



## Evolving to meet changing community needs

While 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers have always provided a safe, supervised, and engaging environment for youth in the hours after school, they have also continuously evolved to meet the changing student and community needs over the last 25 years. With a broader understanding of the supports that youth need to thrive, as well as the new and changing skills needed for 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs, many programs have adapted to incorporate social and emotional learning (SEL) and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) into their curriculum in recent years.

## Overview

The Laconia School District's Office of Extended Learning (OEL), which encompasses all 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs in the district, has been operating since 2002 and currently serves close to 700 students in grades K-12. Over the last 18 years the program has become an integrated part of the district and utilizes a community advisory board to ensure student and community needs are met. One of the OEL's specific elementary school programs, Project EXTRA, has evolved from a primarily academic program to adopt a project-based learning (PBL) approach to help build social and emotional competencies and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. As the community's needs have changed over the years, the advisory board ensures that the programming offered reflects the present needs of its students and families.

## A typical day

After school dismissal, students arrive at the program, receive a free nutritious snack, and have time to be active and catch up with friends before getting back into academic work at the program. Programming then officially begins with a community meeting to go over the day, and then students break for roughly an hour of enrichment activities or a PIQUES (Providing Individualized Questioning and Understanding of Essential Skills) tutorial for underperforming students in the district. The program ends with time for help with school assignments and academic skill building, and a free dinner for all students.

## Project EXTRA

### Laconia, New Hampshire

**700**

Average number of students served during the school year

**59%**

Students from low-income families

### Main funding sources:

- ▶ 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers
- ▶ Private Foundations; Bank of New Hampshire; NH Charitable Foundation; and Curran Foundation

## Outcomes

The program has made significant progress towards many of their goals, objectives, and outcomes. In the 2018-19 school year, 100 percent of students participating in PIQUES made gains as reported on their individual learning plans and progress reports. Teachers report that nearly half of students (48 percent) showed improvement in classroom participation and homework completion, while 29 percent did not need to improve. Among parents surveyed, almost all parents (98 percent) reported that they were pleased overall and the program was very helpful.

## Program characteristics

Because of their unique advisory board made up of community members, including the superintendent, principals, parents, businesses, the mayor, and students, Project EXTRA and the Office of Extended Learning has continually evolved throughout its 19 years to meet the needs and interests of students, parents, and the community at large. From the start of the program, academics has always been the focus; however, over the last decade, the program began to incorporate a project-based learning (PBL) framework for their enrichment to intentionally differentiate their programming from the school day and better engage students. This PBL approach has more recently incorporated building and measuring 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and social and emotional competencies—such as teamwork, problem solving, and critical thinking—due to the advisory board’s position that both are necessary components to help ensure college and career readiness in today’s world. Social and emotional learning (SEL) has also been an important aspect of their programming more recently. As the program has seen an increase in the number of students with adverse childhood experiences, they have responded by training staff in restorative practices, de-escalation techniques, and other ways to effectively handle situations and support these students.

The most recent change the program has made has been an emphasis on middle school through their REAL Initiative (Relevant Experiences Advancing Learners).



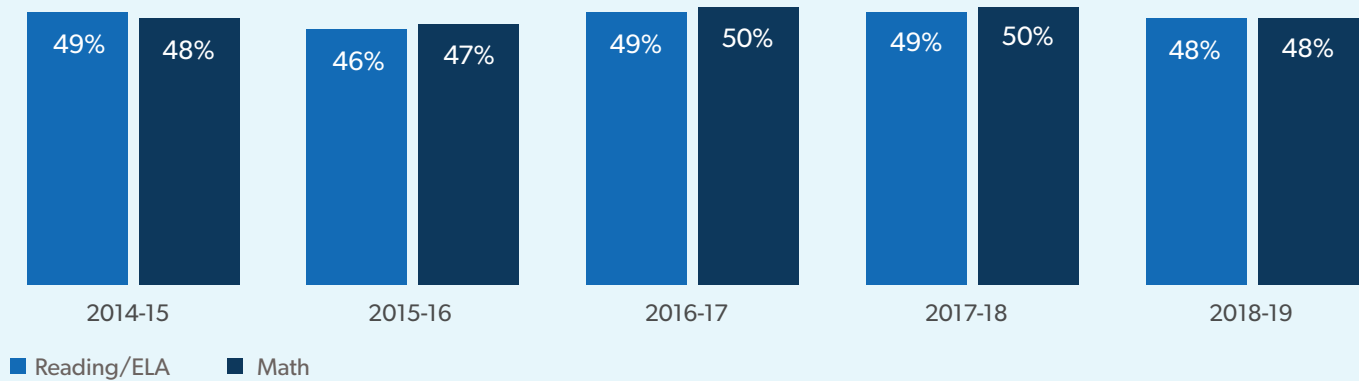
## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers

21<sup>st</sup> CCLC is the only federal funding source dedicated exclusively to supporting local afterschool, before-school, and summer learning programs. Since its inception in 1994, the program has supported school and community based organization partnerships that provide a safe and supervised environment for youth, while inspiring students to learn through hands-on learning and other enrichment activities, find new areas of interest, and connect with positive adult mentors, as well as providing supports to their families. Today, 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs serve students attending high-poverty, low-performing schools.

Read [\*Two Decades of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers: Providing afterschool and summer opportunities to millions of young people and families\*](#) to learn more.

## Department of Education annual performance reports have shown students in 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs are making consistent gains in math and reading

*% of regularly attending 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC students improving in their math or reading grades*



In response to a community needs assessment and the lack of engagement they were seeing at the middle school level, the program created a student leadership team to help with program design and promotion, as well as building contacts with the community and local businesses. The leadership team has helped bring in community partners to do robotics, athletic recreational programming, mock trial with local police and lawyers, and cooking with local chefs. Whereas at the high school level they are able to have an internship program where students can engage in the community, for middle school, they brought the community into the program. By shifting control to a student-led team, the program has seen a dramatic turnaround in attendance rates, and now operates a robust and engaging middle school program.

Over the years, many other aspects of the program have changed. As a now integrated part of the school district, staff are present throughout the school day and participate in all district professional development. The program is seen as an equal partner in students' growth and development and it is recognized that what they do in the program makes a positive impact on the school day.

### Program history

Project EXTRA and the Office of Extended Learning was started in 2002 by the then-assistant superintendent in response to the rapidly rising free and reduced price lunch rates in the district. The program was part of the first cohort in the state to receive 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC funding. From the beginning they have always focused on academics, but new additions have been incorporated over the years to meet the changing needs of the community, including a project-based learning framework, and more recently, a focus on the middle school level.

### Recommendations

- Involve the community at every point possible. Community ownership is important in making your program unique to fit the particular needs of your community. You can't build a program alone, the community needs to be invested.
- Get students involved as much as possible to build a program that they want to be a part of.