

**21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers:  
Evaluation of Projects Funded  
For the 2003-04 School Year**

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# Executive Summary

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The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC) program is funded by the U.S. Department of Education to create or expand the role of community learning centers in providing academic enrichment activities to economically disadvantaged and other students in at-risk situations, in addition to other valuable services and activities (e.g., drug and violence prevention, character education, technology, art, music, recreation) which are intended to complement the students' regular academic program during non-school hours (e.g., after school, weekends, summer). One innovative feature of the program is the provision of academic and enrichment activities targeted at students' adult family members and young siblings. In addition to the specific purposes outlined above, it is anticipated that the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLCs will help working parents by providing a safe, supervised environment for their children during after-school hours and other periods when school is not in session (e.g., weekends, summer recess).

This report provides an evaluation of the first year of the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program where sufficient data is available to conduct such an analysis. Although the program has been in existence for a number of years, grants funded during this year were the first to be subject to program enhancements contained in the NCLB Act of 2001, including a requirement that the program be continuously evaluated using federally- and state-determined performance measures. The 2003-04 school year was the first where data was collected by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) from 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grantees in Texas to fulfill this requirement. Previous research on the effectiveness of after-school programs conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, The Harvard Family Research Project, The National Institute on Out of School Time, and other entities has shown that such programs can have a positive impact on student classroom and out-of-school behavior, and on students' academic performance. This report examines the effect of program participation on various academic performance metrics. The findings presented in this report are a first step that suggest the direction that future longitudinal and control group studies may take once more data become available.

An examination of student demographic information shows that the typical 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC participant during the 2003-2004 school year was economically disadvantaged, Hispanic, and enrolled in Kindergarten through Grade 5. Approximately one-third were classified as limited English proficient (LEP). Approximately one-third of the students participated regularly in community learning center activities, with the majority of activities providing instruction in the core areas of reading/language arts, math, science and social studies. Sports and arts activities were also very common. In all, the data show that the grantees were quite successful recruiting the targeted number of students in at-risk situations to the program. Approximately 80 percent of the participants were classified as economically disadvantaged and the number of students served by community learning was approximately 9 percent the targeted number of students originally established by the grantees. The data also show that services offered by most of the community learning centers were provided by certified teachers, working in collaboration with community based partners and volunteers.

The key findings presented in the report indicate that participation in 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC funded activities appears to be associated with improved student performance in a number of key areas: reading and science ability, student school class passing rates, and regular school day class attendance. For example,

- A substantially higher percentage of students who participated in a majority of available reading tutorials improved their academic ability than students who participated in fewer tutorials. The positive direction of this relationship persists across tutorial categories and for both the fall and spring semesters during the 2003-2004 school year, although the results are not as consistent for participation in mathematics and science tutorials.
- After controlling for students' demographic information, logistic regression analyses showed that the odds of improvement in reading ability were nearly twice as high for students participating in 75 percent or more of available reading tutorials, as compared to students participating in 25 percent or less of the tutorials.
- Interestingly, students participating in 26 percent to 75 percent of science tutorials were more likely to improve their science ability compared to students participating in a lower percentage of tutorials and students participating in 75 percent or more of the science tutorials.
- There was no statistically significant effect of participation in mathematics tutorials after controlling for demographic information.
- Differences in levels of participation do not appear to be associated with differences in student average class grades. Although there was a statistically significant difference in average grades between students who participated in 50 percent or more of available activities and students who participated in less than 50 percent, this difference was small. Both groups of students had an average grade in the 'B' range.
- Students who participated in 50 percent or more of available program activities passed a higher percentage of their regular school day classes and had fewer class absences during the semester than students who participated in less than 50 percent of activities. These differences are statistically significant.<sup>1</sup>
- After controlling for students' demographic information, the relationship between participation in 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC funded activities and other measures of student performance remained statistically significant. The odds of improving student ability in percent classes passed, average student grades, and reducing student absences were lowest for students who participated in 25 percent or less of available activities. Interestingly, the odds of improvement in these measures were highest

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<sup>1</sup> A result is statistically significant if it is unlikely to have occurred by chance.

for students participating in 26 percent to 75 percent of available activities, not for those participating in more than 75 percent of activities.

- Students who had at least one adult family member participating with them in community learning center activities participated in an average of 20.8 percent more activities than students with no family members participating. This result was highly statistically significant.

Although mixed, these results indicate that participation in 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC funded activities appears to be associated statistically with improved student performance. The fact that only one-half of the students participated in a majority of available activities suggests that there is room for improvement in encouraging students to increase their time spent in community learning center activities.

The findings on the effect of adult family member participation indicate that one way to accomplish this goal may be to focus more attention on encouraging family participation in center activities. Less than half of the targeted adults (49 percent) actually participated in community learning center activities during the 2003-04 school year. The data show that once they do participate, adult family members return to participate again at a very high rate (66 percent rate of return). Improving family member recruitment strategies could be an important means to increase student participation, and by extension lead to improved academic performance among the students in at-risk situations targeted by the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program.