Coordinating Service Provision to Facilitate Access to Resources

HOW DO PROVIDERS COORDINATE SERVICES AND COLLABORATE TO BETTER MEET FAMILY NEEDS AND ENSURE ACCESS TO SUPPORTS AND OPPORTUNITIES?

In many communities where student and families experience high levels of poverty, schools are an important vehicle for the delivery and coordination of services and activities that help promote learning and the positive development of students and families. In schools that offer afterschool and summer learning activities supported by the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program, 21st CCLC site coordinators can find themselves in a position where there is an opportunity to coordinate service delivery with (a) other supports and services available within the building and (b) other partner agencies working within the broader community.

As part of the 21st CCLC Integrated Service Delivery System Study (see box for additional information), the research team at the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) explored how 21st CCLC programs in this study coordinate the activities and services they provide with other services and supports provided to students and families within the school or center.

With funding from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) is conducting the 21st CCLC **Integrated Service Delivery Study,** *a 3-year project designed to:*

Identify 21st CCLC programs that are integral parts of broader systems characterized by the coordination of multiple programs, activities, and services

Document strategies and approaches that support the coordination and integration of services; and

Explore how students and families may benefit from integrated and coordinated service delivery

AIR is conducting the study in collaboration with state education agencies in the states of Illinois, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, and Washington. This brief summarizes early findings from the study based on a series of interviews completed in the fall of 2022 with 21st CCLC project directors and site coordinators associated with 30 centers in the five states enrolled in the study.

According to AIR's 2022 interviews with a select group of 21st CCLC programs as part of the study,[1] we found that 21st CCLC—funded programs engaged in several promising processes and structures to help coordinate services and activities funded by 21st CCLC with other services and activities provided within the school and the community more broadly. In this brief, we elevate and expand upon the following observed approaches and strategies for service coordination:

Collaborating with school or community-based initiatives to provide joint programs and events, share resources, and refer families to resources and services

Leveraging a community school's framework to connect students and families more easily to wraparound supports and services

Making use of active, representative governing bodies

Using and sharing data to support coordination

Maximizing the role of the site coordinator to ensure coordination and delivery of culturally competent supports and services

After expanding on each of these strategies, we conclude this brief by providing some recommendations that 21st CCLC project directors, site coordinators, and state coordinators can consider in pursuit of creating more integrated service delivery systems.

Collaborating with school or community-based initiatives to provide joint programs and events, share resources, and refer families to resources and services. Many of the centers we interviewed reported purposefully collaborating with schools or community-based initiatives to increase the effectiveness of service delivery systems, reduce redundancies, and expand the number of students and families served. At some centers, site coordinators reported partnering with non—21st CCLC initiatives situated within their schools that shared similar focuses on either afterschool and summer programming or parent engagement. For example, several centers co-hosted parent engagement nights with these other programs to reduce the load for parents, who often struggled to attend parent nights due to conflicting responsibilities. Similarly, a site coordinator at another center described holding reoccurring meetings with other school-based afterschool providers to strategize on how to coordinate programming and expand the reach of students served.

Other centers reported engaging in community-based partnerships with other cross-sector organizations. In notable instances, 21st CCLC centers participated in larger collective impact initiatives that involve multiple stakeholders working toward achieving a common goal or mission within a community.[2] By joining these initiatives, these centers gained access to additional partners offering wraparound services and had opportunities to coordinate service delivery with partners engaging in similar work, deliberately maximizing the impact of their combined endeavors.

Centers located in smaller, tight-knit communities highlighted the significance of their relationships with social service agencies in addressing needs beyond the scope of the 21st CCLC program (and outside the scope of most schools), such as referring families in search of food, housing, or health care. Site coordinators at these sites emphasized the importance of actively seeking out and initiating new partnerships to deliberately address the specific needs of the students and families they serve. Some centers also utilized technology systems or portals, often created as part of larger school or community-based initiatives, to effectively manage and track referrals for wraparound services. Overall, opening lines of communication for referrals allowed 21st CCLC centers to understand their families' needs and position themselves as capable of providing support beyond the scope of afterschool and summer programming through their deliberate relationships with other providers.

> **Whenever there's a need from a family, we enter it into the care portal,** whatever it is, and churches will see these needs requests, and they'll pick it up [. . .] no questions asked, they'll fulfill it. [We've] seen people who are behind on rent, someone who needs a car—there's all kinds of different needs that help keep families together as opposed to separating a student from the family. So that's been a crucial component of this program as well, is e**quipping teachers with the knowledge about these different community partners and nonprofits and different resources that we have and empowering them to be able to fulfill these requests** for students.
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> — *Site Coordinator*

Leveraging a community school's framework to connect students and families more easily to wraparound supports and services. Multiple centers in this study described employing a [community schools] framework, which supports whole-child development and positive family and community outcomes, typically through cross-sector partnerships with community agencies and providers.[3] At these centers, connecting with community school program coordinators—the staff who lead the coordination and management of community school efforts within sites—provided 21st CCLC project directors and staff access to more comprehensive supports for students, families, and communities. Working closely with these community school program coordinators, center staff received additional support for identifying program volunteers, collecting data, building relationships with community partners, and collaborating on mutually reinforcing programming. At multiple centers, school administrators and grantees reported facilitating these relationships by (a) holding joint meetings between community school coordinators and 21st CCLC site coordinators and (b) positioning the various program coordinators to work in close proximity to one another in the school.

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Making use of active, representative governing bodies. While convening advisory boards—typically comprising students, parents, school-day and district staff, community members, and other partners— is a standard practice for 21st CCLCs, some of the centers we interviewed described purposefully leveraging their advisory board or similar decision-making bodies to inform their coordination of programs and services. For instance, staff at multiple centers described attending their schools' student behavioral and/or child study team meetings to better understand their schools' highest need students and position 21st CCLC programming as a possible support to meet those academic, social, and behavioral needs. At another center, one program director described having a community supports board, organized by the principal, which brought together different agencies and organizations to share updates on events and identify opportunities for collaboration. Other sites described leveraging advisory boards to create a shared vision that guided their approach to programming. Overall, centers emphasized the importance of convening groups with various partners and providers to foster relationship building and provide a platform for collaborators to share program updates, update each other on available programming and supports, and identify opportunities for further collaboration. Likewise, purposefully involving students, teachers, parents, and community members in these advisory boards provided these centers with deeper insights into the needs of their students and families, as well as contextual factors that may contribute to or hinder the viability of a particular strategy or approach.

Using and sharing data to support coordination. Some centers shared practices for collecting and analyzing data that go beyond the federal and state reporting requirements for program implementation and student outcome data. These sites demonstrated a commitment to robust data collection, analysis, and sharing to enhance their understanding of student and family needs and access to services. For instance, several 21st CCLC programs implemented strategies to enhance their teams' access to school- and district-level data, which significantly influenced their ability

to coordinate services effectively. Notably, a subset of centers established data-sharing agreements with the school district, formally integrated into their memorandum of understanding of the 21st CCLC grant. These agreements provided site coordinators with invaluable student-level data, enabling centers to strategically recruit students, develop academic programming to address school-wide gaps, and gain insights into contextual factors that inform engagement approaches with certain students and families.

Some centers also had access to public-facing systems managed by the state or other organizations to supplement the data collected by the 21st CCLC program or the school. By tapping into larger data systems, program directors and site coordinators described having a greater capacity to capture data on community demographics and other conditions that might be impacting students and their families outside of the school building. These sites described receiving a more complete and expansive view of community needs and assets, which then informed the sites' approach to identifying partnerships and modifying program design and delivery.

Maximizing the role of the site coordinator. Site coordinators play a pivotal role in service coordination through their relationships with students and families within the center, school-day staff and leaders, and external partner organizations. In many of the centers interviewed, site coordinators played the role of a "switchboard," in the sense of connecting students and families served through the 21st CCLC program with other activities and services. In some instances, site coordinators described fostering close relationships with school counselors or other school staff that managed caseloads to identify students who may benefit from the CCLC program. Some centers also elevated the importance of compiling a comprehensive list of community partners, activities, and supports, enabling site coordinators to easily offer referrals to students and families in need. Ultimately, the effectiveness of the site coordinator's role was contingent on relationship building, requiring coordinators to establish trust and rapport with individuals before successfully facilitating connections.

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> **Because our coordinator is full time, they're more ingrained in the school.** So, there are referrals that are happening throughout the day. There is the ability to check in with teachers to find out, if we're doing homework help, what are you doing during the school day, so we can make sure it's aligned . . . Just being available to support students and families, ask questions. They do a 'check and connect' with all the students when they come to programs. So, **she just has a really strong pulse of what is even happening in the school that day.** Did something traumatic happen in the community? Did anything happen during the school day in regard to a fight or something like that? **So, there's a lot of connecting with teachers, but that's also the dean, the clerk, the restorative justice person, behavioral health team. So, it's a lot of connecting. She's the connector for all those things, to making sure they get the right students into the right programs.**
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> *— Project Director*

Relatedly, site coordinators can help ensure that services and supports are both culturally appropriate and responsive to student and family needs. Although hiring people from the community was not always an intentional practice, some centers described how hiring people in the local community helped build trust and relationships, which further helped facilitate the ability to successfully connect students and families to needed supports and opportunities provided through other programs. A few centers reported hiring former students, and even the parents of former students, to become center staff. At one center, having a site coordinator from the community has bolstered the 21st CCLC programs capacity to hire locally and recruit students and families during the center's establishment. By positioning these site coordinators who represent families and the local community in a "switchboard" role, centers helped build a necessary level of trust with the community to balance enrichment programs and service provision.

STEPS FOR DEVELOPING MORE-INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEMS

Based on findings from AIR's interviews with 21st CCLC program staff, we provide some concrete actions that individuals working at various levels within the 21st CCLC program can take to facilitate more-integrated service delivery systems as they relate to service coordination and alignment.

21st CCLC Site Coordinators

- **Build and strengthen** relationships with other staff and program coordinators working inside your school or center—especially those who are responsible for designing and providing non–21st CCLC activities, supports, and opportunities.
- **Develop** processes with program coordinators to refer 21st CCLC students and families to those non–21st CCLC activities (and vice versa), and share program updates and data that will enhance the provision and coordination of services.
- **Review** your school's improvement plan, and explore how other programs and services referenced in that plan may be complementary to the activities and services you provide as part of your 21st CCLC program.
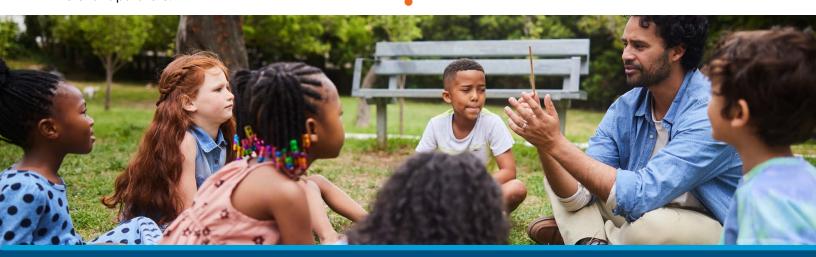
21st CCLC Site Directors

- **Create** an advisory committee comprising key school and community stakeholders, designed to facilitate efforts to develop a more-integrated service delivery system. Include representatives from other programs operating in schools or the broader community who provide activities, services, and supports relevant to your 21st CCLC program participants.

- **Consider** conducting a formal needs/assets assessment on a reoccurring basis to explore student and family needs/assets, existing programs, and resources to support those needs. Given those needs and assets, assess the optimal role that 21st CCLC programs can play in providing supplementary supports and opportunities to participating youth and their families.

- **Strengthen** your center's access to data to inform program development and service coordination by potentially establishing data-sharing agreements with the participating school district and other relevant partners.

State 21st CCLC Coordinators

- **Consider** asking 21st CCLC applicants to reflect on how they might coordinate 21st CCLC service provision with that of other programs within the school and community.

- **Provide** technical assistance to 21st CCLC grantees, helping them better understand the common ways in which schools serve students (e.g., multi-tiered systems of support, restorative practices), common approaches to providing wraparound services in schools, and approaches for building community partnerships.

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