Summer Program Implementation

ISBE 21st CCLC Statewide Evaluation Site Visit Report
May 2018

Introduction

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) implements the U.S. Department of Education 21st Century Community Learning Centers program (21st CCLC), funding afterschool programs across the state that provide access to academic resources and supports, opportunities for programs and services such as youth development, arts and recreation, counseling and social-emotional learning, and technology education. Programs also provide families with access and opportunities to educational and personal development services.

EDC **Education Development Center**

Education Development Center (EDC) has served as the program evaluator for the statewide program since 2013. EDC's evaluation aims to provide ISBE with relevant data and information on the progress of the program and its grantees toward meeting the state's program objectives. To this end, EDC conducts site visits to a selection of grantees each year to learn about the range of programs and the contexts in which these programs occur.

EDC conducts targeted site visits to explore a specific 21st CCLC programming topic with 6-12 grantees that are exemplars or otherwise potentially instructive to the 21st CCLC program. This report focuses on **summer programing at 21st CCLC sites**. EDC sought to capture information related to the design and structure of these summer programs, the ways grantees recruit and retain participants, how grantees approach summer staffing and professional development, and approaches to family engagement and community partnerships during the summer.

About this report

This report is based upon the analysis of visits to 11 sites between June and August 2017. Sites visited (1) offered summer programming and (2) were selected to represent geographic diversity, grade level diversity, and diversity of program focus. The 11 sites visited in this report included sites serving elementary, middle, and high school students, as well as sites that served students across school-age groups. Sites were in urban, suburban, small town, and rural locations. See Appendix A for information on the sites visited for this report.

Figure 1. Site visits by level

- ★ Elementary
- ★ Middle
- ★ High school
- ★ Multiple levels
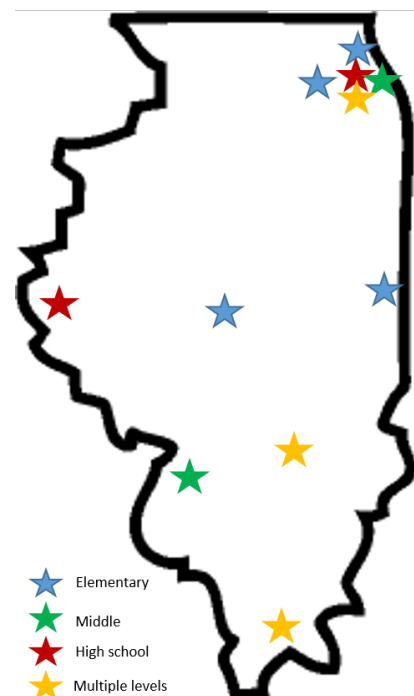
The analysis includes 11 observation reports and 17 interviews with program staff. Observations and interviews during the site visit focused specifically on learning about summer programs. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and transcripts were then coded and analyzed using an inductive, iterative approach, based on the guiding questions for the study. This report is based upon the analysis of interviews as well as the descriptive site visit reports submitted by the evaluators.

Summer program structure and design

Types of programming

🔍 **Grantees vary in how they approach summer programming, particularly in the ways they support academic achievement.**

Grantees noted that during the school year programming primarily focuses on providing students with academic and homework support. One interviewee shared how the school year program is implemented as "an extension of the school day." During the summer, however, grantees noted having more flexibility in how they incorporate academics within their program and implemented various approaches to addressing academic content.

> *Summer is definitely a better time to get more of the academics in on top of the enrichment, which the kids view as more of a fun activity to be a part of just because they aren't in school for eight hours coming to after-school and doing more academics."*
>
> - Program Manager

For example, one grantee focused the summer program on credit recovery using a mix of hands-on direct instruction and a learning management system that tracks what concepts students need to recover. Another grantee offered a four-hour per day transition program for students prior to entering the following grade, including a program for incoming kindergarten students designed to help those students experience what formal school will be like in the fall.

> *"In the summer program, we had block courses that were more hands on and direct instruction ...and it was a math room, a science room, and an English room and those groups were co-taught with an inclusion and support, special ed trained teacher and the core content teacher. [The teachers] had grade print-outs, they pulled what the common assessment data had reported to them as being the needs of that particular group, created activities and lessons."*   - Program Manager

While there are some grantees whose focus during the summer was primarily academic, others expressed that they did not want their summer program to feel like summer school. Specifically, several grantees noted that they see the summer as an opportunity to provide students with programming that is not only academic, but also creative and fun. These grantees blended academics with non-academic

enrichment activities or activities that build social emotional skills. For example, activities observed during sites visits included Storybook Cooking, Fun Numbers, Fairy Tale Fun, Forensic Science, and Sit, Stay, and Read. Each of these activities incorporated aspects of reading, math or science in a creative way. Specific examples included:

Science experiments: *"We do science experiments…in the past, we've used this [science] curriculum which the children really like. It's an activity where they read a story. And it has a scientific topic, whether it's gases, or something to do with physics, and then they do an experiment at the end that proves whatever it was that they were reading about."*

Reading with role play: *"This week is week two, so we're focusing on how we can make a difference in our family. Typically, our main character [in the books we read] has some kind of issue going on in their family, and we come up with ideas on how we can not only help the character make a difference in their family, but how we can take those ideals, and make a difference in our family."*

For many grantees interviewed, their summer program is an opportunity for students to "unwind" without the tension of the school day. While the programs might be designed to prevent "summer slide" or to prepare students academically for the upcoming school year, several sites shared that they focused on providing safe spaces for students in the summer. Many of these programs offered activities that allowed students to practice their relationship building skills with peers and adults and to continue to develop their social emotional learning skills. While social emotional learning was an intentional part of summer programming for some sites, grantees indicated that they had less resources to draw from during the summer (e.g., counselors and other support tools that the school offers to students during the school year) and had to plan their programming accordingly.

> *"I think during summer programming, students get to really enjoy it and relax, and not have that tension from the school day…I think the students get more to be themselves."* - Director

Summer programming allows grantees to offer activities that their students do not get to participate in during the school year.

Non-academic activities were key components of the summer programs for most grantees visited. Example enrichment activities offered in the summer include culinary programs, arts and crafts, indoor and outdoor sports, games, theater, music, book clubs and field trips. Although focused on enrichment, most grantees saw these activities as a chance to incorporate other important topics for students such as character education, college and career readiness, leadership skills, or community service.

Leadership skills: *"We also have a physical component that we incorporate character education in it. We use a scholastic curriculum...They teach them hockey and things like that, but they also*

[infuse] into the curriculum character education and leadership, and they also do a lot of team work. So the kids are having fun, but they don't know that we're putting those little nuggets of leadership."

Community Service: *"We have Community Service, but that's two days a week, Monday and Tuesday. And what they do —- because we have this new building, the students are going around and they are making the building look pretty. They were planting flowers and cleaning up and decorating the outside of the building."*

Particularly, some grantees noted the importance of incorporating field trips as part of their summer activities as a way to both keep students engaged in programming, but also to expose them to new experiences that are not always available for students who come from low-income homes. Example summer field trip opportunities included bowling, seeing a movie, swimming, and visiting an arcade, etc.

"Several of the kids we have, especially in the summer, they're not going on vacation. They're not getting to do a lot of those fun activities that some of the other kids would be…. And so they go out of town [through our program] – it's just like a 30-minute drive, and they go to a different city on the bus, get to see a movie. We take them swimming." - Director

Program length and schedule vary across grantees' summer programs.

Summer programs were structured differently to accommodate the varying needs of the sites and the families in which they serve. Some grantees reported offering approximately three hours of programming per day while others offer between six to eight hours. Some programs were structured to occur in the afternoons as to not coincide with summer school activities unrelated to 21st CCLC, which occurred in the mornings. Another grantee noted that due to the high need for morning care, they implemented two programs that run for three hours in the morning each day.

"So on Mondays it's college and career. Tuesdays it's reading. Wednesdays we talk about like healthy bodies, healthy minds...Then Thursdays is writing and that's pretty much what our A.M. session looks like. And then the afternoon is like the sports, STEM, wellness and arts." - Program Manager

Additionally, grantees reported organizing their schedules flexibly in the summer. For example, grantees offered different topic areas on different days to make their program more engaging for their students. Others designed their program to offer more academically focused activities in the morning and then enrichment-focused activities in the afternoon. Thus, students had greater variety in their schedule than during the regular school year program.

Summer participant recruitment, retention, and benefits

🔍 **Grantees primarily draw on four strategies to recruit students for their summer programs.**

1. **Communicate actively with schools during the year, especially with teachers.** Keeping communication open between program staff and school staff was important when it came to recruiting students for summer programming. Grantees reported obtaining the help from various school staff (e.g., social workers, counselors, principals and teachers) to get a better sense of which students would best benefit from attending the summer program. Another grantee detailed the process they use with the school counselor who develops a list of potential students who would benefit from the program and then sends registration forms home with those students for the summer.

2. Ensure that program staff members, such as site coordinators, are involved in the schools during the school day. Grantees shared that by having their program staff present during the school day, it not only helped with promoting both the school year and summer program, but it also helped students become comfortable with the program staff and more likely to want to sign up for their programs. For some grantees, teachers also worked in the afterschool program, and therefore recruited their students to continue as a part of the summer program.

"Since we're teachers we talk to the kids... So, we kind of use our personal relationships with the kids that we've already built throughout the school year, to kind of bring them back." - Teacher

3. Entice participation by emphasizing that the summer program includes enrichment activities. Some grantees made it a point to share the summer program schedule during recruitment, which allowed both parents and students to see that their program is not just a "babysitting program" or a continuation of school, but an enrichment program that provides a variety of fun and engaging activities.

"[Students] weren't signing up when we first tried –- because I hadn't said we were going to have enrichment afterwards. And so, I had to advertise that we were having enrichment after summer school, and then the kids signed up. Because they didn't want to come and just do school work." - Director

4. Give priority to students who participate during the school year afterschool program. Other grantees purposefully recruited and prioritized students who participated in the school year program to sign up for the summer program before opening it up to the general student population. The key reason for this practice was to facilitate ongoing student retention.

In addition to these four main approaches, grantees shared other recruitment strategies that included: (1) recruiting on a need basis by using assessments, (2) allowing student siblings to participate, (3) telling students to get their friends to sign up, (4) sending flyers home, and (5) using social and local media to help advertise both school year and summer programming.

Grantees offer activities that are relevant to student interests and include some level of student choice to help them retain students.

Several grantees reported that their program design was structured to be "fun" and incorporate students' interests in order to keep students returning to the program.

For example, one program offered a set amount of time each day for students to choose their activities (e.g., art project, kickball, etc.) and sought feedback from students along the way (e.g., continuing a popular music program that occurred during the school year program in the summer). Another program gave students structured activities from which to choose each day. Other specific retention strategies included communicating program expectations to students, communicating with parents and students about the importance of consistent attendance, and offering family field trips.

"As I plan the activities that they do, I do ask the students. What are your interests? What do you like to do? And, if we can, we provide that for them." - Site Coordinator

Grantees cited several benefits for students participating in summer programming.

Gaining new experiences: Several grantees spoke of the benefits students received from the exposure to new experiences and people during their summer programs. New experiences varied from attending field trips to practicing life skills that otherwise are not offered during the school year (e.g., learning how to write checks, budget, and entrepreneurship). Similarly, students had the opportunity to build relationships with adults and peers in a different setting during the summer. As one grantee shared, the program allowed students to branch out, especially as some of the summer programs recruit from a wide number of schools and participants who may not be from the same area as during the school year.

"[Students] are being exposed to things they would have no other chance in their lives to be exposed to. I keep bringing up the music classes... There's no way these parents could ever have the means to give their kids lessons for that." - Site Coordinator

Accessing additional academic and social support: Grantees reported that students who attend summer programs received additional academic and social support and guidance as well as a safe place to be during the summer. This was especially valuable for students who may not be academically prepared for the following school year and students who come from low-income or working families who are looking for programming opportunities for their children in the summer. One site manager noted that students in their program get a lot of things—attention, enrichment, and even food—that they might not be able to get at home during the summer months.

Growing social emotional skills: Finally, program staff described the growth in students' social emotional wellbeing as a central benefit. Through program activities, exposure to new and different experiences, and increased choice over which activities they participate, grantees shared that the summer offered students opportunities to communicate and interact in ways that encourages more autonomy, leadership, and confidence than during many of the school year activities.

"In each room, they have a cool-down corner that youth can either use themselves or be asked to use if staff notice that maybe they are getting a little frustrated and need some space. They fill out a reflection sheet…Youth also have the autonomy to go in there themselves and check where they are at and say like, 'I was just feeling super overwhelmed, so I just needed to take a break for a second. And now I am ready to come back in.' So just allowing them that space to process their emotions and like handle them in a healthy way."   - Program Manager

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Summer staffing and professional development

Grantees viewed staff consistency as important to the goals of the summer program.

Grantees interviewed indicated that their summer programs were staffed by a range of people including teachers, aides, community members, college students, high school students and other volunteers. Several programs purposefully used their school year staff in the summer program, including certified teachers, to keep consistency or connect the summer program to the school year program. This was particularly true of programs that focused on bridging the gap between the school year and preventing "summer slide." Some programs actively sought school-year staff involvement in designing program activities. For example, one grantee shared how teachers were key in developing the summer curriculum. Other programs use their teachers to actively recruit students to sign up for the summer program.

"[The curriculum] also depends on staff members. We like to make sure that staff who are writing the curriculum are also interested in what they are going to be implementing through the day...How can we adapt what you're interested in into informing the youth in a fun and engaging way so that they are also interested in something that you're interested in." - Program Manager

Grantees interviewed provide limited professional development opportunities during the summer unless their staff is not a part of the school year program.

Most grantees indicated that they provide time for planning prior to the summer program in order to get staff ready; however, most do not provide specific professional development for summer staff. Those that do offer professional development tend to have summer staff that are not staff members

during the school year (e.g., college students). These staff members may participate in trainings necessary to work in that setting (e.g., mandated reporter training or a CPR course). One grantee that provided intensive training prior to the summer offered a particular program that required both local and national training on the program model and curricula in order to implement it.

Family engagement and community partnerships

🔍 **Grantees offer minimal parent and family activities during the summer due to challenges with program timing, transportation, and program focus.**

While grantees emphasized that a variety of activities and events were offered to parents and families during the school year (e.g., parent cafes, nutritional classes, college sessions, financial literacy, computer classes, GED courses, etc.), parent and family engagement was less emphasized in the summer. Grantees indicated this decision was driven by logistical barriers including the short timeframe of the summer program, program location (i.e., some programs draw from a wider area in the summer), lack of transportation for some parents, and conflicts with the parents' work schedules since student programming occurs during the day. One grantee indicated that their focus was primarily on serving students during the summer and therefore, they did not focus as strongly on the parent and family connections during this time.

Some grantees attempted to address challenges to summer parent and family engagement through providing transportation when possible. Additionally, one grantee noted that they tried to "stagger the schedule" in order to offer parents options to participate during the day, evenings, and even on the weekends. While direct programming for parents and families might have been minimal, a handful of grantees spoke specifically about the importance of building a relationship with parents during the summer to inform them of the support provided both during the summer and the school year.

"Throughout the summer, we don't really do many family nights like we do over the school year. But we do have a summer showcase where parents and families are invited and their kids perform what they have been learning throughout the summer. " - Program Manager

Despite the challenges, grantees reported encouraging parents and families to attend field trips, volunteer during programming, and attend student showcases at the end of the summer. One grantee shared how they hosted a parent orientation at the beginning of summer to orient both parents and students to summer programming.

From assistance with programming to operations, external partnerships vary based on each grantee's needs.

Depending on the grantees' needs during summer programming, external partners provided a variety of resources both to enhance direct program offerings and support staffing and operations. Specifically, grantees reported partners helping out with food, space, activities, staff, and financial

contributions. For some grantees, partner assistance was focused on the summer activities (e.g., bike shop) while others extended throughout the year (e.g., monetary donation). Examples of the types of partnerships grantees shared included:

Programming:
- ✪ Partnering with the local YMCA to provide swimming lessons.
- ✪ Partnering with a local bike shop that provided bikes, taught students about bicycle safety and repair, and led bike rides.
- ✪ Partnering with local churches to provide space and facilities, such as gyms.

Staffing or financial support:
- ✪ Supplemental funding from the local United Way to increase student enrollment and support additional staff.
- ✪ Contributions from a corporate donor to support expansion of the music program.
- ✪ Donations from local business and faith-based organizations for snacks.

Conclusion

Grantees reported that summer time allowed their programs an increased level of flexibility with respect to program content and structure, enabling them to closely attend to the needs of students and their families, and to incorporate input from the community. Summer programming varied not only from grantee to grantee, but also by site. Grantees indicated thoughtfulness when it came to the type of activities provided to students, with some programs intentionally including student choice or feedback into their summer programming. It is worth noting that while some grantees focused specifically on academics, such as providing credit recovery opportunities for high school students, others blended academic learning with enrichment activities as a form of providing educational activities in a creative, fun and engaging manner. While summer offers the opportunity for different types of activities and programming, it also poses some challenges. Namely, grantees acknowledged that while parent and family engagement is a high priority during the school year, summer schedules lead sites to decrease emphasis on these types of programs.

This report is focused on 21st CCLC grantees' strategies and ideas for implementing their summer programs, and does not draw connections between these grantees' program implementation and student outcomes or other measures of impact. While the statewide evaluation does not offer the findings from these site visits as a prescription for success, the following key takeaways may provide guidance or insight as organizations undertake the design and implementation of their summer programs in the future.

Summer can provide the opportunity for grantees to offer different kinds of programming than during the school year.

Grantees varied in how they address academic content and support academic achievement. Summer can be a time for credit recovery; it can also provide time to integrate core academic subjects into project-based learning activities. Summer can also be a time for grantees to offer

activities that their students do not get to participate in during the school year. Grantees can structure their summer programs to allow students to participate in a wide variety of activities over the course of the day and/or week.

Grantees employ a variety of recruitment and retention for summer programs, and often build upon school-year connections and programming.

Grantees described the importance of communicating with school staff and administrators to identify and refer students. When school-day teachers work in the program, they can help recruit students, and provide a sense of familiarity and continuity. These strategies are important for school-year programming as well. Many grantees prioritize students who participate in programs during the school year. While leveraging the school year program is useful, it can also be important to emphasize how a summer program may differ from the school year, and make sure students and families know about the fun enrichment programming a summer program may offer.

Grantees places less emphasis on certain aspects of the 21st CCLC program during the summer.

Summer may not be the time to implement all components of a robust 21st CCLC program. Grantees shared that they provided limited professional development opportunities to summer staff, with the exception of providing necessary training to staff members that are not a part of the school year program. Grantees also offered minimal parent and family activities during the summer due to challenges with program timing, transportation, and the focus of programs.

Appendix A: Guiding questions and sites visited

EDC visited one program site for each grant, for a total of 11 site visits (table 1). The following five questions guided these site visits including the structure of both the observations and interviews:

1. How do grantees approach the design and structure of the summer program?
2. What strategies are used to recruit and retain students for summer programming?
3. What process does the summer programming use to prepare staff and is this different or similar to how staff are prepared for the school year?
4. What parent and family engagement activities are offered during the summer?
5. What outside organizations do grantees partner with during the summer?

Table 1: Sites visited for this report

Site description	Grades served	Program activities
1. **Suburban school**	K – 5th	Dance, Girl Scouts, Sports Mentoring, Art, and Computer Lab. *Site visit observations: Art, Computer Lab, and Dance.*
2. **Suburban school**	6th – 8th	Reading, science, enrichment, remediation, math, leadership, and physical health. *Site visit observations: Leadership project, Forensic Science, and Student Summer Showcase.*
3. **Urban school**	5th – 8th	Academic support, dance, music, arts and crafts, board games, fitness and sports, mentoring and cooking. *Site visit observations: Academic support.*
4. **Urban school**	9th – 12th	STEM, College Readiness, and Art. *Site visit observations: Icebreaker Activity (Improv), Web Design, and Drama.*
5. **Rural school**	K – 12th	Arts and Crafts, Culinary, Marital Arts, Reading, Dance, Theater, Team Sports, Piano/Choir, Fun Games, Computers, Character Building, Violence Prevention, and Community Service. *Site visit observations: Dance, Culinary, Music, Sewing, Character Building, Theater, and Team Sports.*
6. **Urban school**	2nd – 8th	Junior Achievement, Art, Sports, Healthy Eating, and Guitar Class. *Site visit observations: Junior Achievement, Healthy Eating, and Guitar Class.*
7. **Large town community-based organization**	1st – 4th	Enrichment and Remediation. *Site visit observations: Cooking, Art Enrichment, and Reading Remediation.*
8. **Large town school**	9th – 12th	Math credit recovery, science credit recovery, English credit recovery and History credit recovery. *Site visit observations: English and Math credit recovery.*

Site description	Grades served	Program activities
9. **Rural school**	K – 9th	Archery, Outdoor Water, Arts and Crafts, Cake Decorating, Cooking, Math, Knitting, Science, Dance, and Fieldtrips. *Site visit observations: Cooking, Cake Decoration, Academic Remediation for K-1, Arts & Crafts, Outdoor Water, and Math.*
10. **Large town school**	K – 5th	Reading, Science, Enrichment, and Remediation. *Site visit observations: Reading.*
11. **Suburban school**	3rd – 5th	Summer pre-care and summer programming. *Site visit observations: Pre-Care Program and Writer's Workshop.*

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