Formative Assessment of the 21st Century Community Learning Center Program

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Contents

Executive Summary

Program evaluation

Role of evaluators

➢ Evaluators who are involved with their programs are a persistent, readily accessible source of information and technical expertise in general, and can sustain institutional knowledge and historical consciousness through periods of transition. Evaluators often act as mentors to new program directors regarding best practices, utilizing data and information, and effective planning.

➢ Though most centers recognize the importance of evaluation, few have the capacity to conduct in-depth assessments internally, especially managing and analyzing quantitative data. A good evaluator will provide year-round assistance to the centers regarding all things evaluation: data collection, data entry, and interpreting the data for program planning.

➢ Some evaluators do not consistently communicate with the programs throughout the year and simply meet the minimum requirements of the report. Since the state cannot provide centers with a list of good evaluators, it should provide them with more guidance of how to choose and minimum expectations of evaluators.

Value of evaluation

➢ The local evaluation encourages the centers to maintain focus on 21st CCLC goals especially when it seems easier and more urgent to become enmeshed with operational concerns.

➢ Though many centers need to improve their communications with the targeted schools, requiring academic data opens the door for discussion and collaboration.

➢ The evaluation also helps promote a culture of continuous quality improvement and combats stagnation, complacency and mission drift by consistently reaffirming that intentional and purposeful educational programming is the entire point of the effort.

➢ Survey results and interviews indicate programs value their local evaluations, and use evaluation data to inform their decisions regarding program planning and improvements, and to build support for their programs with stakeholders.

Liabilities of the current system

➢ At present, the evaluation system does not reflect the current state of the program, nor the needs of the centers. The required evaluation activities, the state's use of local and statewide evaluations, the use of local and statewide data, and the school/afterschool *milieu* are disjointed of limited utility.

➢ Local evaluations have become a habitual exercise rather than a substantive process with a clear purpose.

➢ Programs and evaluators collect and report on data because it is required, not because they perceive value in it.

➢ What programs value most from their evaluations is the formative feedback, mentoring, and assistance their evaluators provide, but the evaluation requirements all pertain to summative data collection and reporting.

➢ The local evaluations of the 21st CCLCs should be revised to better reflect the needs of programs and the goals of the state.

➢ The state should review the evaluation requirements to ensure that (1) the data collected serves a specific purpose, (2) that the purpose justifies the time and effort necessary to satisfy the requirement, (3) that the requirement fits with current school and afterschool practices and aligns with the state's goals for the 21st CCLC program, and (4) that the purpose and value of the requirement are clearly communicated to program directors and evaluators.

➢ The state should utilize the local evaluations to track efforts to address strategic priorities set forth in the RFPs and by the administration.

➢ The state should use the state-level evaluation to better coordinate local evaluations. Preliminary steps were taken throughout the fall 2016 semester to build a process to communicate state goals to local evaluators and coordinate their efforts in service to those goals. This work should be continued.

➢ While we recommend revisiting the need for specific data collection, it would be ill advised to eliminate the accountability inherent in the data collection altogether. The requirement to get the data is as important as what the data shows. By requiring programs to collect summative data, it reinforces the purposefulness of the program, and forces program administrators to do the hard work of working with the schools.

Consistent programming challenges

High School programming

➢ Compared to elementary level programs, High School programs offer far more flexible, varied and—theoretically—individually engaging activities to their attendees. They also present 21st CCLC staff with unique challenges. Elementary students are acquiring foundational knowledge and skills, so programs that serve them are very similar; high school students, by contrast, are becoming self-aware individuals with personalized intellectual, career, and social interests.

➢ High school students can make their own choices, and programs face competition with other extracurricular activities.

➢ High school programs must be highly tailored to the needs and interests of students and the feeder schools, and must work harder to make the program appealing to youth, or they will simply choose something else to do with their afternoons.

➢ The course work of high school students is often challenging. This makes it harder to find qualified academic help.

➢ The appeal factor and the activities of teen programming can make high school programs more expensive on a per-student basis.

➢ At the most basic level, the state should understand the distinct nature of high school programs relative to the elementary programs that are the norm. It must consider the impact on high school programming when setting policy. While the two types of programs have common features and similar goals, the differences between the populations means that a funding scheme and regulatory environment that works for one may be a poor fit for the other.

Parent outreach

➢ Centers struggle to find the balance between providing educational experiences with providing engaging activities that parents want to attend. Additionally, some centers have

struggled in gathering feedback from parents through surveys, committees, or the IN-QPSA process.
- ➢ It is important that centers assess the needs of families and provide services tailored to them. Too often, centers offer parent activities that are not substantive or meaningful to the target population. Instead, they schedule activities that are "pre -packaged", and that address some stereotyped notion of what parents need.
- ➢ In addition to specific events or activities, centers should strive to create an organizational culture of supporting and reaching out to parents and families. Centers should be provided resources and guidance to examine their approach to parent engagement.

STEM programming
- ➢ While there are effective programs, centers across the state are ineffective in producing the most important aspects of STEM programming—accurate science content, authentic STEM experiences and the development of STEM identity among participants.
- ➢ The quality of a STEM program is largely determined by the skill and abilities of the facilitator, but programs struggle to find and retain effective STEM facilitators.
- ➢ Program administrators and staff often do not know or understand what defines effective STEM programming.
- ➢ There is a clear need for more frequent and/or more quality professional development opportunities, but the amount of development necessary is largely dependent on background. Teaching good STEM facilitation skills to someone who already appreciates science is simply easier than instilling that appreciation in a skilled facilitator who is intimidated by science and math. Trainings should be cognizant of facilitator background.
- ➢ Programs should be given guidelines regarding what to look for in a STEM facilitator, and where to find them. The emphasis should be on identifying STEM professionals, aspiring STEM professionals, and science enthusiasts who have an easy rapport with youth.
- ➢ Longer term, it may be necessary to steer programs away from lower-impact, weekly drop-in STEM activities, and invest in more intensive multi-week course-style or summer camp programming which can sustain persistent attendance, requires fewer trained facilitators for a shorter period, and can attract highly capable facilitators.

Program quality
- ➢ The 21st CCLC program in Indiana is on solid footing regarding the foundational prerequisites for effective programming. Almost all programs meet almost all standards regarding basic safety and afterschool practices.
- ➢ Where programs can improve is in higher-order programming principles—more focused content, more purposeful programming, and greater engagement.
- ➢ Going forward, the administration of the statewide program should apply its evaluation, accountability, and fiscal policies toward emphasizing continued development of the higher-order program functions—more focused content, more purposeful programming, and greater engagement.

Introduction

As the evaluator for Indiana's 21st Century Community Learning Center program (21st CCLC), we pursued three goals in the process of conceptualizing and creating this document, which serves as the 2016 – 2017 Statewide Evaluation.

1. ***To improve the quality and utility of local and statewide evaluations.***
The Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) wanted to assess both local and statewide evaluations, using the results as a platform for improving both quality and utility.

2. ***To understand chronic obstacles to success.***
IDOE wanted to understand the chronic obstacles to success within the 21st CCLC structure, as opposed to episodic events such as school closings.

3. ***To identify model solutions to chronic issues.***
IDOE wanted to inventory creative programs that found solutions to chronic issues plaguing others, and to create a stock of promising practices available to all programs.

These goals were originally articulated in summer 2016. Since then, a new Superintendent of Education, Dr. Jennifer McCormick, has taken the reigns at IDOE, and she has appointed a new executive and managerial livery. We have structured our analyses in this document in such a way as to honor the original intent of the Scope, ***and*** to alert new 21st CCLC administrators to issues that warrant attention. We hope that this approach helps make their transition process smoother and successful for them and the programs.

Methods

We conducted a system-oriented analysis of local evaluations, and their coordination with the statewide evaluation. We looked specifically at:

➢ The value and use of local evaluations and their components;
➢ The value and use of state-level evaluation;
➢ Integration of local and state-level evaluation goals and processes;
➢ Alignment of local and state-level evaluation with program goals.

We did so using a variety of instruments and tools.

Survey of program directors and site coordinators
The survey queried program administrators regarding their use of data and evaluations. The survey was delivered to the program directors and site coordinators on record in EZ Reports. We received a total of 77 responses, including 40 program directors and 37 site coordinators. Responses were well distributed regionally, and included an appropriate mix of urban, suburban and rural programs.

Survey of feeder school principals
The survey was delivered to all feeder school principals listed in EZ Reports, and focused on the interactions between the feeder schools and the afterschool programs.

Survey and interviews with local evaluators
The survey was delivered to the local evaluators on record in EZ Reports. The survey asked about background, experience and evaluation practice. Since some evaluators evaluate a large

number of sites and tailor their evaluation practices to each center, we conducted more in-depth interviews with these evaluators to capture the breadth of practices which would not have been evident in the survey.

Interviews and site visits with select programs
Five programs were selected for a more detailed investigation, including site visits and interviews with key staff and stakeholders. Programs were selected based on (1) the results of quality and compliance monitoring conducted in the fall of 2016, (2) having been identified as excelling at (and/or being typical of) an aspect of programming with which programs frequently struggle.

Decisions regarding programming areas which warranted further scrutiny were made in consultation with IDOE and Social Legends, which conducted the quality monitoring. The programs selected included those that received the highest and lowest cumulative quality and compliance ratings, a prototypical high school program, and programs which excelled in (1) parent engagement, (2) STEM programming, and (3) Student data use and integration of school-day and afterschool spheres.

Program Evaluation
Strengths of the Current System
Role of the Evaluator
There are 26 providers currently fulfilling the local evaluation requirements, many of whom have been a part of the 21st CCLC community since Cohort 1 in Indiana. They come from a variety of backgrounds and many are full-time evaluation and consulting professionals. Though the evaluation is seen as a tertiary component of 21st CCLC funding, the local evaluators have provided substantial assistance to the local programs and state administration.

Evaluators who are involved with their programs are a persistent, readily accessible source of information and technical expertise. Given the nature of youth development work, there tends to be higher turnover even at program administration levels. Of the 74 program directors and site coordinators surveyed, 16% have worked with 21st CCLC for a year or less with an additional 41% having worked with the program for 1-4 years. Local evaluators who have worked with centers for several years are a persistent source of institutional knowledge and historical consciousness that can help sustain program quality through periods of transition. This role has also been valuable on the state level during periods of administration turnover. Especially on the local level, *evaluators often act as mentors to new program directors* regarding best practices, utilizing data and information, and effective planning.

Though most centers recognize the importance of evaluation, few have the capacity to conduct in-depth assessments internally, especially managing and analyzing quantitative data. A good evaluator will provide year-round assistance to the centers regarding all things evaluation: data collection, data entry, and interpreting the data for program planning. The Cohort 8 RFP dictated that a minimum of one visit to each site should be included in the evaluation plan, though two were encouraged. However, there is no mention of other expectations of evaluators such as surveys or assistance with EZ Reports. If centers are inexperienced in evaluations, they may be

completely dependent on the evaluator to tell them what they are willing to do. Ideally, an evaluator will;

- Conduct surveys or focus groups with parents, youth, staff, and stakeholders;
- Assist in the IN-QPSA process;
- Answer questions regarding academic data collection from schools;
- Conduct fall and spring site visits;
- Assist with the teacher surveys;
- Provide technical assistance for EZ Reports and data entry;
- Complete an extensive evaluation report that includes data analysis and recommendations for improvements; and
- Review the evaluation report with center administration in preparation for program planning.

Anecdotally, we know that there have been some evaluators throughout the years of 21st CCLC that have not performed on par with others. They may have had ample experience in conducting evaluations, but may not recognize the distinct needs of out-of-school programs or be familiar with educational outcomes. Some evaluators do not consistently communicate with the programs throughout the year and simply meet the minimum requirements of the report. Many of these evaluators have been weeded out throughout the years by establishing minimum standards and centers sharing information with one another.
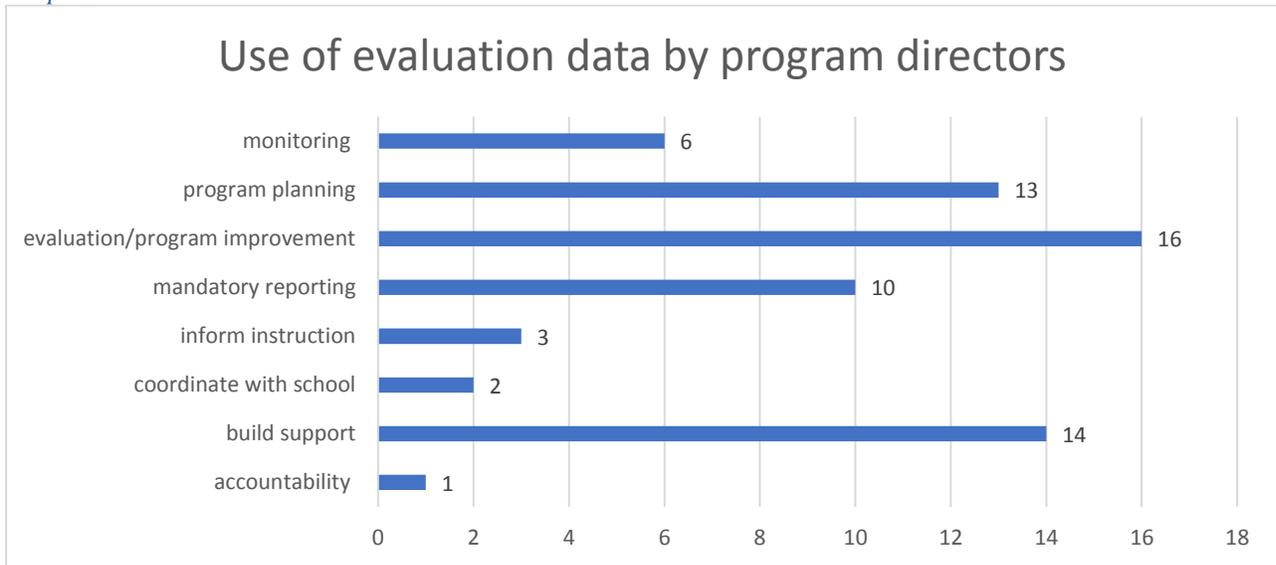
Since the state cannot provide centers with a list of good evaluators, it should provide them with more guidance of how to choose and what to expect from an evaluator. The Cohort 8 RFP is the first time that guidance had been given in an RFP, but the information was limited to selecting an evaluator, not minimum expectations of evaluators.
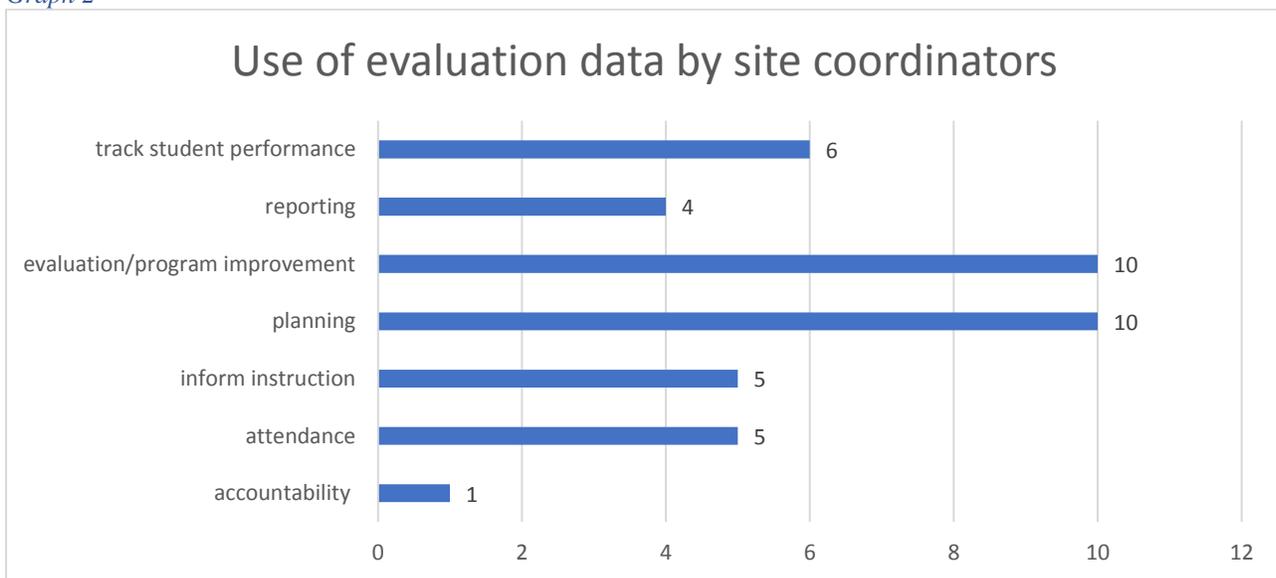
Value of Evaluation
The local evaluation encourages the centers to maintain focus on 21st CCLC goals especially when it seems easier and more urgent to become enmeshed with operational concerns. Though many centers need to improve their communications with the targeted schools, requiring academic data opens the door for discussion and collaboration. The evaluation also helps promote a culture of continuous quality improvement and combats stagnation, complacency and mission drift by consistently reaffirming that intentional and purposeful educational programming is the entire point of the effort.

Based on survey results and interviews, programs value their local evaluations, and use evaluation data to inform their decisions regarding program planning and improvements. Program directors also indicated they use the evaluations to build support for their programs with their stakeholders.

Graph 1

Use of evaluation data by program directors

Category	Value
monitoring	6
program planning	13
evaluation/program improvement	16
mandatory reporting	10
inform instruction	3
coordinate with school	2
build support	14
accountability	1

Graph 2

Use of evaluation data by site coordinators

Category	Value
track student performance	6
reporting	4
evaluation/program improvement	10
planning	10
inform instruction	5
attendance	5
accountability	1

Liabilities of the Current Evaluation System

At present, the evaluation system does not reflect the current state of the program, nor the needs of the centers. The current requirements are based on an evaluation process that was developed several years ago, and while there have been some additions and adjustments made (e.g., IN-QPSA, executive summary requirements) the overall process has not been adequately updated to reflect developments in the school and afterschool environments. The additions and adaptations have been narrowly targeted in response to perceived deficiencies, a desire to streamline, or to

improve a specific area. While we make no claims regarding the value or effectiveness of these changes, when viewed as a systemic process—the interaction of state and local evaluations within the context of the overall administration of the program, both locally and centrally —the required evaluation activities, IDOEs use of local and statewide evaluations, the use of local and statewide data, and the school/afterschool *milieu* are not even remotely symbiotic.

The Youth Program Quality Assessment utilizes concepts similar to those found in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to examine quality youth programming. Hierarchical theory states that programs must understand that "… needs for safety, belonging, and esteem must be met[1]." Before all else, programs must first provide a safe and supportive environment for youth, a place where their psychological and physical safety is assured and staff provide encouragement for their growth. Once the basic needs have been met, then programs can address goals of mentoring and providing high-quality activities with lasting impact.

21st CCLC centers, even the newest, easily satisfy the first two levels of the hierarchy, although they continuously monitor themselves to ensure compliance with 21st CCLC policies. Most programs in Indiana should be assessing higher-order content such as their alignment with academic standards, improving STEM content, and encouraging parent engagement. The evaluation system in Indiana should be revised to better assess these high-order needs. The point should not be to hold programs accountable to the appropriate standard exclusively, but to provide more targeted support.

The local evaluations of the 21st CCLCs should be revised to better reflect the needs of programs and the goals of the state. First, the state should review the evaluation requirements to ensure that (1) the data collected serves a specific purpose, (2) that the purpose justifies the time and effort necessary to satisfy the requirement, (3) that the requirement fits with current school and afterschool practices and aligns with the state's goals for the 21st CCLC program, and (4) that the purpose and value of the requirement are clearly communicated to program directors and evaluators. While the review should include the entire system, there are specific requirements that should receive particular scrutiny:

> **Local Assessments and required STPMs** – the required performance measures are intended to create uniform data to allow accurate summative assessment of the program at the state level. However, given the persistent flux in assessment practices by schools, a large number of centers have been unable to attain the necessary data because the school's testing practices didn't allow it (e.g., no local spring assessment was administered). In the 2015-16 evaluation, 30% of centers were unable to report progress on required math performance measures, and 21% of centers were unable to report progress on required E/LA performance measures. We suggest returning more local control back to centers and local evaluators to create performance measures that fit with what the schools and umbrella organizations are doing. This would require a rigorous review process at the state level to ensure the measures meet criteria, but would ultimately be more beneficial to the centers.

> **IN-QPSA** – as a framework for measuring and discussing program quality, the Indiana Afterschool Standards are an invaluable tool. Within the context of 21st CCLCs, however, the

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[1] *The Youth Program Quality Assessment*. High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. http://etools.highscope.org/pdf/YouthPQA.pdf

required process is poorly integrated with the overall evaluation system. aspects of the IN-QPSA process are redundant with a well-executed local assessment, and with the state's quality and compliance monitoring.

Grades – programs use grades, progress reports and online tools like Power School to monitor their students' performance and plan appropriate interventions, but entering this data into EZ Reports can be time consuming and presents no additional benefit to the centers themselves. As a measure of the academic outcomes of the program, grades are redundant with local assessments and ISTEP+ results. This is a requirement that could be eliminated unless there is a compelling reason at the state level to continue the practice (e.g., supporting comparative analysis based on frequency of attendance).

Teacher survey –There are methodological flaws in the current survey which limit its value, and administering it is a time-consuming task for programs. Local evaluators have taken steps to reduce the burden of distributing the survey and collecting and entering the data, but these are only workarounds. Revising the survey and cleaning up the process would be a boon for programs, but will require specialized knowledge of survey research and research methods.

Requirements for summer programming – the development of a more rigorous implementation and evaluation of summer programming was underway when the IDOE transitioned to new leadership. Work that was slated for January and February was not completed. There are issues regarding specific programming requirements, attendance requirements, funding, evaluation, and performance measures that remain to be resolved.

EZ Reports – aside from required summative data, EZ Reports includes a range of other information and data, but the program information—contacts, feeder school info, evaluator name, etc.—is poorly updated and the utility of some the information stored there is unclear.

Second, the state should use the state-level evaluation to better coordinate local evaluations. Refocusing the summative requirements should free the local evaluators to focus on more substantive tasks, but the state has a responsibility to channel the assessment, feedback and guidance that evaluators provide to centers to ensure that program administration at the local level aligns properly with state goals for the program. Preliminary steps were taken throughout the fall 2016 semester to build a process to communicate state goals to local evaluators and coordinate their efforts in service to those goals. This work should be continued.

The state should utilize the local evaluations to track efforts to address strategic priorities set forth in the RFPs and by the administration. In addition to looking at academic data such as test scores and attendance, specific interest should be placed on the priority programming topics of STEM, college and career readiness, family engagement, and literacy that were listed for Cohort 8. Since the cohorts overlap, multiple cohorts often appear in the evaluations. Upon the completion of a cohort, a four-year summary should be compiled at the state level addressing the specific priorities of that RFP.

While we recommend revisiting the need for specific data collection, it would be ill advised to eliminate the accountability inherent in the data collection altogether. The requirement to get the data is as important as what the data shows. By requiring programs to collect summative data, it reinforces the purposefulness of the program, and forces program administrators to do the hard work of working with the schools.

Many of the centers in Indiana are components of larger organizations such as Boys and Girls Clubs and school districts. For them to maximize the benefits of conducting evaluations, the centers need to have the flexibility to align the evaluation with the umbrella organization's strategic plans and existing data collection. Again, this is not to say that there should not be minimum pieces of datum that are analyzed, but rather centers should be able to establish the wording of their STPMs and place emphasis on specific aspects. For instance, if centers are prioritizing parent engagement, then extra effort should be made to collect parent surveys or conduct focus groups.

Consistent Programming Challenges
High school programming

Compared to elementary level programs, High School programs offer far more flexible, varied and—theoretically -- individually engaging activities to their attendees. They also present 21st CCLC staff with unique challenges. Elementary students are acquiring foundational knowledge and skills, so programs that serve them are very similar; high school students, by contrast, are becoming self-aware individuals with personalized intellectual, career, and social interests. Elementary aged kids are captive audiences occupying specific spaces at specific times because adults have made those decisions for them; high school kids have almost complete disposition over their out-of-school time. Put simply, 21st CCLC programs must offer high schoolers choices among engaging and appealing activities in order to recruit and retain students.

We looked at the 21st CCLC high school program run by The Boys and Girls Club of Huntington County (BGCH) as an example of a successful effort. Their experience is informative in a number of ways.

- In building the program, they faced the common problems endemic to 21st CCLC high school programing.
- The structure of the program exemplifies the variety and diversity of activities and options necessary for success.
- Their method in developing the program exemplifies a targeted, purposeful approach to programming.

Unique challenges
Unique programming – high school programs must be highly tailored to needs and interests of students and the feeder schools. In developing their program, BGCH assesses the needs of students in cooperation with school officials. It adapts programming accordingly.

Huntington county has one high school, and the school's guidance counselors were spread too thin to provide any substantive assistance to students. Parent engagement is lacking. Many of the participants are the first generation in their families to graduate high school, let alone consider college. Parents had no concept of how to prepare for post-secondary education, even the engaged ones.

To meet these shortcomings, the program has developed to provide the institutional knowledge which families lack and the school is ill-equipped to provide. They have taken a "whatever it takes" approach to programming. Every student gets basic academic support—enrichment, homework help and tutoring—plus whatever else they need to graduate and pursue whatever they choose to do after high school. The program guides students through the college prep process, makes regular college visits, assists with financial aid, and transports students to testing sites for SATs.

Recruiting and retention – high school students can make their own choices, and programs face competition with other extracurricular activities. Students who attend afterschool programs must balance their time between program activities and other obligations like band, drama, or athletics. While some programs partner with schools to make attendance compulsory (e.g., for credit recovery), high school programs must work harder to make the program appealing to youth, or they will simply choose something else to do with their afternoons.

Originally, the BGCH program was located at the school, and had difficulty attracting students. They had to overcome the perception that the Boys and Girls Club was a "kid thing", and struggled to achieve the necessary appeal factor. While they made slow, incremental progress in building attendance, it wasn't until they were able to move the program to the newly remodeled club site that they were able to make their original attendance goals. The new facility has a café feel. Students have access to a gym, a lounge with music, TV, and video games. The program has worked with the school to refer students who need assistance, but the draw of the facilities and activities encourages regular attendance, and opens the door to the academic assistance and college and career guidance that the club provides.

Partnerships have also been important. Many programs partner with other extracurricular programs such as athletics to provide academic support to participants. BGCH has partnered with the school's robotics team. The club helps participants keep up with school work throughout a rigorous competition and build season, and provides the college prep guidance that many lack. The club's middle school program is another valuable recruitment tool. The club can provide a continuum of service, and participants transition seamlessly as they advance through school. This is particularly valuable for the college and career activities. The club can provide guidance early when it can do the most good. Working either internally or with a partner, having another program that can channel participants into the high school program is an effective tool.

Academic support – the course work of high school students is often challenging. This makes it harder to find qualified academic help. At BGCH, the school has made the program director a teacher in PowerSchool (assuming parents provide consent) so she has anytime access to grades and assignments. This has made basic academic assistance much easier, but keeping a math tutor has been particularly vexing. The program director has developed several channels for recruiting tutors, but the pool of individuals capable of helping a high school student with their calculus or geometry homework is much smaller than for 3rd grade math. It has been a manageable challenge—the program has never gone an appreciable length of time without a math tutor—but the program director is always looking for new tutors in case she loses the one she has.

Cost – the appeal factor, and the activities of teen programming can make high school programs more expensive on a per-student basis. The extensive college and career readiness activities at BGCH in particular require a higher staff time/student ratio, in addition to travel costs for college, but these are opportunities are effectively not available elsewhere.

Recommendations
At the most basic level, the state should understand the distinct nature of high school programs relative to the elementary programs that are the norm. It must consider the impact on high school programming when setting policy. While the two types of programs have common features and similar goals, the differences between the populations means that a funding scheme and regulatory environment that works for one may be a poor fit for the other.

High school programs should be encouraged to build partnerships with other programs, and find their niche within the landscape of needs and opportunities available to students.

Parent outreach

Parent engagement has long been a topic of concern for 21st CCLCs. Many centers struggle to find the balance between providing educational experiences with providing engaging activities that parents want to attend. Many host special events such as family literacy nights a few times throughout the year with varying levels of attendance across the centers. Additionally, some centers have struggled in gathering feedback from parents through surveys, committees, or the IN-QPSA process.

Effective practices
Boys and Girls Clubs of Fort Wayne (BGCFW) have taken a unique approach to their parent engagement components of 21st CCLC. BGCFW incorporates a philosophy of literally meeting parents where they are when recruiting families to the program and addressing concerns throughout the year. The program director performs individual home visits during recruitment so she can develop a personal rapport with parents and address any questions they may have regarding the center. During the visits, she goes over all required paperwork, the variety of activities and programs available at the center, and attendance expectations. She believes the visits allow the parents to buy into and develop a trust of the center quicker. It also allows parents to connect a face to the center and feel comfortable calling with any questions or concerns throughout the year. Since the beginning of Cohort 6 when BGCFW first received the 21st CCLC award, the program director has met with every family in their home. She has never had a family refuse to meet with her.

The program director feels the home visits are especially beneficial for the families involved in their Specialty Tutoring program through 21st CCLC. The program provides two days of intensive, individualized tutoring per week to students requiring remediation. During the recruitment home visits, the program director outlines the expectations of the tutoring program and emphasizes the importance that students attend their assigned days and times. The program director feels that parents see the home visits as the center putting in the extra effort and time to reach out to the families, so the parents are more likely to adhere to the expectations of attendance.

Home visits are also performed if there are major behavioral issues or issues at the school that require attention. The program director sees BGCFW as a bridge over the gap that exists between many parents and schools. She recognizes that many of the center's parents have had negative experiences with the school, so she works to bring down those walls by explaining policies or assisting the parent in identifying who at the school should be contacted regarding an issue. The program director also provides referrals to community resources to address the needs of the family.

Though the home visits are not particularly expensive compared to other 21st CCLC activities, they are very time intensive. The costs for the visits including staff time and mileage reimbursement. The program director currently takes on all scheduling and performing of the visits. Each visit runs roughly 30-45 minutes not including travel time. Another factor of the home visits is the competency of the staff performing them. The BGCFW program director has training and experience in home visits for several years prior to joining the BGCFW team. Any staff person taking on home visits should be properly trained and feel comfortable potentially going into unknown neighborhoods.

Recommendations
While not all centers would be able to or should adopt home visits, it is important that centers assess the needs of families and provide services tailored to them. Too often, centers offer parent activities that are not substantive or meaningful to the target population. Instead, they schedule activities that are "pre -packaged", and that address some stereotyped notion of what parents need.

Parent programming should:
- Be based on the local environments at each site – academic trends, improvement plans, etc.;
- Be based on an assessment of parent needs and concerns at each site;
- Be time-limited, laser focused and highly useful to at least a sub set of parents;
- Recognize that parents hold disposable time dear, be well-scheduled to optimize participation;
- Consider ways to bring programming to parents rather than always having them cone to the sites. (Fort Wayne's home visits are a good example.)

Parent programming is one component of 21st CCLCs that can easily incorporate community partners. For instance, centers could partner with local colleges to help arrange for individual tutoring for kids struggling in certain subjects. Schools and PTAs/PTOs could launch parent "campaigns" focusing on "mobilizing" parents to engage with their kids and to promote school success. or they can partner with a local mental health organization to provide information regarding effective discipline strategies and their appropriate use.

Unfortunately, many of the parent surveys conducted by centers focuses on parental opinions of how the center benefits their students and not necessarily what the parents need from the center. This holds true for searching online for parent surveys of afterschool programs. *The creation of needs assessment tools for 21st CCLCs would be beneficial technical assistance or professional development in the future.*

The Texas Afterschool Centers on Education and Texas 21st CCLC have developed a *Family Engagement in Out-of-School Time Needs Inventory* based on information from BOSTnet's *Engaging Families in Out-of-School Time Programs Toolkit* that allows programs to assess themselves on parent engagement and support. In addition to specific events or activities, centers should strive to create an organizational culture of supporting and reaching out to parents and families. The above resources can help guide centers through an examination of themselves and how they approach parent engagement.

STEM programming

While there are effective programs, STEM programming across the state shows inconsistency and unevenness in program quality, particularly in relation to science content, authentic STEM experiences and the development of STEM identity among participants.

In our evaluation of STEM programming, we use the Dimensions of Success (DoS) observation tool developed by the PEAR Institute (http://www.pearweb.org/tools/dos.html) as both an observation tool to assess individual activities, and as a framework for defining what the term "quality STEM program" means in practice. The tool breaks STEM programming into 12 dimensions which rate the activity on:

- Features of the learning environment – physical space and facilitation practices;
- Engagement level – the extent to which participants engage in hands-on, cognitively challenging activities;
- STEM knowledge and practices – accurate science content and authentic STEM processes;
- Youth development in STEM – building and reinforcing a "STEM identity" (the ability to picture themselves as a scientist).

Simply stated, the better a program scores on those 12 dimensions, the more effective it will be in achieving the goals of STEM programming. STEM programming recognizes that scientific literacy is an invaluable life skill, and that the United States faces an alarming shortage of capable STEM professionals.

In our observations, we have seen a consistent pattern in STEM programming. We received similar feedback from other evaluators and program directors we interviewed. Specifically, the youth workers tapped to facilitate STEM programs are capable in terms of facilitation, and are good at building positive relationships with the students, but they frequently lack a basic understanding of science and scientific practices, as well as the goals of STEM education.

This pattern is consistent across the state, and in the country as a whole. Graph 3 shows the results of DoS observations of STEM activities in Indiana and nationally. The observations were conducted by certified DoS observers as a part of a range of data collection efforts from 2014-2016 in Indiana. Observations included data from ongoing program observations as well as data collected as a part of a study of inter-rater reliability and a larger multi-state study of program quality paired with student outcome data. The data was prepared by PEAR on behalf of the Indiana Afterschool Network (IAN), who partnered with PEAR on the studies, and is included here with permission.

Average DoS Ratings by Dimension
IAN Averages Compared to National Averages
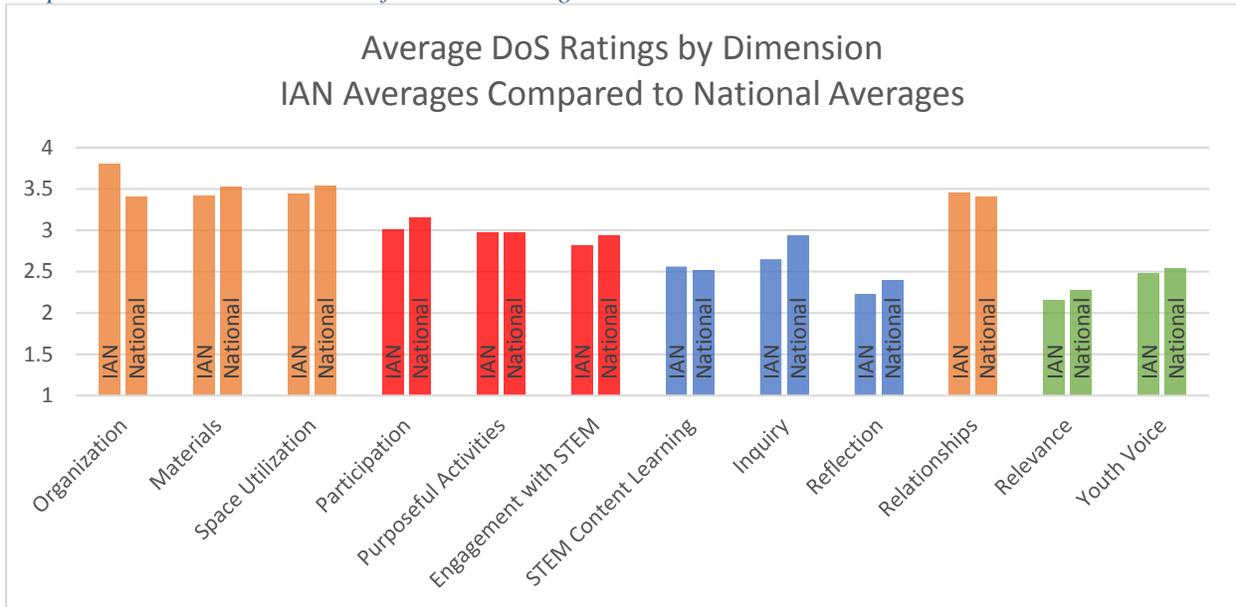
In Indiana and across the nation, programs have scored consistently higher on dimensions related to general program facilitation and positive relationships (orange), but score much lower on dimensions of STEM knowledge and practices (blue), and identity (green).

We believe the background of facilitators contributes significantly to this pattern. The youth workers that make up the majority of frontline staff are good at what they know, but are simply unprepared to effectively communicate scientific principles, as they are unfamiliar with them themselves. Program directors have turned to STEM professionals and licensed teachers to facilitate STEM programs, but while these groups are more knowledgeable about STEM content, they can present other challenges. STEM professionals can be unprepared to work with kids, and as a whole are not very skilled at communicating their expertise to non-experts. The net effect is that the activity becomes more a demonstration of their expertise, rather than an opportunity for students to engage in authentic STEM processes, even though the STEM content is spot on. For their part, licensed teachers are often too expensive. They can also be too quick to treat the afterschool STEM environment as a formal classroom, and miss the opportunities provided by an informal student-led process.

The STEM program at the Boys and Girls Club of Wayne County in Richmond, IN is a microcosm of STEM programming across the state. It is a well-run program generally (their Jeffers site received the highest cumulative rating on quality and compliance standards of any site visited), and their experience exemplifies what a good STEM program can be, the persistent obstacles which even a well-run program faces in trying to effectively implement a consistently high-quality STEM program, and effective practices for supporting high-quality STEM programming.

The program consists of two components—the technology room at the main club site (Jeffers), and STEM activities held regularly at all three sites.

- The technology room has an excellent facilitator, and this component of the center's STEM program is consistently high-quality. He is a tech industry professional and works part time for the club. The facilitator exhibits a clear love of science, which is effectively communicated to the students, and the program excels at the relevance and youth voice dimensions which have the greatest impact on the development of a STEM identity.
- The facilitator explicitly works to build interest in the STEM program and recruit students beyond those who already gravitate to such things.
- The program director attributed the success of the program to the skill and character of the facilitator, and was fearful of ever having to find a replacement.
- The quality of the other regular STEM activities waxes and wanes depending on the facilitator.
- The program director has observed the trials of youth workers facilitating stem activities, and developed hiring standards based on core attributes—a love of science and an ability to relate to youth and children—over teachable skills like program facilitation. She has created relationships with two nearby colleges to identify promising candidates as STEM facilitators, and refer them to the club, but the pool of potential candidates who demonstrate these core attributes is small, and it is a challenge to find enough to keep positions filled. Most are in position for less than a year.
- The program director engages in both formal and informal coaching of STEM facilitators, and makes use of any professional development opportunities, but the turnover rate limits the utility of such efforts because the training process must be frequently restarted with new staff.

Overcoming the lack of qualified facilitators will be a long-term challenge, but there are strategies that can be implemented immediately that will begin the process and provide immediate returns. There is a clear need for more frequent and/or more quality professional development opportunities, but the amount of development necessary is largely dependent on background. Teaching good STEM facilitation skills to someone who already appreciates science is simply easier than instilling that appreciation in a skilled facilitator who is intimidated by science and math.

Recommendations
- Programs should be given guidelines regarding what to look for in a STEM facilitator, and where to find them. The emphasis should be on identifying STEM professionals, aspiring STEM professionals, and science enthusiasts who have an easy rapport with youth, e.g., developing an internship program with STEM programs at nearby universities. This would have the added benefit of helping future STEM professionals more effectively communicate with non-experts.
- Professional development opportunities should be made available to address the specific weaknesses of facilitators observed in PEAR's data. These should be cognizant of facilitators backgrounds, e.g., a workshop for teachers adapt to an informal afterschool environment.
- Programs should be encouraged to consider the likely professional development needs of facilitators from specific backgrounds when hiring and planning professional development.

- ➢ Program directors should be encouraged to communicate the goals/purpose of out-of-school STEM and the characteristics of good OST STEM to their STEM facilitators. Program directors should be instructed in the goals/purpose of out-of-school STEM, and the characteristics of good OST STEM activities. Too many don't seem to know, which goes a long way to explain why they don't communicate it to their facilitators.

Longer term, it may be necessary to steer programs away from lower-impact, weekly drop-in STEM activities, and invest in more intensive multi-week course-style or summer camp programming which can sustain persistent attendance, requires fewer trained facilitators for a shorter period, and can attract highly capable facilitators.
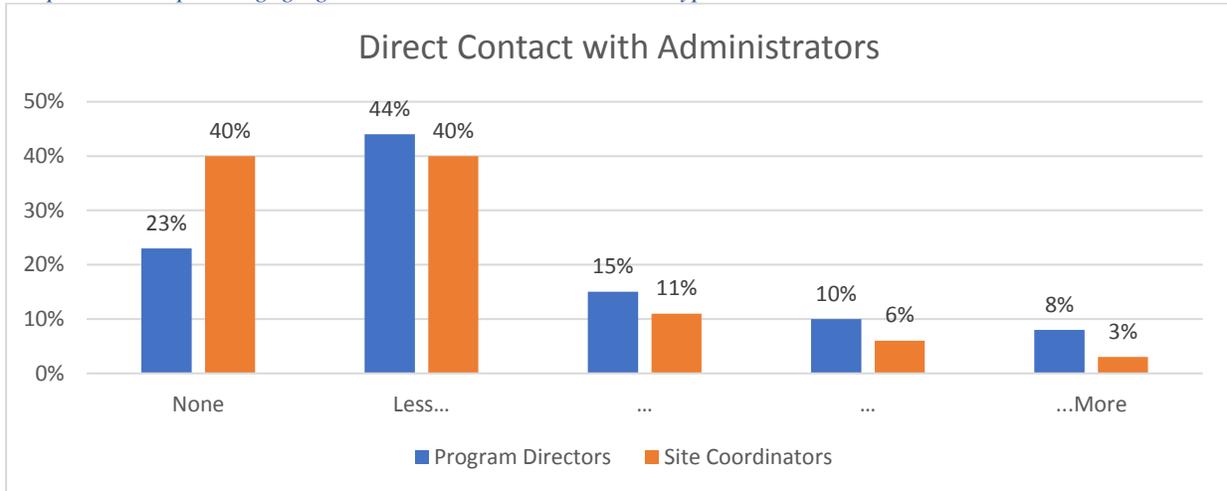
School interactions

Tying afterschool activities to the school day remains an area where improvement is badly needed. There are two levels of interaction: (1) administrative coordination emphasizing common goals and complementary programming, and (2) operational coordination to share data and focus academic assistance on specific needs.

Most programs try to coordinate their activities with the needs of feeder schools. They use student data to inform programming. but the nature and extent of such coordination, especially concerning data availability, varies dramatically across schools and programs. From assessing year-end data to identify broadly where programs have or have not succeeded to routine interactions between the school and afterschool staff to identify who does and who does not need extra help, the quantity and quality of collaborative interactions are disappointing.
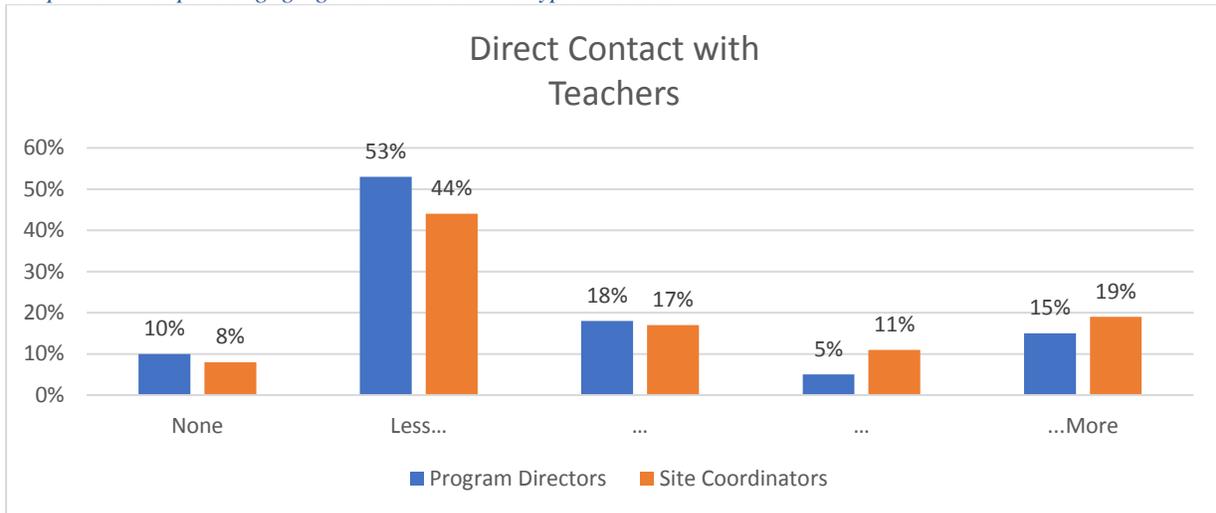
Survey data show the distribution of the variance.
- ➢ To measure the extent of cooperation between schools and program sites, program directors and site coordinators were asked how much time they spent engaging with teachers and school administrators as an indicator of school/afterschool engagement and data sharing. Graph 4 and Graph 5 show the distribution of responses. While a small number of sites show intensive coordination with school administrators and teachers, *most show very little*.
- ➢ While the response rate of the principal survey precludes definitive analysis, there is at least some evidence that school administrators disinvest in 21st CCLC programs, and fail to make the best use of their afterschool program. When asked to summarize their goals for their school's 21st CCLC, only two of the eight principals who responded articulated goals that demonstrated thoughtful and valued connections between the school day and 21st CCLC activities. The remainder provided general goals (i.e., academic support and character development), and two were unaware that their school had a 21st CCLC (though this may indicate inaccurate feeder school info in EZ Reports rather than an actual shortcoming).
- ➢ Very few program directors indicated school improvement plans were an important consideration in program planning (Graph 6).
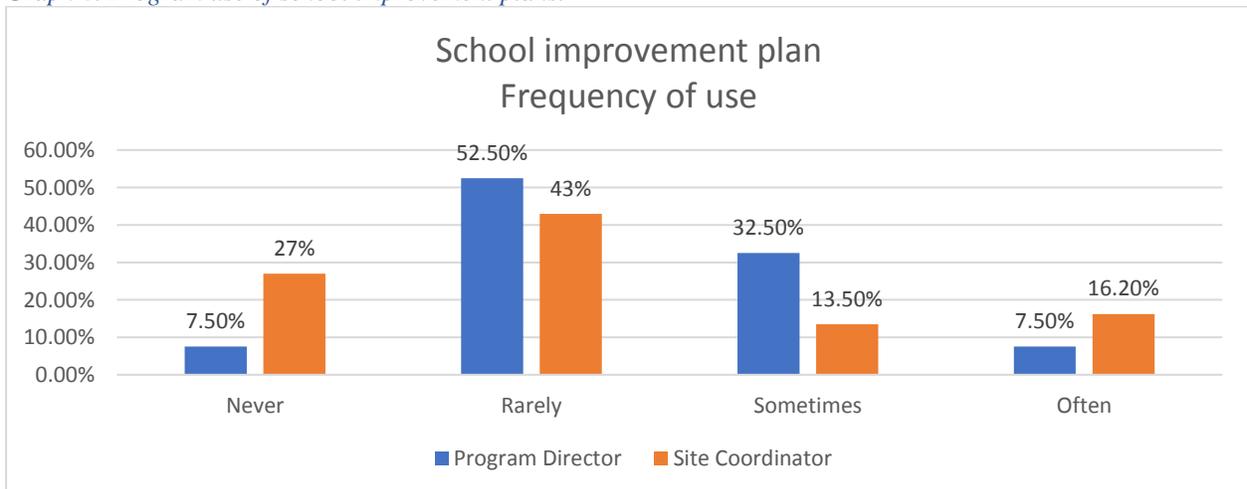
Graph 4. Time spent engaging with school administrators in a typical week.

Direct Contact with Administrators

	None	Less...	...	...	...More
Program Directors	23%	44%	15%	10%	8%
Site Coordinators	40%	40%	11%	6%	3%

Graph 5. Time spent engaging with teachers in a typical week.

Direct Contact with Teachers

	None	Less...	...	...	...More
Program Directors	10%	53%	18%	5%	15%
Site Coordinators	8%	44%	17%	11%	19%

Graph 6. Program use of school improvement plans.

School improvement plan Frequency of use

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Program Director	7.50%	52.50%	32.50%	7.50%
Site Coordinator	27%	43%	13.50%	16.20%

Effective practice

The HI-DEF program at Lake Ridge New Tech Middle School is a model of a well-integrated afterschool program with rigorous data use. As part of its overall improvement effort, the school has made its HI-DEF afterschool program a seamless extension of its school day.

 - ➢ The school received a 1003(g) School Improvement Grant, and has invested heavily in student data use. HI-DEF is a key component in the school's improvement strategy.
 - ➢ The school conducts window tests every three weeks to assess student mastery. The first 30 minutes of every school day is Academic Success Time (AST). AST classes are differentiated by skill mastery. Students are assigned to classes based on performance on the most recent window test, so AST classes are reassigned every three weeks.
 - ➢ HI-DEF is an extension of this testing and remediation model. In addition to the standard homework help, students in HI-DEF receive individualized tutoring on specific skills and standards. The program is staffed with teachers from the school to provide tutoring.
 - ➢ At the administrative level, there is seamless coordination between the school and 21st CCLC, as they are essentially one unit. Additionally, the school's data manager is the 21st CCLC program director, so program decisions are made with an intimate knowledge of the school's student population. Both strategically and operationally, the activities of the afterschool program are guided entirely by the goals of the school and the educational and character needs of its students.

Recommendations

The typical homework help and study time that essentially all programs provide has improved student outcomes. Compared to participants who attend less often, regularly attending participants have consistently demonstrated better academic outcomes. Yet the data above indicates that these efforts are poorly coordinated with the feeder schools, which limits the effectiveness of the interventions and the impact of the program overall.

Not every school employs the robust system of student data use that Lake Ridge does, and programs can serve multiple schools, so expecting all programs to strive for this model or level of coordination is unrealistic. Yet moving more programs in this direction—collaborating more closely with school administrators and teachers to focus the content of academic assistance on the needs of individual participants—will expand the impact of the program. Data use, not just data collection, should be a feature of evaluation and accountability.

There are two important notes in that regard. First, the data collection requirements made of 21st CCLCs opens the door to establishing the communication necessary for this kind of collaboration, particularly for sites not housed within the schools themselves. This should be factored into decisions regarding data requirements. Second, there is a temptation among program directors to recruit too broadly and serve too many students, thus diluting their programming (and introducing staffing challenges which further affects program quality). Reining in this temptation will be necessary to keep programs focused on the purpose of the 21st CCLC program. Having a minimal effect on a larger number of students is less desirable than having a meaningful effect on a smaller number of students. Improving the focus of academic assistance favors the latter over the former.

Program Quality

Most programs have matured to the point where they meet or nearly meet the basic standards of quality afterschool programming. Graph 7 shows the distribution of the mean quality and compliance ratings of the 63 sites visited in the fall. A site which met all standards would have a mean rating of 3.00, so it is clear from the data that with a few exceptions, 21st CCLCs have tended to the basic requirements of safety, structure, and practices necessary for the programs to be effective. We assessed the program run by Communities in Schools of Lake County (CISLC), one of the three programs with the lowest cumulative quality and compliance ratings, to see if their failure to thrive was the product of any systemic issue(s) which could be addressed through policy, or a consequence of local concerns.

Graph 7. Distribution of average compliance and quality ratings.

Praxis is the local evaluator for CISLC, so we are familiar with the program and its decline. In addition to our regular qualitative assessments as part of the local evaluation, we conducted an additional visit and interview with the program director to examine any systemic issues as part of this evaluation. What we found is that the reasons the program has struggled are a combination of external pressures and internal mismanagement. In terms of external factors, students have numerous options for afterschool programming, and rather than collaborating or coordinating activities, programs compete. The school district has also closed and merged schools, and in the current program year one of the sites was significantly impacted by the evacuation of an entire neighborhood served by its feeder school, and the relocation of the school, after lead was found in the water supply. Students were scattered across the city, and the school district could not provide transportation for the afterschool program, which throttled attendance.

While these external factors have added challenges, the primary issue has been an ineffective organizational structure. The executive director has taken a very active role supervising the program, which undermined the effectiveness of both the program director and the site coordinators. Those with direct authority over the program did not have the authority to make decisions, and the program withered under the progressive weight of the resulting coordination

failures. CISLC's experience is informative, as some of their missteps are common to other programs, and it shows the damage that can be done to a program long-term if these issues are allowed to persist.

First, goals and targets for the program were not shared with frontline staff, to include site coordinators. They were given operational instructions, but without a thorough understanding of the purpose of what they were being told to do, implementation lacked purpose. For example, in an interview, one site coordinator spoke proudly of the gains she had made in program attendance for the year, but was unaware that her site had a specific attendance goal for the grant. Despite the gains, her site was still well short of its goal.

Second, without ownership of their program, administrators were not able to make the necessary relationships with school administrators. The program is housed inside the schools, but has operated almost completely independently. Schools have double-booked space, forcing the 21st CCLC to adjust programming on the fly in alternate spaces (or cancel activities); limited their access to facilities so homework help was held in noisy cafeteria space with multiple other activities going on; and even created other competing afterschool programs.

Recommendations

CISLC is an extreme case to illustrate a simple point. For a program to be effective, and to achieve the goals of the grant, the parts must fit together and be oriented to a specific purpose. On the hierarchy of program development—from fundamental requirements of safety and structure, up through more challenging aspects of sound content, purposeful programming and engagement—the 21st CCLC program in Indiana is on solid footing regarding the foundational prerequisites for effective programming. While some continued vigilance will be necessary to ensure that all programs achieve or maintain basic standards, the bulk of this work is done. Going forward, the administration of the statewide program should apply its evaluation, accountability, and fiscal policies toward emphasizing continued development of the higher-order program functions—more focused content, more purposeful programming, and greater engagement.

Conclusions

The programming challenges above represent opportunities for the state to align their accountability, evaluation, and support practices to improve the quality and impact of afterschool programs throughout the state.

The coordination of in-school and afterschool activities is essential for the effectiveness of the 21st CCLC program. Sharing student data is a critical component of this important function, but the current evaluation system emphasizes process over results.

Accountability revolves around the collection of data, rather than program effectiveness. Consequently, centers communicate with schools to retrieve data to meet their reporting requirements, but too many do not adequately align their programming with the schools they serve.