



**21st Century Community Learning Centers
Cohort 4
Report on Program Implementation and Program Outcomes
2010-2011**

INTRODUCTION

The Pennsylvania Department of Education awarded a 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21C) grant to EducationWorks (EW) for “Project Strong Start” in Philadelphia, PA. The program operated during 2007-2008 (Year 1), 2008-2009 (Year 2), and 2009-2010 (Year 3). EW was awarded a one year extension (“extension year”) for the 2010-2011 year to serve 250 youth in grades K-8 in four Philadelphia public elementary schools: Grover Cleveland, George Clymer, John F. Hartranft, and Gen. John F. Reynolds. The extension year award was 50 percent of the award given the prior three years. The program year began July 1, 2010 and ended on June 30, 2011. Youth were expected to attend at least 30 times during the year. A variety of enrichment activities were implemented including: project-based learning, homework assistance, chess, and African drum and dance.

As a result of Project Strong Start, regularly attending students were expected to improve in their math and reading achievement; show improvement in social skills and attitudes toward school; improve in classroom and program site behaviors; and, reduce their number of school absences. Additionally, students and parents would be satisfied with the program.

This report describes the implementation of program activities and highlights some program outcomes. It is part of a larger evaluation report that was submitted to the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Schedules and Attendance

Each 21C site personnel roster was made up of a Site Coordinator, a Program Assistant, and several group leaders who were AmeriCorps members. The group leaders were in charge of facilitating most of the activities directly with the students. Consultants were hired to facilitate special activities like African dance and drum. All EW site personnel attended two weeks of training prior to the start of summer programming and again prior to the start of school year programming. Summer programming, referred to as “summer camp,” took place at the four school sites. Camp was offered 5 days a week for 7 weeks from 8:00am to 5:30pm and

included a daily lunch and snack. During the school year, programming was offered 5 days a week after school for 3 hours a day and for 38 weeks.

All 21C program sites followed the same basic schedule. From the time of school dismissal to 3:30pm, students signed in to the program and had their snacks. From 3:30 to 5:00pm, students had two-45 minute sessions that included a “club,” an activity, or project-based learning. Each club or activity was offered twice a week and project-based learning was offered three times a week. Youth participated in homework help from 5:00 to 5:45pm each day.

A total of 500 school-aged youth attended the EW 21C programs (Table 1). Of the school-aged youth, 350 attended the program sites at least 30 times during the grant year, greatly exceeding the 250 students for which EW contracted. All of the sites had well above half of their participants attending at least 30 days. Furthermore, almost half (44%) of the students attended at least 90 times (Table 2). There were slightly more female students who attended and the majority of the youth were African American (Table 3). Reynolds had the highest number of total participants and the highest percentage of regular attendees, with “regular attendee” defined as at least 30 days attendance.

Table 1.

Student Attendance*								
GRADE	Reynolds		Clymer		Cleveland		Hartranft	
	ALL	Regular**	ALL	Regular	ALL	Regular	ALL	Regular
K	19	14	16	15	19	14	17	15
1	20	14	14	9	25	17	32	20
2	25	19	22	14	25	17	21	14
3	23	18	16	10	10	8	23	16
4	9	4	13	10	24	14	12	10
5	30	25	15	8	16	11	7	2
6	9	8	2	2	5	4	4	0
7	7	6	2	2	4	0	1	0
8	9	7	1	1	2	1	1	0
Total	151	115 (76%)	101	71 (70%)	130	86 (66%)	118	77 (65%)

*An additional 128 students in grades 6, 7, and 8 attended these sites under a different 21C grant.

**The term "Regular" refers to youth who attended the program sites at least 30 days.

Table 2.

Frequency of Attendance		
Days Attended	# of Students	% of Total
0-29	151	30%
30-59	76	15%
60-89	53	11%
90+	220	44%

Table 3.

Student Attendance and Gender & Ethnicity						
	Male	Female	African American	Hispanic	White	Other
All	226	274	478	7	1	14
Regular	165	184	334	5	1	8

Program Activities

During the summer of 2010, youth participated in a variety of activities at the full-day summer camp programs:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| Arts, Crafts and Board Games | Math Games |
| Chess | Martial Arts |
| Crafty Readers | Philly Reads |
| Drama | Physical Education |
| Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) | Riskwatch (Being Safe) |
| Girl Scouts | Scrabble |
| Go Green Project Based-Learning | Swimming |

Youth at the summer camps took weekly summer trips that included: Bartram’s Garden, bowling, Historic Germantown, Morris Arboretum, the movies, Neshaminy Shore, the Philadelphia Zoo, the Schuylkill Center, skating, Smith Playground, and Snipes Farm.

During the school year, in addition to getting homework help and participating in project-based learning activities about Martin Luther King and healthy eating and lifestyles, youth participated in one or more of these 21C clubs: African dance and drum, chess, double-dutch, and basketball.

PARENT AND TEACHER PERCEPTIONS AND COMMUNICATION

Parents¹

Parents were generally satisfied with the EW 21C programs. Nearly four-fifths (79%) of the 43 parents who completed a parent survey at the end of the school year reported that their child completed his/her homework at the program and were satisfied with the homework help their child received (84%). Almost all of the parents (98%) reported feeling that their child was safe and that their child received good supervision at the after school program. All of the parents reported feeling comfortable talking to staff at the after school program and finding the program staff to be helpful if parents had any questions. When asked what they liked best about the EW 21C programs, almost a fifth of the parents responded “the staff.”

Parents attended various events and performances during the year. Events included a Thanksgiving potluck, a masquerade-themed dance, culminating events for the project-based learning activities, and a chess award ceremony. Parents attended and volunteered at Martin Luther King Day community service activities hosted by EW. Performance recitals for African dance and drum at Clymer and Hartranft also attracted parents to the schools. These types of events had the greatest attendance rates of parents. Some parents even donated food and refreshments.

Teachers

As EW programs were held on school grounds, there were opportunities to connect with school staff. A little over half (58%) of the teachers reported being aware of the goals of EW and half knew of the specific activities that EW offered students. Half of the teachers also reported having talked to EW staff regarding student needs and three-quarters of the teachers reported encouraging students to attend EW programs. Three-quarters also reported being generally satisfied with EW.

A little over half of the site coordinators reported in mid-year surveys that they communicated with teachers at least once a week about the school day curriculum or the behaviors of students in the 21C program. Five out of the six coordinators felt that the classroom teachers were supportive of their after school program’s efforts.

¹ “Parent” is used to describe all adult guardians of the 21C students.

OUTCOMES

Academic Outcomes

Usable report card grades were collected for 312 students for math and 287 students for reading.² Scores from the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) were collected for 109 students for math and 111 students for reading.³

In math, the report card grade average was 79 percent (a C average) both in the fall marking period and the spring marking period with no statistically significant difference between the two marking periods. Among regular attendees, 85 percent had a C or better as their final math grade. In reading or English Language Arts (ELA), the report card grade average was also 79 percent (a C average) both in the fall marking period and the spring marking period with no statistically significant difference between the two marking periods. Among regular attendees, 82 percent had a C or better as their final reading/ELA grade.

For PSSA scores, almost a quarter of regularly attending students (23%) improved in their math and reading PSSA scores compared to 7 percent of students who did not attend regularly improving (Tables 4 and 5).⁴ A smaller proportion of students who were regular attendees declined in the math and reading PSSA scores compared to non-regular attendees.

Table 4.

Mathematics PSSA Score Changes between 2009-10 & 2010-11				
Attendance Rates	Improved	Declined	No Change	Did Not Need to Improve
<30	7%	33%	40%	20%
≥30	23%	23%	46%	7%

Table 5.

Reading PSSA Score Changes between 2009-10 & 2010-11				
Attendance Rates	Improved	Declined	No Change	Did Not Need to Improve
<30	7%	40%	47%	7%
≥30	23%	17%	59%	1%

² Report card grade distributions are as follows: A=100-90; B=89-80; C=79-70; D=69-65; and, F=64-0.

³ There are four possible PSSA levels: “Advanced”, “Proficient”, “Basic”, or “Below Basic.”

⁴ In Tables 4 and 5, “Did Not Need to Improve” refers to students who were already achieving at the highest level during the previous year (2009-10) and maintained this level during the following year (2010-11).

School Attendance and Suspension Rates

In general, there were no truancy issues among students who attended the EW 21C programs. For the 2010-11 school year, 97 percent of the students had an average daily attendance rate of 80 percent or greater. Of the few students who had an average daily attendance rate of less than 80 percent during the prior year, 93 percent increased in their attendance in the following year.

Students who were regular attendees were less likely to have suspension problems (89%) compared to non-regular attendees (77%) during the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school year (Table 6). A greater proportion of non-regular attendees were more likely to have increased in their number of suspensions from the previous school year compared to regular attendees (15% versus 6%).

Table 6.

Suspension Rates and Program Attendance				
Attendance Rates	Improved	Declined	No Change	Did Not Need to Improve
<30	8%	15%	0%	77%
>30	4%	6%	0%	89%

Additional Educational, Social, and Behavioral Outcomes

The EW 21C program aimed to develop various positive qualities in youth. Parents were asked to report on observed changes in behaviors and attitudes during the school year.⁵ Almost all of them (98%) observed their child become interested in new things since starting the 21C program. Additionally, almost three-quarters of the parents saw an improvement in their child's self-confidence and their attitudes toward school and learning. A little over half of the parents saw a change in their child's school attendance, with almost a fifth (19%) reporting that their child did not need to improve in their attendance. Regarding reading and math abilities, over half of the parents reported seeing improvement (63% and 58%, respectively).

Teachers also reported on surveys the changes they observed with the participating youth during the school year (Table 7). Teachers observed the most improvement in their students' class participation (41% exhibiting some improvement.) A little over a third (38%) of

⁵ Parents were able to choose whether they saw an improvement, no change, a decline, or if no change was needed.

the students showed some improvement in their class behavior and their academic performance. Over a quarter of the students improved in class attendance (29%) or did not need to improve (27%).

One teacher commented on the changes observed in two Kindergarten students who were regular attendees of the 21C program: “Both of my students were very shy, soft-spoken, and needed a lot of help with learning the letters of the alphabet and sounds. Both students have developed a lot. They both have grown socially [and interact more] with peers. Academically, both students participate more in class and are completing grade-level work. EW has helped me in helping my students learn their letters and numbers. EW has been very positive in making sure students’ work is completed the way I like it to be.”

Table 7.

	Teacher Survey Responses			
	Some Improvement	Some Decline	Did Not Need to Improve	No Change
Turning in homework on time	29%	20%	18%	34%
Completing homework to your satisfaction	31%	16%	19%	34%
Participating in class	41%	3%	15%	41%
Volunteering	30%	5%	11%	55%
Attending class regularly	29%	3%	27%	40%
Being attentive in class	34%	13%	13%	39%
Behaving well in class	38%	26%	11%	25%
Academic performance	38%	15%	10%	38%
Coming to school motivated to learn	34%	10%	17%	39%
Getting along well with other students	25%	15%	19%	41%

Finally, in order to assess changes in attitudes and behaviors, students were given surveys at the beginning of the year and again at the end of the year. Based on their responses, students tended to answer more favorably regarding their own positive attitudes and behaviors in the spring surveys compared to the fall surveys (Table 8). For example, the percentage of

students who agreed that they thought everyone is responsible for making their community better increased by 18 percentage points; that they can make a difference in their community increased by 12 percentage points; and, that they are important to their community increased by 14 percentage points. Students also reported feeling better about themselves in the spring compared to the fall and having more positive attitudes toward school and learning (“engagement in learning”).

Table 8.

Student Survey Results				
	All or Most of the Time		Some of the Time, Never, or I Don't Know	
	FALL	SPRING	FALL	SPRING
Engagement in Learning	79%	86%	21%	14%
Self-Esteem	87%	96%	13%	4%
	Agree		Disagree	
	FALL	SPRING	FALL	SPRING
Social/Life Skills	82%	97%	18%	3%
Responsibility	83%	99%	17%	1%
Teamwork	79%	92%	21%	8%
Service to Community	79%	96%	21%	4%
Interest in Exploration	90%	99%	10%	1%

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In its “extension year,” Project Strong Start engaged a total of 500 school-aged youth in their EW 21C programs. Of the school-aged youth, 350 attended the program sites at least 30 times during the grant year. Youth participated in a variety of high-quality activities including project-based learning, African dance and drum, and chess. As a result of Project Strong Start, regularly attending students were expected to improve in their math and reading achievement; show improvement in social skills and attitudes toward school; improve in classroom and

program site behaviors; and, reduce their number of school absences. Additionally, students and parents would be satisfied with the program.

Student grades in math and reading/English Language Arts did not change during the year, with over 80% of the regularly attending students earning a C or better in their first and last report cards. In fact, students who were regular attendees at Project Strong Start sites were less likely to need to improve in their math and reading grades during the school year compared to students who attended the program less than 30 times. Of the regular attending students, 23% improved their PSSA scores in math and reading. Seven percent of the students who did not attend regularly also improved their math and reading PSSA scores. Nearly 90% of the regularly attending students did not have attendance or suspension issues. Teachers saw an improvement in behavior for 38 percent of their students and improvement in attendance for 29 percent of their students. Almost all of the students (89%) reported that they liked coming to the after school program.

Participating students improved in their attitudes toward improving their communities, felt better about themselves, and had better attitudes toward school. Students also reported having improved in their responsibility, teamwork, and were more interested in exploring new things. Teachers also observed an improvement in participating students' motivation to learn for over a third of their students. Parents were generally satisfied with Project Strong Start especially with the homework help their child received and the safe environment provided by EW. Additionally, almost three-quarters of the parents saw an improvement in their child's self-confidence and their attitudes toward school and learning.