



What does the research say about 21st Century Community Learning Centers?

NOVEMBER 2017

21st Century Community Learning Centers are afterschool and summer learning programs that are locally-designed school and community solutions that help kids learn and grow, keep children and teenagers safe, and support families to balance work with home. Students in programs participate in hands-on learning, discover new interests, receive nutritious snacks and meals, and have the chance to be physically active. Programs offer a broad array of activities and learning experiences—from learning about electricity and how to build circuits to growing vegetables and preparing healthy meals—that help students build their communications skills, learn how to work collaboratively, and foster confidence in themselves. These are the foundational skills that students need as they move through school and toward adulthood.

But what does the research tell us about the effectiveness of Community Learning Centers? The following is a small sampling of findings from evaluations of the federally-funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers Programs that demonstrate the positive impact programs across the country are having on students' academics, school-day attendance, engagement in learning, and behavior.

Community Learning Centers help students learn

- ▶ **Improved academic performance:** A statewide evaluation examining three years' of data on the After School Safety and Enrichment for Teens program—California's high school component of the Community Learning Centers program—found that students participating in the program received higher English language arts (ELA) and math assessment scores, and performed better on the ELA and math sections of California's high school exit examination than non-participants.¹
- ▶ **Improved grades:** Students regularly attending Washington State's Community Learning Centers saw improvements in their reading and math achievement, as well as a positive impact on their overall GPA, compared to students not enrolled in the program.²
- ▶ **Increased likelihood of grade promotion:** A 2016 evaluation of Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers, known as the Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE), found that students with high levels of attendance in the program saw gains in their math performance, consistent with previous positive outcomes associated with the program. A 2013 evaluation found that students attending the program saw improvements in their reading and math state assessment scores and were more likely to be promoted to the next grade. High school students' likelihood of grade promotion increased up to 97 percent among students with high levels of program attendance.³

Community Learning Centers help boost school attendance

- ▶ **Decreased school-day absences:** Evaluations of the Texas' Afterschool Centers on Education consistently found that students regularly attending the program improved their school-day attendance. Both a 2016 and 2013 evaluation found that students with high levels of program attendance saw particularly strong results; students participating for 60 days or more had a school-day absence rate 19 and 15 percent lower than students who did not participate in the program.⁴
- ▶ **Greater improvement in school-day attendance among regularly attending students:** Students regularly participating in New Jersey's Community Learning Centers saw statistically significant reductions in school-day truancy compared to their non-participating peers. The evaluation found that students with very high levels of attendance (attending the program 70 days or more) demonstrated an even greater reduction in truancy.⁵
- ▶ **Decreased chronic absenteeism:** An evaluation found that students participating in the Oakland Unified School District's afterschool programs were less likely than non-participants to be chronically absent from school, and as a whole, increased their school-day attendance by 35,343 days in the 2010-11 school year, earning the district as much as approximately \$1 million in additional revenue.⁶

Students regularly attending Washington State's Community Learning Centers saw improvements in their reading and math achievement, as well as a positive impact on their overall GPA, compared to students not enrolled in the program.



Images provided by The 50 State Afterschool Network

Community Learning Centers help to keep kids engaged

- ▶ **Improved class participation and homework completion:** A statewide evaluation of Community Learning Centers in West Virginia found that, based on teachers surveyed, students participating in the programs saw improvements in their school day engagement. Teachers reported that close to 7 in 10 students participating in Community Learning Centers improved their homework completion and class participation.⁷
- ▶ **Positive impact on students in most need of improvement:** An evaluation of North Dakota’s Community Learning Centers found that of student participants who needed to improve their class participation and motivation, teachers reported that 60 percent improved their class participation and more than half (51 percent) showed improvement in coming to school motivated to learn. Additionally, 3 in 4 parents agreed that their child’s attitude toward school improved because of the program.⁸
- ▶ **Boost to students’ motivation to learn:** An evaluation of New Hampshire’s Community Learning Centers found that teachers reported that 64 percent of students who regularly participated in the program were more successful finishing their homework and 60 percent increased their level of class participation. Close to all principals surveyed (98 percent) reported that the programs improved students’ attitudes toward school and 93 percent believed the programs boosted students’ motivation to learn.⁹

Among North Dakota’s Community Learning Center participants:



3 out of 5 students improved their class participation



3 out of 4 parents said that their child’s attitude toward school improved because of the program.



Community Learning Centers help to improve students' foundational skills

- ▶ **Stronger communication and collaboration skills:** An evaluation of Arkansas' Community Learning Centers found that an overwhelming majority of students in the programs—an average of 71 percent—reported that the program helped them with their communication and collaboration skills, such as working well with others and sharing their thoughts with other students, even if they disagreed. Additionally, a strong majority of students—an average of 65 percent—reported having positive academic habits.¹⁰
- ▶ **Improved relationships between students:** An evaluation of Nevada's Community Learning Centers found that teachers, students, and parents surveyed reported positive outcomes related to program participation. Teachers reported that 61 percent of students regularly attending the program got along better with other students and 60 percent improved their classroom behavior. Additionally, an overwhelming majority of students reported that the programs had a positive impact on their life (88 percent) and almost all parents surveyed (99 percent) believed that the program had a positive impact on their or their child's life.¹¹
- ▶ **Decreased disciplinary incidents:** Evaluations of the Texas' Afterschool Centers on Education found a statistically significant relationship between regular participation in the program and fewer school-day disciplinary incidents. For instance, a 2016 evaluation found that high school students attending the program for 60 days or more had a school-day disciplinary incidence rate 23 percent lower than students not in the program.¹²

For more research on the impact of 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs, visit afterschoolalliance.org.

Among Arkansas' Community Learning Center participants:



7 out of 10 students reported that the program helped them with their communication and collaboration skills.

Among Nevada's Community Learning Center participants:



3 out of 5 students got along better with other students and improved their classroom behavior.

Endnotes

1. Huang, D. & Wang, J. (2012). *Independent Statewide Evaluation of High School After School Programs*. National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, University of California, Los Angeles. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ba/cp/uclaeval.asp>
2. Naftzger, N., Vinson, M., Liu, F., Zhu, B., & Foley, K. (2014). *Washington 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program Evaluation: Year 2*. American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from <http://www.k12.wa.us/21stCenturyLearning/pubdocs/14-1167WA21CCLCFinalYear2Report-ed.pdf>
3. American Institutes for Research. (2016). *Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers: 2014-15 Evaluation Report*. Retrieved from http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=3546&menu_id=814; American Institutes for Research. (2013). *Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers: Year 2 Evaluation Report*. Retrieved from http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=3546&menu_id=814
4. American Institutes for Research. (2016). *Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers: 2014-15 Evaluation Report*. Retrieved from http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=3546&menu_id=814; American Institutes for Research. (2013). *Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers: Year 2 Evaluation Report*. Retrieved from http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=3546&menu_id=814
5. Vinson, M., Sniegowski, S., & Liu, F. (2015). *New Jersey 21st Century Community Learning Centers Year 2 Report: 2013-14 Program Year*. American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from <http://www.state.nj.us/education/students/safety/afterschool/eval/1314Report.pdf>
6. Public Profit. (2011). *Oakland Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation: Findings Report 2010-11*. Retrieved from https://www.ousd.org/cms/lib07/CA01001176/Centricity/Domain/79/Oakland_OST_Findings_Report_Executive_Summary_10.17.11.pdf
7. Hammer, P.C. & Whisman, A. (2017). *21st Century Community Learning Centers, 2015-2016: A descriptive evaluation*. West Virginia Department of Education, Division of Technology, Office of Research, Accountability, and Data Governance. Retrieved from <https://wvde.state.wv.us/21stcccl/documents/21stCenturyCommunityLearningCenters2015-2016ADescriptiveEvaluation.pdf>
8. Westwood Research & Statistical Services. (2017). *2015-16 School Year Statewide Evaluation*.
9. Russell, C.A. & Woods, Y. (2012). *Evaluation of the New Hampshire 21st Century Community Learning Centers: Findings from the 2011-12 School Year*. Policy Studies Associates, Inc.
10. The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. (2016). *Arkansas 21st Century Community Learning Centers Statewide Evaluation 2014-2015 Annual Report*. The Forum for Youth Investment. Retrieved from http://www.arkansased.gov/public/userfiles/Public_School_Accountability/Federal_Programs/21_CCLC/Arkansas_21st_CCLC_Statewide_Evaluation_Report_2014_15_Final.pdf
11. Leitner, D. (2016). *21st Century Community Learning Centers 2015-16 Evaluation Report*. Pacific Research Associates.
12. American Institutes for Research. (2016). *Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers: 2014-15 Evaluation Report*. Retrieved from http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=3546&menu_id=814; American Institutes for Research. (2013). *Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers: Year 2 Evaluation Report*. Retrieved from http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=3546&menu_id=814