Participation in Michigan's 21st CCLC

Findings from the State Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) Program funds out-of-school-time activities for K-12 students in high-poverty areas. The goal is to expand academic enrichment and youth development opportunities for students attending low-performing schools. Many programs target specific subgroups such as low-achieving students or English language learners. Each grantee serves students in up to five different school or community sites.

In this brief, we report on student participation in Michigan programs, using data from the state evaluation conducted by the Community Evaluation and Research Center (CERC) at Michigan State University.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PARTICIPATION?

Participation is important to success because students must attend the program regularly over time in order to benefit. Participation has several dimensions and can be measured in different ways. One approach, from Chaput, Little, and Weiss (2004) suggests that we measure attendance across four different dimensions:

- **Ever participated** – Students enroll in the program and *attend at least once*.

- **Intensity** – The *total amount of time* a participant spends in program activities.

- **Duration** – The *length of time* a participant attends the program.

- **Breadth** – The *number and variety of activities* the participant engages in.

In this brief, we report on each dimension of participation in Michigan 21st CCLC programs and discuss the implications of our findings for policy and practice.

Data on participation was taken from a Web-based attendance tracking system, annual program reports, parent and student surveys, and school achievement data.

Details of the data sources and analyses can be found in the technical report at outreach.msu.edu/cerc/documents/21CCLC_Participation_tech_report.pdf.

Soaring Beyond Expectations

MICHIGAN STATE
U N I V E R S I T Y

FINDINGS

We present findings in three different areas:

1. Program success in enrolling students from different ethnic groups and grade levels and students at risk of low academic performance.

2. Intensity, duration, and breadth of student participation, including program success in retaining students at risk of low academic performance and students of different genders and grade levels.

3. Students' and parents' reasons for enrolling and program staff reports about what influences student attendance.

Recruitment of Participants: Students Who Ever Participated

We considered students "enrolled" if they attended at least once. This group represents those at the first level of attendance—*ever participated*.

Figure 1: Total Enrollment by Year

Programs served 48,870 different students statewide during the first three years (2003-2006).

At a typical program site:

- 31% of the students in the school enrolled in the program.
- 16% of the students in the school attended the program for at least 30 days.

Most grantees recruited students who were ethnically representative of the students in their schools.

Many grantees told us in their annual reports that they did not deliberately set out to recruit a group that was representative of the student population. Instead, most of these grantees sought to recruit low-achieving students of any ethnic group. Nevertheless, it is important to appeal to students from all groups within the school. In 2005-2006, among sites serving schools with a diverse student body:

- White students were somewhat over-represented at 16 of 99 sites where white students were part of a diverse school population.
- Programs who served schools with Hispanic students were successful in recruiting those students into programs.
- Some programs specifically targeted Arabic students. Because schools do not report information about Arabic students, we cannot tell how well these programs represented the ethnic makeup of the schools.
  - Five sites had 30 or more students in their programs identified as ethnically Arabic.
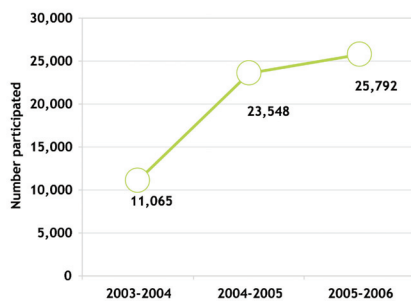 - Arabic students constituted between 16% and 98% of participants at these five sites.

Programs were successful in recruiting students who were at risk of low academic performance.

Among students for whom school achievement data were available in 2005-2006:

- 72% of students recruited into the program had a history of low academic performance.
- Sites where parents reported that school personnel suggested their children enroll were more successful in recruiting at-risk students.

Programs for middle and high school students (6th – 12th grades) served even higher percentages of academically at-risk students.

- In 2005-2006 over 80% of middle and high school students for whom achievement data were available had a history of low academic performance.

Retention of Participants: Intensity and Duration of Participation

Research has shown that regular attendance over time is key to achieving good results. We used two measures of retention: intensity and duration.

Intensity, or attending regularly

For the 21st CCLC program, "regular" attendance was defined by the federal funders as having attended the program 30 days or more in a program year.

Programs have had some success in achieving regular attendance, but there is room for improvement.

On average in the 2005-2006 program year:

- 21% attended between 30 and 59 days.
- 22% attended at least 60 days.

Academically "at-risk" students were less likely to attend regularly than were students not at risk.
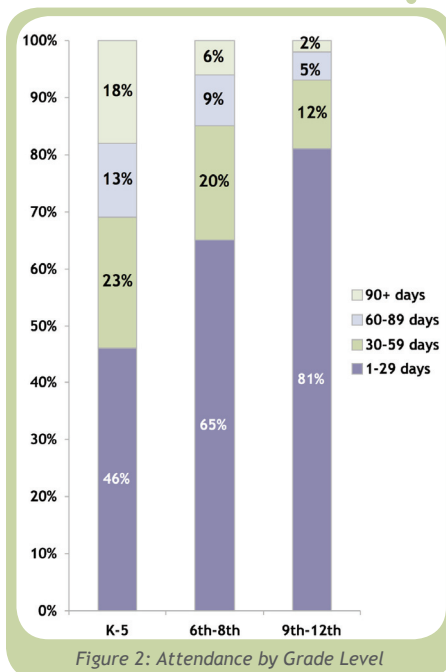
- 54% of students who were not at risk attended at least 30 days.
- 45% of academically at-risk students attended at least 30 days.

Programs have had more success in retaining younger students than older students.

- As Figure 2 shows, student attendance varies according to grade level. As students grow older they are less likely to attend regularly.

Programs recruited virtually equal proportions of boys and girls; however, girls attended somewhat more regularly.

- Girls attended an average of 6 hours more than boys.

K-5: 18%, 13%, 23%, 46%
6th-8th: 6%, 9%, 20%, 65%
9th-12th: 2%, 5%, 12%, 81%

Legend: 90+ days, 60-89 days, 30-59 days, 1-29 days

Figure 2: Attendance by Grade Level

Duration, or the length of time a student participates

As a measure of duration, we looked at the number of students who attended for more than one year.

A relatively small percentage of students attended for more than one program year.

Of the students who could have attended for two or three years, respectively:

- 30% attended for two years.
- 12% attended all three years.

Breadth of Participation: Participation in a Variety of Activities

Research has shown that a rich learning environment includes a variety of activities. Activities should offer opportunities to build new skills, think critically, and practice leadership. We assessed the breadth of student participation as the number and types of activities they attended.

Students participated in a variety of activities; however, not all students participated in activities important for a rich learning environment.

Figure 3 shows the types of activities that students participated in:

- Students were most likely to participate in homework help/tutoring or recreation.
- Not all students participated in academic activities—not even regular attendees—despite the program's focus on provision of academic support.
- Less than two-thirds participated in arts or youth development, which are important to a "rich learning environment."
- Students were least likely to participate in academic enrichment activities beyond homework help and tutoring. These other activities embed academic skill-building in project-oriented activities.

Most youth participated in multiple activities or single activities that served several different purposes.

Activities could serve more than one educational purpose.

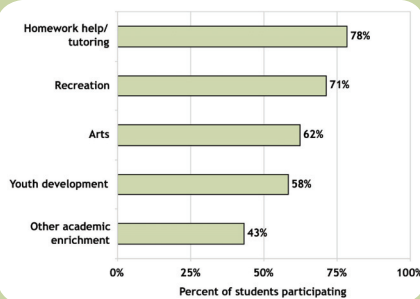- About two-thirds of students participated in three or more different types of activities.

Figure 3: Percent of Students Who Participated in Each Type of Activity

Why Do Students Participate? Why Do Parents Want Students to Come?

In yearly surveys, students and parents were asked for their views of the program and reasons for enrolling.

Most students came because they were interested, but a substantial proportion came at the request of parents.

In the 2006 survey, students were asked the most important reason why they enrolled. Among those who answered:

- 70% said they came because they "want to."
- 25% said a parent wanted them to come.
- 5% said a school teacher, principal, or counselor wanted them to come.
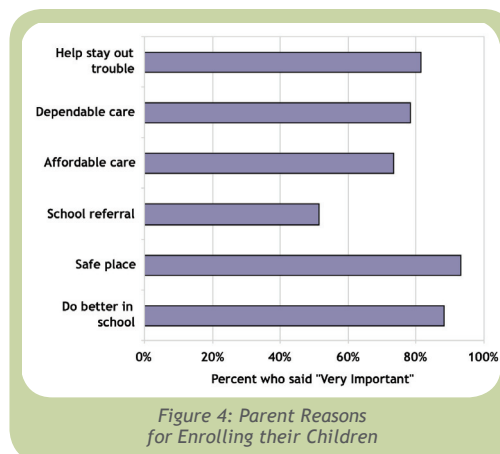
Children and youth came to have fun but also to learn.

In an earlier (2004) survey, students were asked to rate the importance of different reasons for enrolling.

- 53% enrolled because it sounded fun.
- 58% enrolled to help them do better in school.

Parents enrolled children for two primary reasons: To ensure that their children had safe, affordable child care and for academic support.

- As Figure 4 shows, most parents said that they enrolled their children in order to have safe, affordable child care and/or to help their child do better in school.
- About half said a school referral was one reason for enrolling their child.

Figure 4: Parent Reasons for Enrolling their Children

What Do Grantees Say Influences Student Attendance?

In their annual reports, the 34 grantees cited factors that influence attendance positively or negatively. The most frequently mentioned were:

- Competing activities (26).
- Family factors (19), such as family responsibilities of students, family mobility or parent involvement.
- Program factors (19), such as scheduling of activities, transportation, use of incentives, collaborative relationships, or marketing strategies.
- The level of student interest in the activities offered (12).
- Lack of program attendance policies or strict attendance policies (9).
- Student characteristics (9), such as age, gender, ethnicity, or attitudes of their peers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

For Recruitment

Enlist school personnel in recruiting academically at-risk children.

- It is not surprising that programs where parents said teachers suggested enrolling their children were most successful in recruiting academically at-risk students. The opinions of school personnel are generally highly regarded by parents.

Suggestions from grantees for engaging school personnel in recruitment of academically at-risk students:

- Involve the superintendent and principals in planning for recruitment.
- Involve the Title I teacher in planning for recruitment.

Engage parents in planning and recruitment.

- Over 80% of parents said they enrolled their children in part to help them do better in school.
- 25% of children enrolled because their parents wanted them to come.
- One grantee said that involving parents in program planning helped recruit both low-achieving students and the general population.

A few sites should develop more effective strategies to attract ethnically diverse groups of students.

- Nationally, data shows that white students are more likely to engage in after-school activities.
- To be successful, programs must deliberately focus recruitment efforts toward groups that represent the school population.
- In programs where one group is a small minority, special care must be taken to be sure they feel welcome and comfortable.

For Retention

Regular attendance is a continuing challenge for programs.

- Programs need to develop better strategies for engaging certain types of students, such as academically at-risk students, boys, and older youth.

- Middle school programs face challenges from competing activities. Some programs have coordinated with other activities to reduce competition.

- Increasing the involvement of middle and high school students in program planning and development can engage students to attend on a more regular basis.

- Transportation can affect attendance at some sites where parents do not have easy access to cars.

- Scheduling of activities can affect attendance for some programs. Monitoring attendance data has helped some programs determine if scheduling adjustments might improve attendance.

Programs need to focus on developing high-quality activities that are likely to achieve the program goals. All students should be exposed to academic and learning enrichment activities.

- As a main goal of the 21st CCLC program is academic improvement, grantees should ensure that all participants engage in some academic activities.

- Program developers need to emphasize providing more activities that offer opportunities for critical thinking and active learning. Academic enrichment and arts activities are most likely to provide these opportunities.
Youth development activities should provide students with important opportunities for leadership and character development.

- One grantee noted that middle school boys will always choose sports or computers over academics; thus, activities that offer disguised learning in these areas of interest might attract more boys.

- Another grantee suggested that the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation's Youth Program Quality Assessment (Y.P.Q.A.) strategies give practical ideas for youth development and leadership for programs that do not have any curriculum for those areas.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Attendance

Chaput, S. S., Little, P., & Weiss, H. (2004, August). *Understanding and measuring attendance in out-of-school time programs* (Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation Briefs, No. 7). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. Available from www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/pubs.html

Harvard Family Research Project. (2007). *Demographic differences in youth out-of-school-time participation: A research summary.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education. Available from www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/pubs.html

Program Quality

Eccles, J., & Gootman, J.A., Eds. (2002). *Community programs to promote youth development.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. (n.d.). *Youth PQA.* Retrieved August 9, 2007 from highscope.org/content.asp?contentid=117

COMMUNITY EVALUATION AND RESEARCH CENTER

outreach.msu.edu/cerc

MICHIGAN STATE
U N I V E R S I T Y