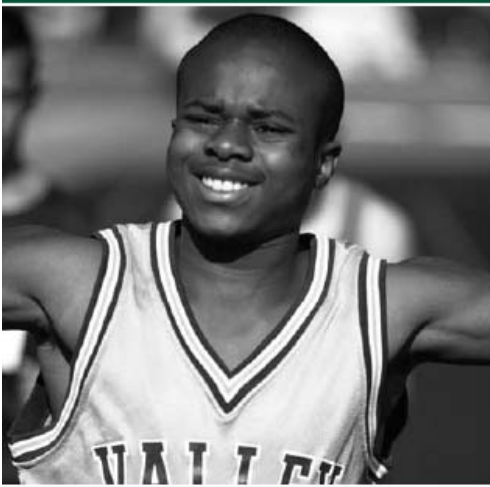


# Sustaining 21st Century Community Learning Centers

What Works for Programs and  
How Policymakers Can Help

*Report*

September 2006



 The **FINANCE** PROJECT



### DESCRIPTION

- Serves 130 students in Denver, Colorado
- 86% of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch
- Focus on reading ability and comprehension
- Diverse local partners have helped access numerous federal funding sources

### Elements of Sustainable Programs

- **Vision**
- Results Orientation
- **Strategic Financing Orientation**
- Broad-Based Community Support
- **Key Champions**
- **Adaptability to Changing Conditions**
- Strong Internal Systems
- Sustainability Plan

## Columbine Elementary School

### *Partnerships and Persistence Give Program Life After 21CCLC*

#### Overview

Columbine Elementary School in Denver, Colorado, has provided before and afterschool services since 1998. The urban magnet school with 86% of its students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch now serves 130 students in an extended school day program that operates from 7:15 to 5:30 every day. By using creative financing and sustainability strategies, the school has been able to expand its afterschool offerings from reading tutoring to a comprehensive array of recreation, enrichment, and academic programming and has sustained its program after the end of a federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant.

#### ✓ **Developing a Vision of an Extended School Day**

Columbine began its afterschool program after receiving a Reading Excellence Act grant from the state of Colorado. To achieve the grant's goals of improving reading achievement in primary grades, the school began a pull-out program, tutoring struggling readers during the school day. While this strategy had some positive effect on reading scores, it also had an unintended negative effect on achievement in other subject areas due to time missed during the pull-out sessions. Recognizing that students needed all of their classroom time, the school decided to develop a new and more comprehensive strategy for improving student achievement.

Columbine implemented a number of changes. The school adopted a new reading curriculum and moved its tutoring program to the afterschool hours. It was no coincidence that these changes were made in tandem; the school's revamped improvement plan centered on integrating the new curriculum into a comprehensive extended day program. With this vision of improving student achievement through integrating learning opportunities into the afterschool hours firmly in place, Columbine began laying the groundwork for making its vision reality.

#### ✓ **Strategic Financing Orientation**

##### **Making Better Use of Existing Resources**

First, school leaders needed to make sure the vision was shared by all school staff. Primary responsibility for this charge was given to a new administrator who was hired to direct the afterschool program and oversee the implementation of the new curriculum. The program director worked with the school's teachers, convincing them to voluntarily stagger their schedules. Staffing the extended day program with full-time certified teachers showed the school's commitment to fully integrating the school day with its afterschool program. Staggering schedules enabled the program to use a valuable resource—its staff—as efficiently as possible, saving the large investment that would have been required to hire additional qualified staff and train them in the school's curriculum.

For its first year, Columbine's tutoring program operated alongside—but completely separate from—a recreation program sponsored by the City of Denver Department of Parks and Recreation. Both programs were operating within the school, but neither offered afterschool programming every day of the school week. Columbine's program coordinator began to build a partnership with Parks Department staff and program leaders. The two programs worked together to expand to a daily program, with the city committing its staff members' time to cover the additional afterschool hours. By eliminating the duplication of services, Columbine was again able to use staffing resources to their utmost efficiency.

### **Maximizing Federal Funding**

In 1999, Columbine was awarded a 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21CCLC) grant from the U.S. Department of Education that was used to expand the extended day program to include before-school programming, a variety of enrichment activities, and tutoring in more academic subjects. Encouraged by success, Columbine's program director immediately began to pursue other federal funding opportunities. A number of youth development organizations active in the Denver area were providing character-building and healthy behavior programming in Columbine and a number of other schools. With the urging of Columbine's program director, these community-based organizations partnered with Columbine to apply for a federal Safe and Drug Free Schools grant. These funds not only supported the character-building and healthy behavior programming, but also provided additional staff support for the entire program.

### **Building Partnerships**

In addition to partnerships with the city and with other youth-serving organizations, Columbine has developed an additional partnership that has helped it sustain its afterschool program. The First Tee of Denver is a non-profit junior golf program dedicated to providing affordable access to the sport for low-income Denver youth. When the organization was looking for a pilot site interested in incorporating golf into an existing afterschool program, the school welcomed this unlikely partner. Columbine's program director was won over by the opportunity to provide students with a new experience—a “hook” to keep them interested in the program—and by First Tee's commitment to incorporating literacy into its programming. In 2003, First Tee staff and volunteers held a one-day work-a-thon to revamp Columbine's playground, adding a driving range, putting green, and sand trap. First Tee and Columbine piloted a “Read and Swing” program, in which students who met reading goals earned free visits to the driving range and rounds of golf. Columbine's site leader credits its partnership with First Tee with providing an attractive program component that the afterschool program could not have offered on its own and with introducing the program to community leaders that otherwise would not be familiar with Columbine's afterschool work.

### **✓ Drawing on Support of Key Champions**

Columbine's principal views the afterschool program as integral to improving student achievement, and has proven her willingness to champion the program to ensure its sustainability. As one of the initial and



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staunch supporters of the extended day strategy, the principal committed school Title I funds for the initial funding of the afterschool program director position. Since the 21CCLC grant ended in 2003, the principal has committed additional Title I and school general funds to fill remaining funding gaps and maintain the before and afterschool program at the same frequency and intensity.

### **☑ Adapting to Changing Conditions**

For the first year after the end of the 21CCLC grant, Columbine students were eligible to receive supplementary educational services (SES), a provision of the No Child Left Behind Act that provides free tutoring for students in low-performing schools and districts. State-approved providers of SES tutoring are reimbursed for their services. The afterschool program engaged in a lengthy application process to become an eligible SES provider and engaged in an outreach campaign to get parents to enroll their children in the program. The next year, with improved student achievement, Columbine was no longer eligible to provide free SES services.

Despite investing significant time to become a state-approved provider only to lose eligibility the next year, Columbine's program director credits the SES funding with easing the program through its first year without 21st Century dollars and with helping the program adapt to a generally more volatile post-21CCLC funding situation.

### **Lessons Learned, Next Steps, and Key Challenges**

Columbine Elementary School invested significant time in outlining its extended school day vision and building an infrastructure of diverse funding both before and during its 21st Century grant period. This clear commitment and funding diversity were instrumental to the program's sustainability after the end of its 21CCLC grant. Though the state and district priority for 21CCLC funding is now middle school programs, making Columbine ineligible to apply for state funds on its own, the school is again deploying its strategy of creative partnerships and looking for ways to build a consortium of schools interested in providing afterschool services for a continuum of ages that will be eligible for another 21st Century grant.



For more information, contact The Finance Project at 202.587.1000 or visit our web site at [www.financeproject.org/irc/ost.asp](http://www.financeproject.org/irc/ost.asp)