# 21st Century Community Learning Centers

## Statewide Evaluation Report

## 2019 - 2020

Submitted by: Agency of Education

Report Compiled by VT Afterschool, Inc.

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## Introduction and Context

The 2019-20 school year was unprecedented and beyond challenging for administrators, teachers, students, families, and of course expanded learning time providers. It began as normal year and then pivoted completely on March 13, 2020 when Governor Phil Scott declared a state of emergency and closed schools beginning the following week in response to the COVID-19 emergency. Consequently, Vermont's 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21C) were immediately shut down as well. In-person programming was halted, but in no way did that mean that directors, site coordinators and staff had an extended spring vacation. The majority of programs were able to use that time to engage students in remote learning, provide professional development opportunities for staff, facilitate transportation of meals to families, and/or provide childcare for essential workers (also referred to as "essential care"), among other productive activities. Even still, each program faced its challenges such as staff furloughs, layoffs, and total operational shutdowns. Programs that were lucky enough to keep their staffs intact and reach out to families still faced significant hurdles and headaches along the way.

This report is broken into two main parts. The first is the data summary as it relates to the statewide evaluation plan that has been reported each year since 2014-15. Up until (and even beyond) March 2020, 21C directors and site coordinators had been collecting and reporting data related to the state's four main goal areas:

- Access and equity are assured for all students.
- All 21C-funded programs are of high quality.
- All 21C-funded programs have effective leaders.
- All 21C-funded programs are sustainable.

The summary of evaluation data will be laid out in the report without comparisons to prior years as has been the case in past years in order to account for the fact that during the last one-third of the school year, programs did not run in a normal, expected way.

The second part of the report deals with the changes that programs made in response to the COVID shutdown. Directors and site coordinators provided information and reflections as part of their annual performance reports (APRs) that they submitted. Related data in this report are summarized and described according to the programmatic changes that were made, in addition to the overall positive highlights, challenges, and opportunities for future changes.

In 2019-20, 25 projects throughout Vermont received funding from the 21C initiative to run afterschool and summer learning programs. These projects operated 98 individual sites in school buildings across Vermont. All sites provided out-of-school time programming during the school year. Eighty-seven sites provided summer learning enrichment for its students, whether on-site or at a nearby school in summer 2019.

Throughout this report, the terms "programs" and "program sites" are used in addition to "sites" to refer to 21C-funded sites. The terms "projects" and "grantees" refer to the grant recipients themselves. Most projects comprise multiple program sites.

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## Summary and Action Items

APR data from 2019-20 show that most state-level evaluation measure targets were met. Projects as a whole successfully served free-and-reduced lunch students and students on individualized education plans (IEPs) on a regular basis at a rate greater than those respective statewide averages. More than one-third of students statewide attended programming on a regular basis. One-third of school year staff statewide were licensed educators. Financially speaking, statewide aggregate cash funding from sources other than 21C dollars exceeded that which came from 21C dollars. Statewide average rates of summer weeks, days per week, and hours per week of operation in 2019 also exceeded statewide targets. Targets for weeks, days per week, and hours per week of operation in the 2019-20 school year were not met on a statewide average basis, which most likely was due to the truncated nature of year.

Once normal operations were halted in March, at least half of all 21C projects engaged in one or more of each of remote programming, professional development, administrative leadership tasks, and assistance with meal delivery to families. Others utilized their spaces, skills and staff to help with providing childcare for children of essential workers during the school day (and after). This report demonstrates the commitment of 21C leaders and staff to the youth and families in their communities based on their varied and dedicated actions during the spring shutdown.

While this report includes a summary of the compulsory Goal Areas, Results and Measures that 21C project leaders submitted via their APRs for 2019-20, the main takeaways and action items from this report come from looking at the field's response and reflections on the weeks and months that immediately followed the COVID-induced shutdown in March 2020. The resulting recommended areas of action are as follows:

**Continue to provide and foster opportunities for the field to come together and share ideas.** In their APR reflections, several 21C directors shared their appreciation for their opportunities to connect with other leaders in the field over Zoom through regular meetings, informational sessions, and open roundtable discussions for the field. These opportunities allowed 21C leaders and the expanded learning field as a whole to connect, share their challenges and ideas, and bond with one another. While programs will presumably get back to complete normalcy at some point in the future, it would be beneficial to continue to provide the field with opportunities to connect with one another without the need to travel.

**Support and guide the field in strengthening their connections with families in their communities**. Upon the rapid pivot to remote programming for projects that facilitated it, 21C project leaders rushed to connect families to keep children and youth connected and engaged. Understandably, this effort was met with mixed levels of success. The efforts brought to the forefront the need for having well-established connections with families for times when outreach is crucial.

**Prioritize and provide professional development opportunities that highlight and focus on social-emotional learning (SEL)**. As 21C leaders and staff face the challenge and opportunity of

eventually welcoming students back to regular programming, they will undoubtedly need to take a step back and support them in processing the changes brought on by the pandemic. Schools will likely have some role in that, but with the additional challenge of getting students up to speed academically. Afterschool spaces are those where students can come to feel safe, supported, and work through the healing process. The timing for this focus is good as 21C programs have baseline SEL data and training through their participation in the Weikart Center's SEL Program Quality Assessment over the past two years.

**Continue to support programs financially especially with regard to assisting them in recruiting and retaining quality staff**. Even in a normal year, recruiting and retaining quality staff tops the list of challenges and barriers to success for 21C programs. This challenge in the context of a pandemic with its financial and general life challenges further hinders the ability of 21C leaders to find quality staff and compensate them appropriately. Providing funding to ensure programs can be adequately staffed is crucial in ensuring that quality programming is available for all children and youth in Vermont.

## Evaluation Results for 2019-20

The following section includes numeric results from the APRs that inform the goal areas set by the Vermont Agency of Education, in collaboration with Vermont Afterschool and leaders from the field. Each goal area comprises three to four results, which each contain between one and six measurable outcomes. The four goal areas are as follows:

1) Access and equity are assured for all students.
2) All 21C-funded programs are of high quality.
3) All 21C-funded programs have effective leaders.
4) All 21C-funded programs are sustainable.

The following section outlines each goal area along with their corresponding results and measures for 2019-20. These numbers were reported during the spring, at the time when some programs were running remote programming and others were not. It is unclear as to how different programs counted attributes such as participation numbers and operations such as a days, weeks, and hours during any remote programming. Due to the fact that it was a shortened year and many programs likely reported numbers having to do with operations and participation only through March, it does not make sense to compare 2019-20 data to any previous years' data.

## Goal Area 1: Access and equity are assured for all students.

Children and youth that have access to regularly participate in quality afterschool and summer learning programming experience a wealth of positive social, emotional, mental, and physical outcomes. Vermont's 21C programming is intended to serve the students who might not have regular opportunities to enroll otherwise – such as students from families with lower incomes. The programs should ideally be in operation for a sufficient amount of time over the course of both the school year and summer so that participants have many opportunities to engage in learning and experience positive outcomes. Finally, the students themselves must commit to

attending on a regular basis in order the gain the most that they can from the experience. The four results and corresponding measures contained in Goal Area 1 were developed with the intention of ensuring that equity and access to 21C programs are ensured for all students in Vermont.

*Result 1.1: 21C programs serve students with limited opportunities to learn outside the school day.*

| Measure | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.1a. 21C-funded sites have a free and reduced lunch rate among regular attendees that meets or exceeds the school rate. | site | **71%** | n/a |
| 1.1b. At the state level, the overall free and reduced lunch rate among regular attendees is greater than **40%.** | state | **53%** | Yes |
| 1.1c. At the state level, the overall rate of regular attendees on Individual Education Plans (IEP) meets or exceeds the state average of **15%.** | state | **20%** | Yes |

For both Measures 1.1a and 1.1b, the resulting percentages must be regarded with the knowledge that they represent only the regular attendees statewide that do not attend sites at schools that participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). Beginning in 2014-15, schools that had more than 40% of their students directly certified for free meals had the opportunity to participate in the program, thus being able to provide breakfast and lunch to their entire student populations at no charge. The presence of CEP affects how some sites report their numbers of free/reduced lunch students and also how the percentages of low-income students in those schools are reported by the state. Therefore, 21C program sites that operated at CEP-designated schools were removed from the analysis for both measures.

Measure 1.1a states that 21C-funded sites should have a rate of free/reduced lunch students among regular attendees that meets or exceeds the school rate. In 2019-20, 71% of non-CEP sites had a free/reduced lunch rate among regular attendees that met or exceeded the school rate. Measure 1.1b states that the total statewide percentage of regular attendees that are eligible for free/reduced price lunch should exceed 40%. In 2019-20, the calculated percentage of regularly-attending students that were eligible for free or reduced lunch was 53%; this calculation excluded students from 16 CEP sites, so the actual percentage is likely higher, but ultimately unknown. The 2019-20 result percentage represented 73% of the total statewide regular attendees after excluding students at CEP schools.

Students who are on Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in Vermont should also be represented equally among their peers as regular attendees in 21C programming, in order access and equity to be upheld. In 2019-20, 20% of regular 21C attendees statewide were on IEPs, and since this was more than the statewide average of 15%, this target was met.

*Result 1.2: 21C programs are open for enough hours, days, weeks to meet needs during school year.*

| Measure | Level | 2019-20 Result | Statewide target reached? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Measure 1.2a: 21C-funded sites offer enough program weeks to match or exceed the current national mean by operating for at least 32 weeks during the school year. | site | **35%** | n/a |
| Measure 1.2b: 21C-funded sites offer enough program days to match or exceed the current national mean by operating for at least 5 days per week during the school year. | site | **82%** | n/a |
| Measure 1.2c: 21C-funded sites offer enough program hours to match or exceed the current national mean by operating for at least 14 hours per week during the school year. | site | **39%** | n/a |
| Measure 1.2d: At the state level, the average number of program weeks offered at sites will match or exceed the current national mean of at least 32 weeks during the school year. | state | **28** | Unable to determine |
| Measure 1.2e: At the state level, the average number of program days offered at sites will match or exceed the current national mean of at least 5 days per week during the school year. | state | **4.8** | Unable to determine |
| Measure 1.2f: At the state level, the average number of program hours offered at sites will match or exceed the current national mean of at least 14 hours per week during the school year. | state | **13** | Unable to determine |

Programs that operate for a sufficient number of weeks, days per week and hours per week during both the school year and summer are best able to foster social, behavioral, and learning gains among the children and youth they serve (Policy Study Associates, 2004). In addition, in order for working families to take full advantage of afterschool programming, their children should have opportunities to attend programming from approximately 3:00 pm until 5:00 or 6:00 pm each weekday over the course of the academic year. Measures 1.2a, 1.2b, and 1.2c were developed to ensure that sufficient school year dosage is in place.

In 2019-20, 35% of 21C sites offered at least 32 weeks of programming during the school year. This percentage is undoubtedly lower than it otherwise would have been if not for the COVID closures. When programming was happening, 82% of sites offered programming every day of the five-day school week and 39% of sites offered it for at least 14 hours per week.

On the state level, 21C programs operated for an average of 28 weeks during the 2019-20 school year, which again is most likely artificially low due to the truncated in-person school year. Program sites operated for an average of 4.8 days per week and 13 hours per week. It is possible that these averages are well-representative of what was happening prior to the shutdown but also could represent both in-person and spring remote programming. For all three of these averages, we cannot state with any certainty whether they each indicate that the statewide targets were met in 2019-20.

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*Result 1.3: 21C-funded programs provide enough summer programming to address summer learning loss.*

| Measure | Level | 2019-20 Result | Statewide target reached? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Measure 1.3a: 21C-funded sites that offer summer programming are open for enough program weeks to match or exceed the current national mean by operating for at least 5 weeks during the summer. | site | **95%** | n/a |
| Measure 1.3b: 21C-funded sites that offer summer programming are open for enough program days to match or exceed the current national mean by operating for at least 5 days per week during the summer. | site | **94%** | n/a |
| Measure 1.3c: 21C-funded sites that offer summer programming are open for enough program hours to match or exceed the current national mean by operating for at least 21 hours per week during the summer. | site | **86%** | n/a |
| Measure 1.3d: At the state level, the average number of program weeks offered at sites will match or exceed the current national mean of at least 5 weeks during summer. | state | **6** | Yes |
| Measure 1.3e: At the state level, the average number of program days offered at sites will match or exceed the current national mean of at least 5 days per week during summer. | state | **5.0** | Yes |
| Measure 1.3f: At the state level, the average number of program hours offered at sites will match or exceed the current national mean of at least 21 hours per week during summer. | state | **37** | Yes |

In Vermont, summer break can last between 10-11 weeks depending on the number of snow days used in the previous winter. Summer learning loss, particularly for students from lower income families is a risk during that period. Additionally, working families across the income spectrum need safe and supportive programming environments for their children during the summer months when school is not in session.

In the pre-COVID summer of 2019, 95% of the 87 sites that offered summer programming were in operation for at least 5 weeks. Likewise, 94% of summer sites offered programming for five days per week. Also, in the summer of 2019, 86% of sites that offered summer programming offered at least 21 hours per week of programming. On average, each summer program offered six weeks of programming along with five days per week and 37 hours per week of programming. Each of these averages exceeded the targets of five weeks, five days per week, and 21 hours per week respectively. We can state with confidence that all three of these targets were met.

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*Result 1.4: 21C-funded programs have a solid base of regular attendees*

| Measure | Level | 2019-20 Result | Statewide target reached? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Measure 1.4a: 21C-funded sites will serve at least one-third of their total participants on a regular basis (with regular basis defined as at least 30 days/year). | site | **76%** | n/a |
| Measure 1.4b: At the state level, the average number of regular attendees will meet or exceed one-third of the total participants served. | state | **40%** | Yes |

Regular attendance is a prerequisite to achieving desirable outcomes of expanded learning opportunities. In addition of ensuring that programs are in operation for a sufficient amount of time and the neediest students are adequately served, programs must also ensure that enrolled students are attending on a regular basis – and if they are not, to identify possible reasons for this. Students who are "regular attendees" are said to attend at least 30 days of programming per year.

In 2019-20, three out of every four sites (76%) served at least one-third of their participants on a regular basis. Statewide, there were 11,467 students that were enrolled in 21C programming and 4,562 or 40% attended on a regular basis. It is unclear as to whether there were additional students that would have attended programming in the spring, or who did attend remotely but were not counted. Regardless, the target of having the fraction of regular attendees in the state exceed one-third was achieved.

## Goal Area 2: All 21C-funded programs are of high quality

This goal is intended to ensure that 21C funding goes toward programs that are intentionally designed to be of high quality. They should support student learning, allow participants to explore topics in depth, provide healthy food options, and provide ample time for physical activity. In addition, programs should engage their staff in continuous improvement planning with a tool for assessing program quality.

*Result 2.1: 21C-funded programs support learning.*

| Measure | Level | 2019-20 Result | Statewide target reached? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Measure 2.1a: 21C-funded sites have at least one program strategy, beyond homework help, that is specifically designed to support students who are performing below grade level or struggling academically. | site | **77%** | n/a |

Afterschool and summer learning programs can supplement learning that occurs during the regular school day. Result 2.1 measures the extent to which these programs do in fact support learning. It is important for programs to be designed to be able to help students who might be struggling academically. Methods that go beyond homework help are likely to help boost the academic performance of such students. In 2019-20, 77% of 21C program sites offered at least one strategy beyond homework help for students who were performing below grade level or otherwise struggling academically. A few examples of such program strategies offered, as written in the APRs were as follows:

- *Our Early Promise Program produces two tutors who come to IAA every day to help kids who are struggling academically. They are in close collaboration with the schoolteachers, and work together on choosing kids, and areas of need.*
- *We have a Reading Buddies program. We work in collaboration with the librarian to group students together so they can practice reading to each other. This has greatly improved the reading levels of students participating. This takes place during each snack period every day of the week. Students who are in grades K-2 read with a buddy. Students in grades 3-5 mostly read independently. Some 3-5 grades students read with high school volunteers.*
- *A teacher stays at least one day a week to assist any students that may be struggling with academics and if needed, we have 2 to 3 teachers that volunteer so students are successful.*

There was at least one program that stated the spring closures prevented them from getting their program strategy up and running:

- *An Afterschool EL program was scheduled to begin but was unable to due to the school closure.*

*Result 2.2: 21C-funded programs allow participants to experience interests in depth.*

| Measure | Level | 2019-20 Result | Statewide target reached? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Measure 2.2a.i: Each 21C-funded site will demonstrate that ALL programs had the opportunity to create culminating products and/or performances. | site | **7.1%** | n/a |
| Measure 2.2a.ii: Each 21C-funded site will demonstrate that ALL or MOST programs had the opportunity to create culminating products and/or performances. | site | **62%** | n/a |
| Measure 2.2a.iii: Each 21C-funded site will have at least five examples of culminating activities. | site | **89%** | n/a |
| Measure 2.2b: Each 21C-funded site will have at least 5 of its program offerings meet for a minimum of 10 days. | site | **82%** | n/a |

Programs should also allow students time to pursue interests through activities that are not available during the regular school day. Rather than simply being introduced to such activities, students should be given opportunities to explore them in depth. Culminating products and performances are ways to facilitate in-depth learning and exploration of specific interests.

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Under this result, there were originally only two measures (2.2a and 2.2b). Measure 2.2a stated, "Each 21C-funded site will demonstrate that ALL programs have the opportunity to create culminating end products and/or performances." Since 21C sites provide a wide variety of programming options, it is difficult for most of them to be able to respond "Yes" to this item since it qualifies that ALL of their programming options must meet these criteria. Since the percentage for this measure has been consistently low, two variations on this measure were amended in order to reveal a more detailed view of the extent to which sites offered culminating activities. The original Measure 2.2a was relabeled as Measure 2.2a.i and subsequently Measures 2.2a.ii and 2.2a.iii were amended.

In 2019-20, 7.1% of sites had culminating products for all of their programs. Measure 2.2a.ii shows that 62% of sites that were able to report that all or most of their programs had the opportunity to create culminating end products and/or performances. Eighty-nine percent of programs were able to report five examples of culminating activities and 82% of sites had at least five programs that met for a minimum of ten days. It is possible that the percentages for all of these measures would have been higher if not for the major disruption in the last third of the school year.

*Result 2.3: 21C-funded programs provide healthy food and physical activity options.*

| Measure | Level | 2019-20 Result | Statewide target reached? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Measure 2.3a: 21C-funded sites provide the opportunity for at least 20 minutes of physical activity daily for every two hours of programming offered. | site | **84%** | n/a |
| Measure 2.3b: 21C-funded sites will score 4.00 or above on the Nourishment scale of the Safe Environment domain of YPQA. | site | n/a | n/a |

After a full school day of mostly sedentary activity, students cannot be expected to engage in expanded learning opportunities to their fullest potential without proper nourishment and opportunities for exercise. Measure 2.3a shows that the vast majority (84%) of 21C sites provided physical activity for their students on a regular basis.

Measure 2.3b relates to the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA). In particular, it deals with the Nourishment scale. In past years, all 21C sites had been required to complete the School Age or Youth Program Quality Assessment with the included Nourishment scale that informed this measure. However, in 2019-20, all sites were instructed to use the Weikart Center's new Social Emotional Learning tool (SEL PQA) for continuous improvement assessment and planning. Therefore, the result for Measure 2.3b is unavailable for that year.

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*Result 2.4: 21C-funded programs strive for continuous improvement with the YPQI.*

| Measure | Level | 2019-20 Result | Statewide target reached? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Measure 2.4a: 21C-funded sites that are in at least their second year of operation involve staff in the completion of self-assessments and program improvement plans through Weikart's YPQI each year. | site | **98%** | n/a |
| Measure 2.4b: 21C-funded sites that are in at least their third year of operation show improvement in their YPQA self-assessment domain scores from the previous year. | site | n/a | n/a |
| Measure 2.4c: The Vermont state average of 21C programs' YPQI domain scores meets or exceeds the national average of external assessment domain scores for the Social Emotional Learning Program Quality Assessment (SEL PQA). | state | **3.75** | unclear |

Between the years of 2014-15 and 2017-18, every 21C-funded site that was in at least their second year of operation was required to complete a self-assessment using either the Youth Program Quality Assessment or the School Age Program Quality Assessment each year. They were expected to involve their staff in the planning, implementation, and program improvement elements of the process in order to work toward ensuring quality programming year after year. In 2018-19, each program site in at least their second year of funding had a few different options including Weikart's newly released SEL PQA. Finally, in 2019-20, each site that was in at least their second year of programming was required to involve their staff in the completion of the at least one SEL PQA per site and corresponding improvement plan. Ninety-eight percent of sites for whom this was a requirement were successful in completing it, as indicated by Measure 2.4a.

Measure 2.4b looks at improvement in self-assessment scores between years. It is not possible to report on this measure for 2019-20 since it was the first year in which all sites were required to complete the SEL PQA. Even though there were some sites that had piloted that new tool in the previous year, the items on the tool changed significantly between the two years.

Measure 2.4c purports to compare statewide scores to the national average of external assessors. However, comparisons between assessments conducted externally and those conducted internally are impossible to compare. In addition, such a score for the SEL PQA is not currently available. Regardless, the statewide average overall score for the SEL PQA in 2019-20 was 3.75, out of a range of 1.0 to 5.0. For a more in-depth analysis of the SEL PQA results for 2019-20, contact Vermont Afterschool's Research Analyst Erin Schwab (erinschwab@vermontafterschool.org) for a full report.

## Goal Area 3: All 21C-funded programs have effective leaders

The third Goal Area was developed to ensure that 21C programs are led by educated individuals who have a strong background in the field and who continually work to develop

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themselves professionally. It was also developed to ensure that programs are able to retain these quality staff.

*Result 3.1: 21C-funded programs are led by experienced leaders.*

| Measure | Level | 2019-20 Result | Statewide target reached? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Measure 3.1a: 21C programs will be led by directors with significant levels of expertise (bachelor's degree or higher in related field). | project | **92%** | n/a |
| Measure 3.1b: 21C programs will be led by directors with significant levels of experience (3+ years of experience). | project | **84%** | n/a |
| Measure 3.1c: 21C sites will be led by site coordinators with significant levels of expertise (bachelor's degree or higher in related field). | site | **68%** | n/a |
| Measure 3.1d: 21C sites will be led by site coordinators with significant levels of experience (3+ years of experience). | site | **92%** | n/a |

Directors and site coordinators with high levels of experience and expertise are best equipped to provide the most positive and beneficial expanded learning experiences for children and youth. Result 3.1 looks at the education and experience of directors and site coordinators.

In 2019-20, 92% of project directors (23 out of 25 total directors) had a bachelor's degree or higher. Eighty-four percent (21 out of 25 directors) had at least three years of related work experience that year. Among individual program sites, 68% had at least one coordinator who held at a bachelor's degree or higher. They represented 67 out of the 98 total sites. Ninety of those sites, or 92% of all program sites, were led by at least one coordinator with three or more years of related work experience.

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*Result 3.2: 21C-funded programs utilize high quality staff to run programs.*

| Measure | Level | 2019-20 Result | Statewide target reached? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Measure 3.2a: 21C sites will be staffed by at least one-third licensed educators during the school year. | site | **46%** | n/a |
| Measure 3.2b: 21C sites that operate in the summer will be staffed by at least one-third licensed educators in the summer. | site | **44%** | n/a |
| Measure 3.2c: At the state level, at least one-third of the staff working in 21C programs during the school year will be licensed educators. | state | **33%** | Yes |
| Measure 3.2d: At the state level, at least one-third of the staff working in 21C programs during the summer will be licensed educators. | state | **32%** | No |

Staff that are licensed educators are often able to help students make connections between topics that they learn during the regular school day and those which they explore in afterschool settings. Therefore, the following four measures look at the percentages of staff for both school year and summer programs that were licensed educators.

During the 2019-20 school year, 46% of 21C program sites were staffed by at least one-third licensed educators. The 44 sites that were staffed by one-third licensed educators were as follows: 12 sites had between 33%-39% of their staff as licensed educators; 16 had 40%-49% of their staff as licensed educators, nine sites had 50%-60% of their staff as licensed educators; seven sites had 60% or more of their staff as licensed educators. Of the sites that did not successfully employ at least one-third licensed educators, six sites did not actually have any licensed educators on staff; 20 sites had 4%-19% licensed educators; and 26 sites had 20%-32% licensed educators.

In the summer of 2019, summer programming was available to students from 87 of the total 98 21C-funded schools. Summer programming itself took place at 67 physical locations, so this measure looks at those 67 schools that ran summer programming and the staff that worked there, 32 (44%) employed staff that included at least one-third licensed teachers.

Overall school year and staff numbers statewide show that 33% of total school year staff in 2019-20 were licensed teachers, and 32% of total summer 2019 staff were likewise licensed teachers. With the statewide goal of one-third of staff as licensed teachers in each time period, this goal was just achieved for school year programs in 2019-20 and missed by one percentage point for summer programs in 2019.

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*Result 3.3: 21C-funded programs have appropriate staff retention rates.*

| Measure | Level | 2019-20 Result | Statewide target reached? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Measure 3.3a: 21C-funded projects have no more than a third of their site coordinators in their first or second year of tenure at each of their particular sites. | site & project | **58%** | n/a |
| Measure 3.3b: At the state level, no more than a third of the 21C directors are in their first or second year of tenure at their program. | state | **16%** | Yes |

Sites that have low turnover rates among leadership can best work toward improving the experiences for children and youth who attend programming at their sites. Measures 3.3a and 3.3b look at the tenure of directors and site coordinators of 21C programs. These Measures are closely connected to Measures 3.1b and 3.1d regarding staff experience. As programs increase their retention rates by reducing staff turnover, both directors and site coordinators will be able to report more years of related experience.

Measure 3.3a has some layers of complexity. It is necessary to look at both individual sites and the projects to which they belong to in order to calculate it. The phrase, "at each of their particular sites" is a key component of this measure. It underlines the importance of looking at each individual site within a project rather than at the total number of site coordinators for a project. For example, a two-site project might have one site with a single coordinator and another site with two site coordinators. If for example, the single coordinator was in their first year of tenure and the two site coordinators with the other site both had over two years of tenure, then by simply tallying coordinators, it would appear that this project has successfully completed the measure because two-thirds of the site coordinators would have been sufficiently experienced. However, only one site would have actually reaped the benefits of coordinator experience. Therefore, this measure was calculated to take into consideration whether each individual site met the criteria; in this hypothetical example, this project would not have successfully completed this measure because 50%, which is greater than 33% of its sites, would not have sufficiently experienced sufficient site-level leadership.

In 2019-20, 82 sites had one site coordinator and 16 sites had two coordinators. Among the single-coordinator sites, 58 had coordinators with sufficient tenure. The remaining 24 coordinators were in their first or second year of tenure. Among the 16 sites with two coordinators, eight of them were able to report that both coordinators had sufficient tenure. Among the remaining eight, five had two coordinators that were both in their first or second years of tenure, and three each had one site coordinator in their first or second year of tenure and one site coordinator with more tenure. Due to the presence of one coordinator with at least two full years of tenure, these three sites were considered to have met the measure. Upon grouping sites based on their projects, it was found that 58% of projects total were able to report

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having at least one-third of their sites with well-experienced leadership through this measure of tenured coordinators.

Measure 3.3b is the only one for which a lowest-possible percentage is desired. In 2091-20, 16% of directors in the state were in their first or second year of tenure (four of the 25 directors).

*Result 3.4: 21C leaders participate in professional development and networking opportunities.*

| Measure | Level | 2019-20 Result | Statewide target reached? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Measure 3.4a: 21C project directors participate in at least 25 total hours of professional development opportunities per year. | project | **84%** | n/a |

Directors that regularly work toward improving and developing their professional skills and knowledge are best equipped to provide the most positive and beneficial expanded learning experiences for children and youth. They are required to engage continuously in professional development opportunities to keep current with the field of afterschool and summer learning and acquire new skills and resources for running their programs and managing their staff.

In 2019-20, all but four 21C project directors (84%) participated in at least 25 hours of professional development. Ten directors participated in 25-50 hours, eight directors participated in 50-100 hours, and four directors participated in more than 100 hours. While the COVID-19 shutdown likely truncated results from measures related to program operations, it likely did not decrease the result for this measure as many projects were able to continue to provide professional development remotely during that time.

## Goal Area 4: All 21C-funded programs are sustainable

The methods to ensure that 21C-funded afterschool and summer learning programs are sustainable are outlined as the three results for Goal Area 4.

*Result 4.1: 21C-funded programs link with the school day.*

| Measure | Level | 2019-20 Result | Statewide target reached? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Measure 4.1a: The associated building principal of each 21C site meets with program director and/or site coordinator at least once a month or a total of nine times during the calendar year. | site | 98% | n/a |

Schools are the primary locations for both school year and summer learning opportunities. School principals who understand the importance of the programming that take place in their schools are most likely to help those programs sustain themselves by providing resources, support and potential connections to new partners or funding sources. Principals who can effectively communicate the benefits of their school's afterschool and summer learning

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programs are well suited to help advocate for the programs at the school district, supervisory union, or even state levels.

It is crucial for program leaders to meet with their associated principals regularly in order to build strong connections and advocate for their programs. This was the case for coordinators of 98% of 21C sites in 2019-20.

*Result 4.2: 21C-funded programs utilize diverse sources of funding.*

| Measure | Level | 2019-20 Result | Statewide target reached? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Measure 4.2a: 21C-funded projects that have been in operation for more than five years have at least five different sources of funding contributing to their annual operating budget. | project | **56%** | n/a |
| Measure 4.2b: 21C-funded projects that have been in operation for more than five years receive no more than 55% of their annual funding from a single funding source. | project | **70%** | n/a |
| Measure 4.2c: At the state level, aggregate cash funding from sources other than federal 21C funds will exceed 5.5 million dollars. | state | **$5.9 million** | Yes |

Funding from the federal 21C initiative gives schools throughout Vermont monetary resources as well as training opportunities to help make quality expanded learning opportunities available to school age children and youth. While this funding is crucial, project leaders also need to work to ensure that their programs can ideally sustain themselves even without it. Projects funded with 21C dollars that are also able to obtain funding from a diverse array of sources have more financial security and sustainability than projects that rely heavily on just a few sources. Projects that have been in operation for five years or more are expected to have had enough time to establish and secure funding from at least four funding sources other than 21C.

In 2019-20, there were 23 projects that had been in operation for more than five years. Among these 23 projects, 14 of them (56%) had at least five sources of funding (including 21C funds but not including in-kind sources) contributing to their annual operating budget.

Measure 4.2b originally read, "21C-funded projects that have been in operation for more than five years receive no more than 50% of their annual funding from a single funding source." The percentage was increased to 55% because more 21C money was awarded in 2014-15 to cover a statewide licensed teacher retirement issue that year. In 2019-20, 16 out of the 23 projects that had been in operation for at least five years (70%) had no more than 55% of their funding coming from the 21C grant.

A total of 5.5 million dollars in federal funding are allocated annually to 21C projects in Vermont. The sum of funds from other sources such as schools, supervisory unions, fundraising and state funds was $5,956,711 in 2019-20 and thus the statewide target of having this number exceed the total statewide federal funding was reached.

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*Result 4.3: 21C-funded programs benefit from meaningful community partnerships.*

| Measure | Level | 2019-20 Result | Statewide target reached? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Measure 4.3a: 21C-funded projects work with a minimum of two community partners that contribute the equivalent of at least $1000/year each in resources or support to the program. | project | **76%** | n/a |

Community partners that can support 21C projects by contributing financially can help with programs' long-term sustainability. While any amount of monetary of in-kind contribution from partners are helpful for programs, this result and corresponding measure look only at community partners who contributed at least $1000. In 2019-20, 76% of projects (19 out of 25) were able to report that they had at least two community partners contributing at least $1000 per year.

## Spring 2020 and the COVID shutdown

On Friday, March 13, 2020 when schools and afterschool programs in Vermont closed temporarily which became the remainder of the 2020-21 school year, 21C providers stepped up in many ways in order to support districts, families, and their own staff. The main ways in which programs pivoted to help meet the immediate and urgent challenges were by providing remote learning programming, engaging their staff in professional development, engaging with school administrators on various efforts, assisting in providing meal support to families, leading activities for staff, and finally providing in-person childcare for essential workers. The table below lists all of these initiatives along with the numbers and percentages of 21C projects that did each of them in spring 2020 as indicated in their annual performance reports (APRs).

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*Initiatives that 21C projects engaged in during spring 2020 COVID-19 shutdown*

| Initiative | Number of 21C projects | Percentage of 21C projects |
|---|---|---|
| Remote programming | 17 | 68% |
| Professional development | 13 | 52% |
| Administrative leadership | 13 | 52% |
| Meal support | 13 | 52% |
| Staff activities | 11 | 44% |
| Childcare for essential workers | 11 | 36% |
| Other | 3 | 20% |
| None of the above | 3 | 12% |

All except for three 21C projects participated in at least one of the above initiatives, and on average each project that did something engaged in three to four of the listed activities. Two projects engaged their leaders and staff in each of the six main activities identified.

Projects that engaged their students in remote learning provided students with opportunities to participate in a variety of activities remotely from home such as book clubs, Hour of Code, math games, nature clubs, podcast/storytelling clubs, yearbook clubs, drawing activities, homework clubs, virtual workouts, Zoom chats, games, and more within the approximately 12 weeks of time between the beginning of the shutdown and the official end of the school year. The majority of the 17 projects that provided such opportunities reported examples of programming that operated for more than a week (14 projects), including seven projects that provided such programming for more than a month. At least one project provided April break programming for its students. Program participation varied as well, with given examples ranging from between a few students up through more than 20 students. Some projects offered remote programming that students could engage in asynchronously, so it is therefore difficult to calculate the participation rates in such programming with utmost accuracy.

Just over half (52%) of all 21C projects used the shutdown as an opportunity to engage in professional development (PD) opportunities which took place over Zoom and similar platforms. Nine projects provided more than one week's worth of PD opportunities, one of whom provided more than a month of such opportunities. The remaining five projects provided up to seven days' worth of PD activities for its leaders and staff. Participation

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numbers varied between an average of one and three participants per session to above 20 participants per session.

Leaders of 21C projects representing half of all grantees joined forces with school administrators, task forces, and advocacy groups to help with COVID response efforts as labeled by the "administrative leadership" category of initiatives listed. Additional efforts included participation in data reviews, summer planning, fall reopening planning, creation of resources for families, and other administrative-type work. These types of tasks varied widely and were mainly longer-term in nature as compared with some one-time PD opportunities. As such, ten out of the thirteen projects that identified having participated in administrative leadership indicated that they did so for more than a month.

Thirteen 21C projects (also 52%) helped with the delivery of meals to families in their communities. They assisted with meal-related administrative work in addition to the physical delivery and distribution. One director in particular wrote an application for summer meals and another helped with tracking numbers and communicating with families. For the most part, these efforts lasted for more than a month.

For essential workers in the spring of 2020, care for their school age children was a priority. Nine 21C projects stepped up and provided safe spaces for these children to be during the day. As one particular program described, "From March 17th - May 15th we offered an essential childcare program open to all students in the SU. We had an average of six children a day and programming included afterschool opportunities from 3:00 – 5:00 pm. We also completed a variety of culminating projects including incubating chicken eggs!" The fact that eight other projects were able to accomplish similar feats was an invaluable service during the tumultuous months of spring 2020.

Leaders representing eleven 21C projects indicated that their staff engaged in one or more types of activities including but not limited to: planning, implementation of virtual programming, professional development, training of new staff, reaching out to students, cleaning up the school space, taking inventory, and completing Filemaker reports. The responses related to this category overlap with several others and also underline the reality that there were plenty of major and minor tasks to be done even though programming was not operating as normal.

Three projects responded on their APRs with "other" to indicate some of the ways they stayed busy and helpful in spring 2020. Staff from one project created kits for students such as summer and birthday bash kits to spread cheer. Another group of staff helped with Chromebook distribution and family outreach on behalf of the schools in their district. Finally, another project reported that they spent time creating a monthly newsletter for families.

The vast number of ways in which 21C leaders and staff demonstrated that they were able to respond to the crisis quickly and creatively were a boon to their communities and families. Because of their combined abilities to quickly pivot and engage in completely new activities, children and youth received meals, programming, and outreach. While these undertakings revealed strengths and opportunities for the programs' leadership, they were not without their challenges. The following section details these highlights, challenges, and identified future needs.

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## Highlights and Demonstrated Strengths

While the spring 2020 COVID-19 shutdown in Vermont (and nationwide) was undoubtedly the greatest challenge that most 21C programs had likely faced, there were also "silver linings" that arose from that time period. Many program leaders reported strengthening connections with their own staff, families, their supervisory unions/districts and the field as a whole. They found success with remote programming and essential care, thus cultivating recognition from both within the field and beyond. They drew strength from each other to better understand and appreciate the talents and dedication of their staff as individuals and as teams. A summary of each of the main strengths in order from most-commonly described to least-commonly described on APRs are as follows:

**Connections within the field were bolstered.** Through on-screen opportunities, such as open field calls and 21C-director-specific calls on Zoom, 21C directors and staff had many chances to see and talk with one another more frequently than usual in spring 2020. One director noted that through these meetings she gained a better sense of who to go to for support within the field. The following are a few quotes that show the strength of some of the connections that leaders in the field made with one another through these virtual opportunities:

- *Thanks to the 21C retreats, I have not only learned a lot about myself, but these meetings gave me the much needed connection to other program directors. The added weekly meetings once March 16th hit, was inspiring, overwhelming and moving. […] Being my first year, I couldn't be more appreciative of these retreats and meetings.*
- *I believe the best resources that I could use is other 21C directors, which has been super helpful during this process. All of the Zoom PD's, emails and retreats have been SO amazing for our future success to continue our programs.*
- *The weekly director meetings and support […] were extremely helpful in helping me not feel like I was the only one dealing with challenges or moments of stress. I don't think any of us could have ever predicted a global pandemic, but it felt like our afterschool community grew closer throughout this process.*

**Family engagement was strengthened due to programs increasing their online presence**. A few program leaders indicated that they utilized their programs' existing Facebook pages to communicate with families and interact with them directly. There were also times that family members joined in on remote programming with their children. One program indicated that they used a phone tree within their community to share with families what the afterschool program was remotely offering. Several programs took advantages of the increased need and opportunity to communicate with families during this time.

**Directors recognized and renewed their appreciation for the dedication of their own staff**. In a "culture of constant stress and change," as one director described the spring of 2020, program staff were frequently in positions of needing to step up to each of the challenges that came their way. Directors recognized these tireless efforts of their staff who helped with essential care, distributed meals, and even planned for programs that did not always come to fruition due to circumstances out of their control. As one director articulated, he witnessed a "collaborative, emotionally invested group of people that maintained a stubborn resolve to demand of

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[themselves] endless hours of brainstorming creative solutions to seemingly impossible situations" with regard to his staff.

**Many projects were able to utilize the closure to engage in more opportunities for professional development and for connecting with their own staff members**. As previously mentioned, virtual platforms such as Zoom were leveraged for professional development opportunities and for making connections among leaders and staff within the field. Several directors recognized this as a bright spot of the COVID closures. Some programs also indicated that they worked on summer planning together and reflected on program improvement possibilities together.

**Projects gained recognition and appreciation from school administrators of their supervisory unions and districts**. As several programs stepped up in various ways to support students and families by collaborating with their SUs and districts, they became grateful when they learned that their efforts had been seen and appreciated by administrators such as superintendents and principals. At least three directors felt valued as a result of their efforts to make themselves available where needed. Strong connections between 21C projects and districts are a crucial strategy for projects to sustain themselves within their respective SUs and districts.

One site coordinator related feedback from a student about how much they appreciated and miss programming that took place during "normal times." This perspective and appreciation for programming as it took place prior to the shutdown serves as a reminder that although there were silver linings, ultimately directors, staff, and students alike were all the while anxiously had been awaiting an end to pandemic life in the spring of 2020.

## Challenges

When the COVID-19 closures forced in-person programming to close and program providers to retreat to their makeshift home offices, stress levels were high. Program providers shared that their home/work life balance was challenging, particularly for those who were parents with children at home. They felt stress and uncertainty about programming and about the upcoming summer. One director described feeling that there was "a new emergency every day." This emotional crisis was a challenge of its own, and compounding it was the programs' four most identified challenges during the shutdown:

**Keeping youth engaged and participating in (remote) programming was difficult**. Six project leaders mentioned in their APRs that it was a challenge to keep their program participants connected and engaged once programming transition to remote-only. The projects that were able to offers remote programming were eager to do so, but students and families were overwhelmed with remote school and a myriad of other stressors during this time. As a result, continued participation in afterschool programming became a lower priority for many students.

**Communication with families was challenging.** Reaching out to families in an effort to keep students involved with and engaged in programming was difficult for a few reasons. Some projects either decided or were instructed to not overwhelm families with messages since families were likely already burdened enough with communications related from teachers, employers, and others. There was also this issue of access to the internet, which some families

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did not have at home. And even when families were available and connected to the internet, it was not always easy for directors and coordinators to figure out how to best connect with and support them.

**The perennial challenge of retaining quality staff was intensified**. Vermont Afterschool ran a survey in late March 2020 and among the respondents were eleven 21C directors who reported that there had been at least some job losses within their respective programs due to the shutdown. On the APR, one director reported that a site had a coordinator that resigned in conjunction with the pandemic. That same director asserted that hiring for the fall of 2020 had been becoming more difficult than usual with all of the unknowns. Another director reported that their project had been rebuilding after having lost seven or eight program leaders to full time job opportunities with benefits. The shutdown added difficulty to that already tough situation. Being able to recruit and retain quality staff in a field of largely part-time work is a regularly reported issue among directors.

**While some projects worked relatively seamlessly with their school administrations, at least a few struggled with communication issues**. The director of one project lamented that a decrease in communication and accessibility with district administrators was one of the most disheartening and discouraging moments of the school year. There was at least one other project for which planned summer programming got preemptively cancelled by the district. Project directors and supervisory union/school district leaders alike were under immense pressure with fewer-than-needed guidelines and support. As an unintended result, communication was often strained.

## Needs and opportunities

When COVID-19 hit in spring 2020, the initial expected time of the shutdown was a few weeks. As that time lengthened and protective measures such as masks and distancing became and assumed part of daily life, the expanded learning field as a whole has had to reckon with long term needs that would and will continue to challenge providers for the foreseeable future. At the same time, the drastic shift in day-to-day operations and relationships have also made apparent certain opportunities for growth. The following themes emerged from the insights of 21C leaders as they reflected on both the silver linings and immense challenges during one of the most tumultuous times in their careers.

**Opportunities for the field to connect, including through virtual options, should continue.** Many 21C project leaders that had an opportunity to engage in more professional development during the closure period in spring 2020 recognized the importance of making more time for it going forward. One director stated, "It was amazing to see [program staff] gaining skills and perspective through virtual professional development. We want to continue this focus going forward." Leaders in the field experienced the benefit of engaging with others in the field through professional development workshops and trainings, open field calls, roundtables, and other meetings that they could participate in while remaining in their homes (assuming the availability of high speed internet).

**The importance of consistent and relevant outreach to families was made apparent to projects.** Several 21C project leaders noted that outreach to families increased when the programs closed in March 2020, while others indicated that communication with them was challenging. Nonetheless, there was a high level of recognition of its importance. This sense of newfound urgency among several 21C leaders was in response to the retrospective desire to have had connections with families in place when the closures happened. Connections with families would have helped several programs with encouraging students to participate in remote programming.

**The spring 2020 program closures illuminated the intense need for strong funding structures, partnerships, as well as relationships with supervisory unions and school districts**. Program sustainability is key to ensuring quality afterschool and summer programs are readily available for all children and youth in Vermont. With aforementioned issues with recruiting and retaining quality staff it is difficult for programs to assuredly and continuously build upon quality. It is vital that the field become better positioned to offer full time and well-funded positions. Financial sustainability as well as supportive partnerships are key. One project director summarized the need well by saying, "As our school district continues to struggle financially, we will need to be creative on how to support afterschool programming. Partnering with neighboring schools/districts and the community will be key."

**Social-emotional learning has been and will continue to be vital as a direct result of the stress and quick changes from spring 2020** and as such, afterschool and summer learning programs are safe spaces where program leaders and staff can support such learning. One director wisely stated upon reflecting on the spring of 2020, "Now more than ever, we see how mindfulness, social-emotional learning, self-regulation, etc. are important, as well as how important it is to create and foster non-academic skills and hobbies as well as a love and passion for the outdoors, as these are really the things we have left at this difficult time. I think that this has really brought to light the importance of what we do in afterschool and the opportunity that we have to expose students to even more of these skills, interests, and passions."

## Conclusion

At the time of the writing of this report (winter 2021), the field still awaits a return to full normalcy, however that may look and evolve as time goes on. The changes made in spring 2020 were, at the time, thought to be short-term. Many programs reopened with modifications in summer 2020 and the commonly held hope was that the 2020-21 school year would usher in more and more normalcy with the passage of time. Over the course of the year, several 21C programs have returned to in-person programming with modifications such as masks and physical distancing practices in place. Schools responded to COVID cases within schools and community spikes. Now one year later, with about the quarter of Vermont's adult population having had at least one vaccine dose, further progress toward a full reopening is steady and hopeful.

Looking back on the spring of 2020, 21C programs in Vermont were faced with a series of unprecedented challenges. After project leaders and their staff had spent the first two-thirds of the 2019-20 school year building on past successes and continuing to provide quality

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programming for youth, the onset of the pandemic necessitated a seismic shift in action. Despite the major changes and losses, most 21C leaders were able to quickly pivot and to engage their staffs in helpful efforts for supporting the field as well as school districts and even families. In doing so, they strengthened their online presence, recognized and renewed their appreciation for their own staff, and gained recognition from their supervisory unions and districts. Perhaps most importantly, they strengthened their connections with one another by attending field forums and professional development opportunities over Zoom. They shared their challenges, such as keeping kids engaged and keeping up communication with families; retaining staff; and communicating with school administrators. Through it all the most pressing needs and areas for future attention came into the forefront. Continued connections within the field, outreach to families, and positive relationships with school districts and a focus on social-emotional learning partners will continue to be essential as the pandemic continues to affect everyday life.

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