



Did You Know?

- More than 1.8 million participants are served by 21st Century Community Learning Centers, including nearly 1.7 million students and 183,461 adults participating in family engagement activities.
- In a national survey, 69 percent of parents of afterschool program participants reported that their child's program provides opportunities for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) learning.
- Elements of quality in afterschool programs, such as positive staff-child relationships and developmentally appropriate activities, are associated with gains in students' reading and math scores.

Quality Afterschool Programs Maximize Positive Outcomes

BY ADRIENNE FISCHER

Improved attendance. Academic growth. A safe and healthy environment. These are just some of the benefits of quality afterschool programming.

As research on the subject continues to grow, it's becoming clear that hours spent outside of school present unique opportunities for narrowing the achievement gap, especially among low-income children. And, as some states have identified key characteristics that make afterschool programs thrive, they're taking action to support their sustained success.

The elements of quality programming vary depending on program goals, settings and capacity, but [researchers find](#) structured, developmentally

appropriate activities, positive staff-child relationships and including student voice and autonomy have the most significant impact on student outcomes. Organizational factors such as sufficient capacity, opportunities for professional development and a strong base of community partnerships [can also contribute](#) to overall program quality.

To increase the availability of quality programming on a statewide or systemic level, afterschool quality improvement efforts include assessment tools, credentialing systems and quality rating systems. These steps may be initiated by state or local policymakers, education or human services agencies, nonprofit advocacy organizations or a combination thereof, and states vary broadly in their application and monitoring of quality improvement in afterschool programs.

State Action

Some states have taken steps to improve after-school quality, either through legislative action or state agency involvement. Eighteen states have utilized afterschool-focused legislative task forces, committees or work groups, and these bodies are frequently tasked with studying quality improvement strategies and drafting recommendations. For example, [Connecticut HB 5446](#) (2018) established an After School Committee tasked with reporting to the legislature ways to coordinate, expand, finance and improve program accessibility and quality. While most of these task forces have sunset, seven states still have active entities.

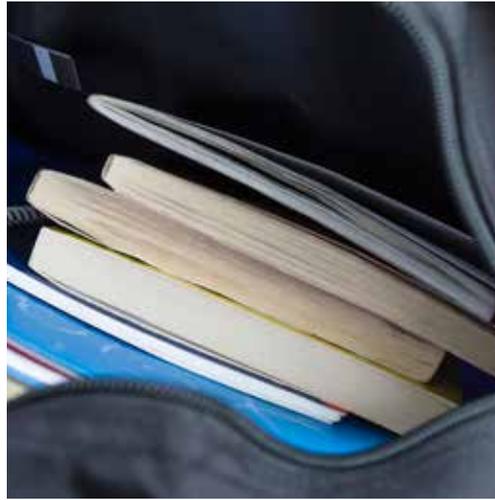
One of the barriers to identifying quality improvement needs among afterschool programs is a lack of access to provider data. To combat this issue, Texas [SB 1404](#) (2017) requires schools to track students' afterschool and summer learning participation in the state's consolidated data system.

States also provide direct support for quality improvement. For example, Utah [SB 125](#), enacted in 2016, required the Utah State Board of Education to develop quality standards for afterschool programs. The board contracted a study of current efforts to improve afterschool program quality and make recommendations to inform the rules required in the bill. Building on this work in the 2018 session, [SB 202](#) provides funding to existing afterschool programs for the purpose of quality improvement.

Statewide afterschool quality improvement efforts also take the form of agency-led initiatives. In California, all state and federally funded afterschool programs are required to participate in the California Department of Education's [quality improvement process](#). A set of rigorous [quality standards](#), developed through a joint effort with the state's nonprofit afterschool network, guide programs through a continuous cycle of assessment, planning and improvement. Each step of the process is informed by data-driven indicators of program quality that link outcomes to overall effectiveness.

Federal Action

The [21st Century Community Learning Centers](#) (21st CCLC) program is the only federal funding stream dedicated exclusively to supporting afterschool and summer learning programs. This



program was updated and reauthorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Each state receives funds based on the formula used to calculate Title I funding for low-income students. Then, state education agencies administer grants on a competitive basis.

States seeking funding must describe how proposed activities will improve students' academic outcomes and overall student success. The program requires states' proposals to include research-based performance measures and indicators to monitor 21st CCLC program implementation and quality. States collect data from programs, conduct a comprehensive statewide evaluation of program effectiveness and analyze evaluations of local programs.

The Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) distributes formula-based grants to states for child care service provision and quality improvement. Approximately 15 percent of all children served by the CCDF are school-age in center-based care, which includes many afterschool programs. The [2014 CCDF reauthorization](#) included provisions to increase the required expenditures for quality activities from 4 to 9 percent of each state's appropriation. Although the CCDF has historically placed a strong focus on early care and education, at least 20 states have used CCDF quality funds to develop school-age specific indicators within their quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS), often in conjunction with afterschool thought leaders.

Additional Resources

- NCSL webinar, [Afterschool Program Quality: What States Are Doing to Help Drive Quality Forward](#)
- NCSL webpage, [Expanding Learning Opportunities Through Afterschool Programs](#)
- Deborah Lowe Vandell, [Afterschool Program Quality and Student Outcomes: Reflections on Positive Key Findings on Learning and Development from Recent Research](#)
- RAND, [The Value of Out-of-School Time Programs](#)
- Afterschool Alliance, [21st Century Community Centers: Statewide Evaluation Academic Highlights, Afterschool Alliance](#)

NCSL Contacts

[Adrienne Fischer](#)
303-856-1544

[Ashley Wallace](#)
303-856-1655