

Afterschool Advocate

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BUSH PROPOSES TO SLASH 21ST CCLC FUNDING

The Bush Administration's newly released budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2004 has a grim surprise for afterschool programs: a proposed 40 percent cut in the federal government's 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program. After touting afterschool programs throughout his first two years in office, and making personal appearances at several, the President proposes to cut \$400 million from the appropriation next year. If Congress agrees to the President's deep cut, more than half a million children would be denied afterschool care.

Administration leaders say their rationale for the cut is a new and extremely controversial study of afterschool programs conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. According to officials at the U.S. Department of Education, the study shows that 21st CCLC programs "had little influence on academic performance and no influence on feelings of safety or on the number of 'latchkey' kids."

Although Mathematica drafted the report several months ago, it was not released until *after* the Administration submitted its budget proposal to Congress on February 3, thereby foreclosing any opportunity for independent review of the data. In its budget proposal, the Administration described the cut as "revers[ing] the growth" of the program, and said the 21st CCLC program, "while well intentioned, ha[d] failed to produce results."

Many scholars and advocates have now read the Mathematica report and say its findings are slanted and unjustifiably

negative. Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Judy Y. Samelson said, "It is terribly disappointing that the Mathematica report highlights only negative findings and that the Bush Administration is using this study to justify a deep, indefensible cut in the federal afterschool program. The Bush plan to slash 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program funding from \$1 billion to \$600 million in Fiscal Year '04 would deny afterschool programs to more than 571,000 children."

Mathematica Report in Detail

Samelson noted that the study has serious methodological problems, and that it includes a number of positive findings that researchers and the Administration chose not to highlight.

In public statements, Mathematica and the Department of Education emphasized that the first year of the evaluation found no statistically significant across-the-board academic gains. Mathematica also emphasized in its findings that the studied programs did not increase students' feelings of safety after school. Both findings contradict the results of numerous independent, academic studies on afterschool programs around the nation.

Among the findings that the Bush Administration and Mathematica largely ignored:

- African American and Hispanic students participating in afterschool programs showed significant academic gains. African American students in programs had higher scores on standardized math and reading tests, a reduced incidence of being absent or tardy for school, and were judged

to have shown increased effort in the classroom. Hispanic students had higher math scores and reduced absence and tardiness.

- Girls in 21st CCLC programs showed significant gains in mathematics and in class participation – two areas that have long worried educators.
- Student participation in afterschool produced greater involvement by parents of participating students – improving parents' participation rates generally and by as much as 40 percent in some areas. Parental involvement has long been regarded as one of the keys to improved academic performance, and afterschool programs around the nation typically work to bring parents and other adults into the school building during the afterschool hours. Advocates say the Mathematica study's finding regarding increased parental involvement, even at this early stage of the research, suggests that this program design is yielding important benefits.
- Many trained, experienced teachers work in afterschool, bringing their skills and expertise to these programs. One-third of the program coordinators and three in five program staff members at programs in the study were school-day teachers. The middle school teachers who worked in afterschool programs noted that, as a result of working with students at the afterschool learning centers, they improved their teaching skills and had better relationships with some students – another significant benefit of the program design.

Mathematica's finding of no across-the-board academic gains may be related to another finding: that student attendance at the studied programs was sporadic. Average attendance at the middle schools in the study

was 32 days a year, and fully half of students attended fewer than 25 days — or less than once a week.

The study had significant methodological problems. Among them:

- The emphasis of the 21st CCLC program has changed since the study began — becoming more focused on academic achievement. In its reporting requirements for grantees, the Department of Education did not begin requiring data on student grades and achievement-test scores until the 2000-2001 school year. As a result, many of the programs did not particularly emphasize academic achievement. In fact, three in ten of the studied middle-school programs described improving academic performance as a “minor objective” of the program, choosing instead to focus on recreational, social or cultural development — a choice consistent with the 21st CCLC program's guidelines at the time.
- Just seven elementary school 21st CCLC grantees participated in the evaluation – far fewer than one might expect for a study of this size. In acknowledging this problem, Mathematica added more elementary school sites to the sample for future phases of the research, and conceded that “the elementary school findings in this report should be viewed as preliminary.”
- Another problem with the sample of elementary schools, according to Mathematica: “grantees were chosen for their ability to carry out the experimental design” of the evaluation, rather than for the characteristics of the students or programs. Therefore, the company concludes, “Findings for the elementary school centers in the evaluation do not generalize to all elementary school centers.”
- The samples of Hispanic and African American students in the studied

elementary schools are not representative of the number of Hispanic and African American students in afterschool programs. According to Mathematica's own numbers, 27.6 percent of elementary afterschool students in 21st CCLC programs were Hispanic, compared to only 1.8 percent of the students in the studied elementary programs. Similarly, 22.8 percent were African American, while 66.8 percent of students in the studied programs were African American.

- White students were over-represented in the student populations of the 34 participating middle school grantees. By comparison to 21st CCLC middle school centers across the nation, the studied centers included more white children, fewer African American, fewer Native American or Pacific Islander, fewer American Indian or Alaska Native, and fewer Asian.
- Beyond the demographics, students in the middle school sample were different in ways that might affect academic achievement. Before their participation in the afterschool program year studied by Mathematica, the middle school students were, as a group, less likely than students in the comparison sample to do assigned homework, less likely to read for fun, more likely to watch television, less confident in their reading skills, more likely to expect to drop out of high school, less likely to have a parent with a college degree and more likely to have a parent who dropped out of high school.

The Mathematica report does not include information about how long students had participated in afterschool programs. Many programs were in their second or third year of 21st CCLC funding, but students themselves may not have participated from the outset. Mathematica's data on attendance indicates that most students' participation was infrequent.

Afterschool Community Reacts

The afterschool community's reaction to the budget proposal and to the Mathematica release was swift and strong.

Cynthia Billings, CEO of PlusTime New Hampshire, warned that "A cut in the 21st CCLC grant program would be absolutely devastating to the children and families of New Hampshire. PlusTime has currently obtained \$4.6 million in private funds to augment this federal grant program, and is three months away from launching a major private campaign to raise additional community learning center funding. If the existing 21st CCLC grant program suffered from these cuts, our losses would be significantly more than the federal funds it represents."

Seattle Police Chief R. Gil Kerlikowske, board chairman of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, said, "It is a tragic mistake to slash spending for afterschool programs and cut off hundreds of thousands of kids from adult supervision during the prime time for juvenile crime."

Amy Gordon, 21st Center Community Learning Centers Project Director for Communities in Schools in Columbus, Ohio said, "I am extremely concerned by the proposed budget cuts, and believe they would be detrimental to our children, parents and community. Children are flourishing in our afterschool programs, proficiency scores are improving, unprecedented opportunities are being offered and parents know their children are in a safe, caring and educational environment during the afterschool hours. The proposed budget cuts could take all this away."

"Dozens of other respected, independent studies tell us that afterschool programs keep children safe, improve academic achievement and help working families," Samelson said. "The 21st CCLC program is vital to children and families across America. It was designed to provide safe, enriching environments for students after school and to help working

families. That the Administration is using a study showing that afterschool programs do not improve grades and test scores as an excuse to slash the federal afterschool budget sends a clear signal that President Bush will use questionable ‘scientific’ research to eliminate popular programs that he does not like.”



ACTION NEEDED

The Administration’s proposed budget cut is the opening salvo of what will likely be a nine-month or longer battle. The congressional budget process generally runs well into autumn and sometimes longer. So afterschool advocates will need to repeatedly voice their views on budget issues this year – to media and to lawmakers. It is extremely important that Members of Congress hear from constituents immediately about the proposed cut. Generating letters, phone calls, postcards, faxes and emails to Congress, and coverage in the media now can make a big difference later. Here are some things advocates can do to help encourage Congress to stand by the 21st CCLC program:

Grassroots Activity

- Send a letter to your Representative and Senators.
- Ask your friends and family to do the same.
- Create an easy-to-fill-out postcard for afterschool parents and community partners to send to their Representatives and Senators.
- Network your way to acquaintances and high-donors of your Representative and Senators and ask that they make contact.

Media Activity

- Send a letter-to-the-editor calling on Congress to reject the President’s budget cut.
- Write an op-ed describing the damage to afterschool that the President’s proposed cut would cause in your community, and submit it to the local newspaper.
- Send a letter to producers of local talk radio shows, asking that they interview you or another spokesperson from your afterschool program about the threat posed by the proposed budget cut. Follow the letter up with a phone call and, if there is interest, see if they will have the parent of a student in your program as an additional guest.
- Contact local television and print news reporters, telling them about the proposed cut and spelling out for them the harm it would do to children and families in your community.



Receiving the Afterschool Advocate via email

We would prefer to send you the *Afterschool Advocate* via email so that you can receive it in a more timely manner. If you would like to receive the newsletter by email, please contact editor Ridgely Benjamin via email (afterschooladvocate@prsolutionsdc.com) or fax (202/371-9142). She will need your name, organization, phone and fax number, and email address. Thank you!



SAMPLE MATERIALS & RESOURCES

Sample Letter the Editor

The following is a sample of a letter you might send. Please be sure to revise it to reflect your local situation.

To the Editor:

I was astonished to learn that the President's 2004 budget would slash funding for afterschool programs by 40 percent – a cut that would mean that half a million fewer students have afterschool care. Afterschool programs have proved their worth, helping students learn, keeping them safe during the often perilous afternoon hours, and relieving their working parents of childcare worries. Study after study has concluded that afterschool programs are effective and cost-efficient.

Our program here at [name of program] [insert two local sentences talking about – positive evaluations or about impact on children, parents and the community; describe what the budget cut would mean for your program (as in: Our current 21st CCLC grant expires in 200x; if the President has his way, there will be little or no hope of continued federal funding, and we may have to close our doors. It's that simple.)].

This budget proposal is a betrayal of children, parents, educators and communities. The President has repeatedly promised that his education policies would "Leave No Child Behind." This budget cut would leave more than half a million children behind. Congress should reject it and restore full funding for afterschool programs in America.



Sample Postcard

The following postcard was developed by Afterschool Ambassador Lynn Sobolov of the Kaleidoscope Community Learning Centers in Morgantown, West Virginia.

Dear Representative [X],

Date _____

I support full funding for 21st Century afterschool programs and hope you will too. Our local [name of your program] in [your city or county] helps working families, keeps kids safe, and supports academic achievement.

Please help us to ensure that full funding is restored in the federal budget for these important programs.

[Name of program] is important to my family because:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____



Talking Points on the Mathematica Study and Proposed Budget Cut

The following talking points will be useful in preparing materials on the proposed budget cut and the Mathematica study. Please note that these are talking points, not a formal document. They should be used as the basis for other documents, not distributed to the media or to public officials.

- 1) The Administration's proposed 40 percent budget cut for 21st Century Community Learning Centers program (21st CCLC) is an utter betrayal of President Bush's promise to "leave no child behind" and to support working families in this country. If Congress goes along with President Bush's cut, more than half a million children will be denied access to the afterschool programs that keep them safe, help them learn and relieve their families of child care worries during the afternoon hours.
- 2) The Administration is hiding behind the Mathematica study as justification for its proposed budget cut. But the study has significant limitations, serious methodological problems and an obvious bias. It evaluates programs based on student academic achievement, even though programs have only recently been required to focus on academic improvement. The federal 21st CCCLC program has changed dramatically since this study was conducted. These findings are based on just one year of data, collected when programs were still developing. Just seven elementary grantees were included, and the study had profound demographic inconsistencies.
- 3) Although the Bush Administration chose to ignore them, the study does have many positive findings. First, afterschool had a direct, measurable academic benefit for African American and Hispanic students, and for girls. Given that the programs in this study were in the early years of their federal funding, and that the federal program was not at that time aimed specifically at improving academic achievement, this finding is very encouraging.
- 4) Student participation in afterschool produced greater involvement by parents of participating students. Since parental involvement has long been regarded as one of the keys to improved academic performance, this is significant.
- 5) The study found that many trained, experienced teachers work in afterschool. Middle school teachers working in afterschool programs say they improved their teaching skills and had better relationships with some students as a result.
- 6) The study found that children in afterschool programs spent more time after school under the supervision of a caring adult – often a teacher – and less in the care of siblings than did other students. Many parents are forced to rely on older brothers and sisters – sometimes not much older at all – to care for small children. The study demonstrated that afterschool programs have had a significant impact in this area.

- 7) Afterschool programs make a positive difference in children's lives, and this study confirms what others have told us: the academic benefits are most pronounced when children participate regularly and over an extended period of time. Not surprisingly, students who drop in and out of afterschool don't get the full academic benefit. There is no shortcut to academic achievement.
- 8) Our nation's goals must be to:
 - Restore the federal afterschool appropriation, stabilize funding for existing afterschool programs, and create many more programs.
 - Work with students and families to ensure that students actually participate – not just enroll – in afterschool programs. Ensure that students attend programs every day over an extended period of time by offering a variety of enriching engaging activities. A number of longitudinal studies have demonstrated that long-term, regular attendance in afterschool programs leads to valuable academic gains.
- 9) Afterschool isn't intended to be entirely about academics. Afterschool programs also serve at least two other vital roles:
 - Keeping kids safe, off the streets and engaged in healthy and constructive activities during the sometimes perilous afterschool hours; and
 - Helping working families negotiate child-care problems in the afternoon.
 It's important to keep those two goals in mind. Other studies have shown that afterschool programs are tremendously successful in accomplishing those objectives.



Fact Sheet on the Mathematica Study

The following facts are drawn from Mathematica's study of 21st Century Community Learning Centers. According to Mathematica, all data cited here are statistically significant.

African American/Hispanic/Girls

The study revealed that middle school African American, Hispanic and female students participating in afterschool programs showed significant academic gains.

- Average mathematics grades for participating middle school African American students were 1.7 points higher than comparison group African American students. (On 100 point scale, as in, 90 is an A, 80 is a B, etc.)
- Average math grades for Hispanic participating middle school students were 1.5 points higher (on 100 point scale) than comparison group Hispanic students.
- Girls: (Comparing participating middle school girls to comparison group girls) Participating girls were 5 percentage points more likely to complete homework to the teacher's satisfaction (teacher-reported); 4.4 percentage points more likely to participate in class; absent 1.3 fewer days. Participating girls also had 9/10ths of a percentage point higher grades in mathematics.

Parental Involvement

Afterschool programs had a very positive impact on parental involvement, one of the keys to improving student performance.

- In the participating middle school centers, parental attendance at open houses was 40 percent higher than in the comparison group (27.4 to 19.1, so 40 percent higher); attendance at PTA meetings was 22 percent higher (33.8 to 27.6, so 22 percent higher); and the incidence rate of volunteering to help out at school was 22 percent higher (17.8 to 14.5, so 22 percent higher).
- In elementary school centers, the percentage of parents reporting “help[ing] their child with homework at least three times last week” was 10.1 percentage points higher for participating parents than for comparison parents. Similarly, participating parents reported “ask[ing] their child about things they were doing in class at least seven times last month”: 7.7 percentage points higher than comparison parents.

Staffing

- In participating Middle school centers, 34 percent of the coordinators were teachers during the regular school day. Sixty percent of the “other staff” were teachers during the regular school day.

Care by Siblings

- Elementary school students cared for by siblings decreased 2.7 percentage points as a result of afterschool.

Methodological Problems

The study suffered from very small test groups, particularly for the elementary school side, so much so that Mathematica acknowledges the elementary results are “preliminary.” In addition, the elementary school sample had severe problems with demographics.

- Total number of 21st CCLC elementary school centers in 2000/2001: 1,758. Total number included in this study: 18 centers, at just 7 grantees. Total number of 21st CCLC middle school centers: 1,460. Total number in this study: 62 centers at 34 grantees.
- Elementary school data are based on just 7 participating grantees. Mathematica has added 7 more for the next report. But because of the very small test group in this study, Mathematica conceded in the report: “[T]he elementary school findings in this report should be viewed as preliminary,” and “Findings for the elementary school centers in the evaluation do not generalize to all elementary school centers, because the ones in the evaluation were chosen for their ability to carry out the experimental design.”
- Elementary school demographics were severely compromised because the sample’s demographic data was in no way representative of the universe of 21st CCLC afterschool programs.
 - 66.8 percent of students in the study’s elementary centers were African American, compared to 22.8 percent in the 21st CCLC elementary school centers nationwide.
 - 1.8 percent of students in the study’s elementary school centers were Hispanic, compared to 27.6 percent of students in 21st CCLC elementary school centers nationwide.
 - 28.2 percent of students in the study’s elementary school centers were white, compared to 39.7 percent of students in 21st CCLC elementary school centers nationwide.

Conceptual Flaws

The federal 21st CCLC program has changed considerably since these data were collected. The findings are based on just one year of data, collected very early in the life of the 21st CCLC

initiative. At that time, improving test scores and grades was not a primary goal of the 21st CCLC program, and so not a mandate for the studied programs.

Other Evaluators Have Found Very Different Results

Mathematica's conclusions, embraced by the Bush Administration, contradict numerous longer-term studies conducted by independent and well-respected researchers.

All of the following evaluations had various positive conclusions about afterschool:

- UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation's multi-year evaluation of LA's BEST.
- The Academy for Educational Development, the Hunter College Center on AIDS, Drugs and Community Health, and the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago's evaluation of New York City Beacons Initiative.
- The Education Department of the University of California at Irvine's evaluation of California's Afterschool Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnership Program (ASLSNPP).
- UC-Irvine's Department of Education and Research Support Services' evaluation of YS-CARE afterschool program in Los Angeles.
- Policy Studies Associates' evaluation of TASC's New York City afterschool programs.
- WestED and Hoffman Clark and Associates' evaluation of San Diego's 6 to 6 program.
- The University of Cincinnati College of Education's Evaluation Services Center's evaluation of Ohio's Urban School Initiative School Age Child Care Project (SACC).
- Public/Private Ventures, with subcontractor Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation's, evaluation of the Extended-Service Schools Initiative.

A summary prepared by the Afterschool Alliance of results from these and other studies is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org/backgroundunder.doc.



The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization supported by a group of public, private, and nonprofit entities dedicated to ensuring that all children and youth have access to afterschool programs by 2010. The Alliance is proud to count among its founding partners the Mott Foundation, U.S. Department of Education, JCPenney Afterschool, Open Society Institute/The After-School Corporation, the Entertainment Industry Foundation and the Creative Artists Agency Foundation.

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