

*Research for Action's Evaluation of 21st Century
Community Learning Center Grantees:*

A SNAPSHOT OF OST PROGRAMS IN PHILADELPHIA IN 2013-14

Prepared by **Research for Action** • May 2015

Brittan Hallar, Ph.D. • Jian Gao, Ph.D. • Tracey A. Hartmann, Ph.D. • Katie Englander



About Research for Action

Research for Action (RFA) is a Philadelphia-based nonprofit organization. We seek to use research as the basis for the improvement of educational opportunities and outcomes for traditionally underserved students. Our work is designed to: strengthen public schools and postsecondary institutions; provide research-based recommendations to policymakers, practitioners, and the public at the local, state, and national levels; and enrich the civic and community dialogue about public education. For more information, please visit our website at www.researchforaction.org.

Acknowledgments

This research was made possible with generous support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and The Philadelphia Foundation. We acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the authors alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of these Foundations.

We also express our appreciation to Vicki Ellis of the School District of Philadelphia, and Thomas Sheaffer, formerly of the City of Philadelphia's Office of Health and Opportunity, for their guidance and support in this third year of the project. We would also like to thank the 21st Century Community Learning Center providers and their staff—City Year of Greater Philadelphia, Communities in Schools, Congreso de Latinos Unidos, Education Works, The Netter Center for Community Partnerships, Pan American Charter School, Philadelphia Arts in Education Partnership, Public Health Management Corporation, Sunrise Inc. of Philadelphia, and To Our Children's Future with Health—for their participation this year.

Finally, this report was greatly enhanced by the contributions of many RFA staff. We especially appreciate the oversight provided by Dr. Kate Shaw, Executive Director, Dr. Daniel Long, Director of Quantitative Research, Dr. Liza Rodriguez, Director of Research Operations and Qualitative Research, Alison Murawski, Director of Communications, and Rachel Greene, RFA's graphic designer. We also want to acknowledge the valuable research assistance we received from RFA Data Analyst Anurag Kumar; student interns Xiaoyang Sun, Anna Rhoad, and Laiyi Wei; and copyeditor Nanda Devi Rich.



Research for Action's Evaluation of Ten 21st Century Community Learning Center Grantees: A Snapshot of OST Programs in Philadelphia in 2013-14

Prepared by **Research for Action** • May 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) grants are designed to support out-of-school time (OST) programs that provide academic support for youth attending high-poverty, underperforming schools. The programs also offer enrichment activities, such as art and music, recreation, and career and technical education.

Pennsylvania has funded 21st CCLC programs since 1998. In 2011-12, Pennsylvania awarded two rounds of grants to its sixth cohort of grantees. The first round of Cohort 6 grants focused primarily on providing academic and enrichment programming for elementary school students, while the second round—Cohort 6A grants—focused primarily on providing middle school Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and high school credit recovery programming.

Ten organizations representing one-third of all Cohort 6 and 6A 21st CCLC grantees in Philadelphia selected Research for Action (RFA) as their local evaluator.^{1,2} Drawing from data gathered for local reports, RFA conducted a mixed-methods evaluation to examine program quality, attendance, and their relationships to student outcomes. We report aggregated findings in this report and provide a set of recommendations for program improvement. The key findings presented in the Executive Summary are discussed in further detail throughout the report.

Student Participation

- Philadelphia's 21st CCLC programs enrolled an ethnically and racially diverse population that was majority African-American or Hispanic/Latino.
- The population of 21st CCLC participants with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities was comparable, though slightly smaller, than the non-OST student population.

¹ One grantee was an intermediary organization representing three provider organizations.

² See Appendix D for a map of providers in Philadelphia.

- A majority of K-5 students participated in 21st CCLC programming for at least 90 days, while less than half of all middle and high school students attended 30 or more days.

Program Quality & Student Outcomes

Philadelphia's 21st CCLC programs seek to improve academic achievement, student behavior, and attendance. Past research indicates that four domains of program practice influence these outcomes: academic content, staffing and professional development, school relationships, and community engagement. Overall, after ruling out the preexisting differences in student demographic characteristics and academic performance in the previous year, our analysis did not provide consistent evidence that OST participants outperformed non-OST students across all the outcome areas and over grade levels. However, our study indicated that:

- **OST participants scored higher than comparison students on PSSA Reading at the elementary level.**
- **High school OST participants were more likely to earn all credits attempted in math, ELA, and, science than comparison students.**

Furthermore, for students who participated in the OST programs, our analysis revealed:

- **Strong academic content and high quality staffing were positively associated with higher student participation in Philadelphia OST programs.**
- **Higher student OST participation levels were positively associated with student social, behavioral, and academic improvement as perceived by teachers.**
- **Implementation of the four quality domains varied widely across and within provider networks.**

Below, we summarize the implementation of quality practices within each of these domains and offer possible explanations for the domains' relationships with student participation and outcomes.

Academic Content: Homework Help and Academic Enrichment

- The quality of academic programming varied across providers and within provider networks. Sixteen programs operated by seven providers were identified as Promising Practice Programs, but only two providers had all their programs rated as Promising Practice Programs.
- Homework help and individualized support were common amongst a majority of programs, but very few programs provided more than 45 minutes of homework help or individual support by tutors.
- Almost all programs offered enrichment activities, but a majority were not connected to student learning.
- There was a positive relationship between academic program content and student participation levels (dosage).
 - Programs' focus on homework help may contribute to this relationship; program staff reported that a primary goal for parents was homework support, so parents, especially those of elementary school-aged children, may have enrolled youth in programs that advertised homework support.
- Academic program content had a limited impact on student academic achievement.

- Limited alignment of academic supports to the school day may be why the analysis found limited impact on student achievement as measured by standardized test scores and course grades.

Staffing: Experience and Professional Development

- Staff experience and professional development opportunities varied across and within providers. All providers had at least one program that exhibited promising staffing practices, but only two providers' programs were all designated as Promising Practice Programs.
- Programs that exhibited promising practices in one dimension such as employing staff who have five or more years of experience, also tended to exhibit other promising practices such as providing staff with relevant professional development.
- Staff at a majority of OST programs had adequate experience working with youth and working for the provider. A solid majority (88%) of programs also characterized staff-youth relationships as generally positive.
- A majority of programs reported that they had insufficient access to professional development.
- There was a positive relationship between promising staffing behaviors and dosage.
 - Staff members' self-reports of education and childcare experience, rapport with youth, and relationship with the provider may help to explain this relationship; if youth feel comfortable with staff and staff work to ensure a safe and supportive atmosphere for participants, then participants may be inclined to attend the program.

School Relationships: Principals and Teachers

- Relationships with school staff varied across and within providers. While all ten providers had at least one Promising Practice Program, only one provider's programs were all designated Promising Practice Programs.
- Teacher hiring practices varied across provider. Roughly three-quarters (79%) of all programs hired staff members who were present during the school day, but only 39% of those programs used a blended staffing model that hired school day teachers. The remaining programs utilized an overlapping staffing model in which at least one staff member from the OST provider was present in the school building during the school day, or employed a combination of both models.
- There was also variation in relationships by school staff position; while OST staff described generally positive relationships with school day staff, more OST staff described promising practices related to principal relationships than for teacher relationships.
- The study did not identify a relationship between OST-school partnerships and dosage or student achievement.
 - Our analysis revealed that OST staff saw the program as distinct from the school day and not typically aligned to school curricula. Additionally, they reported that OST staff and schoolteachers communicated on an "as needed" basis regarding specific students. The lack of alignment between academic supports may mitigate any relationship between student achievement and OST-school partnerships since research suggests that alignment of school-day programming, achieved through ongoing communication with teachers and school staff, is associated with student achievement.













Community Engagement

- OST providers reported that they encouraged staff to interact with parents and offered opportunities for parents to attend OST programming events.

- A majority of programs partnered with at least one outside organization to provide extracurricular activities, academic support, and other enrichment opportunities.
- The study did not identify a relationship between OST-community partnerships and dosage or student achievement.
 - Programs reported that while they encouraged parent and community participation, it was often difficult to organize community events, and attendance was often low. The limited turnout and engagement may mitigate the relationship between community engagement and student outcomes.

Recommendations

Our findings suggest that the OST system as well as OST providers should improve practices across the four program quality domains—academic content, staffing, school partnerships, and community engagement. These recommendations include:

RECOMMENDATIONS	
Academic Content	
	Ensure that participants have at least 30-45 minutes of homework support and provide academic alternatives for students who complete their homework.
	Structure homework help in small groups to offer more individualized support.
	Align enrichment activities to academic skills and, when possible, to school day activities.
Staffing	
 	Continue hiring and retaining high quality staff.
	Promote staff and site coordinator professional development.
School Relationships	
	Continue cultivating and strengthening OST program-principal relationships.
 	Develop systems and strategies for strengthening OST program-teacher relationships.
Community Engagement	
 	Actively seek out parents and encourage parents to participate in OST programming.
 	Continue engaging partners to increase OST program's capacity for supplying high-quality academic and socio-emotional support.
General	
	Provide more uniform and practical guidance to all OST programs across the city or state to ensure consistent and high-quality program content and delivery.
	Encourage ongoing communication across programs to improve programming.

<div> <div>PL</div> <div>SL</div> </div>	Seek out additional funding to supplement current funding and provide additional resources for OST programming, including technology, program supplies, professional development, and higher staff salaries.
--	--

SL

System Level

PL

Provider Level

