New Jersey 21st Century Community Learning Centers

Year 5 Evaluation Report: Descriptive Data and Program Quality Correlational Report for 2023–24

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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).

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Executive Summary

This report presents data that were collected and analyzed as part of a statewide evaluation of New Jersey's 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program, which the American Institutes for Research (AIR) is currently conducting. The findings outlined in this report are primarily associated with 21st CCLC–funded activities and services delivered during school year 2023–24, though prior-year data are also presented for comparative purposes.

The statewide evaluation effort is organized around seven evaluation questions (EQs). This report addresses three of those seven questions:

- **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?
- **EQ4:** How are different levels of program quality associated with academic, behavioral, and social and emotional youth outcomes?

Data Sources

Data were collected from the following sources to address the evaluation questions.

- **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 data (including activity session–level participation data).
- **New Jersey Standards Measurement and Resource for Teaching (NJ SMART) data warehouse.** In early 2025, the research team obtained access to New Jersey assessment test scores and unexcused absence data for 21st CCLC participants served during the 2023–24 school year. These data came from the NJ SMART data warehouse, maintained by NJDOE for students in Grades 3–12. The research team used these data to conduct correlational and quasi-experimental analyses related to student outcomes.
- **Staff survey.** An online staff survey was administered to obtain information from staff working directly with youth in 21st CCLC programs 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. 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 midway through a given school year. ETRS data were used primarily to create values for the program's leading indicators.
- **Youth survey.** AIR conducted a preadministration youth survey during fall 2022 and a postadministration youth survey during spring 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 experiences in 21st CCLC programming related to youth choice, relationships with adult staff members, and relationships with other youth. Questions included on both the preadministration and postadministration surveys were used in the outcome analysis. Program experience questions were used as predictor covariates in the correlational analysis.
- **Parent survey.** In fall 2023, AIR conducted a one-time parent survey. The survey included questions about parental perceptions of how their child had benefited from participating in the 21st CCLC program, as well as perceptions of how their child had changed since participating in the program. Data from this survey were presented in the 2024 report but are also used in this report as center-level indicators of program quality. These indicators are used in the analyses presented in Section 6 concerning outcomes. A copy of the parent survey is provided in Appendix C.

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 ES1, which outlines the questions that make up the *Intentionality of Program Design* scale that appeared in 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?	○	○	○	○
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.)?	○	○	○	○
g. Structured to respond to youth feedback on what the content or format of the activity should be?	○	○	○	○
h. Informed by the expressed interests, preferences, and/or satisfaction of participating youth?	○	○	○	○

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, with higher scores indicating 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., for use in analyzing 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 center-level program quality indicators and student outcomes. Note that this method is not sufficient to indicate *cause* but does provide information about quality-related characteristics that may be important for positive youth outcomes.
- **Quasi-experimental analysis.** This analysis compared student academic outcomes of the highest attendance quintile of 21st CCLC participants with those of a matched group of participants from the lowest two attendance quintiles. Students were paired using propensity score matching (PSM) based on both student and school characteristic data and then analyzed in a multilevel model. The analyses incorporated student-level characteristics and center-level program quality proxy indicators. The purpose of this analysis was to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between the level of 21st CCLC participation and student outcomes.

Summary of Program Characteristics

The following is a summary of key evaluation findings regarding program characteristics.

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

Grantee Characteristics

- A total of 68 grantees actively operated 168 centers during 2023–24.
- A plurality of grantees (35%) were in their fifth year of program operation during 2023–24.
- Grantees were split between the categories of school-based grantees (41% in 2023–24) and non-school-based grantees (59% in 2023–24). These percentages were similar to those in previous years.

Center Characteristics

- A total of 2,170 staff were reported by grantees for school year 2023–24 across all programs, similar to the total number of staff reported for 2022–23 (2,242 staff).
- By far the most common staff type reported by grantees was school-day teacher: 975 were reported for the 2023–24 school year, accounting for 44.9% of all staff. The next largest category was program staff: 475 program staff were reported for 2023–24, accounting for 21.9% of all staff.[1]
- Centers had an average of 14.6 staff members (median: 11) in 2023–24, which was similar to figures for 2022–23 and 2021–22 (14.5 staff and 12 staff, respectively).
- The average student-to-staff ratio increased slightly in 2023–24 compared with 2022–23, reaching about 12.5 students per teacher in 2023–24, compared with about 11.8 students per teacher in the previous year.
- Centers mainly served children in elementary or middle school (83.1% of centers in 2023–24, a little lower than in previous years).
- Approximately 20% of all centers chose career awareness as their theme during 2023–24 (compared with 23% in 2022–23 and 25% in 2021–22). About 51% of centers in 2023–24 chose science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, which was about the same as in 2022–23 (50%). Another 22% of centers in 2023–24 chose visual and performing arts as their central theme. Only 4% of centers chose civic engagement as their theme.

[1] "Program staff" is a category of staff reported in PARS21.

Student Characteristics

- A total of 20,724 students attended 21st CCLC programming for at least 1 day in 2023–24.[2] This was a little higher than the number of attendees in 2022–23 (19,355 students), which in turn was significantly higher than the totals for 2021–22 (15,772 students) and 2020–21 (11,689 students). This indicates a continued rebound from COVID-19 era lows.
- A majority of 21st CCLC participants were Hispanic/Latino (45.5% in 2023–24) or Black (31.5% in 2023–24). Most attendees (68.2% in 2023–24) qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. These proportions were in line with previous years, though the total percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in 2022–23 was somewhat higher (75.6%).
- In 2023–24, about 29.0% of students attended fewer than 30 days of programming, 22.3% attended 30–59 days, 17.7% attended 60–89 days, and 31.0% attended 90 days or more. On average, students attended 63.9 days.
- In 2023–24, about 29.7% of students were in at least their second consecutive year of 21st CCLC programming, compared with about 29.0% in 2022–23, 36% in 2021–22, and 39% in 2020–21.
- On average, students spent about 17% of their time in academic enrichment, compared with 19% in 2022–23, 17% in 2021–22, and 23% in 2020–21. Participants spent about 19% of their time on average in tutoring/homework help, 19% in recreational activities, and 18% in youth development/learning activities.
- Observing the median total student hours spent in each type of activity (instead of the average) showed that students spent a median of 9.0 hours in recreational activities, 7.5 hours in youth development/learning activities, 6.0 hours in academic enrichment, and 6.0 hours in tutoring/homework help.
- A total of 45.7% of students in 2023–24 participated in at least 10 hours of academic enrichment, while 46.7% of students participated in at least 10 hours of youth development/learning activities across the year. About 49.2% spent at least 10 hours in recreational activities. These percentages were all similar to 2022–23, except for the percentage spending 10 hours or more in recreation (up from 42.6% in 2022–23).
- In 2023–24, the typical student attended an average of 83 hours of reading activities and 72 hours of mathematics activities (average of total hours across the reporting period). In 2022–23, the figures were 76 hours and 71 hours, respectively. For 2021–22, the figures were 66 hours and 54 hours, respectively.

[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.

Youth Survey Results Summary

During spring 2024, AIR collected survey data from 21st CCLC participants in New Jersey concerning youth experiences in the program. A total of 5,266 completed surveys were collected. Centers serving more than 100 youth were asked to survey a representative sample of 100 youth, rather than all attendees. This reduced the data reporting burden for centers serving a large number of youth. The 2024 data were considered alongside data from similar surveys collected during spring 2019, spring 2022, and spring 2023.

Generally, survey responses showed that youth thought they *sometimes* or *often* had choices in their programs (with *often* or *sometimes* responses accounting for 56% to 82% 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 84% of responses), and with *mostly true* or *completely true* to items about positive youth relationships (63% to 67% of responses). Students also tended to agree that the program had benefited them in a variety of ways, with approximately 76% 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 relationships with other youth, relationships with adults, and how the program had helped them were less positive in spring 2024 than they were in spring 2022 or spring 2019. That said, results were similar to spring 2023.

Leading Indicators Summary

A primary goal of the statewide evaluation is 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 based on data collected as part of the statewide evaluation. The leading indicators are intended to enhance existing information and data available to 21st CCLC grantees about how they have fared in adopting program strategies and approaches associated with high-quality afterschool programming.

Specifically, the leading indicator system is 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[3] are adopting research-supported best practices.
- 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, which 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).

In the context of this evaluation, general program indicators provide information on a 21st CCLC program's 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 2023–24 (scale response options were *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 the programming period (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 2.89 in

[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, though it is more common for a 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.

2023–24 (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 34.7% of activity sessions in 2023–24 and 28.6% of activity sessions in 2022–23 had either a mathematics or a language arts focus (Leading Indicator 5).
- Statewide, over three fourths (79.7%) of regular attendees participated in mathematics or language arts activities for at least half of their activity time in 2023–24 (Leading Indicator 7). This represented an increase compared with previous years.
- 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 91.3% of activity sessions offered in 2023–24 infused components that were intended to support youth development–related behaviors and social and emotional learning (SEL) (Leading Indicator 8).
- An average of about 91.8% of regular attendees in 2023–24 (compared with 93.4% in 2022–23 and 92.6% in 2021–22) spent at least 20% of their time in activities intended to support youth development–related behaviors and SEL (Leading Indicator 9).
- The *Practices Supportive of Positive Youth Development* and *Opportunities for Youth Ownership* scales in 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.
- 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, with a statewide mean scale score of 2.11 in 2023–24 (compared with 2.08 in 2022–23 and 2.66 in 2021–22).
- Only a very small percentage of program participants (5.4% in 2023–24, 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, 34.7% of activity sessions offered in 2023–24 targeted mathematics or English language arts (ELA), compared with 28.6% in 2022–23, 28.2% in 2021–22, and percentages in the low 30s in previous 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."** Though this indicator value had declined somewhat from the high of 5.9% observed in 2022–23, it was higher than in the years since 2019–20. However, involving family members in activities continues to be a good target for prioritization, given the overall low percentage observed for this indicator.

Correlational and Quasi-Experimental Findings

To explore youth outcomes relative to center-level characteristics, AIR conducted eight correlational analyses (looking at school-related and postadministration youth survey outcomes) and two quasi-experimental analyses (looking at mathematics and ELA assessment scores). The correlational analyses involved a series of HLMs designed to account for the nested structure of the data (student participants attending centers). These models controlled for both student and center characteristics, including student prior-year outcome variables, but did not use random assignment or any type of matched comparison group.

The quasi-experimental analyses were similar to the correlational analyses but were designed to investigate the effect of higher levels of program attendance compared with lower levels of program attendance, controlling for program quality indicators.

In terms of findings, the clearest result was that average center-level postadministration youth survey relationship scores were meaningfully and significantly associated with both mathematics and ELA assessment scores (correlational and quasi-experimental analyses), as well as mindsets, self-management, and interpersonal skills (correlational analyses related to youth survey outcomes). Additionally, Leading Indicator 4 (quality at the point of service) was significantly and positively associated with ELA scale scores (quasi-experimental analysis). Note that the effect estimate for this indicator was meaningfully large, with an increase of about 17 scale score points, on average, for each indicator scale point increase (on a 1–4 scale).

These analyses have important limitations, however. First, the correlational analyses merely show significant variable associations and cannot be used to justify causal claims (though the results can be understood as supporting or not supporting theories about the ways in which

21st CCLC programming affects participating youth). Second, the PSM approach used to create comparison groups for the quasi-experimental analyses cannot account for variables that are not available for inclusion, meaning preexisting differences could potentially account for observed differences (an unknown).

Conclusions and Next Steps

The 2023–24 data presented in this report show that the 21st CCLC program in New Jersey is serving the intended population. In 2023–24, a total of 20,724 youth participated, 68% of whom were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. These youth attended an average of 63.9 days, which was roughly in line with average days of attendance for 2022–23 (64.8 days). Average total hours spent in activities targeting reading and mathematics increased compared with prior years, with average totals of 83 hours and 72 hours, respectively (versus 76 hours and 71 hours, respectively, for 2022–23; 66 hours and 54 hours, respectively, for 2021–22; and 54 hours and 52 hours, respectively, for 2020–21). On average, attendees spent about 36 hours in academic enrichment, 31 hours in tutoring/homework help, and 30 hours in recreation.

Survey results indicated that youth participating in the 21st CCLC program had positive experiences and witnessed growth on an array of outcomes. Based on youth survey data, youth (more often than not) had opportunities to make meaningful choices in their programs. Further, a majority of youth respondents indicated that they had positive relationships with other youth attendees, and a larger majority said they had positive relationships with adults. Youth also reported being helped by the program, with nearly 82% of respondents saying the program had helped them "find out what I like to do" and nearly 81% saying the program had helped them "learn things that will be important for my future."

Related to the youth survey, the correlational and quasi-experimental analyses clearly indicated that centers with high average youth relationship scale scores had greater youth outcomes in terms of mathematics, ELA, mindsets, self-management, and interpersonal skills. Additionally, Leading Indicator 4 (quality at the point of service) was a significant predictor of ELA scale scores in the quasi-experimental analyses, with a meaningful average increase of 17 scale score points for each indicator scale score point increase.

Based on these and other findings detailed in this report, AIR has the following recommendations for NJDOE regarding next steps:

- The relationship between the center-level average scale score for youth relationships, as measured on the postadministration youth survey, deserves further investigation. AIR recommends conducting descriptive exploratory analyses contrasting centers that were strong in youth relationships versus those with room to grow. Additionally, AIR

recommends conducting qualitative data collection at centers with strong youth relationships (as gauged by the youth survey) to better understand how these relationships are encouraged and maintained, and how they relate to observed youth outcomes.

- Given that most center-level program quality proxy variables were not found to be significantly associated with youth outcomes, it may be useful to review the leading indicators and their underlying data sources to determine whether revisions could helpfully be made. AIR recommends reviewing these data sources with a selected advisory group to ensure on-the-ground perspectives are incorporated.

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 center–level characteristics are correlated with student outcomes.

The report presents data that were collected and analyzed as part of a statewide evaluation of New Jersey's 21st CCLC program, which 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 2020–21, 2021–22, 2022–23, and 2023–24 school years. The primary focus of this report, however, is the 2023–24 school year, with prior-year data used for comparative 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.[4] Section 4 presents the results of AIR's youth survey. Section 5 presents data on all statewide leading indicator values for 2023–24. Section 6 presents results from correlational and quasi-experimental analyses exploring youth outcomes related to center-level characteristics, notably center-level indicators of program quality. Section 7 concludes the report, providing a high-level summary of important findings and briefly discussing next steps.

[4] 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, dedicated staff members, and a dedicated center coordinator. Each 21st CCLC grantee in New Jersey has at least one center, but many 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 2020–21, 2021–22, 2022–23, and 2023–24, this report seeks to address three of those seven questions:

- **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?
- **EQ4:** How are different levels of program quality associated with academic, behavioral, and social and emotional youth outcomes?

Sections 3 and 4 address EQ1. Section 5 addresses EQ2. Section 6 addresses EQ4.

Data Sources

Data were collected from the following sources to address the evaluation questions.

- **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 data (including activity session–level participation data).
- **New Jersey Standards Measurement and Resource for Teaching (NJ SMART) data warehouse.** In 2025, the research team obtained access to New Jersey assessment test scores and unexcused absence data for 21st CCLC participants served during the 2023–24 school year. These data came from the NJ SMART data warehouse, maintained by NJDOE for students in Grades 3–12. The research team used these data to conduct correlational and quasi-experimental analyses related to student outcomes.

- **Staff survey.** The online staff survey was administered to obtain information from staff working directly with youth in 21st CCLC programs 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 in 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. 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 center's 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 140 centers that were active during the 2023–24 school year (averaging approximately 8.6 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 provided in 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 midway through a given school year. ETRS data were primarily used to create values for the program's leading indicators.

- **Youth survey.** AIR conducted a preadministration youth survey during fall 2023 and a postadministration youth survey during spring 2024. Both surveys included identical questions related to youth academic identity, self-management, interpersonal relationships, and mindsets. The postadministration survey also included questions about youth experiences in 21st CCLC programming related to youth choice, relationships with adult staff members, and relationships with other youth. Questions included on both the preadministration and postadministration surveys were used in the outcome analysis. Program experience questions were used as predictor covariates at the center level. A copy of the postadministration youth survey is provided in Appendix B.
- **Parent survey.** In fall 2023, AIR conducted a one-time parent survey. The survey included questions about parental perceptions of how their child had benefited from participating in the 21st CCLC program, as well as perceptions of how their child had changed since participating in the program. Data from this survey were presented in the 2024 report but are also used in this report as center-level indicators of program quality. These indicators were used in the analyses presented in Section 6 concerning outcomes. A copy of the parent survey is provided in Appendix C.

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 of Program Design* scale that appeared in 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?	○	○	○	○
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.)?	○	○	○	○
g. Structured to respond to youth feedback on what the content or format of the activity should be?	○	○	○	○
h. Informed by the expressed interests, preferences, and/or satisfaction of participating youth?	○	○	○	○

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, with higher scores indicating 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., for use in analyzing 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 center-level program quality indicators and student outcomes. Note that this method is not sufficient to indicate *cause* but does provide information about quality-related characteristics that may be important for positive youth outcomes.
- **Quasi-experimental analysis.** This analysis compared student academic outcomes of the highest attendance quintile of 21st CCLC participants with those of a matched group of participants from the lowest two attendance quintiles. Students were paired using propensity score matching (PSM) based on both student and school characteristic data and then analyzed in a multilevel model. The analyses incorporated student-level characteristics and center-level program quality proxy indicators. The purpose of this analysis was to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between the level of 21st CCLC participation and

student outcomes. Additional information concerning the use of PSM and HLM, including lists of the variables used, is provided in Appendix D.

Limitations and Challenges

There are limitations associated with the types of data collected by AIR during the 2020–21, 2021–22, 2022–23, and 2023–24 school years. Without attempting to be exhaustive, the primary limitations are as follows.

- **21st CCLC program 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, and some grantees may have provided more accurate data than others. Further, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when 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 recency bias and social desirability bias (i.e., providing socially acceptable but untrue responses in cases where the true responses are perceived to be socially undesirable). Staff survey results (as included in the leading indicators) and youth survey results presented in this report should therefore be interpreted with some caution.
- **Propensity score matching is limited to available characteristics.** Matching the treatment group (highest attendance quintile) and comparison group (lowest two attendance quintiles) on observable characteristics—such as prior-year test scores, demographics, and school-level data—helps to ensure that the treatment and comparison groups are similar to one another. However, this approach can only take into consideration the variables that are available for analysis. To the extent that youth outcomes are actually caused by unobservable youth, program, or school characteristics, the results presented in this report may be biased.

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 programming. This section summarizes the characteristics of grantees, centers, and students associated with 21st CCLC programs that were active during the 2023–24 school year. Overall, 68 grantees operated 168 centers in 2023–24. Together, these 168 centers served 20,724 youth in 2023–24 (compared with 19,355 youth in 2022–23).

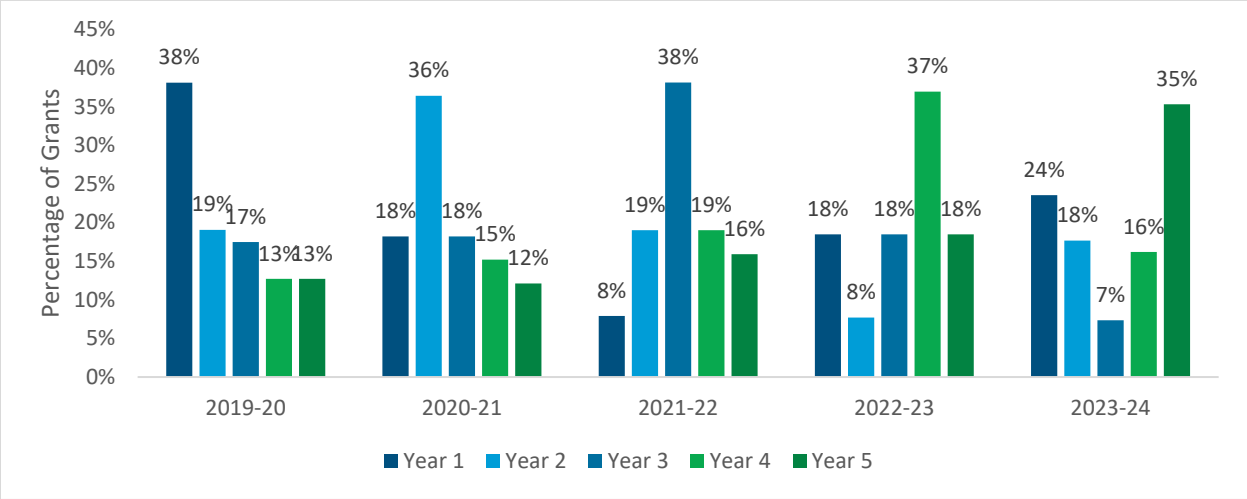
Grantee Characteristics

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 is hoped that grantees, over time, learn how to (a) provide more effective and engaging programming for youth, and (b) more meaningfully embed academic content in their program offerings to address the needs of their students. As Exhibit 2 shows, the plurality of grants that were active during the 2023–24 school year were in Year 5 of funding. This is not surprising, given the 5-year grant cycle and the fact that a plurality of grants in the 2021–22 school year were in Year 3 of funding.

Exhibit 2. Proportion of Grantees by Year of Operation, 2019–20 Through 2023–24



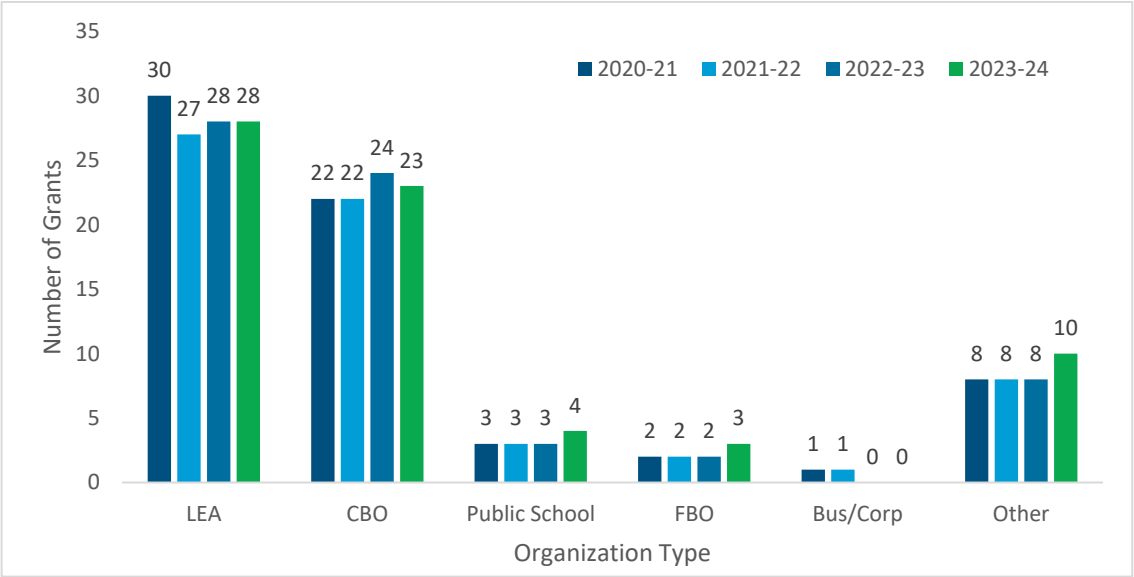
Source. Program Activity and Review System (PARS21).

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, school districts held 41% of active 21st CCLC grants in 2023–24 (similar to the previous year). Community-based organizations accounted for 34% of active grants during this period (down from 37% in the previous year, but close to the proportions seen in 2020–21 and 2021–22). Public schools and faith-based organizations accounted for about 6% and 4% of grants, respectively, in 2023–24, representing a slight increase from previous years (which were closer to 5% and 3%, respectively). All other categories accounted for roughly 15% of grants in 2023–24.[5]

[5] School districts and public schools are separate categories for grant entities, as recorded in PARS21.

Exhibit 3. Number of Grantees by Organization Type



Note. Bus/Corp = business/corporate; CBO = community-based organization; FBO = faith-based organization; LEA = local education agency. LEAs and public schools are separate categories in the Program Activity and Review System (PARS21).
Source. PARS21.

Center Characteristics

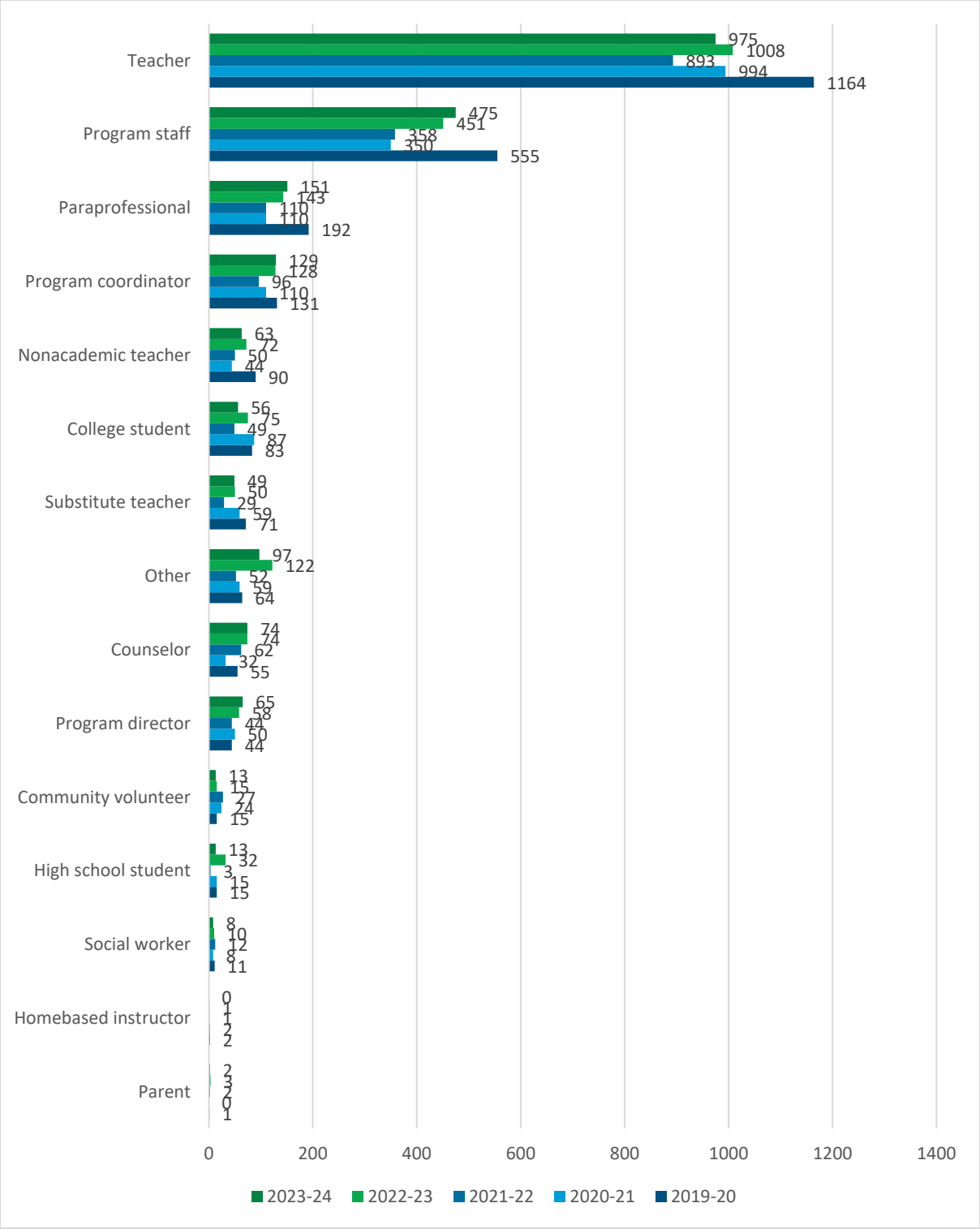
This section presents data on key center characteristics. In this report, the term "center" refers to the physical location where 21st CCLC–funded services and activities take place. Each center has defined hours of operation, dedicated staff members, and a center coordinator to manage operations. Each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

Center characteristics can capture the use of research-supported best practices or the innate attributes of a center. The latter category may not have a strong connection to the afterschool quality practice literature—for example, it might include grade level served, program maturity, and organizational type, none of which provide information about the quality of a program. Other center characteristics, such as the staffing model, are somewhat ambiguous when viewed from a quality practice standpoint, as the literature is unclear on the superiority of certain staffing approaches. From a policy standpoint, NJDOE considers certain approaches to staffing to be appropriate for certain types of activities—namely, that certified teachers should staff academic programming provided in an afterschool setting.

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 or college student. Counting only those staff who were in some way associated with the provision of actual activities, a total of 2,170 staff were reported by grantees for school year 2023–24 across all programs, which was about the same as for 2022–23 (2,242 staff). In terms of staff classifications, by far the most commonly reported staff types were teacher (44.9% of all staff) and program staff (21.9% of all staff), with paraprofessional a distant third (7.0%). 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 Through 2023–24



Note. Based on activity staff data for 147 centers in 2020–21, 139 centers in 2021–22, 155 centers in 2022–23, and 149 centers in 2023–24.

Source. Program Activity and Review System (PARS21).

Overall, centers had an average of 14.6 total staff in 2023–24, which was about the same as the average observed for 2022–23 (14.5 staff) (only counting staff who actually participated in activity offerings). As Exhibit 5 shows, the standard deviation from the mean was 10.5 in 2023–24, which was somewhat lower than in 2022–23 but higher than in 2021–22 and 2020–21.[6]

Exhibit 5. Overall Statistics on the Number of Center Staff

Total staff	*N*	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Standard deviation
2023–24	149	14.6	11	1	57	10.5
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. Program Activity and Review System (PARS21).

In addition to exploring the number of staff employed by centers during the 2023–24 school year, researchers calculated the average student-to-staff ratio associated with activity sessions provided during 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 2023–24, which was similar to other post-pandemic years. The standard deviation for 2023–24 was about the same as last year, at 7.63.

Exhibit 6. Average Student-to-Staff Ratio per Center, 2020–21 Through 2023–24

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
2023–24 student-to-staff ratio	149	1.04	47.39	12.46	7.63
2022–23 student-to-staff ratio	155	1.38	53.15	11.84	7.60
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. Program Activity and Review System (PARS21).

[6] In a normal distribution, this would mean that approximately 68% of centers had between four and 25 staff in total.

Grade Levels Served

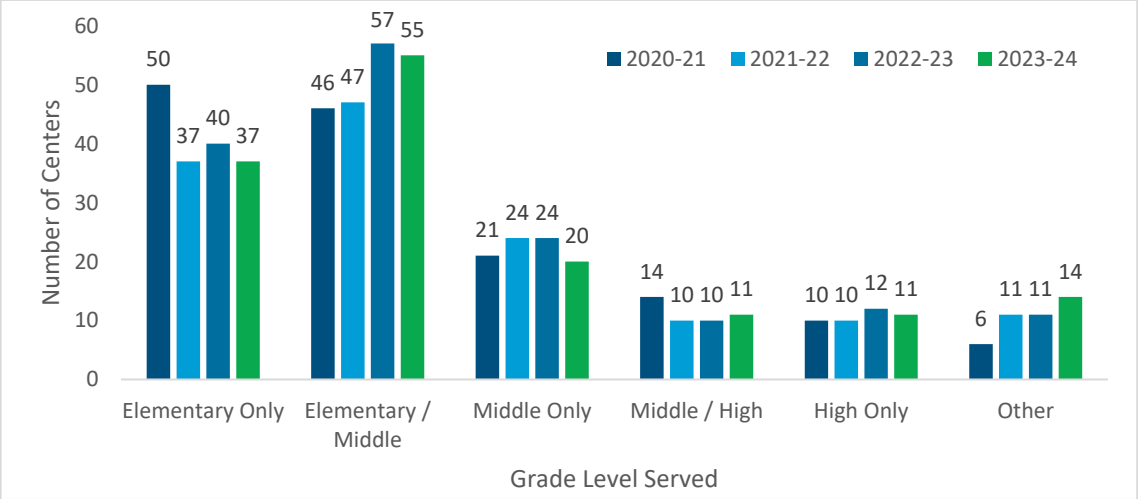
The grade levels served by a program play a role in determining (a) how 21st CCLC programs should structure their operations and program offerings, and (b) the domain of outcomes they should be accountable for through performance indicator systems. Using student-level data on the grade levels of students attending centers, those active during the 2023–24 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 that were active during the 2020–21, 2021–22, 2022–23, and 2023–24 school years served elementary or middle school students in some capacity (89.1% of all centers in 2020–21, 92.8% in 2021–22, 85.2% in 2022–23, and 83.1% in 2023–24) (see Exhibit 7). 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, 62.6% in 2022–23, and 62.2% in 2023–24).

Exhibit 7. Number of Centers by Grade Level Served



Note. Based on 148 centers for 2023–24, 155 centers for 2022–23, 139 centers for 2021–22, and 147 centers for 2020–21. One center for 2023–24 was missing grade-level data.
Source. Program Activity and Review System (PARS21).

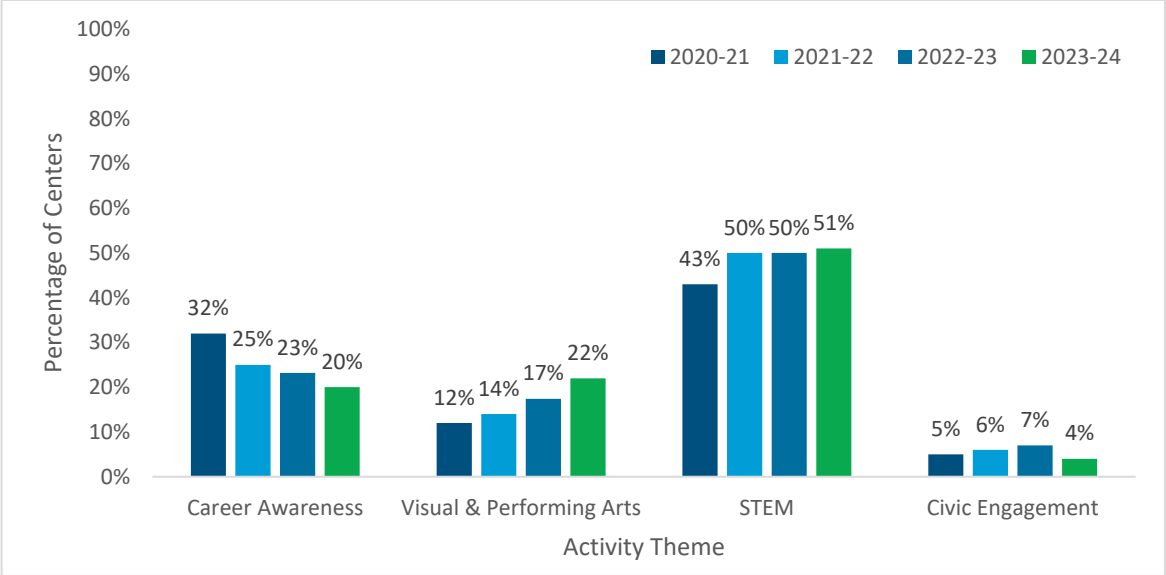
Activity Themes

In the 2023–24 school year, grantees were required to adopt one or more themes when providing activities. 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 2023–24, 20% of centers reported a career awareness theme, continuing a downward trend observed since 2020–21. About 22% reported a visual and performing arts theme (continuing an upward trend that began in 2020–21) and 51% reported a STEM theme (demonstrating a more modest upward trend). Only 4% reported a civic engagement theme (down from previous years). 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 reported by the center (with designation going to the theme with the highest number of minutes).

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

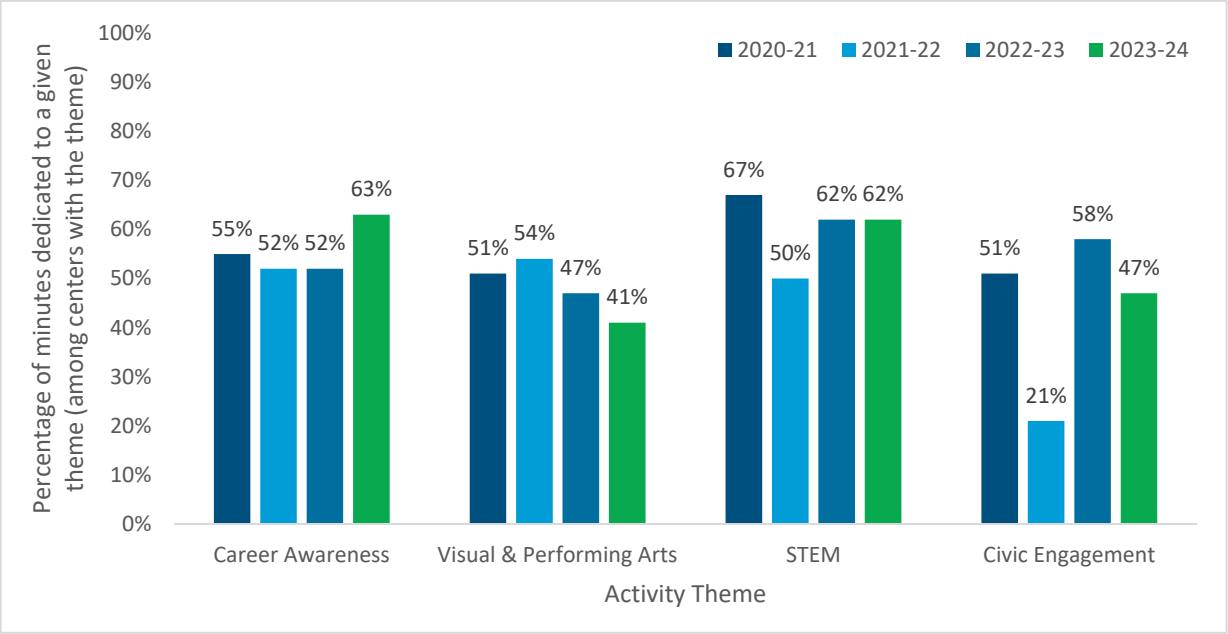


Note. STEM = science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Four centers did not have a dominant center theme.

Source. Program Activity and Review System (PARS21).

As Exhibit 9 shows, in school year 2023–24, centers with a career awareness theme spent, on average, about 63% of their total activity minutes on career awareness, representing a sizeable increase from previous years. Centers with a visual and performing arts theme spent 41% of their time on such activities, down from previous years. Centers focusing on STEM spent about 62% of their time on such activities, which was about the same as in 2022–23. Centers with a civic engagement theme spent about 47% of their time on that theme, slightly down from 2022–23 and 2020–21 but significantly higher than in 2021–22. When these findings are viewed in light of the findings shown in Exhibit 8, a smaller proportion of centers chose the career awareness theme in 2023–24 compared with previous years, but those that did choose this theme dedicated more of their time to it than centers in previous years. The opposite was true for visual and performing arts: More centers chose this theme compared with previous years, but as a group centers spent less time on these activities than in previous years.

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



Note. Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.
Source. Program Activity and Review System (PARS21).

Attendee Characteristics

A total of 20,724 attendees were served during the 2023–24 school year (only counting students with activity participation data in PARS21). During the 2022–23 school year, 2021–22 school year, and 2020–21 school year, there were 19,355 attendees, 15,772 attendees, and 11,689 attendees, respectively.[7] This suggests a continued post-pandemic rebound.

The attendee population was diverse in terms of ethnicity, gender, grade level, and economic disadvantage status (Exhibit 10). Generally, students served during the 2023–24 school year were Black or Hispanic/Latino; enrolled in elementary or middle school, especially in Grades 3–7; and eligible for free or reduced-price lunch programs. This was similar to overall proportions in previous years (with modest variations, as shown in Exhibit 10; note that only 2 years of data are presented because of space limitations).

[7] During the 2020–21, 2021–22, 2022–23, and 2023–24 school years, 147 active centers, 139 active centers, 155 active centers, and 149 active centers, respectively, had student-level attendance records in PARS21.

Exhibit 10. Summary of Demographic Information for Students, 2023–24 and 2022–23

	Demographic category	2023–24		2022–23	
		Number of students	Percentage	Number of students	Percentage
Race/ ethnicity	White	3,220	15.5%	2,319	12.0%
	Black	6,536	31.5%	6,211	32.1%
	Hispanic/Latino	9,438	45.5%	9,507	49.1%
	Asian	788	3.8%	581	3.0%
	Native American	65	0.3%	45	0.2%
	Pacific Islander	56	0.3%	38	0.2%
	Unknown	618	3.0%	654	3.4%
Gender	Male	10,159	49.0%	9,451	48.8%
	Female	10,562	51.0%	9,904	51.2%
Grade level	2	32	0.2%	10	0.1%
	3	2,688	13.0%	2,091	10.8%
	4	2,972	14.3%	2,968	15.3%
	5	2,648	12.8%	2,644	13.7%
	6	3,366	16.2%	2,933	15.2%
	7	2,502	12.1%	2,354	12.2%
	8	1,755	8.5%	1,544	8.0%
	9	1,727	8.3%	1,858	9.6%
	10	830	4.0%	792	4.1%
	11	543	2.6%	511	2.6%
	12	389	1.9%	263	1.4%
Free or reduced-price lunch	Reduced price	1,332	6.4%	1,366	7.1%
	Free	12,800	61.8%	13,266	68.5%
	Not available	6,589	31.8%	4,723	24.4%

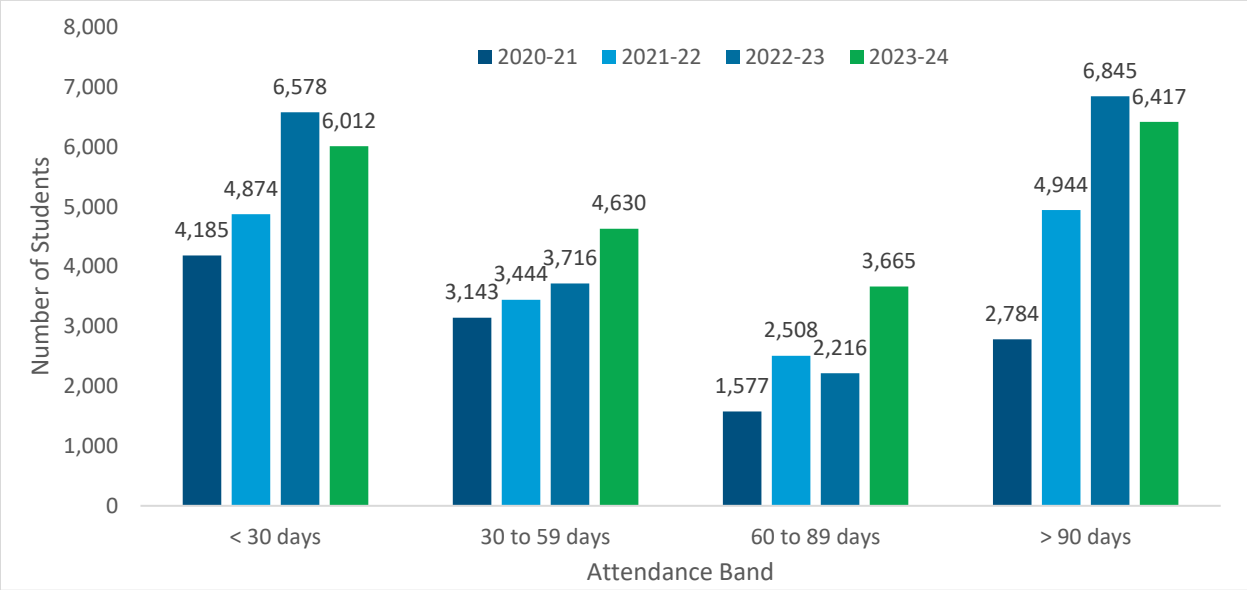
Source. Program Activity and Review System (PARS21).

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 a center is in retaining students in center-provided services and activities. As a result of being a few years out from the height of the pandemic, both numbers were expected to be high compared with previous years.

Students who participated in 21st CCLC activities during the 2023–24 school year attended programming for an average of 63.9 days, slightly down from 64.8 days in 2022–23 but up from 62.8 days in 2021–22 and 54.4 days in 2020–21. Exhibit 11 shows the student population served during the 2023–24 school year, organized into four attendance gradations: students attending fewer than 30 days, students attending 30–59 days, students attending 60–89 days, and students attending 90 or more days. As Exhibit 11 shows, over a quarter of students (29.0%, compared with 34.0% in 2022–23, 30.9% in 2021–22, and 35.8% in 2020–21) attended fewer than 30 days. A smaller proportion attended between 30 days and 59 days (22.3%, compared with 19.2% in 2022–23, 21.8% in 2021–22, and 26.9% in 2020–21). The smallest proportion of students attended between 60 days and 89 days (17.7%, compared with 11.4% in 2022–23, 15.9% in 2021–22, and 13.5% in 2020–21). A plurality of students attended for 90 or more days (31.0%), representing a decrease from 35.4% in 2022–23 but an increase from 31.4% in 2021–22 and 23.8% in 2020–21. This marks a break in the pattern previously observed, where, year over year, higher proportions of students attended 90 days or more of programming. Note, however, the increase in students attending 30–59 days or 60–89 days.

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



Source. Program Activity and Review System (PARS21).

In addition to levels of program attendance during the 2023–24 school year, the research team explored the extent to which participating students had attended the program previously (in continuous years). As Exhibit 12 shows, 60% of students were in their first year of participation during the 2023–24 school year. Approximately 27% were in their second year of participation and 10% were in their third year. Four or more years of continuous participation was found to be relatively rare. While this indicates that a larger proportion of students had attended for 2 or more continuous years in 2023–24 (compared with 2022–23), these patterns were generally similar to those observed in previous years (both pre- and post-pandemic).

Exhibit 12. Continuous Years of Student Participation, 2023–24 and 2022–23

Years of participation	2023–24		2022–23	
	Number of students	Percentage	Number of students	Percentage
1 year	12,496	60.3%	14,996	71.0%
2 years	5,509	26.6%	4,769	22.6%
3 years	1,979	9.6%	852	4.0%
4 years	490	2.4%	365	1.7%
5 years	190	0.9%	82	0.4%
6 years	43	0.2%	47	0.2%
7 years	9	0.0%	5	0.0%

Years of participation	2023–24		2022–23	
	Number of students	Percentage	Number of students	Percentage
8 years	3	0.0%	1	0.0%
9 years	1	0.0%	0	0.0%
10 years	0	0.0%	1	0.0%
11 years	1	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 2023–24 school year or that there was an interruption in participation prior to the 2023–24 school year.
Source. Program Activity and Review System (PARS21).

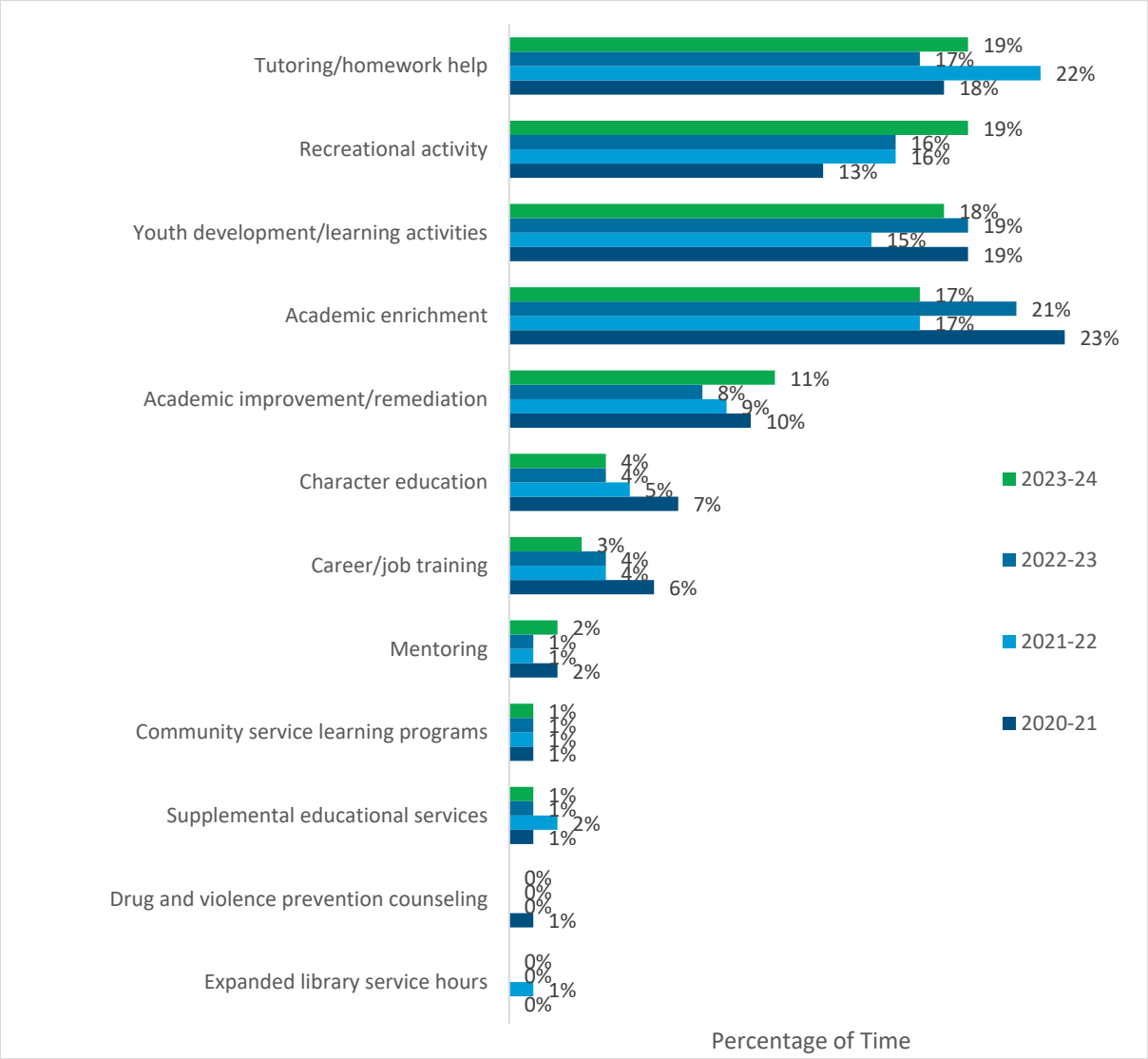
Student Attendance by Activity Type

The evaluation team calculated how much time 21st CCLC participants spent in activities of different types. Within PARS21, 21st CCLC activities 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) (see Exhibit 13). Note the increase in the percentage of time spent in recreational activities and academic improvement/remediation compared with previous years, as well as the relative decline in the amount of time spent in character education and career/job training.

Exhibit 13. Percentage of Time Each Participant Spent in Activities of a Given Type (Average) for 2020–21, 2021–22, 2022–23, and 2023–24



Source. Program Activity and Review System (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 2023–24 school year, academic enrichment had the highest average number of total hours (36.4 school-year hours), followed by tutoring/homework help (30.8 school-year hours) and recreational activities and youth development/learning activities (30.3 school-year hours and 24.8 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.

Average hours for 2023–24 were roughly in line with values observed in previous years. Academic improvement/remediation increased from the previous 2 years (to 18.3 hours, up from 15.0 hours and 14.0 hours in 2022–23 and 2021–22, respectively), as did mentoring (3.8 hours, up from 3.5 hours in 2022–23 and 1.3 hours in 2021–22) and recreational activities (30.3 hours, up from 25.0 hours in 2022–23 and 27.5 hours in 2021–22). Tutoring/homework help, on the other hand, declined (to 30.8 hours, down from 34.1 hours in 2022–23 and 35.4 hours in 2023–24), as did career/job training (to 4.8 hours, from 6.9 hours in 2022–23 and 7.4 hours in 2021–22).

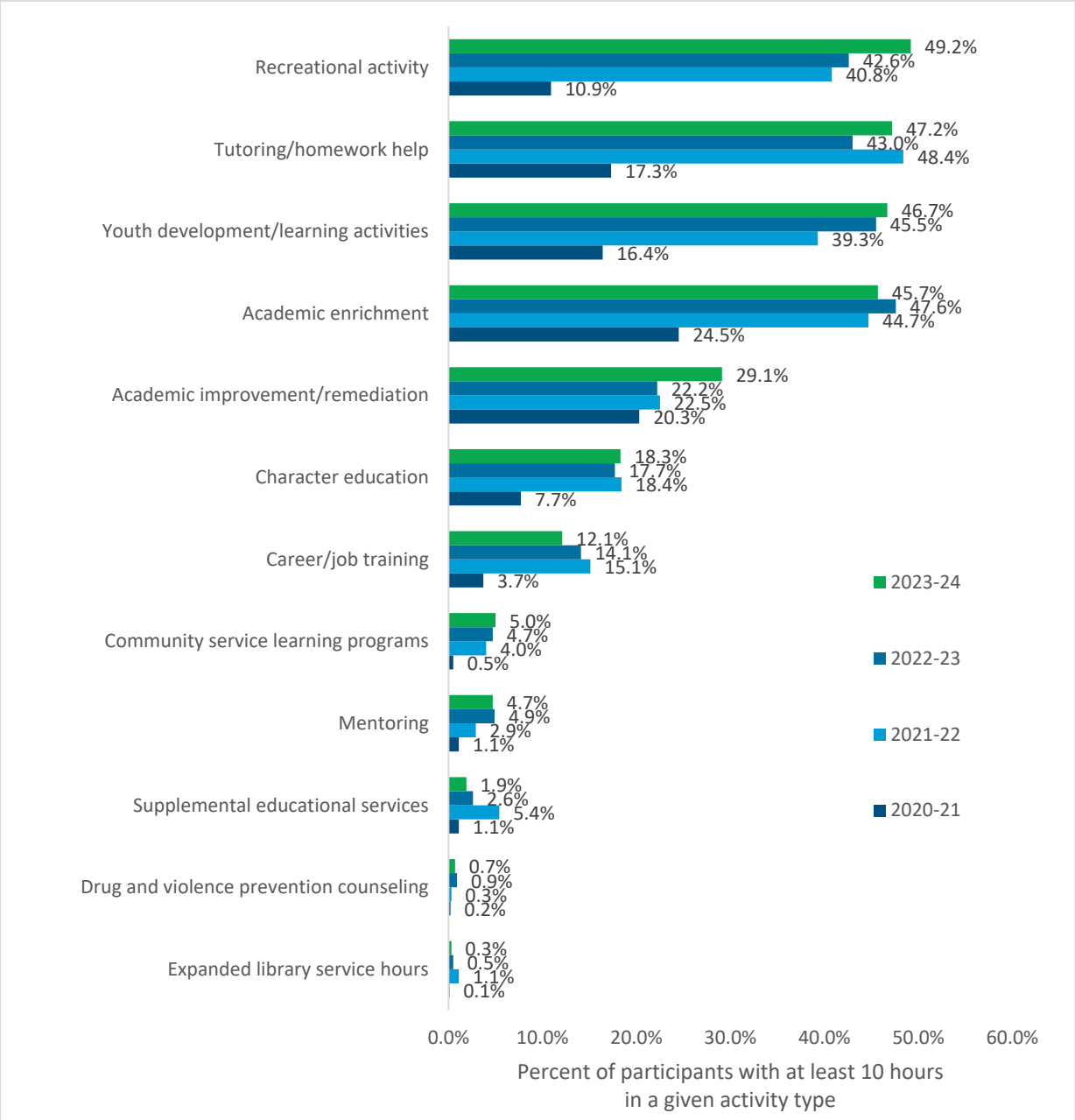
Exhibit 14. Total School-Year Hours of Attendee Participation by Activity Type

School year	2023–24		2022–23		2021–22	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
Academic improvement/remediation	18.3	0	15.0	0.0	14.0	0.0
Academic enrichment	36.4	6	39.8	7.5	28.0	6.0
Tutoring/homework help	30.8	6	34.1	2.0	35.4	8.0
Mentoring	3.8	0	3.5	0.0	1.3	0.0
Drug and violence prevention counseling	0.4	0	0.3	0.0	0.6	0.0
Expanded library service hours	0.2	0	0.2	0.0	0.6	0.0
Recreational activities	30.3	9	25.0	4.0	27.5	3.0
Career/job training	4.8	0	6.9	0.0	7.4	0.0
Supplemental educational services	0.9	0	1.7	0.0	2.7	0.0
Community service learning programs	1.5	0	1.4	0.0	1.1	0.0
Character education	7.4	0	6.6	0.0	8.0	0.0
Youth development/learning activities	24.8	7.5	24.6	6.3	24.9	3.0

Source. Program Activity and Review System (PARS21).

To explore the intensity of youth participation in each activity category, 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 2023–24, recreational activities saw the highest participation, with about 49% of all youth participating for 10 hours or more during the year, followed by tutoring/homework help (47% of all participants) and youth development/learning activities (47% of all participants). The proportion of youth participants who spent at least 10 hours participating in recreational activities has increased year over year since 2020–21, with a similar increase observed for youth development/learning activities and academic improvement/remediation. Career/job training has declined for the last 3 years, in keeping with the average hour figures presented in Exhibit 14.

Exhibit 15. Percentage of Attendees With 10 or More Hours in a Given Activity Type (School Year), 2020–21, 2021–22, 2022–23, and 2023–24



Source. Program Activity and Review System (PARS21).

Participation in Reading and Mathematics Activities

Another approach to examining student participation in 21st CCLC programming offered during the 2023–24 school year is to explore the extent to which they participated in activities intended 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 participated in approximately 83 hours of reading/literacy programming, on average, during the 2023–24 reporting period and 72 hours of mathematics programming. In comparison with 2022–23, the average for reading/literacy was substantially higher, continuing a trend that began in 2022–23. It was also substantially higher than in 2021–22. The mathematics average was about the same as in 2022–23 but again was higher than in 2021–22.

Exhibit 16. Average Number of Hours in Reading and Mathematics per Student, 2019–20 Through 2023–24

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
2023–24 ELA education activities	20,662	0	988 [a]	83.2	106.0
2023–24 mathematics activities	20,662	0	788 [a]	71.7	93.4
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. Program Activity and Review System (PARS21).

Section 4. Youth Survey

During spring 2024, AIR collected survey data from 21st CCLC participants in New Jersey concerning youth experiences in the program. This section of the report presents the results of those experience-related questions. The section is divided into three parts: youth responses concerning youth choice, youth responses concerning their relationships with staff and other youth in the program, and youth responses about how the 21st CCLC program has helped them. Note that none of the material in this section speaks to program outcomes, at least in a causal manner. The data reported 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 5,266 total surveys. Centers serving more than 100 youth were asked to survey a representative sample of 100 youth, rather than all attendees. This reduced the data reporting burden for centers serving a large number of youth.

Questions Relating to Youth Choice

Especially with older youth, providing 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 of their opportunities to make real choices provide a window into this aspect of program quality, in addition to conveying youth perceptions of their own experiences in 21st CCLC programs.

For this reason, the youth survey included questions about youth 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.

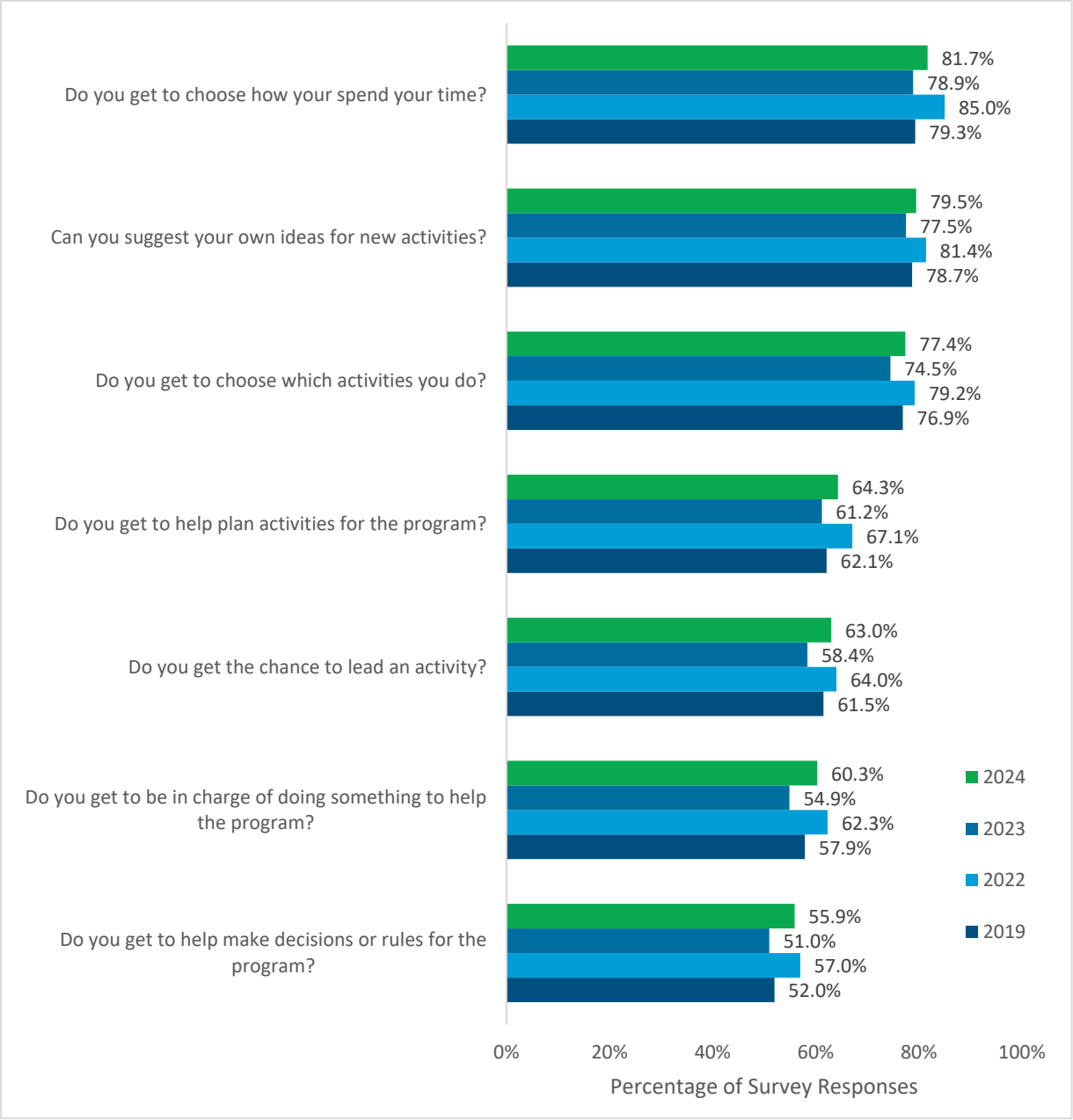
Exhibit 17. Youth Responses to Questions About Opportunities for Choice

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	*n*
Do you get to choose how you spend your time?	4.8%	13.5%	45.1%	36.6%	5,200
Can you suggest your own ideas for new activities?	4.5%	16.0%	43.2%	36.3%	5,187
Do you get to choose which activities you do?	6.9%	15.7%	40.7%	36.7%	5,175
Do you get to help plan activities for the program?	16.9%	18.9%	34.6%	29.7%	5,164
Do you get the chance to lead an activity?	15.8%	21.1%	35.4%	27.7%	5,159
Do you get to be in charge of doing something to help the program?	18.8%	20.9%	33.3%	27.0%	5,190
Do you get to help make decisions or rules for the program?	25.6%	18.5%	30.2%	25.7%	5,188

Source. Postadministration youth survey (spring 2024).

To help visualize these responses, Exhibit 18 shows the combined percentage of respondents indicating *sometimes* or *often* for each item. Data from 2019, 2022, and 2023 are also presented for comparative purposes (the postadministration youth 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, though 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. Responses for these items were expected to be somewhat lower as they pertain more to older youth. Overall, response patterns were roughly similar to those observed in previous years.

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



Source. Postadministration youth surveys (spring 2024, spring 2023, spring 2022, and spring 2019).

Questions About Relationships With Adults and Other 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 positive 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 and their relationships with peers. For the questions about relationships with adults, we used the following stem: **"Thinking about the adults present for this program, how true are these statements for you? In this program, there is an adult here…"** 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 a small percentage of respondents indicated *not at all true* for each item. The statement "Who asks me about my life and goals" received the most *not at all true* responses (about 10% of responses).

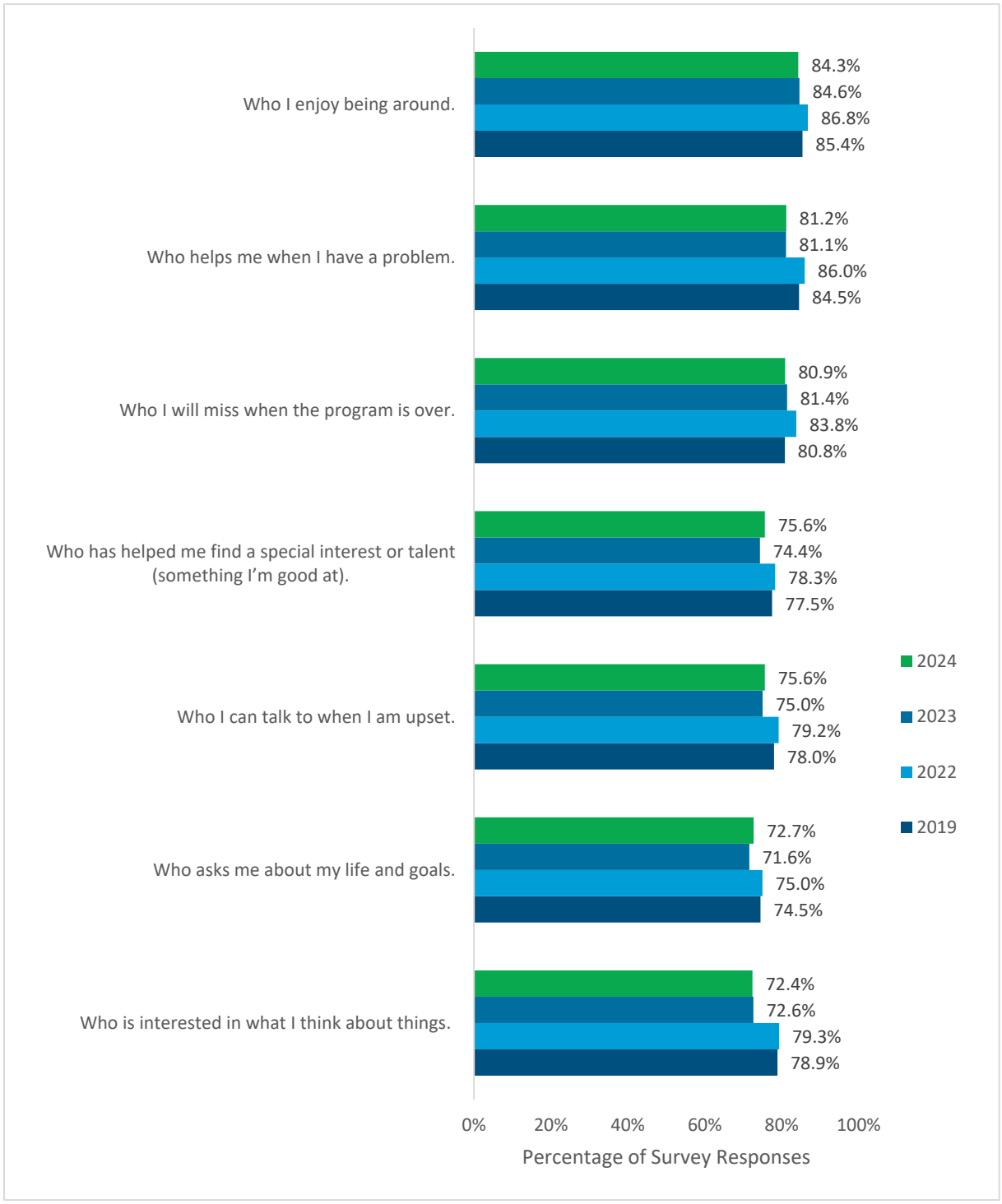
Exhibit 19. Youth Responses to Questions About Relationships With Adults in the Program

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	7.1%	20.5%	37.4%	34.9%	5,134
Who I can talk to when I am upset	7.9%	16.5%	32.7%	42.9%	5,141
Who helps me when I have a problem	4.9%	13.9%	35.4%	45.7%	5,100
Who I enjoy being around	3.4%	12.3%	32.7%	51.6%	5,124
Who has helped me find a special interest or talent (something I'm good at)	8.3%	16.1%	32.4%	43.3%	5,144
Who asks me about my life and goals	10.3%	17.0%	31.6%	41.1%	5,130
Who I will miss when the program is over	7.0%	12.2%	27.5%	53.4%	5,135

Source. Postadministration youth survey (spring 2024).

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 72.4% (for the statement "Who is interested in what I think about things"). About 84.3% responded that the statement "Who I enjoy being around" was *mostly true* or *completely true*, and 81.2% responded *mostly true* or *completely true* to the statement "Who helps me when I have a problem." Overall, response patterns were very similar to those observed in 2023 and very slightly less positive than those observed in 2022 and 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. Postadministration youth surveys (spring 2024, spring 2023, spring 2022, and spring 2019).

Concerning relationships among youth themselves, we used the same response categories for five separate items. Youth were prompted with the following stem: **"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 (15.4%), which was consistent with prior-year 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.

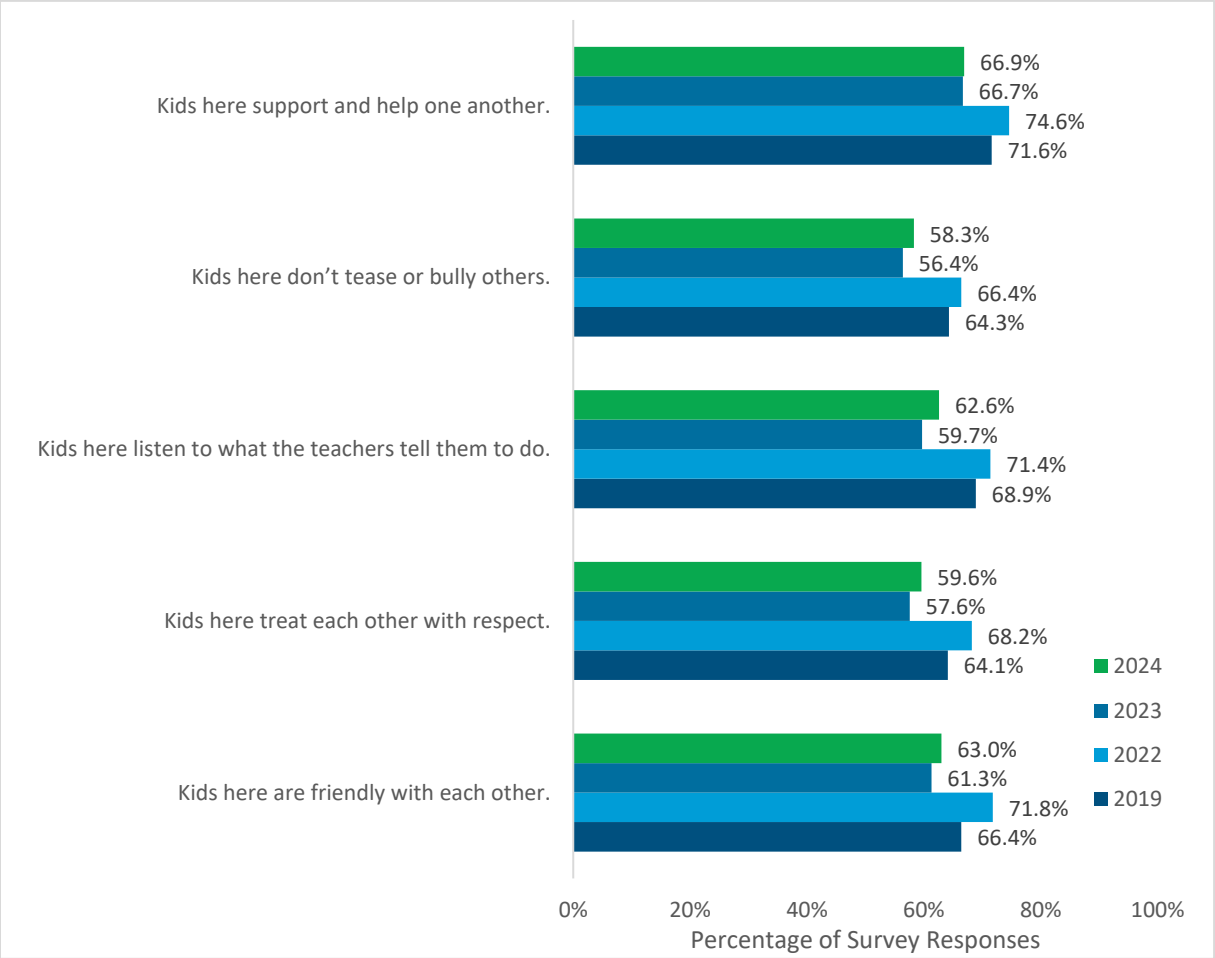
Exhibit 21. Youth Responses to Questions About Relationships Among Participants

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	*n*
Kids here are friendly with each other.	9.7%	27.3%	36.8%	26.2%	5,121
Kids here treat each other with respect.	10.6%	29.7%	35.5%	24.2%	5,120
Kids here listen to what the teachers tell them to do.	9.0%	28.4%	37.3%	25.2%	5,115
Kids here don't tease or bully other kids.	15.4%	26.3%	30.6%	27.7%	5,110
Kids here support and help one another.	8.2%	24.9%	34.3%	32.6%	5,115

Source. Postadministration youth survey (spring 2024).

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, overall responses in 2024 were less positive than in 2022 or 2019 but were slightly more positive than in 2023.

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



Source. Postadministration youth surveys (spring 2024, spring 2023, spring 2022, and spring 2019).

Questions About How 21st CCLC Programming Has Helped Youth

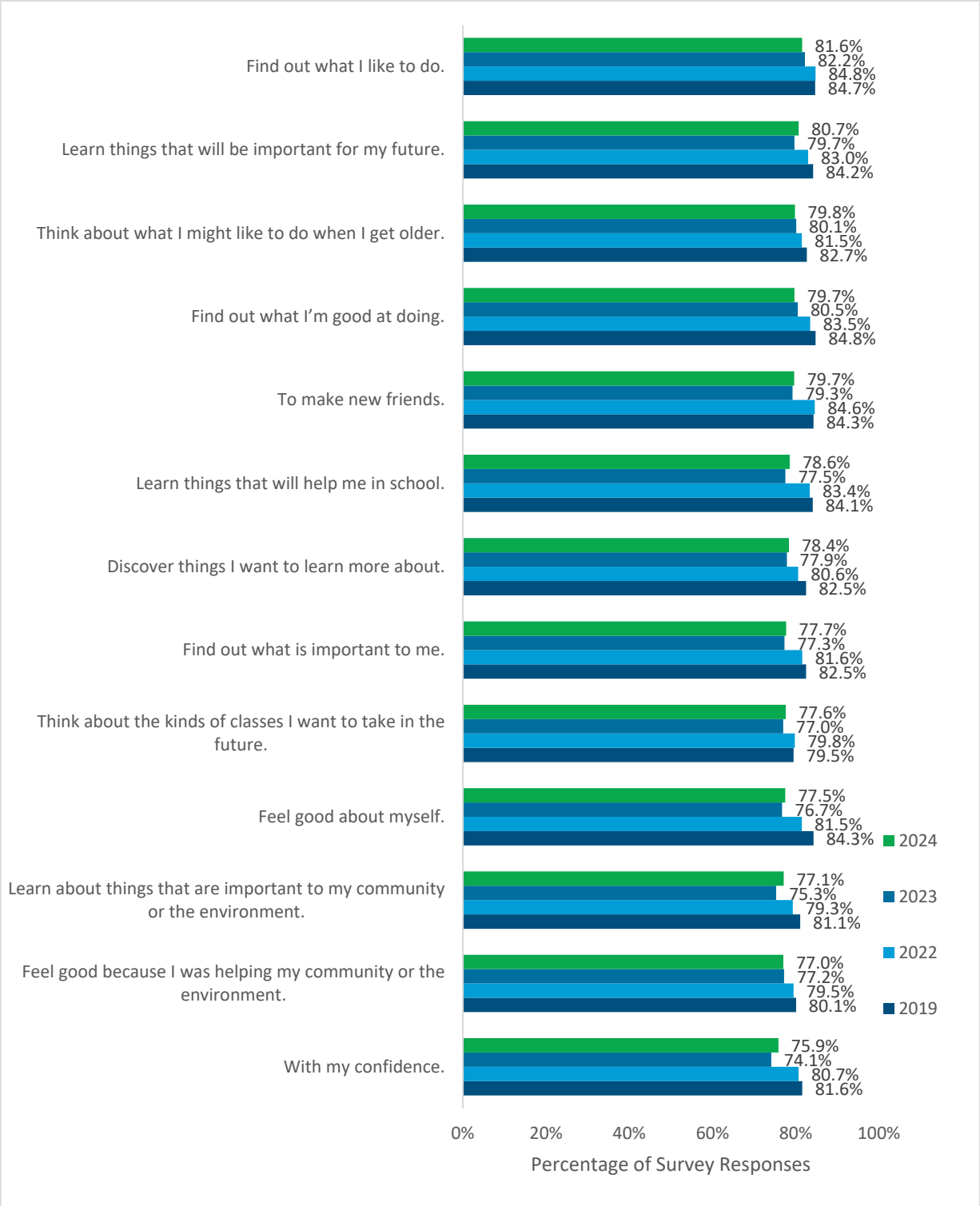
Finally, we asked youth a set of questions about how they think the 21st CCLC program has helped them. Youth were asked to respond to 13 different items using the stem, **"This program has helped me…"** Overall, youth responded positively to these items, with more than three fourths answering *mostly true* or *completely true* to all items. Items that received the highest proportion of *mostly true* or *completely true* responses were "Find out what I like to do" (81.6%) and "Learn things that will be important for my future" (80.7%). Overall, however, many items showed year-to-year declines, with the largest decline relative to 2019 observed for "Feel good about myself" (-6.8%, though 2024 was slightly higher than 2023). See Exhibits 23 and 24. Reasons for these declines are unclear.

Exhibit 23. Youth Responses to Questions About 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	6.5%	16.0%	33.6%	43.9%	4,981
With my confidence	6.6%	17.6%	34.3%	41.5%	4,973
To make new friends	5.0%	15.3%	32.6%	47.1%	4,952
Find out what is important to me	6.6%	15.7%	33.8%	43.9%	4,975
Find out what I'm good at doing	5.2%	15.0%	32.9%	46.8%	4,981
Find out what I like to do	5.0%	13.5%	33.4%	48.2%	4,979
Discover things I want to learn more about	5.8%	15.8%	34.8%	43.6%	4,976
Learn things that will help me in school	5.7%	15.7%	34.4%	44.2%	4,972
Learn things that will be important for my future	4.8%	14.5%	34.2%	46.5%	4,976
Think about the kinds of classes I want to take in the future	6.6%	15.8%	35.4%	42.2%	4,982
Think about what I might like to do when I get older	5.9%	14.3%	33.0%	46.8%	4,975
Learn about things that are important to my community or the environment	5.7%	17.1%	36.4%	40.7%	4,988
Feel good because I was helping my community or the environment	6.8%	16.2%	33.4%	43.6%	4,974

Source. Postadministration youth survey (spring 2024).

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…"



Source. Postadministration youth surveys (spring 2024, spring 2023, spring 2022, and spring 2019).

Year-to-Year Changes

The preceding data show that student responses about opportunities for choice and relationships with adults were roughly in line with previous years (with modest differences), while responses about relationships with other youth were less positive in spring 2024 than in spring 2022 or spring 2019 (but were relatively unchanged from spring 2023). However, the downward trend in positive responses to how programming has benefited youth seems to have leveled out for most items, with the proportion of students indicating *mostly* or *completely true* for most items remaining roughly in line with 2023 response rates (or even increasing very slightly). As was the case last year, however, this trend bears watching.

Section 5. Leading Indicators

A primary goal of the statewide evaluation is 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 based on data collected as part of the statewide evaluation. The leading indicators are intended to enhance existing information and data available to 21st CCLC grantees about how they have fared in adopting program strategies and approaches associated with high-quality afterschool programming. Specifically, the leading indicator system is 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 are 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.

Based on data collected from the staff survey, ETRS midyear reports, and PARS21, the leading indicator system focuses 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 basic program operation (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 provide useful information concerning areas of common strength or weakness. Indicator values across the past 5 years are also presented to show 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 a 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).

In the context of this evaluation, general program indicators 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 results are presented in Exhibit 25.

Overall, the results show the following:

- The average statewide scale score for internal communication fell within the *once-a-month* response category for 2023–24 (scale response options were *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 the programming period (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 2.89 in 2023–24 (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 25. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on General Program Indicators

Leading indicator	Description and calculation	Source	Indicator value, 2023–24
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 1–4 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 *Internal Communication and Collaboration* scale in the staff survey	The statewide mean scale score was 2.56 for 2023–24, which is within the *once-a-month* portion of the scale.
Leading Indicator 2: Link to the 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 1–4 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 *Improve Student Academic Achievement* section of the ETRS: • 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 2.21 in 2023–24, which meant the following: • Information on student academic performance was used occasionally or often. • Linking with the school day was a major strategy. • Communication with school-day teachers occurred daily.
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 1–4 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 *Linkages to the School Day* scale in the staff survey, to inform programming scales in the staff survey	The statewide mean scale score was 2.89 for 2023–24, which meant the following: • Staff *agreed* that linkages to the school day exist.

Leading indicator	Description and calculation	Source	Indicator value, 2023–24
Leading Indicator 4: Quality at the Point of Service Staff are committed to creating interactive and engaging settings for youth.	Each center received a score on a 1–4 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 *Staff Capacity to Create an Interactive and Engaging Environment* scale of the staff survey	The statewide mean scale score was 3.08 for 2023–24, which was within the *agree* portion of the scale, indicating that staff believe their peers largely provide these opportunities to participating youth.

Note. ETRS = Evaluation Template and Reporting System.

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

State-level indicator results are presented in these categories in this section of the report, with an exhibit and summary points provided for each subset.

With respect to mathematics and language arts activities, 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 are more likely to accomplish it if the 21st CCLC staff working directly with youth provide activities that are intended to support academic learning in some way, and if youth actually attend these activities on a consistent and ongoing basis. For this reason, indicators in this section focus on the provision of and participation in these activities.

- A statewide average of about 34.7% of activity sessions in 2023–24 and 28.6% of activity sessions in 2022–23 had either a mathematics or a language arts focus (Leading Indicator 5).
- Statewide, over three fourths (79.7%) of regular attendees participated in mathematics or language arts activities for at least half of their activity time in 2023–24 (Leading Indicator 7). This represented an increase compared with previous years.

- 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 26 for complete indicator results relating to mathematics and ELA activities.

Exhibit 26. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on Activity-Related Indicators Associated With Mathematics and Language Arts

Leading indicator	Description and calculation	Source	Indicator value, 2023–24
Mathematics and ELA			
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, 34.7% of activity sessions offered during 2023–24 met these criteria, compared with 28.2% in 2021–22 and 28.6% in 2022–23.
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 1–4 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 *Intentionality in Activity and Session Design* scale in the staff survey	The statewide mean scale score was 3.01 for 2023–24, which was in the *frequently* portion of the scale, indicating that staff adoption of these practices was common. This was comparable to the 2021–22 and 2022–23 mean scale scores.

Leading indicator	Description and calculation	Source	Indicator value, 2023–24
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 intended to support student growth and development in mathematics and ELA.	Activity detail and attendance pages in PARS21	Statewide, 79.7% of students participating in programming during the 2023–24 school year for more than 30 days met these criteria, compared with 73.6% in 2022–23 and 68.3% in 2021–22.

Note. ELA = English language arts; PARS21 = Program Activity and Review System.

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 provided 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 27, centers operating 21st CCLC programs during the 2023–24 school year were characterized by the following levels of performance on the indicators associated with social and emotional development:

- Statewide, an average of approximately 91.3% of activity sessions offered in 2023–24 infused components that were intended to support youth development–related behaviors and SEL (Leading Indicator 8).

- An average of about 91.8% of regular attendees in 2023–24 (compared with 93.4% in 2022–23 and 92.6% in 2021–22) spent at least 20% of their time in activities intended to support youth development–related behaviors and SEL (Leading Indicator 9).
- The *Practices Supportive of Positive Youth Development* and *Opportunities for Youth Ownership* scales in 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 27 for leading indicator results.

Exhibit 27. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on Activity-Related Indicators Associated With Social and Emotional Development

Leading indicator	Description and calculation	Source	Indicator value, 2023–24
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 intended 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, 91.3% of activity sessions offered during the 2023–24 school year met these criteria (compared with 90.7% in 2022–23 and 90.7% in 2021–22).

Leading indicator	Description and calculation	Source	Indicator value, 2023–24
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 and 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, 91.2% of students participating in programming during the 2023–24 school year for more than 30 days met these criteria (compared with 93.4% in 2022–23 and 92.6% in 2021–22).
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 1–4 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 *Practices Supportive of Positive Youth Development* and *Opportunities for Youth Ownership* scales of the staff survey	The statewide mean scale score was 2.94 in 2023–24 and 2.93 in 2022–23, which meant the following: • Select opportunities for youth development were *regularly* made available. • Staff largely *agreed* that youth ownership opportunities were provided.

Note. PARS21 = Program Activity and Review System; SEL = social and emotional learning.

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 activities intended to 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, with a

statewide mean scale score of 2.11 in 2023–24 (compared with 2.08 in 2022–23 and 2.66 in 2021–22).

- Only a very small percentage of program participants (5.4% in 2023–24, 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 28 for a summary of results for Leading Indicators 11 and 12.

Exhibit 28. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on Activity-Related Indicators Associated With Family Involvement

Leading indicator	Description and calculation	Source	Indicator value, 2023–24
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 1–4 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 *Practices Supportive of Parent Involvement and Engagement* scale in the staff survey	The statewide mean scale score was 2.11, which was within the *did sometimes* 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, 5.37% of all program participants had at least one parent or adult family member participate in at least one activity in 2023–24 (compared with 5.9% in 2022–23 and 3.5% in 2021–22).

Note. PARS21 = Program Activity and Review System.

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 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, 34.7% of activity sessions offered in 2023–24 targeted mathematics or ELA, compared with 28.6% in 2022–23, 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."** Though this indicator value has declined somewhat from the recent high of 5.9% observed in 2022–23, it was higher in 2023–24 than it had been in the years since 2019–20. However, involving family members in activities continues to be a good target for prioritization, given the overall low percentage observed for this indicator.

Overall, most indicators were close to values observed in previous years, with Indicator 5 and Indicator 7 showing modest year-to-year change.

Section 6. Program Quality Indicators and Student Outcomes

This section presents AIR's analyses of 21st CCLC student-level outcomes in New Jersey, specifically as they relate to 2023–24 center-level program quality indicators. Two types of analyses were conducted: correlational and quasi-experimental. The correlational analyses used a series of hierarchical linear models designed to account for the nested structure of the data (student participants attending centers). These models control for both student and center characteristics, including student prior-year outcome variables. However, they do not use random assignment or any type of matched comparison group.

The quasi-experimental analyses were similar to the correlational analyses, but with an important difference: Instead of merely looking at correlations between center-level variables and student outcomes, the quasi-experimental analyses were designed to investigate the effect of higher levels of program attendance compared with lower levels of program attendance, controlling for program quality indicators. To achieve this, the quasi-experimental analyses incorporated a comparison group, focusing on high-attendance participants as the treatment group of interest.

Note that all models controlled for student-level prior-year mathematics and ELA Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) scale scores. This means that the results are generally based on students in the upper elementary and middle school grades (e.g., Grades 4–8). Only records with complete data were used.

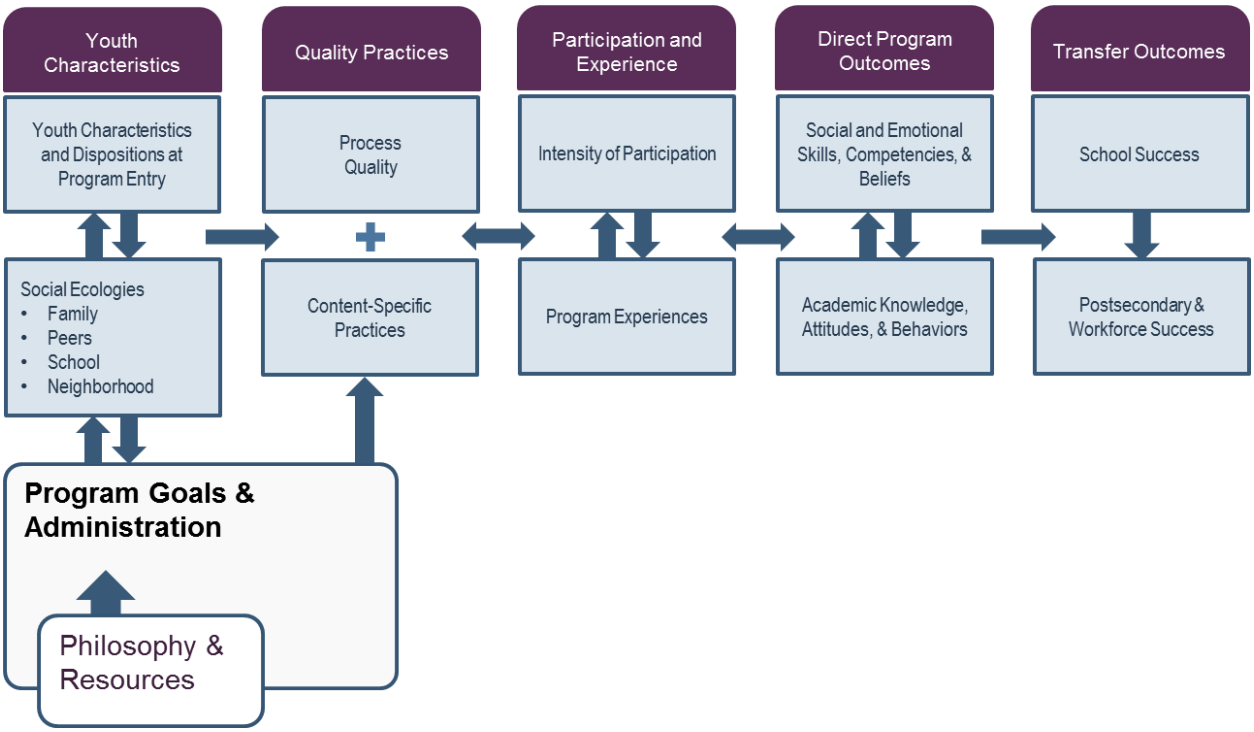
Quality Study: Focus on Center-Level Variables

Before presenting the correlational and quasi-experimental results, this subsection briefly discusses a series of program quality proxy variables used in both analyses. From a theoretical standpoint, program quality (among other factors) can influence experiences that students have while participating in 21st CCLC programming. Programs must be of high quality to have an impact (Auger et al., 2013; Naftzger et al., 2014; Naftzger & Sniegowski, 2018; Pierce et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2018; Tracy et al., 2016), notably with respect to processes and content-specific practices.

Process quality refers to the adoption of practices and approaches to service delivery that result in the creation of a developmentally appropriate setting for youth, where participants feel safe and supported and opportunities exist to form meaningful relationships, experience belonging, and be active participants in their own learning and development. These practices are universal because they are applicable to any type of youth programming, regardless of content, approach, grade level, or setting.

Content-specific practices, in contrast, are program practices that intentionally cultivate a specific set of skills, beliefs, or knowledge in a given youth. Often, these practices closely align with the direct outcomes a program is seeking to cultivate in participating youth. For example, content-specific practices include specific approaches to cultivating literacy skills, formal curricula for SEL, or methods of teaching technology skills. Given the broad nature of 21st CCLC goals in general and the contextual variance in specific center-level programs, individual program practices vary broadly. See Exhibit 29 (noting that *quality* acts as a mediating factor between youth and their participation).

Exhibit 29. Theoretical Framework for How Change Happens in 21st CCLC Programs



The current study sought to explore youth outcomes while taking aspects of program quality into account. However, because no direct measures of program quality were available (e.g., activity observation scores), this study used a series of proxy variables theorized to be related to program quality. For example, from a theoretical standpoint, a higher quality program would generally have stronger relationships among youth and between youth and staff; provide youth participants with more meaningful opportunities for choice; have staff who intentionally communicate with school-day staff to design relevant, targeted activities; and incorporate both academic and youth development aspects into program offerings. These data were available for use in the models and are summarized in Exhibit 30.

Exhibit 30. Program-Level Quality Proxy Variables

Variable(s)	Data source	Calculation	Inclusion rationale
Center-level proportion of students with cross-year participation	PARS21	Percentage at the center level showing the proportion of 2023–24 participants who also participated in 2022–23.	A high proportion of returning participants would suggest a generally positive experience.
Parent perception of benefit	Parent survey	Percentage of parents saying their child is benefitting from the program "a lot."	High parent perception of positive benefit could indicate higher levels of process quality or content quality.
Leading Indicator 1	Staff survey	Rasch scale score based on survey items associated with **internal communication** (staff communicate with other program staff to enhance internal collaboration towards continuous program improvement).	High staff communication could yield more effective student supports and better process quality.
Leading Indicator 2	AIR-collected data in the New Jersey Data Hub	Rasch scale score based on survey items associated with **links to the 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).	Strong linkages to the school day could lead to more effective student supports (notably around academic improvement for this indicator).
Leading Indicator 3	Staff survey	Rasch scale score based on survey items associated with **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).	More effective partnerships could lead to higher quality student supports (notably around academic improvement for this indicator).
Leading Indicator 4	Staff survey	Rasch scale score based on survey items associated with **quality at the point of service** (staff are committed to	This is a general quality indicator, anticipated to be related to participation level (and thereby to outcomes).

Variable(s)	Data source	Calculation	Inclusion rationale
		creating interactive and engaging settings for youth).	
Leading Indicator 6	Staff survey	Rasch scale score based on survey items associated with the **Common Core** (staff design and deliver intentional and relevant activities to support student growth and development in mathematics and reading/language arts).	Higher scale scores for this indicator could suggest that student academic supports are better tailored to student needs.
Leading Indicator 10	Staff survey	Rasch scale score based on survey items associated with **youth development** (staff develop activities that are meant to support youth ownership and other opportunities for positive youth development).	Higher scale scores for this indicator could suggest that student activities are more likely to lead to positive youth development outcomes (notably those related to the postadministration youth survey).
Leading Indicator 11	Staff survey	Rasch scale score based on survey items associated with **staff and family connections** (staff actively engage in practices supportive of parent involvement and engagement meant to support youth growth and academic development).	Higher scale scores on this indicator imply higher levels of family involvement, which would in theory support both youth development outcomes and greater academic improvement.
Student-to-staff ratio	PARS21	Average session-level student-to-staff ratio, using data from PARS21.	Lower student-to-staff ratios would suggest more attention for individual students, which theoretically would lead to better youth development and academic outcomes.
Relationships with youth	Youth survey (postadministration)	Center-level average of youth-level Rasch scale scores (derived from the respective item sets). Only centers with at least seven survey scale scores available were included.	Programs that are strong in these areas would presumably offer better experiences for participating youth, which in turn would lead to stronger participation levels and better student outcomes.
Relationships with adults	Youth survey (postadministration)		
Choice	Youth survey (postadministration)		

Note. AIR = American Institutes for Research; PARS21 = Program Activity and Review System.

Note that additional leading indicator variables were originally considered for inclusion in this list, such as Leading Indicator 8 (infusion of social and emotional skill-building into activities). Ultimately, these variables were not included due to lack of center-level variation.

Correlational Analyses

The correlational analyses were designed, in particular, to explore whether the program quality proxy variables were significantly associated with student outcomes. A series of HLMs was run, looking at the following outcome variables:

- 21st CCLC program attendance (total hours of participation).
- Mathematics assessment scores (using PARCC scale scores, provided by NJDOE).
- ELA assessment scores (using PARCC scale scores, provided by NJDOE).
- Chronic absenteeism status (i.e., having an absence rate of 10% or more), calculated as the proportion of unexcused school-day absences out of total days enrolled.
- Postadministration youth survey scale scores related to questions about youth academic identity, mindsets, interpersonal skills, and self-management. Preadministration youth survey scale scores for the same outcome domains were included as predictors in the models.

As noted previously, all models included prior-year mathematics and ELA PARCC scale scores, along with other relevant baseline outcome data for non-academic outcomes (e.g., prior-year unexcused absence rate or fall preadministration youth survey scale score). Student demographic variables and other center-level characteristic data were also included. For a list of the variables included in the models, see Appendix D.

Correlational Outcome: Total Hours of 21st CCLC Attendance

From a theoretical perspective, higher quality programs should have higher levels of student participation. The first correlational model investigated this by looking at total hours of participation as the outcome of interest. As shown in Exhibit 31, multiple student- and center-level variables were significantly correlated with program participation. In terms of student characteristics, each additional year of age was, on average, associated with a decline of about 15 hours in participation (an expected finding); and Black and Hispanic youth attended at higher levels, on average, than the average student. Higher ELA PARCC scores were associated with lower attendance levels, while higher mathematics PARCC scores were associated with higher attendance levels.[8]

[8] The practical significance (as opposed to statistical significance) of these two correlations is perhaps questionable. The estimate value of -0.121 for English language arts means that, on average, an increase of 1 scale score point in the English language arts score was associated with a 0.121-hour decline in overall participation, while an increase of 1 scale score point in the mathematics score was associated with a 0.223-hour increase in overall participation. Note that the n size for this analysis was sufficiently large to detect very small associations, even if of little practical importance. Also note that correlation merely shows that a relationship exists and does not indicate whether cause is involved or which way causality may flow.

In terms of center-level variables, Leading Indicator 3 (collaboration with school partners) was associated with total program hours, with a single scale score point increase associated with 216 additional hours of program participation, on average (noting that this indicator is measured on a 1–4 scale). The student-to-staff ratio was also significantly associated with hours of program attendance, with every additional student per staff member associated with about 10 additional hours of attendance, on average (the opposite direction of what might be anticipated).

Exhibit 31. Correlational Findings Related to Total Hours of 21st CCLC Attendance

Parameter	Estimate	Std. error	df	t	Sig. (*p*)
Intercept	**211.494**	**15.734**	**48.326**	**13.442**	**0.000**
Lvl1 youth age at program start	**-14.946**	**1.134**	**6041.877**	**-13.183**	**0.000**
Lvl1 male	-5.477	3.043	6008.893	-1.800	0.072
Lvl1 White	4.762	4.628	6035.675	1.029	0.304
Lvl1 Hispanic	**10.258**	**4.651**	**6019.248**	**2.206**	**0.027**
Lvl1 Black	**14.842**	**5.623**	**6027.217**	**2.639**	**0.008**
Lvl1 Asian	-9.701	8.978	6016.986	-1.081	0.280
Lvl1 Pacific Islander	4.262	17.445	6008.857	0.244	0.807
Lvl1 American Indian	-21.582	16.419	6009.913	-1.314	0.189
Lvl1 free or reduced-price lunch	-4.638	3.511	6011.115	-1.321	0.186
Lvl1 limited English proficiency status	-5.723	6.044	6017.039	-0.947	0.344
Lvl1 special education status	-0.308	4.486	6013.552	-0.069	0.945
Lvl1 prior-year English language arts PARCC score	**-0.121**	**0.061**	**6016.323**	**-1.962**	**0.050**
Lvl1 prior-year mathematics PARCC score	**0.223**	**0.068**	**6012.586**	**3.260**	**0.001**
Lvl2 center percent 2023–24 returning participants	-69.416	78.232	48.872	-0.887	0.379
Lvl2 center percent parents saying the program has helped "a lot"	55.250	103.414	48.291	0.534	0.596
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 1, internal communication	66.371	89.663	48.657	0.740	0.463
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 2, link to school day	23.693	60.558	48.184	0.391	0.697
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 3, collaboration with school partners	**216.433**	**84.248**	**48.082**	**2.569**	**0.013**
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 4, quality at point of service	-198.038	114.828	48.897	-1.725	0.091
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 6, Common Core	-8.601	61.056	48.251	-0.141	0.889
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 10, youth development	108.828	119.365	48.438	0.912	0.366

Parameter	Estimate	Std. error	df	t	Sig. (*p*)
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 11, staff and family connections	-21.498	107.991	49.117	-0.199	0.843
Lvl2 student-to-staff ratio (program)	**10.154**	**2.604**	**47.745**	**3.899**	**0.000**
Lvl2 center average youth survey choice scale score	-85.453	104.233	48.473	-0.820	0.416
Lvl2 center average youth survey relationships with adults scale score	167.343	131.382	48.691	1.274	0.209
Lvl2 center average youth survey relationships among youth scale score	-78.493	80.113	49.302	-0.980	0.332

Note. PARCC = Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. All level 1 and level 2 predictor variables were grand-mean centered. Statistically significant associations are highlighted in a bold, blue font ($p < .05$). $N = 7667$.

Correlational Outcome: Mathematics PARCC Scale Score

The next outcome investigated was the mathematics PARCC scale score. As shown in Exhibit 32, many student-level characteristics were associated with mathematics scale scores, but this was true for only one center-level variable. For example, male students, on average, had very slightly higher scale scores than female students (2.8 score points, on average), while students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch had very slightly lower scale scores, on average, than students who were not eligible (about 1.6 score points lower). Notably, total hours of mathematics participation was not significantly associated with the mathematics scale score. Of particular interest here, however, is that a 1-point increase in the center-level average scale score (on a 1–4 scale) for youth relationships was associated with a 10.6-point increase in student mathematics scale scores, on average.

Exhibit 32. Correlational Findings Related to Mathematics PARCC Scale Scores

Parameter	Estimate	Std. error	df	t	Sig. (*p*)
Intercept	**725.802**	**0.696**	**80.494**	**1042.820**	**0.000**
Total mathematics hours	0.007	0.004	1817.751	1.907	0.057
Lvl1 youth age at program start	**-0.559**	**0.197**	**3526.679**	**-2.839**	**0.005**
Lvl1 male	**2.838**	**0.531**	**5060.955**	**5.345**	**0.000**
Lvl1 White	0.005	0.775	3972.992	0.007	0.995
Lvl1 Hispanic	**-2.183**	**0.786**	**4860.778**	**-2.778**	**0.005**
Lvl1 Black	**-1.864**	**0.947**	**4502.844**	**-1.967**	**0.049**

Parameter	Estimate	Std. error	df	t	Sig. (*p*)
Lvl1 Asian	**5.107**	**1.544**	**4979.073**	**3.308**	**0.001**
Lvl1 Pacific Islander	-0.655	2.783	5057.742	-0.235	0.814
Lvl1 American Indian	3.401	2.850	5062.578	1.193	0.233
Lvl1 free or reduced-price lunch	**-1.615**	**0.602**	**5067.472**	**-2.684**	**0.007**
Lvl1 limited English proficiency status	0.840	1.060	5015.937	0.792	0.428
Lvl1 special education status	**-2.047**	**0.764**	**5064.946**	**-2.680**	**0.007**
Lvl1 prior-year English language arts PARCC score	**0.183**	**0.011**	**5005.056**	**17.133**	**0.000**
Lvl1 prior-year mathematics PARCC score	**0.576**	**0.012**	**5056.917**	**48.201**	**0.000**
Lvl2 center percent 2023–24 returning participants	-5.098	2.969	44.620	-1.717	0.093
Lvl2 center percent parents saying the program has helped "a lot"	-4.362	3.827	41.950	-1.140	0.261
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 1, internal communication	-1.280	3.479	49.920	-0.368	0.715
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 2, link to school day	-0.279	2.261	44.359	-0.123	0.902
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 3, collaboration with school partners	0.868	3.177	47.223	0.273	0.786
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 4, quality at point of service	6.724	4.559	54.748	1.475	0.146
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 6, Common Core	1.673	2.324	48.523	0.720	0.475
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 10, youth development	-6.645	4.586	49.122	-1.449	0.154
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 11, staff and family connections	2.395	4.180	47.513	0.573	0.569
Lvl2 student-to-staff ratio (program)	0.065	0.096	44.188	0.678	0.501
Lvl2 center average youth survey choice scale score	-4.582	4.029	52.267	-1.137	0.261
Lvl2 center average youth survey relationships with adults scale score	-4.566	5.118	52.348	-0.892	0.376
Lvl2 center average youth survey relationships among youth scale score	**10.622**	**3.178**	**52.501**	**3.343**	**0.002**

Note. PARCC = Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. All level 1 and level 2 predictor variables were grand-mean centered except total mathematics hours participation. Statistically significant associations are highlighted in a bold, blue font ($p < .05$). $N = 5907$.

Correlational Outcome: English Language Arts Scale Score

Similar to findings related to mathematics scale scores, multiple student-level variables but only one center-level variable were significantly associated with ELA scale scores. Contrary to the mathematics findings, male students, on average, had slightly lower ELA scores than female students (about 5 points, on average), while limited English proficiency status was, as expected, associated with a lower scale score (about 9 points, on average). Again, however, a 1-point increase in the center-level average scale score (on a 1–4 scale) for youth relationships was associated with student ELA scale scores that were about 12.1 points higher, on average. See Exhibit 33.

Exhibit 33. Correlational Findings Related to English Language Arts PARCC Scale Scores

Parameter	Estimate	Std. error	df	t	Sig. (*p*)
Intercept	**738.512**	**0.998**	**68.021**	**739.994**	**0.000**
Total reading hours	**0.015**	**0.004**	**2526.240**	**3.718**	**0.000**
Lvl1 youth age at program start	0.129	0.220	4759.671	0.589	0.556
Lvl1 male	**-5.078**	**0.605**	**5365.886**	**-8.389**	**0.000**
Lvl1 White	-0.868	0.898	5010.199	-0.967	0.334
Lvl1 Hispanic	0.782	0.901	5365.866	0.868	0.386
Lvl1 Black	-0.957	1.088	5273.822	-0.879	0.379
Lvl1 Asian	1.597	1.728	5381.214	0.924	0.355
Lvl1 Pacific Islander	-1.334	3.270	5364.687	-0.408	0.683
Lvl1 American Indian	3.068	3.202	5369.039	0.958	0.338
Lvl1 free or reduced-price lunch	**-1.360**	**0.691**	**5378.394**	**-1.969**	**0.049**
Lvl1 limited English proficiency status	**-8.839**	**1.218**	**5384.079**	**-7.256**	**0.000**
Lvl1 special education status	**-7.609**	**0.883**	**5384.965**	**-8.619**	**0.000**
Lvl1 prior-year English language arts PARCC score	**0.575**	**0.012**	**5384.979**	**47.184**	**0.000**
Lvl1 prior-year mathematics PARCC score	**0.281**	**0.014**	**5386.339**	**20.715**	**0.000**
Lvl2 center percent 2023–24 returning participants	1.975	4.503	46.302	0.439	0.663
Lvl2 center percent parents saying the program has helped "a lot"	0.559	5.842	43.774	0.096	0.924
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 1, internal communication	0.206	5.208	49.470	0.039	0.969
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 2, link to school day	-0.940	3.423	44.512	-0.275	0.785

Parameter	Estimate	Std. error	df	t	Sig. (*p*)
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 3, collaboration with school partners	-2.888	4.808	46.907	-0.601	0.551
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 4, quality at point of service	13.334	6.777	52.664	1.967	0.054
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 6, Common Core	-0.534	3.497	47.270	-0.153	0.879
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 10, youth development	-8.438	6.911	48.960	-1.221	0.228
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 11, staff and family connections	-1.067	6.288	48.292	-0.170	0.866
Lvl2 student-to-staff ratio (program)	-0.035	0.146	44.240	-0.237	0.814
Lvl2 center average youth survey choice scale score	-8.011	6.042	50.181	-1.326	0.191
Lvl2 center average youth survey relationships with adults scale score	-3.610	7.663	50.713	-0.471	0.640
Lvl2 center average youth survey relationships among youth scale score	**12.057**	**4.731**	**51.447**	**2.548**	**0.014**

Note. PARCC = Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. All level 1 and level 2 predictor variables were grand-mean centered except total reading hours participation. Statistically significant associations are highlighted in a bold, blue font ($p < .05$). $N = 6106$.

Correlational Outcome: Unexcused Absences

School-day unexcused absences were analyzed in terms of chronic absence (unexcused absences on 10% or more of enrolled days). Exhibit 34 therefore presents odds ratios rather than effect estimates (i.e., the likelihood of being chronically absent, compared with the average student). Relatively few variables were found to be significantly associated with chronic absence status, though the prior-year absence rate was significantly associated in the expected direction (a higher prior-year absence rate was associated with a slightly higher chance of being chronically absent).

Higher center-level scale score values (on a 1–4 scale) for youth choice, determined via the postadministration youth survey, were, on average, associated with a lower likelihood of chronic absence, while center-level scores related to youth relationships with adults were associated with a higher likelihood of chronic absence. Regarding the latter, it may be that programs with stronger youth–adult relationships (on average) are also more intentional about recruiting high-absence students.

Exhibit 34. Correlational Findings Related to Unexcused Absences

Parameter	Odds ratio	Std. error	df	t	Sig. (*p*)
Intercept	**0.87**	**0.008**	**171.329**	**-16.736**	**0.000**
Total hours of participation	1.00	2.428E-05	699.853	0.233	0.816
Lvl1 youth age at program start	1.00	0.002	1483.427	-0.237	0.813
Lvl1 male	1.01	0.007	6016.377	1.087	0.277
Lvl1 White	1.00	0.010	2145.849	-0.460	0.646
Lvl1 Hispanic	1.01	0.010	3567.113	0.676	0.499
Lvl1 Black	1.02	0.012	3126.176	1.573	0.116
Lvl1 Asian	1.00	0.019	4549.825	-0.050	0.960
Lvl1 Pacific Islander	0.93	0.038	6011.350	-1.817	0.069
Lvl1 American Indian	1.00	0.035	5998.484	-0.105	0.916
Lvl1 free or reduced-price lunch	1.01	0.008	5879.144	1.813	0.070
Lvl1 limited English proficiency status	0.99	0.013	5303.038	-0.948	0.343
Lvl1 special education status	1.02	0.010	5918.611	1.568	0.117
Lvl1 prior year percent unexcused absence	**1.06**	**0.001**	**5658.988**	**81.655**	**0.000**
Lvl1 prior-year English language arts PARCC score	1.00	0.000	5347.617	0.583	0.560
Lvl1 prior-year mathematics PARCC score	1.00	0.000	5784.010	0.524	0.600
Lvl2 center percent 2023–24 returning participants	1.01	0.024	38.810	0.230	0.819
Lvl2 center percent parents saying the program has helped "a lot"	0.98	0.031	35.440	-0.790	0.435
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 1, internal communication	1.03	0.029	44.506	0.943	0.351
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 2, link to school day	0.99	0.018	41.156	-0.758	0.453
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 3, collaboration with school partners	0.98	0.027	52.282	-0.807	0.423
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 4, quality at point of service	1.07	0.040	54.822	1.666	0.101
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 6, Common Core	1.04	0.020	53.938	1.937	0.058
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 10, youth development	0.98	0.039	47.873	-0.535	0.595
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 11, staff and family connections	0.98	0.035	42.452	-0.635	0.529
Lvl2 student-to-staff ratio (program)	1.00	0.001	56.313	-0.662	0.511
Lvl2 center average youth survey choice scale score	**0.92**	**0.036**	**68.999**	**-2.451**	**0.017**

Parameter	Odds ratio	Std. error	df	t	Sig. (*p*)
Lvl2 center average youth survey relationships with adults scale score	**1.10**	**0.045**	**60.090**	**2.084**	**0.041**
Lvl2 center average youth survey relationships among youth scale score	0.98	0.027	48.958	-0.732	0.467

Note. PARCC = Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. All level 1 and level 2 predictor variables were grand-mean centered except total hours of participation. Statistically significant associations are highlighted in a bold, blue font ($p < .05$). $N = 7618$.

Correlational Outcome: Youth Survey, Academic Identity Scale

The final four outcomes investigated via HLM correlational models were all taken from the postadministration youth survey. These outcomes—academic identity, mindsets, self-management, and interpersonal skills—are all based on sets of items designed to work together as construct scales. As described earlier in this report, the items were analyzed using Rasch modeling and converted into scale scores (1–4 scales). These outcomes were all measured preadministration and postadministration. The preadministration score from fall 2023 was used as a control variable in each model, with the spring 2024 variable set as the outcome of interest.

Relatively few student-level characteristics were significantly associated with academic identity. Asian students had, on average, very slightly higher academic identity scores (0.15 points higher overall), while every additional point on the preadministration youth survey academic identity scale was associated with a score that was 0.411 points higher on the postadministration youth survey scale (as expected). No center-level variables were significantly associated with academic identity scale scores. See Exhibit 35.

Exhibit 35. Correlational Findings Related to the Youth Survey Academic Identity Scale Score

Parameter	Estimate	Std. error	df	t	Sig. (*p*)
Intercept	**3.167**	**0.045**	**141.696**	**70.999**	**0.000**
Total hours of participation	2.162E-05	0.000	285.475	0.152	0.879
Lvl1 youth age at program start	-0.007	0.008	1574.616	-0.860	0.390
Lvl1 male	-0.043	0.025	1786.271	-1.751	0.080
Lvl1 White	0.015	0.037	1580.024	0.402	0.688
Lvl1 Hispanic	0.018	0.039	1699.155	0.462	0.644

Parameter	Estimate	Std. error	df	t	Sig. (*p*)
Lvl1 Black	0.028	0.046	1590.831	0.604	0.546
Lvl1 Asian	**0.150**	**0.065**	**1779.501**	**2.307**	**0.021**
Lvl1 Pacific Islander	-0.078	0.119	1772.316	-0.649	0.516
Lvl1 American Indian	0.057	0.149	1780.346	0.379	0.705
Lvl1 free or reduced-price lunch	-0.030	0.028	1781.187	-1.060	0.290
Lvl1 limited English proficiency status	0.014	0.047	1787.737	0.294	0.768
Lvl1 special education status	-0.061	0.038	1784.924	-1.604	0.109
Lvl1 youth survey preadministration score for academic identity	**0.411**	**0.023**	**1785.162**	**18.009**	**0.000**
Lvl1 prior-year English language arts PARCC score	0.000	0.000	1757.455	0.412	0.680
Lvl1 prior-year mathematics PARCC score	0.001	0.001	1787.974	0.977	0.329
Lvl2 center percent 2023–24 returning participants	0.029	0.118	36.238	0.242	0.810
Lvl2 center percent parents saying the program has helped "a lot"	-0.061	0.146	29.794	-0.420	0.678
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 1, internal communication	0.024	0.136	39.461	0.180	0.858
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 2, link to school day	-0.072	0.094	40.391	-0.775	0.443
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 3, collaboration with school partners	-0.028	0.124	43.220	-0.229	0.820
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 4, quality at point of service	-0.094	0.169	36.113	-0.560	0.579
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 6, Common Core	0.067	0.088	39.514	0.765	0.449
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 10, youth development	-0.194	0.171	38.040	-1.133	0.264
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 11, staff and family connections	0.234	0.162	39.124	1.445	0.156
Lvl2 student-to-staff ratio (program)	0.001	0.004	32.383	0.116	0.908
Lvl2 center average youth survey choice scale score	0.049	0.211	43.687	0.230	0.819
Lvl2 center average youth survey relationships with adults scale score	0.019	0.219	42.927	0.087	0.931
Lvl2 center average youth survey relationships among youth scale score	0.227	0.129	40.417	1.764	0.085

Note. PARCC = Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. All level 1 and level 2 predictor variables were grand-mean centered except total hours of participation. Statistically significant associations are highlighted in a bold, blue font ($p < .05$). $N = 1937$.

Correlational Outcome: Youth Survey, Mindsets

The second survey-derived outcome measure was mindsets. For this outcome, only special education status (-0.083 points, on average, compared with overall averages) and preadministration youth survey scores (0.302 points higher for every 1-point increase on the preadministration youth survey score, on average) were significantly associated with mindset scale score.

Two center-level variables were significantly associated with mindset scale scores, however: Leading Indicator 10 and youth relationships. In the case of Leading Indicator 10 (youth development), a single point increase in the center score (on a 1–4 scale) was associated with a -0.330 mindset scale score, on average. The reason for this is unclear, though it could be that programs serving students with lower than average mindset scores responded by infusing more youth development components into their activities. Center-level average youth relationship scores were again associated with mindset scores, with a 1-point increase in the youth relationship score associated with a mindset score that was 0.219 points higher. See Exhibit 36.

Exhibit 36. Correlational Findings Related to the Youth Survey Mindset Scale Score

Parameter	Estimate	Std. error	df	t	Sig. (*p*)
Intercept	**2.981**	**0.038**	**117.344**	**78.987**	**0.000**
Total hours of participation	0.000	0.000	188.757	-1.437	0.152
Lvl1 youth age at program start	-0.002	0.008	1374.053	-0.264	0.792
Lvl1 male	0.034	0.023	1788.884	1.519	0.129
Lvl1 White	0.054	0.033	1411.917	1.628	0.104
Lvl1 Hispanic	-0.058	0.036	1605.515	-1.643	0.101
Lvl1 Black	0.000	0.042	1423.785	-0.011	0.991
Lvl1 Asian	0.103	0.059	1754.064	1.743	0.081
Lvl1 Pacific Islander	-0.188	0.109	1778.978	-1.721	0.085
Lvl1 American Indian	0.049	0.136	1786.225	0.357	0.721
Lvl1 free or reduced-price lunch	-0.040	0.026	1786.522	-1.558	0.119
Lvl1 limited English proficiency status	-0.037	0.043	1783.625	-0.857	0.391
Lvl1 special education status	**-0.083**	**0.035**	**1788.909**	**-2.407**	**0.016**
Lvl1 youth survey preadministration score for mindsets	**0.302**	**0.023**	**1740.087**	**13.078**	**0.000**
Lvl1 prior-year English language arts PARCC score	-0.001	0.000	1705.657	-1.702	0.089

Parameter	Estimate	Std. error	df	t	Sig. (*p*)
Lvl1 prior-year mathematics PARCC score	0.001	0.000	1784.352	1.189	0.234
Lvl2 center percent 2023–24 returning participants	0.039	0.093	34.210	0.417	0.679
Lvl2 center percent parents saying the program has helped "a lot"	-0.224	0.112	26.120	-1.991	0.057
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 1, internal communication	0.022	0.107	36.435	0.203	0.840
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 2, link to school day	-0.058	0.074	37.500	-0.781	0.440
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 3, collaboration with school partners	0.066	0.098	42.410	0.667	0.508
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 4, quality at point of service	-0.036	0.132	31.306	-0.270	0.789
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 6, Common Core	0.084	0.070	37.352	1.203	0.237
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 10, youth development	**-0.330**	**0.135**	**36.387**	**-2.444**	**0.019**
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 11, staff and family connections	0.190	0.128	36.022	1.482	0.147
Lvl2 student-to-staff ratio (program)	0.001	0.003	29.476	0.177	0.860
Lvl2 center average youth survey choice scale score	0.178	0.168	42.561	1.060	0.295
Lvl2 center average youth survey relationships with adults scale score	0.202	0.174	42.238	1.161	0.252
Lvl2 center average youth survey relationships among youth scale score	**0.219**	**0.102**	**38.963**	**2.140**	**0.039**

Note. PARCC = Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. All level 1 and level 2 predictor variables were grand-mean centered except total hours of participation. Statistically significant associations are highlighted in a bold, blue font ($p < .05$). $N = 1937$.

Correlational Outcome: Youth Survey, Self-Management

The third youth survey–related outcome was self-management. As with the previous two survey-related outcomes, relatively few student-level characteristics included in the model were significantly associated with the self-management score. Total hours of participation was associated with the self-management score, but the estimate was not practically meaningful (with an effect estimate of < .000). Free or reduced-price lunch status was negatively associated with the self-management score (-0.053 scale points, on average, compared with the overall average), and the preadministration youth survey score was once again associated with the postadministration youth survey score, as expected.

Two center-level variables were significantly associated with the self-management score: the percentage of parents at a center who said the program had helped their child "a lot," and,

once again, the center-level average scale score for youth relationship. In the case of the former, the association was negative (-0.278 points as the percentage reached 100%). This was contrary to what was expected, with no obvious explanation. In the case of the center-level average score for youth relationships (1–4 scale), every 1-point increase was associated with a self-management score that was 0.246 points higher, on average. See Exhibit 37.

Exhibit 37. Correlational Findings Related to the Youth Survey Self-Management Scale Score

Parameter	Estimate	Std. error	df	t	Sig. (*p*)
Intercept	**2.873**	**0.040**	**145.593**	**71.450**	**0.000**
Total hours of participation	**0.000**	**0.000**	**308.697**	**-1.994**	**0.047**
Lvl1 youth age at program start	0.009	0.008	1585.460	1.178	0.239
Lvl1 male	0.001	0.022	1784.812	0.055	0.956
Lvl1 White	0.003	0.033	1596.704	0.090	0.928
Lvl1 Hispanic	-0.050	0.035	1711.576	-1.429	0.153
Lvl1 Black	-0.017	0.041	1613.297	-0.425	0.671
Lvl1 Asian	0.009	0.058	1781.118	0.153	0.879
Lvl1 Pacific Islander	-0.098	0.106	1770.223	-0.928	0.353
Lvl1 American Indian	0.051	0.132	1777.958	0.383	0.702
Lvl1 free or reduced-price lunch	**-0.053**	**0.025**	**1779.424**	**-2.134**	**0.033**
Lvl1 limited English proficiency status	-0.040	0.042	1787	-0.957	0.339
Lvl1 special education status	-0.057	0.034	1783.522	-1.709	0.088
Lvl1 youth survey preadministration score for self-management	**0.332**	**0.024**	**1754.172**	**13.964**	**0.000**
Lvl1 prior-year English language arts PARCC score	-0.001	0.000	1763.775	-1.452	0.147
Lvl1 prior-year mathematics PARCC score	0.001	0.000	1786.932	1.693	0.091
Lvl2 center percent 2023–24 returning participants	-0.012	0.108	36.312	-0.109	0.914
Lvl2 center percent parents saying the program has helped "a lot"	**-0.278**	**0.134**	**30.071**	**-2.079**	**0.046**
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 1, internal communication	0.031	0.125	39.548	0.247	0.806
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 2, link to school day	0.058	0.085	40.298	0.676	0.503
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 3, collaboration with school partners	-0.009	0.113	42.600	-0.079	0.938
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 4, quality at point of service	-0.107	0.154	36.362	-0.697	0.491
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 6, Common Core	0.063	0.081	39.510	0.780	0.440

Parameter	Estimate	Std. error	df	t	Sig. (*p*)
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 10, youth development	-0.112	0.157	37.984	-0.712	0.481
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 11, staff and family connections	0.126	0.148	39.212	0.851	0.400
Lvl2 student-to-staff ratio (program)	0.000	0.004	32.456	-0.028	0.978
Lvl2 center average youth survey choice scale score	0.297	0.192	43.158	1.545	0.130
Lvl2 center average youth survey relationships with adults scale score	0.001	0.199	42.109	0.006	0.995
Lvl2 center average youth survey relationships among youth scale score	**0.246**	**0.118**	**40.560**	**2.086**	**0.043**

Note. PARCC = Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. All level 1 and level 2 predictor variables were grand-mean centered except total hours of participation. Statistically significant associations are highlighted in blue, bold font ($p < .05$).

Correlational Outcome: Youth Survey, Interpersonal Skills

The fourth and final youth survey–related outcome area was interpersonal skills. Multiple student characteristics were significantly associated with the interpersonal scale score. Males had slightly lower scale scores than females, on average (-0.066). Students with free or reduced-price lunch status or special education status also had lower interpersonal scores, on average (-0.056 and -0.076, respectively). The preadministration youth survey score was again positively associated with the postadministration youth survey score, as expected.

As for center-level variables, the percentage of parents who said the program had helped their child "a lot" was negatively associated with the interpersonal scale score (-0.278 points as the percentage reached 100%), while the center-level average score for youth relationships was positively associated with the interpersonal score (0.263 points higher for every additional youth relationship scale point, on average). This was very similar to the relationships observed for self-management. See Exhibit 38.

Exhibit 38. Correlational Findings Related to the Youth Survey Interpersonal Scale Score

Parameter	Estimate	Std. error	df	t	Sig. (*p*)
Intercept	**2.997**	**0.039**	**132.974**	**76.485**	**0.000**
Total hours of participation	0.000	0.000	216.313	-1.662	0.098
Lvl1 youth age at program start	0.004	0.008	1432.536	0.450	0.653
Lvl1 male	**-0.066**	**0.023**	**1791**	**-2.837**	**0.005**

Parameter	Estimate	Std. error	df	t	Sig. (*p*)
Lvl1 White	0.036	0.034	1475.002	1.053	0.292
Lvl1 Hispanic	0.001	0.037	1636.111	0.026	0.979
Lvl1 Black	0.025	0.043	1481.350	0.594	0.553
Lvl1 Asian	0.110	0.061	1763.415	1.802	0.072
Lvl1 Pacific Islander	-0.132	0.112	1781.345	-1.172	0.241
Lvl1 American Indian	0.135	0.140	1788.083	0.961	0.337
Lvl1 free or reduced-price lunch	**-0.056**	**0.026**	**1788.314**	**-2.118**	**0.034**
Lvl1 limited English proficiency status	-0.020	0.044	1784.702	-0.465	0.642
Lvl1 special education status	**-0.076**	**0.035**	**1790.593**	**-2.146**	**0.032**
Lvl1 youth survey preadministration interpersonal score	**0.297**	**0.023**	**1718.305**	**12.881**	**0.000**
Lvl1 prior-year English language arts PARCC score	-0.001	0.000	1723.197	-1.535	0.125
Lvl1 prior-year mathematics PARCC score	0.000	0.001	1786.918	0.842	0.400
Lvl2 center percent 2023–24 returning participants	0.069	0.097	38.418	0.710	0.482
Lvl2 center percent parents saying the program has helped "a lot"	**-0.278**	**0.118**	**29.847**	**-2.359**	**0.025**
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 1, internal communication	0.000	0.112	41.160	-0.004	0.997
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 2, link to school day	-0.011	0.077	42.211	-0.143	0.887
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 3, collaboration with school partners	0.042	0.103	47.252	0.405	0.687
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 4, quality at point of service	-0.022	0.138	35.456	-0.157	0.876
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 6, Common Core	0.041	0.073	41.954	0.563	0.577
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 10, youth development	-0.135	0.141	40.723	-0.956	0.344
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 11, staff and family connections	0.139	0.134	40.637	1.040	0.305
Lvl2 student-to-staff ratio (program)	0.000	0.004	33.246	0.056	0.956
Lvl2 center average youth survey choice scale score	0.162	0.175	47.466	0.927	0.359
Lvl2 center average youth survey relationships with adults scale score	0.117	0.181	46.928	0.646	0.521
Lvl2 center average youth survey relationships among youth scale score	**0.263**	**0.107**	**43.793**	**2.460**	**0.018**

Note. PARCC = Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. All level 1 and level 2 predictor variables were grand-mean centered except total hours of participation. Statistically significant associations are highlighted in a bold, blue font ($p < .05$).

Quasi-Experimental Method of Analysis

The quasi-experimental analyses used models similar to those employed for the correlational analyses, but instead of including total hours of participation as a linear scale variable, the quasi-experimental analyses compared outcomes between high- and low-attendance 21st CCLC participants. High program attendance was defined as total hours of participation falling within the top quintile of total hours (defined for each grade level), while low attendance was defined as total participation hours falling in the bottom two quintiles of total hours (also defined for each grade level).[9] The primary variable of interest in these analyses was a binary "high attendance" treatment variable. These analyses were less about program quality, per se, and more about assessing whether higher levels of attendance were associated with better student outcomes than lower attendance, controlling for both student demographics and program quality proxy variables.

Defining a Low-Attendance Comparison Group. As in any evaluation of a program where participants are not randomly assigned to the treatment group, the problem of selection was paramount. This is because it is likely that students who participate in 21st CCLC programming at high levels are different from those who participate at low levels. To try to mitigate preexisting differences between high- and low-attendance participants, low-attendance youth (as defined above) were matched to high-attendance youth using both student-level characteristics and school characteristic data. Prior-year academic scale scores (mathematics and ELA) were used in matching.

Specifically, we used propensity score matching to define a comparison group. PSM is a two-step process designed to address the problem of potential selection bias. In the first stage, the probability that each student participates at a high level was modeled on available observable characteristics (i.e., student demographics, prior-year outcome variables, and school characteristics). In the second stage, the predicted probability of high-attendance participation (the propensity score) was used to match low-attendance youth with high-attendance youth. By modeling high-attendance status, this approach enabled a comparison between high- and low-attendance students who had a similar propensity to attend at high levels based on observable characteristics. This process yielded high- and low-attendance groups of equal size using one-to-one matching without replacement. HLM could then be used to assess student outcomes, comparing outcomes between the two groups by means of a binary "high attendance" (or treatment/non-treatment designation) variable.

[9] Hour attendance quintiles were determined separately for each grade level because overall attendance tends to decline as the grade level increases. This approach ensured that high attendance and low attendance were defined in an age-appropriate manner.

While PSM does not remove the risk that effect estimates are capturing preexisting differences between two groups, rather than program effects, this approach is better than a simple comparison between groups without matching because it helps to ensure apples-to-apples comparisons. For more detail on this matching approach, see Appendix D.

Two outcomes were considered for the quasi-experiment:

- Mathematics assessment scale scores (PARCC), provided by NJDOE
- ELA assessment scale scores (PARCC), provided by NJDOE

The quasi-experiment did not assess outcomes related to unexcused absences or youth surveys. In the case of unexcused absences, the outcome of interest was deemed too closely aligned with the treatment definition (high attendance in 21st CCLC programming). Youth survey-related outcomes were not included due to low n sizes. Youth with both pre- and postadministration survey data available for use in the models tended to be those with higher program attendance because they were present to take both surveys, making construction of a low-attendance comparison group difficult, with very low *n* sizes.

For both the mathematics and ELA quasi-experimental model, baseline equivalence after PSM was assessed and found to be acceptable.[10]

Mathematics State Assessment Scores

High attendance in 21st CCLC programming, as defined above, was not significantly associated with mathematics PARCC scale scores. Male students scored slightly higher than female students in mathematics, on average (3.2 scale score points). Prior-year mathematics scores were significant predictors of current-year scores (with every 1-point increase in the prior-year score associated with an increase of 0.550 points in the current-year score, on average). ELA prior-year scores were also significant predictors, though with a smaller effect estimate (0.172). Interestingly, the center-level youth relationship scale score (on a 1–4 scale) was again found to be a significant predictor, with each scale point increase associated with a mathematics scale score that was about 11.4 points higher, on average. See Exhibit 39.

[10] Baseline equivalence was assessed by analyzing prior-year scores using the What Works Clearinghouse approach of dividing the difference between group means by the pooled standard deviation. Values for this calculation for both prior-year mathematics and prior-year English language arts were below .05. In the case of English language arts, a second matching attempt was required to meet this standard (matching is based on the propensity score itself, not individual variables, meaning different matching solutions may have different outcome variable baselines).

Exhibit 39. Quasi-Experimental Findings Related to Mathematics Scale Scores

Parameter	Estimate	Std. error	df	t	Sig. (*p*)
Intercept	**726.630**	**0.954**	**77.480**	**761.443**	**0.000**
High attendance	0.846	1.039	981.177	0.814	0.416
Lvl1 youth age at program start	-0.355	0.306	1654.528	-1.162	0.246
Lvl1 male	**3.202**	**0.845**	**1925.938**	**3.788**	**0.000**
Lvl1 White	0.300	1.208	1520.699	0.248	0.804
Lvl1 Hispanic	-1.987	1.280	1825.530	-1.552	0.121
Lvl1 Black	-2.843	1.504	1731.398	-1.891	0.059
Lvl1 Asian	2.042	2.959	1866.952	0.690	0.490
Lvl1 Pacific Islander	-3.200	5.162	1931.655	-0.620	0.535
Lvl1 American Indian	2.440	4.643	1938.631	0.526	0.599
Lvl1 free or reduced-price lunch	-1.358	0.969	1946.087	-1.402	0.161
Lvl1 limited English proficiency status	-1.401	1.473	1947	-0.951	0.342
Lvl1 special education status	-0.897	1.181	1941.651	-0.760	0.447
Lvl1 prior-year mathematics PARCC score	**0.550**	**0.019**	**1946.404**	**29.009**	**0.000**
Lvl1 prior-year English language arts PARCC score	**0.172**	**0.017**	**1925.143**	**10.083**	**0.000**
Lvl2 center percent 2023–24 returning participants	-7.524	3.913	36.071	-1.923	0.062
Lvl2 center percent parents saying the program has helped "a lot"	-8.107	5.270	37.180	-1.538	0.132
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 1, internal communication	-4.723	4.629	43.875	-1.020	0.313
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 2, link to school day	-0.809	3.222	49.318	-0.251	0.803
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 3, collaboration with school partners	5.686	4.181	37.454	1.360	0.182
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 4, quality at point of service	7.944	5.860	38.795	1.356	0.183
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 6, Common Core	-1.480	3.113	41.500	-0.475	0.637
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 10, youth development	-7.984	6.152	43.698	-1.298	0.201
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 11, staff and family connections	5.448	5.714	41.282	0.953	0.346
Lvl2 student-to-staff ratio (program)	0.236	0.123	31.348	1.922	0.064
Lvl2 center average youth survey choice scale score	-9.760	5.026	35.179	-1.942	0.060
Lvl2 center average youth survey relationships with adults scale score	-0.067	6.720	41.970	-0.010	0.992

Parameter	Estimate	Std. error	df	t	Sig. (*p*)
Lvl2 center average youth survey relationships among youth scale score	**11.387**	**4.468**	**47.168**	**2.549**	**0.014**

Note. PARCC = Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. All level 1 and level 2 predictor variables were grand-mean centered, except for the high-attendance treatment status variable. Statistically significant associations are highlighted in a bold, blue font ($p < .05$). $N = 1998$.

English Language Arts State Assessment Scores

For ELA, high attendance was significantly associated with higher ELA scale scores (with identification in the high-attendance group associated with scale scores that were 4.6 points higher, on average). Female students scored slightly higher than male students on average, with scale scores about 5.1 points higher. Limited English proficiency and special education status were also significantly associated with ELA scale scores: Each was about 8.5 points lower, on average, compared with the overall average student. Prior-year ELA and prior-year mathematics scale scores were also significant predictors, with each scale point increase in the prior-year score associated with an average increase of 0.588 scale score points and 0.266 scale score points in the current-year score, respectively (as expected).

Two center-level variables of interest were significant. First, a 1-point increase in Leading Indicator 4 (quality at the point of service; 1–4 scale) was associated with an average increase of 17.124 ELA scale score points. Second, a 1-point increase in the center-level average youth relationship score (1–4 scale) was associated with a 10.715-point increase in the ELA scale score. See Exhibit 40.

Exhibit 40. Quasi-Experimental Findings Related to English Language Arts Scale Scores

Parameter	Estimate	Std. error	df	t	Sig. (*p*)
Intercept	**738.479**	**1.137**	**76.338**	**649.311**	**0.000**
High attendance	**4.560**	**1.162**	**1355.273**	**3.926**	**0.000**
Lvl1 youth age at program start	-0.171	0.346	1533.369	-0.495	0.621
Lvl1 male	**-5.148**	**0.977**	**1967.316**	**-5.270**	**0.000**
Lvl1 White	0.931	1.376	1697.259	0.677	0.499
Lvl1 Hispanic	0.346	1.531	1818.573	0.226	0.821
Lvl1 Black	-1.979	1.792	1780.284	-1.104	0.270
Lvl1 Asian	3.399	3.701	1890.419	0.918	0.359
Lvl1 Pacific Islander	-4.578	5.243	1966.607	-0.873	0.383

Parameter	Estimate	Std. error	df	t	Sig. (*p*)
Lvl1 American Indian	3.834	5.414	1969.869	0.708	0.479
Lvl1 free or reduced-price lunch	-2.021	1.137	1976.064	-1.777	0.076
Lvl1 limited English proficiency status	**-8.512**	**1.644**	**1977.351**	**-5.178**	**0.000**
Lvl1 special education status	**-8.467**	**1.429**	**1972.967**	**-5.924**	**0.000**
Lvl1 prior-year English language arts PARCC score	**0.588**	**0.020**	**1972.295**	**29.640**	**0.000**
Lvl1 prior-year mathematics PARCC score	**0.266**	**0.022**	**1977.747**	**12.326**	**0.000**
Lvl2 center percent 2023–24 returning participants	-2.249	4.951	42.761	-0.454	0.652
Lvl2 center percent parents saying the program has helped "a lot"	-7.657	6.391	37.919	-1.198	0.238
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 1, internal communication	2.400	5.830	45.956	0.412	0.683
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 2, link to school day	0.796	4.167	49.851	0.191	0.849
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 3, collaboration with school partners	-3.353	5.302	43.596	-0.632	0.530
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 4, quality at point of service	**17.124**	**7.458**	**44.253**	**2.296**	**0.026**
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 6, Common Core	-1.776	3.938	48.305	-0.451	0.654
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 10, youth development	-13.219	7.687	45.476	-1.720	0.092
Lvl2 Leading Indicator 11, staff and family connections	-1.795	7.011	43.294	-0.256	0.799
Lvl2 student-to-staff ratio (program)	-0.049	0.154	37.313	-0.321	0.750
Lvl2 center average youth survey choice scale score	-9.003	6.522	43.954	-1.380	0.174
Lvl2 center average youth survey relationships with adults scale score	-1.475	8.506	48.345	-0.173	0.863
Lvl2 center average youth survey relationships among youth scale score	**10.715**	**5.298**	**45.789**	**2.023**	**0.049**

Note. PARCC = Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. All level 1 and level 2 predictor variables were grand-mean centered, except for the high-attendance treatment status variable. Statistically significant associations are highlighted in a bold, blue font ($p < .05$). $N = 2024$.

Discussion of the Correlational and Quasi-Experimental Results

All the analyses presented in this section have important limitations. First, the correlational analyses merely show significant variable associations and cannot be used to justify causal claims (though the results can be understood as supporting or not supporting theories about how 21st CCLC programming affects participating youth). Second, the PSM approach used to create comparison groups for the quasi-experimental analyses cannot account for variables

that are not available for inclusion, meaning preexisting differences could potentially account for observed differences (an unknown).

That said, a clear finding from these analyses is that center-level average youth relationship scores are meaningfully and significantly associated with student outcomes of interest. This center-level variable was significant in five of eight correlational analyses (mathematics, ELA, and three of the four postadministration youth survey outcomes), and in both of the quasi-experimental analyses (mathematics and ELA). Noting that all the analyses conducted for this section controlled for student-level demographics, prior-year academic outcomes, and other aspects of program quality (as gauged by the proxy variables), this is a meaningful result that deserves further exploration. Additionally, it bears noting that few of the other center-level program quality proxy variables were significantly associated with student outcomes.

Overall positive (desirable) findings include the following:

- The center-level average scale score for youth relationships was significantly and positively associated with mathematics and ELA scale scores (correlational and quasi-experimental analyses), as well as youth mindsets, self-management, and interpersonal skills (correlational analysis).
- Leading Indicator 3 (collaboration with school partners) was significantly and positively associated with program attendance (correlational analysis).
- The center-level average scale score for youth choice was significantly and positively associated with a reduced chance of chronic school-day absence (correlational analysis).
- Leading Indicator 4 (quality at the point of service) was significantly and positively associated with ELA scale scores (quasi-experimental analysis). Note that the effect estimate for this indicator was meaningfully large, with an increase of about 17 scale score points, on average, for each indicator scale score point increase (1–4 scale).

Overall negative (undesirable) findings include the following:

- Increases in student-to-staff ratios were associated with lower program attendance (correlational analyses).
- An increase in the center-level average scale score for youth relationships with adult program staff (1–4 scale) was associated with an increased chance of chronic school-day absence (correlational analyses).
- A scale score point increase for Leading Indicator 10 (youth development) was associated with lower youth mindset scale scores (correlational analyses).

- A higher percentage of parents reporting that the program had helped their child “a lot” was associated with lower scale scores for self-management and interpersonal skills (correlational analyses).

All findings in this second set are correlational. It is therefore important to emphasize that all correlational findings—both positive and negative—are associations, with unclear causal relationships. The quasi-experimental findings are clearer in this respect and are more supportive of causal claims, notwithstanding the limitations noted above.

Section 7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The 2023–24 data presented in this report show that the 21st CCLC program in New Jersey is serving the intended population. In 2023–24, a total of 20,724 youth participated, 68% of whom were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. These youth attended an average of 63.9 days, which was roughly in line with average days of attendance for 2022–23 (64.8 days). Average total hours spent in activities targeting reading and mathematics increased compared with prior years, with average totals of 83 hours and 72 hours, respectively (versus 76 hours and 71 hours, respectively, for 2022–23; 66 hours and 54 hours, respectively, for 2021–22; and 54 hours and 52 hours, respectively, for 2020–21). On average, attendees spent about 36 hours in academic enrichment, 31 hours in tutoring/homework help, and 30 hours in recreation.

Survey results indicated that youth participating in the 21st CCLC program had positive experiences and witnessed growth on an array of outcomes. Based on the youth survey data, youth (more often than not) had opportunities to make meaningful choices in their programs. Further, a majority of youth respondents indicated that they had positive relationships with other youth attendees, and a larger majority said they had positive relationships with adults. Youth also reported being helped by the program, with nearly 82% of respondents saying the program had helped them "find out what I like to do" and nearly 81% saying the program had helped them "learn things that will be important for my future."

Related to the youth survey, the correlational and quasi-experimental analyses clearly indicated that centers with high average youth relationship scale scores had better youth outcomes in terms of mathematics, ELA, mindsets, self-management, and interpersonal skills. Additionally, Leading Indicator 4 (quality at the point of service) was a significant predictor of ELA scale scores in the quasi-experimental analyses, with a meaningful average increase of 17 scale score points for each 1-point increase in the indicator scale score.

Based on these and other findings detailed in this report, AIR has the following recommendations for NJDOE regarding next steps:

- The relationship between the center-level average scale score for youth relationships (as measured on the postadministration youth survey) deserves further investigation. AIR recommends conducting descriptive exploratory analyses contrasting centers that were strong in youth relationships versus those with room to grow. Additionally, AIR recommends conducting qualitative data collection at centers with strong youth relationships (as gauged by the youth survey) to better understand how these relationships are encouraged and maintained, and how they relate to observed youth outcomes.

- Given that most center-level program quality proxy variables were not found to be significantly associated with youth outcomes, it may be useful to review the leading indicators and their underlying data sources to determine whether revisions could helpfully be made. AIR recommends reviewing these data sources with a selected advisory group to ensure on-the-ground perspectives are incorporated.

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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 amid 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.					
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.						
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.						

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
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 what content is covered in program offerings.					
e. Youth make choices about how 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.				

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
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. Postadministration Youth Survey

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) administered a preadministration youth survey in fall 2019, fall 2021, and fall 2022, and a postadministration youth survey in spring 2019, spring 2022, and spring 2023. Both the preadministration and postadministration surveys included youth outcome questions (Question 1 of the survey in this appendix). 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 began 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 programing 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

	Not at all true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Completely true
Academic Identity				
Doing well in school is an important part of who I am	O	O	O	O
Getting good grades is one of my main goals	O	O	O	O
I take pride in doing my best in school	O	O	O	O
Getting a college education is important to me	O	O	O	O
I am a hard worker when it comes to my schoolwork	O	O	O	O
It is important to me to learn as much as I can	O	O	O	O
Mindsets				
I finish whatever I begin	O	O	O	O
I stay positive when things don't go the way I want	O	O	O	O
I don't give up easily	O	O	O	O
I try things even if I might fail	O	O	O	O
I can solve difficult problems if I try hard enough	O	O	O	O
I can do a good job if I try hard enough	O	O	O	O
I stay focused on my work even when it's boring	O	O	O	O
Self-Management				
I can stop myself from doing something I know I shouldn't do	O	O	O	O
When I'm sad, I do something that will make me feel better	O	O	O	O
I can control my temper	O	O	O	O
I can handle stress	O	O	O	O
I can calm myself down when I'm excited or upset	O	O	O	O
When my solution to a problem is not working, I try to find a new solution	O	O	O	O
I think of my past choices when making new decisions	O	O	O	O
Interpersonal Skills				
I listen to other people's ideas	O	O	O	O

	Not at all true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Completely true
I work well with others on group projects	o	o	o	o
I feel bad when someone gets their feelings hurt	o	o	o	o
I respect what other people think, even if I disagree	o	o	o	o
I try to help when I see someone having a problem	o	o	o	o
When I make a decision, I think about how it will affect other people	o	o	o	o

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.**

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

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

3. **Thinking about the adults in 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
Who is interested in what I think about things.	O	O	O	O
Who I can talk to when I am upset.	O	O	O	O
Who helps me when I have a problem.	O	O	O	O
Who I enjoy being around.	O	O	O	O
Who has helped me find a special interest or talent (something I'm good at).	O	O	O	O
Who asks me about my life and goals.	O	O	O	O
Who I will miss when the program is over.	O	O	O	O

4. **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
Kids here are friendly with each other.	O	O	O	O
Kids here treat each other with respect.	O	O	O	O
Kids here listen to what the teachers tell them to do.	O	O	O	O
Kids here don't tease or bully others.	O	O	O	O
Kids here support and help one another.	O	O	O	O

5. **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
Feel good about myself.	O	O	O	O
With my confidence.	O	O	O	O
To make new friends.	O	O	O	O
Find out what is important to me.	O	O	O	O
Find out what I'm good at doing.	O	O	O	O
Find out what I like to do.	O	O	O	O
Discover things I want to learn more about.	O	O	O	O
Learn things that will help me in school.	O	O	O	O
Learn things that will be important for my future.	O	O	O	O
Think about the kinds of classes I want to take in the future.	O	O	O	O
Think about what I might like to do when I get older.	O	O	O	O
Learn about things that are important to my community or the environment.	O	O	O	O
Feel good because I was helping my community or the environment.	O	O	O	O

Thank you!

Appendix C. Parent Survey

The American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) administered a one-time parent survey during fall 2023. To ensure the timely presentation of results, parent survey response data were presented to the New Jersey Department of Education as part of last year's evaluation report (published 2024). The current report includes parent survey results from two questions (Questions 2 and 4), using the response data as center-level indicators of program quality. The indicators were used in the multilevel modeling analysis, the results of which are presented in Section 6 of this report.

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 that were active during fall 2023.

Afterschool Parent Survey

Instructions:

The purpose of this survey is to find out more about your child's experiences in this afterschool program. The answers you provide will help make afterschool programs better for students in New Jersey. We need your honest feedback. The questions on the survey ask about what your child experienced in the afterschool activities offered at this program this school year. These activities include those that your child went to in person before school, afterschool, or on weekends. The term "afterschool" used in this survey refers to all of these types of activities.

Please choose the answer that best describes your child's experience attending afterschool activities in this program. It should take you about 5 minutes to answer all of the questions on this survey.

If you have more than one child attending this program, please choose one of your children and respond to the survey based on that child's experience.

This survey is voluntary. You may choose to take the survey or not. You can skip items or stop at any time. This survey does not have your name or your child's name on it, so everything you write is confidential, which means that no one, including program staff, will be allowed to know how you answer these questions.

1. What grade is your child currently in? (Choose one.) [NOT USED FOR THIS REPORT]

- O Kindergarten
- O 1st grade
- O 2nd grade
- O 3rd grade
- O 4th grade
- O 5th grade
- O 6th grade
- O 7th grade
- O 8th grade
- O 9th grade
- O 10th grade
- O 11th grade
- O 12th grade

2. Overall, to what extent do you believe your child is benefitting from being part of this afterschool program? [USED FOR THIS REPORT]

- O Not at all
- O A little
- O A moderate amount
- O A lot
- O I am not sure whether my child is benefitting from the program.

3. How does your child's afterschool program communicate with you about activities, services, and supports? How effective is that communication for you? [NOT USED FOR THIS REPORT]

Communication Type	Not used	How effective is this communication for you?		
		Not at all effective	Somewhat effective	Very effective
Flyers sent home with my child	o	o	o	o
Email	o	o	o	o
Text messages	o	o	o	o
Private website/internet portal	o	o	o	o
Phone call	o	o	o	o
Paper mail	o	o	o	o
In person	o	o	o	o
Other _____	o	o	o	o

4. To what extent have you seen any of the following changes in your child since they started attending this afterschool program? [USED FOR THIS REPORT]

Since starting this afterschool program, my child appears to be …	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 some improvement in this area and …		
		My child did not improve in this area.	My child improved to some extent in this area.	My child improved a lot in this area.
Getting along better with other children	o	o	o	o
Doing better in school	o	o	o	o
Calmer and more relaxed	o	o	o	o
Happier	o	o	o	o
More outgoing	o	o	o	o

Since starting this afterschool program, my child appears to be …	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 some improvement in this area and …		
		My child did not improve in this area.	My child improved to some extent in this area.	My child improved a lot in this area.
More motivated to go to school	O	O	O	O

5. What are the top THREE needs that you wish your child's afterschool program would address in the coming year? [NOT USED FOR THIS REPORT]

O Addition of program time before school
O Addition of program time after school
O Addition of programming on weekends
O Addition of programming during the summer
O More individual child tutoring/academic support
O Increased homework help
O College/career readiness for my child
O More afterschool program staff
O Addition of more experienced program staff
O Addition of intentional staff/student mentoring
O Improve general communication with parents
O More fun activities that incorporate learning
O More health services for students
O More health services for parents/family members
O More parent involvement with afterschool activities
O More transparency with parents about child involvement in afterschool activities
O Increased skill-instruction for parents (e.g., language, technical skill, etc.)
O Other need _____

Appendix D. Propensity Score Matching and Hierarchical Linear Modeling

For the quasi-experimental models, low-attendance youth were matched with high-attendance youth using propensity score matching (PSM; using one-to-one matching without replication). PSM is a two-step process. First, student and school characteristics were used in logistic regression to model the probability of high participation. This modeling yielded a single-variable score, called a propensity score, that summarized the likelihood of a given individual being included in the high-attendance group, given the characteristics included in the model. Low-attendance participants were then matched with high-attendance participants based on having similar propensity scores. This ensured that the two groups (high-attendance and low-attendance participants) were similar to one another in terms of the available characteristics included in the predictive model.

Given that PSM cannot account for student or school characteristics that are not available in the data sets (e.g., parental motivation or involvement), this qualifies as a quasi-experiment, with the caveat that selection effects may be present. In other words, despite using a matched comparison group, it is possible that observed differences between the high- and low-attendance groups are due in part or in full to preexisting but unobservable differences between the two groups, and not to the program itself. The extent to which this is true is unknown but must be kept in mind when interpreting the results.

The following student-level variables were used to fit the propensity score models:

- Prior-year academic achievement
- Prior-year unexcused absence rate (when chronic absence was the outcome of interest)
- Student demographic information, including the following:
  - Gender
  - Age
  - Race
  - Limited English proficiency status
  - Economic disadvantage status
  - Special education status

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

- School size in terms of enrollment quartile
- Binary indicator showing whether the school was an elementary school or not
- School teacher–student ratio
- Percentage of economically disadvantaged students
- Percentage of students with limited English proficiency
- Percentage of students from different racial groups
- Binary indicator showing whether the school was rural or town-based, rather than suburban or city-based

The final propensity score models were checked to ensure that the analytic sample was balanced in terms of pre-treatment outcome variable. Consistent with What Works Clearinghouse standards, 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.

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