



The Afterschool for America's Children Act

For more than ten years the 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) initiative has helped millions of children and families by enhancing learning, keeping students safe when school is out of session and helping working families. Building on past accomplishments, the Afterschool for America's Children Act supports the innovative advances occurring in before-school, afterschool and summer learning programs, meeting a host of new challenges and re-engaging children in their education and future. The legislation was reintroduced in the 113th Congress on the Senate side on February 14, 2013, as S. 326, with the bill number representing the hours between 3 PM and 6 PM, when young people can most benefit from engaging learning opportunities. Original cosponsors included: Senator Boxer (D-CA), Senator Murkowski (R-AK), Senator Murray (D-WA), Senator Begich (D-AK) and Senator Manchin (D-WV). Over 135 local, state and national organizations have signed a letter in support of the legislation. The House version differs slightly from the Senate version by including global education and social-emotional learning as allowable uses as well as an emphasis on non-cognitive skills delivered through afterschool programs.

Background

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative is the only federal funding source dedicated exclusively to before-school, afterschool and summer learning programs. Authorized in Title IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the initiative provides students attending high-poverty schools with academic enrichment activities; a broad array of additional services designed to reinforce and complement the regular academic program, such as: drug and violence prevention programs, counseling programs, art, music, and recreation programs, and technology education programs; as well as literacy and related educational development services to the families of children who are served in the program.

21st CCLC programs result from collaborations between schools and community-based organizations and provide hands-on, experiential learning opportunities that align with lessons taught during the school day. Evaluations and teacher reports have revealed positive results in behavior and academic achievement for students who regularly attend 21st CCLCs: Students who attend 21st CCLC programs more regularly are more likely to improve their grades, test scores and overall academic behavior (Learning Point Associates, 2007). There are now 4,165 grants funding afterschool programs serving 1,660,713 children and youth in over 11,000 school-based and community-based centers across the country. The parents of 18 million students would place their children in an afterschool program if one were available and accessible.

Highlights of the Legislation

- Strengthens school-community partnerships to include sharing of data and resources, the ability to better leverage relationships within the community and provide an intentional alignment with the school day.
- Promotes professional development and training of afterschool program staff.
- Encourages innovative new ways to engage students in learning that looks different from a traditional school day, with an emphasis on hands-on, experiential learning; science, technology, engineering, and math; social and emotional learning; global education; and physical activity and nutrition education. Supports approaches that focus on individualized learning that provide a variety of ways for students to master core skills and knowledge.
- Provides accountability measures that are connected to college- and career-readiness goals and show student progress over time towards meeting indicators of student success including school attendance, grades and on-time grade level advancement.
- Ensures that funding supports programs that utilize evidence-based, successful practices.
- Increases quality and accountability through parent engagement, better alignment with state learning objectives and coordination between federal, state and local agencies.
- Does not prioritize any one model of expanded learning opportunities over another.
- Maintains formula grants to states that then distribute funds to local school-community partnerships through a competitive grant process.