



Expanding **minds** and Opportunities

Leveraging

the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success

This article is an excerpt from the groundbreaking book, ***Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success***. This landmark compendium, edited by Terry K. Peterson, PhD, is composed of nearly 70 research studies, reports, essays, and commentaries by more than 100 researchers, educators, community leaders, policy makers, and practitioners.

Collectively, these writings boldly state that there is now a solid base of research and best practices clearly showing that quality afterschool and summer learning programs—including 21st Century Community Learning Centers—make a positive difference for students, families, schools, and communities.

Together, the collection of articles demonstrates the power of quality expanded learning opportunities to:

- **promote student success and college and career readiness;**
- **build youth assets such as character, resilience, and wellness;**
- **foster partnerships that maximize resources and build community ties; and**
- **engage families in their children's learning in meaningful ways.**

For information on how to order the full book, download sections and individual articles, or explore the topic areas, visit www.expandinglearning.org/expandingminds.

About the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project

The Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project is a 50-state initiative harnessing the power of networks and leaders to help schools and communities leverage the time beyond school to accelerate student achievement. A partnership of funders led by the C.S. Mott Foundation support the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project. More information about the book and the project, as well as additional resources, can be found at www.expandinglearning.org.

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The Value of Partnerships in Afterschool and Summer Learning: A National Case Study of 21st Century Community Learning Centers¹

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, funded by the United States Department of Education, supports community learning centers that provide academic enrichment opportunities during nonschool hours for children, and particularly for students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2003). While the initiative was first enacted as part of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1994, it remained minimally funded until 1998. Congress rapidly increased appropriations for the initiative from 1998 through 2002; and with the exception of modest increases in funding from 2007 to 2009, funding levels have been maintained at a little less than \$1.2 billion since then. With the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001 (No Child Left Behind), the administration of 21st Century Community Learning Centers funds—as a federal discretionary program—was transferred to state education agencies.

The most recent reauthorization of this initiative incorporates the latest thinking regarding the importance of strong, diverse community partnerships to maximize the impact of federal investments, especially in expanding learning in afterschool and summers. Many state education agencies now require local 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs to collaborate with community partners in order to receive funding. A growing number of state afterschool networks are helping to advance school, community, and family partnerships to provide more learning opportunities, time, and resources.

1. This article is part of a series of technical assistance resources on financing and sustaining out-of-school-time and community initiatives developed by The Finance Project with support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. These tools and resources are intended to assist policy makers, program developers, and community leaders in developing financing and sustainability strategies to support effective initiatives.

Currently, there are almost 11,000 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs across the nation (Profile and Performance Information Collection System, 2012).² Most of these programs have cultivated robust partnerships with a diverse set of community partners, including colleges and universities, youth development organizations, libraries, museums, city parks departments, faith-based organizations, schools, and many more community-based for-profit and nonprofit organizations. Partnerships have strengthened local programs by supporting afterschool and summer programs in ways that are unique and meaningful to their own community.

The Finance Project staff has worked extensively with 21st Century Community Learning Centers grantees, national stakeholder groups, and state education agencies to understand the factors that lead to the long-term sustainability of these programs. Not surprisingly, programs that are supported by strong and diverse community partnerships are more likely to sustain themselves over the long term. This article explores these partnerships more deeply in an effort to

- *illustrate how states have used the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative to engage a diverse set of partners to leverage and sustain local programs;*
- *highlight innovative partnership approaches in Florida, Oregon, Vermont, and Wisconsin; and*
- *identify cross-cutting themes and trends to understand the value of partnerships in leveraging the federal investment in 21st Century Community Learning Centers.*

Using Partnerships to Leverage Resources

The U.S. Department of Education's guidelines for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative strongly encourage local grantees to establish partnerships with other local organizations and agencies. State afterschool networks also encourage and facilitate such partnerships, and many state education agencies formally require that 21st Century Community Learning Centers grantees partner with at least one other organization in order to qualify for state funding. For example, Florida's 2012–13 Request for Proposals requires applicants to identify current public/private partnerships that were or will be used to develop, implement, evaluate, and sustain the centers (Florida Dept. of Education, 2012). The focus on partnerships by the U.S. Department of Education, the building of statewide infrastructures by state afterschool networks, and state mandates have resulted in an unduplicated count of 44,621 21st Century Community Learning Centers partnerships across the nation in 2010—an average of 9 partnerships per local program (Afterschool Alliance, 2012).

2. According to the PPICS website (<http://ppics.learningpt.org/ppicsnet/public/default.aspx>), "The purpose of this system is to collect basic information about 21st CCLC programs across the United States. PPICS was created in 2003 at the commission of the US Department of Education (ED). The system was built to help ED track 21st CCLC programming following the transition from federal to state administration, which took place in 2001. Each year, PPICS is used to collect program data from some 3,000 21st CCLC grants covering close to 9,000 centers serving 1.5 million student attendees."

Types of Partnerships

Local partnerships allow each local program to leverage a variety of community resources. As reported in the national Profile and Performance Information Collection System for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative (Afterschool Alliance, 2012), partnerships provide support for seven major contribution types:

- *evaluation services;*
- *fundraising;*
- *programming or activity related services;*
- *goods;*
- *volunteer staffing;*
- *paid staffing; and*
- *other contributions.*

Most partnerships provide services in more than one domain. Nearly 36% of these partners provide programming or activity-related services, followed by goods (20%) and volunteer staffing (14%). Of the 44,621 partners reported by grantees in 2010, most are community-based organizations or nonprofits (28%). The second largest partner type, at 27% of all partnerships, falls within the “other” category, which includes units of city or county government, regional/intermediate education agencies, health-based organizations, libraries, museums, parks and recreation districts, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, schools/agencies, and private schools.

Monetary Value of Partnerships

The Profile and Performance Information Collection System also asks grantees to place a monetary value on their partnerships. In 2010, grantees reported that partners contributed over \$230,000,000 across the 3,450 grants they supported. Further, over the past 5 years, partners have contributed over \$1 billion to support 21st Century Community Learning Centers programming. (See also the article in this book “School-Community Learning Partnerships: An Essential to Expanded Learning Success” by Priscilla Little.)

Some states, like Wisconsin, produce an annual report of the impact of their 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative statewide. In its 2009–10 report, that state valued the donations (in-kind and monetary) of 968 partner organizations statewide at \$3.4 million—a contribution of \$3,512, on average, per partner (Wisconsin Dept. of Public Instruction, 2011). In addition to having a real financial value in terms of services provided, partners often contribute other highly valued resources and supports to the children and youth served by local programs. Partners can reinforce the importance of learning, provide personalized attention to struggling students, broaden children’s learning experiences through sponsoring field trips and other off-site activities, and fill in critical gaps in services.

Promising State Practices

Though the vast majority of 21st Century Community Learning Centers partnerships are with community-based organizations or nonprofits, the breadth of partnerships varies among communities and states. State leaders have reported that partnerships across many domains are key to the success of programs in their states.

The types of partnerships formed and the benefits they generate for children and youth served are typically different for programs located in rural areas versus those in large localities.

In Wisconsin, where partnerships are a required grant/program component, “nontraditional” partners have proven to be very important for smaller cities and rural communities to enrich afterschool programs. These nontraditional partners include businesses and individuals that do not necessarily have an immediate connection to youth. For example, at the San Juan Diego Middle School, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program has a partnership with a local trucking company. This company supports the afterschool program by providing older students with industry specific, skill-building supports such as a curriculum unit to teach map-reading skills using a GPS.

Vermont has also reported that the partnerships developed in their smaller localities are unique. Over one-third of the schools in Vermont have fewer than 100 students. In some cases partners for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs based at these schools are not organizations, but individuals. In one community, a dogsled racer works with students, while in another, an individual who is a program partner teaches students how to make baskets—both are unique activities in their community’s fabric and way of life. One Vermont leader stated she feels that the many individual partners’ in-kind contributions are most likely seriously underestimated by grantees when entering this data into the Profile and Performance Information Collection System. She also noted that an important component of these partnerships, especially in smaller communities, is the relationship-building that takes place, for example, at town meetings, where personal relationships and stories about the impact on individual or groups students of local 21st Community Learning Centers programs are often shared.

On a larger scale, Oregon is using VISTA volunteers at the state level to teach 21st Century Community Learning Centers program staff about different types of partnerships. VISTA volunteers have noted that program directors have many different definitions and examples of partnerships. The volunteers have worked to help program staff understand the difference between a robust partnership and a fee-for-service relationship. In Fall City, Oregon, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program awarded a small (\$4,000 per year) contract to the local arts council to fund two artists to work with students in their program twice weekly. Over time, the relationship has strengthened as both the program and the Arts Council saw value and results from the partnership. Now, while the initial contract remains, the Arts Council provides two staff members as an in-kind contribution to the program.

In Florida, partnerships are a required component of local programs. Many programs across the state have formed partnerships that capitalize on the abundance of local natural resources; for example, programs might include a focus on marine life or on caverns found within a state park. Another innovative practice in Florida includes partnerships between programs and local businesses and industries. For example, in Fort Lauderdale, the Space Explorers Program partners with the Kennedy Space Center, while the Zoo Explorers Program partners with the local zoo. As another innovative example, one high school principal formed partnerships with local businesses during the after school hours to offer jobs to the students within the context of his school's 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. State leaders are promoting this concept and exploring other ways to keep older youth actively engaged in programs in light of the many demands on youths' time in the afterschool hours.

Considerations for the Future

Over the past 10 years, millions of elementary and secondary students who have participated in 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs have benefitted in myriad ways from the wide range of partnerships available in communities across the country. State departments of education, local community organizations, schools, and state afterschool networks have played a key role in the growth of these robust partnerships. While the comprehensive national data set containing the details, types, and financial impacts of these partnerships is not publicly available on an up-to-date basis, a limited review of data sets supplied by programs, as well as data obtained from interviews with key informants, provides a foundation for understanding the landscape of partnerships and their non-monetary benefits.

The data on partnerships and state examples highlighted in this article are an important first step in maximizing 21st Century Community Learning Centers federal funding and sustaining afterschool programs in schools and communities. Many state leaders and local community, school, and afterschool stakeholders are setting clear expectations for the types and number of partnerships that grantees are expected to develop. There are several things states can do to increase and strengthen partnerships:

- *Offer meaningful incentives to the organizations that partner with 21st Century Community Learning Centers grantees and other similar afterschool and summer programs that have meaningful school-community partnerships. Incentives might include state income tax deductions for private sector partners, bonus funding to appropriate nonprofit partners, or transportation allotments for programs meeting quality standards.*
- *Provide training and technical assistance regarding best practices in partnership development and sustainability tailored for various settings (e.g., urban, towns, rural) and for various types of potential partnerships (e.g., nonprofits, small or large businesses, colleges, hospitals, city and county governmental agencies).*
- *Create statewide or local award programs for outstanding partnership efforts in 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs and similar afterschool and summer programs, perhaps working with Chambers of Commerce, United Ways, state 21st Century Community Learning Centers offices, and state afterschool networks.*

- *Provide more specific definitions regarding what constitutes a partnership versus a contractual relationship and take into account the contribution of time and other resources by individuals and organizations to provide a fuller understanding of the opportunities, challenges, and successes.*

One of the most successful aspects of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative has been the focus on leveraging community partners to provide experiences that youth might not otherwise be able to access through the school day or in a school-based afterschool program that merely extends the school day. In the future, it is important that federal, state, and local leaders involved in these programs expand knowledge about how to build successful community-school-family partnerships in order to improve the quality of opportunities provided to participating students. Also it is important to improve how programs quantify the return-on-investment of these robust and varied partnerships in order to illuminate how the federal government's relatively modest investment in afterschool programs has been more than matched by the talent, supplies, volunteers, space, and general support of school-community partnerships.

In summary, clearly the inclusion of strong partnership provisions in most 21st Century Community Learning Centers has added valuable learning resources and improved the quality of the opportunities provided to students in their afterschool and summer programs.

For More Information

See <http://www.financeproject.org/>

Selected resources on the financing and sustainability of afterschool programs include the following:

Cutting Costs, Keeping Quality: Financing Strategies for Youth Programs in a Difficult Economy by Jennifer Holland and Shawn Stelow Griffin, The Finance Project, 2012. <http://www.financeproject.org/publications/FinancingStrategiesToolkit.pdf>

Making the Match: Finding Funding for After School Education and Safety Programs by Kate Sandel, Cheryl Hayes, Brittany Anuszkiewicz, Carol Cohen and Sharon Deich, The Finance Project, August 2007. <http://www.financeproject.org/publications/MakingTheMatch.pdf>

Forming Partnerships to Meet the Administrative Needs of Youth-Serving Organizations by Torey Silloway and Lori Connors-Tadros, The Finance Project, January 2011. <http://www.financeproject.org/publications/FormingAdminPartnership.pdf>

A Guide to Successful Public-Private Partnerships for Out-of-School Time and Community School Initiatives by Sharon Deich, The Finance Project, January 2001. <http://www.financeproject.org/publications/ostpartnershipguide.pdf>

Sustaining 21st Century Community Learning Centers: What Works for Programs and How Policymakers Can Help by Amanda Szekely and Heather Clapp Padgett, The Finance Project, September 2006. http://76.12.61.196/publications/sustaining_21cclc.pdf

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