



## Funding Hurdles Create Challenges for Effective After-School Programs

*Survey of 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC State Coordinators Shows Federally Funded After-School Programs Improve Performance Yet Face Sustainability Concerns*

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### SUMMARY

Federally funded after-school programs for low-income youth struggle to provide the same level of services after their federal grants end, according to a survey of fifty-one coordinators of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC) programs in every state and the District of Columbia. <sup>2</sup> Additionally, while most states allow high-performing programs to reapply for funding, six states and the District of Columbia, which represent close to 100,000 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC students, prevent effective programs from applying for continued funding when their grant cycle is complete. The survey also confirms a link between after-school participation and school success.

### Key Findings:

- Forty-four state coordinators reported that once a 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grant ends, effective programs have trouble finding alternate sources to replace lost funds.
- In a separate question, six states and the District of Columbia, which serve close to 100,000 of the 1.1 million 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC students, reported that they do not allow current grantees to apply for a grant to fund the same program and population at the end of their initial grant period.
- Although programs struggle to replace 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC funds, most states decrease 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC funding over the course of a grant cycle.
- Reaffirming previous research, the coordinators report that 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs yield notable gains in academic performance and behavioral well-being.
- The survey found coordinators divided about 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs' ability to maintain talented staff. Many coordinators call for more competitive salaries and emphasize the need to professionalize the after-school workforce by offering corresponding degrees in the after-school field.

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<sup>2</sup> Surveys were submitted from all 50 states and the District of Columbia from February 20 to May 2, 2008. A limited number of surveys included incomplete responses from coordinators who elected not to answer questions about which they had no data or felt uncomfortable answering. The survey is available at: [http://www.alliance1.org/Public\\_Policy/misc/CCLC\\_Survey.pdf](http://www.alliance1.org/Public_Policy/misc/CCLC_Survey.pdf)

## **Background**

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC) program provides grants to strengthen after-school programs in low-income communities. In 2008, the federal government funded more than \$1 billion in 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grants to support 10,000 centers serving close to 1.1 million children.<sup>3</sup>

The enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002 transferred authority over awarding 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center grants from the Department of Education to state education agencies. To receive funding, eligible entities apply to their state education agency, and grants are then awarded on a competitive basis. State 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC coordinators must continually evaluate program effectiveness and have an in-depth understanding of the successes and challenges that after-school providers experience in their state.

The purpose of this report is to broaden understanding of how the different state education agencies disseminate 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grant funding and to allow state coordinators to reflect on the programs that they oversee. All 51 coordinators who were asked to contribute to the survey submitted responses.<sup>4</sup>

## **SURVEY FINDINGS**

### **21<sup>st</sup> CCLC Program Sustainability**

#### *Local Providers Face Difficulty Maintaining Services After Grants End*

According to 51 state coordinators, 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC-funded after-school programs face large obstacles sustaining programming once their grant cycle is complete. The 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC portion of the No Child Left Behind Act gives discretion to the states to determine issues such as grant duration, stability of funding, and what happens to programs after their initial grant period. Currently, state education agencies have the option of awarding grants that last from three to five years. The law also leaves it open to the states to determine whether they consider renewing grants to serve the same program and population after the end of the first grant cycle.<sup>5</sup>

When asked what happens when 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC funding stops at the end of a grant cycle, 28 coordinators noted that most quality programs are not able to raise significant funds from alternate sources. An additional 16 responded that quality programs that were able to raise funds were only able to partially make up for the lost 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grants. These results show that in at least 44 states, effective programs cannot keep the same level of services once federal funding ends. Only one coordinator responded that programs can sustain the same level of funding when their grant is complete. Although grantees are required to have sustainability plans in place, programs that do not receive continued funding face an unclear future. To maintain the quality of their program, 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grantees that cannot replace lost funding may have to decrease enrollment or increase attendance fees—placing further stress on low-income parents.

Although state coordinators reported that many programs struggle to maintain consistent funding after the end of their grant period, most states elect to decrease program funding over time. The survey found that 35 states diminish funding over the course of the grant cycle.

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<sup>3</sup> Afterschool Alliance, “21st Century Community Learning Centers Providing Afterschool Supports to Communities Nationwide,” (2008), <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/21stccclcfm>.

<sup>4</sup> Refer to footnote #2.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Education, “21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers: Non-Regulatory Guidance,” (February 2003): Section F-12, <http://www.ed.gov/programs/21stccclc/guidance2003.doc>.

*Policies That Prevent Grant Renewal Could Cut Existing After-School Programs for 100,000 Kids*

After the completion of their first grant cycle, the survey found that at least 43 states allow grantees to compete for a new 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grant to continue funding the same program and population. However, six states (Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Mississippi, Oregon, and Tennessee) and the District of Columbia responded that they prevent previous grantees from reapplying for grants to serve the same program and population. Close to 100,000 students benefit from 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC funding in those seven jurisdictions and attend programs that must find alternative funding sources when their grant ends.

Given the survey results showing 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC coordinators' pessimism about whether programs can maintain equivalent programming once grant funding disappears, the lack of continuation funds could be detrimental for the 100,000 children who currently benefit from 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC in those seven locations. States are forced to decide whether to fund a new cohort to support an additional 100,000 students, or to continue to fund the programs that families have grown to rely on. Since 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC currently receives less than half of its \$2.5 billion authorized funding level, states will continue to be forced to make these difficult funding decisions.

**Table 1. Grant Renewal State-by-State**

*At the end of their initial grant period, can 21st CCLC grantees in your state compete for a new 21st CCLC grant to continue funding the same program and population? (Yes/No)*

<b>States</b>	<b>(Yes/No)</b>	<b>States</b>	<b>(Yes/No)</b>
Alabama	Yes	Montana	Yes
Alaska	Yes	Nebraska	Yes
Arizona	Yes	Nevada	Yes
Arkansas	Yes	New Hampshire	Yes
California	Yes	New Jersey	Yes
Colorado	Not Available	New Mexico	Yes
Connecticut	Yes	New York	Yes
Delaware	Yes	North Carolina	Yes
DC	No	North Dakota	Yes
Florida	Yes	Ohio	Yes
Georgia	No	Oklahoma	Yes
Hawaii	Yes	Oregon	No
Idaho	No	Pennsylvania	Yes
Illinois	Yes	Rhode Island	Yes
Indiana	Yes	South Carolina	Yes
Iowa	Yes	South Dakota	Yes
Kansas	No	Tennessee	No
Kentucky	Yes	Texas	Yes
Louisiana	Yes	Utah	Yes
Maine	Yes	Vermont	Yes
Maryland	Yes	Virginia	Yes
Massachusetts	Yes	Washington	Yes
Michigan	Yes	West Virginia	Yes
Minnesota	Yes	Wisconsin	Yes
Mississippi	No	Wyoming	Yes
Missouri	Yes		

*Should Grants be Renewable?*

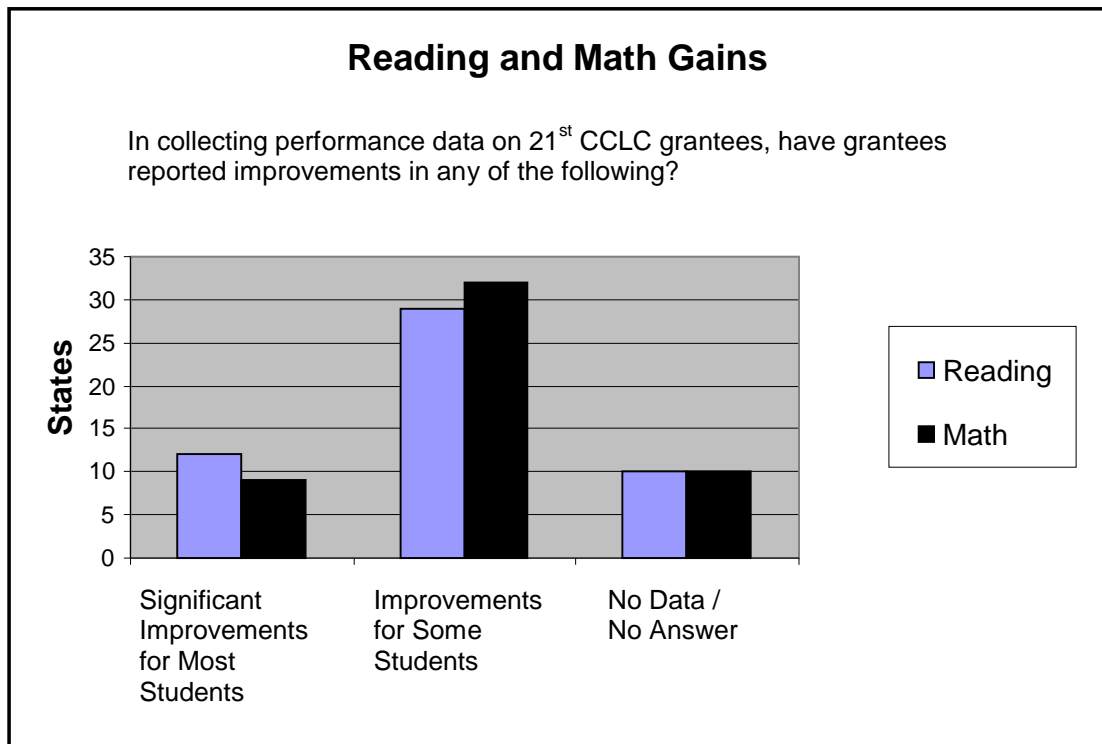
As previously discussed, some states allow grantees to apply for grant renewal to fund the same program and population, and some do not. However, should grants be renewable?

When 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC coordinators were asked whether they believed grantees should be allowed to compete for new 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grants to continue funding the same program and population at the end of their initial grant period, 41 believed grants should be renewed, seven disagreed, and three chose not to answer. These results demonstrate strong support among those who oversee programs to continue to fund effective programs after the end of their initial grant period.

Additionally, of those coordinators who reported that their state allows previous grantees to compete for a new grant to fund the same program and population, 39 coordinators indicated that their states take into account a grantees' performance during the previous funding cycle when considering their application.<sup>6</sup> While a large majority of states do account for a program's performance history, requiring consideration of previous performance in all states during grant renewal would help ensure that quality programs, both new and old, are prioritized during the grant competition.

### Survey Finds Improvements in Student Performance

The federal law requires that states routinely evaluate the effectiveness of 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grantees. Using this data, the coordinators reported noteworthy academic gains and improved behavior from many 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC participants. The results mirror those of previous studies, such as a Learning Point Associates study which found that regular attendees of 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs increase their reading scores on standardized tests by 43 percent and 49 percent in math.<sup>7</sup> Another study conducted in Florida found that 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC after-school programs increase class attendance, reduce the need for disciplinary actions, and improve in-class behavior.<sup>8</sup>



<sup>6</sup> Coordinators were not asked what *type* of performance was considered, however, this may be an important distinction to understand and investigate in future research.

<sup>7</sup> Afterschool Alliance, "21st Century Community Learning Centers Providing Afterschool Supports to Communities Nationwide," (2008), <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/21stccclcfm>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

### *Academic Gains Confirmed*

The answers of 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC coordinators across the country reaffirm the Learning Point Associates study's findings about after-school programs and academic growth. The survey asked if grantees reported improvements in reading, math, increased class attendance, and improved behavioral well-being (e.g. fewer class disturbances, increased motivation to learn). Respondents were given the choice of responding: significant improvements for most students, improvements for some students, no significant improvements, and no data based on their state evaluations. Math and reading saw strong jumps in performance in many states according to the coordinators. For reading, 29 state coordinators reported improvements for some students and 12 more coordinators indicated significant improvements for most students. For math, 32 coordinators reported improvements for some students and nine more reported significant improvements for most students. These findings demonstrate that in most states there is a correlation between participation in 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs and school success.

### *Positive Influence on Behavioral Well-Being*

State coordinators also noted the benefits of 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC on behavior in their responses to questions about increased class attendance and improved behavioral well-being. Coordinators indicated that because of students' participation in after-school programs, school attendance jumped. In the attendance category, 25 coordinators reported improvements for some students and 10 more coordinators indicated significant improvements for most students. Only one state reported no significant improvements.

Coordinators also linked behavioral well-being with after-school participation. Thirteen coordinators reported significant improvements for most students in behavioral well-being, with 25 indicating improvements for some students.

The results demonstrate a clear pattern—21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs improve performance and consequently offer low-income students opportunities to develop academically and personally.

## **Coordinators Identify Program Weaknesses and Suggest Solutions**

### *Workforce Concerns*

When asked about workforce issues in their state, coordinators were divided about whether 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs can hire and retain skilled staff. Research shows that after-school programs run by well-educated and better-compensated staff are more effective.<sup>9</sup> The survey asked coordinators if after-school providers in their state could hire and retain staff sufficiently talented and trained to provide quality services to enrollees. Eighteen coordinators responded yes, while 14 answered no, 11 answered not sure, three answered "some can," and five did not answer.

The current after-school workforce is integral to the positive academic and behavioral gains that 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC students experience. However, these varied responses raise questions about the ability of programs to retain talented staff. Since a notable proportion of states face challenges in this area, increased investment in the after-school workforce would likely help strengthen program quality.

As a follow up to the question about workforce quality and retention, coordinators listed what changes they believe could strengthen the after-school workforce. Two recurring suggestions were to provide academic opportunities for the after-school workforce and to offer more

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<sup>9</sup> Cole, Patricia, "Understanding the Afterschool Workforce: Opportunities and Challenges for an Emerging Profession," *National Afterschool Association for Cornerstones for Kids* (2006): 2, [http://www.cornerstones4kids.org/images/NAA\\_PDF\\_rw111506.pdf](http://www.cornerstones4kids.org/images/NAA_PDF_rw111506.pdf).

competitive salaries. Currently, there are limited graduate degree or credential programs for the after-school field.<sup>10</sup> Coordinators suggest that this is a disincentive for staff to make long-term investments in after-school careers.

Additionally, since 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs tend to operate during after-school hours, the work is often part-time and lacks benefits. Many coordinators stressed the need for more competitive salaries to foster increased commitment from 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC staff. Some coordinators suggested that opportunities for educational credentials in after-school and increased financial investments would help to professionalize the after-school field.

Other recommendations that appeared multiple times were the need for increased professional development and help recruiting staff in rural areas. One coordinator explained that since funding sustainability concerns for 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grantees make programs less stable, staff often think that their program may not exist in the future. According to the coordinator, this uncertainty makes staff less committed to their programs – further decreasing program stability.

#### *Transportation Needs and Student Population Served*

Transportation also emerged as a problem for many 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs. When asked if, in general, transportation to and from after-school programs is a significant problem for 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grantees in their state, 30 coordinators said yes, 18 said no, and three did not answer.

Finally, coordinators were asked if eligible high school students in their state receive proportionally less 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC funded services than eligible younger students. Thirty-six coordinators said yes, nine said no, two responded that they were not sure, and four did not answer. These results confirm that high school students are not as widely served as younger students. Many coordinators suggested reasons for this disparity, explaining that fewer high schools apply for 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grants and that high school students have opportunities to participate in other school-sponsored after-school activities.

### **Conclusion**

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center program continues to be a valued resource for low-income children and families—both improving student performance and offering children a safe and enriching environment to spend their after-school hours. The results of the survey confirm past evidence of 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC's successes, however, also point to ways in which the program can be improved.

State education agencies are forced to choose between high-performing existing programs that would struggle without funds and new programs that, if funded, would reach an additional group of deserving students. This difficult choice is perpetuated by the fact the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC receives less than half of its \$2.5 billion authorized funding level. Funding the program at its authorized level would help alleviate this problem and provide opportunities to focus on other reforms, such as strengthening the after-school workforce. The forthcoming reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act presents an opportunity to advance legislative solutions that address many of the state coordinators' concerns and recommendations. With increased federal investment, the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program can overcome challenges and expand its reach to more low-income children in need of after-school care.

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<sup>10</sup> After-school credential programs are limited, however, there are examples of organizations that are beginning to offer these opportunities. One organization is the Center for After-School Excellence in New York. To learn more visit: <http://www.afterschoolexcellence.org/section/opportunities> .

### **About the Alliance for Children and Families and United Neighborhood Centers of America**

The Alliance for Children and Families, a nonprofit association, was formed by the 1998 merger of Family Service America and the National Association of Homes and Services for Children. The Alliance represents over 370 nonprofit organizations across the nation that provide services and economic empowerment to children and families. Alliance agencies cover a wide spectrum of providers, including a diversity of faith-based organizations and nonsectarian agencies. Together, these organizations deliver more than \$2 billion annually in services to more than 8 million people in nearly 6,700 communities across the United States. More information about the Alliance is available at [www.alliance1.org](http://www.alliance1.org).

United Neighborhood Centers of America (UNCA) is a voluntary, nonprofit, national organization with neighborhood-based member agencies throughout the United States. Formerly known as the National Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers, it was founded in 1911 by Jane Addams and other pioneers of the settlement movement. More information about UNCA is available at [www.unca.org](http://www.unca.org).

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