

21st Century Community Learning Centers: Texas Afterschool Centers on Education

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Executive Summary

to share with the Texas ACE community more broadly.² Addressing this objective largely relied on qualitative and quantitative data collected from centers included in the site visit samples.

- x **Objective 6.** *Provide support and assistance to Texas ACE grantees and centers on how to undertake effective and meaningful local evaluation activities.* This part of the evaluation involved the design and implementation of the Local Evaluation Support Initiative (LESI), which involved guiding a sample of centers through an intentional process of local evaluation design and implementation.³

This report primarily addresses evaluation Objectives 2–6, with particular attention given to the identification of center characteristics and approaches found to be positively associated with Texas ACE attendance and school-related outcomes. Such practices and approaches may warrant consideration on the part of ACE grantees in terms of how to best design and deliver Texas ACE programming.

Evaluation Questions

The content of this report focuses on answering the following set of evaluation questions:

Chapter 2

- x To what extent were the sampled Texas ACE centers representative of all active centers during the programming period in question?

Chapter 3

- x What characteristics were found to be significantly related to levels of Texas ACE program attendance among centers represented in the site visit samples?⁴
- x How are students' experiences in Texas ACE programs related to program attendance?
- x What characteristics were found to be significantly related to positive center-level effects among centers represented in the site visit samples?

Chapter 4

- x What effect does the program have on students attending Texas ACE programming for 60 days or more at centers with high adoption of Assessing Afterschool Program Practices Observation Tool (APT-O) mathematics practices relative to similar students not participating in programming or participating for less than 30 days?
- x What effect does the program have on students attending Texas ACE programming for 60 days or more at centers with high adoption of practices that employ active forms of learning relative to similar students not participating in programming or participating for less than 30 days?

Chapter 5

- x What is the status of efforts to support the local evaluation efforts of Texas ACE grantees?

² Objective 5 specifically refers to best practice briefs based on various data gathered during data collection and from information gleaned while working with Texas ACE programs through the LESI. The briefs are stand-alone, separate handouts that are not part of the current evaluation report but are cited in this report summary to emphasize their role as part of a broad strategy to inform centers of lessons learned during the evaluation years in question.

³ These six objectives summarize those specified in TEA's Request for Proposals: Evaluation of the Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program (released in 2016).

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Figure ES.1. Center Characteristics Found to B

School-Related Outcomes

To examine how center characteristics were related to school-related outcomes, steps were first taken to calculate center-level effects in relation to the following school-related outcomes:

- x Performance on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)-Mathematics assessment
- x Performance on the STAAR-Reading assessment
- x Percentage of school days attended
- x Number of disciplinary incidents

To calculate center-level effects, propensity score matching (PSM) was used to match Texas ACE program participants with similar nonparticipants at the center level. That is, for each center, students were matched to non-attending students who were enrolled in the school or schools affiliated with the center. This approach allowed the evaluation team to explore more carefully how participation in Texas ACE may be related to school-related outcomes by controlling for preexisting differences between students that would otherwise influence analysis results. This process resulted in each center having a specific effect estimate of how Texas ACE participation was associated with school-related outcomes. It is important to note that this approach to calculating center-level effects does not control for some student characteristics such as student interest or motivation to attend programming or certain family characteristics like parent involvement. In this sense, there may be some key differences between students attending programming and those who opted not to attend that are not controlled for in these models, which could be biasing the results.

Two sets of center-level effects were calculated. For one set, students attending the program for 60 days or more during the school year in question were matched with students attending the same schools served by the center but not participating in the program. For the second set of analyses, students attending Texas ACE for 60 days or more in both the current and preceding school year were matched with nonparticipating students.

Center-level characteristics found to be significantly and positively associated with a given school-related outcome are outlined in Figure ES.2. The results highlighted in Figure ES.2 involve both significant and moderately significant findings. If a given characteristic was positively associated with the school-related outcome after 1 year of participation in Texas ACE programming for 60 days or more (1 year) and/or 2 years of participation at this level (2 years), it is noted in parentheses. It is important to note that the analyses resulting in these findings were correlational and descriptive and should not be interpreted as a given characteristic causing a school-related outcome.

Almost all of the variables in Figures ES.1 and ES.2 have a basis in the youth development and afterschool literature as being associated with positive youth outcomes and/or have some representation in the Texas ACE Blueprint. As a result, although the findings highlighted in this chapter are correlational and descriptive, there still may be some value in Texas ACE programs considering these practices, processes, youth experiences, and intermediate outcomes in the design and delivery of Texas ACE programming.

Figure ES.2. Center Characteristics Found to Be Significantly and Positively Associated with School-Related Outcomes

STAAR-Reading	STAAR-Mathematics	School-Day Attendance	Disciplinary Incidents
<p>Content-Specific Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • APT-O Writing Practices (2 years) • APT-O Writing Practices – Youth-based (2 years) • APT-O Mathematics Practices (2 years) • APT-O Mathematics Communication and Reasoning Practices – Youth-based (2 years) <p>Program Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build social and emotional learning skills (1 year, 2 years) <p>Data Use and Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Periodic review of program data (2 years) • Obtaining youth input on programming (1 year) <p>Advisory Board Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning input (2 years) <p>Target Population</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broader target population (2 years) <p>Activity Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in small groups (1 year) <p>Youth Experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance (2 years) 	<p>Process Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PQA Interaction (1 year) <p>Content-Specific Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • APT-O Mathematics Practices (2 years) <p>Data Use and Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtaining youth input on Programming (1 year) <p>Activity Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working alone on tasks (1 year) <p>Youth-Reported Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With my confidence (2 years) 	<p>Process Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PQA Supportive Environment (1 year) <p>Content-Specific Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • APT-O Writing Practices (1 year) • APT-O Writing Practices – Youth-based (1 year) <p>Activity Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning future activities (1 year) • Exploration and discovery (1 year) <p>Youth Experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive perceptions of other 	

Local Evaluation Plans helped Texas ACE programs make program improvements. Also, the feedback process provided to programs on logic models and evaluation plans by LESI liaisons was noted as particularly useful. Challenges with the process included finding time to organize evaluation teams around busy schedules.

Quality Assessment Trainings were noted as some of the most significant successes as Texas ACE programs gained new ideas from trainings and progressed toward quality assessment goals. Centers noted challenges implementing a quality assessment process, including conducting multiple observations when a variety of activities are offered.

Action Planning was highlighted by some participants for helping to facilitate collaboration better between school-day and Texas ACE staff. However, some Texas ACE programs noted that challenges included lack of awareness among new [school-day] teachers' understanding of ACE and how students could be identified and connected to the program.

Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic in early spring 2020 led to school closures and a move toward virtual learning, which also led to less frequent contact between LESI liaisons and Texas ACE participants. Survey participants reported general challenges with the transition to virtual learning and being disconnected from staff, which affected communication, and LESI liaisons also saw a decrease in coaching contacts in the spring of 2020.

Overall Value of Participation in LESI was noted by survey participants or noted by those in contact with

have some representation in the Texas ACE Blueprint, particularly in sections related to strategic planning, community engagement, and internal quality assurance.


- x Portions of both the PQA and APT-O were found to be positively associated with Texas ACE program attendance and school-related outcomes. Use of these types of observation-based instruments are representative of the internal quality assurance processes described in the Texas ACE Blueprint, as



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