

# Evaluating Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers

*2022-2023 Statewide Evaluation Report*



May 2024

Prepared by:



The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality  
A unit of the Forum for Youth Investment

7064 Eastern Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20012

[www.forumfyi.org/weikartcenter](http://www.forumfyi.org/weikartcenter)

*Suggested citation:* Walker, T., Valentino, S., Hashemi, M., Roy, L. (2024). Evaluating Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers: 2022-2023 Statewide Evaluation Report. The Forum for Youth Investment's David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the previous detailed network- and site-level data summaries provided to the Arkansas State Department of Education during the 2022-2023 program year.

2022-2023 Site and Network Survey Data Summaries, delivered September 2023

2022-2023 SAPQA and YPQA Network and Site Reports available in [Scores Reporter](#)

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....4

Program Background.....8

Youth Program Quality Improvement Approach.....8

Evaluation Design.....10

    Performance Measures.....11

    2022-2023 Activities: Overview.....12

    Evaluation Sample.....13

Evaluation Approach and Results.....16

    CQI System Building and Leader Engagement.....16

    Quality Management Practices and Staff Engagement.....18

    Point-of-Service Quality: Instructional Practices and Youth Engagement.....19

    Family Engagement.....28

Recommendations ..... 30

## Executive Summary

The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) distributes federal funds to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC) in high-need areas each year to provide academic activities, enrichment activities, and family engagement services in support of student success. ADE 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs are designed on the evidence-based premise that high-quality staff practices, supported by strong organizational capacity and a culture of continuous quality improvement will achieve greater levels of youth attendance in the variety of academic, enrichment, and family engagement activities offered, providing opportunities to students to strengthen the academic and life skills needed to increase their confidence and readiness for classroom learning. To support this program theory, ADE has partnered with the Forum for Youth Investment's Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality since 2010 to operate the Youth Program Quality Improvement (YPQI) process, a data-driven continuous quality improvement system built on an annual cycle of assessment, program improvement planning, targeted training opportunities, and coaching.

To assess the impact of Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC engagement, Weikart's evaluation team designed, implemented, and analyzed data from program quality assessments, surveys, and program and school records submitted in response to federal requirements annually. In addition to data summaries provided throughout the year to inform quality improvement conversations, each year culminates with a summative evaluation report to document best practices and identify growth areas. This report summarizes data with the intent to document progress towards Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC Goals and Objectives, identify essential practices that contribute to program quality improvement and student success, as well as recommend key priorities for improvement that can accelerate effective youth programming in Arkansas moving forward.

### Goal 1: Increase academic achievement in participants who regularly attend 21st CCLC programs

*Objective 1.1:* 60% of participants regularly attending the 21st CCLC program will increase OR stay in the Advanced or Proficient levels on the statewide assessment for English language/literacy and math.

*Objective 1.2:* 60% of participants regularly attending the 21st CCLC program will show improvement in classroom academic performance as reported on the ADE Statewide Information System.

#### Summary

Twenty-six percent of regularly attending students increased OR stayed in the Proficient or Advanced levels on the English Language Arts ACT Aspire assessment, and 37% of regularly attending students increased OR stayed in the Proficient or Advanced levels on the Math ACT Aspire assessment. While programs did not meet the statewide Objective 1.1 of 60% at proficiency, the percent of students reaching proficiency remained stable for ELA and Math; results worth mentioning during such a challenging period of time for students following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Also for the 2022-2023 program year, 75% of regularly attending students improved in classroom academic performance (i.e., GPA) as reported on the ADE Statewide Information System. This rate exceeds the 60% objective set by ADE for the school year.

### Goal 2: Increase non-academic achievement in participants who regularly attend 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs

*Objective 2.1:* 75% of youth attending 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs will report high levels of life skills, as reported on the youth survey administered by the Weikart Center.

*Objective 2.2:* 75% of youth attending 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs will report high levels of positive academic habits, as reported on the youth survey administered by the Weikart Center.

#### Summary

Ninety-two percent of students that attended Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs reported high levels of life skill development for the 2022-23 program year. Additionally, 95% of students reported high levels of positive academic habits which include asking for help, speaking up for themselves, and achieving goals. Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs provide students with a rich learning environment full of supportive staff who assist with homework completion, provide new activities that align with youth interests and connect to school day content, and promote positive and productive relationships among peers. This data suggests that Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC students continue to develop skills that will help them be successful in school, work, and life.

### Goal 3: Offer quality activities to all youth attending the program.

*Objective 3.1:* All 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs will offer homework help time to 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC participants.

*Objective 3.2:* All 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs will offer academic (beyond homework help) and enrichment activities.

*Objective 3.3:* Every data collection term, 90% of 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs will offer quality activities to families of participating students.

*Objective 3.4:* All programs will fully engage and complete all elements of the YPQI.

*Objective 3.5:* 75% of programs will score a 3.90 or higher on the ITS as measured by the YPQA or School-Age PQA.

#### *Summary*

Aligned with statewide Objective 3.1, 100% of sites offered homework help to students in the program. In response to Objective 3.2, 93% of sites offered academic activities tied to literacy and STEM. Of those programs, 76% also offered activities like music programming, service learning and youth leadership.

In response to ADE Objective 3.3, 97% of sites reported they offered caregiver activities for families at least every few months. Ninety-nine percent of caregivers agreed there are program staff available at programs to talk to about their child, and 97% agreed that program staff can connect them to resources.

Aligned with ADE Objective 3.4, nearly all grantee directors fully engaged and completed all elements of the YPQI process. These include participating in a consensus scoring of the Program Quality Assessment, conversations to determine Program Improvement Plans for the site, providing coaching to their staff, and participating in professional development to strengthen programming. Importantly, when engagement was examined by position, grantee directors reported significantly greater participation in the YPQI process in comparison to afterschool staff.

For ADE Objective 3.5, 50% of Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs provided high-quality experiences, defined as a score of 3.9 or higher, for participating students each year based on their self-assessment PQA scores. Similar to national trends, programs on average tended to report higher scores in Safe and Supportive environment practices than in the Interactive and Engaging environment domains. Additional training and coaching on staff practices aligned to these domains would support program quality improvement throughout ADE 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs.

In response to these overall trends among Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs, the following recommendations are offered:

❖ **Formalize an external assessment strategy.**

With the variation in PQA scores given for the same programs on their self-assessment and external assessment, opportunities for increasing external observations would be beneficial. Adding programs that receive both self and external assessments will capture staff practices at different points of time and provide a strengthened view of offerings. Formalizing which grantees/sites will receive both observations will be important to move program quality improvement work forward for the network.

❖ **Utilize training and coaching supports to promote higher-order aspects of positive youth development programming.**

Higher-order aspects of positive youth development programming, as articulated within the Interactive and Engaging environment domains on the PQA, include providing young people with opportunities for collaboration, planning, choice, and reflection. Although incorporating these elements into programming may not be intuitive, with some ideas and intentionality, they can be readily incorporated into 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs and promote deeper learning and engagement in young people. According to the network's PQA data, the Interactive Environment (3.21) and Engaging Environment (2.82) externally assessed domains had the lowest average scores.

Simple ideas for helping young people reflect on their learning, make choices, or plan their activities are taught in the Weikart Center's Planning and Reflection workshop and can take up minimal program time. Other workshops such as Building Community or Cooperative Learning provide practical ideas that can improve scores in the Interactive domain. Engaging direct staff in relevant professional development opportunities is ideal, but grantee directors can also utilize staff meetings or brief coaching interchanges to provide staff with easy ways to increase young people's opportunities for constructive collaboration, leadership, and engaging in higher order thinking skills.

## Program Background

Since 2002, states have been responsible for distributing federal funds for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) through the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). These federal funds support afterschool programs in low-achieving schools and/or high poverty areas. Grants are awarded to applicants whose main goals are to:

1. Provide opportunities for **academic enrichment**, including tutorial services to help students meet the challenging state academic standards.
2. Offer students a broad array of **additional services, programs and activities** designed to reinforce and complement the regular academic program.
3. Offer families of participating students' opportunities for active and **meaningful engagement in their children's education**, including opportunities for literacy and related educational development.

In alignment with the federal Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), each State Education Agency (SEA) must report on specific indicators designed to measure the effectiveness and quality of each funded program. This data is reported using the 21APR online portal monitored by the U.S. Department of Education. Additionally, SEAs must conduct comprehensive annual evaluations of their 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs that are made available for public consumption.

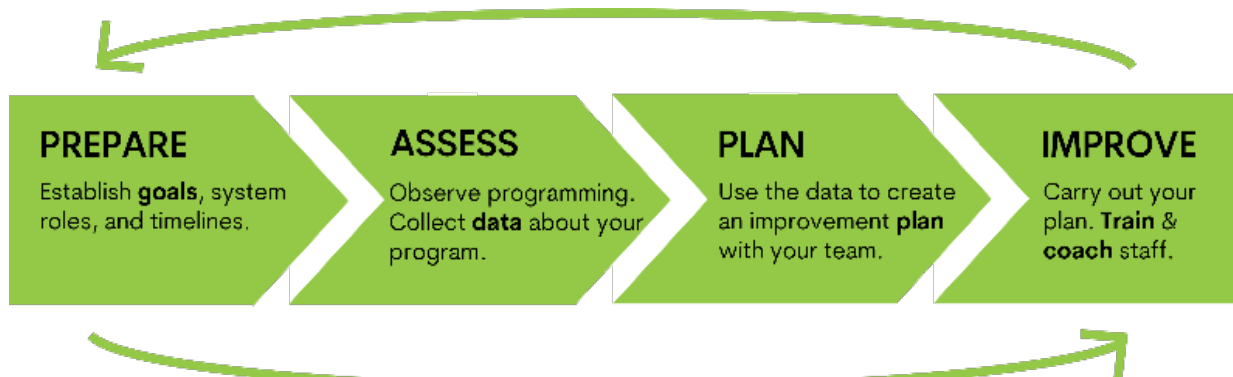
For the 2022-2023 program year, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) distributed 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC funding to **46 unique grantees** (e.g., school districts, community-based organizations) who were responsible for the grant management of **67 unique sites** (e.g., elementary school program, local clubhouse) where **11,164 young people** were served. ADE provides guidance, supportive resources, and technical assistance throughout the year to support high-quality programming across the state and ensure compliance with federal requirements.

## Youth Program Quality Improvement Approach

Since 2010, the Forum for Youth Investment's Weikart Center has partnered with ADE to design, implement, and evaluate a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) system with 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grantees. The CQI system, informed by the research validated Youth Program Quality Improvement (YPQI) approach (**Figure 1**), provides a roadmap and associated supports for utilizing the Program Quality Assessment (PQA) and suite of Leading Indicator surveys to drive improvement of evidence-based organizational and staff practices. These evidence-based practices then build educational settings that foster learning and skill growth for participating students.

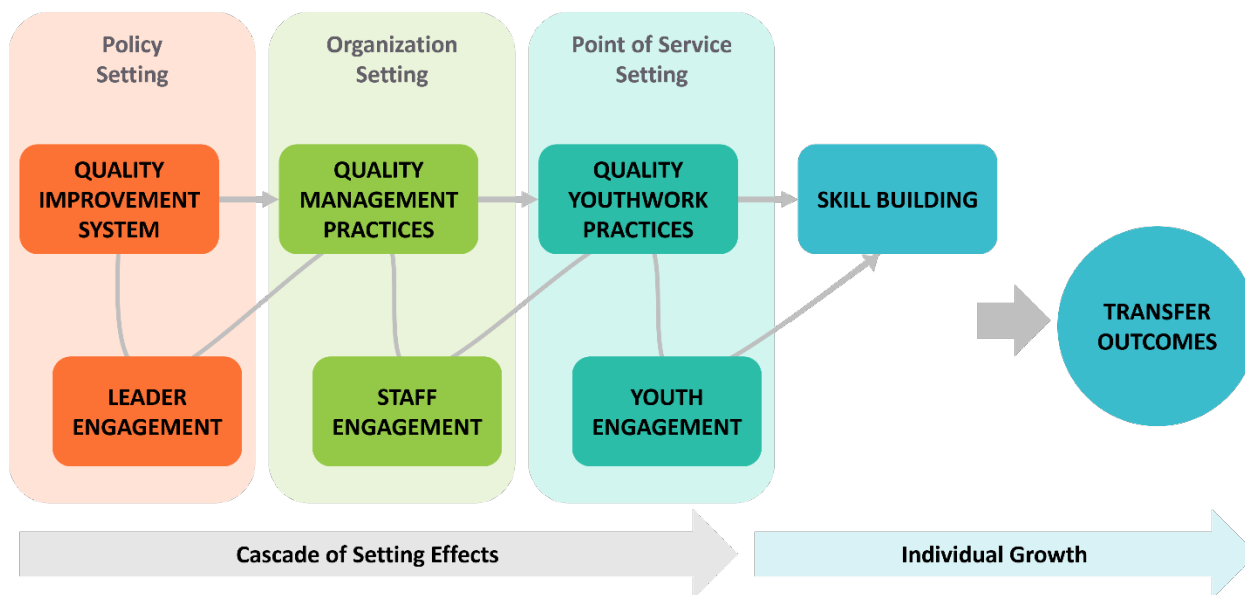


Figure 1. Youth Program Quality Improvement Approach



The transfer of outcomes to youth within afterschool programs is reliant on a cascade of setting effects, comparable to those seen in schools<sup>1</sup> (see **Figure 2**). Policy directives and resources at the system settings level, targeted at grantee directors at the organization setting level, will increase staff engagement and produce quality instructional practices at the point-of-service setting level where youth are engaged and build skills that can be used to improve academic performance.

Figure 2: Cascade of Setting Effects



Within the CQI system setting, ADE sets expectations for their network of grantees related to YPQI engagement and program quality practices along with high levels of support for implementation, opportunities for collaboration, and responsive structures that reinforce the engagement and retention of grantee directors. In response, these program leaders can employ high-quality management practices within the organization setting, improving their ability to

<sup>1</sup> Smith, C., Akiva, T., Sugar, S., Lo, Y. J., Frank, K.A., Peck, S. C., Cortina, K.S. & Devaney, T. (2012). Continuous quality improvement in afterschool settings: Impact findings from the Youth Program Quality Intervention study, Washington, D.C.: Forum for Youth Investment

model practices, set clear expectations, and otherwise support and retain staff. Staff in the point-of-service setting (e.g. youth workers in an afterschool program) then learn how to use quality instructional practices with students, which increases students' attendance and engagement in programming. As students continue to attend these high-quality, well-supported programs, they build skills within the program that can be used to improve their academic performance.

## Evaluation Design

To assess the impact of Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC engagement, the annual statewide evaluation examines improvements in program quality, youth engagement in academic and enrichment activities, and the development of life skills among participating PreK-12<sup>th</sup> grade students. These findings are then examined alongside the Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC Statewide Goals and Objectives to assess annual performance and progress (**Table 1**).

**Table 1. Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC Statewide Goals and Objectives**

<b>Goal 1: Increase academic achievement in participants who regularly attend 21st CCLC programs.</b>
<i>Objective 1.1:</i> 60% of participants regularly attending the 21st CCLC program will increase OR stay in the Advanced or Proficient levels on the statewide assessment for English language/literacy and math.
<i>Objective 1.2:</i> 60% of participants regularly attending the 21st CCLC program will show improvement in classroom academic performance as reported on the ADE Statewide Information System.
<b>Goal 2: Increase non-academic achievement in participants who regularly attend 21st CCLC programs</b>
<i>Objective 2.1:</i> 75% of youth attending 21st CCLC programs will report high levels of social and emotional skills, as reported on the youth survey administered by the Weikart Center
<i>Objective 2.2:</i> 75% of youth attending 21st CCLC programs will report high levels of positive academic habits, as reported on the youth survey administered by the Weikart Center.
<b>Goal 3: Offer quality activities to all youth attending the program.</b>
<i>Objective 3.1:</i> All 21st CCLC programs will offer homework help time to 21st CCLC participants.
<i>Objective 3.2:</i> All 21st CCLC programs will offer academic (beyond homework help) and enrichment activities.
<i>Objective 3.3:</i> Every data collection term, 90% of 21st CCLC programs will offer quality activities to families of participating students.
<i>Objective 3.4:</i> All programs will fully engage and complete all elements of the YPQI.
<i>Objective 3.5:</i> 75% of programs will score a 3.90 or higher on the Instructional Total Score (ITS) as measured by the YPQA or School-Age PQA.

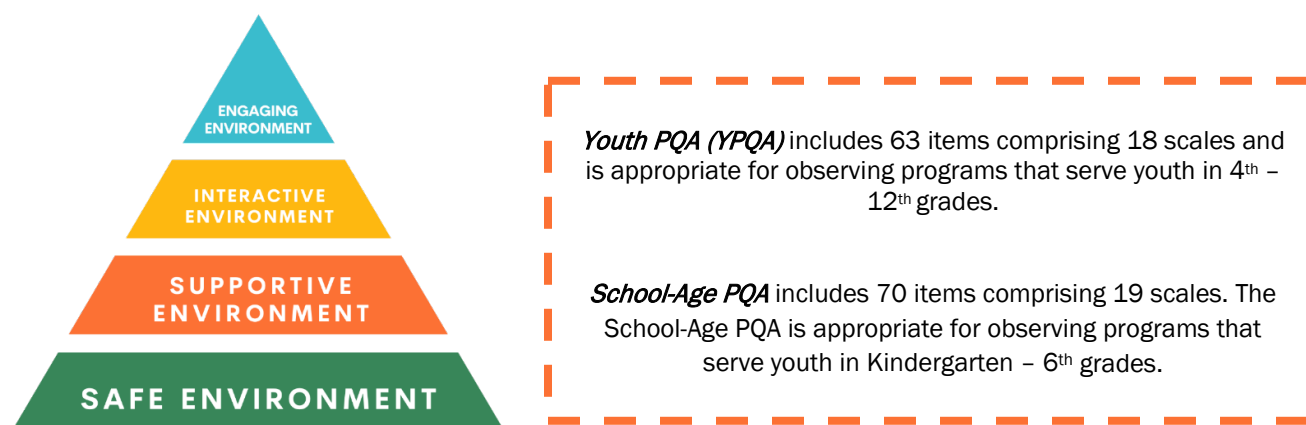
## Performance Measures

Multiple data sources were collected from participating sites to evaluate Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs in the 2022-23 program year.

### *Program Quality Assessment*

The PQA is a validated, observation-based instrument designed to evaluate the quality of K-12 youth programs and identify staff training needs. PQA data spans four domains of program quality: Safe Supportive, Interactive, and Engaging Environments (**Figure 3**). Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs used both the School-Age PQA and the Youth PQA to collect site performance data in the fall.

**Figure 3. Pyramid of Program Quality**



To collect self-assessment data, an internal team was selected at each site to observe staff practices using the PQA. After observations, teams have a scoring meeting to discuss their notes and come to a consensus on the score for each item on the tool. Each item is scored using a 1-3-5 measurement scale, where 1 generally represents the absence of a practice or the presence of a poor practice, 3 represents the informal presence of the practice or availability of the practice to only some youth, and 5 represents intentional delivery of the highest quality practices. Final scores are entered into Scores Reporter, a Weikart Center online data collection platform.

### *Annual Performance Measures*

The online federal data collection system (21APR) was designed to collect required site operations data across seven key program areas including: Centers, Activities, Attendance, Staffing, Families, Participation, and Outcomes, aligned with the GPRA Indicators. The Weikart Center collected data at three timepoints throughout the program year (summer, fall, and spring) for input into the online 21APR platform in accordance with federally mandated deadlines. To complete data collection tied to Activities, Staffing and Family Engagement, grantees submitted tracking forms to the Weikart Center. Program Attendance and Outcomes monitoring were completed using Arkansas' AS21 website, which utilizes Cayen program management software.

### Leading Indicator Surveys

Grantee directors/site coordinators, afterschool teachers/youth workers, students, and families were invited to complete surveys to share feedback on their experience during the program year (**Table 2**). Specifically, these surveys informed our understanding of Organizational Context, Instructional Context, External Relationships, Youth Skills, and Family Satisfaction. Online surveys were administered via Qualtrics. The Weikart Center provided sites with weekly audits to monitor survey completion.

**Table 2. 2022-2023 Leading Indicator Surveys**

Survey	Intended Audience	Length
Grantee Director/Site Coordinator	Individual(s) responsible for site operations.	108 items
Afterschool Teacher/ Youth Worker	Staff responsible for providing direct programming to youth.	120 items
Family	All parents/guardians of youth attending the afterschool programs (regardless of youth age)	59 items
Student	Youth in grades 4 through 12 who attended the afterschool programs <sup>2</sup>	50 items

### 2022-2023 Activities: Overview

The 2022-2023 program year began with an orientation in July for new and returning grantees that established expectations and timelines for the year and provided the opportunity to reflect on and celebrate successes from the previous year (**Table 3**). In August, grantees participated in a Leading with Data workshop that focused on the importance of quality in programming and learned about the role of local evaluation in supporting the achievement of their grant goals. In October, new staff participated in PQA Basics while returning staff completed Beyond PQA Basics. From September through November, all sites were expected to complete a self-assessment using the Youth or School-Age PQA to collect objective data about staff-youth interactions within programs at each site. Additional external assessments were conducted by the Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC leadership team to provide an objective perspective on program quality. In January 2023, grantees and sites participated in a virtual Planning with Data workshop to review their program strengths and growth opportunities and subsequently submit a Program Improvement Plan detailing goals, timelines, necessary resources, and staffing supports to achieve desired improvements.

To support these goals, grantee directors and staff had access to ongoing training opportunities throughout the year to improve targeted instructional skills. Additionally, all staff also had access to online self-paced Youth Work Methods throughout the year to support identified program improvements. Supplemented by ongoing technical

---

<sup>2</sup> Surveys are directed only at this age group because the survey method is not developmentally appropriate for children in third grade or lower.

assistance and embedded coaching supports provided by ADE, these opportunities were made available to all participating programs to reinforce continuous improvement practices.

**Table 3. 2022-2023 ADE 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC Project Timeline**

Activity	Timeline	Aligned Data Collection
Summer Programming	May 2022 – August 2023	
Afterschool Programming	August 2022– May 2023	
Quality & Evaluation Kickoff/Grantee Orientation	July 27, 2022	
Ongoing TA and Coaching	September 2022 - May 2023	
Annual Performance Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Summer: June – August 2022</li> <li>Fall: August – December 2022</li> <li>Spring: January – May 2023</li> </ul>	Attendance Staffing Academic, Enrichment & Family Activities
Program Quality Assessments	September – November 2022  *Training webinar November 9, 2022	Self and External YPQA and SAPQA
Professional Development Leading with Data PQA Basics/Beyond PQA Basics Planning with Data/Advanced Youth Work Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>August 22-23, 2022</li> <li>October 5-6, 2022</li> <li>October 7, 2022</li> <li>January 23, 2023</li> <li>January 24, 2023</li> <li>Online self-paced courses available all year</li> </ul>	Training Evaluation Surveys
Leading Indicator Surveys	March 8 – April 28, 2023 *Training webinar March 8, 2023	Grantee Director/Site Coordinator Afterschool Teacher/Youth Worker Youth Family

## Evaluation Sample

Each year, all participating sites are expected to submit the required data for each term they were approved to offer programs. Almost all sites submitted the required 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC annual performance data on program activities, family services, and attendance to the US Department of Education each term and completed their self PQA. During the 2022-2023 program year Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program served a total of 11,164 students, increasing from the number of participating students served the previous year (**Table 4**).

**Table 4. Participation by Calendar Year, 2019-2023**

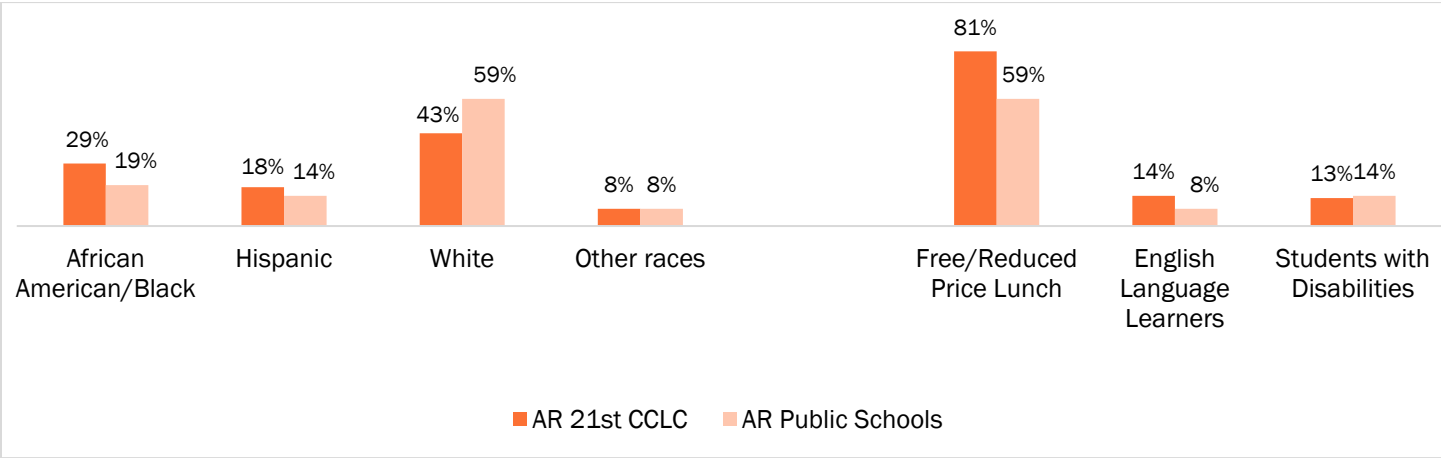
	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Grantees	49	43	26	46
Sites	75	68	59	67
<b>PQA</b>				
External	N/A	40% sites	27% sites	31% sites
Self	100% sites	100% sites	99% sites	99% sites
<b>Surveys</b>				
Grantee Director/Site Coordinator	132 (96% sites)	110 (86% sites)	120 (100% sites)	144 (99% sites)
Staff	657 (96% sites)	473 (94% sites)	591 (100% sites)	727 (100% sites)
Student	945 (36% sites)	1,496 (92% sites)	2,587 (99% sites)	2,718 (100% sites)
Family	545 (33% sites)	550 (71% sites)	1,006 (97% sites)	1,287 (100% sites)
<b>APR</b>				
Program Attendance (fall + spring)	13,245 students (97% sites)	7,548 students (100% sites)	9,660 students (99% sites)	11,164 students (100% sites)
ELA Test Scores	N/A*	N/A*	6,401 students (99% sites)	6,646 students (100% sites)
Math Test Scores	N/A*	N/A*	6,401 students (99% sites)	6,652 students (100% sites)

\*State testing was disrupted in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In alignment with 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC federal requirements, programs continued to serve the most vulnerable students each year (**Figure 4**). For example, 81% of students served received a free and/or reduced-price lunch as compared to 59% across the state; 14% required English Language Learning supports as compared to 8%; similar rates of students served in these programs have reported disabilities (14%) as those across the state (14%)<sup>3</sup>. Participating students were African American/Black (29%), Hispanic (18%), or White (43%).

<sup>3</sup> University of Arkansas, Office of Education Policy. <https://oep.uark.edu/data/demographics/>

Figure 4. Student Characteristics Compared to AR Public Schools, 2023



Demographic data submitted through the Leading Indicator surveys showed that grantee directors and staff members at Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC sites identified as African American/Black (21%), Asian (1.3%), Hispanic/Latino (4%), two or more races (1.3%), and White (65%). Three out of four staff members identified as female, and staff had varied educational attainment including a high school diploma/GED (8%), some college (14%), a Bachelor’s (21%) or Master’s (40%) degree in 2023 (Table 5).

Table 5. Staff Demographic Characteristics, 2023

Education level	HS Diploma/GED	8%
	Some college	14%
	Associate's	4%
	Bachelor's	21%
	Master's	40%
Race	African American/Black	21%
	Asian	1%
	Hispanic or Latino	3%
	Two or more races	1%
	White	64%
Gender	Female	76%
	Male	14%

## Evaluation Approach and Results

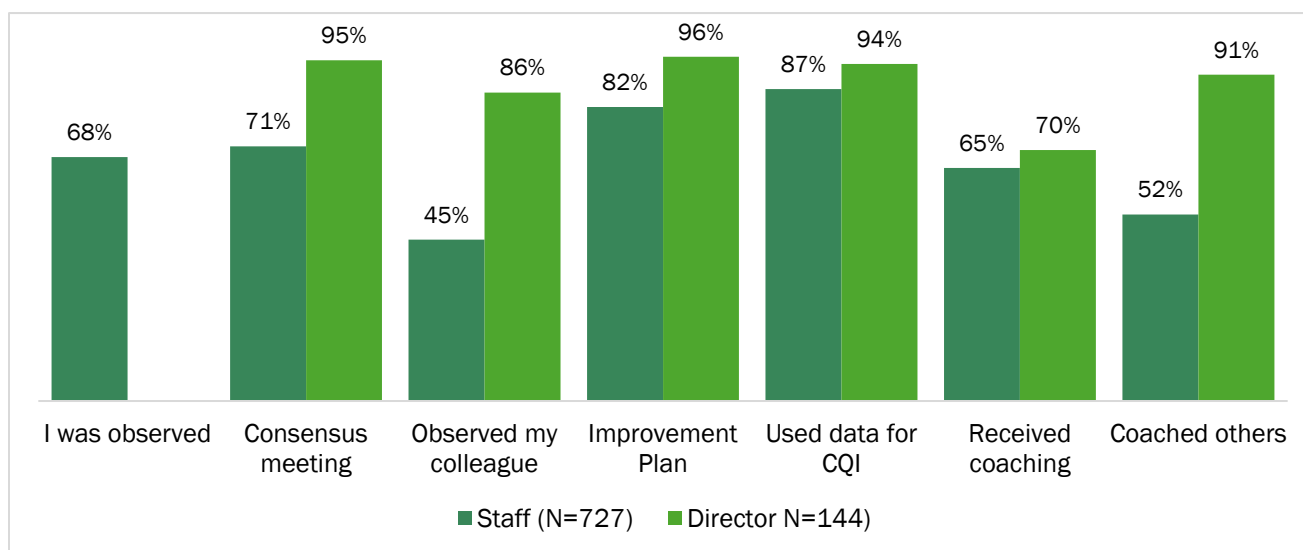
### CQI System Building and Leader Engagement

Through involvement in the YPQI process, ADE aims to establish a CQI system across its network that promotes high-quality program practices. By introducing policies to its network aligned to YPQI engagement and providing the supports necessary to implement high-quality programming, program leaders can maintain high levels of job satisfaction and are better prepared to lead effectively in their programs. Consistent implementation of high-quality instructional practices across sites requires clear leadership and support from grantee directors around program operations, quality standards and YPQI expectations, and available resources for staff support and development.

#### *YPQI Fidelity*

The four staff practices central to YPQI implementation are program quality assessment, data-driven improvement planning, coaching, and training. **Aligned with ADE Objective 3.4, nearly all grantee directors completed all elements of YPQI.** Of note, when engagement was examined by position, grantee directors reported greater participation in the YPQI process in comparison to afterschool staff (**Figure 5**).

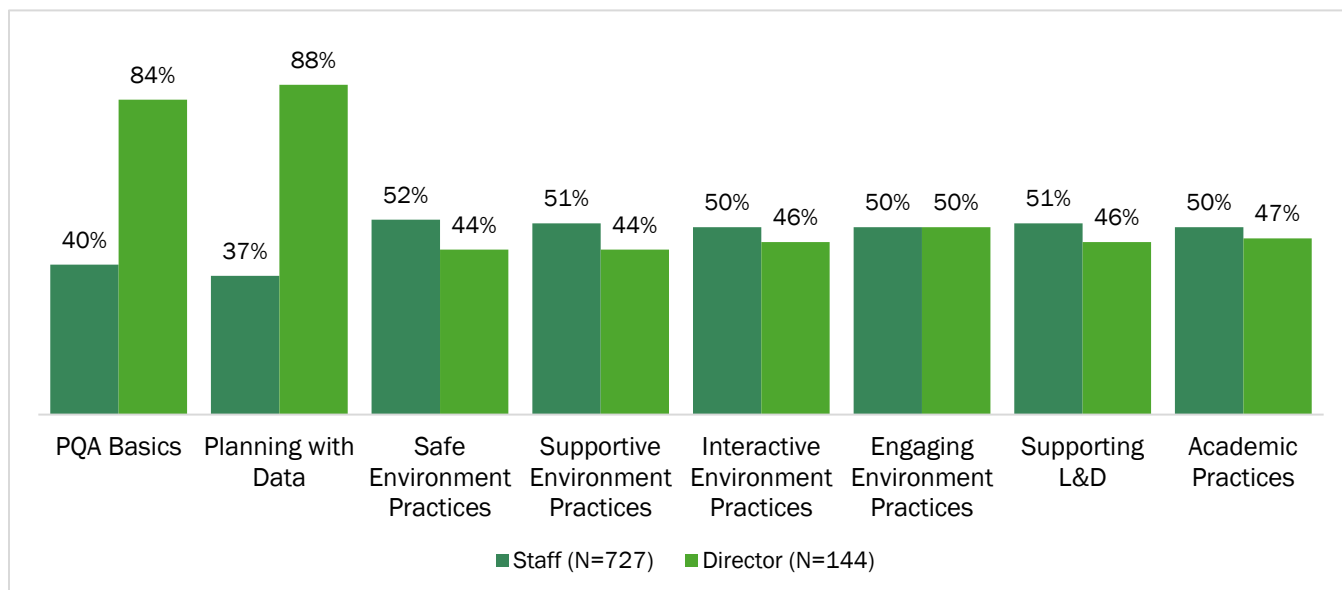
**Figure 5. Grantee Director and Staff Engagement in YPQI Practices, 2023**



Additional questions were examined to understand the extent to which staff participated in the various training opportunities provided to support YPQI. The 2023 survey data showed that there was a noticeable difference in participation by position for the PQA Basics and the Planning with Data trainings, but participation was comparable across role for the other trainings offered over the course of the year (**Figure 6**). Notably, a high percentage of grantee directors (88%) attended Planning with Data in the 2022-2023 program year.



Figure 6. Grantee Director and Staff Engagement in YPQI Trainings, 2023

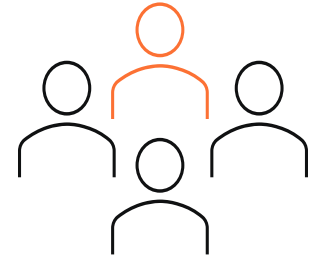


Grantee directors and staff were asked about the types of trainings and activities that had the greatest impact on their practices in the 2022-2023 year. Select responses are below.

- *Planning with Data training had the greatest impact on my practices this year. We were able to use the data to breakdown our program's current strengths and areas for improvement.*
- *I really enjoyed the PQA and determining what works and what is needed for the program to be successful.*
- *Reframing Conflict was very beneficial. Lots of great strategies and steps were shared for handling conflicts in a positive way for both adults and students. Lots of good information and reminders.*
- *The Active-Participatory Approach PD was a great realization to have students share their voice and be leaders in the daily activities we do.*
- *Working through the SMART goals and PIP this year collaborative with our staff was a great process for us and allowed us to have a shared vision for what we were doing at program sites. We also worked this year on better meeting the PQA based on feedback from our external observation last year and that has been helpful as well.*

### Leader Engagement

In addition to reflections on training opportunities, 100% of grantee directors surveyed indicated they are proud of the work they do at programs and look forward to coming to work each day. In response to questions related to workforce retention, approximately 1 in 4 grantee directors indicated they would like to make a career in the afterschool field and plan to pursue further education.

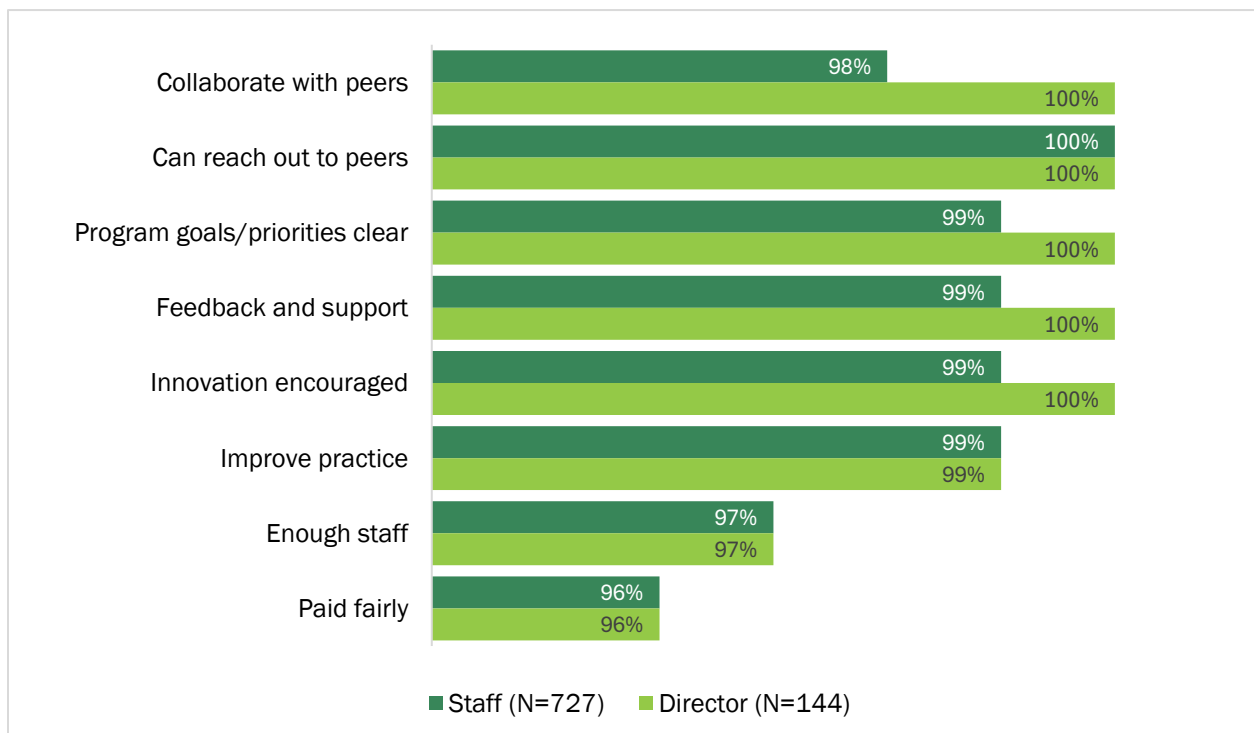


### Quality Management Practices and Staff Engagement

#### Management Practices

ADE invests in training and supports for grantee directors that promote both high-quality management practices within local programs, as well as organizational structures where staff can work more effectively with students. Through the Leading Indicator survey, grantee directors and staff reported on various organizational practices such as discussion of common challenges, collaboration, and program goals and priorities (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Quality Management Practices by Role



According to the survey, 98% of staff indicated they collaborated with their peers to make program and activity decisions and 100% agreed they can reach out to their colleagues for support. Similarly, 100% of grantee directors noted they collaborate with peers and can reach out to them if they have an issue. Most

staff agreed that program goals and priorities are clear and 100% of grantee directors indicated they make sure that staff understand program priorities. Overall, staff surveyed (99%) felt they received feedback and support from their supervisors to be successful, were encouraged to be innovative in their programs, and improve their practice as professionals. All grantee directors agreed they worked to encourage innovation and staff growth. Finally, both staff and grantee directors agreed they have enough staff (97%) and are paid fairly (96%).

### *Staff Engagement*

All of staff surveyed indicated they are proud of the work they do in their programs and look forward to coming to work each day. While most staff indicated satisfaction with their role, only 10% noted they would like to make a career in the afterschool field and plan to pursue further education and go into program administration.

### **Point-of-Service Quality: Instructional Practices and Youth Engagement**

With a strong organizational structure in place that includes robust management practices, staff are well positioned to provide high-quality programming across activities. If students are provided high-quality programs (e.g., high-quality staff practices supported by strong organizational capacity and a culture of continuous quality improvement) then Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC will see higher levels of youth attendance in the variety of academic, enrichment, and family engagement activities offered. If activities offered are both high-quality and engaging, then students will have more opportunities to improve the skills required to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which will prepare youth to be more confident and interested in school-day content. These students will then show up to the classroom ready to learn, leading them to greater gains in academic performance and post-secondary success.

### *Instructional Quality*

Research within the youth development field has established the significant relationship between high-quality programs and youth outcomes. Studies have shown that youth programs with the highest scoring instructional practices, meaning those that prioritize a safe environment, supportive relationships, positive staff-youth interactions, and active learning principles are more likely to promote youth engagement and attendance, which in turn promotes youth skill development across multiple domains, such as academic, social-emotional, and behavioral skills.<sup>4</sup>

The Instructional Total Score (ITS; comprised of the Supportive, Interactive, and Engaging Environment domains) is used as a measure of high-quality instructional practice. In the 2022-2023 program year, the average self-assessment ITS score was 3.90. **In response to ADE Objective 3.5, 50% of sites achieved an**

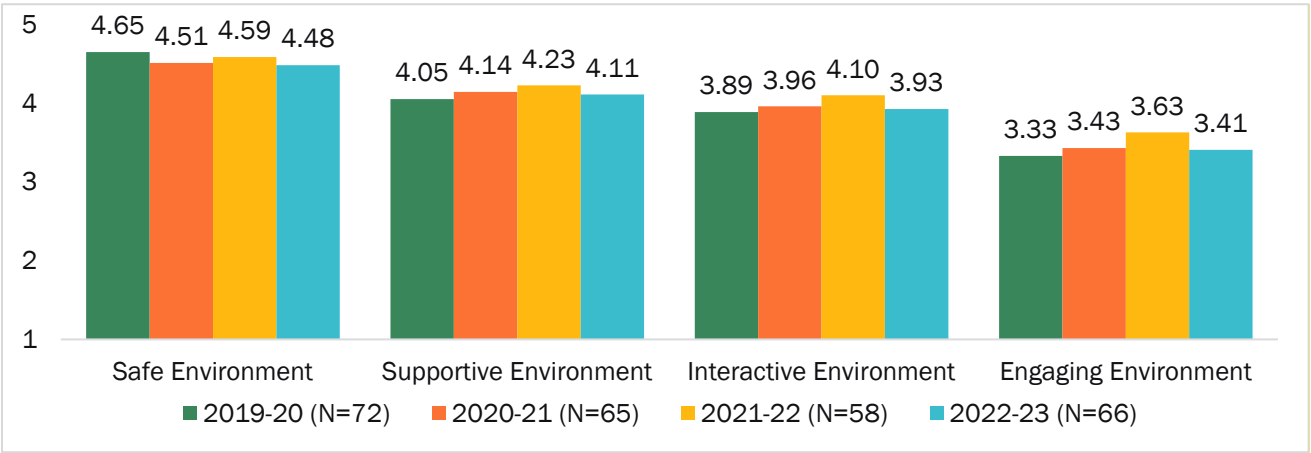
---

<sup>4</sup> Durlak, J., & Weissberg, R. (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(3-4), 294-309.

average ITS score of 3.90 or higher on their YPQA or School-Age PQA self-assessment. This is slightly lower than the previous year of 56% of sites that averaged a 3.90 or higher and is lower than the stated goal of 75%.

While the ITS provides a broad understanding of instructional quality, self-assessment scores were also examined by domain to gather more nuanced information within the program context. **PQA self-assessment scores saw slight decreases from 2021-22 to 2022-23 (Figure 8).**

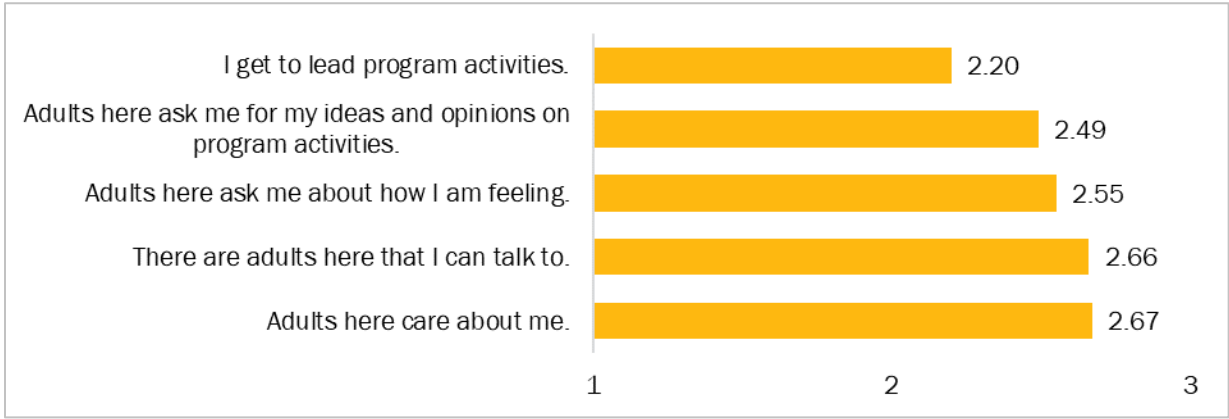
**Figure 8. Self-Assessment PQA Domain Scores by Calendar Year, 2020-2023**



On the self-assessments, all PQA domains received an average score of 3 or higher regardless of year, indicating that most instructional practices were observed some of the time and/or for some of the students (Figure 8). Aligned with national trends, instructional practices within the Safe Environment and Supportive Environment domains were strongest, with lower scores on planning and reflection reported within the Interaction and Engagement domains. This pattern is common among all YPQI networks as providing an interactive and engaging program environment for young people requires an advanced set of staff practices and can be more difficult to achieve compared to establishing a safe and supportive environment.

Students agreed that safe and supportive instructional practices are more common than interactive and engaging practices (Figure 9).

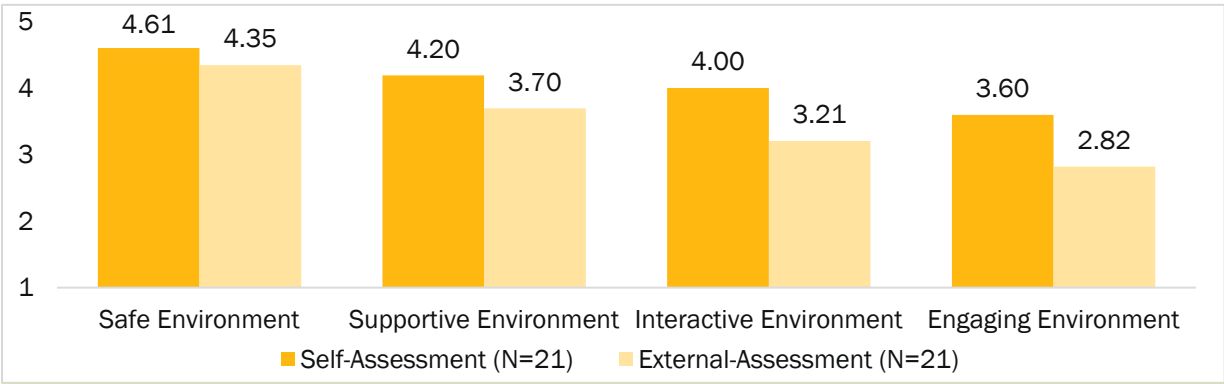
Figure 9. Student Perspectives on Program Quality, 2023 (N=2,361)



Scale: 1 = Not at all true; 2 = Somewhat true; 3 = Very true

In reviewing data from the PQA assessments scored by an external assessor during the 2022-2023 program year, there is a clear divergence of scores as the practices become more complex. Figure 10 includes PQA domain scores for programs that participated in both a self- and externally-scored assessment in the 2022-2023 program year. The Interactive Environment (3.21) and Engaging Environment (2.82) externally assessed domains had the lowest average scores.

Figure 10. 2022-2023 PQA Domain Scores for Self- and External Assessments

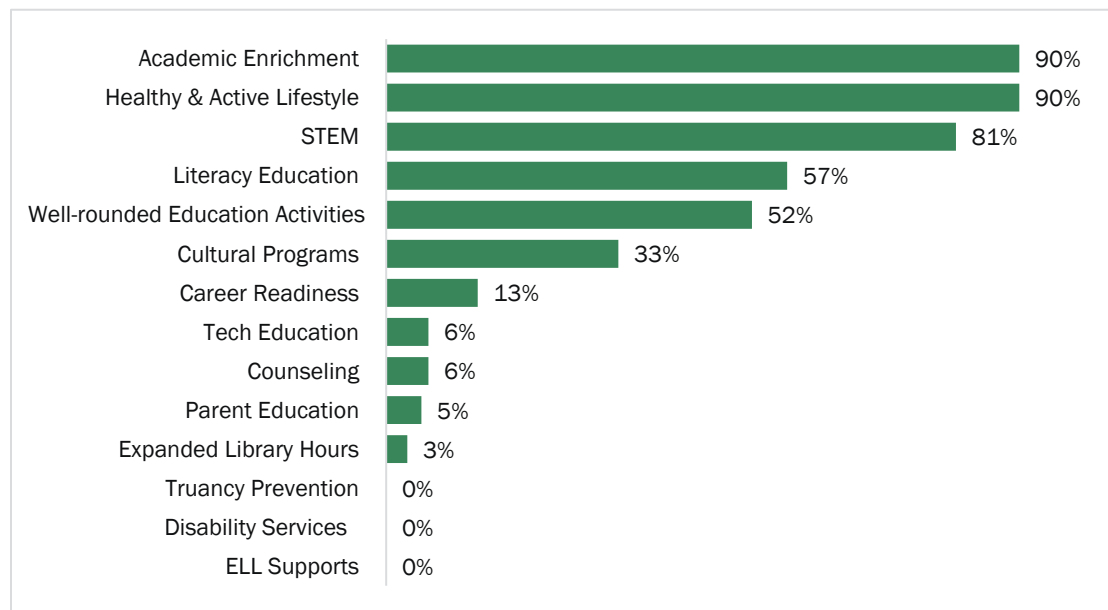


*Skill-Building Opportunities*

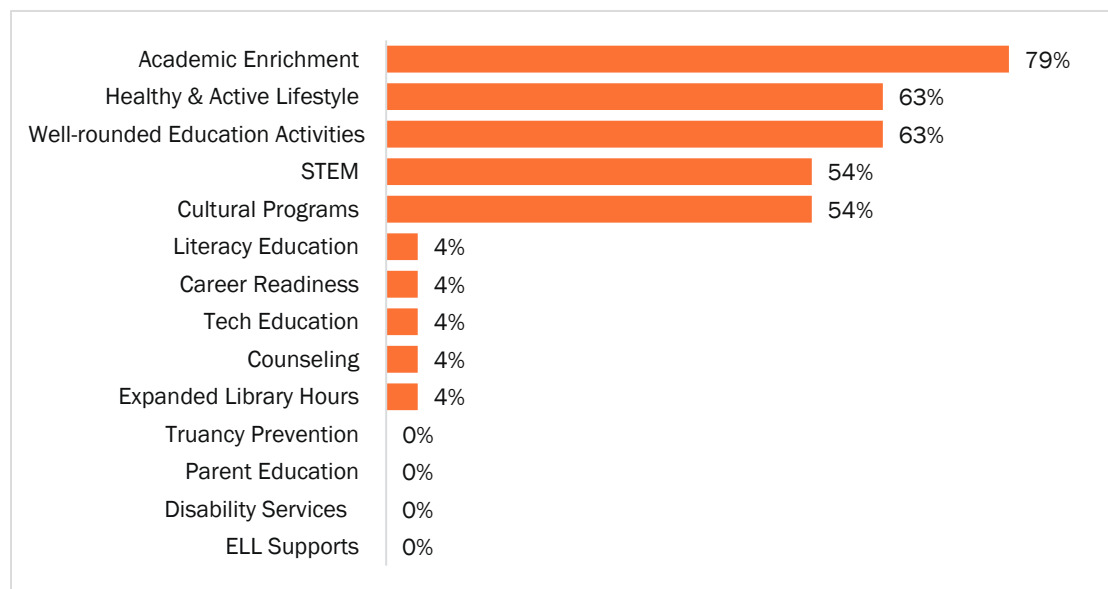
The priorities of 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC funding are to provide students with academic and enrichment activities that will promote youth skills aligned to school-day success. For each APR term, staff reported on the different types of activities that were offered. Like previous years, sites prioritized academic activities, including Literacy Education, Academic Enrichment, and STEM, along with activities that fall into the “Well-Rounded Education Activities” category, like service learning, arts and music, and youth leadership programming (Figure 11).

Aligned with statewide Objectives 3.1 and 3.2, 80% of students at sites reported they are offered homework help during programming, and 90% of programs reported offering activities tied to Academic Enrichment. In addition to Academic Enrichment, 57% also offered Literacy Education, 81% offered STEM programming, and 52% offered Well-Rounded Activities during the school-year.

**Figure 11. School-Year Program Activities at Sites, 2022-23 (N=67)**



**Figure 12. Summer Program Activities at Sites 2022-23 (N=24)**



For sites that offered summer programming, Academic Enrichment was a priority (79%), followed by Healthy & Active Lifestyle (63%) and Well-rounded Education Activities (63%). Over half of sites (54%) offered STEM and Cultural programs during the summer months (**Figure 12**). **Table 6** highlights program activities at the student level by hours for summer, spring, and fall.

**Table 6. Program Activities by Term and Hours**

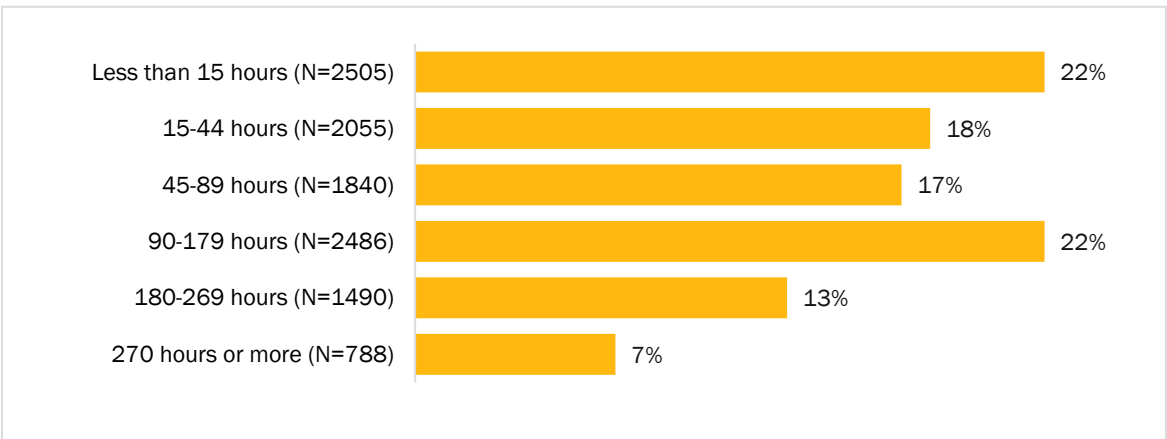
	Summer N= 851		Fall N= 9393		Spring N= 9161	
Activity type	Total hours	Total # of students	Total hours	Total # of students	Total hours	Total # of students
Academic Enrichment	2765	1155	10801	7065	11308	6777
Career Readiness	45	65	251	541	320	509
Counseling	39	53	311	272	283	342
Cultural Programs	51	64	1345	1625	1394	1476
Disability Services	0	0	0	0	0	0
ELL Supports	0	0	0	0	0	0
Expanded Library Hours	15	24	0	0	26	58
Healthy & Active Lifestyle	556	955	5990	6726	6489	6563
Literacy Education	591	838	2565	3142	2488	2974
Parent Education	0	0	48	90	93	95
STEM	461	791	5245	4734	5660	4760
Tech Education	28	12	246	252	230	283
Truancy Prevention	0	0	0	0	0	0
Well-Rounded Education	719	804	2849	3528	2829	3374

### *Youth Engagement*

For the desired program impacts to be achieved, young people must attend the program frequently and consistently throughout the year<sup>5</sup>. Regular attendance is defined as at least 100 hours in a program year. In 2022-2023, 22% of students attended their program less than 15 hours total, while nearly half (42%) of students attended for 90 hours or more (**Figure 13**). Opportunities exist for sites to further engage students that attend programming less frequently and retain students who attend more often.

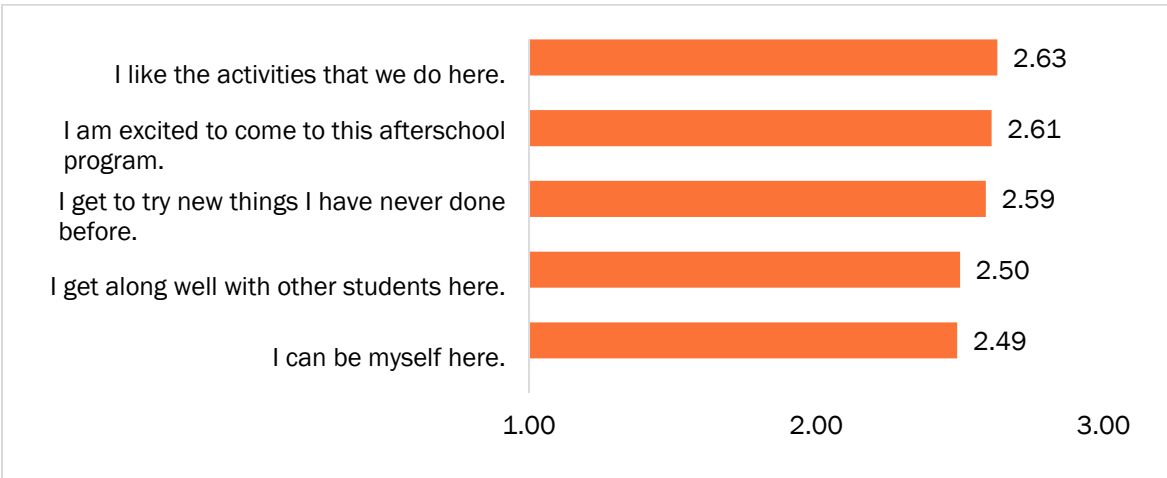
<sup>5</sup> Vandell, D. L., Reisner, E. R., & Pierce, K. M. (2007). Outcomes Linked to High-Quality Afterschool Programs: Longitudinal Findings from the Study of Promising Afterschool Programs. Policy Studies Associates, Inc.

**Figure 13. School Year Program Attendance in Hourly Bands 2022-2023**



Students who did participate continued to report **high levels of satisfaction with the activities offered** and noted they were excited to attend the program and tried new things (Figure 14).

**Figure 14. Student Satisfaction, 2023 (N=2,399)**



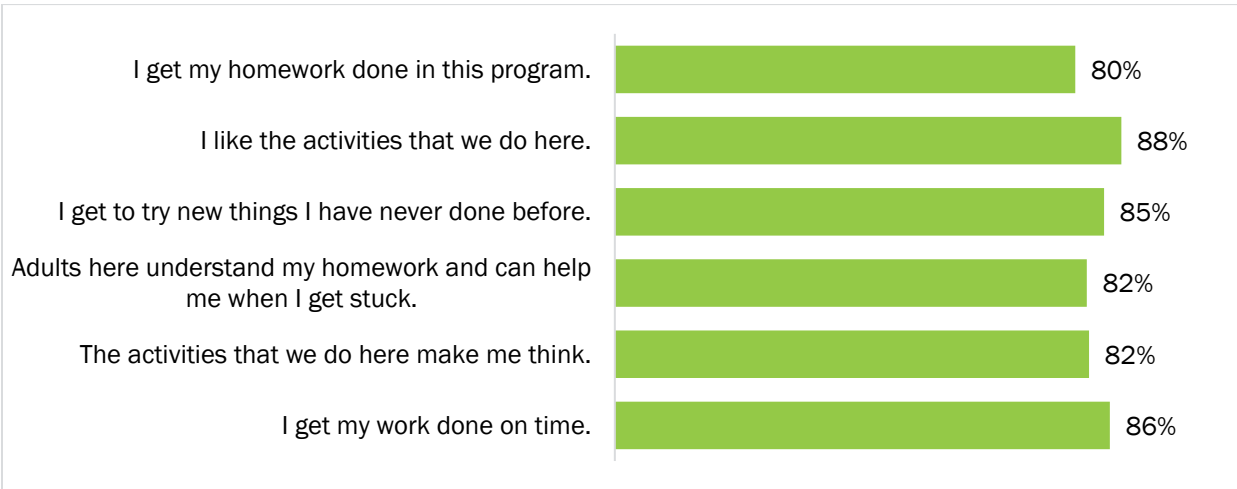
Scale: 1=Not at all true, 2=Somewhat true, 3=Very true

*Academic Rigor*

The critical connection between high-quality 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programming and student academic achievement requires an emphasis on academic rigor throughout programming. When asked about the instructional context and content provided during program activities, **most students reported that the academic support provided, and instructional rigor of program activities, were supportive of their academic development (Figure 15)**. For instance, students (82%) report that program staff understand their homework and that they can complete their homework during program hours (80%).



Figure 15. Youth Reported Academic Support and Instructional Rigor, 2023 (N=2,718)



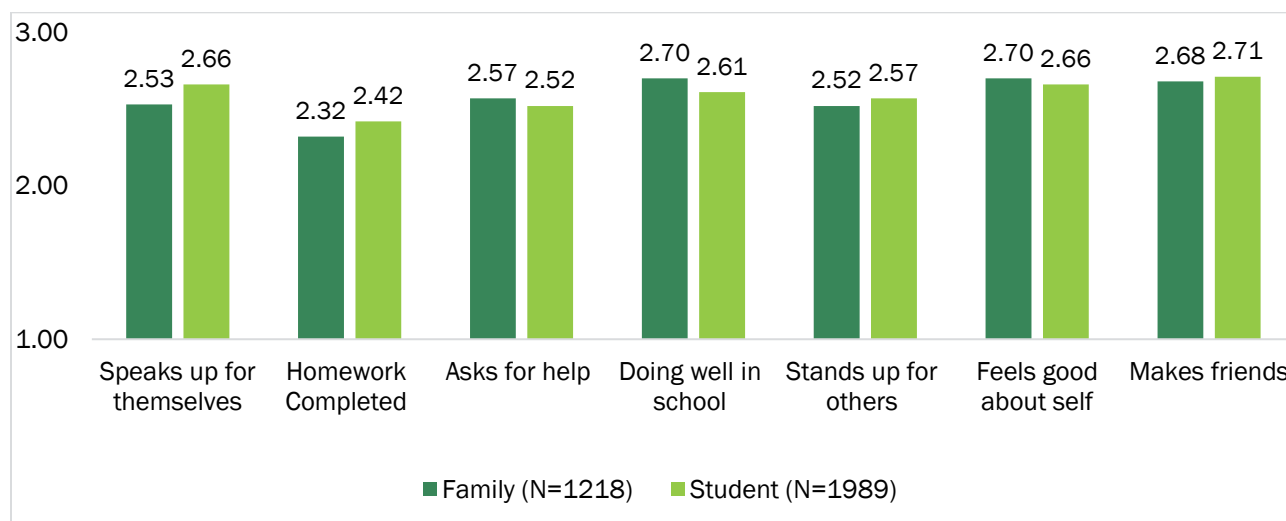
*Skill Development*

The development of additional life skills are like a muscle; the more youth practice them, the stronger and more easily accessible they become. When youth have consistent opportunities for teamwork, problem solving and communication, and are supported through responsive staff practices, the skills and confidence gained can be transferred to other settings that allow youth to achieve success across multiple contexts and be better prepared for post-secondary life.

**Successfully achieving Objective 2.1, 92% of students attending Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs reported high levels of complimentary life skills, as did 100% of their caregivers,** measured by an average response of somewhat true or very true across indicators.

Successfully achieving Objective 2.2, 95% of students agreed that they're doing well in school this year. On average, most families and students acknowledged youth strengths in their ability to make friends and ask for help when needed, as well as feeling good about themselves and standing up for others (**Figure 16**). This data suggests that Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC students continue to develop skills that will help them be successful in school, work, and life<sup>6</sup>.

**Figure 16. Student Skill Development, 2023**



Scale: 1=Not at all true, 2=Somewhat true, 3=Very true

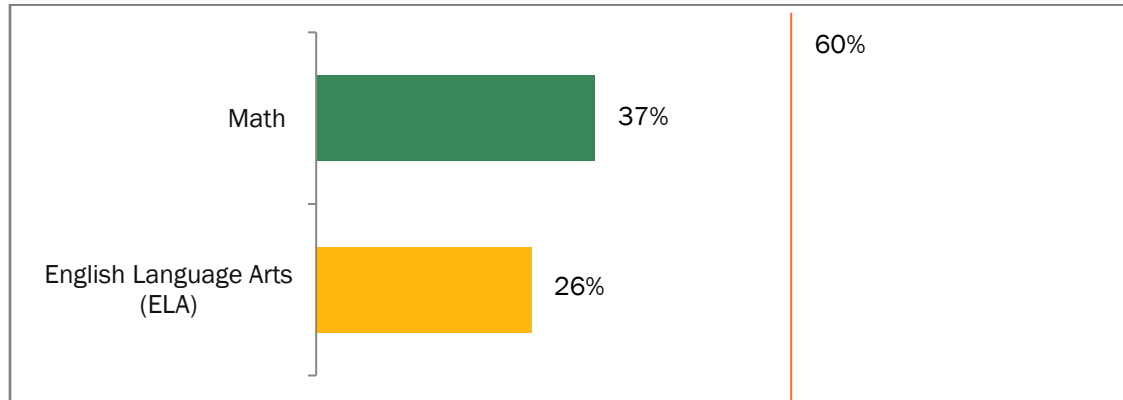
Averages calculated at the site level before calculating network-wide averages.

<sup>6</sup> Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child development*, 82(1), 405-432.

### *Transfer to Outcomes*

For the 2022-2023 program year, in response to Objective 1.1, 26% of regularly attending students increased OR stayed in the Proficient or Advanced levels on the English Language Arts ACT Aspire assessment and 37% of regularly attending students increased OR stayed in the Proficient or Advanced levels on the Math ACT Aspire assessment (Figure 17). A student was identified as “regularly attending” if they attended a program for 100 hours or more (17% of students served).

**Figure 17. Academic Proficiency Levels**



Of note, 73% of students entering the program did not meet proficiency on the English Language Arts ACT Aspire assessment and 65% did not meet proficiency on the Math ACT Aspire assessment. At the state level, 61% of students did not meet proficiency in Math and 61% did not meet proficiency in ELA<sup>7</sup>. 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program participants represent an academically vulnerable group in that their proficiency levels upon entry are 12 percentage points lower than the state average in ELA and four percentage points lower in Math than the state-wide average.

**Aligned with statewide Objective 1.2. 76% of regularly attending high-school students improved in classroom academic performance** (i.e., GPA) as reported on the ADE Statewide Information System. This rate exceeds the 60% objective set by ADE for the school year. **Table 7** highlights the GPRA definitions of academic outcomes for students.

---

<sup>7</sup> Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary & Secondary Education, <https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Offices/learning-services/assessment-test-scores/2023>.

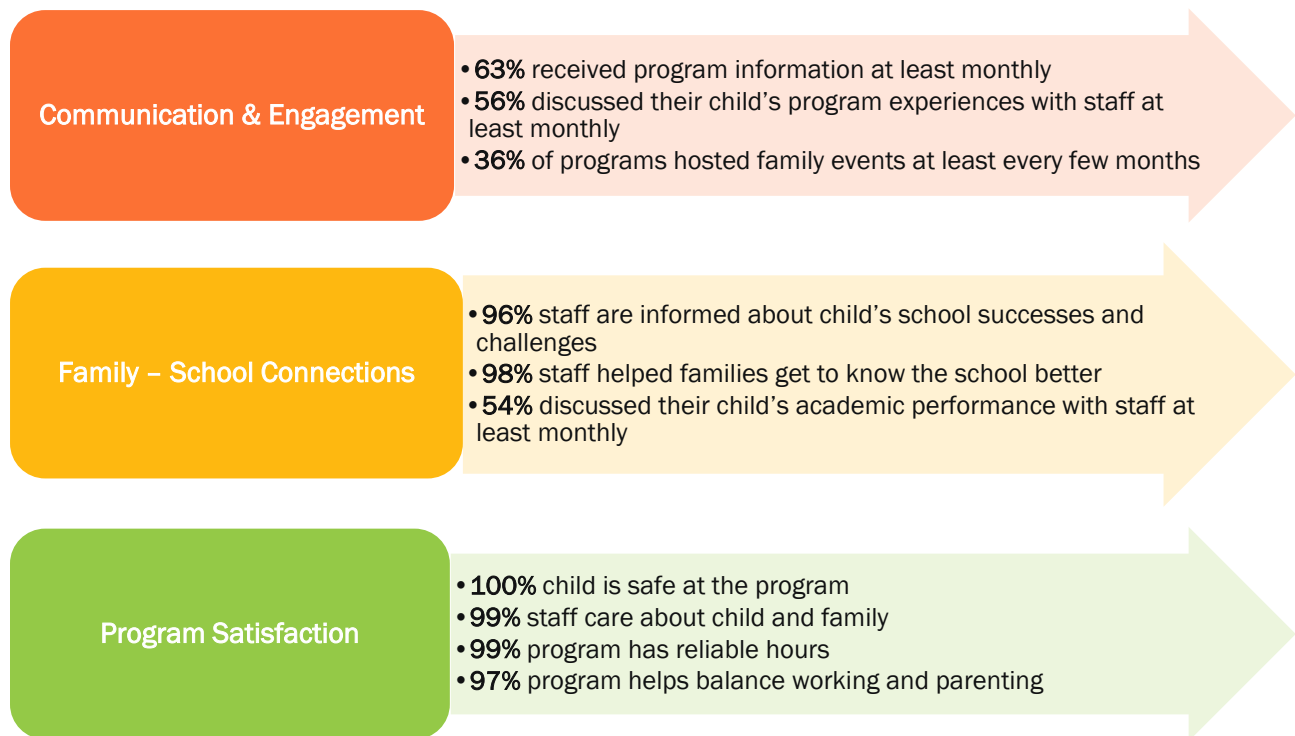
**Table 7. GPRA Definitions of Academic Outcomes**

Metric	Definition	2022-2023 Result
<b>Math and ELA assessment scores</b>	Percentage of students in grade 4-8 participating in 21 <sup>st</sup> CCLC programming during the school year and summer who demonstrate growth in reading and language arts, and math on state assessments.	68% students demonstrated growth in math and 67% demonstrated growth in reading and language arts
<b>Grade Point Average (GPA)</b>	Percentage of students in grades 7-8 and 10-12 attending 21 <sup>st</sup> CCLC programming during the school year and summer with a prior-year unweighted GPA of less than 3.0 who demonstrated an improved GPA.	62% students demonstrated growth in this area
<b>School Day Attendance</b>	Percentage of students in grades 1-12 participating in 21 <sup>st</sup> CCLC during the school year who had a school day attendance rate at or below 90% in the prior school year and demonstrated an improved attendance rate in the current school year.	75% students demonstrated growth in this area
<b>Behavior</b>	Percentage of students in grades 1-12 attending 21 <sup>st</sup> CCLC programming during the school year and summer who experienced a decrease in in-school suspensions compared to the previous school year.	64% students demonstrated growth in this area
<b>Engagement in Learning</b>	Percentage of students in grades 1-5 participating in 21 <sup>st</sup> CCLC programming in the school year and summer who demonstrated an improvement in teacher reported engagement in learning.	91% students demonstrated growth in this area

## Family Engagement

In addition to youth activities, sites were required to offer active and meaningful family engagement opportunities in support of youth's academic success. **In response to ADE Objective 3.3, 97% of sites reported they hosted a family event every few months or more.** Additionally, almost all families agreed that staff cared about their child and family (99%), that the program had reliable hours (99%), and that program staff were well informed of their child's progress in school (96%). Of note, 98% of caregivers agreed that program staff helped them get to know the school better and 97% agreed that program staff can connect them to resources (**Figure 18**).

Figure 18. Family Engagement, 2023



Overall, families reported satisfaction with school connections during the 2023 program year (see **Figure 18**). **Families' satisfaction with communication and engagement continues to be an opportunity for improvement**, with 2023 survey responses showing that 63% of families received program information each month, which is similar to findings from the 2022 program year.

## Recommendations

To assess the implementation of quality improvement efforts and impact of Arkansas 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs, this report examined data collected on YPQI implementation fidelity, program quality, youth and family engagement, as well as skill development and academic outcomes for participating PreK-12<sup>th</sup> grade students. In addition to detailing strong indicators of high-quality youth programming, there are several key areas of focus that can continue strengthening these developmental programs for students.

### ❖ **Formalize an external assessment strategy.**

With the variation in PQA scores given for the same programs on their self-assessment and external assessment, opportunities for increasing external observations would be beneficial. Adding programs that receive both self and external assessments will capture staff practices at different points of time and provide a strengthened view of offerings. Formalizing which grantees/sites will receive both observations will be important to move program quality improvement work forward for the network.

### ❖ **Utilize training and coaching supports to promote higher-order aspects of positive youth development programming.**

Higher-order aspects of positive youth development programming, as articulated within the Interactive and Engaging environment domains on the PQA, include providing young people with opportunities for collaboration, planning, choice, and reflection. Although incorporating these elements into programming may not be intuitive, with some ideas and intentionality, they can be readily incorporated into 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs and promote deeper learning and engagement in young people. According to the network's PQA data, the Interactive Environment (3.21) and Engaging Environment (2.82) externally assessed domains had the lowest average scores.

Simple ideas for helping young people reflect on their learning, make choices, or plan their activities are taught in the Weikart Center's Planning and Reflection workshop and can take up minimal program time. Other workshops such as Building Community or Cooperative Learning provide practical ideas that can improve scores in the Interactive domain. Engaging direct staff in relevant professional development opportunities is ideal, but grantee directors can also utilize staff meetings or brief coaching interchanges to provide staff with easy ways to increase young people's opportunities for constructive collaboration, leadership, and engaging in higher order thinking skills.