

## All Work and No Play? Academic Impacts of Leisure Activity in Out-of-School Time Programming

Designed to improve outcomes for children from high-poverty, low-performing schools, Michigan's 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) program emphasizes academic learning and academic outcomes. **Our study finding suggests that children from disadvantaged backgrounds might be better served if 21st CCLC programs balanced their heavy academic focus with play and leisure activities.**

### Improving Academic Performance with Play

We examined the effects of participation in academic and leisure activities in Michigan 21st CCLC programs on English Language Arts (ELA) and math grades among participants in grades 7 and 8. Leisure activities were defined as any non-academic activity: social time, sports, arts, community services, social-emotional support, etc. **After controlling for demographic differences, our study found that the dosage of leisure activities was linked to better math grades, while the dosage of academic activities was not linked to improvement in either ELA or math.**

No racial gap in grades emerged. Being male or receiving FRPL was associated with lower grades in both ELA and math. Older children and those receiving special education services tended to have lower ELA grades, while ELLs tended to have higher ELA grades. A 10-hour increase in leisure activity time was associated with an increase in the math grade point of approximately 0.02 (A = grade point 4; B = 3).



The study sample includes 1,328 students (return rate = 64%) from 48 sites who participated in Michigan's 21st CCLC programs during the 2022–23 school year. The majority were academically at-risk (92%) and received free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL, 86%). About 51% were female, 67% were non-White, 20% received special education services, and a bit less than 7% were English language learners (ELLs).

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