

21st Century Community Learning Centers

Accelerating Learning. Supporting Families. Earning Results.

Afterschool programs inspire kids to learn and support academic growth, help them build foundational skills like the ability to communicate effectively and think critically, and give parents peace of mind knowing that their child is in a safe space with caring adults.

For more than 25 years, 21st Century Community Learning Centers have helped young people academically and socially and met the needs of families nationwide. But the demand for these programs far exceeds the supply. Nearly **23 million children are not in an afterschool program**, but would be if a program were available to them.¹

21st Century Community Learning Centers **serve nearly 1.4 million children**, providing afterschool and summer learning opportunities in every state. Programs are selected for funding based on their ability to meet the needs of students and families and their connection to education priorities in the state. However, **only 1 in 3 funding requests are awarded** due to intense competition and a lack of adequate federal funding.

THESE COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS PROVIDE:²



opportunities for new, hands-on, academically enriching learning experiences to meet the challenging state academic standards;



a broad array of additional services, programs, and activities, focusing on subjects like science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), physical fitness and wellness, drug and violence prevention, nutrition and health education, service learning, youth development, and arts and music;



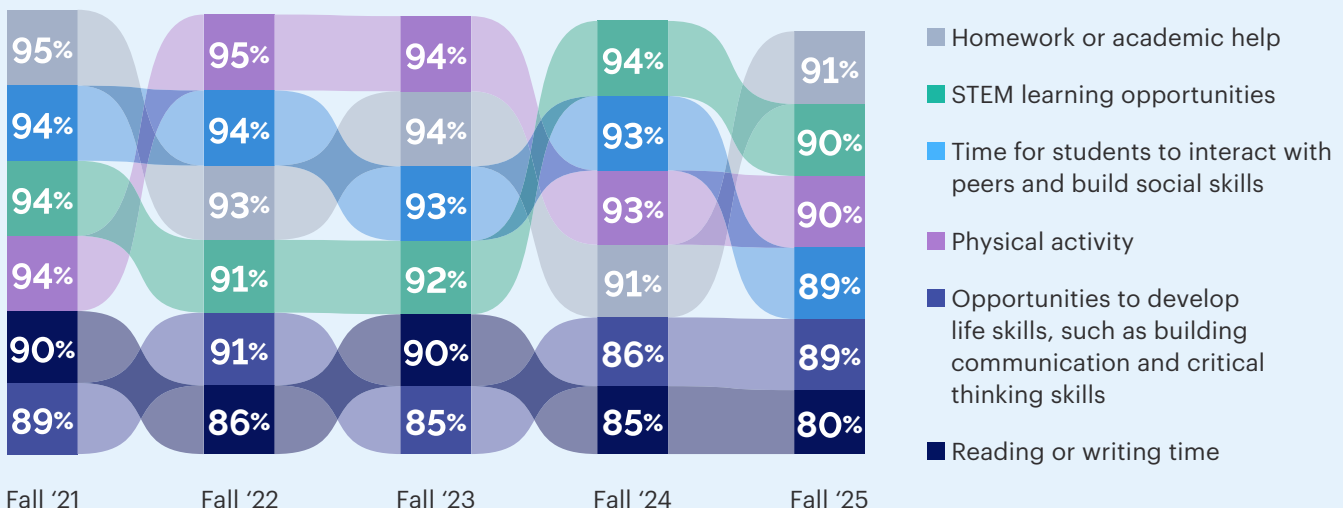
activities that tie into in-demand industry sectors or occupations that are designed to reinforce and complement the academic program of participating students, including, but not limited to, financial and environmental literacy, career readiness, internships, and apprenticeships; and



families of students with opportunities for active and meaningful engagement in their children’s education, including opportunities for literacy and related educational development.

HELPING STUDENTS CATCH UP ACADEMICALLY AND SOCIALLY³

Community Learning Centers are providing students critical supports—from accelerating their academic growth to developing skills they will need in school and out.



Strong Results

Having afterschool choices helps students learn and grow, helps parents balance work and life, and helps employers hire the local workforce they need in the present and the future. Afterschool and summer learning programs focus on the whole child, engaging students in enriching learning experiences that will help them reach their full potential.

AMONG STUDENTS ATTENDING A COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTER:⁴



7 in 10 improved their engagement in learning



2 in 5 who had a GPA below 3.0 the previous year improved their GPA



Approximately 2 in 5 demonstrated growth on their state assessments in reading/language arts or math



Nearly 3 in 5 who were chronically absent the previous school year improved their school-day attendance

Regular attendance produces greater gains

A large-scale study of approximately 3,000 low-income, ethnically diverse elementary and middle school students found that those who regularly attended high-quality programs (including Community Learning Centers) for more than two years gained up to 20 percentiles in standardized math test scores compared with peers who were routinely unsupervised during the afterschool hours. Students with lower program attendance gained 12 percentiles compared with their non-participating peers.⁵

SUPPORTING ACADEMIC SUCCESS

- Statewide evaluations of 21st CCLC programs have found a positive impact on student engagement, motivation in school, on-time grade promotion, and graduation rates.⁶
- The most recent national 21st CCLC annual performance report found that students in the program saw improvements in their engagement in learning, GPAs, and reading and math state assessments, as well as experienced decreases in chronic absenteeism and in-school suspensions.⁴
- Regular participation in afterschool programs helped narrow the achievement gap between high- and low-income students in math, improved academic and behavioral outcomes, and reduced school absences.⁷

SUPPORTING THE WORKFORCE OF TODAY AND TOMORROW

- Businesses want to hire problem solvers and team players. Students learn by doing in afterschool programs and develop the skills they need for the jobs of tomorrow.
- A fall 2025 survey found that overwhelming majorities of 21st CCLC program providers reported providing STEM learning (90%), chances to develop life skills (89%), and leadership opportunities (64%).⁸
- Students regularly participating in 21st CCLC programs see gains in skills and competencies valued by employers, such as the ability to communicate well, collaborate with others, and think critically.⁹
- Jobs in science, technology, engineering, and math are driving global economic growth. Approximately 5.7 million students are getting opportunities to develop an interest and explore STEM in afterschool.¹⁰
- More than 5 in 6 parents agree that afterschool programs help working parents keep their jobs or work more hours, and give them peace of mind knowing their child is safe.¹

“ This special environment we are all able to come to every day after school has helped me become a kinder, smarter, more empathetic, and more self-expressive person.”

—ISSA, D.C., 21ST CCLC PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

Community Learning Centers Support Students' Academic Growth and Future Success

In addition to providing a range of services that complement students' regular academic programs, a number of 21st CCLC statewide evaluations find that students participating in programs experience positive gains in their academic performance, school-day attendance, engagement in learning, and attitude toward school. Programs also play a critical role for the workforce—providing peace of mind to working families and building the foundational skills that young people's future employers want.



BOOSTING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Roughly 9 in 10 students participating in Oklahoma's 21st CCLCs **improved their math (92%) and English language arts (ELA) test scores (87%)**. Additionally, students attending Oklahoma CCLCs for 270 hours or more demonstrated the greatest gains in both math and ELA state assessments.ⁱ

In Colorado, GPA data for students in grades 7-8 and 10-12 showed that **more than 3 in 5 21st CCLC participants who had a GPA below 3.0** in the previous year (63%) **improved their GPA**.ⁱⁱ

A **higher percentage** of Indiana's 21st CCLC participants attending at least 90 days **improved their grade or maintained a B or better** on their spring semester math and ELA grades compared to students attending less frequently.ⁱⁱⁱ Similarly, students in Virginia 21st CCLC programs who **attended more than 270 hours were significantly more likely to show an improvement in their GPA** than students who attended programming less frequently.^{iv}

Students also report that their CCLCs are supporting their performance in school. In Michigan, **3 in 4** participating students reported that program activities **help them do better in school**.^v And in Wisconsin, **4 in 5 students (81%) agree** that their program has **helped them improve their grades**.^{vi}



REDUCING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Nationally, **nearly 3 in 5 21st CCLC participants (59%)** who were chronically absent the previous year **improved their school-day attendance**.^{vii}

In addition to Virginia students participating in 21st CCLC programs having better overall attendance rates compared to their non-participating peers, **participating students receiving special education services showed the most significant gains in attendance, with an average of 4.5 more school days attended** than non-participating students receiving special education services.^{iv}

Aimed at providing essential support to underserved students, 21st CCLCs are particularly effective in improving outcomes for students furthest from economic opportunity. In North Dakota, 21st CCLC participants from low-income families saw greater improvements in their school-day attendance than their non-participating counterparts. **Seventy-two percent of low-income 21st CCLC participants** with an attendance rate of 90% or less **improved their attendance**, 10 percentage points higher than their low-income, non-participating peers (62%).^{viii}

i. David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. (2023). *Evaluating Oklahoma's 21st Century Community Learning Centers: 2021-2022 Statewide Evaluation Report*. The Forum for Youth Investment.

ii. Catherine Roller White Consulting LLC. (2025). *2022-2023 Program Year Statewide Evaluation 21st Century Community Learning Centers*.

iii. Diehl Consulting Group. (2024). *Indiana 21st Century Community Learning Centers Statewide Evaluation Report: 2022-2023*.

iv. Muzzi, C., McKinney, R., Black, J., & Zoblotsky, T. (2023). *Evaluation of Virginia's 21st Century Community Learning Centers 2021-2022*. The Center for Research in Education Policy, University of Memphis.



IMPROVING SCHOOL-DAY ENGAGEMENT AND BEHAVIOR



Washington teachers reported that a majority of students attending 21st CCLC programs who needed to improve made progress in several areas, including **participating in**

learning activities (57%), being attentive during learning activities (54%), and being motivated to learn (51%).^{ix}

21st CCLCs also keep older students engaged and connected to school. More than **8 in 10** of Delaware's 21st CCLC participants in 9th-12th grade (83%) reported **feeling more connected to their school** because of their program.^x Similarly, Kentucky's middle and high school CCLC participants overwhelmingly agreed that their program helped them **become more involved in school (82%), enjoy attending school (74%), and stay out of trouble (82%).**^{xi}

Evaluations also show that CCLCs may have a positive cumulative effect on behavior. In Indiana, **students who attended 21st CCLC programs for more than 60 days per school year over the course of 3 or 4 years were significantly less likely to be suspended** than those participating less frequently.ⁱⁱⁱ



SUPPORTING THE CURRENT AND FUTURE WORKFORCE

21st CCLCs support working families and equip young people with the transferable skills and competencies that will contribute to successful futures. In North Dakota, **92% of parents with a child in a 21st CCLC program** agreed that programs allow them to **keep their jobs**. Evaluators estimated that **CCLC programs' economic impact in the state was up to \$33 million** through child care cost savings and additional economic activity from working families during program hours.^{xii}

Among middle and high school students in Montana's 21st CCLC program, more than 9 in 10 reported that their program had helped them with **being responsible (95%), making good decisions (94%), working with others (93%), and handling problems (92%).**^{xiii} And in New Jersey, an overwhelming majority of participants agreed that programs helped them **discover their interests (82%), build their confidence (74%), and learn things that will be important for their future (80%).**^{xiv}

In Ohio, **92%** of participating high school students **successfully graduated**, and approximately **2 in 3 students** reported that because of the program, **they were more aware of the career they might pursue (69%) and career next steps (64%).**^{xv}

v. Wu, J., Yang, N., Prince, B., & Stoddard, D. (2025). *Michigan Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers Evaluation 2023-2024 Annual Report*.

vi. Chapa, B., Marlin, D., Sim, G., Werley, N., Wineburg, A., & Wilson, J. (2025). *Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers 2023-2024 Annual Report*. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

vii. U.S. Department of Education. (2024). *21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) analytic support for evaluation and program monitoring: An overview of the 21st CCLC performance data: 2022-2023 (19th report)*.

viii. Hektner, J. (2024). *Evaluation of 21st Century Community Learning Centers in North Dakota 2022-2023 GPRA Outcomes with Spring 2024 Survey Results*. Department of Human Development and Family Science, North Dakota State University.

ix. Gross, K. & Sniogowski, S. (2025). *Washington Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers Statewide Evaluation 2023-24 Program Year Report*. American Institutes for Research.

x. Spearing, D. (2022). *21st CCLC Subgrantee Evaluation Delaware Department of Education*. Via Evaluation.

xi. Center for Evaluation, Policy, and Research. (2024). *Kentucky 21st Century Community Learning Centers Initiative Evaluation of the 2022-2023 Statewide Results*. Indiana University.

xii. Arcaira, E., Brown, T., & Grady, J. (2025). *21st Century Community Learning Centers State of North Dakota State Evaluation SY 2023-2024*. Alvarez & Marsal.

xiii. Resendez, M. & Ray, J. (2023). *Montana 21st Century Community Learning Centers State Evaluation Report: 2021-22*. JEM & R, LLC.

xiv. American Institutes for Research. (2024). *New Jersey 21st Century Community Learning Centers Year 4 Evaluation Report: Descriptive Data and Attendance Study for 2022-23*.

xv. UC Evaluation Services Center. (2025). *Ohio's 21st Century Community Learning Centers 2023-24 Annual Report*.

Community Learning Centers by the Numbers⁴

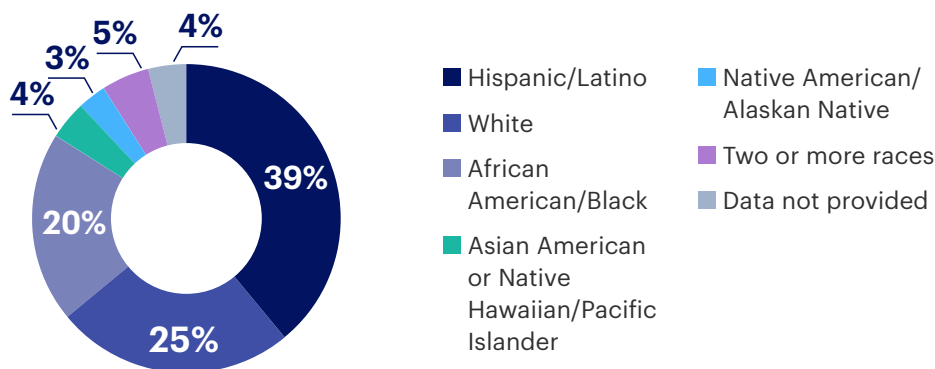
21st Century Community Learning Centers provide essential support to students, many of whom are from underserved communities, and offer creative, engaging learning opportunities to kids of all ages and backgrounds.

1,382,476 PRE-K-12TH GRADE CHILDREN AND YOUTH ARE IN COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS

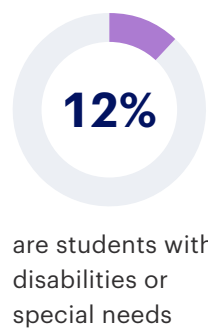
428,884 ADULTS AND FAMILY MEMBERS SERVED



COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS ARE SERVING A DIVERSE GROUP OF STUDENTS...



...AS WELL AS REACHING STUDENTS WHO MAY NEED ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS AND THEIR FAMILIES.



“My daughter is on the autism spectrum, and when she first started with the 21st Century program, she was extremely timid and struggled with social interactions... However, **the staff at her school went above and beyond to support her individual needs.** They took the time to understand her challenges, worked closely with her, and developed strategies that helped her feel safe, welcomed, and included. **Thanks to their consistent patience, encouragement, and care, my daughter has made remarkable progress—both socially and academically.**”

—PARENT OF ALABAMA 21ST CCLC PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

THE TOP 5 ACTIVITIES IN COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS



ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT

Total hours: **2.6 Million**



HEALTHY AND ACTIVE LIFESTYLE ACTIVITIES

Total hours: **1.98 Million**



WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

(including credit recovery or attainment)

Total hours: **1.5 Million**



STEM LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Total hours: **1.5 Million**



LITERACY ACTIVITIES

Total hours: **906,000**

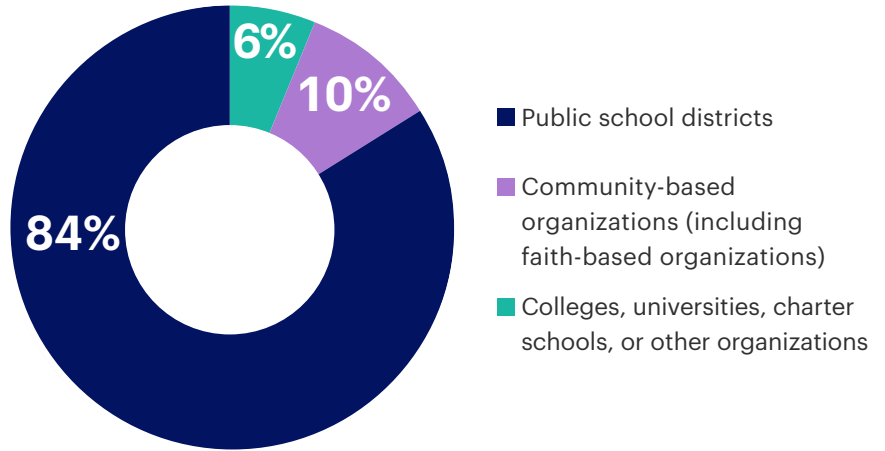


A resilient third grader with a quiet strength beyond his years had faced more challenges than most kids his age. Despite the uncertainty at home, he came to school each day with a sense of wonder and a hunger to learn. This year, his class participated in Trout in the Classroom, funded by our 21st Century Grant, where students learned to care for trout from eggs to fingerlings...

The project gave him a sense of purpose, and he began to see himself as a caretaker and scientist...When his class planned an overnight camping trip and learning experience near the Colorado Headwaters Museum, he was excited—but also unsure. He didn't have the gear most kids would bring: no sleeping bag, no backpack, not even a water bottle. But thanks to 21st Century Grant funding, we were able to ensure he had everything he needed... Back at school, he carried himself differently. **The combination of the trout project, the camping experience, and the support of the 21st Century Grant gave him something deeper than school—it gave him belonging, purpose, and a vision of himself as someone who can shape the world around him.**

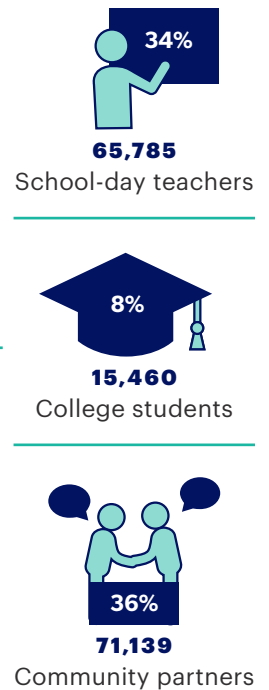
—COLORADO 21ST CCLC PROGRAM PROVIDER

PRIMARILY IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS, COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS ALSO BRING IN COMMUNITY PARTNERS



TOTAL CENTERS 9,985

TOTAL STAFF 195,308



Driven by Local Needs

21st Century Community Learning Centers work closely with schools, youth and community groups, faith-based organizations, and businesses. Each program is shaped by the local community to best meet the needs of the people and organizations it serves. Grantees have an average of 9 partner organizations.¹¹ A typical program receives \$67,000 from partners.¹²

BETWEEN 2006 AND 2010, PARTNERS CONTRIBUTED MORE THAN \$1 BILLION.

Funding and Unmet Demand

More than 3 in 4 children whose parents want them to be in an afterschool program are unable to access one. This unmet demand is highest among children in low- and middle-income families compared to children in families with high incomes.¹

Reinforcing these findings, a recent program provider survey found that a strong majority of 21st CCLC providers (60%) are extremely or very concerned that there are children in their community who need afterschool programming, but are missing out, and more than half report a waitlist for their program, higher than non-21st CCLC programs (52% vs. 45%).⁸

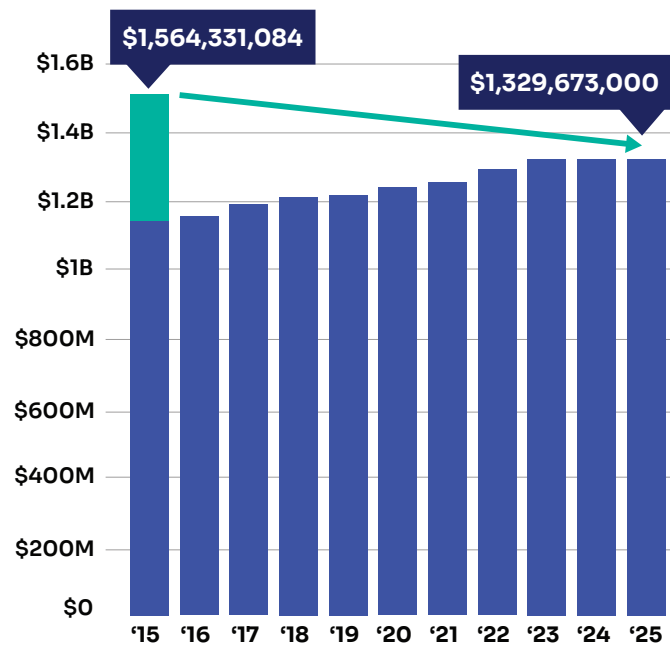
At the same time, 21st CCLC program providers report significant concerns related to their program's current and future sustainability:

- 86% are very worried that proposed cuts to the federal education budget would impact their program in the future
- 80% are very worried about their program's long-term funding and the program's future; approximately 2 in 3 are very worried about loss of funding to their program in the current year (65%)
- 64% are very concerned about their ability to pay staff a livable wage and benefits
- Nearly 4 in 10 providers (39%) say that their program's weekly cost-per-child has increased in the last year

Despite rising demand and budgetary challenges programs face, 21st CCLC funding—the only sustained federal funding source dedicated exclusively to providing afterschool and summer learning opportunities for children and youth—has largely remained flat over the past decade. After adjusting for inflation, the current funding level is more than \$234 million below the 2015 level.¹³ The need for additional supports to increase available afterschool programs and student slots to meet this demand is evident.

HISTORY OF FUNDING FOR 21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS

2015 appropriations level, adjusted for inflation



Only **1 in 3** requests for funding Community Learning Centers is awarded. Over the span of 10 years, **\$4 BILLION** in local grant requests were denied because of intense competition and a lack of adequate federal funding.¹⁴

Afterschool is a smart investment in our children's future

EVERY \$1 INVESTED IN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS SAVES \$3 BY¹⁵

- ✓ Increasing kids' earning potential
- ✓ Improving kids' performance at school
- ✓ Reducing crime and welfare costs

SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC INVESTMENTS IS STRONG AND BIPARTISAN¹



93% Democrats



89% Independents



87% Republicans

Endnotes

1. Afterschool Alliance. (2025). *Lost Opportunity: Afterschool Programs in Demand, But Out of Reach for Many*.
2. Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. S. 1177—182, Part B—21st Century Community Learning Centers.
3. Afterschool Alliance. (2025). [Unpublished raw data from Afterschool Alliance’s program provider surveys conducted spring 2020 through fall 2025].
4. U.S. Department of Education. (2024). *21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) analytic support for evaluation and program monitoring: An overview of the 21st CCLC performance data: 2022-2023 (19th report)*.
5. Vandell, D. L., Reisner, E. R. & Pierce, K. M. (2007). *Outcomes Linked to High Quality Afterschool Programs: Longitudinal Findings from the Study of Promising Afterschool Programs*. Policy Studies Associates, Inc.
6. Afterschool Alliance. (2023). *Recent Evaluations of 21st Century Community Learning Centers Illustrate Wide Range of Benefits*.
7. Pierce, K. M., Auger, A. & Vandell, D. L. (2013). *Narrowing the Achievement Gap: Consistency and intensity of structured activities during elementary school*. Unpublished paper presented at the Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Seattle Wa.
8. Afterschool Alliance. (2025). [Unpublished raw data from Afterschool Alliance’s program provider survey fielded Oct. 27 – Dec. 22, 2025].
9. Afterschool Alliance. (2023). *Recent Evaluations of 21st Century Community Learning Centers Illustrate Wide Range of Benefits*.
10. Afterschool Alliance. (2021). *STEM Learning in Afterschool on the Rise, But Barriers and Inequities Exist*.
11. Learning Point Associates. Profile and Performance Information Collection System (PPICS). Data retrieved May 1, 2014.
12. Griffin, S. S. & Martinez, L. (2013). The Value of Partnerships in Afterschool and Summer Learning: A National Case Study of 21st Century Community Learning Centers. *Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success*.
13. Afterschool Alliance calculation based on federal appropriations for 21st Century Community Learning Centers.
14. O’Donnell, P. & Ford, J. R. (2013). The Continuing Demand for 21st Century Community Learning Centers Across America: More Than Four Billion Dollars of Unmet Need. *Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success*.
15. Afterschool Alliance estimate based on findings from state-level return on investment studies conducted in states that include California, Georgia, Maryland, Oklahoma, and Vermont.

