District of Columbia 21st Century Community Learning Centers – Quality Assessment

School Year 2005-06

By Wendy Russell

RMC Research Corporation
1501 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 1250
Arlington, Virginia 22209
703-558-4800

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables ii

Introduction 1

Quality Assessment Process 1

Program Quality Self-Assessment: Findings 3

- Section I. Effective Programming 4
- Section II. Measuring outcomes and evaluation 6
- Section III. Staffing and Professional Development 8
- Section IV. Appropriate Environments 9
- Section V. Linkages between School Day and After School 10
- Section VI. Strong Partnerships and Sustainability 12
- Section VII. Program Management and Governance 13

Recommendations 17

Appendix A: Program Quality Self-Assessment for Continuous Improvement Planning (QSAP) 19

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Site Visit Locations and Cohorts 2

Table 2. Number of answers and percentage of "met" ratings on the sections of the Self-Assessment for Continuous Improvement Planning (SACIP) 4

Table 3. Self-assessment ratings regarding measures of effective programming (quality measures are organized in descending order of "met" rating) 5

Table 4. Self-assessment ratings regarding measuring outcomes and evaluation (quality measures are organized in descending order of "met" rating) 7

Table 5. Self-assessment ratings regarding measures of staffing and professional development (components organized by descending order of "met" rating).....8

Table 6. Self-assessment ratings regarding measures of program health, safety and nutrition (components organized by descending order of "met" rating).....10

Table 7. Self-assessment ratings regarding coordination between regular school day and after school (components organized by descending order of "met" rating).....11

Table 8. Self-assessment ratings regarding strong partnerships and sustainability (components organized by descending order of "met" rating) 13

Table 9. Self-assessment ratings regarding strong partnerships and sustainability (components organized by descending order of "met" rating) 14

Table 10: Overall Program Rating by Cohort 15

INTRODUCTION

RMC Research Corporation provided support to the District of Columbia's 21st Century Community Learning Centers program in meeting No Child Left Behind, Title IV, Part B statutory requirement to evaluate the effectiveness and inform quality assurance practices of local programs. Specifically, RMC Research, working with District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) Office of Federal Grants Programs (OFGP), established a program quality assessment process that assisted the state in *ensuring that programs implement effective strategies that includes technical assistance, evaluation and dissemination of promising practices.* This report outlines the quality assessment process, delineates the findings highlighting both the best practices and technical assistance needs of local grantee programs, and offers recommendations to inform state activities related to program monitoring and evaluation.

QUALITY ASSESSMENT PROCESS

As out-of-school time programs have expanded and matured, the issue of quality has moved from the periphery to the core of conversations across research, policy and practice. The emphasis on quality focuses on how to define, assess and inform efforts to improve and sustain quality (Yohalem, 2005[1]). Also emerging from these conversations on quality is the complementary relationship between self assessment and evaluation. Although both processes aim at program improvement, they differ on purposes. Self-assessment is a tool to provide immediate information at the local level with potential to involve staff members and ensure their buy-in into the change process. Evaluation is (or should be) an outside, impartial analysis of implementation fidelity and effect on program users. Rather than address the question of "how we are" regarding specific components, evaluation focuses on the broader question of impact – what was the effect of the program and for whom? To answer this question, access to implementation and outcome data is imperative. Therefore, the self-assessment process can be a step toward evaluation by alerting local programs to the need to collect data about participants, activities, and outputs, and identifying gaps in data collection.

In the D.C. 21st CCLC program context, the emphasis of the quality review process was a combination of state-level quality assurance and local grantee's assessment of program implementation against quality measures to inform program improvement. In this case, the process was also a first step to increase data awareness among local grantees, and to understand the scope of available and missing data, before a formal outcome evaluation can be proposed. The report describes the self-assessment process and findings. Lessons learned and recommendations for further refining this process follow in the final section of this report.

[1] Yohalem, N., Wilson-Ahlstrom, A., & Yu, D. (2005). *Youth Program Quality Assessment and Improvement: Celebrating Progress and Surfacing Challenges. A Meeting Report.* Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment, Impact Strategies, Inc.

The *Program Quality Self-Assessment for Continuous Improvement Planning (QSAP)*

RMC Research, drawing on the previous work and research of multiple organizations[2], developed the *Program Quality Self-Assessment for Continuous Improvement Planning* (QSAP) for use with the DCPS 21st CCLC local grantees. The tool is comprised of seven sections divided into quality measures for a total of 75 measures, as such:

I. Effective Programming – 19 quality measures;
II. Measuring Outcomes and Evaluation – 9 quality measures;
III. Staffing and Professional Development – 9 quality measures;
IV. Appropriate Environments – 11 quality measures;
V. Linkages between School and After-school – 7 quality measures;
VI. Strong Partnerships and Sustainability – 10 quality measures;
VII. Program Management and Governance – 10 quality measures.

Program staff was asked to assess their perception of progress toward each of the quality measures on a four point rating – Beginning, Developing, Met and Don't Know. Sections I through V were to be answered by all regular staff members, while Sections VI and VII were presented to administrative staff.

An early draft was piloted with the program staff at a 21st CCLC site. Feedback about their experience in completing the tool was used to refine both the instructions for completing the self-assessment and the actual elements of the tool. A final version (Appendix A) was completed in October 2005 and Cohort 1-3 grantees were informed in an October 24, 2005 e-mail from D.C.'s OFGPs about the process for completing the self-assessment and pending site visits.

Over the course of the ensuring three months, November – January, RMC Research collected completed self-assessment tools from 19 Cohort 1-3 program sites and conducted 16 site visits. As some grantees had multiple program sites, not all sites were identified for a site visit. Table 1 below indicates the sites within each cohort that received a visit.

Table 1: Site Visit Locations and Cohorts

Cohort	Sites Visited
1	Bell Multicultural HS, PR Harris Educational Center, KidSafe Centers – Stanton ES, Thurgood Marshall Academy PCS, Browne JHS
2	Beacon House, Ideals PCS, National Center J.C. Nalle ES, Options PCS, Roots OCS, SeeForever Maya Angelou PCS –Shaw
3	Bell Multicultural HS, Fletcher Johnson Ed Center, PR Harris Ed Center, Friendship Edison PCS – Sousa MS, KidSafe – Tyler ES, SeeForever Maya Angelou PCS – Evans, Thurgood Marshall Academy PCS

[2] Adapted from New York Sate Afterschool Network *Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool (1/6/05);* Achieve Boston's Self-Assessment Questionnaire; and The After-School Corporation, *Building a Quality After-School Program, (downloaded 7/29/05).*

Grantees were instructed to distribute the assessment to all regular instructional and managerial program staff who were to individually complete it. The completed assessments were sent to RMC Research. For each program, staff responses were aggregated into a single report that was used to identify areas of needs and points for conversation during the ensuing site visit with the grantee. The sites then received a follow-up site visit report documenting the conversation, findings and recommendations. The current report aggregates findings from all self assessments and site visits.

Program sites rated the experience of the self-assessment process and follow-up site visit as positive and useful for evaluating their programs and planning program improvement. This resonates with research findings from other quality assessment processes (Yohalem, 2005, p. 6[3]) and further delineates specific outcomes also voiced by DCPS 21st CCLC participants, including:

- Satisfaction with the instrument and willingness to use it for improvement;
- Local improvisation with the self assessment process that brings variations such as who and how many staff to include, understanding and interpretation of the quality measures, or staff knowledge of program operations;
- Generating good conversations among program staff (occurred prior to site visit or as a recommendation from the site visit); and
- Planning and acting based on self-assessment findings.

It is also important to understand the limitations of a self-assessment process particularly in terms of reliability. Self-ratings tend to be higher than ratings provided by an external observer and vary considerably across programs and within a same program. Indeed, perspectives about quality vary dramatically at the point of service (local site). In this study, average variation of responses from staff within a same site was greater than across sites. Therefore, for evaluation and accountability purposes, findings from self-assessment tools should be complemented with site visits, and analysis of outcome data as reported on the APR and achievement of state performance indicators. With these caveats in mind, the next section presents a summary discussion of findings from the D.C. 21st Century CCLC' *Self-Assessment for Continuous Improvement Planning (SACIP)* related to school year 2005-2006.

PROGRAM QUALITY SELF-ASSESSMENT: FINDINGS

A total of 157 staff members from 19 sites completed the self-assessment tool. Table 2 lists the average number of responses per section and the percentage of respondents that rated the sections as "met." In some sites all staff members addressed all seven sections, while in others, only administrators provided ratings to sections VI and VII, explaining the difference in number of responses for those two sections.

[3] Yohalem, N., Wilson-Ahlstrom, A., & Yu, D. (2005). *Youth Program Quality Assessment and Improvement: Celebrating Progress and Surfacing Challenges. A Meeting Report.* Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment, Impact Strategies, Inc.

Table 2. Number of answers and percentage of "met" ratings on the sections of the Self-Assessment for Continuous Improvement Planning (SACIP)

Sections	Answer per section (Average)	"Met" ratings
I. Effective programming	149	61%
II. Measuring outcomes and evaluation	152	45%
III. Staffing and professional development	153	70%
IV. Appropriate environments	152	72%
V. Linkages between school day and after school	152	57%
VI. Strong partnerships and sustainability	85	54%
VII. Program management and governance	84	61%

As seen in the Table, 70% or more of respondents felt that their programs had met quality measures for two sections: Appropriate Environments (72%), and Staffing and Professional Development (70%). Between 50% and 61% of respondents felt that quality measures had been met in five sections: Effective Programming (61%); Program Management and Governance (61%), Linkages between School Day and After school (57%), and Strong Partnerships and Sustainability (54%). Measuring Outcomes and Evaluation was the section with the lowest percentage of "met" ratings (45%). Within each component, specific quality measures highlighted areas of strong practice and those needing improvement. A discussion of each section follows.

Section I. Effective Programming

Table 3 details how staff members rated quality measures related to effective programming. The quality measures are displayed in descending order of "met" rating. As seen in the Table, 60% or more of the respondents considered that their programs had met most of the quality measures that define effective programming, particularly those related to supporting student learning and addressing diversified needs of participants (measures a through k). However, opinions were divided on whether participants' achievement was being assessed or used for planning (measures m and n). Support for families and involvement of youth in planning and tutoring received the lowest "met" ratings.

Table 3. Self-assessment ratings regarding measures of effective programming (quality measures are organized in descending order of "met" rating)

Effective Programming – Section I	Performance Level				Responses (N)
	Beginning	Developing	Met	Don't Know	
a. Has an established time, place and supplies for homework completion	2%	7%	89%	2%	152
b. Activities are commensurate with age and skill level of participants	2%	20%	74%	4%	153
c. Has alternative activities for students who don't have homework	5%	15%	71%	9%	152
d. Activities reflect and support program's desired outcomes	4%	21%	71%	4%	149
e. Integrates opportunities for developing personal responsibility, leadership, and team work skills throughout the program.	9%	18%	69%	4%	151
f. Addresses academic, physical, social and emotional needs of the participants (a well rounded program)	5%	25%	68%	2%	151
g. Academic support is intentional and embedded into program activities	5%	27%	67%	1%	150
h. Use homework as a window into school day subject matter	4%	15%	65%	15%	149
i. Provides opportunities for participant work and achievements to be showcased	8%	19%	65%	8%	148
j. Offers project-based, experiential activities that are challenging and promote creativity and development of participant self expression	8%	29%	63%	0%	139
k. Language arts and math support utilize curriculum that is research-based	10%	15%	61%	14%	150
l. Program activities are aligned with state learning standards	8%	18%	60%	14%	147
m. Student learning needs and accomplishments are regularly assessed and documented	9%	25%	58%	9%	151
n. Have a method from tracking student learning and developmental skill needs	12%	25%	50%	14%	151
o. Families of students are encourage to be contributors to the program	10%	32%	48%	11%	149
p. Lesson plans are developed and shared with program and school-day staff	18%	22%	47%	12%	147
q. Older children help younger children with homework completion	12%	19%	47%	22%	153
r. Families of students are provided with enriching literacy and other educational opportunities	15%	32%	39%	14%	146
s. Participants (youth) are involved in program planning	17%	28%	39%	17%	151
Section I	9%	22%	61%	9%	149

Site visits confirmed that the majority of sites offered programming that provided academic support, were well rounded with varied and appropriate enrichment opportunities. Equally true was that all programs provided homework help, highlighted (when possible) participant achievements and were working toward both federal and SEA program requirements along with stated program objectives. Youth development indicators such as opportunities for developing leadership, team work and personal responsibility, involving youth in program planning or having older children helping with homework were not evidenced in practice. Two of those activities received low percentages of "met" ratings (measures q and s), opportunities for developing leadership (measure e) was rated as "met" by almost 70% of respondents, yet not evident in practice. Technical assistance in youth development strategies and service learning might support increased program performance in this area.

Although respondents were divided regarding their programs' abilities to track student learning, site visits highlighted the work of some programs on this area. For instance, Roots PCS utilizes a color coded student roster to indicate student progress toward meeting learning objectives and a daily planner with noted homework assignments that is shared with afterschool tutors to assist with program planning and tutoring. SeeForever programs use student folders (portfolios) to keep volunteer tutors informed of student progress and individual learning needs. These best practices can easily be adopted by other programs as efficient methods to assess and document individual student needs.

Two areas in which all programs could benefit from technical assistance are family engagement, and knowledge of state standards and research-based practices for reading and math support. Site visits reinforced the findings from the self-assessment ratings. A few programs publish a calendar of activities for parents, and fewer provide parent centered programming that might assist in engaging parent interest and support. Exceptions exist, though. For instance, the four ACES program sites and Roots PCS held monthly family centered programs and encouraged parents to serve as aides assisting with snacks, playground supervision and reading buddies for elementary aged students.

Section II. Measuring outcomes and evaluation

As Table 4 suggests, staff either do not know whether their programs have developed strategies for measuring outcomes and evaluate results, or they consider that programs are still developing these strategies. The site visits showed that all sites collect daily attendance, grades and to the extent it is available, state test results. For most, it is a data collection exercise, and only few sites carefully monitor the information to inform student needs and program impact. Yet, only 54% of respondents agreed that their program had a system to collect information on attendance and participation. About half of the 16 programs visited indicated they were seeking or had acquired the services of an outside evaluator. All programs indicated that technical assistance in evaluation practices and information on state expectations for program evaluation would be useful.

The most common finding for this section is that even if programs do carry out evaluative activities, they do not systematically share the findings with program staff to inform program operations or improvement. This resulted in high numbers of assessment

respondents indicating they were not familiar with the practices associated with the quality measures contained in Section II. During site visits, many program staff indicated they were not familiar with the state program performance indicators.

Table 4. Self-assessment ratings regarding measuring outcomes and evaluation (quality measures are organized in descending order of "met" rating)

Measuring Outcomes and Evaluation – Section II	Performance Level				Responses (N)
	Beginning	Developing	Met	Don't Know	
a. A system is in place to daily collect participant and program data	8%	23%	54%	16%	154
b. Uses evaluation findings for continuous program improvement	8%	23%	53%	15%	142
c. The program, at regular intervals, evaluates its progress towards meeting proposed goals, objectives and outcomes	12%	22%	51%	15%	154
d. Monitors if program is addressing identified student and family learning needs	14%	20%	46%	19%	154
e. Has aligned program plan with partner school(s) improvement plan(s)	7%	18%	44%	31%	150
f. The program regularly collects data and monitors performance in relation to state performance measures	7%	21%	43%	29%	154
g. Findings from data collection, evaluation reports and progress reports are communicated to staff, partners, school and families in a reader friendly format (summaries)	12%	21%	43%	24%	157
h. A local evaluation process has been established that includes gathering both quantitative and qualitative data	13%	22%	40%	25%	152
i. Includes feedback from stakeholders in the program evaluation	12%	23%	34%	31%	148
Section II	10%	21%	45%	23%	152

DCPS has already introduced changes to facilitate program accountability. For instance, the recently proposed year-end report requesting that programs rate their progress towards meeting the state indicators will help inform and promote this practice. Requiring quarterly reports from grantees may also help with focusing attention on program outputs and results. However, these reports may only be known to program directors. The state should encourage programs to share reports with school administrators and program staff to keep them aware of program progress, strengths and needed improvements. Providing periodic updates to all programs on DCPS policies and practices related to standards, annual state assessments and effective utilization of data for decision making will also benefit grantees.

Section III. Staffing and Professional Development

Table 5 details ratings for quality measures regarding staffing and professional development. Across all programs staff receives the appropriate background checks, have competence on core academic areas when pertinent, and are trained to work in close collaboration with regular school day staff and community partners. This is due in large part to the fact that the majority of afterschool staff are regular school day teachers who provide the academic support and enrichment to participants. According to the self-assessment ratings, many programs encourage staff to draw on interests and provide creative, alternative programming.

Table 5. Self-assessment ratings regarding measures of staffing and professional development (components organized by descending order of "met" rating)

Staffing and Professional Development – Section III	Performance Level				Responses (N)
	Beginning	Developing	Met	Don't Know	
a. Staff are carefully screened with appropriate background checks	1%	7%	84%	9%	151
b. Ensures staff have competence in core academic areas (when appropriate)	3%	11%	79%	6%	154
c. Encourages staff to draw on their interests, talents and skills to offer creative enrichment programming	7%	11%	78%	4%	152
d. Program staff are trained to work in close collaboration with the regular school day staff and community partners	5%	14%	71%	10%	152
e. Have regular staff meetings to review program delivery, student needs and future plans	8%	23%	67%	2%	151
f. Trains staff to plan suitable activities that correspond to the academic and developmental needs of participants	5%	26%	62%	7%	153
g. School staff and program staff attend professional development together	6%	17%	61%	16%	153
h. Maintains and monitors student/staff ratio appropriate to the activity (academic, recreational, enrichment)	2%	13%	60%	5%	153
i. Volunteers are actively recruited, trained and supported	7%	23%	52%	19%	156
Section III	5%	16%	70%	9%	153

Through the self-assessment tool and interviews, during site visits programs indicated a need for improvement on having regular staff meetings, providing training to plan suitable strategies, and the recruitment and training of volunteers. More than 20% of the respondents rated these components as in development. Likewise, close to 20% of respondents rated "School staff and program staff attending professional development together" as in development and 16% checked "don't know" for this measure.

The 21st CCLC programs operating at Ideal, Maya Angelou sites and Thurgood Marshall offer best practice examples of creative enrichment programming provided by both staff and community volunteers. The Maya Angelou program had a city-wide volunteer recruitment campaign while Thurgood Marshall and Center for Children and Families taps its community and business partners to provide enrichment, tutoring and career to work opportunities for participants. Beacon House actively utilizes the services of college and high school volunteers and Ameri-corps and City-corps placements. To ensure strong staff capabilities, The National Center requires that applicants to work in the program present a lesson as part of their interview. Also, to the extent possible, inviting parents to provide enrichment classes or programs present another mechanism for encouraging more parent participation.

The most frequent recommendation from site visits was that programs schedule regular staff meetings to review program delivery, student needs and make future plans. Some programs held no meetings, others use an ad-hoc schedule as needs arose and at some sites, meetings were held but not at convenient times so regular attendance was difficult. In contrast, Beacon House staff meets every Tuesday and Roots PCS meets every other Friday to discuss programming.

Site visits revealed that programs provide staff training and opportunities for program staff to attend professional development meetings that address a variety of topics, including planning and delivering activities that meet student needs. However, know how acquired in those meetings is not being systematically transmitted back to program staff and volunteers. Programs could derive multiple benefits from more regular staff meetings where they can share information obtained from both in-program knowledge and professional development offerings. Beacon House may provide a best practice example in that the program trains all staff in their academic support programs and volunteers on strategies for homework help.

Section IV. Appropriate Environments

The majority (80% or more) of the respondents considered met quality measures related to health, safety and nutrition. Corresponding to the self-assessments, the critical measures of safe and clean program spaces that are adequately equipped, and track participant whereabouts throughout program hours and have sign in and out procedures for students were observed at all site visits. In addition, 60% or more of respondents agreed that programs provide healthy and nutritious snacks for their students, have approved emergency readiness plans that are shared with families, provide safe and reliable transportation for activities outside the center, and are informed of the health needs of participants. In summary, programs are providing students with appropriate environments that are safe and conducive to learning.

Two items are of concern. First, although 58% of respondents said that programs were accessible to students with disabilities, site visits found that accessibility is an issue in most sites, particularly due to aging school buildings that do not meet ADA requirements. This finding was consistent across all programs and cohorts. Second, 34% of respondents perceived their programs as not having met the requirement that staff receives CPR and First

Aid training and another 34% were not able to rate this measure. Staff needs to be aware of those colleagues who can be of help during an emergency, until all staff can be adequately trained. Table 6 details responses for the components of Section IV.

Table 6. Self-assessment ratings regarding measures of program health, safety and nutrition (components organized by descending order of "met" rating)

Appropriate Environments (*Health, Safety and Nutrition*) Section IV	**Performance Level**				**Responses (N)**
	Beginning	**Developing**	**Met**	**Don't know**	
a. Program space is safe from hazards and clean	1%	6%	90%	4%	154
b. Emergency contact information (EMT, families, staff, students) in a central location	1%	4%	86%	9%	152
c. Documents where participants are during program hours	0%	7%	85%	8%	154
d. Appropriately equipped and suitable for activities being conducted	3%	10%	84%	3%	155
e. Manages effective arrival and dismissal procedures and plans for safe travel home	4%	9%	81%	6%	155
f. Provides healthy and nutritious snacks and meals	4%	14%	74%	8%	154
g. Approved emergency readiness plan and procedure established and shared with staff and families	5%	14%	70%	12%	151
h. Safe and reliable transportation is provided for program activities away from the center	1%	10%	67%	22%	148
i. Staff are informed about special health needs of participants	4%	14%	65%	17%	153
j. All program areas are accessible to students with disabilities	7%	9%	58%	27%	149
k. Staff have received First Aid and CPR training	16%	18%	31%	34%	147
Section IV	4%	10%	72%	14%	152

Discussions with program staff indicated that improvement strategies would focus on establishing and training all staff on emergency procedures, identifying and or training staff and possibly older student participants in CPR and First Aid. In addition, for the few programs that showed concerns about healthy snacks, information on the USDA snack program was provided.

Section V. Linkages between School Day and After School

Table 7 details responses to the quality measures related to linkages between school day and after school sites. Although many teachers who work in the after school sites are also part of the faculty during the regular school hours, coordination is an area where site staff expressed a need for further development. Overall, 20% of respondents were not aware of how the program addressed the quality measures for Section V. About 40% of respondents did not know whether program staff participated in IEP or 504 plan reviews, and 34% did

not know if parental consent to access student record was kept on file. While 62% stated having regular communications with school day staff centered on student progress, 53% saw their programs as providing opportunities for joint progress reports and problem solving between regular school day and after school staff.

Table 7. Self-assessment ratings regarding coordination between regular school day and after school (components organized by descending order of "met" rating)

Linkages Between School Day and After School Section V	Performance Level				Responses (N)
	Beginning	Developing	Met	Don't know	
a. Daily school attendance records are checked	5%	18%	66%	11%	154
b. Program Director and school principal frequently discuss program and school coordination	3%	13%	64%	21%	150
c. Coordinates program activities with school day curriculum and events	8%	18%	63%	10%	153
d. Regularly communicates with school day staff to monitor academic and behavioral progress of students	9%	22%	62%	7%	154
e. If required, a signed parental release is on file to access student achievement records	3%	7%	56%	34%	149
f. Day time teachers are involved in progress reporting and joint problem solving with student performance issues and program improvement	8%	22%	53%	17%	153
g. Program staff participate on IEP and 504 plan reviews for students with disabilities (or at a minimum have access to these records and plan activities accordingly)	5%	15%	37%	43%	149
Section V	6%	16%	57%	20%	152

During site visits, all programs were found to have strategies in place to collect program attendance. Some were more efficient and accurate than others. At Tyler ES (KidSafe) students (even the youngest) signed themselves in on a pre-printed sheet. "It provides a signal to the student that they have entered the program." Many programs take attendance at the beginning of the program during snack or homework hour; others wait and collect attendance during the "club" or enrichment activities capturing students who have remained throughout the program.

Several program directors met weekly with school administrators either formally or informally to review afterschool program activities and plans. For example at Tyler ES (KidSafe) the principal communicated monthly reading goals to the program director who incorporate them into activities. At Options PCS and The National Center and both SeeForever sites, the program directors either participate in weekly administrative meetings or meet weekly with the school principal. Other sites, however, need further efforts to establish collaborative working relationships with school administrators.

Programs could benefit with exploring more consistent communication and planning strategies. Already noted that afterschool program staff could benefit from frequent staff meetings and shared communication about program activities. Examples drawn from a few best practices could benefit others such as Beacon House that meets every Tuesday with program staff to review curriculum, intervention strategies and activity plans. Program directors and coordinators need to establish mechanisms for sharing knowledge about school day events and curriculum themes with all afterschool staff so aligned activities can be planned. This is also an area where OFGPs might consider providing programs with support through technical assistance. Each program needs to review their policies and procedures for access to student records and ensure that staff are adequately informed on a need to know basis.

Section VI. Strong Partnerships and Sustainability

Establishing strong community partnerships and engaging in sustainability planning are twin areas in which all programs could improve. Table 8 displays responses for quality measures under this section. Sixty percent or more of respondents considered that programs had met the following measures: program purpose is clearly articulated by all partners; the program has defined methods of communication between schools and community; and openly encourages new partners and orient them. However, the fact that many of the respondents did not have a role on establishing and maintaining community partnerships may explain the high percentage of "don't know" responses (10% or more for all but one measure), which skewed results.

Two programs, however, stand out in their community outreach and sustainability endeavors. Thurgood Marshall and SeeForever (Maya Angelou PCS) programs are potential best practice models for community partnership development and leveraging alternative resources. Bell Multicultural, KidSafe Centers, Beacon House and National Center for Children and Families are programs that benefit from having an independent board that provides oversight and fundraising for their afterschool activities. However, these programs would benefit from technical assistance on managing federal grant funds from the OFGP as many of these parent programs seek and depend on private sector resources and may not be familiar with federal management requirements.

Many programs indicated their students engage in community service activities, but on a limited scope. Options PCS offers an intriguing strategy; students have been working on painting murals both inside and outside the school building as a community beautification project and to deter gang tagging. Other programs have held food collection drives over the holidays and a few programs had service clubs that worked on "good deed" activities in and around the program site. Programs could possibly benefit from technical assistance and resources on ideas and strategies for planning and providing community service and community-based learning opportunities.

Table 8. Self-assessment ratings regarding strong partnerships and sustainability (components organized by descending order of "met" rating)

Strong Partnerships and Sustainability Section VI	Performance Level				Responses (N)
	Beginning	Developing	Met	Don't know	
a. Program purpose is clearly articulated by all partners	6%	19%	66%	9%	85
b. Has well defined methods of communication between school and community organizations	6%	20%	63%	11%	87
c. The program openly encourages new partners and has a system for orienting them to program purpose, goals and procedures	6%	16%	57%	21%	87
d. Students engage in community service activities that enhances program visibility	9%	22%	53%	15%	86
e. Families, schools and community partners provide input into program	8%	21%	52%	20%	87
f. All partners feel accountable to program outcomes and performance measures	8%	16%	52%	23%	86
g. Additional funding sources (federal, state, local) are tapped to **supplement** program activities	4%	12%	52%	32%	82
h. Anecdotal "good news" stories are collected and shared	5%	19%	52%	24%	79
i. Written agreements and/or contracts in place and reviewed periodically for performance	7%	19%	49%	25%	84
j. Evaluation findings disseminated and discussed with partners	8%	15%	43%	33%	84
Section VI	7%	18%	54%	21%	85

Section VII. Program Management and Governance

According to the self-assessment tool, programs have mostly met their needs to establish clear structures for management and governance, except regarding advisory committee. As displayed in Table 9, about 80% of respondents indicated that a clear structure for staff was in place, and that supplies were accessible and organized (quality measures a and b). Sixty to 75% of respondents also agreed that the programs had clear administrative procedures, and processes to communicate expectations to participant and families (quality measures c through g). Close to 50% were unaware if the program had a Memorandum of Understanding with partners or an Advisory Committee.

Some programs struggle to meet attendance targets and several programs offer incentives for student participation. Therefore, two measures that can strengthen local programs are developing clear procedures for recruitment and retention to ensure that the target audience is being served, along with establishing clear attendance expectations with incentives for participation. While a strong, creative, engaging program is the best attendance magnet,

most programs could benefit from working more closely with the principal and teachers to establish a student referral system for those needing additional academic and behavior support. Bell Multicultural places phone calls to inform parents their student has not been attending the afterschool program and elicit their support to encourage continued attendance. Randle Highland's coordinator actively recruits parent, teacher and student participation by knowing each individual by name and making them feel welcome along with directly requesting their involvement in short or long-term endeavors (parent helping out during snack time or a teacher working with the cheerleaders).

Table 9. Self-assessment ratings regarding strong partnerships and sustainability (components organized by descending order of "met" rating)

Program Management and Governance **Section VII**	**Performance Level**				**Responses (N)**
	Beginning	**Developing**	**Met**	**Don't know**	
a. Has a clear salary structure for staff	4%	7%	81%	8%	84
b. Ensures that supplies are organized, maintained and accessible	5%	14%	78%	3%	86
c. Clear attendance and participation expectations communicated to families, school, partners and participants	3%	17%	75%	5%	87
d. Has established procedures for recruitment, registration and retention of participants that ensures target audience is being reached and served	5%	16%	69%	9%	85
e. Records and track expenses and expenditures match program components	2%	10%	62%	26%	82
f. Creates and uses an employee/volunteer handbook that outlines program expectations, policies, and procedures	7%	18%	60%	15%	85
g. Completes all required reports and submits them in timely manner	1%	17%	60%	21%	81
h. Publishes and disseminates a calendar of activities to families, participants and partners	7%	18%	55%	19%	83
i. Clear memorandum of understanding (MOU) with partners and contracts with providers are in place, monitored for compliance and services documented	6%	9%	42%	43%	81
j. An Advisory Committee of stakeholders is established and meets at regular intervals to review program progress against proposal and performance measures	14%	11%	28%	47%	81
Section VII	5%	14%	61%	20%	84

Many programs publish a monthly activities calendar also accompanied by an afterschool program newsletter highlighting program events and student accomplishments. Both Options and Ideal programs provide fine examples of program newsletters. At many sites, the suggestion was made to provide opportunities for students to get engaged in producing articles for the newsletter, or producing the entire documents as an enrichment activity.

Finally, many programs may not need an employee/volunteer handbook as afterschool staff also works at the site during the day and are familiar with the work environment and program expectations. But, the process of codifying that information clarifies policies and procedures for all who work with the afterschool program and left no room for uncertainty should an incident occur. The Evans Campus of the SeeForever program and Ideal PCS both have a published employee and volunteer handbooks that might serve as a helpful examples for programs wanting to craft their own.

Overall Program Ratings

With the information acquired from the quality assessment process and obtained during site visit observations and conversations, a 3 scale rating was devised to describe overall program performance. Again the caveat that programs self-rated on the quality assessment and site observations only represent a snapshot of one day in the program and viewed through possible observer bias. Table 10 below indicates by cohort each program's overall rating.

Table 10: Overall Program Rating by Cohort

Cohort	Program Name	Site Location	Program Rating
1/3	Bell Multicultural	Bell Multicultural HS	2+
	Thurgood Marshall PCS	Summer Prep and Afterschool Enhancement	3
1	D.C. Public Schools A.C.E.S.	PR Harris Ed Center Elementary	2
		Randle Highland ES	3
		Browne JHS	2+
	KidSafe Centers	Stanton ES	1+
2	Beacon House	Beacon Community Ctr	2
	Ideal Academy PCS	Ideal Academy	3
	National Center for Children and Families	J.C. Nalle Community School	3
	Options PCS	Options PCS	2
	Roots PCS	Roots PCS	2
	SeeForever	Maya Angelou PCS – Shaw Campus	2+
3	D.C. Public Schools A.C.E.S.	Fletcher Johnson Ed Center	2
		P.R. Harris Ed Ctr. Secondary	1+
	Friendship Edison PCS	John Philip Sousa MS	1
	KidSafe Centers	Tyler ES	2
	SeeForever	Maya Angelou PCS – Evans Campus	2+

Key: 1= Needs immediate attention and support
2=Performing adequately with areas of strength and areas needing improvement
3=Exemplary program, best practice site

Four cohort 1 and 2 programs, who have been operating the longest, achieved a rating of 3 or exemplary program site. Ten programs from all three cohorts received a rating of 2 indicating that they exhibited strong quality measures on most indicators, but have some areas on which they could focus improvement efforts. Three programs emerged as needing immediate intervention if they were to survive and thrive as quality programs. Each program faced not insurmountable challenges, but could benefit from administrator support and buy-in and mentoring and training of inexperienced site coordinators. Also support in creating and scheduling of program offerings that would encourage student participation and enhance student enrichment learning opportunities.

Reflecting on all the programs, the following qualities that contributed to making them effective included:

- Strong principal support of the program and formal, preferably weekly, meetings to discuss program coordination, issues and activities.
- Programs that were considered to be part of the total school's daily offering that was intended to support student learning and not viewed as a separate non-school activity.
- Programs that offered a rich variety of enrichment activities provided by both teachers and community volunteers that considered student interest, developmental needs and academic learning challenges.
- Channels of communication between program staff, day teachers and off campus volunteers, tutors and enrichment providers were well established and frequently maintained.
- Regular staff meetings were held providing opportunities to brief and train staff and review current practice and plan ahead.
- Programs that had established Boards or representative and diverse oversight committees that periodically reviewed program practices and accomplishments often had wider community outreach and support with more varied and creative enrichment offerings.

These factors align with research on high-performing after-school programs conducted by Policy Studies Associates. They documented in their report (Birmingham, et al, 2005[4]) that across 10 programs, they found shared characteristics around programming, staffing and support systems similar to those cited above. They found these programs:

- Balanced supporting youth academically with a commitment to engaging youth in high-quality enrichment activities.
- Exposed participants, through arts and academic enrichment, to new experiences and gave them a sense of confidence to do things they had never tried.
- Supported homework through small groups managed by college students, with the assistance of teaching specialists or experience after-school leaders.
- Maintained close working relationships with host schools.

[4] Birmingham, J. Pechman, E. M., Russell, C. A., Mielke, M. (November 2005). *Shared Features of High-Performing After-School Programs: A Follow-Up to the TASC Evaluation.* Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates, Inc. Prepared for: The After-School Corporation and Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. With Support from: U.S. Department of Education

- Clearly established participant norms and expectations at the beginning of the program year.
- Included families in the life of the program in various ways.
- Had coordinators with a vision of what they were trying to accomplish, and moving toward achieving this vision through goal setting and hiring of staff.
- Offered ongoing professional development in periodic full-staff meetings that took place after the program afternoon was over, and in day-long in-service sessions that focused on using curricula.
- Strengthened professionalism through mentoring, guidance by managers, lesson planning and open dialogues among staff.
- Attracted visiting artists and recreation specialists with expertise in arts and sports to vary and strengthen the quality of project offerings.
- Relied on good communication and collegiality among staff to maintain the quality of their projects.

In summary, the majority of DCPS 21st Century programs are providing quality programming resulting in effectively supporting student growth and achievement. All programs indicated the Quality Self-Assessment tool provided them with insights into their program operations fostering plans for program improvement. DCPS can support these programs in their improvement efforts by continuing to provide technical assistance in areas of strongest need. These areas are summarized below.

Technical assistance in youth development strategies and service learning might support increased program performance in this area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

DCPS's OFGP has a track record of providing technical assistance meetings for program grantees both prior to proposal submission and during program operations. The quality assessment findings will assist the OFGP staff in determining topics on which to plan and provide technical assistance during the coming year. These topics are listed below not in any order.

- Family engagement and programming for family activities that will assist families in supporting their child's learning.
- Periodic updates to all programs on DCPS policies and practices related to standards, annual state assessments and effective utilization of data for decision making.
- Research-based practices for reading and math support.
- Program evaluation practices and information on state expectations for program evaluation.
- Management policies and practices for federal grant funds.
- Access and storage of student records that maintain privacy yet facilitate reporting requirements.

- Resources and strategies for planning and providing community service and community-based learning opportunities.

Additionally, programs found that communication among program staff and between school administrators, school day staff, partners and parents is an area for improvement. Programs also expressed a need for ways to share expertise and knowledge among programs so as to not "reinvent the wheel" but build on effective practices already in use at other sites. OFGPs could possibly support these program needs by on a more regular basis, bringing programs together for networking and sharing of best practices. For example,

- Maryland holds quarterly half day grantee network meetings. The state shares program information, provides training, and selects one to two programs to share a best practice.
- Virginia has established a 21st CCLC website page with sections for a) state program announcements, information, reminders, b) programs questions and answers, c) best practice examples, ideas, tips.

As a result of this first year utilization of the Quality Self Assessment, it can be said that the instrument seems effective for supporting program improvement and assessing program quality. Yet, it can be improved to increase its quality and rigor and be integrated as a component of DCPS's 21st CCLC program state evaluation. We propose the following:

- Revise the current tool to address findings from this year's administration.
- Examine relationship between self assessment results and APR to establish predictive validity of the quality assessment.
- Refine the current evaluation design to integrate the self assessment as a data collecting tool in compliment with data collected by the evaluators, APR and DCPS assessment data.

APPENDIX A: PROGRAM QUALITY SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PLANNING (QSAP)

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Office of Federal Grants Programs

December 2005

Dear 21st Community Learning Center Grantee:

As you will recall during our September 14th meeting we shared with you a draft of the ***Program Quality Self-Assessment for Continuous Improvement Planning.*** We explained at that meeting this is a tool designed for both the state level program evaluation and your use in measuring your program's progress towards implementing a quality after school program. This is not a monitoring device, rather an evaluative snapshot of your program's status against quality indicators.

What follows are the **instructions** for completing the *Program Quality Self-Assessment*. **Please read them carefully**. If you have questions, please contact Wendy Russell at RMC Research Corporation (703-558-4806, russellw@rmcarl.com).

Instructions:

1. All regular **instructional and managerial staff** should individually complete the assessment. Instructional staff, aides, and active community partners, please complete Sections I-V, on pages 1-6. Program Directors, Site Coordinators, managers, please complete ALL sections (I-VII), pages 1-8.

2. Distribute copies and request they be completed and returned to the program director/Site Coordinator. Make copies for the program site if you wish. An aggregated report will be provided for each site.

3. Be **honest and thoughtful** about your program's performance when considering each program element. This is not a "gotcha" exercise, but rather a process designed to help you and the state think about how your program can be strengthened to provide quality services to your students and families.

4. Under **Performance Level**, consider the following when assessing your program's performance level on a given element:

a) **Beginning -** does not currently exist or is in the very early stages of development.
b) **Developing –** have been working on this and believe some progress is being made, but also think there is room for improvement.
c) Met – are fairly confident this element is practiced consistently and contributes to program success.
d) NR (No Response) – if you honestly do not know about this item, check this box. But, please don't use because you don't want to make a decision about an item about which you are unsure. Try to respond to all the items.

In the **Plan to Improve** section, indicate your perception of the urgency to address this element to improve program quality. Programs have different developmental needs at different points in time and not all improvement needs can be addressed simultaneously. Some elements will be more critical than others to improve (e.g. safety versus youth involved in program planning). If **Met** has been checked under **Performance Level**, check **Cont.** implying we will continue to implement. If you checked "No Response" leave this blank.

5. Each **Content Category** section concludes with room to note ideas or suggestions you may have about the program. Please record your thoughts in the following manner:
   - **Action Plan** - steps the program could take to improve; and
   - **Technical Assistance Needed** - questions or assistance needed to move planning forward.

Please return completed *Assessments* to Wendy Russell at the address below or according to previous arrangements for pick-up:

RMC Research Corporation
1501 Wilson Blvd. Suite 1250
Arlington, VA 22209

District of Columbia – 21st Century Community Learning Centers
Program Quality Self Assessment for Continuous Improvement Planning

Cohort # _____ **Program Name:** _____ **Site Location:** _____

THANK YOU for your thoughtful response!

Content Categories

Effective Programming – Section I	**Performance Level**				**Plan to Improve**			
	Beginning	**Developing**	**Met**	**NR**	**Right Now**	**This Year**	**Next Year**	**Cont.**
* Academic support is intentional and embedded into program activities								
* Families of students are provided with enriching literacy and other educational opportunities								
* Families of students are encourage to be contributors to the program								
* Student learning needs and accomplishments are regularly assessed and documented								
* Participants (youth) are involved in program planning								
* Offers project-based, experiential activities that are challenging and promote creativity and development of participant self expression								
* Addresses academic, physical, social and emotional needs of the participants (a well rounded program)								
* Lesson plans are developed and shared with program and school-day staff								
* Program activities are aligned with state learning standards								
* Language arts and math support utilize curriculum that is research-based								
* Activities are commensurate with age and skill level of participants								

Adapted from New York Sate Afterschool Network *Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool (1/6/05);* Achieve Boston's Self-Assessment Questionnaire; and The After-School Corporation, *Building a Quality After-School Program, (downloaded 7/29/05).*

Effective Programming (cont'd)	Performance Level				Plan to Improve			
	Beginning	Developing	Met	NR	Right Now	This Year	Next Year	Cont.
* Homework help								
o Has an established time, place and supplies for homework completion								
o Has alternative activities for students who don't have homework								
o Older children help younger children with homework completion								
o Use homework as a window into school day subject matter								
o Have a method from tracking student learning and developmental skill needs								
* Provides opportunities for participant work and achievements to be showcased								
* Activities reflect and support the program's desired outcomes								
* Integrates opportunities for developing personal responsibility, leadership, and team work skills throughout the program.								

Action Plan	Technical Assistance Needed

Adapted from New York Sate Afterschool Network *Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool (1/6/05);* Achieve Boston's Self-Assessment Questionnaire; and The After-School Corporation, *Building a Quality After-School Program, (downloaded 7/29/05).*

Measuring Outcomes and Evaluation – Section II	Performance Level				Plan to Improve			
	Beginning	Developing	Met	NR	Right Now	This Year	Next Year	Cont.
* The program, at regular intervals, evaluates its progress towards meeting proposed goals, objectives and outcomes								
* A local evaluation process has been established that includes gathering both quantitative and qualitative data								
* Includes feedback from stakeholders in the program evaluation								
* The program regularly collects data and monitors performance in relation to state performance measures								
* A system is in place to daily collect participant and program data								
* Findings from data collection, evaluation reports and progress reports are communicated to staff, partners, school and families in a reader friendly format (summaries)								
* Monitors if program is addressing identified student and family learning needs								
* Has aligned program plan with partner school(s) improvement plan(s)								
* Uses evaluation findings for continuous program improvement								

Action Plan	Technical Assistance Needed

Adapted from New York Sate Afterschool Network *Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool (1/6/05);* Achieve Boston's Self-Assessment Questionnaire; and The After-School Corporation, *Building a Quality After-School Program, (downloaded 7/29/05).*

Staffing and Professional Development – Section III	Performance Level				Plan to Improve			
	Beginning	Developing	Met	NR	Right Now	This Year	Next Year	Cont.
* Ensures staff have competence in core academic areas (when appropriate)								
* Have regular staff meetings to review program delivery, student needs and future plans								
* Trains staff to plan suitable activities that correspond to the academic and developmental needs of participants								
* Encourages staff to draw on their interests, talents and skills to offer creative enrichment programming								
* Volunteers are actively recruited, trained and supported								
* Staff are carefully screened with appropriate background checks								
* Program staff are trained to work in close collaboration with the regular school day staff and community partners								
* School staff and program staff attend professional development trainings together								
* Maintains and monitors student/staff ratio appropriate to the activity (academic, recreational, enrichment)								

Action Plan	Technical Assistance Needed

Adapted from New York Sate Afterschool Network *Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool (1/6/05);* Achieve Boston's Self-Assessment Questionnaire; and The After-School Corporation, *Building a Quality After-School Program, (downloaded 7/29/05).*

Appropriate Environments (*Health, Safety and Nutrition)* Section IV	**Performance Level**				**Plan to Improve**			
	Beginning	**Developing**	**Met**	**NR**	**Right Now**	**This Year**	**Next Year**	**Cont.**
* Program space is safe from hazards and is clean								
* Appropriately equipped and suitable for activities being conducted								
* Approved emergency readiness plan and procedure established and shared with staff and families								
* Provides healthy and nutritious snacks (and meals)								
* Manages effective arrival and dismissal procedures and plans for safe travel home								
* Documents where participants are during program hours								
* Emergency contact information (EMT, families, staff, students) in a central location								
* Staff are informed about special health needs of participants								
* Staff have received First Aid and CPR training								
* Safe and reliable transportation is provided for program activities away from the center								
* All program areas are accessible to students with disabilities								

Action Plan	**Technical Assistance Needed**

Adapted from New York Sate Afterschool Network *Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool (1/6/05);* Achieve Boston's Self-Assessment Questionnaire; and The After-School Corporation, *Building a Quality After-School Program, (downloaded 7/29/05).*

Linkages Between School Day and After School – Section V	Performance Level				Plan to Improve			
	Beginning	Developing	Met	NR	Right Now	This Year	Next Year	Cont
* Coordinates program activities with school day curriculum and events								
* Regularly communicates with school day staff to monitor academic and behavioral progress of students								
* Daily school attendance records are checked								
* Day time teachers are involved in progress reporting and joint problem solving with student performance issues and program improvement								
* Program Director and school principal frequently discuss program and school coordination								
* If required, a signed parental release is on file to access student achievement records								
* Program staff participant on IEP and 504 plan reviews for students with disabilities (or at a minimum have access to these records and plan activities accordingly)								

Action Plan	Technical Assistance Needed

Adapted from New York Sate Afterschool Network *Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool (1/6/05);* Achieve Boston's Self-Assessment Questionnaire; and The After-School Corporation, *Building a Quality After-School Program, (downloaded 7/29/05).*

*** **Program Directors, Site Coordinators/Managers Please Continue…**

Strong Partnerships and Sustainability – Section VI	Performance Level				Plan to Improve			
	Beginning	Developing	Met	NR	Right Now	This Year	Next Year	Cont.
* Has well defined methods of communication between school and community organizations								
* Program purpose is clearly articulated by all partners								
* Families, schools and community partners provide input into program								
* The program openly encourages new partners and has a system for orienting them to program purpose, goals and procedures								
* All partners feel accountable to program outcomes and performance measures								
* Students engage in community service activities that enhances program visibility								
* Written agreements and/or contracts in place and reviewed periodically for performance								
* Evaluation findings disseminated and discussed with partners								
* Additional funding sources (federal, state, local) are tapped to **supplement** program activities								
* Anecdotal "good news" stories are collected and shared								

Action Plan	Technical Assistance Needed

Adapted from New York Sate Afterschool Network *Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool (1/6/05);* Achieve Boston's Self-Assessment Questionnaire; and The After-School Corporation, *Building a Quality After-School Program, (downloaded 7/29/05).*

Program Management and Governance – Section VII	Performance Level				Plan to Improve			
	Beginning	Developing	Met	NR	Right Now	This Year	Next Year	Cont.
* Has established procedures for recruitment, registration and retention of participants that ensures target audience is being reached and served								
* Clear attendance and participation expectations communicated to families, school, partners and participants								
* Creates and uses an employee/volunteer handbook that outlines program expectations, policies, and procedures								
* Has a clear salary structure for staff								
* Ensures that supplies are organized, maintained and accessible								
* Publishes and disseminates a calendar of activities to families, participants and partners								
* Completes all required reports and submits them in timely manner								
* Records and track expenses and expenditures match program components								
* Clear memorandum of understanding (MOU) with partners and contracts with providers are in place, monitored for compliance and services documented								
* An Advisory Committee of stakeholders is established and meets at regular intervals to review program progress against proposal and performance measures								

Action Plan	Technical Assistance Needed

Adapted from New York Sate Afterschool Network *Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool (1/6/05);* Achieve Boston's Self-Assessment Questionnaire; and The After-School Corporation, *Building a Quality After-School Program, (downloaded 7/29/05).*