



Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers Pandemic Evaluation

2020-2022 Data and Trends

November 1, 2023

Issued by the Vermont Agency of Education/Student Pathways Division

State of Vermont

Agency of Education

Governor: **Phillip B. Scott**

Secretary of Education: **Heather A. Bouchey, Ph.D., Interim Secretary**

Chief Financial Officer: **William T. Bates**

1 National Life Drive
Montpelier, VT 05620-2501
education.vermont.gov
(802) 828-1130

Document Name: Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers Pandemic Evaluation

This Report / Document Issued by:

Emanuel Betz, 21C Program State Coordinator

Primary Author: Emanuel Betz, State Coordinator

Direct questions to: emanuel.betz@vermont.gov

Revision Log:

This document was originally issued on: **November 1, 2023**

This document was revised on: **N/A**



Purpose

The Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers program (21C) provides approximately six million dollars annually in federal education funding serving historically between 85-100 centers and up to 15,000 youth annually during afterschool and summer hours. The purpose of this 21C statewide evaluation report is to review the data gathered during the pandemic years of 2020-22 in order to improve and inform all 21C systems and programs during the endemic period and beyond.

Executive Summary

There were multiple phases of the pandemic, each of which brought unique challenges and context to running afterschool programs during the pandemic. Broadly speaking, buildings and programs were closed or curtailed in the opening months, followed by a restarting year when in-person instruction was reintroduced. This time period's contextual highlights included assuring safety protocols, managing major staffing challenges, yet while being able to produce strong summer programming in the 16th month after closing, followed by a more gradual rebuilding of afterschool programs in the subsequent schoolyear ending in June of 2022.

Programs adapted programming and approaches during the first two phases. Total attendance dropped from 11,541 to 7218 with regular attendance numbers (30 plus days) dropping from 4601 to 2802 youth served. Parents and partners could not enter buildings. Local evaluation activity was reduced to a trickle. Youths' school day schedules were changed with great variability, which affected the diversity of afterschool choices and available staff, while challenging organizational norms. A new trend of many program directors resigning occurred in 2021. Yet, hundreds of new remote programs and other approaches were implemented along with opening back up to in-person programming.

The building back phase of 2021-22 saw a significant rebound in attendance with total attendees topping 10,000. Summer program numbers doubled. Total in-person days reached 15,869 total days offered. While low-income youth service dipped slightly, those with disabilities attended at pre-pandemic norms. At the same time, expenditures increased by 28%. Partnerships started being rebuilt and were increased by 106% even while 9 of 23 project directors had left their jobs.

At the time of writing in the summer of 2023 the pandemic had created a net loss of 14 projects or a decline in funded sites of 16%. This is concerning. At the same time of the 10 objective measures able to be tracked as part of this report, 7 of 10 are now in positive territory during the building back phase. With the current leadership losses being stemmed at the director level, this and other metrics in positive territory now stand at 8 of 10 at the time of writing. However, these are basic structural measures only and do not assess program quality. For the 86 existing projects, most appear to be in a viable position to continue their growth back to pre-pandemic norms. This will take intense effort with renewed state action, local leadership, and team effort where focused goals and strategies drive attainment.

This report was iterative and generated over time to inform the 21C program during the endemic transition as well as to guide its future action. Key recommendations to support building improvement and resiliency in the system include the following areas:

- Continuous improvement of 21C granting systems including program start-up supports and technical assistance methodologies that can flexibly and effectively support existing and new grantees.
- Rebuilding the local and statewide evaluation systems with metrics and associated work that will reinvigorate program quality implementation and clarify intended results.
- Continuous monitoring and tracking of access and equity in the areas of participation and affordability so that opportunity gaps can be mitigated, and the needs of funded communities and families met.
- Building back the variety, depth, and choice in programming across the afterschool system.
- Building back staff numbers of licensed teacher staff and equivalent community experts.
- Enhancing family communication and community partnerships.
- Improving school-program integration within projects.

Background and Goals

On Friday March 13 of 2020, the Covid pandemic hit Vermont and the world, closing schools and all its 21C funded projects serving 100 afterschool centers in VT. In Vermont throughout the pandemic, all 21C funded programs were situated in and managed by school districts. At this point in time, programs were expected to pivot flexibly in a rapidly changing environment based on local conditions to and/or between in-person, remote or hybrid dispositions with regard to implementing summer and afterschool programming. Funding remained constant and available for all projects throughout the first two years of pandemic within the dates of this report: March 2020-June 30, 2022.

With regard to summative evaluation metrics and annual evaluation, the 21C AOE office adapted its annual evaluation process and annual contracted report and analysis pivoting to using adapted metrics maintaining the same goals followed since 2014 for 2020-2022, which will be summarized here. The summary of evaluation data will be laid out in the report with severely limited comparisons to prior year's data points due to the pandemic. In addition, given the complexity of needs, data availability, and real-time decision making during the pandemic, this report was generated internally by AOE. In taking this path, AOE remained committed to collecting and using data for objective on-going improvement through the pandemic, recognizing however that the data itself and the conditions in which it was gathered may make the analysis less accurate than normally could be expected under normal operating conditions. At the same time, new metrics were generated, which can inform future actions and recommendations, and approaches.

VT21C Metric Chart Tracking 2020-22

	Metric Area	Collection Area
Maintained	Attendance Leadership Funding Qualitative Questions	Amounts and regular attendance. Education level Type and amounts Focus on strengths and challenges
Reduced	Access and Equity Staffing Partnerships Programming	Economic disadvantage and disability percentages Tracked licensed teacher staff only. Tracked with change in amount. Maintained targeted program metrics
Added	Remote Learning In-Person Days Enrichment #s Youth Leadership	Type and numbers Summer and Afterschool breakouts Daily average numbers of program options High school as staff, tracking examples
Dropped	High Quality School Integration	End products examples # Principal meetings with program

The state’s four main goal areas as a focus for activity and evaluation remained:

- 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.

For the last pre-pandemic 19-20 full evaluation report using standard metrics since 2014, which include results inclusive of March-June pandemic months of that year, see:

<https://education.vermont.gov/documents/21C-statewide-evaluation-report-2019-20> In particular, starting on page 18, this report summarizes the types of activities implemented in the three spring months following pandemic closure, where 68% of projects immediately pivoted to remote programming, 36% implemented new essential “child-care” options and more than 50% of projects implemented meal supports, leadership and professional development activity with staff. To complement that initial data, this report provides further data, themes, examples, highlights and afterschool lessons learned from the next two years of the pandemic.

Pandemic Timeline

	March 2020	Summer 2020	School Year 2020-21	Summer 2021	Schoolyear 21-22	Summer '22
	Phase 1	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	
VT Daily Caseload Counts	<10	<10	80-190 Nov-May	10-100 (July<30)	100-2000 Jan '22= peak	
Guidance +Protocols	None-schools close	Limited to non-school essential care guidance	September: School guidance released	No major new summer guidance	Iterative changes mostly to contact tracing	Local
Afterschool In Person Instruction levels	None	Limited	Varied	High- with no known school closures	High with classroom level closures occurring	All back to in-person
Leadership descriptor*	Confused	Cautious	Adapting	Hopeful+ Almost Normal	Challenging	Expanding
Context	State of emergency starts	Afterschool pilots school-based protocols used in the fall	Varied in-school schedules	First full use of facilities and staff without restrictions	Regular required pivots due to state guidance	"Endemic" Period starts

Overview of Attendance Data

	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22	% year over year increase
Pandemic Year	NA	March Closure	1	2	--
21C Funded Centers	100	100	100	95	-5%
Total Students Served	12,289	11,541	7218	10420	+44%
Regular attendees*	5737	4601	2802	5225	+86%
Total summer #s	--	--	2431	4888	+101%
%Low-income RA	61%	56%	60%	49%	-11%
% RA on IEP/504	20%	20%	21%	21%	0%
Total expenditure	11,934,594	11,038,388	9,882,626	12,635,252	+28%

Other Indicators

	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22	Year over year % increase
Local Evaluation outcomes reported	112	80	18	55	+183%
In person summer days	NA	NA	585	2149	+267%
In person afterschool days	NA	NA	11250	13720	+22%
Total days	NA	NA	12335	15869	+29%
Summer licensed teachers	331	334	NA	NA	--
Afterschool licensed teachers	779	574	359	NA	NA
Total paid Licensed teachers (full year)	NA	NA	NA	593	NA
Number of new directors	NA	~<5	4	9	+125%
Partnerships **	--	--	94	194	+106%
“ARP ESSER” Funds used	--	--	--	3,298,271	--
# Remote programs	--	--	hundreds	38	--
# projects submitting local measures	--	--	--	8 of 23	--

*Includes some Child-Care ARP funds

** definition changed from a \$1000 value to a \$100 value

Phase One: Impact on the first year of Summer Programming in the aftermath of closure

In the pre-COVID summer of 2019, 95% of the sites that offered summer programming were in operation for at least 5 weeks. On average, each summer program offered six weeks of programming with five days per week and 37 hours per week of in-person programming. Each of these averages exceeded the targets of five weeks, five days per week, and 21 hours per week respectively.

In the summer of 2020, following the introduction of the virus and subsequent adaptations to building openings and programs, the context in Vermont was that school based in-person state protocols had not been delivered yet to schools as they were designed to be released for the start of the school year of September 2020. As such, 21C funded programs that were considering running in-person summer programming would have to do so following and/or adapting summer program health guidance targeted towards yet applicable to non-school run programs such as essential child-care centers and summer camps. Within this context, of the 100 centers that were approved and expected to run at 60 summer sites, of all projects n=24, in 2020 only 29% offered in-person programming, 12% were hybrid including in-person and remote programming, and 54% offered remote only programming and one program each or 4% offered only a meal program and one nothing at all. Of the in-person sites, 52% or 31 sites delivered in-person programming with a range of 8 to 39 days totaling 585 in-person days. Total

students served inclusive of all programs were 2431. Disaggregate data between remote versus in-person numbers were not available year over year, yet the order of magnitude of loss of in-person days was reduced by at least two-thirds based on an assumption that at least 1500 summer in person days or 25 on average per site occurs annually.

Impact on Afterschool + Summer Programming in year one (phase two) of the pandemic

The first full year of the pandemic started the school year with new state safety guidance and significant increases with the virus count, particularly through the winter months. As such schools and their afterschool programs had to create a new variety of in-person and remote instruction days making up each week. While there was great variation among schools, split weeks by grade with 2 days on/off for each grade span for in-person instruction, with the 5th day of the week being “remote for all” was a regular occurrence. In effect, many students then received 3 days of remote and 2 days of in person instruction week to week during the school day. Some may have been 100% remote for varying or regular periods of time. It is in this context that afterschool programs managed their sites and program offerings. In the past, where every day every student may have been available to attend afterschool, during this phase, only some sub-sets of grades may have been attending school a few days each week with no one in the building each Wednesday for example. This provided an immense challenge of how and who could receive afterschool services on what days and times.

This challenge is represented in the data, and we can see in this year that regular attendees dropped precipitously by 40%, which is the best overall indicator of effect. Likewise total attendees dropped by 37% as well, yet interestingly the budget expenditure fell by only 10%. This is likely a result of maintaining the high proportion of fixed costs being staff. While these numbers dropped, given the context of the pandemic and difficulty in providing services judgement might be informed by local context. As one project advocated:

“For the past year we have been in survival mode. A lot of the forwarded planning was put on hold as we navigated outdoor programming, remote programming, and hybrid learning. The biggest lesson we learned is how resilient we are. Through all the ups and downs we were able to continue to offer programming and keep connecting to students and families. Through we were not offering the same amount of programming we have in the past; we are happy that what we did offer never lacked in quality.”

Evidence of resiliency too is in the following summer’s data following the pandemic’s arrival where summer numbers were at 2481, almost the same as the pandemic school year regular attendee metric. In addition, hundreds of remote and other new programs were created. (see below for more detail) Further, and not to be underestimated, service was at parity for IEP (21%) and low-income youth (60%) served. On the flip side during this year, there was a major dip in the usage of licensed teachers as staff, also tracking to an estimated negative 40% differential year over year. In addition, the winds of major leadership change started, with four Directors leaving their positions. Further, as evidenced by virtually no reporting (n=18) of any local evaluation measure tracked, evaluation activity outside of requirements virtually stopped. This demonstrates how non-programmatic domains were impacted significantly. This is reiterated too with the number of partners, which sat a low number of 94, which again during the pandemic in a situation when outsiders could not enter buildings, could be considered a strength as well as challenge, but it is a fair statement to say all system components like these were negatively impacted. Again, some local commentary can inform:

Overall, I am overjoyed that we even had the opportunity to run programs this year. Coming off the COVID year of no one being in school, I was nervous of what we were going to be able to do. Summer kicked us off on a positive note and showed us that we are capable of running programs here at City School, just with a different look. Our expenditures [in this phase] are down from the past, but we are still using money to make programs go.

The fall semester got off to a really slow start as expected as students and families didn't know what to expect. I was able to provide information through our morning announcements with pre-recorded videos. This was a great opportunity for myself to present information in an accessible way and for students to see my face. The videos were a big hit and attendance gradually increased. Our fall semester provided limited opportunities as classes were only offered three days a week and specific to grade levels due to our cohort structure and guidance. While the opportunities were limited, we were able to give choice and provide extended learning opportunities to 36 students. The most important thing was that we were able to do all of this while keeping everyone safe.

Impact on Summer and Afterschool in year two of the pandemic

In 21-22, the strategic goal of the AOE 21C office was to “stabilize and enhance” the 21C system as the working context began to move from pandemic to endemic. Specific targets for the 21-22 year that were set were: increase to 4000 regular attendees, continued parity of low income and IEP service numbers at 60% and 20% and a goal to use at least 2 million dollars leveraging ARP-ESSER funding to support “Recovery. Finally, as a system indicator, 100% reporting to state and federal requirements remained a goal.

Reviewing the outcomes chart above, these metrics were exceeded in multiple cases. Regular attendee numbers grew at 86% to 5225 served year over year, reporting was maintained at 100%, IEP service rates stayed steady at 21% and over 3.2 million dollars from local ARP-ESSER were leveraged to support growth. There were commensurate levels of growth in the areas of total days and students served, partnerships, in-person programming, and reporting of local evaluation metrics, all of which is very positive and a testament to the 21C afterschool communities' work.

On the negative side of the ledger during this same period, many leaders n=9, or 40% of the project leaders left their positions, which was on top of prior year exits. In many cases, rehiring may have taken up to a period of months, which certainly puts immense stress on local projects as some programs hung in the balance. Likewise low-income service dropped 11 percentage points from 60% to 49% for the first time in 20 years, although this needs to be tempered somewhat in that state rates have been dropping by 2% year over year: In 2018-19 the statewide average was 40%, moving to 38% in 2019-20 and then to 36.72% in 2021-22. In truth it is unclear how accurate this particular metric may be given the disruptions in collection brought on by the pandemic and the reality of the above, but the numbers require attention and ongoing reflection. In same vein at the project level, 5 more project sites were lost, bringing the total number of funded sites to its lowest ebb in a decade dipping under 100 for the first time to 95 sites. This number highlights evidence that the system was under immense stress.

The crucial area of program quality at a statewide level was difficult to assess effectively in such a changing environment. Anecdotally from the AOE site visits and meetings with project

leaders, the general program changes that occurred was that the club type enrichment structures were executed numerically at a much lower level. This can be confirmed using a known historical comparison, where prior to 2015 it would be very unusual for a daily enrichment offering count to be under 3 daily on average. During 21-22, AOE added this metric and learned that 48% of projects or roughly half offered only 1 or 2 enrichment choices daily: 19% offered 1 daily, 29% offered 2, 18% offered 3, 21% offered four daily and 13% five program choices daily. One might also look at these data and concur positively that 52% of projects maintained parity with past practice under very challenging circumstances and this is an enormous win and testament to the work. The future goal is to grow these and like results annually. Finally, an additional positive trend should be acknowledged; note though that in 21-22, 359 licensed teachers were paid as staff in afterschool providing evidence of building back. This is far from an estimated 800 baseline range pre-pandemic, but it's almost halfway there.

Focus Area: Partnerships during the Pandemic

Partnerships are a core component to 21C program diversity, quality, and sustainability. Historically, total partnership numbers have been in the several hundred range with 600 being the highest annual known total achieved in one year. This number would include organizational, programmatic, and even small partners who contribute something to the program. The current state could be described within the following quotes: *"In the past, there has been good community engagement...but our partnerships were limited due to COVID..."* *"We have partnerships within the community, but we are currently not using them due to not letting anyone indoors except for school day staff and students."*

In the first full year of the pandemic in 20-21, total partners were reduced to 94 with about a third of these or 33 being dedicated to new virtual activity. 56% of projects reported fewer than 3 partners and only 6 projects or 26% reported at least 5 partners, which would be easily achievable in a normal year pre-pandemic. Unfortunately, 10 projects had under 2 partners total and 4 projects had no partner activity. Given the exceedingly challenging conditions including shut buildings to outsiders, the fact that partnerships could exist at all demonstrates the strong community connections that many programs had at varying levels as well as demonstrating an ability to pivot in some degree to entirely new methods. It is notable that in three cases (~10%) projects were able to grow the number of partners in the middle of the pandemic. What is interesting yet unknown is to what degree the pandemic will have on longer-term partnership re-development. On the one hand, new connections and programs were built, often on a virtual platform or in a smaller contributory method, yet on the other, long standing effective partnerships were stopped. For example, as one project reported: *"We had a great partnership with the Vermont law School with 20 students coming in and mentoring and partnering with a kiddo. Hopefully we will [be able to] go back to it."*

Focus Area: Maintaining Effective Leadership in the System

Directors and site coordinators with high levels of experience, drive and expertise are best equipped to provide the most positive and beneficial expanded learning experiences for children and youth. One important question is what effect did the pandemic have on the capacity to hold onto strong and effective leader workforce year over year?

The available metrics at this period looked at the education and related experience of project directors and site coordinators.

Project Directors: In 2019-20, 92% of project directors (23 out of 25 total directors) had a bachelor's degree or higher. In 21-22 this result tipped up to 96%. The breakout includes 1 Director with an Associate's degree, 9 with a Bachelors, 11 with a master's and two PhDs. In 19-20, 84% percent (21 out of 25 directors) had at least three years of related work experience that year. In 21-22 however, 11 of 23 leaders, there was a 52% decline for directors that had at least 3 years of experience that were leading programs. As a related statistic, within the statewide director group, experienced directors comprised only 39% of the group (in the position 5 years or more)

Site Coordinators: Among individual program sites, in 20-21 68% had at least one coordinator who held a bachelor's degree or higher. In 21-22 this number remained relatively consistent at 65%. The breakout for all leaders was as follows: 43 with a BA, 22 with an MA, 11 with an Associates, 19 with some college and 5 who had completed high school. In 20-21. 92% of all program sites were led by at least one coordinator with three or more years of related work experience. In 21-22 this number stayed in the same high range at 96%.

It is clear from this data that the system maintained a relative consistent baseline quality standard even though immense pandemic forces were put on schools and that market conditions favored worker mobility, particularly as the endemic months began. The bigger question is will this trend maintain itself in the future or will time force a more systemic change in leadership patterns? The second point is with a high degree of competent, but new leaders, what new support structures can and should be put in place to support them as part of future state effort?

Focus Area: Family Engagement and Parent Communication

As part of annual reporting, projects were asked to report on two questions: What types of family engagement or programming occurred? How and what communications methods are used to communicate with families and the community?

Family engagement and parent communication within 21C funded afterschool programs were significantly impacted in the first full year of the pandemic. 84% of responses that were general in nature were of a negative nature, noting limitations of building access or the outright inability for families to enter buildings. Words used to describe this new reality were: *“restricted, hard to access, not allowed, and cannot attend.”* On the flip side, one project noted that *“Every site as a positive is parents don't come into the program so the end of day transition is smoother. There still is interaction yet it is a lot less stressful for all. ‘We will likely keep this structure.’”* In another case in a change of routine it was noted that *“Staff go down to cars at pick up as needed to communicate to parents.”* This theme of a “change of routine” was reiterated by many as well in same year monitoring visits.

Regarding program communications with families, under the pandemic the typical use of a variety of methods of print, electronic and other means remained relatively static. Several reports indicated an uptick in the use of e-communications, and a reliance on district wide e services among other methods. Interestingly as one site put it: *“All sites have one or more engagement/communication strategies in place this year including: Mailchimp Newsletters,*

Blog Facebook pages and regular emails.” And another project noted that “there was a great deal of communication--Because all of our programs went electronic in late spring last year it was great that parents got used to this method of communication.”

Focus Area: Remote Learning

These new methods of outreach manifested themselves in other ways as well for both families and students. While there were only six reports of “typical afterschool” family events in all projects in 20-21, 326 unique remote programs were implemented within 91% of 21C funded projects with 22% of projects offering remote programming explicitly to families themselves. The range of remote project offerings was 2-63 with at least half the project offering 10 or more offerings. However, over time as the endemic period took hold, except for one project, all remote programming ceased to continue by June of 2023.

	Implementing remote programs	Includes remote Family offering(s)	Projects without any remote programming
Pre-pandemic	<1%	<1%	<1%
20-21	91%	22%	9%
22-23	5%	NA	95%

	Projects doing remote programs	Includes Family offering(s)	Projects without remote programs
Pre-Pandemic	<1%	<1%	<1%
20-21	91%	22%	9%
22-23	1	NA	21 of 22

Looking at what was offered as part of the hundreds of remote offerings, for example, *“At the beginning of the year “we hosted virtual family town hall events at each site to let families know about the new COVID protocols we would be following and gave examples of activities. All the staff attended, which was a great way for families to meet core staff. This connection allowed us to support families with meal kits as well.”* Other examples included a remote learning academy, summer parent academy, Online Family Zoom Clubs and a Visiting Scientist series, online cooking programs, and two caregiver education series open to parents, foster parents, grandparents, aunts/uncles, and babysitters. Other unique initiatives were tried for the first time ever such as Hike 100 (July - August 2020) – a *“Remote program designed to engage families in getting outside, moving, and exploring nature.”* Fire and Ice (February 2021): Families and community members were invited to make their own ice luminaries to help light up their town! And a Super Reader Challenge: – *“Originally designed as a remote program to meet an identified need for providing reading support, this extremely popular program soon became a whole family challenge when families requested, we extend the challenge to include an adult component.”* In another typical Vermont example, one director worked with a parent leadership group that implemented an outdoor garden with 4 raised beds.

In addition, another service that was provided to families from 21C funded afterschool programs was the production and use of enrichment {and food kits} implemented in a few programs: *This*

year, each school site sent home weekly take-home enrichment kits to those enrolled with KEAP. In addition, the STEM Adventures Program sent home STEM kits to all KEAP registered students at every break including Thanksgiving, Winter Holidays, February Break and April Break. Two online surveys assessed these kits, one in February and one in late May. Ninety-seven percent of the parents surveyed in February were “Very Satisfied” or “Highly Satisfied” with the kits. Seventy percent of our families used the kits as a family project. Of the 40 respondents to our May online survey, 36 received our April Break STEM kits and every single respondent was “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied” with the kits’ overall quality. The final kits in April included a “Camp in A Box” created by the Fairbanks Museum & Planetarium focused on astronomy for grades 3-8 (161 registered students) and a Lego Balloon Car building kit for grades K-2 (115 registered students). In another example: “During the summers of 2020 and 2021, we sent home paper Activity Packets for each K-8 student in the district. Each student received 4 packets throughout the summer which were designed with three age bands in mind: K-2, 3-5 and 6-8. Activities included a combination of independent-intended and family-inclusive ideas.”

All of this ceased once in person instruction returned except in one project.

2023 Learning for the Future- Monitoring Endemic Trends

As part of this overall limited report analysis, there were ten metrics showing positive trends as noted in the charts above and three in the negative category reviewing data from 21-22 to school year 22-23.

The three concerning trends observed were: low-income service percentage served, the number of funded sites and number of new Directors. Updates as of July 1, 2023, follow:

1. New data on low-income service percentage will be available after December 1, 2023.
2. In school year 22-23, the total number of funded sites has been reduced by another 5%, bringing the total sites down to 86 active sites, with a total reduction of funded sites down by more than 16% total because of the pandemic. This is a very concerning trend.
3. On a positive note, as of 22-23 an additional 3 directors have resigned and have been rehired. This compares with 4 Directors who were rehired in the first year of the pandemic and 9 in the second year or 21-22. As of June 30th, 2023, no project started the funding year without a new director. These numbers show significant year over year stabilization of leadership positions at least at the Director level. Data at the site coordinator level was not available at the time of publication.

Recommendations

1. Granting Systems: The systemic reduction in the number of program sites needs to be analyzed in depth across 21C systems to ascertain action steps for improvement. Considerations should include:

- a. An analysis of why the program sites are fewer in number and determining if this is unique to 21C funded programs while developing a plan of action.
 - b. Considering changes or improvements to the granting system for communities including creating alternative strategies that can be more relevant to the current endemic context.
 - c. Changes to start-up support and technical assistance structures over time.
 - d. Responding and leveraging the potential impact of other funding streams such as ARP-ESSER and other nascent state funding streams such as cannabis revenue.
2. Evaluation systems: The VT 21C evaluation system was curtailed because of the pandemic. In addition, commensurate local evaluation metrics, while coming back into use, are not nearly at pre-pandemic levels. Building and implementing a new statewide evaluation system and supporting local evaluation efforts in a consistent manner over time is needed. In addition, reinstating high quality program metrics, and associated technical assistance and Professional development commensurate with the 21C legislation and vision is essential to meet long term outcomes and opportunity afterschool-summer programming presents.
 3. Leadership: Developing intentional strategies to attract and retain skilled leaders at the director and site coordinator level remains essential for systemic longevity.
 4. Equity and affordability: The fact that low-income service rates have dropped slightly needs to be monitored closely with a deeper dive into the data to identify to what degree the numbers are representative of service versus it being a data quality issue. Consider if there are alternative methodologies to assess equity within afterschool programs. As one report stated: *“Families’ work habits have changed. More parents are working from home or have flexible work schedules due to Covid. This may impact enrollment and participation in the long term. It is more important than ever that we provide high-interest programming to families and make programs as affordable as possible.”*
 5. High Quality Programming: The known level of high-quality, high-interest enrichment programming has been reduced during the pandemic period due to a variety of factors. The Agency of Education ignores focusing on action steps in the evaluation, technical assistance, and professional development in this area at its peril.
 6. Partnerships, which are a pillar of afterschool success, were significantly curtailed as part of the pandemic and need to be supported to grow back to earlier pre-pandemic levels. These impact the quality, depth and organizational sophistication needed to be successful over the long term.
 7. Costs have risen 28% through the pandemic and will impact sustainability and potentially long-term viability. Understanding and adapting grant policy to the new post COVID context is a state imperative, including understanding post-pandemic costs at detailed level.

Conclusion

The data gathered during the pandemic and endemic period above shows a system that is resilient and building back in many basic areas but still has several crucial headwinds to overcome, several of which are systemic in nature. The degree that the 21C system can adapt to the lessons of these and other data will determine the future chances of afterschool success for many of Vermont's most needy communities. Further, the context of afterschool and state and federal funding streams is changing and dynamic, and it remains imperative that all Vermont's afterschool funding streams and systems are interacting and responding with an intentional an improved collaborative design.