21st CCLC Evaluation Report for Washington, DC

Matt Vinson, Alex Bishop, Rachel Rosenberg, Robert Fales, Stephanie McCarty, Rachel Blume, Katherine Gross, Nicol Christie

AIR: Youth, Family, and Community Development

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Executive Summary

In 2021, DC's Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE) engaged the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) to conduct a district-wide evaluation of their 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) programs. AIR proposed an evaluation focused on questions related to program quality and how quality plays a role in participant experience. Specifically, AIR proposed an evaluation to explore the following research questions (RQs):

- **RQ1.** How are subgrantees associated with fiscal year (FY) 2019 and FY 2021[1] performing with respect to program characteristics of interest to OSSE? How have program characteristics changed over the past 3 years based on available data?
- **RQ2.**[2] What evidence is there that 21st CCLC programs in Washington, DC, are using practices that research suggests are connected to positive youth outcomes?
- **RQ3.** What is associated with varying levels of youth interest and engagement in 21st CCLC programming? How can programs improve youth interest and engagement?
- **RQ4.** From the perspective of 21st CCLC stakeholders, how is participation in 21st CCLC programming supporting youth outcomes? What factors help explain variation in these perceptions, both between individuals and between centers?

Addressing these questions, this report provides a summary 2 years of programming data (2017–2018 and 2018–2019) and presents key findings and recommendations for both the district and individual programs.

Analytic Sample

For review of existing data (covering school years 2017-18 and 2018-19), AIR included all subgrants associated with FY19 and FY21, or sixteen subgrants in all. For all new data collected by AIR (such as surveys and focus groups), AIR worked with the subgrantees to identify 16 21st CCLC sites deemed to be high quality (one per subgrant).

[1] These two cohorts comprise the 16 subgrantees that were active in 2017–18, 2018–19, and 2021–22.
[2] The research questions have been reordered from the original sequence to better align with the conceptual framework.

Data

To investigate the RQs, AIR researchers relied on the following types of data:

- Historical program data including attendance and race/ethnicity demographics, covering school years 2017-18 and 2018-19
- Data newly collected by AIR during 2021-22, including:
  - Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) scores (observations)
  - Program director/center coordinator interviews
  - Program staff surveys
  - Youth surveys
  - Youth focus groups
  - Parent focus groups

The historical data supported investigation into RQ1. Program activity observations, youth surveys, and staff surveys to address RQs 2 and 3. Parent focus groups supported investigation into RQs 2-4. Program director/center coordinator interviews and youth focus groups provided additional material for all RQs.

A more complete description of all data types, including an explanation of the collection processes, is included in the main body of this report. Copies of all relevant data collection tools are in the appendices.

Methods of Analysis

AIR employed several different methods to explore different data types . The historical data, surveys, and observational scores were analyzed using basic descriptive statistics, while interviews were analyzed using NVivo software to highlight significant recurring themes. In terms of the research questions, RQ1 was addressed strictly through descriptive statistics, while RQs 2, 3, and 4 were addressed through a combination of descriptive and qualitative analysis (mixed methods), with particular focus on prominent, emergent themes.

Summary of Key Findings and Priority Recommendations

Key findings from the full report are summarized below (in order of importance and priority) followed by AIR's top four recommendations for OSSE.

Key Finding #1. Across the evaluation sample, both parents and center staff reported that improving academic achievement is a primary goal of 21st CCLC programming. Based on achievement data that were available(PARCC scores), the programs involved in the evaluation are indeed serving students who need academic support. Aligned with this, some parents interviewed by AIR expressed a desire to see more academic support for their child, along with better program alignment with school day instruction. Some program staff also expressed a desire for a deeper understanding of school-day instruction to promote even stronger linkages to the school day. Exploring and strengthening ties to the school day was therefore an important theme that emerged from the evaluation.

Key Finding #2. Parents revealed that they highly value and appreciate the centers for providing a safe space for their youth. Based on parent feedback, they expressed that in their view centers provided a family-oriented and inclusive atmosphere, which created a sense of "family," "belonging," and "community."

Key Finding #3. Social and emotional learning (and related health related issues) were reported as top priority for 21st CCLC programming by both parents and staff.

Key Finding #4. With respect to the types of programs offered, parents and youth noted the importance of a variety of programming, with variety as a significant factor in decisions to attend. Program variety was about equally important to parents and youth. Parents wanted programming that focused on creativity, arts, and fostering social-emotional skills, while youth wanted sports, experiments, art, and time to spend with their friends.

Key Finding #5. Engaging both youth and families is an important and necessary component of 21st CCLC programming.

Recommendations

Based on our key findings, and in alignment AIR's 21st CCLC conceptual framework (presented in the full report), we have several recommendations that we strongly suggest OSSE implement. More detailed recommendations are included in the final section of this report. We have summarized below the most critical and time-sensitive recommendations that we have identified to be addressed immediately.

Key Recommendation #1. The most prominent finding is that there is a need for high-quality *data* at the program (center/site) level and at the district level (DC). **OSSE must develop and**

implement an integrated and comprehensive data-collection system that can be used systematically across all sites. Programs would all benefit from access to standardize data collection structures, tools, and processes to evaluate their 21st CCLC programs and to make data-driven decisions. While the programs have external evaluators with whom they work to collect and report federally-required data, AIR still encountered issues with the quality, quantity, and consistency of data available. As such, we recommend that OSSE design an integrated and comprehensive data collection system for all sites, within the next year.

Key Recommendation #2. OSSE needs to provide centers with additional guidance on how to collect and manage data for 21st CCLC reporting: Related to Key Recommendation #12, programs expressed concern about their ability to collect and monitor program data. They each have different ways of collecting and housing data, but there was no standardization across programs, and sometimes even within programs. Further, the data collection platforms that programs rely on do not all collect the same information, or in the same ways. Programs need significant support from OSSE to determine not only what data to collect and keep but also how to collect and keep the data. Therefore, as part of addressing Key Recommendation #1, OSSE should work with subgrantees to define prescribed ways of collecting and reporting data, and work with subgrantee staff to enhance knowledge around data collection and use.

Key Recommendation #3. OSSE needs to establish key program metrics to guide subgrantee data collection and standardize subgrantee data collection practices. Aligned with Key Recommendations #1 and #2, OSSE should work to define key performance measures to help assess whether 21st CCLC programs are making strides toward improving implementation of the program and gauge the extent to which youth enrolled in programming are achieving or working toward program goals. Diverse stakeholder perspectives should be considered and solicited by OSSE in the development of key performance indicators for programs. This may involve convening families, partners, community partners, and youth to help OSSE identify which indicators best represent high quality programming in DC.

Key Recommendation #4. OSSE needs to invest in additional and ongoing professional development for program leaders and staff. Center staff require regular, ongoing, and high-quality professional development, especially around the topic of social and emotional learning. Social emotional learning has become increasingly critical to programs as a result of COVID-19 pandemic. OSSE must invest in training and support of programs to improve staff recruitment and retention.

1. Introduction

Report Overview

In 2021, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education in DC (OSSE) asked the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to conduct a 1-year district-wide evaluation of their 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program. Specifically, OSSE asked that AIR review 21st CCLC historical data from school years 2017–18 and 2018–19, as well as conduct a series of data collection efforts during school year 2021–22.[3]

AIR's evaluation sought to explore questions concerning program implementation, youth experience in the program, and stakeholder perceptions about program impact. The goal of exploring these topics was threefold:

1. Provide OSSE with a descriptive analysis of 21st CCLC programming across the district
1. Identify general areas of strength and areas for growth (for continuous improvement)
2. Provide OSSE with a set of recommendations for future evaluation work (based on what was learned in relation to the completion of Goals 1 and 2)

To meet these goals, AIR collected qualitative data (interviews and focus groups) and quantitative data (activity observations, youth and staff surveys, and historical data such as program attendance levels and participant demographics). These data were collected from 16 subgrantees (out of 26 total in the District of Columbia as of 2021–22), identified by OSSE as (a) active during the 2021–22 school year (available for new data collection activities) and (b) previously active during 2017–18 and 2018–19 (able to provide historical data).

This report provides a summary of what we learned from analysis of the 2017–18 and 2018–19 historical program data and analysis of newly collected 2021–22 data. The overall purpose of the report is to provide OSSE with a better understanding of how the Washington, DC 21st CCLC program is being implemented, with a primary goal of helping OSSE determine next steps in their evaluation and program improvement efforts.

Research Questions

In keeping with the high-level goals established with OSSE, AIR's evaluation team began the evaluation effort with four research questions (RQs):

[3] No data from 2019–20 or 2020–21 were considered as part of the evaluation due to the unknown effects of the SARS-Cov-II pandemic on programs during those 2 years.

- **RQ1.** How are subgrantees associated with fiscal year (FY) 2019 and FY 2021[4] performing with respect to program characteristics of interest to OSSE? How have program characteristics changed over the past 3 years based on available data?
- **RQ2.**[5] What evidence is there that 21st CCLC programs in Washington, DC, are using practices that research suggests are connected to positive youth outcomes?
- **RQ3.** What is associated with varying levels of youth interest and engagement in 21st CCLC programming? How can programs improve youth interest and engagement?
- **RQ4.** From the perspective of 21st CCLC stakeholders, how is participation in 21st CCLC programming supporting youth outcomes? What factors help explain variation in these perceptions, both between individuals and between centers?

In brief, RQ1 addresses overall program characteristics, RQ2 addresses matters of program quality, RQ3 addresses participant interest and engagement, and RQ4 addresses perceptions of program impact.

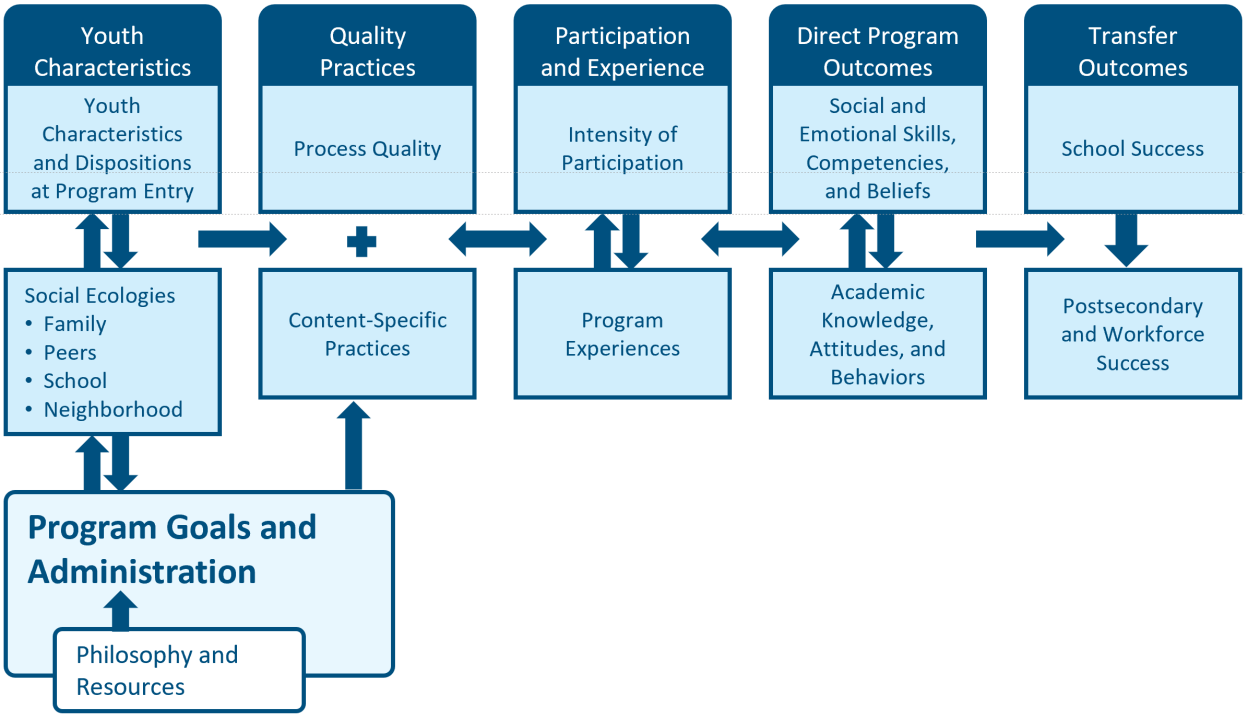
To guide our investigation into these questions, AIR researchers considered these four questions within the context of our conceptual framework for how change happens in 21st CCLC, described next.

Conceptual Framework

AIR's approach to the evaluation was based on a conceptual framework for how programs can see positive change as a result of 21st CCLC programming. This framework was developed and refined over several years from studies that explore how youth benefit from participation in afterschool programs (Durlak, Mahoney, Bohnert, & Parente, 2010; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Pierce et al., 2013; Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007). The conceptual framework provides the context in which we devised research questions and guided how we interpreted our findings. See Exhibit 1.

[4] These two cohorts comprise the 16 subgrantees that were active in 2017–18, 2018–19, and 2021–22.
[5] The research questions have been reordered from the original sequence to better align with the conceptual framework.

Exhibit 1. A Conceptual Framework: How Afterschool Programs Can Have an Impact on Youth Participants



Program goals and administration. The foundation of the conceptual framework is a program's goals and administration. The 21st CCLC program was designed to support youth academic achievement, while also providing enrichment activities and services to youth and their families.[6] Programs vary in how they are structured and operated, offering activities and services that are dependent on local resources and population needs. Our evaluation explored this variation primarily via site coordinator interviews, youth and parent focus groups, and staff surveys.

Youth characteristics. The framework next considers how youth are influenced and supported by the environments in which they live and go to school. Past programming experiences, relationships with peers and teachers, the level of interest in programming topics and content, expectations regarding program experience, and the level of choice in attending all have a bearing on how youth will engage in and experience 21st CCLC programming (Durlak et al., 2010). For the evaluation, we relied on school year 2017–18 and 2018–19 program data to determine how youth were participating in DC programs. Additionally, we conducted center coordinator interviews to gather detail about the youth populations served in each center.

[6] https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-formula-grants/school-support-and-accountability/21st-century-community-learning-centers/

Quality practices. Programs are more likely to have an impact if they are high quality (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Naftzger, Hallberg, & Yang, 2014). This can be understood in terms of *process* quality (meaning the adoption of practices and approaches to service delivery that result in developmentally appropriate environments) and *content* quality (referring to content-specific practices meant to cultivate specific skills, beliefs, or knowledge). To assess process quality, we used the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA), a validated and commonly used observation tool in the field of afterschool programing (Naftzger, Devaney, & Newman, 2015). Then we administered a staff survey to inform our understanding of content-specific practices for each program. Additionally, we drew on the site coordinator interviews and parent focus groups to gain insight into other aspects of program quality such as organization and retention.

Participation and experience. For youth to benefit from programming, they need to attend programming—ideally, at high levels—across multiple years and participate in a variety of activities (Naftzger et al., 2018; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). However, merely being present in the program is not enough to ensure that youth will benefit from the activities. They also need to experience both engagement and interest during the activities to develop the beliefs, skills, and knowledge that can help them succeed in school and beyond (Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012; Greene, Lee, Constance, & Hynes, 2013; Mohr-Schroeder et al., 2014; Shernoff & Vandell, 2007). To gather insight into youth participation and experience, we relied on 2017–18 and 2018–19 attendance data along with a youth survey covering aspects of youth engagement.

Direct and transfer outcomes. Once youth are engaged and participating in program activities, it is expected that they will begin to develop key skills, beliefs, and knowledge. Although the evaluation approach was not an impact study (as already stated, no claims about *cause* are justified by the approach), the youth and parent focus groups and center coordinator interviews informed our understanding of how programs support these outcomes, and therefore we included data from these sources in the overall narrative for how change happens.

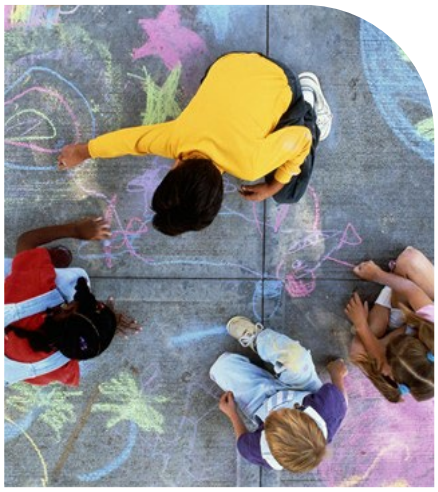
Data Collection and Methods

As indicated in the preceding discussion of the conceptual framework, AIR sought to explore the conceptual framework via targeted data collection activities. This subsection presents brief details of all data collection done by AIR during 2021–22 (including collection of historical data), along with notes on analytic methods for each type of data.

Quantitative Historical Data (2017–18 and 2018–19 Program Data)

AIR researchers collected 2017–18 and 2018–19 school year program data from the 16 subgrantees included in the evaluation. From these subgrantees we requested basic program data such as overall operations, program attendance, and attendee demographics. Partnership

for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment score data for attendees of these programs were also obtained through a data request to OSSE. All but one subgrantee were able to provide the requested data, yielding data for 15 subgrantees and 93 associated centers. To analyze these data, all submitted information was first compiled into common datasets. These common datasets were then analyzed to create basic descriptive statistics such as totals, averages, and percentages for each data type. These data primarily address questions concerning youth characteristics, presented in Section 3 of this report.



Qualitative, Observational, and Survey Data (2021–22 Data)

In addition to gathering historical data from OSSE and the subgrantees, AIR engaged in several new data collection efforts during 2021–22. These efforts included conducting site coordinator interviews, program activity observations, youth surveys, youth focus groups, parent focus groups, and staff surveys. These data were collected from a subset of centers associated with the 16 subgrantees: Each of the 16 subgrantees was asked to identify a single center associated with their grant that they considered to be high quality. Qualitative, observational, and survey data were collected from these centers only. Of the 16 centers identified by the 16 subgrantees as being high quality, 15 centers provided data, with one center being given permission by OSSE not to provide data given challenges specific to that program.

Each of the qualitative data collection efforts carried out with these 15 centers is summarized below.

- ***Center Coordinator Interviews*** were conducted virtually with center coordinators from each of the 15 participating centers (noting again that one center did not participate in the qualitative, observational, or survey data collection). Center coordinators were asked to describe the vision and goals for programming, program staff training and hiring practices, and family engagement opportunities.
- ***Program Activity Observations*** were conducted at 15 of the sites selected by the subgrantees. An AIR researcher visited each site and scored an enrichment-type activity using the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA), a validated out-of-school-time observational tool. Activities were scored in the Supportive Environment, Interaction, and Engagement domains.

- ***Youth Surveys*** were distributed and collected following program activity observations. Questions on the survey addressed student experience participating in the activity offered on the day of observation.
- ***Youth Focus Groups*** were conducted in-person at each center the day that program activity observations took place. The goal of these focus groups was to understand the student experience in programming regarding perceived benefits, types of programming offered, and improvements for programming. Students who had obtained signed permission from their parents participated, resulting in youth participation across grade levels (Grades 3–12).
- ***Parent Focus Groups*** were conducted virtually with parents from each center. Parents who elected to participate were asked to describe perceived benefits to their child's participation in programming, interactions with program staff, family engagement opportunities, and improvements for programming.
- ***Staff Surveys*** were conducted in January 2022. These surveys, administered by the subgrantees to staff actively providing activities at their selected sites, asked staff about their perceptions concerning staff roles, staff goals with respect to youth skill instruction, and program linkages to the school day.

In general, interview and focus group data were first transcribed and then analyzed using NVivo software. This approach allowed AIR researchers to identify salient themes across qualitative data types, and to mark specific quotes especially helpful for illustrating those themes. The observational scores and survey data were analyzed using basic descriptive statistics. More detail on how AIR carried out specific analyses is provided as necessary throughout this report.

Exhibit 2 below provides a summary of all data collected for this evaluation, along with associated research questions.

Exhibit 2. Data Collection by Research Questions

Data Source No.	Data Source	Associated Research Question	Subgrantees and Centers Reporting
1	Program data (historical)	RQs 1–4	All 16 study subgrantees and all 93 associated centers

Data Source No.	Data Source	Associated Research Question	Subgrantees and Centers Reporting
2	Program director/center coordinator interviews	RQs 1–4	Subgrantees were asked to choose one of their centers to provide all of these data to AIR.
3	Program activity observations	RQ2, RQ3	15 of the study subgrantees.
4	Youth surveys	RQ2, RQ3	15 of the study subgrantees.
5	Youth focus groups	RQs 1–4	15 of the study subgrantees.
6	Parent focus groups	RQs 2–4	
7	Program staff surveys	RQ2, RQ3	

Report Organization

This report is organized around the conceptual framework previously described. The report is therefore organized into six sections as follows: (1) Introduction, (2) Program Administration Goals, (3) Youth Characteristics, (4) Quality Practices, (5) Participation and Engagement, (6) Stakeholder Perceptions of Youth Outcomes, and 7) Key Finding and Recommendations.

Exhibit 3 shows the core report structure, omitting the introduction and recommendations sections for sake of clarity. Each section is shown by number and title (with section names following the conceptual framework), along with associated research questions and thematic topics. Notes for the thematic topic column generally indicate which data AIR researchers used to explore each part of the conceptual framework.

Exhibit 3. Conceptual Framework Mapped to Report Themes

Section	Subsection Title	Research Question	Thematic Topic
Introduction and Methodology			
2	Program Administration and Goals		• Goals for center and programming to meet student and family needs • Programing offered
3	Youth Characteristics	RQ1	• Historical data overview of participant characteristics • Site coordinator interview feedback concerning populations served

Section	Subsection Title	Research Question	Thematic Topic
4	Center and Program Quality Practices	RQ 2	• Organizational Quality Practices • Content quality in programming – Designing programs to meet parent and youth needs – Designing activities to meet program goal – Using data to inform programming – Selection and training of center staff to help accomplish program goals – Soliciting youth and parent feedback to inform programming • Process quality in programming – Leveraging and maintaining partnerships – Leveraging a variety of stakeholders to inform program decision making – Communication strategies – Selecting and training program staff • Challenges and successes
5	Participation and Engagement	RQ2 and RQ3	• Implementation practices to support participation and engagement • Efforts to recruit students and families • Efforts to retain students and families in programing • Parent and youth perspectives about choosing an afterschool program • Assessing youth participation and experience in 21st CCLC activities – Programing characteristics – Challenges and successes • Assessing participation and experiences in family activities – Programing characteristics – Challenges and successes
6	Program Outcomes	RQ 4	• Stakeholder perceptions of program benefits
Recommendations			

Limitations of Findings and Cautions for Interpretation

There are several important limitations associated with the data presented in this report. These are described below and should be kept in mind when reviewing the findings.

- Attendance and participation data varied greatly in completeness and data quality, making it challenging to evaluate the impact of 21st programming and the characteristics of student

participants. This was particularly problematic with the historical data. Some programs had more developed systems for collecting and reporting these data.

- Pandemic conditions affected qualitative and survey data collection. In late fall 2021 and winter 2022, Washington, DC experienced a surge of the Omicron strain of SARS-CoV-II. Because of this, student attendance in programing was notably muted and low attendance likely had an impact on survey return rates and focus group participation.
  - Survey data are self-reported by program youth and should be interpreted with caution and mindful of potential biases (such as social desirability—answering a question based on what is deemed acceptable or wanted rather than on what is true).

2. Program Administration and Goals

As shown in the conceptual framework, program administration and goals are a foundational element to 21st CCLC programming. To learn about DC's 21st CCLC program administration and goals, AIR researchers interviewed site coordinators and asked them a series of questions about how their programs are run. Additionally, we asked youth and parent focus group participants whether particular features of the 21st CCLC program were especially important in making a decision to attend. Lastly, we administered a survey to staff actively providing 21st CCLC activities to gain insight into how front-line staff perceive their program's goals, and to find out more about how program staff interact or plan with school-day staff. Data from all these sources are presented in this section.

Site Coordinator, Parent, and Youth Perceptions of Program Administration and Goals

During the site coordinators interviews, AIR asked coordinators about their programming goals, how staff are trained to achieve those goals, and who informs how programming decisions are made. We also asked parents and youth what factors they considered when choosing to participate in the afterschool program.

Center Programming Goals

Center coordinators reported a variety of different programming goals, but three rose to the top including:

- improving academic achievement;
- engaging family and community;
- and fostering social and emotional learning skills.

Exhibit 4. Number of Site Coordinators Emphasizing Particular Program Goals

Program Goals	# of Centers
Improve academic achievement	13 out of 16
Engage family and community	7 out of 16
Foster social-emotional learning	6 out of 16
Partner with schools	5 out of 16
Provide a safe environment for youth	4 out of 16
Offer more equitable opportunities	4 out of 16
Help youth reach their potential	3 out of 16
Provide mentorship	2 out of 16
Focus on STEM	2 out of 16
Foster youth leadership	2 out of 16
Emphasize culture and history	2 out of 16
Improve literacy	2 out of 16

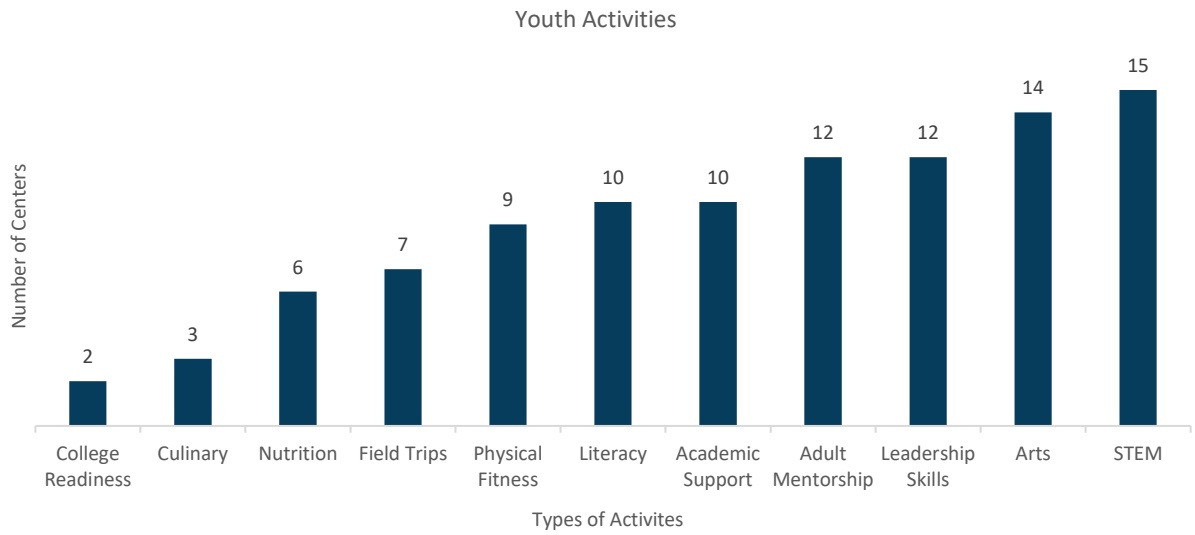
Improving academic achievement was frequently described as part of a larger effort by programs to address the learning and achievement gaps in underserved communities. To this end, coordinators across centers reported offering a variety of academic and enrichment activities. Exhibit 4 summarizes the types of youth activities most frequently mentioned during interviews with top activities related to enrichment in the Arts and STEM, the development of leadership skills, mentoring, and academic support and literacy.

One coordinator emphasized the importance of improving the academics of youth they serve to improve outcomes in their community overall and provide needed support.

> "Ideally, we would like to help youth improve academically. I think that's one of our overarching goals, just because working in Title I schools, a lot of the data shows that youth in these communities are several percentage points behind other demographics of youth in academic growth and achievement. One of our biggest focuses is having the space to allow youth to get extra support."
>
> *—Center Coordinator*

Coordinators across centers reported offering a variety of academic and enrichment activities. Exhibit 5 summarizes the types of youth activities most frequently mentioned during interviews.

Exhibit 5. Number of Centers Offering Youth Activities



Source: 15 site coordinator interviews

Center coordinators also frequently referenced offering opportunities for youth leadership and using some form of mentorship framework to align their activities with their program's goals of fostering youth leadership. One coordinator described youth assuming the role of program leaders, assigning them different tasks and responsibilities. The coordinator explained:

> "We're trying to focus on youth leadership… we want them to take accountability and have responsibilities throughout the day… during our homework hour, I have our middle schoolers helping our elementary schoolers..."

All center coordinators reported providing activities to address multiple programming goals. One coordinator described purposefully finding books for students that, in addition to improving literacy, also would help students explore larger themes regarding cultural diversity and agency:

> "We look for characters that reflect our youth. So, characters whose illustrations are black, simple as that, but that's not the end all be all. It's still a diverse curriculum, but we really try to find those books. We look for books where the character has endured an obstacle, but has been able to overcome, be it their own agency. Because the overall theme of the program is I can make a difference. So, the books then have to mirror that theme." —Center Coordinator

Leveraging a variety of stakeholders to inform program decision making

Center coordinators were asked about programming decisions at their centers and what resources they used to inform decision making. Several respondents[7] noted that diverse committees of stakeholders help inform how centers will strive to accomplish their goals.

Nine center coordinators described specific stakeholders that help make programming decisions. The most common types of stakeholders included advisory boards or committees, internal center leadership teams, and center staff. Some center advisory committees included parent and youth representation. For example, one center coordinator emphasized the importance of including different types of stakeholders in programming decisions,

> "I think that with the advisory group, the purpose of it was to get feedback from other communities, stakeholders on how they felt the program was going and what they felt like needed to be improved and so after we had those meetings, we would debrief as a team and talk through some of the glows and grows from those meetings…We would strategize on how to improve some of those areas."
>
> —Center Coordinator

These stakeholder groups helped to identify what centers should focus on based on an internal data review; feedback solicited from youth, parents, and the community; and curriculum resources. We detail how these groups specifically used these strategies in the "Center and Program Quality Practices" (Section 4).

Designing programs to meet parent and youth needs: Parent and youth perspectives about choosing an afterschool program

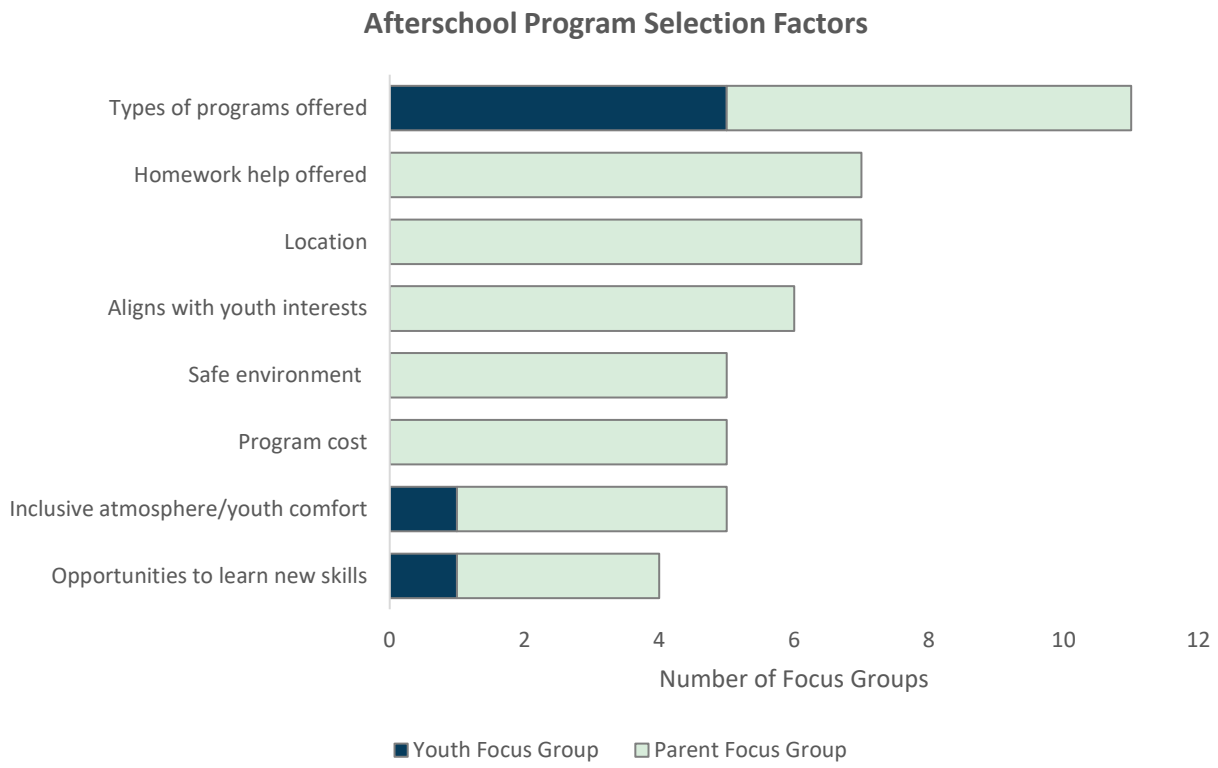
To better understand how center goals may or may not align to parent and youth goals, AIR asked youth and parents about their afterschool program choices and what factors they find most significant in their decision making. Specifically, parents said they were focused on the types of programs offered, availability of homework help, the center's location, activities that align with youth interests, a safe environment, the cost of the program, an inclusive environment, and opportunities for youth to learn new skills. Youth interviewed specifically noted that the types of programs offered, an inclusive environment and opportunities to learn

[7] In consultation with OSSE, this topic was given lower priority for the interviews.

new skills were most important to their program attendance decisions. These insights into the priorities of parents versus youth may help centers understand how they might align their goals and programs to the needs of the youth and families they strive to serve. Additionally, these findings may help inform which program elements to highlight in participant recruitment and staff hiring and recruitment efforts.

Exhibit 6 summarizes factors that youth and parents reported considering when choosing an afterschool program.

Exhibit 6. Factors Parents and Youth Consider in Their Afterschool Program Choice, by respondent type



Note. *N* = 15 parent and youth focus groups.

Parents also said that their positive experience with staff members was often the primary reason they initially chose their afterschool program for their child and why they would continue to choose enrolling them in programing. Parents emphasized the center's location and the center's ability to provide a safe environment for their children as other important factors when choosing an afterschool program. **If the center was not nearby their child's school, parents expressed the desire for centers to provide transportation to the center.** Parents also reported that they needed to feel that their child was entering a safe environment and that their child felt welcomed. Parents frequently cited center staff as the source of creating a welcoming atmosphere and, in many cases, stated they feel like their child's program had created a sense of "family," "belonging," and "community" for their child.

The following quotes illustrate how parents defined a safe and inclusive environment.

> "How they blend with the other youth and with the staff, how they get along, how comfortable they feel. Do they feel safe? Do they feel secure? All those things come into play when you put in your child into any program where you're not the specific supervisor, when giving someone else the option and the choice to watch over your child."

> "We considered diversity and also whether or not the staff had a knowledge of diversity and also were kind of fluent in different race and ethnicities and were going to be sensitive to that."

> "Everyone is nice and friendly. Everyone can relate to everyone, which makes it easier to talk to other people. And basically, there's no judgment or any sort of opinion about other people. Everyone just feels comfortable."

Some parents expressed wanting more academic support for their child with clear alignment with what their child learns during the school day, such as homework help or additional tutoring while other parents wanting programming that focuses on creativity, arts, and fostering social-emotional skills. Many parents indicated that they look for a balance between academic and non-academic programs to ensure (1) their children complete their homework before they come home and (2) their child has fun with their friends through recreational or creative activities.

Youth primarily expressed interest in sports, experiments, art, and time to spend with their friends. Youth commonly shared that they made their decisions based on what they like to do or what they want to learn. Likewise, parents also indicated that their child's interests and passions were major factors in their choice of an afterschool program. This was true for centers that serve all age groups of youth.

Program Staff Perceptions of Program Goals

AIR researchers used staff surveys to gain insight into how activity leaders perceive program goals (as opposed to administrative staff or site coordinators), and to explore how 21st CCLC staff engage with school day staff. During spring 2022 AIR administered this survey at the 16 programs identified for data collection, with instruction that the survey should be taken by front-line staff actively engaged in activity delivery. Eighty-four staff responded to the survey (5.25 staff per center on average). The survey asked staff about their background (e.g., years of experience, if they hold a teaching certificate, how many hours they work per week) as well as their perceived roles in the program, and about program linkages with the school day. The following subsection presents data from the staff survey relevant for understanding program goals and administration.

Staff Survey Respondent Education Levels

Exhibit 7 outlines the experience of program staff who responded to the survey, such as years of experience providing out-of-school activities, years at their current program, and how many hours they work in the program per week. The vast majority of staff had at least some college, with 89% indicating at least "some college" or higher.

Exhibit 7. Staff Survey Respondent Characteristics

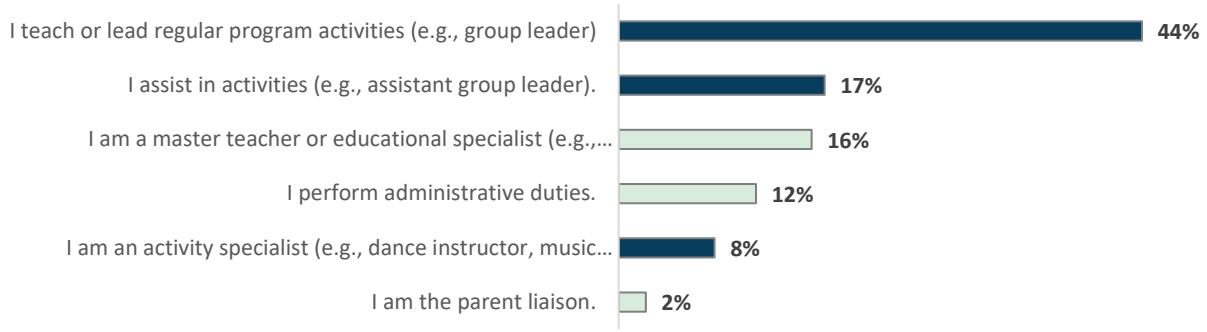
Program Staff Experience	Mean	Median
Years of experience providing activities in out-of-school-time programs	9	6
Years worked at current program	5	3
Hours worked per week	20	20
Education Level	**Percentage of Staff (%)**	
Less than High School	2	
High School Diploma or GED	8	
Some College	30	
Two-Year College Degree	6	
Four-Year College Degree	26	
Some Graduate Work	2	
Master's Degree or Higher	26	

Source: Staff Survey (*n* = 84).

Staff Roles in Programming

When asked to select a role description that best fits their work in the program, most staff indicated a role directly involved with providing activities (70%). Several respondents reported that they serve in a supportive role (e.g., parent volunteers, supervisors, and administrators). See Exhibit 8 where the darker blue bars denote roles where staff were directly providing activities.

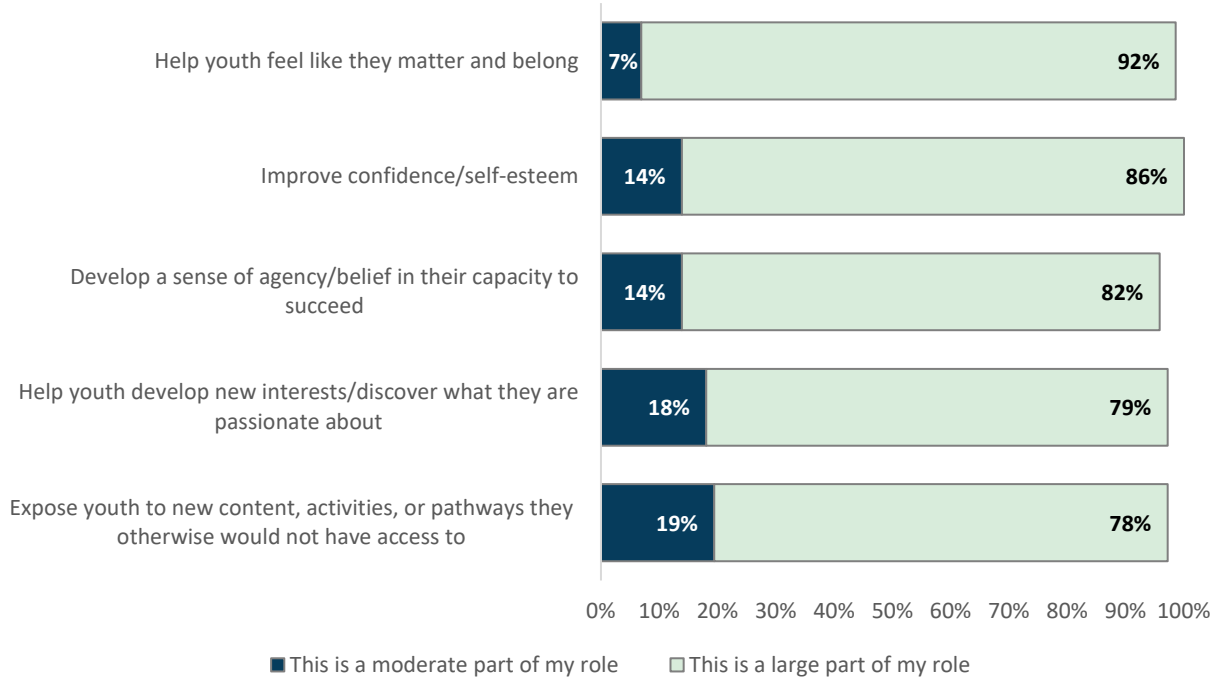
Exhibit 8. Staff Survey Respondent Roles: "Which of the following best describes your primary role in the program?"



Staff were asked how they perceive their role relative to youth outcomes. To assess this, staff were presented with a list of youth outcomes and asked to indicate whether they see it as their role to impact each outcome (using the same response options as before, namely "This is not part of my role," This is a small part of my role," "This is a moderate part of my role," and "This is a large part of my role"). Looking again at responses from non-administrative staff (i.e., excluding staff who selected "administrative duties" or "parent liaison" as their primary role description), each outcome received a strong majority of "large part" responses from staff (about three quarters of responses or higher for each outcome). Notably, however, the highest items in terms of "large part" responses were "Help youth feel like they matter and belong" and "Improve confidence/self-esteem." These ratings align with staff responses that a large part of their role involved

providing support of social and emotional skills. See Exhibit 9.

Exhibit 9. Staff Survey: "To what extent do you see it as your role in the program to impact youth in the following ways?"

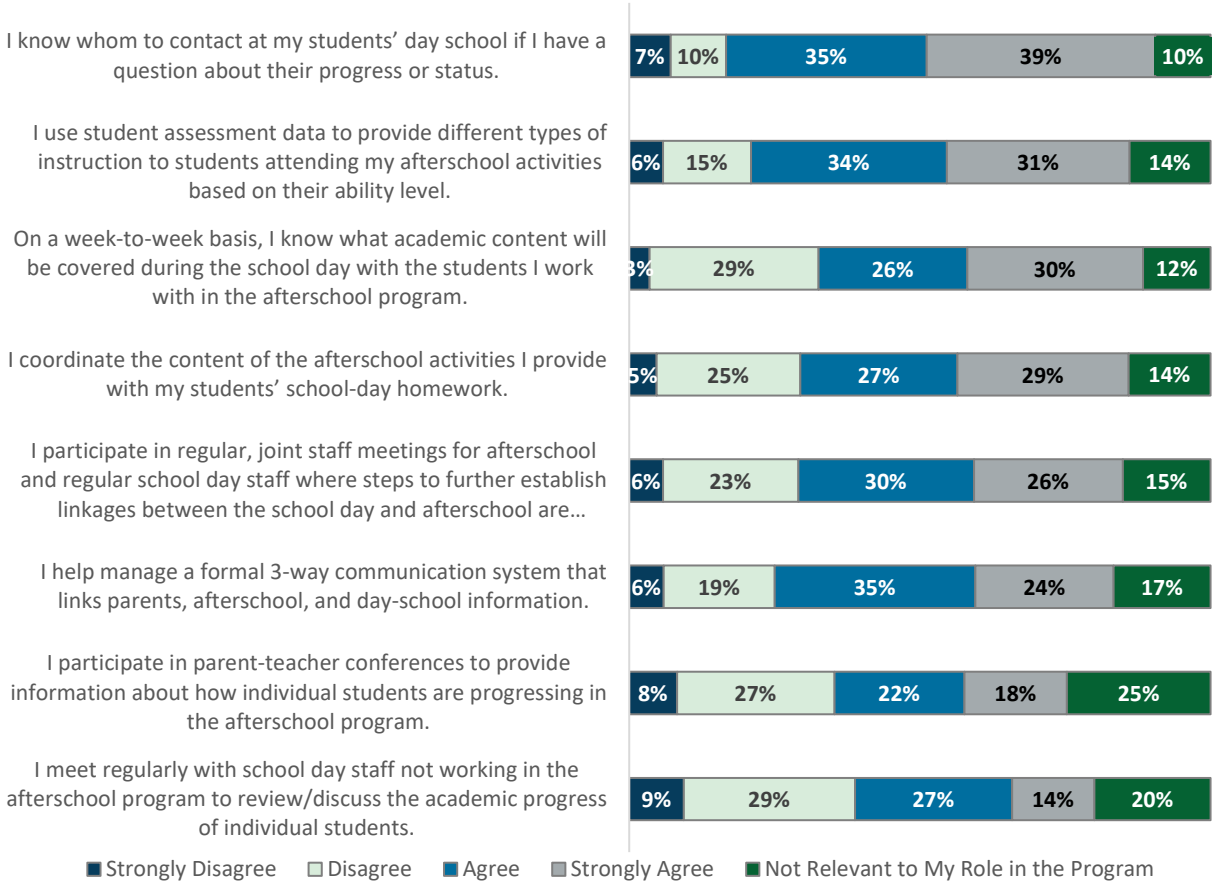


Note. n = 72.

Programming Linkages to the School Day

The survey also asked respondents (including administrative staff and parent liaisons) about how their program provided linkages to the school day. Overall, a strong majority of staff reported knowing whom to contact if they have questions about student academic progress (with 74% of respondents selecting *agree* or *strongly agree* for this item), and that they use assessment data to guide their instruction (65% selecting *agree* or *strongly agree*). However, only around half of staff (or less) indicated a deeper knowledge of school-day instruction, or regular, formal meetings with school-day staff for planning purposes. See Exhibit 10.

Exhibit 10. Staff Survey: "Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding linkages to the school day."



AIR assessed the extent to which staff indicated linkages to the school day *overall* rather than for one or two items. Using Rasch modeling[8] (i.e., a single score encompassing all responses for the school-day linkage items) to derive an overall "school-day linkages" score, we found only about a quarter of respondents (20 of 84) provided answers that were consistently more on the *disagree* than *agree* side of the response scale. That is, most respondents indicated at least some degree of linkage to the school day. Further, averaging these scores to the center level indicated that most centers were more in *agreement* than not (with only two centers being slightly on the *disagree* side of the scale midpoint). All centers had at least one staff respondent with an overall domain score of *agree* or higher.

[8] Rasch modeling is a mode of analysis that places both items and respondents on a single scale, enabling items and person to be ranked in terms of difficulty or ability. Rasch analysis can be used to derive a single construct score from multiple items while taking into consideration the different "difficulty" levels of the disparate items. The resultant Rasch scale scores provide a useful metric for gauging an individual's overall construct ability (or, in this case, overall agreement that linkages to the school day exist). Note that we also explored the relationship between individual respondent Rasch scale scores and experience in years, as well as between scale score and education level. No clear relationships were found based on this sample.

Program Administration and Goals Summary

Responses to staff surveys showed that site coordinators were generally in agreement that academic improvement is a priority goal of their programs. This priority was often framed within an overarching goal of closing learning and achievement gaps. To this end, coordinators mentioned offering a variety of enrichment activities, such as STEM, arts, and leadership activities. This variety of activities was specifically mentioned by parents and youth as a reason for coming to 21st CCLC programming, though parents also mentioned other important factors such as location, whether homework help was offered, and whether the center felt safe. In terms of decision making, coordinators cited inclusion of participant stakeholders as important, with some mentioning inclusion of parents or youth as part of advisory boards. Activity leaders within the programs indicated that helping youth to feel like they matter and belong was a large part of their role.

As regards program staff, coordinators noted that they invested in their staff by using internal and external professional development opportunities to work towards improving how they approach reaching their program goals. Site coordinators emphasized that professional development that provides resources that they can use immediately was most useful. **Specifically, site coordinators requested training related to social and emotional learning as well as guidance related to collecting and managing data for 21st Century reporting to further support the achievement of program goals.**

3. Youth Characteristics

To properly contextualize 21st CCLC programming, youth characteristics need to be considered alongside overall program goals and administration. Understanding the population served helps to clarify program goals and to illustrate whether the program is achieving the goals intended for the population it serves.

To investigate the characteristics of the youth population served by programs in DC, AIR researchers relied primarily on two data sources: site coordinator perspectives on populations

served, along with notes on center recruitment efforts; and historical data (covering 2017–18 and 2018–19). This section presents findings based on these data sources.

Site Coordinator Perceptions of Population Served

AIR staff conducted interviews with center coordinators to learn more about who DC 21st CCLC centers serve. We asked who their center programs serve and if there are specific populations they target for enrollment in programming. Center coordinators reported serving a variety of youth but targeting youth with specific characteristics. Namely, coordinators sought youth from a lower socioeconomic status, youth in need of academic support, youth from targeted racial and ethnic backgrounds, local youth, and specific grade levels and age ranges.

In terms of recruiting youth with these characteristics, site coordinators shared that having current program participants help recruit has been a successful strategy (e.g., parents and youth tell people they know about the program). **Site coordinators from nine centers reported their success in recruiting families when parents of the program assisted in their recruitment efforts.** Five coordinators shared that parents of currently enrolled youth speaking with other parents or participating in recruitment events has greatly benefitted their recruitment efforts. Center coordinators mentioned similar successes in their recruitment efforts with youth. Coordinators from six centers reported successes recruiting youth for afterschool programs through family and friend recommendations made by youth currently or previously enrolled in the program. Five coordinators mentioned experiencing success when youth recommend the program to their peers. One center coordinator explained how youth-to-youth recruitment occurs at their center:

> "It's word-of-mouth with the students. That's how we always end up reaching our enrollment goals, because that one student who doesn't even want to be there because their parents signed them up, [but] once they came for a couple of weeks, they end up thinking, 'This is a lot of fun. I want my friends to sign up'… that's when we start seeing all the enrollments pouring in from other students." —Center Coordinator

Developing a variety of recruitment materials

Seven center coordinators reported using a variety of recruitment materials as a successful recruitment strategy. Some coordinators mentioned handing out paper flyers at schools and locally within the community, while other coordinators mentioned digital formats such as

emailing newsletters or leveraging social media. Coordinators emphasized the importance of knowing your target audience and your community to identify the best approach. One coordinator explained,

> "Everyone does not have internet. So, we go into communities and developments with old school flyers… If your goal is to find the people who don't have that access, you have to mirror your work and strategy around what their day-to-day looks like. So, if they don't have technology, you can't use technology in your recruitment."

Partnering with school faculty and staff to recruit youth and families

Additionally, coordinators from seven centers cited their success recruiting youth by partnering with school faculty and staff. Coordinators highlighted informing administrators and staff about their program and its benefits as an essential recruitment strategy. **Coordinators also reported asking school faculty and staff to recommend youth they think would benefit from the program as helpful in ensuring their programs are enrolling youth who need support most.** In general, coordinators emphasized the importance of taking the time to build positive relationships with school faculty and staff. One center coordinator indicated that establishing a relationship with school faculty and staff early on was essential to their recruitment efforts. They said,

> "First and foremost, it's really the collective of building a partnership with the schools…We start with the principals and having kind of a one-on-one meeting, facilitating, getting to know us and what we offer as an afterschool aftercare program. We set those meetings in advance."

Recruitment challenges: Competing with other afterschool programs and life priorities

The main recruitment challenge center coordinators reported was experiencing competition with other afterschool programs or youth having life responsibilities after their school day. Five center coordinators mentioned competing with other afterschool programs such as sports and tutoring programs. These programs occur on the same day or time as center programming. Coordinators from centers serving youth from all different age groups also shared anecdotes about how youth have other priorities in their homelife such as taking care of a sibling or working a part-time job that prevents them from attending afterschool programs. One coordinator explained,

> "I think that young people at some of our schools were just facing so much…Young people were parents. Young people were primary breadwinners for their family… there were a lot of competing needs other than like, 'Hey, come to our afterschool program."

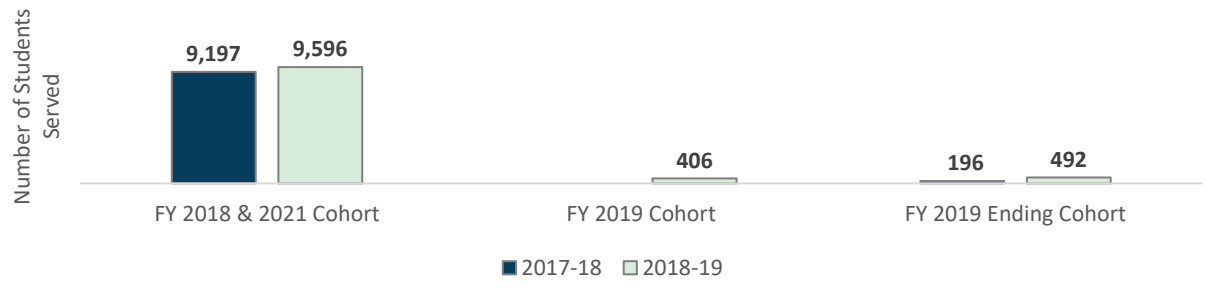
Overall Attendance Levels

Another way to assess the population served in DC 21st CCLC programs is by the total number of youth in attendance. At the very least, this provides insight into the overall reach of the 21st CCLC program.

According to the 2017–18 and 2108–19 attendance data submitted to AIR, 9,393 youth participants in 2017–18, and 10,647 program participants in 2018–19 were served by the 16 subgrantees included in this evaluation. These figures should be understood as minimum baselines, however; only 8 of the 16 subgrantees could provide attendance data for 2017–18, and 12 for 2018–19, suggesting that the true attendance levels for each year should be higher. Also, note that, across both program years, DCPS accounted for the majority of students served (though this is expected given the size of DCPS, as DCPS oversaw more than half of all centers in operation during 2021–22, the year in which AIR was conducting this evaluation).

Exhibit 11 presents a summary of program participants served by individual subgrantees across both years, separating subgrantees according to initial funding year (cohort).

Exhibit 11. Across All Cohorts, FY 2018 FY 2021 Served the Largest Number of Youth (over 9,000)



Note. These counts only reflect historical youth-level attendance data submitted by subgrantees, and do not include historic data provided in quarterly or year-end reports. Not all subgrantees included youth-level attendance records as part of their historic data submissions.

Youth Participant Demographics

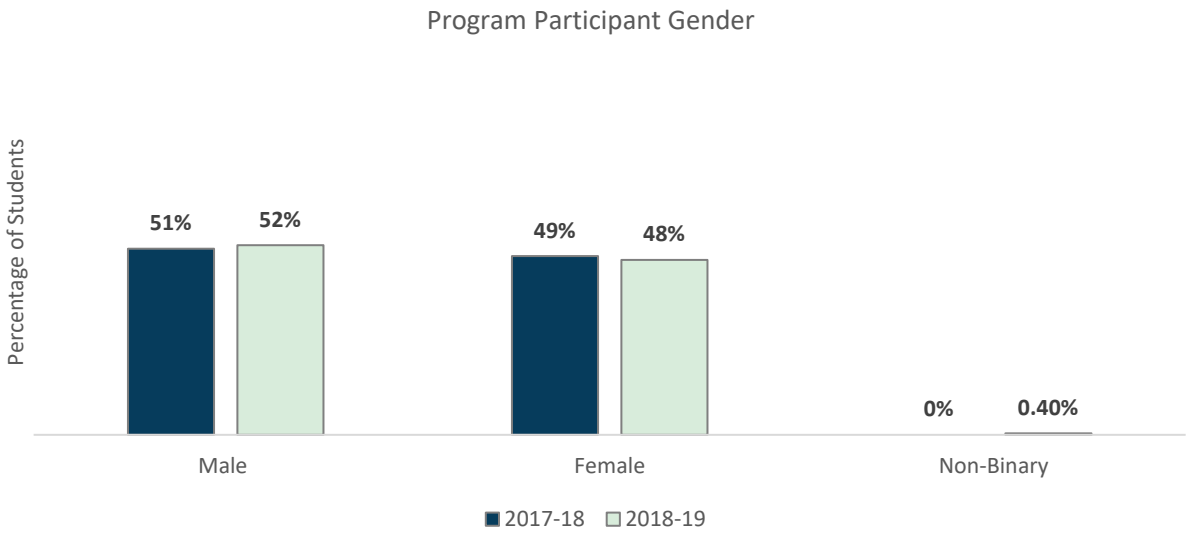
In addition to overall levels of attendance, subgrantees were asked to report demographic data for their program participants. This subsection presents summaries of these demographic data, starting with participant gender and progressing through race/ethnicity and grade level.

In terms of participant gender, slightly more males were served by programs than females, though the gap only constituted two to four percent. However, note that DCPS did not report any 2018–19 gender data, so gender data are missing for approximately 74% of all program

participants served during 2018–19. See the technical appendix for further discussion of gender data excluding DCPS from the sample.

Exhibit 12 presents a summary of overall participant gender data across both years.

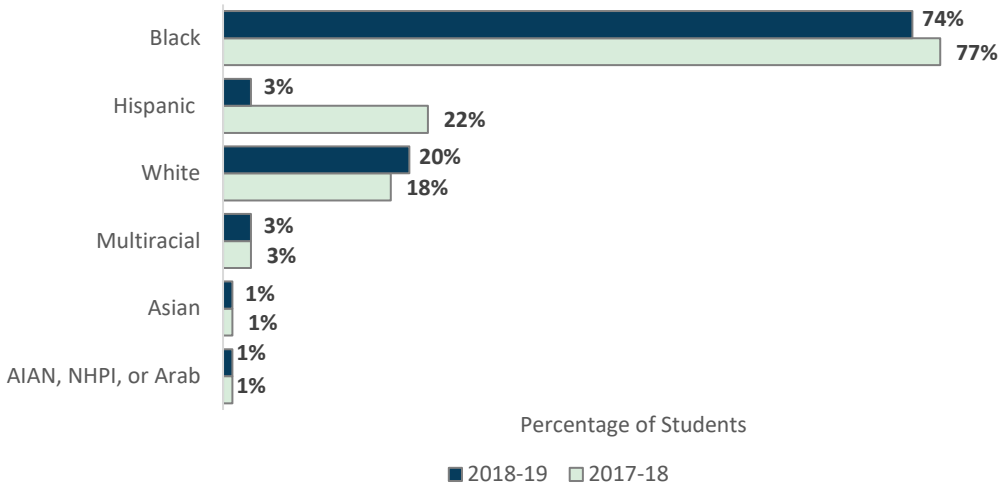
Exhibit 12. Overall Program Participant Gender



Note. For 2017–18, *N* = 8,928. For 2018–19, *N* = 2,685. The number of youth who identified as non-binary was rounded to 10 to protect youth privacy. Gender data are missing for 74% of participants in 2018–19.

In terms of participant race and ethnicity, the vast majority (about three quarters) of participants in both years were reported by subgrantees as Black. About a fifth of participants in each year were identified as White. Of some note, the proportion of participants identified as Hispanic (which could overlap with other race categories) declined substantially between the two years, from 22% in 2017–18 to 3% in 2017–18. DCPS reporting seems to account for this: For the 2018–19 reporting period, all DCPS participants were reported as *Not Hispanic*. See the technical appendix for further discussion of race and ethnicity data excluding DCPS from the sample. Exhibit 13 presents a summary of the overall participant race and ethnicity data across both years.

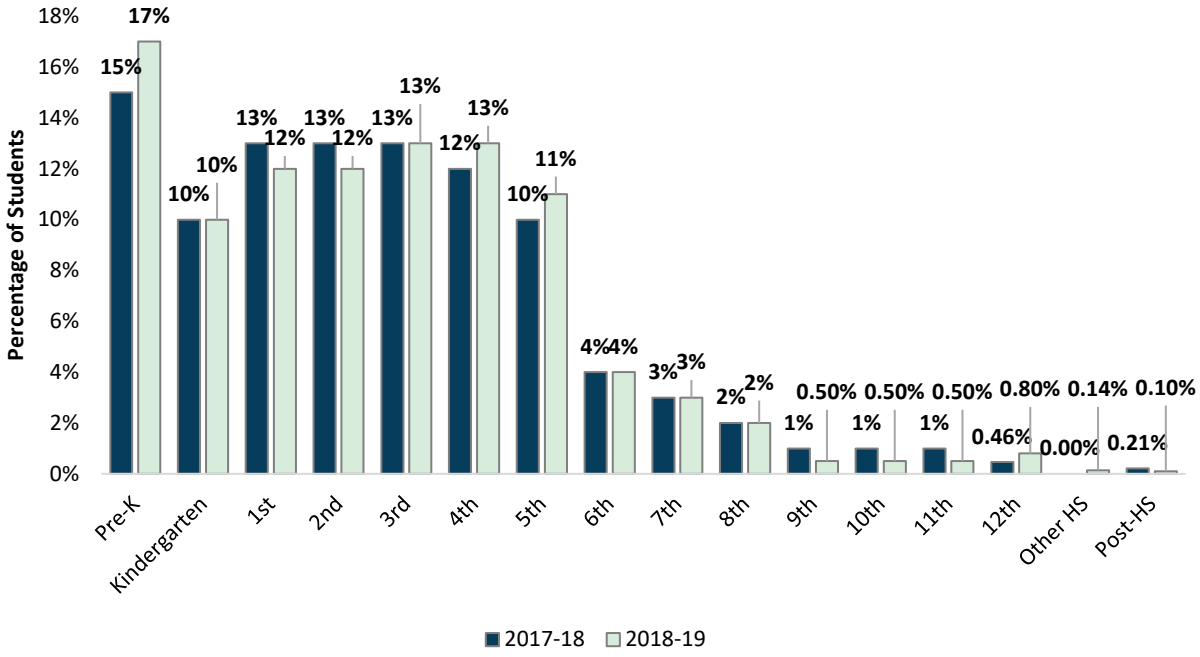
Exhibit 13. Overall Program Participant Race and Ethnicity



Note. For race, *N* = 8,487 for 2017–18 and *N* = 8,588 for 2018–19. For ethnicity, *N* = 8,717 for 2017–18 and *N* = 8,664 for 2018–19. Race data are missing for 11% of participants served during 2017–18, and for 18% of participants served during 2018–19. Ethnicity data are missing for 19% of participants served during 2018–19. American Indian or Alaska Native is abbreviated as "AIAN." Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander is abbreviated as "NHPL."

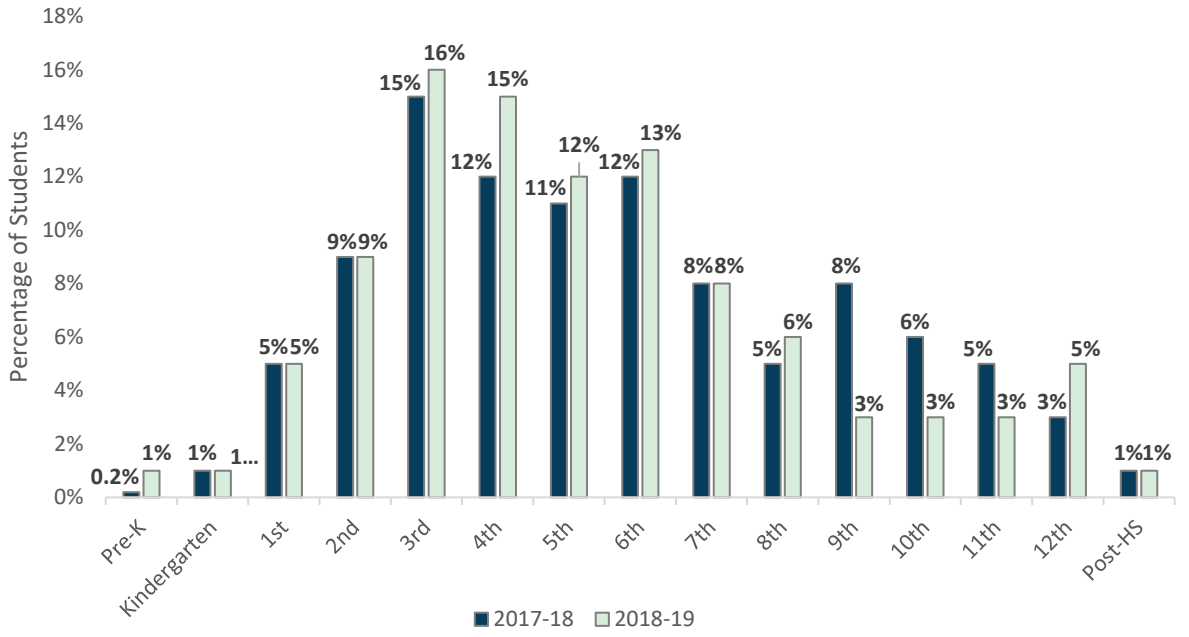
In terms of grade levels served, the vast majority of youth were in grade levels Pre-K through Grade 5 in both 2017–18 (86%) and in 2018–19 (88%). Pre-Kindergarten students alone accounted for 15% of all participants in 2017–18, and for 17% of participants in 2018–19. These proportions are greatly affected by DCPS, however; without DCPS, a greater proportion of youth served fell between Grades 3 and 8. See Exhibits 14 and 15.

Exhibit 14. Overall Program Participant Grade Levels



Note. For 2017–18, *N* = 9,057. For 2018–19, *N* = 8,988. Grade data are missing for 14% of program participants served during 2018–19.

Exhibit 15. Program Participant Grade Levels Without DCPS



Note. *N* = 1,537 for 2017–18. *N* = 1,407 for 2018–19.

Youth Participant Baseline Assessment Data

A key goal of the 21st CCLC program is to serve youth who are lower performing in terms of academics. One way to gauge whether the program is in fact serving this population is to look at state assessment scores for mathematics and English language arts, and to see what proportion fall below the level of "meets expectations." While there is no set benchmark or ideal target percentage, the data can at least show whether youth in academic need are attending the program, and if so, approximately in what proportion relative to all attendees. With multiple years of data, it is also possible to see whether the proportion changed year to year.

Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) Scores for Math and ELA

To investigate this, AIR researchers obtained PARCC data from OSSE (aggregate statistics based on attendee lists) and calculated the proportion of 21st CCLC participants at each PARCC score level. In order to calculate these proportions, AIR imputed the counts of students at each PARCC score level using the aggregate percentages by year and subgrant provided by OSSE. There are five score levels, Levels 1–5, with Level 1 being the lowest. Levels 4 and 5 meet expectations (level 5 is "exceeds expectations"), while Levels 1–3 fall below expectations.

OSSE provided aggregate Math PARCC score data for approximately 3,775 program participants from 2017–18, and aggregate ELA PARCC score data for approximately 3,791 program participants from 2017–18. From the 2018–19 program year, OSSE provided aggregate Math PARCC score data for approximately 3,951 participants, and aggregate ELA PARCC score data for approximately 3,960 participants. Note that the PARCC data do not specify how many students have records of taking *both* the Math and ELA subject tests in a given year, versus only a single subject test score record.

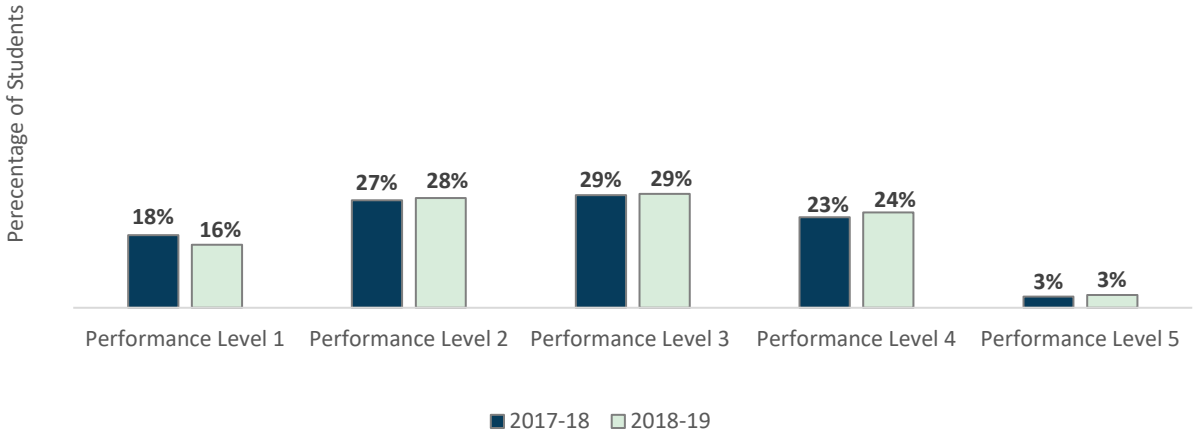
PARCC Scores

Math: Only 26% of program participants in 2017–18 and 27% of participants in 2018–19 met or exceeded expectations (PARCC Levels 4 and 5) in Mathematics.

ELA: Only 27% of program participants in 2017–18 and 31% of participants in 2018–19 met or exceeded expectations (PARCC Levels 4 and 5) in ELA.

The majority of participants in both 2017–18 (56%) and in 2018–19 (57%) either partially met or approached expectations in Mathematics (Levels 2 and 3). About 18% of participants in 2017–18 did not meet expectations in Mathematics, while a smaller proportion of participants (16%) received Level 1 scores the following program year. See Exhibit 16 for PARCC Mathematics results across both program years.

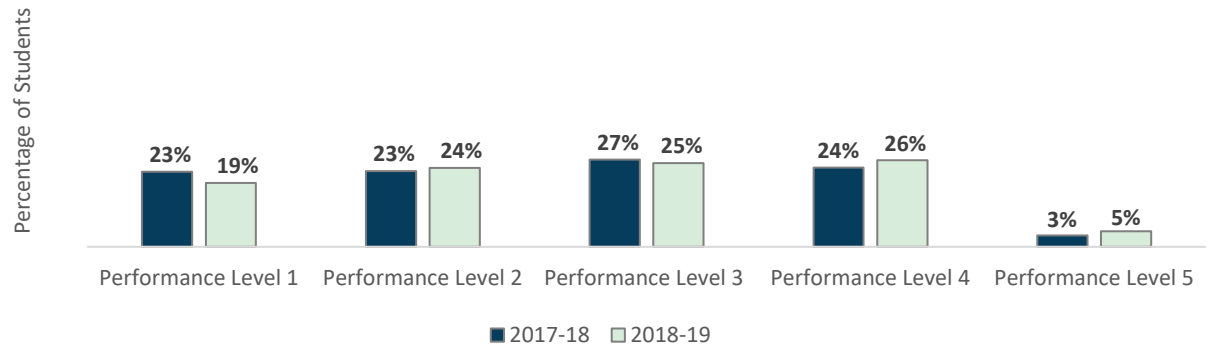
Exhibit 16. Mathematics PARCC Results for 21st CCLC Participants, by PARCC Score Level



Note. *N* = 3,775 for 2017–18. *N* = 3,951 for 2018–19.

In terms of English language arts, 27% of program participants in 2017–18 and 31% of participants in 2018–19 met or exceeded expectations (Levels 4 and 5) in ELA. About half of all participants in both 2017–18 and 2018–19 either partially met or approached expectations (Levels 2 and 3) in ELA. Around 23% of participants in 2017–18 did not meet expectations in ELA (Level 1), while a smaller proportion of participants (19%) received Level 1 scores the following program year. See Exhibit 17 for PARCC Language Arts results for both program years.

Exhibit 17. English Language Arts PARCC Results for 21st CCLC Participation, by PARCC Score Level



Note. *N* = 3,791 for 2017–18. *N* = 3,960 for 2018–19.

For both mathematics and English language arts, more than two thirds of youth participants in both years were below expectations (Levels 1–3). Further, the proportion of youth in each level was fairly stable each year, with shifts year to year of only a few percentage points (though note that additional years of data would be required to detect patterns). In all, it seems that the 21st CCLC program in DC is indeed serving youth who need academic support.

Youth Characteristics Summary

In all, there were a total of 9,393 youth in 2017–18 and 10,647 in 2018–19—though these figures are likely low given low reporting rates among the 16 subgrantees. The median number of youths served per subgrant was 326 in 2017–18 and 302 in 2018–19. Demographically, these participants were about evenly split male and female, and around three quarters of participants were Black. Most were in lower grade levels, notably pre-k through fifth grade, though a higher proportion of youth were in Grades 3–8 if DCPS is not considered. Academically, for both mathematics and English language arts around three quarters of participants scored below expectations. All this fits with the site coordinators' feedback concerning targeted populations and suggests that the 21st CCLC program in DC is serving the populations intended by the program.

3. Center and Program Quality Practices

Center and Program Quality Practices

Within the conceptual framework, program quality is a critical intermediary between the population served (youth characteristics) and program participation and engagement. Per the framework, programming must be high quality if the target population is to attend with high engagement. To explore program quality, then, AIR researchers investigated aspects of organizational quality, process quality, and content quality defined as follows:

- **Organizational quality** refers to more general subgrant- or center-level practices that broadly support program quality, notably in ways not covered by *content* or *process* quality.
- **Process quality** refers to within-activity adoption of practices and approaches to program delivery that result in developmentally appropriate settings.
- **Content quality** refers to within-activity practices meant to cultivate specific skills, beliefs, or knowledge.

This section presents data pertaining to each of these areas of program quality.

Organizational Quality

Organizational quality, as defined here, is a more general domain of program quality than either content or process quality and can cover many different aspects of program best practices. In this subsection we focus on organizational traits that were discussed by the site coordinators and parents as being especially important for overall program quality. Specifically, this subsection presents information on partnerships, communication methods, use of data, staff hiring, and staff training. For partnerships and communication methods, we present not only perceived program strengths, but also challenges and associated practices that may be useful for broader consideration.

Leveraging and maintaining successful partnerships

All 15 centers reported, in some form or another, that they leverage partnerships with external groups and organizations to support program delivery. Center coordinators reported developing strategic partnerships with vendors that enable their center to work towards accomplishing their goals and meeting the needs of the youth they serve. Centers leverage partnerships to offer a diversity of program activities (e.g., creative writing, art, karate, STEM/robotics, etc.) that interest and engage youth, support parent engagement, provide food and/or transportation, and assist with hiring high-quality staff and curriculum development.

Center coordinators described successful partnerships in multiple ways. Three coordinators described successful vendors as those who offered a structured curriculum and extensive training for their center's staff. Coordinators specifically praised vendors who had the "training and knowledge needed to work with youth." One coordinator explained that they deliberately seek out partners who have a historical track record of working with DC Public Schools. Overall, coordinators reported that successful partnerships enabled youth to form new positive relationships with staff, learn a variety of skills, and engage in exciting opportunities they may not otherwise have the chance to experience.

Partnership Challenges

In addition to exploring what makes partnerships successful, AIR researchers also asked coordinators to reflect on partnership challenges. Four coordinators identified fostering a strong relationship with their school sites as particularly challenging. Coordinators reported having to navigate issues of program space, storage of materials, and borrowing or sharing materials. One coordinator spoke to the need and occasional challenges with working directly with teachers to address academic or behavioral challenges with certain youth.

"And sometimes we'll just have to go and camp out their [teacher's classrooms] and ask, "'Hey, do you have five minutes?"

As a result of these challenges, three center coordinators indicated the importance of maintaining consistent communication with their school site.[9] Specifically, coordinators noted the need to keep teachers and administrators informed of program activities and successes or challenges related to youth served. One coordinator explained that their center overcame initial challenges at the school through early and intentional relationship-building with school faculty,

"Sometimes I feel like when an outside organization is coming and working with the youth and their students, as I've heard many times before, sometimes it's a wall built up. But I was able to get over that, making sure that I arrive early and build relationships with the school coordinator, the principal, and also some of the teachers of the students that we serve really helped."

Parent Communications

AIR researchers asked coordinators, parents, and youth to describe their center's methods for communicating about programming. Parents most frequently referenced receiving texts or phone calls, emails, in-person or face-to-face updates, and/or flyers and newsletters from the centers. Exhibit 18 summarizes these methods and why parents and coordinators have found them effective.

Exhibit 18. Methods of Communication and Why They're Effective

Phone or Text: "Communication is great because if something's wrong, she [center coordinator] has no problem picking up the phone calling you if you're late, 'Hey where you at? Is something wrong? What's going on?' Things like that" - Parent

In-Person Check-Ins and Updates: "I would say my communication with them is always in person. I'm always inquiring 'How did my son do' How was y'all's work-day?... they're going to the good stuff; they're going to tell me the bad stuff." - Parent

Flyers and Newsletters: "We have a monthly newsletter that we do for the after-school program as well, just to also engage parents, and let them know what's happening in the program." - Coordinator

[9] Staff survey results indicated that center staff know whom to contact at their students' school. However, staff survey results also indicated that center staff do not have ongoing meetings or regular communication with non-program school staff. These findings provide insight about potential partnership and communication challenges and emphasize the importance of fostering strong relationships with schools.

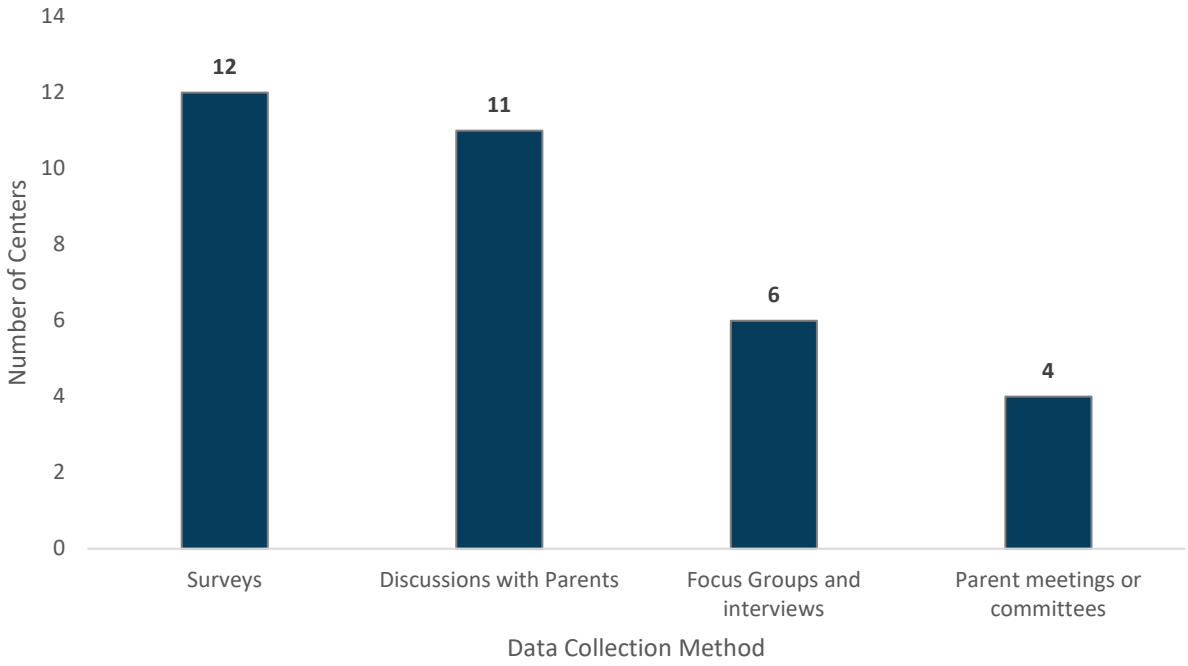
Parents reported general satisfaction with how center coordinators communicated with them, praising centers for keeping them informed about their children and their responsiveness and openness to feedback. Parents said that centers maintain constant communication with the appropriate amount of messaging. Because some centers emphasize interpersonal communications with parents and youth, many parents and youth also reported feeling taken care of by their center, often referring to them as "family." One parent said,

> "When you put your kid in [our program] then you're going to end up with family. She [center coordinator] calls you; she texts you; she checks on you. So, for me I think that my kids have gained extended family from [our program] because she [center coordinator] does what the school doesn't do."

Soliciting youth and parent feedback to inform programming

Among the specific data used to inform program offerings and assess program quality, center coordinators reported soliciting youth and family feedback using the following data collection methods: (1) both formal and informal discussions with parents and youth; (2) surveys; (3) focus groups and/or interviews; and (4) parent meetings or committees. Exhibit 19 provides more detail on each of these methods below.

Exhibit 19. Methods Centers Used to Collect Youth and Parent Feedback



Some centers also reported collecting feedback via informal email or phone, Google forms, and suggestion boxes. It should be noted that while individuals from all centers reported providing opportunities to provide feedback, parents from seven different centers indicating having

minimal to no opportunity to provide feedback. Parents may have perceived "opportunity" by parents across centers or they may not have been as aware of such opportunities. Overall, youth and parents reported appreciating the opportunity to provide feedback about their child's afterschool center experiences. Some parents and youth reported that their feedback had resulted in positive outcomes such as staff addressing and resolving specific issues. One parent said,

> I feel like they've [center staff] been open for any type of criticism that you may have, or any issues that you would bring to the table. It's nothing to just pull them to the side and say 'Hey, this is the problem. Here's something that I would suggest."

Communication Challenges

Despite general satisfaction with center communication, some parents expressed dissatisfaction with how their center communicated with them. Some parents expressed that the communication they received was unclear or confusing. One parent explained,

> "Sometimes I think the person who's writing the emails, they can literally be a little confusing, and so I've been comfortable saying 'Hey, I got the email, quite frankly, I read it twice, and I wasn't clear what you were saying.'"

Parents also reported instances of experiencing issues communicating with program coordinators due to a lack of sufficient contact information or encountering logistical issues, such as last-minute cancellations or difficulties communicating late pick-ups and drop-offs. The pandemic exacerbated these issues by often temporarily shutting down in-person learning. One parent explained,

> "Sometimes it could be a little last minute, and it's understanding. And then there's an email. I know sometimes people don't always have time to check an email, but it's an email telling us 'Hey it's going to be virtual today. No classes. So that's something of a challenge.'"

In some instances, parents reported encountering "overcommunication," or feeling overwhelmed with too many emails and texts. These made it difficult to determine which messages to prioritize. Parents explained that the important messages might get overlooked because they are not flagged or do not appear any different in format than all other communications.

Finally, parents at some sites noted challenges with center orientations, reporting that they did not receive sufficient information about the program expectations or initial onboarding. As one parent said,

"We didn't get no literature, no welcome package, no meet and greet. It was none of that due to the COVID restrictions, but with it being a wait list and a capacity, like a number, you would think it'll have a little better one-on-one with parents and youths, so that youth and the parent have a clear insight of what their objective is for the day or for their program overall."

Using data to inform programming

Coordinators at all 15 centers in the subsample of sites indicated using data to inform their program's decision making. Ten coordinators reported using data to inform program offerings and 13 coordinators reported using data to assess their program quality. These data sources ranged from formal statistics (data on academic performance and proficiency, graduate and college matriculation) to evaluation tools (YPQAs, external evaluations, pre- and post-surveys), to informal methods of collecting input (input from youth, parents, school administration, teachers, and staff). To inform program offerings, coordinators often reported relying on primary data collection methods (i.e., surveys, focus groups) where coordinators directly asked youth and families about what programs they were interested in and their experience at the center. However, one coordinator notably reported using national data on which enrichment activities yielded the most academic achievement benefits to determine program offerings. For assessing program quality, coordinators reported tracking both academic achievement and SEL indicators (i.e., number of behavioral incidences at school, surveys on emotional safety and well-being) to determine whether the programming had its desire effect. Overall, centers varied significantly in data they used and whether their data collection methods were formal or informal.

Implementing effective hiring processes and investing in program staff

Having high-quality, well-trained program staff helps ensure high-quality afterschool program delivery. AIR researchers asked center coordinators to describe their processes for hiring and training program staff. Most centers described a standardized process that included an initial screening, interview, and background check. Any delays in hiring tended to occur during the background check process, usually due to city requirements, like drug testing. Coordinators described prioritizing the hire of individuals who have prior experiences working with youth and have connections to the communities that they are working. One coordinator described why it's important to hire staff with youth and outreach experience,

"I think having experience working with youth and some experience in doing outreach, because that's a huge part of what we do in recruiting and trying to connect to families and knowing the resources that are available in the area. And if one is not fully aware of what services are around the area, we are still able to learn about them and just knowing how to network. I think it's really important that way we are able to talk to more families and youth."

Coordinators also reported hiring alumni from their programs, former volunteers, and, in a few cases, certified teachers.

On top of hiring highly qualified individuals, continuing to invest in staff through high-quality professional development also emerged as a major ingredient for success. We detailed professional development opportunities centers offer their staff in the subsection below related to how staff are trained to accomplish program goals. It is worth noting again, however, as center coordinators emphasized the importance of hiring and retaining staff with continuous improvement mindsets and passion to learn different approaches to serving the youth and families they serve.

Professional Development Opportunities for Staff

21st CCLC centers use both internal and external professional development opportunities to help their staff work toward achieving their center's programming goals. Coordinators indicated that internal training opportunities tend to focus on communicating the center's core values, defining center expectations, strategies to engage youth and encourage youth attendance, and emphasizing continuous improvement among staff members. Coordinators also reported that their staff attend a wide variety of professional development offered by OSSE that target topics such as program outcomes, youth development, and parent engagement.

Outside OSSE trainings, center coordinators shared that they often send center staff to a variety of external opportunities such as national conferences and leadership workshops to receive support and learn about new ideas related to how to approach their center's goals. One center coordinator emphasized the importance of ongoing training and why having tangible resources they can use after the training as most helpful.

> So I go to those trainings, and I have my notes and make sure that I take those back to the team and implement it into… the assessment (of) program effectiveness. That was a really, really good training on just how you assess (program effectiveness) right."

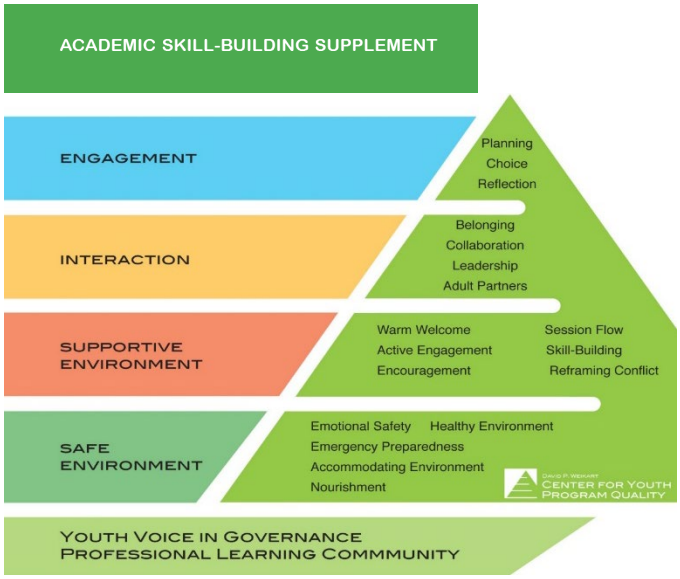
Process Quality

To explore process quality, AIR researchers administered the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) observational tool. The Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) is a well-known and validated activity observation scoring tool. The YPQA, developed by The Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality (Weikart Center), a division of the Forum for Youth Investment, includes scorable items in four domains: Safe Environment, Supportive Environment, Interaction, and Engagement. We describe the observational tool and our findings in more detail in this subsection.

The YPQA Tool Description

As noted, the YPQA is a validated observational assessment tool for examining the level of instructional quality at the point-of-service. That is, the tool enabled us to gauge how well staff are incorporating high-quality instructional practices, as determined by current research, into their instruction. In terms of the conceptual framework, this directly relates to *process quality*.

Exhibit 20. YPQA Hierarchy



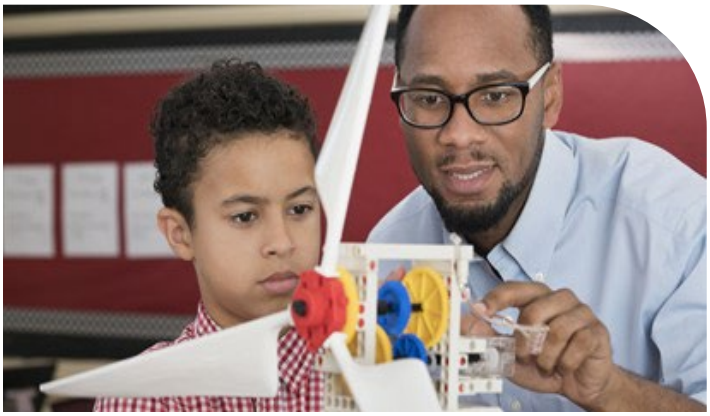
Source. David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality

The YPQA tool itself comprises four quality domains: Safe Environment, Supportive Environment, Interaction, and Engagement. These four domains are structured in a pyramid hierarchy (Exhibit 20), where the practices are increasingly hard to implement and youth engagement is more important as you move from the bottom to the top of the pyramid, from one domain to the next. The latter practices are higher order in how they invite youth to take on more meaningful roles in their own learning, through strategies such as planning, choice, and reflection. These practices are less commonly implemented, less related to compliance structures, and generally more difficult for staff to deliver, but they are more tied to positive outcomes.

Scales associated with the Safe Environment domain were not scored. Instead, AIR researchers focused on the three domains (and their associated subscales) that covered instructional quality and staffing practices: Supportive Environment,[10] Interaction and Engagement. Each of these separate subscales (e.g., "Warm Welcome") consists of multiple items, each scored as a 1, 3, or 5 (with 5 being best practice). Evidentiary thresholds in the tool determine each score level.

[10] Note that AIR researchers did not observe any conflict during activity visits, leading to exclusion of the Reframing Conflict scale from the data presented in this section.

Activities Observed



AIR researchers observed one to two activities for each of the 15 centers (each center representing a separate subgrantee), with 18 activities observed in all. Most activities observed were geared toward youth in Grade 4 or higher (13 of 18 activities, with activities serving youth up through high school), with only 5 activities serving primarily K–3 youth. Note that the YPQA is not primarily designed for younger youth (the School-Age PQA, or SAPQA, being preferred for K–3), and is better suited for activities serving youth in grades four or higher. Because of this, the findings below include notes regarding score variation across K–3 and 4–12, where appropriate.

In terms of activity types for activities serving youth in fourth grade or higher, six activities were "visual and performing arts" and three were "STEM" activities. Activities targeting younger youth (K–3) were either "literacy" or "other academic enrichment." Activities were observed for half an hour to an hour.

Creating a Supportive Environment

Exhibit 21 presents all scores for the **Supportive Environment** domain. Items are arranged from highest average score to lowest. Descriptions in the table are based on the YPQA descriptions for score level 5 and have been edited for brevity and clarity.

The exhibit shows high average scores for the Supportive Environment domain. While some specific items had average scores closer to the mid-range of 3.0, no scores fell below a 3.0, and most were at 4.0 or higher. This indicates that activities among visited centers are creating a supportive environment for participating youth.

Exhibit 21. Supportive Environment Domain

Score Area	Average Score	Description
Warm Welcome 2	5.00	Staff mainly use a warm tone of voice and respectful language.
Warm Welcome 3	5.00	Staff generally smile, use friendly gestures, and make eye contact.
Session Flow 3	5.00	There are enough materials and supplies prepared for all youth to begin activities.
Session Flow 5	5.00	There is an appropriate amount of time for all activities.

Score Area	Average Score	Description
Skill Building 5	5.00	When youth struggle, staff always provide learning supports or encouragement.
Encouragement 3	5.00	Staff are almost always actively involved with youth.
Session Flow 2	4.88	Staff have all materials and supplies ready to begin all activities.
Session Flow 4	4.78	Staff explain all activities clearly.
Warm Welcome 1	4.73	All youth are greeted by staff as they arrive or at start of session.
Skill Building 2	4.67	Staff encourage all youth to try out skills or attempt higher levels of performance.
Active Engagement 1	4.44	The activities involve youth in engaging with materials or ideas or improving a skill through guided practice for at least half the time.
Active Engagement 3	4.44	The activities balance concrete experiences involving materials, people, and projects with abstract learning or concepts.
Encouragement 1	4.33	Staff support at least some contributions or accomplishments of youth by acknowledging what they've said or done with specific, nonevaluative language.
Skill Building 4	4.29	Staff break difficult tasks into smaller, simpler steps for all youth.
Session Flow 1	4.14	Staff start and end session within 10 minutes of scheduled time.
Active Engagement 2	**4.11**	**During activities, staff provide all youth a structured opportunity to talk about what they are doing and what they are thinking about to others.**
Encouragement 2	**4.11**	**Staff make frequent use of open-ended questions.**
Skill Building 3	**4.00**	**Staff model skills for all youth.**
Active Engagement 4	3.67	The program activities lead to tangible products or performances that reflect ideas or designs of youth.
Skill Building 1	3.33	Staff tell youth a specific learning or skill-building focus for the session or activity.

AIR researchers also reviewed Supportive Environment average scores in terms of primary grade levels served by each activity, splitting activities into two groups: One set of activities serving primarily kindergarten through third grade youth, and another set of activities serving primarily fourth grade youth and up. There were only three Supportive Environment items where scores diverged by more than one point, on average: Active Engagement 2 (3.8 for activities focusing on 4–12, versus 5.0 for activities focusing on K–3), Encouragement 2 (again 3.8 for activities focusing on 4–12, versus 5.0 for K–3), and Skill Building 3 (3.6 for 4–12 versus 5.0 for K–3). These are all shown in bold, blue font in the table above.

Providing Youth Interaction

In terms of the **Interaction** domain, average scores were lower than for Supportive Environment, as shown in Exhibits 22 and 23. This was expected, however, given that the

Interaction domain was higher in the YPQA pyramid of program quality than Supportive Environment (meaning that items in the Interactive domain should have been harder to implement than items in Supportive Environment). Items associated with Collaboration and Leadership had the lowest average scores, with values generally 2.0 or lower.

Exhibit 22. Interaction Domain Scores

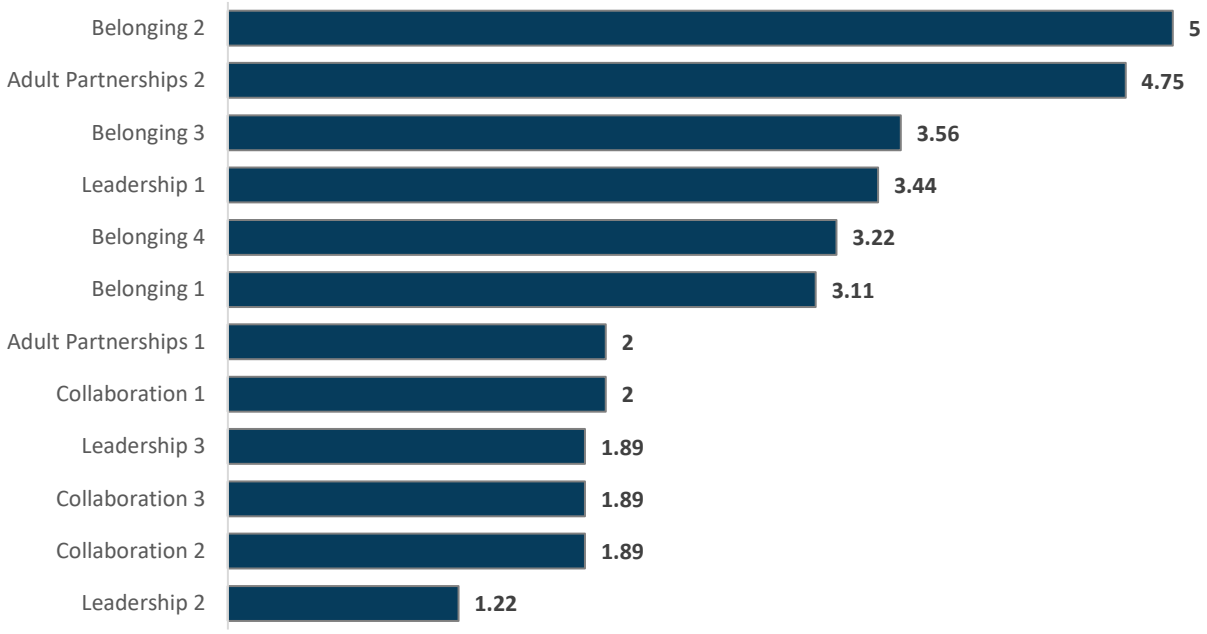


Exhibit 23. Interactive Domain Scores With Description

Score Area	Average Score	Description
Belonging 2	5	Youth do not exhibit any exclusion or staff successfully intervene if exclusive behavior occurs.
Adult Partnerships 2	4.75	Staff provide an explanation or reason for every behavioral expectation, guideline or direction given to youth.
Belonging 3	3.56	Youth strongly identify with the program offering.
Leadership 1	3.44	Staff provide all youth multiple or extended opportunities to practice group-process skills.
Belonging 4	3.22	Staff provide structured opportunities to publicly acknowledge the achievements, work, or contributions of at least some youth.
Belonging 1	3.11	Staff provide structured opportunities with the purpose of helping youth get to know each other.
Collaboration 1	2	Staff provide opportunities for all youth to work cooperative as a team or in a group.

Score Area	Average Score	Description
Adult Partnerships 1	2	Staff share control of most activities with youth, providing guidance and facilitation while retaining overall responsibility.
Collaboration 2	1.89	Staff provide all youth opportunities to participate in activities with interdependent roles.
Collaboration 3	**1.89**	**Staff provide opportunities for all youth.**
Leadership 3	1.89	Staff provide all youth one or more opportunities to lead a group.
Leadership 2	1.22	Staff provide opportunities for all youth to mentor an individual.

Note: Items where average scores for K–3 and 4–12 activity groups diverged by more than 1.0 point are shown in the shaded blue rows.

As with Supportive Environment, AIR investigated Interaction scores by activity focal grades (K–3 versus 4–12). Only one item had an average score difference of more than one point, Collaboration 3, with activities for older youth scoring higher (2.2 versus 1.0). This difference makes sense, however, given the item (staff provide opportunities for all youth) and the age-group differences. Overall, item scores were fairly similar between the two grade groups.

Engaging Youth

Scores in the **Engagement** domain tended to be lower than they were for either Supportive Environment or Interaction. Average scores for Planning were lowest, but only one item (Reflection 1) had an average score above a 3.0. See Exhibits 24 and 25.

Exhibit 24. Engagement Domain Scores

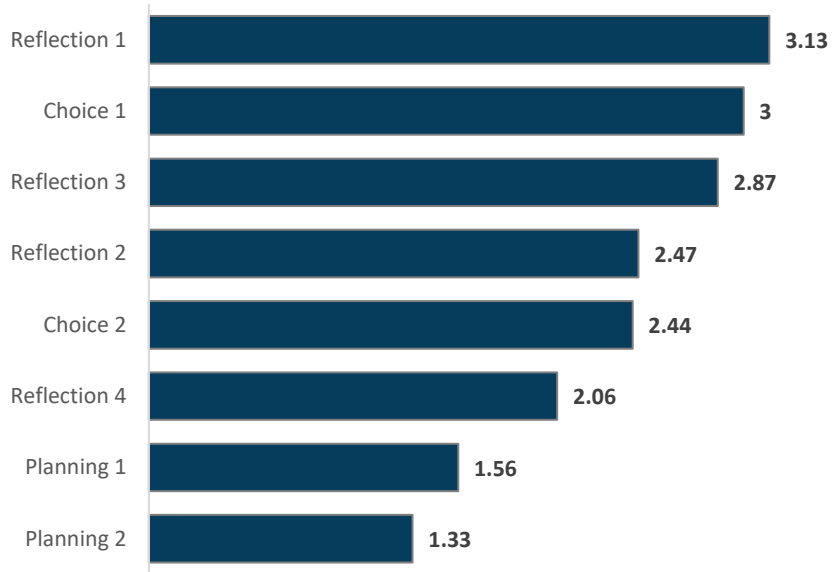


Exhibit 25. Engagement Domain Scores With Description

Score Area	Average Score	Description
Reflection 1	3.13	Staff engage all youth in an intentional process of reflecting on what they have done.
Choice 1	3	Staff provide opportunities for all youth to make at least one open-ended content choice within the content framework of the activities.
Reflection 3	2.87	Staff initiate structured opportunities for youth to give feedback on the activities.
Reflection 2	2.47	Staff use two or more strategies to encourage youth to share what they have done and reflect on their experiences.
Choice 2	2.44	Staff provide opportunities for all youth to make at least one open-ended process choice.
Reflection 4	2.06	In the course of the program offering, staff provide all youth opportunities to make presentations to the whole group.
Planning 1	1.56	Staff provide multiple opportunities for youth to make plans for projects and activities.
Planning 2	1.33	In the course of planning the projects or activities, two or more planning strategies are used.

For Engagement, differences between the grade-level groups (K–3 and 4–12) were somewhat more pronounced. The 4–12 activity group had higher average scores than the K–3 group for Choice 2 (3.0 versus 1.0) and Reflection 4 (2.4 versus 1.0), but a lower score for Choice 1 (2.7 versus 3.8). This also makes sense, however. Choice 2 refers to staff providing open-ended process choices, while Reflection 4 refers to youth presentations, both of which are more developmentally appropriate for older youth. Average scores for Choice 1, concerning open-ended content choices within activities, were near 3.0 for both groups, so this difference may not be as meaningful.

Content Quality

As defined within the conceptual framework, content quality refers to within-activity practices meant to cultivate specific skills, beliefs, or knowledge. In this sense, content quality can be said to be *high* within a specific activity if the practices used by the activity leader to teach a given skill, belief, or knowledge are generally effective as indicated by suitable evidence.

This subsection does not present direct, empirical evidence of practice effectiveness in this sense, notably because gathering such data would have required extensive data collection effort outside the scope of AIR's present work. However, this subsection does present information on the types of skills, beliefs, and knowledge that 21st CCLC programs in DC are trying to affect, as conveyed to AIR researchers via the staff survey.

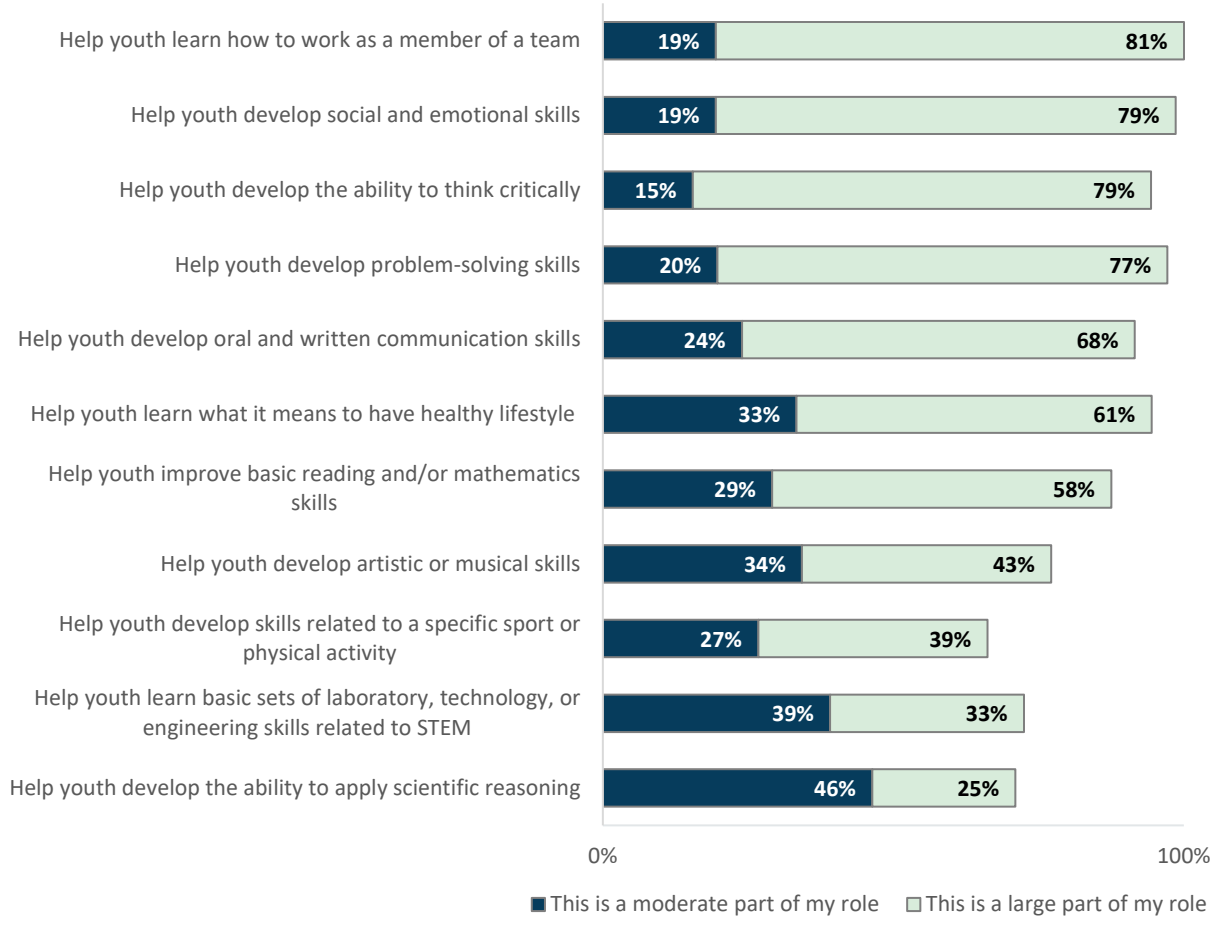
Staff Skill-Building Roles

In addition to the role-related questions shown in Section 2, the staff survey asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they see it as their role to teach specific skills to students.

Respondents were given a list of skills and asked to indicate whether they saw teaching each skill as "not part of my role," "a small part of my role," "a moderate part of my role," or "a large part of my role." Responses for staff identifying as activity leaders, teachers, education specialists, and activity specialists (*n* = 72) are shown in Exhibit 26.

Overall, non-administrative staff saw their role first as helping youth build social skills (81% of respondents), with "Help youth develop social and emotional skills" a close second (79%). Academic-related skills also received high proportions of "large part of my role" responses, however, with "Help youth develop the ability to think critically" tied with social and emotional skills (79% indicating that this was a "large part of my role"). Also, specific skills such as problem-solving, communication, and mathematics/reading were high in terms of proportion of "large part of my role" responses.

Exhibit 26. Staff Survey: "To what extent do you see it as your role in the program to teach the following set of skills?"



Note: n = 72.

These results are somewhat different from the skill-related goals outlined by site coordinators (as shown in Section 2 of this report). As shown here, most activity leaders saw it as their role to help youth learn how to work as a member of a team, and to develop social and emotional skills. In contrast, site coordinators, in discussing program goals, emphasized academic improvement as a primary concern. These responses could imply that center staff and coordinators see the priorities of programing goals somewhat differently. Note, however, that the staff survey data were gathered in early 2022 during a resurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is possible that these skill priorities would shift if the survey were administered again absent a COVID-19 outbreak.

Program Quality Summary

In terms of organizational quality, site coordinators indicated that leveraging partnerships is important for ensuring activity variety and providing youth with opportunities they might not otherwise have. Partnering with the school day has, for some programs at least, been something of a challenge, however, notably concerning issues of space and materials. Parents indicated that timely and effective communication was an important factor in helping them to feel like the program was taking care of them, almost as family.

In terms of process quality, the activities observed were characterized by high supportive environment scores, somewhat less high interaction scores, and modestly lower engagement scores. This is in keeping with the YPQA hierarchy and is expected. For interaction, leadership and collaboration items scored lowest. For engagement, planning and reflection were lowest. Some differences were observed between activities serving younger youth versus older youth (K–3 versus Grades 4–12), but these differences were generally explainable as a function of youth age.

In terms of content quality, activity leaders reported that helping youth learn how to work as a member of a team was a large part of their role, followed closely by helping youth develop social and emotional skills.

4. Participation and Engagement

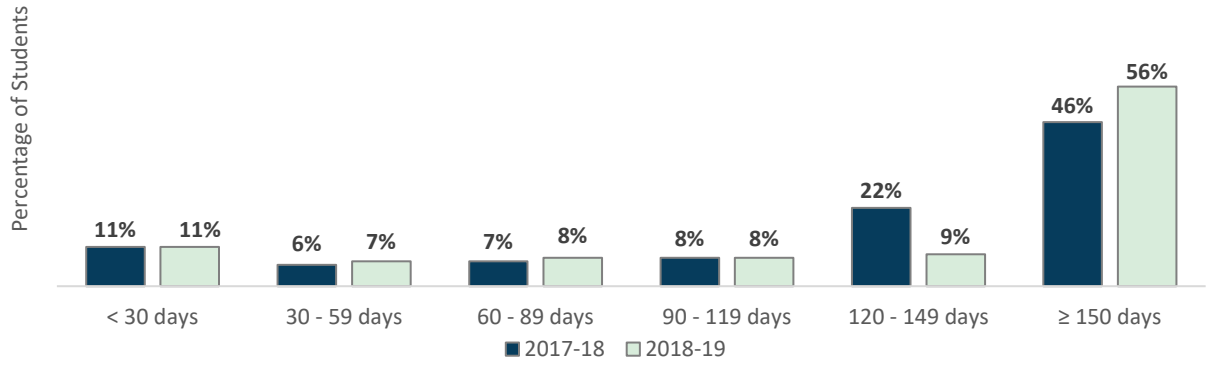
The logic of the conceptual framework is that, if programming is of sufficient quality, youth participation and engagement will be high. In turn—and given that the programming *is* high quality—high levels of participation and engagement are expected to lead to positive youth outcomes.

This section presents data on youth attendance and engagement. The data stem from several sources: First we present overall attendance patterns for 2017–18 and 2018–19 using the historical data; second, we present qualitative data based on parent focus groups, youth focus groups, and site coordinator interviews; third, we present the results of a youth engagement survey; fourth, we present information concerning family engagement activities based on historical data, site coordinator interviews, and parent focus groups; and fifth, we present data on participant retention based on site coordinator interviews.

Student Attendance

Exhibit 27 presents a summary of overall program participant attendance levels across 2017–18 and 2018–19. Overall, 89% of youth served in 2017–18 and 88% served in 2018–19 were considered regular attendees, meaning they attended at least 30 total days of programming at their respective sites. Notably, 46% of youth in 2017–18 and 56% of youth in 2018–19 attended at least 150 total days of programming. These findings, however, are skewed by DCPS-specific program attendance (which tends to be very high).

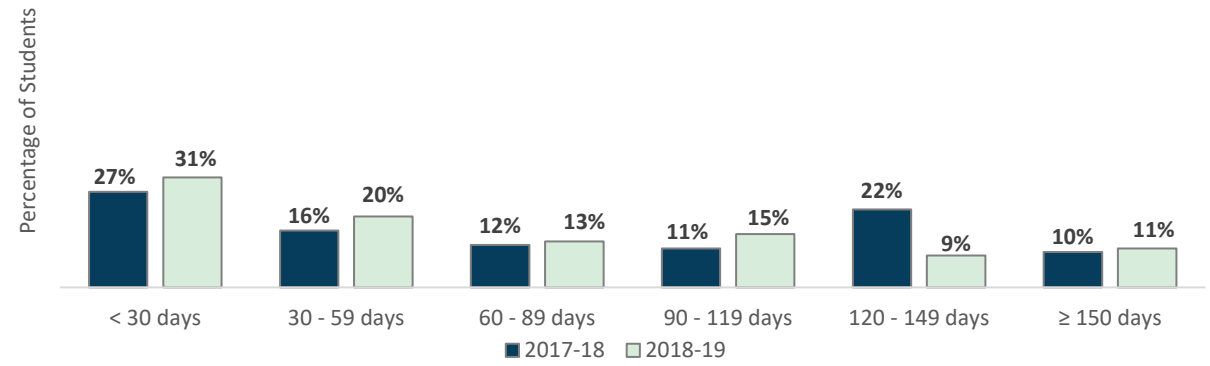
Exhibit 27. Overall, 89% of youth served in 2017–18 and 88% served in 2018–19 attended at least 30 total days of programming, with 46% of youth in 2017–18 and 56% of youth in 2018–19 attending at least 150 total days of programming



Note. For 2017–18, *N* = 9,037. For 2018–19, *N* = 9,539.

Exhibit 28 presents a summary of program participant attendance levels without DCPS. In contrast to attendance levels overall, attendance levels tabulated without DCPS data indicate that only 10% of youth in 2017–18 and 11% in 2018–19 attended at least 150 days of programming. Not including DCPS data, the proportion of regular attendees was 71% in 2017–18, and 68% in 2018–19. These participation levels are generally high for 21st CCLC programming.

Exhibit 28. Not including DCPS, only 10% of youth in 2017–18 and 11% in 2018–19 attended at least 150 days of programming



Note. For 2017–18, *N* = 1,517. For 2018–19, *N* = 1,958.

Youth and Family Program Participation and Experiences

Focus groups with youth and parents of participating youth provided a deeper understanding of how participating youth and parents experience programming. AIR researchers asked parents and youth questions about the types of activities they found the most beneficial and enjoyable, opportunities provided for youth leadership, improvements that could be made to programming, and the quality of interactions with program staff. The following subsection summarizes the most salient themes parents and youth reported about each of these topics.

Centers offer a variety of youth activities

Parents and youth provided positive feedback about center activities, often citing that their center provides a variety of activities for youth to participate in (which, as previously noted, is a factor for youth and parents in choosing to attend 21st CCLC programming). Parents and youth frequently expressed similar satisfaction for activities, especially academic support (e.g., homework help and tutoring); arts and crafts; and health-based activities (e.g., sports and cooking class).

Parents were especially enthusiastic about academic support programs. Parents from four centers cited homework support and completed homework assignments as a reason that they can focus on other essential family responsibilities at home. Additionally, parents from three centers mentioned that academic support programming ensures youth get one-on-one attention that they may not receive in the classroom or at home. One parent said,

> "It's [homework help] not similar to other schools. It's different because they pay more attention to each of them, and they help them more. They help them with their homework after they get picked up, which is a good thing because sometimes, depends what time you get off work and stuff. You don't have a lot of time to just sit down and help them and be there for an hour, teaching them, you can go through it, but you have to do other things."

Centers embed opportunities for youth ownership in their programming

AIR researchers asked youth, parents, and center coordinators to discuss the ways in which youth could take ownership over their experience during program activities. The discussion about youth ownership yielded responses that referenced the following strategies: incorporating youth voice, opportunities for youth to lead, engaging in self-directed learning, and opportunities to present. For example, one youth mentioned opportunities related to youth voice:

> "Well, in the previous meetings I've joined, they will always listen to our ideas on issues and what we think about like current issues that are happening right now."

All 15 centers offer opportunities for youth ownership in some form during program activities by employing at least one of the strategies.

Some parents and youth specifically cited youth opportunities for leadership and building leadership skills as successful characteristics of center programming. Twelve of the 15 subsample programs reported providing program activities that cultivate leadership skills. Leadership activities offered by centers included youth-led antibullying initiatives, youth learning responsibility, and youth developing public speaking skills. However, four centers also provided leadership opportunities that occurred organically during programming. These opportunities included youth providing mentorship to their peers, participating in youth clubs, and taking on the role of activity leaders. These opportunities for youth to take ownership in programs helped youth develop new skills and stay interested and engaged in center programming.

Activities for Families of Participating Youth

As a way to explore this connection between program quality and youth participation and engagement, AIR administered a post-activity youth survey for activities observed at the 15 centers visited by AIR researchers. The survey was collected between November 2021 and January 2022, with a total of 93 responses received (an average of 6.2 surveys per center). The survey asked participants about their experience in the activities they had participated in "that day."[11] Respondents were presented with a set of questions about their experience in programing, with response options of "Not at all," "A little," "Somewhat," and "Very much." Questions on the survey focused on six areas of youth experience: Engagement, Relevance, Challenge, Interaction, Learned something/got better at something, and Positive/Negative Affect. Results for each of these question groups are presented below.

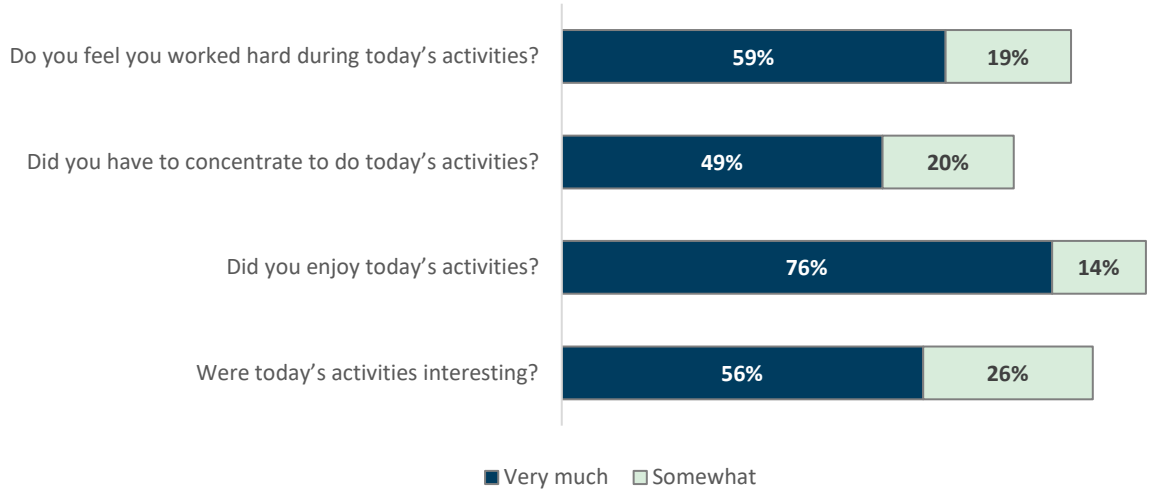
Note that most surveys were collected in person, though around 10% of surveys were collected virtually due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

***Engagement*.** Engagement refers to active participation, investment, and value in learning (Schmidt et al., 2020). Engagement is generally a composite variable based on a set of discrete experiences happening in-the-moment for participating youth. Similar studies oriented at measuring in-the-moment expressions of engagement base their conceptualization of this construct on the concept of flow as articulated by Csikszentmihalyi (1990). Flow refers to the state when interest, concentration, and enjoyment occur simultaneously (Naftzger et al., 2018; Shernoff & Vandell, 2007; Shumow & Schmidt, 2014).

[11] A key benefit of this approach is that youth report on recent events and experiences, thereby enhancing the quality and authenticity of their responses given less difficulty with recall.

On the youth survey, four items measured engagement: (a) Were today's activities interesting? (b) Did you enjoy today's activities? (c) Did you have to concentrate to do today's activities? and (d) Do you feel you worked hard during today's activities? Youth generally responded with "somewhat" or "very much" to these items, though it stands out that youth enjoyed the activities at high levels (with more than three quarters saying they enjoyed today's activities "very much"). See Exhibit 29.

Exhibit 29. Youth Survey Results for ENGAGEMENT (Showing "Somewhat" and "Very much" Responses): "Please answer these questions about TODAY's AFTERSCHOOL ACTIVITIES"

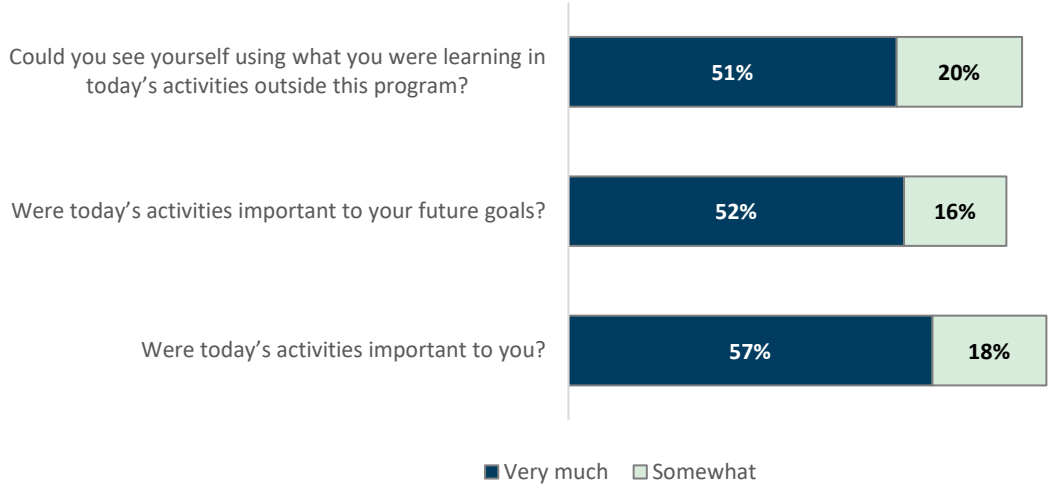


Note. *n* = 93.

Relevance. Relevance occurs when youth perceive an activity as having meaning, importance, or utility beyond the learning activity in which they are currently engaged. Promoting relevance is one of the best strategies for triggering and sustaining youth interest and engagement in learning environments (Assor, Kaplan, & Roth, 2002).

On the youth engagement survey, relevance was defined by combining responses from the following three items asked on the survey: (a) *Were today's activities important to you?* (b) *Were today's activities important to your future goals?* and (c) *Could you see yourself using what you were learning in today's activities outside this program?* Overall, about 70% of respondents indicated "somewhat" or "very much" to each of these items. Importantly, more than half of respondents indicated that they saw the day's activities as being useful outside the program and could apply the day's activities to future goals. See Exhibit 30.

Exhibit 30. Youth Survey Results for RELEVANCE (Showing "Somewhat" and "Very much" Responses): "Please answer these questions about TODAY's AFTERSCHOOL ACTIVITIES"

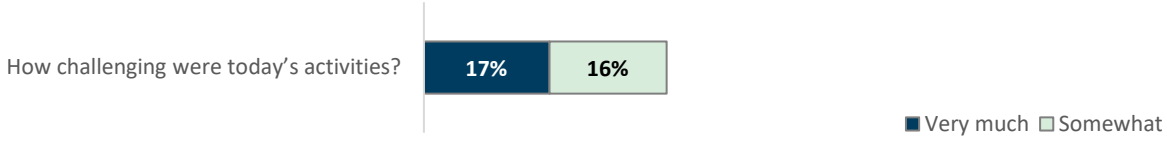


Note. *n* = 93.

***Challenge*.** Based on Emergent Motivation Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000), youth are most apt to experience a state of engagement when there is a relative balance between the difficulty of a task and their ability in an area where they feel generally competent, putting them in a position where there is a need to focus and concentrate to undertake the task in question. When this balance is achieved, youth will experience an appropriate level of challenge in the activity they are undertaking. See Exhibit 31.

On the youth engagement survey, challenge was measured by asking the following question: *How challenging were today's activities*? Overall, youth reported fairly low levels of challenge, with only 33% responding with either "somewhat" or "very much."

Exhibit 31. Youth Survey Results for CHALLENGE (Showing "Somewhat" and "Very much" Responses): "Please answer these questions about TODAY's AFTERSCHOOL ACTIVITIES"

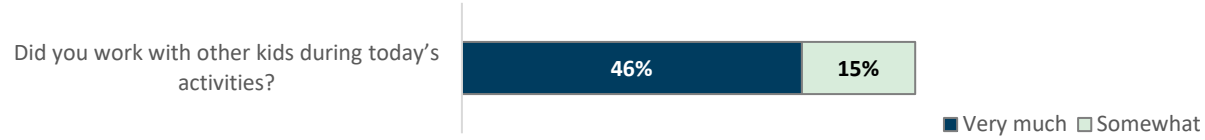


Note. *n* = 93.

***Interaction*.** Having opportunities to experience a sense of belonging, a culture of inclusion, and collaborative work have all been shown to be important components of a motivating learning environment for early adolescent youth (Larson et al., 2019). To gauge interaction, the survey

asked youth the question: (a) *Did you work with other kids during today's activities?* Overall, about 60% of respondents answered "somewhat" or "very much." Given that the activities were observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, however, this actually may be a fairly high level of interaction (thereby fitting with staff survey results showing that staff see cultivation of teamwork as one of their primary roles). See Exhibit 32.

Exhibit 32. Youth Survey Results for INTERACTION (Showing "Somewhat" and "Very much" Responses): "Please answer these questions about TODAY's AFTERSCHOOL ACTIVITIES"



Note. *n* = 93.

***Learned Something*.** Students participating in afterschool programs also have the opportunity to learn new content and develop and practice new skills. Participation in high-quality afterschool programming in particular has been shown to provide students with the opportunity to develop new knowledge and skills that will help them better understand where they excel, what they value, and what they would like to do more of or learn more about (Larson & Dawes, 2015; Shumow & Schmidt, 2014). This process also can be linked to their developing interests, which is a critical component of student growth and development linked to numerous motivational elements related to learning, including goal-directed behavior, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and achievement value (Renninger & Hidi, 2011). Finally, the successes that youth experience while participating in skill-building activities can support the development of a positive self-concept and enhance motivation to participate in additional learning opportunities (Larson et al., 2019).

On the youth engagement survey, learning something was measured by asking the following question: *Do you feel like you learned something or got better at something today*? Overall, youth respondents indicated that they did feel this way, with more than three quarters of respondents responding with "somewhat" or "very much" to this item. See Exhibit 33.

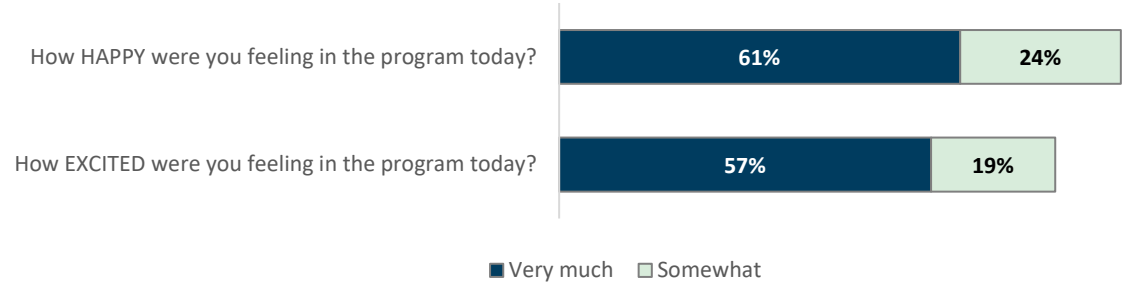
Exhibit 33. Youth Survey Results for LEARNED SOMETHING (Showing "Somewhat" and "Very much" Responses): "Please answer these questions about TODAY's AFTERSCHOOL ACTIVITIES"

Note. *n* = 93.

Positive and Negative Affect. Emotions influence student learning in a variety of ways, including how students process, store, and retrieve information. They also support student motivation to participate in a given learning task or activity given the enjoyment they feel from doing so (Ashby, Isen, & Turken, 1999; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2000).

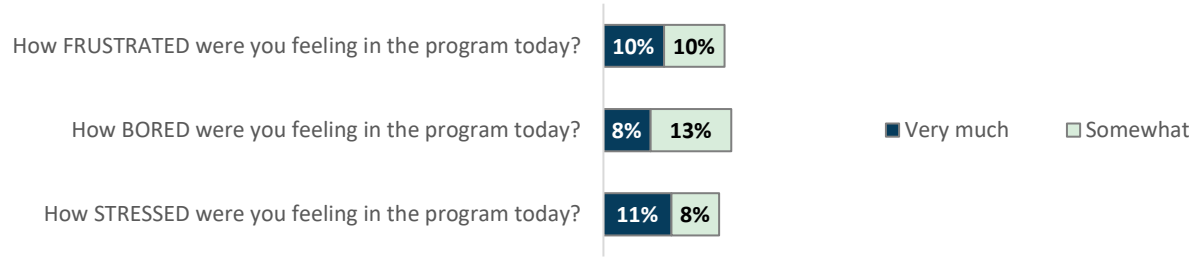
On the youth engagement survey, positive affect was defined by responses from the following two items asked on the survey: (a) *How HAPPY were you feeling in the program today?* and (b) *How EXCITED were you feeling in the program today?* Negative affect was defined by three items: (a) *How FRUSTRATED were you feeling in the program today?* (b) *How BORED were you feeling in the program today?* And (c) *How STRESSED were you feeling in the program today?* Youth reported a generally positive affect in response to these questions, but nearly 20% of youth did report frustration, boredom, or stress. Although this response was from a minority of participants, it is important. Note, however, that it was not necessarily the case that the negative affect captured in these responses was due to the activities, noting again that the survey was taken during the COVID-19 pandemic and that the items merely ask about emotional states felt during the activities. See Exhibits 34 and 35.

Exhibit 34. Youth Survey Results for POSITIVE AFFECT (Showing "Somewhat" and "Very much" Responses): "Please answer these questions about TODAY's AFTERSCHOOL ACTIVITIES"



Note. *n* = 93.

Exhibit 35. Youth Survey Results for NEGATIVE AFFECT (Showing "Somewhat" and "Very much" Responses): "Please answer these questions about TODAY's AFTERSCHOOL ACTIVITIES"



Note. *n* = 93.

Family Engagement

Based on quarterly and end-year reports for 2017–18 and 2018–19, a total of 12 out of 15 subgrantees held family engagement events. Examples of these activities include a "spelling bee" and "chess tournament," "community service," "parent meetings," and "general family events." Exhibit 36 groups family engagement events across reporting periods and by event types.

Exhibit 36. Family Engagement Data

Reporting Period	Event Type(s)
2017–2018	Community service, workshops, parent meetings, family engagement in youth activities, academically oriented family events, general family events
2018–2019	Community service, workshops, parent meetings, family engagement in youth activities, academically oriented family events

Source: Quarterly and end-year subgrantee reports for 2017–18 and 2018–19.

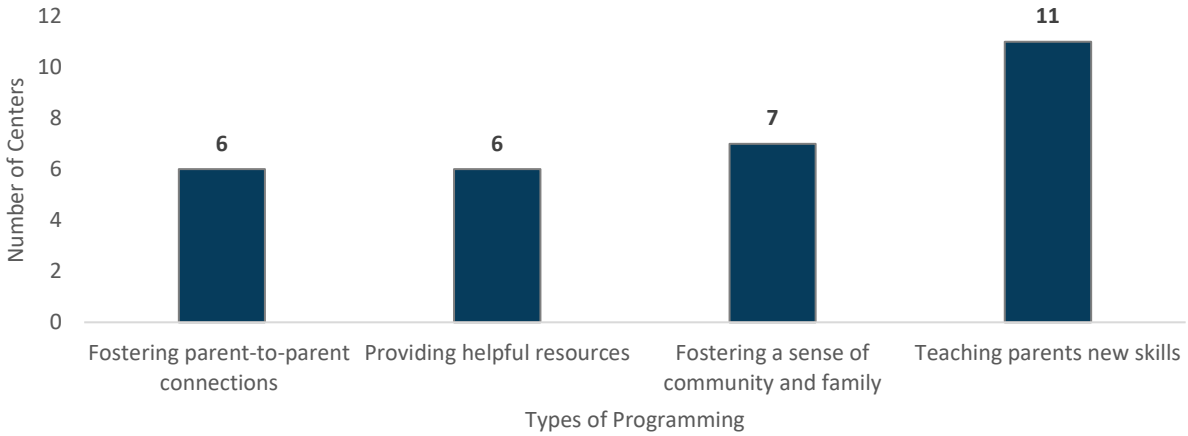
Note, however, that in the process of submitting their family engagement historic data to the research team, some subgrantees expressed that they were unsure of the best way to collect and maintain data for family engagement and family events. This may be a topic for OSSE to consider.

Site Coordinator and parent perceptions of family engagement activities

When asked about family engagement specifically, parents and site coordinators described a number of activity characteristics that they thought were particularly helpful. Exhibit 37 summarizes the activity aspects that parents and center coordinators considered most

successful or engaging. Site coordinators often defined success as their highly attended activities and parents cited the aspects they enjoyed most.

Exhibit 37. Most Successful Types of Family Engagement Activities



Source: 15 site coordinator interviews and parent focus groups. Counts shown in the chart are the combined totals for both.

According to five center coordinators and parents from six centers, programs that teach parents new skills or build on existing skills are the most successful. For example, parents cited receiving resources and attending activities for families to support their child's learning and improve their personal relationships with their children as especially helpful. Additionally, centers also often help parents learn workforce skills (e.g., financial literacy, how to use technology). One center coordinator offered insight into the impact of parent enrichment activities:

> "We actually partner with an organization...They come in, they do parent workshops and parent focus groups…They're just little workshops to help build relationships at home. Their focus is on the parent and the student relationships…They're trying to change the atmosphere at home because that's where it starts. The problems that we see in school building normally starts at home…We do one once or twice a month."

Family Activity Challenges

In addition to discussing the successful aspects of programming, parents were asked to discuss the challenges of participating in family programming. In general, parents had little to report related to challenges they experience with participating in parent activities. The negative experiences that they did describe are summarized below.

Lack of parent availability

Four center coordinators and parents from five focus groups reported family availability as the greatest barrier to family participation in programming. Parents mostly cited conflicting work schedules as the main reason they are unable to participate in family engagement activities. However, parents also cited other barriers to participation in family engagement programming, such as the lack of access to reliable transportation or being unable to secure childcare for their other children.

FAMILY ACTIVITY CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Parents offered a couple suggestions for improving family engagement activities but were generally satisfied with the family programming offered at centers.

- Parents in four focus groups indicated that they would like to see more **general community building activities.** One of the parents provided their reasoning for suggesting more community building events, "As a community, I think game nights and stuff like that, it would help them [children] build relationships with their peers…parents should be participating as a support system for the children to further engage…"
- Parents in two focus groups indicated that they would appreciate more **parent classes** that relate to developing parent workforce skills (e.g., Microsoft Suite skills, using technology) and other educational advancement. One parent explained the purpose of having parent classes, "That's mainly what we needed, more support with work development and just different educational things. Some people can't read as well as others, some people can't count as well as others."

Positive interactions with program staff affect youth and family experiences

AIR researchers asked parents and youth to reflect on their interactions with center staff. Across centers, parents and youth generally expressed satisfaction with how program staff interacted with youth and families. Parents emphasized that program staff acted professionally and consistently delivered high-quality experiences for their child. Many parents reported that their children have fostered strong relationships with program staff, whom parents say are one of the main reasons programming has been enjoyable for their children. Overall, youth reported liking the program staff they interact with and appreciating the support they provide. Exhibit 38 outlines characteristics parents and youth reported as making positive interactions with program staff.

Exhibit 38. Positive Interactions With Program Staff

Program Staff Successes	Number of Centers	Description
Benefits to participating youth	13	Program staff were praised for providing academic support, encouraging youth to try new skills and activities, and for helping youth grow socially and emotionally.
Sense of community and family	13	Program staff were praised for creating a sense of "family" or "community" within the program. Parents expressed gratitude that program staff treated their children like family members.
Concern for youth social and emotional well-being	10	Program staff were praised for clearly caring for youth social and emotional well-being (e.g., checking in on their mental health and helping them handle personal issues or conflicts).
Working directly with parents to address unmet needs	9	Parents shared stories about coordinators and program staff working directly with parents to problem-solve on issues regarding their child (e.g., helping their child get potty trained) and helping them navigate financial and personal stressors.
Positive behavioral interventions	7	Parents cited various instances of program staff intervening appropriately in behavioral situations, helping to diffuse youth, and using creative approaches to classroom management

Center staff may consider these insights as reason to continue to invest in high-quality staff and strive to retain staff that demonstrate qualities that align to the positive interactions described in the exhibit above.

Challenges in youth and family experiences

Although there were far more positive sentiments expressed about program staff, some parents and youth reported some challenges working with program staff. Challenges included isolated issues with classroom management or handling behavioral issues, youth experiencing conflict with specific staff members, parents lacking connection or a relationship with program staff, and issues accommodating student needs (e.g., hearing impairment, safety measures).

Some parents and youth identified instances of program staff struggling to discipline or appropriately manage conflict among youth. One parent offered suggestions for how program staff could better navigate relationships with youth,

> "I don't like or approve sometimes how they talk with the kids…Sometimes kids can be sassy and talk some type of way and I notice that sometimes the kids talk to the staff, including my daughters, like they're talking to their friends…I think they need to kind of put a limit. The staff needs to put a limit in there."

Retaining Target Populations

Center Retainment Strategies

AIR researchers also asked center coordinators to reflect on what practices their centers implement to retain youth and families. Center coordinators reported successful strategies and barriers to retaining youth. The most frequently mentioned successful strategies for retaining youth were related to the programming structure and program staff. However, the barriers to retaining youth reported by center coordinators were largely external factors inhibiting youth participation.

Programming structure and design helps retain youth

Center coordinators reported that specific aspects of their program's structure or curriculum contributed to their program's success by engaging youth and creating a comfortable and "safe" atmosphere that makes youth want to come back. One coordinator explained that their center hosts a week of orientation for youth to get to know each other, become familiar with activities the center offers, learn the expectations for participation in the program, and begin building relationships with program staff.

Staff retention can positively impact youth retention

Center coordinators and parents referenced program staff as an essential part of retaining youth. Program staff form strong relationships with the youth and parents as youth consistently attend programming. Parents cited these relationships with program staff as an important aspect to their child's participation in the program. Further, parents who reported successes with program staff often referenced knowing said staff members for a long time, indicating that retention of these staff is important for relationship-building. Similarly, center coordinators shared the importance of extending their program's impact into the home lives of youth by forming relationships with their families and encouraging the younger siblings to join the program, as well.

Additionally, center coordinators emphasized the importance of youth seeing program staff supporting youth outside programming hours. Three center coordinators reported encouraging their staff to embed themselves in the school community to form strong relationships with program youth. One coordinator reported intentionally hiring paraprofessionals who already had preexisting connections with the school community.

Challenges Retaining Youth and Families

Center coordinators reported a range of barriers to youth retention. Exhibit 39 details the different types of barriers reported and an example of how those challenges are reflected in retention. Retainment challenges were often consistent with center recruitment challenges.

Exhibit 39. Barriers to Retaining Youth in Programming

Barrier to Retention	Explanation	Example
Transportation	Five coordinators identified transportation to and from as a barrier to youth retention. Parents similarly reported struggling with providing transportation for their children to centers.	"Honestly, I think that is the biggest barrier is the transportation. I think that even for some of our middle school, because I think that there's a lot of young people that would really benefit from coming multiple days a week. Even if they came three days a week, even for our classes that are only one day a week, there are a lot of families that can't reach because of a transportation issue…"
External factors	Three coordinators reported that youth struggling with external stressors, such as family instability or social isolation, were less likely to consistently attend programming.	"So, if a family is stable, they can come to [our center] every day. If there's some challenges between, okay, this weekend I'm going with mom, this weekend I'm going with dad, that could really present a challenge."
Competition with other programs	Three coordinators noted that direct competition from other afterschool programs influenced their ability to retain youth.	"For example, there's a soccer program that, depending on the school and if it's there, it pulls attendance from us, and it happens three days a week. So, the kids want to do both. They definitely want to do both. But sometimes they leave right after soccer practice is over or their game is over, and they can't stay with us because it's time to go."
School attendance issues	Two coordinators noted that high school youth who already struggle to attend school consistently also will struggle to attend afterschool programming.	"So, to ask a high school young person to come four days a week in programming is just not possible."

Participation and Engagement Summary

Youth attended the 21st CCLC program at fairly high rates during 2017–18 and 2018–19. Youth and parents highlighted activity variety as one key to engagement, with opportunities for leadership and new skills other important factors. Generally, youth reported via the youth survey that they find the activities engaging and relevant, but not particularly challenging. Lack of interest in some activities combined with logistical challenges can dampen participation. Creation of a safe, friendly environment helps to retain youth, as does staff retention.

5. Perceived Program Outcomes

The conceptual framework culminates with intended outcomes centers strive to accomplish. AIR researchers asked parents how their child has benefited from attending their afterschool program, and we asked youth what they have learned from participating in programming. AIR researchers also asked center coordinators to report what benefits youth gain by participating in 21st CCLC-funded programming. Common themes emerged across all groups.[12] Exhibit 40 provides a summary of their responses.

Exhibit 40. Perceived Programming Benefits Observed

Program Benefits	Center Coordinators	Parent Focus Groups	Youth Focus Groups
Improved social-emotional learning	9	11	4
Center provides a safe space for youth	8	3	2
Youth are interested in programs offered	0	5	5
Youth learn about culture and history	3	2	2
Youth learn a new skill	2	2	2
Improved academic achievement	1	1	0

Note. Number of interviews/focus groups asked about specific perceived program benefits: center coordinators (*n* = 14), parent focus groups (*n* = 13), youth focus groups (*n* = 11).

Center coordinators, parents, and youth most frequently cited improved development of social and social emotional skills as the top benefit youth experience. According to interviews with center coordinators and focus groups with parents and youth, all 15 programs provided programming that benefitted the youth through social and emotional learning in some form. Exhibit 41 captures the breadth of social and relationship building skills centers reported addressing in their programming.

[12] Staff survey results reveal that some perceived staff impact on youth aligns with the perceived program outcomes described during interviews. For example, most center staff feel their role affects youth by helping youth feel like they matter and belong and improving their confidence and self-esteem (i.e., improved social and emotional learning and providing a safe space). However, other perceived impacts from the staff survey do not align with interview data. Specifically, survey results show most staff see their role as helping youth learn a new skill and encouraging their interest in program offerings. Interview findings, however, suggest these outcomes are not observed as frequently by center coordinators, parents, and youth.

Exhibit 41. Relationship-Building and Social Skills Addressed by Centers

Additionally, a common theme associated with how youth benefit from participating in programming was youth having a safe space to learn and interact with other youth. Six centers were reported to provide youth with a safe space to participate in enrichment activities in an otherwise potentially dangerous neighborhood. For example, one center coordinator expressed the importance of providing these safe spaces to youth.

> "I think the most successful thing is a safe space for our students. I know that word is used a lot in educational conversations, but truly, when you think about the neighborhood that they live in, sometimes, I mean to be frank, they hear gunshots, they see fighting and things of that nature. But when they come into this space before and after for those four hours in a day, they're safe, they're having fun, they're learning, they're engaging with adults that truly love them and want the best for them."

In general, youth, parents, and center coordinators shared positive experiences at centers and anecdotes that illustrated how youth and families benefit from enrolling, regularly attending, and engaging in center programming.

6. Key Findings

Historic Data Findings

Overall, a system to streamline data collection would be beneficial to future efforts to evaluate subgrantee progress. Key to the conceptual framework for continuous improvement, it is important for OSSE and subgrantees to have an accurate record of the population served to determine whether program goals are met. Thus, OSSE should collaborate with subgrantees to guide data collection, quality, and management practices that align with program metrics.

Program Quality Findings

Overall, the item scores for the YPQA followed expected patterns, showing relative strength in the Supportive Environment domain, and comparative weakness in the Interaction and Engagement domains. The individual item scores may, however, provide OSSE with insight regarding places where high-quality process practices could be helpfully implemented more broadly.

To that end, OSSE may want to consider thinking about a more centralized strategy for supporting point-of-service quality, including the adoption of a tool like the PQA, and scaffolding centers in implementing such a tool to raise awareness of developmentally appropriate practices.

Improving School Day Linkages Findings

The 21st CCLC staff responding to the survey indicated that they see it as a large part of their role to help youth learn how to be members of a team, and how to improve their social-emotional skills. Further, staff see it as a large part of their role to help youth feel like they matter and belong, and to help youth with confidence and self-esteem. That is, staff indicate that support of social-emotional skills is very much a part of their role, though academic support is also prominent.

In terms of school-day linkages, a strong majority of staff respondents indicated that they at least have a school-day contact for youth-related questions. Staff by and large also seem to be able to access academic scores for use in tailoring their instruction. That is, while response patterns suggest that school-day linkages could perhaps be strengthened for a minority of programs (notably via more regular, planned communication), staff generally *agreed* with items in the linkages section of the survey.

Youth Survey Findings

Overall, participants indicated a high level of enjoyment in their activities, with 90% of participants saying they enjoyed the day's activities at least "somewhat." Additionally, over half of respondents indicated that they thought the activities were important for their future goals, and that they could use what they learned in the day's activities outside the program. However, very few respondents indicated that they were challenged by the day's activities, with only 33% indicating that they were challenged at least "somewhat." Given that challenge is a necessary component of learning, this is a noteworthy result, though complicated by the fact that 78% of respondents indicated that they "worked hard" at least somewhat, and a similar proportion indicated they "learned something or got better at something." This is also a typical response pattern, based on AIR's experience with this item in other survey administrations outside Washington, DC. Finally, it bears repeating that a small proportion of youth did report negative affect, answering "somewhat" or "very much" to the negative affect questions dealing with frustration, boredom, and stress. If a survey similar to this one is administered in the future with similar findings, it may be worth exploring further.

Interview and Focus Group Findings

To address program quality, centers provide a variety of youth and family activities aligned to their goals (e.g., improve academic support, provide a safe environment). When AIR asked parents about what they look for in an afterschool program, many parents indicated that they look for a balance between academic and nonacademic programs in addition to a safe place for their child to learn after school. All center coordinators also indicated using data to their programming quality. Overall, centers varied significantly in the data they used and whether their data collection methods were formal or informal. Many centers solicit feedback from youth and parents each year to capture their perspectives on program experiences, engagement, and areas for improvement. Youth and parents expressed appreciation for feedback opportunities and had a few stories to share related to how their feedback had resulted in positive outcomes at their center.

In addition to addressing program quality, center coordinators described the supports and processes they implement to provide positive experiences at their center including, (1) leveraging partnerships in the community to provide specialized programming or resources, (2) implementing effective and multiple communication methods to share information with parents and youth, (3) implementing effective hiring processes and investing in program staff.

Successful partnerships often included partners that offer activities aligning with program goals and youth interests in addition to providing youth with basics necessities such as transportation to the center and a meal after the school day. Coordinators emphasized the importance of fostering positive relationships with schools due to challenges centers often experience when

their activities are located at schools (e.g., lack of supplies and space). Overall, parents reported satisfaction with how their centers communicated with them, but some parents and youth expressed dissatisfaction with their center's communication methods. They suggested that distributing a staff contact list, a calendar of events, and strengthening the current orientation/onboarding process would improve their experiences. Strong partnerships with schools and consistent communications are markedly important to centers as they emerged as themes across different topics, including: recruitment success, programming quality, and perceptions of experiences at centers. Lastly, centers described a well-defined standardized process and continuing to invest in staff through high-quality professional development as essential to ensuring delivery of high-quality programming.

Parent and youth perceptions of their experiences at centers indicate that centers offer a variety of programs that generally interest youth. Positive experiences with staff help retain youth and encourage parents to reenroll their child at centers. Barriers to participation were mainly logistical in nature such lack of transportation for drop-off or pick-up. Coordinators, youth, and parents named several benefits they have observed or experienced from program participation. Centers seem to be successful in working towards their program goals as several of the reported benefits align to center goals (e.g., improved social-emotional learning, center provides a safe space for youth). Interestingly, despite centers reporting academic achievement as important to center goals and parents valuing programming that targets academic support, it was infrequently reported as a perceived benefit of program participation. Exploring this disconnect further could help centers understand how to better embed high-quality programs, resulting in a higher likelihood of meeting their goals and achieving their intended outcomes.

7. Recommendations

Top Priorities

OSSE

- **District Priority #1: OSSE needs an integrated and comprehensive data-collection system among all sites.** Programs would all benefit from access to standardized data collection structures, tools, and processes in order to accurately evaluate its 21st CCLC program and make informed data-driven decisions. This access would be helpful for assessing program progress and supporting continuous improvement for sites. (*Program Goals and Administration*)
- **District Priority #2: OSSE needs to provide centers with additional guidance on how to collect and manage data for 21st CCLC reporting.** Programs expressed concerns about their ability to collect and monitor program data. One center explained, "We have our different

internal ways of keeping our data…but there are questions that are asked on certain platforms that are very specific to that platform and it's not something that we regularly keep. So, then it's going back and saying, "What are all the questions I know were asked and how to put those together for the team?'" (*Program Goals and Administration*)

- **District Priority #3: OSSE needs to invest in additional and ongoing professional development for program leaders and staff.** Centers requested training related to social and emotional learning. Though center coordinators did not provide specific examples of social and emotional learning topics, one coordinator emphasized the importance of needing support for both youth and staff members, "I think with that level of social-emotional learning that we are giving to kids in terms of emotional intelligence, adults need that too. How they can help to self-preserve, and cope, and be open-minded, but most of all, feel a sense of joy in their jobs." (*Professional development*)

Program

- **Program Priority #1: High-quality programs develop and implement more formal structures to collect and analyze data** throughout the year to ensure that program offerings are relevant, youth and parents are having positive experiences, and program quality is high. Managing and monitoring data effectively is critical to serving center target populations and achieving programming goals. (*Quality Practices*)

Interim Priorities

OSSE

- **District Priority #4: OSSE needs to establish key program metrics to guide subgrantee data collection and standardize subgrantee data collection practices.** More specifically, the indicators should assess whether 21st CCLC programs are making strides toward improving implementation of the program and gauge the extent to which youth enrolled in programming are improving on key school-related outcomes. Generally, we recommend that states develop indicators spanning three general categories: (1) implementation indicators; (2) program attendance indicators; and (3) student outcome indicators. Similarly, efforts should be undertaken to develop indicators related to family member participation in programming, program satisfaction, and the provision of authentic opportunities to both provide feedback on program operation and serve in leadership roles in relation to informing programming design and delivery. We also strongly advocate including the DC 21st CCLC community in the indicator development process, in terms of helping to identify what should be measured, when and how data are collected, and importantly, how information is provided back to programs to inform program improvement efforts. Critical

to this effort also will be efforts to develop and deploy a more standardized data collection and reporting system. (*Quality Practices*)

Program

- **Program Priority #2: High-quality programs use the YPQA observation tool to:**
  - **Embed youth leadership opportunities into center programs.** Leadership activities are a focus area for most centers. How they incorporate leadership activities into their programming for most centers was unclear, however.
  - **Improve youth engagement in center activities.** Several centers reported challenges maintaining youth engagement.
  - **Embed social and emotional learning into their programs.** Parents, youth, and center coordinators have observed the benefits of cultivating social and emotional skills. (Participation and Experience)
- **Program Priority #3: High-quality programs invest in center staff as they play a critical role in maintaining youth and family retention.** Youth and parents expressed that center staff provided a safe environment and that their interpersonal relationships contributed to their decision to continue attending center programming. Retaining staff could positively youth retention. Centers should continue to hone their hiring criteria and practices to ensure they are hiring staff who align to their center's vision and core values. Centers need to continue to develop staff to motivate, inspire, and reward staff as part of their continuous improvement strategy. Centers should strategize ways to maximize retention or its impact (i.e., raising wages, creating a robust onboarding system, keeping staff involved after they leave). (*Quality Practices*)
- **Program Priority #4: High-quality programs solicit feedback from youth and families about their experiences with programming and how they would improve different aspects of their experience.** Parents and youth shared that they appreciated the opportunity to provide feedback in formal and informal ways. The ways in which centers collected feedback varied greatly. For programmatic improvement, implementing structured and timely methods of collecting data is important. Collecting feedback from youth and families about their values and interests can help inform how to improve connections, engagement, and overall satisfaction with program experiences. (*Participation and Experience*)
- **Program Priority #5: High-quality programs prioritize fostering positive relationships with school faculty and staff to help recruit and retain youth.** Center coordinators emphasized that building relationships with school faculty and staff was a successful method for recruiting youth for afterschool programs. Center coordinators should leverage these

relationships to help alleviate competition with other programs and lack of parental support and connection. (*Program Outcomes*)

Long-Term Priorities

OSSE

- **District Priority #5: OSSE needs to explore the disconnect between program academic progress goals and stakeholder perceptions of program impact.** Academic achievement was reported as an important center goal for most centers, and parents indicated valuing programming that targets academic support; however, gains or improvement in academic achievement was not frequently reported as a program benefit. (Program Outcomes)
- **District Priority #6: OSSE needs to solicit feedback from youth and families about** their experiences with programming and how they would improve different aspects of their experience. Parents and youth shared that they appreciated the opportunity to provide feedback in formal and informal ways. The ways in which centers collected feedback varied greatly. For programmatic improvement, implementing structured and timely methods of collecting data is important. Collecting feedback from youth and families about their values and interests can help inform how to improve connections, engagement, and overall satisfaction with program experiences. (*Participation and Experience*)

Program

- **Program Priority #6: -High-quality programs implement a variety of recruitment methods that are appropriate for the center's target populations.** Coordinators indicated the importance of knowing your target audience and your community to identify the best approach. (*Youth Characteristics*)

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AIR generally follows the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA) 7th edition guidelines for references and citations.

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Appendix A. Technical Appendix

Data Collection Methods

This evaluation was formed using the following data-collection methods.

- *Program data.* Programs submitted data for 2017–18 and 2018–19 that included youth attendance records, demographics, attendance records for family engagement activities, 21st CCLC quarterly and year-end reports, and annual performance reports submitted to the U.S. Department of Education (21APR reports). AIR asked the 16 subgrantees to report this program data for *all* centers associated with their 21st CCLC grant (93 centers in all).
- *Program director/coordinator interviews.* In fall 2021, AIR conducted a series of one-hour virtual interviews with program coordinators and center directors. Fifteen interviews were conducted (given that one subgrant was excused from the interview and other 2021–22 data-collection activities, as previously noted), with AIR staff interviewing the program director or coordinator for one center per subgrant as identified by the subgrant. The interview questions sought to uncover common practices and challenges among programs, along with information concerning program goals and program success. Interview data were transcribed, and then analyzed using NVivo software.[13] Note that two versions of the interview protocol are included in the appendices as Appendix A and Appendix B (the version used depending on whether the subgrant in question was scheduled to end in late fall 2021 or continue through spring 2022).
- *Youth focus groups.* From fall 2021 through winter 2022, AIR conducted 15 one-hour focus groups with youth who participated in 21st CCLC programming. AIR asked centers included in the evaluation to identify six youth to participate in each focus group, ideally representing a mix of attendance levels (e.g., less than 15 days of participation, around 30 days of participation, and more than 45 days of participation). The questions that AIR researchers asked were designed to explore youth engagement in 21st CCLC programming, looking at what motivates youth to participate in programming and how youth think the program has affected them. Each focus group was transcribed, with the transcriptions analyzed using NVivo software. A copy of the focus group protocol is in Appendix B.
- *Parent focus groups.* From fall 2021 through winter 2022, AIR conducted 15 one-hour focus groups with parents and guardians whose youth participated in 21st CCLC programming. AIR asked center staff to identify up to six parents to participate in each focus group. The

[13] NVivo software is a standard qualitative analysis package that allows for upload of transcripts (or other documentation), which can then be coded by analysts for summarization. The software is particularly helpful for identifying prominent themes across multiple data sources.

questions asked by AIR researchers explored parents' perceptions of their child's experiences and how their child has benefitted and provided opportunities for parents to provide input and feedback. AIR also asked about center-provided opportunities for parents to participate in program-related decision making, and to provide overall reflections on the quality of the program and the program staff. Each focus group was transcribed, with the transcriptions analyzed using NVivo software. A copy of the focus group protocol is in Appendix B.

- *Program staff surveys.* A survey of program staff at 15 centers was conducted in January 2022. The purpose of this survey was to obtain information from front-line staff concerning perceived staff roles, along with information about linkages with the school day. Survey links were sent to each of the 15 centers providing data for 2021–22, with instructions for the survey link to be sent to all staff actively providing 21st CCLC activities on a regular basis. Questions on the survey related to staff perceptions concerning their role vis-à-vis program goals, linkages to the school day, and staff experience. Data from the surveys were analyzed descriptively, primarily in terms of the proportion *agreeing* with statements provided on the survey. A copy of the center coordinator survey is provided in Appendix G.
- *Youth experience survey.* During the 15 site visit observations conducted by AIR researchers as described below, AIR collected youth surveys concerning program experience. Surveys were primarily administered in hard copy with forms distributed and picked up at the end of each activity, but some surveys were administered virtually (notably in two cases where the observed activity was virtual given program closures caused by COVID-19). A copy of the survey is provided in Appendix F.
- *Site visit observations.* From fall 2021 through winter 2022, AIR conducted 15 site visit observations, one per center providing 2021–22 data. Centers were visited one time during the 2021–22 school year, with most visits taking place in fall 2021. Each visit included observations of up to two activities, with a single AIR observer scoring each activity against a modified (shortened) version of the Weikert Center's Youth Program Quality Assessment tool (YPQA). Activities were observed for 30 minutes to an hour. In most cases only one activity was observed due to program schedule limitations. YPQA scores were analyzed descriptively, primarily through investigation into average domain scores.

Program goals and administration. The foundation of the conceptual framework is a program's goals and administration. The 21st CCLC program was designed to support youth academic achievement, while also providing enrichment activities and services to youth and their families.[14] 21st CCLC programs vary in how they are structured and operated, offering activities

[14] https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-formula-grants/school-support-and-accountability/21st-century-community-learning-centers/

and services that are dependent on local resources and population needs. The evaluation explored this variation primarily via site coordinator interviews.

Youth characteristics. The framework next considers how youth are influenced and supported by the environments in which they live and go to school. Past programming experiences, relationships with peers and teachers, the level of interest in programming topics and content, expectations regarding program experience, and the level of choice in attending all have a bearing on how youth will engage in and experience 21st CCLC programming (Durlak et al., 2010). For this study, we relied on youth focus groups, parent focus groups, and youth surveys to obtain this information. Additionally, we conducted center coordinator interviews to obtain additional detail about the youth populations served in each center, along with information about program implementation.

Quality practices. Programs are more likely to have an impact if they are high quality (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Naftzger, Hallberg, & Yang, 2014). This can be understood in terms of *process* quality (meaning the adoption of practices and approaches to service delivery that result in developmentally appropriate settings) and *content* quality (referring to content-specific practices meant to cultivate specific skills, beliefs, or knowledge). To assess process quality, we used the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA), a validated and commonly used observation tool in the field of afterschool programing (Naftzger, Devaney, & Newman, 2015). Interviews and focus groups further informed our understanding of content-specific practices and youth experiences.

Participation and experience. For youth to benefit from programming, they need to attend programming—ideally, at high levels—across multiple years and participate in a variety of activities (Naftzger et al., 2018; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). However, merely being present in the program is not enough to ensure that youth will benefit from the activities. They also need to experience both engagement and interest during the activities to develop the beliefs, skills, and knowledge that can help them succeed in school and beyond (Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012; Greene, Lee, Constance, & Hynes, 2013; Mohr-Schroeder et al., 2014; Shernoff & Vandell, 2007). In theory, high-quality program processes and content-specific practices should positively affect youth engagement and interest in 21st CCLC programming. To assess process quality we conducted activity observations, scoring activities observed using an established observational tool. Youth engagement surveys and youth focus groups also played key roles in exploring youth experiences in programming.

Direct and transfer outcomes. Once youth are engaged and participating in program activities, it is expected that they will begin to develop key skills, beliefs, and knowledge. Although the evaluation approach was not an impact study (as already stated, no claims about *cause* are

justified by the approach), the youth and parent focus groups and center coordinator interviews informed our understanding of how programs support these outcomes, and therefore we included data from these sources in the overall narrative for how change happens.

Description of Historic Data

Historic data are data that subgrantees should have collected in compliance with OSSE reporting requirements. These include youth program attendance, youth demographics, attendance records for family engagement events, subgrantee quarterly reports, subgrantee year-end reports, and 21APR reports.

Historic data provide an overview of program characteristics during the 2017–2018 and 2018–2019 programming years. However, the research team's process of collecting and analyzing subgrantee data revealed opportunities for improvement in subgrantee data collection, quality, and management practices. While the majority of subgrantees were able to submit some combination of the requested data, data quality varied.

Exhibit A1. Varied Quality of Available Subgrantee Data Sources

Data Source	Description
Youth Program Attendance	Student-level data; number of days youth attended 21st CCLC programming.
Youth Demographics	Student-level data; including center name, school name, school ID, district ID, local education agency (LEA) ID, grade level, gender, and race and ethnicity.
Family Engagement Event Attendance	Subgrantee-level data; including event description and number of families that attended.
Quarterly Reports	Subgrantee-level data; quarterly reports with grantee information, center information, staffing, activities, participation, and outcomes.
Year-End Reports	Subgrantee-level data; year-long reports with grantee information, center information, staffing, activities, participation, and outcomes.
21 APR Reports	Subgrantee-level data; 21APR is a data collection tool for the 21st CCLC program that is funded by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. 21APR reports include grantee information, center information, staffing, activities, participation, and outcomes.

Youth program attendance and youth demographics data: The research team's request for youth attendance records was the most intensive and specific. The team requested a specific format and variables to allow for participant matching with records OSSE maintains and to allow for efficient data cleaning. The quality of these data submitted by subgrantees varied. Three subgrantees submitted these data in the correct format with close to all the requested variables; two subgrantees submitted these data in the correct format with most of the

requested variables; four subgrantees submitted these data in an adequate format with some of the requested variables; four subgrantees submitted these data in an inadequate format and/or with only a few requested variables; and three subgrantees submitted no attendance and youth demographic data. The sample of youth data used to conduct descriptive analyses, also known as the analytic sample, was calculated by eliminating duplicate youth information and matching youth data across the reporting period. It is important to note that in the research team's review of these data, there were many instances of youth listed more than once and minimal information to uniquely identify duplicate youth was provided. For this reason, the number of youth served presented in this report may not match other tallies reported to OSSE by subgrantees. These tallies are not more accurate than other subgrantee data sources, they are simply the most accurate tallies solely based on the data provided to the research team.

Attendance records for family engagement events: The content and quality of family engagement data varied by subgrantee. In most cases, family engagement data were found in quarterly reports and year-end reports. It is important to note that, while the template for quarterly reports was similar across subgrantees (including activity logs that note parental involvement), the template for year-end reports varied. For some subgrantees, family engagement information was detailed in year-end reports. For others, family engagement information was not included in year-end reports. Based on this variation in content and quality of the limited data available to the research team, the only family engagement program metric available to OSSE is whether family engagement events took place in the reporting periods of interest.

Quarterly and year-end reports: Most subgrantees submitted these reports. Quarterly reports captured grantee information, center information, staffing, activities, participation, and outcomes, aggregated across fiscal quarters. Year-end reports captured the same information, aggregated across the year. As mentioned above, the template for year-end reports varied across subgrantees.

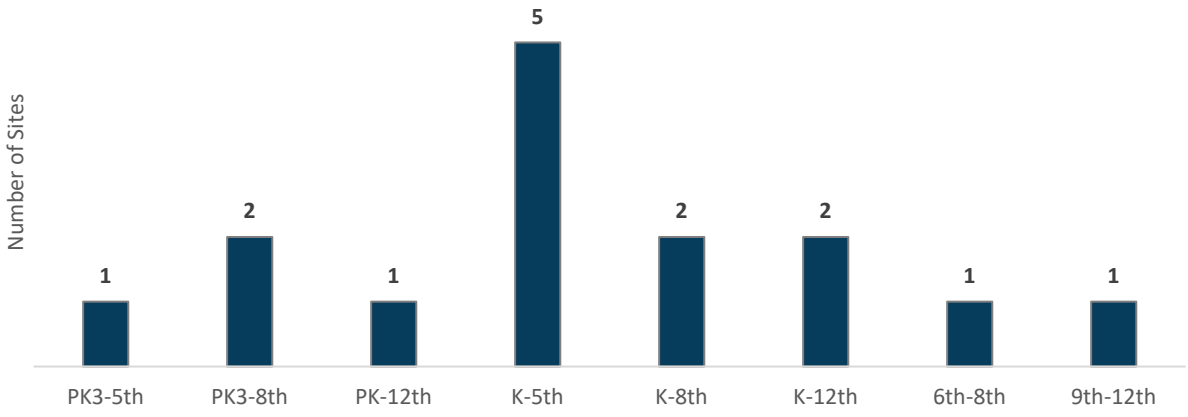
21APR reports: Only 4 of the 15 subgrantees that submitted historical data were able provide us with a copy of their 21APR reports for the requested reporting periods. Most commonly, subgrantees informed the data collection team that they input information directly into 21APR and did not have a document with that aggregated information. Some subgrantees informed us that they directly contacted 21APR for a copy of their reports but were informed that 21APR was unable to provide them with an internal copy of the reports they submitted. 21APR reports captured grantee information, center information, staffing, activities, participation, and outcomes.

Data quality varied across data sources and subgrantee submissions. To conduct descriptive analyses of youth served (e.g., grade levels served, program days attended, average program attendance), the research team used youth program attendance and youth demographic data. When those data were not submitted by subgrantees, no analyses were provided, or other historic data sources were referenced. Each visualization's data source is highlighted in the visualization note.

High-Level Characteristics of Subgrantees and Centers Providing Data

Scores from AIR's activity observations showed that the programs selected for inclusion in the sample were indeed generally higher quality (notably in respect to scores associated with supportive environment and interactive environment scales), albeit with some areas for growth. Also, note that nine centers in our sample served youth in grades 1 through 5, one served youth in grades 6 through 8, and one served youth in grades 9 through 12. In addition, one center served youth in K through 5, and three served youth in grades 1 through 8. Exhibit A1 presents an overview of the grade levels served by the centers included in our sample.

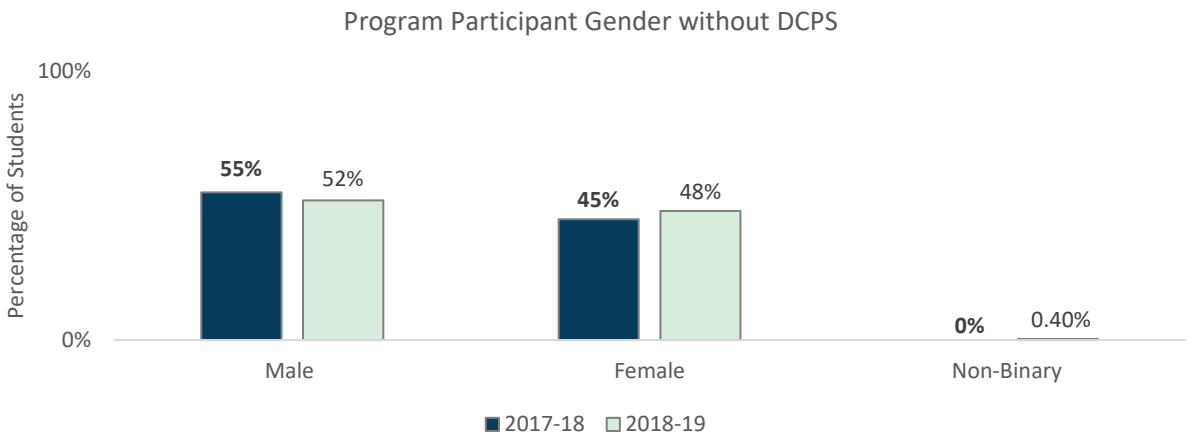
Exhibit A2. Grade Levels Served by Visited Centers



High-Level Youth and Program Characteristics Excluding DCPS

For some program and youth characteristics, DCPS greatly differed from other subgrantees. We have highlighted these cases in the body of the report by presenting exhibits with and without DCPS included. For cases in which DCPS did not greatly differ from other subgrantees, we include exhibits that exclude DCPS in this technical appendix.

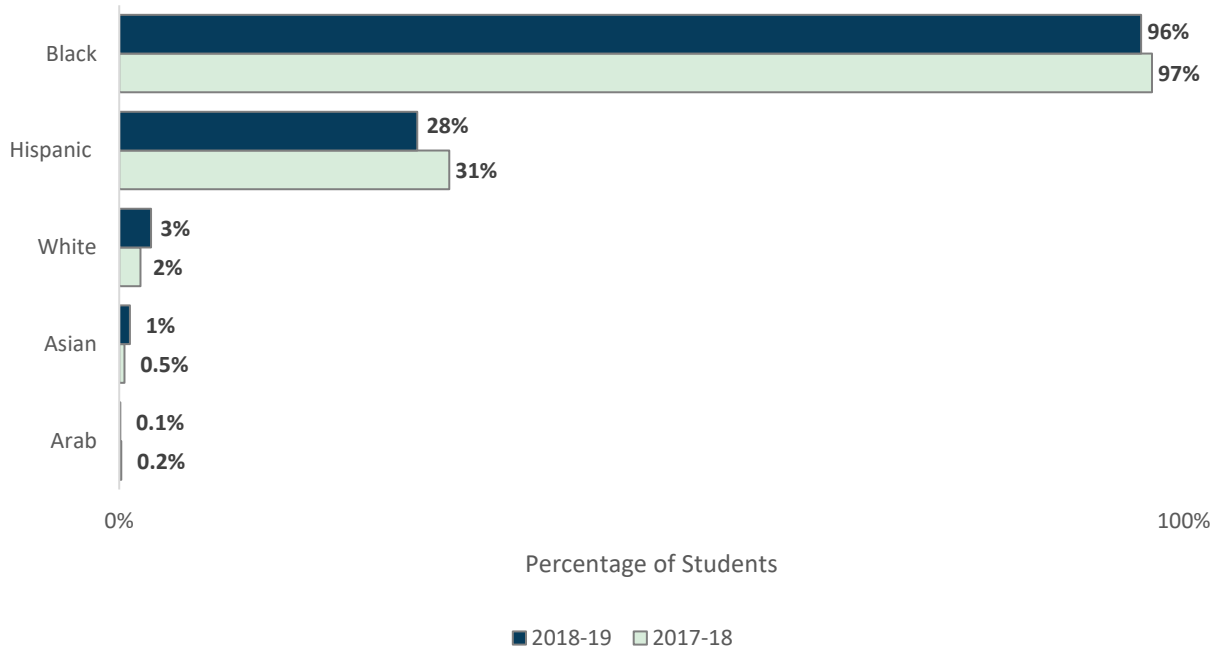
Exhibit A3. Program Participant Gender Without DCPS



Note. For 2017–18, *N* = 1,408. For 2018–19, *N* = 2,684. The number of youth who identified as non-binary was rounded to 10 to protect youth privacy.

Gender data not including DCPS are presented in Exhibit A3. Within this subsample, the ratio of male to female youth in 2017–18 was higher than the overall ratio for the same period. However, DCPS did not report any 2018–19 gender data.

Exhibit A4. Program Participant Race and Ethnicity Without DCPS



Note. For race, *N* = 967 for 2017–18 and *N* = 1,010 for 2018–19. For ethnicity, *N* = 1,197 for 2017–18 and *N* = 1,083 for 2018–19.

Exhibit A4 presents a summary of participant race and ethnicity data not including DCPS. The categories used to collect race data within this subsample were limited to Black, White, Asian, and Arab. Not including DPCS, more than 95% of youth were reported as Black across both years. Additionally, 31% of youth in 2017–18 and 28% of youth in 2018–19 were reported as Hispanic.

The race and ethnicity categories in Exhibit A4 are not mutually exclusive. In other words, a student may be part of more than one race and or ethnicity category. Therefore, the percentages in Exhibit A4 add up to more than 100%.

Appendix B. DC 21st CCLC Center Coordinator Interview Protocol

[For Continuing Grants]

I am a researcher from the American Institutes for Research (AIR). Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. As you are probably aware, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) has contracted with AIR to evaluate the 21st CCLC district-wide program. We are interested in learning more about your experiences implementing the 21st CCLC afterschool program and your perspectives on program implementation, youth and family participation/engagement, and anticipated program outcomes. Our questions focus on pre-pandemic operations and programming. We have a few questions at the end, if we have time, to discuss programming changes resulting from the pandemic.

This interview should take approximately 60 minutes.

Please know that participation in this interview is voluntary. You can choose to decline to answer any question I ask and can stop the interview at any time. You will not be identified by name or position in any of our reporting to OSSE, nor will your responses be shared with program leadership. Your responses will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Any quotes we use from this interview will be kept entirely anonymous, without any identifying information.

I would like to record our interview to capture everything you tell me accurately. The recording will be accessed only by AIR evaluation team staff. Do I have your permission to record this interview with you?

Before we start, do you have any questions for me about your rights as a participant or the focus of this interview?

INTERVIEWER: [If yes, turn on the voice recorder and proceed.] I am here with [respondent name], at [program name, provider name, site], and today is [name of day, month, and date]. "Do I have your permission to record the interview?"

Program vision and goals

I have a few general questions about your 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) Program.

1. Is there a broad vision for your center's 21st century CCLC programming? Please describe. If yes, how was the vision developed?

2. How would you describe the target population for your center's 21st century CCLC programming?

3. Does your center have set goals for 21st CCLC programming? Please describe. How were the goals developed?

Types of activities provided for participating youth, how they align to goals, and how youth benefit from programming

Next, I'd like to learn about the kinds of activities your center offers and how youth benefit from participating in your programs before COVID-19.

4. What kinds of 21st CCLC activities and services does your center offer for students?

5. What type(s) or kinds of 21st CCLC activities do you feel are most conducive to meeting your program's goals?

    a. What is it about these activities that make them especially useful?

6. What have been the most successful aspects of 21st CCLC programing and services?

7. Tell me about the opportunities for youth to have ownership in their experience? For example, are there opportunities for leadership, self-directed learning, student voice, presentations, or project-based learning?

8. How do you think youth benefit from participating in your program? Please try to name the top three ways in which students benefit from your program.

    a. How do you know youth are benefiting in the ways you just described?

9. What challenges have you experienced in providing 21st CCLC programming and services?

Recruitment and enrollment strategies, including target populations and what draws youth to the program

Next, I have a few questions about recruitment, enrollment, and retention strategies for youth participants.

10. What kinds of strategies do you use to recruit students for the 21st CCLC program? What do you think draws youth to your program?

    a. Do you use any unique strategies for specific student groups, such as places at-risk students or English Learners?

11. What are some of the barriers to getting youth to enroll in your out-of-school time program?

12. Once enrolled, what strategies do you use to keep young people attending your programming?

    a. What successes have you had in retaining youth in the programming?

    b. What challenges have you had in retaining youth in the programming?

Processes for engaging parents and adult family members in programming and program decision making

Next, I want to learn about how you engage parents and adult family members in programming.

13. What kinds of 21st CCLC activities and services does your center currently provide for parents and families to support learning at home and school?

14. How are parents typically involved in the 21st CCLC program?

15. What strategies have you used to recruit families?

    a. Have any of your recruitment efforts been more successful than others?

16. What percentage of your families are engaged in the 21st CCLC program?

    a. What are some of the barriers that prevent more parents from being engaged in the 21st CCLC Program? What could the program do differently to attract and engage more parents in the 21st CCLC program?

Program staffing and processes for orientation, training, and professional development

Next, I have a few questions about how staff are prepared for providing programming.

17. What is your process and selection criteria for hiring staff for the program?

18. What kinds of professional development (PD) and technical assistance (TA) training are available for you and your staff members?

- Who provides the professional development for you and your staff?
- Have you and other 21st CCLC staff participated in PD and TA offerings by OSSE and or the US Department of Education?
- Do these trainings provide evidence-based practices that you can use to improve the quality of your program?
- How have you used evidence-based practices to improve and or modify the 21st CCLC program to meet the needs of students and families?

19. What supports do you think would be useful in the future for yourself or other staff supporting the implementation of 21st CCLC?

Specific tools or resources that have informed site coordinators' thinking on how to design and provide programming and steps taken to ensure that programming is high quality

Next, I have a couple questions about how your center makes decisions about programming and monitoring program quality.

20. Have you used any specific resources or tools to inform decision-making around programming?

21. What kinds of data do you or your organization collect to (1) determine what programs to offer and (2) assess program quality? (i.e., how youth interact with each other, how staff interact with one another and youth, how the program space is used)?

    a. Do you gather student, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders input and feedback in your program (e.g., to determine program offerings, on program quality, on administration of the program, etc.)? If so, how?

Program partnership and program delivery

Next, I want to learn about how your center might work with partners to support and deliver programs.

22. To what extent does your program use outside organizations and agencies to support the delivery of programming?

23. What are some of the benefits of your 21st CCLC program partnership?

24. Is there an Advisory Committee or Board to support the 21st CCLC?

    a. If so, who comprises the committee?

    b. Can you describe the role the committee plays in decision making about programming and students' outcomes?

Questions about the pandemic: [If time, do not prioritize]

Since we have time, I'm going to ask you to reflect on the experience of programming during the pandemic.

25. Has the vision for 21st century CCLC programming at this center changed at all in response to the pandemic?

26. How has the provision of services and activities for youth changed since the onset of the pandemic?

27. Given the uncertain nature of the pandemic and the needs among your participants, what types of supports do you envision needing in the future?

Challenges and facilitating factors

Lastly, I have a couple wrap-up questions.

28. What kinds of supports do you think you will need in the coming program year?

29. What do you think is the most important ingredient to your 21st CCLC program's success in supporting youth's development?

Do you have any other thoughts or information you'd like to provide about your experience as a site coordinator or your 21st CCLC program that we haven't covered in this interview?

Thanks so much for your thoughtful responses and time today!

[For FY19 Grants Ending]

I am a researcher from the American Institutes for Research (AIR). Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. As you are probably aware, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) has contracted with AIR to evaluate the 21st CCLC district-wide program. We are interested in learning more about your experiences implementing the 21st CCLC afterschool program and your perspectives on program implementation, youth and family participation/engagement, and anticipated program outcomes. Our questions focus on pre-pandemic operations and programming. We have a few questions at the end, if we have time, to discuss programming changes resulting from the pandemic.

This interview should take approximately 60 minutes.

Please know that participation in this interview is voluntary. You can choose to decline to answer any question I ask and can stop the interview at any time. You will not be identified by name or position in any of our reporting to OSSE, nor will your responses be shared with program leadership. Your responses will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Any quotes we use from this interview will be kept entirely anonymous, without any identifying information.

I would like to record our interview to capture everything you tell me accurately. The recording will be accessed only by AIR evaluation team staff. Do I have your permission to record this interview with you?

Before we start, do you have any questions for me about your rights as a participant or the focus of this interview?

INTERVIEWER: [If yes, turn on the voice recorder and proceed.] I am here with a site coordinator working for X program and today is X. “Do I have your permission to record the interview?”

Program vision and goals

I have a few general questions about your 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) Program.

1. Has there been a broad vision for your center’s 21st century CCLC programming? Please describe. If yes, how was the vision developed?

2. How would you describe the target population for your center’s 21st century CCLC programming?

3. Has your center set goals for 21st CCLC programming? Please describe. How were the goals developed?

Types of activities provided for participating youth, how they align to goals, and how youth benefit from programming

Next, I'd like to learn about the kinds of activities your center offers and how youth benefit from participating in your programs before COVID-19.

4. What kinds of 21st CCLC activities and services has your center offered for students?
5. What type(s) or kinds of 21st CCLC activities do you feel have been most conducive to meeting your program's goals?
    a. What is it about these activities that make them especially useful?
6. What have been the most successful aspects of your center's 21st CCLC programing and services?
7. Tell me about any opportunities for youth to have ownership in their experience as part of your CCLC programming? For example, have there been opportunities for leadership, self-directed learning, student voice, presentations, or project-based learning?
8. How do you think youth have benefitted from participating in your program? Please try to name the top three ways in which students have benefitted from your program.
    a. How do you know youth are benefiting in the ways you just described?
9. What challenges have you experienced in providing 21st CCLC programming and services?

Recruitment and enrollment strategies, including target populations and what draws youth to the program

Next, I have a few questions about recruitment, enrollment, and retention strategies for youth participants.

10. What kinds of strategies have you used to recruit students for the 21st CCLC program? What do you think has drawn youth to your program?
    a. Have you used any unique strategies for specific student groups, such as placed at-risk students or English Learners?

11. What are some of the barriers to getting youth to enroll in your out-of-school time programming?

12. Once enrolled, what strategies do you use to keep young people attending your programming?

    a. What successes have you had in retaining youth in the programming?

    b. What challenges have you experienced in retaining youth in the programming?

Processes for engaging parents and adult family members in programming and program decision making

Next, I want to learn about how you engage parents and adult family members in programming.

13. What kinds of 21st CCLC activities and services has your center provided for parents and families to support learning at home and school?

14. How are parents typically involved in your 21st CCLC program?

15. What strategies have you used to recruit families?

    a. Have any of your recruitment efforts been more successful than others?

16. What percentage of your families are engaged in the 21st CCLC program?

    a. What are some of the barriers that prevent more parents from being engaged in the 21st CCLC Program?

Program staffing and processes for orientation, training, and professional development

Next, I have a few questions about how staff are prepared for providing programming.

17. What has been your process and selection criteria for hiring staff for the21st CCLC program?

18. What kinds of professional development (PD) and technical assistance (TA) training are available for you and your staff members?

    a. Who provides the professional development for you and your staff?

b. Have you and other 21st CCLC staff participated in PD and TA offerings by OSSE and or the US Department of Education?

c. Do these trainings provide evidence-based practices that you can use to improve the quality of your program?

d. How have you used evidence-based practices to improve and or modify the 21st CCLC program to meet the needs of students and families?

19. What supports do you think would be useful in the future for yourself or other staff supporting the implementation of 21st CCLC?

Specific tools or resources that have informed site coordinators' thinking on how to design and provide programming and steps taken to ensure that programming is high quality

Next, I have a couple questions about how your center makes decisions about programming and monitoring program quality.

20. Have you used any specific resources or tools to inform decision-making around programming?

21. What kinds of data have your or your organization collected to (1) determine what programs to offer and (2) assess program quality? (i.e., how youth interact with each other, how staff interact with one another and youth, how the program space is used)?

    a. Do you gather student, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders input and feedback in your program (e.g., to determine program offerings, on program quality, on administration of the program, etc.)? If so, how?

Program partnership and program delivery

Next, I want to learn about how your center might work with partners to support and deliver programs.

22. To what extent does your program used outside organizations and agencies to support the delivery of programming?

23. Is there an Advisory Committee or Board to support the 21st CCLC?

    a. If so, who comprises the committee?

b. Can you describe the role the committee plays in decision making about programming and students' outcomes?

Questions about the pandemic: [If time, do not prioritize]

Since we have time, I'm going to ask you to reflect on the experience of programming during the pandemic.

24. Has the vision for 21st century CCLC programming at this center changed at all in response to the pandemic?

25. How has the provision of services and activities for youth changed since the onset of the pandemic?

Challenges and facilitating factors

Lastly, I have a couple wrap-up questions.

26. How do you plan to sustain your programming in the future?

27. Based on your experience, what have been some of the benefits of the 21st CCLC program partnership with OSSE?

28. Do you have any other thoughts or information you'd like to provide about your experience as a site coordinator or your 21st CCLC program that we haven't covered in this interview?

Thanks so much for your thoughtful responses and time today!

Appendix C. Parent Focus Group Protocol

DC 21st CCLC Parent/Caregiver Focus Group Protocol

Hello, I'm _____ from the American Institutes for Research. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I'm part of a research team contracted by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) to study how youth benefit from the Nita M. Lowey 21st CCLC afterschool programs. We would like to learn about how parents and students experience programming at [NAME OF PROGRAM].

This focus group should last approximately 60 minutes. Please know that participation in this focus group is voluntary. You can choose not to answer any question I ask and can stop participating at any time. Information from this group conversation and any identifying information, like your name or your child's name, will not be used in any reports we submit to OSSE. All your responses will be kept confidential.

I will be taking notes as we talk and would also like to record our conversation to make sure we capture all you have to say. The recording will only be shared with other members of the AIR research team. Do I have your permission to record this conversation?

[If all participants agree state the following]

Since I will be relying on our recording to create my notes, please say your first name each time you answer a question. If you want to use a pseudonym, or made-up name, instead of your real name, that's totally fine. Just remember to use the same made-up name every time.

Virtual Focus Group Norms

- Since we are not in the same room, I will call on you based on the order in which you appear on my screen, we will go in order (left to right), but you are free to pass. You do not have to answer every question. If there are questions or topics that you do not wish to answer, you don't have to.
- Please mute yourself when you are not talking so we can reduce background noise.
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- Does anyone have any questions?

Check on consents. If don't have all of them. Ask for verbal consent on the recording and let Alex/Robert know so we can follow up to get forms.

[start recording]

Today is DATE and I'm conducting a focus group with parents and guardians who have children participating in the X afterschool program.

[start recording]

Let's start with some introductions, and then we will talk about your child's afterschool programs.

Please tell me:

- Your name (or the name you will be using today)
- That you agree to participate in the focus group today [if don't have all consents]
- What grade level your child is in
- How long your child has been attending (program name).

[Remind the participants to state their names each time they share their comments]

Parent/Caregiver perceptions of what their child experiences and benefits of their participation

First, I'd like to ask about your child's experiences in afterschool programming.

1. How did you and your child determine which afterschool programs they would participate in?
    a. What factors did you consider in this decision? For example, transportation, the goals of the activity, timing of programing, location/convenience, quality of program, cost. or support from staff.
2. Have there been any particularly positive experiences your child has had in the [NAME OF PROGRAM] programing? Please describe these experiences.

(**Note to interviewer**: This could be about positive experiences with the program activities, experiences with staff, experiences with other youth participating in the program, experiences with mentors or volunteers, etc.)

3. Has your child experienced any challenges in participating in [NAME OF PROGRAM] programing? Please describe.

(**Note to interviewer**: These could be logistical or negative programing experiences)

4. Does your child have any favorite activities that are part of their afterschool program? If so, what do you think makes these activities special for your child?

5. Do you think your child has benefited from participation in 21st CCLC programming? If so, how? If not, why not?

    a. Probe, if not otherwise discussed: What about academically?

    b. Probe, if not otherwise discussed: What about in terms of behavior?

6. Has your child expressed interest in afterschool activities not currently offered?

Parent/Caregiver participation in activities

Next, I'd like to hear about your participation in any afterschool programs or activities at [NAME OF PROGRAM] 21st CCLC program.

7. Have you ever participated in 21st CCLC program afterschool activities for parents or families? If so, what activities have you participated in?

If yes, ask probes:

    a. How did you hear about this/these programs?

    b. Please describe what's gone well and/or what's been challenging about participating in these programs?

    c. Would you participate in programing in the future? If so, what kinds of activities would interest you most?

    d. Do you have any recommendations for how more parents could be engaged in the program to support their child' learning at home and school?

    e. What additional activities and services the program could offer to support students and families?

If they have not participated:

a. Would you consider participating in [NAME OF PROGRAM] programing in the future. If so, what kinds of programs would interest you most?

How the program staff communicate with parents about programming and their child's experience, quality interactions with program staff, and opportunities to provide input and feedback on programming

Next, I have a couple questions about interactions you may have with the [NAME OF PROGRAM] *program staff.*

8. How often does your child's program staff communicate with you?

9. Are you satisfied with the program's communication with you? Why/why not?

10. Have you had any opportunities to provide feedback on the 21st CCLC programming your child participates in? To whom, how?

Overall reflections

Lastly, I have a couple wrap-up questions.

11. How satisfied are you with the 21st century programming at your child's school? Do you have any suggestions for how programming could better support families in the future?

Questions concerning the pandemic: [If time, do not prioritize]

12. Did your child attend programing virtually this past year? (If so, ask the following sub-questions)

    a. What activities did your child attend?

    b. What went well in virtual programming?

    c. What do you think could have been improved about virtual programming?

13. Do you have any final thoughts or information you would like to provide about your child's experience or your experience in afterschool programming that we haven't covered yet.

Thank you so much for your thoughtful responses and your time today!

Appendix D. Youth Focus Group Protocol

DC 21st CCLC Youth Focus Group Protocol

[Prior to beginning, double-check with the site coordinator that all focus group participants have a signed parent/guardian consent form allowing their child to participate in the focus group.]

Interviewer: Make sure to ask subgrant staff what the youth call the program. Also refer to site materials for this information.

Thanks again for agreeing to participate in this discussion today. My name is _____ and I am a researcher with the American Institutes for Research. We are trying to get a better idea of how students, like yourselves, experience programs outside of the regular school day. Our discussion today will also help us understand how we can make programing even better. We want to hear your opinions and feedback about what you like, don't like, would like to see more of, etc. There are no right or wrong answers. Please feel free to ask me questions at any time.

This discussion should last about 60 minutes. I'm going to ask you some questions about the afterschool activities you have participated in. Please know that participation in this discussion is voluntary. Voluntary means that you can choose to participate or to stop participating at any time. You can also choose not to answer any of the questions I ask today. We will not identify you by name in our reports and we will not share your responses with your parents or any staff at the program you attend.

I will be taking notes as we talk and would also like to record our conversation to make sure we capture all you have to say about the program. The recording will only be shared with other members of the AIR research team. Do I have your permission to record this conversation?

[If all participants agree state the following]

Since I will be relying on our audio recording to create my notes, please say your first name each time you answer a question. If you want to use a pseudonym, or made-up name, instead of your real name, that's totally fine. Just remember to use the same made-up name every time. During this discussion I will ask a question, and then anyone who wants to answer first can go ahead and answer. No need to raise your hands but try not to interrupt each other. I will also make sure everyone has a chance to answer every question. If I ask you if you want to answer or have anything to add, please go ahead and either share or tell me you want to pass.

Before we start, do you have any questions for me?

Let's start with some introductions, and then we will move into talking about your afterschool program.

[start recording]

Please tell me:

- Your name (or the name you will be using today)
- What grade you're in
- How long you have been attending [NAME OF PROGRAM] (overall, not just an individual session).

[Remind the participants to state their names each time they share their comments]

General Out of School program questions

1. Have you ever participated in an out of school program more than one time (school year, semester, quarter, or summer)? If you have, what made you want to go back?
2. When you look for activities to attend what are you looking for? What interests you??
3. Have you learned any new skills or had new experiences by participating in out of school programs? Can you tell me about that?
    a. Have you found the new skills or experiences useful? Do you think you might use them in the future?

Program Specific Questions

4. What activities do you participate in as part of [NAME OF PROGRAM]?
    a. Are these activities in-person or virtual?
    b. What aspects of this program's activities do you like? Why?
    c. Are there any aspects of the activities that you don't like? Why don't you like them?
    d. Is it pretty easy for you to participate in these activities?

e. Do you ever have difficulty participating in the program? For example, because of needing a ride or the time of a program?

5. How did you find out/learn about [NAME OF PROGRAM]?

6. How do youth get along in the activities you attend at [NAME OF PROGRAM]?

7. If you could give the program staff advice on how to have more kids participate in [NAME OF PROGRAM] what would you tell them?

8. Are there any activities offered by the program that you've wanted to attend, but couldn't? Why? For example, needing a ride, or how much a program costs.

9. Have your program staff generally done a good job with running the [NAME OF PROGRAM]?

    a. Have you had a favorite [NAME OF PROGRAM] staff person? If so, what makes them one of your favorites?

10. Do you have opportunities to provide feedback to the [NAME OF PROGRAM] staff, either about the activities or about the program overall?

11. Do you have opportunities to lead, or help with planning?

12. If you could give your out of school time program staff advice about what kinds of activities to offer in the future what would you tell them?

13. Is there anything else about you experience with [NAME OF PROGRAM] that you wanted to mention?

Conclusion

Thank you so much for participating today! It's been wonderful to hear about your experiences and this information will be useful for the future. Just a reminder that what we talked about today is just between this group and our research team. Please don't talk about what was said today outside of our group to help keep the confidentiality of everyone here. Thanks again and have a great rest of your day!

Appendix E. Parent Focus Group – Spanish Version

DC 21st CCLC - Proceso para el grupo de discusión de padres/guardianes

Hola, me llamo _____ de los Institutos Americanos para la Investigación, AIR (por su sigla en inglés). Gracias por tomar tiempo para hablar conmigo hoy. Soy parte del equipo de estudio contratado por la Oficina del Superintendente de Educación del estado, OSSE (por su sigla en inglés), para estudiar cómo los jóvenes se benefician con los programas extracurriculares de los Centros Comunitarios de Aprendizaje del siglo 21 Nita M. Lowey. Quisiéramos oír sobre las experiencias de los padres y los estudiantes en el programa _____ de los Centros Comunitarios de Aprendizaje del siglo 21 Nita M. Lowey.

Este grupo de discusión durará aproximadamente 60 minutos. Por favor tenga en cuenta que la participación en este grupo de discusión es voluntaria. Usted puede decidir no contestar cualquiera de las preguntas que le haga y puede retirarse de la discusión en cualquier momento. La información sobre la conversación en este grupo e información personal como su nombre, el nombre de su hijo, y el nombre del programa no se usará en ninguno de los reportes que presentemos a OSSE. Cualquier cita que usemos en los reportes finales será breve, completamente anónima y no incluirá información que le pudiese identificar. Todas sus repuestas serán mantenidas de manera confidencial.

Estaré tomando notas a medida que hablamos y también me gustaría grabar en audio nuestra conversación para asegurarnos de captar todo lo que usted tenga que decir acerca del programa _____ de los Centros Comunitarios de Aprendizaje del siglo 21. La grabación será compartida solo con miembros del equipo de estudio de AIR. ¿Tengo su permiso para grabar esta conversación?

[Si todos los participantes están de acuerdo indique lo siguiente:]

Como voy a depender de la grabación para crear mis notas, por favor diga su nombre cada vez que responda a una pregunta, usted puede usar otro nombre, o un nombre inventado en vez de su nombre, está bien. Solo recuerde usar el mismo nombre cada vez que participa.

Reglas del Grupo de Discusión:

Como no estamos en el mismo salón, yo llamaré su nombre en el orden en que aparece en mi pantalla. Iremos en orden (de la izquierda a la derecha), pero puede ceder su turno. Usted no tiene que responder a todas las preguntas. Si hay preguntas o temas que no quiere responder, usted no tiene que responder.

Para estar seguros de que no hablamos al mismo tiempo, iremos de izquierda a derecha (indíqueles el orden). Queremos escuchar todos sus comentarios, y esto garantizará que todos los participantes puedan compartir sus opiniones sin interrupción.

Por favor mantenga su micrófono en silencio cuando no esté hablando. Usted puede sentir la necesidad de hablar cuando alguien esta hablando, pero por favor use la casilla de comentarios o "levante su mano" y estaremos seguros de llamarle enseguida.

No hay preguntas correctas o incorrectas. Queremos que todos los participantes compartan sus opiniones libremente, por favor recuerde ser respetuoso durante nuestra conversación de hoy.

¿Algo más? ¿Alguien tiene alguna pregunta?

[Empiece la grabación]

Empezaremos con algunas introducciones, y luego hablaremos del programa extracurricular de su hijo.

Por favor, dígame:

Su nombre (o el nombre que va a usar hoy)

¿En qué grado escolar está su hijo?

¿Cuánto tiempo ha estado su hijo participando en el programa extracurricular _____?

[Recuerde a los participantes que digan su nombre cada vez que van a dar comentarios]

Percepciones del Padre/guardián sobre la experiencia de su hijo en el programa y los beneficios de participar en el mismo

Primero me gustaría preguntarle acerca de las experiencias de su hijo en el programa extracurricular

1. ¿Cómo determinaron usted y su hijo en qué programa extracurricular él/ella participaría?

    a. ¿Qué factores consideró en esta decisión? Por ejemplo, transporte, las metas de la actividad, el tiempo del programa, ubicación/conveniencia, calidad del programa, costo, o apoyo del personal?

2. ¿Ha habido alguna experiencia particularmente positiva que haya tenido su hijo/hija en el programa _____. Por favor describa esta experiencia.

(Nota para el entrevistador si nadie responde: esto podría ser sobre experiencias positivas con las actividades del programa, con el personal, experiencias con otros estudiantes que participan en el programa, experiencias con los tutores/voluntarios, etc.

3. ¿Ha experimentado su hijo dificultades participando en el programa extracurricular _____? Por favor describa.

(Nota para el entrevistador si nadie responde: esto podría ser experiencias con la organización del programa o experiencias negativas en el programa.

4. ¿Su hijo/hija tiene algunas actividades favoritas que son parte de su programa extracurricular? Si es así, ¿qué cree que hace que estas actividades sean especiales para su hijo?

5. ¿Hay otros programas que usted quisiera que fueran ofrecidos? Por favor explique.

6. ¿Cree que su hijo se ha beneficiado de la participación en los programas de los centros 21st CCLC? Si es así, cómo, si no, ¿por qué no?

    a. Indague, si no hay comentarios pregunte: ¿Qué pasa académicamente?

    b. Indague, si no hay comentarios pregunte: ¿Qué pasa en términos de comportamiento?

7. ¿Ha expresado su hijo interés en actividades extracurriculares que no se ofrecen que actualmente?

Participación del padre/guardián en actividades

A continuación, quisiera escuchar acerca de su participación en cualquier programa o actividad extracurricular del programa 21st CCLC _____.

8. ¿Ha participado alguna vez en actividades extracurriculares del programa 21st CCLC para padres y familias? ¿Si es así, en qué actividades ha participado?

Si la respuesta es sí, pregunte:

    a. ¿Cómo se enteró de este programa/estos programas?

b. Por favor describa qué ha salido bien y / o lo que ha sido difícil en la participación en estos programas.

c. ¿Participaría en programas en el futuro? Si es así, ¿qué tipo de actividades le interesarían más?

d. ¿Tiene sugerencias sobre cómo más padres podrían participar en el programa para apoyar el aprendizaje de sus hijos en casa y en la escuela?

e. ¿Qué actividades y servicios adicionales podría ofrecer el programa para apoyar a los estudiantes y a las familias?

Si ellos no han participado:

a. ¿Consideraría usted participar en el programa _____ en el futuro? Si es así, ¿qué clase de programas le interesarían más?

Cómo el personal del programa se comunica con los padres acerca de la programación y la experiencia de los hijos, interacciones de calidad con el personal del programa y oportunidades para proveer comentarios e ideas sobre la programación.

A continuación, tengo un par de preguntas sobre interacciones que puede tener con el personal del programa _____.

9. ¿Con qué frecuencia se comunica con usted el personal del programa?

10. ¿Está satisfecho con la comunicación del programa con usted? ¿Por qué? / Por qué no?

11. ¿Ha tenido alguna oportunidad de proveer comentarios sobre el programa 21st CCLC en el que su hijo participa? ¿A quién, cómo?

Reflexiones generales

Por último, tengo unas preguntas de resumen.

12. ¿Qué tan satisfecho está con el programa 21st CCLC en la escuela de su hijo? ¿Tiene alguna sugerencia sobre cómo la programación podría apoyar mejor a las familias en el futuro?

Preguntas relacionadas con la pandemia: [Si hay tiempo, no le dé prioridad]

13. ¿ Asistió su hijo a la programación en línea el año pasado? (Si es así, haga las siguientes preguntas)

    a. ¿A cuáles actividades asistió su hijo?

    b. ¿Qué salió bien en la programación en línea?

    c. ¿Qué piensa que se podría haber mejorado en la programación en línea?

14. ¿Finalmente, tiene otras ideas o información que quisiera dar sobre la experiencia de su hijo o su experiencia en el programa de actividades extracurriculares que aún no hayamos cubierto?

¡Muchas gracias por sus amables respuestas y dedicar tiempo a hablar con nosotros hoy!

Appendix F. Youth Experience Survey

Washington, DC 21st CCLC
Youth Experience Survey

The purpose of this survey is to find out more about afterschool programs like this one and how young people like you feel about these programs. We care about what you think about this program, and your answers will help make afterschool programs better for youth in Washington, DC.

We need your honest feedback. The questions on the survey ask about what you experienced in this afterschool program today. This is not a test. There are no "wrong" answers. Please choose the answer that best describes your experience today.

This survey should take about five minutes to answer all of the questions. This survey is voluntary. You only have to take the survey if you want to. This survey does not have your name on it, so everything you write is confidential, which means that no one (not your parents, teachers, school staff or other students) will be allowed to know how you answer these questions. There is no risk to taking this survey. If you choose not to take the survey or choose not to answer some of the questions, your participation in the program will not change or be affected in any way.

Please answer each question by checking the boxes or filling in the circle next to the answer**.** You can skip questions you don't want to answer and you can stop taking the survey if you don't want to finish it.

1. **Please answer these questions about <u>TODAY's</u> AFTERSCHOOL ACTIVITIES**

	Not at All	A Little	Somew hat	Very Much
a. How challenging were today's activities?	○	○	○	○
b. Were you good at today's activities?	○	○	○	○
c. Were today's activities interesting?	○	○	○	○
d. Were today's activities important to you?	○	○	○	○
e. Were today's activities important to your future goals?	○	○	○	○
f. Could you see yourself using what you were learning in today's activities outside this program?	○	○	○	○
g. Did you work with other kids during today's activities?	○	○	○	○
h. Did you enjoy today's activities?	○	○	○	○

i. Did you have to concentrate to do today's activities?	○	○	○	○
j. Do you feel like you learned something or got better at something today?	○	○	○	○
k. Do you feel you worked hard during today's activities?	○	○	○	○
l. How HAPPY were you feeling in the program today?	○	○	○	○
m. How EXCITED were you feeling in the program today?	○	○	○	○
n. How FRUSTRATED were you feeling in the program today?	○	○	○	○
o. How BORED were you feeling in the program today?	○	○	○	○
p. How STRESSED were you feeling in the program today?	○	○	○	○

2. **Did anything happen today that made the activities especially GOOD or BAD? Please describe.**

Appendix G. Staff Survey

PROGRAM STAFF ROLES

To what extent do you see it as *your role* in the program to teach the following set of skills?	This is *not* part of my role	This is a *small* part of my role	This is a *moderate* part of my role	This is a *large* part of my role	Not Sure
a. Help youth develop social and emotional skills	○	○	○	○	○
b. Help youth improve basic reading and/or mathematics skills	○	○	○	○	○
c. Help youth learn basic sets of laboratory, technology, or engineering skills related to STEM	○	○	○	○	○
d. Help youth develop the ability to apply scientific reasoning	○	○	○	○	○
e. Help youth develop artistic or musical skills	○	○	○	○	○
f. Help youth develop skills related to a specific sport or physical activity	○	○	○	○	○
g. Help youth develop oral and written communication skills	○	○	○	○	○
h. Help youth develop problem-solving skills	○	○	○	○	○
i. Help youth develop the ability to think critically	○	○	○	○	○
j. Help youth learn how to work as a member of a team	○	○	○	○	○
k. Help youth learn what it means to have healthy lifestyle	○	○	○	○	○

To what extent do you see it as *your role* in the program to impact youth in the following ways?	This is *not* part of my role	This is a *small* part of my role	This is a *moderate* part of my role	This is a *large* part of my role	Not Sure
a. Improve confidence/self-esteem	○	○	○	○	○
b. Help youth develop new interests/discover what they are passionate about	○	○	○	○	○
c. Expose youth to new content, activities, or pathways they otherwise would not have access to	○	○	○	○	○
d. Help youth feel like they matter and belong	○	○	○	○	○
e. Develop a sense of agency/belief in their capacity to succeed	○	○	○	○	○
f. Other (please describe) _____	○	○	○	○	○

COMMUNICATION AND LINKAGES TO THE SCHOOL DAY

Q5. 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.						
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).						

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Q10. How many years have you worked as an activity leader in this program? [text box]

Q11. How many years have you worked in out-of-school programming generally? [text box]

Q12. On average, how many hours per week do you work in this program? [text box]

Q13. On average, how many students do you work with on a daily basis in the program? [text box]

Q14. 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)

Q15. Do you hold a teaching credential or certification?

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

Q16. 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 H. Youth Program Quality Assessment Observation Protocol

PROGRAM INFORMATION

(Complete for Program Self-Assessment or External Assessment)

Organization name: _____ Site/program name: _____

Date of observation (mm/dd/yyyy): _____

If multiple observations were conducted, provide the date of the last one conducted.

How was this observation conducted? Check all that apply:

☐ In-person observation ☐ Live virtual observation ☐ Observed a recorded session

Name(s) of program offering(s) observed: _____

Brief description of program offering(s): _____

_____

_____

_____

Staff: Youth Ratio: Total number of staff observed _____ Total number of youths observed _____

Grades of young people observed (Circle all that apply):

K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 12+

Type(s) of program/activity observed (Check all that apply):

☐ Mentoring ☐ Literacy ☐ STEM ☐ Other academic enrichment (e.g., homework help, tutoring, college prep)

☐ Career readiness (e.g., entrepreneurship) ☐ Youth leadership ☐ Community service/ civic engagement ☐ Visual & performing arts (e.g., drama, painting, music)

☐ Sports, fitness & physical health (e.g., basketball, dance, cooking) ☐ Other:

WARM WELCOME | Staff provides a welcoming atmosphere.

	ITEMS				SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES
1.	**1** No youth are greeted by staff as they arrive or at the start of the session.	**3** Some youth are greeted by staff as they arrive or at the start of the session.	**5** All youth are greeted by staff as they arrive or at the start of the session.	☐	
2.	**1** Staff mainly uses a negative tone of voice and disrespectful language.	**3** Staff sometimes uses a negative tone of voice and disrespectful language and sometimes uses a warm tone of voice and respectful language.	**5** Staff mainly uses a warm tone of voice and respectful language.	☐	
3.	**1** Staff generally frowns or scowls, uses unfriendly gestures and avoids eye contact.	**3** Staff sometimes exhibits unfriendly behaviors and sometimes uses a friendly approach.	**5** Staff generally smiles, uses friendly gestures and makes eye contact.	☐	

SESSION FLOW | Session flow is planned, presented & paced for youth.

	ITEMS				SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES
1.	**1** Staff does not start or end session within 10 minutes of scheduled time.	**3** Staff either starts or ends session within 10 minutes of scheduled time (but not both).	**5** Staff starts and ends session within 10 minutes of scheduled time.	☐	Record the following: Scheduled starting time _____ Actual starting time _____ Scheduled end time _____ Actual end time _____
2.	**1** Staff does not have materials and supplies ready to begin activities.	**3** Staff has some materials and supplies ready to begin activities, or staff has materials and supplies ready to begin only some activities.	**5** Staff has all materials and supplies ready to begin all activities (e.g., materials are gathered, set up).	☐	If no materials/supplies are required, do not rate. Write an "X" in the box at the left.
3.	**1** There are only enough materials and supplies prepared for less than half of the youth to begin activities.	**3** There are enough materials and supplies prepared for more than half, but not all, of the youth to begin activities.	**5** There are enough materials and supplies prepared for all youth to begin activities.	☐	If no materials/supplies are required, do not rate. Write an "X" in the box at the left.
4.	**1** Staff does not explain any activities clearly.	**3** Staff explains some activities clearly.	**5** Staff explains all activities clearly (e.g., youth appear to understand directions; sequence of events and purpose are clear).	☐	
5.	**1** There is not an appropriate amount of time for more than one activity.	**3** There is an appropriate amount of time for all but one activity (e.g., for one activity, most youth either do not finish or finish early with nothing to do).	**5** There is an appropriate amount of time for all of the activities (e.g., youth do not appear rushed; most youth who are generally on task finish activities; most youth do not finish significantly early with nothing planned to do).	☐	

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT | Activities support active engagement.

	ITEMS				SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES
1.	**1** The activities provide no opportunities for youth to engage with materials or ideas; activities mostly involve waiting, listening, watching and repeating.	**3** The activities provide opportunities for youth to engage with materials or ideas for less than half of the time.	**5** The activities involve youth in engaging with (creating, combining, reforming) materials or ideas (e.g., role play, projects, experiments, writing and illustrating stories, outside exploration) for at least half of the time.	☐	
2.	**1** Staff does not provide youth any structured opportunities to talk about (or otherwise communicate) what they are doing and what they are thinking about to others.	**3** During activities, staff provides some youth a structured opportunity to talk about (or otherwise communicate) what they are doing and what they are thinking about to others (e.g., staff asks some youth to explain what they are doing or why, staff has half the group explain their art project to another youth).	**5** During activities, staff provides all youth a structured opportunity to talk about (or otherwise communicate) what they are doing and what they are thinking about to others (e.g., each youth explains the reasoning behind their design to staff; staff assigns youth to small groups to work on a shared task).	☐	
3. (Y)	**1** The activities focus almost exclusively on abstract learning or concepts, providing limited or no related concrete experiences (activities almost exclusively consist of learning about a topic; lecture format).	**3** The activities focus almost exclusively on concrete experiences, providing limited or no opportunities to engage with related abstract learning (activities almost entirely consist of youth doing, practicing, or experiencing, without learning about or discussing the how, what, or why).	**5** The activities balance concrete experiences involving materials, people, and projects (e.g., field trips, experiments, interviews, practicing dance routines, creative writing) with abstract learning or concepts (e.g., learning/talking about a topic, lectures, staff providing diagrams/formulas).	☐	
4. (Y)	**1** The activities do not (will not) lead to tangible products or performances.	**3** The activities lead (or will lead) to tangible products/performances, but do not reflect ideas or designs of youth (e.g., youth will perform dances selected by staff, all youth make birdhouses according to the design supplied by staff).	**5** The program activities lead (or will lead in future sessions) to tangible products/performances that reflect youths' ideas/designs (e.g., youth explain their projects to whole group, all create dance routines to perform later, youth create their own sculptures).	☐	

SKILL-BUILDING | Staff supports youth in building skills.

	ITEMS				SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES
1.	**1** Staff never mentions a specific learning or skill-building focus for the session or activity (e.g., objective, learning target, goal).	**3** Staff tells youth a specific learning or skill-building focus for the session or activity (e.g., objective, learning target, goal) but the focus is not clearly linked to the activity.	**5** Staff tells youth a specific learning or skill-building focus for the session or activity (e.g., objective, learning target, goal) and the focus is clearly linked to the activity (e.g., youth do activity related to focus, language from focus is described in activity).	☐	
2.	**1** Staff does not encourage youth to try skills or attempt higher levels of performance.	**3** Staff encourages some youth to try skills or attempt higher levels of performance.	**5** Staff encourages all youth to try skills or attempt higher levels of performance.	☐	
3.	**1** Staff does not model skills.	**3** Staff models skills for some youth.	**5** Staff models skills for all youth.	☐	
4.	**1** Staff does not break difficult task(s) into smaller, simpler steps for any youth or there are no tasks of sufficient difficulty to warrant explaining steps.	**3** Staff breaks difficult task(s) into smaller, simpler steps for some youth.	**5** Staff breaks difficult task(s) into smaller, simpler steps for all youth (e.g., steps are explained in sequence; instructions are provided for specific steps; examples of completed steps are shared).	☐	
5.	**1** When youth struggle (with errors, imperfect results or failure), staff, even once, responds with sarcasm, condescension, criticism, punishment or making fun of the youth.	**3** When youth struggle (with errors, imperfect results or failure), staff sometimes does not respond with learning supports or encouragement (e.g., numerous youth are raising their hands for help, but the staff does not get around to responding to all of them; staff ignores struggling youth).	**5** When youth struggle (with errors, imperfect results or failure), staff always provides learning supports or encouragement (e.g., youth are helped to problem solve, encouraged to try another approach, told why an error was made, encouraged to keep trying, given guidance or explanation when needed)	☐	If no youth struggle with imperfect results, do not score. Write an "X" in the box at the left. Expect to score this item if item 2 above scores a 3 or 5.

ENCOURAGEMENT | Staff supports youth with encouragement.

Note: Open-ended questions do not have predetermined, correct answers; they seek the opinions, thoughts & ideas of youth.

	ITEMS				SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES
1.	**1** Staff does not support contributions or accomplishments of youth in either of the ways described for a score of 3 or 5, or simply doesn't support youth at all.	**3** Staff supports contributions or accomplishments of youth but uses subjective or evaluative comments, such as "Good job!", "I like it!" or "You're so smart!"	**5** Staff supports at least some contributions/accomplishments of youth by acknowledging what they've said or done with specific, non-evaluative language (e.g., "Yes, the cleanup project you suggested is a way to give back to the community," "It looks like you put a lot of time into choosing the colors for your painting").	☐	
2.	**1** Staff rarely or never asks open-ended questions.	**3** Staff makes limited use of open-ended questions (e.g., only uses them during certain parts of the activity or repeats the same questions).	**5** Staff makes frequent use of open-ended questions (e.g., staff asks open-ended questions throughout the activity and questions are related to the context; most youth have opportunities to answer questions that seek opinions or require thoughtful answers).	☐	
3. (Y)	**1** Staff is not actively involved with youth except for brief introductions, endings, or transitions (e.g., they are physically separated from youth or do not interact with them).	**3** Staff (or some of the staff) is sometimes or intermittently actively involved with youth.	**5** Staff is almost always actively involved with youth (e.g., they provide directions, answer questions, work as partners or team members, check in with individuals or small groups).	☐	

REFRAMING CONFLICT | Staff uses youth-centered approaches to reframe conflict.

Note: A conflict is an interaction between youth that involves strong feelings or serious negative behaviors. Strong feelings are any emotions that interrupt the learning of an individual or group of youth. If there is not a conflict or incident involving strong feelings, do not score. Mark all items with an "X".

	ITEMS				SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES
1. (Y)	**1** Staff even once approaches conflicts or negative behavior by shaming, yelling, scolding, or threatening youth.	**3** Staff sometimes does not approach conflicts or negative behavior calmly.	**5** Staff always approaches conflicts or negative behavior calmly (i.e., approaches, stops any hurtful actions, and acknowledges youths' feelings).	☐	
2. (Y)	**1** Staff does not seek input from youth in determining either the cause or solution of conflicts or negative behavior.	**3** Staff seeks input from youth in determining the cause or solution (but not both) of conflicts and negative behavior.	**5** Staff seeks input from youth in order to determine both the cause and solution of conflicts and negative behavior (e.g., youth generate possible solutions and choose one).	☐	
3. (Y)	**1** In conflict and negative behavior situations, staff does not deal with the relationship between youths' actions and their consequences.	**3** In conflict and negative behavior situations, staff tells youth the relationship between their actions and the consequences.	**5** To help youth understand and revolve conflicts and negative behavior, staff encourages youth to examine the relationship between their actions and the consequences.	☐	
4. (Y)	**1** Staff neither acknowledges conflicts or negative behavior nor follows up with those involved afterward.	**3** Staff acknowledges conflicts and negative behavior but does not follow up with those involved afterward.	**5** Staff acknowledges conflicts and negative behavior and follows up with those involved afterward.	☐	

BELONGING | Youth have opportunities to develop a sense of belonging.

ITEMS				SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES
1.	**1** Staff does not provide opportunities for youth to get to know each other (e.g., the entire session is structured so youth have no time where talking among themselves is allowed or encouraged).	**3** Staff provides informal opportunities for youth to get to know each other (e.g., youth engage in informal conversations, youth get to know each other as a by-product of an activity).	**5** Staff provides structured opportunities with the purpose of helping youth get to know each other (e.g., there are team-building activities, introductions, personal updates, welcomes of new group members, icebreakers).	☐	
2.	**1** Youth exhibit evidence of excluding peers (e.g., youth are avoided or ostracized by other youth, "I don't want to sit with her – she's not my friend") and staff does not explicitly promote more inclusive relationships (e.g., suggest ways to include others in play, introduce excluded youth to other youth, say, "Remember, 'Be Kind' is one of our rules").	**3** Youth exhibit some evidence of excluding peers and staff intervenes, but not sufficiently to end exclusion (e.g., staff introduces an excluded youth to other youth, but the newcomer is treated coolly and avoided or ignored; staff intervenes in some instances of exclusionary behavior but not others).	**5** Youth do not exhibit any exclusion or staff successfully intervenes if exclusive behavior occurs (e.g., staff introduces excluded youth to other youth and they then include them, staff successfully suggests a way to include a lone boy in youths' play).	☐	
3.	**1** Youth do not identify with the program offering (e.g., many youth complain about or express dislike of the program offering or activities).	**3** Youth do not strongly identify with the program offering but do not complain or express dislike.	**5** Youth strongly identify with the program offering (e.g., hold one another to established guidelines, use ownership language, such as "our program," engage in shared traditions such as shared jokes, songs, gestures).	☐	
4. (Y)	**1** Staff does not provide opportunities to acknowledge the achievements, work, or contributions of youth.	**3** Staff provides opportunities to acknowledge the achievements, work, or contributions of some youth, but opportunities are unscheduled or impromptu (e.g., staff spontaneously asks two youth to show off their dance moves to the group).	**5** Staff provides structured opportunities (e.g., group presentations, sharing times, upcoming recognition celebrations, exhibitions, performances) to publicly acknowledge the achievements, work, or contributions of at least some youth.	☐	

COLLABORATION | Youth have opportunities to collaborate & work cooperatively with other

ITEMS				SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES
1. (Y)	**1** Staff does not provide opportunities for youth to work cooperatively as a team or in a group.	**3** Staff provides opportunities for some youth to work cooperatively as a team or in a group.	**5** Staff provides opportunities for all youth to work cooperatively as a team or in a group.	☐	
2. (Y)	**1** Staff does not provide opportunities for interdependent youth roles.	**3** Staff provides the opportunity for some youth to participate in activities with interdependent roles.	**5** Staff provides all youth opportunities to participate in activities with interdependent roles (e.g., note-taker; treasurer, spokesperson for planning committee; tennis players, singles or doubles).	☐	
3. (Y)	**1** Staff does not provide opportunities for youth to work toward shared goals.	**3** Staff provides opportunities for some youth to work toward shared goals.	**5** Staff provides opportunities for all youth (groups or individuals) to work toward shared goals (e.g., each youth contributes a section to a story, youth build a catapult together).	☐	

III. INTERACTION: BELONGING | COLLABORATION | **LEADERSHIP** | ADULT PARTNERS

LEADERSHIP | Youth have opportunities to act as group facilitators & mentors.

ITEMS				SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES
1. (Y)	**1** Staff does not provide all youth opportunities to practice group-process skills.	**3** Staff provides all youth at least a limited opportunity to practice group-process skills (e.g., a full-group discussion is long enough for all youth to contribute, youth briefly share in pairs).	**5** Staff provides all youth multiple or extended opportunities to practice group-process skills (e.g., contribute ideas or actions to the group, do a task with others, take responsibility for a part).	☐	
2. (Y)	**1** Staff does not provide opportunities for youth to mentor an individual.	**3** Staff provides opportunities for some youth to mentor an individual.	**5** Staff provides opportunities for all youth to mentor an individual (e.g., youth teach or coach each other).	☐	
3. (Y)	**1** Staff does not provide opportunities for youth to lead a group.	**3** Staff provides opportunities for some youth to lead a group (e.g., some youth lead warmup exercises, some youth lead a small-group discussion).	**5** Staff provides all youth one or more opportunities to lead a group (e.g., teach others; lead a discussion, song, project, event, outing or other activity).	☐	

III. INTERACTION: BELONGING | COLLABORATION | LEADERSHIP | **ADULT PARTNERS**

ADULT PARTNERS | Youth have opportunities to partner with adults.

ITEMS				SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES
1. (Y)	**1** Staff rarely shares or attempts to share control of activities with youth.	**3** Staff attempts to share control with youth but ends up controlling most activities themselves.	**5** Staff shares control of most activities with youth, providing guidance and facilitation while retaining overall responsibility (e.g., staff uses youth leaders, semiautonomous small groups or individually guided activities).	☐	
2. (Y)	**1** Staff provides no explanation or reason for behavioral expectations, guidelines, or directions given to youth.	**3** Staff provides an explanation or reason for some behavioral expectations, guidelines, or directions given to youth.	**5** Staff provides an explanation or reason for every behavioral expectation, guideline, or direction given to youth.	☐	Score X if no behavioral directions or guidelines are given.

IV. ENGAGEMENT: **PLANNING** | CHOICE | REFLECTION

PLANNING | Youth have opportunities to make plans.

ITEMS				SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES
1. (Y)	**1** Staff does not provide opportunities for youth to make plans for projects or activities.	**3** Staff provides at least one opportunity for youth (individual or group) to make plans for a project or activity (e.g., how to spend their time, how to do a task).	**5** Staff provides multiple opportunities for youth (individual or group) to make plans for projects and activities (e.g., how to spend their time, how to do a task).	☐	
2. (Y)	**1** There is no planning for projects or activities, or no identifiable planning strategies are used.	**3** When planning projects or activities, at least one identifiable planning strategy is used.	**5** In the course of planning the projects or activities, two or more planning strategies are used (e.g., brainstorming, idea webbing and backward planning).	☐	

IV. ENGAGEMENT: PLANNING | **CHOICE** | REFLECTION

CHOICE | Youth have opportunities to make choices based on their interests.

Note: [a]* Discrete *refers to a finite list of specific alternatives. [b]* Open-ended *indicates non-discrete, open possibilities within some boundaries. [c]* All youth *refers to situations where all youth make individual choices or situations where all youth participate in group decision making.

ITEMS				SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES
1. (Y)	**1** Staff does not provide opportunities for all youth to make content choices.	**3** Staff provides opportunities for all youth to choose among content alternatives, but choices are limited to discrete choices presented by the leader.	**5** Staff provides opportunities for all youth to make at least one open-ended content choice within the content framework of the activities (e.g., youth decide topics within a given subject area, subtopics, or aspects of a given topic).	☐	
2. (Y)	**1** Staff does not provide opportunities for all youth to make process choices.	**3** Staff provides opportunities for all youth to choose among process alternatives, but choices are limited to discrete choices presented by the leader.	**5** Staff provides opportunities for all youth to make at least one open-ended process choice (e.g., youth decide roles, order of activities, tools or materials, or how to present results).	☐	

IV. ENGAGEMENT: PLANNING | CHOICE | **REFLECTION**

REFLECTION | Youth have opportunities to reflect.

Note: Reflect means to review, summarize and/or evaluate recent events or activities. Reflections are usually expressed by talking with others and/or in writing (a journal or report, for example).

ITEMS				SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES
1.	**1** Staff does not engage youth in an intentional process of reflecting on what they have done.	**3** Staff engages some youth in an intentional process of reflecting on what they have done.	**5** Staff engages all youth in an intentional process of reflecting on what they have done (e.g., writing in journals; reviewing minutes; sharing progress, accomplishments, or feelings about the experience).	☐	
2.	**1** Staff does not encourage youth to share what they have done with others or to reflect on their experiences.	**3** Staff uses at least one identifiable strategy to help youth to share what they have done and reflect on their experiences (e.g., staff asks youth, "What did you do today?").	**5** Staff uses two or more strategies to encourage youth to share what they have done and reflect on their experiences (e.g., writing, role playing, using media or technology, drawing, using props).	☐	
3.	**1** Staff dismisses feedback from youth who initiate it, or youth have no opportunities to provide feedback on the activities.	**3** Staff is receptive to feedback initiated by youth on the activities but does not solicit it.	**5** Staff initiates structured opportunities for youth to give feedback on the activities (e.g., staff asks feedback questions, provides session evaluations).	☐	
4. (Y)	**1** In the course of the program offering, staff does not provide structured opportunities for youth to make presentations to the whole group.	**3** In the course of the program offering, staff provides some youth opportunities to make presentations to the whole group.	**5** In the course of the program offering, staff provides all youth opportunities to make presentations to the whole group.	☐	In the course of the program offering, do youth make presentations?

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