Why and How 21st Century Community Learning Centers and Full-Service Community Schools Can Collaborate

This fact sheet was developed by the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) National Technical Assistance Center (NTAC) in collaboration with the Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) program. Its purpose is to help State and local 21st CCLC and FSCS program leaders:

- Understand shared priorities.
- Identify opportunities for — and benefits of — coordination and collaboration.
- Initiate collaboration between 21st CCLC and FSCS programs.

21st CCLC

Program office:
School Support and Accountability

Program type:
Formula grants to SEAs (which administer competitive grants)

Types of projects funded: Community learning centers that provide academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours

Funding cycle: 3, 4, or 5 years

Shared (center)

- ✔ Federally funded
- ✔ Administered by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
- ✔ Support students
- ✔ Engage Families
- ✔ Provide expanded learning/enrichment hours
- ✔ Collaborate/coordinate with schools and communities
- ✔ Seek to sustain key activities beyond current funding cycle

FSCS

Program office:
School Choice and Improvement Programs

Program type:
Discretionary/competitive grants to LEAs, nonprofits, and other public or private organizations and institutions of higher education

Types of projects funded: Development and implementation of schools that integrate resources and supports for students and families, including but not limited to out-of-school time programs.

Funding cycle: 5 years

Both programs are federally funded.

The Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program was created in 1994 when Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). When Congress reauthorized the legislation in 2015 as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), it included the Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) program. In 2024, the administration boosted funding to out-of-school time and FSCS programs, demonstrating a continued conviction in the value of each.

Both programs supplement State and local efforts.

ESSA's "supplement, not supplant" provision applies to both 21st CCLC and FSCS programs. This provision requires that federal funds used for education must supplement, and not replace, other funds from State or local sources. By adhering to this provision, both 21st CCLC and FSCS programs contribute additive benefits to students, families, and community members — rather than replacing services that States or localities would provide on their own.

Both programs connect students to essential community-based supports.

The 21st CCLC and FSCS programs both use the assets of local communities to provide services that help address a broad scope of students' academic and developmental needs. By supporting in- and out-of-school services that help students learn and grow, these federal grant programs often serve as central organizing forces for States, districts, and schools. Personnel working directly or indirectly with each program often work toward similar ends to cultivate positive relationships between schools and the community, create safe learning environments, and provide high-quality, career-connected learning opportunities.

Both programs serve students and families with similar needs.

21st CCLC Program	FSCS Program
The 21st CCLC program provides funding for more than 10,500 community learning centers around the country. These programs connect students with academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours, particularly students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools.	The FSCS program provides support for the planning, implementation, and operation of full-service community schools that improve the coordination, integration, accessibility, and effectiveness of services for children and families, particularly for children attending high-poverty schools, including high-poverty rural schools.
The 21st CCLC programs help students meet State and local standards in core academic subjects, such as reading and math, and offer enrichment activities designed to complement and reinforce the regular academic programs. These programs also engage participating students' families.	Full-service community schools participate in a community-based effort to coordinate and integrate educational, developmental, family, health, and other comprehensive services through community-based organizations and public and private partnerships.

21st CCLC Program	FSCS Program
Priorities are established in the legislation and described in the U.S. Department of Education's non-regulatory guidance. State educational agencies may include other priorities in their subgrant competitions (e.g., creating a welcoming, safe environment; supporting family engagement and providing family supports; establishing mentoring programs).	Federal priorities are guided by four key elements, or pillars, defined in the 2022 and 2023 Notices Inviting Applications as (i) integrated student supports, (ii) expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities, (iii) active family and community engagement, and (iv) collaborative leadership and practices.

The 21st CCLC and FSCS programs provide similar supports for students and families.

| 21st CCLC Program Purpose	Four Pillars of FSCS
Student Supports	
Student Supports: Offer students a broad array of **additional services, programs, and activities designed to reinforce and complement the regular academic program** of participating students. Examples include youth development activities, service learning, nutrition and health education, physical fitness and wellness programs, career and technical programs, and internship or apprenticeship programs.	**Integrated Student Supports:** Address well-being barriers to learning in and out of school through partnerships with public and private entities — including **community partnerships with agencies and providers of services** such as assistance with housing, transportation, nutrition, and more.
Expanded Hours for Learning and Enrichment	
Academic Enrichment During Non-School Hours: Establish or expand activities in community learning centers that provide for academic enrichment, including providing tutorial services to help students meet challenging State academic standards. Examples include the arts, music, mathematics, science, technology education programs, financial literacy programs, and environmental literacy programs.	**Expanded and Enriched Learning Time and Opportunities: Offer extended learning hours and experiences**, such as before-school, during-school, afterschool, and summer programs that provide additional academic instruction and time for learning, and enrichment activities to enhance students' educational experiences. Examples include internships, externships, tutoring, extracurricular activities, and community-connected instruction.
Family Engagement	
Family Engagement: Offer opportunities for families' active and meaningful engagement in their children's learning and development, and offer literacy and other educational services to the families.	**Active Family and Community Engagement: Involve families and community members** in the school as active partners in students' education through activities and decision-making processes — for example, adult education programs, parent-teacher-student meetings, community outreach events, and other collaborative efforts to support student success.

School and Community Collaboration

Collaboration: Involve at least one local educational agency (LEA) that receives funds under Title I, Part A and another eligible entity, such as a **community-based organization (CBO)**, Indian tribe or tribal organization, another public or private entity, or a consortium of two or more such agencies, organizations, or entities (with a few exceptions, such as the LEA being unable to partner with a CBO in reasonable geographic proximity and sufficient quality). The program must be developed and carried out in active collaboration with the schools that participating students attend.
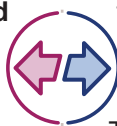
Collaborative Leadership and Practices: Build a culture of professional learning and collective trust through activities and governance structures where families, students, teachers, principals, and community partners share responsibility and power. Together these actors can make decisions and co-create supportive environments in formal settings such as school-based or community-wide leadership teams, or informal ones such as hallway conversations with teachers or coffee with community school coordinators.

Both programs face similar implementation challenges.

Family and Community Engagement

Challenges that can affect family and community engagement may include various constraints on family and community members' time, schedule, and resources. Lack of **transportation** and limited **internet access** can also be a factor. Additionally, some programs and schools may need support in **developing asset-based approaches** to collaborating with families and community partners, especially if their leaders do not come from the community. Some ongoing implementation challenges are including the views of all families and caregivers in surveys and accurately measuring the results of programs or interventions on family engagement.

Coordination With Schools and Districts

Alignment and coordination with schools and school districts can be challenging for 21st CCLC and FSCS grant programs. Each program is influenced by local contexts that are not directly replicable across sites. Providing support to ensure that programs meet legal requirements and have essential elements in place while allowing for flexibility based on the specific reality of individual communities (such as a school shutting down or changes in leadership) is a constant challenge. In addition, programs operated by community-based or faith-based organizations may have to overcome communication or scheduling challenges that arise from lack of shared structures and systems with schools and districts.

Program Sustainability

Sustainability is a common concern as local programs with federally funded grants seek to continue key activities beyond the current 3-, 4-, or 5-year grant funding cycle in the face of staff turnover and — in some cases — limited capacity or opportunities to pursue additional funding and partnerships. After federal funds expire, it can be a challenge to keep the same partnerships and positions in place. Providing technical assistance, connecting grantees to useful resources, and creating meaningful opportunities to plan for continuation of key program activities beyond the life of the grant are ongoing challenges for program directors.

Key Lessons and Solutions for State and Local Program Leaders

The following strategies support the overall program goals of improving student outcomes by increasing student engagement, increasing academic achievement, and supporting student growth and well-being.

To support family and community engagement:

SEA
- Establish performance indicators (e.g., participation rates, opportunities for family participation, parent survey results) or funding priorities around family engagement.
- Include family members and community leaders on statewide steering committees and children and youth cabinets.

Programs
- Embed family engagement into the program by engaging students' families in a variety of ways (e.g., as co-creators, supporters, encouragers, monitors, advocates, and models).
- Regularly administer surveys to solicit feedback from families, teachers, principals, and community partners to help inform collaborative schoolwide decisions.

These strategies support the overall program goals of improving student outcomes by increasing student engagement, increasing academic achievement, and supporting student growth and well-being.

To coordinate with schools and districts:

SEA
- Ensure that all program leaders complete a needs assessment to determine what professional development site coordinators and frontline staff need.
- Provide purposeful professional development to grant program staff and school leaders to better understand each program and how they can work with the goals of local schools and communities.

Programs
- Use the 21st CCLC NTAC's [free professional development resources](#) to provide training in targeted areas, such as learning recovery, embedding academics into enrichment activities, guiding positive student behavior, and becoming a leader.
- Use the [general community school resources](#) on the FSCS web page. This web page includes a learning series on community schools, logic models, program data collection and reporting guidance, and additional information about how to develop, implement, and sustain community schools.

To address student health and wellness:

SEA
- Provide information to program leaders on infusing health and nutrition education into events that engage families. Also, encourage program leaders to explore coordinating with other sources such as the USDA's [Child and Adult Care Food Program](#), local grants, and State health departments.

Programs
- Arrange events around dinnertime and ask families to contribute their own healthy recipes, which can be compiled into a community cookbook. At the end of the program year, distribute printed cookbooks to all participants.

To support program sustainability:

SEA

- Convene State leadership across departments and agencies serving youth to coordinate funding from multiple federal, State, and local sources. This can optimize current program offerings and create a path toward sustainable implementation of essential program components. For example, ESSA Title I funds can be used to provide transportation to families who otherwise would not be able to attend family engagement events. Many additional funding streams are included in a White House Toolkit, Federal Resources to Support Community Schools.

Programs

- Use and align federal education funding to make strategic investments that build capacity and increase program utilization. To build capacity, federally funded programs can use funding streams that support professional development. For example, ESSA Title II funds can provide professional development targeted to building the capacity of educators to support family and community engagement. To improve program utilization, federally funded programs can connect with other agencies that serve high-need students — including the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Agriculture. For example, 21st CCLC programs can help coordinate and improve access to summer meal programs funded through the Department of Agriculture.

For additional information about these programs:

21st CCLC Program	FSCS Program
21stCCLC@ed.gov	FSCS@ed.gov

"A single twig breaks, but the bundle of twigs is strong." —Tecumsehseh