

**A COMPARISON OF HIGH PERFORMING  
AND LOW PERFORMING  
21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY  
COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTER SITES  
IN SOUTH CAROLINA  
ON QUALITATIVE VARIABLES**

**PREPARED**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Some 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC sites in South Carolina serving poor and low-performing schools and their students are more successful in reducing the performance gap than are other 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC sites. In the 2010-2011 state 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC evaluation, System Wide Solutions (SWS) attempted to identify what qualities the ten sites which performed the best in 2009-2010 have in common that other sites may learn from to help reduce the performance gap for their students. SWS was able to identify seven such qualitative variables.

During early 2012, the ten highest performing 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC elementary school sites (those which had the greatest year-over-year changes in student academic achievement) from 2010-2011 and the ten lowest performing 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC elementary school sites (those which had the least changes in student academic achievement) were identified through analysis of standardized test scores. These twenty sites were then visited by SWS staff to determine if they exhibited the identified variables.

The high performing sites had, on average, more than two times as many of the measured variables operating in the programs than did the low performing sites (4.7 versus 2). The high performing sites all provided at least three of the variables (Direct Support Provided to Students, Staff from Area, and Guidance and Mentoring Provided) and 80% were strongly connected to the community, an additional success variable. None of these variables were consistently present in more than 50% of the low performing sites.

The feeder schools for the low performing sites were more likely to be located in a rural setting (60% versus 0% of the high performing sites). The low performing sites were, on the average, majority White, while the high performing schools were majority Black. Thirty percent of the high performing sites were operated by (non-charter) public schools compared to 55.6% of the low performing sites. The high performing sites, on the average, had more students than did the low performing sites. Students in the high performing sites attended the program only slightly more often than did students in the lower performing sites.

The conclusion of the report is that it appears that at least four of the variables (Direct Support Provided to Students, Staff from Area, Guidance or Mentoring Provided and Strongly Connected to Community) are observed more often in high performing 21<sup>st</sup>CCLC elementary afterschool programs than in low performing afterschool programs. In South Carolina, there may also be a connection between high performance and a program being located in a non-rural setting; the type of organization that is operating the program may be another distinguishing variable.

It is recommended that further study be conducted with a larger sample of programs with a more refined instrument.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program is intended for students in poor and low-performing schools and their students. Some 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC sites in South Carolina serving poor and low-performing schools and their students are more successful than other 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC sites in reducing the performance gap for at risk students. In the 2010-2011 state 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC evaluation, System Wide Solutions (SWS) attempted to identify what qualities the ten sites which performed the best in 2009-2010 had in common that other sites may learn from to help reduce the performance gap for their students. SWS was able to identify seven such qualitative variables. The next step was to determine if these variables are less likely to exist in the low performing 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC sites. If so, the variables are more likely to be at least part of the reason the high performing sites produce greater benefits for their students.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The ten highest performing elementary school 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC sites from 2010-2011 (those which had the greatest changes in student academic achievement) and the ten lowest performing sites (those which had the least changes in student academic achievement) were identified through analysis of standardized test scores. These sites were then visited by a team from SWS to determine if they exhibited the identified variables.

The sites that were to be visited for the 2011-2012 evaluation study were selected in a three phase process. Sites with data for fewer than 30% of their students were excluded from the analysis. Sites that primarily serve Kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, high school grades, or private school students were also excluded as these students do not take the state standardized PASS test. In the first phase, the percentage of students who improved was calculated for each site. This percentage was calculated using the average of the number of students who improved their performance level on the ELA, math, and writing PASS test from the previous year divided by the number of students at the site for whom there was data.

During the second phase, the sites were ranked according to how well they improved outcomes for students in comparison to the remainder of the students in the same schools. Independent samples t-tests were performed for each site to determine if the students who participated in the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program had a higher average improvement in scale score on the ELA, math, and writing PASS test than students who attended the same school(s) and did not participate in the program.

During the third phase, the research team compared the percentage of students who improved to the comparison analysis rankings. Sites were rank ordered according to the percentage of students who had improvement. Sites with the highest percentages of students who improved, that also had significant improvements over non-21<sup>st</sup> CCLC students were selected to be in the group of high-performing schools according to their rank order. The ten sites with the lowest percentages of students who improved and that also had significant declines in student performance when compared to non-21<sup>st</sup> CCLC students were then selected as the low-

performing sites. Eight of these ten low-performing sites were middle schools. All of the top ten performing programs were elementary schools. Since the students in middle schools and the rate at which students in middle schools improve on PASS scores are so different from elementary schools, a group consisting primarily of lower-performing middle schools would not serve as a valid comparison to a group of high-performing elementary schools. Therefore, a group of ten lower-performing elementary school programs were selected to serve as a comparison group. Most of these ten elementary school programs had higher percentages of students who were improving than did the middle school programs but were still showing significant declines in scores when compared to non-21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program students.

The fieldwork methods chosen to determine the qualitative commonalities among the twenty sites were observation and interviews. Each site was visited by SWS staff members who spent from three to five hours on site observing the program and interviewing students, staff, the site coordinator, volunteers, and other stakeholders such as parishioners if the site was a church. Prior to the site visit, the program director for the subgrant was interviewed via telephone, usually for an hour to an hour and a half. A questionnaire was used to guide this interview and a site visit protocol was used to guide the observations and interviews for the site visit. During the site visits, the protocol questions were used as beginning points for conversations, with as much information as possible being gathered about the site and its operations.

The SWS staff took notes from the interviews and conversations and from observation of the activities at the sites. These field notes were formalized into reports. The staff held several informal discussions to explore their findings. Determination of the presence or absence of program qualities was governed by an iterative process. Two lengthy formal meetings were held to determine the similarities and differences among the programs. One team member read the notes from the meetings, the formal reports and formal reports from previous site visits in other years to these same sites. He or she compiled further evidence to support the similarities that had been earlier determined, and wrote a draft of the evaluation report that delineated which of the elements was present and the data described to support those findings. The report was reviewed by the other team members, consensus reached and then finalized.

The seven commonalities being examined are:

1. The sites have been operating an afterschool program for a considerable length of time, for at least ten years.
2. The staff in the sites have, on the whole, been working with the program for a long period of time, from five to 30 years.
3. The coordinator of the program has been with the site, as coordinator, for a considerable length of time (five year or more).
4. The site provides individualized guidance or mentoring support for the students.
5. The staff are predominantly from the geographic area served by the site, or have received training and mentoring in the culture of the neighborhood.
6. The sites are strongly connected to the community, through community initiatives or community supports.
7. The site provides direct social or academic support to students that make it easier for them to concentrate on learning.

After concluding the site visits, one low performing site was eliminated from the sample because the program had changed substantially from the prior year, so no conclusions could be drawn. Therefore, the following analysis is based on nine low performing sites.

## FINDINGS

Among the ten highest performing sites the number of variables present ranged from 3-7, resulting in an average of 4.7 of the seven variables operating in these programs. Among the nine lowest performing sites the number of variables present ranged from 0-4, resulting in an average of two of the seven variables operating in these programs.

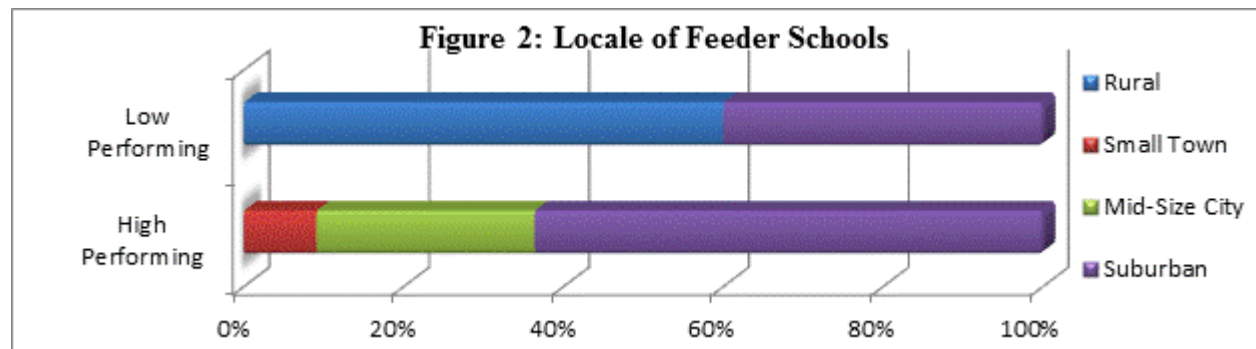
The variables most likely to be found among the high performing sites were Direct Support Provided to Students (100%), Staff from Area (100%), Guidance or Mentoring Provided (100%), and sites strongly connected to community (80%). None of these variables were consistently observed in more than 50% of the low performing sites. In the Table below, high performing sites are delineated with “a” and low performing sites delineated with “b.”

<b>Table 1: Qualitative Results from Visits to High and Low Performing Sites</b>								
Site	Longevity of Program	Longevity of Staff	Longevity of Coordinator	Guidance or Mentoring	Local Staff	Connected to Community	Direct Support to Students	Total Factors
1a.				✓	✓		✓	3
2a.	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	5
3a.	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	5
4a.				✓	✓	✓	✓	4
5a.	✓			✓	✓		✓	4
6a.				✓	✓	✓	✓	4
7a.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7
8a.				✓	✓	✓	✓	4
9a.	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
10a.	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	5
1b.								0
2b.					✓		✓	2
3b.	✓			✓	✓	✓		4
4b.						✓	✓	2
5b.					✓		✓	2
6b.					✓	✓		2
7b.				✓	✓	✓		2
8b.						✓	✓	2
9b.				✓			✓	2

Of the eleven feeder schools for the ten high performing sites, one (9.1%) of the feeder schools is located in a small town, three (27.3%) of the feeder schools are located in mid-sized cities, and seven (63.6%) of the feeder schools are in suburban areas. No high performing sites serve students from rural feeder schools.

Of the ten feeder schools for the nine low performing sites, six (60%) of the feeder schools are in rural areas, and four (40%) are in suburban areas. No low performing sites serve students in mid-sized cities or small towns.

Table 2: Locale of Feeder Schools										
	Rural		Small Town		Mid-Size City		Suburban		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
High Performing	0	0.0%	1	9.1%	3	27.3%	7	63.6%	11	100%
Low Performing	6	60.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4	40.0%	10	100%

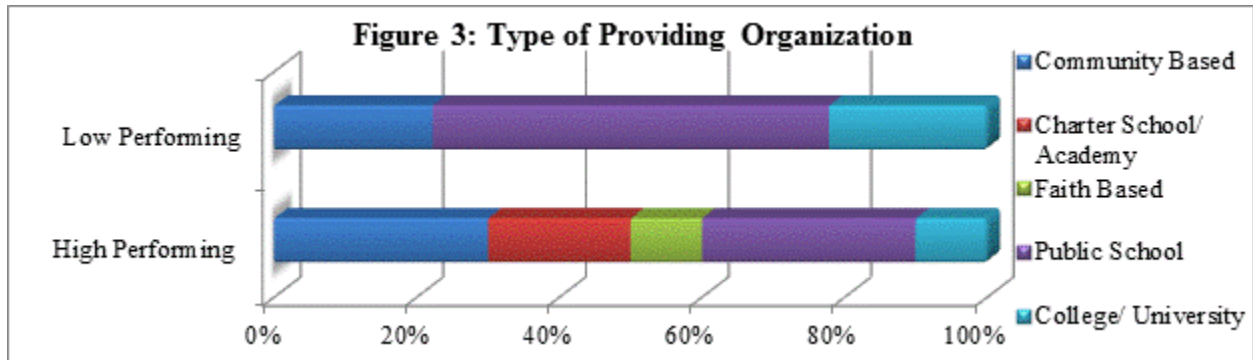


Evaluators defined Type of Operating Organization as the entity that provides programming directly to the students, not necessarily the fiscal agent or subgrant recipient. Of the ten high performing sites, three (30%) are operated by a Community Based Organization, two (20%) are operated by a Charter School or Academy, one (10%) is operated by a Faith Based Organization, three (30%) are operated by Public Schools, and one (10%) is operated by a College or University.

Of the nine low performing sites, two (22.2%) are operated by a Community Based Organization, five (55.6%) are operated by Public Schools, and two (22.2%) are operated by a College or University.

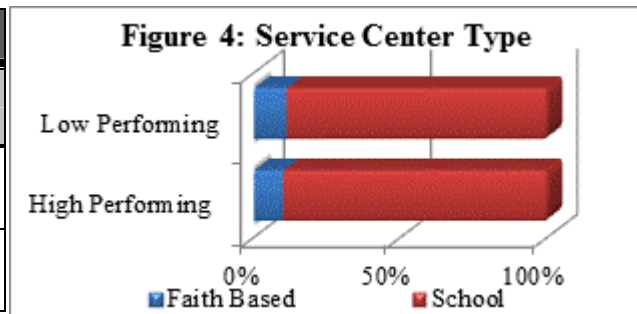
Table 3: Type of Operating Organization										
	Community Based		Charter School/Academy		Faith Based		Public School		College/University	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
High Performing	3	30.0%	2	20.0%	1	10.0%	3	30.0%	1	10.0%

Low Performing	2	22.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	5	55.6%	2	22.2%
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Of the ten high performing sites, nine (90%) provide their services in a school, and one (10%) provides them in a faith based center. Of the nine low performing sites, eight (88.9%) provide their services in a school, and one (11.1%) provides their services in a faith based center.

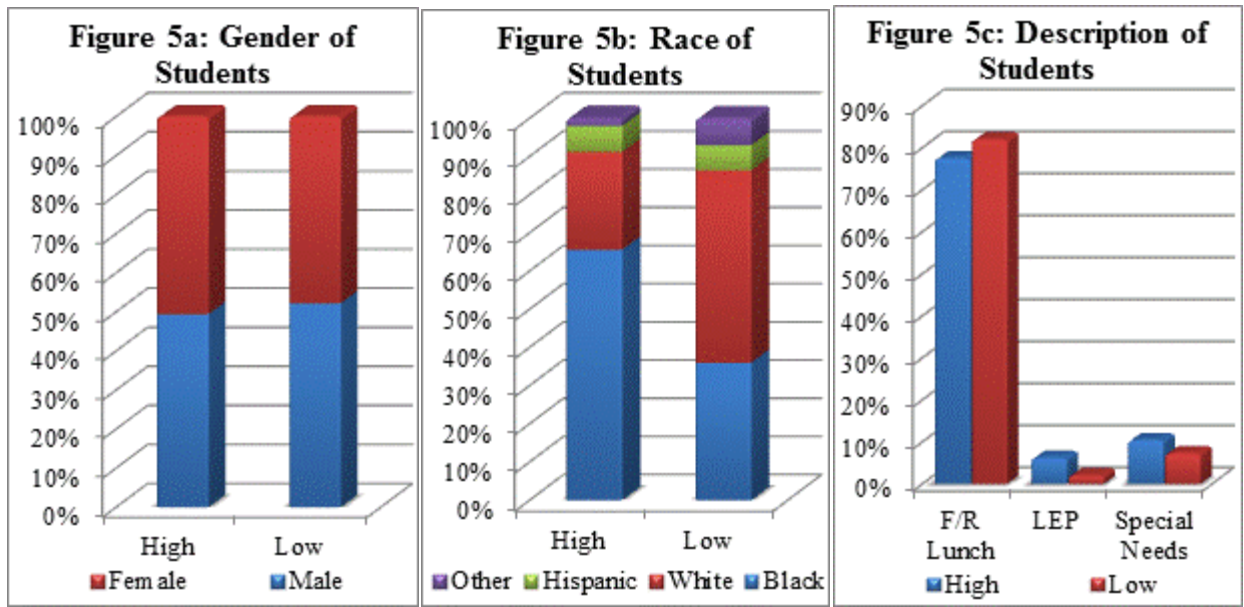
	Faith Based		School	
	#	%	#	%
High Performing	1	10.0%	9	90.0%
Low Performing	1	11.1%	8	88.9%



Students in the ten high performing sites are majority female (50.6%), Black (65.6%), and receiving free or reduced lunch (77.5%); 6.2% of these sites' students have limited English Proficiency and 10.4% have special needs.

Students in the nine low performing sites are majority male (52.2%), White (50.4%), and receiving free or reduced lunch (82.0%); 2% of these sites' students have limited English Proficiency and 7.3% have special needs.

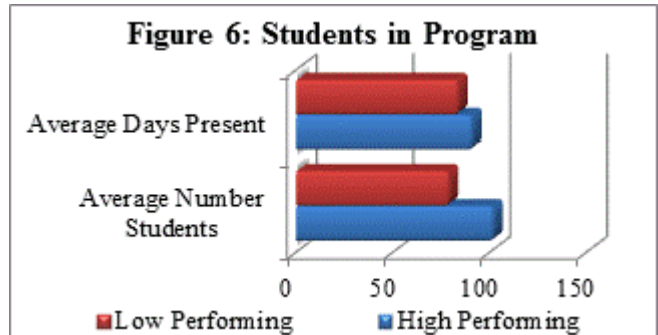
	Gender		Race				Free/Reduced Lunch	Limited English Proficiency	Special Needs
	Male	Female	Black	White	Hispanic	Other			
High Performing	49.4%	50.6%	65.6%	25.6%	6.8%	2.0%	77.5%	6.2%	10.4%
Low Performing	52.2%	47.8%	36.0%	50.4%	6.6%	7.0%	82.0%	2.0%	7.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50.5%</b>	<b>49.5%</b>	<b>53.5%</b>	<b>35.8%</b>	<b>6.7%</b>	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>79.4%</b>	<b>4.4%</b>	<b>8.6%</b>



The ten high performing sites have an average of 102 students enrolled in the 21stCCLC program who, on average, were present in the after school program for 91.1 days in the 2010-2011 school year.

The nine low performing sites have an average of 79 students enrolled in the 21stCCLC program who, on average, were present 83.8 days in the 2010-2011 school year.

	Average Number of Students	Average Days Student Present
High Performing	102	91.1
Low Performing	79	83.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>88.1</b>



## DISCUSSION

The high performing sites, on average, had more than two times as many of the measured variables operating in the programs than did the low performing sites (4.7 versus 2). All of the high performing sites provided three of the variables (Direct Support Provided to Students, Staff from Area, and Guidance or Mentoring Provided) and 80% were Strongly Connected to Community, a fourth variable.. None of these variables were consistently present in more than



50% of the low performing sites. These findings suggest that the seven variables associated with the more successful programs are worthy of further refinement and examination.

In addition to the seven study variables, there were other differences between the high-performing and low-performing sites on several dimensions, such as location, student demographics, and type of organization that is operating the program.

The feeder schools for the low performing sites were more likely to be located in a rural setting (60% versus 0% of the high performing sites). The low performing sites were, on the average, majority White, while the high performing sites were majority Black.

While poverty is consistently high among students in both high and low performing sites, low performing sites had somewhat greater poverty rates (82%) than did the high-performing ones (77.5%). Moreover, high performing sites had slightly higher rates of students with Limited English Proficiency (6.2% vs. 2%) and Special Needs (10.4% vs. 7.3%) than did the low-performing sites.

Thirty percent of the high performing sites were operated by (non-charter) public schools, while 55.6% of the low performing sites were operated by (non-charter) public schools. The high performing sites had, on the average, more students enrolled in the afterschool program than did the low performing sites. Students in the high performing sites attended the program only slightly more often than did students in the lower performing sites..

## **CONCLUSIONS**

1. It appears that at least four of the variables (Direct Support Provided to Students, Staff from Area, Guidance or Mentoring Provided and Strongly Connected to Community) are observed more often in high performing 21stCCLC elementary afterschool programs than in low performing ones.
2. In South Carolina, there may be a connection between high performance and a program being located in a non-rural setting.
3. The type of organization that operates a program may also be a factor that contributes to program success.
4. The variables need to be further refined and tested in a wider sample of programs.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. It is recommended that further study be conducted on the seven program variables with a larger sample of programs and a more refined instrument.