

# Archived Information

## II. A Comprehensive Look at 21st-Century After-School Programs in Middle Schools

This chapter focuses on program implementation at centers that serve middle school students. We discuss program offerings, student participation levels, staffing, linkages to schools and community organizations, and funding and sustainability. Several themes emerge from the results presented in this chapter. To their credit, all the middle school grantees in the evaluation's nationally representative sample had organizational structures in place and were providing a range of after-school activities to students. Academic offerings—especially homework assistance—were common components of programs. In addition, many parents, students, principals, and school faculty expressed support for the programs.

Some problems also came to light, however. Students in the middle school centers often were less engaged in academic classes than in recreation or cultural activities. Centers had difficulty recruiting and retaining students, and students did not attend centers frequently or consistently. Center coordinators spent a lot of time finding appropriate, available staff members for activities. Many staff worked at the centers for only a few days each week or only some months in of the school year, which led to less daily consistency of staff. Programs rarely had strong links to community organizations; instead, they generally used such organizations as sources for someone to lead a recreational or cultural activity of particular interest. Sustaining these programs beyond the federal grant was proving to be a substantial challenge.

Five main sources of information shed light on the middle school centers:

1. Site visit observations and interviews with staff members at district offices, centers, and host schools that were part of the national evaluation.
2. Surveys of project directors, principals, center coordinators, center staff members, and students.

3. Center attendance records for participants.
4. A survey of participants in six sites about their reasons for attending, activities in which they participated, and perceived outcomes. In addition, a survey of a sample of students who had not participated in centers about their reasons for not participating and their perceptions of centers.
5. Annual performance report data that grantees submitted to the U.S. Department of Education (ED).

We often used different sources of information to confirm patterns, but to simplify our presentation, we cite the most direct source.

#### **A. After-School Programs in Middle Schools Were Designed for Broad Student Appeal**

In addition to the broad list of activities the federal statute encouraged, three prominent considerations shaped 21st-Century programs in middle schools. Program designers sought to:

1. Create offerings that had broad student appeal and were responsive to rapidly changing student interests, which prompted them to give students choices about the activities in which they participated and to vary the offerings.
2. Find staff members who could lead activities and work well with students and who could work after school, which led them to segment program schedules to suit staff members, especially teachers, who had limited availability after school.
3. Accommodate staff members', parents', and teachers' views of what students needed to improve and develop, which resulted in providing a range of activities that spanned academic, physical, social, and cultural dimensions.

Not surprisingly, site visitors found that most centers focused on multiple objectives that extended beyond academic improvement. While most centers had academic improvement as a major objective, noteworthy percentages also placed major emphasis on recreation, safety, and cultural opportunities (Table II.1).

Table II.1  
Objectives of 21st-Century Middle School Centers

	Percentage		
	Major Objective	Minor Objective	Not an Objective
Help Children Improve Academic Performance	69	31	0
Provide Recreational Opportunities for Children	56	30	15
Provide a Safe Environment for Children After School	56	38	7
Provide Cultural Opportunities for Children	41	39	20
Help Children to Develop Socially	31	56	13
Help Parents or Other Adults Develop Skills	10	31	59

SOURCE: Site visitor assessments based on visits to 61 centers.

Middle school centers typically viewed recreation sessions and, to a lesser extent, enrichment activities as the focal points of the program and the components that attracted students. Centers encouraged or required students to attend the academic sessions before they engaged in other activities that provided more choice, variety, and potential for fun. “Fun” activities were the reward for doing homework or engaging in other academic activities.

Choice was a frequent method that centers used to appeal to middle school students (see box). Choice was least common for academic assistance, particularly homework or test preparation sessions, and most common for activities emphasizing recreation, culture, and interpersonal skills. When centers restricted students’

Policies on Student Choice of Activities	
Full Choice	41%
Some Choice	41%
No Choice	18%

choice of activities, they did so to address the needs of particular students or to achieve a balance of academic and other activities. Centers also restricted student choice for some activities to maintain desired student-teacher ratios or to obtain an appropriate mix of students.

Middle school centers paid significant attention to staffing their programs adequately. A center typically had 12 or 13 paid staff members working with students. The average student-staff ratio across the centers was about 11-to-1, ranging from 3-to-1 to as high as 50-to-1.<sup>10</sup> Staff expressed to site visitors that to ensure a positive and productive experience for both groups, they wanted to prevent student-staff ratios from rising too high, but “too high” varied by place and type of activity. Some grantees had general goals for centers to keep the student-staff ratio in virtually all activities below a certain level, 10-1 to 15-1. Other grantees had set maximum student-staff ratios only for specific activities such as tutoring and, generally, academic activities has lower student-staff ratios than recreational activities. Also, in practice the ratios are likely to have been lower due to participant absences from the program (just as regular-school class sizes in practice may be lower if some students are absent from school).

### **1. Offerings of the Typical Middle School Center**

Three types of activities were common to most centers: (1) academic assistance, (2) recreation, and (3) cultural enrichment and interpersonal skill development.<sup>11</sup> Generally, the first time slot was devoted to academic assistance, followed by one or two slots for recreation and enrichment and interpersonal activities. Academic assistance sessions usually lasted 45 minutes to an hour, during which students often had a snack, which almost every center provided. Centers also sponsored occasional field trips or presentations for the school community that highlighted accomplishments from after-school activities.

---

<sup>10</sup>These estimates are based on the total number of students enrolled in a center and the total number of paid staff working with students; more precise estimates are difficult because of variations in the number of students and staff at a center on a given day.

<sup>11</sup>Only five centers provided academic activities with no cultural or recreational activities.

**a. Academic Assistance Offerings**

Middle school centers used two main strategies to deliver academic assistance: (1) homework sessions and, more commonly, (2) homework sessions combined with “other academic assistance” (see box). This second category varied across centers and included tutoring, preparation for state assessment tests, or sessions to improve reading, writing, or math skills.

<b>Middle School Center Academic Assistance Activities</b>	
Homework Plus Other Academic Assistance	54%
Homework Only	33%
Only Other Academic Assistance	10%
None of the Above	3%

Homework sessions were the most prevalent type of after-school academic assistance that centers offered. Site visitors observed that most homework sessions resembled study halls in which students were expected to know their assignments, bring their materials, and work independently. These sessions typically consisted of about 20 students monitored by two staff members (usually certified teachers or a certified teacher and a paraprofessional). Although having teachers from the host school oversee homework sessions offered a potentially fruitful path for helping students after school, the caliber of homework assistance was low. This weak assistance may help explain why only 38 percent of students thought the centers were a good place to get homework done. The sessions focused on providing students with the opportunity to complete homework, not on ensuring they completed it. Site visitors rarely observed staff members checking homework for completeness and accuracy. Help was nearly always available, but students had to ask for it. Although the teachers’ role was to maintain order and a quiet atmosphere, sessions often were noisy.

A few centers did develop strategies to strengthen homework sessions. About one-fifth of centers used written documents to monitor students’ homework assignments or academic needs. Some centers in host schools required some or all students to record homework assignments in journals. Centers used these journals to find out what students were supposed to be working on,

then made a note for the regular teacher that the student had completed the homework. In other centers, the coordinator used a list of failing students provided by the host school to identify those who needed extra attention. A few center coordinators generated lists of after-school participants and shared them with the school day teachers, who then identified students who needed extra help.

Centers offered students other types of academic assistance, which included tutoring, classes in practicing concepts and skills for state assessment tests, and computer-based instruction to improve skills. By far the most common forms of academic assistance other than homework were sessions to build reading, writing, or math skills: 51 percent of middle school centers provided help with reading and writing, and 46 percent provided help with math. Because centers often targeted particular students, such as those referred by a classroom teacher for extra help or those performing poorly on state tests, this academic help reached only a portion of students. Tutoring sessions, for example, typically grouped five to seven students with a teacher to work on specific skills, often using materials similar to those used in class. Practice sessions for state tests often had 7 to 10 students working with a teacher on specific reading or math skills that were to be tested. Computer classes of up to 15 students featured software practice on academic concepts learned during the day. These other forms of academic assistance were less frequent than homework sessions, typically occurring between one and three days a week.

**b. Recreation, Cultural Enrichment, and Interpersonal Skills Offerings**

In general, recreation was the most prevalent activity other than academic assistance that centers offered (provided more than

<p><b>Illustrative Recreation Activities</b></p> <p>Swimming Weight Training Bowling Dance Rock Climbing Fishing Kickboxing Cheerleading Basketball Breakdancing Martial Arts</p>
---

once a week by 84 percent of middle school centers). Recreation activities often incorporated structured opportunities for students to learn a skill or develop specialized skills (see box). Other, less-structured, recreational activities, such as open gym, free play, board games, or general computer use, provided some supervised relaxation and physical outlets for students.

Most centers (77 percent) offered cultural activities more than once a week, but less frequently than they offered recreation and academic assistance. Interpersonal skills activities were the least frequently offered,

<b>Illustrative Activities</b>	
<b>Cultural Enrichment</b>	<b>Interpersonal Development</b>
Japanese	Leadership
Manners Training	Conflict Resolution
Crafts (Sewing, Rug Making)	Positive Peer Modeling
Photography	Mentoring
Drama	Teen Issue Forums
Broadcasting	Peer Risk Prevention
Sandstone Sculpture	
Choir, Band, Orchestra	

although most centers (54 percent) did offer them more than once a week. In addition, students could develop interpersonal skills in activities that had other stated objectives. For example, recreation activities involving teamwork could reinforce leadership and conflict resolution skills.

Center coordinators favored changes in the mix of activities to attract new students as well as to keep already enrolled students attending the center. Supply and demand governed many decisions about activities. When too few students enrolled in an activity, centers introduced new activities. When too many students wanted to participate in an activity, centers tried to add sections if instructors were available. Accommodating instructors' work schedules was also an important consideration. Cycling the activities helped coordinators tap the expertise and interests of teachers and outside staff members, many of whom wanted to limit their time commitment.

**c. How Students Spent Their Time at Middle School Centers**

Additional questions asked of participants at six middle school programs provide a bit more detail on the range of activities that students participated in at middle school centers. The

students' perspective is consistent with that of other sources. Homework, sports, and computers were the dominant activities participants cited, followed by reading, writing, or science activities; tutoring; lessons in art, music, and dance; and volunteering or community service (Table II.2).<sup>12</sup> Students also reported special activities they did at centers. The most common were being in a special tournament of some kind (cited by 29 percent of participants), performing in a play or show (cited by 26 percent), and a range of other activities, such as giving a speech or creating artwork, each cited by less than 20 percent.

#### **d. Offerings for Adults**

Although the federal statute specifies several services to adults in its list of allowed grantee activities, centers' offerings for adults were minimal. Nearly two-thirds of middle school centers offered no services or activities for adults, and other centers offered sporadic activities that varied widely.<sup>13</sup> Dismayed by low attendance at early attempts to serve adults, most center directors had concluded that parents (the main group they felt they could tap for activities) did not want additional commitments on their schedules, which were already filled with jobs and child care obligations.

### **B. Participants Did Not Attend Centers Often**

Student attendance is a critical element of 21st-Century middle school centers. Centers could improve student outcomes only if students attended. Attendance typically was voluntary,

---

<sup>12</sup>The high rate at which participants cited tutoring as a center activity suggests that they were considering homework help as tutoring. A student meeting one-on-one with a tutor at centers was rare, according to site visitors.

<sup>13</sup>Among the offerings that site visitors noted were family involvement (family art, holiday celebrations), adult literacy (GED classes, English as a Second Language classes, and job skills), adult enrichment (courses in computers, Spanish, gardening), and adult basic needs (medical services and parenting skills classes).

Table II.2  
Participant Activities  
(Middle School Centers in Six Sites)

Students Who Participated in the Following Center Activities “Some” or “A Lot”:	Percentage
Homework	62.8
Organized sports	56.5
Surfing the Internet or other things on a computer	51.3
Non-homework reading, writing, or science activities	38.5
Tutoring	33.9
Lessons (music, dance, art, others)	34.0
Volunteering or doing community service	21.3
Percentage of Participants Who Participated in the Following Activities in a Center	
Participated in a special tournament	28.6
Performed in a play or show	25.7
Gave a dance performance	18.1
Performed a piece of music	16.0
Other accomplishments	13.1
Gave a speech	12.5
Produced a piece of art that was displayed	12.5
Participated in a debate	10.4
Produced a newspaper or newsletter	5.8
None of the above	30.3

SOURCE: Participant survey module in six middle school sites. The sample size is 263 participants.

however, so centers believed they had to attract students through center offerings and relationships with staff and schools.

We explored how centers recruited students, what the frequency and patterns of student attendance were, what attendance policies had been established, and how participants’ and nonparticipants’ perceptions of centers may have affected attendance. The picture that emerged suggests that limited participation is likely to be the norm for middle school programs. Participants came because they wanted to come and they perceived positive outcomes from participating, but the average participant did not participate much. This suggests that most students consider the 21st-Century programs to be acceptable places to go after school, but they do not find the activities so compelling that they want to attend every day or often. Students who

had not participated in the centers thought centers were less attractive than other after-school opportunities or faced barriers such as household obligations that made participation difficult.

The primary recruiting approach used by programs was to appeal to students at the host school (used by 85 percent of middle school centers). Common recruiting techniques included letters to parents, teacher and parent referrals, presentations at school events (registration, open houses, and parent-teacher conferences), and announcements over the school’s public address system. Some centers also used newspaper articles, announcements on the school bulletin board or outdoor sign, and radio ads. Some centers relied on referrals or recommendations from school staff members. Others targeted their efforts to students with particular needs or characteristics (such as those with low grades or test scores), sometimes contacting their parents to encourage enrollment. The data show a consistent pattern—participants usually heard about centers from teachers or other school staff members or found out about them through posters or school announcements (Table II.3).<sup>14</sup>

Table II.3

How Students Heard about Centers  
(Middle School Centers in Six Sites)

How Students Heard about the Center	Percent of Students
A teacher, counselor, or other adult at school	61.2
Posters or announcements at school	38.9
Friends	34.2
Their parents	13.9
Some other way	4.6

SOURCE: Participant survey module in six middle-school sites. The sample size is 263 participants. Some items had smaller sample sizes due to nonresponse. Respondents could cite more than one way they had heard about centers so percentages do not add to 100.

<sup>14</sup>Data on how students had heard about centers were collected from students in six middle school programs in the evaluation. The additional questions were part of the enhancement supported by a Mott Foundation grant.

Students considered attendance at centers to be voluntary on their part (Table II.4). Parent wishes were influential for less than half of participants and reports that their school required them to attend were rare. Parents of middle school participants corroborated that their son or daughter wanted to go to the center. They also indicated that they believed centers would help their child do better in school (78 percent), and more than half said they thought the center was a safe place that would keep their son or daughter safe and out of trouble. More than a third also said they needed child care.

Participating students perceived a range of positive outcomes from their center experiences. For example, many (64 percent) reported that they learned to help others “some” or “a lot” at centers (Table II.5). Participants also said they were more confident in their schoolwork, felt more comfortable with students who were different, and felt more able to work out problems by talking about them.<sup>15</sup>

The voluntary nature of attendance and the positive views of both students and parents did not mean that students attended the centers often, however. Records show that attendance was low during the 2000-2001 school year (Table II.6). Participants who were part of the national evaluation sample ultimately attended centers for 32 days on average during the school year.<sup>16</sup> More than half (54 percent) attended fewer than 25 days. A small percentage of students did

---

<sup>15</sup>Evaluations of other after-school programs also have found that participants report positive outcomes. See, for example, evaluations of the Beacons program (Warren et al. 1999), the Extended Services Schools program (Grossman et al. 2002), the After-School Corporation program (Reisner et al. 2001), and the California After-School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnership Program (Bissell and Malloy 2002).

<sup>16</sup>In general, participants in the sample were students who had attended centers for three days or more during the first month that centers were open (the basis for selecting students into the sample as participants) and for whom parental consent to be in the study had been given. Appendix A provides more details on how participants were identified.

Table II.4  
Reasons Middle School Students Attend Centers  
(Middle School Centers in Six Sites)

Why Students Participated	Percent of Students
They wanted to go	66.2
Their parents wanted them to attend	40.0
A teacher, counselor, or other adult at school wanted them to attend	26.2
Someone else wanted them to go	14.5
Why Students Participated according to Their Parents	Percent of Parents
My child wanted to go	87.0
It will help my child do better in school	77.5
It is a safe place for my child after school	58.8
It will help my child stay out of trouble	56.7
School staff suggested that my child enroll	43.0
It provides dependable after-school care	39.2
It provides affordable after-school care	33.8
I work and need after-school care for my child	26.4

SOURCE: Participant survey module in six middle school sites and parent survey in all sites. Sample sizes are 1,494 parents and 263 participants. Some items had smaller sample sizes due to nonresponse. Respondents could cite more than one reason for participating so percentages do not add to 100.

Table II.5  
Perceived Outcomes of Participation in Middle School Centers  
(Middle School Centers in Six Sites)

Percentage of Students Who Report Having Learned to Do the Following “Some” or “A Lot” in the Center:	
Help others	63.9
Feel more confident about my school work	62.1
Feel more comfortable with kids who are different from me	61.1
Feel more confident solving math problems	57.6
Work out problems by talking about them	52.0
Deal with peer pressure	44.6
Speak and understand English better	42.8
Enjoy reading more	42.6

SOURCE: Participant survey module in six middle school sites. Sample size is 514.

Table II.6

21st-Century Middle School Center Attendance  
(2000-2001 School Year)

Average Days Attended in the 2000-2001 School Year	32.5
Number of Days Attended (Percent of Participants)	
25 Days or less	53.6
26 to 50 Days	24.2
51 to 75 Days	12.5
76 to 150 Days	9.8
Attendance Rate <sup>a</sup> (Percent of Participants)	
10 Percent or less	18.2
11 to 25 Percent	36.1
26 to 50 Percent	22.4
51 to 70 Percent	9.0
71 to 85 Percent	6.4
86 to 100 Percent	8.0

SOURCE: Center Attendance Records. The sample size is 1,869.

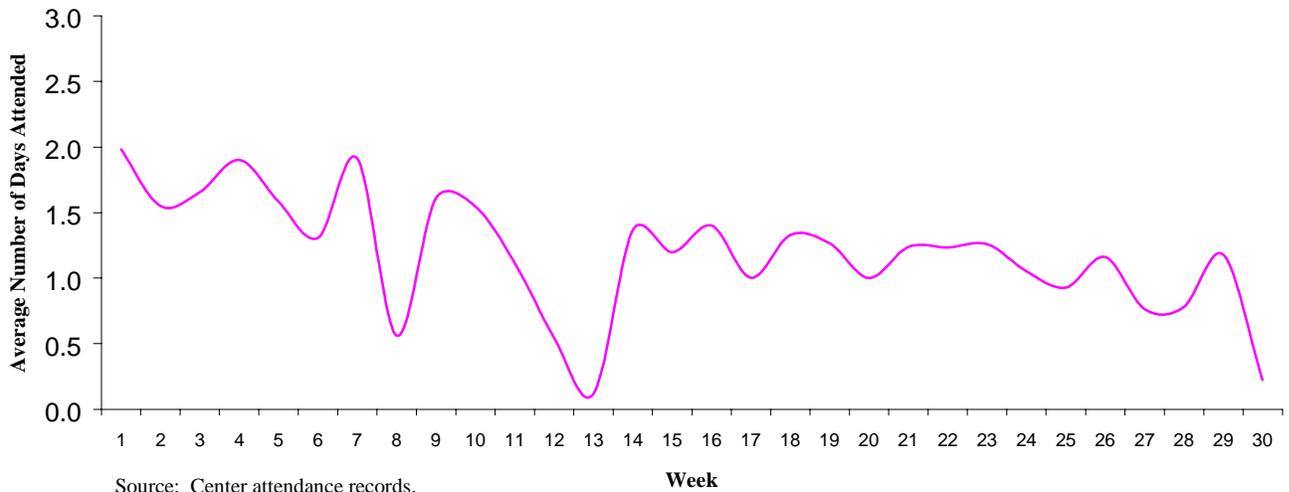
<sup>a</sup>The attendance rate is the number of days participants attended as a proportion of the number of days centers were open, which they provided in their annual performance reports. Totals may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

attend regularly, however. For example, 22 percent of participants attended centers for more than 50 days, and nearly 10 percent for more than 75 days. Consistent with the low number of days attended, more than half of students had attendance rates of less than 25 percent, meaning they attended centers less than 25 percent of the days that centers were open. The attendance rates reported here are similar to rates reported for the Extended Services Initiative (Grossman et al. 2002).

The pattern of attendance during the school year reveals a slow but steady decline in attendance, with sharper (and temporary) declines around major holidays. Figure II.1 plots average days attended each week during the 2000-2001 school year. The downward trend of

Figure II.1

Average Days Attended Per Week  
(Middle School Centers, 2000-2001 School Year)



average attendance during the school year is evident, as are the sharp declines around the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays.<sup>17</sup>

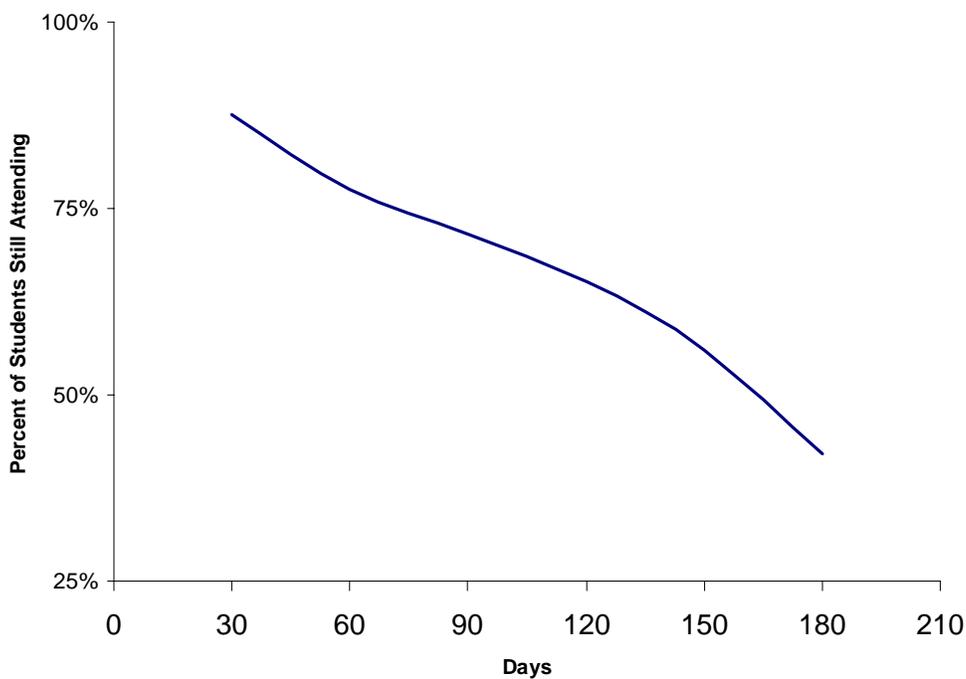
Figure II.2 shows the distribution of days between the first and last calendar day that a middle school student in the sample attended a center. The figure indicates that 60 days after students had started attending centers, 25 percent of them had stopped attending (they had no day of attendance in the center's records more than 60 days after their first day of attendance), and 50 percent of students had stopped attending after 160 days. The figure suggests that a group of students may have been trying out centers and stopped attending after a month or two. Students who continued to attend beyond the tryout period were likely to attend for a longer time, and 25

---

<sup>17</sup>The figure is based on the number of weeks starting from the week when a center opens, so any particular calendar date can fall in a different week, depending on when centers opened. For this reason, holidays that fall on a specific date can be in different weeks on the figure. The Christmas holiday may fall in the 15th week for a center that opens early in a year and in the 10th week for a center that opens later in a year.

Figure II.2

Distribution of Length of Time Attending Centers  
(Middle School Centers, 2000-2001 School Year)



Source: Center attendance records.

percent of middle school students were still attending centers more than 180 days after the first day they attended.

The steady erosion of attendance would have contributed to the need to recruit students throughout the school year to fill slots that became vacant when students stopped attending. Center staff recognized the recruitment and retention issue, with almost 60 percent of program directors and 64 percent of coordinators of middle school centers rating “recruiting students” as a challenge. Staff members told site visitors that they believed the program was less appealing than other things students could do after school, such as sports, other organized activities, or activities at home. However, center policies also made it easy to attend for a limited number of days. Site visitors noted that most centers (82 percent) allowed students to enroll at any time, and many centers allowed students to participate on a drop-in basis, choosing each day whether

to participate. In addition, as noted earlier, many centers scheduled activities in cycles. This may have led to students attending only during the cycles when the activities they wanted to participate in were offered.

Student perceptions about the centers also suggest reasons why recruiting would have been challenging. A survey of students who did not participate in centers at six middle school grantees indicated that, while many nonparticipants thought centers were a fun place to go (86 percent) and a good place to get homework done (87 percent), nearly half (46 percent) considered centers to be “mostly a place kids go when their parents are at work,” and 27 percent considered them to be “just for kids who need help in school” (Table II.7). Rather than go to centers, 64 percent of nonparticipants said that they wanted to “hang out” after school, 42 percent said that centers did not have activities they were interested in, and 39 percent said they went to other organized activities after school. Others cited responsibilities, such as doing chores around the house (50 percent) or caring for siblings (28 percent), that may have made participation difficult regardless of how centers were perceived or what they offered.

Twenty percent of nonparticipants also said it was too hard to get a ride home after the program.<sup>18</sup> Nonparticipants said they would be more likely to go to centers if they could choose what to do there (81 percent); if more of their friends attended (78 percent); if centers were less like school (68 percent); and, paradoxically, if they could get their homework done there (67 percent).

---

<sup>18</sup>Center staff members and teachers also told site visitors that transportation could be a major obstacle to attendance. Some centers did not provide students with transportation home. For some that did, students had to wait too long for buses to leave, bus rides were too long, students got home too late, or buses dropped students too far from home.

Table II.7

Nonparticipant Views about 21st-Century Centers  
(Middle School Centers in Six Sites)

---

What They Think about the 21st-Century Center	
It's good for getting your homework done	86.7
It's a fun place for anyone to go	86.4
It's mostly a place where kids go when their parents are at work	46.8
It's just for kids who need help with school	25.3
It's a punishment for kids who misbehave	13.5
Reasons for Not Participating in Centers	
Want to just "hang out" after school	64.4
Have to do chores around the house	49.8
Program doesn't have activities I want to participate in	42.2
Go to other organized activities after school	38.7
Think the program is for other kinds of kids	22.2
Have to take care of younger brothers or sisters	28.1
Too hard to get a ride home from the program	20.2
Didn't think I would be safe in the program	10.4
Would go to the After-School Program if...	
They could choose what they did there	81.2
More of their friends went there	78.4
It were less like school	67.7
They could get their homework done there	67.4
It were easier to get a ride home	46.4
The teachers there paid more attention to them	40.6
More of their regular teachers were there	41.3

---

SOURCE: Nonparticipant Survey, Students not attending at all during the year, sample size is 427. Some items had smaller sample sizes due to nonresponse.

### **C. District and Local School Staff Shared Administrative Responsibilities for the Centers and Used Teachers to Staff Centers**

Under the terms of their grants, school district officials had responsibility for developing after-school programs, hiring staff, and overseeing center activities at selected schools within the district. They could use different approaches to carrying out this responsibility. For example, they could administer centers as a part of the host school (which most chose to do), or they could subcontract the center's administration and operation to local organizations (which they did at only 15 percent of schools in the sample). Centers could rely either on teachers as staff (which

was the most frequent approach) or on community members and staff from local organizations (used by a smaller fraction).

Overall, administrators had successfully set up the administrative functions necessary to operate centers. Role delineation was clear, and school centers had the autonomy to customize their offerings. Furthermore, they were able to recruit the staff necessary to lead activities, drawing largely from the ranks of teachers at the host school. Hiring staff, however, consumed considerable administrative attention throughout the school year, possibly limiting time available for other functions such as developing collaborations or planning for sustainability. The preferences for hiring teachers also made investments in professional development appear less necessary, as will be discussed in section C.4 below.

### **1. Roles and Responsibilities of District and Center Staff**

Within the district office, project directors usually administered the centers with little intervention from senior district administrators. In addition, center coordinators (one level below project directors) often were responsible for planning and managing their own centers. This devolution of authority and responsibility stemmed from the view that host school staff members could best understand staff capabilities and student needs and interests. Moreover, many project directors oversaw more than one center and had responsibilities beyond the 21st-Century grant, so decentralization was necessary. Center coordinators were not completely free agents, however. On key decisions, they often consulted with their project director and sought input or approval from school principals or assistant principals.

Project directors usually tried to involve representatives of key organizations or constituencies, including school staff, district staff, community agencies and businesses, and parents when establishing after-school centers. Some project directors used advisory boards as part of these outreach efforts. The responsibilities of advisory boards varied widely. Some

boards met formally to make key decisions, such as how much grant money would be allocated to each center and what activities would be offered. Some centers had boards that played an advisory role but had no decision-making responsibilities. Finally, some centers had no advisory boards at all, either because project directors had been unable to use a convened board effectively or because they relied on informal networks for ideas and feedback.

District and school staff members who were part of the 21st-Century program typically had diverse responsibilities. Project directors often had supervisory and administrative roles—overseeing center operations, hiring center coordinators, dealing with budget issues, and sometimes serving as the key liaison between centers and collaborating partners (Table II.8). Coordinators usually handled the day-to-day details of running the centers, such as recruiting students, setting activity schedules, recruiting and assigning staff members, monitoring attendance, and, sometimes, leading activities.

Table II.8

Project Director Roles in Middle School Centers

	Percentage Reporting		
	Major Role	Minor Role	No Role
Having Final Decision-Making Power	77	23	0
Planning the Program	69	25	6
Hiring Center Coordinators	69	19	13
Hiring Center Staff	47	38	16
Meeting with Center Staff on a Regular Basis	55	29	16
Supervising Center Staff	41	31	28
Preparing Grant Application	41	16	44

SOURCE: Project Director Survey. Sample size is 31.

To gain a sense of the priority given to the development of programs, we were particularly interested in how coordinators—those closest to the day-to-day operations of centers—spent their time. Daily operations occupy much of coordinators’ available time. Coordinators devoted over half of their time performing administrative tasks and directly dealing with students (Table II.9). Planning activities ranked third, consuming 22 percent of coordinators’ time.

Other staff members typically had roles more narrowly focused than those of coordinators, spending 81 percent of their time working directly with students. Survey responses (not shown in tables) revealed that 59 percent of other staff members reported playing a role in homework help or tutoring. More than a third supervised recreational activities or games, and a similar proportion played a role in math or science instruction.

Table II.9  
Staff Time Use in Middle School Centers

	Average Percentage of Time	
	Coordinators	Other Staff
Administrative Tasks	31.0	4.0
Working Directly with Students	29.0	81.0
Planning Activities	22.0	8.0
Consulting with School-Day Teachers	10.0	3.0
Interacting with Parents	8.0	3.0
Other	1.0	2.0

SOURCE: Staff Survey. Sample size for coordinators is 60 and for other staff is 518. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

## 2. Qualifications and Work Schedules of Center Staff

About two-thirds of coordinators and of other staff had experience as a classroom teacher, and 34 percent of coordinators and 60 percent of other staff currently worked as a teacher during the school day (Table II.10). Some staff members who did not work at the host school or another

Table II.10

## Center Staff Hours, Pay, and Roles

	Coordinators	Other Staff
Average Days a Week Worked at the Center	4.4 days	3.0 days
Average Hours a Day Worked at Center	5.1 hours	2.8 hours
Average Hourly Pay	\$16.50/hour	\$15.80/hour
Employed by (Percent)		
21st-Century Program	77.0	82
Some other organization	23.0	18
Involvement in Student Activities or Instruction (Percent)		
Lead teacher, tutor, coach, of student activity	52.0	77.0
Assist in student activities	21.0	18.0
Not directly involved in student activities	26.0	5.0
Currently Have Another Job (Percent)		
Yes	66.0	84.0
No	34.0	16.0
Work as Teacher During Regular School Day (Percent)		
Yes	34.0	60.0
No	66.0	40.0

SOURCE: Staff Survey. The sample size is 61 for coordinators and 524 for other staff. Some items had smaller sample sizes as a result of nonresponse. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

school during the day worked for another organization, such as a collaborating partner. This group of staff was a minority overall, although they were more of a presence in particular centers. Across all centers, 23 percent of coordinators and 18 percent of other staff reported being employed by an external organization.

Many 21st-Century administrators favored hiring teachers for reasons that they viewed as more important than pedagogical skills. Whereas 45 percent of coordinators rated teaching experience as “very important,” 95 percent rated rapport with students as very important, and 91 percent rated experience working with children as very important. Site visit interviews also revealed that administrators wanted staff members to have personal assets, such as a positive attitude, an outgoing personality, and strong interpersonal skills.

### **3. Hours and Pay**

Coordinators worked at centers most days of the week, averaging about five hours a day (Table II.10). Other staff averaged nearly three hours each day, three days a week. Most middle school center staff worked at another job in addition to working at the center. Among center coordinators, 66 percent had another job, often as teachers but also as assistant principals, guidance counselors, or teacher's aides.

Middle school coordinators paid by the hour reported an average hourly wage of \$16.50. Other staff members, nearly all of whom were paid by the hour, reported an average hourly wage of \$15.80. These pay rates exceed other reported levels of compensation for child care providers and after-school programs. For the Making the Most of Out-of-School Time (MOST) after-school initiative, pay for coordinators ranged from \$8 to \$15 an hour, and other staff received between \$5 and \$9 an hour (Halpern et al. 2001). If the focus is on teachers' customary pay, however, these hourly rates are lower than compensation levels for teaching in the regular school day. We estimate that regular teachers received an average of \$25 an hour for working a 10-month schedule in the 2001-2002 school year, considerably more than the \$15.80 earned, on average, by staff in the programs.<sup>19</sup> Because of provisions in union contracts in some districts, not all teachers were reimbursed at this lower level. We also do not have data to make comparisons with what schools paid teachers for other work outside the regular school day.

### **4. Professional Training**

A common view among project directors and coordinators was that heavy doses of training were unnecessary because staff with teaching backgrounds were sufficiently trained for performing their after-school roles, and training would only increase the demands on teachers'

---

<sup>19</sup>Based on 1998-1999 data presented in the *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2001, adjusted for inflation.

after-school time commitments. During the 2000-2001 school year, for example, about three-quarters of center coordinators reported receiving training but only a quarter of all other staff reported receiving training. When they received training, coordinators reported an average of 23 hours of training and other staff reported an average of 19 hours of training.

Two kinds of training were common: (1) orientation and (2) skill training. Orientation gave staff members information they needed to know to work in the centers. Often, centers had a general hour- or daylong orientation meeting before the start of the school year (or before the start of each program session during the year) to discuss general issues related to the program, such as its objectives, paperwork requirements, policies and procedures, and plans for the upcoming year or session. Skill training taught staff how to perform tasks critical to their roles. Examples included discipline and classroom management techniques, remedial reading and math instruction, and first aid and CPR techniques. Some center coordinators and project directors also received training addressing broader issues, such as sustaining programs, managing volunteers, and providing high-quality services. These opportunities were often affiliated with state, regional, or national conferences.

#### **D. Programs Established Modest Links to the Regular School Day and Weak Links to Community Organizations**

Most centers in the evaluation operated in supportive atmospheres within their host schools, although the programs functioned in tandem with the schools and not as integrated components. Outside organizations from the community, while serving at the behest of the center and school staff, were a major new presence in many of the host schools through their involvement with the after-school program. However, the roles these organizations played did not appear likely to expand substantially in most centers, because both parties had limited interest and inclination in bringing this about.

## **1. School Support for, and Links with, Centers**

Most principals were supportive of the centers. Principals of host schools visited with center coordinators frequently and interacted with center staff in a variety of roles. About half the principals played a major role in planning the program and getting it started, and more than three-fourths were advisers to it (Table II.11). Despite the breadth of interactions on center issues, however, most principals (60 percent) reported that they spent only an hour a week or less on these issues. Principals also believed having teachers working in the centers had led to positive outcomes for centers and for teachers. For example, 76 percent of principals who had a teacher working in a center reported that this strengthens “to a great extent” the alignment of curriculum and instruction between the school day and the center, and 65 percent of principals indicated that it was “not at all” true that teachers working in centers caused students and teachers to spend too much time together. Principals were more moderate in their views of how centers had improved student outcomes. Just over a third reported that homework completion had increased to a great extent, a quarter felt that school attendance had improved to a great extent, and fewer than a fifth felt that classroom behavior had improved to a great extent.

Not surprisingly, centers received their greatest support and had the most communication with teachers from host schools who worked at the centers. These teachers believed that their teaching had been improved by working in centers.<sup>20</sup> Nearly all agreed or strongly agreed that their relationships with some students had improved because they got to work with those students after school, and about three-quarters agreed or strongly agreed that they had had the chance to try new activities and teaching strategies. Teachers who had never worked for the

---

<sup>20</sup>The statement is based on teachers that worked in centers and did not have a student in the sample. To reduce burden, we excluded from the staff survey any teachers that had students in the sample, because these teachers were being asked to complete a different questionnaire as part of the evaluation.

Table II.11

## Middle School Principals' Involvement In Centers

	Percentage
Principal Had a Major Role in:	
Planning the center	48.0
Hiring center staff	36.0
Administering the center	26.0
Meeting with center staff on a regular basis	26.0
Preparing the grant proposal	23.0
Supervising center staff	21.0
Principal Has Position of	
Advisor to staff running the center	75.0
Member of center management and planning committee	53.0
Advisor to outside organization running the center	19.0
Other	10.0
Center coordinator	5.0
No role	3.0
Time Principal Spends on Tasks Related to the Center	
Less than one hour a month	12.0
A few hours a month	28.0
About one hour a week	20.0
A few hours a week	27.0
More than a few hours a week	13.0
How Often Principal Visits the Center	
Never	0.0
Less than once a semester	0.0
One to two times a semester	7.0
About once a month	12.0
A few times a month	15.0
At least once a week	67.0

SOURCE: Principal Survey. Sample size ranges from 57 to 60.

program were generally supportive, at least to the extent of referring students (Table II.12). However, this group of teachers communicated much less with center staff—only about half reported discussions on topics related to students in the after-school program. Consistent with this finding, interviews during site visits indicated that host school teachers not working for centers often knew little about centers and were not involved with them.

Table II.12

## Host School Teacher Interactions with 21st-Century Middle School Centers

	All Teachers	Teachers Currently Working for the Program	Teachers That Had Worked for the Program	Teachers That Had Not Worked for the Program
Percentage of Teachers Who Referred Students to Program	93	94	99	91
Percentage of Teachers Reporting They Occasionally or Frequently Communicated with Center Staff to:				
Exchange information about students' assignments	65	77	76	54
Discuss students' academic needs or progress	71	81	78	63
Discuss students' behavior	62	82	66	51
Discuss or identify learning issues exhibited by students	60	77	66	50
Discuss any other items related to coordinating in- and after-school learning	64	84	73	50

SOURCE: Teacher Survey. Sample size is 327 for all teachers, 79 for teachers currently working for the program, 79 for teachers that had worked for the program, and 169 for teachers that had not worked for the program.

Centers linked with their schools by way of offering homework sessions and hiring teachers as staff. Staff and principals perceived that teachers' familiarity with the skills of particular students and with the homework assigned to students were an effective way of tying the after-school program to the regular school's program. More extensive links were evident in some centers where concepts or skills from state achievement tests and state assessment learning standards determined the content of academic assistance sessions. Despite the solid representation of school staff, however, recreation and enrichment activities seldom linked with regular school day instruction. In fact, program designers often wanted to provide a clear distinction with school-day activities to pique students' interest and encourage enrollment.

## **2. Collaborations with Community Agencies and Organizations**

A stated objective in the legislation creating the 21st-Century program was to foster closer ties between schools and communities through collaborative partnerships with a range of local organizations. The evaluation explored the nature and extent of collaborative efforts between centers and local organizations and the tensions and barriers that arose.

Collaborations in the sense of programs and community organizations working together were common, according to information that programs provided on their annual performance reports (Table II.13). Among the most frequent collaborators were community-based organizations, county or municipal agencies, Boys and Girls Clubs, the YMCA, colleges and universities, and local businesses. Libraries and museums, health institutions, and faith-based organizations were noticeably less common. Center coordinators reported collaborations with an average of four organizations.

Information from annual performance reports asks programs to indicate only that they were working with various organizations but did not ask about the nature of the collaboration. A closer examination by site visitors found that the dominant type of collaboration was for local organizations to provide services for hire to the 21st-Century program. For example, a center might pay a local martial arts studio, a dance studio, or a theater company to provide weekly after-school classes, but these outside instructors and their organizations would have limited additional involvement with the program. Collaborations in the sense of shared governance and integrated operations were rare.

The tensions and challenges of collaborating were evident in some programs, where several school staff members considered the staff of other organizations as inexperienced in school settings and expressed concern about their lack of reliability. Instances when outside staff failed to show up when expected to lead activities buttressed this concern. Against this backdrop of

Table II.13

## Organizations Working with 21st-Century Centers

	Percentage of Grantees Reporting Participation
Community-Based Organizations	89
County or Municipal Agencies (Such as Police, Parks and Recreation, Health and Social Services)	89
National Organizations (Such as Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA/YWCA, Big Brothers/Big Sisters)	80
Colleges or Universities	74
Businesses	61
Libraries or Museums	40
Hospitals/Clinics/Health Providers	40
Faith-Based Organizations	29

SOURCE: Tabulations from Annual Performance Reports. Sample size is 225.

perceived disadvantages, and given the ample 21st-Century grant, some centers concluded that they could easily function with little to no involvement of outside organizations.

Some grantees collaborated effectively with community organizations, and their experiences suggest practices that may facilitate stronger collaborations. The grantees provided sufficient staff time to develop and maintain collaborations, and they often had full-time directors or center coordinators who could spend more time working with organizations. They involved organizations at the grant-writing stage, spelling out roles, responsibilities, and budgets there. These successful grantees also fostered open and frequent communications between centers and organization staff through regular planning and coordination meetings, as well as informal communications in the hallways.

## **E. Programs Depended on Federal Grants and Had Not Prepared for Sustainability**

The resources that grantees and centers used to support program operations provide insights into efforts that will be needed to sustain centers after the federal grants expire. The relatively short period entailed in the three-year federal grants puts immediate pressure on districts to begin considering how they will support centers after the grant ends. Information from annual performance reports and from site visits provides a gauge of resources that would need to be replaced and the prospects and challenges districts face in sustaining their after-school programs.<sup>21</sup>

### **1. Grantee Expenditures and Funding Sources**

Performance report data indicate that grantees had budgeted to spend about \$196,000 per center, with about \$135,000 per center (about 69 percent) from their 21st-Century grants. With centers enrolling about 200 students a year (see Table I.1), planned expenditures amounted to almost \$1,000 per enrolled student.<sup>22</sup> Public school expenditures per enrolled student averaged about \$6,100 in 1999, so centers were supplementing regular school expenditures by roughly 16 percent.<sup>23</sup>

Grantees also tapped a range of other sources for funds, including grants from other federal, state, or private sources, Title I funds, the USDA National School Lunch Program, private foundations, and cash gifts from private citizens or philanthropies. A handful of grantees in the

---

<sup>21</sup>More information on sustainability will be available next year, when second-cohort grantees, for which the grant period ended in December 2001, and third-cohort grantees, for which the grant period ends in summer 2002, face the challenge of continuing their centers.

<sup>22</sup>Planned expenditure per program *slot* is higher because students do not attend the full year. For example, a center may have 100 slots that are filled by 200 students over the course of a year (this would be true, for example, if the average participant stayed in the program for half a year). In this case, planned expenditure per slot would be twice as much as planned expenditure per enrolled student.

<sup>23</sup>According to the 1998 *Condition of Education* public-school expenditure per student was \$5,734 in the 1996-1997 school year. Inflating this amount by the increase in the Consumer Price Index from 1996 to 1999 (the index value was 156.9 in 1996 and 166.6 in 1999) yields the figure in the text.

national evaluation also charged fees for some or all students to help cover the cost of particular activities in which students participated. However, fees were seldom a major revenue source. Many grantees also received in-kind donations that helped stretch their financial resources. Common in-kind donations included schools providing free access to and use of facilities, equipment, and supplies; community members and teachers volunteering to work in the centers; outside organizations covering the cost of their staff working for centers; businesses, clubs, and other organizations donating equipment, materials, and supplies; and public agencies and private organizations granting reduced-price access to local facilities or events.

## **2. Approaches to Sustainability**

With grantees relying heavily on 21st-Century grant funds, a key issue for their future is their ability to find funding from other sources after the grant ends. Without comparable resources, from either direct funding or in-kind support, service reductions are inevitable.

Project directors and district staff often expressed their desire to keep centers open after the 21st-Century grants end. However, site visitors observed few concrete actions leading toward sustainability. At the time of the visits, about one-third of grantees had made no plans and taken no actions to sustain their programs; half had developed some plans but had not yet taken any action. In surveys of center coordinators and host school principals, only 10 percent of principals and 12 percent of coordinators reported that funding sources had been identified or secured. And, 34 percent of project directors and 40 percent of principals expected that lack of funds would prevent them from having a similar after-school program after the 21st-Century grant ended.

First-cohort grantees that had received the earliest grant awards were no farther along in their planning than grantees with later awards. The fall 2001 status of the first-cohort grantees, whose grants ended in the previous spring, illustrates the varying success that these grantees

enjoyed. Of the nine first-cohort grantees in the national evaluation, one stopped providing services entirely, one had secured a new 21st-Century grant, four were using carryover funds (funds from the grant that had not been expended by the end of the grant period), and three had scaled back their after-school programs significantly.

Grantees were considering a wide variety of potential funding sources. Project directors and other officials could offer few specifics but mentioned some possible sources.<sup>24</sup>

- ***Federal Funds or Grants.*** Several grantees indicated that they were hoping to win another 21st-Century grant (perhaps being overoptimistic; few first-cohort grantees had been successful in winning an additional grant).
- ***State Funds or Grants.*** About one-third of grantees also mentioned the possibility of securing state funding, such as average daily attendance funds and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funds.
- ***District Funds.*** About one-third of the grantees cited the school district as a potential funding source but noted that their districts were hard-pressed to provide basic services and would not have much money to spare.
- ***Community Funds.*** About one-third of middle school grantees and most of the elementary grantees were looking to the community for future support. They anticipated that community-based organizations, public agencies, and businesses would help sustain after-school programs. The vendor model of relationships commonly in place with many of these external organizations is likely to limit such prospects, however.
- ***Fees.*** A very few grantees indicated they would consider fees—either charging them for the first time or raising current fees—to help pay for services, although some project directors were skeptical that families could afford higher fees.

Three factors appear to have impeded sustainability efforts. First, the responsibility for securing resources to sustain programs typically fell to project directors, but more than half of the directors had responsibilities beyond overseeing the 21st-Century grant and had limited time available for sustainability planning. Second, grantees in poor or remote areas described having limited local resources, such as corporations and foundations, to draw on for future funding.

---

<sup>24</sup>These data were gathered before the reauthorization of the 21st-Century program, which has charged states with administration of the competitive grants.

Third, the 21st-Century grant's lack of a matching requirement for grantees may have contributed to limited sustainability planning. Many grantees reported that they received matching funds, often in-kind, but the 21st-Century grant did not require matching as a condition. Without a matching requirement, grantees had a full three years of funding at the outset of their grants—enough to offer a full program to a significant number of students; they did not have to find other funding sources during that time, as would be the case for grants that required a larger match in later years.

The newly authorized 21st-Century program that transfers administration to the states addresses sustainability in two ways. Grants can be given for up to five years, and states can set matching requirements for the grants. Whether relaxing these aspects of grants makes sustainability efforts more successful nonetheless depends on other sources of funds being available at the state and local levels. More states and local school districts have begun to provide funding for after-school programs, but even these have been created as time-limited grants rather than as ongoing funding that would be better suited for sustaining programs (Langford 2001).

The lack of a clear path to sustainability has implications for program implementation. Centers (and other after-school programs) in principle may be concerned about developing attributes of their programs such as staff skills, interesting and engaging activities for participants, and connections with local community organizations and agencies, but a lack of assured funding would be a strong disincentive for investing in these activities. If districts planned for centers to be operating for longer periods and if funding were more assured,

investments in staff and curriculum could have greater returns and would be more appealing to districts wanting to raise the quality of center offerings.<sup>25</sup>

We will obtain more evidence about how grantees approach sustainability during the second year of the evaluation, which will see the end of the 21st-Century grants for most grantees in the evaluation.<sup>26</sup> If second- and third-cohort grantees are similar to first-cohort grantees, however, few will have secured funding to sustain their centers.

#### **F. Designers of More Academic After-School Programs in Middle Schools Will Have to Resolve Challenging Issues**

The requirement to provide academic services and support from within a school distinguishes 21st-Century centers from after-school programs in general. Site visitors noted that providing academic services increased support for centers from districts and host schools interested in helping students raise grades and test scores. In addition, as noted earlier, parents believed that attending centers would help students do better in school.

Providing academic services also created issues, however. Programs wanted to attract students by being seen as more than just an extension of school, and providing academic services was counter to that desire. Furthermore, the low levels of attendance limited the kinds of academic services centers could offer. With participants attending an average of one or two days a week and sometimes not attending for weeks, teachers in centers would have had just as much difficulty following a curriculum scope and sequence to improve academic outcomes as they would have had if students attended regular school only one or two days a week. Activities that started and ended on the same day, and that reinforced or expanded on what was being taught

---

<sup>25</sup>Under the new legislation, states will be able to use a portion of their allotted funds to provide technical assistance and training and may undertake some of the investments that individual grantees did not.

<sup>26</sup>Some grantees in the national evaluation may have unexpended funds they can carry over, but the carryover period typically lasts less than a year. Some grantees also may have received additional 21st-Century grants, but these funds usually would apply to centers not studied as part of the national evaluation.

during the regular school day, were probably best suited for centers, although their limited nature would likely not contribute as much to academic improvement.

The nature of middle schools themselves also affected the academic activities middle school centers could offer. With subjects divided into departments and taught at different levels, and with students possibly having many teachers during a school day, linking academic activities in centers with course subject matter would be challenging even if students attended centers frequently.

Attracting teachers to provide or oversee academic activities also created challenges for programs. (Although programs were not required to use certified teachers for academic activities, nearly all of them did.) Teachers are experienced in curriculum and instruction and familiar with the demands of maintaining classroom order, and simply having them as center staff created links to the regular school program. However, center directors and coordinators noted that many teachers had little desire to teach after school when they had already taught a regular school day. Centers accommodated teachers' limited enthusiasm by being flexible in the hours and days that they asked teachers to commit to working in the centers. Although teachers made up the majority of center staff they were also likely to be working the fewest days and hours in the centers (47 percent of all paid staff members, but 56 percent of teachers, worked one or two days a week).

In the end, providing homework sessions was a middle ground that fit within the constraints. Nearly all students said they did homework after school anyway, so homework sessions provided a service that fit their needs. Sessions were not compromised by infrequent attendance, because regular classroom teachers were determining the content of the sessions by the homework they assigned. Even an inexperienced teacher could oversee homework sessions and help students who had questions or needed assistance with their homework.

The broad appeal of homework sessions is counterbalanced by their effectiveness, however. Of all the activities that centers offered, site visitors typically observed that homework sessions engaged the students least, and the teachers who oversaw the sessions did little teaching. Furthermore, improvement in academic outcomes is limited by the extent to which homework would improve academic outcomes in general. Whether homework has these effects is an area where research has been far from unanimous (Cooper and Valentine 2001). The evidence is clearer that homework improves academic achievement for high school students but less clear for middle and elementary school students. Getting more benefit from homework sessions is a challenge that after-school staff will need to address.

