City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects

CUNY Graduate Center

9-2022

Transforming Afterschool Programs into "Engines of Development": A Policy Analysis of the Federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers

Jane Quinn

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/4978

Discover additional works at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).
Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

TRANSFORMING AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS INTO “ENGINES OF DEVELOPMENT”:

A POLICY ANALYSIS OF THE FEDERAL 21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS

by

JANE QUINN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2022

© 2022

JANE QUINN

All Rights Reserved

Transforming Afterschool Programs into "Engines of Development":

A Policy Analysis of the Federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers

by

Jane Quinn

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

____________________	____
Date	Deborah Shanley Chair of Examining Committee
____________________	____
Date	David Bloomfield Executive Officer

Supervisory Committee:
Deborah Shanley
Juan Battle
David Bloomfield

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

Transforming Afterschool Programs into “Engines of Development”:
A Policy Analysis of the Federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers

by

Jane Quinn

Advisor: Deborah Shanley

Although schools receive most of the attention in discussions of and research about educational policy, an equally important—and under-investigated—arena is the non-school hours. American students spend more time outside of school than in school, and a host of studies have shown that the ways young people spend their discretionary time can greatly influence their short-term and long-term outcomes. Issues of educational equity are deeply embedded in the topic because opportunities to participate in high quality out-of-school learning experiences are not evenly distributed in American society. The single most important policy target in this aspect of student life is the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program, a part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that annually provides over $1 billion in funding for afterschool and summer programs across the K-12 age and grade spectrum. As the largest source of public funding for out-of-school-time programs, the 21st CCLC program offers untapped potential to address the opportunity gap between more and less affluent young people.

This dissertation research involves a mixed-methods policy analysis study in two parts: (1) review of U. S. government documents (including authorizing legislation, non-regulatory guidance, annual performance reports, and external evaluations), with a focus on analyzing the strengths and shortcomings of the current 21st CCLC policy and making a research-based proposal around strategies designed to improve the policy and resulting programs; and (2) interviews focused on key unanswered questions with a diverse group of 15 thought leaders in the afterschool field, analysis of their responses, and integration of the new findings into final recommendations prepared for the federal government and the afterschool field.

The study argues that the central challenge facing the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program—consistently low rates of student participation—can be addressed only by listening to the voices of young people and responding to their desire for engagement and challenge in out-of-school-time programs.

Acknowledgments

Many smart, caring, and thoughtful people contributed to this dissertation—first among them my beloved husband, Terry Quinn, who offered generous and endless support during the entire research and writing process. A close second is my dissertation committee—CUNY professors Deborah Shanley, Juan Battle, and David Bloomfield—who guided my thinking from start to finish and who made themselves available whenever I needed their sage advice or consistent encouragement.

I am grateful to the Urban Education Program at CUNY for accepting me into its scholarly embrace and for nurturing my transition from practitioner to researcher, honing my critical thinking skills while also providing access to a superb set of relationships with faculty and fellow students. Special thanks to Professors Michelle Fine and Nick Michelli, who encouraged me to consider applying for the program, and who guided my application process at critical junctures, and to Professor Wendy Luttrell for her savvy and gracious leadership of the program. I extend sincere gratitude to my former Children's Aid colleagues Stacey Campo and Drema Brown for their invitation to join them as Urban Ed doctoral students.

Since we first all met in September of 2018, the members of Cohort 18 have been phenomenal thinking partners, colleagues, and friends. I am especially appreciative of Karen Zaino and Daicy Diaz-Granados for inviting me to join a Dissertation Writing Group whose bi-weekly meetings sustained me during the months of intense analysis, drafting, and revision.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to the 15 out-of-school-time thought leaders who agreed to be interviewed as part of my dissertation research. Their names shall remain confidential, as I promised them, but they know who they are. I want them to know how much their ideas advanced my own.

Several colleagues shared their dissertations with me and provided companionship throughout the years of my doctoral journey, including Jaynemarie Angbah, Stacey Campo, Jen Siaca Curry, Amy Ellis, Hayin Kimner, Helen Janc Malone, Jennifer Pelligrine, Sanjiv Rao, and Emily Woods. Other colleagues—including Neil Naftzger, David Osher, Joseph Renzulli, Jen Rinehart, Michelle Seligson, and Gina Warner—readily engaged with me in long and meaningful discussions on various aspects of my topic.

I am greatly indebted to Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005), the renowned psychologist who coined the phrase "engines of development," which so captured my imagination that it found its way into my dissertation title.

Finally, I want to thank my family members, close friends, and trusted colleagues who never tired of asking about my courses and writing, who listened with care, and who cheered me on through the process—Susan Bachurski; Dayle Berke; Marty Blank; Jane Brody; Patrick Dail; Danielle DiMare; JoAnne Ferrara; Gail Grandison; Kiernan Graves; Ira Harkavy; Reuben Jacobson; Ann Johnson; Cathy and Sandy Leff; Cathy Laughlin LeVesque; Susan MacMillan; Charlie, Lynn, and Alissa Magrum; Kaima Nelson-Bowne; Alicia Pagano; Edmond Rinnooy Kan; Janice Roddenbery; Ann and Chrissy Rowland; John Shore; Kathleen Sullivan; Ann Thompson Cook; Lisa Villarreal; and Pamela Wilson—as well as my First Presbyterian Brooklyn faith community; my long-standing *Unrulies* women's group; and my new-found *ReWiree*s support group.

I couldn't have done it without all of you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract iv

Acknowledgments vi

Chapter 1: Introduction 1
- Statement of the Problem 1
- Background on the Issue and on the Current Policy 2

Chapter 2: Literature Review 8

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework 22

Chapter 4: Methodology 36
- Research Approach and Design 36
- Research and Interview Questions 39
- Ethical Considerations 41
- Trustworthiness 41

Chapter 5: Findings 43
- Phase One: Document Review and Analysis 43
- The Unknown Implications of the COVID Pandemic on OST Programs 51
- Phase Two: Thought Leader Interviews 52

Chapter 6: Discussion 82

Chapter 7: Conclusion 107
- Introduction 107
- Limitations 108
- Implications 110
- Recommendations for Future Research 111
- Final Thoughts 113

Appendices 115
- Appendix A: Interview Protocol 115
- Appendix B: Coding Manual 117

References 120

Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem Statement/Why It Matters

Although schools receive most of the attention in discussions of and research about educational policy, an equally important—and under-investigated—arena is the non-school hours. American students spend more time outside of school than in school (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001), and a host of studies have shown that the ways young people spend their discretionary time can greatly influence their short-term and long-term outcomes (Clark, 1988; Vandell et al., 2007; Harvard Family Research Project, 2008; Neild et al., 2019). Issues of educational equity are deeply embedded in the topic because opportunities to participate in high quality out-of-school learning experiences are not evenly distributed in American society. In fact, low-income children and students of color have far fewer opportunities to participate in high quality programs than their more affluent peers (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992; Putnam, 2015; Heath et al., 2018).

The single most important policy target in this aspect of student life is the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program, a part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that annually provides over $1 billion in funding for afterschool and summer programs across the K-12 age and grade spectrum. As the largest source of public funding for out-of-school-time programs, the 21st CCLC program offers untapped potential to address the opportunity gap between more and less affluent young people.

This study will offer background information on the topic of out-of-school-time (OST) learning; outline the history of, and the central role played by, the 21st CCLC program in out-of-school (or informal) learning across the U. S.; review and analyze the existing literature in five relevant categories; offer a conceptual framework for examining the 21st CCLC policy and program; analyze the strengths and shortcomings of the current policy; and make a research-based proposal around strategies that would improve the policy and resulting programs, with a focus on educational equity.

Background on the Issue and on the Current Policy

The controversial but influential (Hanushek, 2016) Coleman Report, published in 1966, called national attention to a host of non-school factors that have a significant impact on American students' school success, including "poverty, community attitudes, low educational level of parents" (Coleman et al., 1966, p. 21). However, it took more than 20 years for the non-school factor of *time use* to surface as a critical related issue and as a possible intervention point. In a landmark report published in 1988, researcher Reginald Clark documented key findings developed in his study about the question: *Why do some economically disadvantaged youth succeed in school while many other similarly situated young people fail?* Clark's conclusion: the critical difference between more and less successful low-income students was how they spent their non-school hours. He found that young people who spent 20-35 hours per week of their discretionary time in constructive learning activities did substantially better in school. In Clark's research, constructive or "high-yield" learning activities included reading for pleasure, talking with knowledgeable adults, playing strategy games (such as Scrabble, chess, and dominoes that require the player to spell, compute, make decisions, and solve problems), playing sports, participating in other organized programs, doing homework, attending theater or movies, and completing household chores. In contrast, less successful low-income students spent most of their discretionary time in passive pursuits, especially watching television and playing video games (Clark, 1988).

Clark's research did not begin to gain policy traction until the mid-1990s, when Attorney General Janet Reno used her bully pulpit to call attention to the risks inherent in the non-school hours as "prime time for juvenile crime" (Fox & Newman, 1997). This focus on danger rather than development is unfortunate although not totally surprising, given the nation's preoccupation with high crime rates at the time, during the height of the crack epidemic. A group of enlightened police chiefs both hastened and responded to Reno's call to protect young people from becoming victims and/or perpetrators. They created an organization called Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, which advocated for increased investments in an array of child-friendly programs, including after school (Fox & Newman, 1997). Even today, this organization continues to advocate for expansion of out-of-school-time programs, as its most recent publication on the topic attests (Council for a Strong America, 2019). At the time of its inception, the Fight Crime organization joined other national partners, such as United Way of America and the National Collaboration for Youth, in calling for expansion of youth development programs that could supplement what schools had to offer—although with decidedly different apparent motivations. The police chiefs' group tied its arguments to the criminalization discourse of the time (1990s to the present) while the youth advocacy organizations saw inherent value in investing in America's youth and their futures (United Way of America, 1991).

Against this background, Congress created the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program, the first major federal initiative designed to expand the quantity and quality of afterschool programs in the United States. Initially incorporated into the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act), the program has grown from an initial appropriation of $750,000 to its current budget of nearly $1.3 billion (U. S. Department of Education, 2021; Afterschool Alliance, March 14, 2022). The choice to embed the program in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act constitutes what Tefera and Voulgarides describe as a *big-P policy*—a formal federal or state policy that travels to and becomes enacted at the local level (Tefera & Voulgarides, 2016, p. 1). The program annually serves over 2 million individuals (students and parents) through more than 10,125 centers (U. S. Department of Education, 2020). With its primary focus on low-income schools, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program offers unparalleled potential to reduce the opportunity gap between more and less affluent young people.

The 21st CCLC program enjoys strong bipartisan support in Congress—while, at the same time, it is regularly listed as a potential cut to the federal budget. The size of the program and its ubiquity in local communities (nearly every Congressional district has at least one 21st Century-funded program) contribute to its bipartisan support, as does widespread approval from voters, particularly from parents who appreciate the child-care aspects of their local programs. The program has been reauthorized each year since 1994. Heather Weiss, Director of the Harvard Family Research Project, made the following observation about the kind of broad support the program enjoys: "The agreement by key congressional and administration leaders to significantly increase funding of the landmark federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers legislation between 1997 and 2001 was a powerful signal that afterschool programs and activities were worth significant public investment as part of the nation's efforts to educate and prepare its children for future success" (Weiss, 2013).

Nonetheless, a significant countervailing force is the persistent political pressure to cut the program, in part because its less-than-stellar documented results generate grist for the defunding agenda. Critics of the program organize their arguments around three themes: (1) they question whether the federal government is playing an appropriate role by providing funding for afterschool programs, which they see as a parental responsibility; (2) they say that the 21st CCLC doesn't work—and may, in some cases, actually harm children; and (3) they argue that there are better uses for these funds and offer specific suggestions for reallocation. Several of the nation's conservative think tanks have published articles and opinion pieces that make one or more of these arguments. For example, a commentary published in the *Daily Signa*l (an arm of the Heritage Foundation) during March of 2017 was entitled "Trump's Responsible Decision to End an After-School Program That Harms Children" (Muhlhausen, 2017). This article cited only one study, a controversial and outdated evaluation commissioned by the U. S. Department of Education early in the history of 21st CCLC (James-Burdumy et al., 2005) as the basis for its analysis. The conservative *National Review* picked up on the debate days later, referencing the Muhlhausen article, agreeing with its conclusion, and offering the headline "Yes, Cut the After-School Program." This article suggested that 21st CCLC be eliminated in its entirety and that "its funding should be either returned to the taxpayers or redirected toward programs with demonstrated effectiveness" (Richwine, 2017). The Heritage Foundation published another anti-21st CCLC article some 18 months after the Muhlhausen piece. The 2018 article proposed funding education savings accounts for military families by repurposing the 21st CCLC program, which it calls "ineffective," again relying primarily on the 2005 evaluation results. The article advocated that "repurposing 21st CCLC funds could provide an ESA worth up to $6,000 to each of approximately 200,000 children of active-duty military families," noting multiple benefits. "Not only would this step help with military retention and recruitment and save money for the Defense Department, it would, most critically, give children of military families access to education options that are the right fit for them" (Burke, Schwalbach, & Butcher, 2018).

The conservative American Enterprise Institute weighed in on the 2017 debate over President Trump's proposal to eliminate the 21st CCLC program by taking a different tack, offering an updated analysis of evidence that the program is producing positive results while urging expansion of ongoing evaluations and continuous improvement efforts. In an AEI blog post entitled "Dear President Trump: Afterschool Learning Matters, Too," Gerard Robinson observed that his own research and "the work of dozens of other researchers over the last decade" have demonstrated the value of 21st CCLC and similar programs. "Although an elimination of CCLCs—and every large program—may be worthy of consideration when picking winners and losers in an annual budget process, playing the 'lack of evidence' card is not a winning strategy in this case" (Robinson, 2017). This author observed that "ongoing evaluation is important to continuous improvement of all federally funded programs, which President Trump should demand as a criterion for receiving CCLC funds" (Robinson, 2017).

Critics and advocates understand the need to strengthen the policy behind the program, which makes it ripe for a rigorous analysis. 21st CCLC began as an enrichment program that sought to expand learning opportunities for low-income students while also removing barriers to students' learning and healthy development. Advocates lauded the use of the word "enrichment" throughout the authorizing language, noting that it stood in sharp contrast to the remedial approaches that characterized other policies and funding streams. Even then, however, a serious gap existed in the authorizing language, because the term "enrichment" was never defined. And, in fact, in one place the legislation lists academic tutoring as a possible enrichment option (U. S. Department of Education, 2016), demonstrating a lack of clarity surrounding the characteristics of remediation and enrichment.

With the subsequent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001, the then-new law (known as No Child Left Behind) emphasized a narrow approach to student achievement, one that relied on standardized tests and grades as the principal measure of student learning. At this same time, the responsibility for program administration devolved from the federal level to the 50 state departments of education, a significant change that occurred without any organized preparation, such as capacity-building among state program administrators.

The current reauthorization of ESEA, finalized in December of 2015, resulted in a law called the Every Student Succeeds Act, which provided opportunities to redress some of NCLB's most egregious problems. For example, states are now required to use at least one non-academic measure of student success or school quality. Several policy research organizations have recently issued reviews of evidence under ESSA, including one focused on community schools (Maier et al., 2017) and another, on afterschool programs (Neild et al., 2019). These reviews, coupled with a vibrant existing literature on out-of-school-time programs, offer great potential to influence significant policy changes that tackle issues of educational equity in a concerted manner. In addition, the 21st CCLC policy fits the definition offered by Fullan and Boyle (2014) as a “driver” of change—that is, “a policy or strategy that is designed and intended to get results across the system” (Fullan & Boyle, 2014, p. 10).

One additional feature of the program’s history that is noteworthy is the unique public-private partnership between the U. S. Department of Education and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation that undergirds the program. This partnership has endured from 1994 to the present and has played a significant role in developing the advocacy and capacity-building infrastructure surrounding the federal investment (Goodson, 2006). For example, Mott created and has continuously funded a national advocacy organization, the Afterschool Alliance, and the foundation also supports 50 state afterschool networks that address both advocacy and capacity-building (conferences, training, printed and on-line resources, and networking opportunities).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This review will examine five distinct but related bodies of professional literature that offer relevant insights to the 21st CCLC policy and program: (1) studies that establish the potential and actual contributions of out-of-school-time learning; (2) meta-analyses of the effectiveness of existing programs; (3) studies that examine specific aspects of 21st CCLC-funded programs; (4) national evaluations commissioned by the U. S. Department of Education on the 21st CCLC program; and (5) studies on enrichment as a pedagogical approach (since the federal legislation specifies enrichment as the goal of the program while never defining its meaning or strategies).

Studies that establish the potential and actual contribution of out-of-school-time learning: A substantial body of research indicates that a lot of young people's learning happens outside of school (Clark, 1988; Eccles, 1999; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Larson et al., 2004; McLaughlin, 2005; Halpern, 2006; Vandell et al., 2007). These studies concur that out-of-school-time learning programs are most effective when they offer activities that are challenging and engaging to young people, that respond to students' interests, and that offer variety in format and balance in content (including but not limited to academics). These foundational studies served to provide important evidence that advocates cited, policymakers responded to, and practitioners used to improve their practice.

Several of these researchers also documented the fact that poor children receive fewer of the developmental inputs that make a difference in current and future success, including high quality schools and out-of-school-time experiences. This point is reinforced in a substantial body of more recent literature that positions out-of-school-time learning as a factor in closing the "opportunity gap," a stance that views the so-called achievement gap in America's schools as largely the result of structural inequities in society that lead to inequitably distributed opportunities to learn—and this belief too is supported by research (Putnam, 2015; Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Carter & Welner, 2013). A related extensive recent analysis of extracurricular activities (defined as activities offered primarily outside of school hours and not part of the traditional school curriculum) and disadvantaged youth (assessed by gender, socio-economic status, race, and immigration status) found that although disadvantaged youth are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities, they often experience greater benefits when they do participate. These authors concluded that the "evidence clearly supports expanding access to extracurricular programs for disadvantaged youth" (Heath et al., 2018, p. 1).

The Harvard Family Research Project, with funding from the Mott Foundation, conducted a thorough analysis of the research on afterschool programs in 2008, concluding that "The evidence base is clear: Well-implemented, quality after school programs have the potential to support and promote healthy learning and development. Moreover, there is a research warrant for continued public and private support for after school investments" (Harvard Family Research Project, 2008, p. 10). The authors cited four key implementation factors that need to be addressed if such programs are to offer maximum benefit: access; sustained participation; program quality; and strong partnerships.

The most extensive review of afterschool programs is the 26-year National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development, whose staff worked with a team of nationally prominent principal investigators to assess the short- and long-term effects of children's participation in early care and afterschool education (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, n. d.). In a recent interview, Deborah Lowe Vandell—one of the lead investigators throughout the duration of the study—observed that "our science has now substantially increased what we know...and we are now much better situated to meet the needs of children and adolescents by providing accessible, affordable, high-quality afterschool learning opportunities" (Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, 2021, paragraph 11). Vandell went on to note that "We've also identified many of the key ingredients needed for out-of-school-time programs to have positive effects. This work has shown that consistent and sustained participation in high-quality afterschool programs is linked to positive academic and social outcomes for both children and adolescents" (Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, 2021, paragraph 12). The study found long-term positive effects owing to children's participation in early care and out-of-school-time programs, suggesting that benefits do not fade but instead persist over time. In addition, this study found that consistent participation in afterschool programs contributed to children's social competence, including feeling more confident about meeting new people and interacting with peers and adults. This finding "bodes well for students' future success in school and in the workplace," according to Vandell (Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, 2021, paragraph 20).

Another recent study looked at patterns of participation in afterschool activities among nearly 1,800 low-income, ethnically diverse children and found that both program quality and children's regular program participation were essential factors in producing positive outcomes. When these factors were present, positive outcomes included higher academic performance, better work habits, stronger task persistence, and less aggression toward peers, compared to children with low participation rates or with large amounts of unsupervised out-of-school time (Vandell et al., 2020).

While many studies on out-of-school-time learning focus on afterschool programs—including the Harvard Family Research Project's extensive analysis and the NICHD longitudinal study—some researchers have paid significant attention to the role of the summer break from school in either promoting or diminishing young people's learning and healthy development. Harris Cooper and his colleagues (1996) are generally credited with conducting the initial contemporary research that highlighted the role of the summer months in contributing to learning loss, particularly among low-income students, and in exacerbating the achievement disparities between more and less affluent children (Cooper et al., 1996). Recent research has documented dramatic variability in summer learning loss, pointing out that decrements are not randomly distributed but, rather, "tend to accumulate for the same students over time" (Atteberry & McEachin, 2021). Other studies have addressed questions of program effectiveness in dealing with summer learning loss by offering advice to policymakers and program operators (Quinn & Polikoff, 2017; McCombs et al., 2020).

An additional body of research focuses on what youth and parents want from out-of-school time programs. The most extensive study to date—a national survey of parents and middle- and high-school aged youth conducted by Public Agenda and commissioned by the Wallace Foundation—began with this question: *Isn't it perilous to ignore their voices in a sector of learning where, unlike schools, kids can—and do—vote with their feet?* (Duffett & Johnson, 2004, p. 7). This study provided a rich array of findings, including the fact that the majority (61 percent) of youthful respondents agreed that "when the school day is done, the last thing I want is to go to a place that has more academic work" (Duffett & Johnson, 2004, p. 10). Other findings in this survey indicate that young people gave good marks to afterschool programs where they learned a lot, had fun, and made good friends. Taken together, these and other findings suggest not that young people eschew academic content in afterschool programs but rather that they want academic and other content offered in ways that are enjoyable, engaging, and interactive.

Finally, in this category of literature assessing the potential and actual contributions of out-of-school-time learning programs, a refreshing analysis conducted by Katherine Philp and Michele Gregoire Gill tackled the fundamental question of the purpose of after-school programs. These authors observed that the increased focus on academics in OST programs overlooks the substantial potential of such spaces to support students who are most likely to disengage from traditional schooling, including low-income students of color. These areas of untapped potential include increasing young people's connections to caring adults, deepening their personal interests and identities, and promoting their social capital through expanded personal connections and institutional resources (Philp & Gill, 2020).

Meta-analyses of the effectiveness of selected programs: This group of studies includes at least four meta-analyses of multiple studies showing the effectiveness of high quality programs: the earliest one (2006), a study of 35 afterschool programs that employed control or comparison groups in their evaluations and met other inclusion criteria; a second one, focused on after-school program quality and conducted by Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan (2010) of 68 afterschool programs across the country that have demonstrated success in generating positive student outcomes; and the third, a comprehensive examination of meta-analyses and large-scale, rigorous OST program evaluations conducted by the RAND Corporation and commissioned by the Wallace Foundation; and a 2019 Wallace Foundation-sponsored review of the evidence of after-school program effectiveness analyzed in the context of the Every Student Succeeds Act (the current reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act).

The 2006 study examined research on out-of-school-time programs for assisting at-risk students in reading and/or mathematics. This meta-analysis of 35 studies found small but statistically significant positive effects of out-of-school-time programs on student achievement in both reading and math as well as larger positive effect sizes for programs with specific characteristics, such as one-to-one tutoring in reading. Both afterschool and summer programs demonstrated effectiveness. More than half of the programs (19 of 35) in this analysis appear to be traditional school-sponsored summer school programs, blurring the line between schools' core instructional programs and out-of-school-time offerings (Lauer et al., 2006).

The Durlak et al. meta-analysis (2010) found that effective initiatives contributed to policy-relevant outcomes including improved school attendance, school connectedness, classroom behaviors, academic outcomes, and graduation rates, and to significant reductions in problem behaviors and growth in social-emotional skills. This analysis sought to identify the programmatic features associated with program success. The four features identified in this study revolve around the acronym SAFE, which stands for sequenced, active, focused, and explicit. Effective programs used a connected and coordinated set of activities, incorporated active forms of learning, targeted specific personal and social skills, and offered at least one program component devoted to the development of these skills (Durlak et al., 2010). While this meta-analysis generated interest, excitement, and widespread adoption across the afterschool field over the past decade, it is not referenced in any of the available documents about the 21st CCLC program—this despite the prevalence of language in the legislation and guidance documents urging use of "evidence based practices" and "scientifically based research."

The 2017 RAND Corporation study, commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, examined the evidence base on a broad range of OST programs, including many funded through 21st CCLC, with a view toward better understanding the possible effects of programs. The research team reviewed meta-analyses and large-scale, rigorous experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations of afterschool and summer programs, focusing primarily on multi-purpose programs such as 21st CCLC and academic OST programs. The overall conclusion of this analysis is "that OST programs are generally effective at producing the primary outcomes that would be expected based on their content and design…based on our review, we consider these programs worthy of continued public investment." But the authors add an important caveat: "However, the primary benefits of OST programs are often understudied or underreported." These authors recommended that "when making funding decisions, federal, state, and local governments and private foundations consider all the benefits that programs provide to youth and families and emphasize program quality. We also encourage funders and researchers to measure outcomes aligned with program content." (McCombs, Whitaker, & Yoo, 2017, p. 2).

This latter point concerning the multiple benefits of high-quality programs and the need for multiple measures of program effectiveness is pursued in a subsequent (2019) Wallace-commissioned study, a meta-analysis of more than 60 programs that have produced evidence of effectiveness aligned with at least one of three levels of evidence required by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The main purpose of the review was to help decision-makers identify effective afterschool programs for possible implementation. Unlike the Durlak et al. meta-analysis, it "did not rigorously examine which parts of individual programs were effective or seek to generalize across programs about the effectiveness of specific components" (Neild et al., 2019, p. ii). However, this study is relevant to the analysis at hand because it provides useful evidence-based advice for afterschool program providers, state and federal policymakers, and evaluators. The advice it addressed to the federal government is especially germane:

> The U. S. Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Center (21CCLC) program should encourage program evaluations that investigate a range of student outcomes, including academic achievement measured other than by state standardized tests. The U. S. Department of Education describes a broad vision for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, including providing opportunities for academic enrichment and a wide array of additional services, programs, and activities for students and families. Given this broad mandate and focus on enrichment, the indicators used by the federal government to judge the program's performance may capture only a subset of potentially important outcomes. We particularly note that using state standardized test scores as key performance measures may set unrealistic expectations for what afterschool programs can and should accomplish. We recommend that the Department encourage states and their evaluators to use measures that are clearly aligned to the purpose of the programs and sensitive to changes that they realistically could provide (Neild et al*.,* 2019, p. 51).

Peer-Reviewed Studies of 21st CCLC Programs: A third body of literature focuses on peer-reviewed studies of 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs. Some of these studies examined individual programs while others looked across multiple sites; and some assessed specific aspects of programming (such as partnership issues and program quality). This review identified only one study that dealt with 21st CCLC policy issues.

- *Program quality.* There is considerable consensus in the out-of-school-time field about what constitutes quality in after-school programs. This agreement has developed over the past 30 years and has been fueled, in part, by the federal investments. Current studies of program quality have made excellent use of the growing consensus on quality indicators but have also revealed frequent gaps between desired and actual dimensions of quality. For example, Holstead et al. (2015) examined specific aspects of quality in 21st CCLC programs for high school youth, looking for promising research-based practices in 19 programs across three dimensions identified in the literature as critical: program activities, recruitment and retention, and student voice and choice. They found that many of the grantees employed promising practices but that the extent to which they were implemented varied considerably. For example, while 15 of the 19 offered opportunities for credit recovery, and 11 provided time to do homework or receive tutoring, only seven covered program content around career and college development, and only 10 taught life skills training. The programs in question used a variety of recruitment and retention practices, although they reported employing more passive strategies than active ones. Of the three sets of practices examined, the programs struggled most with student voice and choice. Only three of the 19 initiatives had surveyed youth to identify their interests, and none had established a youth advisory board or involved young people in hiring decisions. The authors recommended several professional development approaches to building staff capacity in this area—an important consideration in addressing quality gaps across the field (Holstead et al., 2015). Another study examined perceptions of program quality and outcomes as well as the actual relationship between quality and outcomes, involving 337 programs and 3,388 stakeholders in Ohio. The research team used the Ohio Quality Assessment Rubric to gather perceptions of program quality, and they assessed the actual relationship between program quality and outcomes by using a canonical correlation analysis (Paluta et al., 2015). A third study on program quality described strategies used in two 21st CCLC-funded programs to integrate a goal-setting skills intervention into elementary-level afterschool programs. Their results showed that the intervention offered benefits for both students and teacher-facilitators, and the authors made suggestions for improvements in implementation based on their assessment of the program's strengths and weaknesses (Hallenbeck & Fleming, 2011).

- *School-community partnerships***.** The authorizing legislation for 21st CCLC programs strongly encourages schools to work with community partners, such as youth development and mental health organizations. Some states require such partnerships as a condition of funding. Kenneth Anthony and Joseph Morra explored the theme of school-community partnerships in their 2016 study of afterschool program sites located in three K-6 schools in an urban school district in southern New England. All three programs received a mix of funding, including grants from the 21st CCLC program as well as state and local philanthropies. Despite its limitations, including the small size of the sample and the self-reported nature of the data collected, this study confirmed several well-known challenges inherent in school-afterschool partnerships and offered a wide array of constructive ideas for attending to them. In addition, it pointed toward needed changes in the language of the authorizing legislation regarding how partnerships might be strengthened, such as requiring evidence of shared planning (Anthony & Morra, 2016). Paluta et al. also addressed partnership issues in their study by urging schools to recognize the potential added value of strategic collaborations, particularly with school social workers who are skilled in linking multiple systems on behalf of youths and families (Paluta et al., 2015).
- *Policy-focused studies:* A very different, though equally useful, analysis is provided by Sarah Fierberg Phillips (2010) in her study assessing the political history of the 21st CCLC program, in which she analyzes why efforts to change the program were successful in 1998 and unsuccessful in 2003. In 1998, during the Clinton administration, the budget increased from $40 million to $200 million; in 2003, the Bush administration made an unsuccessful attempt to cut the program's budget from $1 billion to $400 million. In assessing these two sets of decisions, Phillips explains and applies a political theory developed by Theda Skocpal—a polity-centered approach—in her examination of the societal and political forces that influenced these policy decisions about the 21st CCLC program at two different points in history. Citing Skocpal,

Phillips observes that the term *polity* “refers to the political organizations and institutions of a society. In the U.S., the polity includes the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government as well as political parties and extra-governmental interest groups. Skocpal argues that policy is initiated or transformed when congruence exists between the goals and capacities of key political actors such as politicians, bureaucrats, political parties, and interest groups” (Phillips, 2010, p. 29). She goes on to outline the socio-economic and cultural realities that influenced the funding decisions relating to the 1998 and 2003 versions of the 21st CCLC program, both of which resulted in increased program funding despite the very different political environments. Phillips timed her article to coincide with the 15th anniversary of the program in 2010, but she also looked ahead to possible future funding battles, noting that “Whatever form future advocacy efforts take, they are strongest when they are rooted in a solid understanding of history” (Phillips, 2010, p. 34).

Studies commissioned by the U. S. Department of Education: Another relevant body of literature consists of national evaluations commissioned by the U. S. Department of Education about the effectiveness of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. These studies have gathered data from selected sites and have focused over the years on an array of outcomes, including children’s feelings of safety while participating in the programs, academic outcomes as measured primarily by standardized test scores, and teachers’ perceptions of how their students have benefitted (or not) from their participation in the funded programs. These studies have shown limited program effectiveness in relation to these outcomes but have pointed the way toward needed changes, which appear to have been made incrementally over time (Harvard Family Research Project, 2002; James-Burdumy et al., 2005; Weiss, 2013). The U. S. Department of Education recently commissioned a new multi-year national evaluation, entitled *The Effects of a Systemic Approach to Improving Quality in Afterschool Programs: An Impact Evaluation to Inform the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) Program.*

With Mathematica Policy Research in the lead, the evaluation partners are Synergy Enterprises, Research for Action, and Pemberton Research. The research team is currently recruiting up to 100 21st CCLC sites, half of which will be selected by lottery to implement the continuous quality improvement system supported by the study (reportedly the Youth Program Quality Assessment system developed by the Weikart Center) for two years, and half will continue their normally planned programs. The study's initial report is expected in 2023, according to the U. S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (U. S. Department of Education, 2022).

Studies on enrichment as a pedagogical approach: Because the term *enrichment* is central to the 21st CCLC legislation and the program's non-regulatory guidance, the existing literature on this topic is germane to the present analysis. The fact that this term is never defined in either the legislation or accompanying guidance has led to confusion and multiple interpretations among policymakers, program administrators, and grantees; meanwhile, a strong body of research exists that can provide explicit assistance to all these key stakeholders about the characteristics and benefits of this evidence-based approach to out-of-school-time learning.

Over the past four decades, University of Connecticut Professor Joseph Renzulli and a team of his colleagues have developed a substantial body of theoretical and empirical research focused on the concept of enrichment. Renzulli defines this term as a pedagogy that offers "high levels of student engagement and the use of enjoyable and challenging learning experiences that are constructed around students' interests, learning styles, and preferred modes of expression" (Renzulli Center for Creativity, Gifted Education, and Talent Development, n.d.). Initially developed as a strategy for teaching gifted children, the Renzulli enrichment approach has proven to be effective for all students when it takes the form of a schoolwide enrichment model (Renzulli & Reis, 2014). The schoolwide model has been adopted by districts across this country and internationally. This model recently (2019) received visibility in New York City when it was recommended for adoption systemwide by the School Diversity Advisory Group.

It is ironic that Renzulli credits many of his insights about the value and methods of enrichment to what he calls “playground pedagogy”—the kinds of authentic learning that often take place during informal opportunities that bring young people together. He has observed that “sometimes, the most important lessons about learning are right before our eyes, but because they are not considered ‘real school,’ we tend to overlook them in favor of highly organized and prescriptive pedagogy that characterizes formal learning” (Renzulli, *Lessons Learned from Playground Pedagogy,* n.d.). In this analysis, he notes that young people who are engaged in play or in extracurricular activities tend to group themselves across age lines in accordance with their interests. In addition, many of their activities will be directed toward the production of a specific product or the achievement of a goal that is relevant to the entire group. A third characteristic of playground pedagogy, according to Renzulli, is enjoyment. “Whenever people ask me to define what I mean by enrichment or high end learning, I always answer with what I call the three E’s—enjoyment, engagement and enthusiasm…While one would be naïve to argue that all learning (or our jobs and work) can always be enjoyable, efficiency in school or the workplace is always heightened when students or adults enjoy what they are doing” (Renzulli, *Lessons Learned from Playground Pedagogy,* n. d.*).*

Renzulli encourages his readers to compare this kind of engaged learning “with the often distant and ambiguous goals that typical classrooms dominated by lesson plans, prescribed standards, and preparation for yet another test. I am not arguing against the important role of formal learning situations. However, these prescribed and presented learning experiences need to be counterbalanced with learning that is based on student interests and a pedagogy that makes whatever students are doing instantaneously relevant to their own interests, motivation, and desire to produce something that is important to them” (Renzulli, *Lessons Learned from Playground Pedagogy,* n. d.*).* The irony in this situation is that, while Renzulli is advising that formal education take more notice of how children learn in informal settings, many out-of-school-time learning programs—including 21st CCLC—have taken on the narrow goals and often ineffective methods of formal education.

Also relevant to the federal 21st CCLC policy is Renzulli's analysis of the particularly pernicious effects on low-income children of the kinds of test-based accountability measures found in No Child Left Behind and related Federal policies since 2001. He delineates this kind of pedagogy as deductive, didactic, and rife with rote memorization and knowledge consumption:

> What do all these reform initiatives have in common? Most are built on structural changes, designed by well-intentioned policy-makers or agencies (usually far removed from the classroom), and calculated to have an impact on entire school districts, states, or even the entire nation. More importantly, however, is that these structural changes have drawn mainly upon (and even forced) a low level pedagogy that is highly prescriptive and didactic, approaches to learning that emphasize the accumulation, storage, and retrieval of information that will show up on the next round of standardized tests. We have become so obsessed with content standards and test scores that assess mainly memory, that we have lost sight of the most important outcomes of schooling: thinking; reasoning; creativity; and problem-solving skills that allow young people to *use* the information driven by content standards in interesting and engaging ways (Renzulli, 2013, p. 46).

Renzulli describes this situation as a kind of "education conspiracy against low income children" (Renzulli, 2013, p. 45). He points out that test-based accountability has resulted, for the majority of economically disadvantaged and struggling students, in a steady diet of "remedial and compensatory pedagogy that has not diminished the achievement gap, but, as research has shown, has actually contributed to its perpetuation…Many of these programs are designed to find out what a child cannot do, does not like to do, and sees no reason for doing" (Renzulli, 2013, p. 46). This analysis bears relevance to the 21st CCLC program, since its policy specifically targets low-income students in Title I schools, many of whom have been the object of the very kind of pedagogy that Renzulli decries.

In a recent (2020) analysis, members of the Renzulli team examined the use of enrichment in a variety of out-of-school-time programs and reiterated the importance of building on student interest, encouraging independent and autonomous learning, and exposing participants to a wide variety of topics, persons, places, and events not commonly covered in the regular school curriculum (Renzulli et al., 2020). This analysis, based on the authors' long-standing interest and expertise around the topic of enrichment, is directly relevant to the 21st CCLC policy and program in that it focuses specifically on the out-of-school-time learning environment.

In summary, this review highlights both strengths and gaps in the existing professional literature, evidencing a dearth of studies focused on public policy, with few addressing out-of-school-time learning policy in general and even fewer grappling with the specifics of the 21st CCLC policy. In addition, this review supports the problem statement outlined earlier—the relative lack of attention to out-of-school-time education compared to in-school research and the critical equity issues embedded in the non-school hours.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Critical developmental theory will serve as my research framework. In relation to general critical theory, I draw on the work of Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln, who observed that the aim of inquiry in the critical theory paradigm "is the *critique and transformation* of the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender structures that constrain and exploit humankind, by engagement in confrontation, even conflict" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 113). They add that "advocacy and activism are key concepts" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 113). My goal in examining the 21st Century Community Learning Centers policy and program is aligned with this set of ideas. I want to offer a rigorous critique of the current federal policy as well as transformative policy suggestions aimed at improving the implementation of informal education for children and adolescents in low-income American communities. In relation to the nature of knowledge, critical theory focuses on structural and historical insights. In my research, I seek to address the history of out-of-school-time generally and of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers policy particularly, both with a view toward marshalling evidence concerning strategies designed to maximize the benefits of informal learning and to redress the inequalities identified by current research.

In critical theory, the inquirer's voice is not that of a disinterested scientist but rather that of a transformative intellectual—one who facilitates insights into the current state and who stimulates others to act on such insights (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Through my research, I seek to provide a rigorous analysis that will result in the improvement and transformation of a key federal policy that has significant impact on the lives of low-income children and adolescents across the country. In bringing a critical eye to the 21st Century Community Learning Centers policy and funding stream, I have sought to adopt and use an equity lens in every aspect of the analysis, including but not limited to the central issues of quality and access.

In using critical developmental theory as my conceptual framework, I seek to understand how recent advances in synthesizing current findings across neuroscience, epigenetics, developmental systems theory, and cultural-historical analysis can provide solid theoretical grounding useful in all developmental settings, including formal and informal learning environments. Critical developmental theory stands in sharp contrast to traditional developmental theory in several respects: (1) it deliberately avoids "the long-standing and continued history of centering western European conceptions of the world" (Adams-Wiggins & Taylor-Garcia, 2020, p. 486); (2) it counters persistent myths about child development, including the myths about carefree childhood; about childhood as transcending class, ethnicity, and gender; and about America as a child-friendly society (Mintz, 2017, p. 648).

In this section, I explore five themes emanating from contemporary theories about human development and examine the implications of each theme in relation to my analysis of the 21st CCLC policy and program.

Key theme #1—The inherent complexity of human development: While the legislation supporting the 21st CCLC program reduces the task at hand to raising test scores through so-called "scientifically based practices," current knowledge of children's learning and development conveys a more complicated, nuanced, and hopeful picture. Esther Thelen devoted her nearly four-decade professional career to understanding the interaction of the mind and the body, ultimately conceptualizing a grand theory of human development. Her painstaking early studies of patterns of infant movement revealed active problem-solving on the part of even the youngest of subjects—some only a few days old. This notion, that young people are active participants in their own learning, is antithetical to the "banking model" (Freire, 1970) that underlies No Child Left Behind and other aspects of U. S. education policy and practice.

As her work evolved, Thelen came to view "the child-in-context as a complex system of reciprocally coupled and reciprocally interactive components" (Spencer et al., 2006, p. 1532). In creating her theory of human development, Thelen sought to root her thinking in general principles that apply across varied phenomena and traditionally disparate domains. These principles revolve around four issues: (1) an emphasis on time—behavior emerges in the moment, but the effects of each behavioral decision accumulate over longer time periods; (2) a focus on multiple determinants—behavior is multiply determined and *softly assembled* from the nonlinear interactions of multiple subsystems; (3) an emphasis on embodiment—the idea that perception, action, and cognition form an integrated system that cannot be partitioned; and (4) a respect for individuality—based on the idea that development happens in individual children solving individual problems in unique ways. Thelen's dynamic systems theory emphasizes the complexity of human development. Spencer et al. observe that "she hoped these ideas would have a profound effect on the way people think about development, as well as how they think of themselves—as embodied, grounded, ever-changing, ever improvising people in the world" (Spencer et al., 2006, p. 1536). Thelen understood that a good theory "can dramatically alter views of what intervention is all about" (Thelen, 2005, p. 255).

Other theorists have also contributed important ideas about the complexity of human development experience. For example, Carol Lee observes that "we cannot articulate a generative and robust science of learning and development without explicit attention to the diversity of human experience" (Lee, 2008, p. 272). More specifically, she cites the nation's long history of racial injustice, noting that "the attribution of Whiteness as normative served to justify all forms of discrimination against those who were classified as non-White" and that "to ignore race is to take our vision away from the ways in which our society institutionalizes challenges to particular groups of people" (Lee, 2008, p. 272). These are not trivial observations in a country where fewer than half of public-school students are white (Riser-Kositsky, 2020) and where fully 51% come from low-income families (Suitts, 2015). Lee notes that academic learning is influenced by the nature of the supports or scaffolds that are available for learning, including the structure of prior knowledge. She makes the case that developmental needs are going to differ by cultural community.

Further adding to the complexity argument is the idea that human development is a lifelong process, not one relegated to childhood. The work of Erik Erikson (1963) on this topic is widely recognized as a breakthrough. “Unlike the vast majority of 19th-century and 20th-century developmental theories, Erikson’s theory (1963) envisions development as a lifelong project, proceeding from birth to death through the eight psychosocial stages described in *Childhood and Society”* (Sorell & Montgomery, 2001, p. 99). These authors, while criticizing Erikson’s work from a feminist perspective (finding it based largely on the experience of white, middle class, European and American men), nonetheless consider it relevant to contemporary questions of human, including identity, development.

Implications of key theme #1 for the 21st CCLC program: I see at least four implications for policy and practice as I review this set of findings about the complexity of human development: (1) young people, as agents of their own development, should be offered clear roles in choosing, and in some cases leading, program activities; (2) program planners, in their proposals, should be required to explain how they will address the specific needs and interests of their selected population (in response to the recognition of diversity of experience); (3) given that human development is a lifelong process, programs should be required to explain how they will foster a love of learning and an ability to “learn to learn”; (4) proposers should be required to discuss the developmental appropriateness of their programs and activities, tailoring their choices to the differential strengths and needs of elementary-age children, young adolescents in middle school, and high school-age youth.

Key theme #2—The false dichotomy between nature and nurture: Despite the persistence of the belief that biology is destiny (Dar-Nimrod & Heine, 2011) and the ubiquity of the everyday conversations about the relative merits of nature v. nurture, 21st century science reveals that human development occurs through the interaction of mind, body, and environment. These findings represent a clear consensus that nature and nurture play collaborative and complementary roles in the process of human development. In a 2013 chapter entitled “Current Thinking about Nature and Nurture,” David Moore concludes that “all our characteristics are influenced by both biological and experiential factors” (Moore, 2013, p. 630). He then goes on to reinforce and strengthen this point by observing that “the case must be made that Nature and Nurture are now known to *always* interact during development” (Moore, 2013, p. 633). William Overton concurs by observing that “the person is the relational synthesis of biological and socio-cultural processes” (Overton, 2013, p. 101). Robert Lickliter states clearly and emphatically that “Contemporary life sciences tell us that there are many gene-dependent processes, but no gene-directed ones. This revolutionary message effectively eliminates the long-standing nature-nurture debate and replaces it with a view that appreciates that organisms and their environments make up a unitary system” (Lickliter, 2008, p. 16).

Moore worries about the political implications of the public’s misunderstanding of this reality, noting that when taxpayers believe genes determine IQ, this belief “could lead to voting against the use of tax revenues for supporting public schools; why, some might argue, should we spend money on the education of children who might be ‘biologically’ unable to learn?” (Moore, 2013, p. 631). Dar-Nimrod and Heine add a caveat and reinforce Moore’s point by observing that “a tendency to explain behavior in biological terns is one of the stronger predictors of stereotyping” (Dar-Nimrod & Heine, 2011, p. 803).

These concerns are not unfounded, given the long and robust history of researchers’ and policymakers’ use of biological theories to establish the existence of racial, gender, and cultural hierarchies. Stephanie Shields and Sunil Bhatia assess the salience of Charles Darwin’s theories of evolution and natural and sexual selection, observing that his work was influenced and constrained by the context in which he was writing—the Victorian Era in England—and the limitations of what was then known and understood about race, gender, and culture. These authors note further that many of Darwin's ideas were subsequently misappropriated by eugenicists and cultural imperialists, among others. While readily acknowledging Darwin's original and multiple contributions to Western thought, they also hold him to account for providing comparative developmental psychology, albeit unwittingly, "the scientific tools to show that the non-Western 'Other' as a native subject was infantile, feminine, immoral, irrational, and uncivilized—in other words, not adult, not male, and not manly—and therefore in need of the governance of wise, powerful, civilized, responsible Western colonizers" (Shields & Bhatia, 2009, p. 117).

Another false but persistent idea is a widespread preoccupation with the brain as something separate from the body and its surrounds. This fixation has deep roots that go back to Descartes who, according to Thomas Biddell, "with his panoply of dualisms, is frequently singled out as the culprit responsible for launching our fractured world view" (Biddell, 2020, p. 3). This preoccupation shows up clearly in the banking or transmission model (Freire, 1970) that has predominated in U. S. policy and practice for several decades—particularly under the federal No Child Left Behind policy.

The notion that cognitive development can be separated from the social, emotional, physical, and moral/ethical, and can be measured using standardized tests, would appear to be rooted in some of the same pernicious assumptions underlying the brain measurement studies cited by Philip Gasper in his analysis of the return of scientific racism. Gasper traces the history of brain fixation from Thomas Jefferson's 18th century theories about racial differences to Darwin's evolutionary arguments to the development of IQ tests in the early 20th century that were based "on the view that the races were biologically distinct and that whites had superior characteristics" (Gasper, 2018, paragraph 5). He also makes the link between IQ tests and standardized achievement tests. He notes that although IQ correlates highly with performance on academic achievement tests, and that there is a Black-white gap between achievement test results for reading and for math in the United States (with Blacks on average scoring significantly lower than whites), that gap has decreased significantly over the past several decades. Gasper makes the case that this documented decrease in the achievement gap between 1963 and 2003 shows that the differences over those four decades were based on opportunity, not on biology. "What happened for most of that time was that the gap between educational resources and opportunities for Blacks and whites also narrowed…Attempts to explain the gap by appeal to unknown genetic differences serve only as a cover for conservative attacks on programs (from Head Start to affirmative action) aimed at reducing educational inequalities" (Gasper, 2018, IQ paragraph 8).

Anna Stetsenko supports the argument about the need to ramp up public investments in opportunities that recognize existing inequities as she examines the complementary and interactive roles of genetic and environmental influences on human development. Stetsenko posits that human potential "is realized in the course of activity-dependent generation of open-ended, dynamic, and situated developmental processes that are critically reliant upon sociocultural supports, tools, mediations, and access to requisite resources, especially through education" (Stetsenko, 2017, p. 112). Lickliter agrees with this view, noting "the importance of identifying the essential resources of normal, healthy development. Defining and providing these resources should be an essential priority for all families, communities, and societies" (Lickliter, 2008, p. 16). In a similar vein, Willis Overton observes that "theory-predicated and evidence-based policies and programs associated with Relational-Developmental-Systems ideas can be instruments of social justice" (Overton, 2013, p. 104).

Implications of key theme #2 for the 21st CCLC policies and programs: Embracing the scientific consensus view that human development occurs through the interaction of mind, body, and environment would revolutionize the 21st CCLC policy and program, moving it away from a fixation on standardized test scores as the primary measure of effectiveness and moving it toward a holistic view of students' learning and development. Policies would need to respect and build on local culture. This would require a kind of flexibility that does not exist in the current legislation and regulatory guidance. Revised policies also should support and encourage pedagogies that are active, challenging, engaging, and experiential.

Key theme #3—The role of context in human development: Theoretical psychologist Alan Costall posits an important link between the work of Charles Darwin and the subsequent development of ecological approaches to psychology by highlighting the interdependence and even co-evolution involved when organisms interact with their environments. He observes that "A number of ecological psychologies have been established as a corrective to the focus, within mainstream psychology, on mind as both disembodied and abstracted from a wider 'world'" (Costall, 2001, p. 430), citing the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1994), among others.

Bronfenbrenner argues that, in order to understand human development, one must consider the entire ecological system in which growth takes place. His theory conceives of the ecological environment as a set of nested structures, each residing inside the other like a set of Russian dolls. Moving from the innermost level to the outside (and from the most immediate influences to the more distant), the levels of the environment are: (1) microsystems include family, school, peer group, and workplace; (2) mesosystems are the linkages and processes taking place between two or more microsystems, such as the connection between home and school; (3) exosystems involve the linkages and processes between two or more settings, at least one of which exerts only indirect influences on the developing child, as the relationship between the child, the home, and the parent's workplace; (4) macrosystems consist of the overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture or subculture (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Later in the design of this system, Bronfenbrenner added a fifth factor, chronosystems, in which time becomes a property of the surrounding environment. Bronfenbrenner and other ecological theorists provided a revolutionary set of ideas accounting for the multiple influences on human development, which posit varied entry points for interventions and growth-promoting opportunities. These theories have also provided a platform for extending the ecological paradigm into other arenas, such as the role of genetics in human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Considering all aspects of context in human development requires attention to many complex variables, including race, gender, socio-economic status, parenting practices, and other aspects of culture. On the issue of race, Karlyn Adams-Wiggins and Daphne Taylor-Garcia note that anti-Blackness is part of the ecology and context of Black youth's growing-up experiences in America. They observe that schools are among the contexts that contribute to this negative reality and they call on researchers to counter anti-Black bias by listening to the voices of marginalized youth and identifying racist policies and practices in education (Adams-Wiggins & Taylor-Garcia, 2020). Psychologist Hazel Markus chastises her profession for playing "a powerful role in confirming racial hierarchies and in creating and maintaining the idea of race as a natural or biological fact" (Markus, 2008, p. 659). Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva analyzes the characteristics of what he calls the "new racism" of the post-civil rights era. He then focuses on ways to disrupt "specific mechanisms, practices, and social relations that produce and reproduce racial inequality at all levels" (Bonilla-Silva, 2015, p. 1360).

Frederic Weizmann (2004) traces the convoluted and multi-rooted history of race over the millennia, examining how essentialism and typological thinking contributed ideas to the construction of racialized concepts and racial differences, which became prominent in the 18th century and continue to this day. He cites the work of Karl Popper, the philosopher of science who observed that ideas about race were concretized and systematized in the writings of the ancient Greeks, including Plato. He discusses the residue of racialized ideas that remained as one set of scientific or religious ideas was overshadowed by a more modern set—residue that forms the basis for much of our present thinking. But, he concludes that:

> race is neither a timeless idea nor an inevitable one. It is an idea that is bound up with the growth of both modern society and modern science. As a category, race corresponds to the idea of subspecies, a descriptive concept that…is deeply flawed. That the concept of race is no longer a tenable one has been reinforced by findings from the Human Genome Project (e.g., Lewis, 2002). It may not be too much to hope that just as the concept of race had a beginning, it may also have an end (Weizmann, 2004, p. 43).

This hopeful viewpoint would likely come as welcome news to parents of Black children and youth as they struggle to protect their offspring from the ravages of racism. Sinikka Elliott and Megan Reid write about parenting strategies employed by low-income Black mothers in their efforts to keep their adolescent children safe in dangerous neighborhoods, especially in an era of mass incarceration. These strategies involved warning children and telling cautionary tales; physically sheltering children from violence and crime by keeping them close to or inside the home; and limiting their social contact with peers and other community members (Elliott & Reid, 2019, p. 199).

A key point about gender as a contextual issue includes the fact that, just as white was construed as normative in earlier understandings of race, so male was considered the norm in terms of gender. The work of theorists as recent and prominent as Erik Erikson (1902-1994) has been assessed as male-centered. For example, feminist scholars Gwendolyn Sorell and Marilyn Montgomery observed that, in Erikson's work, "specific concepts incorporated into the theory reflect androcentric biases that seriously challenge its relevance and utility for understanding the subjective, material aspects of developmental processes" (Sorell & Montgomery, 2001, p. 112).

Poverty as a developmental context has important implications for policies such as the 21st CCLC program, which is directly focused on children living in low-income neighborhoods. In his 2008 Presidential Address to the American Educational Research Association, William Tate IV explored the effects on children's development of growing up in conditions associated with poverty. He observed that "To seek an understanding of the strengths and problems in our communities is an important civic function" (Tate, 2008, p. 408), noting that "Linking research on human development (in and outside school settings) and development regimes has the potential to enhance ecological validity while contributing to the geography-of-opportunity literature" (Tate, 2008, p. 408).

Implications of key theme #3 for the 21st CCLC policies and programs: Informal learning policies that attend to contextual issues in human development need to take account of the several factors that influence young people's growing-up circumstances, including race, gender, and poverty. Policy guidelines should be flexible enough to account for varying circumstances but, in all cases, should require proposers to demonstrate their awareness of and responses to the lived experiences of students they seek to serve. For example, as a basic requirement for funding, 21st CCLC proposals should be based on a thorough assets and needs assessment that includes input from key stakeholders, including students, parents, educators, and other community residents. Applicants should be required to demonstrate the ways in which their proposals respond to the unique circumstances of their operating contexts.

Key theme #4—The mediating role of experience and activity in human development. Bronfenbrenner posited that "human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 38). This view—that the individual is an active agent in his/her own development—is consistent with the work of several other key theorists and conveys important insights for informal learning programs. Barbara Rogoff and her colleagues observe that "children's development occurs within and through their everyday experiences" (Rogoff et al., 2018, p. 5). These researchers believe that "To understand child development requires deepening and updating our understanding of what children are up to in their everyday lives, in the variety of cultural settings that they navigate," including "how they manage their navigation across settings" (Rogoff et al., 2018, p. 5). This insight is particularly relevant to 21st CCLC programs and their relationship to schools—for example, to what extent they should replicate, complement, even disrupt what happens in school. Rogoff et al. also discuss participation theory, which holds that "individual and context or culture are not viewed as separate entities; instead they are considered mutually constituting aspects of the process of life" *(*Rogoff et al., 2018, p. 7). Participation theory views child development "as a process of growth in ways of participating in the endeavors of their communities, in a process of *transformation of participation*" *(*Rogoff et al., 2018, p. 7).

The child as active agent in his/her own development represents a consistent thread throughout recent literature. Stetsenko and Ho examine the role of play in offering "unique opportunities for children to develop and exercise their agency, identity, and voice," noting that "play is serious work for children as they develop their capacity for agency" (Stetsenko and Ho, 2015, p. 221). Their approach, the transformative activist stance, "puts an additional emphasis on the process of children creating and co-authoring their world itself while they create and co-author their identities—as facets of one and the same process of continuous becoming of both individuals and the world" (Stetsenko and Ho, 2015, p. 231). Similarly, John Shotter concludes that action leads to knowledge and understanding, noting that "It is in our acting that we come to our first understandings, vague though they may be" (Shotter, 2012, p. 103).

A related theme is the role of activity in promoting human development. Timothy Racine and Jeremy Carpendale observed that "the mind is defined in and through activity" (Racine & Carpendale, 2007, p. 20). Bronfenbrenner discusses the role of "proximal processes," defined as enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment that occur on a regular basis over extended periods of time. He views such processes as having the potential to be "engines of development that help individuals come to make sense of their world and understand their place in it, and…changing the prevailing order while fitting into an existing one" (Tudge et al., 2009, p. 200). The work of psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is relevant here in his discussions of "flow," a sense of enjoyment, purpose, and meaning that comes from learning processes that involve intense concentration and high levels of motivation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Implications of key theme #4 for the 21st CCLC policies and programs: The daily provision of 21st CCLC programs offers great opportunity as a "proximal process" envisioned by Bronfenbrenner, but only if young people participate regularly and only if program quality attains the level of an "engine of development" as Bronfenbrenner envisioned them. The voluntary nature of these programs on the part of young people (with guidance and even insistence on the part of their parents) must be considered in policy and programming options. The choices to participate or not, to attend programs regularly or not, to engage fully or not, are critical factors in the trajectory and sustainability of these programs. Moving the 21st CCLC program from its current focus on remediation and standardized assessments and toward a strong enrichment orientation would constitute a good first step. In addition, programs should be rewarded for offering culturally responsive pedagogies, experiential learning, and opportunities for youth leadership, voice, choice, and engagement.

Key theme #5— The infinite potential of every individual: Anna Stetsenko makes a forceful argument that "all persons have infinite potential—incalculable in advance, unlimited, and not predefined in terms of any putatively inborn 'endowments'" (Stetsenko, 2017, p. 112). This conclusion draws on a wide range of emerging positions and evidence across neuroscience, epigenetics, developmental systems theory, and cultural-historical analyses. A similar conclusion appears in the recent report of a large-scale project being conducted by a consortium of well-regarded national education organizations, including the American Institutes for Research (AIR), Education Counsel, the Learning Policy Institute, the Opportunity Institute, Populace, and Turnaround for Children. This effort, known as the SoLD initiative (Science of Learning and Development), began in 2016 with a shared commitment of a group of scholars "to a better and more equitable education for each and every child—and a hypothesis that a synthesis of the knowledge from multiple disciplines on the science of learning and development could provide critical insights and solutions to persistent and growing inequity and underperformance in the U.S. education system" (American Institutes for Research, 2020). The key findings of the SoLD initiative mirror the five themes outlined here: (1) that human development depends upon the ongoing, reciprocal relations between individuals' genetics, biology, relationships, and cultural and contextual influences; (2) that each individual's development is a dynamic progression over time; (3) that the human relationship is a primary process through which biological and contextual factors mutually reinforce each other; (4) that, while all children are vulnerable to risks and adversities, micro- and macro-ecologies provide assets that foster resilience and accelerate healthy development and learning; (5) that students are active agents in their own learning, as multiple neural, relational, experiential, and contextual processes converge to produce their unique developmental range and performance (Science of Learning and Development, 2020). The work of this collaborative group also involved creating toolkits that offer resources for schools and community youth development programs to support the application of this new science to their daily practice.

Implications of key theme #5 for the 21st CCLC policies and programs: This deep consensus on fundamental questions about human development speaks directly to the Congressional requirement that 21st CCLC programs employ scientifically based principles and practices. The work ahead involves ensuring that this contemporary knowledge finds its way into public policy debates and legislative vehicles, especially subsequent reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Research Approach and Design

The research approach and design are tied directly to the goal of the study: to offer a set of research-based recommendations about ways to strengthen the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers policy. The research approach is divided into two phases: (1) a preliminary assessment, based on an extensive analysis of the U. S. government documents as well as a review of professional literature about out-of-school-time programs, pointed to several promising hypotheses about the policy's shortcomings and possible avenues for its improvement; (2) a series of interviews with 15 key thought leaders in the out-of-school-time field, particularly those who could offer either historical or current analytical perspectives on the underlying policy and resulting programs.

The phase one document review included analysis of the authorizing legislation, the non-regulatory guidance, a major external multi-year evaluation commissioned by the U. S. Department of Education, and several of the most recent annual performance reports on the 21st Century Community Learning Centers—all documents that are publicly available on the U. S. Department of Education website. In addition, I reviewed several other publicly available documents, including a study conducted on the program by the U. S. Government Accountability Office. I then analyzed these documents to develop a set of preliminary recommendations that served three purposes: an independent study that I completed as part of my coursework; my Second Examination, completed in May of 2021; and the basis for the development of interview questions that I used in phase two of the study.

Phase two of the research consisted of a series of one-to-one interviews conducted via Zoom, with thought leaders in the out-of-school-time field who are knowledgeable about the 21st CCLC policy and program, both historically and currently. The interviewees represented a broad cross-section of the field—specifically those with experience developing the federal policy, those with experience administering the federal policy, and grantees (local program operators) directly affected by the policy. The following chart represents an initial framework for the design of the interviewee cohort:

	Policy Developers	Policy Administrators	Grantees Affected by Policy	Total
Established/Historical	2	2	2	6
Current/Recent	2	2	2	6
Total	4	4	4	12

The research participants constituted a purposeful sample, in accordance with the framework outlined above. Maxwell defines a purposeful sample as “a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 88)—a situation that describes the research context for this study. Knowledgeable thought leaders in the out-of-school-time field can bring perspectives rooted in experience, evidence, and judgment; and the proposed cross-section of leaders will invite multiple viewpoints on key questions. As the principal investigator and a long-standing leader/member of the out-of-school-time field, I developed an initial list of potential participants, which I then cross-checked with two other field leaders—one an established/historical leader and the other, a current/recent leader. To avoid any conflict of interest, I made sure that the field leaders who helped to identify the research participants did not themselves become key informants to the study. Michelle Seligson, the founding director of the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST), served as peer reviewer for selection of the established/historical interviewees; and Gina Warner, Executive Director of the National After School Association, served as peer reviewer for selection of the current/recent interviewees.

In consultation with my Dissertation Committee, I adapted the above interviewee framework slightly in order to include at least one critic of the program and one or more key researchers. My final list of interviewees consisted of the following thought leaders (including dates of interviews):

	Policy Developers	Policy Administrators	Grantees Affected by Policy	Other Thought Leaders
Established/Historical	*11-11-21* USDOE Senior Staff Member under Secretary Riley *11-30-21* HHS child-care expert; helped organize 1997 White House Child Care Conference that led to 21st CCLC program	*10-19-21* and *11-19-21* Two leading USDOE 21st CCLC Program Administrators under Secretary Riley	*11-15-21* Local 21st CCLC Program Director (2001-present), works for a small school district *11-10-21* Director, 21st CCLC programs (2005-2020), large urban district	*11-2-21* Vocal Critic of 21st CCLC policy and programs *11-23-21* Leading OST researcher; evaluator of many 21st CCLC programs
Current/Recent	*11-22-21* Key advocate for 21st CCLC and other OST programs *12-6-21* Recent U.S. Secretary of Education *11-3-21* Key champion for 21st CCLC program in U.S. Congress	*12-13-21* Recent Director, 21st CCLC office, USDOE *11-18-21* Current State 21st CCLC Administrator	1-12-22 Senior VP at large urban community-based organization, oversees multiple 21st CCLC grants	*12-13-21* Former 21st CCLC program director and OST researcher; current private funder
Total	5	4	3	3

To recruit these research participants, I reached out to them via email and explained the purpose and parameters of the study, including the time commitment involved for each key informant (approximately 60 minutes). After receiving replies indicating interest, I followed up by scheduling an appointment and providing additional details about the parameters and protocols for the study. I conducted the interviews via Zoom, using a standardized interview protocol (Appendix A), during the Fall of 2021, beginning immediately after I received IRB approval. With the participants' consent, all interviews were recorded on Zoom and transcribed via Otter.ai.

After completing each interview, I listened to each recording and prepared a memo that initiated the analytic process. Preparing these memos allowed me to begin to make meaning of each interview and to "develop tentative ideas about categories and relationships" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 107). Once the interviews were transcribed, I employed thematic coding, described by Braun and Clarke as "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2002, p. 79). These authors outline a six-step process that includes: (1) familiarizing yourself with your data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report. I used Dedoose coding software to code all 15 interviews, in preparation for data analysis. Appendix B outlines the coding structure employed. I prepared additional reflective memos throughout the coding and analytic process.

Research and Interview Questions

In his book entitled *Qualitative Research Design,* Joseph Maxwell draws a distinction—one that he views as critical for interview studies—between *research* questions and *interview* questions. Maxwell observes that research questions "identify the things you want to understand" while interview questions "generate the data that you need to understand these things" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 69). Based on this analysis, I developed two sets of questions: research questions that are central to both phases of my dissertation research; and interview questions created for the phase two thought leader interviews.

Research Questions: The following overarching questions guide my overall research plan:

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current federal 21st Community Learning Centers policy?
2. What are the most effective ways to align the goals, expected outcomes, and success measures of federal out-of-school-time policy?
3. How might the current political climate, especially the post-pandemic context, affect out-of-school-time federal policy?
4. What are research-based strategies for strengthening the current policy?

Interview Questions: The following questions, emanating from the preliminary analysis conducted during the phase one document review, served as the focus of the phase two thought leader interviews:

1. *Purpose of out-of-school-time programming:* What is the purpose of out-of-school-time programs? Do these purposes vary from group to group (e.g., low-income v. more affluent students? Students of color v. white students? Urban v. rural students)? Can OST programs ameliorate some of the inequities present in formal learning? Given the purpose of out-of-school-time programming, what are plausible expected outcomes of these programs and what are the best ways to measure program effectiveness?
2. *Participation levels:* What accounts for the low levels of student participation (less than 30 days annually) among nearly half of the 21st CCLC program participants? What can be done to correct this problem?
3. *Partnerships between schools and community resources:* How important are partnerships between schools and community resources in contributing to the effectiveness of 21st CCLC programs? If they are important, how can this aspect of the policy be strengthened?

4. *Balancing national guidance with local responsiveness:* How can federal out-of-school-time policy provide clear evidence-based guidelines and parameters while also allowing for flexibility in grantees' responses to local needs and contexts?
5. *State administration:* What strategies do OST thought leaders recommend for strengthening the state administration of the federal 21st CCLC policy and program? Among the subset of state administrator thought leaders, do they want more guidance, more flexibility, or something else?
6. *Impact of COVID:* How do the recent COVID pandemic and the resulting disruptions in formal education affect students' out-of-school-time learning? How does the pandemic affect the political decision-making about the 21st CCLC policy and program?

Ethical Considerations

"The dual aims of research ethics policy are to respect and protect research participants, on the one hand, and to cultivate ethical researchers, on the other" (Halse & Honey, 2010, p. 136). Since several of the key informants in this study are former officials in the U. S. government and/or current leaders in the out-of-school-time field, I have paid careful attention to protecting their anonymity and to giving them ample opportunity to identify any confidential or controversial information they might choose to disclose.

Trustworthiness

My positionality in the out-of-school-time field—as a long-time member and leader in the field—required that I maintain and communicate objectivity throughout the research project. For example, while I have my own views about the purpose(s) of OST programs in young people's lives, I was interested to learn what experts say—and whether there is a useful consensus on one of the most basic questions about informal education: what is its purpose?

In Chapter 17 of *Qualitative Educational Research*, Maxwell discusses two broad types of threats to validity that are often raised in relation to qualitative studies: researcher bias and reactivity (the effect of the researcher on individuals studied). I anticipated that both problems could be perceived as possibly occurring in my study, since I have been an advocate for expansion of public investments in out-of-school-time programs for many years and have been active as a practitioner in the OST field for this same period. While my knowledge of issues in the OST field and my network of contacts could clearly bring strengths to my study, I understood that they could also raise concerns, which I sought to address. Maxwell notes that validity threats are made implausible by evidence, so the strength and quality of the evidence I was able to marshal is critical to my analysis. In relation to the second possible threat, reactivity, Maxwell observes that “the goal in a qualitative study is not to eliminate this influence, but to understand it and use it productively” (Maxwell, 2010, p. 282). I know most of the field leaders professionally, which is not unusual, according to Maxwell: “the fact that the researcher is part of the world he or she studies…is a powerful and inescapable influence” (Maxwell, 2010, p. 282). In anticipation of this potential problem, I was careful not to ask leading questions, to convey a genuine sense of openness, and to search for additional ways to mitigate any undue influence. After I recorded and had each interview transcribed, I checked with all 15 interviewees on the accuracy of the transcripts. In addition, in my post-interview memos, I reflected on my perceptions of the interviewees’ reactions to me and vice versa.

To test the reliability of my coding process, I used Dedoose software to construct an inter-rater reliability test that encompassed 14 interview excerpts. My coding partner’s assessment garnered a pooled Kappa score of .89, which qualifies as excellent (any score over .60 is considered good).

Chapter 5: Findings

Phase One: Document Review and Analysis

In this section, I analyze the current state of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, based on a review of the U. S. government's own documents as well as on critiques offered in the professional literature. This assessment then informed the phase two thought leader interviews whose findings are discussed later in this chapter. The data from both the phase one document review and phase two thought leader interviews are then brought together in the recommendations section of Chapter 6/Discussion.

U. S. government documents reveal both strengths and weaknesses in the policy that establishes and guides the 21st CCLC program and its implementation. In addition to reviewing historical documents relating to the program, I examined the existing 21st CCLC legislation (Part B of the February 2016 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act); the most recent Overview of the 21st CCLC Annual Performance Data (2019-2020) as well as three earlier such reports (2013-2014, 2016-2017, and 2018-19); and the U. S. Department of Education's most recent non-regulatory guidance regarding the program. Because the most recent Annual Performance Report (published in December 2021, based on 2019-2020 implementation) included several months of data influenced by COVID-related school closures, I relied more heavily on the previous year's report (published in 2020, based on 2018-19 implementation) in the following analysis, since it reflected more typical patterns established over many years. I also reviewed a 2017 report prepared by the U. S. Government Accountability Office at the request of the U.S. Congress, which made several clear recommendations for strengthening the program, based on an extensive document review, program observations, and consultation with key informants. I have organized this part of my review around several key aspects of the initiative, assessing strengths and weaknesses in each:

Purpose of the Program: In section 2401 of the authorizing legislation, the program's purpose is stated as "to provide opportunities for communities to establish or expand activities in community learning centers that (1) provide opportunities for academic enrichment, including providing tutorial services to help students, particularly students who attend low-performing schools, to meet the challenging State academic standards; (2) offer students a broad array of additional services, programs, and activities, such as youth development activities, service learning, nutrition and health education, drug and violence prevention programs, counseling programs, arts, music, physical fitness and wellness programs, technology education programs, financial literacy programs, environmental literacy programs, mathematics, science, career and technical programs, internship or apprenticeship programs, and other ties to an in-demand industry sector or occupation for high school students that are designed to reinforce and complement the regular academic program of participating students; and (3) offer families of students served by community learning centers opportunities for active and meaningful engagement in their children's education, including opportunities for literacy and related educational development" (U. S. Department of Education, 2016).

What immediately follows is a definition section that reiterates several ideas contained in the statement of purpose (e.g., meet standards, reinforce and complement regular academic programs) but fails to provide definitions for key terms, most notably the term "enrichment." The conflation of tutoring with academic enrichment is also a weakness, since tutoring generally involves reviewing content that has ready been taught. While some students need remediation through tutoring and should have access to high quality versions of it, most experts agree that tutoring and enrichment—in both theory and practice—represent two different approaches to academic content and processes (Renzulli & Reis, 2014).

The results of this lack of clarity show up in marked ways in the government's own program reports. For example, the Overview of the 21st CCLC Annual Performance Data, 2018-2019 showed that homework assistance was the most frequently offered program activity, followed by physical activity and then tutoring. Again, while homework help and tutoring represent potentially important aspects of a well-balanced program, their prevalence as reported by the site directors may suggest that the stated enrichment purpose of the 21st CCLC program is being given short shrift at the point of local service delivery. For example, in the aggregate, homework help is offered at five times the rate of mentoring and four times the rate of youth leadership; and tutoring is offered at five times the rate of community/service learning (U. S. Department of Education, 2020, pp. 11-12).

A section buried deep inside the USDOE's non-regulatory guidance for the 21st CCLC program provides a glimpse of both the confusion and the opportunity for improvement that exist. In one place, the listing of allowable funded activities includes "remedial education activities and academic enrichment learning programs, including providing additional assistance to students to allow the students to improve their academic achievement" (U. S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 26). This bulleted point seems to be making a distinction between remedial education and academic enrichment, although neither term is defined. The listing then cites "tutoring services (including those provided by senior citizen volunteers) and mentoring programs," again suggesting some confusion about the possible distinction between remedial education and tutoring. Later in this same section, in a call-out box entitled "Experience & Practice," the guidance document offers a useful description of possible academic enrichment activities, including chess clubs, theatre programs, book clubs, computer clubs, and hands-on science—with an explanation of how each program type might enhance academic achievement as part of an enrichment approach. This section of the guidance could be used to further clarify the definition and role of academic enrichment in fostering student engagement and in enhancing program quality (U. S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 26).

Eligible Entities and Staffing Patterns: The authorizing legislation (section 4201) lists local education agencies and community-based organizations as among the eligible entities that qualify to receive 21st

CCLC funds, yet the government's reporting system (U. S. Department of Education, 2020) indicates that more than 80 percent of the grants go to school districts while only 10 percent are awarded to community-based organizations. In addition, 5.2 percent go to charter schools and 1.3 percent, to faith-based organizations. This pattern is reflected in the staffing categories reported in local programs, with the government's performance report showing that school day teachers and other school staff represent nearly 60 percent of the staffing of local 21st CCLC sites. Given that the purpose of the program is to increase learning opportunities for students who attend low-performing schools, this pattern appears extremely problematic. Particularly troubling is the fact that school day teachers represent fully 41.7 percent of paid staff in 21st CCLC programs. Since 79 percent of school day teachers are non-Hispanic white (National Center for Education Statistics, April 2020) and 75 percent of 21st CCLC participants are students of color (U. S. Department of Education, 2020), this demographic mismatch is clear. These problems are inter-related: if 80-plus percent of grants are awarded to school districts, it follows that—absent additional federal guidance or requirements—these grantees will rely on existing staff; but, in doing so, they are continuing the patterns that may have led to the low-performing status that made them eligible for 21st CCLC funding in the first place. In addition, given that prior research has pointed to the centrality of strong and caring youth-adult relationships in producing positive outcomes, 21st CCLC programs should be required to outline their strategies for hiring the most appropriate and effective staff. This pattern appears to have intensified during the ensuing year, with the most recent Annual Performance Report (U. S. Department of Education, 2021) indicating that more than 82.8 percent of the grants that year went to school districts and an additional 4.9 percent were awarded to charter schools, while only 9.4 percent went to community-based organizations.

Who is Served by the 21st Century CLC Program: According to the government's 2020 performance report (U. S. Department of Education, 2020), in 2018-19, over 2 million people were served by the 21st CCLC program, which included 1,367,012 student attendees; 297,383 summer attendees (likely a duplicated count since summer participants may have been recruited from the population of school-day attendees); and 381,018 adults and family members. Overall, the program served a nearly even split between males and females. The largest group of participants was identified as Hispanic (39.0 percent), followed by White (25 percent) and Black (20.5 percent). English Language Learners represented 13.8 percent of participants; special needs students (those with Individual Education Plans) represented 10.3 percent of participants; and 67.5 percent of participants qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. These data would seem to indicate that the program is reaching its target audience—low-income students and students in low-performing schools. However, in the absence of quality programming, this strength is negated and the opportunity for positive impact is diminished. Further, these reports indicate that nearly half of student attendees (46.8 percent) are elementary-age (pre-K to grade five) while 53.2 percent of student attendees attend grades 6 through 12.

Student Attendance Patterns in Funded Programs: The government's 2020 performance report indicates that nearly half (45 percent) of students participated for fewer than 30 days while only 22.6 percent participated for more than 90 days (U. S. Department of Education, 2020). Given that prior research (Vandell et al., 2007; Harvard Family Research Project, 2008; McCombs, Whitaker, & Yoo, 2017; Vandell et al., 2020) has clearly demonstrated that "dosage makes a difference," these program attendance patterns represent a distinct weakness in the 21st CCLC program. Low attendance rates may be the result of the programs' emphasis on tutoring and homework help rather than on challenging and engaging enrichment activities that appeal to young people (Duffett & Johnson, 2004). Another factor may be the programs' staffing patterns, discussed earlier in this section. An additional factor in attendance patterns may be the age distribution, cited above, showing that more than half of the participants are middle and high school students. The government's 2020 performance report showed that students in the earlier grades are more likely to be "regular" attendees, with 61.9 percent of elementary-age participants being counted as "regular student attendees" and only 38.1 percent of sixth through twelfth graders being similarly designated (U. S. Department of Education, 2020). A recent policy brief prepared by the Afterschool Alliance, entitled *Five Things to Know about 21st Century Community Learning Center Attendance Numbers,* suggests that "the program needs a better data collection system to accurately reflect the current state of attendance" (Afterschool Alliance, n.d., p. 2).

Family Engagement: Government documents provide little data pertaining to the quality or extent of family engagement in funded programs, even though this component is a mandatory element of 21st CCLC programs. The USDOE's 2013-14 performance report listed family literacy and parental involvement as activities that sites were required to report on, but the 2016-17 and 2018-19 reports contained no such information. This latest report showed that parents represented less than 1 percent of paid staff in the funded programs and 15.8 percent of volunteers (U. S. Department of Education, 2020). These numbers present a potential weakness and lost opportunity, given that parents and other family members can bring important cultural and social capital to 21st CCLC programs while also benefitting economically from staff positions.

Partnerships: The government's non-regulatory guidance for the 21st CCLC program states that local applications must include a description of "the partnership between a local education agency, a community-based organization, and another public or private organization (if appropriate)" (U. S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 17). Furthermore, this document requires states to give competitive priority to partnerships "submitted jointly between at least one LEA receiving funds under Title I, Part A and at least one public or private community organization." The guidance instructs states to look for evidence in the applications that proposed partnerships are real—that they reflect joint planning, that each partner has a substantial role to play in the delivery of services, that the partners share resources designed to carry out those roles, and that they have significant ongoing involvement in the management and oversight of the program (U. S. Department of Education, 2003, pp. 17-18). Despite this clearly stated intent to encourage meaningful collaborations between school districts and community partners, there is substantial evidence—contained in the government's own performance reports as well as in recently published studies on 21st CCLC programs—that many of the funded partnerships do not reflect the equal nature described in the non-regulatory guidance. For example, studies conducted by Anthony and Morra and by Paluta et al. (cited above) document partnership challenges identified in current 21st CCLC programs.

Scientifically Based Research: USDOE guidance spells out the department's expectations that funded programs will employ strategies rooted in scientifically based research. "The Department, in collaboration with other agencies, will continue to identify programs and practices based on rigorous scientific research and will ensure that such information is made widely available" (U. S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 33). Noting that such research is appropriate especially in reading and mathematics, USDOE encourages the States and local programs to provide staff with professional development training in practices and strategies that have been proven effective. This emphasis on scientifically based research highlights the importance of integrating this approach into all aspects of 21st CCLC operations, including the existing theoretical and empirical evidence relating to enrichment and other aspects of program quality.

Results: Despite the apparent mismatch between the federal program's goals and the narrow measures used to assess program effectiveness, the government's own reports indicate that grantees have made notable progress over the years in producing desired results. For example, only 5.4 percent of elementary 21st Century regular program participants moved from not proficient to proficient or above in reading on state assessments in 2013-14. By 2018-19 (the most recent available data on this particular measure), this figure had risen to 26 percent. Similarly, in 2013-14 only 12.6 percent of middle school students and 9.6 percent of high school students moved from not proficient to proficient or above in mathematics on state assessments. Five years later, this figure had risen to 19.2 percent (here, middle and high school students were combined into one category). These data represent both a strength and a weakness. While the percentages of students moving toward proficiency have risen as the programs matured, they are all still alarmingly low. These data may reflect one or more of several factors: the general difficulty in moving student achievement levels on state assessments; the narrowness of the outcome measures in relation to the programs' inputs and activities; and the low levels of participation, referenced above. Although these changes could be an artifact of the new accountability system that went into effect during the 2018-19 performance period, that hypothesis is undercut by the fact that the 2018-19 data mirror those reported in 2016-17 (U. S. Department of Education, 2018). The 2017 report prepared by the Government Accountability Office recommended that the U. S. Department of Education "expand its performance measures for the 21st Century program to address all program objectives. Specifically, Education should establish performance measures related to key behavioral, including student attendance and disciplinary incidents, and socio-emotional outcomes" (U. S. Government Accountability Office, 2017, pp. 30-31).

State Administration: In section 4202 (c) (3), the authorizing legislation outlines a set of complex and multi-faceted activities expected of state education agencies, including monitoring and evaluating funded programs; providing capacity building, training, and technical assistance to grantees; conducting a comprehensive evaluation (directly, or through a grant or contract) of program effectiveness; ensuring that grantees' programs are aligned with state academic standards; conducting a rigorous peer review process as part of state-level grants competition; ensuring that grantees identify and partner with external organizations; and working with teachers, principals, parents, the local workforce, the local community, and other stakeholders to review and improve State policies and practices to support the implementation of effective programs (U. S. Department of Education, 2016). In exchange for accepting this set of responsibilities, and to underwrite their cost, USDOE allows states to spend up to 7 percent of their funding allocation on these activities. Whether or not the amount of this allocation is appropriate, the capacity of many state departments of education is stretched by the enormity of these responsibilities, and the expertise of their staffs is often not well aligned with the specifics of the 21st CCLC program. The 2017 Government Accountability Report addressed several shortcomings in the state administration of the 21st CCLC program and explicitly advised the U. S. Department of Education to "provide written, non-regulatory guidance to states on developing and conducting high-quality 21st Century state evaluations to help address the difficulties states face in measuring program performance and effectiveness" (U. S. Government Accountability Office, 2017, p. 31). Other recommendations in this report addressed concerns about the accuracy of data submitted to the federal government by states and the importance of sharing effectives practices across states, particularly around program sustainability.

The Unknown Implications of the COVID Pandemic on OST Programs

An additional consideration that arose during the research process was the global COVID-19 pandemic that affected all aspects of life, including education in the United States and internationally. The funding picture for afterschool programs in the U.S., including those underwritten by 21st CCLC grants, has been complicated by the pandemic and the resulting federal support allocated through the American Rescue Plan (ARP). A report published by the Afterschool Alliance in March of 2021 indicated that funds from the ARP specifically available for afterschool and summer programs include:

- $8.45B available from State Education Agencies, including: $1.22B for summer enrichment; $1.22B for afterschool programs; and 5 percent (approximately $6.1B) for learning recovery (afterschool, summer, extended learning time);
- $22B provided to Local Education Agencies for learning recovery strategies, including afterschool and summer enrichment;
- $39B for child care, which can include school-age care (with funds flowing through state child care agencies);

- $1B for the Corporation for National and Community Service through Americorps, specifically to support Americorps positions that help address learning recovery and related purposes; and
- $350B for state and local governments that can be used for childcare and other purposes.

The implications of this massive level of funding are not fully known, but it is possible that the balance of power between schools and their community partners has already shifted during the pandemic's lockdown period—at least in relation to afterschool programming. A *New York Times* article (March 21, 2021) observed that, during the 18-month period when most American schools closed their doors and moved to remote learning in response to the pandemic, many child-care centers and community-based afterschool and summer programs continued to operate. This article noted that "child-care centers have emerged as substitute schools for many thousands of American children for whom online learning is not an option" (Shapiro, March 21, 2021, p. 4). This article went on to observe: "The outsize role that child care workers have played during the pandemic is fueling a push by child care providers, activists and some politicians to…integrate child care into the broader education system" (Shapiro, March 21, 2021, p. 4). While the American Rescue Plan is intended to be a temporary response to many of the economic and social challenges wrought by the pandemic, this infusion of new federal funds into out-of-school-time programs and the renegotiation of relationships between schools and community partners will certainly have an impact on the future of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. In the move from phase one to phase two of my study, I added questions to my interview protocol that addressed the implications of the COVID pandemic on out-of-school-time policies and programs.

Phase Two: Thought Leader Interviews

The 15 thought leaders, who represented a range of perspectives (from national to local) and time periods (historical to current), responded to six sets of questions about the 21st Century

Community Learning Centers that included: the purpose(s) and outcomes of out-of-school-time programming; participation issues; partnership issues; state administration; federal policy and guidance; and the implications of COVID for the program and policy. All interviewees offered views on all six sets of questions, with clear themes emerging on many issues and nuanced, at times divergent, views represented on a few topics.

Purpose(s) and Outcomes of Out-of-School-Time Programs: All interviewees saw out-of-school-time programs serving multiple purposes (expressed in various ways) and no one thought that out-of-school-time programs, including the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, should be "more school"—that is, should duplicate what takes place during the regular school day. One high-level former USDOE official observed:

> Schools, as you know, can be a little rigid sometimes. And afterschool time, it can be a little more flexible, a little bit more informal. I think it's an amazing chance for kids to build friendships and work as teams, whether it's drama, art, or music, or chess, or debate, or Model UN, or community service projects—finding creative ways to ask kids what they want to do and doing it in teams, in groups, having them build those relationships. That's a hugely, hugely important role that the non-school hours can play now and going forward.

This set of ideas reflected the views of most interviewees, who posited that out-of-school-time programs should support the holistic development of young people, including their cognitive growth and school success, while also intentionally advancing their social, emotional, physical, and moral development. A researcher and vocal critic of the way many 21st CCLC programs took a turn toward remediation under No Child Left Behind conceptualized out-of-school-time programs as a "third developmental space," in addition to home and school. In his view, afterschool and summer programs "are their own distinct developmental institution" that therefore need to be understood, developed, and carried out not in reference to other institutions but in relation to their unique place in student, family, and community life. He elaborated that "while learning is an important frame through which to look at them, I would say it is not the only one." He urged program planners to consider the other dimensions of young people's development and the particular contributions that out-of-school-time programs can make—contributions that are rooted in a deep understanding of the developmental tasks facing youth in different age groups and in varying family and community contexts.

For one former 21st CCLC program administrator in a large midwestern urban district, the words "social development" epitomized her view of the most central purpose of the program. She too offered ideas about specific kinds of enrichment, such as theatre and music, that 21st CCLC programs should provide. This same informant drew a contrast between two programs she observed during her program monitoring visits in the same district:

> I remember one of the first schools I went into when I first got to the district. I walked into the school to observe programming, and it was the most quiet thing I ever heard my life. 'Oh, my God, what's going on?' They had like big numbers and stuff. So I wanted to see what was going on. Well, yes, the principal made sure everybody stayed, and they were all sitting in their seats, and they all had worksheets in front of them that they had to do and her whole thing was like, 'it's got to be academics and more academics and more academics.' And then there's the other principal--you walk in, and he's making sure they have theater and music. He felt just because they were in a very highly impoverished area, they shouldn't have anything different than Caucasian kids in the suburbs that have all the resources, including family resources…So his mission was to make sure that he exposed his students to things that students in a higher income, a non-minority, setting would have. And that, to me, is part of the equity opportunity of out-of-school-time.

This excerpt introduces another strong theme across the thought leader interviews—the potential role of out-of-school-time programs in promoting equity and increasing opportunities for learning and healthy development. One respondent, a state 21st CCLC program administrator and former local program director, noted that "the educational system has not been designed to provide equitable opportunity. We don't have the same constraints in afterschool and summer programs. We have a workforce that is more reflective of the young people and our programs can connect every young person to a protective, caring adult and to opportunities that can expand their horizons." A current local program administrator who oversees multiple 21st CCLC grants spoke passionately about the equity aspect of these programs: "I want poor kids and disenfranchised communities of color to get what rich kids' parents pay for them to get…and so I see this as a long-term strategy for opening up pathways and opportunities for kids that don't have access to them."

While all respondents discussed the 21st CCLC program's purpose in relation to young people, some added broader social purposes including family support, school improvement, and community safety. Several respondents observed that COVID had highlighted the critical role played by out-of-school-time programs in providing supervised child-care for working families—one of the original purposes of the 21st CCLC program. One knowledgeable respondent noted that, at its outset in 1997, the 21st CCLC program "had a lot of flavors to it. It was helping kids succeed in school, it was exposing them to new opportunities that they were unlikely to experience on their own, it was involving parents to some extent in expanded learning, keeping kids safe, keeping them engaged, and involving the community to leverage their resource, provide multi-dimensional opportunities. It later got much more focused on a priority around student achievement." Another informant, a leading advocate for the program, stated emphatically: "I think the two biggest purposes are our students and our parents," by "exposing kids to learning and opportunities that they might not have otherwise" and by "supporting working parents, to give them peace of mind that their children are safe when they cannot be with them."

Perhaps the most comprehensive view of the goals of out-of-school-time programs was offered by one of the early architects of the 21st CCLC program, another former USDOE official. He sees four overarching and inter-related purposes: (1) expanding learning and development opportunities for young people and parents; (2) providing youth supervision and child-care for working families; (3) engaging community partners (who can provide "experiences for young people that are more varied and different and give them exposure in a lot more ways than if just a school runs it"); (4) some academics—done differently from school—to reinforce and expand what schools teach (for example, helping young people develop an interest in reading or in math and science).

This overview raises the question of the role of 21st CCLC and other OST programs in supporting students' academic achievement. Respondents offered several takes on this issue. While no one thought that the primary purpose of these programs should be to raise test scores (a phenomenon that has been observed and documented in current practice), several respondents supported the idea that 21st CCLC programs should provide academic support as well as academic and other forms of enrichment. One respondent, a former federal 21st CCLC program administrator, observed:

> I am pretty supportive of the idea that these programs have to provide academic services. I think that's not a negotiable requirement. I think its political support always has ridden on 'we're going to help kids succeed in school. And we're going to help them through a variety of ways.' But to say it could be just an enrichment program, just an arts program, just a sports program, I think it's dead in water if it tries to go in that direction.

Another respondent, a current local 21st CCLC program director, discussed how her program addresses this widely understood requirement: "I would say that a little bit over a third of our time is spent in academic support. In our program, we have homework help, where the students are in different classrooms and they have a teacher there to help them with their homework. There are probably 15 students in a classroom with one teacher. And then we also offer a small group tutoring component for the students who need that." She emphasized that this type of academic support is part of a comprehensive daily program that seeks to balance its hour of homework help and tutoring each day with two additional hours of recreation and educational enrichment. "We try to do things like bring in the community, try to connect students and families with resources that they may not know about or may not normally have access to, such as enrichment experiences, whether it be arts and culture, nutrition, STEM."

A somewhat different view is offered by another current local 21st CCLC program operator, who observed that out-of-school-time is an opportunity to create continuity of learning for kids—and to contextualize school-day learning and "make it matter in out-of-school-time." She elaborated on this idea by asking: "So, how do you take reading and contextualize it into something around, for example, community needs assessment? How do you marry literacy with community-based projects? This approach can provide a reinforcement and application of really important skills, both hard skills and soft skills." This same respondent noted that some students need targeted opportunities to "recover" from "what's not happening for them in the school day." This means that the programs she oversees offer "targeted tutoring that's really helping kids that maybe aren't getting what they need in the school day…How can we use out-of-school-time to help remove barriers for kids?"

Taken together, the responses of these 15 thought leaders on the questions about the purposes of out-of-school-time programs provide a clear picture focused on expanded learning and development opportunities that consider the strengths and needs of the "whole child" while also addressing important societal needs. These broader societal needs include providing child-care for working families and promoting educational equity among low-income children and youth. Interviewees offered a wide variety of examples of expanded, enriched learning opportunities that stand in sharp contrast to the kinds of activities that seem to predominate in current 21st CCLC practice, such as homework help and tutoring. Over and over, they discussed the need for programs to take a comprehensive and balanced approach, one that responds to the needs and interests of young people, that takes account of parental input, and that recognizes the voluntary nature of students' participation. While academic support, including homework help and tutoring, have a place and can be implemented in ways that are engaging for students, they should be kept in balance with other offerings. An excellent summary statement was offered by one respondent, a long-time 21st CCLC federal program administrator: "So the purposes are about exposure," he said. "They are about providing a different set of experiences."

Across the 15 interviews, thought leaders sprinkled their responses with examples of enrichment that included book clubs, chess, debate, music, drama, dance, visual arts, robotics, computer programming, community service, leadership development, mentoring, soccer, tennis, and other sports. Notably, no interviewee mentioned homework help or tutoring as an example of enrichment—and, in fact, one respondent noted that they are “totally different.”

Related to the question of out-of-school-time program purposes is that of expected outcomes. Interviewees offered a variety of ideas in response to the question: *Given the purpose of out-of-school-time programming, what are plausible expected outcomes of these programs and what are the best ways to measure program effectiveness?* At the broadest level, these 15 thought leaders favored multiple measures of program effectiveness and measures that reflect what the programs offer through their goals and activities. For example, if programs seek to increase academic motivation (such as helping young people develop an interest in STEM), test scores would be an inappropriate measure. This theme was reiterated in various ways across the 15 interviews. Beginning with this STEM example, one respondent cited a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, math) summer camp in a low-income rural area:

> They basically teach big concepts in STEM, all through different art forms, for the whole day—drama, music, visual arts. They get very high attendance, which most summer programs don’t. And when kids are asked in a survey, ‘Are you comfortable with science and math?,’ they are just off the charts. Now people say, ‘Do they learn a lot of math and science?’ And…I tell them ‘You’re not going to learn any math and science unless you’re interested first.’ So many young people, particularly young women and kids of color, by middle school are so turned off by math, science, maybe even technology, that they are not going to engage. So having them be able to start, in this case, mostly kids in middle school in rural areas, they are starting to think ‘Yeah, I can do that stuff.’ So that’s another whole angle of academic learning, particularly for kids who are struggling or who have stereotypical views of important content, like science and math.

This same respondent discussed the “very different angle” that out-of-school-time programs can take in helping young people build “foundational skills”—such as learning how to learn, not being afraid to learn or make mistakes, social-emotional learning, and academics, “all mixed in.” From an outcomes perspective, changes in young people’s aspirations, motivation, and confidence might be plausible expected results and could be addressed through multiple measures, including youth surveys and parent or teacher observations. Another interviewee reiterated the importance of surveying youth about program outcomes, noting that current programs could benefit from Milbrey McLaughlin's study of the Beacon Centers in the early 1990s: "What we were measuring back then was prophetic in terms of what we need to be looking at now—you know, asking kids in a variety of ways, 'do you have people here that care about you? Do you feel safe, emotionally and physically?'"

The respondent who offered four overarching purposes of out-of-school-time programs—(1) expanding learning and development opportunities for young people and parents; (2) providing youth supervision and child-care for working families; (3) engaging community partners; and (4) providing some academics, done differently from school, to reinforce and expand what schools teach—made the following observation about plausible expected outcomes:

> I would probably focus on all those four areas and look at some measures and then you get into...I can't decide if this is a fifth purpose or a way to get to the other four purposes, but clearly, engagement and relationships are essential for learning but particularly essential in after school and summer programs, because they are not mandatory. And even if they are mandatory, kids won't show up if they don't sense they're really part of something. And once they're in the program, they have to feel engaged and have to *be* engaged, not just feel engaged. And so I think sort of, from a outcomes perspective, I would measure something in each of those four other areas. But then when they get there, I think the young people really have to feel that they're part of something. They have positive relationships with their peers and with the adults working.

The centrality of student engagement and inter-personal relationships with adults and peers was a point of consensus among all the thought leader interviewees. They highlighted the engagement and connection aspects of 21st CCLC programs and potentially elevated them to be the focus of documented, even mandatory, outcomes.

Another respondent, a researcher with extensive experience evaluating afterschool and summer enrichment programs, tackled the outcomes and measurement question in this way:

> First of all, there are a lot of very reasonable worthwhile objectives in out-of-school-time programming. I think each site-based program needs to choose their own--but, of course, then you have intermediary organizations that say, 'these are going to be our key objectives, because we think this is the most important thing for the population we serve.' So I really think ideally that there should be a range of worthwhile outcomes identified. I mean, other people have

> done this--this doesn't need to be redone. The Partnership for After School Education has done this. They've got whole publications on desired outcomes for kids in after school and objectives for measuring them. I really think that the decisions in those areas need to be made at the local level, because circumstances are so different from one population to another, from one community to another, from one set of institutions, the public schools in one place versus public schools in another place. So any worthwhile objective you can identify, there is a way to measure. And there's a way to measure early, initial engagement, as well as longer-term benefits.

Most respondents agreed with this assessment—that 21st CCLC programs should be judged (for funding) on the alignment of their stated goals, activities, and outcome measures. This alignment needs to be rooted in a solid assessment of local student, family, and community needs, and the overall program and policy should allow for response to local needs and for implementation variation. Several respondents agreed with the interviewee who noted that "different programs are designed to do different things" and that "one of the things that makes afterschool so special is that it really is, at its best, local—meeting the needs of the local kids for local communities." That said, respondents agreed that all programs should meet some threshold benchmarks, such as students' engagement in their own learning and their connectedness with schools, peers, and adults. Students' school day attendance and behavior can be used as measures of both engagement and connectedness (as they are now) but could be made stronger if combined with additional measures that include student voice, such as student surveys. Other areas of agreement on the outcomes question included: the need to differentiate program purposes and outcomes based on the age and developmental stage of students; and the opportunity to incorporate new measurement tools, such as those designed to document changes in social-emotional learning.

Participation levels: Universally, the 15 thought leaders spoke about the importance of students' regular participation in out-of-school-time programs that seek to produce positive learning and development outcomes. Many interviewees cited existing research documenting that "dosage makes a difference," as well as studies showing that programs with higher quality scores produce greater participation rates. Upon hearing about the U.S. Department of Education's current data regarding participation patterns in

21st CCLC programs, including data indicating that nearly half of the "regular participants" attended fewer than 30 days per year, several respondents expressed alarm, concern, and ideas for addressing the issue. One interviewee, a researcher and vocal critic of the 21st CCLC program, observed that "30 days of participation a year strikes me as just not participation at all. So if that's what the majority of kids participate, then you really don't have a program at all." A former USDOE official expressed similar concerns and offered ideas for addressing the problem:

> Yeah, that's really interesting to hear. And obviously, most schools are open about 180 days. So that's one sixth of the time. That's less than once a week. So for me, that's not what the goal would be. Three to five times a week would be the goal. When it's less than once a week, you're not even close. So for me, this is not like field of dreams—if you build it, they will come. We have to build what kids are looking for, what they're asking for, that's going to vary, you know, community by community and age groups--middle schoolers, high schoolers, whatever. So there's no universal answer there. But for me, that's just talking to kids, it's surveys, it's putting in place those things that would give them a reason to stay in school, you know, after school. And my honest take, serving kids 30 days a year, the impact there would be minimal at best. The daily routine is to have these relationships--there are no miracle cures here. So I don't want to say that's a waste of time. But it's way, way sub-optimal. It can't be here's our stock set of options--it's got to be about what youth want and we will listen to you and we'll put that stuff in place.

Across the spectrum of thought leaders, from national to local, there was agreement that research supports the developmental benefits of students' regular participation in productive and organized activities in the non-school hours. One respondent, a local 21st CCLC program director, noted that "the expectation is that they come on a regular basis. We prefer five days a week. Now, if someone registers and says, 'my kid has CCD (religious instruction) every Tuesday, they can only come four days a week,' we will still accept them." Many interviewees agreed with the view that expectations about regular participation need to be clear and communicated clearly to parents and students—and that they need to be tempered with flexibility, as noted in the example above.

Several informants observed that addressing participation levels in 21st CCLC programs raises questions about definitions of "program" and "participation." For example, one respondent noted the problematic nature of defining these terms because "there are other things going on after class time that might be considered afterschool activities but that are not part of the 21st Century program. And maybe one thing we should be doing is trying to figure that out in an additive way, not in a competitive one." A researcher and afterschool program evaluator made a related observation:

> Okay, so let's go back to some work that Deborah Vandell has done over the past 25 years. What she has found, when she tracked outcomes for students with varying types of after school situations, what mattered was that young people were engaged in productive activities and organized activities in the afterschool hours. And it could be daily participation, or almost daily participation, in an afterschool program; or it could be participation in an afterschool program coupled with other activities, such as scouts and religious instruction, and organized sports, although sports has, there's some sort of question marks there...So what you really need to know, and the government could do this, is what are these kids doing during the rest of their other weekdays? What are they doing on Saturdays? What are they doing in the summer? So if after school complements other organized activities--music lessons, sports, religious school, scouts, whatever it is, that's one thing. If it's the only organized activity that the kids have, that's a completely different thing. And I think that this is a sort of a failure of imagination on the part of the federal sponsors of this type of research. They should be, at least for some portion of the study, they should have a sub-sample that addresses these scenarios.

This informant went on to note that "low participation is a kind of warning flag. But it's not necessarily a complete negative unless you know more." Knowing more appears to be the responsibility of program applicants, who are required to demonstrate the need for afterschool programs in their communities and who have the flexibility to propose attendance policies that maximize regular program attendance while also allowing for less than five-day-per-week participation. A state out-of-school-time program administrator discussed how this issue is playing out in his state, where 21st CCLC funding is coordinated with state funding to provide a comprehensive approach to out-of-school-time programming:

> And so we're in the middle of trying to re-educate programs and say that 'Your (state) funding has more flexibility than you think. And you can design an attendance policy at a local level.' You know, when sites are monitored, they're not monitored to find out if students attend every day. They're monitored to find out if they follow their own attendance policy. And if they create an early release policy that allows students to be absent for a variety of family or other reasons, they're not going to get a finding…But with that, we have some of our education leaders challenging me, saying 'you're going to erode what we've built, this is going to turn into a drop-in program.' And I want to say no, because we still have our quality standards in place. And when you have deep relationship with kids, you know, these numbers are really not this high

> because of a rule that we made. These numbers are this high because we've emphasized the quality of relationships between staff and children. So children *want* to be there.

Implicit in this last quote is an understanding that participation rates are tied to program quality, including the key component of inter-personal relationships. This view was reiterated by several other respondents—for example, by a former federal official who noted that "the way to address this issue is through the quality and appealing nature of the program, like making sure that we're listening to what kids want and are interested in."

A related participation issue, in addition to annual participation rates, is that of year-to-year engagement. One respondent cited research documenting that "kids who participate for two years show greater growth than kids who participate for only one year. And kids who participate for three years show more growth than kids who participate for two years--this is on different types of indicators, like school attendance, some of the social-emotional indicators." This same individual cited research conducted for The After School Corporation in New York City that showed better attendance during the school year and higher rates of year-to-year participation among young people who also participated in summer enrichment programs—a finding relevant to 21st CCLC programs that are funded for summer as well as afterschool programs. One interviewee noted that her middle school 21st CCLC program opened its summer program to incoming sixth graders, which spurred enrollment in the school year afterschool program while also serving as a bridge for students transitioning from elementary to middle school.

Several respondents questioned the accuracy and meaning of the data in the USDOE Annual Performance Reports, noting for example that parents are counted as program participants in the same way students are. This anomaly throws the numbers off, since parents would be expected to participate in 21st CCLC parent education and other engagement programs much less frequently than students would attend afterschool programs. One former federal official said "I wanted to actually do a study that would tell us how to better count, for lack of a better word, count the participation," but did not receive needed support for such an inquiry.

Many thought leaders suggested that the federal 21st CCLC guidelines should distinguish between programs for younger students and older students, noting particularly that five-day-per-week program attendance is not realistic for high school students. An experienced local 21st CCLC program administrator observed that "especially when you get to the high school level, oh my goodness, 'there are clubs I want to join,' and' I'm on the football team' so it's not like they are not engaged." Another respondent, a former USDOE program administrator, reflected on the situation as follows:

> What if the afterschool program was offering a month-long course in modern dance, and that's what you wanted to do? So you went for a month or less, you came in and out, depending on what the catalog of activities was at any given time. So I think there's quite a bit of that going on. That it's not about the daily attendance, it's about taking advantage of things that really appeal to kids, particularly older kids…If you're talking about younger kids, whose parents are working and are not at home, you know, from three to five or six PM, that would be more worrisome to me. Where are they? Why aren't they taking advantage of these services?

Most respondents observed that the current participation data provided in the Annual Performance Reports warrant further attention from federal officials. Data-gathering protocols issued by the federal government, monitored by the states, and required of all grantees should distinguish among major categories of participants, such as younger students (perhaps elementary and middle school), older students (e.g. high school or secondary school), and parents. One local program administrator argued for multiple changes to the APR reporting system, observing:

> Okay, so I just actually did my APR, and it got me all mad all over again. So, basically, and I'm sure you know this because you said you saw the statistics and everything, but it just asked like such basic, you know, demographic questions, which I get are important. But, you know, they ask the demographic questions and ask like how many hours are spent in the different categories, like STEM, literacy, that kind of stuff. All important, but it really doesn't ask anything about the experiences of the students.

Most informants believe that participation rates are tied to several other issues, including program quality, partnerships, and staffing. Over and over, they talked about the importance of listening to the voices of young people, providing challenging and engaging activities, paying close attention to inter-personal relationships (between youth and adults as well as between youth and their peers), distinguishing between the needs of younger and older students in both programming and participation expectations, and adhering to program quality standards established by the afterschool field.

Partnerships between schools and community resources: When asked about the importance of school-community partnerships in 21st CCLC programs, all 15 thought leaders used words like “essential,” “vital,” and “critical,” with one interviewee calling partnerships “the secret sauce” that makes programs effective, and another offering the idea that “I don’t know how you would do it any other way.” In the words of one interviewee, “it’s everything.”

Respondents provided several reasons why partnerships are essential. A former federal official observed that “I actually think it’s the only way to do it—because you can’t ask teachers to work 12-hour days.” Another informant observed that community partners can be assets to schools “because community organizations are more likely to be in touch with families, to be aware of a range of institutions within the community, to know more about what parents want and what kids need, and to understand both the resources in the community and the deficits of the community.”

Across the interviews, respondents named various kinds of partners whose skills and expertise could help schools. For example, a former member of Congress and strong supporter of the 21st CCLC program stated that she thought partnerships were very important “because there are so many pressures on the parents, on the families.” She went on to observe that when one of the schools in her Congressional district established a partnership with a dental services provider, “those children may not have had dental services, may not have had the opportunity to go to a dentist, had it not been brought into the school. And that’s just one example.” Other respondents listed a wide variety of examples of community partners’ knowledge and skills that can be brought into schools: career exploration for parents and older students, arts and culture, health care, technology, sports, cooking and nutrition, parent workshops, youth development knowledge through youth-serving organizations, housing assistance through family support or community development agencies, employment opportunities through local businesses, and economic development opportunities through community colleges, four-year colleges, and technical schools. "Through partnerships, you are able to diversify the enrichment," observed one interviewee. A former federal official provided this summary of views about the value of community partners:

> But there's so many other things that those community people can do. I mean, it's just endless what they could do—you know, they can be with kids on field trips, going to the art museum, or the symphony or teaching about community history…And then when you have organizations that have their own missions, that only I think energizes the program. You know, so you've got maybe someone who's STEM focused, or maybe someone who is youth development focused. I don't see how you can do 21st CCLC programs without community partnerships.

In addition to the programmatic benefits, several interviewees named program sustainability as another advantage of partnerships linking schools and community resources. One former federal official observed that "the best partnerships are the ones that leverage additional resources that live within the community organizations, whether they are Ys or Boys and Girls Clubs or museums or libraries…If you're not leveraging resources outside of the grant, you're just missing out on what this whole program is supposed to be about. And you're totally undermining any hope of sustainability." Another former federal official corroborated this view by observing that "the other part of why partnerships are so important is for sustainability—is having schools and community groups, youth groups, arts groups, involved because it really drives down the cost, number one. And secondly, it really has a better chance of sustainability if something goes wrong with one of the sectors."

Another important role played by community partners is increasing the number and kind of adults who interact with young people on a regular basis. Several respondents noted that community-based organizations often hire a more diverse cadre of employees than do schools. A related observation was offered by the former director of a multi-site urban 21st CCLC program, who stated that community partnerships are "really key" because "In an urban setting, so few principals and faculty come from their community. They might not be aware of the resources that, in my mind, all communities have—and I don't mean resources as just money. I mean resources in the context of what's going on." This respondent continued by saying "Engaging adults from the community can have a positive impact on student participation in programs as well as providing great examples of learning and participating and volunteering."

Another interviewee made a strong connection between school-community partnerships and student participation:

> I think the fact that most kids don't participate regularly would seem to be the starting point for thinking about partnerships. It doesn't sound as if the community resources are really there and being used because, if they were, then you'd have kids there and using them, right? So…there's something not going on, a connection not being made somehow, somewhere. Sounds like it's just rhetoric more than anything else.

Given the consensus on the importance of community partnerships in 21st CCLC programs, several interviewees offered ideas for bolstering such partnerships. One strategy involves strengthening the requirement that authentic partnerships be an explicit and mandatory part of the application process. A related strategy involves adding several competitive points to applications that demonstrate true partnerships. A state 21st CCLC program administrator noted that "we're making people sign off that it is a true partnership, not just a paper signature…I think maybe the feds could do something similar, in terms of trying to make sure that these partnerships are not window dressing." A former federal official who was involved in the early planning of the 21st CCLC program noted that, from the outset, "there were lukewarm messages and they weren't explicit—that you have to have a partnership. It's a requirement."

A leading advocate observed that "One of the beautiful things about 21st Community Learning Centers is the money does not have to go to a school district. So a community partner can come to a school district if they're the lead with something to offer, not the other way around." Although USDOE data indicate that community-based organizations constitute less than 10 percent of grantees nationally, this part of the program could be emphasized and supported at the federal level or through state administration.

Another strategy suggested by key informants is to publicize the benefits of authentic partnerships. One interviewee stated:

> Our response has been to showcase the best models. 'You know what, you did this by yourself, School District A; and School District B, with similar demographics, did it with community-based organizations—and look, at School District B, everyone's happier because the teachers aren't as exhausted, the kids have access to a whole different group of educators to work with, you're engaging more members of the community.' So just showcasing why it's a win for everybody.

The several thought leaders who represent partner organizations brought a unique set of ideas to the conversation about school-community partnerships and how to strengthen them. One respondent who works for a community-based organization that operates several 21st CCLC programs observed that "we cannot exist in a school where we're not aligned with the direction of the work. So, first, the idea of being on the same page about what we want for kids, what we're trying to collectively accomplish, and what we feel equally accountable for—that happens through the partnership." This interviewee went on to note that her organization has found it difficult to partner with certain schools and principals: "We had to leave, we left three schools over the last two years. We couldn't even get data, right? And we need critical conversations with principals about what we want to provide everybody and what students we want to target." This interviewee suggested the benefits that partnerships can offer by cross-training staff—for example, the community partner can train teachers on principles of child and adolescent development and trauma-informed responses while the educators can train youth development staff on strategies for integrating literacy into informal education activities.

Given the pronounced benefits of school-community partnerships, why has this component of the 21st CCLC program been so difficult to operationalize? One respondent observed that "as long as the bulk of the dollars are given to schools, and then they get to decide whether or not to bring any partners, it's going to be hard, but not insurmountable."

Balancing national guidance with local responsiveness: In response to the question "How can federal out-of-school-time policy provide clear evidence-based guidelines and parameters while also allowing for flexibility in grantees' responses to local needs and contexts?," interviewees agreed that current 21st CCLC policy allows considerable flexibility for grantees to respond to local needs and contexts. That said, they had several ideas for strengthening the policy in ways that address the program's distinct vision in relation to overall educational opportunities, program quality, sustainability, clarity of purpose, and alignment between goals and outcome measures. One respondent, a former administrator of a large multi-site initiative, observed: "I think the federal policy has to stop being this stand-alone thing. Instead it needs to say that, 'in the overall structure of educational policy in this country, it is clear and needed that we have enriching and engaging out-of-school time. We have a dedicated funding stream for that.' But then it's making very clear what they're looking for, in a balanced and comprehensive way." Another respondent offered that the federal policy's focus "ought to be more fostering program quality and sustainability—and the overall objective is fostering positive child and youth development." This same individual went on to observe that:

> I would say the feds need to be as flexible as is politically feasible. I don't think the feds should be in the business of telling local communities what's best for their kids, because they don't know about local communities. So I think that the feds ought to set some standards around common themes, like staffing and physical space, and snacks and meals, and even if possible providing access to other social services through the afterschool program. And then they should basically allow the communities to decide what's most important.

Some thought leaders believe that the 21st CCLC policy has evolved, over the years, into a broad funding stream rather than a federal program with a clear focus. One respondent likened the current policy to an archeological artifact that has acquired several layers of "stuff"—in this case, policy ideas—that are piled on top of one another. The policy's flexibility in allowing for local responsiveness—the main point of the research question—seemed of less concern to respondents than the policy's coherence. Several respondents concurred with the view that the federal policy should emphasize program quality to a much greater extent than it does now, in recognition of the advances in the afterschool field's knowledge since the program's inception. For example, they discussed the possibility that the federal program could encourage and even require local grantees to assess and report on their program quality, using a standardized rubric such as the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA). In support of this idea, one respondent said:

> There are several good quality self-assessment tools. Some of the state afterschool networks have developed them. There's YPQA…Those instruments are almost uniformly built around social and emotional indicators—the interaction of the adults, how adults are interacting with kids, how kids are interacting or not interacting with one another, the extent to which their activities have some kind of focus on skill development of whatever variety. So, I think that's a very good idea. And it wouldn't require a lot of new development work. These tools exist and many of them are excellent.

A related suggestion, noted by another respondent, centered on the idea that the U.S. Department of Education should establish an office on out-of-school-time education, which could address both the connections between formal and informal learning and coherence among the various federal OST efforts.

A different view on the salience of the federal policy was offered by a former USDOE official who was involved in the inception of the 21st CCLC policy and program. This individual stated that because it is "very, very hard to do anything regulatory, or even non-regulatory, I think it's probably good enough," going on to observe:

> It touches the right buttons…how many other things are there to say—other than 'diversify the services you offer, make sure you touch on the academics, but make sure that's not the only thing you do. Make sure you provide opportunities for kids that will excite them and give them things to do that they likely may never have had a chance to do in the absence of these programs. Watch out for the quality of what you do. Make sure that the staff get along with the kids and engage with the kids.' All of this is known.

This person's observation that "all of this is known" is accurate, as other respondents observed when they discussed the ready availability of OST program quality assessment tools. Taken together, this set of responses—despite some differences of opinion—converges around the theme of program quality and the federal role in making program quality a major focus of continuous improvement efforts.

In responding to this question, several interviewees took the opportunity to discuss other aspects of the federal government's role in relation to out-of-school time. For example, four individuals said the U.S. Department of Education should exert stronger leadership in advancing out-of-school-time education as a critical factor in students' learning and development. They stressed as well that the U.S. Secretary of Education and other high-ranking officials should model more active and visible leadership. One of these individuals, who was involved in the inception of the 21st CCLC policy and program, observed that "there needs to be a lot of leadership from the Department. In my opinion, it's never been given the political leadership that it deserved." This interviewee added: "So you can guide states and localities with guidance and mandates and laws…but the bully pulpit matters, and how you are highlighting innovation, how much you're investing in technical assistance." A related observation, made by a recent high-ranking federal official, cited the tension within the Department of Education between the senior career staff and the political appointees:

> But the struggle is always there. It does not come from Congress. Congress puts the money in, but the budget that goes from the Department to the Congress, to the Hill, always proposes a reduction because there's no support at the U.S. Department of Education, from senior leadership, for the program. So picture this, when a new administration comes in, the senior leaders are informing the budget people. The senior leaders, they want the money to go to Title I and Title II and Title III and other titles on career and technical education. And where did you get that money?—from the programs that you don't think are a priority. It's those career staff that are making the recommendations to the political appointees...the senior leadership team that had direct access to the Secretary…They're not interested in the afterschool program.

Another issue at the federal level appears to be the limited capacity of the 21st CCLC program staff in the U.S. Department of Education. One respondent, a program administrator during the early stages of the 21st CCLC program, said "I think the 21st Century program has three or four people in it at the federal level. They are going to concentrate on being good stewards of federal resources and rely far more on the state coordinators to wrestle with the issues we have been discussing," such as program quality, participation, partnerships, and sustainability. This observation about limited staff capacity at the federal level, and the reliance on the program's state administrators, leads directly to the next set of findings.

State administration: As noted in the Background section, the administration of the 21st CCLC program—after initially being run as a federal discretionary grant competition—devolved to the state departments of education in 2002, in concert with the exponential growth of the program's budget and the strong link to the accountability measures of No Child Left Behind. Several former U. S. Department of Education officials spoke about this change as "losing control" of the program at the federal level. The cohort of interviewees expressed divergent opinions about this change, with one observer noting "I can't think of a kind of governmental institution that is more poorly equipped to oversee afterschool education than state education agencies." However, an equally knowledgeable respondent stated, "I think the state-administered model, the competition at the state level model, is in general a pretty workable framework. It takes the unmanageable at the federal level and makes it semi-management at the state level."

Despite such differences of professional judgment, the respondents agreed about several points regarding state administration of the 21st CCLC program. These included the importance of the federal guidance to state departments of education and the need for federal investments in building the capacity of the state administrators on an ongoing basis. On the federal guidance aspect of state administration, a leading advocate observed that:

> You really have to think about all three levels (federal, state, and local) together because what happens is you have the federal government and the Department of Education—they give grants out to the 50 states who run their own RFPs. And they have a lot of leeway in how they do it. They don't all look the same. And, so, any guidance that comes out from the federal

> Department of Education, there's a question of how did the state education agencies interpret it? And I can tell you that I have been in a room with state education agencies and the Department of Education, and it's as if I heard one thing and the SEAs heard something totally different. And maybe like 20 of them heard one thing and 10 of them another—and I thought it was a pretty clear presentation. But they're all coming in with their own thoughts and opinions and biases. And so one of the things is that most of the state education agencies are really reluctant to do things differently from how they've been doing them. So if you want them to do something in a different way, you have to be really, really clear from the Department, and that can sometime be very difficult, especially with guidance and regulations. And you know, the Department's not the one running the programs, and then to get that to people on the ground, it's another whole step.

A related view offered by another interviewee focused on the federal role in communicating the vision and importance of the 21st CCLC program to state departments of education: "I also think there's got to be a message to state Departments of Education that this has got to be a priority—that afterschool is part of the 21st century learning environment." The idea of the big picture and the learning environment was amplified by another respondent, who observed that "the way the 21st CCLC program was erected…actually missed an opportunity to think holistically about the field and what the field contributes to youth and families. Direct learning is the responsibility of the schools. Out-of-school-time fits in a different pocket and has a different set of responsibilities that are equally important. But there's no bridge between those two things, no intentional bridge."

Several thought leaders observed that many state administrators lack an understanding of the complementary roles of formal and informal education because their backgrounds involve only formal K-12 education. One interviewee, a state administrator, noted that "I'm not going to generalize, but I think there are many states where the person in charge of 21st Century is administering the fund versus leading with a vision—they are also administering many other funds." Another respondent observed that state administrators "need to keep focused on the big picture and…learn about, showcase, and help develop local leadership skills. I think state administrators feel like they're just box checkers." A third informant observed that, in her state, "the administrators of this funding did not come from the out-of-school-time space. They understood districts and in-school education but they didn't have a firm understanding of out-of-school-time issues or how to select the right programs for funding."

One interviewee, an outlier on the topic of state administration of the 21st CCLC program, recommended that the responsibility for program administration should revert to the federal government:

> I think it ought to be an LEA grant, not a state grant. The reason why it's state-driven is because the Department wants the state, who owns education for the state, to develop a holistic approach and by owning after school, it could create an infrastructure where it can use all its different resources to get to a specific outcome. But the afterschool program is still in isolation at the state level…if they could take all the money for after school and put it in Title I, they would do it, but the law doesn't permit it. They wouldn't do after school. But I think now…the policy can be strengthened by making the eligibility requirement to LEAs in schools and not the states.

All other respondents appeared to believe that the state administration of the program is here to stay and offered a variety of ideas about how to strengthen this aspect of the program. For example, a recent high-ranking USDOE official observed that the cohort of state administrators is small and easily identifiable, and should be targeted for ongoing guidance and professional development:

> But that's only 50 people, and having them in conversation, having them talking quarterly or meeting annually, or whatever it might be. That's a real clear role, whether it's the Department of Education or maybe CCSSO (Council of Chief State School Officers), if you value this stuff, you're sharing, you're talking, you're seeing natural leaders, you're seeing how you move people along. And out of 50 people charged with that responsibility, whatever their titles are, you know there are probably 10 that are A+s, 30 in the middle, and probably 10 that aren't fantastic. So, try and figure out who your 10 A+s are and really help them drive a national agenda.

Several interviewees agreed about the importance of federal investments in ongoing professional development for state 21st CCLC program administrators. "I suppose you could require them to participate in a certain number of professional development days. The next best thing would be to have them be required or encouraged or invited to visit interesting programs and activities at local levels. They can only recommend what they know." A related opinion, offered by a former federal official, focused on "broadening learning, relationships, partnerships…really work on providing leadership to the state 21st Century offices on those concepts." One respondent stated that the content offered to state administrators should include such topics as how to collaborate with other state agencies around out-of-school-time programming and how to use diverse federal and state funding streams to achieve a coherent vision for afterschool and summer programs in each state.

Another idea proposed by several thought leaders about strengthening state administration of the federal program involves requiring states to create advisory boards composed of afterschool experts, including researchers and practitioners. Several states currently work with their Mott-funded state afterschool networks as their advisory boards as well as in other roles, such as providing technical assistance to grantees, presenting at statewide conferences, and even helping to run grants competitions. One local program director observed that "I feel like our state has it together. I feel like they give us guidelines, specific guidelines, but they do allow for flexibility with certain things. We have regular quarterly meetings of the project directors and our program officers." This respondent noted that her state program administrators build capacity within the state by working closely with their state afterschool network and their state 21st CCLC program evaluator, a national recognized evaluation firm. But not all states have taken this route and, in the view of one respondent, "it should not be that state agencies do not at the very least have advisory boards and/or are led by folk who really understand this work." Adding force to this recommendation, another respondent stated emphatically that "states would be greatly improved if they would treat their afterschool network as a true implementation partner."

As noted earlier, the role played by 21st CCLC state program administrators is multi-faceted and complex. One respondent, a former federal official, noted that "they have a big job to do. Running these competitions is tough, and overseeing the grantees is tough, and identifying the ones they think are standouts to feature in their state meetings. It's an influential job, I think." Several other interviewees commented on the influence of state administrators in determining how their state's funding allocation will be spent and what criteria will be used to make funding decisions.

One national expert noted that "the states need to be honest about what it costs to run a quality program, and make sure their grants are based on that, even if we're serving fewer kids. And I think that states should absolutely prioritize, and this is part of the law, working with community-based organizations…where these kids live." This view about program costs was echoed by an experienced local practitioner who noted that her state hadn't changed the per-site allocation in its 21st CCLC program for 20 years, which resulted in a variety of challenges for local program operators. "In the state's mind, they wanted to spread the wealth, spread the wealth, spread the wealth. But the reality of it was, to do a very comprehensive out-of-school-time program and have the kinds of impacts that the state and federal government wanted, there's no way to get that level of impact with the small amounts of funding."

Several respondents discussed the problems associated with viewing the 21st CCLC allocations as seed money rather than as relatively permanent investments in the developmental landscape. In the absence of federal guidance on this question, states make their own decisions and receive frequent criticism (for example, as noted in the "share the wealth" quote above). Several individuals, of varying backgrounds, discussed the difficulties caused by this lack of clarity. One observer, a former local program director, expressed frustration with the seed funding approach: "Some states, like ours, used to come in and say 'OK, your award for year four will go down by ten percent and your award in year five will go down by 25 percent'—because the goal is that you just go on and you just do this on your own. And it's not real. That's not real." Another respondent, a former federal official, concurred with this view:

> I think it's a misplacement of emphasis to insist on conditions for sustainability from the get-go…that's before they even know if what they're offering is worth sustaining. And it's not like all

> these resources are going to suddenly materialize to replace the federal funding. I have come around more to believe in permanent revenue streams, where the permanent revenue streams are constantly being used in more effective and efficient ways…I'm not sure why grants should always be rotating to new places, and funding gets cut off in places where people have actually learned how to use it really effectively. And they're not going to be able to keep going if it goes away. So I like an idea of a revenue stream, and then some innovation, you want to do some seed money to new places. But the idea of rolling over everything all the time to get new people involved when they're maybe not prepared…the more you move the money around, like a three card Monte game, the more you upset proven practice, the higher the probability of going to a place less well equipped to do a good job.

A final theme related to state administration of the 21st CCLC program involves communication. Several respondents believe that capturing and publicizing the positive narratives emanating from the program is a joint responsibility of federal, state, and local players. They feel that the state role is particularly important because state administrators have the ability (and responsibility) to capture large amounts of information, including rigorous performance data and programmatic success stories. One respondent, a former local program director, noted that "there is not enough of a narrative around the power of the work that's happening. And if it's not there, states can do their part to increase it in the way they've done their part to increase it around teacher training or Common Core." A former recent federal official added that "we can do a much better job of telling the story of after school—yeah, all of us, whether it's to a Congressperson or to someone on the elevator. We don't know how to talk about after school. So states and districts, we're all going to have to do a better job of telling the story of after school."

Impact of COVID: Respondents were asked how the recent COVID pandemic and the resulting disruptions in formal education affected students' out-of-school-time learning, and how the pandemic might affect the political decision-making about the 21st CCLC policy and program. In response to the first question, the cohort of interviewees agreed that COVID's impact on young people was dramatic and multi-faceted. One former federal education official observed that the pandemic "has been a devastating time for kids academically, socially, emotionally. I don't think we have begun to understand yet how bad it's actually been." A local program operator said "we really lost that year and a half. It's like the kids just kind of forgot how to act, how to act in school, how to act with their peers. So that's a challenge that we were faced with." A third respondent observed that, on the academic side alone, "you have to look at all those losses," not just reading and math but also art, music, STEM, pathways to college and careers, and more.

Student disengagement during COVID concerned several respondents. One interviewee observed that "after being home, a lot of kids figure 'why do I need to do this?' I mean it. They still promoted a lot of the students even though, during that virtual time, I don't think everyone was doing what they were supposed to be doing." Another respondent noted the importance of "finding ways to help kids reconnect and work through anxiety or social anxiety and start to relearn skills that should be natural, but that got really stunted" during the pandemic.

Several informants noted that during the roughly 18 months (March 2020-September 2021) when schools across the country were closed, dramatic changes occurred in the out-of-school-time landscape. Many afterschool programs shifted their focus from providing daily school-based enrichment to addressing students' and families' immediate needs, including access to technology, food and nutrition, health care, housing, social services, and emergency financial assistance. According to a former local program director, "There is a mandate built into 21st Century that requires a close partnership with a school. I think what we've seen in the last 18 months is that out-of-school-time programs that had strong partnerships with schools, and school leaders that believed in the work that out-of-school-time programs were doing, continued to have those strong partnerships throughout the pandemic." A leading advocate for OST programs made a similar observation, noting that "during the pandemic, when schools were shut, it was the schools that had the strongest relationships with community-based organization that were able to really succeed in leveraging those partnerships to reach kids." This resulted in the creation of learning hubs where students could go if they couldn't learn virtually at home, meal delivery, lesson plan delivery, and other supports.

Other respondents noted that the pandemic served to increase public understanding of the multiple roles played by schools and afterschool programs in the lives of American students and their families. A 21st CCLC state administrator said “people recognized that working families needed places for their elementary children to go, for the economy to recover.” He cited the result that legislators in his state “wanted to create universal after school…because it’s good for communities and families.” Another thought leader commented on the impact of COVID in shattering the belief that all learning happens only in schools: “I think you have many more parents and policymakers that really recognize that learning can happen outside the classroom. And I also think that there was a recognition by policymakers and parents and the public that the non-academic piece is really important. Some of it is the crisis we’re having in mental health.” A former federal official added “I think COVID uncovered the essential nature of all these other supports—that had to include after school, out-of-school-time programs, and youth-serving programs, just the way it did with childcare in general and the need for it—and how dependent families are.”

These observations about COVID highlighting the essential nature of out-of-school-time supports brought forth unsolicited worries on the part of several thought leaders about the vulnerability of these programs, particularly in relation to workforce issues. One thought leader, the director of a national afterschool advocacy organization, observed that COVID has exacerbated the ongoing problem of staffing shortages in the OST field. Another interviewee, a senior executive in a large local non-profit, explained that her organization’s school district partner is suffering from such an acute teacher shortage that the district is “taking our workforce. They're the biggest poacher right now because they have a lot of people that have left the classroom. A lot of principals have left and they have just, without embarrassment and unapologetically, actively recruited our staff to move on to the other side.” A third interviewee discussed the staffing shortage as part of the OST field’s vulnerabilities in the wake of COVID: “Yes, they lost a lot of ground. And it is actually financially a better choice for their youth development professionals to work in fast food versus work in their organizations, because the pay is higher and there's more job security…I think that, right now, organizations do not have the resources to do it and do it well, because they've lost a good chunk of their staff." This respondent went on to note the irony in the current situation involving COVID recovery funding and its effect on the OST labor force: "So now there are more resources, but the resources are only going to schools, they're not going to other types of organizations. And so organizations will close. I actually worried at the beginning of the pandemic, that the field would disappear altogether. I'm not sure if that's not still potentially a reality."

As respondents reflected on the second COVID question, how the pandemic might affect the political decision-making about the 21st CCLC policy and program, two distinct lines of thought appeared. One view sees new opportunities for the 21st CCLC policy and program in the post-COVID environment. The other envisions schools focusing on their most immediate tasks, to the exclusion of broader constructs and opportunities, including out-of-school time.

One interviewee, a former federal official, captured the first group's beliefs when he said that "they're really stressing community-based organizations a whole lot more than they've ever done. There's a lot more interest in that broad learning that we talked about. People are realizing kids aren't going to catch up, the ones who are behind already, without afterschool and summer opportunities." This stance received support from another former federal official, who saw potential opportunity in the post-COVID environment: "My common sense and non-political view would be that it should increase everybody's support for this work and its importance. Hopefully people are understanding more than ever how much we need to do for kids to help them catch back up, to help them grow in a healthy manner." A leading advocate for expansion of 21st CCLC and other afterschool programs observed:

> I think on the most local of local levels, there are places where relationships between schools and community-based organizations absolutely strengthened because of COVID—because they worked in collaboration from day one. And there are places where those relationships began because of COVID. So I would say, coming out of it, I think our field is more respected and

> hopefully that will lead to more resources because people finally got to see how much it mattered. Yeah, that's the optimist in me.

Another former federal official encapsulated the second viewpoint: "It's school itself that is so much more of an overwhelming issue that afterschool is an after-thought. The toll that COVID has taken is a deep wound." This viewpoint was confirmed by a recent federal official who observed that after school was not a priority in the U.S. Department of Education when schools started to reopen during September of 2021: "They weren't worried about afterschool—they were worrying about the in-school day." A third respondent, when asked if the balance of power between schools and out-of-school-time programs might shift as a result of both groups' performance during the pandemic, rejected that idea with vigor: "That's wishful thinking, for two reasons. Afterschool has no institutional base, whereas the school day has got this vast institutional base of the public school system. It's got powerful unions. So that's always going to hurt afterschool when it comes to federal or state appropriations."

Despite this lack of consensus, several thought leaders encouraged the "framing of a new moment for out-of-school time"—one that recognizes the challenges and capitalizes on the opportunities. One interviewee concluded that the political winds may favor positive change. She observed that, during recent discussions in the U.S. Congress:

> For the first time ever, we had senators saying 'We want money to go to summer programs, not summer school, not academics. We want money to go to the enrichment part of afterschool, not the tutoring, not the homework. We need our kids to be kids, we need them, after isolation, to be with other kids.' So I'm hopeful that there's a real recognition of the value of after school.

On this more optimistic note, we move to the Discussion section of the study in which I consider the phase one (document review) and phase two (thought leader interview) findings in relation to the study's overarching research questions, theoretical framework, and literature review. As part of this analysis, I offer a set of research-based recommendations that address strategies for strengthening the 21st CCLC policy, now and during the subsequent reauthorization process.

Chapter Six: Discussion

Four overarching research questions have guided my study since its inception: (1) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current federal 21st Community Learning Centers policy? (2) What are the most effective ways to align the goals, expected outcomes, and success measures of federal out-of-school-time policy? (3) How might the current political climate, especially the post-pandemic context, affect out-of-school-time federal policy? (4) What are research-based strategies for strengthening the current policy? The two parts of the study—the review of publicly available documents about the 21st Century Community Learning Centers and the 15 thought leader interviews—have provided important insights into all four questions. For each question, I will summarize key findings and integrate them with relevant citations drawn from my literature review and theoretical framework.

Research Question #1: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current 21st Century Community Learning Centers policy?

My analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the current policy indicates that the big story is one of untapped potential—that the many strengths of the current policy are undercut by a lack of clarity in the way the policy is written and framed as well as by shortcomings in the quality of implementation. For example, as noted earlier, one clear strength of the current policy is that the resulting programs appear to be reaching their target audience of students who attend low-income and low-performing schools (U. S. Department of Education, 2020). However, this strength is greatly diminished by several other findings that appear in the government's performance reports, including students' irregular participation patterns and the remedial approach of the preponderance of the programming offered (U. S. Department of Education, 2020). The dialectical nature of these strengths and weaknesses creates an opportunity to examine them in tandem, as illustrated by this first example *(Strength/weakness #1).*

Strength/weakness #2: Implicit in the work of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers is the fact that the resulting programs serve multiple socially relevant purposes, including providing childcare for working families, safety and supervision for children, and a wide range of academic and social supports for program participants. These goals have helped the program build political support over the past 30 years, with public opinion polls showing widespread voter interest (Afterschool Alliance, April 2022) and academic policy reports that document strong bipartisan political support (Weiss, 2013). That said, a known weakness in this area is the misalignment between the multiple politically salient purposes and the narrow measures used to judge the program's results. As indicated in the previous section, the 15 thought leaders interviewed as part of this study favored multiple measures of program effectiveness that reflect what the programs offer through their goals and activities. This view is corroborated by the research of Neild et al., whose meta-analysis of more than 60 evaluations of afterschool programs counseled the U.S. Department of Education to "encourage states and their evaluators to use measures that are clearly aligned to the purposes of the programs and sensitive to changes that they realistically could provide" (Neild, Wilson, & McClanahan, 2019, p. 51).

Strength/weakness #3: The enrichment orientation of the 21st CCLC policy is unique. While many federal policies use compensatory, deficit-oriented language, the 21st CCLC policy takes a different approach, by including the word "enrichment" in its central purpose and providing some examples of the kinds of services, programs, and activities that might be appropriate. As one of the interviewed thought leaders noted, federal policy "needs to say that, 'in the overall structure of educational policy in this country, it is clear and needed that we have enriching and engaging out-of-school time. We have a dedicated funding stream for that.'" The weakness inherent in this part of the policy is the lack of a clear definition of enrichment and the explicit conflation of academic enrichment with "providing tutorial services to help students…meet the challenging State academic standards." The professional literature, particularly the four decades of research conducted by Joseph Renzulli and his University of Connecticut team, presents a starkly different picture of enrichment, one defined by “high levels of student engagement and the use of enjoyable and challenging learning experiences” (Renzulli Center for Creativity, Gifted Education, and Talent Development, n.d.).

Strength/weakness #4: There is strong support, across key stakeholder groups, for the idea that afterschool programs should not merely be “more school,” but rather should complement and supplement what schools offer while being qualitatively different in both their content and processes. All 15 thought leaders voiced this view—a stance that is clearly represented in the research literature (Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007; Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Heath, Anderson, Turner, & Payne, 2018; Torre, Leon, Wang, & Cai, 2019; Vandell, Simpkins, Pierce, Brown, Bolt, & Reisner, 2020). Additional support for this notion can be found in public opinion surveys and polls (Duffett & Johnson, 2004; Afterschool Alliance, 2022). Despite the clarity of this consensus among researchers, parents, and youth, the 21st CCLC policy and resulting programs have a strong “more school” orientation, with tutoring and homework help being two of the three most frequently offered services and standardized test results being a central measure of program effectiveness.

Strength/weakness #5: Educational equity stands out as a definite focus of the 21st CCLC policy and resulting programs, with directives that explicitly target funding toward low-income students and students attending low-performing schools. The need for federal policy designed to disrupt educational inequities during out-of-school-time is well documented in research literature that spans several decades (Wynn, Richman, Rubenstein, & Littell, 1987; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992; Putnam, 2015). However, this same literature has called attention to the centrality of high-quality implementation if equity is to be truly served. It appears that the educational equity purposes of the 21st CCLC policy are being substantially undercut by a lack of adequate attention at all levels—federal, state, and local—to issues of program quality (James-Burdumy, Dynarski, Moore, Deke, Mansfield, &

Pistorino, 2005; Paluta, Lower, Anderson-Butcher, Gibson, & Iachini, 2016; Neild, Wilson, & McClanahan, 2019).

Strength/weakness #6: As every 21st CCLC grantee knows, and as several thought leader informants in this study verified, the reporting requirements for grantees are stringent and complex. Holding grantees accountable for reporting consistently on performance measures would ordinarily qualify as best practice and would appear, in this case, to be a strength. However, this asset is diminished by the precise requirements of the GPRA (Government Performance and Results Act) measures used for the 21st CCLC program. The weakness in this part of the program was well documented in the U. S. Government Accountability Office's 2017 report and verified by several thought leaders. The GAO report offered explicit recommendations that the U. S. Department of Education address issues of data completeness and accuracy (U. S. Government Accountability Office, 2017, pp. 30-31). A recent effort to fix the specific problems associated with tracking students' participation in the program (U. S. Department of Education, March 2022) does not appear to have addressed the major challenges identified by the Afterschool Alliance (Afterschool Alliance, no date) and other key stakeholders in the field. For example, the new requirements direct program staff to count student participation in hours rather than days. This change adds a dimension of complexity to the data-collection burden for grantees. In addition, this new approach seems to be based on questionable benchmarks that do not reflect the best available evidence. For example, the accompanying description about translating hours into days defines the "range of students at and above research-based dosage band" as 30-59 days of participation per year (U. S. Department of Education, March 2022, p. 11). The directive provides no reference for the research on which this determination is based. As indicated in Chapter 1, a substantial body of research has documented the importance of students' "consistent and sustained participation" in producing positive results (Harvard Family Research Project, 2008; Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, 2021, paragraph 12)—a view supported by the thought leaders interviewed for the present study. Also corroborating this view is research cited in the Government Accountability Office report that documented positive academic results, in one specific program, only for those students who had participated for more than 60 days (U. S. Government Accountability Office, 2017, p. 17). In summary, while the current APR performance management system for the 21st CCLC program requires grantees to collect and report a substantial amount of data, the utility and accuracy of much of that data have been shown to need improvement.

Strength/weakness #7: Out-of-school-time programs have demonstrated the value of increasing opportunities for young people to engage in positive relationships with peers and adults (Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007; Harvard Family Research Project, 2008; Putnam, 2015; Heath, Anderson, Turner, & Payne, 2018; Torre, Leon, Wang, & Cai, 2019; Vandell, Simpkins, Pierce, Brown, Bolt, & Reisner, 2020). Several of these studies emphasize the role that caring and competent adults can play by serving as mentors and role models for young people and by building young people's social capital through programs that connect youth with opportunities outside their current circumstances (Putnam, 2015; Baldridge, 2019). As one thought leader observed: "To me, that is the headline of out-of-school time—that OST becomes a network of access to possibilities. And so I see it as a long-term strategy for really opening up pathways and opportunities for kids that don't have access to them." The untapped potential in many current 21st CCLC programs is that a clear majority of the adults they employ are school-day staff. This substantially decreases the likelihood that these same adults will be able to tap into new networks of support and connection for the young people engaged in the programs.

Strength/weakness #8: A related issue is that of the building of partnerships between schools and community resources. The fact that such partnerships are ostensibly a requirement for funding under the 21st CCLC program is a strength, given the program's equity orientation and its stated intent "to offer students a broad array of additional services, programs, and activities, such as youth development activities, service learning, nutrition and health education, drug and violence prevention programs, counseling programs, arts, music, physical fitness and wellness programs, technology education programs, financial literacy programs, environmental literacy programs, mathematics, science, career and technical programs, internship or apprenticeship programs…designed to reinforce and complement the regular academic program of participating students" (U. S. Department of Education, 2016). All 15 thought leaders who were interviewed for this study stated emphatically that authentic school-community partnerships are essential, critical, vital—the only effective way to conduct afterschool programs. However, several external studies (Anthony & Morra, 2016; Paluta et al., 2015), in combination both with data appearing in government reports and in thought leader interviews, suggest that the partnership aspect of the 21st CCLC policy has not been fully realized. The Anthony & Morra study proposed the need for changes in the authorizing legislation, such as requiring evidence of shared planning. This recommendation corroborates the view of this study's interviewed thought leaders who worried that many of the 21st CCLC partnerships are simply "window dressing" efforts that exist only on paper.

Strength/weakness #9: Another unusual aspect of the 21st CCLC programs is that community-based and other non-school organizations are named as eligible entities to apply for and receive funding. While this allowance is a potential strength, given the program's focus on low-performing schools that stand to benefit from solid and long-term community participation, the reality (as documented in the government's annual performance reports) is that schools and school districts account for over 80 percent of the program's grantees. One interviewed thought leader made a relevant observation when she cited research about an afterschool funding agency whose results she had evaluated. The funder supported both school-based and center-based programs (e.g., those run by non-profit organizations either in their own or in school facilities). What the cited evaluation revealed was that, while the two types of programs achieved equivalent levels of participation, the school-based programs tended to attract and retain youth who were high achievers, while the community-based programs tended to attract young people who were low achievers. The researchers' interpretation was that students who were low achievers "wanted to get out of the building as fast as they could at the end of the school day. And if there was some place they could go where they would be welcomed, there would be snacks, and there would be friends and interesting things to do, 'Hallelujah. That was great.' But kids who were flunking did not want to stick around the school building at the end of the school day versus kids who were successful in the school day." This interviewee argued that program planners should recognize that the students who most need what 21st Century Community Learning Centers have to offer may be reluctant to participate, especially if the programs look like "more of the same" that isn't working for them during the regular school day. She observed that community-based organizations can bring assets to the role of 21st CCLC grantee or authentic partner that complement the strengths of schools. This view is corroborated by the research of McLaughlin (2000) and Baldridge (2019), among others.

Strength/weakness #10: The U. S. Department of Education's annual performance reports indicate that the 21st CCLC programs serve a wide age range of students, from pre-kindergarten to grade 12. These reports indicate that nearly half of student attendees (46.8 percent) are in grades pre-K to five while 53.2 percent attend grades six through twelve. At first glance, this age diversity might appear to be a strength—and it may be, given the wide array of unmet needs that the policy and program seek to address (Afterschool Alliance, 2019). However, a further review of these data shows that the students in the earlier grades are more likely to be "regular" attendees, with 61.9 percent of elementary age participants being counted as "regular student attendees" and only 38.1 percent of sixth through twelfth graders being similarly designated. These data pinpoint several areas of possible weakness in the policy and resulting programs: the lack of federal guidance about what constitutes age-appropriate afterschool and summer programming; the overly broad categories used to collect data (such as including sixth and twelfth graders in the same group despite the distinct differences, from a developmental perspective, between these age groups); the lack of federal guidance about program focus and participation expectations (for example, the childcare role played by elementary and early middle school programs vs. the career-and-college-readiness role played by high school programs). The integration of existing theoretical and empirical research could substantially improve the 21st CCLC policy in relation to issues of developmentally appropriate programming. To give just one example, the Holstead et al. study examining 21st CCLC programs for high school age youth uncovered major gaps between research-based best practices and the actual implementation experience at 19 sites. This study highlighted three aspects of afterschool programming as being critical to their success: program activities; recruitment and retention; and student voice and choice (Holstead et al., 2015). This and related studies provide specific indicators about the need for focusing attention on program quality, including developmentally appropriate best practices. The fact that only three of the 19 programs examined by Holstead et al. conducted student interest surveys as part of their program planning stands as a powerful illustration of the need for quality improvement based on a deep understanding of child and adolescent development.

Strength/weakness #11: Several of the thought leaders cited, as a strength, the flexibility afforded to local communities by the federal 21st CCLC policy—a flexibility that allows communities the opportunity to respond to local needs and to capitalize on neighborhood assets and resources. While none of the thought leaders suggested that the policy should prescribe at the federal level precisely what should take place at the local level, many respondents observed that the federal guidance should be much clearer on several distinct issues. For example, the guidance should provide an explicit research-based definition of "enrichment," strengthen requirements about the centrality of community partnerships in school-based programs, clarify participation expectations, and offer support for quality implementation. None of the thought leaders wanted the policy to undercut the ability of communities to respond flexibly to local needs. Rather, they wanted knowledge about program quality to be much more fully integrated into all aspects of the policy and its administration at the federal, state, and local levels.

Strength/weakness #12: A related issue is the broad nature of 21st CCLC as a funding stream. Several respondents cited the political salience of this phenomenon, including the idea that nearly all members of the U.S. Congress have 21st CCLC-funded programs in their districts, and that many members have added language about their own priorities (e.g., financial literacy, STEM) during the reauthorization processes. One respondent noted that the breadth of the funding "provides something for everyone" in Congress. The weak aspect of this issue, according to several respondents, is that the 21st CCLC policy and program have become an "archeological dig" of incoherent ideas, activities, and programs that are not aligned with current research about best practices in out-of-school-time programming. For example, the Durlak et al. meta-analysis found that program effectiveness is enhanced when programs embody four consistent features: they offer a connected set of activities; they incorporate active forms of learning; they target specific personal and social skills; and they offer at least one program component devoted to the development of these skills (Durlak et al., 2010). The government's own data indicates that, across the board, the 21st CCLC funding supports a broad array of activities, including remedial and drop-in programs that are known to lack one or more of these essential, research-based features.

Strength/weakness #13: The relative permanence and steady growth of the 21st CCLC funding appropriations from 1994 to the present, coupled with the hiring of dedicated USDOE staff to oversee the program, are viewed by many observers as clear strengths at the federal level. But several equally clear weaknesses are also apparent to some of the interviewed thought leaders. Several cited a lack of high-level leadership for the program in the U. S. Department of Education. Others referred to regular in-fighting between political appointees and career staff about the value of the program as well as about its very existence.

Strength/weakness #14: The 2002 decision to devolve the administration of the 21st CCLC funding from the federal to the state level is viewed by some observers as a strength. In the words of one thought leader, “it makes the unmanageable, manageable” and moves funding decisions closer to the point of service. The weaknesses in this arrangement have been stark, most notably centered on the inadequate capacity at many state departments of education to manage the multiple responsibilities, which include monitoring expenditures, supporting implementation, and commissioning state evaluations. While the costs of these and other designated responsibilities are underwritten by a seven percent set-aside, many states find the administrative burden overwhelming. The Government Accountability Office’s 2017 report paid particular attention to shortcomings in the state administration of the 21st CCLC program and urged the U. S. Department of Education evaluations to play a more assertive role in guiding and monitoring the work of state departments of education (U. S. Government Accountability Office, 2017). This view was corroborated by several of the interviewed thought leaders.

Strength/weakness #15: National opinion polls consistently show high levels of popular support for afterschool and other out-of-school-time programs. In 2018, for example, 69 percent of respondents strongly agreed that afterschool programs are “an absolute necessity” for their community (Afterschool Alliance, no date b). In addition, most respondents, including 84 percent in one recent poll, support the public funding of such programs (Afterschool Alliance, 2014). This strength is tempered by what many observers describe as the field’s “weak narrative” about its work. Several thought leaders asserted that the afterschool field needs a more deliberate and compelling communications strategy that emphasizes the essential nature of the work, including its multiple purposes and benefits. As noted earlier, these views range from those of a local program operator who observed that “there is not enough of a narrative around the power of the work that’s happening” to those of a former federal official who stated that “we’re going to have to do a much better job of telling the story of afterschool.” These respondents saw a connection between public support and political support, recognizing that the future of 21st CCLC funding depends on both.

In summary, and in response to research question #1, the 21st CCLC policy and resulting programs exhibit many strengths on which to build as well as many documented weaknesses that need to be addressed. The ten recommendations offered in response to research question #4 will offer a set of ideas about how to harness the strengths and tackle the weaknesses in ways that are consistent with the best available research evidence.

Research Question #2: *What are the most effective ways to align the goals, expected outcomes, and success measures of federal out-of-school-time policy?*

The interviewed thought leaders' key ideas on this question are summarized in the earlier Findings chapter. This section will put those ideas in conversation with contemporary professional literature on the same topic. The overarching composite finding in response to this question is that, in order to address the current misalignment between the 21st CCLC goals and the measures of the program's success, one or the other will need to change substantially. There is no support, either in the professional literature or among the field's thought leaders, for using standardized test scores as a central measure of program effectiveness or for expecting test scores to rise owing to student participation in these programs as they are currently designed. Second, both the professional literature and several thought leaders have pointed out that 21st CCLC does not represent a unified program that can be measured uniformly across the country. As noted in the recent RAND analysis, "when studies evaluate the effectiveness of 21st CCLC programs, they are examining a *funding stream* to multiple centers and organizations implementing a range of programming, as opposed to examining a single program or curriculum" (McCombs, Whitaker, & Yoo, 2017, p. 8). These authors note that "21st CCLC funding is not intended for programs to implement the same activities, but instead can be used to fund programs aligned with the 14 different 'authorized activities' outlined in the legislation" (McCombs, Whitaker, & Yoo, 2017, p. 8). Several thought leaders made related observations, noting that "different programs are designed to do different things" and that "one of the things that makes afterschool so special is that it really is, at its best, local—meeting the needs of the local kids in local communities."

As an alternative to a single set of measures designed to judge program effectiveness, several interviewed thought leaders focused their attention on the need for individual programs to align goals, activities, and outcome measures. One interviewee, a researcher and program evaluator, observed that the afterschool field has developed effective tools to guide local decision-making on these alignment issues. As an example, this individual cited the measurement framework developed by the national organization Every Hour Counts, which created a self-described "blueprint for understanding the impact of programs on youth outcomes, making improvement at the system and program levels, and influencing policy (Every Hour Counts, 2014, p. 3). This framework outlines three levels of outcomes: system, program, and youth. Each outcome at each level is described clearly in the framework, as is the underlying research base for each individual item.

Another thought leader cited the approach and tools developed by Boston After School & Beyond, a citywide system that has adopted a common set of measures and validated tools to drive growth in student skills and program quality. "Our measures are more holistic than standardized tests. They cover a range of program factors and learning outcomes…and they incorporate the perspectives of students and staff" (Boston After School & Beyond, 2022). This assessment approach has been disseminated broadly to the afterschool field through publications and national conferences.

The implication of this set of insights for 21st CCLC is that funding applicants should be challenged, required, and supported to specify and align their program's goals, expected outcomes, and measures, through the use of available tools such as those described here. At both the federal and state levels, training and other forms of funded capacity-building efforts can make this aspect of program improvement a high priority. This idea is consistent with one of the key conclusions of the RAND study: "Policymakers and funders can incentivize intentional, quality programming by providing adequate resources and prioritizing funding for programs that can demonstrate intentionality of design and quality characteristics" (McCombs, Whitaker, & Yoo, 2017, p. 15).

Should the federal government choose to delineate and measure outcomes expected of all funded programs, several thought leaders offered ideas about appropriate choices. These include improvements in day-school attendance and other measures of student engagement; increases in students' perceptions of belonging and connectedness to school; increases in students' access to social capital; changes in students' aspirations; improvements in foundational or executive function skills, such as planning, decision-making, time management, and communication. In addition to these possible outcomes at the youth level, thought leaders cited possible results at the program level—Did the program expose young people to new ideas and opportunities? Did the program promote equity and, if so, how? Did the program adhere to established quality standards and, if so, how?

These ideas are consistent with the concluding recommendations for policy and practice made by the RAND team:

- When making funding decisions, federal, state, and local policymakers should consider all the benefits that OST programs provide;
- Policymakers, private funders, and intermediaries should incentivize and support OST providers' efforts to develop intentional, high-quality programs;
- Policymakers, private funders, and researchers should better catalog and assess the value of experiences offered in OST programs;
- Funders should expect and researchers should measure outcomes that align with program content;
- OST programs should track and try to maximize attendance of each individual student (McCombs, Whitaker, & Yoo, 2017, pp. 15-17).

Finally, it should be noted that the misalignment among 21st CCLC goals, outcomes, and success measures documented in the research literature and cited by the field's thought leaders starts with the authorizing legislation, a document that conflates enrichment and remediation. A key strategy for addressing this misalignment involves amending the language in the authorizing legislation by offering a research-based definition of enrichment. Details about this idea are contained in the analysis of research question #4, below.

Research Question #3: *How might the current political climate, especially the post-pandemic context, affect out-of-school-time federal policy?*

This question became outdated between the time of its formulation and the present. When the question was originally posed, most Americans believed that the COVID pandemic was nearing its end. We now know that the pandemic is likely to become endemic—that is, a phenomenon that we need to learn to live with and adjust to. That said, the realities of COVID have been felt across the country, including and perhaps especially in our education system. For example, stories about the effects of COVID on students' learning and mental health, teachers' stress and burnout, parents' frustrations and worries, and schools' loss of students and staff have become regular fare in *Education Week* and other national publications. Similarly, a review of recent articles appearing in *Educational Researcher* (an official journal of the American Educational Research Association) reveals such titles as "Achievement Gaps in the Wake of COVID-19" (June-July 2021), "Students Attending School Remotely Suffer Socially, Emotionally, and Academically" (October 2021), and "Patterns in the Pandemic Decline of Public-School Enrollment" (November 2021). This emerging evidence base is focused primarily on identifying the challenges wrought by COVID—an understandable phenomenon, given the situation—but this research does not begin to address research question #3, which is speculative in nature. For the interviewed OST thought leaders, this question prompted a provocative set of responses, one that generated more divergent views than any of the other topics. To characterize this divergence in the starkest terms, some respondents believed that, in the wake of the pandemic/endemic, policymakers and schools would double down on narrow academic accountability efforts. Others anticipated that COVID might serve to increase policymakers' and educators' understanding of the holistic developmental needs of students.

One group of the field's thought leaders saw new opportunities for the 21st CCLC policy and program resulting from COVID, especially considering the demonstrated ability of many programs to respond to the needs of children and families during the height of the crisis, when schools shut down for 18 months or more. Others regarded these optimistic views as “wishful thinking,” given the available evidence, particularly ideas and directives emanating from the U. S. Department of Education. Despite this lack of consensus on research question #3, all interviewed thought leaders believed in the value of this study and its salience in informing future federal out-of-school-time policy.

Research Question #4: *What are research-based strategies for strengthening the current policy?*

Based on this study’s two-part data analysis, I offer the following ten research-based recommendations focused on strategies for strengthening the policy that undergirds the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. These recommendations are intended to address the most central problems experienced throughout the history of the program—the lack of clarity about the program’s goals, the low rates of student participation, the lack of alignment between goals and outcome measures—and to strengthen the program’s implementation.

Recommendation #1: Provide a clear definition of the word *enrichment* and require grantees to explain how they will employ this pedagogical approach in their proposed programs. The term enrichment is central to the goals outlined in the authorizing legislation, yet it is never defined there. Meanwhile, a very clear definition appears consistently throughout the writings of Dr. Joseph Renzulli and his colleagues, as cited above. Using this definition throughout the legislation would clarify for all stakeholders—including the state departments of education that administer the 21st Century funds—the nature of, and distinctions among, the various kinds of academic activities that are encouraged under the legislation. There appear to be three types of academic activities permitted under the law: academic remediation (which would include tutoring, or review of content previously taught); academic support (which would include homework help); and academic enrichment (such as book clubs, debate teams, and STEM programs). In addition, the legislation allows other kinds of enrichment, including social and cultural enrichment, the arts, and physical activity, among others. An explicit research-based definition of enrichment would clarify that young people are to be exposed to new content, ideas, and settings; they are to be offered new experiences through hands-on learning; and the content and processes used need to be engaging and relevant to the young people themselves. Researchers at the Chapin Hall Center for Children, in Chicago, published a compelling study several years ago showing that, in two local neighborhoods, children living in low-income families primarily received remediation and counseling during the non-school, while wealthy suburban students had access to a dizzying array of enrichment experiences, such as pet care and microwave cooking (Wynn et al., 1987). There is no evidence that these kinds of disparities have decreased in any measurable way during the intervening decades. In awarding grants, the 21st CCLC program should use engagement, enjoyment, and enthusiasm (Renzulli, *Lessons Learned from Playground Pedagogy,* no date) as the key criteria for enrichment. In addition, they should ask applicants to describe how their afterschool and summer learning programs will operationalize these three program dimensions through hands-on learning, compelling program content and processes, and alignment with student interests. Furthermore, the federal definition of enrichment should draw on Renzulli's four explicit characteristics of *bona fide* enrichment pedagogy: (1) personalization of interest; (2) use of authentic methodology; (3) no existing solution or "right" answer; and (4) designed to have an impact on an audience other than or in addition to the teacher (Renzulli & Reis, 2014).

Recommendation #2: Create multiple measures of program success, based on evidence about the holistic developmental needs of young people. According to the U. S. Department of Education (2018), the objectives of the 21st CCLC program are to 1) provide students with opportunities for academic enrichment; 2) offer a broad array of additional services, programs, and activities; and 3) offer families of students served by community learning centers opportunities for active and meaningful engagement in their children's education. Since 2001 and continuing to the present day, the program has used student performance on math and English as the major criterion for measuring program effectiveness, based on state assessments and grades, in what are known as the GPRA (Government Performance and Results Act) indicators. Until 2018-19, all funded programs were required to collect and report this data, along with teacher perceptions of improvement in participating students' homework completion, classroom participation, and classroom behavior. Beginning in 2018-19, states were not required to submit data on every GPRA indicator—rather, states had the discretion to choose among the three GPRA indicators (state assessments, teacher-reported student behavior, or grades). As a result, descriptive statistics in the most recent performance reports are calculated on the reporting by those states that provided data on a given measure. The 2018-9 Annual Performance Data report stated that only 26 percent of attendees showed improvement on state assessments in elementary reading, and only 19.2 percent in middle/high school mathematics (U. S. Department of Education, 2020). States reported that 48.5 percent of participants improved their mathematics grades at the elementary level; that 45.6 percent of middle and high school participants improved their mathematics grades; that 48.2 percent of students improved their English grades in elementary school; and that 46.7 percent of secondary students improved their English grades.

Given that the purpose and funded activities of the program are far broader than these narrow measures reflect, it makes both political and practical sense to define and capture the initiative's true benefits. Plausible examples, based on the extensive body of research on students' participation in high quality afterschool and summer enrichment programs, could include: increases in student engagement as manifested in day-school attendance and project completion as well as teacher observations and student self-reports; student skill development, such as leadership, conflict resolution, technology, teamwork, and goal-setting; increases in students' positive interpersonal connections and social capital; increases in family engagement in students' education; and increases in parents' ability to participate in the workforce, as their child-care needs are addressed. If multiple and broader measures were authorized, programs would have permission and incentives to expand and strengthen their enrichment offerings. Updated guidance on multiple success measures should acknowledge the recent development of valid and reliable tools for assessing changes in students' non-cognitive skills and encourage their use in 21st CCLC programs. For example, the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) is being used by some pioneering 21st CCLC programs to assess changes in students' social and emotional learning (Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health, no date). This program feature is aligned with the goals of both the 21st CCLC program and the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act. The DESSA is one of several validated measures cited in the results framework developed by Every Hour Counts (cited above) and should be incorporated into the 21st CCLC required resources as well as into capacity-building at all levels (federal, state, and local). One additional sub-recommendation on this topic is that 21st CCLC policy should integrate advice provided by the Science of Learning and Development national effort, with a particular focus on COVID recovery. A recent analysis prepared by the SoLD Alliance notes that "a key priority in the response and recovery effort is to keep schools open—maximizing the connections and relationships that accelerate learning and development while also ensuring the health and safety of our students, families, and educators" (Science of Learning and Development Alliance, 2022). Their clear focus on connections and relationships speaks to priority issues in both school-day and out-of-school-time programs, as affirmed by the thought leader interviews as well as by theoretical and empirical evidence.

Recommendation #3: Strengthen authentic partnerships between schools and community partners. Since its inception, the 21st CCLC program has been grounded in the idea that schools should harness the resources and skills of community partners, such as youth development and cultural organizations, in their afterschool and summer offerings. Although the authorizing language focusing on this aspect of the work has gotten stronger over the years, on-the-ground experience suggests that the proposed "partnerships" often exist only on paper. The Anthony and Morra study (2016), cited earlier, documents the kinds of challenges that ensue when partnerships are not well-planned in advance and when specific roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined. The literature on best practices in crafting school-community partnerships provides guidance on strategies for strengthening this aspect of the 21st CCLC legislation and regulations. For example, schools and their partners should be required, at the proposal stage, to provide evidence—such as written memoranda of understanding and data-sharing agreements—that their partnership is authentic and meaningful. They should also be required to demonstrate that the proposed allocation of resources among the collaborators is fair and commensurate with the work each partner is undertaking. Authentic partnerships between schools and community organizations can also help to improve issues of staff diversity. They can seek as well to address the demographic mismatch between adult staff and students identified in the USDOE's annual performance reports.

Recommendation #4: Establish clearer definitions of age-appropriate best practices and desired outcomes, with a focus on differentiating needs and opportunities by elementary, middle, and high school. As currently written, the 21st CCLC legislation and accompanying regulations make no distinction, as to recommended content or learning processes, between programs for elementary and secondary schools. This gap is particularly striking in the context of the U. S. Department of Education's most recent data (2020) showing that more than half (53.2 percent) of funded programs serve students in grades six through twelve. As reported by Holstead et al. (2015), cited earlier, many programs for high school students do not use appropriate adolescent engagement strategies, such as providing adequate opportunities for choosing activities or developing leadership skills (Holstead et al., 2015). The recent National Academies of Sciences study on the promise of adolescence urged the teaching of 21st century skills such as decision making, adaptability, and socio-emotional competence (National Academies of Sciences, 2019). Funded programs should be guided and required to adopt best practices around addressing the holistic strengths and needs of young people at each developmental stage. The 21st CCLC program could benefit from stipulating more carefully delineated age and grade categories—

for example, separating primary grades from older elementary grades, and separating middle school grades from high school grades. In addition, combining these changes with those outlined in Recommendation #5 immediately below, would presumably help to boost the low rates of participation identified in the USDOE's annual performance reports.

Recommendation #5: Require grantees to describe how they will support and enhance students' cultural backgrounds in their programming. There is a high level of diversity among the students served by the 21st CCLC program. Nearly 40 percent of participants are Hispanic, 20.5 percent are Black, 4.6 percent identify as bi-racial, 3.4 percent are Asian, and 3.4 percent are Native American). This documented heterogeneity suggests that funded programs have a unique opportunity to offer culturally relevant content and pedagogies that appeal to young people, build on their strengths, and recognize their heritage. Several researchers have posited that out-of-school-time programs can serve to ameliorate some of the inequities perpetuated by the traditional education system. For example, the March 2017 issue of the *Review of Research in Education* offered two such analyses. The first reported on ways "community-based educational spaces," including afterschool programs, community-based youth organizations, and community-based arts programs, can counter some of the pernicious effects of discriminatory policies and practices in schools by fostering sociopolitical consciousness among program participants. The authors provided examples of how such programs engage youth in the use of academic skills to pursue inquiry, cultural critique, and social action (Ngo et al., 2017). The second article argued for shifting the analytic lens "from youths' perceived deficiencies to the ways their repertoires of practice are developed, extended, and leveraged" (Gutiérrez et al., 2017, p. 35) through participation in intentionally designed out-of-school-time programs and activities. These authors build on ideas relating to culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogies that are school based. For example, the work of Django Paris and H. Samy Alim envisions "schooling as a site for sustaining the cultural ways of being of communities of color rather than eradicating them" (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 2). While the USDOE might find these ideas too radical to integrate into its non-regulatory guidance, the Department could require that grantees understand (through surveys, interviews, and focus groups) and respond to student interest; that they use active learning methodologies; and that they demonstrate an understanding of, and a response to, students' cultural backgrounds in their proposed programming. Grantees should also be required to demonstrate that their proposed staffing patterns pay attention to issues of representation—that is, that program participants will have plentiful opportunities to see themselves represented in the staff of their 21st CCLC program.

Recommendation #6: Maximize the potential of summer programs. While the legislative intent of the 21st CCLC policy includes summer sessions as an inherent part of its purview, the U. S. Department of Education's most recent data (2020, p. 10) indicates that funded programs currently serve fewer than one quarter the number of students during summer that they reach during the school year (297,383 v. 1,367,012). Given the recent research relating to the cumulative and disproportionate nature of summer learning loss and its contribution to achievement disparities (Atteberry & McEachin, 2021), all 21st CCLC-funded programs should be encouraged to offer well-balanced and high-quality programs consistent with the growing consensus on effective summer programs (McCombs et al., 2020). Grantees willing and able to provide enriching summer programs should be compensated appropriately. (Currently some states set a maximum award per grantee, meaning that programs must choose between afterschool and summer options, or to serve limited numbers of students during both time periods.)

Recommendation #7: Build the capacity of state departments of education to understand and support best practices in afterschool and summer enrichment. The 2002 decision by the U. S. Department of Education to shift responsibility for the 21st CCLC program from the federal to the state level was not accompanied by any commensurate effort to build the capacity of state administrators to take on their new tasks. Some states, such as California, hired new and knowledgeable staff. Others, such as New

York, assigned the program to their current team of K-12 program administrators—who, by their own admission, knew little or nothing about afterschool or summer programs. This expertise gap continues to be felt in states across the country as generalist administrators struggle to translate their knowledge of school-based interventions to the out-of-school-time environment. The U. S. Department of Education administers an allocation of national program funds that could be used for such a targeted capacity-building effort. In addition, the Department should assess the workload it has assigned to the states. The amount of the seven percent set-aside appears to be arbitrary: What is the basis for the chosen percentage? Is it adequate, given the requirements? Is the funding being well spent by the state departments of education? How, if at all, are states being held accountable for the expenditure of these funds? This last question is important because many states receive large allocations for program administration, based on the size of their overall 21st CCLC funding (which, in turn, is based on the USDOE's Title I formula). For example, California receives more than $10 million for administering the 21st CCLC program ($148, 826,873 X .07) and New York receives $6,540,224 ($93, 431,769 X .07). Finally, the federal government should require states to hire 21st CCLC program administrators who can demonstrate strong knowledge of out-of-school-time issues and to establish statewide advisory boards that can bring additional expertise.

Recommendation #8: Invest in studies of the *long-term* impact of young people's participation in 21st CCLC programs. There is reason to believe that young people's regular participation in high quality out-of-school-time programs is associated with policy-relevant long-term benefits. For example, a longitudinal study of the LA's BEST program—a high quality citywide initiative in Los Angeles targeted at elementary-age students, grades two through five—found that regular program attendance in elementary school was associated with higher rates of high school graduation (La Torre et al., 2019). To date, no such research has been conducted on 21st CCLC programs, although at least one early study showed positive short-term (two-year) results of 21st CCLC programs that had been nominated by the afterschool field as “best practice” sites (Vandell et al., 2007). The policy relevance of long-term studies is clear, as has been demonstrated by research documenting the cost-effectiveness of increased educational spending that resulted from school finance reforms (Jackson et al., 2016). Increased high school graduation rates offer clear economic benefits sought by policymakers and citizens alike. A federally funded evaluation of the long-term effects of students’ participation in high quality 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs has the potential to yield a positive return on whatever investment of public dollars is made. These gains can build, as well, on prior federal efforts such as the 26-year NICHD longitudinal study cited earlier.

The RAND study cited above posited the need for “a different, longitudinal approach to investigating and understanding OST programs’ contributions to youth development.” The authors noted that “It might be that a combination of experiences over a course of years contributes more to youth development, academic attainment, and life success than does one individual program” (McCombs, Whitaker, & Yoo, 2017, p. 16). This observation—which transcends but could incorporate 21st CCLC—is consistent with, and a way to operationalize, Bronfenbrenner’s ideas about the central role of “proximal processes” in young people’s development and about OST programs as “engines of development” (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Recommendation #9: Hold grantees accountable for both program quality and fiscal responsibility. Several thought leaders noted that federal and state accountability measures tend to focus far more on fiscal issues than on program quality. For example, they cited recent federal attention to, even preoccupation with, the issue of how to deal with program fees (e.g., if parents pay program fees, should these revenues be deducted from grant awards?). While there is need for fiscal accountability in the 21st CCLC policy and program, that factor should be balanced with a predominant emphasis on program quality. Both are needed. On the fiscal side, grantees should not be allowed to use 21st CCLC funds to supplant existing expenditures. There is evidence (Holstead et al., 2015) that some grantees are using 21st CCLC funding for such school-related purposes as credit recovery. This gives the appearance of supplanting existing expenditures and would seem to be a violation of long-standing federal policy that prohibits the use of new federal funds to replace current local expenditures. Practices such as credit recovery in high schools would appear to operate outside both the spirit and the letter of the 21st CCLC policy and program. On the program quality side, grantees should be required to use and report on a standardized and validated measure of program quality, such as the Youth Program Quality Assessment or one of several instruments created by state afterschool networks (such as the NYSAN Quality Self-Assessment). Approaching accountability in a more balanced way would send a strong signal to current and potential grantees about the central role of program quality in achieving positive outcomes for students and their families. The new 21st CCLC national evaluation's focus on assessing the impact of a continuous quality improvement system (U. S. Department of Education, 2022b) appears to be a major step in this direction.

Recommendation #10: Continue the policy's focus on students in low-income and low-performing schools, but fully fund the program so that all eligible students can be served. In her April 30, 2019 testimony to the United States Congress, Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant observed: "The nation's current federal investment in afterschool is modest, but crucial to families and communities, providing afterschool to 1.7 million children. But the investment is nowhere near what it should be if we are to make sure every child who needs an afterschool program has one. For every child now in an afterschool program, two more are waiting to get in" (Afterschool Alliance, 2019). Since that time, primarily as a result of COVID, unmet demand for afterschool programs has "skyrocketed," according to the Afterschool Alliance. A new study commissioned by the Alliance and conducted by Edge Research found that families of 24.6 million children, more than ever before, were unable to access a program. Many reported that cost was a barrier. This study cited key equity considerations, noting that parents of 58 percent of Black, 55 percent of Latinx, and 46 percent of white children would enroll their child in afterschool programs if they could. Based on this research, the Alliance now estimates that for every child now enrolled in an afterschool program, three more are waiting to get in (Afterschool Alliance, 2020). In her most recent Congressional testimony, Grant urged the House Appropriations Committee to boost this year's 21st CCLC funding by $500 million (Afterschool Alliance, May 26, 2022).

Evidence marshaled by Harvard University Professor Robert Putnam (2015) highlights the importance of the non-school hours in contributing to the "opportunity gap" between upper- and lower-income children. Putnam documents the fact that, while parents in both sets of circumstances are spending more than in the past on their children's out-of-school learning, the rate of increased spending is far greater among more affluent families. Full or greatly increased funding of the 21st CCLC program could substantially address this disparity.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Introduction

Out-of-school-time learning represents a hidden opportunity in the quest for educational equity in America. Most educational research focuses on within-school factors, to the exclusion of out-of-school influences and experiences, despite a plethora of evidence that documents the importance of non-school factors in promoting or hindering students' success. This study seeks to redress this balance by focusing on the country's largest out-of-school-time education policy and funding stream, the federal government's 21st Century Community Learning Centers. In addition, the choice of this subject advances a focus on educational equity, since the 21st CCLC policy and funding intentionally target students that attend high-poverty and low-performing schools.

Theoretical Overview

This study employs contemporary developmental theory, with particular attention directed at child and adolescent development. The dissertation's title references Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and his call to pay concerted attention to "proximal processes" (intentional and regular experiences that help to shape individual growth) that can serve as "engines of development." Recent advances in neuroscience, epigenetics, developmental systems theory, and cultural-historical analysis have built on the work of Bronfenbrenner and others in outlining key principles of contemporary developmental theory that carry direct implications for learning in and out of school.

Through the efforts of a consortium of well-regarded national education organizations, the Science of Learning and Development (SoLD) initiative has synthesized a complex body of knowledge and articulated five key areas of broad consensus: (1) that human development depends upon the ongoing, reciprocal relations between individuals' genetics, biology, relationships, and cultural and contextual influences; (2) that each individual's development is a dynamic progression over time; (3)

that the human relationship is a primary process through which biological and contextual factors mutually reinforce each other; (4) that, while all children are vulnerable to risks and adversities, micro- and macro-ecologies provide assets that foster resilience and accelerate healthy development and learning; (5) that students are active agents in their own learning, as multiple neural, relational, experiential, and contextual processes converge to produce their unique developmental range and performance (Science of Learning and Development, 2020). These principles provide important theoretical grounding for federal education policy, including the policy undergirding the 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

Methods and Findings Overview

This qualitative study seeks to offer a set of research-based recommendations designed to strengthen the federal 21st CCLC policy. The research approach is divided into two phases: (1) a preliminary assessment, based on an extensive review of U. S. government documents relating to the policy as well as a review of professional literature on out-of-school-time programs; and (2) a series of interviews with 15 thought leaders in the out-of-school-time field, with a focus on individuals who could offer either historical or current analytical perspectives on the underlying policy and resulting programs. The synthesis of findings drawn from these two phases culminates in a set of ten recommendations for the U. S. Department of Education and other key audiences to consider when addressing the policy's shortcomings and building on its strengths.

Limitations

This qualitative study employs a document review and thought leader interviews as its primary analytic methods. These choices have resulted in several key limitations. While the researcher tried to be critical in assessing the thoroughness and accuracy of reviewed government documents, these materials present their own strictures, in that they are products of a highly politicized context. The researcher's decision to focus on federal documents precluded a broad and growing body of additional relevant possibilities, including evaluations of 21st CCLC programs commissioned by the states. A rigorous examination and synthesis of these evaluations represents a possible direction for future research, as discussed in the section below. Another precluded body of work is represented by the scores of doctoral dissertations that have evaluated individual 21st CCLC programs. While a handful of these were included in the literature review, selected because they had been published in peer-reviewed journals, many of those not reviewed may have been useful in shedding light on this study's four research questions

Similarly, the interview portion of this study carries several limitations, including the relatively small number of interviewees (15). As noted in the Methodology section, creating a purposeful sample involves making a series of choices based on clear criteria (Maxwell, 2005). The decision to focus on a broad cross-section of the field—specifically, individuals with experience in developing the federal policy in question, those with experience administering the federal policy, and local program operators directly affected by the policy—necessitated eliminating other key informants whose ideas might have added value to the study. In addition, the study was limited by the fact that several invited interviewees declined to participate. This group included a recent U. S. Secretary of Education, a midwestern state 21st CCLC administrator, and one of the lead investigators of the first federally commissioned evaluation of the 21st CCLC program. Their input may conceivably have altered the nature and scope of the study's findings.

The study's focus on federal policy might have led some researchers to decide to review transcripts of Congressional reauthorization hearings that involved 21st CCLC. The omission of these data sources may have limited the study's ability to discern relevant political lessons at key points during the history of the policy and program.

Finally, the research is grounded in the understanding that the U. S. government wants the 21st CCLC policy and resulting programs to employ strategies rooted in scientifically based research. While official statements from the government support this understanding, it is possible that—in the end—ideology and political considerations will turn out to be a more salient factor in policy formulation than scientifically based research.

Implications

This policy analysis has strong potential for real-world impact. It provides a rigorous, critical analysis of findings presented in the government's own reports and engages key subject-matter experts in responding to targeted questions germane to policy improvement. While numerous studies of 21st CCLC programs exist, few of them focus on the underlying policy. The present study offers an opportunity to address this glaring policy gap. In addition, the timing of the release of the proposed research/policy analysis may be propitious. Due to delays necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and to the recent provision of recovery funding available through the American Rescue Plan Act, experts predict that there will be no concerted effort to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, including the 21st CCLC program, for at least two years, or until 2024 at the earliest.

The Congressional reauthorization process offers the single best opportunity to make changes in the current 21st CCLC policy and resulting programs. Given the focus of my research, I plan to disseminate the study's findings to key policy actors, including U.S. Department of Education officials, the staff and members of relevant Congressional committees, and leaders of afterschool and education advocacy organizations (e.g., Afterschool Alliance, National After School Association, National Institute on Out-of-School Time, Coalition for Community Schools, National Center for Community Schools, Learning Policy Institute, Center for American Progress). I have already initiated outreach to several of these groups, including the U. S. Department of Education and the Afterschool Alliance, both of which have expressed interest in the study's findings. In addition, I will seek to publish work adapted from this dissertation in various professional journals, such as *Education Week*, *After School Matters*, *American Educational Research Journal*, and *Review of Educational Research*. These publications offer relevance across the different aspects of the field that I seek to influence, including policy and practice.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study raises several sets of questions that could be addressed by future research. First, as indicated above, there is potential value in examining and synthesizing the findings of the state evaluations of 21st CCLC programs, several of which are cited in recent studies of out-of-school-time programs (McCombs, Whitaker, & Yoo, 2017) and in the Government Accountability Office report submitted to the U. S. Department of Education at the request of the U. S. Congress (U. S. Government Accountability Office, 2017). Several nationally recognized evaluation firms have been commissioned to conduct these studies—the American Institutes for Research and the Education Development Center, among others. Such statewide evaluations can provide valuable insights on best practices in various areas of need identified in the present study. These include building authentic school-community partnerships, increasing student engagement, implementing effective participant recruitment and retention strategies, and engaging families more fully in their children's education. In addition, state evaluations can provide specific guidance about the varied contexts in which 21st CCLC programs operate, including urban, rural, and suburban settings.

Another 21st CCLC topic that bears further investigation is the state administration of the program. One valuable approach would be to compare the capacity-building strategies used by more and less effective states (as determined by the state evaluations). Another possible line of inquiry is an analysis of the 50 states' Requests for Proposals, an issue flagged as needing attention in the Government Accountability Office report. This report presented survey results indicating that many of the states were not adhering to best grantmaking practices in establishing their criteria for 21st CCLC programs applying for funding in their states (U. S. Government Accountability Office, 2017).

A critical examination of the role of state afterschool networks in supporting quality implementation of 21st CCLC programs is another promising avenue of investigation. Several of the thought leaders interviewed for this study called attention to the opportunity, including one respondent who opined that "states would be greatly improved if they would treat their afterschool network as a true implementation partner."

Beyond the specifics of the 21st CCLC policy and program, future research could shed light on salient issues in the out-of-school-time field identified in the literature review and thought leader interviews. Chief among these issues is the effect of COVID on the after-school workforce, an issue parallel to—but under-investigated in relationship to—the current teacher shortage. Anecdotal evidence on this issue abounds, with stories reported in *Youth Today* and other OST communication vehicles. A systemic study of the problem appears to be warranted. One thought leader offered firsthand testimony that her organization's afterschool staff were being actively recruited for employment by her local school district while another observed that "I actually worried, at the beginning of the pandemic, that the field would disappear altogether."

Additional ideas for future research were suggested in two other thought leader interviews: a study comparing the relative advantages of federal vs. state administration of federal grants programs; and a study comparing the quality of 21st CCLC programs run by schools vs. community-based organizations.

Finally, given the centrality of educational equity to the present study as well as to the entire field of K-12 education, future research on out-of-school-time programs should continue and expand explorations of their equity agendas. To what extent are these programs, and their underlying policies, effective in providing low-income students with the resources known to bolster learning and development?

Final Thoughts

The inspiration for this dissertation is grounded in a real-world experience dating back to 2002, the year that the federal No Child Left Behind policy overwhelmed the K-12 enterprise at all levels. I was working as a program administrator for a large non-profit organization that operated several 21st CCLC programs in low-income schools located in the Washington Heights and South Bronx neighborhoods of New York City. I witnessed the pernicious effects of the new Supplemental Education Services component of NCLB, which required many students to drop out of high-quality afterschool enrichment programs in order to participate in the new SES after-school tutoring efforts. Many of these new initiatives were operated by for-profit organizations that had just entered the K-12 tutoring market, including Kaplan and Princeton Review. My most vivid memory about this set of events involved receiving reports about middle-school students crying as they were pulled out of their thriving and engaging enrichment programs and sent to daily SES tutoring. My equity antennae went on alert, and I determined to find out what sort of public policies were responsible for such injustices.

This experience led me to several questions that have haunted me for years, particularly the question “Should only rich children have access to enrichment?” My own view is that the three ideals espoused by Allen and Reich (2013)—education, justice, and democracy—can intersect in policy venues such as the 21st CCLC program, a flawed but eminently fixable federal endeavor. I believe that by clearly defining the term *enrichment* in the legislation and non-regulatory guidance, in accordance with the four decades of theoretical and empirical research conducted by Joseph Renzulli and his colleagues, the program will be immeasurably strengthened. Such a change would provide explicit guidance to potential grantees about the characteristics and benefits of this evidence-based approach to out-of-school-time learning—benefits that would almost surely reverse the low participation rates that currently undermine the program’s effectiveness. I can envision the radical improvements that could occur once the 21st Century Community Learning Center programs across the country are re-designed to promote young people’s enjoyment, engagement, and enthusiasm—rather than state standards, test preparation, and rote learning. A thoughtful and evidence-based reconsideration of this policy offers the potential to benefit the country’s highest-need students by providing more of what affluent parents and communities take for granted every day.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (Out-of-School-Time Education Thought Leaders)

Hello,

Thank you again for your interest in my study and for agreeing to be interviewed as part of this study. The interview will contribute to research I am conducting for my dissertation (to earn my doctoral degree.) **My research is a policy analysis of the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers policy and is focused on strategies for strengthening the current policy and resulting programs.**

The interview will last about 90 minutes. You may say that you'd rather not answer a question if you don't want to. You may also choose to pause or stop your participation at any time. If you should say something that you consider especially sensitive and that you would not want to be in a report, please feel free to note that or to signal me. As indicated in the letter of consent, I will treat your interview as strictly confidential. For example, I will not use your name in any written report. I will use generic descriptions of key informants, all of whom are thought leaders in some aspect of the out-of-school-time education field.

With your permission, I would like to video record this interview in order to have a more complete record of our conversation. Would that be acceptable to you? If at any time you are uncomfortable with what's being recorded, you can ask me to stop the recording, you can turn off your camera, or you can leave the video conversation.

___ yes   ____no

Before we get started, is there anything more I can tell you about the purpose of this research?

Questions:

1. *Purpose of out-of-school-time programming:* What is the purpose of out-of-school-time programs? Do these purposes vary from group to group (e.g., low-income v. more affluent students? Students of color v. white students? Urban v. rural students)? Can OST programs ameliorate some of the inequities present in formal learning? Given the purpose of out-of-school-time programming, what are plausible expected outcomes of these programs and what are the best ways to measure program effectiveness?

2. *Participation levels:* What accounts for the low levels of student participation (less than 30 days annually) among nearly half of the 21st CCLC program participants? What can be done to correct this problem?

3. *Partnerships between schools and community resources:* How important are partnerships between schools and community resources in contributing to the effectiveness of 21st CCLC programs? If they are important, how can this aspect of the policy be strengthened?

4. *Balancing national guidance with local responsiveness:* How can federal out-of-school-time policy provide clear evidence-based guidelines and parameters while also allowing for flexibility in grantees' responses to local needs and contexts?

5. *State administration:* What strategies do OST thought leaders recommend for strengthening the state administration of the federal 21st CCLC policy and program? Among the subset of state administrator thought leaders, do they want more guidance, more flexibility, or something else?

6. *Impact of COVID:* How do the recent COVID pandemic and the resulting disruptions in formal education affect students' out-of-school-time learning? How does the pandemic affect the political decision-making about the 21st CCLC policy and program?

7. *Final Question:* Is there anything I should have asked you but did not?

Appendix B: Coding Manual

Code	Code Definition	Subcode	Subcode Definition
Purpose(s)	What thought leaders identify as the most important purpose(s) of out-of-school-time programming	Purpose(s) Subcodes: --Academic --Affective --Family Support/Child Care --Instrumental	Academic: Thought leaders' ideas about how out-of-school-time programs can promote students' academic success Affective: Thought leaders' ideas about how out-of-school-time programs can promote students' social and emotional development Family Support/Child Care: Thought leaders' ideas about how out-of-school programs can support families by providing childcare and other benefits (e.g., homework help) Instrumental: Thought leaders' ideas about broad social purposes of out-of-school-time programs (e.g., promoting children's safety in the non-school hours, reducing juvenile crime)
Outcomes	How thought leaders view plausible expected outcomes of out-of-school-time programs	Outcomes Subcodes: --Tailored v. generic --Measurement issues	Tailored v. generic: How thought leaders view the specificity needed in federal policy about program outcomes Measurement issues: What thought leaders identify as key measurement issues related to out-of-school-time programs
Participation	How thought leaders view current data about participation patterns	Participation Subcodes: --Data collection issues --Program issues --Age differences	Data collection issues: What thought leaders identify as data collection issues, including problems in the way data are currently collected in 21st CCLC programs Program issues: What thought leaders identify

			as programmatic reasons for high or low participation rates in 21st CCLC programs Age differences: How thought leaders think age differences (e.g., elementary age vs. secondary age) should and do affect participation rates in 21st CCLC programs
Partnerships	How thought leaders view the importance of partnerships in making 21st CCLC programs more effective	Partnerships Subcodes: --Importance of --Strategies for strengthening	Importance of: What thought leaders say about the importance of school-community partnerships in making 21st CCLC programs effective (e.g., specific contributions partners can make and how they add value to schools' contributions) Strategies for strengthening: What thought leaders describe as specific strategies for strengthening school-community partnerships in 21st CCLC programs
Federal Policy and Guidance	What thought leaders view as needed changes in federal policy and guidance about 21st CCLC program	Federal Policy/Guidance Subcodes: --Authorizing legislation --Non-regulatory guidance --Other policies	Authorizing legislation: What changes thought leaders recommend to strengthen the 21st CCLC authorizing legislation Non-reg. guidance: What changes thought leaders recommend to strengthen the 21st CCLC non-regulatory guidance Other policies: What changes thought leaders recommend to strengthen other policies related to the 21st CCLC program
USDOE Role	What thought leaders view as needed changes in the USDOE's role as overall program leader/administrator		
State Administration	How thought leaders think the state		

	administration of 21st CCLC could be strengthened		
Local Issues/Perspectives	What thought leaders articulate about local issues in relation to 21st CCLC policy and/or programs		
Enrichment	How thought leaders define and operationalize enrichment, a central tenet of 21st CCLC policy and programs		
Equity/Opportunity	How thought leaders view the role of 21st CCLC policies and programs as promoting equity and increasing opportunities for low-income youth		
COVID	How thought leaders think the pandemic will affect out-of-school-time policies, programs, and funding	COVID Subcodes: Post-COVID opportunities Post-COVID challenges	Post-COVID opportunities: How thought leaders view the opportunities for out-of-school-time programs in the post-COVID environment Post-COVID challenges: How thought leaders view the challenges for out-of-school-time programs in the post-COVID environment

References

Adams-Wiggins, K. R. & Taylor-Garcia, D. V. (2020). The Manichean division in children's experience: Developmental psychology in an anti-black work. *Theory & Psychology,* 30 (4), 485-506.

Afterschool Alliance. (no date a). *Five things to know about 21st Century Community Learning Center attendance numbers.* Unpublished brief.

Afterschool Alliance. (no date b). *America for afterschool.* http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/National_Parent_Poll_OnePager_final.pdf

Afterschool Alliance (2014, October). *America after 3PM: Afterschool programs in demand.* http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM

Afterschool Alliance. (2019, April 30). *House subcommittee's vote to increase funding 'reflects the strong, bipartisan national consensus that afterschool programs work'.* Statement by Jodi Grant, Executive Director, Afterschool Alliance, in press release retrieved from http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/press_archives/LHHS-Subcomm-Vote_043019.pdf

Afterschool Alliance. (2020, December 8). *Unmet demand for afterschool programs reaches all-time high: New survey identifies cost and access as barriers that prevent participation, even as satisfaction and support for afterschool programs grows.* Washington, DC: Author.

Afterschool Alliance. (2022, March 14). *Congress increases funding for afterschool and summer programs.* Washington, DC: Author.

Afterschool Alliance. (2022, April). *America after 3PM: Promoting healthy futures: Afterschool provides the supports parents want for children's well-being.* Washington, DC: Author.

Afterschool Alliance. (2022, May 26). *Public witness testimony of Jodi Grant, submitted to U.S. House Committee on Appropriations.* Washington, DC: Author.

Allen, D. & Reich, R. (Eds.). (2013). *Education, justice, and democracy.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

American Institutes for Research. (2020). The potential of science of learning and development (SoLD) to transform education systems. https://www.air.org/project/potential-science-learning-and-development-sold-transform-education-systems

Anthony, K. & Morra, J. (2016, Fall). Creating holistic partnerships between school and afterschool. *Afterschool Matters,* 24, 33-42.

Atteberry, A. & McEachin, A. (2021). School's out: The role of summers in understanding achievement disparities. *American Educational Research Journal,* 58 (2), 239-282.

Baldridge, B. J. (2019). *Reclaiming community: Race and the uncertain future of youth work.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Biddell, T. (2020). Philosophical background to integrative theories of human development. In Mascolo, M. F. & Biddell, T., (Eds.), *Handbook of integrative developmental science*. New York: Routledge.

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2015). The structure of racism in color-blind, “post-racial” America. *American Behavioral Scientist,* 59 (11), 1358-1376.

Boykin, A. W. & Noguera, P. (2011). C*reating the opportunity to learn: Moving from research to practice to close the achievement gap.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. In *International encyclopedia of education,* Vol. 3, 2nd Ed. Oxford: Elsevier. Reprinted in: Gauvain, M. & Cole, M. (Eds.) *Readings on the development of children,* 2nd Ed. (1993), 37-43. New York: Freeman.

Burke, L., Schwalbach, J., & Butcher, J. (December 20, 2018). *Funding education savings accounts for military families by repurposing the ‘21st Century Community Learning Centers’ program.* Downloaded from https://www.heritage.org/education/report/funding-education-savings-accounts-military-families-reppurposng-the-21st-century

Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. (1992). *A matter of time: Risk and opportunity in the nonschool hours.* New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Carter, P. & Welner, K. (2013). *Closing the opportunity gap: What America must do to give every child an even chance.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. (2021). Results: A 26-year study shows early care and afterschool are crucial, and benefits last. *Mott News.* Downloaded from https://mott.org/new/articles/results-a-26-year-study-shows-early-care-and-afterschool-are-crucial-and-benefits-last/

Clark, R. M. (1988). *Critical factors in why disadvantaged students succeed or fail in school.* Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development.

Coleman, J., Campbell, E., Hobson, C., McPartland, J., Mood, A., Weinfeld, F., & York, R. (1966). *Equality of educational opportunity*. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EDO12275.pdf

Cooper, H., Nye, B., Charlton, K., Lindsay, J., & Greathouse, S. (1996). The effects of summer vacation on achievement test scores: A narrative and meta-analytic review. *Review of Educational Research,* 66 (3), 227-268.

Costall, A. (2001). Darwin, ecological psychology, and the principle of animal-environmental mutuality. *Psyke & Iagos,* 22 (2), 473-484.

Council for a Strong America. (2019, October). *From risk to opportunity: Afterschool programs keep kids safe when juvenile crime peaks.* Washington, DC: Author.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience.* New York: HarperCollins.

Dar-Nimrod, I. & Heine, S. J. (2011). Genetic essentialism: On the deceptive determinism of DNA. *Psychological Bulletin*, 137 (5), 800-818.

Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health. (no date) *Devereux student strengths assessment: Scales and associated items.* https://centerforresilientchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/DESSA-Scales-and-associated-items-rev-07-2016.pdf

Duffett, A. & Johnson, J. (2004). *All work and no play? Listening to what KIDS and PARENTS really want from out-of-school time.* New York, NY: The Wallace Foundation.

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., & Pachan, M. (2010). *A meta-analysis of after-school programs that seek to promote personal and social skills in children and adolescents.* American Journal of Community Psychology 45: 294-309. http://www.flume.com.br/pdf/Durlak_A_meta-analysis of_after_school.pdf.

Eccles, J. S. (1999). The development of children ages 6 to 14. *The Future of Children*, *9* (2), 30–44.

Eccles, J., & Gootman, J. A. (Eds.). (2002). *Community programs to promote youth development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Elliott, S. & Reid, M. (2019). Low-income black mothers parenting adolescents in the mass incarceration era: The long reach of criminalization. *American Sociological Review,* 84 (2), 197-219.

Erikson, E. H. (1963). *Childhood and society* (2nd ed.). New York: Norton.

Every Hour Counts. *Measurement framework: How to measure success in expanded learning systems.* (2014). New York: Author.

Fox, J. A. & Newman, S. A. (1997). *After-school crime or after-school programs: Tuning in to the prime time for violent juvenile crime and implications for national policy: A report to the United States attorney general.* Washington, DC: Fight Crime: Invest in Kids.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum.

Fullan, M. & Boyle, A. (2014). *Big-city reforms: Lessons from New York, Toronto, and London*. New York: Teachers College Press (a joint publication with the Ontario Principals' Council).

Gasper, P. (2018). The return of scientific racism. *International Socialist Review*, Issue #110. Downloaded from https://isreview.org/issue/110/return-scientific-racism

Goodson, A. (2006). *Bridging institutions and social policy: Philanthropic foundations and the development of federal funding for afterschool programs*. Doctoral dissertation, Boston College.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* 105-117. London: Sage.

Gutiérrez, K., Cortes, K., Cortez, A., DiGiacomo, D., Higgs, J., Johnson, P., Lizzáraga, Mendoza, E., Tien, J., & Vakil, S. (2017). Replacing representation with imagination: Finding ingenuity in everyday practices. *Review of Research in Education,* 41, 30-60.

Hallenbeck, A. & Fleming, D. (2011, Spring). Implementing a goal-setting intervention in an afterschool program. *Afterschool Matters*, 13, 38-48.

Halpern, R. (2006). *Critical issues in after-school programming.* Chicago, IL: Erikson Institute.

Hanushek, E. A. (2016). What matters for student achievement: Updating Coleman on the influence of families and schools. *Education Next,* 16 (2). https://educationnext.org/what-matters-for-student-achievement/

Harvard Family Research Project. (2002). Special report on the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program national evaluation. *Evaluation Exchange*, 9 (1), 11-15.

Harvard Family Research Project. (2008). After school programs in the 21st century: Their potential and what it takes to achieve it. *Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-school Time Evaluation,* 10, 1-12.

Heath, R. D., Anderson, C., Turner, A. C., & Payne, C. M. (2018). Extracurricular activities and disadvantaged youth: A complicated—but promising—story. *Urban Education,* 1-35, https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085918805797

Hofferth, S. L. & Sandberg, J. F. (2001, May). How American children spend their time. *Journal of Marriage and Family,* 63, 295-308.

Holstead, J., Hightower King, M., & Miller, Al. (2015, Spring). Research-based practices in afterschool programs for high school youth. *Afterschool Matters,* 21, 38-45.

Jackson, C., Johnson, R., & Persico, C. (2015, October). The effects of school spending on educational and economic outcomes: Evidence from school finance reforms. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 131 (1), 157-218. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjv036

James-Burdumy, S., Dynarski, M., Moore, M., Deke, J., Mansfield, W., & Pistorino, C. (2005). *When schools stay open late: The national evaluation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program—Final Report.* Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

Larson, R., Eccles, J., & Gootman, J. A. (2004, April). Features of positive developmental settings. *Prevention Researcher*, *11*(2), 8-13.

La Torre, D., Leon, S., Wang, J., & Cai, L. (January 2019). *Long-term outcome study: A longitudinal study of LA's BEST students' persistence and graduation rates.* Los Angeles: UCLA National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing.

Lauer, P. A., Akiba, M., Wilkerson, S. B., Apthorp, H. S., Snow, D., & Martin-Glenn, M. L. (2006). Out-of-school-time programs: A meta-analysis of effects for at-risk students. *Review of Educational Research,* 76 (2), 275-313.

Lee, C. (2008). The centrality of culture to the scientific study of learning and development: How an ecological framework in education research facilitates civic responsibility. 2008 Wallace Foundation Distinguished Lecture. *Educational Researcher*, 37 (5), 267-279.

Lickliter, R. (2008). Developmental dynamics: The new view from the life sciences. In Fogel, A., King, B. J., & Shanker, S. G. (Eds.), *Human development in the twenty-first century: Visionary ideas from systems scientists,* 11-17. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J., & Lam, L. (2017). *Community schools as an effective school improvement strategy: A review of the evidence.* Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

Markus, H. R. (2008). Pride, prejudice, and ambivalence: Toward a unified theory of race and ethnicity. *American Psychologist*, 63 (8), 651-670.

McCombs, J., Whitaker, A., & Yoo, P. (2017). *The value of out-of-school time programs.* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

McCombs, J. S., Augustine, C. H., Pane, J. F., & Schweig, J. (2020). *Every summer counts: A longitudinal analysis of outcomes from the national summer learning project.* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

McLaughlin, M. (2000). *Community counts: How youth organizations matter for youth development*. Washington, DC: Public Education Network.

Mintz, S. (2017). Why history matters: Placing infant and child development in historical perspective. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology,* 14 (6), 647-658.

Moore*, D. S. (2013). Current thinking about nature and nurture.* In Kampourakis, K. (Ed.), *The philosophy of biology: A companion for educators.* New York: Springer.

Muhlhausen, D. B. (2017, March 17). Trump's responsible decision to end an after-school program that harms children. *Daily Signal.* Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation.

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2019). *The promise of adolescence: Realizing opportunity for all youth.* Washington, DC: The National Academies Press*.*

National Center for Education Statistics. (2020, September). *Characteristics of public and private elementary and secondary school teachers in the United States: Results from the 2017-18 national teacher and principal survey.* Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Education.

Neild., R. C., Wilson, S. J., & McClanahan, W. (2019). *Afterschool programs: A review of the evidence under the Every Student Succeeds Act.* Philadelphia: Research for Action.

Ngo, B., Lewis, C., & Maloney Leaf, B. (2017). Fostering sociopolitical consciousness with minoritized youth: Insights From community-based arts programs. *Review of Research in Education*, *41*, 358–380.

Overton, W. (2013). A new paradigm for developmental science: Relationism and relational-development systems*. Applied Developmental Science, 17 (2), 94-107.*

Paluta, L. M., Lower, L., Anderson-Butcher, D., Gibson, A., & Iachini, A. L. (2016, January). Examining the quality of 21st century community learning center after-school programs: Current practices and their relationship to outcomes. *Children & Schools*, 38 (1), 49-56.

Paris, D. & Alim, H. S. (Eds.) (2017). *C*ulturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Peterson, E. (March 12, 2021). American Rescue Plan: How will the funds flows? What do I need to know? *Policy Brief.* Washington, DC: Afterschool Alliance.

Peterson, T.K. (Ed.) (2013). *Expanding minds and opportunities: Leveraging the power of afterschool and summer learning for student success.* Washington, DC: Collaborative Communications Group.

Phillips, S. F. (2010, September). Honoring 15 years of the 21st century community learning centers program. *Afterschool Matters,* 12, 28-36.

Philp, K. D. & Gill, M. G. (2020). Reframing after-school programs as developing youth interest, identity, and social capital. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences,* https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732219892647

Putnam, R. D. (2015). *Our kids: The American dream in crisis.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

Quinn, D. M. & Polikoff, M. (2017, September 14). *Summer learning loss: What is it, and what can we do about it?* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution. Downloaded from https://www.brookings.edu/research/summer-learning-loss-what-is-it-and what-can-we-do-about-it/

Racine, T.P., & Carpendale, J.I.M. (2007). The role of shared practice in joint attention. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology,* 25 (1), 3-25.

Renzulli Center for Creativity, Gifted Education, and Talent Development. (no date). *Schoolwide enrichment model (SEM).* https://gifted.uconn.edu/schoolwide-enrichment-model/

Renzulli, J. S. (no date). *Lessons learned from playground pedagogy.* Retrieved from https://gifted.uconn.edu/schoolwide-enrichment-model/playpeda/

Renzulli, J. S. (2013). The achievement gap and the education conspiracy against low income children. International Journal for Talent and Creativity, I (1), 45-55.

Renzulli, J. S. & Reis, S. M. (2014). *The schoolwide enrichment model: A how-to guide for talent development* (3rd ed.). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

Renzulli, J. S., Reis, S. M., & Brigandi, C. (2020). Enrichment theory, research, and practice. In *Critical issues and practices in gifted education: A survey of current research on giftedness and talent development,* Plucker, J. A. & Callahan, C. M. (Eds.), third edition. Sourcebooks, Inc. https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=MAMGEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT262&dq=related:0Th-Y52AW2kJ:scholar.google.com/&ots=BeZfJemmSw&sig=1qoEAbkTYUEhgzKI-tKPFeRQHm8#v=onepage&q&f=false

Richwine, J. (2017, March 21). Yes, cut the after-school program. *National Review.* https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/after-school-program-cuts-21st-century-community-learning-center/

Riser-Kositsky, M. (2020, June 16). Education statistics: Facts about American schools. *Education Week.* Downloaded from *https://www.edweek.org/leadership/education-statistics-facts-about-american-schools/2019/01*

Robinson, G. (2017, March 31). Dear President Trump: Afterschool learning matters, too. *AEIdeas* Blog Post. Downloaded from https://www.aei.org/education/k-12-schooling/dear-president-trump-afterschool-learning-matters-too/

Rogoff, B., Dahl, A., & Callanan, M. (2018). The importance of understanding children's lived experiences. *Developmental Review,* 50, 5-15.

Science of Learning and Development. (2020). *Key findings and implications of the science of learning and development.* Palo Alto, CA: Author.

Science of Learning and Development Alliance. (2022). *Charting a path to COVID recovery for all young people.* Palo Alto, CA: Author.

Shapiro, E. (2021, March 21). 'Always an afterthought': Schools are closed, but not child care centers. *The New York Times,* p. 4.

Shields, S. A. & Bhatia, S. (2009). Darwin on race, gender, and culture. *American Psychologist,* 64 (2), 111-119.

Shotter, J. (2012). Ontological social constructionism in the context of social ecology: The importance of our living bodies. In *Lock, A. & Strong, T. (Eds.), Discursive perspectives in therapeutic practice.* London and New York: Oxford University Press.

Sorell, G.T. & Montgomery, M.J. (2001). Feminist perspectives on Erikson's theory: Their relevance for contemporary identity development research. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research,* I (2), 97-128.

Spencer, J.P., Clearfield, M., Corbetta, D., Ulrich, B., Buchanan, P., & Schöner, G. (2006). Moving toward a grand theory of development: In memory of Esther Thelen. *Child Development,* 77 (6), 1521-1536.

Stetsenko, A. & Ho, P-C. G. (2015). The serious joy and joyful work of play: Children becoming agentive actors in co-authoring themselves and their world through play. *International Journal of Early Childhood,* 47 (2), 221-234.

Stetsenko, A. (2017). Putting the radical notion of equality in the service of disrupting inequality in education: Research findings and conceptual advances on the infinity of human potential. *Review of Research in Education*, *41*, 112–135.

Suitts, S. (2015). *Low income students now a majority in the nation's public schools.* Atlanta, GA: Southern Education Foundation.

Tate, W.F. (2008). "Geography of opportunity": Poverty, place, and educational outcomes. *Educational Researcher,* 37 (7), 397-411.

Tefera, A. & Voulgarides, C. (2016). Is educational policy alleviating or perpetuating the racialization of disabilities? An examination of "big-P" and "little-p" policies. Teachers College Record, 118 (14), 1-24. Retrieved from http://www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentId=21541

Thelen, E. (2005). Dynamic systems theory and the complexity of change. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues,* 15 (2), 255-283.

Tudge, J. H. R., Mokrova, I., Hatfield, B. E., & Karnik, R. B. (2009). Uses and misuses of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 1, 198-210.

United Way of America. (1991). *Investing in children: A strategy to change at-risk lives*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

U. S. Department of Education. (2003, February). *21st Century Community Learning Centers non-regulatory guidance.* Washington, DC.

U. S. Department of Education. (2015). *Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) analytic support for evaluation and program monitoring: An overview of the 21st CCLC performance data: 2013-14 (10th report).* Washington, DC.

U. S. Department of Education. (2016, February 5). *Elementary and secondary education act of 1965, Part B: 21st Century Community Learning Centers*, pp. 233-244. Retrieved from www2.ed.gov/programs/21stcclc/legislation.html

U. S. Department of Education. (2018). *21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) analytic support for evaluation and program monitoring: An overview of the 21st CCLC performance data: 2016-17 (13th report).* Washington, DC.

U. S. Department of Education. (2020). *Overview of the Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) annual performance data: 2018-2019 (15th report).* Washington, DC.

U. S. Department of Education. (2021). *Overview of the Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) overview of the annual performance data: 2019-2020 (16th report).* Washington, DC.

U. S. Department of Education. (2021). *Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers funding status.* Washington, DC. https://www2.ed.gov/print/programs/21stcclc/funding.html

U. S. Department of Education. (2022a). *21APR new GPRA final implementation guide.*

U. S. Department of Education. (2022b). *The effects of a systematic approach to improving quality in afterschool programs: An impact evaluation to inform the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) Program.* Washington, DC. https://ies.ed.gov/nee/projects/evaluation/21cclc.asp

U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. (no date). NICHD study of early child care and youth development series (SECCYD). Washington, DC. Downloaded from: https://dash.nichd.nih.gov/study/412614

U. S. Government Accountability Office (April 2017). *K-12 education: Education needs to improve oversight of its 21st Century program.* GAO Reports to Congressional Committees, GAO-17-400

Vandell, D., Reisner, E., & Pierce, K. (2007, October). *Outcomes linked to high-quality afterschool programs: Longitudinal findings from the study of promising afterschool programs.* Irvine, CA: University of California, Irvine. https://www.purdue.edu/hhs/hdfs/fii/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/s_iafis04c04.pdf

Vandell, D. L., Simpkins, S. D., Pierce, K. M., Brown, B. B., Bolt, D., & Reisner, E. (2020). Afterschool programs, extracurricular activities, and unsupervised time: Are patterns of participation linked to children's academic and social well-being? *Applied Developmental Science,* DOI: 10.1080/10888691.2020.1843460

Weiss, H. (2013). Fifteen years of evaluation of 21st century community learning centers: A driver for program quality and capacity in the field. In Peterson, T. (Ed.) *Expanding minds and opportunities: The power of afterschool and summer learning for student success.* Washington, DC: Collaborative Communication Group.

Weizmann, F. (2004). Type and essence: Prologue to the history of psychology and race. In Winston, A. (ed.), *Defining difference: Race and racism in the history of psychology,* 21-47. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Wynn, J., Richman, H., Rubenstein, R. A., & Littell, J. (1987). *Communities and adolescents: An exploration of reciprocal supports.* Chicago: University of Chicago, Chapin Hall Center for Children. Paper prepared for the William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship.

Yohalem, N. & Wilson-Ahlstrom, A. with Fischer, S. & Shinn, M. (2009, January). *Measuring youth program quality: A guide to assessment tools.* Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment.