



24-25' **ANNUAL REPORT**

Nebraska 21st Century Community
Learning Centers



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All photos of students and staff featured in this publication were taken during Nebraska 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) programs or professional development events. Students pictured attend Nebraska 21st CCLC programs located in Chadron, Columbus, Crete, Kearney, Kimball, Lincoln, Nebraska City, Norfolk, North Platte, Oakland-Craig, Ogallala, Omaha, O’Neill, Oshkosh, Santee, Schuyler, Scottsbluff, and Walthill.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nebraska’s 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program provided out-of-school time programming to students across 140 sites and 38 communities during the 2024–25 school year and summer 2024, funded through 35 subgrantees. School year afterschool programming served 17,520 students, with summer programming reaching 6,471 students. The program effectively reached high-need populations, with 87% of participants eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, 61% identifying as non-White, 21% receiving special education services, and 17% classified as English learners.

Program Quality

Nebraska’s 21st CCLC sites demonstrated strong program quality across multiple dimensions. Most sites maintained healthy staff-to-student ratios, with a median staff ratio of 1:4.7 (1 staff member for every 4.7 students), and staff reported feeling well-prepared across key competency areas. Community partners gave programs an average relationship quality score of 87 out of 100, with nearly all partners (97%) reporting alignment between their work and the goals of the school. Parents of 21st CCLC participants expressed strong satisfaction with the program, with 91% agreeing the program benefits their child and very few (3% or fewer) expressing dissatisfaction across any quality measure. Students across all grade levels reported positive program experiences, with particularly strong ratings for adult relationships and sense of belonging.

Outcomes

Across the included federally required Program Performance Outcomes (PPOs), Nebraska’s 21st CCLC programs demonstrated meaningful impact, particularly for students with sustained participation. A consistent dose-response pattern emerged across outcome areas, with students accumulating 90 or more hours of programming showing notably better results, and those with 270 or more hours showing the strongest outcomes of all.

During SY24-25, Nebraska’s 21st CCLC programs showed positive results across all four federally required PPOs. Furthermore, students with more hours of programming showed stronger positive results. Teacher-reported engagement in learning improved for 64% of 1st-5th grade participants, rising to 71% among students with 270+ hours. Math assessment scores grew for nearly one in four 4th-8th grade participants (24%), climbing from 17% among students with the fewest hours to 28% among those with the most. School-day attendance improved for 26% of chronically absent students, ranging from 14% at the lowest dosage to 44% among students with 270+ hours. And 9% of participants experienced fewer in-school suspensions than the prior year, with the strongest gains in the 90–179 and 180–269 hour bands (14% and 19%).

Beyond the PPOs, supplemental evaluation data reinforced these findings. Students, parents, and teachers consistently reported positive academic, behavioral, and social-emotional impacts, with effect sizes growing in step with participation hours across virtually every measure examined.

Nebraska in Context

Nebraska’s afterschool landscape presents a notable paradox: programs are affordable, highly rated, and provide substantial programming hours to participants, yet statewide participation ranks 44th nationally and unmet demand ranks 47th. Parents in Nebraska perceive fewer developmental benefits from afterschool programs than parents in most other states, suggesting an opportunity to better communicate program value and expand access.

Recommendations

Key recommendations for the 2025-26 program year and beyond include:

1

Developing a quality framework crosswalk to connect evaluation data to continuous improvement planning





2

Investing in parent-facing awareness and communication to close the gap between program quality and public awareness



3

Encouraging stronger participant attendance

INTRODUCTION

Program Background

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) has been federally-funded for over 20 years, providing a competitive grant program designed to support the establishment of community learning centers serving students attending schools with high needs.¹ The 21st CCLC initiative was authorized under Title IV, Part B of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended, which moved the administration of the 21st CCLC program to state departments of education.

The intent of a community learning center is to offer students academic enrichment and other activities during non-school hours (before and after school, summer, or out-of-school days) and to complement the regular programming within schools and better target the academic needs of students. All funded state education agencies are required to report on key indicators and outcomes among their subgrantees throughout the year.

The focus is on ensuring that sites offer:

- ✦ Opportunities for academic enrichment to meet academic standards
- ✦ A range of enrichment activities, which may include arts, physical fitness, etc.
- ✦ Families with participating students opportunities to be meaningfully engaged and receive support

¹ U.S. Department of Education. (2024, September 3). Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers non-regulatory guidance. <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/21st-century-community-learning-centers-non-regulatory-guidance-107642.pdf>

Nebraska Implementation

To align with the federal goals of 21st CCLC, Nebraska’s program focuses on three overarching goals:

- Improving overall student academic success
- Increasing positive behavior and social interactions
- Increase active and meaningful family and community engagement

Starting in 2024-25, Nebraska included two additional statewide initiatives – literacy and chronic absenteeism.

Daily program schedules include time for academic support, a healthy meal or snack, time for physical activity, and hands-on clubs and activities.

The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) conducts an annual grant competition to subaward five-year 21st CCLC federal grants for out-of-school time programming. These 21st CCLC grant dollars are leveraged with other federal, state, and partner/local fiscal support to operate quality afterschool and summer programs. Each year there are two types of awards granted:

- **First time grants:** Previously these sites were 100% grant-funded during the first three years and received a smaller percentage during the fourth and fifth year (80% and 60% respectively). This structure was revised starting with the 2024-25 grant awards to provide 100% grant funding during all five years awarded.
- **Continuation/renewability grants:** These were available only to school buildings that have successfully implemented 21st CCLC programming for five years. They receive a daily rate that is 50% of the amount of their first time grant and receive level funding for a five-year period.

Grants are awarded to schools or community-based organizations. Some may opt to fund a number of sites, though others may only serve one location.

This report highlights who was served, the components of a quality program, and outcomes from the project during the 2024 summer and 2024-25 school year. Throughout the report, an asterisk (*) is used to denote when a finding is statistically significant. This means that the difference shown in the data is likely not due to chance.

Evaluation

The University of Nebraska Medical Center Munroe-Meyer Institute (UNMC-MMI) managed all data collection, data processing, and federal reporting during the 2024-25 reporting period. Partners for Insightful Evaluation, Inc. (PIE) began serving as the evaluator for Nebraska’s 21st CCLC program in January 2026 and assumed responsibility for analyzing the 24-25 data and developing the statewide report. The evaluation is designed to meet both federal accountability requirements and Nebraska-specific continuous improvement goals. Federally, all 21st CCLC subgrantees are required to report on Program Performance Outcomes (PPOs), formerly called Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) measures², which track outcomes in academic engagement, math and reading assessment growth, GPA, school-day attendance, and in-school suspensions. Beyond these required measures, Nebraska’s statewide evaluation draws on a comprehensive set of additional data sources, including surveys of students, parents, teachers, community partners, and staff, as well as participation and dosage data. Together, these data sources provide a multi-perspective picture of program reach, quality, and impact across Nebraska’s subgrantees. A full description of all evaluation data sources is provided in Appendix A.

“ I think the afterschool program is doing a great job balancing help with homework, fun activities/exercise, involving community/school clubs, and meeting the needs of the kids! Keep it up!”

Parent of 21st CCLC student

² Throughout the remaining of this report GPRA measures will be referred to as PPOs.

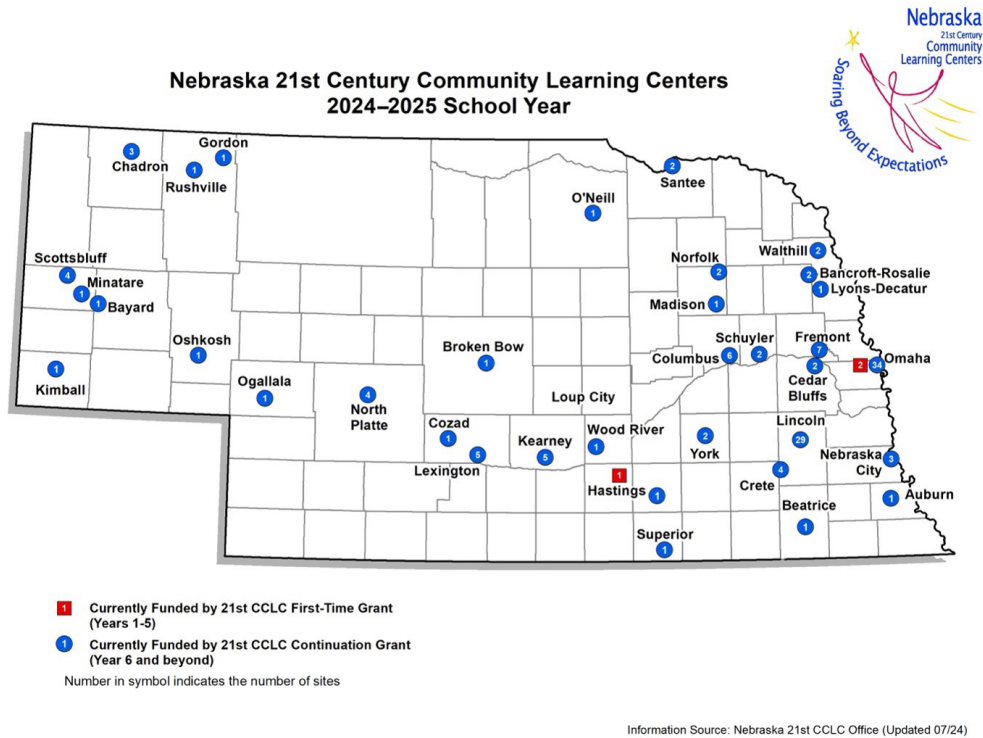


In 2024-25, grant awards totaled \$6.6 million to benefits students across 140 sites in 38 Nebraska communities.

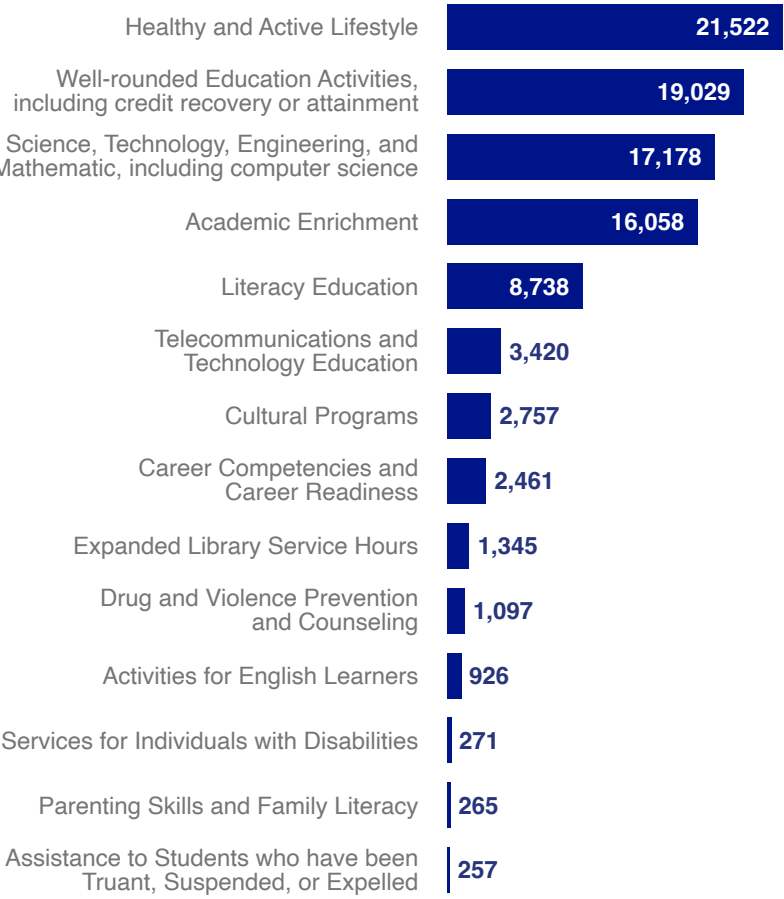
NEBRASKANS SERVED

Subgrantees

In total, 36 subgrantees were funded during the 2024-25 funding year. This included funding for 86 sites funded through continuation/renewability grants and 54 sites funded through first time grants, though none were newly funded in 2024-25.



Participants by Activity Type

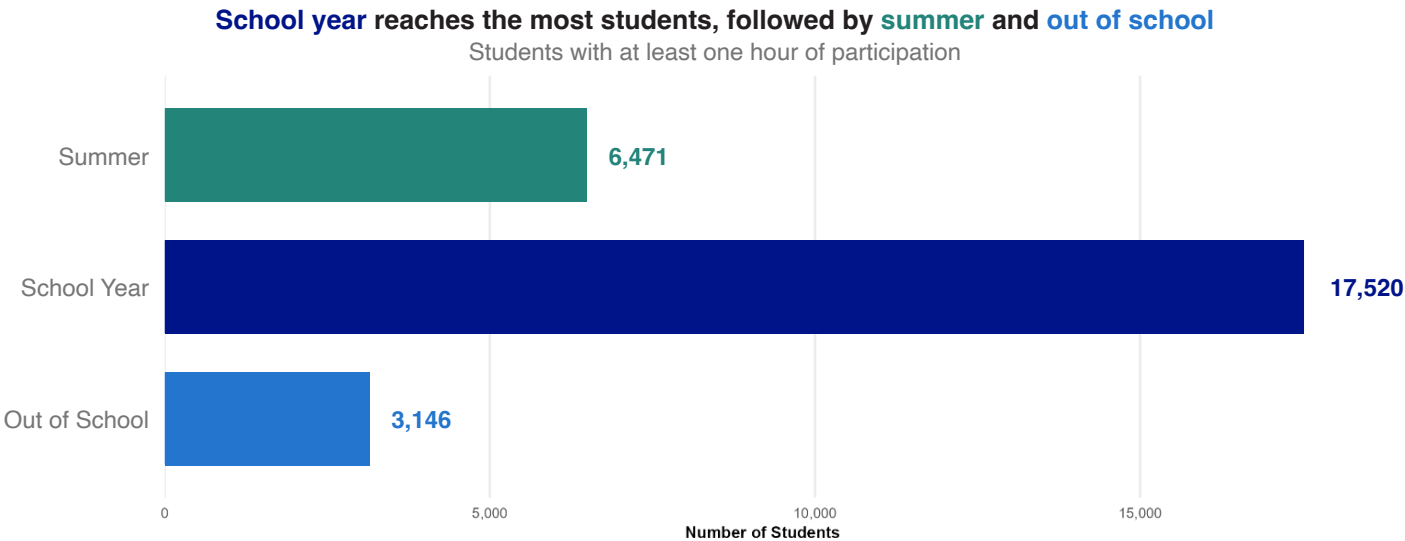


Activities

A defining feature of Nebraska's 21st CCLC program are the meaningful, hands-on enrichment activities students engage in beyond the traditional school day. Through a wide range of clubs and activities, 21st CCLC sites offer students the opportunity to dive deeper into subjects they are curious about. Nebraska's offerings and participation span across all 14 federally defined activity types, with the greatest engagement in Healthy and Active Lifestyle activities (21,522 participating), Well-rounded Education Activities (19,029 participating), Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (17,178 participating), and Academic Enrichment (16,058 participating).

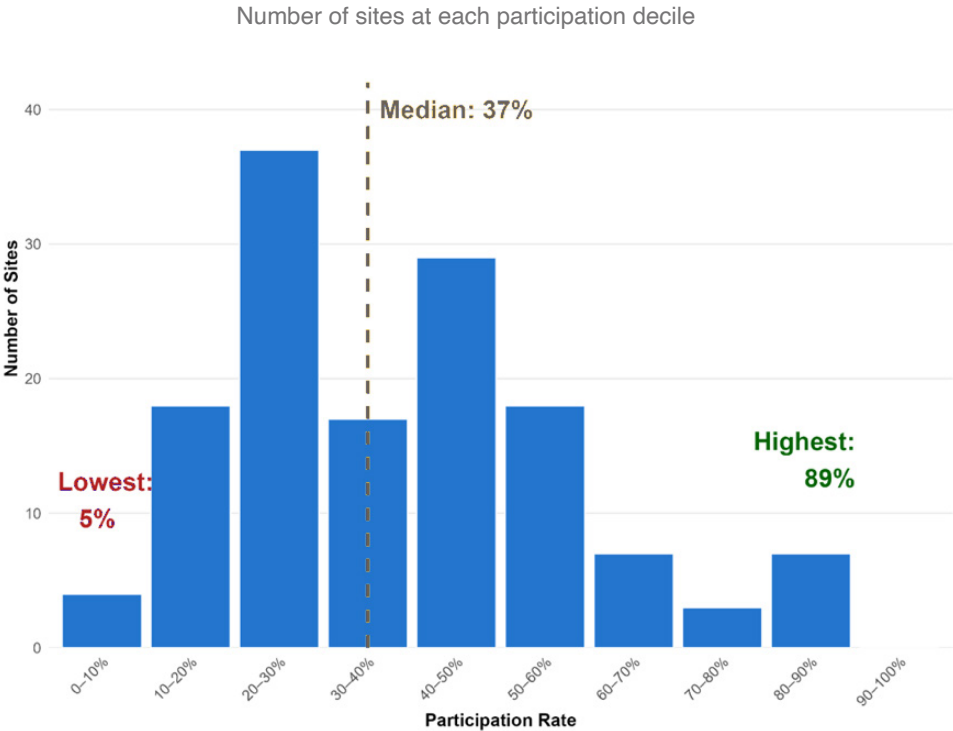
Participation

Subgrantees offer programming after the school day, on out-of-school days (i.e., professional development days), and/or during the summer. School year programming that occurs after the school day serve the largest number of students (17,520), reaching nearly three times as many participants as summer programming (6,471) and over five times as many as out-of-school programming (3,146).



Participation of the school's population in 21st CCLC programming varied widely across the 21st CCLC sites, ranging from just 5% to 89%. Most sites fell between 20% and 50%, with the typical site engaging about one-third of its enrolled students (37%). While a handful of high-performing sites reached participation rates above 70%, very few sites fell below 10%. Overall, the results show that strong participation is possible, but most sites have room to grow in reaching more students.

While some 21st CCLCs reach nearly 90%, most of the 140 sites see about a third of students participate

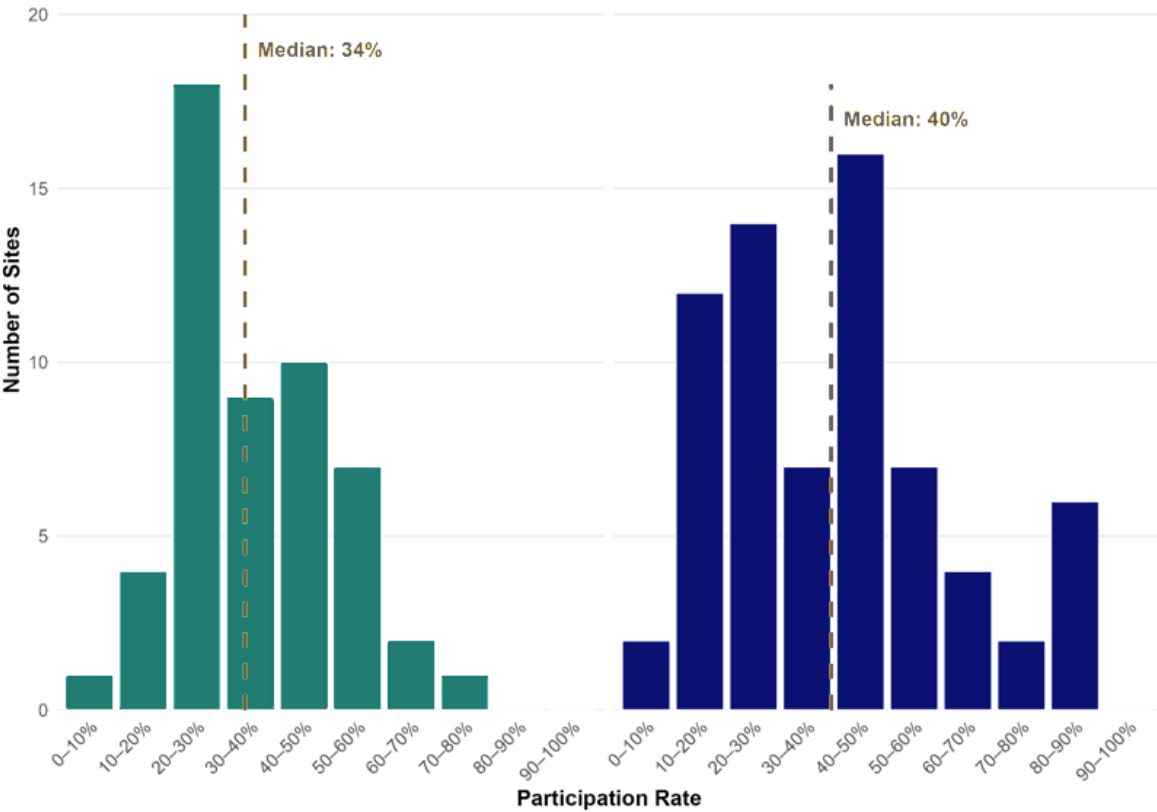




Established sites (funded for 16+ years) have a higher median participation rate (40%) compared to newer sites (funded for <16 years) at 34%. However, the two groups display distinctly different distributional patterns. Newer sites (n=52) show a more concentrated distribution with participation rates ranging from 5% to 71%, with the middle 50% of sites falling between 27% and 44%. In contrast, established sites (n=70) exhibit a wider spread, ranging from 6% to 89%, with the middle 50% between 21% and 51%. In addition, a similar pattern was observed when comparing metro sites to nonmetro sites, with typical participation at 38% v. 33%, respectively. This may be explained in that many of the metro sites are also established sites with at least 16 years of program history.

Established sites (16+ years) have higher median participation than newer sites (<16 years)

Number of sites at each participation decile
Source: Nebraska 21st CCLC Program Data

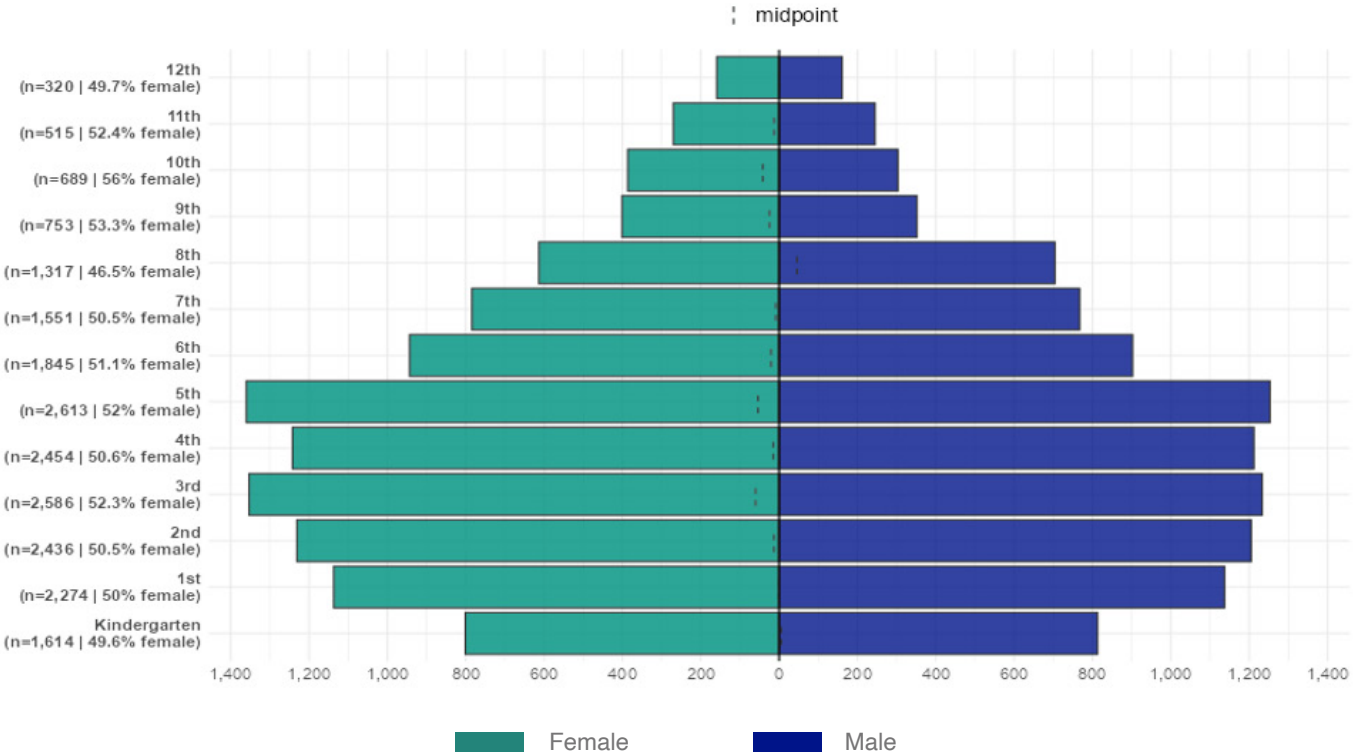


Demographics

Student enrollment in Nebraska’s 21st CCLC programs is concentrated in the elementary grades, with participation peaking in 5th grade (2,613 students). Grades 3–5 represent the highest enrollment levels, each with over 2,400 students. Enrollment drops sharply after 6th grade, with high school grades (9th–12th) accounting for a much smaller share of participants, with only 320 students in 12th grade compared to over 2,500 in 5th grade. The number of male and female students is remarkably balanced across all grade levels.

Student enrollment in Nebraska CCLCs peaks in 5th grade

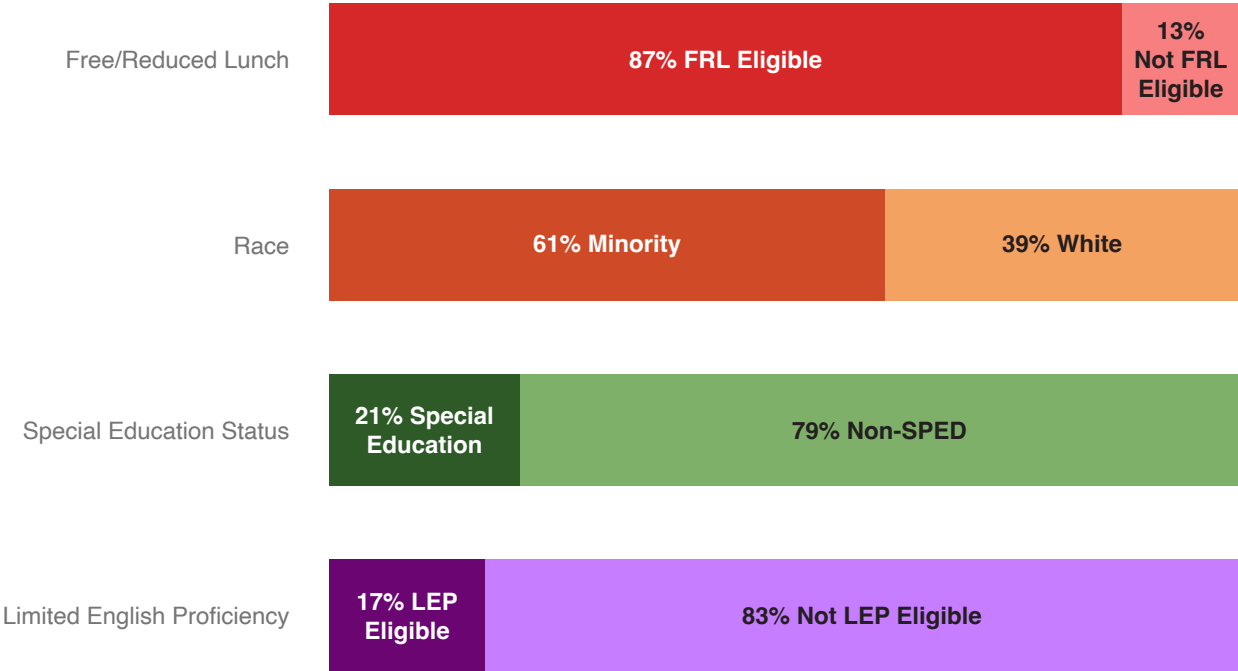
The number of Female and Male Students are roughly equal across grades



The vast majority of 21st CCLC participants (87%) are eligible for free/reduced lunch, reflecting the program’s focus on serving economically disadvantaged communities. Non-White students comprise 61% of participants while White students represent 39%, demonstrating the program’s effectiveness in reaching minority students. Students with special needs comprise 21% of participants, which exceeds the 17% represented in the statewide population³. About one in six participants (17%) are English learners. These demographics confirm that Nebraska CCLCs are effectively serving high-need populations, particularly economically disadvantaged students and minority students, consistent with the program’s mission.

87% of Nebraska CCLC students are eligible for free/reduced lunch

Percentage of students in each demographic group (n=20,967)
Source: Nebraska 21st CCLC Program Data



White students comprise the largest group in Nebraska CCLCs at 38.6%, followed by Hispanic students at 33.5% and Black students at 14.5%. Notably, Nebraska CCLCs serve a higher proportion of Hispanic and Black students than the statewide K-12 population (21.9% and 6.4%, respectively), indicating the program is effectively reaching historically underserved communities. Compared to national CCLC demographics, Nebraska serves a higher percentage of White students (38.6% vs. 24.7%) and fewer Hispanic students (33.5% vs. 39.3%). Native American students represent 2.8% of Nebraska CCLC participants, comparable to the national rate and slightly above Nebraska’s K-12 enrollment (1.6%).

Student Demographics by Race/Ethnicity

Comparing Nebraska CCLC to State and National Benchmarks
Source: Nebraska 21st CCLC Program Data, NDE Membership Data, U.S. Department of Education

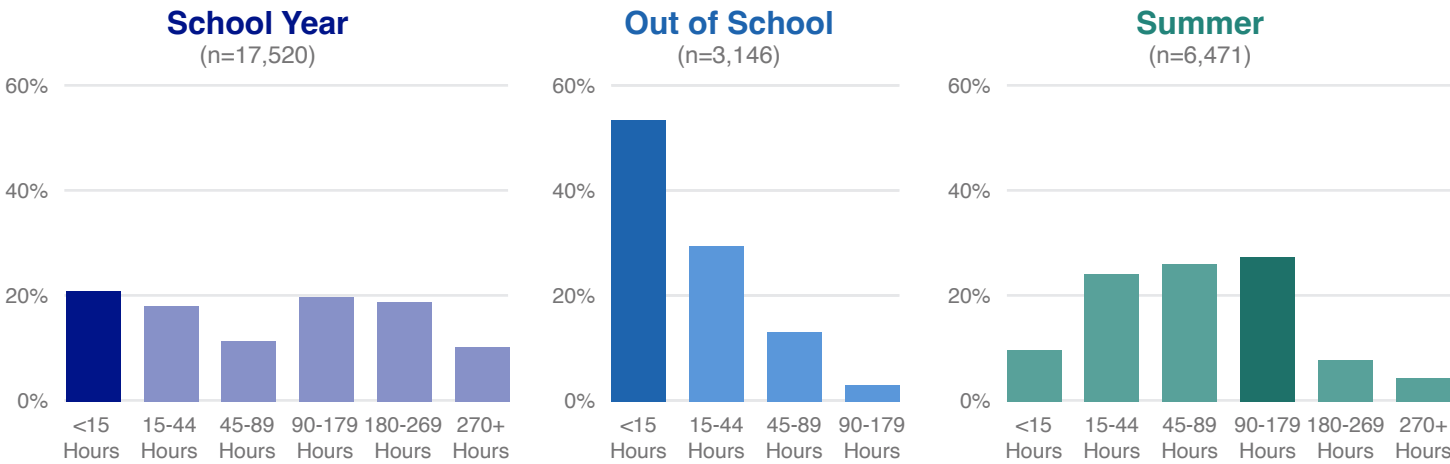
Race/Ethnicity	Nebraska CCLC	Comparison Groups	
		Nebraska K-12	National CCLC
White	38.6% (n=8,103)	62.4% (n=229,234)	24.7% (n=345,403)
Hispanic	33.5% (n=7,019)	21.9% (n=80,409)	39.3% (n=547,137)
Black	14.5% (n=3,047)	6.4% (n=23,563)	20.2% (n=281,869)
Multiracial	7.2% (n=1,504)	4.8% (n=17,785)	4.7% (n=64,756)
Asian	3.3% (n=682)	3.1% (n=11,457)	2.9% (n=39,671)
Native American	2.8% (n=589)	1.2% (n=4,462)	2.8% (n=38,716)
Pacific Islander	0.1% (n=23)	0.2% (n=639)	1% (n=13,932)

Attendance

The distribution of participation hours varies notably across program types. Hours of attendance during school year afterschool programming are evenly distributed, while out of school hours are heavily skewed toward less than 15 hours, and summer hours peak at 90-179 hours. On average, students received 118 afterschool programming hours during the school year, 22 hours of out-of-school programming, and 91 hours of programming during the summer.

³ Nebraska Department of Education. (2024). *Special education enrollment data*. Nebraska Department of Education. Retrieved from [KIDS COUNT Data Center – Special Education](#)

Less than 15 hours was the most common hour band for school year (21%), out of school (54%), while 90 to 179 hours was the most common band for Summer (28%)



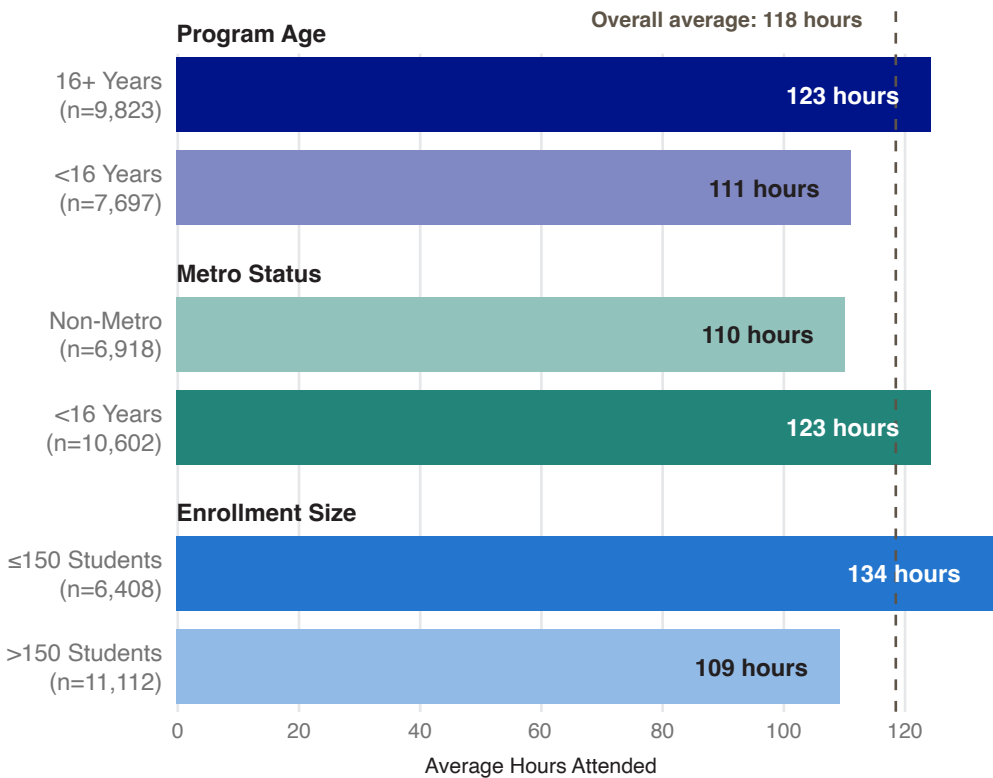
“Offering different choices of activities so children can experience what things they like or would like to further explore. Perhaps they wouldn’t get those choices outside of school.”

Community Partner of 21st CCLC Program

The length of time students participated in programming varied across programs and demographic groups. The average hours of afterschool participation for established sites (those funded for 16+ years) was 123 hours, compared to 111 hours for newer sites. Similarly, metro sites outpace non-metro sites (123 hours v. 110 hours). Smaller sites (≤ 150 students) also show higher engagement than larger sites (>150 students), with smaller sites averaging 134 hours compared to 109 hours for larger sites.

Established, metro, and small sites show higher average school year hours

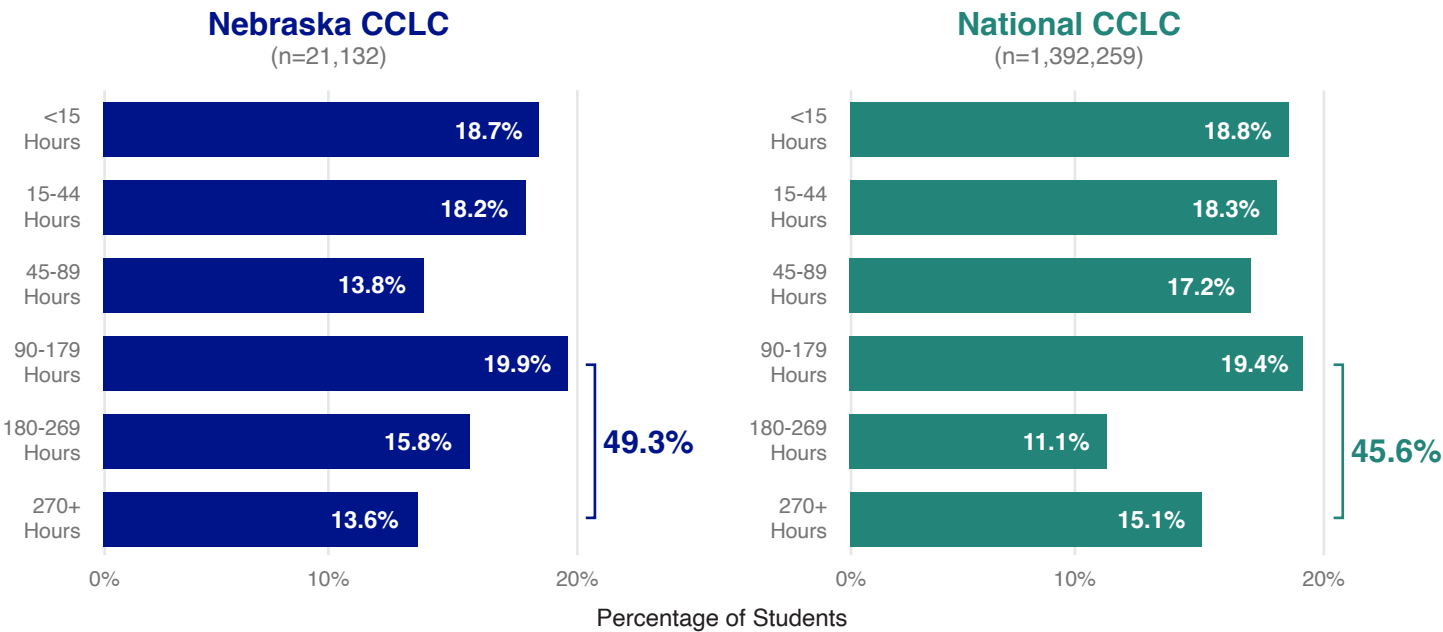
Source: Nebraska 21st CCLC Program Data



Nebraska CCLC students show a similar distribution of total hours (summer + school year + out-of-school) compared to national CCLC averages, though nearly half (49.3%) of Nebraska CCLC participants attend at least 90 hours, compared to 45.6% of national CCLC participants.

Nebraska CCLC and National CCLC students show similar hourly attendance distributions

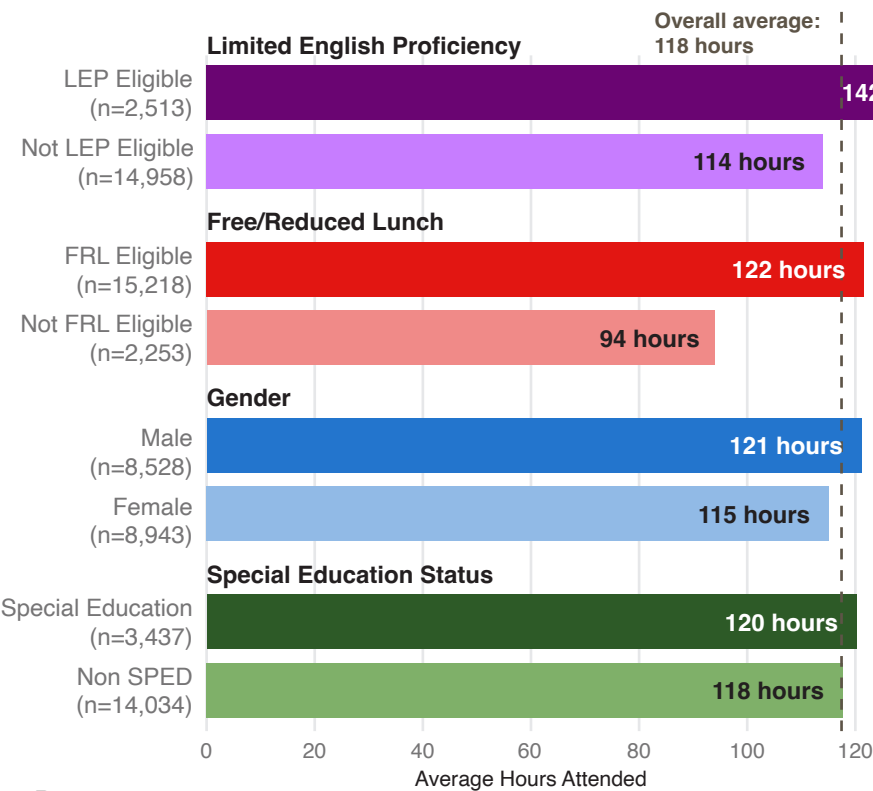
Note: National Data is for School Year 2022-23



Free/Reduced Lunch eligible students attend significantly more hours than non-FRL eligible students

Source: Nebraska 21st CCLC Program Data

Note: Demographic data missing for 49 students



Students eligible for free/reduced lunch attend significantly more afterschool programming hours during the school year (122 hours) than non-eligible students (94 hours). Similarly, students with limited English proficiency also attended afterschool programming at significantly higher rates than those not classified as limited English proficiency (142 hours v. 114 hours). Other demographic comparisons (gender, special education) show minimal variation, with both groups hovering near the 118-hour average. Black students attend the most afterschool hours (average of 149 hours during the school year), followed by Hispanic students (134 hours).



PROGRAM QUALITY

The Quality Framework for 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) established in 2018 outlines the essential components of high-quality out-of-school time programs that support student success, well-being, and future readiness. At its core, the framework emphasizes strong leadership, sound management practices, and continuous improvement processes that ensure programs are safe, effective, and responsive to student and family needs. Quality programs provide engaging learning experiences that align with the school day, foster academic growth, promote health and wellness, and create inclusive environments where all students can thrive.

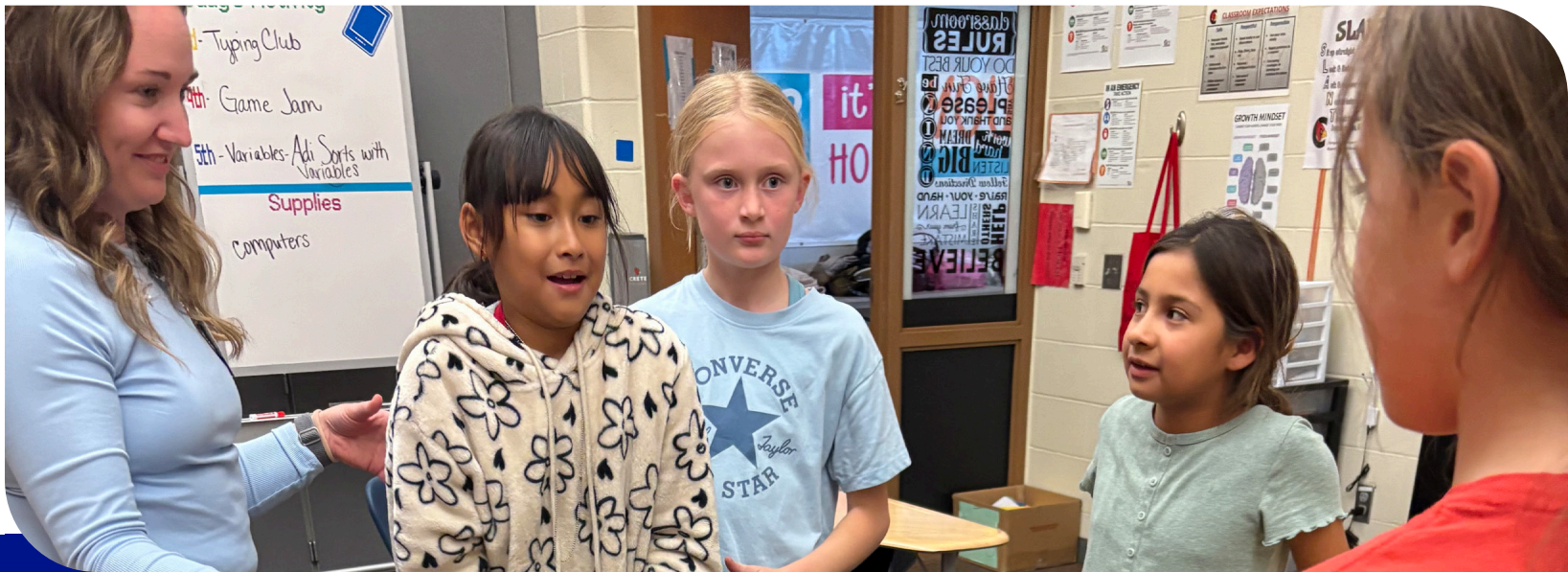
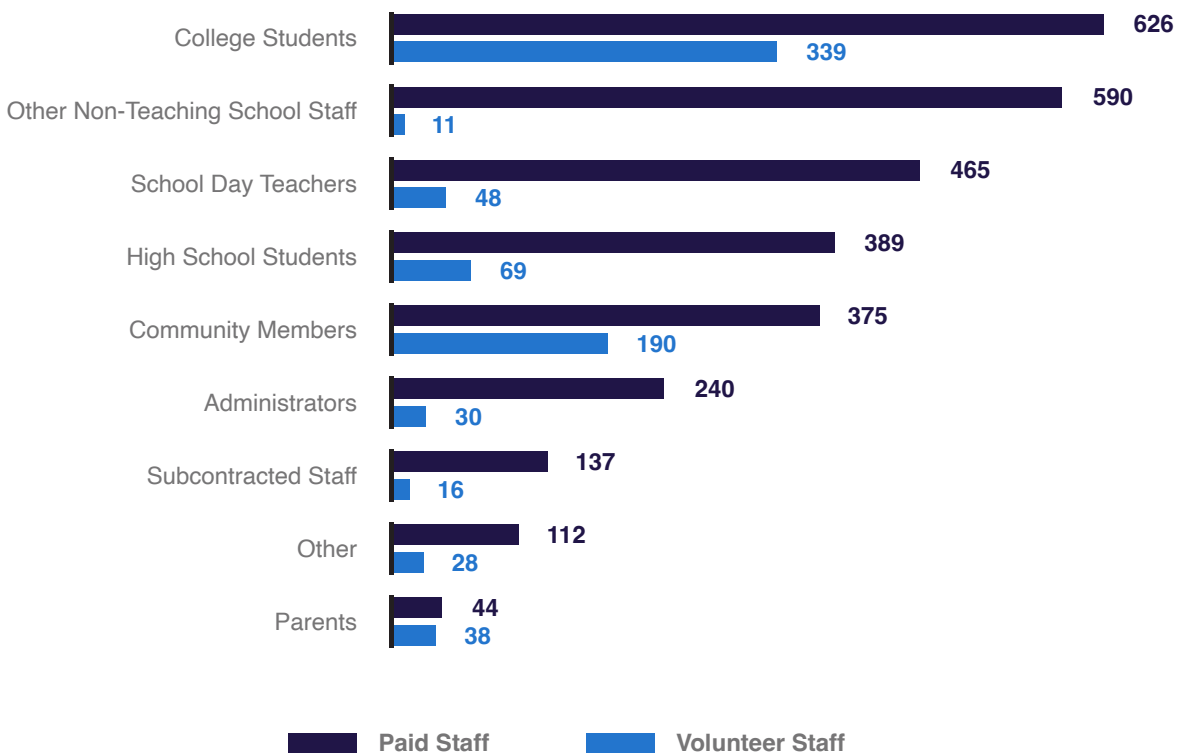
The framework also highlights the importance of meaningful relationships and partnerships in supporting student development. Through collaboration with families, schools, community organizations, businesses, and higher education institutions, 21st CCLC programs expand opportunities for learning, career exploration, and personal growth. Prepared and diverse staff, active family engagement, and intentional support during educational transitions help students build confidence, develop leadership skills, and prepare for success in college, careers, and life. Together, these elements create sustainable programs that strengthen both individual outcomes and community impact.



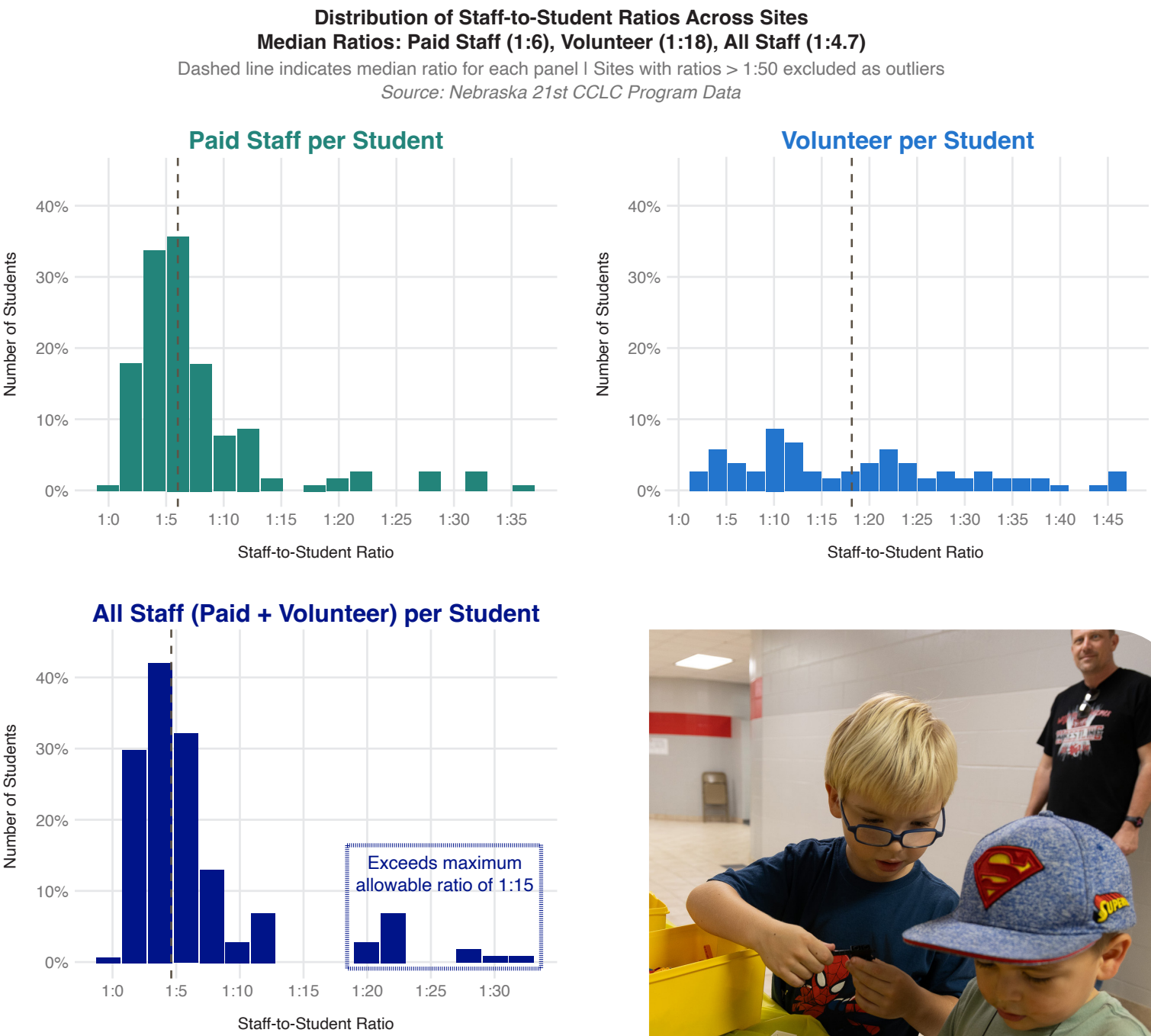
Staffing

Sites utilize a variety of staff, including both paid and volunteer staff, to implement programming. College students are most commonly used, both in a paid and unpaid capacity. School staff, including school day teachers and other non-teaching staff, are also often used; however, they are nearly always utilized in paid positions.

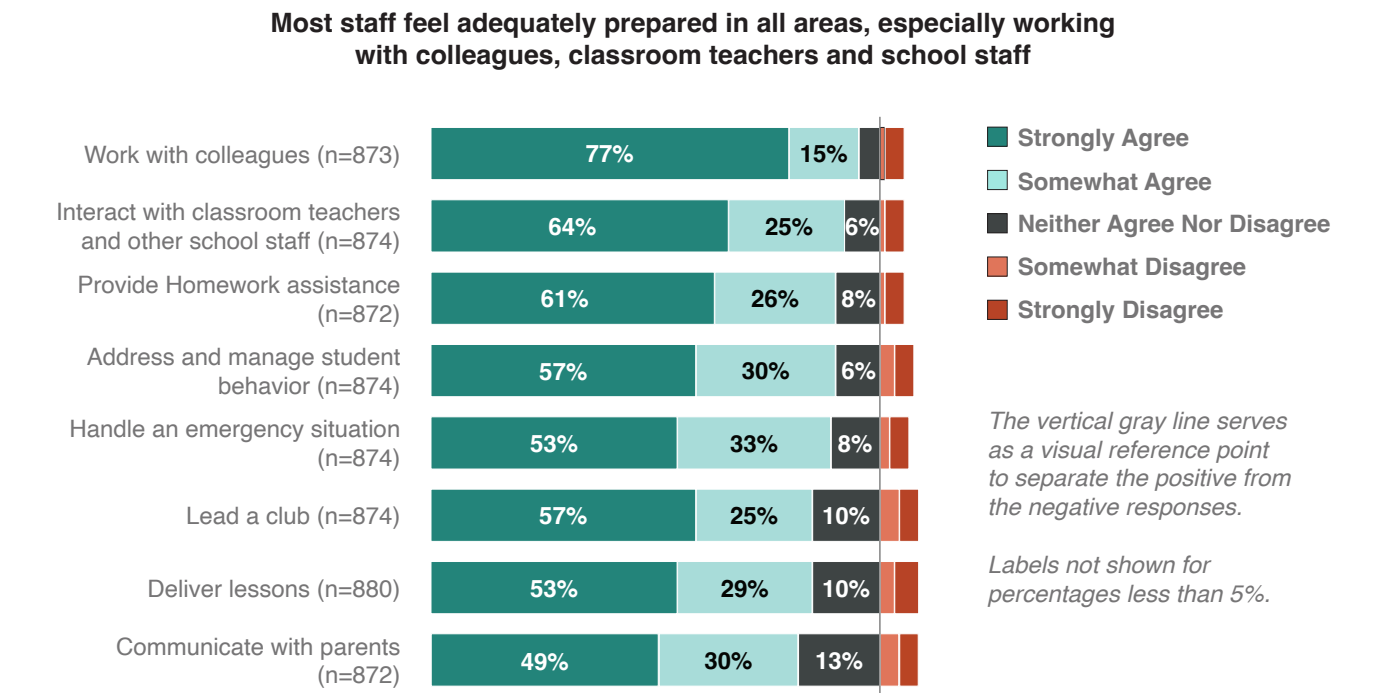
College students are most commonly used for staffing



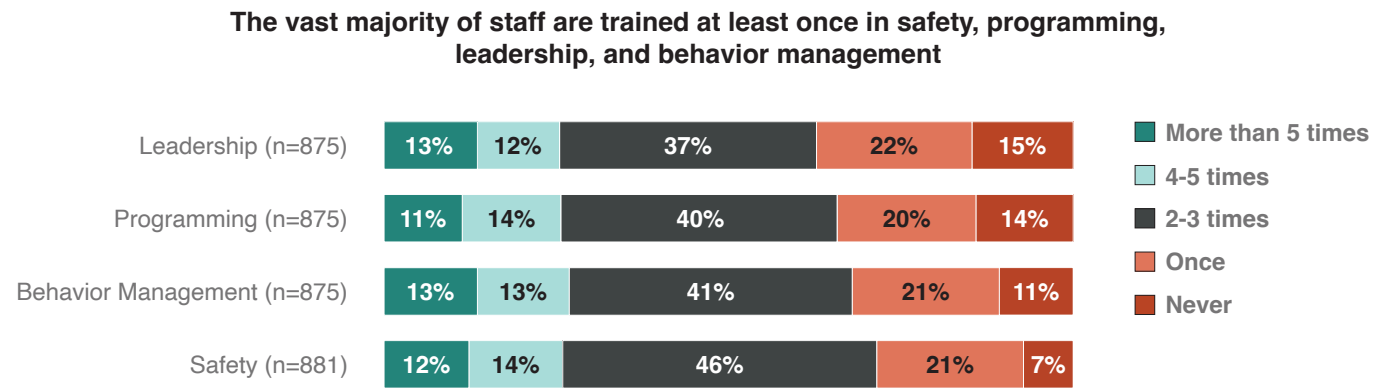
Most sites maintain strong staff-to-student ratios, with median ratios of 1:6 (1 staff member for every 6 students) for paid staff and 1:4.7 when including volunteers. Volunteer staffing is more variable, with a median ratio of 1:18. Only 8 sites (5.9%) exceed the 1:15 threshold established by the state as the maximum ratio allowed when accounting for all staff.



Overall, staff reported feeling well-prepared, with the highest confidence in working with colleagues (77% strongly agreeing) and interacting with classroom teachers and school staff (64% strongly agreeing). Across all eight areas, the combined “strongly agree” and “somewhat agree” responses consistently represent the large majority of respondents, indicating that most CCLC staff feel adequately equipped for their day-to-day roles.

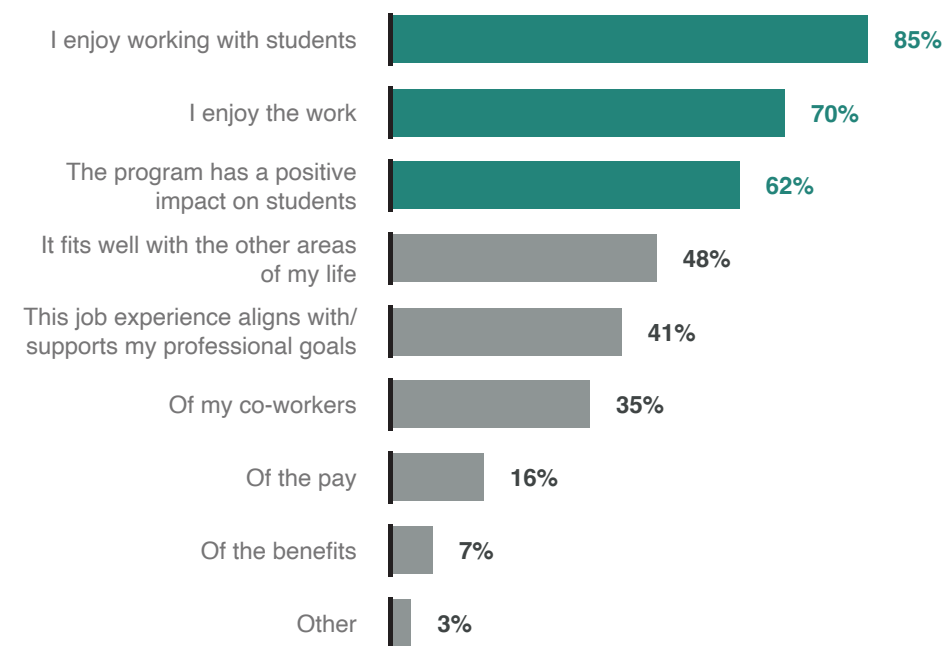


Safety was the most frequently received form of training, with more than 90% reporting they had been trained at least once, and seven out of ten trained at least twice. Behavior management, programming, and leadership training followed closely, each with roughly 85–90% of staff reporting at least one training experience. Across all four areas, most staff reported receiving repeated training.



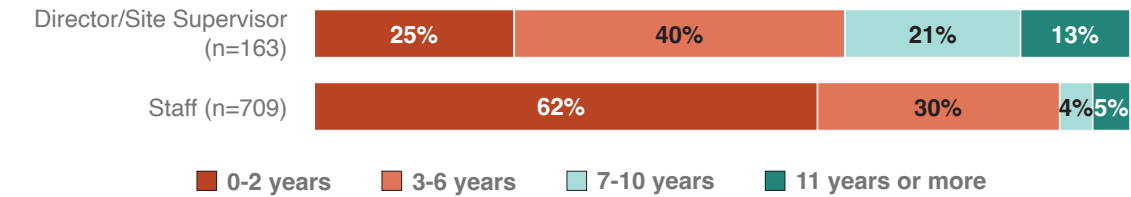
Staff most often cited their reasons for working at their afterschool program were because they enjoy working with students (selected by 85% of staff), enjoy the work itself (70%), and believe the program has a positive impact on students (62%). Reasons related to pay or benefits were selected less frequently. These findings suggest that mission-driven motivations are the dominant draw for CCLC staff.

The primary reasons staff work at the afterschool program are because they enjoy working with students, enjoy the work, and the program has a positive impact on students (n=886)



While program directors and site supervisors intend to stay for longer periods of time, the majority of staff members (62%) only intend to remain part of their CCLC for 2 or fewer years. These data suggest that a significant portion of the staffing workforce views afterschool employment as a shorter-term commitment, which has implications for continual turnover and staff recruitment planning.

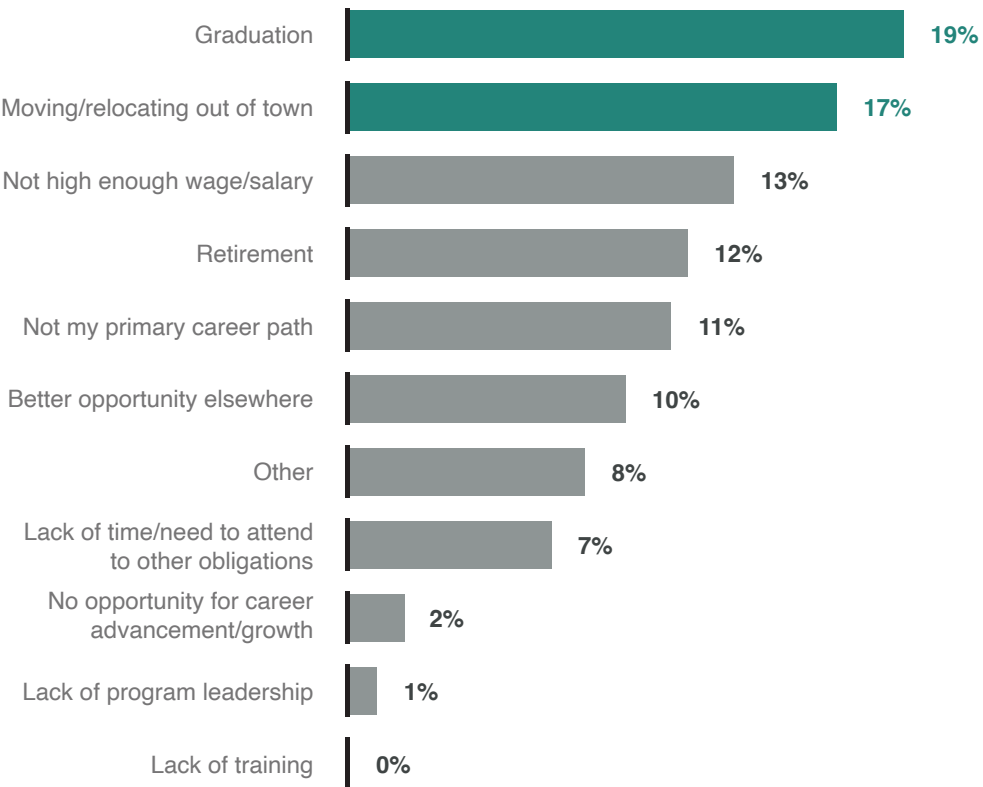
The majority of current staff see themselves being part of their afterschool program for 2 or fewer more years



The two most frequently cited reasons staff indicated would leave were graduation (19%) and moving or relocating out of town (17%), reflecting the reality that many CCLC staff are students or individuals at transitional life stages. Factors related to working conditions, such as lack of training, lack of program leadership, or limited opportunity for career advancement, were cited much less frequently, suggesting that structural workplace concerns are not the primary drivers of anticipated turnover.



The primary reasons staff would leave their afterschool program would be because they are graduating or moving/relocating (n=881)

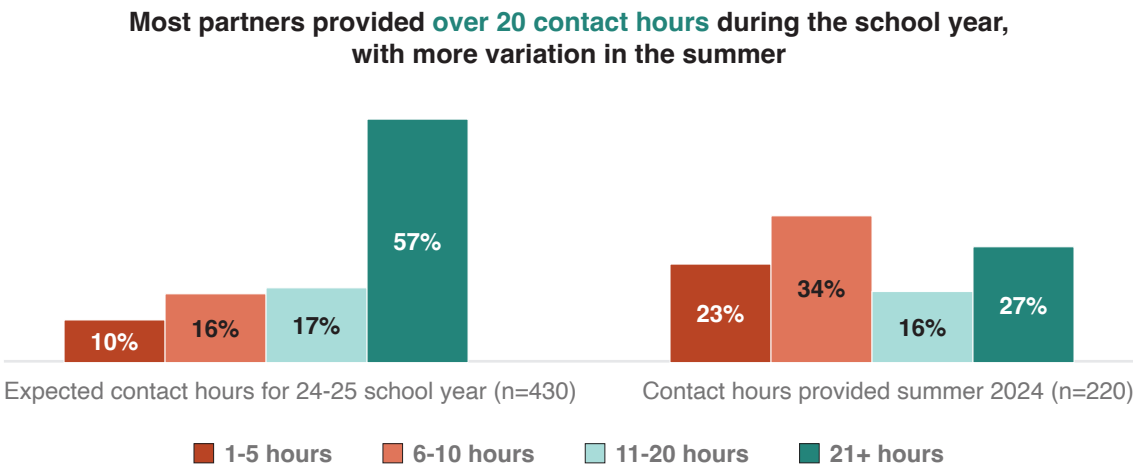


Despite potential challenges with staff turnover, one partner noted that regardless of changes in staffing, the commitment to students is foundational:

“A key strength of this afterschool program is its ability to foster a strong sense of community among both students and staff. Even through transitions in staffing, the program has remained focused on creating a positive and supportive environment. The team has shown resilience and adaptability, maintaining consistency for the kids while building strong working relationships among staff members.”

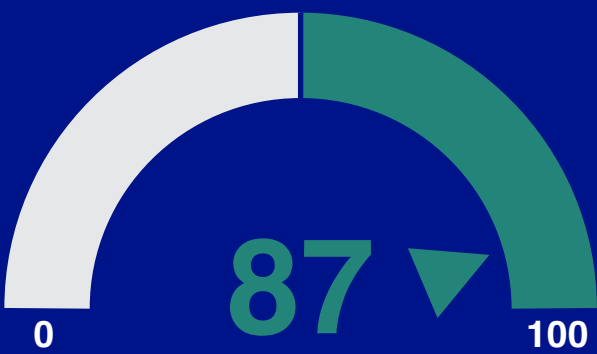
Partners

When surveyed near the end of the school year, the majority of community partners (57%) indicated that they expected to provide over 20 contact hours during the 2024–25 school year. Summer contact hours showed considerably more variation, with a larger share of partners providing fewer hours compared to the school year.

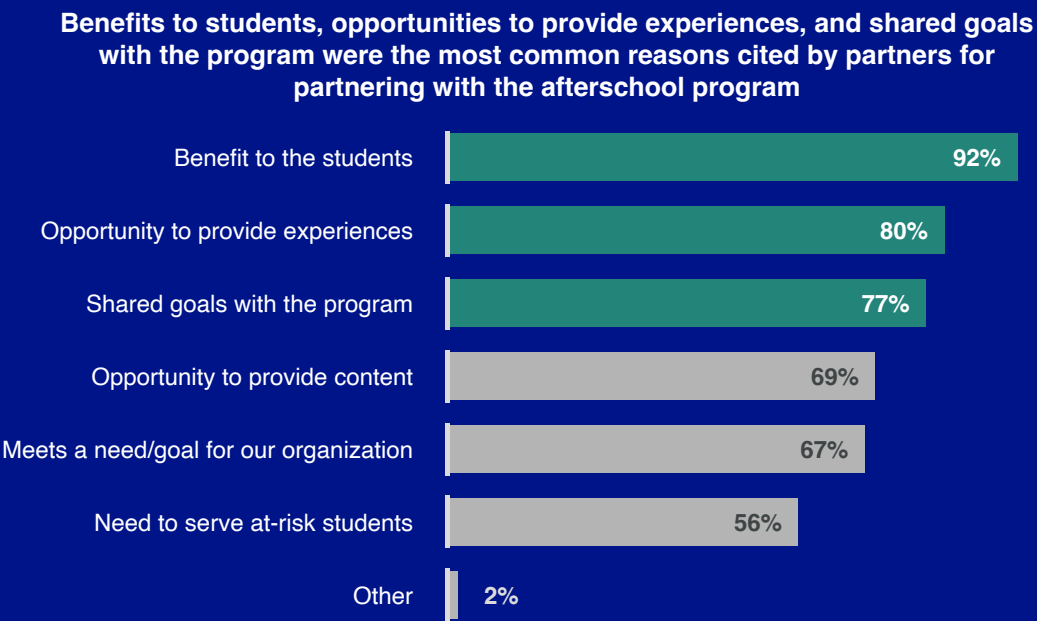


Community partners reported having strong relationships with their CCLC programs, with an average overall score of 87 reported (out of 100). This reflects a positive partnership climate across Nebraska’s 21st CCLC programs and suggests that the relational foundation for effective collaboration is well established.

Partners report overall strong relationships with their afterschool programs.



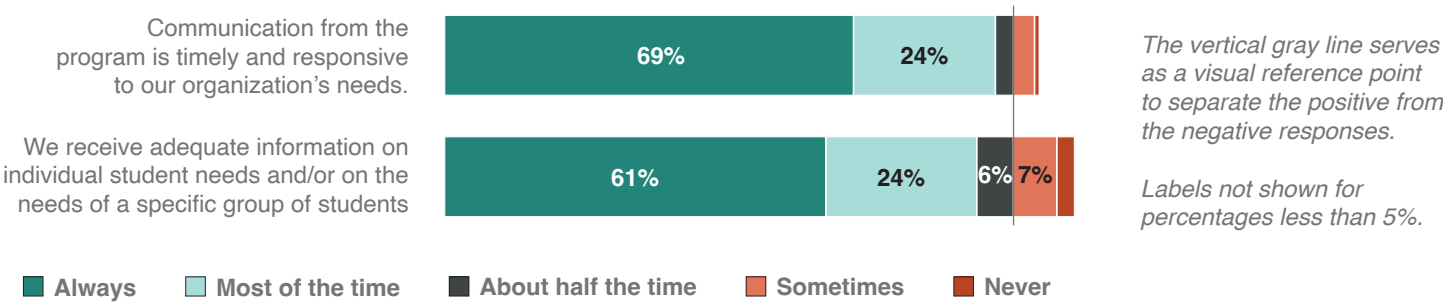
Benefits to students, opportunities to provide experiences, and shared goals with the program were the most common reasons partners cited for partnering with their CCLC program, each selected by more than three-quarters of community partners. This suggests partners are primarily motivated by student-centered and mission-aligned rationale.



Nearly all partners (97%) understand the vision, mission, and goals of the 21st CCLC program. The same percentage (97%) also feel their organization’s work with the CCLC program is aligned with the goals of the school for their students.

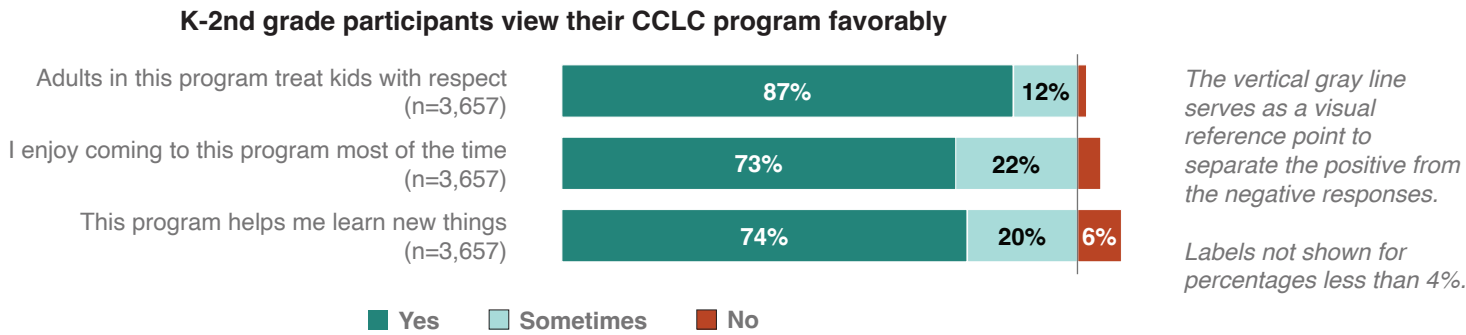
Community partners also report communication with the CCLC is working well. Timeliness and responsiveness of communication received the highest ratings, with 69% reporting this is always the case and an additional 24% reporting it is true most of the time.

Most partners report communication is working well all or most of the time (n=439)



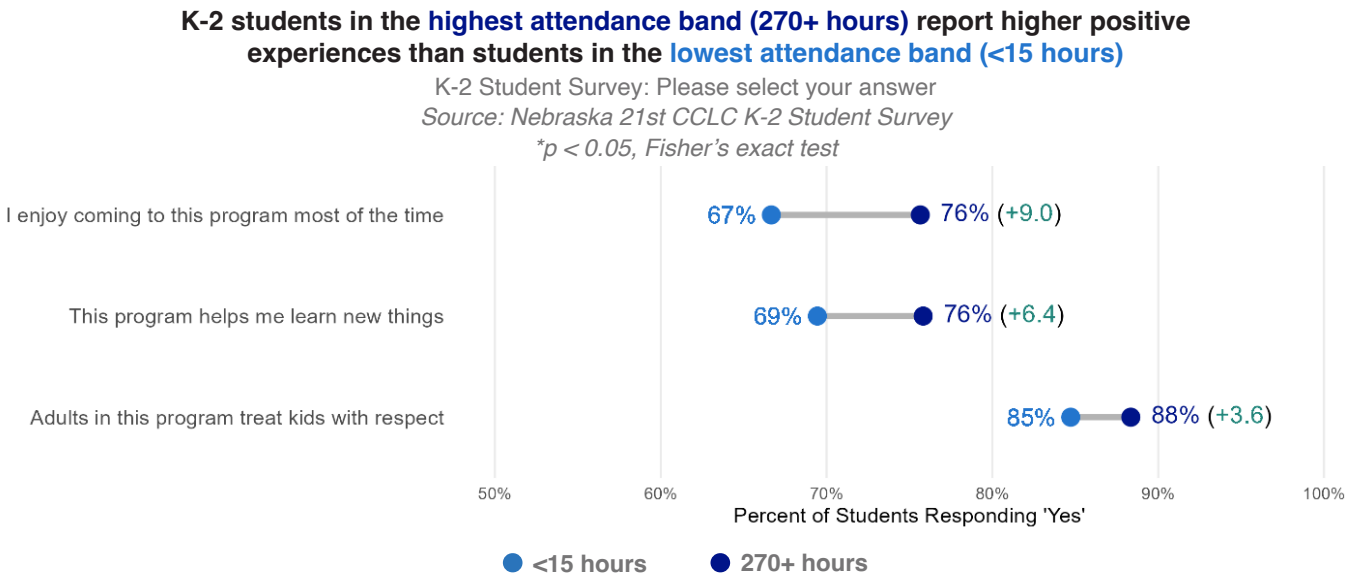
Engaged Learning

Students across all age groups view their CCLC programs favorably. Among K–2nd grade participants, the highest positive response was for adults treating kids with respect (87% yes), though fewer than 7% responded “no” to any item, indicating that nearly all younger participants hold a strongly positive view of their CCLC experience.

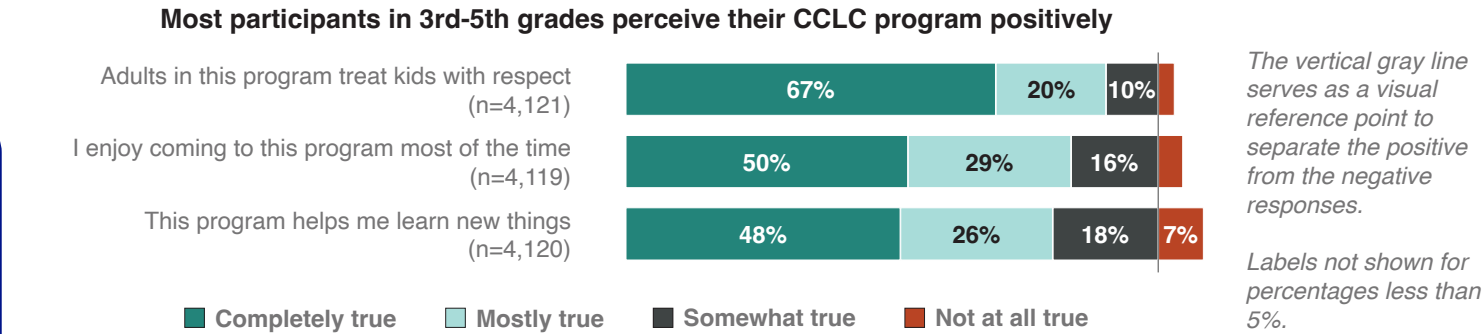


Students are grouped into attendance bands by total hours of program participation, allowing comparisons between those with minimal exposure (<15 hours) and sustained engagement (270+ hours). In program evaluation, this concept is often referred to as “dosage,” which is the amount of programming a participant actually receives, with the underlying assumption that a higher dose will result in better outcomes.

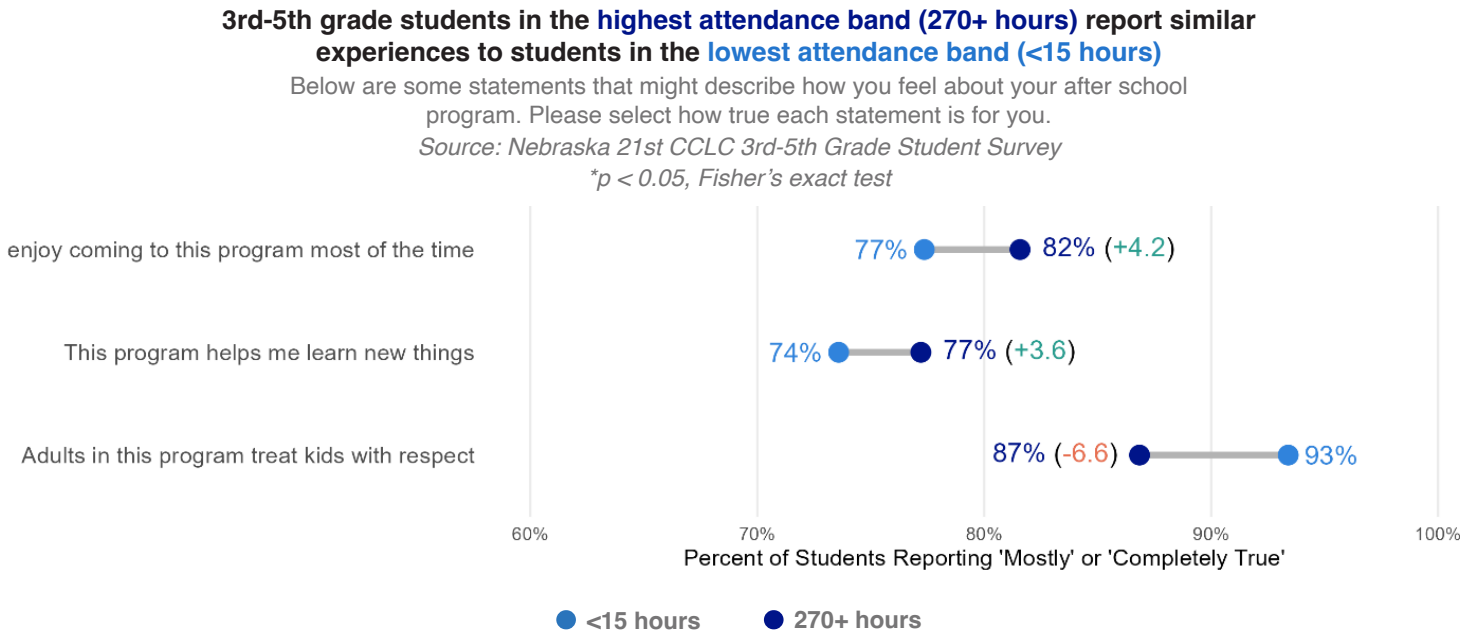
K-2 students who attended 270+ hours of afterschool programming reported higher positive experiences across all three survey items compared to those attending fewer than 15 hours, though none of these differences reached statistical significance. The largest gap was observed for “I enjoy coming to this program most of the time” (+9.0 percentage points), followed by “This program helps me learn new things” (+6.4 percentage points) and “Adults in this program treat kids with respect” (+3.6 percentage points).



Similarly, 3rd–5th grade participants also provided the highest positive response to adults treating kids with respect, with 67% selecting “completely true” and an additional 20% selecting “mostly true.” Enjoyment of the program and perceived learning were also viewed positively, with roughly three-quarters of students selecting one of the top two response options for each.

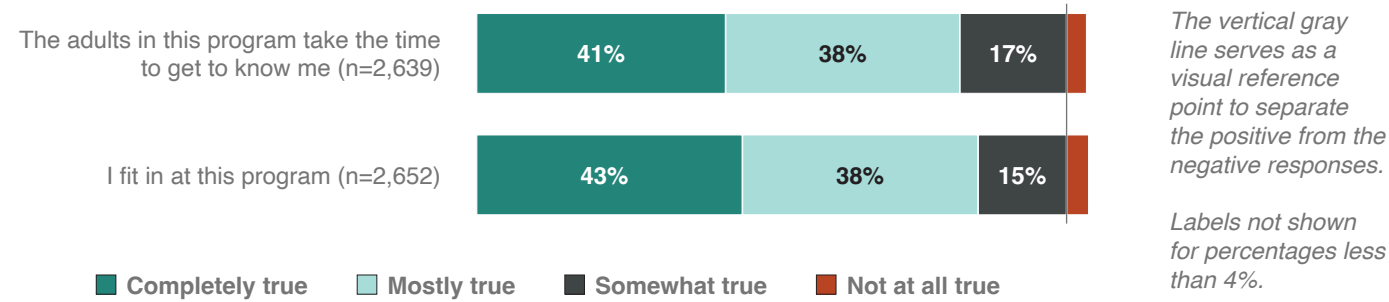


Students in 3rd-5th grades in the highest attendance band reported slightly higher rates of enjoying the program (+4.2 percentage points) and learning new things (+3.6 percentage points) compared to those in the lowest attendance band. However, students attending 270+ hours were less likely to report that adults treat kids with respect (-6.6 percentage points) than those attending fewer than 15 hours. However, none of these differences were statistically significant.



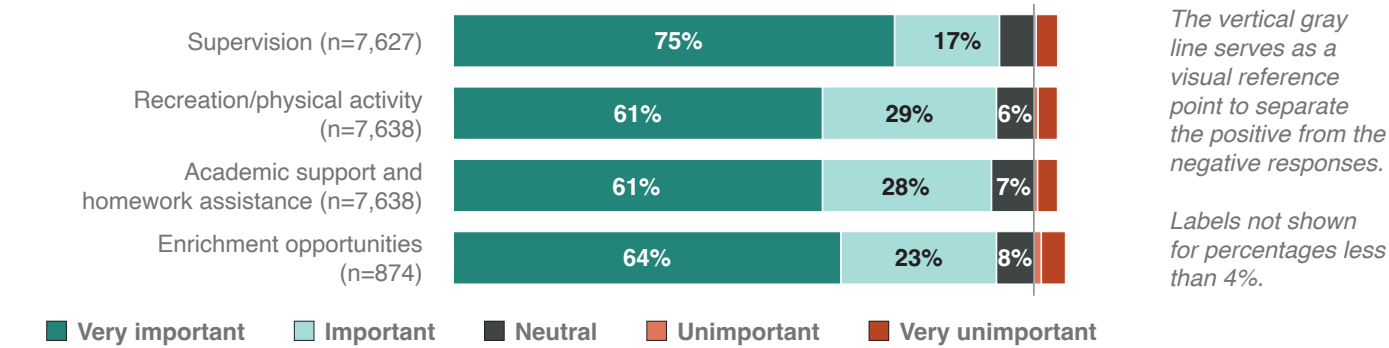
Participants in 6th–12th grades also show strong majorities responded positively when asked about belonging and relationships. Eighty-two percent reported that fitting in at the program was completely or mostly true, and 79% said the same about adults taking the time to get to know them. Fewer than 5% of students selected “not at all true” for either item, reflecting broadly positive perceptions of program climate and adult connection among older youth.

Most participants in 6th-12th grades perceive their CCLC program positively



Parents rated supervision as the most important program component, with 92% indicating this is “very important” or “important,” though recreation and physical activity (90%), academic support and homework assistance (89%), and enrichment opportunities (87%) followed closely. This suggests parents value all of these aspects of afterschool programming.

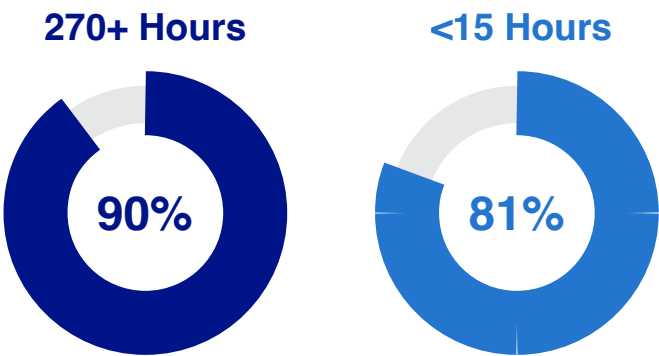
Parents feel supervision is the most important factor



Parents’ valuation of academic support and homework assistance rose steadily with the amount of programming their child received. Among parents whose children attended fewer than 15 hours, 81% rated this component as “very important” or “important,” compared with 90% of parents whose children attended 270 or more hours — a statistically significant 9 percentage-point gap. Endorsement climbed in near-stepwise fashion across the six attendance bands (81% > 83% > 85% > 88% > 87% > 90%), suggesting that as families experience more of the program, they more strongly endorse its academic support function.

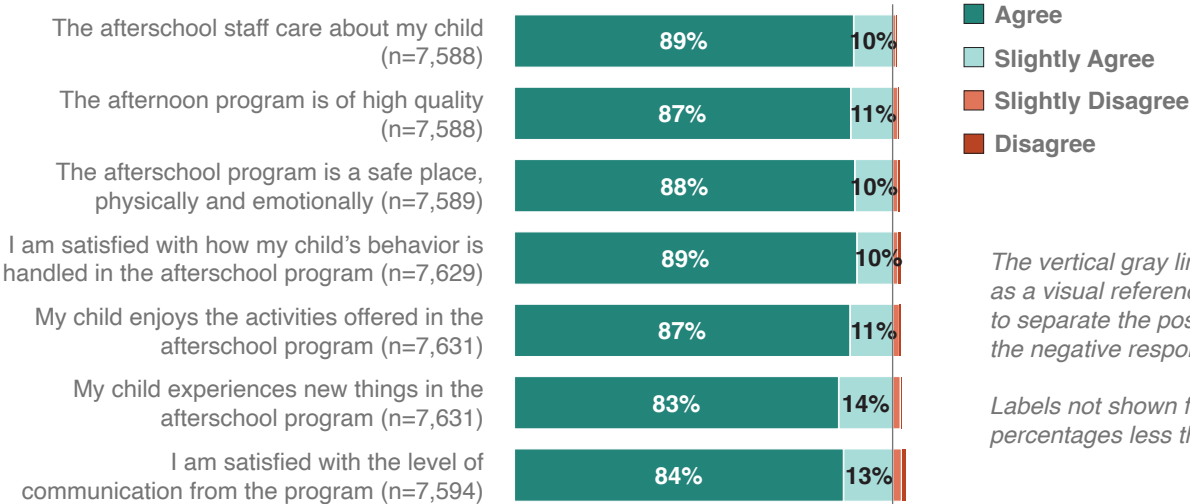
Parents of children who attended 270+ hours (90%) were significantly more likely to rate ‘Academic support and homework assistance’ as important than parents of children who attended less than 15 hours (81%)

Percent who rate as very important or important, by hours served in afterschool programming



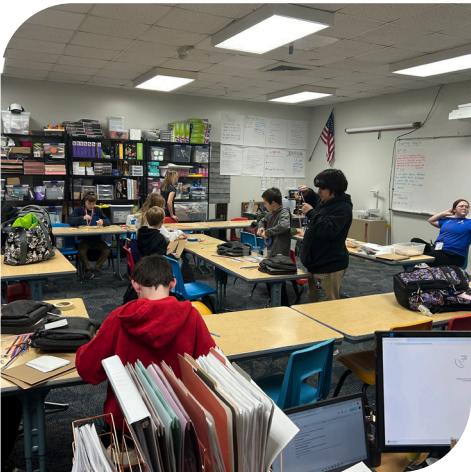
Parents overwhelmingly reflect positively regarding their child’s afterschool program experience. Very few parents (3% or fewer) disagreed across all quality-related measures, ranging from relationships to safety.

Parents perceive the afterschool program positively



“I’m very proud of the afterschool programs that my daughter is engaged and involved with. It helps boost her morale as well as helps keep her grades up. It gives her great confidence in the community and in her school.”

Parent of 21st CCLC student

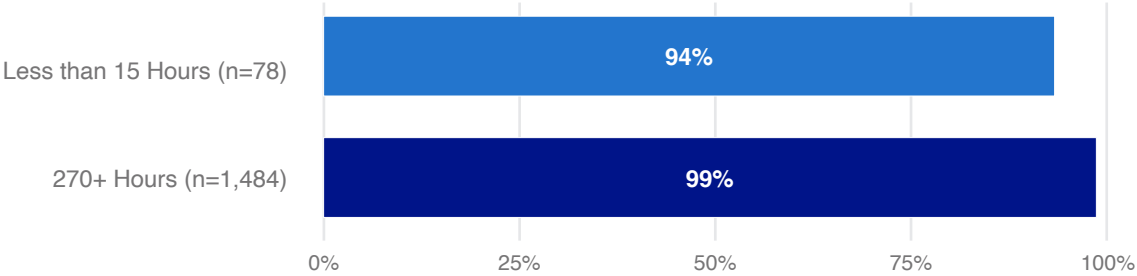


Overall, parents provided generous praise for the programs their children attended, most often noting appreciation for the specific program activities and staff. One parent of a child with autism, for example, noted “All staff in this program make sure he has the chance to explore things and activities in his own way, at his own pace. I cannot even express how much that means to me. It’s everything. I am so thankful for this program.”

However, parents noted some areas for improvement, with the most common areas being program activities, homework help & academic support, parent communication, and staff quality & support. One noted that having “more varied activities to keep him engaged” would be helpful, with another one specifically mentioning more activities outside.

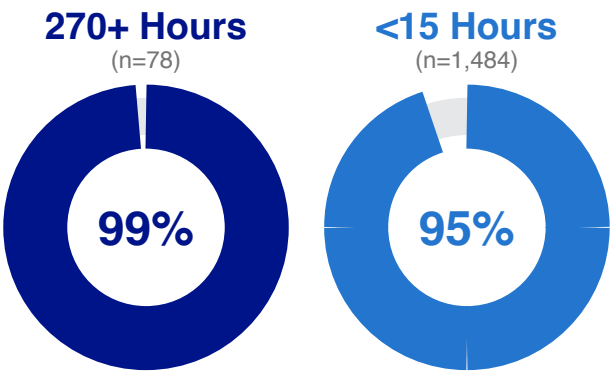
Parents of children with the most hours of afterschool programming were significantly more likely to report that their child enjoys the activities than parents of children who attended the fewest hours (99% vs 94%).

Parents of children who attended **270+ hours (99%)** were significantly more likely to agree with the statement ‘My child enjoys the activities offered’ than parents of children who attended **less than 15 hours (94%)**
Percent who agree or slightly agree, by hours served in afterschool programming



Similarly, parents of children with the most attendance hours were significantly more likely to agree that their child experiences new things in the afterschool program (99%) than those with lowest attendance hours (95%).

Parents of children who attended **270+ hours (99%)** were significantly more likely to agree with the statement ‘Child Experiences New Things’ than parents of children who attended **less than 15 hours (95%)**
Percent who agree or slightly agree, by hours served in afterschool programming



“Our family has greatly appreciated the after school programs. Specifically anything STEM related has been great for our son. He has made different friends from other classes and it gives him a chance to learn new things that he otherwise would not have the opportunity for.”

Parent of 21st CCLC student



Teachers frequently commented on students’ academic performance and support, with most noting positive growth or praising the afterschool program’s role in reinforcing learning. However, a meaningful subset also raised concerns, particularly around homework completion and students who remain below grade level.

One teacher noted that

“It can be difficult for a student to follow classroom and school expectations when this program is less structured and does not incorporate homework time into their program.”

Time to complete homework was also noted by a parent, who expressed that a helpful change would be “ensuring children do their homework in the afterschool program... Needs to be more than just homework club because that isn’t offered to all students.”

The concerns that appeared most frequently centered on student behavior and attendance, with teachers noting that inconsistent participation, whether due to behavioral consequences or chronic absenteeism, limits how much students can benefit from the program. However, teachers recognize the benefits beyond academics, with many highlighting the program’s overall impact on students, and the peer relationships students build through participation as strengths.

Feedback regarding one student explained that the program helped the student

“Build strong, positive relationships with his peers. He has come out of his shell so much over the course of the school year. Attending the afterschool program has played a big part in this as it encourages students to interact with each other through various activities.”

“[Student] has spent a great amount of time at the afterschool program. Being a part of this program has had a profoundly positive effect on his learning and development. As home life can be a bit trying sometimes for this student, his involvement in structured activities has been greatly beneficial to his learning in the classroom!”

Teacher of 21st CCLC student



Community partners also noted the supportive learning environment provided to students:

“One of the key strengths of this afterschool program is its ability to foster a strong sense of community among the kids. The program creates a welcoming and supportive environment where students feel connected, valued, and encouraged to build positive relationships with their peers and staff.”

Another community partner noted that

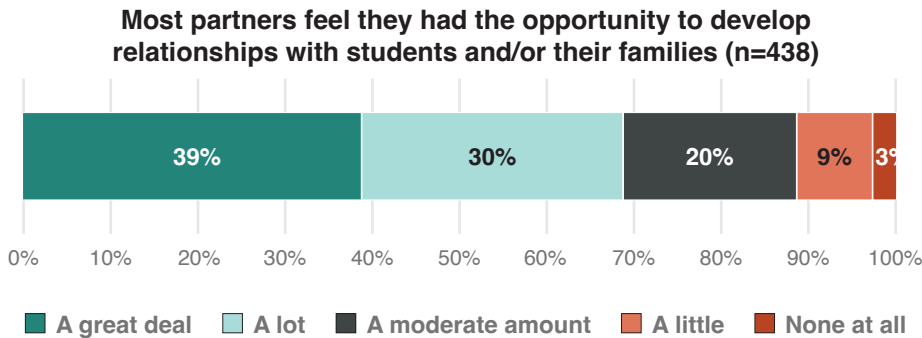
“This afterschool program provides a safe, supportive, and structured environment where youth can explore interests, build friendships, and develop life skills beyond the classroom. The commitment of staff to engage youth in meaningful, hands-on learning experiences is evident, and the program fosters strong relationships between students and caring adult mentors. The collaboration with community organizations also enhances the diversity and quality of enrichment opportunities available.”

Family Engagement

Most community partners felt they had the opportunity to develop relationships with students and/or their families through the CCLC program. Nearly 70% reported having a great deal (39%) or a lot (30%) of opportunity to build these relationships, while an additional 20% reported a moderate amount, suggesting that most partnerships are structured in ways that support meaningful family and student connection.

“I have LOVED the family night programming they have offered. It has been a fun way to do activities as a family at school!”

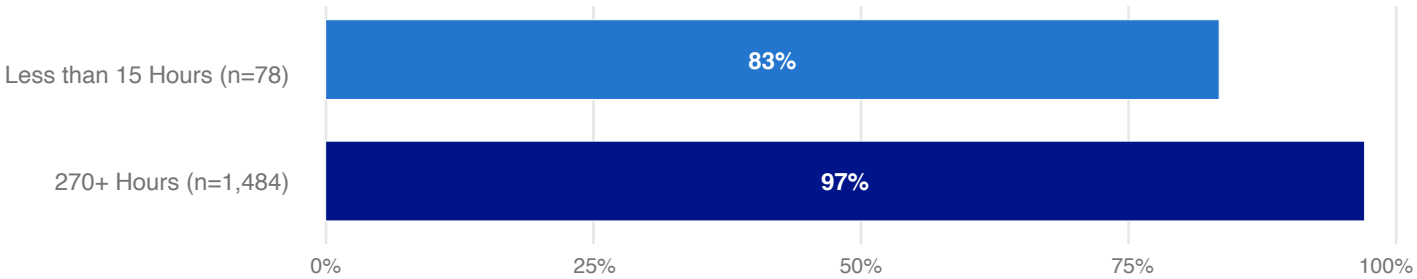
Parent of 21st CCLC student



The vast majority of parents feel they have opportunities to engage in the CCLC program, with 78% agreeing outright, and an additional 15% slightly agreeing, for a combined agreement of 93%. This indicates that access to family engagement opportunities is a broad program strength across Nebraska’s 21st CCLC subgrantees.

Parents of children who attended more hours of afterschool programming reported significantly higher levels of engagement opportunities.

Parents of children who attended **270+ hours (97%)** were significantly more likely to agree with the statement ‘I have opportunities to engage’ than parents of children who attended **less than 15 hours (83%)**
Percent who agree or slightly agree, by hours served in afterschool programming



One potential area of improvement with family engagement related to communication, with one parent noting:

“I would love to get more basic communication about trends, topics, or events happening in the program... The more regular emails should contain notifications about visitors to the program, opportunities for parents to get involved, recurring concerns or issues, and staff introductions or bios so we can get to know the people spending time with our kids.”



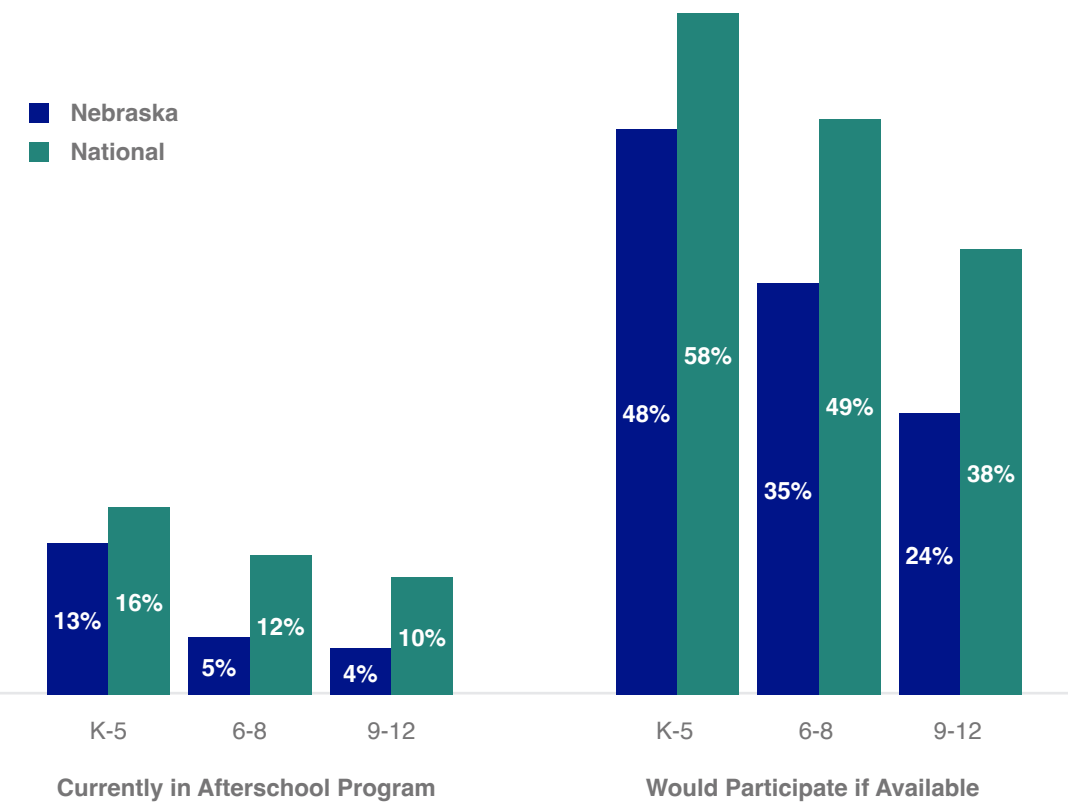
NEBRASKA IN CONTEXT

Comparisons in this section draw on the Afterschool Alliance’s America After 3PM survey (2025 wave), which asks parents nationally about children’s participation in afterschool programs. Note that “afterschool programming” here includes all provider types, including school-based, community-based, faith-based, private, and 21st CCLC. Nebraska’s 21st CCLC network is a significant but not exclusive part of that landscape, so state-level findings reflect the broader afterschool sector rather than 21st CCLC specifically. Additional information is provided, including a link to the website in Appendix A.

Demand

Nebraska consistently trails national benchmarks in both afterschool program participation and unmet demand across all grade levels. Only 13% of K-5 students, 5% of 6-8 students, and 4% of 9-12 students currently participate in afterschool programs, compared to 16%, 12%, and 10% nationally. Similarly, fewer Nebraska parents report they would enroll their child if a program were available (48%, 35%, and 24% by grade level) compared to national figures (58%, 49%, and 38%).

Demand for and Participation in Afterschool Programming Across All Grades in Nebraska Lags Compared to National Benchmarks



Nebraska ranks in the bottom tier nationally across key demand indicators. Only 8% of children currently participate in afterschool programs (rank 44th), and 37% would participate if available (rank 47th)—both well below national medians of 11% and 48%, respectively. Support for public funding remains relatively strong at 86%, though still below the 89% national median (rank 43rd). Between 2020 and 2025, current participation dipped slightly, 10% to 8%, unmet demand fell more sharply, 46% to 37%, and support for public funding eased from a 2020 high of 92% to 86%.

Nebraska Demand for Afterschool Programming
Source: After 3PM, Afterschool Alliance

Metric	2025 %	2025 Rank	2025 Median	Trend (2009-2025)
Currently participating	8%	44	11%	
Would participate if available	37%	47	48%	
Support for public funding	86%	43	89%	

Barriers

Nebraska parents report fewer barriers to afterschool enrollment than parents nationally. On the four most common parent-reported barriers, a smaller share of Nebraska parents cite the barrier than the national median: cost (48% in Nebraska vs. 55% nationally), no safe way to and from programs (38% vs. 49%), inconvenient location (36% vs. 47%), and program availability (32% vs. 42%). Cost is the most commonly cited barrier both in Nebraska and across the country, but even so, fewer Nebraska parents name it as a barrier than parents in most other states. The table below also shows where Nebraska ranks on how often parents cite each barrier, where a rank of 1 indicates that Nebraska had the fewest parents report it among all states. By that measure Nebraska sits near the top on each of these barriers. Furthermore, reports of all four of these barriers by parents have fallen since 2020, led by cost (–10 percentage points), inconvenient location (–9), and lack of availability (–8).

Nebraska Barriers to Afterschool Program Enrollment
Source: After 3PM, Afterschool Alliance

Barrier	% of NE Parents Citing Barrier	NE Rank Among States (1 = fewest parents cite)	2025 State Median	Trend (2014-2025)
Programs inconveniently located	36%	2	47%	
Programs too expensive	48%	7	55%	
Programs not available in community	32%	1	42%	
No safe way to/from programs	38%	2	49%	

At \$113 per week, Nebraska’s average afterschool program cost ranks 18th lowest nationally, which is more affordable than most states but still representing a meaningful expense for families. Costs across the nation range from \$74 in South Dakota to \$203 in Alaska.

Benefits

Nebraska parents who use afterschool programs report strong agreement on program benefits, though rankings vary. Agreement that programs “keep kids safe and out of trouble” ranks highest at 19th nationally (78%), while “help working parents keep their jobs” ranks lower at 45th (80%). Agreement that programs “provide working parents peace of mind” falls in the middle at rank 36 (83%). The latter two metrics fall slightly below their respective national medians (83% and 84%). Trends show all three perceived benefits surged between 2014 and 2020 (peace of mind from 61% to 89%, helping parents keep their jobs from 64% to 84%, and keeping kids safe from 56% to 79%), and have eased only modestly since, with 2025 levels (83%, 80%, and 78% respectively) remaining well above their 2014 baselines.

Nebraska Parent Agreement on Afterschool Program Benefits

Source: After 3PM, Afterschool Alliance

Metric	2025 %	2025 Rank	2025 Median	Trend (2014-2025)
Help working parents keep their jobs	80%	45	83%	
Keep kids safe and out of trouble	78%	19	77%	
Provide working parents peace of mind	83%	36	84%	

Nebraska ranks in the bottom quartile nationally on parent perceptions of opportunities provided by afterschool programs. Only 68% agree programs help children “become more excited about learning” (rank 50th), compared to a 74% national median. Agreement is higher for “engage in real-life and off screens” (83%, rank 45th), “gain teamwork, critical thinking, and leadership skills” (79%, rank 49th), and “learn life skills and responsible decision-making” (83%, rank 39th); however, all fall below national medians.

Nebraska: Parents Agree Children Have Opportunities To...

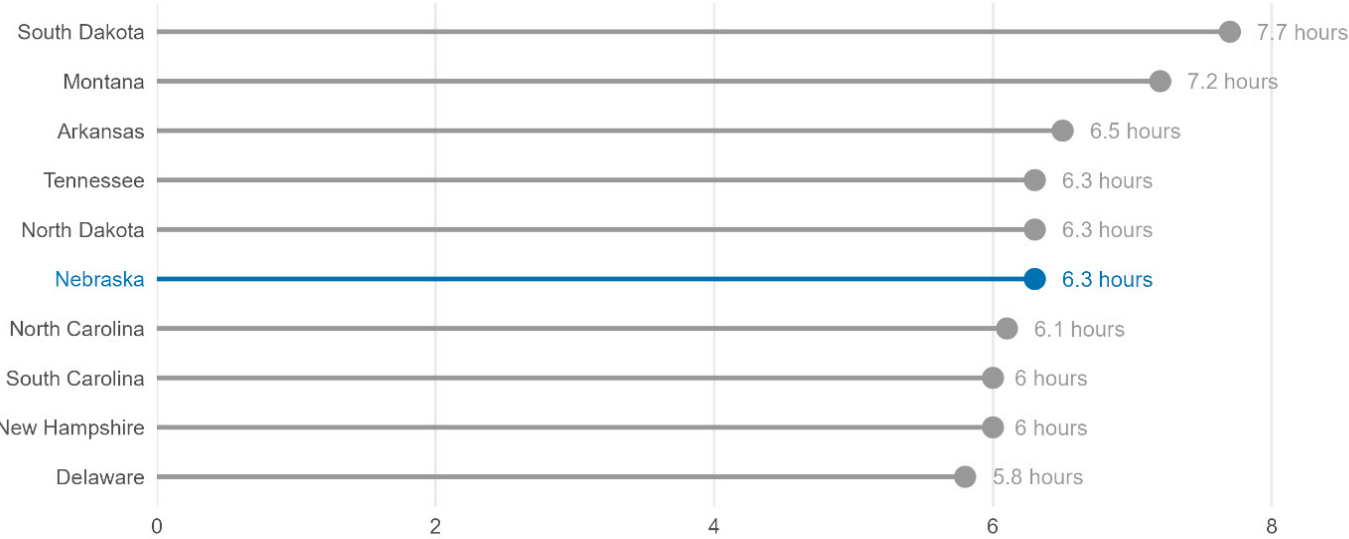
Source: After 3PM, Afterschool Alliance

Opportunity	2025 %	2025 Rank	2025 Median
Become more excited about learning & improve attendance	68%	50	74%
Engage in real-life activities (off screens)	83%	45	86%
Gain teamwork, critical thinking & leadership skills	79%	49	84%
Learn life skills & social skills	83%	39	86%

Among children who do participate, Nebraska ranks 4th nationally in average weekly hours spent in afterschool programs at 6.3 hours (tied with North Dakota and Tennessee), trailing only South Dakota (7.7), Montana (7.2), and Arkansas (6.5).

Average time per week children spend in an afterschool program

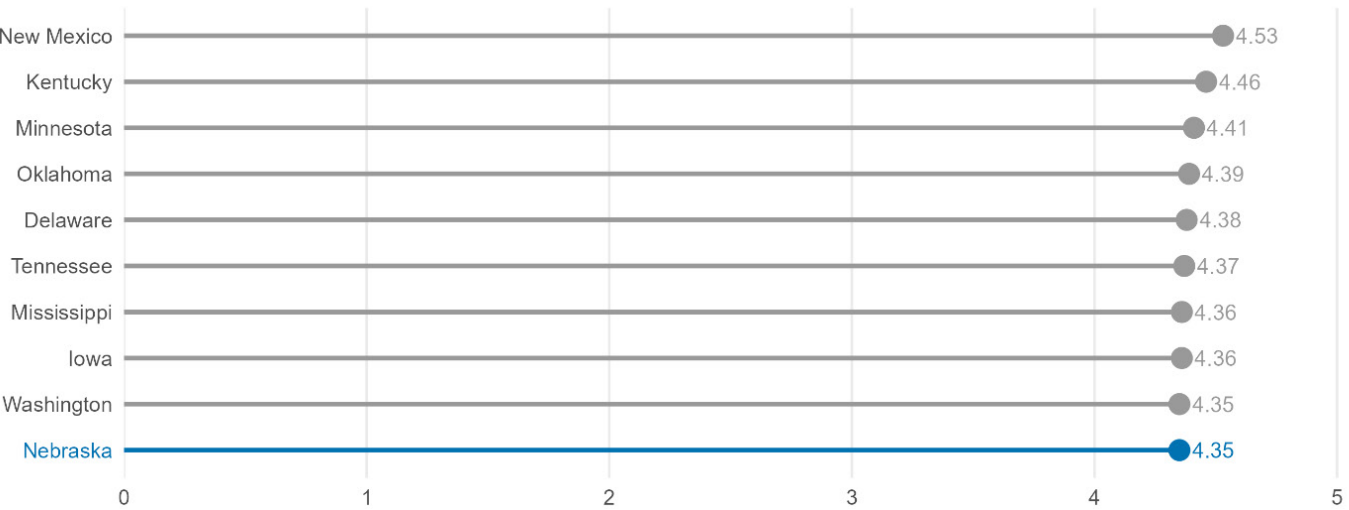
Nebraska ranks #4 (tied) at 6.3 hours



Nebraska parents rate their children’s afterschool programs highly, with an average quality rating of 4.35 out of 5, which ranks 9th nationally (tied with Washington).

Nebraska Ranks 9th (tied) in Parents Rating Afterschool Program Quality (4.35/5)

Source: After 3PM, Afterschool Alliance



Nebraska’s afterschool landscape presents a paradox: programs are affordable (rank 18th in cost), highly rated (rank 9th in quality), and engaging for participants (rank 4th in hours attended); however, participation and demand rank among the lowest nationally. Parents report fewer barriers than most states, but also perceive fewer developmental opportunities from programs. These findings suggest opportunities to increase awareness and communicate program value to drive greater enrollment and community support.



OUTCOMES

The 21st CCLC program requires subgrantees to report on a set of federally defined outcome measures known as Program Performance Outcomes (PPOs). These indicators, which focus on areas such as academic performance, school-day attendance, engagement in learning, and behavior, are reported annually to the U.S. Department of Education and serve as a primary accountability mechanism for the program.

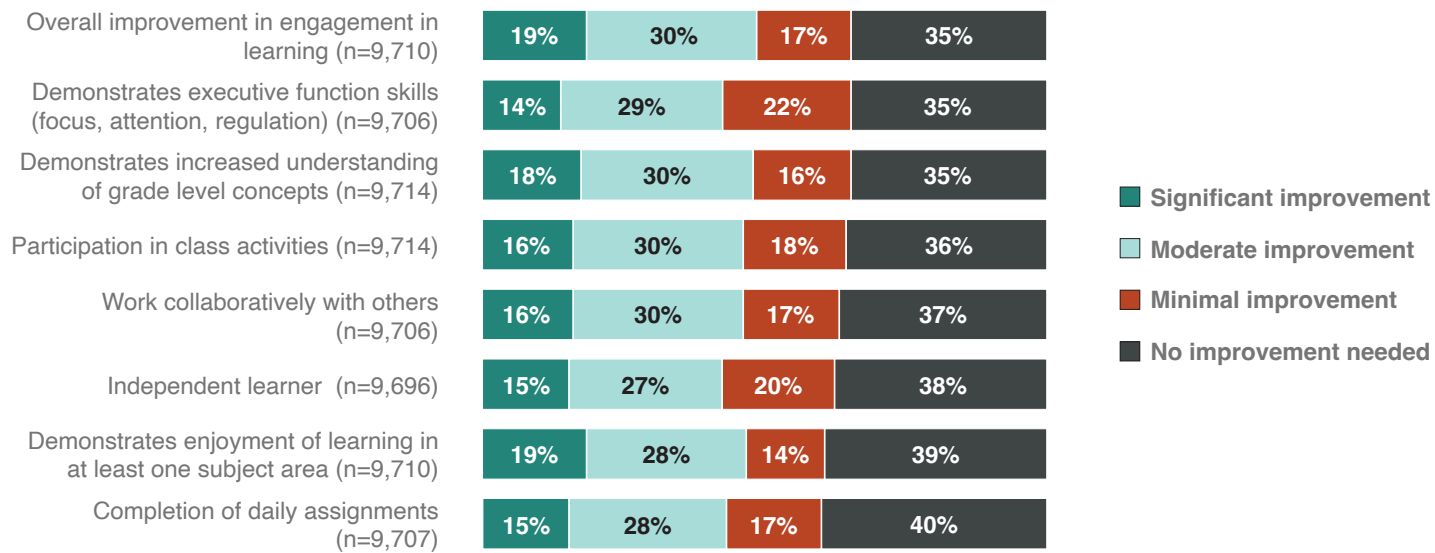
While the PPOs provide an important foundation for understanding program impact, they represent a floor rather than a ceiling for evaluation. Nebraska’s statewide evaluation goes beyond these required measures to capture a broader picture of program outcomes, drawing on additional data sources that provide meaningful information for both statewide reporting and local continuous improvement planning. The sections that follow present both federally required PPO data and these supplemental evaluation findings.

Academic Outcomes

Teacher Reported Academic Outcomes

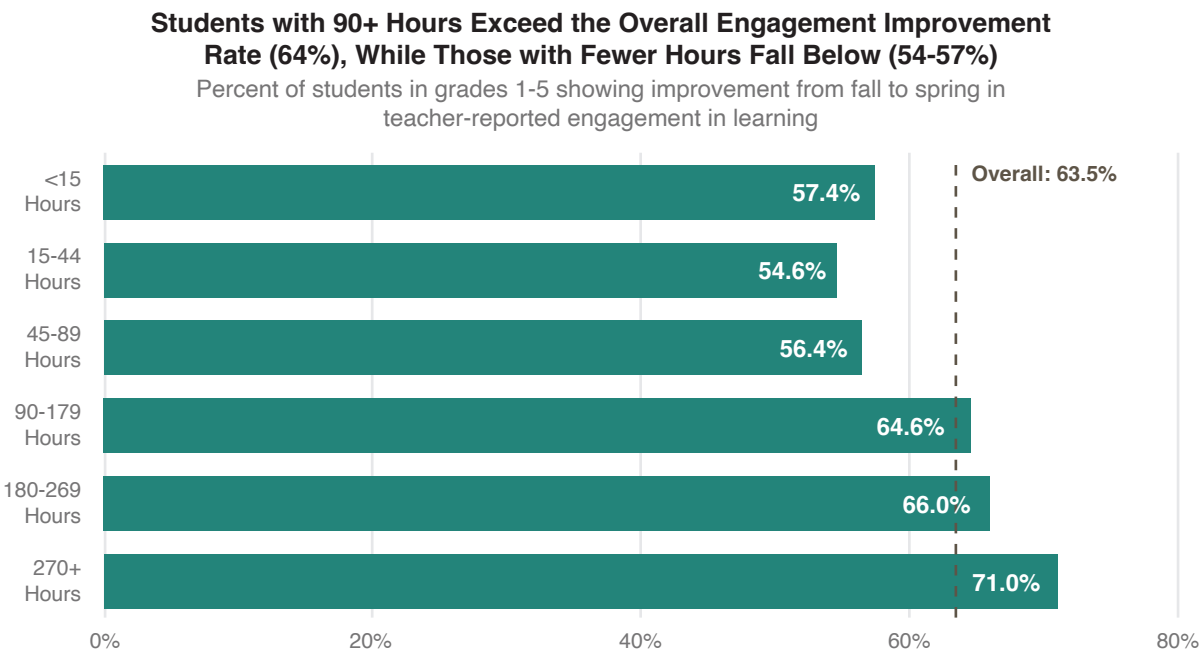
Teachers of students who participated in programming during the school year (either in afterschool or out-of-school programming) indicate that at least 60% of K–8th grade participants showed at least minimal improvement across all eight academic engagement and learning indicators, though less than 20% were described as showing significant improvement. The highest combined moderate-to-significant improvement rates were seen for overall improvement in engagement in learning (49%), participation in class activities (46%), demonstrates increased understanding of grade level concepts (48%), and working collaboratively with others (46%). Executive function skills showed the lowest rate of moderate-to-significant improvement (43%) and the highest rate of minimal improvement (22%). Notably, a substantial proportion of teachers (ranging from 35% to 40% across items) indicated no improvement was needed, suggesting that a meaningful share of participants were already performing well at program entry.

Teachers report minimal to significant improvements in 60% or more of K-8th grade participants across all areas



The survey item asking teachers to report on their student’s overall improvement in engagement in learning is used as a PPO for federal reporting purposes, but only for 1st-5th grade students. For this population specifically, 63.5% of teachers reported significant, moderate, or minimal improvement among 1st-5th grade students.

This federal outcome measure showed a clear dose-response relationship with school year afterschool participation, with rates increasing steadily from 55-57% among students attending fewer than 90 hours to 65-71% among those attending 90 or more hours. Students with 270+ hours were 7% more likely to show improvement than the overall average of 64%, a statistically significant difference. A notable threshold emerges at 90 hours, above which all groups exceed the overall average. This suggests that sustained participation of at least 90 hours may be necessary to realize meaningful gains in student engagement.



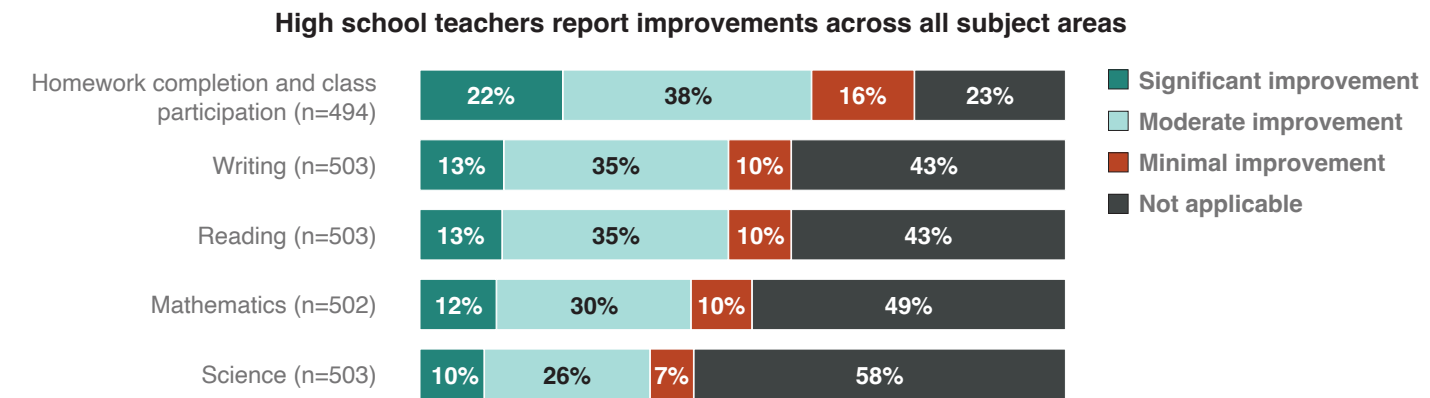
Teacher-reported engagement improvement rates were consistently high (62–65% overall) and showed minimal variation across metro status, program size, and program tenure, with all groups following a similar dose-response pattern peaking at 70–76% for students with 270+ hours.

“[Student] started out very shy when she entered 6th grade. Checking in on her this year, she just beams with confidence. The academic support has been amazing for her. She knows that if she doesn’t ask a question in class she can always get help at club.”

Teacher of 21st CCLC student

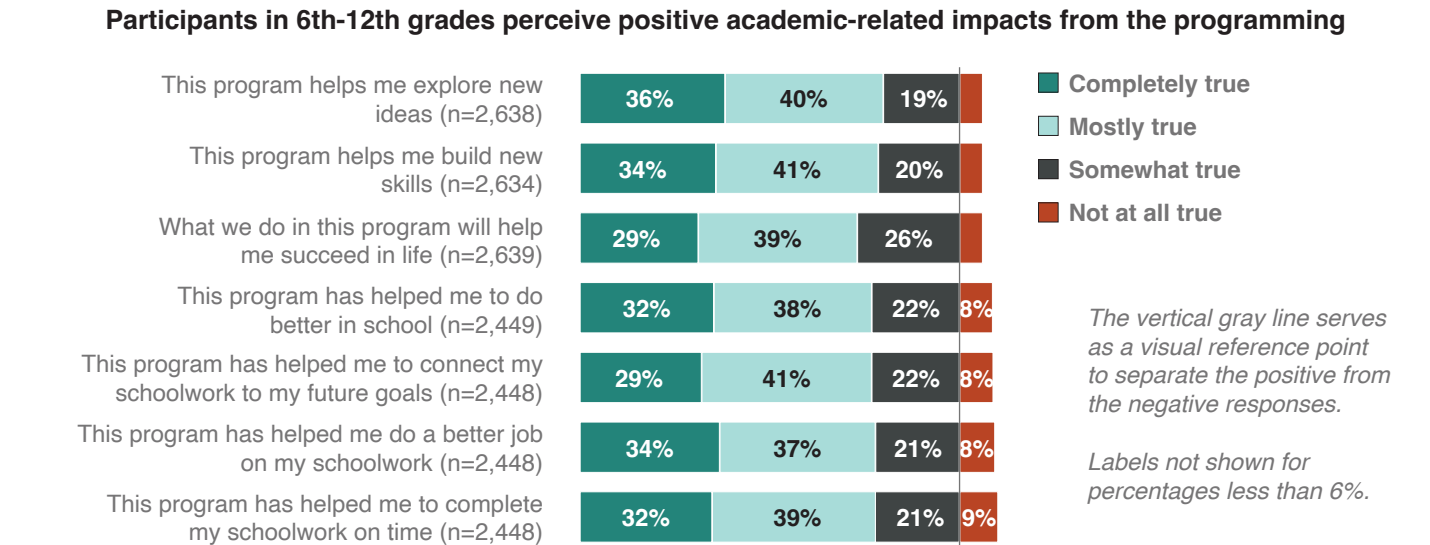
The impacts of Nebraska’s CCLC efforts implemented in 2024-25 on student engagement improvement were similar to the impacts from the previous year, with teacher-reported student engagement improvement remaining remarkably stable from SY23-24 to SY24-25 at approximately 63%, with minimal variation across most hour bands. The dose-response relationship also persisted, with students attending 270+ hours showing the highest improvement rates (71-74%) compared to those attending fewer than 15 hours (57-60%). Overall, the consistency of engagement patterns across years suggests that program effects on student engagement are robust and reliable, with little change in impacts over the past two years.

Teachers report at least minimal improvement in homework completion and classroom participation in over three quarters (77%) of CCLC high school participants, though less than one-quarter (22%) report significant improvement. While many surveyed teachers reported the subject as not applicable, notable improvements were observed within each of the four subject areas.



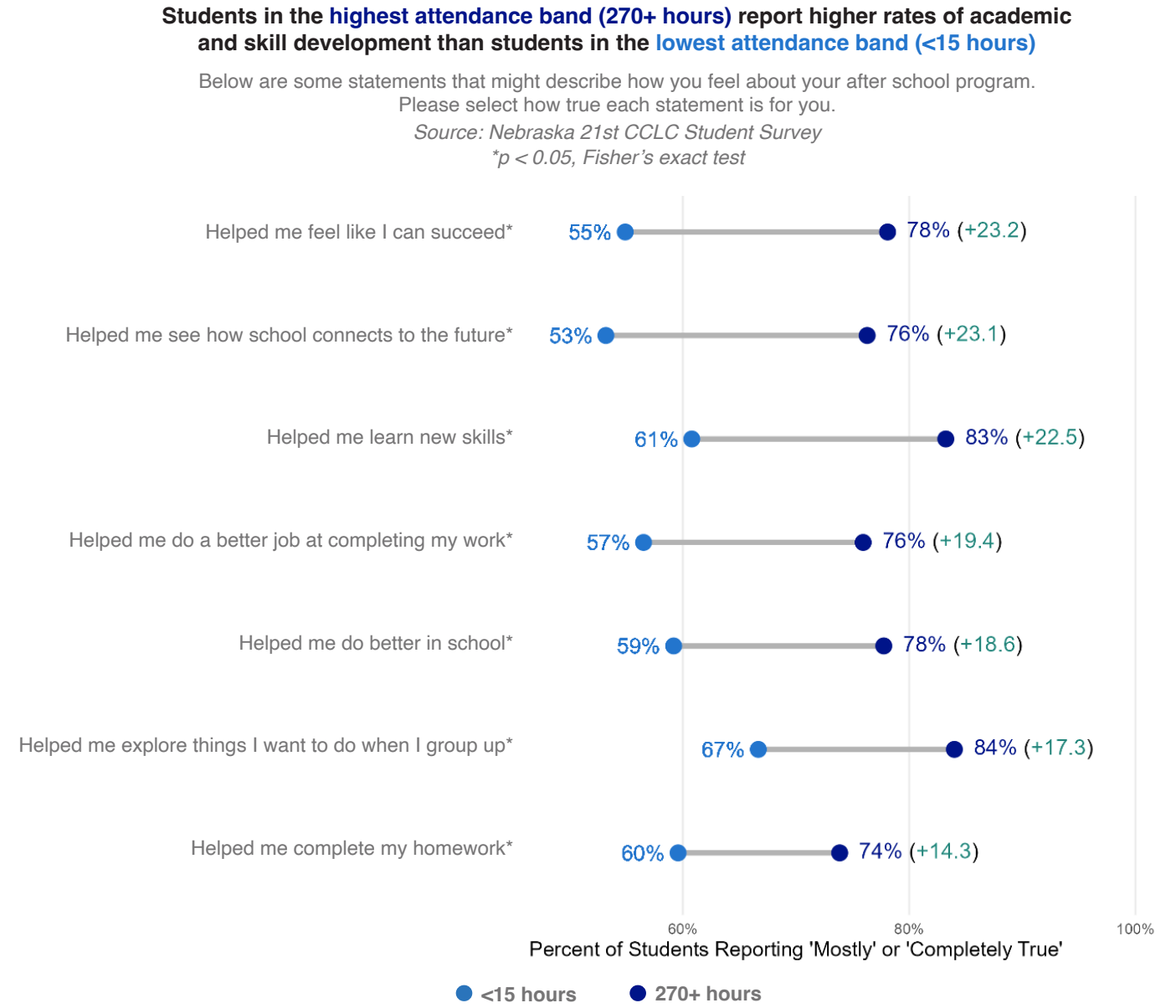
Student Reported Academic Outcomes

The vast majority of students in 6th–12th grades perceive positive academic-related impacts from their CCLC programming, with approximately 70% or more of students selecting “completely true” or “mostly true” across all seven items measured. The highest combined positive responses were for exploring new ideas (76%) and building new skills (75%).



“CCLC has helped [Student] complete her homework assignments both consistently on time and correctly. I believe this to be a big help for her academic success because she would likely not receive this much assistance at home.”

Teacher of 21st CCLC student

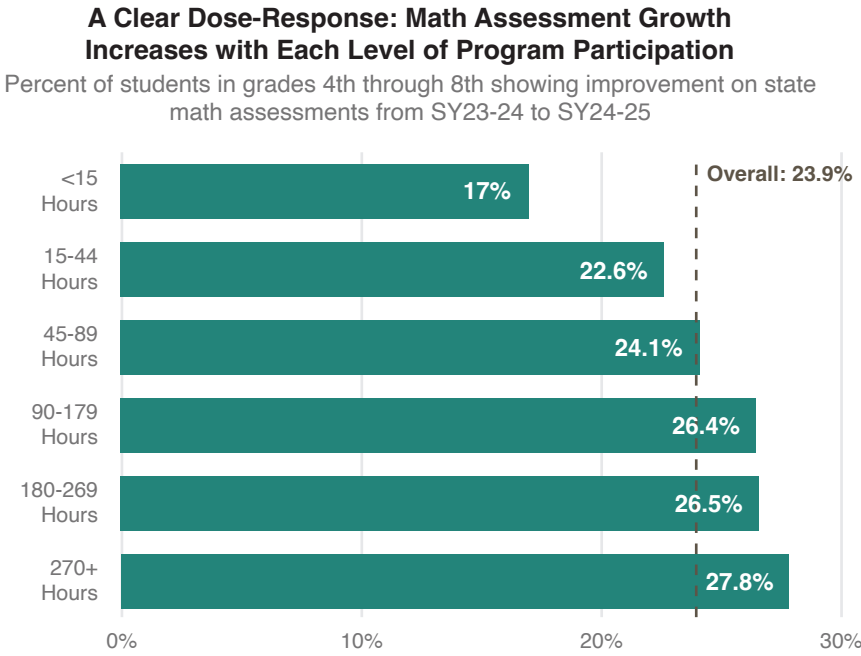


Students who attended 270+ hours of afterschool programming consistently reported higher rates of academic and skill development compared to those attending fewer than 15 hours, with statistically significant differences across all seven items. This indicates that increased program participation is associated with stronger self-reported academic outcomes across multiple dimensions. The largest gains were observed for students reporting that the program helped them feel like they can succeed (+23.2 percentage points) and see how school connects to their future (+23.1 percentage points).

Math Assessment Scores

Growth in math assessment scores over time for students in 4th-8th grades is another PPO reported as a federal outcome. Overall, nearly one-quarter (23.9%) of participants in this age group who participated in CCLC programming in 2024-25 experienced growth in their math assessment scores from SY23-24 to SY24-25.

Exploring this growth by dosage also showed a dose-response relationship with afterschool participation, with improvement rates rising steadily from 17% among students with fewer than 15 hours to 28% among those with 270+ hours. While math assessment scores increased an average of 24% across all CCLC participants, there was a clear benefit to those who participated more, with notable jumps in growth for students who participated 15+ and 90+ hours. This consistent stair-step pattern suggests that sustained program engagement is associated with stronger academic outcomes in mathematics, and similar to the teacher reported engagement in learning outcome, the impacts are most profound for those who attend at least 90 hours of programming.



“**[Student] is a busy body who finds great enjoyment in the opportunities that [Afterschool club] presents. His academic growth has been positively impacted by his involvement in [Afterschool club].**”

Teacher of 21st CCLC student

Math assessment growth rates were remarkably consistent across program characteristics, with minimal differences by metro status (Metro 23.5% vs. Non-Metro 25%), program size (larger 23% vs. smaller 26%), and program tenure (established 23.7% vs. newer 23.4%).

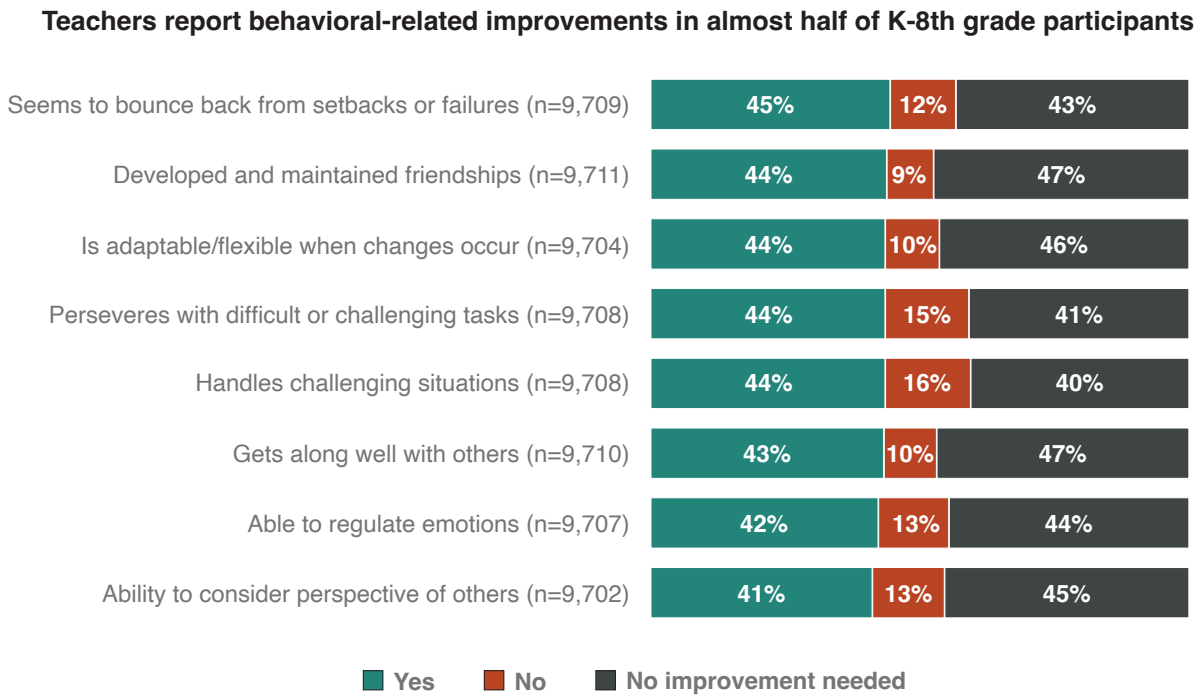
The impacts of Nebraska’s CCLC efforts implemented in 2024-25 on math assessment scores were similar to the impacts from the previous year, with math assessment growth rates remaining remarkably stable from SY23-24 to SY24-25 at approximately 24%. The dose-response relationship between program participation and math growth persisted across both years, with students attending 270+ hours achieving the highest growth rates (28%) compared to those attending fewer than 15 hours (17%). The consistency of these patterns across years suggests that the relationship between afterschool dosage and academic outcomes is robust and not driven by year-specific factors.

Exploring this growth by dosage also showed a dose-response relationship with afterschool participation, with improvement rates rising steadily from 17% among students with fewer than 15 hours to 28% among those with 270+ hours. While math assessment scores increased an average of 23.9% across all CCLC participants, there was a clear benefit to those who participated more, with notable jumps in growth for students who participated 15+ and 90+ hours. This consistent stair-step pattern suggests that sustained program engagement is associated with stronger academic outcomes in mathematics, and similar to the teacher reported engagement in learning outcome, the impacts are most profound for those who attend at least 90 hours of programming.

Behavior

Teacher Reported Behavior Outcomes

Teachers of students who participated in programming during the school year (either in afterschool or out-of-school programming) indicate that behavioral improvements were observed in 41–45% of K–8th grade participants across eight social-emotional and behavioral indicators. Similar to academic indicators, a substantial share of teachers (ranging from 41% to 47%) indicated no improvement was needed, reflecting that many participants did not present with behavioral concerns at program entry.

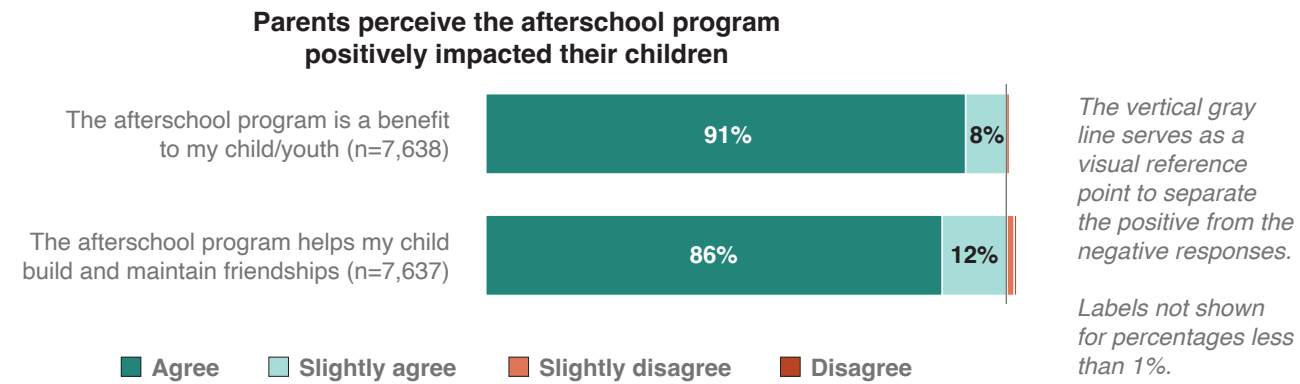


“**[Student] has gotten better at expressing his emotions in a positive way. He used to have lots of arguments with classmates, but that has decreased significantly. He has also shown improvement when asking for help when emotions are hard to work through.**”

Teacher of 21st CCLC student

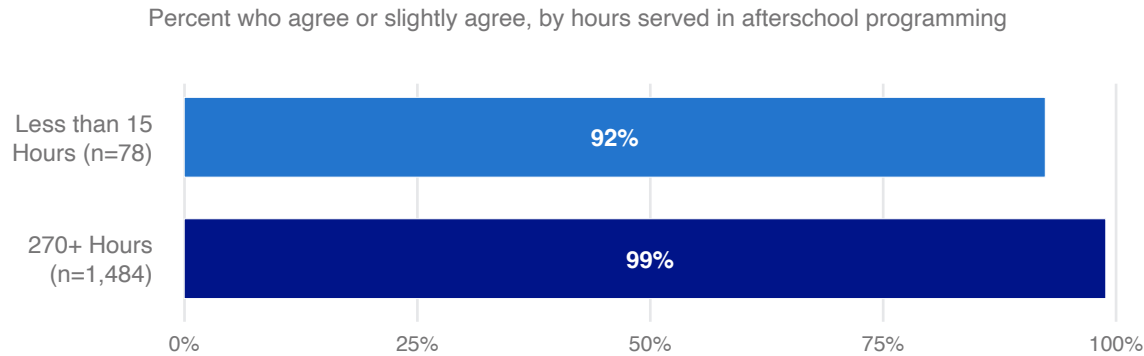
Parent Reported Behavior Outcomes

Nearly all parents perceive the afterschool program positively impacted their child’s social and behavioral development, with 91% of parents agreeing that the afterschool program is a benefit to their child, with an additional 8% slightly agreeing. Similarly, 86% agreed and 12% slightly agreed that the program helps their child build and maintain friendships.



Parents of children who attended the most afterschool hours were significantly more likely to report that their child was able to build and maintain friendships than those who attended less than 15 hours.

Parents of children who attended **270+ hours (99%)** were significantly more likely to agree with the statement ‘The program helps my child build friendships’ than parents of children who attended **less than 15 hours (92%)**



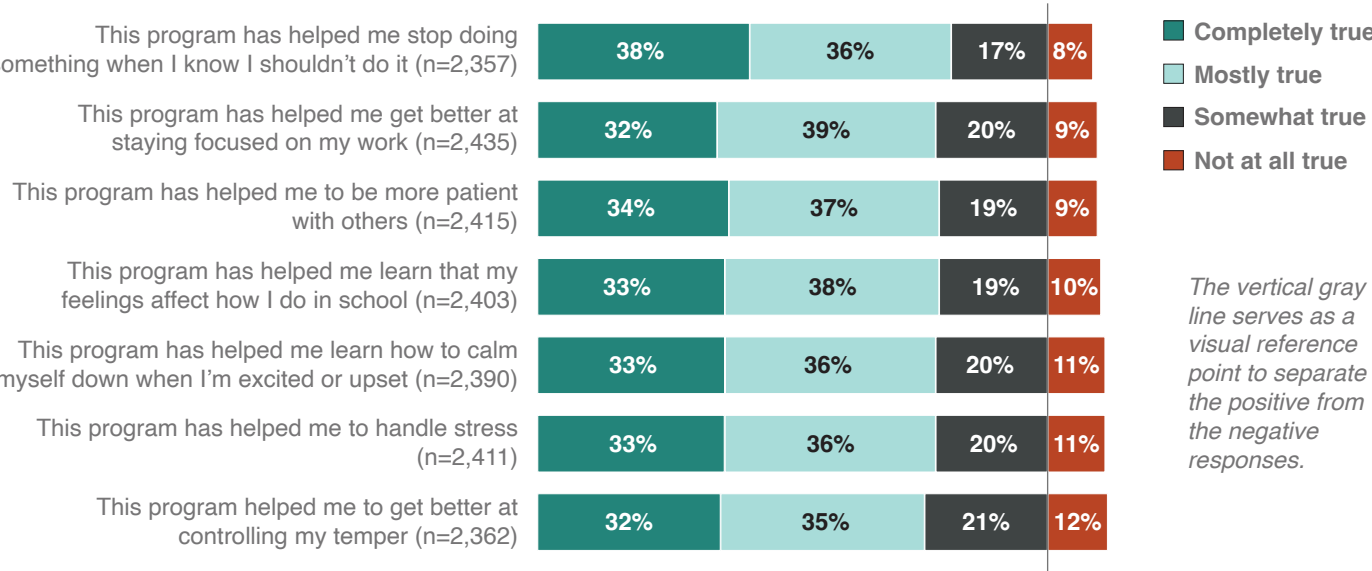
“ [Student] really likes the after school program! There has not been one club he has not enjoyed. He gets to learn new recipes, crafts, and have a safe place where he can practice his social and life skills. For a child on the spectrum, this is the perfect place where he can be included in a smaller group than a regular school setting and get the support he needs.”

Parent of 21st CCLC student

Student Reported Behavior Outcomes

Participants in 6th–12th grades show that strong majorities perceived positive behavior-related impacts from their afterschool programming across all seven self-regulation and social-emotional items, with combined “completely true” and “mostly true” responses ranging from 67% to 75% across items.

Participants in 6th-12th grades perceive positive behavior-related impacts from the programming*



“ [Student] enjoys the stability of the afterschool program. He has and continues to maintain a group of friends that help him navigate his emotions when they become too much.”

Teacher of 21st CCLC student

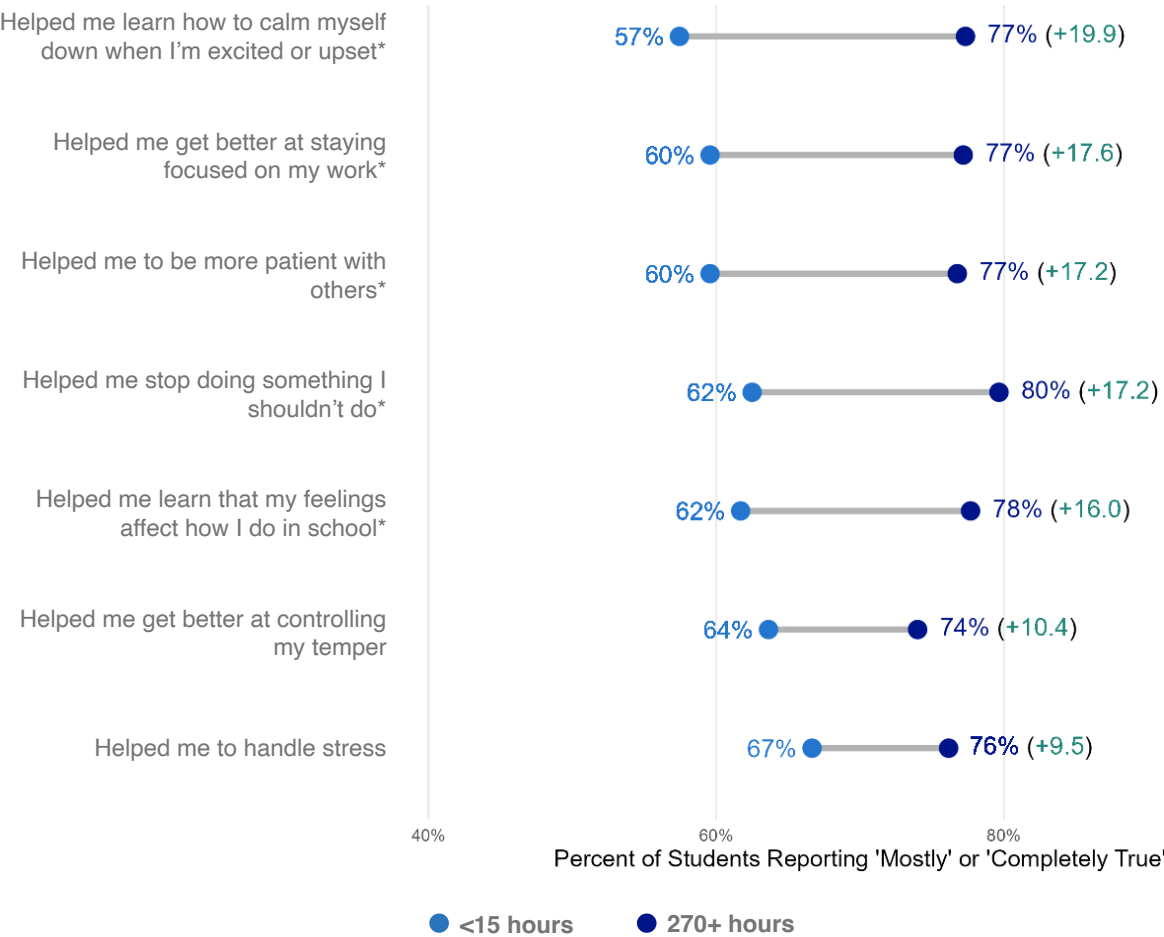
Students who attended 270+ hours of afterschool programming consistently reported higher rates of positive behavioral skill development compared to students attending fewer than 15 hours, with statistically significant differences across five of seven items (indicated with an asterisk). The largest gains were observed for the indicators where students reported that the program helped them calm themselves down when they're excited or upset (+19.9 percentage points) and get better at staying focused on their work (+17.6 percentage points).

Students in the highest attendance band (270+ hours) report higher rates of positive behavioral skill development than students in the lowest attendance band (<15 hours)

Below are some statements that might describe how you feel about your after school program. Please select how true each statement is for you.

Source: Nebraska 21st CCLC Student Survey

*p < 0.05, Fisher's exact test



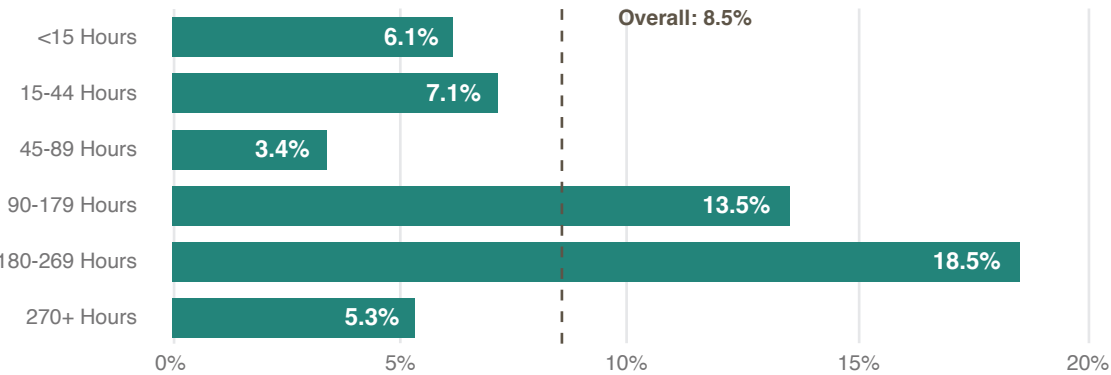
In-School Suspensions

Year to year improvements in in-school suspensions is another PPO reported as a federal outcome. On average, 8.5% of those who participated in CCLC programming in 2024-25 experienced fewer in-school suspensions in SY24-25 compared to SY23-24. This improvement

rate followed an inverted-U pattern when looking at dosage, with students in the 90-179 and 180-269 hour bands showing the highest improvement rates at 14% and 19%, respectively. However, students at both participation extremes, including those with fewer than 90 hours and those with 270+ hours, showed lower improvement rates ranging from 3% to 7%.

Students with 90-269 Hours Showed the Highest Suspension Improvement Rates (14-19%), Outperforming Both Lower and Higher Participation Levels

Percent of students in grades 1-12 with prior-year in-school suspensions demonstrating improvement from SY23-24 to SY24-25

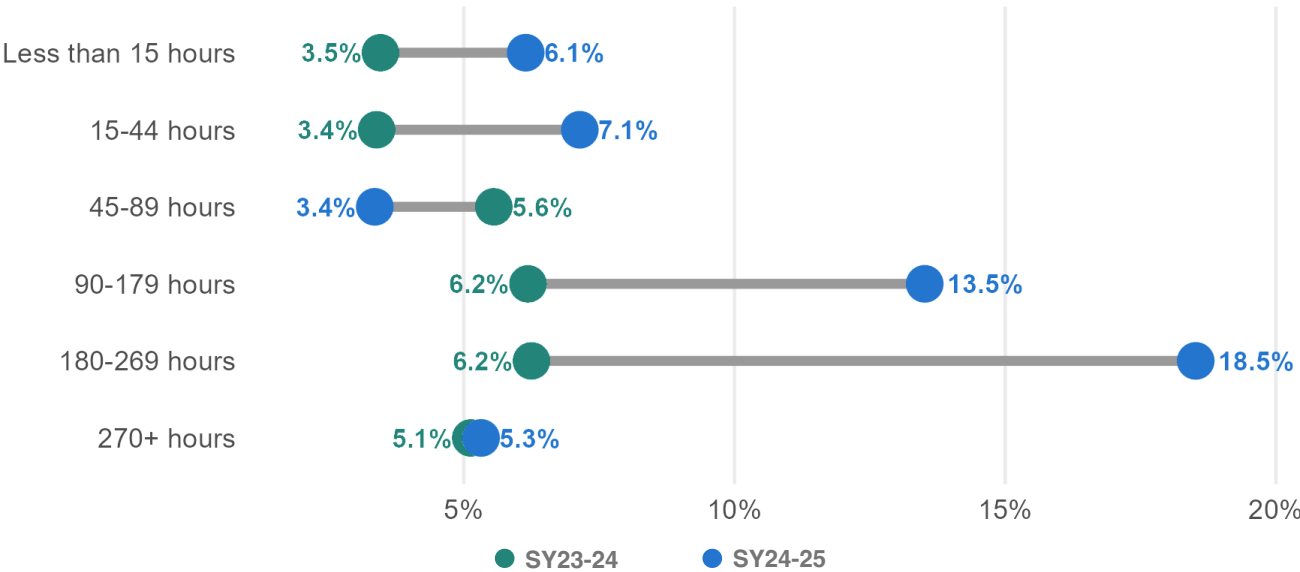


Metro schools (9.3%) and larger programs (8.9%) showed modestly higher overall improvement with in-school suspension improvements than their Non-Metro (6.5%) and smaller program (6.9%) counterparts, with the most pronounced differences at mid-to-high hour bands.

The impacts of Nebraska's CCLC efforts implemented in 2024-25 on in-school suspensions were greater than the previous year, as improvement rates nearly doubled overall from 4.7% in SY23-24 to 8.5% in SY24-25. Students who participated in the 90-179 and 180-269 hour bands showed the largest gains, with improvement rates more than doubling from approximately 6% to 13.5% and 18.5%, respectively. The 45-89 hour band was the only group to show a decline, dropping from 5.6% to 3.4%. This suggests the programming implemented in SY24-25 had a more profound impact on in-school suspensions than the programming offered the previous year.

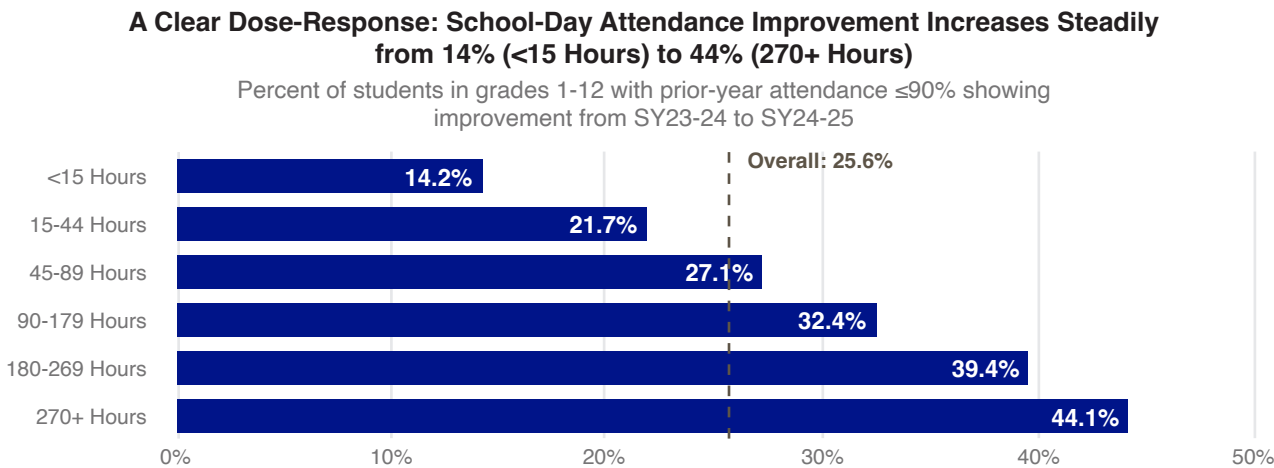
Suspension Improvement Rates Nearly Doubled from 4.7% (SY23-24) to 8.5% (SY24-25)

Percent of students in grades 1-12 with prior-year suspensions showing decreased suspensions

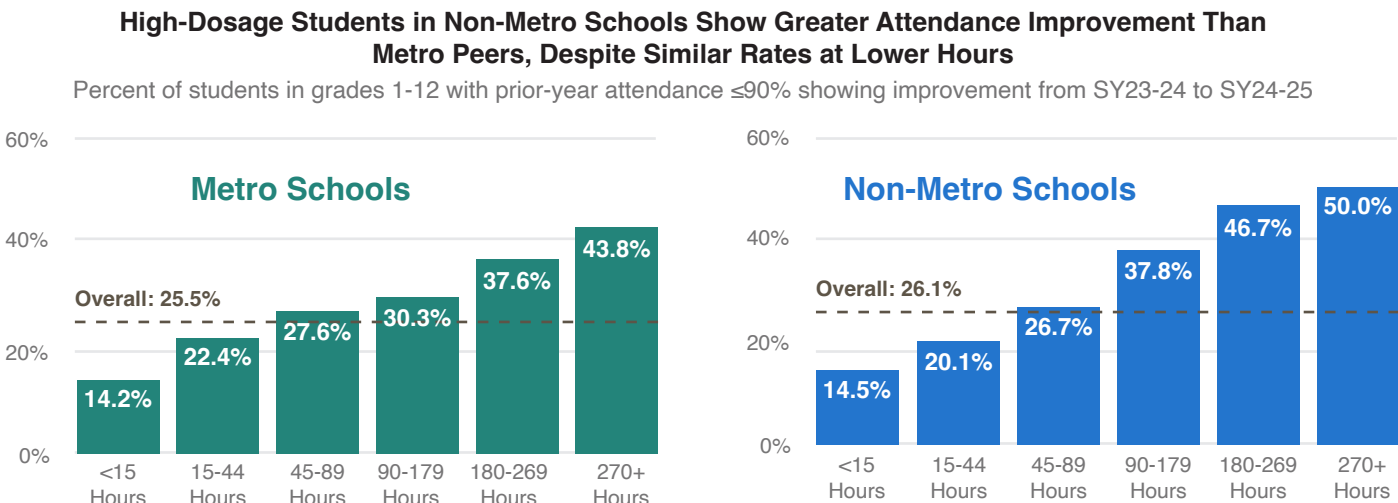


School-Day Attendance

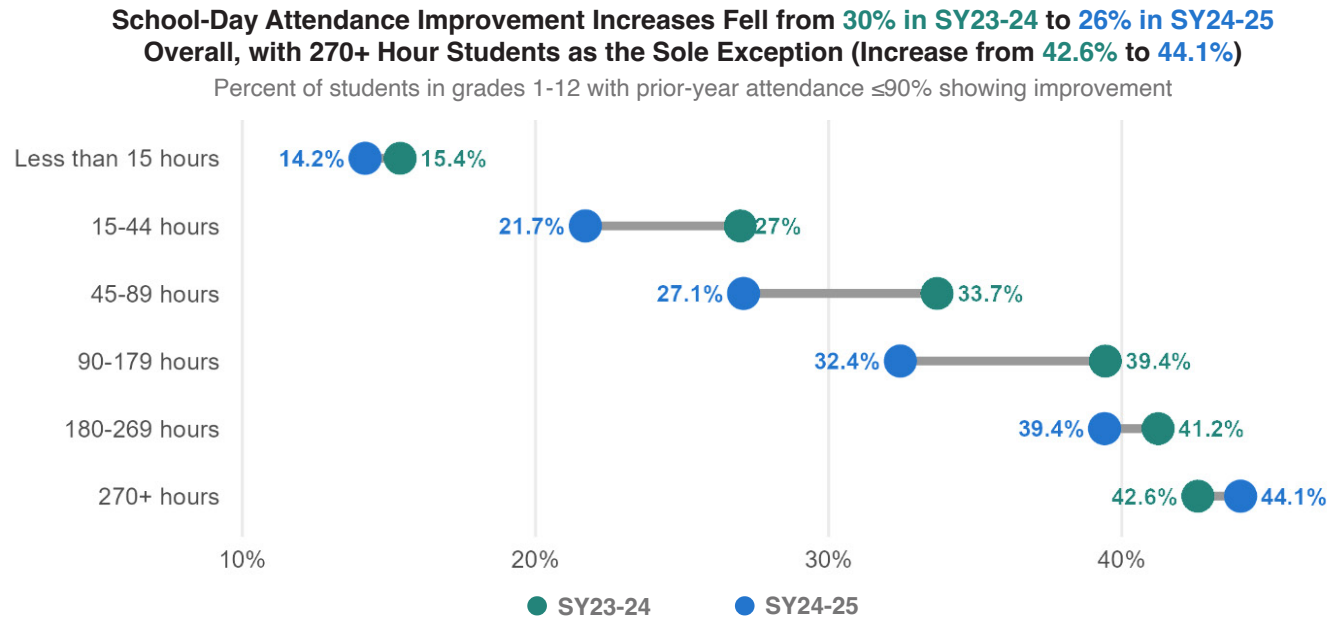
Improvement over time in school-day attendance is also reported as a federal PPO, which showed an average improvement of 25.6% from SY23-24 to SY24-25 for those who attended CCLC programming in 24-25 and experienced a school-day attendance rate of 90% or below in SY23-24. School-day attendance improvement also showed a strong dose-response relationship with afterschool participation in SY24-25, with rates increasing steadily from 14% among students attending fewer than 15 hours to 44% among those attending 270+ hours. Similar to other findings, a stair-step pattern shows that sustained program engagement is associated with improved school-day attendance. The 30 percentage point gap between the lowest and highest participation groups underscores the potential benefits of sustained engagement in afterschool programming for improving school-day attendance.



School-day attendance improvement rates showed consistent dose-response patterns across all program types examined, with higher CCLC participation hours associated with greater improvement. Overall rates were similar across program characteristics: Metro (25.5%) vs. Non-Metro (26.1%), larger programs (24.2%) vs. smaller programs (28.8%), and established programs (28.5%) vs. newer programs (22.8%). However, notable differences emerged at higher hour bands. Non-Metro schools outperformed Metro schools at 180+ hours (46.7–50% vs. 37.6–43.8%), and smaller programs (≤150 students) showed the highest improvement rate at 270+ hours (56.7% vs. 38.9% for larger programs). Established programs (16+ years) showed more consistent improvement across all hour bands, while newer programs showed lower rates at <15 hours (11.4% vs. 19.6%) but caught up at higher dosages.



The impacts of Nebraska’s CCLC efforts implemented in 2024-25 on school-day attendance was more modest than in the previous year, as improvement rates declined across nearly all participation levels from SY23-24 to SY24-25, with the overall rate dropping from 30% to 26%. Students in the highest dosage group (270+ hours) were the only exception, improving from 42.6% to 44.1%. The dose-response relationship between program participation and attendance improvement remained consistent across both years, with higher-attending students showing greater rates of improvement. This pattern suggests that sustained, high-dosage afterschool participation may buffer against broader declines in attendance outcomes. Even so, the overall downward trend likely reflects the persistent and well-documented challenges of chronic absenteeism facing schools statewide, a barrier that afterschool programming alone is not positioned to overcome without coordinated school-day strategies and family engagement efforts.



Return on Investment

A briefing paper prepared for the Nebraska Department of Education by Beyond School Bells (February 2026) synthesizes more than two decades of national and state-level research on the fiscal return of afterschool and summer programs. Across states and methodologies, the evidence is consistent: high-quality afterschool programs generate strong returns for taxpayers, with state-level return-on-investment (ROI) studies from California, Maryland, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Oregon, and Vermont finding returns ranging from approximately \$2 to \$13 for every \$1 invested. These returns are driven primarily by improved graduation rates, higher lifetime earnings, and reduced long-term public costs related to crime, substance abuse, grade retention, and other social services.

Importantly, Nebraska’s own 21st CCLC evaluation data reflect the same student outcomes that serve as the drivers of ROI in studies conducted elsewhere, including improved attendance, teacher-reported academic growth, strong student engagement, and high parent satisfaction. As the briefing concludes, continued investment in Nebraska’s afterschool programs represents both a commitment to students and a sound, evidence-based investment for state taxpayers. The full briefing paper, including a summary of individual state findings and selected sources, is provided in Appendix B.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Develop a quality framework crosswalk to guide program assessment and continuous improvement planning.** The data collected across multiple stakeholder groups, including staff, partners, parents, teachers, and students, reflect dimensions of quality that are not yet systematically tied to the Quality Framework for 21st CCLC. NDE should develop a crosswalk that maps evaluation data to framework components, making it easier for sites to interpret their data in the context of quality standards and for targeted continuous improvement planning.
- **Invest in parent-facing awareness and communication. The America After 3PM data reveals a paradox:** Nebraska’s afterschool programs are highly rated (parent quality rating 4.35/5, rank 9th nationally), affordable (rank 18th in cost), and offer substantial dosage to participants (6.3 weekly hours, rank 4th), yet current participation (rank 44th) and unmet demand (rank 47th) sit near the bottom nationally, and parents perceive fewer developmental opportunities than parents in most states. Furthermore, Nebraska’s 21st CCLC data show clear beneficial outcomes for strongly engaged students, such as improved school-day attendance, math assessment growth, and engagement in learning. NDE and subgrantees should partner with the communications consultant to develop family-facing materials that translate program activities into the developmental and academic benefits parents say they value, with targeted outreach in communities showing the largest gap between eligibility and enrollment.
- **Encourage stronger attendance among participants.** Across nearly all outcomes, including academic growth, school-day attendance, engagement in learning, in-school suspensions, and student- and parent-reported benefits, students who participated at higher levels (more hours) consistently showed better results than those with minimal exposure, and these differences were often substantial. A clear dose-response pattern emerged across outcome areas, with meaningful gains beginning to appear at 90 hours and the strongest results concentrated among students with 270 or more hours of participation. Sites should treat enrollment as a starting point, not an end goal, and adopt intentional strategies to keep students engaged throughout the year. Practical approaches include early identification of students whose attendance is tapering off, gathering data on reasons for attrition, recognition and incentive programs that celebrate participation milestones, family outreach that reinforces the connection between consistent attendance and student benefit, and program scheduling and activity design that keeps programming engaging and relevant enough that students want to return.



APPENDIX A. EVALUATION DATA SOURCES

America After 3PM (Afterschool Alliance)

A nationally representative household survey conducted by the Afterschool Alliance every several years since 2004, with the most recent wave fielded in 2025 and released in 2026. The survey collects parent-reported data on children’s afterschool participation, unmet demand, perceived benefits, and barriers to enrollment, with state-level estimates for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Nebraska-specific findings are used in this report to benchmark state-level demand, barriers, and parent-rated benefits of afterschool programming against national medians and to track changes since the 2014 and 2020 waves. More information is available on the website: <https://afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM/data/national/demand>

Attendance

The total number of hours individual students participated in 2024 summer programming and 2024–25 afterschool and out-of-school programming that occurred during the school year was submitted to the University of Nebraska Medical Center Munroe-Meyer Institute (UNMC-MMI) by each site’s Program Director. Demographic information, such as gender, race/ethnicity, free/reduced lunch eligibility was added to the database by the Nebraska Department of Education. As required by the U.S. Department of Education, student participation is reported across six attendance “hour bands” (less than 15 hours, 15–44 hours, 45–89 hours, 90–179 hours, 180–269 hours, and 270 or more hours) which are used to examine the relationship between dosage and student outcomes such as academic growth, school-day attendance, behavior, and teacher-rated engagement. This information was aggregated and reported to the federal reporting system (21APR), as well as utilized for this evaluation report.

Activities, Staffing, and Community Partners Data

At the end of each term, Program Directors provided an update on 1) how many hours and how many students participated in each activity type, 2) how many staff were utilized by type, and 3) which community partners they involved in their programming. This information was provided through an online Qualtrics form that was administered by the University of Nebraska Medical Center Munroe-Meyer Institute. This information was aggregated and reported to the federal reporting system (21APR), as well as utilized for this evaluation report.

Teacher Survey

Two versions of the teacher survey, one for K–8th grades and another for 9th–12th grades, were distributed by UNMC-MMI via Qualtrics, either through individual email links or a generic login system for teachers without email access. Subgrantees received reminder rosters to follow up with non-completers. A total of 9,711 K-8th grade and 503 9th-12th grade teacher surveys were returned. The K–8th grade version asks teachers to rate each student’s fall-to-spring improvement in engagement in learning (participation, assignment completion, collaboration, independence, executive function, grade-level understanding, and enjoyment of learning), current social-emotional skill levels (friendships, emotional regulation, perspective-taking, resilience, perseverance, adaptability), and whether the student improved on each SEL skill. The “overall

improvement in engagement in learning” item is utilized for the federally required engagement in learning PPO. The 9th–12th grade version adds academic subject improvement (reading, writing, math, science), current credit-earning likelihood, homework/behavior, and family engagement. Both versions close with an open-ended comment on the program’s impact on the student. The PPO measure was reported to the federal reporting system (21APR) for 1st-5th grade students, while the surveys in their entirety were analyzed for this evaluation report.

Staff Survey (Afterschool Workforce Survey)

The staff survey was made available by UNMC-MMI to all CCLC staff statewide via Qualtrics from October 2024 to May 2025, with distribution implemented in coordination with subgrantees. A total of 886 responses were received from across 114 CCLC sites. The survey collects demographic information (gender, age, race/ethnicity), role (staff, site supervisor, program director), education level, tenure, and asks about motivations for working in the program, how many more years they intend to stay, primary reasons they might leave, preparedness across key competencies (delivering lessons, managing behavior, communicating with parents, interacting with school staff, providing homework assistance, handling emergencies), professional development (PD) received by topic area since August 2024, preferred PD format, and obstacles to completing PD. No staff survey data is submitted for federal reporting purposes; however, the data were analyzed for evaluation purposes.

Community Partner Survey

The partner survey was distributed by UNMC-MMI via Qualtrics between April-May 2025 to each site’s community partners (one email per partner per site). A total of 460 total responses across 30+ programs were received. The survey asks partners to identify their organization type and partnership type (lead agency, programming, training, funding/materials, discounted services), and estimate contact hours provided during the school year and summer. Substantive questions cover communication quality, understanding of program goals, relationship strength, alignment with school goals, capacity to provide additional services, fulfillment of partnership agreements, suggestions for additional partners, PD needs, and open-ended strengths and improvement suggestions. No partner survey data is submitted for federal reporting purposes; however, the data were analyzed for evaluation purposes.

Parent Survey

The parent survey was distributed by UNMC-MMI via Qualtrics at the end of each term to parents of students in CCLC programs. Parents received separate surveys if they had multiple children enrolled. A total of 7,851 surveys were returned. The survey covers two areas: (1) importance ratings for academic support, recreation/physical activity, enrichment, and supervision; and (2) a series of agree/disagree statements on perceived benefits — whether the program benefits their child, staff care, child enjoyment, exposure to new experiences, friendships, behavior management, communication, safety, engagement opportunities, school-program partnership, and overall quality. The survey closes with an open-ended question on how the program can best support parents. No parent survey data is submitted for federal reporting purposes; however, the data were analyzed for evaluation purposes.

Student Surveys

Three versions of the student surveys were differentiated by grade level, with all administered in-program at the end of each term in coordination with UNMC-MMI. The K–2nd version, completed by 3,657 students, is a four-item yes/sometimes/no survey (friends in program, enjoys coming, helps learn new things, adults treat kids with respect). The 3rd–5th grade version, completed by 4,134 students, assesses academic self-efficacy and motivation, self-regulation skills, and program perceptions across 12+ items on a four-point scale. The 6th–12th grade version, completed by 2,626 students, covers academic identity, grit and perseverance, the program’s impact on school performance and emotional regulation, and program belonging and engagement. No student survey data is submitted for federal reporting purposes; however, the data were analyzed for evaluation purposes.

U.S. Department of Education 21st CCLC Annual Performance Data

Published annually by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, this report compiles national data submitted by state educational agencies through the 21APR data collection system. It presents program characteristics, student demographics, activity participation, and outcomes on the five PPO measures across all 54 reporting states and territories. Nebraska’s PPO results are included in the state-by-state tables. The 2022-2023 report (19th edition) was used in this evaluation to provide national and state-level context for Nebraska’s program performance, allowing Nebraska’s outcomes to be interpreted relative to comparable programs across the country.

PPOs

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program tracks Program Performance Outcomes measures. These measures were established by the U.S. Department of Education in 2020 and took effect beginning with the Summer 2021 term. Each measure is calculated for students who meet a specified eligibility criterion and is reported across federal attendance bands. Data sources vary by measure and are described below.

Mathematics/Reading Assessment

This measure tracks the percentage of students in grades 4-8 who demonstrate growth on Nebraska state assessments in mathematics and reading. All students participating in 21st CCLC programming during the school year and summer are included. Prior-year assessment scores serve as the baseline, and data are provided by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE). For this evaluation report, only Mathematics Assessments are included. The Reading Assessment data was not included due to data processing errors identified during analyses. [Mathematics Assessment Data: n = 888 students; 125 sites reporting]

Grade Point Average (GPA)

This measure tracks the percentage of students in grades 7-8 and 10-12 who demonstrate an improved GPA. All students participating in 21st CCLC programming during the school year and summer with a prior-year unweighted GPA of less than 3.0 are included. The GPA data was not included due to data processing errors identified during analyses.

School Day Attendance

This measure tracks the percentage of students in grades 1–12 who demonstrate an improved school-day attendance rate in the current school year. It is restricted to students whose attendance rate was at or below 90% in the prior school year. Prior-year attendance rate serves as the baseline. NDE provides raw attendance data (days attended and absent), and the evaluation team calculates the attendance percentage. [n = 888 students; 137 sites reporting]

In-School Suspensions

This measure tracks the percentage of students in grades 1–12 who experience a decrease in in-school suspensions compared to the prior school year. All students participating in 21st CCLC programming during the school year and summer are included. Note, as a matter of policy, not all Nebraska schools implement in-school suspensions as a disciplinary response to poor student behavior. Prior-year suspension counts serve as the baseline, and data are requested from NDE each November. [n = 504 students; 84 sites reporting]

Teacher-Reported Engagement in Learning

This measure tracks the percentage of students in grades 1–5 for whom teachers report improvement in engagement in learning. All students participating in 21st CCLC programming during the school year are included. Data are collected through the annual teacher survey administered via Qualtrics, in which classroom teachers complete a single retrospective rating for each participating student on eight items, including the GPRA/PPO item ‘Overall improvement in engagement in learning’. Each item is rated on a four-point scale: Minimal Improvement, Moderate Improvement, Significant Improvement, or No Improvement Needed (student demonstrates grade level skills). The PPO is calculated using the final item — overall improvement in engagement in learning. The denominator includes all students for whom the survey was completed. The numerator consists of students rated Minimal, Moderate, or Significant Improvement; students rated No Improvement Needed are included in the denominator but excluded from the numerator, as this response indicates the student was already performing at grade level and did not demonstrate a need for improvement. [n = 894 students; 104 sites reporting]



APPENDIX B. AFTERSCHOOL RETURN ON INVESTMENT IN AFTERSCHOOL AND SUMMER PROGRAMS

Afterschool Return on Investment in Afterschool and Summer Programs: What National and State Evidence Shows

Briefing Paper for the Nebraska Department of Education, 21st CCLC program
Prepared by: Beyond School Bells, February 2026

Executive Summary

Across the United States, more than two decades of research and state-level fiscal analyses have reached a consistent conclusion: **High-quality afterschool and summer programs improve student outcomes and deliver strong returns for taxpayers.** In study after study, states have found that these programs return significantly more in long-term benefits than they cost.

In 2016, Beyond School Bells worked with the Nebraska Public Policy Institute to conduct a literature review of state and national return-on-investment (ROI) studies. That review examined multiple state ROI studies and found that afterschool programs typically return \$3 to \$12 in benefits for every \$1 invested. These benefits are driven by improved attendance, stronger academic outcomes, reduced dropout rates, and lower costs related to crime, substance abuse, and social services.

Nebraska’s own afterschool evaluation data show similar outcomes, including improved attendance, strong teacher-reported academic growth, and high parent satisfaction. These are the same outcomes that drive long-term fiscal benefits in state ROI studies across the country.

Key Takeaways for Nebraska

- State ROI studies consistently show **\$3–\$12 returned for every \$1 invested** in afterschool.
- These savings come from **higher graduation, higher earnings, and lower crime and social service costs.**
- Nebraska’s own data show the **same attendance, academic, and family outcomes** that drive ROI in other states.

Bottom line: Nebraska can confidently view afterschool investments as a high-impact strategy for improving student achievement and long-term economic outcomes.

Why ROI Matters for Afterschool Policy

State education leaders are increasingly asked to demonstrate the fiscal impact of policy choices, such as investments in particular educational interventions, not just educational outcomes. ROI studies help answer a straightforward question: do the long-term benefits of afterschool programs outweigh their costs?

Most ROI studies estimate program costs, identify measurable outcomes, and assign dollar values to those outcomes. Typical benefit categories include reduced dropout, increased earnings, reduced crime, and lower demand for social services.

What National and State-level Research Consistently Shows

National research finds that high-quality afterschool programs are associated with improved attendance, stronger academic engagement, reduced behavior incidents, and better social-emotional outcomes. Programs also support families by providing reliable supervision during peak work hours, reducing parent absenteeism and supporting workforce stability. Because of these combined benefits, national policy briefs frequently estimate that every \$1 invested in afterschool can save at least \$3 in societal costs.

What Early ROI Studies Established (2000–2016)

Early state ROI studies conducted between 2000 and 2016 - across states such as California, Maryland, Minnesota, and Oklahoma - consistently found positive returns, typically between **about \$3 and \$13 for every \$1 invested**, with savings driven by improved school attendance and graduation, higher lifetime earnings and tax contributions, reduced grade retention, and lower public costs related to incarceration, crime, substance abuse, and other social services. In these studies the benefits ranged from: CA (\$8.92–\$12.90 per \$1), MD (\$3.36 per \$1), MN (\$2.72 per \$1), and OK (\$3 per \$1 plus additional crime savings).

A Foundational Example: California’s Statewide ROI Study

A widely cited analysis of California’s afterschool expansion found a cost per participant of about \$10,000 and benefits ranging from \$89,000 to \$129,000. This produced a net benefit of \$79,000 to \$119,000 per participant and an overall ROI of \$8.92 to \$12.90 per \$1 invested, with a heavy impact on the savings to the criminal justice system. However, even excluding crime-reduction benefits, the program still returned roughly \$3 to \$4 per \$1 invested.

More Recent State ROI Studies (Post-2018)

Recent statewide return-on-investment studies in Pennsylvania, Oregon, and Vermont all reached similar conclusions: high-quality afterschool programs generate substantial public value, with estimated returns ranging from **about \$2 to \$6.69 for every \$1 invested**. These returns are driven largely by improved graduation rates, higher lifetime earnings, and reduced costs related to crime, substance abuse, and other social services. Specifically, these studies found:

- **Pennsylvania (2021)** Pennsylvania’s legislative ROI study estimated that afterschool programs return **\$6.69 for every \$1 invested**, driven primarily by reductions in high school dropout, crime, substance use, and teen pregnancy. The analysis concluded that even modest improvements in these areas produce substantial long-term savings for taxpayers and communities.
- **Oregon (2021)** Oregon’s statewide ROI analysis found that afterschool investments generate approximately **\$4.60 in benefits for every \$1 spent**, based on improvements in graduation rates, workforce outcomes, and reductions in crime and other social costs. The study used state-specific cost assumptions and modeled a public subsidy per youth to demonstrate the fiscal value of expanded access.
- **Vermont (2019)** Vermont’s expanded learning ROI study estimated a return of **\$2.18 for every \$1 invested**, with projected savings from reduced substance addiction, lower dropout and retention rates, and decreased juvenile and adult crime. The analysis showed that even in a small, rural state, increased access to high-quality programs produces significant long-term taxpayer savings.

Taken together, state studies over the past two decades consistently **show positive returns ranging from roughly \$3 to \$12 for every \$1 invested**.

Bottom line: Over the past two decades and in different states and using different methods, all systematic, state-level studies examining the return to taxpayers on investments in afterschool programs find consistently strong, positive returns.

What All ROI Studies Have in Common

Across states and methodologies, ROI studies follow the same basic logic: when students attend high-quality afterschool programs regularly, they attend school more often, engage more deeply, and perform better academically. Those improvements lead to higher graduation rates, stronger workforce outcomes, and lower public costs related to crime and social services.

Because children’s developmental needs are similar across states, the pathways that produce ROI are consistent nationwide.

What Nebraska Already Knows About Afterschool Impact

- Over two decades of evaluations of Nebraska’s 21st Century Community Learning Centers have found that regular participation in these programs:
- Improved attendance among regular participants
- Strong teacher-reported academic growth (including 73% showing moderate-to-significant math improvement)
- Enhanced student engagement and sense of belonging
- Strong family benefits, with 92% parents rating supervision as important/very important

These outcomes align directly with the factors that drive ROI in other states.

What This Means for Nebraska Policy?

The evidence from national research, state ROI studies, and Nebraska’s own evaluation data points to the same conclusion: high-quality afterschool and summer programs are among the most cost-effective strategies available for improving student achievement and long-term economic outcomes.

Continued investment in these programs represents not only a commitment to Nebraska’s students, but also a sound, evidence-based investment for Nebraska taxpayers.

In summary: Afterschool programs improve student achievement today and reduce public costs tomorrow.

Selected Sources

- Afterschool Return on Investment Briefing, Nebraska Department of Education, February 2026

National Research and Policy Resources

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- Claremont McKenna College, Rose Institute. The Costs and Benefits of After School Programs. 2009.
- Maryland Out of School Time Network. Return on Investment Study. 2011.
- Minnesota Department of Education. Minnesota After-School Advance: ROI Study. 2014.

- Oklahoma Afterschool Network. Economic Impact of Afterschool Programs in Oklahoma. 2013.
- University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Nebraska Public Policy Institute. Expanded Learning Opportunities: ROI Literature Review. 2016.

Recent State ROI Studies (Post-2018)

- Pennsylvania Joint State Government Commission. Return on Investment of Afterschool Programs in Pennsylvania. 2021.
- OregonASK. Afterschool in Oregon: Return on Investment Study. 2021.
- Vermont Afterschool. Return on Investment in Vermont’s Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs. 2019.

Nebraska Evaluation Reports

- Nebraska Department of Education. 21st Century Community Learning Centers Evaluation Report, 2018–2019.
- Nebraska Department of Education. 21st Century Community Learning Centers Annual Report, 2020–2021.

Additional Economic Framework

- Washington State Institute for Public Policy. Benefit-Cost Results and Methodology.





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