

EDUCATION WEEK

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Swords Drawn Over Funding for Expanded Learning

By **Nora Fleming**

Time is money may be the new refrain for the extended-learning community, as divisions have emerged over how federal grants should be awarded to programs that provide extra hours of academic enrichment to underprivileged students.

The **21st Century Community Learning Centers** program currently supports 8,900 centers and sites that provide academics, enrichment, and recreation during nonschool hours to 1.5 million underserved students. The federal government allocates formula grants to all 50 states, which then redistribute the money to schools and community organizations through competitions.

It is one of the fastest-growing federal grant programs in history; this past year, 3,300 active grants totaled \$1.1 billion, up from \$40 million in 1998.

More Competition?

Competition could become fierce. Recently proposed legislation in the Senate could significantly increase the number of applicants, restructure the way grants are awarded, and up the accountability requirements for existing out-of-school-time programs. The friction arising between out-of-school-time groups and expanded-school-day groups over those proposals may highlight some larger issues in the field.

The proposed **Improving Student Achievement and Engagement through Expanded Learning Time Act** would increase the applicant pool to expanded-learning-time schools, or schools that lengthen their calendars for academics, enrichment, and professional development. A counterbill, the **Afterschool for America's Children Act**, meanwhile, focuses on funding and improving 21st CCLC-supported after-school programs by increasing the requirements for staff training, community partnerships, and school alignment.

Although the bills could be stand-alone legislation, it is more likely they will be incorporated or used as guidance in restructuring 21st CCLC funding in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

In the U.S. Department of Education's fiscal 2012 budget proposal to Congress, department officials recommended changes to the 21st CCLC program through the ESEA that

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Definitions

Expanded Learning Time:

Schools add time to their days, weeks, or years for academics, enrichment, recreation, and professional development.

Out-of-School Time:

Programs that take place in hours or settings outside the traditional school day, such as after school, before school, summer, and weekends.

Pending Legislation

Improving Student Achievement and Engagement Through Expanded Learning Time Act

Would increase the 21st Century Community Learning Center applicant pool to expanded-learning-time schools.

echo some of the legislation's themes. The goal, department officials said, is to beef up the program's focus on improving outcomes for children through such measures as expanded-learning-time, after-school, and summer programs, and wraparound services that target students in the lowest-performing schools. Priority would be given to programs that have strong partnerships and affect greater numbers of students, particularly expanded-school-day models.

"Our proposal for the 21st CCLC would provide competitive grants to states and districts to give them more flexibility to determine the types of programs that best meet the needs of their students," Michael Yudin, the department's acting assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education, said in an interview. "Some districts may need high-quality after-school programs, while others may need interventions in the form of full-service community schools or expanded learning time."

Another bill, the proposed [Time for Innovation Matters in Education Act](#), would create a competitive-grant program for states and districts that want to expand learning time in their schools, but it does not specify if that would come out of 21st CCLC funding.

A number of after-school advocates worry that increasing the types of models funded through the 21st CCLC program and prioritizing applications from expanded-learning-time programs would reduce the money available for after-school programs. They are also concerned that shifting from formula to competitive state grants would reduce local decisionmaking and support.

Jen Rinehart, the vice president of policy and research at the [Afterschool Alliance](#), a Washington-based nonprofit group that advocates for after-school programs, said her group has estimated that funding an expanded-school-day program could cause six after-school programs to close their doors.

Other after-school leaders say that while they support expanded-school-day models that use added time to offer new ways for students to learn, they are not sure that 21st CCLC dollars should be used to pay for them, given the high costs associated with some models and the already-competitive nature of 21st CCLC.

But expanded-school-day advocates worry that after-school programs alone are unable to meet the demand of disadvantaged students who need extra hours to catch up. By serving all children in an underperforming school, proponents argue, an expanded-school-day program can have a substantial, and potentially larger, impact. In addition, they say, it can offer students a more comprehensive and well-rounded experience within the school day rather than outside of school. The push for longer school calendars has already gained some buy-in from the Obama administration.

"In a time when schools across the country are being forced to make cuts, the ELT model creates a more sustainable and thoughtful restructuring of the school day that connects and broadens learning through strong partnerships between schools and community-based organizations," said a spokeswoman for Sen. Bernard Sanders, I-Vt., a sponsor of the expanded learning time bill.

Applications would get priority over out-of-school time. (SB 1311)

The Afterschool for America's Children Act

Would enhance the quality of 21st CCLC-supported after-school programs through increased requirements for staff training, community partnerships, and school alignment. (SB 1370)

Time for Innovation Matters in Education Act

Would create a competitive grant program for states and districts that want to implement expanded-learning-time models in their schools. Funding source not yet specified as 21st CCLC. (SB 851, HB 1636)

SOURCE: Education Week

History of Expansion

The 21st CCLC program was originally created in 1994 to finance community programming for adults and children that made use of school sites outside the school day, but within a few years was refocused to support student programs that kept children safe during the hours they were out of school.

An Education Department-commissioned study, released in 2003, found the academic outcomes of those programs to be limited. While there was criticism of the study's procedure and analysis, given that many programs were relatively new, pressure has continued in the years since to make out-of-school-time programs more accountable and linked to academic outcomes, while remaining distinct and different from the school day. Today, the department estimates 70 percent of grant applicants are schools that run out-of-school time programs, while 30 percent are community-based organizations.

According to Lucy Friedman, the president of [The After-School Corp.](#), or TASC, a New York City-based organization that advises both after-school and expanded-learning-time programs, the expectations for both types are continuing to evolve, focusing on meeting the needs of the "whole child" through a blend of academics and enrichment.

"[These programs] are not just baby-sitting or remediation or throwing a basketball around—and they shouldn't be," Ms. Friedman said. "Everyone is looking for the magic bullet in education reform, but there is not just one way to do this," she added. "We can't expect every model to be alike because no two schools or communities are exactly alike; the approach that schools and communities take [should] depend on their individual needs."

All the proposed legislation includes provisions on ramping up accountability requirements to narrow achievement gaps. As 21st CCLC stands now, programs receiving the three- to five-year grants must submit data that measure both academic and behavior-development outcomes of participants. Efforts are under way by the Education Department to improve those accountability measures, along with technical assistance provided to state education agencies and the programs themselves when performance targets are not met, one department official said.

The Collaborative for Building After-School Systems, a coalition of 10 leaders from large out-of-school-time organizations, has submitted a [report](#) to Congress with recommendations on improving 21st CCLC through ESEA reauthorization and the recent legislation. The coalition suggests that legislation require programs to have community partnerships, supply matching funds, share information and work more collaboratively with schools, and be held to stronger accountability measures based on shared goals.

Given the small size of 21st CCLC grants, it is challenging for grantees to provide well-rounded, high-quality programming for participants without using partnerships for support, said Jennifer Peck, a coalition member and the executive director of the [Partnership for Children and Youth](#), an organization that advises entities on out-of-school programs and policy.

The coalition also suggested that successful programs get their grants renewed without having to reapply for a new grant. "If we really believe these learning opportunities are important, then we should fund them in

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an ongoing way and maintain investments in effective programs over time," Ms. Peck said.

Driving the Debate

With continued delays in ESEA reauthorization, it is unclear what the future of the 21st CCLC program will be. But while the current legislation has ignited tension between expanded-learning-time and out-of-school-time advocates over money and priorities, it has also spurred debate in the field over what youth outcomes are desired for learning that doesn't resemble a traditional school class, and what models are best to meet those outcomes.

The debate over 21st CCLC funding may serve as a means for further hashing out those issues. Even in the program's early days of underwriting community-based programs, 21st CCLC funding was tied to building partnerships by schools, organizations, and parents and to devoting time to extra services.

"One of the potential strengths of 21st CCLC funding is that it can and does serve as a bridge between the fields of youth development and education," said Ellie Mitchell, the director of the **Maryland Out of School Time Network**. "By encouraging partnerships between schools, teachers, and youth-development specialists, we begin to really understand a whole-child perspective toward learning both academic and nonacademic skills."

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