

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

Project Staff
Andrew Moellmer
Joseph Shields
Sonia Castañeda

**Office for Planning, Grants, and Evaluation
Texas Education Agency
January 2005**

Executive Summary

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st 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 21st 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 21st 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 21st 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 21st 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 21st 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 stude

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 21st 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 21st CCLC program.