

PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP IN 21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 5 JUNE 30, 2007

21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLCs), whether located at schools or in community agencies, offer new expanded opportunities for school improvement, especially as new working relationships with students, educators, school and district administrators, parents/guardians, health and social service providers, local businesses, colleges and universities, and others are formulated. Oftentimes the resources and opportunities afforded by 21st CCLCs, however, remain untapped and underutilized. Stronger, more strategic partnerships between 21st CCLCs and schools are needed that maximize 21st CCLCs' contributions to overall school improvement. The role of the principal within these new school-family-community partnership agendas is critical to these expanded school improvement designs.

WHAT DOES RESEARCH TELL US ABOUT PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS?

A plethora of educational research can be found related to the importance of the principal role both within the school and the community. In fact, the quality of a school's educational program is heavily reliant on the principal and his/her leadership abilities (e.g. Barth, 1990). According to Simmons (2006), to ensure the success of school systems, it is necessary that principals have the following attributes: the skills to both manage and lead; the capacity to promote the success of all students; the knowledge of emerging research findings, technological skills, and policies; and the ability to identify critical problems and resolve them appropriately.

Principals today must also balance competing stakeholder interests while operating under pressures related to standards-based reforms and new accountabilities (Simmons, 2006). To do so, they must have both the knowledge and the skills to promote success by collaborating with the school-community in the creation of a collective shared vision; fostering school cultures that are conducive to student learning; effectively and efficiently managing the operations and resources of the school; and mobilizing school- and community-based resources in support of optimal school success (Chirichello, 2001). Indeed, the role of the principal is obviously complex and requires a vast array of competencies.

In schools involved with 21st CCLCs, the role of the principal is increasingly multidimensional. A recent book published by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP, 2006) highlights six key strategies that principals should be able to accomplish when working with after-school programs. Lessons learned here are generalizable to 21st CCLCs and their school-family-community partnership priorities. Specifically, NAESP proposes that principals need to be able to:

- Articulate the importance of high quality after-school programming to various stakeholders in the school and outside community;
- Collaborate with program site directors to ensure appropriate and efficient management of program resources;
- Foster linkages between school day learning and after-school learning;
- work together with program staff in the process of evaluation; and
- Utilize their credibility to advocate for continued funding and increased access to out-of-school time supports for all children.

PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP WITHIN 21ST CCLCs

Given the importance and complexity of the principal role, the Ohio State University's College of Social Work and the Ohio Department of Education's Office of Students, Families, and Communities together designed a four-part professional development series for principals involved in Ohio 21st CCLCs. This series, titled the *Principal Leadership Seminar* (PLS), focused on developing principals' competencies related to the effective utilization of their 21st CCLCs to help meet overall school improvement goals. The PLS was piloted during the 2006-2007 academic year with a cohort of 8 principals. Facilitation was done by an interdisciplinary team of professionals comprised of a past principal, 21st CCLCs state leadership, and higher education faculty from educational leadership and social work.

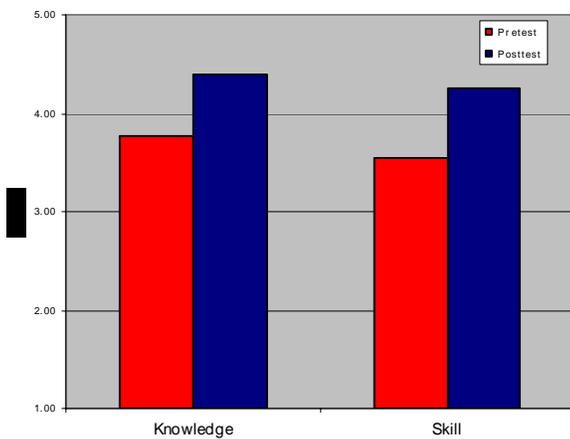
The OSU College of Social Work partners with the Ohio Department of Education to provide technical assistance and support to 21st CCLCs grantees in Ohio. For more information and/or for references cited in this brief, please contact Dawn Anderson-Butcher; anderson-butcher.1@osu.edu and/or Diane Schneider-Farmer; diane.schneider-farmer@ode.state.oh.us.

21ST CCLCs PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP SEMINAR SERIES

The PLS emphasized the following content components:

Collaborative, Adaptive, and Distributed Leadership	Sustainability Strategies and Resources	Expanded School Improvement Planning, Tools, and Strategies
<p>Strategies focused on fostering new and strengthened relationships among principals, educators, parents/guardians, 21st CCLCs staff, students, and other community partners. It also involved the development of new structures (e.g., teams, sub-groups) designed to distribute power, authority, and responsibilities so that principals aren't responsible for everything and can rely on others to lead various school improvement priorities. Emphasis also was placed on the creation of clear roles and responsibilities among key leaders central to the school and the overall 21st CCLCs agenda.</p>	<p>Principals, together with their 21st CCLCs site coordinators, explored ways in which they might better align current and potential school- and community-based resources in support of student learning and healthy development. Strategies designed to foster integration and coordination were explored, as well as opportunities for the braiding and blending of funding and related resources were discussed.</p>	<p>Stress was placed on the value of complementing traditional standards-based reform efforts with strategies that target the other factors outside of the school day that influence student achievement and school success (i.e., non-academic barriers). Priorities focused on the role of the 21st CCLCs in providing critical intervention supports for students that address BOTH academic and non-academic barriers to learning and development.</p>

These content priorities were developed to aid principals in obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary to allow them to focus and coordinate resources, programs, and processes not only within their 21st CCLCs, but across their entire school community. In other words, principals gained new skills that allowed them to strengthen their roles as instructional leaders, especially as they adopted more collaborative leadership styles that facilitated the development and implementation of academically-focused, coordinated efforts among the 21st CCLCs and their schools. Initial evaluation findings indicate that principal participants gained new knowledge and skills through their involvement in the PLS. With these new competencies also came enhanced perceptions related to the value of 21st CCLCs and related collaborative partnership agendas (see tables below).



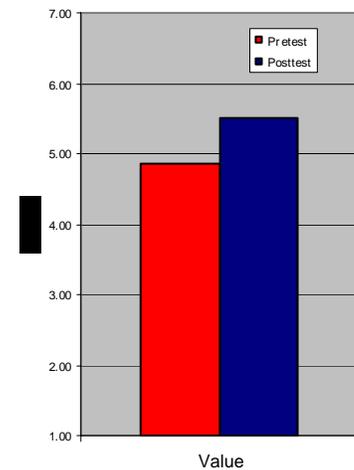
Quotes from Participants

The notion of collaborative, adaptive district leadership has accelerated our practice.

(I learned there is a difference) between doing and pulling others along for buy-in versus doing things with group ideas and investment.

Participation helped accomplish the goal of collaboration and the direction of the 21st CCLCs in our school.

I learned how to move outside the walls of the building for school support.



WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Principal leadership is critical for maximizing connections between 21st CCLCs and the schools they serve. As new competencies are developed among principals, they are then able to facilitate new, expanded collaborative leadership structures that allow for the better integration of school priorities with the out-of-school time agenda. Professional development opportunities such as the PLS are instrumental to building these new capabilities. Ultimately, the school benefits as its priorities are better aligned with the 21st CCLCs agenda; and the 21st CCLCs' overall potential for contributing to school outcomes is maximized as stronger, more strategic linkages are created.