21st Century Community Learning Centers

Soaring Beyond Expectations

south dakota
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Learning. Leadership. Service.

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I. Introduction

A plethora of research in the past few years has demonstrated that quality out-of-school time programs bolster student academic and social skills, particularly in low-income or one-parent families. As part of this, out-of-school programs can promote healthy lifestyles and choices, provide fun activities and community service, increase school attendance, and improve grades and test performance (Afterschool Partnership). Studies have also shown that out-of-school programs save taxpayers approximately $3 in reduced crime and welfare costs for every dollar invested (Rose Institute). Out-of-school programs are a vital part of the educational and socio-economic fabric of South Dakota. A recent South Dakota Kids Count report showed 86% of women in the State with school-age children are in the labor force and 72% of school-age children have both parents working (SDCDC). In South Dakota last year, 27% (36,320) of K-12 youth were responsible for taking care of themselves after school (Afterschool Alliance).

The primary purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the effectiveness of the South Dakota 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program. The report methodology used an in-depth self-assessment for individual sites in four key areas: administration, academic programming, youth development, and partnerships"dcugf"qp"f cvc"htqo "4235/4236. Questions were then further structured around the following areas:

- Did participants demonstrate an increased involvement in out-of-school activities?
- Did participants demonstrate increased interest in academic areas?
- Did participants demonstrate social benefits and exhibit positive behavioral changes?
- Did the 21st CCLC's work toward services that benefit families?
- Did the 21st CCLC's collaborate with other stakeholders in the community?
- Did the programs serve families with the greatest need in the community?

- Were staff current in professional development related to running an effective out-of-school program?

- To what extent did individual sites use data and local resources to monitor and improve program effectiveness?

Each site formed a team of stakeholders to rate, from basic to exemplary, detailed questions in each of the four key areas. The process allowed each team to identify areas of strengths and challenges. They then created action plans on how they would address areas of greatest need. The results were submitted directly to an independent entity - The Red Stone Education Group - for tabulation and analysis.

II.   Program Demographics

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers were located at 61 sites throughout South Dakota. Overall, 9,739 students were enrolled in 2014. In keeping with grant guidelines, over 75% of participants were eligible for free and/or reduced lunch. The student demographics also showed a broad representation of ethnic groups. For example, although American Indians comprised about 8.9% of the overall population, they represented over 40% of program participants. Hispanic, African-American and Asian participation was also high when compared to the overall State population. A complete breakdown is show in Figure 1:

Figure 1. Enrollment, 2013-14	Percent of Enrollment	South Dakota Population by Percentage
White	49%	85.7%
American Indian	41%	8.9%
African American	4%	1.9%
Asian	2%	1.3%
Other	4%	2.2%

The demographic breakdown also showed the majority of participants - 65% - were from areas considered to be rural by the U.S. Census. The remainder attended sites in cities such as Rapid City and Sioux Falls. In addition, children from kindergarten through fifth grade were the main beneficiaries of 21st CLCC programs. As seen in Figure 2, 60% of participants ranged from PK to 5th grade with enrollments steadily declining with student age.

Figure 2. Enrollment, 2013-14	Percent of Enrollment
Prekindergarten - Fifth grade	60%
6th grade - 8th grade	25%
9th grade - 12th grade	15%

III.   Survey Results

As indicated above, the methodology used to obtain results was a self-assessment tool where individual sites were encouraged to form teams to rate themselves on a continuum. In addition, the teams were encouraged to see this as an educational process where the questions would prompt internal discussion and goal-setting. The self-evaluation was also structured to seek input into how the South Dakota Department of Education could best assist individual sites to improve their ratings. The aggregate results broken down by category are highlighted in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Administration

		NA	Basic	Emerging	Proficient	Exemplary
Program Goals & Objectives	Systematically Reviewed	2	1	17	33	8
	Stakeholder Awareness	0	6	21	24	10
	Diversity/Inclusion	1	2	9	32	17
Management	Supervision	1	0	6	34	20
	Financial Oversight	1	0	3	23	34
	Financial Advisors	0	0	8	30	23
	Staff Meetings	1	4	16	15	25
	Handbook	1	0	11	28	21
Staff Capacity and Development	Staff Qualifications	0	0	6	14	41
	Staff Training	0	1	13	36	11
	Staff Input on Training	0	2	17	33	9
Funding	Diverse Funding Sources	3	8	17	26	7
	Funding Security	1	5	19	28	8
Marketing and Advocacy	Program Director Activities	0	1	18	30	12
	Staff Activities	2	4	21	28	6
	Marketing	0	4	14	28	15
Evaluation and Data Collection	Evaluation Procedures	2	1	10	28	20
	Data Collection	2	9	19	13	18
	Use Of Data	2	4	16	29	10
Resources	Program Space	2	6	4	19	30
	Staff Qualifications	1	2	9	29	20
	Program Supplies	1	1	11	36	12
	Volunteer/Youth Involvement	3	8	25	16	9
	Safety Procedure	1	2	13	14	32

Programming

		NA	Basic	Emerging	Proficient	Exemplary
Homework Assistance	Schedules & Activities	3	10	15	26	6
	School Connections	4	10	12	26	8
	Family Connections	3	10	21	19	7
Academic Enrichment in Mathematics	Intentionality in Program Design	2	3	24	28	3
	Resources & Materials	1	1	21	24	13
	Afterschool Connection	2	15	20	17	6
	Differentitaed Programming	1	8	28	18	5
Academic Enrichment in Literacy	Intentionality in Program Design	2	2	25	27	4
	Resources & Materials	1	1	16	29	13
	Afterschool Connection	2	18	20	14	6

	Differentitaed Programming	1	5	31	18	5
Academic Enrichment in Social Studies & Science	Intentionality in Program Design	1	3	34	18	4
	Resources & Materials	6	2	14	31	7
	Afterschool Connection	6	17	16	18	3
	Differentitaed Programming	6	17	16	18	3
Arts Enrichment	Intentionality in Program Design	7	3	17	24	8
	Resources & Materials	7	2	20	19	12
Recreation Programming	Intentionality in Program Design	6	1	11	32	10
	Resources & Materials	6	2	7	25	20
Health & Saftety Programming	Intentionality in Program Design	7	7	24	21	1
	Resources & Materials	6	5	15	25	9
	Food & Nutrition	4	1	11	29	15

Youth Development

		NA	Basic	Emerging	Proficient	Exemplary
Youth Engagement	Range of Offerings	4	2	6	40	8
	Youth Choice	4	4	14	37	1
	Reflection	4	8	15	23	10
Youth Leadership	Opportunities	3	5	30	20	2
	Stakeholder Involvement	6	19	18	15	2
Program Climate	Rules & Behavior Management	2	0	8	32	18
	Psychological Safety	1	0	11	28	20
	Youth / Adult Interactions	1	1	9	35	14
	Peer Interactions	1	2	5	25	27

Partnerships

		NA	Basic	Emerging	Proficient	Exemplary
Community	Collaborative Functioning	5	2	24	26	3
	Involvement in Programming	5	7	23	23	2
School	Communication	2	11	10	29	8
	Alignment	3	18	16	15	8
Families	Communication	1	5	7	43	4
	Involvement in Programming	2	5	21	26	6

IV.   Program Trends

An impact evaluation of this type is intended to help participants and policy makers decide whether the overall out-of-school programs are generating intended effects and are promoting accountability in the allocation of resources. As part of this, the self-evaluation was to assist individual sites in understanding what works, what does not, and how data should be used as part of gauging program effectiveness. No control group was created to compare participants' outcomes. Therefore, the evaluation was limited to assessing direct attitudes and outcomes of program participants and staff. In reviewing the aggregate data, several trends emerged highlighting both program strengths and challenges. These included:

A.   Strengths

- The ability to incorporate a variety of lesson plans that focused not just on reading and math but on science and art at nearly 70% of sites;

- Homework help tutors were included at nearly 60% of sites;

- The ability to provide a safe environment for students was a particular boon given the high percent of working parents;

- About 60% of sites rated themselves as proficient or exemplary when asked if staff was aware of program goals and objectives and if these were tied to activities;

- Nearly 80% of sites rated themselves as proficient or exemplary when asked if they offered a range of staff trainings and professional development opportunities:

- Over 80% of sites rated themselves as proficient or exemplary when asked if they reviewed staff qualifications in addition to reporting well-defined recruitment, hiring and retention policies;

- Over 90% of sites rated themselves as proficient or exemplary when asked if they created an engaging environment for youth that included academic support;

- Over 90% of sites rated themselves as proficient or exemplary when asked if they created an engaging environment for youth that included social support;

- Over 85% of sites rated themselves as proficient or exemplary when asked if activities were intentionally designed to build relationship between participants;

- Nearly 75% of sites rated themselves as proficient or exemplary when asked if they had adequate safety procedures

- Over 80% of sites rated themselves as proficient or exemplary when asked if they had adequate rules and behavior management strategies;

- Over 75% of sites rated themselves as proficient or exemplary when asked if they their program provided a "positive and respectful" climate for youth and adults;

- Nearly 95% of sites rated themselves as proficient or exemplary when asked if they had sound financial management procedures.

B.   Challenges

While each site demonstrated its own unique struggles outlined in the individual surveys, there were several areas in which sites self-assessed at an emerging or basic score. According to the surveys, the following were viewed as program challenges:

- The need to include more built-in planning time between the site supervisor and staff;

- Overall, regular communication was adequate between out-of-school program staff and parents although fostering greater systematic input and involvement was difficult at most sites;

- A majority of sites wanted parents to connect home activities with school day and out-of-school learning goals;

- While communication between 21st CLCC staff and school personnel was typically good, most sites wanted to better integrate out-of-school program and classroom activities;

- While a variety of academic and non-academic activities were provided, students needed more opportunities to serve in leadership and decision-making roles to enhance both their own personal development and level of engagement with the program;

- Academic skill enhancement was routinely offered in a variety of subjects at all sites although the ability to differentiate instruction to better meet individual student needs was often a challenge. This need was highlighted in all academic areas, including literacy, math and social studies and science;

- A sizeable percentage of sites indicated the need to secure a greater diversity of funding sources to sustain program activities in the long-term;

- Many of the programs had some connection with the community to assist in youth engagement but, overall, these activities were quite limited;

- While most sites collect data, the process was typically not systematized and reviewed on a regular basis to improve program quality;

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- Longitudinal data was seldom reviewed to understand longer-term trends;

- While the percentage of students on free/reduced lunches was high at nearly 75%, certain sites indicated they should take additional steps to ensure students who fall into this category are prioritized in the admissions process.

V.   Synopsis of Action Plans and Technical Support

As part of the self-evaluation, individual sites were to submit an Action Plan to address the areas where they deemed themselves to be particularly deficient and how they would address such issues in the future. An additional Technical Support section was also included as part of the process. In this section, the sites were requested to verbalize the areas of the program which could benefit from outside resources and specify what resources would be preferred. Fourteen sites did not submit an Action Plan and Technical Assistance form. Numerous sites only completed the Action Plan or the Technical Assistance, leaving the other incomplete. Nevertheless, according to the returned surveys, two trends became apparent:

A.   Increased community collaboration - While the 21st CLCC's goal is to increase academic performance, a significant factor in this process is to build a sense of connection with the school and broader community.

B.   Increased parental involvement - The majority of programs stressed an interest in increasing parent involvement. Suggestions to enhance current involvement and to spur interest from parents which have not been involved in the past included:

- Creating family nights which are held at the time of pick up.
- Staff trainings focused on family engagement.

- Distribution of a parent/guardian survey to gather information/feedback would be beneficial.

VI.   Conclusion and Recommendations:

Overall, the 21st Century Community Learning Center Program met its core objectives as outlined in federal regulations. The program had a positive impact on students and filled an important role by providing academic support and social skill development. In addition, parents/guardians knew their children were not just in a safe environment but were part of a caring community.

Through the surveys, several reoccurring themes were evident when gauging program strengths as seen in the following:

- The programs sponsored a broad-array of daily activities that led to positive changes in students' social behavior and attitudes toward community;

- The programs sponsored activities that led to positive changes in student attitudes toward school and academic improvement;

- The programs fostered an environment where students felt safe and parents felt comfortable with having their children in the program;

- The programs were administered efficiently with staff who strove to do their best to meet goals and objectives.

While the program met its core objectives as noted above, the evaluations did reveal several ways to improve the overall delivery of services and activities. The following areas should be examined for possible implementation as the program moves forward:

- A greater emphasis on professional development activities to include ways to differentiate instruction which might also include mixed age activities and behavior management techniques;

- While a broad variety of academic enrichment activities occur these should be more closely aligned with school activities and lessons;

- Parent involvement should be prioritized to include enhanced communication and structured activities;

- Community and stakeholder involvement should be prioritized with an emphasis on providing leadership and partnership opportunities to enhance long-term program sustainability;

- Individual sites should be using their data to analyze longitudinal trends to see which activities are most effective in terms of cost in relation to academic and social results;

- Sites should work to diversify resources and increase in-kind support from local stakeholders;

- While the percent of students on free/reduced lunches was high at nearly 75%, certain sites should take additional steps to ensure students who fall into this category are prioritized in the admissions process.

Citations:

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