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# **New Jersey 21st Century Community Learning Centers Year 1 Evaluation Report: Descriptive Data**

**Matthew Vinson**

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

For approximately a decade, 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) operating across the state of New Jersey have provided youth in high-poverty communities the opportunity to participate in academic enrichment programs and other youth-development and support activities designed to enhance their academic well-being. The primary purpose of this report is to highlight how afterschool programs funded by 21st CCLC have performed relative to the goals and objectives specified by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) in terms of supporting youth growth and development. In particular, this report seeks to provide a descriptive picture of the 21st CCLC program across New Jersey. Additionally, this report outlines how well New Jersey 21st CCLC grantees performed in relation to a set of *leading* and *summative* indicators defined for the program that are meant to assess how well grantees are both (a) implementing programming that is likely to support the achievement of the goals and objectives specified by NJDOE for the 21st CCLC program and (b) obtaining desired youth outcomes. It is intended that this information will provide additional guidance and insight to both the NJDOE and grantees currently providing programming regarding the steps that should be taken to support and undertake meaningful program improvement efforts.

The information contained in this report is the result of data collected and analyzed as part of a statewide evaluation, currently being conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) of the 21st CCLC program in New Jersey. The results outlined in this report are associated with 21st CCLC-funded activities and services delivered during the course of the 2012–13 school year.

The report, properly a descriptive report rather than a full impact evaluation, has been organized around a series of chapters using a similar format to those presented in evaluation reports provided by AIR in previous years. In Chapter 2, a summary of the evaluation questions and an explanation of why these questions are important to the field is provided. In addition, a description of the analytic methods used to support the evaluation is provided in Chapter 2, including a description of data sources. An overview of grantee, site,<sup>1</sup> and youth characteristics are summarized in Chapter 3, with a particular emphasis on characteristics that have been shown to be related to improving youth academic achievement and attaining desired program outcomes. Finally, in Chapter 4 the leading indicator system is summarized and discussed with regard to how information relates to future evaluation and technical assistance efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> In this report, the terms *site* and *program* are used to refer to the physical location where 21st CCLC-funded services and activities take place. Sites are characterized by defined hours of operation, have dedicated staffs, and usually have positions akin to site coordinators. Each 21st CCLC grantee in New Jersey has at least one site; many grantees have more than one site.

## Chapter 2. Evaluation Questions and Methods

As part of a five-year plan, the evaluation seeks to answer four primary evaluation questions related to implementation of the New Jersey 21st CCLC programs on desired youth outcomes and impact:

1. What were the primary characteristics of the programs funded by 21st CCLC and the youth served?
2. How well did program sites perform on the leading indicators defined for the program, and how is this level of performance relevant to thinking about what additional supports, training, and professional development NJDOE should potentially invest in?
3. To what extent does evidence exist of a relationship between (a) select program and youth characteristics and (b) the likelihood that youth demonstrated the following:
  - a. Higher levels of attendance in 21st CCLC
  - b. An improvement in behaviors likely to be supportive of better academic achievement
  - c. Higher academic achievement in reading or language arts and mathematics
4. To what extent does evidence exist that youth participating in services and activities funded by 21st CCLCs demonstrated better performance on state assessments in reading and mathematics compared with similar youth not participating in the program?

For 2012–13 (Year 1 of the five-year evaluation), the evaluation of 21st CCLC programs in New Jersey sought only to address questions 1 and 2. More rigorous analyses will be conducted using data from 2013–14, 2015–16, and 2016–17 (i.e., impact evaluations will be conducted during Years 2, 4, and 5 of the five-year evaluation). This approach is consistent with evaluation best practices.

Collectively, the domain of evaluation questions presented previously is representative of both the goals and objectives NJDOE has specified for the 21st CCLC program, as well as of some of the more pressing questions currently before the afterschool programming field nationally. The NJDOE requires 21st CCLC funded programs to “supplement the education of youth in grades 4–12 and assist youth in attaining the skills necessary to meet New Jersey’s Curriculum Content Standards and Common Core State Standards” (State of New Jersey Department of the Treasury, 2013, p. 1). The staff at NJDOE responsible for administering the 21st CCLC program have taken steps to operationalize this goal by specifying a series of objectives that outline what is to be achieved in this regard and by what means.

- Goal 1: To provide high-quality educational and enrichment programs that will enable youth to improve academic achievement and promote positive behavior and appropriate social interaction with peers and adults.
  - Objective 1.1: The grantee will establish and maintain partnerships and collaborative relationships with schools, families, youth, and the community to enhance youth’ access to a variety of learning opportunities.

- Objective 1.2: The grantee will adopt intentional strategies and research-based practices designed to support youth skill building and mastery, both academically and from a youth-development perspective.
- Objective 1.3: The grantee will adopt practices to support the orientation, training, and development of afterschool staff in the adoption and use of intentional strategies and research-based practices to ensure program quality.
- Objective 1.4: Youth regularly participating in the program will be positively impacted in terms of performance on state assessments in reading and mathematics.
- Objective 1.5: Youth regularly participating in the program will demonstrate improved school-day attendance, decreased disciplinary actions or other adverse behaviors, improved social-emotional functioning, and the development of 21st century skills.

The five objectives can be further broken down into two primary types:

- Type 1: Objectives 1.1 (establishing and maintaining partnerships); 1.2 (intentional adoption of strategies and practices); and 1.3 (supports to ensure program quality) detail operational elements that are seen by the state as being supportive of the academic achievement and behavioral outcomes central to the 21st CCLC program.
- Type 2: Objectives 1.4 (program impact on reading and mathematics assessments) and 1.5 (program impact on school-day attendance, disciplinary actions, social-emotional functioning, and 21st skill development) are more summative in nature, providing more detail about what constitutes improvement in academic achievement and behavior outcomes.

Additional insight into how NJDOE staff responsible for the administration of 21st CCLC programs perceive programmatic characteristics and attributes leading to the achievement of desired youth outcomes are described in Goals 2 and 3, and their associated objectives, as identified by NJDOE:

- Goal 2: To implement activities that promote parental involvement and provide opportunities for literacy and related educational development to the families of participating youth.
  - Objective 2.1: The agency will establish collaborative relationships that offer opportunities for literacy and related educational activities to the families of participating youth.
  - Objective 2.2: Parents participating in grant-funded activities will increase their involvement in the education of children under their care.
  - Objective 2.3: Grantees will adopt intentional strategies to communicate to parents and adult family members about program goals and objectives, activities, and their child's experience in the program.
- Goal 3: To measure participants' progress and program effectiveness through monitoring and evaluating.

- Objective 3.1: Throughout the grant period, the grantee will continually assess program quality and effectiveness and use this information to support quality improvement.
- Objective 3.2: The grantee will work to obtain data on youth' in-school progress in the areas of academic achievement, behavior, and social development and use this information to inform the design and delivery of programming.
- Objective 3.3: Throughout the grant period, the grantee will adopt measures as needed within the program when data is not available from other sources to assess (a) youth engagement in program activities, (b) the academic and/or social-emotional needs of participating youth, and (c) program impact.
- Objective 3.4: The grantee will measure the impact of the program on family members of participating youth.

The objectives associated with Goals 2 and 3 either pertain to (a) directly engaging parents and other adult family members of 21st CCLC youth participating in programming and keeping parents and adult family members apprised of how the program is serving their children or (b) ensuring measures and practices are in place to assess the quality of program implementation and impact to inform program improvement efforts.

Collectively, the domain of goals and objectives established by NJDOE seem to directly or indirectly reinforce the primacy of youth achievement and behavioral change as the outcomes of greatest interest and suggest that programs can take steps to realize these outcomes as follows:

- Establishing and maintaining partnerships and collaborative relationships within the community;
- Being intentional in adopting strategies and practices that support youth skill building and mastery, both academically and from a youth-development perspective;
- Implementing activities that promote parental involvement and providing opportunities to the families of participating youth; and
- Ensuring measures and approaches are in place to assess program quality and effectiveness and use this information to support quality improvement.

Each of these operational elements and approaches are represented in recent efforts in the field of afterschool education to identify the features of high-quality afterschool programs (Granger, Durlak, Yohalem, & Reisner, 2007; Little, 2007; Wilson-Ahlstrom & Yohalem, 2007; Vandell et al., 2005; Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2007). Generally, many of the measures developed for use in the evaluation are meant to assess how 21st CCLC grantees are performing across the operational elements and attributes embedded in NJDOE's program goals and objectives. Additionally, many of the measures assess how grantees are performing in terms of characteristics that the current best practices literature suggests are associated with program features likely to positively affect youth achievement and related outcomes.

## Data Sources and Analytical Methods

The data collected and analyzed to carry out the 2012–13 evaluation effort were obtained from three primary sources: administrative data systems, surveys, and an AIR-created data-collection application designed to collect more standardized local evaluation data. Each source and how it contributed to the project is outlined in greater detail.

### Program Activity and Review System (PARS21)

PARS21 is a web-based data-collection system developed and maintained by the NJDOE that collects directly from grantees a broad array of data on program characteristics, youth demographics, attendance, and outcomes throughout the program year. Data extracted from PARS21 were used to construct variables summarizing the activity and staffing models employed by sites; program maturity and organization type; and levels of program attendance in relation to the 2012–13 school year. The data extracted from PARS21 used to carry out analyses summarized in this report were obtained during the spring and fall semesters of 2013 and early in 2014.

### Staff Survey

The purpose of the online staff survey was to obtain information from staff working directly with youth in programs funded by 21st CCLCs about the extent to which they engage in practices suggested by the afterschool research literature as likely to be supportive of both positive academic and youth-development outcomes. The scales that appeared on the survey included the following:

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

Staff were selected as part of the survey sample if they were actively providing services at the site that directly served youth participating in the program. The 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC project directors were instructed to select those staff who worked most frequently with youth in the program and delivered activities that were most aligned with their program's objectives for youth growth and development. The goal was to have project directors identify a minimum of 12 staff per site to take the survey. In cases in which sites had fewer than 12 active staff, all staff working with youth at the site were directed to take the survey. Survey data collection took place between December 2012 and February 2013. A total of 911 complete surveys were obtained from 108<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Note that 114 total sites had active session data for the 2012–13 school year. This indicates that six sites submitted no staff survey data.

sites active during the 2012–13 school year, which is an average of approximately eight staff completed surveys per site. The staff survey can be found in Appendix A.

### **New Jersey 21st CCLC Evaluation Template and Reporting System**

Developed by AIR as part of the statewide evaluation, the 21st CCLC Evaluation Template and Reporting System (ETRS) is a web-based data-collection application designed to obtain program-level information about the characteristics and performance of afterschool programs funded by 21st CCLCs, based on information from local evaluation efforts. The system is designed to collect information at two time points: midway through a given school year and at the end of given programming cycle. The system is made up of the following sections:

- Program operations
  - Enrollment and recruitment
  - Policies and procedures
  - School-day links
  - Program staff
  - Monitoring tools
  - Summer programs
- Goals
  - Goal A: Improve youth academic achievement
  - Goal B: Improve youth behavior and attitudes
  - Goal C: Improve parent education and involvement
  - Goal D: Improve community partnerships
- Conclusions and recommendations
  - Conclusions
  - Recommendations

Completion of both the midyear (December 2012 to February 2013) and end-of-year reports (September 2013 to November 2013) was undertaken by project directors, often in conjunction with their local evaluators. The ETRS was used to collect midyear and end-of-year evaluation report information from each of the 114 21st CCLC-funded programs active during the 2012–13 school year.

### **Analytic Approach and Methods**

Although previous reports prepared by the AIR evaluation team as part of this project have included findings predicated on both qualitative and quantitative approaches, the findings outlined in this report are purely quantitative. This approach was largely driven by the evaluation questions being answered and the overall five-year evaluation plan. The analyses highlighted in this report fall within two general categories:

1. *Descriptive analyses.* Information related to grantee, center, and youth characteristics obtained from PARS21, NJ SMART, the staff survey, and the ETRS were analyzed descriptively to explore the range of variation on a given characteristic. Some of the leading indicators were also calculated employing descriptive analysis techniques.
2. *Analyses to create scale scores.* Many questions appearing on the staff surveys and that were represented in the ETRS were part of a series of questions designed to assess an underlying construct/concept, resulting in a single scale score summarizing performance on a given area of practice or facet of afterschool implementation (e.g., practices that support linkages to the school day). An example is shown Figure 1, which outlines the questions making up the *Intentionality Program Design* scale that appeared on the staff survey.

**Figure 1. An Example of a Survey Scale Calibrated Using Rasch Techniques**

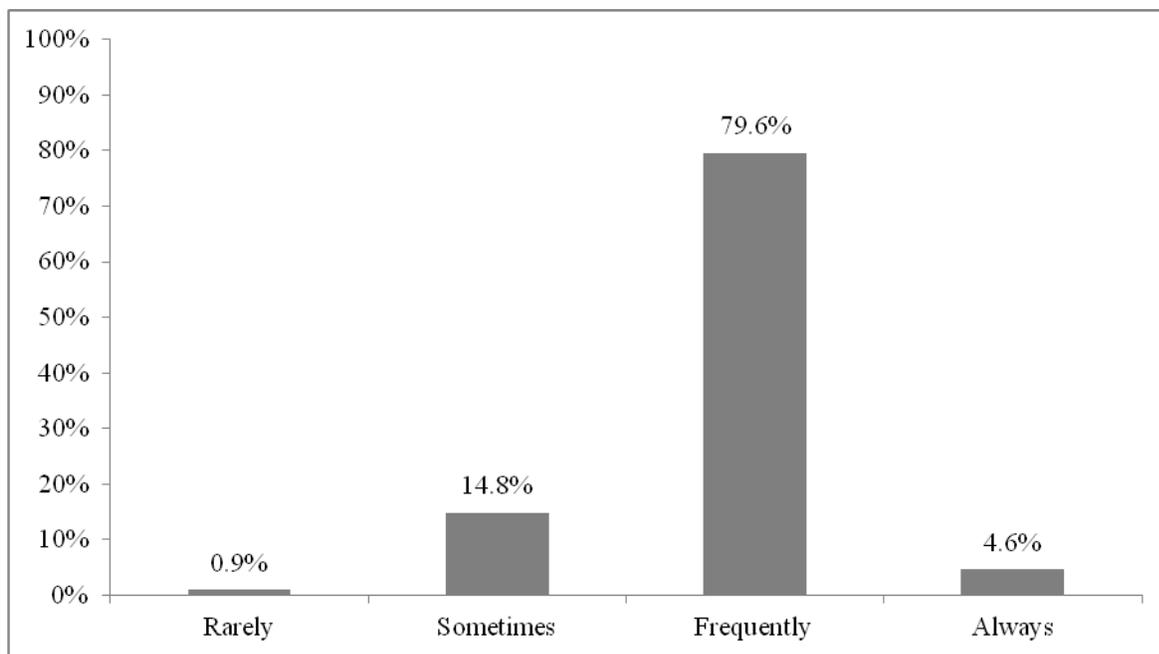
How often do you lead or participate in program activities that are...	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
a. Based on written plans for the session, assignments, and projects?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Well planned in advance?	<input type="radio"/>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

For scales like this, Rasch scale scores were created using staff and project director responses to a series of questions to create one overall score. These scale scores ranged from 0 to 100; higher scores were indicative of a higher level or more frequent adoption of a specific quality practice or set of practices. The program-level scale scores derived from the ETRS represented responses from one respondent, most likely the project director, whereas the scale scores based on staff survey data represented the average of scale scores for all staff respondents who took the survey associated with a given program.

The scale scores resulting from the application of Rasch approaches can also be used to classify which portion of the rating scale the average scale score fell within. For example, the statewide mean value for the *Intentionality in Program Design* scale highlighted in Figure 1 was 63.8, which put the statewide average in the *frequently* range of the scale indicating the typical staff

member responding to the survey reported engaging in these practices on a frequent basis. As shown in Figure 2, this approach also allowed the evaluation team to explore the distribution of program sites in light of which response option their average scale score put them in. As shown in Figure 2, 78 percent of sites had an average scale score that put them in the *frequently* range of the scale.

**Figure 2. Distribution of Average Site Scale Score on the Intentionality in Program Design Scale by Response Option**



Source: 911 staff survey responses associated with 108 program sites.

The primary benefit of this approach is the capacity to distill responses from several questions down into one overall score for the program, simplifying the process of interpreting how a program performed on a given element of quality, particularly in relation to other programs in the state.

### Limitations and Challenges

It is important to note that several limitations are associated with the methods employed to support the evaluation. The primary limitation of the results highlighted in this report relates to the fact that most of the data sources employed are predicated to some extent on self-reported data provided by 21st CCLC grantee staff. This likely introduces some level of error predicated on the following factors:

- **Imperfect recall and motivation.** The staff survey, ETRS reports, and even PARS21 data contained items that required respondents to mentally review events, conversations, practices, and experiences that took place during the 2012–13 school year and then decide which rating scale option best summarized their perceptions. It is likely that some respondents were more adept at this than others and that some responses were better than

others. Similarly, some respondents were likely more motivated than others to be diligent as they selected a response—investing time and making more efforts to recall events.

- **Social desirability.** Anyone reading the items appearing on each of the measures employed as part of the evaluation could easily select a response that would indicate a high level of functioning on the program implementation element under consideration. Respondents who were motivated to put their program's best foot forward might have been apt to choose a favorable response—one that reported a higher level of functioning than was actually the case—thereby biasing the estimate of 21st CCLC program implementation derived from their responses.

To partially account for these two concerns, data were triangulated across sources to look for consistent evidence of implementation. This approach was employed primarily when analyzing leading indicator data as described in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 3. Grantee, Center, and Youth Characteristics

Twenty-first CCLC programs are often characterized by a wide diversity of approaches, youth populations, and types of organizations involved in providing 21st CCLC programming. This chapter summarizes the characteristics of grantees, program sites, and youth associated with 21st CCLC programs active during the 2012–13 school year.

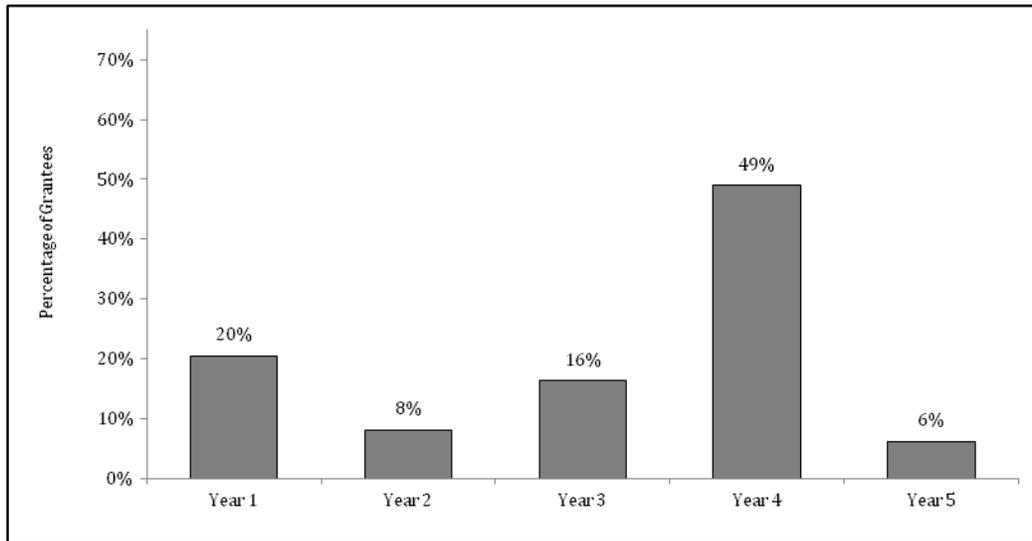
### Grantee Characteristics

Some elements associated with the design of the 21st CCLC program make grantee-level characteristics (e.g., maturity and the type of organization serving as the grantee) worth examining when trying to discern which characteristics are likely to be associated with positive youth outcomes. In this instance, the term *grantee* refers to the organization that serves as the fiduciary agent on the grant in question, whether it is a local education agency (LEA), community-based organization (CBO), or other entities, and whether it is ultimately responsible for administering grant funds at the local level.

### Grantee Maturity

One element of how 21st CCLC programs function that is increasingly receiving attention in terms of exploring issues related to program quality relates to how programs evolve during the grant period to increase the likelihood of program sustainability after the grant period is over. It should also be noted that NJDOE does not reduce funding in concurrent years; funding is provided for a five-year period. An example of programs evolving during the grant period is the case of grantees finding that they need to emphasize some elements of their programs and to reduce or eliminate others in response to changes in the youth served or the changes in funding levels. In addition, the expectation is that grantees over time would learn (a) how to provide more effective and engaging programming for youth and (b) how to more meaningfully embed academic content into their program offerings in ways that address the needs of the youth they are serving. As shown in Figure 3, most of the grants active during the 2012–13 school year were in Year 4 of funding. Given that 21st CCLC grants can be appropriated for a maximum of five years, many of the programs active during this period could be considered to be mature, having had the opportunity to overcome implementation issues in their program delivery strategies with one year of programming remaining.

**Figure 3. Percentage of Grantees by Year of Operation**

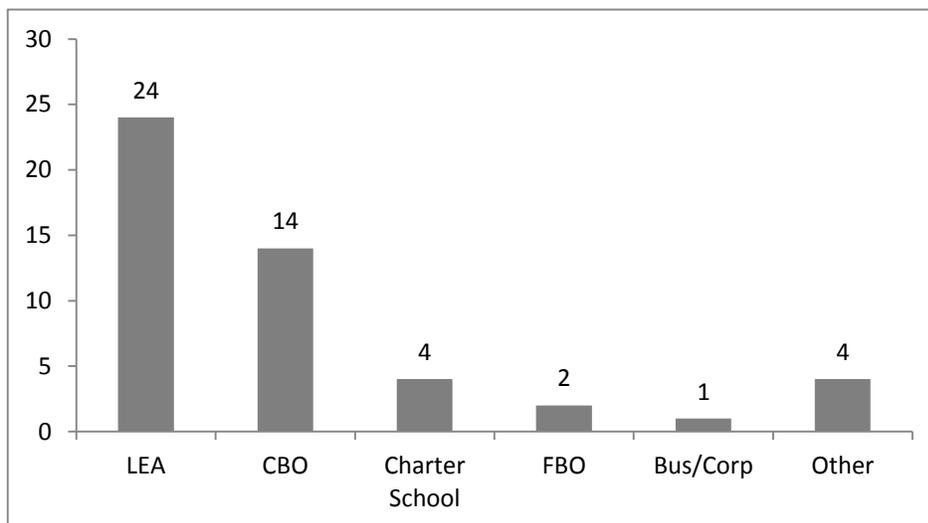


Source: PARS21.

### Grantee Organization Type

One of the interesting elements of the 21st CCLC program is that all types of organizations are eligible to apply for and receive 21st CCLC grants. As shown in Figure 4, nearly half of grants active during the 2012–13 school year were held by LEAs, and CBOs accounted for slightly fewer than one third of the grants active during this period.

**Figure 4. Number of Grantees by Organization Type**



Source: PARS21.

## Key Program Site Characteristics

In this report, the term *site* is used to refer to the physical location where 21st CCLC-funded services and activities take place. Sites are characterized by defined hours of operation, have dedicated staff, and usually have positions akin to site coordinators. Each 21st CCLC grantee in New Jersey has at least one site; many grantees have more than one site.

In addition, site characteristics can be termed either to be indicative of research-supported best practices or simply as innate attributes of the site in question without a strong connection to the afterschool quality practice literature. Site characteristics indicative of the latter might include the grade level served, program maturity, and organizational type. For example, identifying a program as one that serves only elementary youth says nothing about the quality of that program. Although these types of variables are included in models oriented toward assessing the impact of the program on desired youth outcomes, this report does not focus on them in depth.

Other characteristics at a site, such as the staffing model, are somewhat ambiguous when viewed from a quality practice standpoint, with the literature less clear on the superiority of certain staffing approaches. From a policy standpoint, NJDOE considers certain approaches to staffing for certain types of activities to be appropriate from a quality standpoint—namely, that certified teachers should staff academic programming provided in the afterschool program. The analyses contained in this report is intended to build an understanding of whether certain staffing models seem to be more often associated with positive youth outcomes and thereby warrant consideration as a quality practice worthy of emulation and replication. Like the characteristics detailed earlier, however, this report does not spend a great deal of time exploring this from a purely characteristic standpoint.

## Staffing Clusters and Ratios

Like their counterparts nationally, programs funded by 21st CCLC in New Jersey employ staff with a variety of qualifications, including academic teachers, nonacademic teachers, college and high school youth, counselors, paraprofessionals from the school day, and other program staff with a wide spectrum of backgrounds and training. To summarize more effectively the different staffing models employed by program sites during the 2012–13 school year, an effort was made to classify program sites into groups or clusters using cluster analysis techniques, based on the extent to which they relied on different categories of staff to deliver programming during the school year in question. In this instance, the variables used to create the clusters represented the percentage of total paid staff who were academic teachers, nonacademic teachers, counselors, and other staff working at a site during the school year. The data used to construct these clustered staffing variables were obtained from PARS21. It should be noted that PARS21 does not include administrative staff (e.g., project director, site coordinator, or data entry staff), except when the site coordinator is also responsible for implementing an activity. As shown in Figure 5, five primary staffing models were identified:

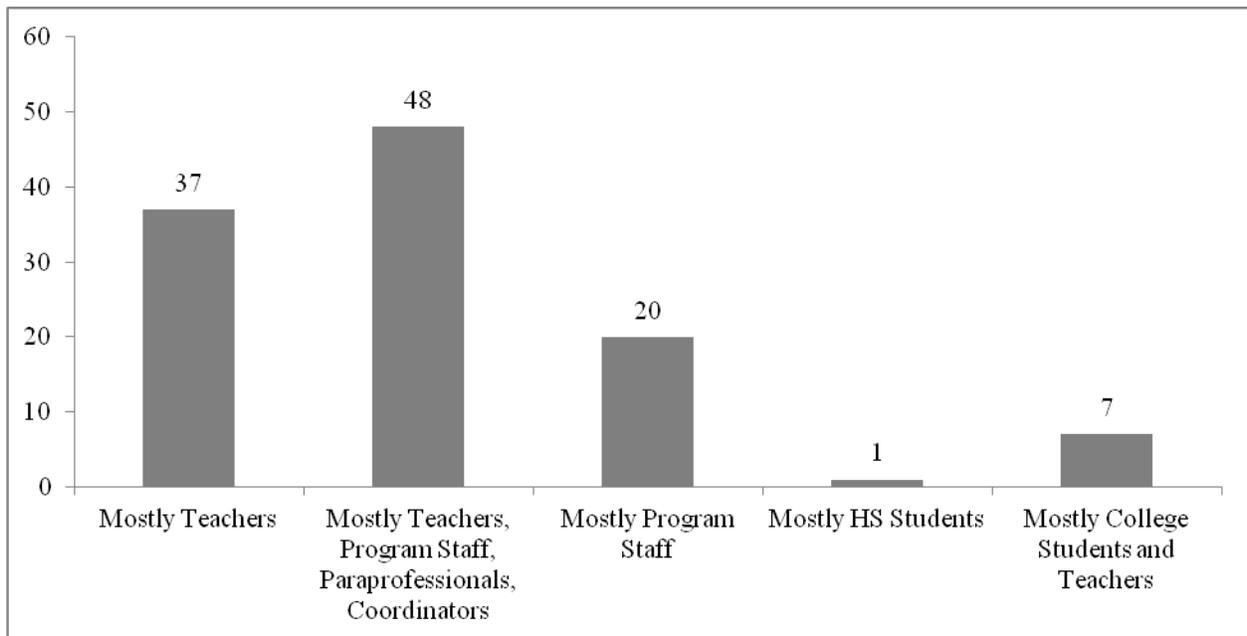
1. *Sites staffed mostly by teachers.* On average, 81 percent of the staff associated with sites in this cluster were academic teachers.
2. *Sites staffed mostly teachers, program staff, paraprofessionals, and program coordinators.* On average, 37 percent of the staff associated with sites in this cluster were

teachers, 12 percent were program staff, 12 percent were paraprofessionals, and 10 percent were coordinators.

3. *Sites staffed mostly by program staff.* On average, 54 percent of the staff associated with sites in this cluster were program staff.
4. *Sites staffed by high school youth.* This cluster, consisting of one site only, had 100 percent high school youth provided as staff.
5. *Sites staffed by college youth and teachers.* On average, college youth represented 48 percent of staff associated with sites in this cluster, and academic teachers represented 24 percent.

Overall, sites were most apt to be classified in either the (a) *Mostly teachers* or (b) *Mostly teachers, program staff, paraprofessionals, and coordinators*.

**Figure 5. Number of Program Sites by Staffing Cluster Type**



Source: PARS21.

In addition to exploring the various approaches to staffing employed by sites during the 2012–13 school year, an effort was made to calculate the average youth-to-staff ratio associated with activity sessions provided during the span of the school year in this report. As shown in Table 1, the average youth-to-staff ratio (average center-level ratio) was found to be approximately 1 staff person for every 11 youth participating in specific activities, although the span of ratios was quite broad, ranging from approximately 1:1 to just under 1:47.

**Table 1. Average Youth-to-Teacher Ratio Per Center, 2012–13**

	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
2012–13 Youth-to-staff ratio	113	1.09	46.57	10.99	8.11

Source: PARS21.

### Participation in Reading and Mathematics Activities

Another approach to examining youth participation in 21st CCLC programming offered during the 2012–13 school year is to explore the extent to which youth participated in activities that were meant to support skill building in mathematics and reading, regardless of activity type (e.g., enrichment, tutoring). As mentioned, one of the central goals of the 21st CCLC program is to support growth and development in reading and mathematics. As outlined in Table 2, youth on average participated in approximately 30 hours of reading or literacy programming during the 2012–13 reporting period and 21 hours of mathematics programming.

**Table 2. Average Number of Hours in Reading and Mathematics Per Youth, 2012–13**

	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
2012–13 reading or literacy education activities	14,050	0.00	366	30.08	46.94
2012–13 mathematics education activities	14,050	0.00	394	20.77	36.78

Source: PARS21.

### Grade Levels Served

A topic garnering increasing federal attention relates to the role that grade level plays in terms of (a) how 21st CCLC programs should structure their operations and program offerings and (b) the domain of outcomes they should be accountable for through performance indicator systems.

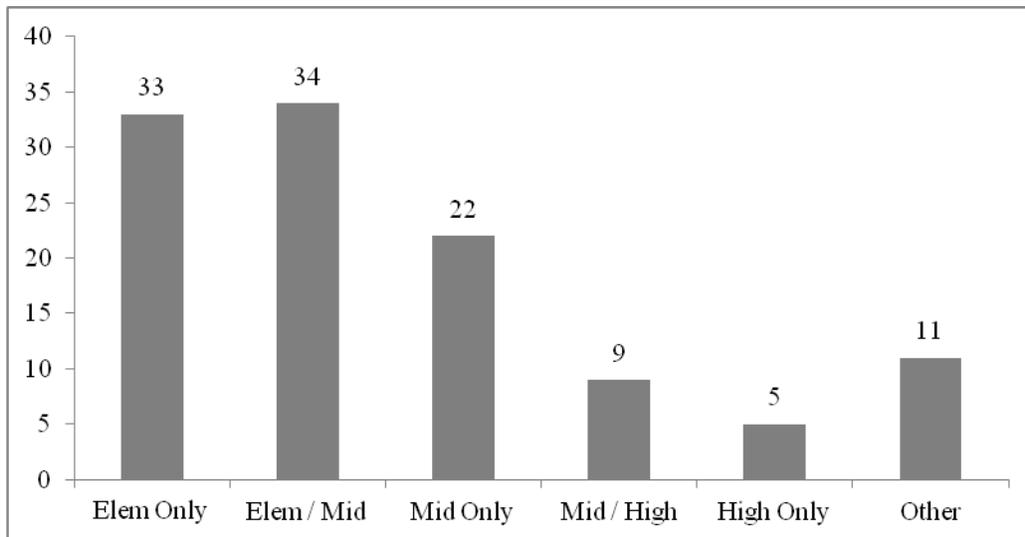
Using youth-level data about the grade levels of youth attending sites, the sites active during the 2012–13 school year were classified as follows:

- *Elementary only*, defined as those sites serving youth up to Grade 6.
- *Elementary/middle*, defined as those sites serving youth up to Grade 8.
- *Middle only*, defined as sites serving youth in Grades 5–8.
- *Middle/high*, defined as sites serving youth in Grades 5–12.
- *High only*, defined as sites serving youth in Grades 9–12.

A sixth category, called *other*, includes sites that did not fit one of the five categories. For example, a site that serves all grade levels might not be classifiable as serving a particular grade level, and it falls under *other*.

The “High only” category is especially important to analyze because afterschool programming for older youth often looks considerably different from programming for elementary or middle school youth (Naftzger et al., 2007). In addition, high school youth have different needs from younger youth, and often they have other afternoon obligations, such as jobs or extracurricular activities. As shown in Figure 6, the bulk of the sites active during the 2012–13 school year served elementary or middle school youth in some capacity.

**Figure 6. Number of Program Sites by Grade Level Served**



Source: PARS21.

## Youth Characteristics

During the course of the 2012–13 school year, a total of 14,050 youth participated at some level (i.e., attended programming for at least one day during the school year) in 21st CCLC programming at 114 program sites active during this period. This population was diverse, as shown in Table 3. Generally, the population of youth served during the 2012–13 school year was Black and Hispanic/Latino; was enrolled in elementary or middle school, especially in Grades 4–6; and was eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch programs.

**Table 3. Summary of Demographic Information for Youth, 2012–13**

Demographic Category	2012–13	
	Number of Youth	Percentage
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White	2,019	14.4%
Black	4,518	32.2%
Hispanic/Latino	6,600	47.0%
Asian	298	2.1%
Native American	25	0.2%

**Table 3. Summary of Demographic Information for Youth, 2012–13 (Continued)**

Demographic Category	2012–13	
	Number of Youth	Percentage
Pacific Islander	32	0.2%
Unknown	558	4.0%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	6,974	49.6%
Female	7,076	50.4%
<b>Grade</b>		
4	2,300	17.0%
5	2,767	20.4%
6	2,968	21.9%
7	2,156	15.9%
8	1,796	13.2%
9	509	3.8%
10	426	3.1%
11	382	2.8%
12	251	1.9%
<b>Free or Reduced-Price Lunch</b>		
Reduced	1,182	8.4%
Free	9,573	68.1%
N/A	3,295	23.5%

Source: PARS21.

### Youth Attendance Levels

Attendance is an intermediate outcome indicator that reflects the potential breadth and depth of exposure to afterschool programming. In this regard, attendance can be considered in terms of (a) the total number of youth who participated in the center’s programming throughout the course of the year and (b) the frequency and intensity with which youth attended programming when it was offered. The former number can be used as a measure of the breadth of a center’s reach, whereas the latter can be construed as a measure of how successful the site was in retaining youth in center-provided services and activities.

Among youth participating in activities during the 2012–13 school year, the average number of days attending 21st CCLC programming was 70. In Figure 7, the youth population served during the 2012–13 school year is broken down into four attendance gradations:

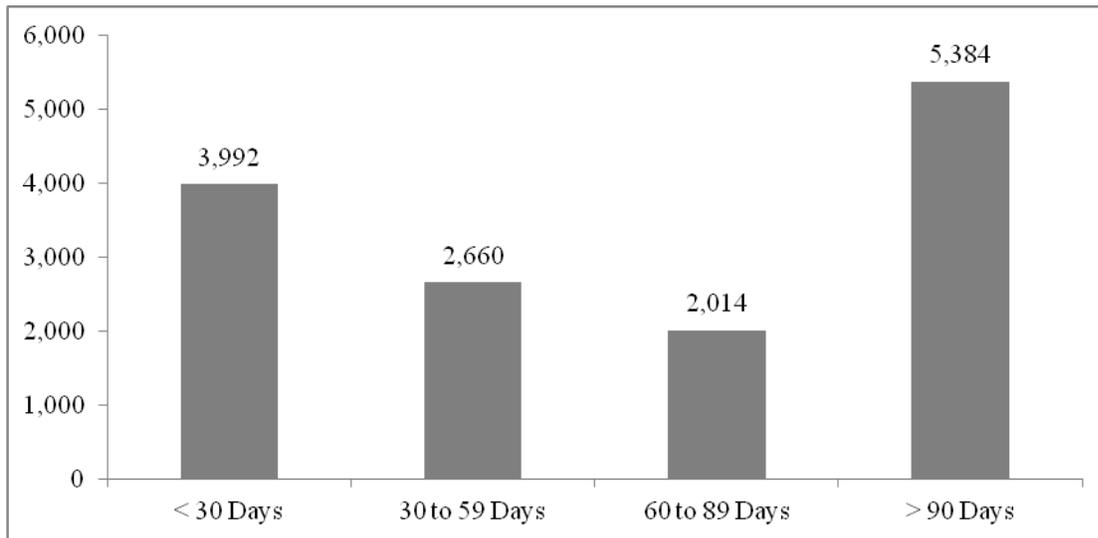
1. The percentage of youth attending fewer than 30 days
2. Those youth attending 30 to 59 days
3. Those youth attending 60 to 89 days

4. Those youth attending 90 days or more

As shown in Figure 7, less than one third of the youth (28.4 percent) attended fewer than 30 days, and slightly more than one third participated for 90 days or more (38.3 percent).

To demonstrate program impact, one would expect that there would be a positive relationship between higher levels of attendance in the program and the likelihood that youth witnessed gains in youth achievement and behavioral outcomes. There is evidence of this fact through data collected nationally through the Profile and Performance Indicator Collection System, especially for elementary youth (Naftzger, Vinson, & Swanlund, 2010).

**Figure 7. Percentage of Youth Served in 21st CCLCs by Attendance Gradation**



Source: PARS21.

In addition to levels of program attendance during the course of the 2012–13 school year, we were interested in exploring the extent to which youth participating during this period had been attending the program at a given site for more than the school year in question. Hypothetically, it would be expected that a greater number of years of continuous participation in the program would be associated with a greater degree of improvement on the outcomes of interest in this report. However, as shown in Table 4, for most youth, the 2012–13 school year represented the first year they participated in 21st CCLC programming at the site in question; approximately 21 percent were in their second or third year of participation. Four or more years of continuous participation was found to be relatively rare.

**Table 4. Continuous Years of Youth Participation**

Number of Years	2012–13	
	Number of Youth	Percentage
One year	10,913	77.7%
Two years	2,221	15.8%
Three years	648	4.6%

**Table 4. Continuous Years of Youth Participation (Continued)**

Number of Years	2012–13	
	Number of Youth	Percentage
Four years	246	1.8%
Five years	16	0.1%
Six years	6	0.0%

*Note.* One year of continuous participation indicates that a given youth is either in his or her first year of programming during the 2012–13 school year or that there was an interruption in participation prior to the 2012–13 school year.

*Source:* PARS21.

### **Youth Attendance Profiles**

An effort was made to determine the extent to which youth participated in different types of activities during the school year. To achieve this outcome, we employed K means clustering to identify the most dominant youth activity profile types within the population of youth served during the school year in question.

The first step in creating K means clusters was to identify for each youth what percentage of his or her time in 21st CCLC program was spent in each of the following types of activities:

1. Academic improvement or remediation,
2. Academic enrichment,
3. Tutoring or homework help,
4. Mentoring,
5. Drug and violence prevention counseling,
6. Expanded library service hours ,
7. Recreational activities,
8. Career or job training,
9. Supplemental educational services,
10. Community service learning programs,
11. Character education, and
12. Youth development and learning activities.

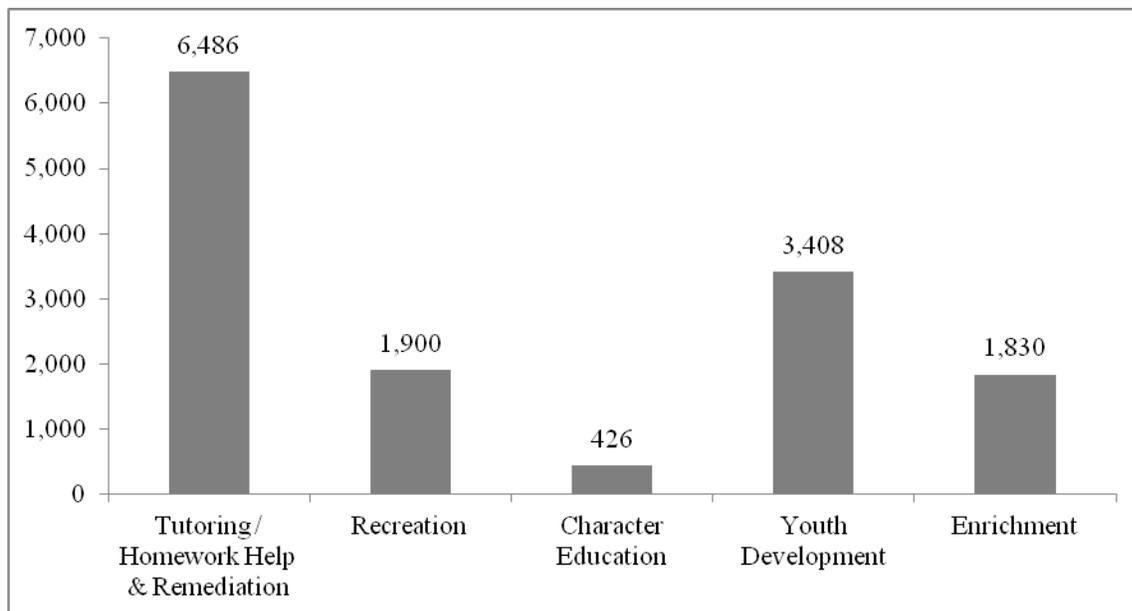
These youth-level activity percentages were then used to identify and define five clusters, each characterized by a dominance of one activity type or particular combination of activity types:

- *Mostly tutoring or homework help and remediation*, characterized by an average of 40 percent of the time spent in tutoring or homework help and 24 percent of the time in remediation.

- *Mostly recreation*, characterized by an average of 59 percent of the time spent in recreation.
- *Mostly character education*, characterized by an average of 62 percent of the time spent in character education activities.
- *Mostly youth development*, characterized by an average of 29 percent of the time spent in youth-development activities (with a variety of other activities).
- *Mostly enrichment*, characterized by an average of 71 percent of the time spent on enrichment activities.

The number of youth in each cluster is presented in Figure 8. The two largest clusters are Mostly tutoring or homework help and Remediation, and Youth development.

**Figure 8. Number of Youth by Youth Activity Cluster**



Source: PARS21.

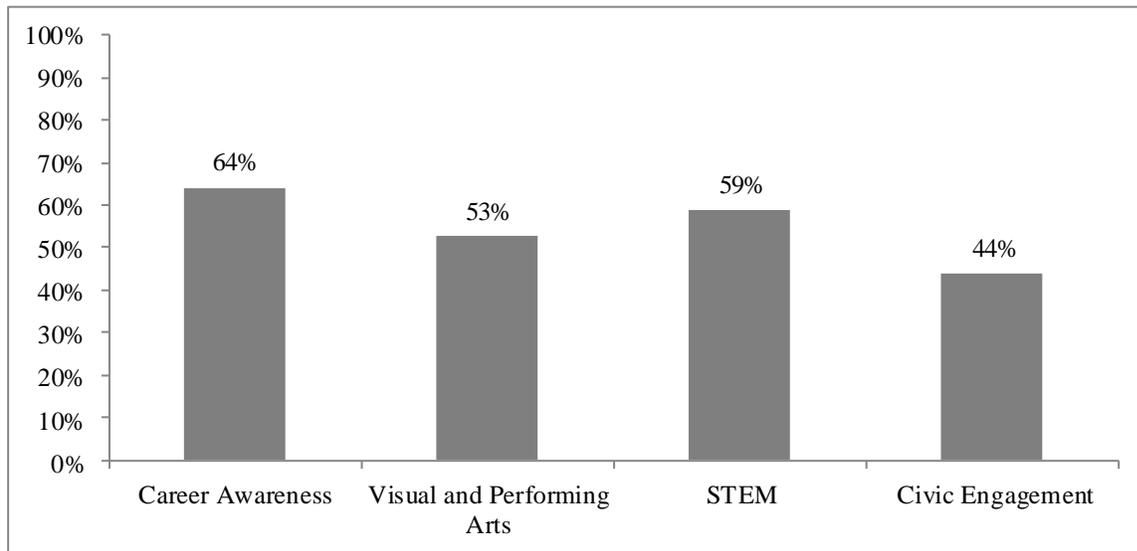
### Activity Themes

During the course of the 2012–13 school year, NJDOE also required grantees to adopt one or more of the following themes when providing activities. Themes were to be selected based on the youth’s needs, interests, and developmental age and were meant to support targeted skill building and development through the provision of activities youth would especially find engaging.

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

A total of 98 percent of sites active during the 2012–13 school year were found to have provided activity sessions associated with one or more of the aforementioned themes based on the data reported in PARS21. As shown in Figure 9, 64 percent of sites adopted a career awareness and exploration theme, 59 percent a STEM theme, 53 percent a visual and performing arts theme, and 44 percent focused on civic engagement.

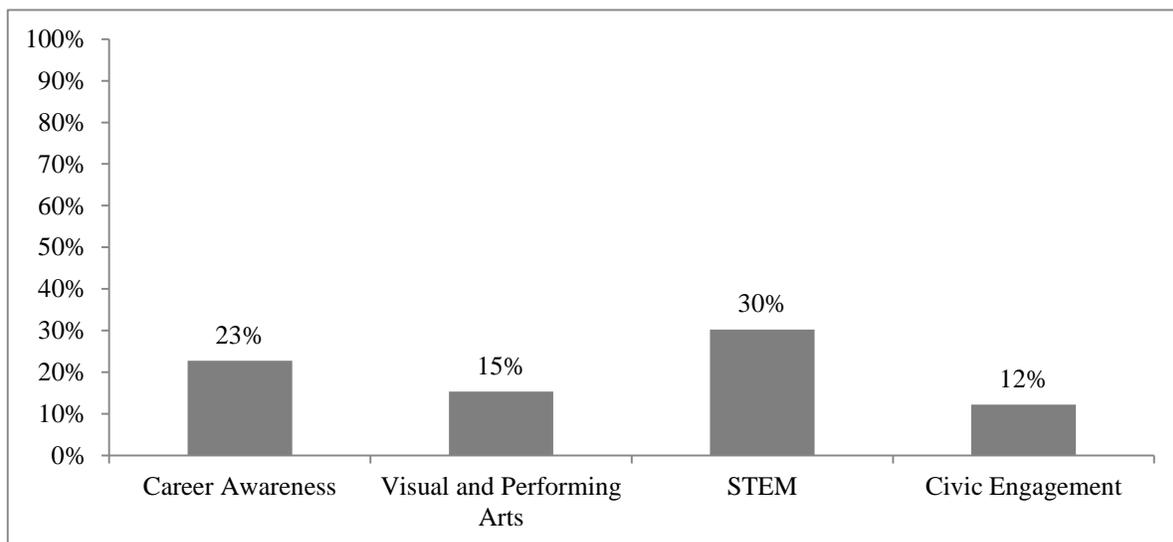
**Figure 9. Percentage of Program Sites by Primary Theme**



Source: PARS21.

As shown in Figure 10, sites on average spend anywhere between 12 percent and 30 percent of their total activity time providing activities consistent with their selected theme.

**Figure 10. Percentage of Minutes Dedicated to Selected Theme by Theme Type**



Source: PARS21.

## Chapter 4. Leading Indicators

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

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

Predicated on the data collected from the staff surveys, the ETRS midyear report, and PARS21, the leading indicator system is focused on *quality program implementation* as opposed to youth or program outcomes. The midyear report is designed to consolidate and report on the data collected as part of the basic operation of the program (like PARS21 data for example). The report is also designed to report on the data describing program evaluation efforts regarding the adoption of research-supported practices so that programs can identify strengths and weaknesses and reflect on areas of program design and delivery in need of further growth and development. More consistent implementation of research-supported best practices will theoretically support the attainment of desired youth and program outcomes.

The leading indicator system was also developed to be useful to NJDOE staff by supporting the identification of common issues and areas that grantees statewide are struggling with and that can be targeted at statewide project director meetings and trainings to build program capacity in those areas.

### How the Leading Indicators Were Organized

The 22 leading indicators can be organized using two different frameworks:

1. By program level (organizational processes, quality at the point-of-service, and participation and engagement)
2. By domain of quality practice

The leading indicators were first organized into three overarching domains:

1. *Organizational processes* relate to practices that are defined for the program and that provide an infrastructure to support implementation of effective practice in the design, delivery, and evaluation of afterschool programming. Quality afterschool programs start with sound organizational processes. At the organizational level, programwide strategies

and approaches are developed and implemented to deliver program activities that promote participants' academic success and positive development. This can be represented by the adoption of a specific curriculum for 21st CCLC activities, placing an emphasis on a particular instructional strategy like project-based learning, or focusing on a given content area like STEM. Ideally, steps are taken by programs to strengthen their activities and offerings by forging meaningful partnerships with the families and the community both (a) to broaden their scope of program offerings and (b) by including important constituents in program design and delivery. Finally, programs can take steps to ensure their strategies are relevant by engaging in a process of continuous quality assessment and improvement. What characterizes each of these processes is that they are adopted at the organizational level and have ramifications and relevance for the full domain of staff who work in the program and the youth who participate.

2. *Quality at the point of service* relates to practices that occur at the point of service, where staff and youth interact directly during the provision of an activity or offering. The focus at this level is on the instructional practice of individual staff. Are steps taken to plan activities with intentionality? Do staff have access to and make use of data on youth academic performance? Are staff adopting practices that are likely to result in the creation of a supportive, interactive, and engaging environment for participating youth? Quality at the point of service refers to the program climate experienced by participating youth, the quality of interactions among participants and staff, and the degree to which supports and opportunities for interaction and engagement are afforded to youth. Quality at the point of service is the result of these components (climate, positive interactions, and opportunities for engagement) and is promoted by intentionally designed activities offered by afterschool program staff that seek to cultivate these types of experiences for participating youth.
3. *Participation and engagement* refers to the level of participation by youth and adults in activities provided by 21st CCLC programs. Youth cannot be expected to experience a positive impact by the program unless they actually participate in program offerings and activities.

The leading indicators can also be organized into more specific domains of *quality practice*:

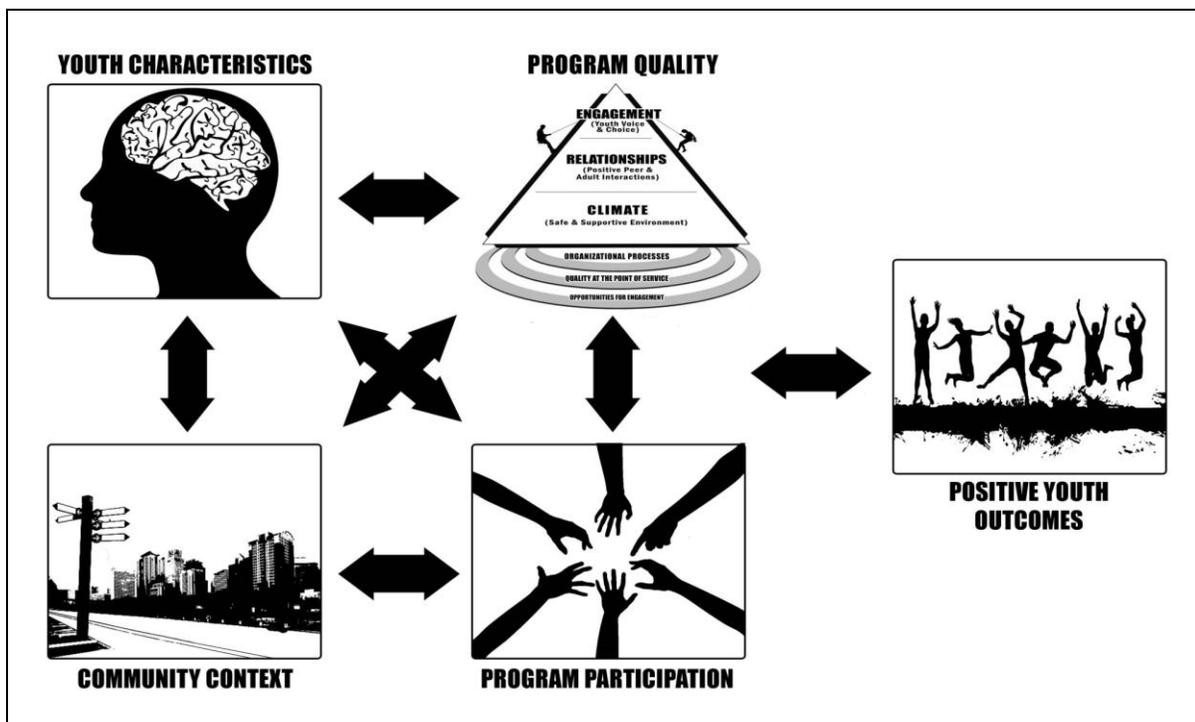
- Strategies and practices that support the academic development of participating youth
- Strategies and practices that support the development of participating youth from a youth-development perspective
- Strategies and practices that support the engagement and development of parents and adult family members
- Strategies and practices that support the use and engagement of partners
- Strategies and practices that support program improvement efforts.

Each of the *level* and *quality* domains used to organize the indicators are representative of both the goals and objectives specified for the 21st CCLC program by NJDOE and AIR's larger framework for understanding the path to quality in afterschool programs. As shown in Figure 11, the achievement of desired youth outcomes is considered to be a function of a complex set of interactions between several program elements, including:

- *Youth characteristics:* The characteristics and contributions youth bring to the afterschool setting that influence how they engage with and benefit from afterschool programs.
- *Community context:* The resources and characteristics of the local and school community context that serve to support meaningful partnerships to develop program goals, program design, and provide program guidance. For instance, community context will be very different for rural, suburban, and urban communities.
- *Program participation:* Youth are more likely to benefit from afterschool program participation if they attend consistently over a period of time and participate in a variety of activity types.
- *Program quality:* Program quality is a series of practices and approaches that support the provision of developmentally appropriate, high-quality settings and activities at the point of service. This includes practices and approaches adopted by (a) activity leaders working directly with youth (such practices are represented in the Quality at the point of service domain in the leading indicator system) and (b) the organization as a whole, which provides an infrastructure to support implementation of effective practice in the design, delivery, and evaluation of afterschool programming (represented in the organizational processes domains in the leading indicator system).

The current iteration of the leading indicator system addresses only a portion of the quality framework depicted in Figure 11; there are several opportunities to expand the leading indicator system to more fully represent additional, important components of afterschool program quality.

**Figure 11. AIR’s Quality Framework for Afterschool Programs**



In the sections that follow, statewide levels of leading indicator performance are summarized by each of the five *quality* domains outlined previously, highlighting which indicators in that *quality* domain are aligned with different *levels* within the program.

## **Strategies and Practices That Support the Academic Development of Participating Youth**

Each of the programs funded by 21st CCLC grants have the express goal of improving youth achievement outcomes. Although a research base suggests that this goal can be met by simply paying attention to *how* programming is delivered (Birmingham, Pechman, Russell, & Mielke, 2005; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007), program sites will be more apt to accomplish this goal if practices ensure (a) school-day instructional strategies and content are integrated into the planning and delivery of afterschool activities; (b) that staff working directly with youth are intentional in applying these strategies at the point of service; and (c) that youth actually attend such activities on a consistent and ongoing basis. NJDOE also expects that grantees will engage in measurement and evaluation activities that will allow the program to understand its impact on academic-related outcomes and to inform the program on what steps can be taken to improve program quality in a manner likely to facilitate attainment of such outcomes. That is, the grantees are expected to refine their programming continually, to adapt their logic model in light of new data or evaluation results, and to do so in a manner consistent with their program goals.

As shown in Table 5, sites operating 21st CCLC programs during the course of the 2012–13 school year demonstrated the following:

- Widespread adoption of specific instructional strategies to support academic skill building among participating youth (Leading Indicator 1)
- At least some access to school-based data on youth academic functioning and needs (Leading Indicators 2 and 3)
- Frequent intentionality in the design of activity sessions in terms of the skills and knowledge they were trying to impart to participating youth (Leading Indicator 18)

Less common was the offering of academic-related sessions and participation in these activities in accordance with the performance targets specified in the indicator descriptions (Leading Indicators 5 and 21). Two points are important to keep in mind when interpreting these findings:

1. When calculating Leading Indicators 5 and 21, only PARS21 offering and participation data from the fall semester of 2012 were used. The goal was to provide leading indicator reports to grantees midyear to allow them the capacity to make adjustments to programming during the latter part of the school year. In this sense, these indicators do not represent the full dosage of academic-related programming received by these youth.
2. The performance thresholds were set arbitrarily to create a metric against which to assess performance. As noted in Table 5, an average of 23 percent of activity sessions offered during the fall semester of 2012 were intentionally meant to support youth growth and development in either mathematics or reading and language arts and were led by a certified teacher, whereas an average of 23 percent of youth participating in programming during the fall semester for more than 15 days spent 50 percent or more of their time in

such activities. This raises the following question: Are these levels of program offerings and attendance in academically oriented activities sufficient to support youth academic growth and development in the manner required by the program? If these levels are not sufficient, then what would these thresholds need to be, and how would this be balanced against the domain of other youth-development-oriented activities delivered by a given center (i.e., if more time is dedicated to activities meant to support youth growth and development in reading and mathematics, then what does that entail for the rest of the programming time)? These questions warrant careful consideration when examining the leading indicator data and in future conversation oriented at refining and developing the leading indicators.

**Table 5. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on Indicators Related to Strategies and Practices That Support the Academic Development of Participating Youth**

Leading Indicator	Description and Calculation	Source	Indicator Value, 2012–13
<b>Organizational Processes</b>			
Leading Indicator 1: Academic Development—Strategies are adopted to support the academic development of participating youth.	Each site received a score on a 0 to 100 scale, based on responses provided to questions related to the degree to which strategies were adopted to support the academic development of participating youth that appeared on the midyear version of the evaluation template.	Responses to the following question, which appeared in the <i>Improve Student Academic Achievement</i> section of the evaluation template: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Which strategies were used to improve achievement in reading/English and mathematics (check all that apply)?</li> </ul>	Ninety-eight percent of program sites met the performance threshold associated with this indicator.
Leading Indicator 2: Link to School Day—Program staff take steps to establish effective linkages to the school day that inform the design and delivery of program activities meant to support youth academic growth and development.	Each site received a score on a 0 to 100 scale, based on responses provided to questions related to the degree to which strategies were adopted to support the academic development of participating youth that appeared on the midyear version of the evaluation template.	Responses to the following questions, which appeared in the <i>Improve Student Academic Achievement</i> section of the evaluation template: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How did the program obtain student information? How accessible was this information, and how often was it used?</li> <li>▪ What strategies did you use to link the program to the regular school day?</li> <li>▪ What strategies were your staff members using to communicate with classroom teachers, and how frequently were they being used?</li> </ul>	The statewide mean scale score was 43.5, which meant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Information on student academic performance was <i>rarely or occasionally used</i>.</li> <li>▪ Linking with the school day was <i>somewhat of a strategy</i> to a <i>major strategy</i>.</li> <li>▪ Communication with school-day teachers occurred <i>once per grading period</i> to <i>monthly</i>.</li> </ul>

Leading Indicator	Description and Calculation	Source	Indicator Value, 2012–13
<p>Leading Indicator 3: Common Core Assessment—Staff obtain data on how well youth are functioning in core academic areas and use that information to inform program design and delivery.</p>	<p>Each site received a designation of <i>having met</i> or <i>did not meet</i> the indicator in question, depending on whether they reported obtaining data on youth academic functioning at some point during the school year when completing the midyear evaluation template. The data yielded from these measures should ultimately be used to (a) inform how programming meant to support student academic growth and development is developed and implemented and (b) serve as a baseline against which to measure student growth across the school year in question.</p>	<p>Responses to the following question, which appeared in the <i>Improve Student Academic Achievement</i> section of the evaluation template:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Please indicate if you have been able to measure the academic functioning of participating youth using one or more of the following data sources.</li> </ul>	<p>In all, 85.6% of program sites met the performance threshold associated with this indicator.</p>
<p>Leading Indicator 4: Within-Program Assessment—Staff at the center implement <i>within-program</i> measures to gauge youth academic performance and growth.</p>	<p>Each site received a designation of <i>having met</i> or <i>did not meet</i> the indicator in question, depending upon whether or not they reported implementing within-program measures when completing the midyear evaluation template related to program impact on improving student academic achievement.</p>	<p>Responses to the following questions, which appear in the <i>Goal A: Improve student academic achievement</i> section of the evaluation template, respectively.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Please indicate if you have been able to measure the academic functioning of participating youth using one or more of the following data sources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve student assessment scores—program-level pretests or posttests</li> <li>• Improve student homework completion</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>In all, 23.4% of program sites met the performance threshold associated with this indicator.</p>

Leading Indicator	Description and Calculation	Source	Indicator Value, 2012–13
<p>Leading Indicator 5: 21st Century Skills—A meaningful level of activity sessions delivered during the first semester of the school year are intentionally meant to support youth growth and development in either mathematics or reading/language arts and are led by a certified teacher.</p>	<p>Using data collected in PARS21 in relation to student attendance in activities with either a mathematics or reading/language arts focus, 50 percent of activity sessions delivered during the first semester of the school year were intentionally meant to support student growth and development in either mathematics or reading/language arts and are led by a certified teacher.</p>	<p>Activity detail and attendance pages in PARS21.</p>	<p>In all, 6.2% of program sites met the performance threshold associated with this indicator.</p> <p>Statewide, an average of 22.8% of activity sessions offered during the fall semester of 2012 met these criteria.</p>
<p><b>Point of Service Quality</b></p>			
<p>Leading Indicator 18: Common Core—Staff design and deliver intentional and relevant activities designed to support youth growth and development in mathematics and reading/language arts.</p>	<p>Each site received a score on a 0 to 100 scale, based on mean responses provided to questions related to the degree of intentionality in activity and session design appearing on the staff survey.</p>	<p>Responses to questions, which appeared in the <i>Intentionality in Activity and Session Design</i> scale of the staff survey.</p>	<p>The statewide mean scale score was 63.8, which fell in the <i>Frequently</i> portion of the scale indicating the adoption of these practices by staff is common.</p>
<p>Leading Indicator 19: Collaboration with school partners—Program staff collaborate with school personnel to adopt practices that are supportive of academic</p>	<p>Each site will received a score on a 0 to 100 scale, based on mean responses provided to questions related to linkages to the school day and using data on student academic achievement to inform programming appearing on the staff survey.</p>	<p>Responses to questions, which appear in the <i>Linkages to the School Day</i> and <i>Using Data on Student Academic Achievement</i> to inform programming scales of the staff survey.</p>	<p>The statewide mean scale score was 64.7, which meant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Staff <i>agree</i> that linkages to the school-day exist.</li> <li>▪ Staff typically use data on students’ academic needs <i>occasionally/often</i>.</li> </ul>

Leading Indicator	Description and Calculation	Source	Indicator Value, 2012–13
skill building, including linkages to the school day and using data on youth academic achievement to inform programming.			
<b>Participation and Engagement</b>			
Leading Indicator 21: Common Core Skills— Youth enrolled in the program participate in a meaningful level of activities designed to support youth growth in reading and mathematics achievement.	Using data collected in PARS21 in relation to student attendance in activities with either a mathematics or reading/language arts focus, 75 percent of students participating in 21st CCLC programming for more than 15 days during the first semester of the school year will have participated in activities that were intentionally meant to support student growth and development in mathematics and reading/language arts for at least 50 percent of their total time in the program.	Activity detail and attendance pages in PARS21.	In all, 6.2% of program sites met the performance threshold associated with this indicator. Statewide, an average of 21.9% of students participating in programming during the fall semester of 2012 for more than 15 days met these criteria.

## Strategies and Practices That Support the Development of Participating Youth From a Youth Development Perspective

Youth development is a multifaceted construct consisting of a series of positive developmental experiences youth have when key supports and opportunities are afforded throughout their participation in youth-serving programs. In high-quality programs, environments are supportive and interactive, and they provide youth with opportunities to experience engagement and ownership of the setting (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Smith & Hohmann, 2005).

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is also an integral component of youth growth and achievement that has been shown to be positively impacted in afterschool settings that promote the development of these skills through the creation of specific conditions for learning (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Afterschool programs that have been shown to be successful in supporting the development of SEL skills integrate opportunities for participants to build on their social and emotional competencies through sequenced activities that are actively engaging and focused on the development of social skills. Ideally, these strategies are based on an understanding of participants' assets and needs garnered through ongoing formal and informal assessment.

As shown in Table 6, the sites operating 21st CCLC programs during the course of the 2012–13 school year were characterized by the following levels of performance on the indicators associated with this quality domain:

- Approximately one third of program sites (a) were taking steps to assess youth functioning on social and emotional competencies (Leading Indicators 7 and 8) and (b) had met goals for the infusion of components meant to support youth-development-related behaviors and SEL functioning of participating youth and actual youth participation targets for the fall semester of 2012. In the case of the latter set of findings, a question should be raised around the meaningfulness of the performance thresholds associated with Leading Indicators 9 and 20. Little is known regarding what is an appropriate dosage for youth participation and how best to assess implementation outside direct observation. Although many questions remain regarding how program sites are infusing youth development and SEL components into programming, the leading indicators related to this quality domain seem to suggest a significant portion of New Jersey 21st CCLC's community are dedicating meaningful efforts to the design and delivery of this type of programming.
- In terms of activities provided at the point of service meant to support youth development, statewide averages on the *Staff Capacity to Create Interactive and Engaging Environment* scale (the source for Leading Indicator 16) and the *Practices Supportive of Positive Youth Development* and *Opportunities for Youth Ownership* scales of the staff survey (the sources for Leading Indicator 17) suggest that staff adoption of such practices is more common than not. However, for each of these indicators, 11 percent and 19 percent of sites, respectively, had an average scale score that indicated these practices were only occurring *occasionally to largely not at all*. This set of programs could likely benefit from additional support on how best to implement these types of supports and opportunities for participating youth.

**Table 6. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on Indicators Related to Strategies and Practices That Support the Development of Participating Youth From a Youth Development Perspective**

Leading Indicator	Description and Calculation	Source	Indicator Value, 2012–13
<b>Organizational Processes</b>			
Leading Indicator 6: Youth Engagement—Staff implement strategies to support the social and emotional development of participating youth in the program.	Each site received a score on a 0 to 100 scale, based on responses provided to questions related to the degree to which strategies are adopted to support the social-emotional development of participating youth that appear on the midyear version of the evaluation template.	Responses to the following question, which appeared in the <i>Improve Student Behavior and Attitudes</i> section of the evaluation template: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What strategies were used to support the social-emotional development of participating youth? (Check all that apply.)</li> </ul>	Ninety-eight percent of sites met the performance threshold associated with this indicator.
Leading Indicator 7: Youth Assessment—Site staff take steps to implement measures to assess social and emotional competencies and use that information to inform program design and delivery.	Each site received a designation of <i>having met</i> or <i>did not meet</i> the indicator in question, depending on whether they reported implementing one or more measures at some point during the school year to assess youth functioning on one or more youth-development-related behavior or social-emotional construct. The data yielded from these measures should have been used to (a) inform how programming meant to support youth development and social-emotional constructs is developed and implemented and (b) serve as a baseline against which to measure student growth across the school year.	Responses to the following question, which appeared in the <i>Improve Student Behaviors and Attitudes</i> section of the evaluation template: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Please indicate if you have been able to measure youth-development-related behaviors and social-emotional functioning of participating youth in each of the following areas.</li> </ul>	Fifty-eight percent of sites met the performance threshold associated with this indicator.
Leading Indicator 8: Within Program Assessment—Staff at the site implement	Each site received a designation of <i>having met</i> or <i>did not meet</i> the indicator in question, depending on whether they reported implementing within-program measures when	Responses to the following questions, which appeared in the <i>Goal B: Improve student behavior and attitudes</i> section of the evaluation template, respectively:	Forty-one percent of sites met the performance threshold associated with this

Leading Indicator	Description and Calculation	Source	Indicator Value, 2012–13
<i>within-program</i> measures to assess youth social and emotional functioning and gauge program impact.	completing the midyear evaluation template related to program impact on improving student behavior and attitudes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Please indicate if you have been able to measure youth-development-related behaviors and social-emotional functioning of participating youth in each of the following areas               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve youth-development-related behaviors and social-emotional functioning of participating youth.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	indicator.
Leading Indicator 9: Social and Emotional Learning—Staff infuse components that are meant to support the social and emotional development of participating youth.	Fields exist in PARS21 that allow users to specify whether an activity is characterized by an infusion of components that are meant to support youth-development-related behaviors and SEL functioning. Users specify what areas of youth and development and SEL functioning are being targeted, if any. The goal is to have 20% of activity sessions delivered during the first semester of the school year be characterized by an infusion of components that are meant to support youth-development-related behaviors and SEL.	Responses to the following fields in PARS21: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is this activity intentionally designed to support the improvement of youth-development-related behaviors and social-emotional functioning in any of the following areas (check all that apply)?</li> </ul>	Seventy-four percent of sites met the performance threshold associated with this indicator. Statewide, an average of 73% of activity sessions offered during the fall semester of 2012 met these criteria.
<b>Point-of-Service Quality</b>			
Leading Indicator 16: Quality at Point of Service—Staff are committed to creating interactive and engaging settings for youth.	Each site received a score on a 0 to 100 scale, based on responses provided to questions related to the degree of <i>Staff Capacity to Create Interactive and Engaging</i> settings for youth.	Responses to questions, which appear in the <i>Staff Capacity to Create Interactive and Engaging Environment</i> scale of the staff survey.	The statewide mean scale score was 62.6, which fell within the <i>Agree</i> portion of the scale indicating staff believe their peers largely provide these opportunities to participating youth.

Leading Indicator	Description and Calculation	Source	Indicator Value, 2012–13
<p>Leading Indicator 17: Youth Development— Staff develop activities that are meant to support youth ownership and other opportunities for positive youth development.</p>	<p>Each site received a score on a 0 to 100 scale, based on responses provided to questions related to the degree to which staff reported adopting practices designed to support youth development and ownership.</p>	<p>Responses to questions, which appear in the <i>Practices Supportive of Positive Youth Development</i> and <i>Opportunities for Youth Ownership</i> scales of the staff survey.</p>	<p>The statewide mean scale score was 62.3, which meant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Select opportunities for youth development were made available occasionally.</li> <li>▪ Staff largely agree that youth ownership opportunities are provided.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Participation and Engagement</b></p>			
<p>Leading Indicator 20: 21st Century Skills— Youth enrolled in the program participate in a meaningful level of activities designed to support youth development and social and emotional competencies.</p>	<p>Using data collected in PARS21 in relation to student attendance in activities which infused youth-development-related and social-emotional components, 50% of students participating in 21st CCLC programming for more than 15 days will have participated in activities infused with components that are meant to support youth-development-related behaviors and social-emotional functioning for at least 20% of their total time in the program.</p>	<p>Responses to the following fields in PARS21:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is this activity intentionally designed to support the improvement of youth-development-related behaviors and social-emotional functioning in any of the following areas (check all that apply)?</li> </ul>	<p>Seventy-two percent of sites met the performance threshold associated with this indicator. Statewide, an average of 71% of students participating in programming during the fall semester of 2012 for more than 15 days met these criteria.</p>

## Strategies and Practices That Support the Engagement and Development of Parents and Adult Family Members

Engaging families in programming and providing family learning events is an important component of the N 21st CCLC program. Programs can engage families by communicating with them about site programming and events, collaborating to enhance their child's educational success, and providing intentional activities meant to both support family involvement and the cultivation of family literacy and related skills. Historically, 21st CCLCs have witnessed some of their greatest challenges in terms of getting parents and adult family members meaningfully engaged in program offerings and events (Naftzger et al., 2011).

As shown in Table 7, sites operating 21st CCLC programs during the course of the 2012–13 school year were characterized by the following levels of performance on the indicators associated with this quality domain:

- In terms of engaging in practices to support and cultivate parent involvement and engagement (Leading Indicator 14), most sites were found to do so just *sometimes* (70 percent of sites fell within this range of the scale), as opposed to *never* (8 percent of sites) or *frequently* (18 percent).
- Fifty-four percent of sites indicated adopting measures to assess the program's impact on parent education and involvement (Leading Indicator 15).
- Only a very small percentage of programs (6 percent) were able to engage parents or other adult family members in activities for at least 15 percent of the youth served in the program during the fall semester of 2012.

Many of these findings are consistent with previous leading indicator results and demonstrate the ongoing challenges of reaching out to and engaging parents and adult family members of participating 21st CCLC youth.

**Table 7. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on Indicators Related to Strategies and Practices That Support the Engagement and Development of Parents and Adult Family Members**

Leading Indicator	Description and Calculation	Source	Indicator Value, 2012–13
<b>Organizational Processes</b>			
Leading Indicator 14: Staff and Family Connections—Staff actively engage in practices supportive of parent involvement and engagement meant to support youth growth and academic development.	Each site received a score on a 0 to 100 scale, based on mean responses provided to questions related to the extent to which staff engage in practices supportive of parent involvement and engagement.	Responses to questions, which appear in the <i>Practices Supportive of Parent Involvement and Engagement</i> scale of the staff survey.	The statewide mean scale score was 60.6, which fell within the <i>Did sometimes</i> portion of the scale.
Leading Indicator 15: Family Impact Assessment—Staff at the site implement measures to assess program impact on the parents and family members of participating students.	Each site received a designation of having met or did not meet the indicator in question depending on whether they reported implementing within-program measures in the <i>Goal C: Improve parent education and involvement</i> section of the midyear evaluation template.	Responses to the following question, which appears in the <i>Goal C: Improve parent education and involvement</i> section of the evaluation template: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Please indicate if you have been able to measure progress on the objectives you specified, and what types of measures were used: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent surveys</li> <li>• Student surveys</li> <li>• Teacher surveys</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Fifty-four percent of program sites met the performance threshold associated with this indicator.

Leading Indicator	Description and Calculation	Source	Indicator Value, 2012–13
<b>Participation and Engagement</b>			
Leading Indicator 22: Family Involvement— Parents and family members of enrolled youth participate in activities designed to support family engagement and skill building.	Using data collected in PARS21 in relation to parent and adult family member attendance in activities, 15% of youth attending programming during the school year had at least one parent or adult family member participate in at least one activity meant to support parental or adult family member involvement or skill building.	Activity detail and attendance pages in PARS21.	Six percent of program sites met the performance threshold associated with this indicator.

## Strategies and Practices That Support the Use and Engagement of Partners

Encouraging partnerships between schools and community organizations is an important component of the national 21st CCLC programs. Partners are defined as any organization other than the grantee that actively contributes to a 21st CCLC-funded program to help programs meet their goals and objectives. Partners play a variety of roles in supporting a 21st CCLC-funded program. For example, partners provide programming and staff, provide physical space and facilities, and facilitate fundraising efforts. In many instances, partners can play a critical role in providing activities and services, especially in such cases when the grantee lacks expertise or training in that area, so as to enhance the variety of learning opportunities available to youth.

From a quality perspective, mutually beneficial partnerships are most effective when staff from the partner organization work directly with youth and are involved in regular program processes related to staff orientation, training, evaluation, feedback, and professional development.

The leading indicator for community context is meant to capture the degree to which partners associated with the site are actively involved in planning, decision making, evaluating, and supporting program operations.

As shown in Table 8, sites operating 21st CCLC programs during the course of the 2012–13 school year were characterized by the following levels of performance on the indicators associated with this quality domain:

- In terms of engaging a partner in collaborative efforts to promote a shared vision and understanding of the work (Leading Indicator 12),<sup>3</sup> most sites were found to engage in such practices *formally* as opposed to doing such things with partners on an *informal* basis, or *not at all*. Partner staff were also described as only being *moderately* involved in the provision of select activities such as recruiting other potential partners, participating in site events like family night, serving on an advisory board, participating program planning, assessing programming, or helping build toward sustainability.
- Approximately 16 percent of activity sessions delivered during the fall semester of 2012 were provided by staff employed directly by the partner (Leading Indicator 13, Activity sessions delivered by staff employed directly by partners).

It is our sense that a clearer articulation of what effective partnerships might look like in relation to the design and delivery of 21st CCLC programming is warranted, particularly in terms of using partners strategically to expand the domain and diversity of activities that can be offered to participating youth.

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<sup>3</sup> Leading Indicator 12 references partner involvement in activities such as helping establish goals and objectives for the program, orienting new staff to the program, providing professional development opportunities, reviewing evaluation results and targeting areas for improvement, developing and evaluating the effectiveness of operational procedures, and planning for program sustainability or expansion.

**Table 8. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on Indicators Related to Strategies and Practices That Support the Utilization and Engagement of Partners**

Leading Indicator	Description and Calculation	Source	Indicator Value, 2012–13
<b>Organizational Processes</b>			
Leading Indicator 12: Community Partner Engagement—Partners associated with the site are actively involved in planning, decision making, evaluating, and supporting the operations of the afterschool program. As a result, participants are provided access to a variety of opportunities.	Each site received a score on a 0 to 100 scale, based on responses provided to questions related to the degree of partner engagement that appear on the midyear version of the evaluation template.	Responses to the following questions, which appear in the <i>Improve Community Partnerships</i> section of the evaluation template: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To what extent do you and those among your partners who were involved in programming, work together to do the following?</li> <li>▪ Indicate whether staff from partner agencies were involved in the following types of activities or events.</li> </ul>	The statewide mean scale score was 48.9, which meant that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Grantees largely collaborated <i>formally</i> with partners.</li> <li>▪ Partners were involved <i>to a moderate extent</i> in supporting the typical program.</li> </ul>
Leading Indicator 13: Activity sessions delivered by staff employed directly by partners—Staff from partner organizations are meaningfully involved in the provision of activities at the center.	The indicator is predicated on the proportion of total activity sessions delivered during the first semester of the school year by staff employed directly by a partner or collaborating agency.	Use staff information page in PARS21 to determine connection to a partner agency.	Sixteen percent of activity sessions provided in the fall of 2012 were delivered by partner staff.

## Strategies and Practices That Support Program Improvement Efforts

Leading indicators within this domain examine both self-assessment strategies and internal communication and collaboration among program staff. As noted by Smith (2007), Glisson (2007), and Birmingham et al. (2005), an organizational climate that supports staff in reflecting on and continually improving program quality is a key aspect of effective youth-development programs. Programs characterized by a supportive and collaborative climate permit staff to engage in self-reflective practice to improve overall program quality. Self-reflective practice is more likely to lead to high-quality program sessions that provide youth with positive and meaningful experiences (Smith *et al.*, 2012).

As shown in Table 9, the sites operating 21st CCLC programs during the course of the 2012–13 school year were characterized by the following levels of performance on the indicators associated with this quality domain:

- Eight-two percent of sites reported engaging in some form of self-assessment process employing a specific tool or instrument during the 2012–13 school year (Leading Indicator 10).
- The average statewide scale score for internal communication fell within the *once a month* response category (scale response options included *never*, *a couple of times per year*, *about once a month*, and *nearly every week*), suggesting the assessed collaborative efforts were frequently implemented during the 2012–13 programming period (Leading Indicator 11).

Within the field of afterschool programming, self-assessment processes have been one of the primary mechanisms of supporting quality improvement efforts. There are new opportunities to capitalize on this approach in New Jersey as well with the development of a self-assessment tool by the New Jersey School-Age Care Coalition aligned with the state’s newly adopted state afterschool standards. Finding ways to make use of this tool to support 21st CCLC implementation efforts will be an important task to undertake in the future.

**Table 9. Summary of Statewide Leading Indicator Performance on Indicators Related to Strategies and Practices That Support Program Improvement Efforts**

Leading Indicator	Description and Calculation	Source	Indicator Value, 2012–13
<b>Organizational Processes</b>			
Leading Indicator 10: Program Self-Assessment—Program staff periodically reflect on program practices through one or more self-assessments to inform program improvement.	Each site received a designation of <i>having met</i> or <i>did not meet</i> the indicator in question, depending on whether they reported completing one or more self-assessments at some point during the school year.	Responses to the following question, which appears in the <i>Program Operations</i> section of the evaluation template: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Were any of the following self-assessment tools completed at this site during the program period? (Select all that apply.)</li> </ul>	Eighty-two of sites met the performance threshold associated with this indicator.
Leading Indicator 11: Internal Communication—Staff communicate with other program staff to enhance internal collaboration toward continuous program improvement.	Each site received a score on a 0 to 100 scale, based on mean responses provided to questions related to the degree of communication and collaboration reported in relation to questions on the staff survey.	Responses to questions, which appear in the <i>Internal Communication and Collaboration</i> scale of the staff survey.	The statewide mean scale score was 61.6, which fell within the <i>Once a month</i> portion of the scale.

## Determining Program Improvement Priorities from the Leading Indicators

One goal of the leading indicator system is to help NJDOE make a determination regarding where efforts should be invested to support programs in the adoption of quality afterschool practices. For each indicator represented in the leading indicator system, there is a level of performance that a quality approach or practice is largely *not* being adopted by the site in question. In Table 10, each of the indicators and related scales are listed along with the level of performance that indicates that a given practice is largely absent from the site in question and the number and percentage of sites that fall within these ranges.

As shown in Table 10, there are two general types of indicators where 50 percent or more of sites fell within a range indicating that the quality practice was largely absent:

1. Indicators related to assessment practices oriented as assessing youth functioning in a given area and how youth have improved in that area since the onset of participation in the program (Leading Indicators 4 and 8).
2. Indicators related to offering certain types of activities and participant attendance levels in these activities based on PARS21 data (Leading Indicators 5, 21, and 22).

These findings are very similar to those from 2011–12.

In terms of assessing youth functioning on key outcomes, it is recommended that NJDOE work with AIR evaluation staff, staff from the New Jersey School-Age Care Coalition, and grantee representatives to develop a more formal set of guidelines and expectations for the implementation and use of measures meant to assess youth functioning on key outcomes. The goal should be to identify the least burdensome approaches that still yield useful information and capitalize effectively on measures used during the school day. In terms of assessing youth growth on youth development and SEL-related outcomes, NJDOE might want to consider statewide adoption of measures at some point in the future. Significant efforts are being made to develop measures related to youth functioning on non-cognitive and related outcomes. NJDOE might want to explore how it can best capitalize on these efforts so as to support the adoption of valid and reliable measures that are aligned with the domain of non-cognitive outcomes that 21st CCLC programs are likely to impact. This is especially the case for 21st CCLC programs given the ages of the youth served, their approach to service, and their activity design and delivery.

As noted, there is a need for clarification regarding an acceptable level of programming (and participation in said programming) to support academic and SEL development of participating youth; the question is, what amount of programming—intentionally meant to support youth growth in academic or SEL development—is necessary to meet growth goals related to these areas? Currently, there is no clear-cut threshold. Indicators related to these areas should likely to be revised based on a consensus from key program stakeholders on what these levels should be. It might be appropriate to abandon concrete thresholds in this regard and simply monitor how offering and participation levels change over time in response to NJDOE guidance, evaluation, or technical assistance.

**Table 10. Leading Indicator Scales by Number and Percentage of Program Sites Where Quality Practices Were Largely Absent**

Domain or Indicator	Rating Options Indicating Practice Not Present	N Sites	Percentage of Sites
<b>Strategies and Practices That Support the Academic Development of Participating Youth</b>			
Leading Indicator 1: Academic Development—Strategies are adopted to support the academic development of participating youth.	No strategy use	1	1%
Leading Indicator 2: Link to School Day—Program staff take steps to establish effective linkages to the school day that inform the design and delivery of program activities meant to support youth academic growth and development.	Do not receive data from schools; Limited strategies for linking with school day and communicating with teachers	4	4%
Leading Indicator 3: Common Core Assessment—Staff obtain data on how well youth are functioning in core academic areas and use that information to inform program design and delivery.	Did not obtain	15	13%
Leading Indicator 4: Within-Program Assessment—Staff at the site implement <i>within-program</i> measures to gauge youth academic performance and growth.	Did not implement	84	74%
Leading Indicator 5: 21st Century Skills—A meaningful level of activity sessions delivered during the first semester of the school year are intentionally meant to support youth growth and development in either mathematics or reading/language arts and are led by a certified teacher.	Did not meet	103	91%
Leading Indicator 18: Common Core—Staff design and deliver intentional and relevant activities designed to support youth growth and development in mathematics and reading/language arts.	Rarely	1	1%
Leading Indicator 19: Collaboration with school partners—Program staff collaborate with school personnel to adopt practices that are supportive of academic skill building, including linkages to the school day and using data on youth academic achievement to inform programming.	Disagree, strongly disagree, do not receive data	27	24%

Domain or Indicator	Rating Options Indicating Practice Not Present	N Sites	Percentage of Sites
<b>Strategies and Practices That Support the Development of Participating Youth From a Youth Development Perspective</b>			
Leading Indicator 21: Common Core Skills—Youth enrolled in the program participate in a meaningful level of activities designed to support youth growth in reading and mathematics achievement.	Did not meet	103	91%
Leading Indicator 6: Youth Engagement—Staff implement strategies to support the social and emotional development of participating youth in the program.	No strategy use	1	1%
Leading Indicator 7: Youth Assessment—Site staff take steps to implement measures to assess social and emotional competencies and use that information to inform program design and delivery.	Did not implement	46	41%
Leading Indicator 8: Within-Program Assessment—Staff at the site implement <i>within-program</i> measures to assess youth social and emotional functioning and gauge program impact.	Did not implement	64	57%
Leading Indicator 9: Social and Emotional Learning—Staff infuse components that are meant to support the social and emotional development of participating youth	Did not meet	27	23.9%
Leading Indicator 16: Quality at the Point of Service— Staff are committed to creating interactive and engaging settings for youth.	Disagree, strongly disagree	12	11%
Leading Indicator 17: Youth Development—Staff develop activities that are meant to support youth ownership and other opportunities for positive youth development.	Disagree, strongly disagree, available occasionally, never available	22	19%
Leading Indicator 20: 21st Century Skills—Youth enrolled in the program participate in a meaningful level of activities designed to support youth development and social and emotional competencies.	Did not meet	29	26%

<b>Domain or Indicator</b>	<b>Rating Options Indicating Practice Not Present</b>	<b><i>N</i> Sites</b>	<b>Percentage of Sites</b>
<b>Strategies and Practices That Support the Engagement and Development of Parents and Adult Family Members</b>			
Leading Indicator 14: Staff and Family Connections—Staff actively engage in practices supportive of parent involvement and engagement meant to support youth growth and academic development.	Never	9	8%
Leading Indicator 15: Family Impact Assessment—Staff at the site implement measures to assess program impact on the parents and family members of participating youth.	Did not implement	49	43%
Leading Indicator 22: Family Involvement—Parents and family members of enrolled youth participate in activities designed to support family engagement and skill building.	Did not meet	103	91%
<b>Strategies and Practices That Support the Utilization and Engagement of Partner</b>			
Leading Indicator 12: Community Partner Engagement—Partners associated with the site are actively involved in planning, decision making, evaluating, and supporting the operations of the afterschool program. As a result, participants are provided access to a variety of opportunities.	Do not do, not at all	0	0%
Leading Indicator 13: Activity sessions delivered by staff employed directly by partners—Staff from partner organizations are meaningfully involved in the provision of activities at the center.	0%	77	68%
<b>Strategies and Practices That Support Program Improvement Efforts</b>			
Leading Indicator 10: Program Self-Assessment—Program staff periodically reflect on program practices through one or more self-assessments to inform program improvement.	Did not meet	17	15%
<b>Strategies and Practices That Support the Engagement and Development of Parents and Adult Family Members</b>			
Leading Indicator 11: Internal Communication—Staff communicate with other program staff to enhance internal collaboration towards continuous program improvement.	Never	7	6%

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