

Committee on Education and Labor
“After School Programs: How the Bush’s Administration’s Budget Impacts Children and Families”
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As Delaware’s Department of Education (DDOE) After School Program co-coordinator, I am honored to present testimony about the work we are doing in Delaware’s 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC). My testimony describes DDOE’s current monitoring initiative, our approach to accountability, and plans for continued improvement of our CCLC program.

As the 21st CCLC state program officer, I take very seriously the monitoring, funding, and continuous improvement of our 25 programs operating in 55 sites throughout the state. The DDOE views the 21st CCLC grant program as a tool to provide students with rich learning experiences that will directly affect their academic achievement. DDOE is working hard with its 21st CCLC centers to ensure that center personnel are addressing its program goals of improving students’ performance on statewide assessments and offering services designed to reinforce and complement traditional academic programs.

DDOE’s Current Monitoring Initiative

Grantees’ Applications for Funding.

The first step in developing centers that can meet our program goals is helping grantees understand how to respond to a DDOE-issued Request for Proposal (RFP). Delaware’s grantees include school districts, institutions of higher learning, and both local and nationally affiliated community based organizations. It is important that they realize, from the beginning of the grant process, that the DDOE will hold them accountable for the objectives they outline in their initial responses to an RFP.

We help potential grantees apply for funding through technical assistance meetings, at least two of which occur prior to the release date of a new RFP. In particular, we provide instruction on the creation of goals and outcome statements, since a potential grantee must provide concrete goals, objectives, and milestones for a proposed program in the initial request for funding. We also include examples, such as the following taken from a current RFP:

Goals, objectives and milestones are all outcomes. Your proposal should identify these three kinds of outcomes. Outcomes themselves are statements that tell how the project's target population would improve. Every outcome should describe a change in a target population. In addition, they set standards of progress towards alleviating the problems identified in the needs assessment. Statements that describe strategies or management issues **are not** proper outcome statements."

An example of an outcome statement containing all the above elements:

By June 2008, 70% of eighth graders in the two participating middle school sites who scored a 1 or 2 on the DSTP in the fifth grade will achieve a rating of 3 or more on the DSTP reading examination, a 20% increase over current levels.

In addition, we encourage grantees to include local baseline data when constructing objectives for their programs and to use both local and state testing data as evidence of success.

Selecting High-Quality Proposals.

An independent panel comprised of persons with experience in such areas as out-of-school programs, reading/language arts, mathematics, and strategies to improve the success of at-risk students or schools, reviews each response to a new 21st CCLC proposal. The review panel attends a training session prior to reviewing the applications, which emphasizes the importance of funding programs that represent strong relationships between schools and their partnering agencies that will help participating students succeed.

Monitoring Program Performance.

Site visits. DDOE, through a contract with the University of Delaware, continues to monitor and provide technical assistance to grantees after the initial grant award. This process begins with a visit by a technical assistance coordinator who outlines the grantees' responsibilities, such as the creation of a sustainability plan, compliance with the Office of Child Care Licensing regulations, site-monitoring schedules, data collection and required attendance at 21st CCLC professional development sessions.

Next site monitors, retired teachers with a broad base of experience and who receive training on the 21st CCLC program, make periodic site visits. Monitors visit all 21st CCLC sites operating a school-year program twice a year and those operating a school-year-plus-summer program three times per year. At least one visit is unannounced. Each monitor spends a minimum of three hours at each site and writes a report documenting the site visit, which is sent to the grant contact, principals of participating school, and site coordinators. In these three hours, monitors review enrollment numbers, overall safety, check-in and dismissal procedures, as well as document evidence of communication with participating students' teachers, evidence of lesson planning and embedded academic activities within recreational pursuits. For example, at a current site that offers cooking

lessons, the monitor looks for evidence that the program includes information on fractions. The technical assistance coordinator and I as state program director both review all site visit reports. They request clarification and/or a meeting with appropriate site personnel to resolve any problems noted in the report. Feedback, especially from school principals on the site-visit review process, has been positive. This process, which has evolved over the last several years, helps ensure that after-school and regular school activities are in alignment.

Assessment Tools. Beginning this year, as part of our continued effort to build quality after-school programs, we require that grantees use a Self Assessment and Continuous Improvement tool which was adapted from the *North Carolina Center for Afterschool Programs Established Standards of Excellence Self-Assessment Tool: K-12*. This self-assessment tool groups the following eleven (11) characteristics, into four (4) key categories that are indicative of high-quality after-school programming:

Program Management and Delivery

Safe, Healthy, and Orderly Environment
Qualified and Diverse Staff
Opportunities to Learn in Diverse Environments

Program Connections

Positive Participant and Staff Interactions
Active Family and Community Partnerships
Consistent Participant Attendance

Program Participants

Greater Personal Responsibility
Improved Academics Achievement
Greater Creativity and Well-Being

Program Finance and Growth

Fiscal Planning and Management
Sustainability

Guidelines in the self-assessment tool help both new and experienced grantees plan and appraise their progress in providing the best programs possible for the children and families they serve. Our monitors also evaluate evidence of the use of the assessment tool in their site-visit reports.

Application for Continued Support.

The final step in our efforts to build programs that play a role in improving students' academic performance is use of the Continuation Application. Delaware initially awards five-year 21st CCLC grants with full funding for the three years, followed by a 25 percent reduction in year four, and a 50 percent reduction in year five. After the initial grant, award grantees must complete a Continuation Application annually. In the Continuation Application, each grantee must provide evidence of progress on the measurable goals and outcomes listed in the grant application. These goals and objectives include academic outcomes.

Accountability

Delaware's Contract with RMC Research Corporation.

To comply with federal legislation requiring comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the state's 21st CCLC programs, the DDOE gathers data related to each site. The state contracted with RMC Research Corporation to review this existing data and address questions related to program implementation and effectiveness.

Conclusions RMC Evaluation.

1. The Delaware 21st CCLC program is reaching out to the community. Between 2003 and 2004, the number of centers grew more than 250 percent, from 18 to 46. Grantees grew more diversified, with an increased presence of local and nationally-affiliated community-based organizations, in addition to school districts and institutions of higher education. All programs reported partnerships with public and private organizations, both for profit and not-for-profit, and including faith-based organizations. The program reached 123 schools ranging from preK to the ninth grade, including a growing number of charter schools. In the past school year, five of the 17 charter schools in Delaware (29 percent) participated in the program.
2. The program is serving large percentages of minorities and low-income students. In SY 2005-2006, 46 centers served 3,792 students and 933 adults. Of these 48 percent were eligible for the free and reduced meal program (FARM), compared to 34 percent in the statewide student enrollment. Minority students comprised 45 percent of the student enrollment statewide and 73 percent of the 21st CCLC students. However, students with disabilities were less likely to attend the centers (nine vs. 14 percent statewide). The 48 centers served mostly students at the elementary grade levels, with fewer than 10 percent in grades seven to nine. In response to this finding, the DDOE included competitive priority points for grantees proposing to serve middle and high school students in the recently concluded Cohort 5-21st CCLC competition. Of the ten new grantees added after this competition; eight are serving middle and high school students.
3. The program is providing academic support and a broad array of additional services for the youth. In the past school year, the 46 centers offered a total of 1,603 hours a week (34.84 hr/week per program) of academic activities and support, in addition to 439 hours (9.54 hr/week per program) of additional activities. Frequently addressed academic contact areas included reading, mathematics, technology, and arts/music. Academic support included tutoring, mentoring, remedial education, and supplemental education. Most programs also offered recreation, cultural enrichment, health education, and drug and violence prevention activities.
4. 21st CCLC participants are making academic gains. The analysis of results in the DSTP Reading and Mathematics suggest that 21st CCLC students improved scores at a rate that were consistent with average Delaware students, even though the program is serving large numbers of children and youth at-risk of academic failure.

When compared with statewide averages, the 21st CCLC students have lower DSTP scores; yet, when compared to peers from the same schools, they showed stronger performances. A longitudinal analysis indicated that gains in DSTP mathematics scores of third-grade CCLC students were larger than the average gains for all Delaware students.

Next Steps

This year (2007-2008) all schools and/or districts, serving as either the lead or partnering agency in a 21st CCLC grant, must tag students receiving services through 21st CCLC programs in eSchool Plus, Delaware's statewide pupil-accounting system. Tagging students' unique identifiers to indicate that they are receiving CCLC services, will allow for analyses of these students over their entire school careers. Dr. Qi Tao, Education Associate in the Technology Management and Design workgroup, has designed a supplemental service data cube within DDOE's data warehouse which will allow for the analysis of data across programs. In addition, we will be able to compare measures of attendance, disciplinary action, graduation, and DSTP proficiency of students who have received 21st CCLC services with those who have not received them

Conclusion

21st CCLC is a relatively new program. It will celebrate its tenth birthday this year. The program as it exists today has only been in operation since 2002. It has made great strides. I believe its main strength lies in building partnerships between the school and community-based organizations. This partnership has resulted in stronger and better programs than either the schools or agencies could create on their own. We know that all students need to participate in vibrant and exciting after school programming to learn to connect with the world beyond school. Currently, over 14 million students leave school at 3:00 pm or earlier, with nowhere to go. The administration's current proposal to convert the 21st CCLC program to a voucher system may force programs to close, which would result in more students with no place to go after school. In addition, the move to a voucher system would undermine existing public, private, community, and faith-based partnerships that are working well. I think the 21st CCLC program, as it now exists, has earned the right to continue. It offers the best chance to offer seamless services to our children.

Thank-you for this opportunity to testify, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Endnotes

DDOE 21st CCLC Recommended Self Assessment Tool. Available at; at:

<http://www.doe.state.de.us/programs/si/files/DE%2021st%20CCLC%20Self-Assessment%20Tool4categories.pdf>

21st CCLC Profile and Performance Information Collection System(PPICS). Available at:

<http://ppics.learningpt.org/ppics/index.asp>.

RMC research Corporation (2006). *Delaware 21st Century Community Learning Centers: Evaluation Report (SY2003-04-SY2005-06)*. Available at:

<http://www.doe.state.de.us/programs/si/files/Delaware%2021st%20Century%20Community%20Learning%20Centers%20Final%20Report.pdf>