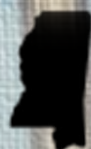


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Review of CCLC Afterschool Programs

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Executive Summary

Many taxpayer-funded federal and state programs exist to help families find, afford, and enroll their children in childcare and afterschool care. These programs are intended to offer a variety of services including basic childcare for young children and afterschool/summer enrichment programs for school-aged children. The Mississippi Office of the State Auditor (OSA) has examined these programs, and this is the second of a series of reports detailing how effectively these programs operated in Mississippi during Federal Fiscal Year 2024 (FFY 2024).

The first report highlighted the Mississippi Department of Human Services' (MDHS) failure to fully monitor Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) afterschool grants and collect measurable outcome data to ensure TANF-funded afterschool care programs provided value to taxpayers. OSA analysts recommended MDHS appropriately monitor nonprofits receiving afterschool grant funding and also begin collecting and assessing metrics to ensure grant requirements are met. These changes will help ensure both taxpayers and beneficiaries receive value from program spending.

In this report, analysts evaluated Mississippi's use of the Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) grant, which is federally funded and awarded to states each year.¹ In Mississippi, the grant is administered by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) and then allocated to public and private organizations that applied and were approved for funding by MDE. Much like TANF afterschool programs, CCLC programs are intended to help students in low-performing, high-poverty public schools.² Despite MDE admitting to being three years behind on publishing mandatory evaluations of the CCLC program on behalf of the federal government, OSA was able to analyze the program and make the following recommendations to ensure the programs deliver their stated goals.

Recommendations:

- *OSA recommends MDE improve its data collection to monitor program attendance and measure the extent of student growth.*
- *OSA recommends MDE establish consistent requirements for external evaluations and ensure all programs use independent monitors.*
- *OSA recommends MDE publish its three-year overdue federal evaluations.*

¹ See [resource](#).

² Students must be enrolled in public school.

Analysis

Program Design

In Mississippi, 45 different organizations operating 136 centers obtained CCLC funding in FFY 2024.³ Of these, 22 were operated by local school districts, 21 by nonprofits, and two by other types of organizations.⁴ Program funds are intended to provide academic enrichment for school-aged children in low-performing schools with demonstrated academic need, and priority is given to students recommended for participation by school staff.⁵ Programming must include math and English language arts curriculum and provide literacy and other educational services to the families of participating children.⁶ Additional activities include initiatives to encourage school attendance and reduce suspensions, drug and violence prevention programs, STEAM activities, and college and career readiness programs.

Approximately 9,500 Mississippi children participated in CCLC afterschool programs during FFY 2024. This report evaluates 16 school districts and 17 nonprofits MDE data show reported both active participants and spending during FFY 2024.⁷

Funding

The MDE requires organizations to submit applications to receive CCLC funding, and successful applicants receive subgrant funding over four years. In FFY 2024, Mississippi's 45 programs were budgeted to receive approximately \$16 million (an average of just over \$300,000 per program).⁸ The 33 school districts and nonprofit organizations analyzed in this report were budgeted to receive approximately \$11.2 million (an average of \$340,000 for each program). Figure 1 below shows budgeted CCLC funding by organization type.⁹

Figure 1		
Organization Type	Participants	Budgeted Funding (%)
School Districts	7,290	\$5.65 Million (50.4%)
Nonprofits	2,244	\$5.56 Million (49.6%)

³ Unless otherwise noted, all data were provided by MDE to OSA analysts.

⁴ The "other" organizations were a public university and a for-profit daycare. Both were excluded from analysis.

⁵ See [resource](#).

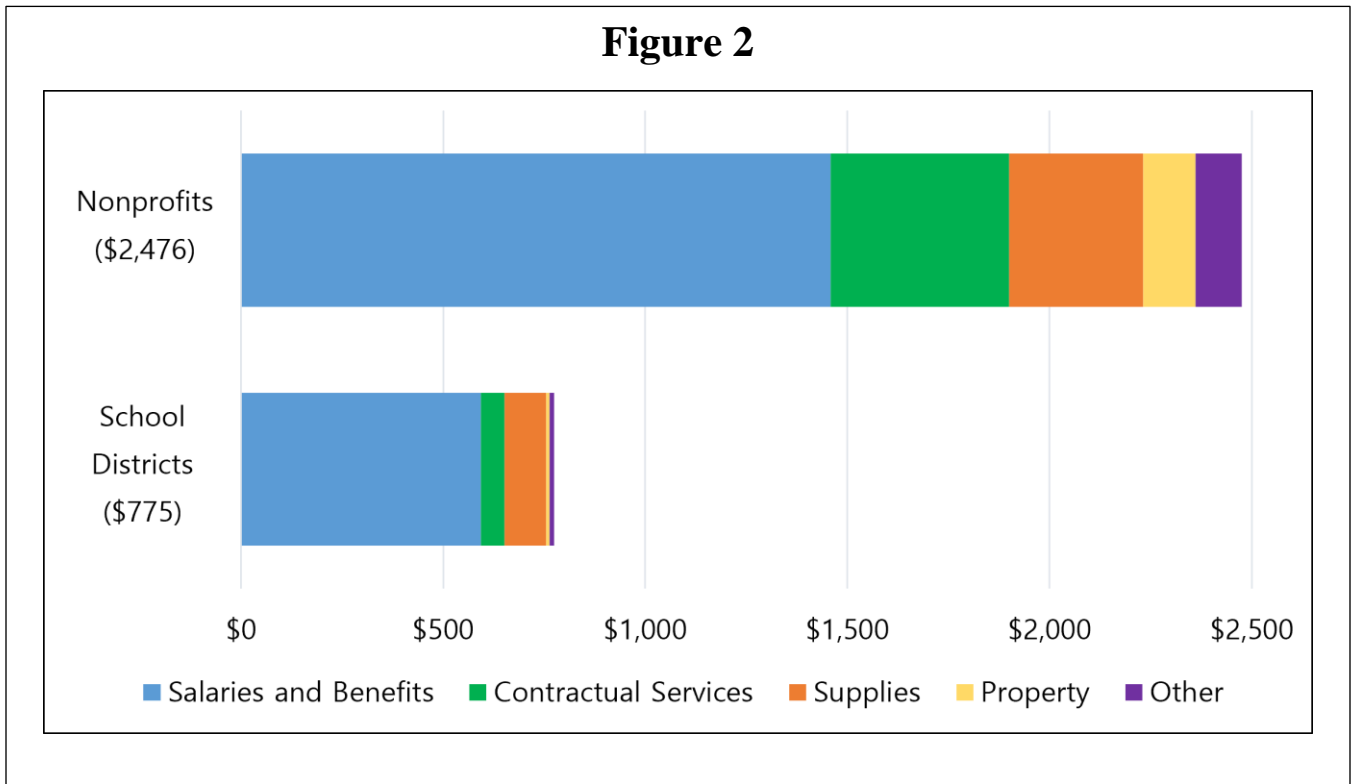
⁶ See [resource](#).

⁷ Organizations reporting no participants were excluded from analysis.

⁸ See [resource](#).

⁹ Budgeted numbers were chosen over spending due to variances between Grant Year and School Year.

Figure 2 shows the amount budgeted per participant by budget category and program type.^{10, 11} The figure shows MDE approved over 300% more per-participant funding for nonprofit programs than those operated by school districts. Even when accounting for program length, nonprofits were still awarded approximately 300% more funding than school districts.



Attendance

Unlike MDHS’s TANF afterschool programs, MDE maintained attendance data absent of obvious errors.¹² However, CCLC attendance data provided only slightly more analytical value than TANF participant data. For example, while TANF participant data recorded participation for children who attended once during the entire program, CCLC data grouped participant attendance in multi-day and multi-hour increments.¹³ OSA analysts chose to evaluate attendance data based on days instead of hours.¹⁴ MDE data show, for year-long CCLC programs, a participant could have a 50% absence rate yet still be included in the same “attendance bucket” as someone with perfect attendance. Likewise, a student who attended only one day of a month-long program would have the same reported attendance

¹⁰ Data from MDE used for average.

¹¹ Organizations with no participants listed in MDE data were excluded.

¹² See [report](#).

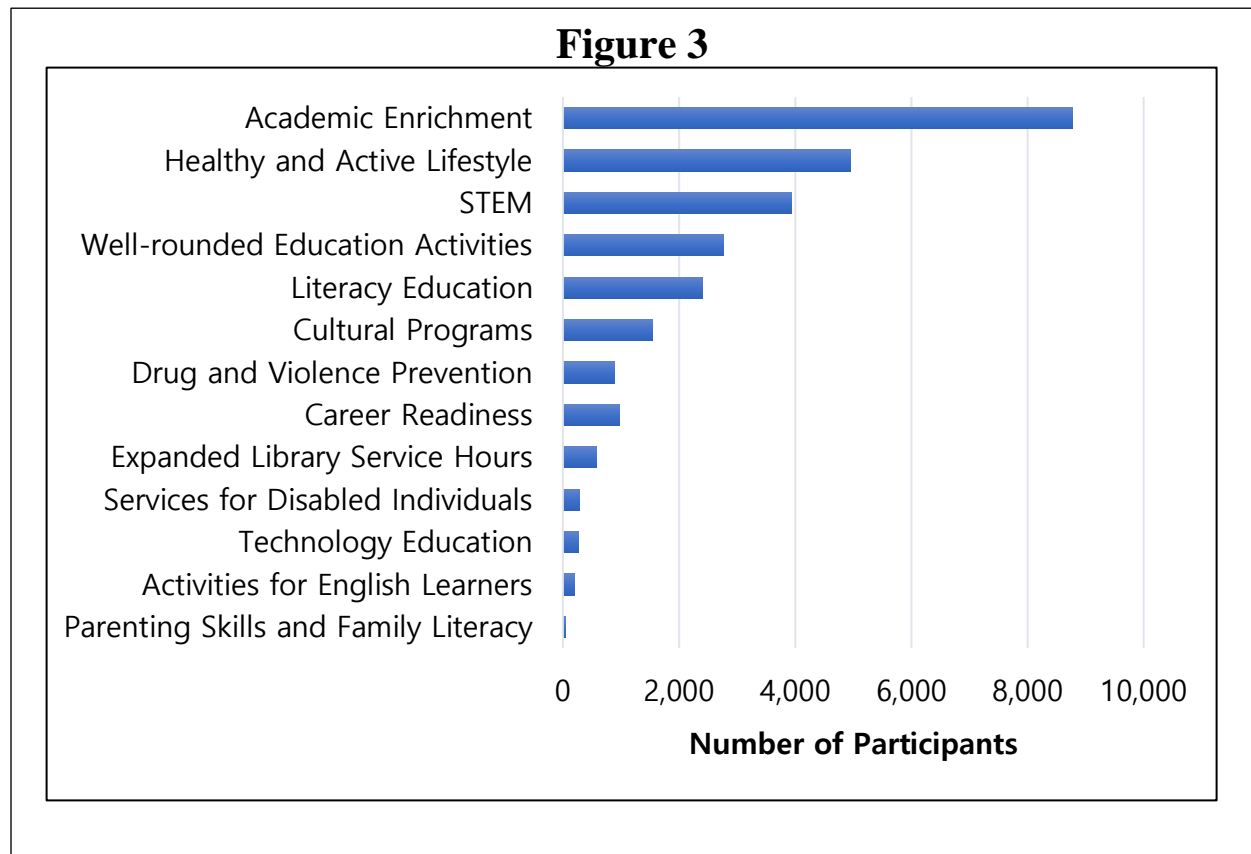
¹³ Data from MDE provided attendance buckets of 1-29, 30-59, 60-89, & 90+ days and <15, 15-44, 45-89, 90-179, 180-269, & 270+ hours.

¹⁴ Previous federal [reports](#) used days to measure attendance. Current federal [guidelines](#) use hours.

rate as a participant with perfect attendance.¹⁵ **Analysis shows approximately 75% of CCLC participants attended 50% or less of planned days of programming.**¹⁶ If more meaningful attendance data were available, analysts expect the attendance rate would decline further.¹⁷

Each participant was enrolled in a variety of activities in addition to academic enrichment that must align with the categories provided by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE).¹⁸

Figure 3 below shows program enrollment by activity.^{19,20}



¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ “Planned days” do not account for limited site/program closures due to extenuating circumstances.

¹⁷ Except for participants attending “90+ days,” analysts assumed participants attended the maximum number of days in each attendance bucket. See note.¹³ For participants attending “90+ days,” analysts assumed each attended at least 50% of planned days of programming.

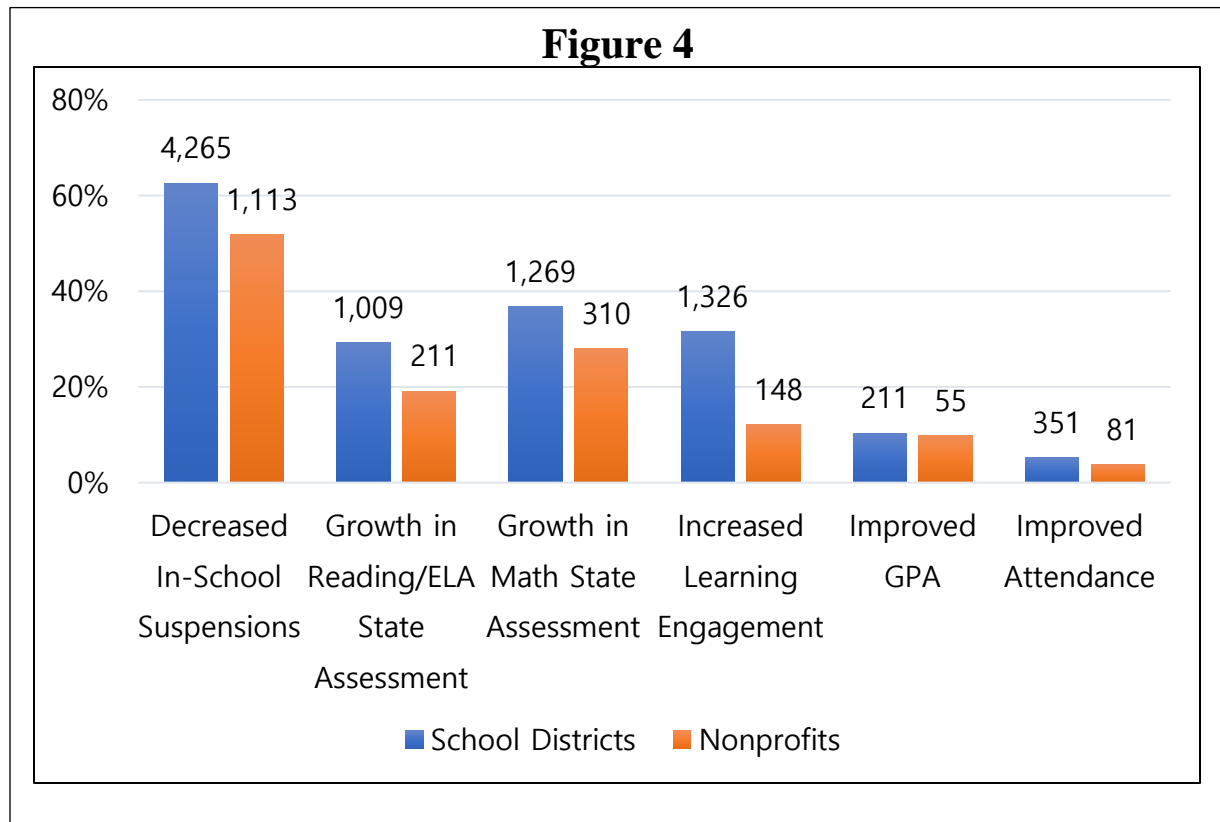
¹⁸ See [resource](#).

¹⁹ Participants may enroll in multiple activities simultaneously. Some activities were restricted by grade level.

²⁰ One activity category with zero participants was excluded.

Effectiveness

OSA analysts compared subgrantees using the Government Performance Results Act (GPRA) indicators established by the USDE.²¹ These indicators are measured through an individual's participation in the activities offered at centers. Figure 4 below compares the number of participants in each organization type who showed growth across each indicator.^{22, 23} The figure shows 63% of school district-operated program participants demonstrated a decrease in in-school suspensions but only 4% of nonprofit-operated program participants demonstrated improved school attendance.



While this apparent growth is encouraging, the data reflects even minimal individual improvement as “growth.” For example, MDE data would show a student who was absent or suspended 19 times in one year but only 18 times the next showed improvement, and therefore would be included in the chart above.²⁴ OSA analysts noted these minimal improvements do not prove true program effectiveness and recommend MDE bolster its data collection to better measure the extent to which GPRA indicators are improved.

²¹ See [resource](#).

²² Pre-K and Kindergarten participants were not evaluated for GPRA indicators.

²³ “Decreased In-School Suspensions” and “Improved Attendance” was measured for all students. “Growth in Reading/ELA and Math” was measured for 4th-8th grade participants, “Increased Learning Engagement” was measured for 1st-5th grade participants. “Improved GPA” was measured for 7th-8th and 10th-12th grade participants.

²⁴ See [resource](#). “Growth” means a year-over-year 5% positive change in attendance or in-school suspensions, increased teacher-reported learning engagement, at least 0.2 GPA improvement, or reading/ELA/math growth as measured by the [MDE Public School Accountability Standards](#). Figure 4 shows students meeting these threshold(s).

Oversight and Evaluation

The MDE provides oversight for how CCLC subgrantees operate and spend subgrant money.²⁵ While operating a CCLC program, subgrantees are required to collect and submit performance and attendance data through the 21 Annual Performance Report Data Collection System (21APR), which is used by the USDE and MDE. This data aligns with GPRA indicators and is used to evaluate CCLC program effectiveness.²⁶ Federal guidance requires MDE to use these data to prepare an annual statewide program evaluation.²⁷ Mississippi has failed to publish this mandatory evaluation since November 2022. MDE staff stated they have yet to secure an outside contractor to conduct this evaluation, which is currently almost three years overdue.²⁸ **Analysts recommend MDE take the necessary steps to publish the overdue evaluations mandated by the federal government.**

As part of operating a CCLC program, individual subgrantees must also have their programs evaluated. For example, subgrant terms require them to develop an evaluation plan to show whether programming actually provides value to participants and taxpayers. Intended to help guide program operations, these evaluation plans must account for collecting data which, when evaluated, would show whether the academic needs of participating students were met.²⁹ Evaluation plans culminate with a report compiled by an external evaluator.³⁰

Upon review, analysts determined the quality of each external evaluation report varied. For example, some external evaluations were filled with spelling and grammar errors while others provided detailed academic assessment data and actionable recommendations. These differences in quality and thoroughness undermine the intent of these external evaluation reports and prevent MDE employees and taxpayers alike from determining whether these programs are truly effective.

Further, OSA analysts found evidence subgrantees violated state and federal regulations by engaging external evaluators who were not independent.³¹ For example, one subgrantee contracted with an individual who worked for the nonprofit arm of the organization being evaluated. This situation created a clear conflict of interest and directly contradicts the requirement for an **external** evaluator. **Analysts recommend MDE require external evaluation reports include standard data and be conducted by approved evaluators to ensure independence.**

²⁵ USDE requires the State Education Agency in each participating state to provide oversight for the program.

²⁶ See [resource](#).

²⁷ See [resource](#).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See [resource](#).

³⁰ See note.⁶ ([FY 24 RFP section 2-2.5-J](#))

³¹ See [resource](#).

Conclusion

Unlike TANF afterschool care programs, CCLC-funded programs do collect attendance data and measure whether participants improve academically. However, the extent to which the CCLC program does either is insufficient for analysts to confirm it is an effective program. This is due in part to its high projected absence rates and a lack of data showing the extent to which participants improve academic performance. Like MDHS, MDE should improve data collection and track measurable outcomes to determine this program's effectiveness and efficiency. Further, analysts recommend MDE take steps to improve the annual reports submitted by each program and publish its backlog of mandatory federal reports currently overdue.