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21st Century Community Learning Centers

A Descriptive Evaluation for 2011-2012

Teachers perceived the greatest improvements in the promptness and quality of homework turned in by students, and their overall academic performance and participation in class.

Nearly three quarters of program directors found the continuous improvement process for after school helpful. Likewise, the great majority found the WVDE monitoring visits helpful.

Regarding parent and community involvement, more than half of program directors indicated they either had no family components in their programs or that they were, at best, well below target goals.

This evaluation study provides descriptive information about the implementation and outcomes of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) program in West Virginia, from September 2011 through May 2012.

Method of study. The report draws on information from online surveys of directors of 24 CCLC programs and from school teachers of nearly 4,000 participating students.

Findings. Most participating students were in the elementary grades. The mean number of days students attended ranged from about 14 to 96 days, depending on the program. Teachers perceived the greatest improvements in participating students' behaviors related to promptness and quality of homework turned in, overall academic performance, and participation in class. Regarding CCLC program volunteers, the largest sources were K-12 service learning programs, parents and faculty members, local businesses, and postsecondary service learning programs. Although AmeriCorps was not the largest source of volunteers, it was the group with which program directors reported the greatest level of success. Regarding work with partners, the two most frequent types of support received from partners were programming and resources. Partnerships engaged in funding, programming, resources, and training were reported to be the most effective. Regarding professional development, the topics best attended by program directors were programming, STEM/STEAM, and program evaluation. Regarding parent and community involvement, more than half of program directors indicated they either had no family components in their programs or that they were, at best, well below target goals. Of those who reported success in this area, three main themes emerged as reasons for their successes: (a) the right types of activities, (b) ongoing, even daily contact with parents, and (c) a shared commitment to the program, which involved engaging parents in meaningful work toward program goals. Program directors reported offering more than 300 substance abuse prevention activities, involving more than 11,000 students and nearly 900 adults. Nearly three quarters of program directors found the continuous improvement process for after school moderately or very helpful. Likewise, the great majority found the WVDE monitoring visits moderately or very helpful.

Limitations of study. We cannot assume that the CCLC attendance was a key factor in the improvement of behaviors perceived by teachers. We did not hear from all program directors, so we lack information about at least three of the programs.

Recommendations. Topics that program directors reported needing additional professional development include programming, staff development, and STEM/STEAM; for technical assistance topics include program evaluation, program sustainability, and project management. Parent involvement, too, seems to need attention. Avoid requiring major effort from program staff for program monitoring and evaluation at the beginning of the school year and look for ways to streamline reporting and data collection requirements. Continue with current practices for WVDE site visits, which program directors seem to greatly appreciate. Involve program directors in providing input when planning takes place for program improvements. Consider publishing a calendar for the full year, at the beginning of the school year.

For more information, contact the coauthor Patricia Hammer (with Larry J. White), Office of Research (phammer@access.k12.wv.us), or download the full report from the Office of Research website (<http://wvde.state.wv.us/research/reports2012.html>).