

Students Who Receive Special Education Services Demonstrate Growth at 21st Century Community Learning Centers in Massachusetts

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Overview

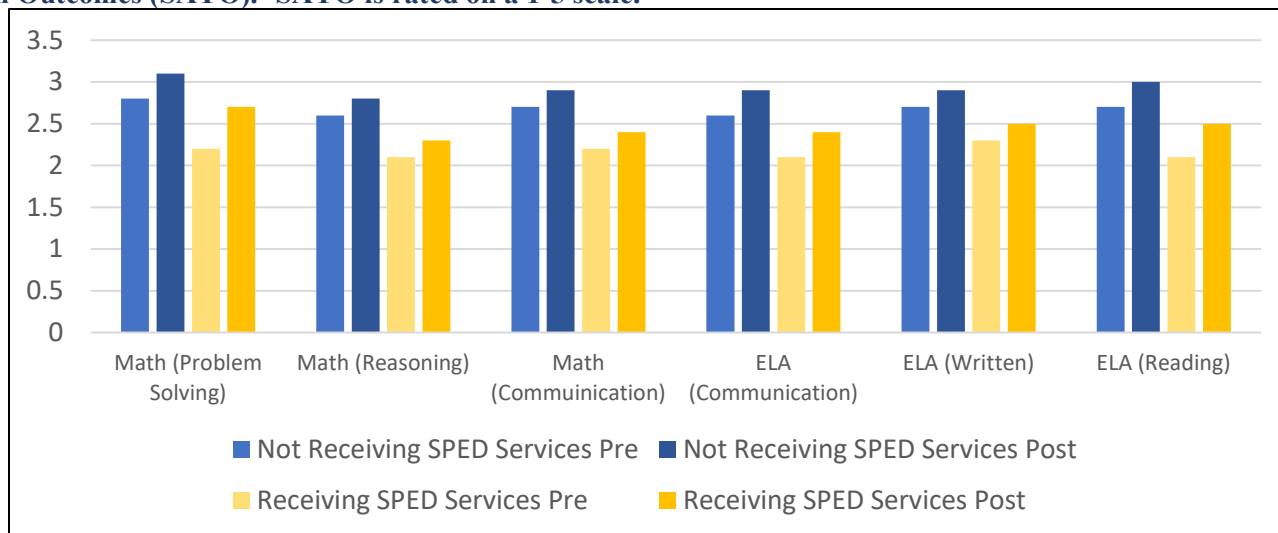
Afterschool, summer and other out-of-school time (OST) programs offer opportunities for academic enrichment and social-emotional learning outside of the school day. The 21st Century Community Learning Centers of Massachusetts demonstrate the capacity for OST to contribute meaningfully to learning and youth development in academics and beyond.¹ The Learning Centers facilitate growth in both academic and social-emotional skills among the general participant population as well as participants who receive special education services during the school day.

Academic Outcomes

OST programs like 21st Century Learning Centers provide academic enrichment as a fundamental component of their efforts to support students. It is essential to evaluate the extent these programs give all students the opportunity to develop their academic abilities. Programs aimed at improving grades and other academic outcomes vary in their efficacy in populations receiving special education services (Daley & McCarthy, 2021). In some cases, however, students in this population benefit from academic enrichment as much or more than other students (Nichols-Barrer & Haimson, 2013).

In 2023-2024, MA 21st Century Community Learning Centers participants who received special education services demonstrated comparable and often higher rates of growth compared to the rest of the participant population (Figure 1). The Centers constitute a key resource for helping to reduce the gap in academic achievement and provide opportunities for all students to succeed in math and English Language Arts (ELA).

Figure 1. 2023-24 Mean Pre/Post in Academic Outcomes as Rated by Teachers on the Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes (SAYO).² SAYO is rated on a 1-5 scale.



Social-Emotional Learning Outcomes

Social-emotional learning is a central component of in-school and out-of-school education as it has been shown to equip students with skills that serve them in their academic, professional, and personal lives (Mahoney et al., 2021). Supporting the development of these skills is especially important among students who receive special education services, as these students are at higher risk of psychosocial challenges (Brossard-Racine et al., 2012; Dix, 2011).

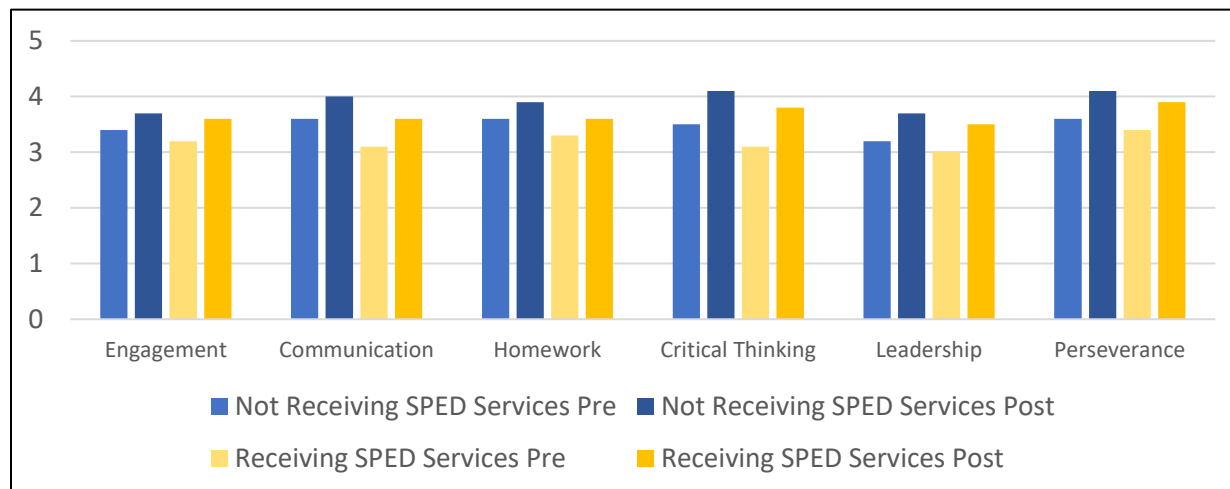
21st Century Community Learning Centers are a notable example of programming that supports growth across social-emotional learning outcomes including among students receiving special education services. During the **2023-24** school year, MA 21st Century Community Learning Center **participants who received special education services showed**

¹ <https://www.doe.mass.edu/21cclc/reports/default.html>

² <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nkF2MipsNOdjCMjnfNC0Wu5wxJcPy7iJ/view>

growth over the course of programming across measurement areas including engagement in learning, communication, homework, critical thinking, leadership, and perseverance. Growth in these areas was comparable to, and in several cases greater, than growth shown in the general participant population (Figure 2). The previous year (2022-23), youth receiving special education services showed more growth in perseverance and relations with peers as rated by OST staff compared to youth not receiving special education services. They also showed **equal or more growth in every social-emotional learning outcome as rated by teachers.**

Figure 2. 2023-24 Mean Pre/Post in Social-Emotional Learning Outcomes as Rated by Teachers on the Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes (SAYO). SAYO is rated on a 1-5 scale.



21st Century Community Learning Centers in MA offer opportunities for academic enrichment and social-emotional learning as part of their mission to support students in OST settings. Initiatives aimed at these essential aspects of youth development do not always result in positive outcomes for all students, with those receiving special education services often left behind. In the case of MA 21st Century Community Learning Centers, however, **both groups of students, those in regular education and those who received special education services during the school day, demonstrated growth in academic and social-emotional outcome areas**, suggesting that the Centers are effective in their efforts to offer transformative learning experiences for all participants.

References

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For more information, contact:

Georgia Hall, PhD
National Institute on Out-of-School Time
Wellesley College
ghall@wellesley.edu