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**Afterschool Programming in the Implementation of ESSA**

Title IV part B of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed into law in December 2016, governs the 21st Century program, an established and quality program that is achieving positive results for Pennsylvania youth. The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative is the only federal funding source dedicated exclusively to before school, after school, and summer learning programs. Nearly 40,000 students participate in 21st CCLC programs across Pennsylvania. In the 2016 program year, there were over 150 grantees operating 464 centers across Pennsylvania, benefiting over 650 communities.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Students who regularly participate in Community Learning Centers improved their school attendance, class participation and behavior, homework completion, and reading and math achievement scores and grades.[[2]](#endnote-2) Students who engage in extracurricular programs like 21st CCLC have shown to have statistically significantly higher test scores, bonding to school, and self-perception, with significantly lower problem behaviors when compared to students not in such programs.[[3]](#endnote-3)

As the state continues to move along in the ESSA implementation and recent 21st Century RFP release, we highlight for you other ways ESSA creates opportunities for afterschool programs. The implementation of ESSA provides Pennsylvania with the opportunity for creating a comprehensive vision for student success. The recommendations that stemmed from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) call for a student-centered, holistic approach in the implementation of ESSA. This involves the coordination of services for young people so that they have everything they need for success, not only academic supports but coordination with community partners that provide the health, safety, and mentoring services that help to ensure student success. We encourage the use of out-of-school time strategies to foster family engagement, engage the community in planning for school improvement, align resources to remove nonacademic barriers to success, and provide afterschool programs linked to classroom learning to sustain school improvement efforts.

ESSA’s provisions on Parent and Family Engagement also provides opportunities to capitalize on the impact afterschool programs can have on connections between communities and families and a child’s education. These provisions call on education agencies to collaborate with community-based organizations, such as afterschool programs, to carry out parent engagement plans and in using its parent engagement funds. Afterschool programs provide a crucial bridge between communities and schools and can help foster the family engagement called for under ESSA.

ESSA also places an emphasis science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) learning and on college and career readiness. Afterschool programs provide limitless opportunities for students to advance in these areas. The state is experiencing a rapid growth in the need for STEM professionals. If we want the next generation of students to be fluent in STEM, we have to take an immersion approach. School age children spend only 20 percent of their waking hours in school—the other 80 percent is spent outside of school.[[4]](#endnote-4) Children discover their passions and pick up new skills as they explore their world in afterschool hours. To allow for the level of exposure and experiences needed to develop fluency in STEM, we must ensure that all communities offer ways for students to engage with these subjects in multiple and varied ways, including afterschool programming. We ask that you take into consideration the positive impact afterschool programming can have on STEM fluency in Pennsylvania’s ESSA implementation plan.

Afterschool programs also provide a link to higher education and career readiness. Afterschool and summer learning programs have a proven record of accomplishment in helping children avoid the pitfalls of poor academic achievement, poverty, truancy, and behavior issues, which can derail their futures before they begin.[[5]](#endnote-5) Afterschool programs offer a key opportunity to expose students to higher education options and career paths and to teach them skills that can unlock doors to future career prospects. The afterschool hours offer time for apprenticeships, guest speakers, and project-based activities that are not always available during a school day focused on a core curriculum. Afterschool is an essential support to help students move ahead to success in higher education and careers. Please acknowledge the vast opportunities for college and career readiness programs when implementing the state plan.

1. Data provided by the PA Department of Education (2017) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Naftzger, N., Sniegowski, S., Devaney, E., Liu, F., Hutson, M. & Adams, N. (2015). Washington 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program Evaluation: 2012-13 and 2013-14. American Institutes for Research. http://www.k12.wa.us/21stCenturyLearning/pubdocs/ Final2012 14StatewideEvaluationReport.pdf. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., & Pachan, M. (2010). A Meta-Analysis of After-School Programs That Seek to Promote Personal and Social Skills in Children and Adolescents. American Journal of Community Psychology, 45, 294-309. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10464-010-9300-6 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Talking Points, Afterschool STEM Hub, http://www.afterschoolstemhub.org/ (last visited May 1, 2016). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Afterschool: Supporting Career and College Pathways for Middle School Age Youth, Afterschool Alliance (Jan. 2011), http://afterschoolalliance.org//documents/issue\_briefs/issue\_collegeCareer\_46.pdf [↑](#endnote-ref-5)