

# NYSED 21st Century Community Learning Centers

Round 8 Case Studies: 2023 - 2024



# Overview

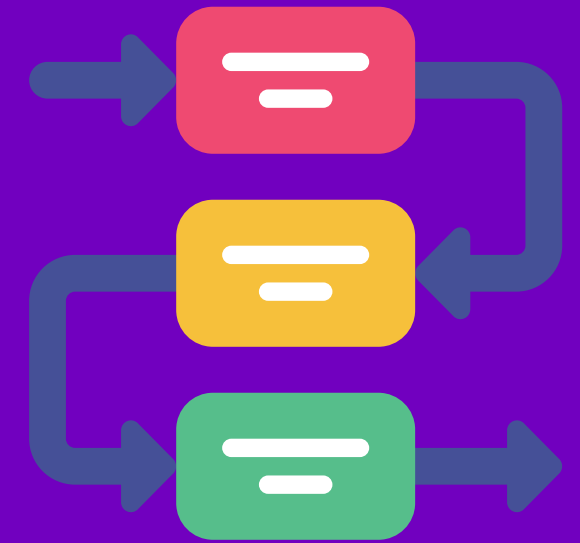
This report aims to enhance learning and insights within the NYS 21CCLC community by elevating successful practices and pinpointing shared concerns.



It is organized into five sections, each focusing on themes identified during site visits. Each section outlines implementation challenges and successful strategies derived from the insights and experiences of the participating 21CCLC stakeholders. Furthermore, it presents examples of how specific sites addressed these challenges, utilizing either established practices or innovative approaches. By highlighting these practices, the report aims to facilitate learning across programs, enabling one to benefit from the experiences of others.

# Methodology

MI conducted an exploratory case study to investigate the implementation strategies, challenges, and innovations of 21CCLC programs during the second year of Round 8. The study sample consisted of 10 Round 8 sites that demonstrated successful implementation representative of various grantee types, locations, sizes, and grade levels served. From April to June 2024, the researcher visited one site from each of the 10 participating grantees. Activities were observed, in-person interviews were held with program and/or site leadership, and separate remote interviews were conducted with local evaluators. Each interview lasted between one to two hours.



## SITE SELECTION

Location: 6 NYC and 5 RoS

Lead Agency: 4 LEAs and 6 CBOs

Grades: 4 Elementary, 4 Middle School; and 4 High School sites

## DATA COLLECTION

10 program observations

22 Interviews with 38 participants:  
12 local evaluators, 10 program directors,  
7 site coordinators, 4 CBO administrators,  
3 school leaders, and 2 education liaisons.

## ANALYSIS

Qualitative analysis of  
key themes, successful  
strategies, and  
challenges

# Themes



New Immigrant  
Students and  
Families



Program  
Advisory  
Committees



Family  
Engagement  
Strategies



Food-based  
Programming



Evaluation  
Partnerships

Interview questions focused on areas targeting common implementation issues. Five themes emerged from the interviews as being particularly salient.



# New Immigrant Students and Families

21CCLC programs can provide essential support to new immigrant families to promote student achievement and overall well-being.

## CHALLENGES

- Adapting to population changes may require new recruitment strategies, staffing, and programming.
- Students face significant academic and social-emotional challenges and may be reluctant to seek help for trauma.
- Demonstrating positive outcomes can be difficult, as unstable housing may lead to families going "uncounted," and SEL outcomes often go unmeasured.
- Barriers such as language, transportation, competing commitments, and skepticism hinder parent and student engagement with the program.

## PRACTICES

- English Language Support: ESL classes, bilingual staff, interpreters, and translated materials.
- Inclusive Community: Actively recruiting newcomers and providing a comfortable space for discussions.
- SEL Focus: Programming that fosters friendships, belonging, confidence, and mental health support.
- Supportive Leadership: Staff build relationships with families and receive training to understand their needs, ensuring accessible communication.



# Examples of Notable Strategies



This program for high school students, previously serving a Spanish-speaking community, now supports Haitian families due to an influx of new arrivals. They hired a Haitian staff member for better communication and offer daily ESL classes for students. Social workers facilitate groups to assist students in adjusting, while **Saturday ESL classes for parents provide a space for discussion, questions, and building supportive relationships.**

*We want the kids to feel comfortable approaching us if there's a problem. **We want to build safe relationships.** We want them to know it's okay if they're not okay. We want them to share their feelings and know that they're not alone... The parents can be a challenge. Some work at multiple jobs. They don't have transportation and have to take cabs to come to the school. **But parents want to learn English and do come on Saturdays for English classes.** [Program Director]*

To assist English language learners, **afterschool program students are paired with their school day ELL teachers.** They engage in enjoyable activities, such as outdoor scavenger hunts, to improve their English skills. Additionally, students attend bilingual social-emotional learning classes that focus on friendship-making, and similar themes. A bilingual social worker also leads groups addressing newcomers' adjustment challenges.

*One of our teachers uses extended day to help new students acclimate to school and to catch up. She asked the guidance counselor to do extra SEL work with the class. In the middle school, a community partner provides a bilingual social worker who does a newcomers group. **We have students who act as "ambassadors" to newcomer students.** I saw one ambassador telling a new student why she should attend the afterschool program. [Program Director]*



In this high school, English language learners were previously left out of activities and resources. **The district designed this 21CCLC program to specifically include these students.** Through afterschool classes taught by bilingual educators, participants had the opportunity to earn their Seal of Biliteracy and Seal of Civics. Furthermore, the program made notable progress in involving parents, addressing a common challenge faced by immigrant families with high school students



A group of six bilingual seniors discussed their experiences in the 21CCLC program. One student highlighted her Seal of Biliteracy project on women's status, describing the challenges of presenting in English and Spanish, which she successfully overcame. **All students noted improved English skills from the afterschool program,** appreciated the bilingual peer discussions, and enjoyed art activities. They all plan to attend college in the fall, with one student receiving a scholarship to study in Spain.

***Personal outreach is the most successful engagement strategy.*** We call and speak to parents in their language. We make them understand that they can participate in the activity, they will be engaged, and they are not expected to sit there and not understand what is happening. We assure them we will include them and furnish activities in their language. Events where they can watch their children perform and see how they are adapting to the culture are huge. [HS Principal]





# Program Advisory Committees (PACs)

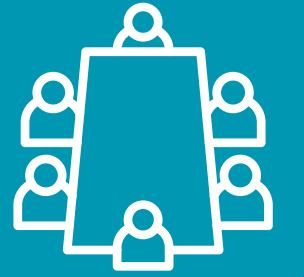
Program Advisory Committees (PACs) foster collaborative decision-making and community engagement for 21CCLC programs, tailored to the specific needs of each program. Some committees convene separately by location, while others operate as multisite groups. Advisory meetings can take place in person, be conducted entirely online, or feature a combination of both formats.

## CHALLENGES

- Consistent scheduling when stakeholders have conflicting availability and competing demands
- Meaningful involvement of a diverse board that embodies the voices of all stakeholder groups within the 21CCLC community.
- Ensuring meetings possess distinct purposes and objectives and are not just pro forma.
- Making ample time for planning to prepare for meetings and to enact decisions.

## PRACTICES

- Advisory meetings focus on overarching topics to align goals, while separate logistical meetings implement decisions.
- Program-wide meetings allow for resource sharing, addressing common issues, and save time. Site-specific meetings cater to the unique culture and needs of each school and afterschool community.
- Remote or hybrid meetings enhance attendance from stakeholders with varying schedules and facilitate participation across distant sites.
- Meetings utilize program data for progress tracking and decision-making, focusing on program quality through reviews, issue identification, and action planning.
- Advisory committee members consist of stakeholders impacted by the program and those in roles that impact program implementation.



# Examples of Strategies Used by Productive PACs



Through their PAC, the CBO-led program has established a presence in schools, gained program support, and collaborated on activities. **School leaders and district staff plan resource integration to meet community needs.** They formed a multisite advisory committee of about 12 members, meeting at rotating school locations, and are working to find a suitable meeting time for all stakeholders, including parents and students.

*They have district people as well as the principals from each school. It's the one time when the site coordinators meet together. The principals share student needs and seek program support. **The meetings are that place where everyone can talk about what they're struggling with and is going well** so that they can figure out how to help each other. The district and the CBO discuss what is needed and how they can support each other. A district representative for a different grant also attends to explore collaborative support. [Program Evaluator]*

Harnessing evaluation data in PAC meetings establishes a shared foundation for members to connect and contribute meaningfully to planning dialogues. Within this program, **at every advisory meeting, the evaluator presents accessible data** and guides discussions, illuminating the significance of the findings in the context of program development.

***The advisory meeting is a place to share feedback and brainstorm steps for improvement.*** At the year's start, we reflect on data to gather insights on team reactions and contexts influencing changes for the upcoming program year. We present findings and seek feedback, asking questions such as: Was there anything that fell below your expectations? What could be the reasons for that? What are the specific contexts at individual sites, and how might they affect the results? This process is typically very collaborative. [Program Evaluator]



This program showcases a strong commitment to engaging the 21CCLC community. The PAC includes principals, teachers, family engagement specialists, district superintendents, vendors, and five or six parents from each school. Remote, multi-site meetings enable members from the three sites, situated in different towns, to take part. These meetings focus on the program's shared goals and objectives, while also allowing each site to tailor its approach. Each session allocates time for evaluating progress, planning for upcoming changes, and gathering feedback to inform implementation. **Real-time interpretation services ensure that parents with limited English proficiency can fully engage in the discussions.**

***We have everyone there we need**, and they've been great at providing feedback. Coordinating across three sites has been interesting, as each has its unique style while we aim for program standardization. One site's implementation of teacher push-in has sparked interest in the others. We actively listen to their ideas regarding our plans. However, troubleshooting and brainstorming do not take place during these meetings; instead, planning and strategizing are carried out at each school with the principals and teachers.*

*[Program Director]*

***They make it very transparent** that the advisory committee is where you give feedback and hammer out ideas for the benefit of students. **That's why people give open and honest feedback.** The exchange of ideas is very positive for everybody and also helps the liaisons and site directors. They are very open about decisions so parents understand developments. They prioritize inclusivity by providing real-time translation for Spanish-speaking parents. Parents are vocal and helpful, even about the evaluation. **[Program Evaluator]***



# Family Engagement Strategies

Family engagement is a fundamental pillar of 21CCLC programs. Nevertheless, it often poses challenges for 21CCLC programs that invest considerable resources in outreach and planning, which can sometimes be underused or ignored. In response, programs are developing innovative strategies to actively and meaningfully involve parents in their enriching journey.



## CHALLENGES

- Families face competing priorities such as work and caring for children.
- Various programs within schools vie for families' attention and time.
- Transportation options are limited.
- Language barriers and cultural differences can create discomfort for parents.
- A lack of trust or a feeling of belonging to the school or 21CCLC program exists.
- Families are unaware of the advantages of being involved.

## PRACTICES

- Partner with the district, school, or community organizations rather than organize separate events and activities.
- Offer resources for car-sharing or organizing activities in locations that are accessible to more parents.
- Address families' immediate needs, such as food, childcare, and access to essential resources.
- Design intentional programs focused on family engagement, community-building events, and learning activities for adults.
- Maintain high-touch communication through regular face-to-face conversations, phone calls, and messages to effectively engage parents.

# Examples of Family Engagement Strategies



Family engagement at this CBO-led site includes various initiatives such as student showcases, community events, educational programs, and referrals for food, housing, and tax assistance. Families have access to essential items like toys, books, and household essentials. The introduction of Cell-Ed offers online lessons in literacy and life skills, with training provided for parents to use this resource. Its effectiveness as a learning option is being evaluated. **Additionally, car-share services assist parents in picking up their children from the program.**

*We have adult programming with CELL-ED. It allows parents to take courses on their own time. We have sessions for them to learn about it and 30 parents signed up. We're figuring out whether virtual or in person is better. The showcases are well attended. The **parents are willing to spend time for their children, where they can see their children.** [Program Director]*

**This program leverages the school's well-established and strong family engagement initiatives** rather than creating separate 21CCLC programming that might duplicate activities and compete for parents' attention. These events serve to promote the 21CCLC program and attract students. Attendance for 21CCLC parents is tracked separately to ensure that objectives are being met. The evaluator has utilized these events to gather parents' feedback on the 21CCLC program, as obtaining survey data can often be challenging.

*There are themed, monthly activities on Saturdays for all family members, like yoga and Halloween trunk-or-treat. We have had 400 family members attending. **We also have a parent resource center** where they can get can get referrals to English lessons, immigration lawyers, food and housing assistance, 0 to 3 reading initiatives, or anything else they need. [Program Director]*



By employing a combination of strategies—including **intensive outreach, a diverse array of engaging and educational events, incentives, and transportation assistance**—this site, which caters to middle and high school students, achieves high attendance rates among families for its events and activities.

*There are family events like the health fair with raffles and prizes and other activities. There are Paint and Sip and Bingo. There was a Financial Literacy and Financial Aid workshop for the parents of seniors. There have been ESL workshops. You have to have lots of outreach. We provide free food – **dinner is always a good incentive. Raffles are a good strategy.** There is usually a good turnout when students put on performances, like the band. Parents like to come to those. [Site Director]*

*They have many family engagement opportunities and provide so much information and referrals to make sure that parents have all the resources they need. They had a parent orientation day, a health fair, the Hispanic Heritage Month celebration, and the Dr. Martin Luther King Day of Service. They have ESL, self-care, and even financial workshops for parents. They have food distribution also. They have a really high turnout. -- 126 parents in one event. **A big part is giving the parents something to motivate them to come.** They're working late and it's hard for them. These engagement events have higher attendance if you're able to give them food or raffles, and free Uber rides. [Program Evaluator]*





# Food-based Programming

Food preparation and cooking activities were popular among students of all age levels, as well as with parents.

## CHALLENGES

- Numerous schools struggle with insufficient facilities, equipment, and trained cooking instructors.
- Students may have diverse dietary requirements and allergies, necessitating thoughtful planning and ingredient selection.
- Cooking involves safety measures and close supervision to avoid accidents, particularly with younger learners.

## PRACTICES

- Aligning with health and fitness goals
- Integrating academic subjects such as mathematics, science, literacy, and social studies
- Focusing on SEL components, including teamwork, communication, community building, and collaboration.
- Providing opportunities for parents to bond with their children and network with other adults
- Using culinary arts as part of career exploration for older students
- Utilizing cooking as an enjoyable and interactive method to explore diverse cultures and cuisines
- Leveraging of community resources to enhance access to food and related resources.



# Examples of Food-based Programming



This elementary school site **incorporates cooking with literacy and cultural awareness**. The classes are offered by a vendor that specializes in food-based programs. Additionally, this vendor is providing a “cook night” as a family engagement event, which received a warm response from parents.

*The cooking vendor is great. They have great facilitators who are able to open kids up to new foods. Everybody tries everything. Kids like it. We will add related books for literacy. **We are doing a family cook night.** They are excited and participate. We had 30 families sign up. [Program Director]*

This middle school program features a club that **combines math with nutritional information through engaging, hands-on activities involving food**. Led by one of the school’s educators, it supports the curriculum effectively. Additionally, a second club, also created by a teacher, organizes visits to local establishments, especially those focused on food preparation. This gives students the chance to taste and observe how food is made within their culturally rich community.

*Many students enjoy participating in the math and nutrition club, and parents appreciate it for its academic benefits. **This club also emphasizes culturally responsive education by exploring the connections between food and culture.** In another club, members take walks through the diverse community, where they have the opportunity to sample different foods each day. [Site Coordinator]*



Within this high school site, the cooking club served as a vital platform for students from various grade levels and cultural backgrounds to foster community and engage with the afterschool program. **Participation in the cooking club enabled students to become invested in the 21CCLC program**, thereby exposing them to new opportunities. The presence of organic support is particularly crucial for programs that cater to high school students.

*The cooking vendor did a separate workshop for families. **This gave the families a good understanding of what the students were doing** from scratch. The only issue was that they were not in a kitchen. Cooking was done with hot plates and there was not enough equipment for cooking. [Site Coordinator]*

*We have a large population that does not speak English or Spanish. **The cooking club incorporates cultural responsiveness.** Students make dishes from their countries. They talk about their experiences based on their cultural backgrounds. None of the cooking class students knew each other when they started. Now they have bonded. They continue to show up even though the class has ended. They just want to be here. Now they will go to the other clubs too. [Site Coordinator]*



# Evaluation Partnerships

The 21CCLC evaluation aims to be a collaborative process, where evaluators partner with program leadership and staff to assess how well 21CCLC programs achieve both locally defined and New York State outcomes. Evaluators adopt different approaches to participation and collaboration, influencing how they work with and assist their programs.

## CHALLENGES

- The evaluation scope is influenced by factors such as budget size, the number of sites involved in the program, and their locations; however, the requirements remain consistent for each evaluation.
- It's essential to find a balance between addressing a program's evaluation needs or requests and safeguarding against scope creep.
- Timeliness of NYS student academic data is often lacking, which may not provide the most accurate long-term indicators of student progress. While SEL outcomes are regarded as meaningful, they are not consistently or specifically assessed.

## PRACTICES

- Evaluators play various roles in supporting the program, acting as thought partners, critical friends, technical assistance providers, advocates, and experts on 21CCLC policies and requirements.
- They enhance programs' internal evaluation capacity by advising on data collection systems and offering support or guidance during self-assessment and monitoring processes (such as QSA and SMV).
- Throughout each program year, evaluators regularly supply data to aid in continuous program planning.
- They deliver timely and accessible reports in various formats tailored to the audience and intended use.
- Evaluators also share their expertise regarding programming.



# Examples of Evaluation Partnerships



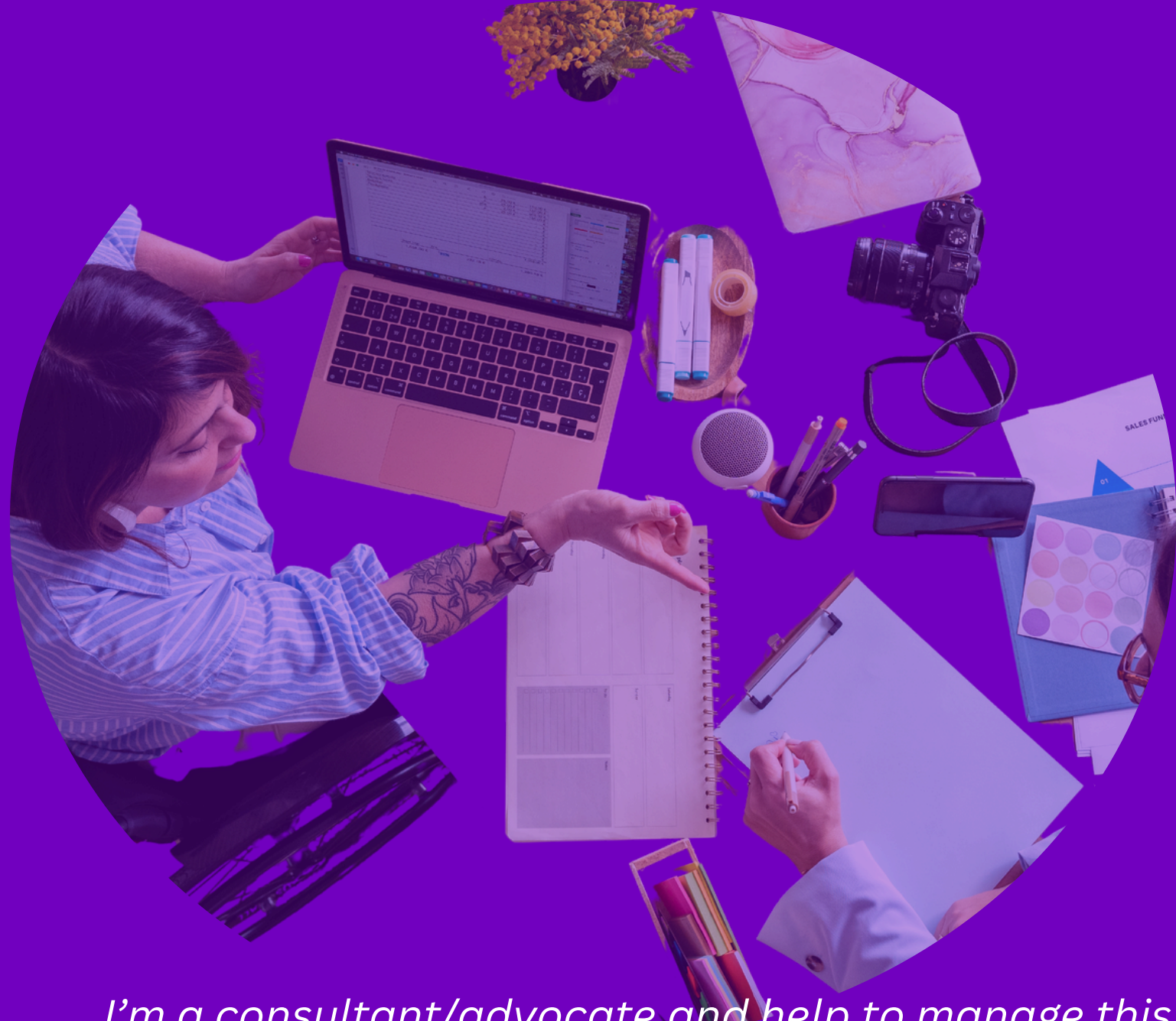
Evaluators of a new, CBO-led program play a crucial role in ensuring adherence to its proposed activities and objectives. **They identify any discrepancies and offer support for necessary adjustments as needed.** The program is receptive to feedback and effectively incorporates it to enhance its implementation.

*They're so committed to quality programming and doing this right, that they don't get defensive about negative findings. They very much act on them. **They are using us to be another independent eye on what's going on.** They really care about what they're trying to do. They're trying to follow the grant and do things the right way. That's huge because in so many instances the grants are written by somebody else who's not implementing it and they don't want to do what's in the grant.*

*[Program Evaluator]*

This program depends on its evaluation partnership to deliver continuous insights regarding the effective implementation of various sites. **This collaboration assists the director in prioritizing focus areas that require immediate attention,** thereby addressing issues before they escalate.

*Our evaluator's understanding and utilization of the data is great. In my role, I don't have the capacity to dig in the way they do. As our sites start, or when someone new joins, they'll do training and go through EZreports. If there's a question about the grant, I'll go to them first. They'll help me interpret things and have been a true thought partner. **I feel like they're doing some of the preventative work where my work is more responsive.** They're checking in on things very regularly. I'll look at their reports and know if I should be stepping in. They'll tell me when we're not necessarily meeting our targets, so we'll talk about that. *[Program Director]**



In this partnership, the evaluator leverages their independent relationships with the lead CBO and participating school districts to keep the program aligned with its stated objectives while accommodating the diverse priorities of district and program administrators. This collaboration is vital for guiding implementation and making adjustments. Maintaining continuous and transparent communication regarding insights derived from various data sources is essential for effective decision-making.

*I'm a consultant/advocate and help to manage this grant, ensuring we meet our targets. **I act as an intermediary between the school district and the program.** One time they said, we have a lot of grants and yours can't be a priority. I understand but have to advocate for this program. I tell the district, you have to do [what's in the grant]. You have to figure out how to do it. I do advise the program on how to overcome barriers. If students like a class, I'll tell them to offer it more often, things like that. [Program Evaluator]*

*We evaluate everything and spend a lot of time speaking with each other. **We make changes based on what we're seeing and what they're saying.** If there is anything negative then we address it. If it's about not meeting an objective we determine if it is realistic and modify it. If it's about programming, we change it. We survey students in the first 3 months and if they are not enjoying an activity, we replace it. We will address a teacher if that's an issue. We have asked vendors who were not engaged with students to make adjustments. If we are not meeting goals, we brainstorm on how to meet them. [Program Director]*



**Let's Get the  
Conversation  
Going**

# Next Steps

This report serves as a platform to showcase the thoughtful and innovative practices taking place within the 21CCLC programs. We look forward to hearing from you.

## **FEEDBACK?**

If you want to let us know how you liked this report or pose any questions about it...

## **SUGGESTIONS?**

If there is a practice you would like to share or have ideas for themes for next year's case study...

## **NETWORKING?**

If you want to discuss your work and get more information from your colleagues...



Email us at [21ceval@measinc.com](mailto:21ceval@measinc.com)