

U.S. House Committee On Appropriations

Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies

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Testimony of Karen West

Special Projects Curriculum Supervisor, Corbin Independent Schools of Corbin, KY

Afterschool Alliance

Good morning. I would like to begin by personally extending my sincere appreciation to Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro for the invitation to share the success and need for the 21st Century Community Learning Center initiatives for our students across the nation, within the state of Kentucky, and in my community of Corbin, Kentucky.

21st Century Community Learning Centers play a vital role in communities across the nation in providing services to students most at-risk for academic failure and especially those in gap populations who typically achieve at rates lower than their highest-achieving peers. These programs represent unique collaborations between schools and community members to provide a balance of academic and non-academic interventions to students who lack family support, individual drive, or a connection to the schools they attend. These programs operate before school, during summer months, and in peak afterschool hours when students are most likely to engage in illicit behaviors such as substance abuse.

My home district knows the impact of successful implementation of the 21st Century Community Learning Center Model. In the most recent academic school year (2014), Corbin Independent had an enrollment of just under 3,000 students. We are situated in one of the Five Promise Zones across the nation in a rural area in which economic despair is rampant. Poverty

rates are as high as 43%. This is not the result of unemployment or a bleak economy but is representative of generational poverty perpetuated by cycles of under-education. Nearly one in three students hails from a home in which a parent does not have a high school diploma. 88% of our students are latchkey children. There are no available summer, afterschool, or educational programs outside the 21st Century programs in our rural area.

Despite these circumstances, the Corbin school district has found a path to success in leading our students to achieve postsecondary transition – in fact, we have consistently ranked in the Top 5 districts in our state’s accountability rankings. More importantly than this tidbit, Corbin has had ZERO students drop out of school since the implementation of 21st Century programs for our youth.

The success of our district is not accidental – it is parallel to the implementation of 21st Century Community Learning Center programs for all our students in grades K-12. Outcomes for our participants for the most recent academic year reveal:

*1,329 (one-third) of our students attended our 21st Century program;

*82% who attended regularly improved reading grades from fall to spring;

*81% who attended regularly improved math grades from fall to spring;

*Students participating in our three-week afterschool ACT prep program saw an average gain of two points in their composite score, while some achieved as much as a 7 point gain from the December to March test dates; and

*The use of harmful substances among our students has declined dramatically during the past five years of program implementation. Prescription drug abuse dropped 73%; Marijuana usage rates decreased 50%; cigarette smoking receded by 30%; alcohol use declined by 15%.

My story is not unique to the Corbin District. This level of success is seen in countless schools and communities across Kentucky and the nation who implement 21st Century programs. Statewide, Kentucky has seen tremendous impact.

*A total of 189 program sites are funded across the state with 21st Century dollars (*Kentucky Department of Education 21st Century APR program data*);

*21stCCLC brings in approximately \$17 million into Kentucky (which also funds a significant number of jobs) to provide quality after school and summer learning programs;

*In 2013, 47,315 children and youth were served in these programs (*Kentucky Department of Education 21st Century APR program data*); and

*Participation rates in Kentucky have grown from 7% in 2004 to 15% in 2014, largely due in part to the increase in appropriation levels (*America After 3PM report*).

What makes 21st Century programs work? 21st Century Community Learning Centers are individualized to each state and community who examines the needs of the population and designs a program to close achievement gaps and to prepare students to become college- and career-ready in their transition to post-secondary life. For students who attend the program, the opportunities provided in 21st Century are a lifeline that save them from being lost in a sea of ambivalence and disconnect from their future and the educational experience. 21st Century Community Learning Centers orchestrate opportunities that anchor students to peers and adults in their schools and communities so that they value coming to school and see education as a pathway to a future that otherwise seems only vaguely possible. This is accomplished through providing academic supports paired with personal connections, community partnerships, and structured opportunities that allow students to explore and develop talents and interests that are not addressed as part of the regular school day.

If anything, the greatest weakness of the program is that there is not enough funding to offer 21st CCLC in more schools and communities. In fact, only 1 out of 3 requests for 21st CCLC funding is awarded nationally. Over the last 10 years, \$4 billion in local grant requests were denied because of the lack of adequate federal funding and intense competition (*Learning Point Associates, 2012*).

Demand for afterschool programs continues to grow. Today, 10.2 million children participate in afterschool programs. Another 19.4 million children would participate if a program were available – up from 15.3 million in 2004. For the first time, a majority of school-age children either are, or want to be, in an afterschool program. In 2014, 11.3 million school-age children were unsupervised between the hours of 3 and 6 when juvenile crime and other inappropriate activities peak.

Nationally the outcomes of 21st CCLC are clear as well:

- Research in 2011 and 2012 from several state education agencies found that teachers report that students regularly participating in 21st Century Community Learning Centers show improvements in homework completion, class participation, attendance, behavior in class, and reading and math achievement scores and grades (American Institutes for Research, 2011 & 2013; Evers, 2012).
- A separate 2013 study out of the University of California, Irvine’s School of Education found that regular participation in afterschool programs helped to narrow the achievement gap between high-income and low-income students in math, improved academic and behavioral outcomes, and reduced school absences (Pierce, Auger & Vandell, 2013).

We also know the federal government is getting its money’s worth with 21st CCLC. A recent return on investment analysis in Vermont found that **for every \$1 invested in quality**

afterschool and summer learning programs, Vermont sees a return of \$2.18 in long-term benefits and savings.

I'm grateful for the opportunity today to share the wonderful work that 21st CCLC afterschool and summer learning programs are doing for our children and to ask that you do all you can to ensure that funding for afterschool programs continues and grows. The impact of these programs on our students is immeasurable. Many come to the program because we have school policies instituted that require make-up work or tutoring when they do not make adequate academic progress. When they walk in the door, they quickly find a place where they are home, where they are welcome, where they connect to a new friend, a teacher, or another caring adult in a way that did not seem possible. Suddenly, school isn't a punishment; it isn't the place they "have" to report each day – it's a place they can develop interests and talents and see the connection between what they are learning in school day courses and the real-world around them. Instead of dropping out of school or misbehaving, these students become focused on their future, a brighter future, and clearly see the pathway to the possibilities before them. **21st Century programs change lives!** As a representative of a community that has directly benefitted from 21st CCLC, I encourage the committee to ensure that 21st CCLC funding remains dedicated to afterschool, before school, and summer programs. In this difficult economy, it is especially critical that funds for afterschool not be diverted to other purposes, which would result in even more kids left without afterschool programs.