

**THE 2007-2008 EVALUATION  
OF THE SOUTH CAROLINA  
21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING  
CENTER PROGRAM**

Soaring  
Beyond Expectations  
Enhancing Quality in the 21st Century



*Volume III:  
An Examination of the State Level  
Administration of the SC 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC Program*

**Prepared For the South Carolina  
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By  
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**April 15, 2009**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of Volume III is to provide state level administrative and programmatic recommendations that the evaluators believe will strengthen the program, including recommendations for the evaluation process itself. The content for Volume III was generated in a series of discussions held among the members of the evaluation staff. These discussions took place throughout the year covered by the evaluation and culminated in a consensus process during the first week of March 2009.

Over the last year to 18 months, the South Carolina 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC state office has brought many positive changes to the state's 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program. Among these changes have been: **strong advocacy for the program; support for data and evaluation; stronger fiscal accountability among the sub-grantees; programmatic experimentation; and filling some of the need for more state staff.**

For the future, in addition to continuing what it is already doing so well, the state office, in concert with the state evaluator, should move forward on: **establishing a SC 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC web site; taking the greatest possible advantage of the GEMS® online data system; overcoming technophobia; improving the timeliness of communications; publicizing program eligibility; adding additional staff; and coordinating further with GEMS® and the evaluators.**

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# INTRODUCTION

## **The 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC Program Federal and State Mandates**

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) program is administered by the U. S. Department of Education (USDOE) and is authorized under Title IV, Part B, of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. The purposes of this program are 1) to create or expand community learning centers that provide academic enrichment opportunities to assist students, particularly those who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools, in meeting state and local standards in core academic subjects; 2) to offer students a broad array of enrichment activities that can complement their regular academic programs; and 3) to offer literacy and other educational services to the families of participating children.

The South Carolina State Department of Education (SDE) administers the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC) program in South Carolina as the State Education Agency (SEA). Through a competitive process, the SDE awards funds received from the USDOE to local organizations for the purpose of establishing or expanding community learning centers. At the end of the 2007-2008 grant year, there were 95 programs (operating 171 sites) funded in the state that served 13,899 students.

## **Purpose of the Evaluation**

The South Carolina 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC Evaluation is designed to meet part of the Federal requirement for a statewide evaluation of the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC and portions of the Federal requirements for local evaluations. There are five volumes in the evaluation of grant year 2007-2008. Volume I of the evaluation covers the state's progress on meeting federal objectives. Volume II states the achievements of the program, including a comparison group analysis; and describes the characteristics of sites with successful outcomes for students. Volume IV examines differences in outcomes among the type of organization providing the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC services. Volume V is a series of one page summaries of the program highlights for each of the 95 programs from the 2007-2008 grant year.

## **Purpose of Volume III**

The purpose of Volume III is to provide state level administrative and programmatic recommendations that the evaluators believe will strengthen the program, including recommendations for the evaluation process itself.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The content for Volume III was generated in a series of discussions held among the members of the evaluation staff. These discussions took place throughout the year covered by the evaluation and culminated in a consensus process during the first week of March 2009.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Establishing a Web Site Specifically for the SC 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC**

The South Carolina 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC presently communicates with sub-grantees, centers, the public, parents, schools and others through a variety of methods. However, a website dedicated solely to the SC 21<sup>st</sup>CCLC site would provide a much more efficient, centralized way of communicating information on a large scale and on a continuing basis.

Beyond basic information about the program, items could be posted such as RFP's, results of evaluations, special announcements, grant opportunities, upcoming staff development and training sessions, the latest in best practices and similar helpful documents. Moreover, many of the faith based and community based programs have difficulties in obtaining secure email. This function could also be arranged through the website.

The cost of designing and maintaining high quality websites has been greatly reduced in the last few years. Finding the right firm must be done carefully, and has to be done within the framework of the Department's plans. However, cost would likely not be a major issue.

### **Taking the Greatest Possible Advantage of GEMS®**

The GEMS® online data system has numerous features of which the state and sub-grantees are not yet taking full advantage. For example, reports which could be used to compare among centers within a single sub-grantee are available but are generally not being examined. Moreover, many sub-grantees seem to be unaware of the automatic real-time reports that would help them in managing their own programs. Additional discussions are just beginning about how to make best use of GEMS®.

### **Technophobia**

Some members of the state staff never use the information that can be obtained from the GEMS® while others use it regularly. The same is true of some sub-grantee directors. Not all state nor local administrators are taking advantage of information that can assist them in making program decisions. Embracing a new technology is difficult, but once it is embraced, there is so much that can be learned and used efficiently.

### **Strong Advocacy for the Program**

The State 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC office has been a very strong advocate for the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program at the state level. Without that advocacy, given the present economic conditions in the state and the nation, the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program would have suffered and, along with it, the students who depend on this program to support their school performance

## **Support for Data and Evaluation**

The State 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC office has been a strong advocate for accurate data and a strong evaluation element upon which to base decisions. This is not always the case with programs. Basing decisions on data is highly encouraged by the federal government and is, therefore, important to continued funding.

## **Fiscal Accountability**

The State 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC office has advocated with the sub-grantees for an increased level of fiscal and programmatic accountability. Not all sub-grantees have heard this message and have received negative consequences. It is important for program integrity to continue the accountability message and to carry through with appropriate sanctions.

## **Communications**

Communications between the state office and evaluators are not always timely. For example, the evaluators sometimes don't find out about a major meeting that it is necessary for them to attend at until a week or two before the meeting date, which may require rescheduling several other events to be there. Meeting plans, statewide memos and other information should be shared on a more timely basis.

## **Program Eligibility**

The eligibility criteria for students to be recipients of the SC 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC services have been raised as a question by sub-grantees throughout the contract year, particularly in regard to individual poverty status. If this information could be clearly put in writing by the state 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC office and posted on the GEMS® home page, it might eliminate some of the continuous questioning.

## **Experimentation**

It is important that there be certainty and consistency in the administration for the program. However, it is also important that there be some room for experimentation. The state office has allowed this experimentation through efforts like the special summer programs. These efforts should be continued and guided by need and data.

## **Staff Needs**

The state office has accomplished a great deal with only a few staff. However, additional staff are needed, particularly to do site reviews and to follow up on the rich quantity and quality of data available to the program.

## **Coordination with GEMS® and Evaluation**

Time is difficult to find, but the staff that operates the GEMS® and carries out the evaluation would like to have more time to interact with the state office staff. The purposes would be to coordinate work, to find out what they are doing that is useful and not as useful and to provide as much information and gather as much information as possible that would be helpful to improve the operation of the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC for the state.

## CONCLUSIONS

Over the last year to 18 months, the South Carolina 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC state office has brought many positive changes to the state's 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program. Among these changes have been:

- Strong advocacy for the program
- Support for data and evaluation
- Stronger fiscal accountability among the sub-grantees
- Programmatic experimentation
- Filling some of the need for more state staff

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

For the future, in addition to continuing what it is already doing so well, the state office, in concert with the state evaluator, should move forward on:

- Establishing a SC 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC web site
- Taking the greatest possible advantage of GEMS®
- Overcoming technophobia
- Improving the timeliness of communications
- Publicizing program eligibility
- Adding additional state staff
- Coordinating further with GEMS® and with the evaluators