between high- and low-level participants. However, this approach to balancing groups can only take into consideration variables available for analysis. To the extent that youth outcomes are in actuality caused by unobservable youth, program, or school characteristics, the results presented in this report may be off. This is simply an unknown, and is why random assignment experiments represent the gold standard for scientific inquiry (given random assignment’s ability to balance groups on observable and unobservable characteristics).

Section 3. Program Characteristics

Programs funded by 21st CCLC grants are often characterized by a wide diversity of approaches, student populations, and types of organization involved in providing 21st CCLC programming. This section summarizes the characteristics of grantees, centers, and students associated with 21st CCLC programs active during the 2022–23 school year. Overall, 65 grantees in 2022–23 operated 155 centers. In all, the 155 centers in 2022–23 served 19,355 youth (compared with 15,772 youth in 2021–22), likely showing a continued recovery from pandemic-era closures and virtual programming.

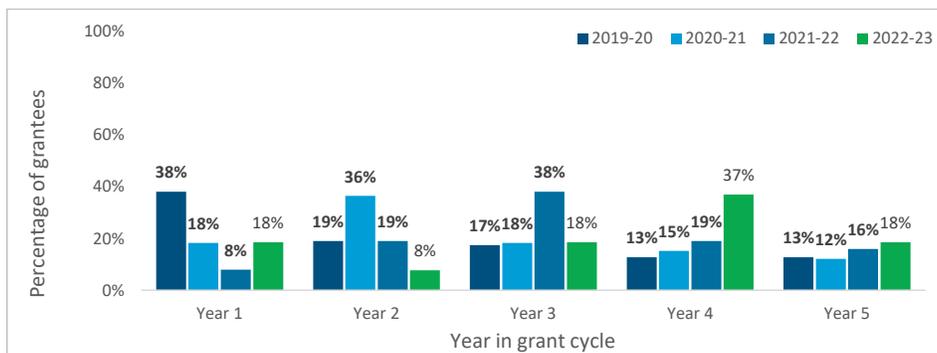
Grantee Characteristics

This section contains information on key grantee characteristics. In this report, the term “grantee” refers to the organization that serves as the fiduciary agent on the grant in question, regardless of whether it is a school district, community-based organization, or other entity, or whether it is ultimately responsible for administering grant funds at the program level.

Grantee Maturity

Programs evolve across the grant period. For example, grantees may find themselves needing to emphasize some elements of their programs and reduce or eliminate others in response to changes in the students served. In addition, it would be optimal for grantees, over time, to learn how to (a) provide more effective and engaging programming for youth, and (b) more meaningfully embed academic content in their program offerings in ways that address the needs of the students they are serving. As Exhibit 2 shows, the plurality of grants active during the 2022–23 school year were in Year 4 of funding. This is not surprising, given the 5-year grant cycle and the fact that a plurality of grants for the 2021–22 school year were in Year 3 of funding.

Exhibit 2. Number of Grantees by Year of Operation, 2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23

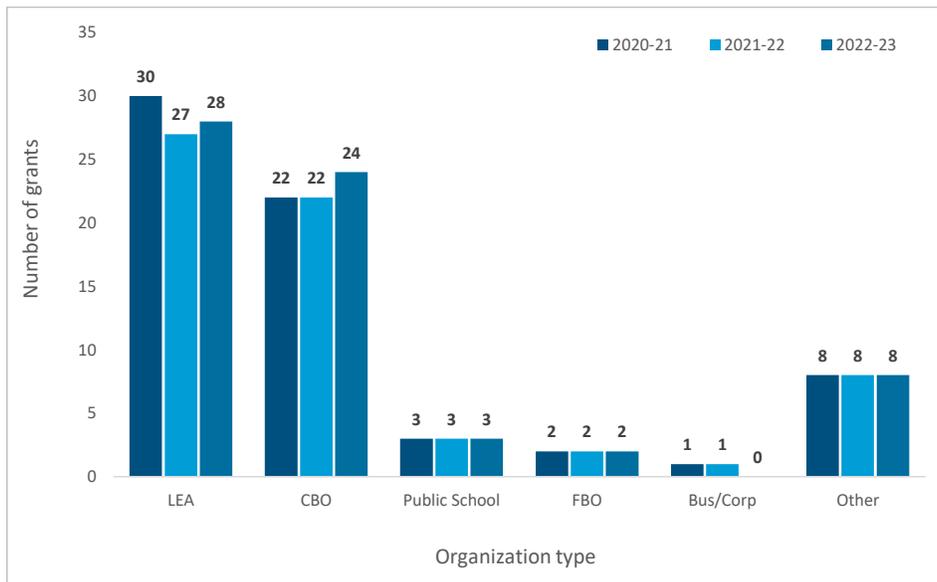


Source. PARS21.

Grantee Organization Type

An important element of the 21st CCLC program is that all types of organizations are eligible to apply for and receive 21st CCLC grants. As Exhibit 3 shows, 43% of grants active during the 2022–23 school year were held by school districts (approximately the same as in the previous year), whereas community-based organizations accounted for 37% of the grants active during this period (up from 35% in the previous year). Public schools and faith-based organizations in 2022–23 accounted for about 5% and 3% of grants, respectively—approximately the same as in previous years. All other categories accounted for roughly 12% of grants in 2022–23, equivalent to prior-year percentages.⁷ See Exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3. Number of Grantees by Organization Type



Note. LEA = local education agency; CBO = community-based organization; FBO = faith-based organization; Bus/Corp = business/corporate. LEA and public school are separate categories within the PARS21 data reporting system.
Source. PARS21.

⁷ School districts and public schools are separate categories for grant entities as recorded in PARS21.

Center Characteristics

This section presents key center characteristic data. In this report, the term “center” refers to the physical location where 21st CCLC–funded services and activities take place. Each center has defined hours of operation, dedicated staff members, and a center coordinator to manage operations. Each 21st CCLC grantee in New Jersey has at least one center; many grantees have more than one center.

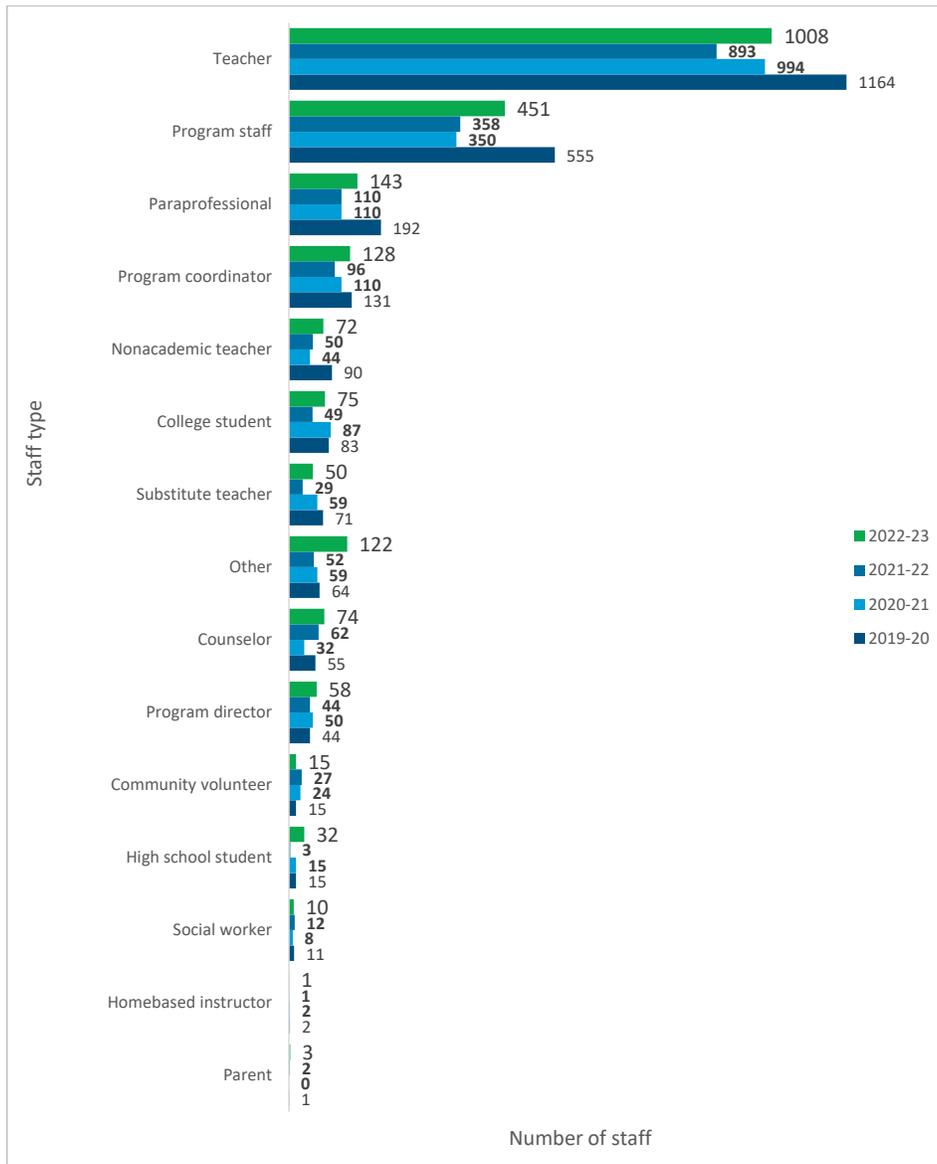
Center characteristics can be described as indicative of research-supported best practices or as innate attributes of the center in question, without a strong connection to the afterschool quality practice literature. The latter category of center characteristics might include the grade level served, program maturity, and organizational type. For example, identifying a program as one that serves only elementary students says nothing about the quality of that program.

Other characteristics of a center, such as the staffing model, are somewhat ambiguous when viewed from a quality practice standpoint; the literature is unclear on the superiority of certain staffing approaches. From a policy standpoint, NJDOE considers certain approaches to staffing for certain types of activities to be appropriate—namely, that certified teachers should staff academic programming provided in an afterschool program.

Staffing

Grantees in New Jersey report staff information in PARS21, linking each staff member to activities provided during 21st CCLC programming. Staff can be categorized in a number of different ways, such as “parent” and “college student.” Counting only those staff who were in some way associated with the provision of actual activities, a total of 2,242 staff were reported by grantees for school year 2022–23 across all programs, significantly up from 1,788 staff in school year 2021–22 and 1,944 staff in school year 2020–21. In terms of classification of these staff, by far the most commonly reported staff types were “teacher” (45.0% of all staff) and “program staff” (20.1% of all staff), with “paraprofessional” a distant third (6.4%). Exhibit 4 shows the total number of staff across New Jersey by staff type.

Exhibit 4. Total Number of Staff by Staff Type, 2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23



Note. Based on activity staff data for 147 centers in 2020–21, 139 centers in 2021–22, and 155 centers in 2022–23. Source. PARS21.

Overall, centers had an average of 14.5 total staff in 2022–23, up from an average of 12.9 total staff for the 2021–22 school year and an average of 13.2 for the 2020–21 school year (only counting staff who actually participated in activity offerings). However, as Exhibit 5 shows, there was some variation in total staff, with a standard deviation of 11.5 staff members in 2022–23.⁸

Exhibit 5. Overall Statistics on Number of Center Staff

Total staff	N	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Standard deviation
2022–23	155	14.5	12	1	90	11.5
2021–22	139	12.9	11	1	52	8.8
2020–21	147	13.2	11	1	51	8.9

Source. PARS21.

In addition to exploring the number of staff employed by centers during the 2022–23 school year, researchers calculated the average student-to-staff ratio associated with activity sessions provided during the span of the school year in question. As Exhibit 6 shows, the average student-to-staff ratio was approximately one staff member for every 12 or so youth participating in activities in 2022–23 (compared with approximately 13 in 2021–22, and only around seven in 2020–21). The mean ratio for 2022–23 was therefore slightly lower than in 2021–22 but higher than in 2020–21. Note, however, that the 2020–21 ratio is based on a lower number of total staff and a lower number of total students owing to low attendance during the pandemic.

Exhibit 6. Average Student–Teacher Ratio per Center, 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
2022–23 student-to-staff ratio	155	1.38	53.15	11.84	7.6
2021–22 student-to-staff ratio	139	2.42	66.88	13.22	9.73
2020–21 student-to-staff ratio	147	0.42	41.09	7.08	6.68

Source. PARS21.

⁸ In a normal distribution, this would mean that approximately 68% of centers would have between three and 26 total staff.

Grade Levels Served

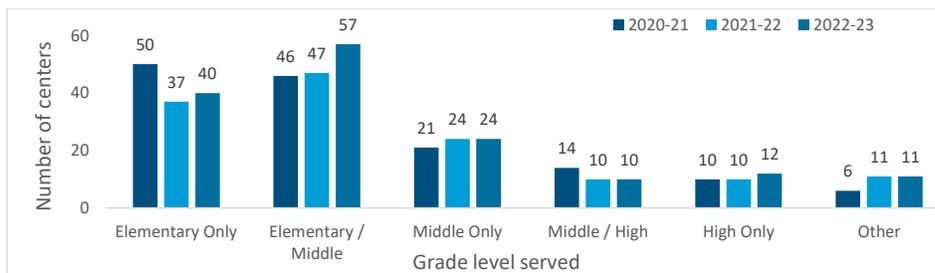
The grade levels served by a program play a role in determining (a) how 21st CCLC programs should structure their operations and program offerings, and (b) the domain of outcomes they should be accountable for through performance indicator systems. Using student-level data on the grade levels of students attending centers, those active during the 2022–23 school year were classified as follows:

- Elementary only, serving students up to Grade 6
- Elementary/middle, serving students up to Grade 8
- Middle only, serving students in Grades 5–8
- Middle/high, serving students in Grades 5–12
- High only, serving students in Grades 9–12

This is the same classification scheme as was used in previous years. Note that a sixth category (“Other”) includes centers that do not fit into one of the five categories above, such as centers that serve students across all grade levels or some other combination of grade levels.

A majority of centers active during the 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23 school years served elementary or middle school students in some capacity (89.1% of all centers in 2020–21, 92.8% in 2021–22, and 85.2% in 2022–23). Approximately three fifths of all centers served elementary students in at least some capacity (65.3% of all centers in 2020–21, 60.5% in 2021–22, and 62.6% in 2022–23). However, the overall proportion of centers serving only elementary students was lower in 2022–23 (to 25.8%, from 26.6% in 2021–22 and 34.0% in 2020–21), with increases in centers serving middle school students in some capacity (36.8% elementary/middle and 15.5% middle only in 2021–22, compared with 33.8% and 17.3% respectively for 2021–22, and 31.3% and 14.3% respectively for 2020–21). See Exhibit 7.

Exhibit 7. Number of Centers by Grade Level Served



Note. Based on 155 centers for 2022–23, 139 centers for 2021–22, and 147 centers for 2020–21. One center for 2022–23 was missing grade-level data.

Source. PARS21.

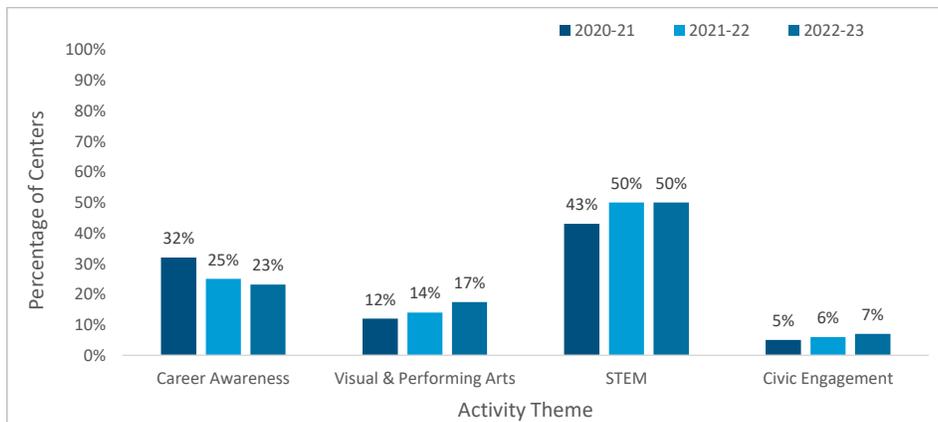
Activity Themes

For the 2022–23 school year, grantees were required to adopt one or more themes when providing activities. The grantees were to select a theme based on students’ needs, interests, and developmental age; and were meant to further support targeted skill building and development through the provision of activities youth would find especially engaging. Themes included the following:

- Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)
- Career awareness and exploration
- Civic engagement
- Visual and performing arts

As Exhibit 8 shows, in school year 2022–23, 23% of centers reported a career awareness theme, 17% reported a visual and performing arts theme (up from 12% and 14% in 2020–21 and 2021–22, respectively), 50% reported a STEM theme, and 7% reported a civic engagement theme. Compared with 2021–22, there was no change in centers reporting a STEM theme (from 50% in 2021–22 to 50% in 2022–23). There was a decrease in centers reporting a career awareness theme, however, from 32% in 2020–21 and 25% in 2021–22 to 23% in 2022–23. Note that themes were derived for centers based on (a) whether they offered any activities associated with a given theme, and (b) how many total activity minutes were associated with each theme the center reported (with the theme designation going to the theme with the highest number of minutes).

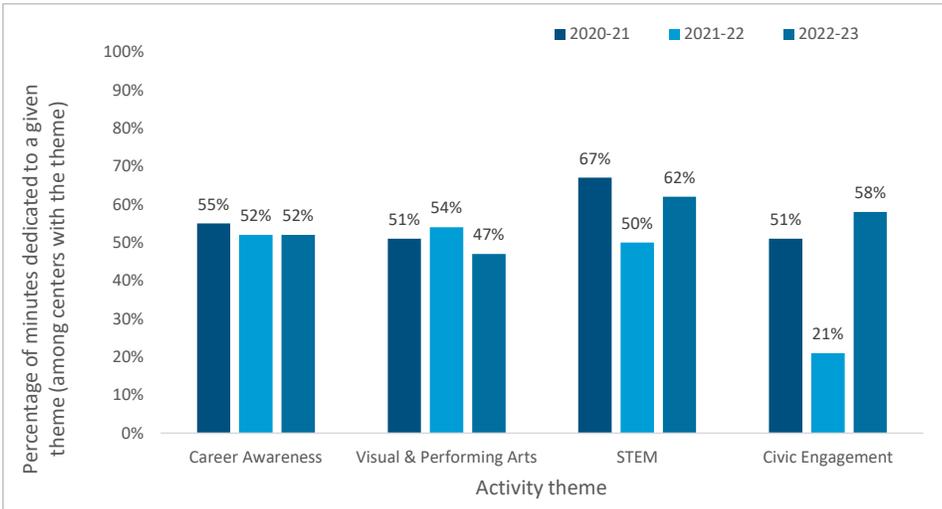
Exhibit 8. Percentage of Centers Offering Activities Linked to a Given Theme



Source. PARS21. Four centers did not have a dominant center theme.

As Exhibit 9 shows, in school year 2022–23, centers with a career awareness theme spent, on average, about 52% of their total activity minutes on career awareness. Centers with a visual and performing arts theme spent 47% of their time on such activities, down slightly from 54% in 2021–22 and 51% in 2020–21. Centers focusing on STEM spent about 62% of their time on such activities, up from 50% in 2021–22, but still down from 67% in 2020–21; and centers with a civic engagement theme spent about 58% of their time on that theme, way up from 21% in 2021–22 and returning closer to the 51% in 2020–21. The extent to which these changes (year to year) are related to the pandemic is somewhat unclear, but it seems likely that the pandemic had at least some impact on total minutes dedicated to specific types of activities. Future data may help to clarify this issue.

Exhibit 9. Percentage of Total Activity Minutes Dedicated to Activity Themes Among Centers With Each Theme



Source. PARS21.

Attendee Characteristics

There was a total of 19,355 attendees served during the 2022–23 school year (counting only students with activity participation data in PARS21). During the 2021–22 school year and 2020–21 school year, there were 15,772 and 11,689 total student attendees, respectively.⁹ This suggests that overall attendance slumped during 2020–21 (during the pandemic) but has now

⁹ During the 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23 school years, 147, 139, and 155 active centers, respectively, had student-level attendance records in PARS21.

rebounded back toward 2019–20 levels. The attendee population was diverse in terms of ethnicity, gender, grade level, and economic level, as Exhibit 10 shows. Generally, students served during the 2022–23 school year were Black and Hispanic/Latino; enrolled in elementary or middle school, especially in Grades 3–7; and eligible for free or reduced-price lunch programs. This is similar to overall proportions during previous years (with modest variations observed, as shown in Exhibit 10; note that only 2 years of data are presented because of space limitations).

Exhibit 10. Summary of Demographic Information for Students, 2022–23 and 2021–22

	Demographic category	2022–23		2021–22	
		Number of students	Percentage	Number of students	Percentage
Race/ Ethnicity	White	2,319	12.0%	1,990	12.6%
	Black	6,211	32.1%	5,596	35.5%
	Hispanic/Latino	9,507	49.1%	7,137	45.3%
	Asian	581	3.0%	530	3.4%
	Native American	45	0.2%	37	0.2%
	Pacific Islander	38	0.2%	28	0.2%
	Unknown	654	3.4%	452	2.9%
Gender	Male	9,451	48.8%	7,512	7,733
	Female	9,904	51.2%	7,745	8,037
Grade Level	2	10	0.1%	7	0.0%
	3	2,091	10.8%	2,013	12.8%
	4	2,968	15.3%	2,611	16.6%
	5	2,644	13.7%	2,066	13.1%
	6	2,933	15.2%	2,474	15.7%
	7	2,354	12.2%	1,684	10.7%
	8	1,544	8.0%	1,208	7.7%
	9	1,858	9.6%	1,197	7.6%
	10	792	4.1%	632	4.0%
	11	511	2.6%	335	2.1%
	12	263	1.4%	157	1.0%
Free or Reduced- Price Lunch	Reduced price	1,366	7.1%	1,030	6.5%
	Free	13,266	68.5%	10,616	67.3%
	Not available	4,723	24.4%	4,124	26.2%

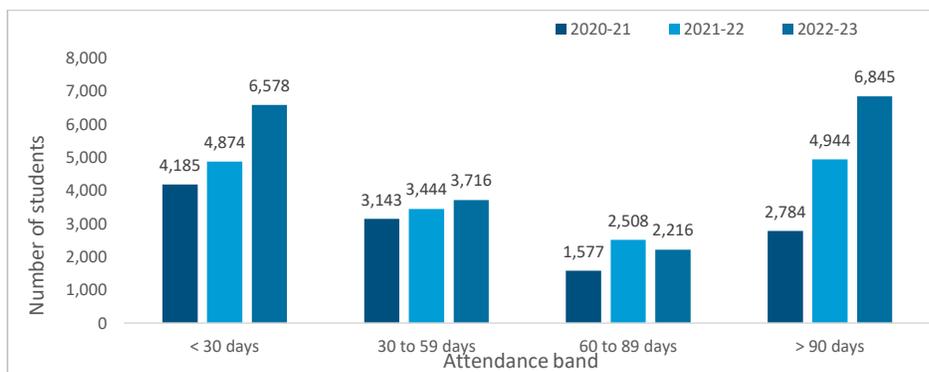
Source. PARS21.

Student Attendance Levels

Attendance is an intermediate outcome indicator that reflects the potential breadth and depth of exposure to afterschool programming. Attendance can be considered in terms of (a) the total number of students who participated in the center’s programming throughout the course of the year, and (b) the frequency and intensity with which students attended programming when it was offered. The former number can be used as a measure of the breadth of a center’s reach, while the latter can be construed as a measure of how successful the center was in retaining students in center-provided services and activities. As a result of being a few years out from the height of the pandemic, of course, it is expected that both numbers will be high compared with previous years.

Among students participating in activities during the 2022–23 school year, the average number of days students attended 21st CCLC programming was 64.8 days, up from 62.8 days in 2021–22 and 54.4 days in 2020–21. Exhibit 11 shows the student population served during the 2022–23 school year, broken into four attendance gradations: students attending fewer than 30 days, students attending 30 to 59 days, students attending 60 to 89 days, and students attending 90 or more days. As Exhibit 11 shows, about one third of the students (34%, compared with 30.9% in 2021–22 and 35.8% in 2020–21) attended fewer than 30 days. A smaller proportion of students attended between 30 and 59 days (19.2%, compared with 21.8% in 2021–22 and 26.9% in 2020–21). The fewest number of students (11.4%) attended between 60 and 89 days. A plurality of students attended for 90 or more days (35.4%), which was an increase from 31.4% in 2021–22 and 23.8% in 2020–21. This year-to-year shift toward higher levels of attendance (90 days or more) bears watching; if the trend continues while total students served also increases, it will be worth exploring this trend further.

Exhibit 11. Number of Students Served in 21st CCLC by Attendance Gradation



Source. PARS21.

In addition to levels of program attendance during the 2022–23 school year, the research team explored the extent to which students participating during this period had been attending the program previously (in continuous years). As Exhibit 12 shows, 71% of students were in their first year of participation during the 2022–23 school year. Approximately 23% were in their second year of participation, and only 4% were in their third year of participation. Four or more years of continuous participation was found to be relatively rare. These patterns are generally similar to those observed in previous years, with a higher proportion of youth in year one likely due to return from pandemic conditions.

Exhibit 12. Continuous Years of Student Participation, 2022–23 and 2021–22

Years of participation	2022–23		2021–22	
	Number of students	Percentage	Number of students	Percentage
1 year	14,996	71.0%	10,128	64.2%
2 years	4,769	22.6%	4,333	27.5%
3 years	852	4.0%	812	5.1%
4 years	365	1.7%	378	2.4%
5 years	82	0.4%	74	0.5%
6 years	47	0.2%	43	0.3%
7 years	5	0.0%	2	0.0
8 years	1	0.0%	1	0.0
9 years	0	0.0%	0	0.0
10 years	1	0.0%	1	0.0
11 years	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

Note. Prior-year records were matched to current-year records using participant identifiers. One year of continuous participation, for example, indicates that a given student was either in their first year of programming during the 2022–23 school year or that there was an interruption in participation prior to the 2022–23 school year. *Source.* PARS21.

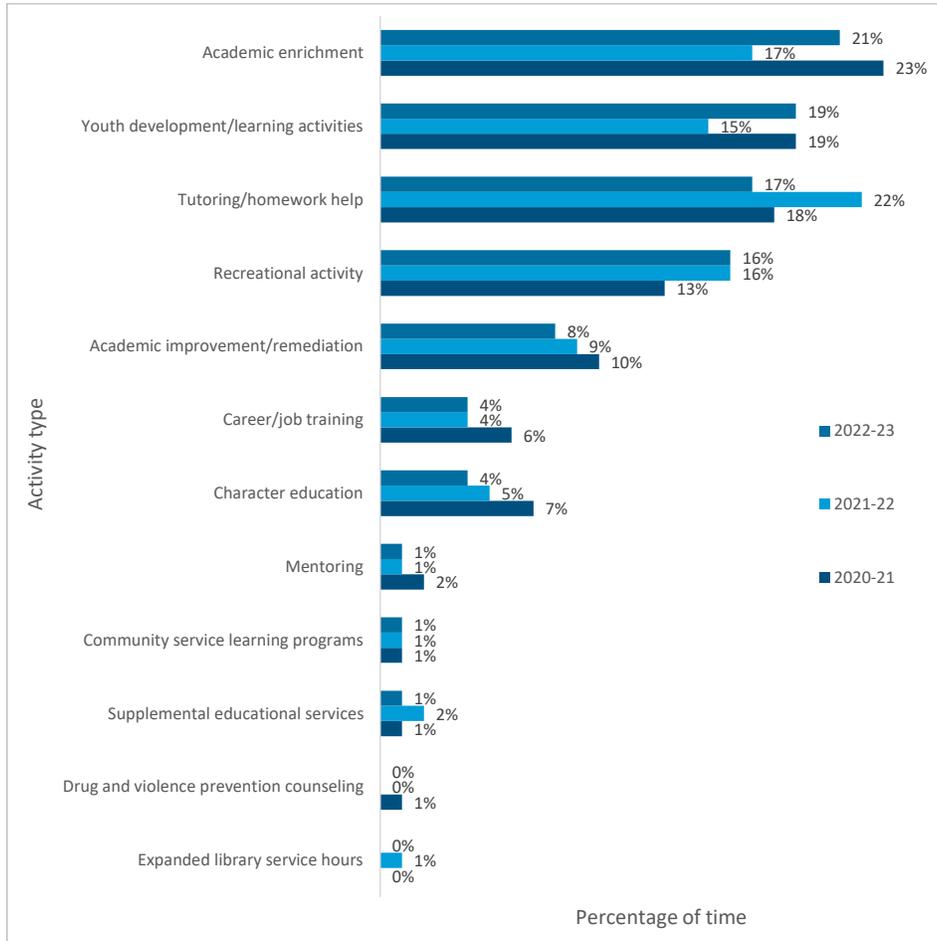
Student Attendance by Activity Type

The evaluation team calculated how much time 21st CCLC participants spent in activities of different types. Within PARS21, activities in which attendees participate can be classified as follows:

- Academic improvement/remediation
- Academic enrichment
- Tutoring/homework help
- Mentoring
- Drug and violence prevention counseling
- Expanded library service hours
- Recreational activities
- Career/job training
- Supplemental educational services
- Community service learning programs
- Character education
- Youth development/learning activities

Using these activity categories, participant attendance records, and activity session duration data, a total number of minutes for each activity type was calculated for each participant. This information was then used in conjunction with total participation minutes to derive student-level percentage statistics concerning each attendee's time spent in each type of activity. Averages of these percentages were then taken to determine what proportion of time participants spent in each activity category (again, on average). Note the strong emphasis on tutoring and homework in 2021–22 compared to both 2020–21 and 2022–23; this may reflect an increased need for such supports immediately following the pandemic. See Exhibit 13.

Exhibit 13. Percentage of Time Each Participant Spent on Activities of a Given Type (Average) for 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23



Source: PARS21.

General statistics were also run for total participant hours (school year) by activity type, calculating the average and median number of total hours for each type of activity (see Exhibit 14). In the 2022–23 school year, academic enrichment had the highest average number of total hours, with 39.8 school-year hours; followed by tutoring/homework help (34.1 school-year hours) and then recreational activities and youth development/learning activities, with 25.0 and

24.6 mean school-year hours, respectively. In terms of median values, the low number of hours meant that only tutoring/homework help, academic enrichment, recreational activities, and youth development/learning activities had median hours above 0.

Compared with previous years' values, 2022–23 average hours were similar to 2021–22 averages and generally higher than 2020–21 averages. As an exception to this general trend, however, average hours of academic enrichment were notably higher in 2022–23 (39.8 hours) than in 2021–22 (28.0), returning to levels similar to 2020–21 (36.1).

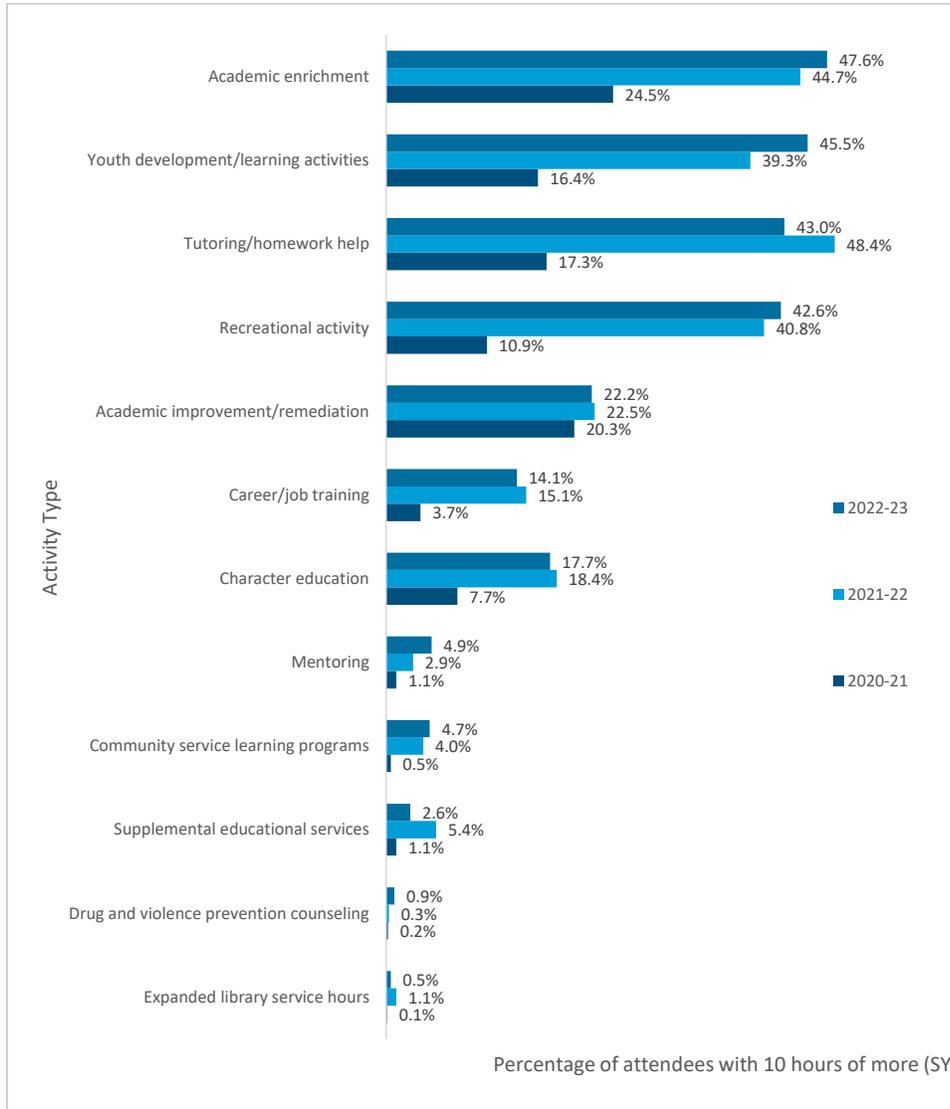
Exhibit 14. Total School-Year Hours of Attendee Participation by Activity Type

School year	2022–23		2021–22		2020–21	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
Academic improvement/remediation	15.0	0.0	14.0	0.0	8.8	0.0
Academic enrichment	39.8	7.5	28.0	6.0	36.1	2.0
Tutoring/homework help	34.1	2.0	35.4	8.0	22.1	0.0
Mentoring	3.5	0.0	1.3	0.0	1.6	0.0
Drug and violence prevention counseling	0.3	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.6	0.0
Expanded library service hours	0.2	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.4	0.0
Recreational activities	25.0	4.0	27.5	3.0	12.3	0.0
Career/job training	6.9	0.0	7.4	0.0	5.7	0.0
Supplemental educational services	1.7	0.0	2.7	0.0	.9	0.0
Community service learning programs	1.4	0.0	1.1	0.0	.4	0.0
Character education	6.6	0.0	8.0	0.0	5.2	0.0
Youth development/learning activities	24.6	6.3	24.9	3.0	22.8	0.0

Source. PARS21.

To explore the intensity of youth participation in each activity category type, a simple calculation was made to identify youth participating for at least 10 hours in each activity type (again, counting total hours for the entire school year). Exhibit 15 shows the percentage of youth participating for at least 10 hours. As indicated, in 2022–23, academic enrichment had the highest participation, with about 48% of all youth participating for 10 hours or more during the year, followed by youth development/learning activities (45.5%) and tutoring/homework help (about 43%). Overall, the proportion of youth reaching the 10-hours-or-more benchmark was much higher for each activity type in 2022–23 than in 2020–21 (with the exception of academic improvement/remediation), but was similar to 2021–22 proportions. This presumably shows the effect of the pandemic on 2020–21 participation.

Exhibit 15. Percentage of Attendees With 10 or More Hours in a Given Activity Type (School Year), 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23



Source. PARS21.

Participation in Reading and Mathematics Activities

Another approach to examining students’ participation in 21st CCLC programming offered during the 2022–23 reporting period is to explore the extent to which they participated in activities meant to support skill building in mathematics and reading, regardless of activity type (e.g., enrichment, tutoring, or academic remediation). As mentioned, a central goal of the 21st CCLC program is to support student growth and development in reading and mathematics. As Exhibit 16 outlines, students on average participated in approximately 76 hours of reading/literacy programming during the 2022–23 reporting period and 71 hours of mathematics programming. In comparison with 2021–22, these hour averages are substantially higher, with increases from 66 hours in reading/literacy programming and 54 hours in mathematics programming. The 2021–22 hours are also higher than averages in 2020–21. These higher mean levels of participation in reading and mathematics are in keeping with the higher proportion of students attending 90 days or more of programming.

Exhibit 16. Average Number of Hours in Reading and Mathematics per Student, 2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23

	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
2022–23 ELA education activities	19,170	0	770 ^a	75.9	96.8
2022–23 mathematics education activities	19,170	0	770 ^a	71.4	93.2
2021–22 ELA education activities	15,752	0	771 ^a	66.1	87.9
2021–22 mathematics education activities	15,752	0	465	53.6	68.5
2020–21 ELA education activities	11,660	0	1,058 ^a	54.3	104.68
2020–21 mathematics education activities	11,660	0	917 ^a	51.7	105.75
2019–20 ELA education activities	18,978	0	479.5 ^a	56.3	63.2
2019–20 mathematics education activities	18,978	0	401.5 ^a	51.5	57.8

Note. ELA = English language arts. The method of activity data reporting changed in 2015–16 to allow activity records to target multiple subjects.

^a These values are outliers, but help to show the range of possible values.

Source. PARS21.

Section 4. Youth Survey

During spring 2023, AIR collected survey data from 21st CCLC participants in New Jersey concerning youth experiences in the program. This section presents the results of those experience questions. This section is divided into three parts. First, youth responses concerning youth choice are presented. Second, youth responses concerning their relationships with staff and other youth in the program are presented. Third, youth responses about how the 21st CCLC program has helped them are presented. Note that none of the material in this section speaks to program outcomes, at least in a causal manner; the data in this section merely present youth responses to experience-related questions on the postadministration youth survey.

Also note that the results presented in this section are based on 4,370 total completed surveys. However, centers serving more than 100 youth were asked to survey a representative sample of 100 youth, rather than all attendees. This sampling reduced the data-reporting burden for centers serving a large number of youth.

Questions Relating to Youth Choice

Especially with older youth, allowing opportunities to make real, meaningful choices is an important part of program quality. Giving youth a sense of control and real choice in activities can help them become more engaged and experience a sense of agency (Beymer et al., 2018; Larson & Angus, 2011; Naftzger & Sniegowski, 2018; Nagaoka, 2016). Youth perceptions concerning their opportunities for real choice provide a window into one aspect of program quality, in addition to conveying youth perceptions of their own experience in 21st CCLC programs.

For this reason, the survey included questions concerning youths' perceptions of their opportunities to make choices in the 21st CCLC program. The exact wording of the prompt was as follows: **"Now think about this program in particular. When you are at this program, how often..."** This stem was followed by seven items that youth could answer by selecting *never*, *rarely*, *sometimes*, or *often*. The full domain of questions, along with responses (by percentage of all responses received for each item), is presented in Exhibit 17.

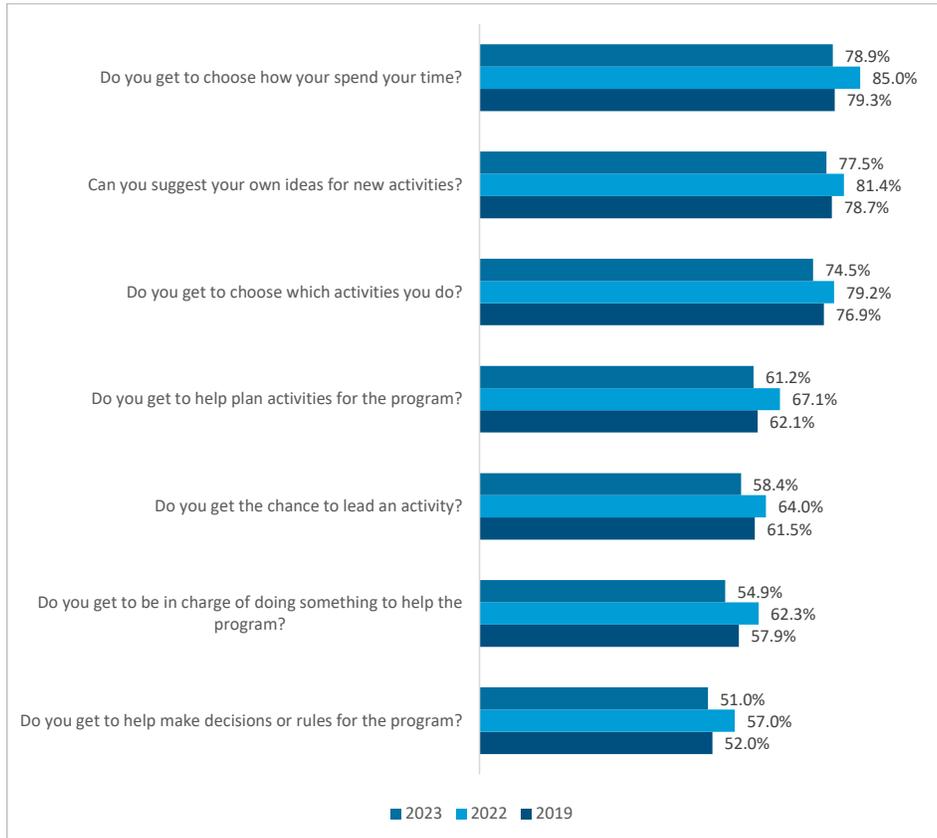
Exhibit 17. Youth Responses to Questions Concerning Opportunities for Choice

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	<i>n</i>
Do you get to choose how you spend your time?	8.3%	12.7%	49.0%	29.9%	4,387
Can you suggest your own ideas for new activities?	6.2%	16.3%	44.2%	33.3%	4,368
Do you get to choose which activities you do?	8.6%	17.0%	41.6%	32.9%	4,353
Do you get to help plan activities for the program?	18.7%	20.1%	37.1%	24.1%	4,365
Do you get the chance to lead an activity?	20.3%	21.3%	37.9%	20.5%	4,356
Do you get to be in charge of doing something to help the program?	23.6%	21.5%	34.9%	20.0%	4,367
Do you get to help make decisions or rules for the program?	30.4%	19.6%	31.6%	18.4%	4,365

Source. Youth postadministration survey (spring 2023).

To help visualize these responses, Exhibit 18 shows the combined percentage of respondents indicating *sometimes* or *often* for each item. Data from 2018 and 2019 are also presented for comparison purposes (the youth postadministration survey was not administered in 2020 or 2021). Generally, youth felt they either *sometimes* or *often* were able to choose how they spent their time, could suggest ideas for new activities, and could choose what activities to do, although youth were less likely to indicate that they *often* felt that way. Conversely, youth were less likely to indicate that they *sometimes* or *often* were able to make decisions or rules for the program, were in charge of something to help the program, or had a chance to lead an activity, though these were expected to be somewhat lower, as they pertain more to older youth. Interestingly, positive responses for all items were lower (as a proportion of all responses) than they were in 2022, and more comparable to 2019 responses. One possible explanation for this is that, while overall attendance was subdued during 2021–22, students with positive experiences in 21st CCLC programming were more likely to attend (or continue attending) during that year, skewing the survey results toward more favorable responses. This is only a possible explanation, however.

Exhibit 18. Percentage of Youth Respondents Answering *Sometimes* or *Often* in Response to Each Question Related to Opportunities for Choice



Source. Youth postadministration surveys (spring 2023, spring 2022, and spring 2019).

Questions Relating to Relationships With Adults and Youth

For youth to have a positive experience in 21st CCLC programming, centers need to foster positive relationships between youth and adults (Auger et al., 2013; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Kauh, 2011; Miller, 2007; Naftzger & Sniegowski, 2018; Traill et al., 2013), as well as relationships among the participants themselves (Akiva et al., 2013; Larson & Dawes, 2015). Creating these positive relationships is an essential aspect of program quality and can facilitate important youth outcomes.

For this reason, we asked youth about their perceptions of their relationships with adults, along with questions about their relationships with their peers. Concerning adults, we asked the following: **“In this program, there is an ADULT...”** Seven items followed this stem, with response options of *not at all true*, *somewhat true*, *mostly true*, and *completely true*. See Exhibit 19 for a presentation of all questions and response rates, by response category. Note that only a small percentage of respondents indicated *not at all true* for any item, although the statement “who asks me about my life and goals” received the most *not at all true* responses (about 10% of responses).

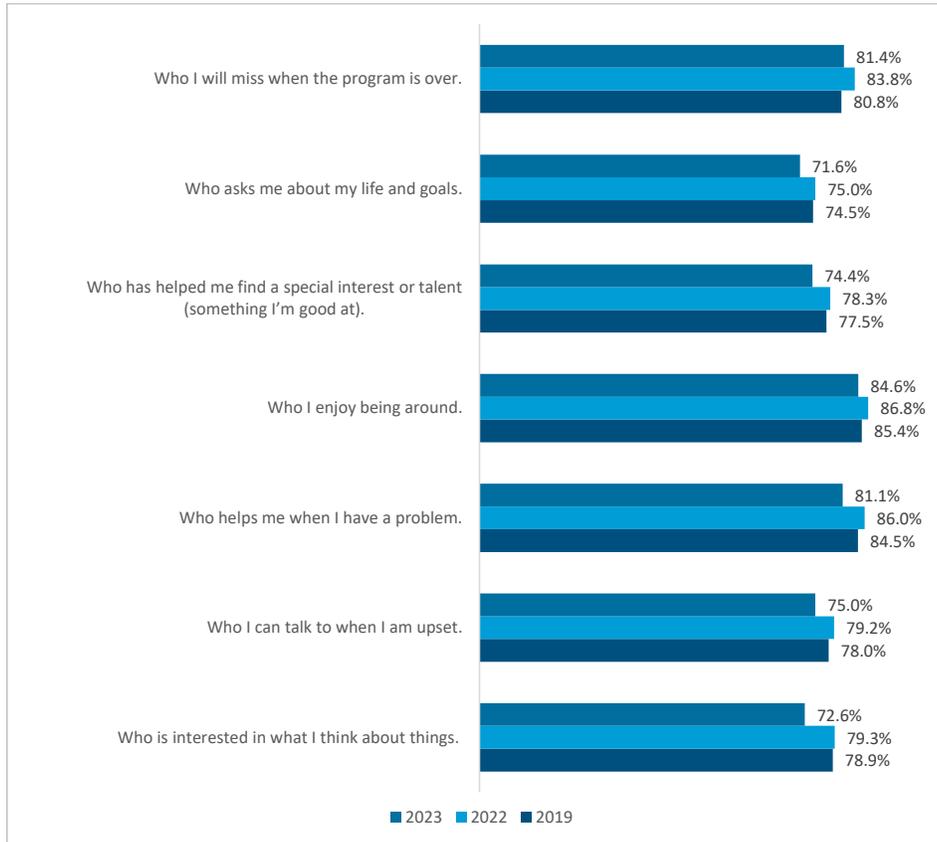
Exhibit 19. Youth Responses to Questions Concerning Relationships With Adults in the Program

Thinking about the adults present for this program, how true are these statements for you? In this program, there is an adult here...	Not at all true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Completely true	n
Who is interested in what I think about things	6.7%	20.7%	37.6%	35.1%	4362
Whom I can talk to when I am upset	8.3%	16.7%	32.6%	42.4%	4348
Who helps me when I have a problem	4.4%	14.4%	33.9%	47.2%	4330
Whom I enjoy being around	3.6%	11.8%	33.6%	51.0%	4347
Who has helped me find a special interest or talent (something I’m good at)	8.6%	17.1%	32.9%	41.4%	4348
Who asks me about my life and goals	10.0%	18.4%	32.8%	38.8%	4350
Whom I will miss when the program is over	7.1%	11.5%	28.0%	53.4%	4351

Source. Youth postadministration survey (spring 2023).

To help visualize these responses and clarify areas of greatest strength and relative weakness, Exhibit 20 presents combined response percentage rates for *mostly true* and *completely true*. Generally, youth responded to all items positively, with the lowest *mostly true* and *completely true* response rate calculated at 71.6% (“Who asks me about my life and goals”). About 85% responded that the statement “Who I enjoy being around” was *mostly true* or *completely true*; and 81.1% responded *mostly true* or *completely true* to the statement, “Who helps me when I have a problem.” Overall, a lower proportion of youth indicated *mostly true* or *completely true* for all items concerning relationships with adults than was the case in 2022, more in line with responses in 2019.

Exhibit 20. Percentage of Youth Respondents Answering *Mostly True* or *Completely True* in Response to Each Question With the Stem, “In This Program, There Is an ADULT...”



Source. Youth postadministration surveys (spring 2023, spring 2022, and spring 2019).

Concerning relationships among the youth themselves, we used the same response categories for five separate items. Youth were prompted with the following: **“At this program, how do kids get along? Indicate how true each statement is based on your own experience in this program.”** All five questions, along with responses by percentage responding in each category, are presented in Exhibit 21. Note that the item “Kids here don’t tease or bully other kids” received the highest *not at all true* response rate, at 15.6%, consistent with 2022 responses. Overall, response patterns were similar item to item, with lower proportions of answers falling in the *mostly true* or *completely true* range than was the case for questions about relationships with adults.

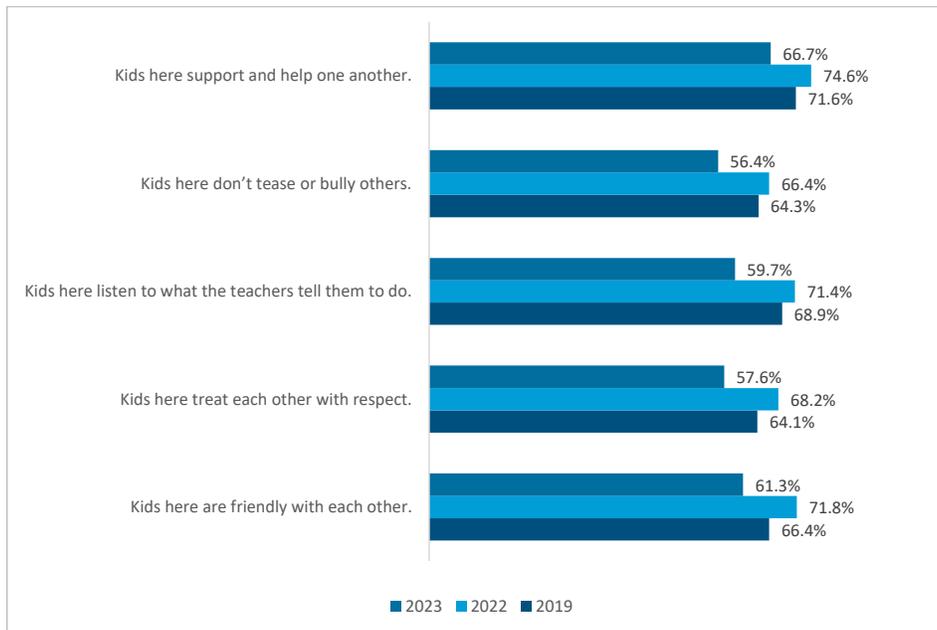
Exhibit 21. Youth Responses to Questions Concerning Relationships Among Participants

At this program, how do kids get along? Indicate how true each statement is based on your own experience in this program.	Not at all true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Completely true	<i>n</i>
Kids here are friendly with each other.	9.7%	29.0%	39.7%	21.6%	4,360
Kids here treat each other with respect.	10.2%	32.2%	37.2%	20.5%	4,355
Kids here listen to what the teachers tell them to do.	8.3%	32.0%	36.9%	22.8%	4,342
Kids here don't tease or bully other kids.	15.6%	27.9%	33.8%	22.6%	4,353
Kids here support and help one another.	7.6%	25.7%	38.6%	28.0%	4,351

Source. Youth postadministration survey (spring 2023).

As with the other two item sets, Exhibit 22 presents response rates for *mostly true* and *completely true* together as a way to visualize the data. Again, the overall responses in 2023 were less positive than they were in 2022, but also less positive than they were in 2019.

Exhibit 22. Percentage of Youth Respondents Answering *Mostly True* or *Completely True* to Each Question Related to Youth Relationships in the Program



Source. Youth postadministration surveys (spring 2023, spring 2022, and spring 2019).

Questions Relating to How 21st CCLC Programming Has Helped Youth

Finally, we asked youth a set of questions about how they think the 21st CCLC program has helped them. Youth were asked to respond to 13 different items using the stem, “This program has helped me...” Overall, youth responded positively to these items; with one exception, more than three fourths of all respondents answered *mostly true* or *completely true* to all items. Only 74.1% responded *mostly true* or *completely true* to “with my confidence,” which was a drop of greater than six percentage points from 2022. Items that received the highest proportion of *mostly true* or *completely true* responses were “find out what I like to do” and “find out what I’m good at doing.” In prior years, “feel good about myself” had some of the highest *completely true* responses, but this year it had the second lowest *completely true* response rate, with only 76.7% of respondents answering *mostly true* or *completely true*, compared to 81.5% in 2022. See Exhibits 23 and 24. It is unclear why this should be the case, though it could be related to continued pandemic stress or return to more normal attendance levels following the pandemic. Future reports will continue to monitor these trends.

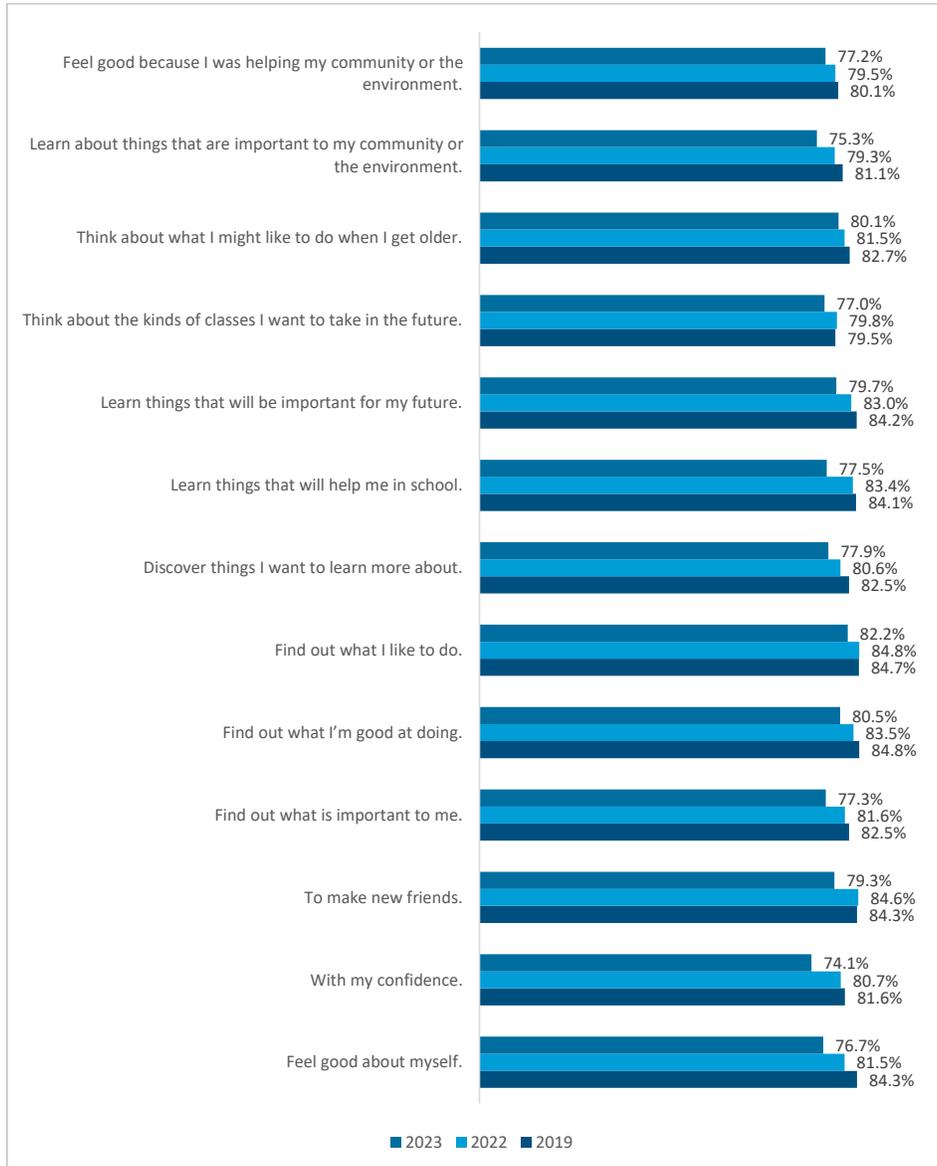
Exhibit 23. Youth Responses to Questions Concerning How the Program Has Helped Them

How has this program helped you specifically? For each line, indicate how true each statement is for you. This program has helped me...	Not at all true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Completely true	n
Feel good about myself.	7.1%	16.1%	36.7%	40.1%	4,304
With my confidence.	6.9%	19.0%	36.0%	38.2%	4,293
To make new friends.	5.9%	14.8%	34.4%	44.8%	4,280
Find out what is important to me.	6.4%	16.3%	36.2%	41.1%	4,284
Find out what I’m good at doing.	5.6%	13.9%	36.2%	44.3%	4,293
Find out what I like to do.	4.9%	12.9%	36.6%	45.7%	4,286
Discover things I want to learn more about.	6.2%	15.9%	36.2%	41.8%	4,273
Learn things that will help me in school.	5.7%	16.8%	36.0%	41.6%	4,275
Learn things that will be important for my future.	5.1%	15.2%	34.8%	45.0%	4,269
Think about the kinds of classes I want to take in the future.	6.5%	16.4%	36.3%	40.8%	4,278
Think about what I might like to do when I get older.	5.4%	14.4%	36.4%	43.7%	4,266
Learn about things that are important to my community or the environment.	6.0%	18.7%	38.0%	37.3%	4,286
Feel good because I was helping my community or the environment.	6.7%	16.1%	36.7%	40.6%	4,261

Source. Youth postadministration survey (spring 2023).

Exhibit 24. Percentage of Youth Respondents Answering *Mostly True* or *Completely True* in Response to Each Question With the Stem, “This Program Has Helped Me...”

Commented [PE1]: Reverse order to match exh 23, or OK as is?



Source. Youth postadministration surveys (spring 2023, spring 2022, and spring 2019).

Year-to-Year Changes

The preceding data show that student responses concerning opportunities for choice, relationships with other youth, and relationships with adults were less positive in spring 2023 than they were in spring 2022. This suggests that there may be a normalizing of the response sample, wherein 2022 respondents may have been more likely to have had positive experiences with the program (and therefore more likely to overcome attendance barriers following the pandemic), while the larger 2023 sample may be more similar to the 2018 and 2019 samples. It could also be the case that the higher positive response patterns from 2022 reflected an effect of the return to in-person programming, rather than program changes *per se*; after a year or more of virtual programming, youth returning to in-person activities may have been more inclined to treat one another with respect, be friendly toward one another, and so on. It could also be the case that lower attendance levels were more conducive to providing youth with choices and supporting relationships. If any of these explanations is actually the case, then regression back to pre-pandemic levels would be consistent.

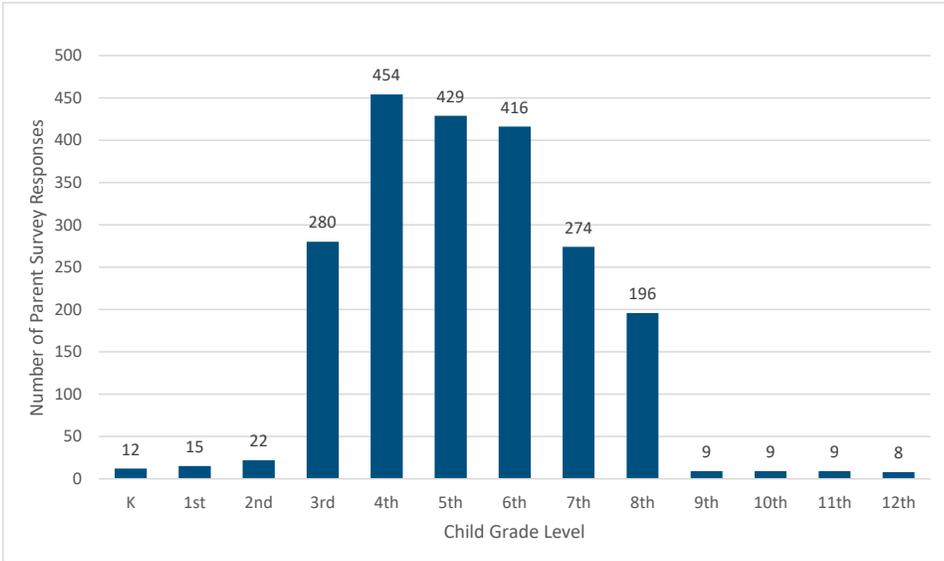
However, the downward trend in positive responses to how programming benefited the youth goes against these explanations. While percentages of youth responding *mostly true* or *completely true* to each item associated with program benefit remained relatively high, there is a clear downtrend from 2019 to 2023. This movement could be reflective of more persistent negative impacts of COVID-19, but could also be related to unexplored factors. This trend bears watching. It is important to note, however, that preliminary results for the 2023–24 youth survey show slightly higher percentages of youth responding *somewhat true* or *mostly true* to these items, with markedly higher percentages saying *completely true* than was the case for 2023 (1 to 3 percentage points for each item).

Section 5. Parent/Caregiver Survey

A survey for parents of youth participating in New Jersey 21st CCLC programming was sent out in fall 2023. **While fall 2023 falls outside the primary year of focus for this report, the response data are included here to avoid delay in results reporting.** The purpose of the parent survey was to find out more about youth participants’ experiences in 21st CCLC afterschool programming as seen by parents, and to obtain feedback from parents concerning program interests.

There were 2,226 parents who started the survey, with 81.8% (1,821) completing the survey in full. Consistent with the student characteristics, a majority of respondents had children who were in Grades 3 to 7. See Exhibit 25.

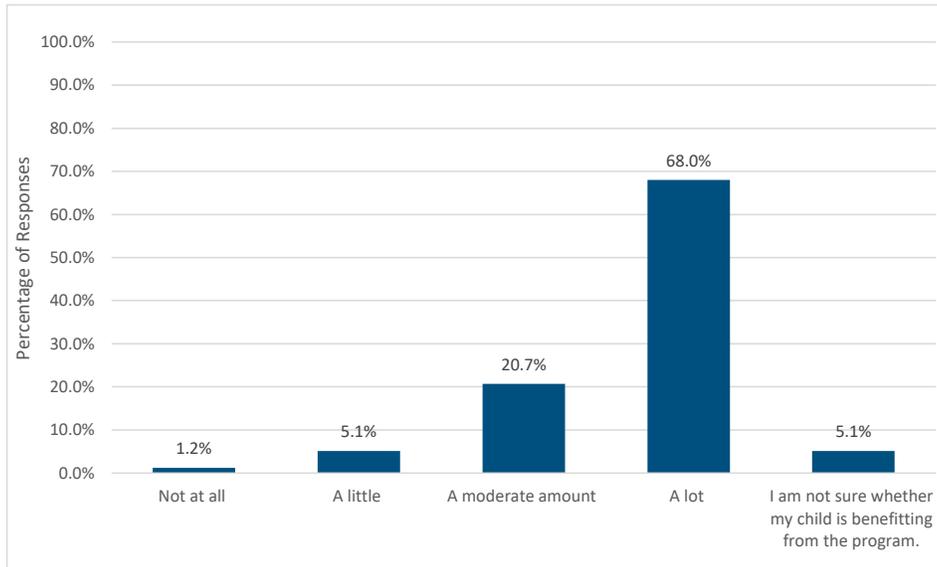
Exhibit 25. Parent Survey Respondents by Their Child’s Grade Level



Source. Parent survey (fall 2023).

Parents were asked the extent to which they believed their child is benefiting from being part of their afterschool program. Response options were *Not at all*, *A little*, *A moderate amount*, *A lot*, or *I am not sure whether my child is benefiting from the program*. As can be seen in Exhibit 26, 88.7% of parents indicated their child was benefiting a *moderate amount* or *a lot*, with over two thirds indicating their child was benefiting *a lot*.

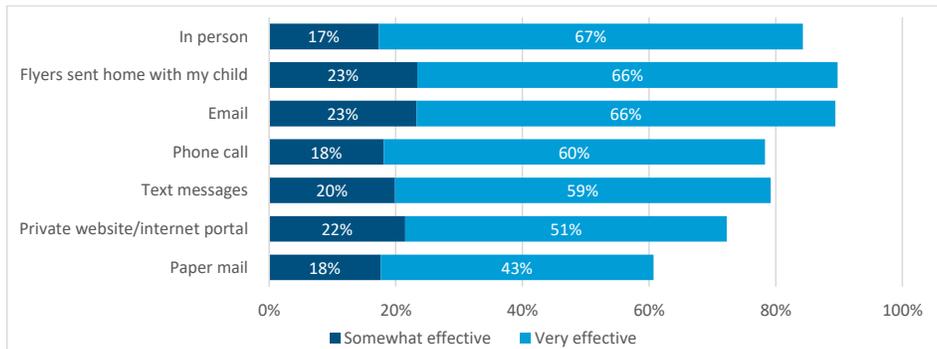
Exhibit 26. Parent Perceptions of Child Benefit From Participation in 21st CCLC Programming



Source. Parent survey (fall 2023).

Parents were also asked to indicate how their child’s afterschool program communicates with them about activities, services, and supports, and how effective they found those communication methods to be. Exhibit 27 shows the most used communication types and their perceived effectiveness. The forms of communication most commonly used were flyers (with only 6.4% indicating they were *not used*) and email (with only 6.8% indicating they were *not used*). These approaches were also deemed generally effective (with about two thirds saying these methods were *very effective*). In-person communication was regarded as *very effective* as well, with the highest proportion of respondents (67.2%) selecting this response option. Private website/internet portal and paper mail were regarded as the least effective of the primary forms of communication. A small percentage of parents selecting “other” indicated they received communication via apps such as *Dojo* and *Remind*, and regarded these as *very effective* (18 of the 19 participants who wrote them in said they were *very effective*).

Exhibit 27. Parent Perceptions of Communication Effectiveness



Source. Parent survey (fall 2023).

Parents were asked about the extent to which they had seen specific types of changes in their child since they started attending the afterschool program. Over two thirds of parents said their child either *improved to some extent* or *improved a lot* in all the areas of change listed in the survey. The area parents reported the most improvement was “doing better in school,” followed by being “happier.” Importantly, “happier” and “more motivated to go to school” were the areas that parents most rated as having seen *a lot* of improvement.

Exhibit 28. Parent Perceptions of Program Impact

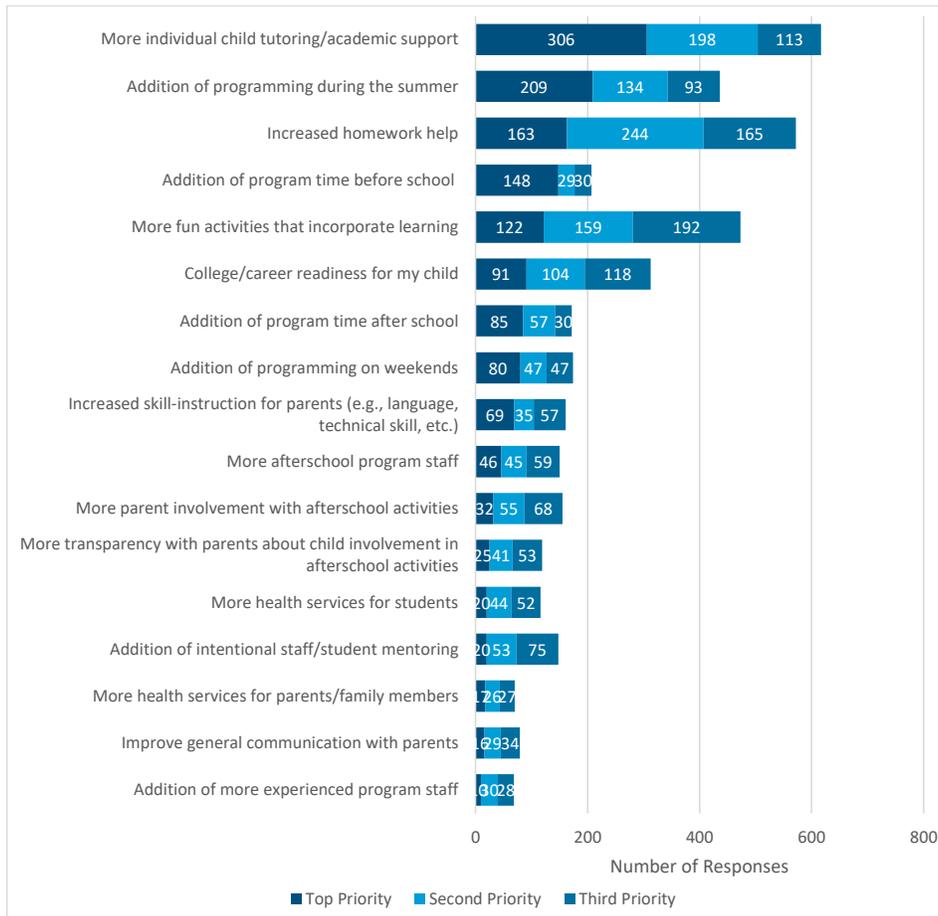
Changes	My child was doing fine in this area before they started the program, and I didn't expect to see improvement.	I was hoping to see improvement in this area, but my child DID NOT IMPROVE in this area.	I was hoping to see improvement in this area, and my child IMPROVED TO SOME EXTENT in this area.	I was hoping to see improvement in this area, and my child IMPROVED A LOT in this area.	N
Getting along better with other children	29.4%	3.9%	26.0%	40.7%	1,817
Doing better in school	22.5%	5.3%	29.9%	42.3%	1,802
Calmer and more relaxed	27.7%	5.6%	28.4%	38.3%	1,795
Happier	24.6%	3.3%	25.8%	46.2%	1,807
More outgoing	23.9%	4.5%	26.5%	45.1%	1,796
More motivated to go to school	23.9%	5.8%	24.1%	46.2%	1,792

Source. Parent survey (fall 2023).

Overall, responses from parents concerning their perceptions about program impact were positive. There may be some self-selection bias to this, however; it is unclear whether the parents responding to the survey are generally representative of all parents of attending youth. That said, the relatively high number of responses does provide good evidence that parents perceive positive impact of the program on their children.

The final question on the survey asked parents to rank in terms of importance possible program modifications. As Exhibit 29 shows, the top priority area for parents was “more individual child tutoring/academic support,” followed by “addition of programming during summer” and “increased homework help.” In general, parents showed most interest in adding academic-related or fun learning activities, and adding program time.

Exhibit 29. Parent Programming Priorities



Source. Parent survey (fall 2023).

Section 6. Leading Indicators

A primary goal of the statewide evaluation was to provide 21st CCLC grantees with data to inform program improvement efforts regarding their implementation of research-supported best practices. Building from the quality framework, AIR and NJDOE worked collaboratively to define a series of leading indicators predicated on data collected as part of the statewide evaluation. The leading indicators were meant to enhance existing information and data available to 21st CCLC grantees about how they fared in adopting program strategies and approaches associated with high-quality afterschool programming. Specifically, the leading indicator system was designed to do the following:

- Summarize data collected as part of the statewide evaluation in terms of how well the grantee and its respective centers were adopting research-supported best practices.
- Allow grantees to compare their level of performance on leading indicators with similar programs and statewide averages.
- Facilitate internal discussions about areas of program design and delivery that might warrant additional attention from a program improvement perspective.

Predicated on the data collected from the staff survey, ETRS midyear reports, and PARS21, the leading indicator system is focused on *quality program implementation* as opposed to youth or program outcomes. The midyear report is designed to consolidate and report on data collected as part of the basic operation of the program (e.g., PARS21 data). The report also provides information on program evaluation efforts regarding the adoption of research-supported best practices. More consistent implementation of research-supported best practices will theoretically support the attainment of desired youth and program outcomes.

In the following sections, statewide levels of leading indicator performance are summarized. The indicators are divided into two general domains: general program operation and specific activity offerings at each center. The indicator values shown in each section are based on center-level indicator values, aggregated to the state level. The hope is that these aggregate values will provide useful information concerning areas of common strength or weakness. Indicator values across the past 5 years are also presented as a way of showing indicator change or stability over time, notably between pre-pandemic and pandemic years.

General Program Indicators

General program indicators relate to program practices at the general or program level, but they may have a strong effect on the participant's experience. Programs characterized by a supportive and collaborative climate permit staff to engage in self-reflective practice to improve overall program quality. As noted by Smith (2007), Glisson (2007), and Birmingham and colleagues (2005), an organizational climate that supports staff to reflect on and continually improve program quality is a key aspect of effective youth development programs. Furthermore, research suggests that youth achievement outcomes can be improved by simply paying attention to *how* programming is delivered (Birmingham et al., 2005; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). These indicators therefore provide information on program internal communication, links to the school day, collaboration with school partners, and staff commitment to quality at the point of service. The indicator values are presented in Exhibit 30.

Overall, the results presented in Exhibit 30 show the following:

- The average statewide scale score for internal communication fell within the once-a-month response category for 2022–23 (scale response options included *never, a couple of times per year, about once a month, and nearly every week*). This suggests that the assessed collaborative efforts were frequently implemented during both programming periods (Leading Indicator 1).
- Centers tended to have at least some access to school-based data on youth academic functioning and needs (Leading Indicator 2).
- In terms of program staff collaborating with school personnel to adopt practices that are supportive of academic skill building, including linkages to the school day and using data on youth academic achievement to inform programming, the statewide average was 2.90 in 2022–23 (about the same as in previous years). This indicates that staff agreed that linkages exist (Leading Indicator 3).
- In terms of activities provided at the point of service to support youth development, statewide averages on the *Staff Capacity to Create Interactive and Engaging Environment* scale (the source for Leading Indicator 4) suggest that staff adoption of such practices is more common than not. This was also the case in previous years.

Exhibit 30. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on General Program Indicators

Leading indicator	Description and calculation	Source	Indicator value, 2022–23
Leading Indicator 1: Internal Communication—Staff communicate with other program staff to enhance internal collaboration toward continuous program improvement.	Each center received a score on a 1 to 4 scale, based on mean responses to questions in the staff survey about the degree of communication and collaboration.	Responses to questions that appear in the <i>Internal Communication and Collaboration</i> scale of the staff survey	The statewide mean scale score was 2.60 for 2022–23, which is within the <i>once-a-month</i> portion of the scale.
Leading Indicator 2: Link to School Day—Program staff take steps to establish effective linkages to the school day that inform the design and delivery of program activities meant to support student academic growth and development.	Each center received a score on a 1 to 4 scale, based on responses to questions about the degree to which strategies (that appeared on the midyear version of the evaluation template) were adopted to support the academic development of participating youth.	Responses to the following questions, which appeared in the <i>Improve Student Academic Achievement</i> section of the ETRS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did the program obtain student information? How accessible was this information, and how often was it used? • What strategies did you use to link the program to the regular school day? • What strategies were your staff members using to communicate with classroom teachers, and how frequently were they being used? 	The statewide mean scale score was 2.48 in 2022–23, which meant the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on student academic performance was rarely or occasionally used. • Linking with the school day was somewhat of a strategy to a major strategy. • Communication with school-day teachers occurred once per grading period to monthly.
Leading Indicator 3: Collaboration With School Partners—Program staff collaborate with school personnel to adopt practices that are supportive of academic skill building, including linkages to the school day and using data on student academic achievement to inform programming.	Each center received a score on a 1 to 4 scale, based on mean responses to questions in the staff survey about linkages to the school day to inform programming.	Responses to questions that appeared in the <i>Linkages to the School Day</i> scale of the staff survey, to inform programming scales of the staff survey	The statewide mean scale score was 2.90 for 2022–23, which meant the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff <i>agreed</i> that linkages to the school day exist.

Leading indicator	Description and calculation	Source	Indicator value, 2022–23
Leading Indicator 4: Quality at Point of Service—Staff are committed to creating interactive and engaging settings for youth.	Each center received a score on a 1 to 4 scale, based on responses to questions about the degree of staff capacity to create interactive and engaging settings for youth.	Responses to questions that appeared in the <i>Staff Capacity to Create Interactive and Engaging Environment</i> scale of the staff survey	The statewide mean scale score was 3.05 for 2022–23, which was within the <i>agree</i> portion of the scale, indicating that staff believe their peers largely provide these opportunities to participating youth.

Activity-Related Indicators

Activity-related indicators relate to actual activity provision and therefore relate directly to participant experience in 21st CCLC programming. These indicators are subdivided into three groups:

- Indicators related to mathematics and language arts
- Indicators related to social and emotional development
- Indicators related to parent or guardian involvement

The state-level indicator results are presented in this section in these categories, with an exhibit and summary points provided for each subset.

With respect to mathematics and language arts activity provision, each program funded by a 21st CCLC grant has the express goal of improving youth achievement outcomes. As already noted, general program practices are important to achieving this goal, but programs will be more likely to accomplish this goal if the 21st CCLC staff working directly with youth provide activities intentionally meant to support academic learning in some way, and if youth actually attend such activities on a consistent and ongoing basis. The indicators in this section, therefore, focus on the provision of and participation in these activities.

- A statewide average of about 28.6% of activity sessions in 2022–23 and 28.2% of activity sessions in 2021–22 had either a mathematics or a language arts focus (Leading Indicator 5).
- Statewide, nearly three fourths of regular attendees participated in mathematics or language arts activities for at least half of their activity time in 2022–23 (Leading Indicator 7).
- The design of activity sessions frequently targeted the skills and knowledge staff were trying to impart to participating youth (Leading Indicator 6). This was also the case in previous years.

See Exhibit 31 for complete indicator results relating to mathematics and ELA activities.

Exhibit 31. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on Activity-Related Indicators Associated With Mathematics and Language Arts

Leading indicator	Description and calculation	Source	Indicator value, 2022–23
<i>Mathematics and ELA</i>			
Leading Indicator 5: 21st Century Skills—A meaningful level of activity sessions delivered during the first semester of the school year are intentionally meant to support youth growth and development in either mathematics or reading/language arts and are led by a certified teacher.	PARS21 student attendance data were used to determine the proportion of activity sessions delivered during the school year that were intentionally meant to support student growth and development in either mathematics or ELA and were led by a certified teacher.	Activity detail and attendance pages in PARS21	Statewide, 28.6% of activity sessions offered during 2022–23 met these criteria, compared with 28.2% in 2021–22.
Leading Indicator 6: Common Core—Staff design and deliver intentional and relevant activities designed to support student growth and development in mathematics and reading/language arts.	Each center received a score on a 1 to 4 scale, based on mean responses to questions in the staff survey about the degree of intentionality in activity and session design.	Responses to questions that appeared in the <i>Intentionality in Activity and Session Design</i> scale of the staff survey	The statewide mean scale score was 3.03 for 2022–23, which was in the <i>frequently</i> portion of the scale, indicating that the adoption of these practices by staff is common. This was comparable to the 2021–22 mean scale score.
Leading Indicator 7: Common Core Skills—Youth enrolled in the program participate in a meaningful level of activities designed to support youth growth in reading and mathematics achievement.	PARS21 student attendance data were used to determine the proportion of students—among those who participated in programming for more than 30 days—who spent at least 50% of their time in the program participating in activities that were intentionally meant to support student growth and development in mathematics and ELA.	Activity detail and attendance pages in PARS21	Statewide, 73.6% of students participating in programming during the 2021–22 school year and 68.3% of students participating in programming during the 2021–22 school year for more than 30 days met these criteria.

The second set of activity-related leading indicators relates to social and emotional youth development. Youth development is a multifaceted construct consisting of a series of positive developmental experiences youth have when key supports and opportunities are afforded throughout their participation in youth-serving programs. In high-quality programs, environments are supportive and interactive, and they provide youth with opportunities to experience engagement and ownership of the setting (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Smith & Hohmann, 2005). Social and emotional learning (SEL) is also an integral component of youth growth and achievement, and has been shown to be positively affected in afterschool settings that promote the development of these skills through the creation of specific conditions for learning (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Afterschool programs that successfully support the development of SEL skills integrate opportunities for participants to build on their social and emotional competencies through sequenced activities that are actively engaging and focused on the development of social skills. Ideally, these strategies are based on an understanding of participants' assets and needs, garnered through ongoing formal and informal assessment.

As shown in Exhibit 32, the centers operating 21st CCLC programs during the course of the 2020–21 school year were characterized by the following levels of performance on the indicators associated with social and emotional development:

- Statewide, an average of approximately 90.7% of activity sessions offered in 2022–23 infused components that were meant to support youth development–related behaviors and SEL (Leading Indicator 8).
- An average of about 93.4% of regular attendees in 2022–23 (comparable to the 92.6% of regular attendees in 2021–22) participated for at least 20% of their time in activities meant to support youth development–related behaviors and SEL (Leading Indicator 9).
- The *Practices Supportive of Positive Youth Development* and *Opportunities for Youth Ownership* scales of the staff survey (the sources for Leading Indicator 10) suggest, as in previous years, that staff adoption of such practices is more common than not.

See Exhibit 32 for leading indicator values.

Exhibit 32. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on Activity-Related Indicators Associated With Social and Emotional Development

Leading indicator	Description and calculation	Source	Indicator value, 2022–23
Leading Indicator 8: Social and Emotional Learning—Staff infuse components that are meant to support the social and emotional development of participating youth.	Fields in PARS21 allow users to specify whether an activity is characterized by an infusion of components that are meant to support youth development–related behaviors and SEL functioning. Users specify what areas of youth development and SEL functioning are being targeted, if any. The goal is to have 20% of activity sessions delivered during the school year characterized by an infusion of components that are meant to support youth development–related behaviors and SEL.	Responses to the following field in PARS21: Is this activity intentionally designed to support the improvement of youth development–related behaviors and social-emotional functioning in any of the following areas (check all that apply)?	Statewide, 90.7% of activity sessions offered during the 2022–23 school year met these criteria (equal with the 90.7% of activity sessions offered during the 2021–22 school year).
Leading Indicator 9: 21st Century Skills—Youth enrolled in the program participate in a meaningful level of activities designed to support youth development and social and emotional competencies.	PARS21 student attendance data were used to determine whether at least 50% of students participating in programming for more than 30 days participated in activities infused with components intended to support youth development–related behaviors and social-emotional functioning for at least 20% of their total time in the program.	Responses to the following field in PARS21: Is this activity intentionally designed to support the improvement of youth development–related behaviors and social-emotional functioning in any of the following areas (check all that apply)?	Statewide, 93.4% of students participating in programming during the 2022–23 school year and 92.6% of students participating in programming during the 2021–22 school year for more than 30 days met these criteria.
Leading Indicator 10: Youth Development—Staff develop activities that are meant to support youth ownership and other opportunities for positive youth development.	Each center received a score on a 1 to 4 scale, based on responses to questions about the degree to which staff reported adopting practices designed to support youth development and ownership.	Responses to questions that appear in the <i>Practices Supportive of Positive Youth Development</i> and <i>Opportunities for Youth Ownership</i> scales of the staff survey	The statewide mean scale score was 2.93 in 2022–23 and 2.94 in 2021–22, which meant the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select opportunities for youth development were made available <i>regularly</i>. • Staff largely <i>agreed</i> that youth ownership opportunities are provided.

The third set of indicators concerning activity provision relates to parent or guardian involvement. Engaging families in programming and providing family learning events is an important component of 21st CCLC programming. Programs can engage families by communicating

with them about center programming and events, collaborating to enhance their child’s educational success, and providing intentional activities meant to both support family involvement and cultivate family literacy and related skills. Historically, 21st CCLC programs have witnessed some of their greatest challenges in getting parents and adult family members meaningfully engaged in program offerings and events (Naftzger et al., 2011). Leading Indicators 11 and 12 relate to programs’ efforts to involve parents or guardians in 21st CCLC programming:

- In terms of engaging in practices to support and cultivate parent involvement and engagement (Leading Indicator 11), most centers were found to do so sometimes or frequently, with a statewide mean scale score of 2.08 in 2022–23 compared to 2.66 in 2021–22.
- Only a very small percentage of program participants (5.9% in 2022–23, 3.5% in 2021–22, 4.4% in 2020–21, and 4.1% in 2019–20) had parents or other adult family members attend activities during the school year.

See Exhibit 33 for a summary of Leading Indicators 11 and 12.

Exhibit 33. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on Activity-Related Indicators Associated With Family Involvement

Leading indicator	Description and calculation	Source	Indicator value, 2022–23
Leading Indicator 11: Staff and Family Connections— Staff actively engage in practices supportive of parent involvement and engagement meant to support youth growth and academic development.	Each center received a score on a 1 to 4 scale, based on mean responses to questions about the extent to which staff engage in practices supportive of parent involvement and engagement.	Responses to questions that appear in the <i>Practices Supportive of Parent Involvement and Engagement</i> scale of the staff survey	The statewide mean scale score was 2.08 in 2022–23, down from 2.66 in 2021–22 and 2.22 in 2020–21, all of which were within the <i>did sometimes</i> portion of the scale.
Leading Indicator 12: Family Involvement— Parents and family members of enrolled youth participate in activities designed to support family engagement and skill building.	PARS21 parent and adult family member attendance data were used to determine whether at least 15% of youth attending programming during the school year had at least one parent or adult family member participate in at least one activity meant to support parental or adult family member involvement or skill building.	Activity detail and attendance pages in PARS21	Overall, 5.9% of all program participants had at least one parent or adult family member participate in at least one activity in 2022–23, compared with 3.5% in 2021–22.

Determining Program Improvement Priorities From the Leading Indicators

One goal of the leading indicator system is to help NJDOE determine where efforts should be invested to support programs to adopt quality afterschool practices. This section therefore focuses on areas where it seems there is room for growth, based on overall percentages or averages.

As in previous years, two indicators showed consistent room for growth:

- **Leading Indicator 5, “Offering activities meant to support student growth in either mathematics or language arts that are led by a certified teacher.”** Statewide, 28.6% of activity sessions offered in 2022–23 targeted mathematics or ELA, compared with 28.2% in 2021–22 and percentages in the low 30s in prior years. As in previous years, most centers did offer at least *some* activities of this sort, but there is a lot of room to increase these offerings.
- **Leading Indicator 12, “Parent or family member involvement in activities.”** This indicator value has almost returned to its previous high (6.2% of youth program participants having a parent or family member participate in an activity in 2018–19), with 5.9% in 2022–23. This is an increase from 3.5% in 2021–22. However, involving family members in activities continues to be a good target for prioritization.

No indicator values shifted substantially between 2021–22 and 2022–23. Leading Indicator 12 had been trending downwards (up through 2021–22), but in 2022–23 reverted to previous-year levels. Similarly, Leading Indicator 11 was also noted for having risen sharply in the prior year, but has dropped down to levels observed in previous years.

Section 7. Student Program Attendance Level and School-Related Outcomes

This section presents AIR’s analyses of 21st CCLC outcomes in New Jersey, specifically as they relate to 2022–23 program participation. The analyses are of two types: quasi-experimental and correlational. The quasi-experimental analyses investigate the effect of higher levels of attendance compared with lower levels of attendance, looking at outcomes of mathematics and ELA assessment scores (using Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers [PARCC] scale scores as provided by NJDOE) and unexcused school-day absences (as a proportion of total days enrolled, as also provided by NJDOE). The correlational analyses investigate outcomes derived from the preadministration to postadministration of a youth survey.

Quasi-Experimental Method of Analysis

In any evaluation of a program where participants are not randomly assigned to participate or not participate, the problem of selection is paramount. We know that it is likely that students who participate in 21st CCLC programming at high levels are different from those who participate at low levels (the comparison employed for this report). These differences can bias estimates of program effectiveness because they make it difficult to disentangle preexisting differences between students included in the treatment group versus the comparison group. The quasi-experimental approach outlined here, inverse probability of treatment weighting (IPTW), is a method for mitigating that existing bias in program effect.¹⁰

IPTW is a multi-stage process. In the first stage, the probability that each student participates in the 21st CCLC program at a high level (as defined below) is modeled on available observable characteristics, yielding an overall propensity score. (See Appendix C for lists of variables used in this stage, as well as in the analytic models.) Extreme outlier values are then trimmed from the overall dataset to avoid skewing the results via high weights.¹¹ Propensity scores are then recalculated on the trimmed dataset and converted into case weights. These case weights are then used within two-level hierarchical models (accounting for both student and school-level variables) so that treatment and comparison groups are evenly balanced. Note that calculation of the propensity scores included prior-year measures for the outcomes of interest. The

¹⁰ IPTW is helpful in cases where the comparison group is small relative to the treatment group, as is the case here. In such cases, IPTW can be preferable to using propensity score matching, in which treatment cases are matched with comparison group cases via propensity scores. Both IPTW and propensity score matching are approaches to balancing the treatment and comparison groups absent random assignment.

¹¹ That is, students with a very high propensity score who did not in fact participate at a high level were excluded, as were students with a very low propensity score who in fact did attend at a high level. This trimming removed about 2.5% of all cases available for analysis.

hierarchical linear models used to analyze the weighted cases incorporated all variables used to create the propensity scores (student and school-level variables), and also employed robust standard errors.

The AIR evaluation team defined treatment in three different ways, with comparison groups matched to each treatment definition through a separate IPTW process. The treatment definitions are as follows:

1. Students who attended at least 30 days during the 2022–23 school year,
2. Students who attended at least 60 days during the 2022–23 school year, and
3. Students who attended at least 30 days the 2022–23 school year and 30 days in the 2021–22 school year.

The comparison group for all three treatment definitions was defined as students who attended for 15 days or less during the 2022–23 school year. This comparison group definition was selected to further mitigate potential selection bias (given that low-level attending youth are presumably more similar to higher attending youth than are non-attenders at the same schools), while treatment group definitions were selected to explore “high attendance” from multiple angles.

The goal of the quasi-experimental analyses was to answer the following evaluation questions:

- To what extent is there evidence that students participating in 21st CCLC at high levels demonstrated better performance on reading and math assessments as compared with similar students participating at low levels?
- To what extent is there evidence that students participating in 21st CCLC at high levels demonstrated better performance in terms of unexcused school-day absences compared with similar students participating at low levels?

The rest of this subsection seeks to provide data that directly address these two research questions.

English Language Arts State Assessment Scores

AIR examined the impact of higher 21st CCLC participation on ELA scores, using ELA state test scale scores as the outcome in question. As noted, prior-year academic performance was included in the matching models in order to better ensure apples-to-apples comparisons, along with demographic factors, as described in Appendix C. AIR ran three separate comparisons in order to explore impact on ELA scores: 1) participants with 30 days or more of 21st CCLC participation compared with participants with 15 days or less, 2) participants with 60 days or

more of 21st CCLC participation compared with participants with 15 days or less, and 3) participants with 30 days or more in the 2022–23 school year and 30 days in the 2021–22 school year compared with participants with 15 days or less. Results of each comparison are presented in Exhibit 34.

No significant differences were observed between higher attending participants and lower attending participants for ELA scale scores.

Exhibit 34. ELA Score Outcome Among Students, Higher Attendance Participants Versus Lower Attendance Participants

Treatment Definition	N Treatment	N Comparison	Estimate	Standard Error (Robust)	t value
30 days or more	3,477	659	-0.5242	0.6904	-0.8
60 days or more	2,771	668	-1.1000	0.7745	-1.4
30 days in 2022–23, 30 days in 2021–22	2,831	668	-0.0558	0.7680	-0.1

Mathematics State Assessment Scores

AIR’s evaluation team performed the same three types of analyses for mathematics assessment scale scores: 1) participants with 30 days or more of 21st CCLC participation compared with participants with 15 days or less, 2) participants with 60 days or more of 21st CCLC participation compared with participants with 15 days or less, and 3) participants with 30 days or more in the 2022–23 school year and 30 days in the 2021–22 school year compared with participants with 15 days or less. Results for these three comparisons are presented in Exhibit 35.

No statistically significant differences were observed.

Exhibit 35. Mathematics Score Outcome Among Students, Higher Attendance Participants Versus Lower Attendance Participants

Treatment Definition	N Treatment	N Comparison	Estimate	Standard Error (Robust)	t value
30 days or more	3,477	659	0.3542	0.6523	0.5
60 days or more	2,771	668	0.2880	0.7317	0.4
30 days in 2022–23, 30 days in 2021–22	2,831	668	0.4534	0.8320	0.6

Unexcused School-Day Absences

In addition to examining state assessment results, the AIR evaluation team analyzed the impact of 21st CCLC program participation on unexcused school-day absences. To do this, AIR first converted unexcused school-day absences into unexcused absence rates by dividing unexcused

absences (in days) by total days enrolled (also in days). AIR removed from consideration any students with less than 60 days total membership. Then, AIR performed the same three types of comparisons as were done with the assessment data: 1) participants with 30 days or more of 21st CCLC participation compared with participants with 15 days or less, 2) participants with 60 days or more of 21st CCLC participation compared with participants with 15 days or less, and 3) participants with 30 days or more in the 2022–23 school year and 30 days in the 2021–22 school year compared with participants with 15 days or less. Results for these three comparisons are presented in Exhibit 36.

Unlike ELA and mathematics test results, all three comparisons yielded statistically significant differences in terms of unexcused absence rates. For each of the three treatment definitions, the treatment group had roughly a 0.4% lower unexcused absence rate than did the comparison group. This may not seem like a large difference, but across a full school year of 180 days an absence rate difference of 0.4% accounts for approximately three-quarters of a full day absent (0.72 day). Additionally, these are overall group-level effect estimates; most youth do not have many unexcused absences, so the rates are generally low for both treatment and comparison groups.

Exhibit 36. Mathematics Score Outcome Among Students, Higher Attendance Participants Versus Lower Attendance Participants

Treatment Definition	N Treatment	N Comparison	Estimate	Standard Error (Robust)	t value
30 days or more	3,477	659	-0.0040***	0.0010	-4.11
60 days or more	2,771	668	-0.0041***	0.0011	-3.74
30 days in 2022–23, 30 days in 2021–22	2,831	668	-0.0040***	0.0011	-3.69

*** $p < .001$

Summary of Quasi-Experimental Results

The analyses presented in this subsection have two important limitations. First, the comparison group *n* sizes are all relatively small compared to the treatment *n* sizes. Second, using propensity scores and IPTW cannot account for variables that are not available for inclusion, meaning preexisting differences could potentially account for the observed differences (an unknown). However, these results are very similar to results obtained from previous analyses conducted by AIR on these same outcome types.¹² In general, few if any significant effects tend

¹² For example, see results from Vinson, M, Liu., F., Lin, S. (2019). *New Jersey 21st Century Community Learning Centers: Year 5 Evaluation Report, Impact Data for 2016–17*. Chicago, IL: American Institutes for Research.

to be observed with respect to ELA and mathematics test scores, while statistically significant effects are often observed with respect to reduction of unexcused school-day absences. The results shown here are therefore in keeping with previously observed outcome effects.

Correlational Method of Analysis

As first described in Section 4 of this report, AIR collected preadministration and postadministration youth outcome surveys during 2022–23. Whereas Section 4 presented descriptive data taken from the experience-related questions included on the postsurvey (and only on the postsurvey), this subsection will present pre-to-post changes on the youth outcome questions as they correlate to youth program attendance and as they correlate to the answers provided in response to the experience questions included on the postsurvey.

This subsection answers the questions:

- Did youth outcomes measured by the pre-to-post surveys increase more for higher-attending youth?
- Did youth outcomes as measured by the pre-to-post surveys increase more for youth reporting better program experiences?

Note that the answers to these questions as presented here are entirely correlational and are *not* quasi-experimental. Because of that, it is not possible to say that the outcomes observed here were actually caused by the 21st CCLC program.

Collection and Preparation of Survey Data

Youth surveys were administered directly to 21st CCLC attendees by centers using AIR’s online survey platform. The preadministration survey was collected in the fall, and the postadministration survey was collected in the spring. Both the youth pre- and postsurveys included questions aligned with the following constructs:

- Academic identity
- Interpersonal skills
- Mindsets
- Self-management

A full list of all questions with their associated constructs is presented in Appendix B (as a full copy of the youth postsurvey). As an example, however, the Mindsets scale included items such as “I finish whatever I begin,” “I don’t give up easily,” and “I stay positive when things don’t go the way I want,” which the youth were instructed to answer by indicating *not at all true*, *somewhat true*, *mostly true*, or *completely true*.

Responses to these items were converted into construct scale scores using Rasch analytic techniques. The scale scores were placed on a 1 to 4 scale roughly corresponding to the response options. The pre scores were then subtracted from the post scores to obtain a pre-to-post change value for each outcome. Additionally, responses relating to youth choice, youth relationships with adults in the program, and youth relationships with other youth in the program were converted to scale scores and used as predictors in separate two-level hierarchical linear models. All predictors used in the quasi-experimental analysis were included in these analyses, including prior-year values for state assessment tests and unexcused absences. Only records with complete data were used.

There were on average 145 calendar days between the youth pre- and postsurvey administrations, with a minimum of 120 days and a maximum of 173 days (standard deviation of 11 days). The results presented here are based on 944 total students who had both a pre survey and a post survey, as well as NJSMART prior-year outcome and demographic data to use as control variables.

Results

There were no significant correlations found between 21st CCLC program attendance level and changes on the pre-to-post youth outcome constructs. This is similar to results observed for the 2016–17 report, in which a similar analysis was undertaken. Also akin to the results from 2016–17, however, AIR did find statistically significant correlations between the youth experience scales and increases on all four outcomes. For example, for every 1.0 scale point increase on the relationships with adults scale, there was an associated increase of 0.21 scale points on the academic identity scale, an increase of 0.20 scale points on the mindset scale, an increase of 0.18 scale points on the self-management scale, and an increase of 0.20 scale points on the interpersonal skills outcome scale. Similar correlations were observed for the youth choice scale, as well as for the relationships with youth scale (only with lower levels of associated increase in the case of the latter). See Exhibit 37.

Exhibit 37. Associations Between Pre-to-Post Changes on Youth Outcome Scales With Attendance and Program Experience Scales

Outcome	Variable	N	Estimate	Standard Error
Academic Identity	Days Attended	943	-0.0002	0.0006
	Relationships with Youth		0.1240***	0.0287
	Relationships with Adults		0.2106***	0.0341
	Youth Choice		0.1256***	0.0374
Mindset	Days Attended	943	-0.0004	0.0004

Outcome	Variable	N	Estimate	Standard Error
	Relationships with Youth		0.1475***	0.0229
	Relationships with Adults		0.1990***	0.0271
	Youth Choice		0.2061***	0.0297
Self-Management	Days Attended	943	0.0002	0.0004
	Relationships with Youth		0.1375***	0.0221
	Relationships with Adults		0.1756***	0.0260
	Youth Choice		0.2249***	0.0286
Interpersonal Skills	Days Attended	943	-0.0005	0.0004
	Relationships with Youth		0.1451***	0.0238
	Relationships with Adults		0.2014***	0.0283
	Youth Choice		0.1760***	0.0308

Note: *** $p < 0.001$

As noted, these results are similar to those observed in analyses of the 2016–17 data, showing that the 2016–17 results were not merely a 1-year observance. The 2016–17 analysis was limited to those students needing to improve on the pre-score measures, however (i.e., scoring under 3.0 on a 1–4 scale), and the results here are limited to those youth with prior-year ELA, mathematics, and unexcused absence rate data available for use as control variables. The results from this year’s analysis are, if anything, clearer than those presented for 2016–17, with lower (better) p values for the observed correlations.

What this suggests is that mere participation in 21st CCLC programming is not enough to move youth outcomes as measured by AIR’s youth surveys. This is emphasized by the quasi-experimental findings, in which no significant effects were observed for ELA and mathematics while the significant effects observed for unexcused absences did not greatly vary based on dosage definition. Instead, the results overall suggest that strong relationships and provision for youth choice matter in terms of improvement on the youth outcomes measured by the surveys (noting again that nothing in this subsection on youth survey data is causal). In brief, the stronger the relationships as reported by the youth themselves, and the more opportunity for youth choice as reported by the youth themselves, the stronger the pre-to-post growth on the outcome scales tended to be.

As a final note, subsequent two-level correlational models using the same survey dataset confirmed that academic identity postadministration scores were significantly and positively correlated with both ELA and mathematics test scores ($p < .05$): For each point increase in the

postadministration academic identity scale, there was an associated increase of 3.1 points for ELA and 2.8 points for mathematics, controlling for prior-year scores and other demographic and school-level variables. This stands to reason. Students with higher scores on the academic identity scale could be expected to score higher on tests (noting that the test scores and the postadministration data were taken around roughly the same time, spring 2023). Additionally, higher scores on the interpersonal and self-management postadministration scales were also associated with higher ELA scores, with one-point increases on the survey scales associated with an increase of 2.9 and 3.9 ELA points, respectively. While these findings are presumably highlighting linked traits, these observations do underscore that choice and relationships could at least potentially play intervening roles in achieving academic outcomes for participating youth.

Limitations of Results

It bears repeating that all of the results in Section 7 should be interpreted with caution. Due to incomplete data, the sample size is small compared to the overall attendee population. In addition, despite the propensity scoring and weighting approach employed to balance treatment and comparison groups (used to minimize the impact of selection bias on the estimates of program impact), it is simply an untestable assumption that such an approach can fully account for selection bias, or create a truly “apples to apples” comparison. To the extent that other variables exist (not available for this analysis) that predict student participation in 21st CCLC and are also related to student achievement or school absence, these analyses are limited. The quasi-experimental analyses, along with the correlational analyses presented concerning the youth survey data, therefore provide only initial evidence about the impact of 21st CCLC, and should not be considered equivalent to experimental studies with strong internal validity. Additionally, note that the youth postsurvey outcome questions and program experience questions were asked on the same survey during spring 2023 (with the experience questions following the outcome questions). With both sets of questions appearing on the same survey, it is at least conceivable that youth answers to the experience-related questions were influenced by the language of the outcome questions.

Section 8. Conclusions and Next Steps

Conclusions and Next Steps

The 2022–23 data presented in this report seem to show that the 21st CCLC program in New Jersey is rebounding from COVID-19-era lows. In 2022–23 there were a total of 19,355 student attendees reported across the state, compared with 15,772 in 2021–22 and 11,689 in 2020–21. This attendance level is in keeping with pre-pandemic attendance levels. Further, these youth attended an average of 64.8 days, up from 62.8 days in 2021–22 and 54.4 days in 2020–21. Average total hours spent in activities targeting reading and mathematics increased compared with prior years as well, with average totals of 76 and 71 hours respectively (versus 66 and 54 hours respectively for 2021–22, and 54 and 52 hours respectively for 2020–21). Staffing levels likewise seemed to be returning to pre-pandemic levels, with 2,242 total staff reported for 2022–23, compared with 1,788 in 2021–22 and 1,944 in 2020–21.

Survey results also indicated that youth participating in the 21st CCLC program are having positive experiences, and are witnessing growth on an array of outcomes. Based on the youth survey data, youth more often than not do have opportunities for meaningful choices in their programs. Further, a majority of youth respondents indicated having positive relationships with other youth attendees, while a larger majority said they have positive relationships with adults. The parent surveys collected in fall 2023 also suggest that participants are witnessing growth in terms of happiness and motivation to go to school (among other outcomes), though these results are properly associated with school year 2023–24.

Impact and correlational analyses conducted by AIR also tend to support this positive picture, albeit with some mixed results. Comparing high-attending youth with low-attending youth, statistically significant impacts of 21st CCLC were found for each of three different “high attendance” definitions in terms of unexcused school-day absence reduction. This finding is consistent with results of analyses conducted for the 2016–17 report. However—and this is also consistent with the 2016-17 results—no statistically significant impacts were found related to mathematics and ELA state assessment test results. This suggests that mere attendance in 21st CCLC (as measured via AIR’s three treatment definitions) is not sufficient to cause observable improvement in test scores. Further, assessment test scores are likely to be difficult outcomes to “move” given the typical dosage levels in 21st CCLC programming, as noted above.¹³

¹³ Hill, Bloom, Black, and Lipsey (2008) found that, on average, the effect of a whole year of learning—including school-day learning—on assessment results averaged 0.31 standard deviation units for reading and 0.42 standard deviation units for mathematics. That is, even if a program did have an effect on assessments, the effect is likely to be very small given the amount

That said, the correlational analyses undertaken by AIR resulted in a series of significant findings. Youth who reported having strong relationships in the program—whether with other youth or with adult staff—also improved in terms of academic identity, mindsets, self-management, and interpersonal skills.¹⁴ Higher scale scores in terms of youth choice were also significantly correlated with higher scores in terms of these four survey outcomes. This suggests that the quality of experience in 21st CCLC matters when it comes to growth on intermediate outcomes such as academic identity. This fits with other research on program quality more broadly, which suggests that program quality can have an impact on youth outcomes (Auger et al., 2013; Naftzger et al., 2014; Naftzger & Sniegowski, 2018; Pierce et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2018; Tracy et al., 2016). Given this, AIR plans to more deeply investigate the role of program quality relative to youth outcomes in next year’s evaluation report, notably by analyzing data from youth surveys, staff surveys, self-assessments, leading indicators, key performance indicators, and parent surveys relative to youth outcomes.

of time youth attend 21st CCLC programs relative to all their time spent in education. Even if there is an impact, it simply may be too small to detect.

¹⁴ This fits with other research on out-of-school-time programming concerning the importance of building relationships for achieving youth outcomes (Auger et al., 2013; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Kauh, 2011; Miller, 2007; Naftzger & Sniegowski, 2018; Traill et al., 2013).

References

- Akiva, T., Cortina, K. S., Eccles, J. S., & Smith, C. (2013). Youth belonging and cognitive engagement in organized activities: A large-scale field study. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 34*(5), 208–218. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2013.05.001>
- Auger, A., Pierce, K. M., & Vandell, D. L. (2013). *Participation in out-of-school settings and student academic and behavioral outcomes*.
- Beymer, P. N., Rosenberg, J. M., Schmidt, J. A., & Naftzger, N. J. (2018). Examining relationships among choice, affect, and engagement in summer STEM programs. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence, 47*(6), 1178–1191. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-018-0814-9>
- Birmingham, J., Pechman, E. M., Russell, C. A., & Mielke, M. (2005). *Shared features of high-performing after-school programs: A follow-up to the TASC evaluation*. Policy Studies Associates.
- Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2007). *The impact of after-school programs that promote personal and social skills*. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.
- Eccles, J., & Gootman, J. A. (Eds.). (2002). *Community programs to promote youth development*. National Academies Press.
- Glisson, C. (2007). Assessing and changing organizational culture and climate for effective services. *Research on Social Work Practice, 17*(6), 736–747.
- Hill, C. J., Bloom, H. S., Black, A. R., & Lipsey, M. W. (2008). Empirical benchmarks for interpreting effect sizes in research. *Child Development Perspectives, 2*(3), 172–177.
- Naftzger, N., Vinson, M., Manzeske, D., & Gibbs, C. (2011). *New Jersey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) impact report 2009–10*. American Institutes for Research.
- Smith, C. (2007, March). *Predictors of quality at the point-of-service provision: Empirical and methodological background for the YPQA field trial*. Presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Boston, MA.
- Smith, C., & Hohmann, C. (2005). *Full findings from the Youth PQA validation study*. High Scope Educational Research Foundation.

Appendix A. Staff Survey

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) administered a staff survey in spring 2020, spring 2022, and spring 2023. This appendix presents the 2023 version of the staff survey. (An earlier version included questions specific to virtual programming given pandemic-related school closures.) Note that the first page of the survey included general survey and confidentiality information, as well as consent language (not shown here).

Collective Staff Efficacy

Q1. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding all staff that work with students in this program:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Sure
a. Program staff listen to youth more than talk at them.					
b. Program staff actively and continuously consult and involve youth.					
c. Program staff provide structured and planned activities explicitly designed to help youth to get to know one another.					
d. Program staff provide opportunities for youth to lead activities.					
e. Program staff provide opportunities for youth to help or mentor other youth in completing a project or task.					
f. Program staff provide opportunities for the work, achievements, or accomplishments of youth to be publicly recognized.					

Q2. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding all staff that work with students in this program:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Sure
a. Program staff provide ongoing opportunities for youth to reflect on their experiences (e.g., formal journal writing, informal conversational feedback).					
b. Program staff are effective at finding ways to provide youth with meaningful choices when delivering activities.					

Q2. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding all staff that work with students in this program:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Sure
c. Program staff are effective at providing youth with opportunities to set goals and make plans within the confines of the program.					
d. Program staff ask for and listen to student opinions about the way things should work in the program.					

Program Design

Q3. How often do you lead or participate in program activities that are...	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
a. Based on written plans for the session, assignments, and projects?				
b. Well planned in advance?				
c. Tied to specific learning goals?				
d. Meant to build upon skills cultivated in a prior activity or session?				
e. Explicitly meant to promote skill building and mastery in relation to one or more state standard?				
f. Explicitly meant to address a specific developmental domain (e.g., cognitive, social, emotional, civic, physical, etc.)?				

Communication and Linkages to the School Day

Q4. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding linkages to the school day:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Relevant to My Role in the Program	Not Sure
a. On a week-to-week basis, I know what academic content will be covered during the school day with the students I work with in the afterschool program.						
b. I coordinate the content of the afterschool activities I provide with my students' school-day homework.						

Q4. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding linkages to the school day:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Relevant to My Role in the Program	Not Sure
c. I know whom to contact at my students' day school if I have a question about their progress or status.						
d. The activities I provide in the afterschool program are tied to specific learning goals that are related to the school-day curriculum.						
e. I use student assessment data to provide different types of instruction to students attending my afterschool activities based on their ability level.						
f. I help manage a formal 3-way communication system that links parents, program, and day-school information.						
g. I participate in regular, joint staff meetings for afterschool and regular school day staff where steps to further establish linkages between the school day and afterschool are discussed.						
h. I meet regularly with school day staff not working in the afterschool program to review the academic progress of individual students.						
i. I participate in parent-teacher conferences to provide information about how individual students are faring in the afterschool program. (NOTE: If you are a school-day teacher, please respond to this question in relation to students you do not have in your school-day classroom).						

Service Delivery Practices

Q5. How often are students participating in the activities you provide in the program afforded the following types of opportunities:	Never Available	Available Occasionally in Some Classes or Activities	Available Regularly in Most Classes or Activities	Always Available
a. Work collaboratively with other students in small groups.				
b. Have the freedom to choose what activities or projects they are going to work on or participate in.				
c. Work on group projects that take more than one day to complete.				
d. Lead group activities.				
e. Provide feedback on the activities they are participating in during time set aside explicitly for this purpose.				
f. Participate in activities that are specifically designed to help students get to know one another.				
g. Make formal presentations to the larger group of students.				

Youth Ownership

Q6. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about how your students build ownership of the program:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Sure
a. Youth are afforded opportunities to take responsibility for their own program.					
b. Youth have the opportunity to set goals for what they want to accomplish in the program.					
c. Youth help make plans for what activities are offered at the program.					
d. Youth make choices about <i>what</i> content is covered in program offerings.					
e. Youth make choices about <i>how</i> content is covered in program offerings.					
f. Youth help create rules and guidelines for the program.					

Internal Communication

Q7. How frequently do you engage in the following tasks with other staff working in the afterschool program:	Never	A Couple of Times Per Year	About Once a Month	Nearly Every Week
a. Conduct program planning based on a review of program data.				
b. Use evaluation data to set program improvement goals.				
c. Discuss progress on meeting program improvement goals.				
d. Observe other afterschool staff delivering programming in order to provide feedback on their practice.				
e. Conduct program planning in order to meet specific learning goals in coordinated ways across multiple activities.				
f. Share ideas on how to make programming more engaging for participating students.				
g. Share experiences and follow up about individual youth.				
h. Receive feedback from school-day teachers and/or administrators on how the program could better support student learning needs.				
i. Participate in training and professional development on how to better serve youth.				
j. Discuss current research-based instructional practices.				

Parent Communication

Q8. How often do you or other center staff:	Never	Sometime	Frequently
a. Send materials about program offerings home to parents.			
b. Send information home about how the student is progressing in the program.			
c. Hold events or meetings to which parents are invited.			
d. Have conversations with parents over the phone.			
e. Meet with one or more parents.			
f. Ask for input from parents on what and how activities should be provided.			
g. Encourage parents to participate in center-provided programming meant to support their acquisition of knowledge or skills.			

Respondent Characteristics

NEW Q11 (Q13). On average, how many hours per week do you work in this program?
[text box]

NEW Q12 (Q14). On average, how many students do you work with on a daily basis in the program? [text box]

NEW Q13 (Q15). What is your highest level of education?

- a. Less than high school (1)
- b. High school or GED (2)
- c. Some college, other classes/training not related to a degree (3)
- d. Completed two year college degree (4)
- e. Completed four year college degree (5)
- f. Some graduate work (6)
- g. Master's degree or higher (7)

NEW Q14 (Q16). Do you hold a teaching credential or certification?

- a. Yes (1)
- b. No (2)

NEW Q15 (Q17). Which of the following best describes your primary role in the program?

- a. I teach or lead regular program activities (e.g., group leader) (1)
- b. I assist in activities (e.g., assistant group leader). (2)
- c. I am a master teacher or educational specialist (e.g., supervise or train other program staff). (3)
- d. I am an activity specialist (e.g., dance instructor, music instructor, martial arts instructor). (4)
- e. I am the parent liaison. (5)
- f. I perform administrative duties. (6)

Appendix B. Youth Postadministration Survey

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) administered a preadministration youth survey in fall 2019, fall 2021, and fall 2022. AIR administered a postadministration youth survey in spring 2019, spring 2022, and spring 2023. Both the preadministration and postadministration versions of this survey included youth outcome questions (question 1 of the survey shown in this appendix), while only the postadministration survey included program experience questions (questions 2–5).

The youth survey shown in this appendix includes the youth consent form presented to youth as they begin the survey. Parent permission forms were also distributed but are not included here.

Dear Student,

The youth survey on the following pages is part of a statewide evaluation of 21st CCLC out-of-school-time programming. We want to learn what students think about the out-of-school-time programming in which they participate. We want to use this feedback to help make the programs more exciting and useful for students like you.

What Are You Asking Me to Do?

We are asking you to:

- Answer some questions about your experiences in out-of-school-time programming. The questions are about what kinds of things you like and what kinds of things you want to do.
- You will respond to questions as part of a survey that you would take after reading this form.

Your responses will not be shared with anyone outside of the evaluation team, including your program leader, teachers, or school principal.

Why Should I do This? By responding to this survey, you will help the state of New Jersey learn how to improve out-of-school-time programming across the state. There are no risks to taking this survey beyond those that are part of everyday life.

Your Privacy. How you answer the questions on the survey will be private. No one from your school, the program, the New Jersey Department of Education, or the general public will know what you told us when answering the survey questions.

You do not have to take the survey if you do not want to. You can choose not to take the survey and still stay in your program. If you decide not to take the survey, it will not hurt your relationship with program staff.

Please check if you agree:

- Yes, I **agree** to take this survey.
- No, I **do not** want to participate in this survey.

[Submit button – yes takes student to survey, no takes student to thank you page]

**Youth Survey for Middle and High School (4th-12th Grades)
New Jersey 21st Century Community Learning Centers**

Instructions: The purpose of this survey is to find out more about 21st CCLC out-of-school programs in New Jersey. Our goal is to help make out-of-school time programs better for you and other young people. This survey should take about 15 minutes. Below are questions that ask about you and some of the things you think and feel about yourself and your out-of-school-time program. **This is not a test.** There are no “wrong” answers. Please choose the answer that is most true or most like you.

This survey is completely voluntary. You do not have to answer any of the questions if you don’t want to, and you can stop taking this survey at any time. This survey is confidential to the extent permitted by law, which means that no one (not your parents, teachers, school staff or other students) will be allowed to know how you answer these questions.

1. **Young people might describe themselves in many ways. We have listed some things youth might say or think about themselves. How true is each statement for you? Choose the answer that is most true for you for each statement.**

	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Somewhat true</i>	<i>Mostly true</i>	<i>Completely true</i>
Academic Identity				
Doing well in school is an important part of who I am	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting good grades is one of my main goals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I take pride in doing my best in school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting a college education is important to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am a hard worker when it comes to my schoolwork	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is important to me to learn as much as I can	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mindsets				
I finish whatever I begin	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I stay positive when things don’t go the way I want	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don’t give up easily	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I try things even if I might fail	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can solve difficult problems if I try hard enough	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can do a good job if I try hard enough	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Somewhat true</i>	<i>Mostly true</i>	<i>Completely true</i>
I stay focused on my work even when it's boring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Self-Management				
I can stop myself from doing something I know I shouldn't do	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I'm sad, I do something that will make me feel better	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can control my temper	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can handle stress	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can calm myself down when I'm excited or upset	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When my solution to a problem is not working, I try to find a new solution	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think of my past choices when making new decisions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interpersonal Skills				
I listen to other people's ideas	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I work well with others on group projects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel bad when someone gets their feelings hurt	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I respect what other people think, even if I disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I try to help when I see someone having a problem	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I make a decision, I think about how it will affect other people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. Now think about this program in particular. When you are at this program, how often...

	<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>
Do you get to choose how you spend your time?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Can you suggest your own ideas for new activities?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you get to choose which activities you do?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you get to help plan activities for the program?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you get the chance to lead an activity?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you get to be in charge of doing something to help the program?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you get to help make decisions or rules for the program?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. Thinking about the adults in this program, how true are these statements for you? In this program, there is an adult here...

	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Somewhat true</i>	<i>Mostly true</i>	<i>Completely True</i>
Who is interested in what I think about things.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Who I can talk to when I am upset.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Who helps me when I have a problem.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Who I enjoy being around.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Who has helped me find a special interest or talent (something I'm good at).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Who asks me about my life and goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Who I will miss when the program is over.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. At this program, how do kids get along? Indicate how true each statement is based on your own experience in this program.

	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Somewhat true</i>	<i>Mostly true</i>	<i>Completely True</i>
Kids here are friendly with each other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kids here treat each other with respect.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kids here listen to what the teachers tell them to do.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kids here don't tease or bully others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kids here support and help one another.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. How has this program helped you specifically? For each line, indicate how true each statement is for you. This program has helped me...

	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Somewhat true</i>	<i>Mostly true</i>	<i>Completely True</i>
Feel good about myself.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
With my confidence.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To make new friends.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Find out what is important to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Find out what I'm good at doing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Find out what I like to do.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Somewhat true</i>	<i>Mostly true</i>	<i>Completely True</i>
Discover things I want to learn more about.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learn things that will help me in school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learn things that will be important for my future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Think about the kinds of classes I want to take in the future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Think about what I might like to do when I get older.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learn about things that are important to my community or the environment.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feel good because I was helping my community or the environment.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Thank you!

Appendix C. Inverse Probability of Treatment Weighting

To help reduce the effect of high-weight cases, individuals with high propensity to attend *but who did not attend* were removed if their propensity score was above the 95th percentile of all scores. Similarly, individuals with low propensity to attend *but who did attend* were removed from the dataset if their propensity score was below the 5th percentile.

The outcome of interest in modeling propensity scores is treatment status (1 for students participating in the program, 0 for the comparison group). To account for this binary outcome, logistic regression was used to model the logit (or log-odds) of student group assignment status. Student-level variables used to fit the propensity score models included the following:

- Prior-year academic achievement
- Prior-year unexcused absence rate
- Student demographic information, including
 - Gender
 - Age
 - Racial status
 - Limited English proficiency (LEP) status
 - Economic disadvantage status
 - Special education status

In addition to the student-level variables, the propensity score model also included school variables that added information about the school a student attended to account for school-based contextual differences, which may account for differences in the propensity for a student to participate. These school variables include the following:

- School enrollment
- School teacher-student ratio
- Percentage of female students
- Percentage of economically disadvantaged students
- Percentage of special education students
- Percentage of LEP students
- Percentage of students in different racial groups
- Percentage of teachers with advanced degree

The propensity score model was fit separately for each definition of treatment (30+ days, 60+ days). The final propensity score models were checked to ensure that the analysis sample was balanced across relevant covariates. Consistent with What Works Clearinghouse standards (Institute of Education Sciences, 2017), we considered treatment and matched comparison groups to be balanced if the standardized mean difference in baseline measures between the two groups of students was less than or equal to 0.25 standard deviations.

About the American Institutes for Research®

Established in 1946, the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit institution that conducts behavioral and social science research and delivers technical assistance both domestically and internationally in the areas of education, health, and the workforce. AIR's work is driven by its mission to generate and use rigorous evidence that contributes to a better, more equitable world. With headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, AIR has offices across the U.S. and abroad. For more information, visit [AIR.ORG](https://www.air.org).



AIR® Headquarters
1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor
Arlington, VA 22202-3289
+1.202.403.5000 | [AIR.ORG](https://www.air.org)

Notice of Trademark: "American Institutes for Research" and "AIR" are registered trademarks. All other brand, product, or company names are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners.

Copyright © 2023 American Institutes for Research®. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, website display, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the American Institutes for Research. For permission requests, please use the Contact Us form on [AIR.ORG](https://www.air.org).

25281_06/24