Summary of 21st CCLC Learning Community Workshops

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Introduction

The federally-funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program funds out of school time (OST) programs designed to improve academics, behavior, and attendance through academic support and enrichment opportunities for low-income youth who attend high-poverty, low-performing schools. Research for Action (RFA) serves as the external evaluator for fourteen providers across the city.

As part of RFA's evaluation, RFA prepares annual, individual reports for each of the providers that include information on program implementation and student outcomes. Through the generous support of both the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Philadelphia Foundation, RFA aggregates the findings across providers to create a "citywide" report.[1] The "citywide" report represents roughly one-third of all 21st CCLC programs in Philadelphia and has provided one of the only comprehensive looks into the city's OST sector.

RFA's third citywide report was released in May 2015. During the summer and fall of 2015, RFA hosted three Learning Community Workshops to provide opportunities for Philadelphia's 21st CCLC providers to further discuss the findings from the "citywide" report as well as their implications for practice. The Learning Community Workshops focused on program quality, an area that the OST research base cites as critical for impacting student outcomes.[2] Each Workshop tackled a particular element of program quality: 1) academic programming; 2) staffing; and 3) OST-school partnerships. RFA selected these topics because OST researchers frequently cite them as key elements of high-quality afterschool programs, RFA had robust data sets within each area, and RFA organized the "citywide" report analyses around these topics.

This document summarizes the Learning Community Workshops and is intended to serve as a resource for providers who attended the workshop. The document includes:

- A description of the Learning Community Workshop format
- Highlights from the small group and large group discussion of each quality area;
- Participant feedback on each Workshop; and
- Participant list and contact information.

Through promoting research-based practices and dialogue across provider organizations, these events serve as a step forward in strengthening the quality of OST programs in Philadelphia.

Learning Community Workshop Format

All of the Workshops followed a similar agenda. The format of the Workshop is described in Table 1, below.

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[1] For information regarding RFA's "citywide" findings and analysis, refer to the "citywide" report.
[2] Holstead, J., & King, M. H. (2011). High quality 21st Century Community Learning Centers: Academic achievement among frequent participants and non-participants. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 16*(4), 255-274.

Table 1. Learning Community Workshop Format

WORKSHOP ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION
Introductions & Workshop Overview *(15 minutes)*	• RFA provides description of "citywide" report, reviews agenda. • Attendees introduce themselves and briefly describe their programs.
Research Review *(20 minutes)*	• RFA reviews the framework for evaluating program quality. • RFA presents the 2015 findings on 21st CCLC program quality in Philadelphia in one of the three quality areas.
Best Practices *(15 minutes per provider)*	• Staff from two 21st CCLC providers with high quality practices in a given area (e.g. academic programming) describe their programs and present strategies for ensuring high quality practices.[3]
Small Group Discussions *(45 minutes)*	• RFA facilitates two small group discussions (5-9 participants) focused on identifying common challenges among providers and strategies for addressing these challenges.
Large Group Discussion *(45 minutes)*	• Small groups summarize their discussions, share strategies, and ask questions.
Workshop Evaluation *(5 minutes)*	• Attendees complete a brief Learning Community Workshop evaluation form (see Appendix A).

Highlights from Small Group and Large Group Discussions

Tables 2 through 4 summarize the major topics covered during the small and large group discussions. For each topic covered, participants identified at least one challenge their organization faced, and other participants responded with promising practices they used to resolve or ameliorate the issues.

Table 2. Common Challenges and Promising Practices in OST Academic Programming

TOPIC	COMMON CHALLENGES	PROVIDER STRATEGIES
Communicating with School Day Staff	Finding time to connect with teachers	• Arrive during the school day to meet with teachers • Talk to teachers during student pick-up • Collaborate with teachers to provide support to specific youth • Partner with specific teachers to gauge what is happening during the school day at each grade level
Homework Help	Staffing	• Volunteer coordinator to train homework help staff • Utilize volunteers from local universities
	Youth without homework	• Youth become responsible for teaching one another • Offer non-homework academic activities (e.g. worksheets, games, books)
Engagement	Student disinterest in STEM	• Competitions and games that connect to a culminating event • Incorporate STEM concepts into popular activities like basketball
Monitoring Student Progress	Receiving school data	• Incentives for youth to bring in report cards • Communicate with principal to show how data is/could be used to facilitate data sharing in the future

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[3] The OST-School partnerships presentation did not include presentations from providers. Instead, RFA presented the vignette used in the "citywide" report to describe high quality practices.

Table 3. Common Challenges and Promising Practices in OST Staffing

TOPIC	COMMON CHALLENGES	PROVIDER STRATEGIES
Hiring	Finding qualified staff	• Structure interviews so that candidates must facilitate a class, provide mock lesson plans, or complete an activity simulation • Ask for references • Gather feedback on staff from students and principals if they are school-day staff • Ensure candidates are fully aware of roles and responsibilities
	Staff compensation	• No strategies identified
	Location/commute	• No strategies identified
	Hiring Schedule	• No strategies identified
	Ensuring professionalism	• Use resources from PSAYDN[4] • Conduct annual or more frequent staff reviews
	Coverage	• Maintain a list of OST staff "alumni" who would be willing to fill in
	Turnover	• No strategies identified
	Program "fit"	• Interview candidates in a group setting • Include older participants (e.g. high schoolers) in interviews
	Volunteers	• Appoint a volunteer coordinator • Establish different volunteer roles based on strengths and availability (e.g. administrative, educational, recreational) • Provide professional development for volunteers • Establish quarterly contracts for volunteers • Ask volunteers to complete applications • Encourage older siblings or program "alumni" to volunteer • Recruit high school volunteers who have school requirements for community service and/or college students who have civic-engagement requirements or work-study agreements • Have high school OST participants work with elementary-aged students
	Timing	• Have regular check-ins with staff to give feedback • Provide informal, end-of-week recaps on what went well and what needs to change • Mandatory PD on days when SDP is closed or operating on a half-day schedule – Provide early afternoon programming for youth, then have PD • Schedule PD well in advance and alert staff
Professional Development (PD)	Content/lesson planning	• Divide staff roles and responsibilities across staff (e.g. one staff member responsible for lesson planning, one for teaching, one for behavior management) • Pair experienced teachers/staff members with new and/or part-time staff (e.g. teachers paired with volunteers)
	Behavior management	• Pair staff who have strong youth relationship-building/behavior management skills with staff who are stronger in content
	Provider capacity to provide PD	• Ask SDP if OST staff can attend school PD • Provide a mix of in-house and external speakers/PD opportunities • Utilize resources from the OSTRC/Foundations, Inc. • Ask staff for PD references
	PD Attendance	• Pay staff to attend PD

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[4] PSAYDN is the Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool Youth Development Network. Their website offers a variety of resources for measuring and improving quality. Website: http://www.psaydn.org/

Table 4. Common Challenges and Promising Practices in OST-School Relationships

TOPIC	COMMON CHALLENGES	PROVIDER STRATEGIES
Communicating with School Day Staff	Finding time to connect with teachers	• Arrive during the school day to meet with teachers • Talk to teachers during student pick-up • Attend faculty meetings, school administrative meetings, board meetings, etc. • Invite school-day staff to attend OST trainings and ask if OST staff can attend school trainings • Ask school-day staff who are also OST program staff to advocate for the OST program during school staff meetings • Encourage OST staff to attend parent-teacher nights and open houses
	Ensuring school-day staff know that OST is not just a "babysitting service"	• Email teachers with attendance list and OST participant data (e.g. reading progress) • Collaborate with teachers to provide support to specific youth • Partner with specific teachers to gauge what is happening during the school day at each grade level • During school-day staff meetings, or through meetings, give school staff updates about OST activities, events, and upcoming trainings (orally and/or in a one-page newsletter) • Distribute copies of the RFA report and/or other research highlighting the importance of OST programming
	Communicating with principals	• Send regular updates and invite the principal to OST events or have them tour the program • Ask OST provider directors (who may not be at the school) to check in with principals, introduce themselves, etc. • If looking for a new site, meet with the principal beforehand to gauge principal buy-in, support, and enthusiasm for an OST program • Be persistent in setting up meetings • Invite principal to OST curriculum planning meetings and solicit principal input in activities
	Communicating over the summer	• Communicate with school-day teachers at the beginning and end of the summer to ensure that teachers are aware of the OST program's mission to reduce summer slide, provide academic enrichment, etc. • Alert school-day teachers if their rooms will be in use over the summer • Recruit school-day teachers as summer OST staff
Maintaining Relationships	Experiencing staff turnover at the school and OST program	• Meet with new school-day staff at the beginning of the year to introduce them to the OST program • If employing school-day teachers, plan for programming/staffing prior to the start of the school year so you can advertise open positions to new staff • Welcome new staff and principals with kind words, materials on the OST program, and/or "welcome baskets" • Leverage OST experience with the school to build rapport with new administrators (e.g. If the OST provider has been in the school for many years, meet with the new principal to discuss the program's impact, dedication to the school community, etc.)
Space	Negotiating for space during the school year and maintaining space	• Decorate available space (including classrooms and/or hallway corkboards) with OST participant work, program expectations, program flyers, etc. so school-day staff and visitors can learn more about the program • Hang signs at the front of the building and outside of OST spaces designating them as OST spaces to increase awareness • Store supplies on carts so that OST programming can take place in a variety of locations and program can be flexible to room changes

		• Encourage OST staff to introduce themselves to school-day teachers, especially if the OST staff member will be using the school-day teacher's room. – Have OST staff ask school-day teachers whether they can move desks, what classroom areas they can use (e.g. class library, art supplies), etc. • Offer to share OST supplies with school-day teachers • Request multi-purpose spaces (gym, auditorium, cafeteria) to avoid issues around sharing classroom space • Continue to ask school staff for space throughout the year as OST programming needs change • Ensure that school-day teachers see school principal as a program advocate to avoid any attempts of school-day staff trying to take away OST program space • Invite school-day teachers to stay in their classrooms during OST programming • Use a room "checklist" to ensure that the OST program leaves the classroom tidy
	Negotiating for space over the summer	• Communicate with school-day teachers before the end of the school year if their room will be an OST room over the summer • Take pictures of the rooms prior to summer programming so that desks and supplies can be configured to the school-day teachers' preferences at the end of the summer • Adapt schedule to avoid school maintenance interference and scheduled brown-outs

Evaluation Feedback

Participants completed a brief evaluation of the Learning Workshop in which they noted: what they had learned; what they would like to learn more about; what action steps they would take within their organizations to incorporate strategies discussed in the Workshop; and lingering questions. These reflections are summarized in Tables 5 through 8 below.

Table 5. Key Lessons and Actions Attendees Gathered from the Academics Workshop

LESSONS	ACTIONS
There is a relationship between attendance rate and homework completion.	• No actions identified
Programs face many challenges acquiring data.	• No actions identified
Peer tutoring and creating lessons for youth who struggle with literacy are good strategies for homework help.	• Plan to incorporate elements into programming and training • Creating action plans to approach different situations including strategies for when students do not have homework and how to structure homework time • Share homework strategies with colleagues • Ensure that all staff read RFA reports and use best practices
Programs must make deliberate efforts to connect schools with OST programs.	• Create action plans to approach forming relationships with school staff
Providers need to have specific strategies around PBL in place.	• Share PBL strategies with program director

Table 6. Key Lessons and Actions Attendees Gathered from the Staffing Workshop

LESSONS	ACTIONS
It is important to document staff work (or lack thereof) through written notes, feedback, and regular performance reviews.	• Create a documentation template for staff performance • Use a bi-annual review process (school year and summer)
Providers should set firm guidelines and expectations for staff.	• Create work agreement to iron out any loose or informal guidelines
School-day partners and local organizations can provide additional support.	• Have school day partners observe programming
Professional development opportunities are important for all staff.	• Pool resources and network with other providers to learn about professional development opportunities for staff • Ensure that all staff receive professional development opportunities • Plan professional development activities well in advance and alert staff to the opportunities • Ask if OST staff can join SDP professional development opportunities • Plan professional development on half days • Include on-site professional development opportunities • Advocate for professional development opportunities at the city level • Make professional development opportunities hands-on • Provide in-house staff training and orientation
Some providers split staff roles and/or pair staff with complementary strengths	• Encourage lead teachers to lead curriculum planning • Pair staff so that each pair has a "teaching" expert and a "behavior" expert • Match volunteers with teachers
Hiring and retaining high quality staff is important but challenging	• Reach out to colleagues across organizational divisions for job applications/qualified candidates • Recruit work-study students and qualified volunteers from local schools • Use a rigorous interview process to evaluate OST candidates • Challenge veteran staff who are no longer effective • Encourage staff to take leadership roles • Advertise open (or anticipated) positions as soon as possible—preferably as teachers are returning to school

Table 7. Key Lessons and Actions Attendees Gathered from the OST-School Partnerships Workshop

LESSONS	ACTIONS
Active involvement with school-day staff can help OST providers improve OST-School relationships	• Encourage OST staff to establish principal/school-day teacher relationships that include ongoing, regular check-ins • Present information about 21st CCLC program at school staff meetings and/or hold formal school/OST meetings • Collaborate with other school programs • Communicate quality practices to provider staff, frontline staff, principals, school counselors, and school-day teachers • Address misunderstandings about OST (e.g. not just a babysitting service) • Send school-day staff emails, one-page OST information sheet, or OST newsletter to school staff and/or identify additional ways to keep school-day staff and administrators up-to-date on OST programming • Invite school-day staff to OST professional development and ask if OST staff can attend school-day professional development • Introduce the OST program to new school-day teachers and principals
Active parent involvement can help OST-school relationships	• Encourage staff to strengthen OST-family relationships
RFA did not find a correlation between OST-School relationships and student outcomes, possibly because of challenges associated with OST-School relationships	• No actions identified

Table 8 describes Workshop participants' lingering questions.

Table 8. Remaining Questions for Attendees, by Quality Topic

TOPIC	QUESTION
Academics	• What approaches do other organizations use for homework and future interest plans? • What is the relationship between afterschool programming and GPAs/report cards? • How do we effectively share data with staff? • How do we provide effective professional development to staff with limited time, varying skill levels, and limited resources?
Staffing	• How do I attract candidates with more education? • How do I release staff that are not performing? • How involved will the Pennsylvania Department of Education be with improving professional development across the state? Will they be involved with implementing more opportunities for localized training across regions, i.e. SDP programs should be able to engage in more shared PD? • Can I hold professional development on ½ days for school-day staff who are also OST staff? • How do I find money to pay staff for professional development? • How do I retain quality staff, especially when money is tight? • How can I incentivize staff to encourage staff retention? • How do I balance hiring qualified staff with a small budget?
OST-School Relationships	• Can we receive a scope of work or list of school priorities prior to the school year starting so that we can strengthen our OST partnership and program structure by offering relevant programming? • How can I deal with school staff too heavily intervening with OST programming? • What is the process for data sharing with SDP (e.g. reading levels, test scores, etc.)? • How can I coordinate professional development with site coordinators to improve OST-School partnerships? • Are there data that show that challenges preclude academic improvement? • Does RFA plan to do anything with the information learned in the workshop today in terms of future research? • Are there other activities, situations, or performance targets that would show an effect between OST-School relationships and student outcomes?

Participant List

In total, over 40 participants from 14 organizations attended one or more of the Learning Community Workshop series.

Table 9. Number of Learning Community Workshop Participants by Organization

ORGANIZATION	ACADEMICS WORKSHOP	STAFFING WORKSHOP	SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP WORKSHOP
Congreso de Latinos Unidos	3		1
Education Works	3	1	2
Drexel University	1	2	
Free Library of Philadelphia		1	1
Lutheran Children and Family Service		1	
Neighborhood Education Workshop		1	
Netter Center for Community Partnerships		5	
Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC)	2	1	
Southeast Delco School District		1	1
Sunrise of Philadelphia	2	1	1
Philadelphia Arts in Education Partnership (PAEP)		3	2
PhillyBOOST	1	1	
School District of Philadelphia	2		2
To Our Children's Future With Health			1
TOTAL	14	18	11

Appendix A. Learning Community Workshop Evaluation

Each Learning Community Workshop participant had the opportunity to complete an evaluation form. The form is presented below.

RESEARCH FOR ACTION:
21st CCLC Learning Community Workshop Evaluation

List **3** things that you learned during the workshop.

List **2** things that you still have questions about as a result of the workshop.

List **1** thing that you will do with the information you received from the workshop.