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# FUNDING FOR EXPANDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES: THE LINCOLN EXPERIENCE

*Over its 15 year history, the Lincoln Community Learning Centers (CLC) program has been notable for its collaborative structure and diversified support. The Lincoln CLC partners deliver before- and after-school and summer programs at 25 high need elementary, middle, and high schools. Braided financial and in-kind support from multiple sectors has supported the citywide ELO process.*

## COLLABORATIVE STRUCTURE

The Lincoln Community Learning Centers (CLC) is a collaborative strategy designed to promote student learning, strengthen families and engage neighborhoods. Programming at the 25 sites is coordinated by one of **ten lead agencies** (Boys and Girls Club, Cedars Youth Services, City of Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department, Family Service, Lincoln Housing Authority, Malone Center, Nebraskans for Civic Reform, Northeast Family Center, Willard Community Center, and YMCA). The sites are operated by lead agencies whose practices are articulated in memoranda of understanding and guided by CLC goals. Lead agencies hire and supervise staff at the CLC sites. Staff salaries fit within the lead organization's salary structure. Each of the CLC sites has a full-time, 12-month school community coordinator responsible for building relationships and developing partnerships with the school, families, neighborhoods, businesses, and providers. The school community coordinator is instrumental in ensuring program quality.

**Lincoln CLC administration** is comprised of two staff who are employees of Lincoln Public Schools and consultants. They lead the CLC strategy, establish guidelines, and coordinate partnerships with systems that relate to CLCs. Program administration and coordination staff office in the community rather than at Lincoln Public Schools' (LPS) District Office. The location reflects the vision of CLCs as a community initiative with the school district as one of many partners. The CLC director works closely with the CLC Executive Team and meets weekly with LPS administrators.

The **CLC Leadership Council** meets approximately four times during the year and is an advisory council that includes Lincoln Mayor and Lincoln Public Schools Superintendent, along with representatives from lead agencies, Lincoln City Council, Lincoln Public Schools School Board, and local businesses. The **CLC Executive Team** of the Council meets more frequently for financial review and long-term planning. Its membership comprises the Lincoln Mayor, Lincoln Public Schools Superintendent, Lincoln Community Foundation President, United Way Executive Director, Foundation for Lincoln Public Schools President, and Woods Charitable Fund President.

## SUPPORT

Support for Lincoln CLC is diverse and includes cash as well as significant in-kind contributions from a wide variety of sources. Lincoln CLC has been successful in aligning its mission to those of lead agencies and LPS. Rather than being seen as an add-on, lead agencies and LPS see their participation in Lincoln CLC as an integral to their work. For example, many CLC sites play a role in school improvement strategies. All lead agencies solicit and manage support. Lincoln CLC leadership is currently evaluating software systems that would provide a common platform for all sites to track revenues and expenses, including in-kind support. Many funders have a preference for funding direct services to children, rather than program administration, at times making it difficult to obtain support for administration which sustains the infrastructure that ensures the CLC strategy is fully implemented.

Lincoln CLCs operate 12 months of the year. Over the summer, sites may combine for program effectiveness and cost efficiencies. Given that it is full day, summer programming is expensive to provide.

## CASH SUPPORT

The majority of support to ELO programs is generated through the efforts of the lead agencies. Their financial costs to operate ELO programs include personnel costs, program supplies, professional development and administrative costs. Lincoln CLC does not ask lead agencies to provide an accounting of their own financial underwriting that supports their ELOs, but it is generally understood that all lead agencies provide financial support to their programs and promote them as important services they deliver. Financial revenues to the lead agencies to support these costs come from numerous sources including federal funds, philanthropic grants, and parent fees.

### Federal Funds

As is the case of most of Nebraska's CLCs, major funding has come from the federal **21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers** formula grant administered as a competitive grant by the Nebraska Department of Education. All 25 CLC sites receive some portion of 21<sup>st</sup> Century funds. Currently, Lincoln CLC is directing all its 21<sup>st</sup> Century funds for programming at the 25 sites and none is being used for the program administration. 21<sup>st</sup> Century funds do not begin to approach the full cost of Lincoln CLC. Indeed, the entire state's allocation for 2013 was only approximately \$5.5 million, half of what would be needed for full funding (\$12 million) (Afterschool Alliance, 2014). A majority of the Lincoln Public Schools that host CLCs use **Title I** funds<sup>1</sup> to support CLC operations. Schools use Title I funds a variety of ways, including support for the school community coordinator position, programming, family engagement, and mental health services.

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<sup>1</sup> Title 1 funds are federal education funds available through Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965) as amended by No Child Left Behind. Title 1 funds may be used to support a broad spectrum of student intervention products and services including tutoring and expanded learning time. Schools receive Title I funds based on the proportion of low-income students they serve.

Food for children participating in Lincoln CLCs is paid for through the **USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program**. Lincoln Public Schools Nutrition Services files the forms required by USDA. At most locations, food includes breakfast and afternoon snack. One middle school also serves supper.

#### Philanthropic Funds

Local and national philanthropies have provided funding for Lincoln CLCs. The **Lincoln Community Foundation** provided initial funding for piloting the first four CLC sites in 1999. Since then the Foundation has continued to provide funding and intermediary support to the CLCs. The **Foundation for Lincoln Public Schools, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Partnership for Healthy Lincoln, Sherwood Foundation, United Way of Lincoln/Lancaster County, and Woods Charitable Fund**, along with other foundations have provided ongoing support over many years. One sign of the supportive relationship that CLC has developed with local foundations is the practice that foundations contact CLC leadership when they receive a grant proposal that asserts a connection with CLCs or is related to before- after-school, or summer programming.

#### Parents

Nearly all the Lincoln CLC sites charge **fees to parents**, and those that do have sliding fee scales or need-based scholarships. This is aligned with other ELOs across the nation: Although programs serving more affluent families are often able to rely solely on parent fees; programs that serve low-income children cannot rely on parent fees alone, since parents may be unable to cover the full cost of care (Halpern, Deich, & Cohen, 2000).

## IN-KIND SUPPORT

In-kind (non-cash) support is crucial for Lincoln CLC. In some cases, in-kind support reduces the cash support that would otherwise be required. In other cases, in-kind support provides improved services or enhanced opportunities that would otherwise not be possible. Similarly to cash support, it is widely understood that each of the ten lead **agencies provides in-kind support** to operate their sites. Two additional significant sources of in-kind support are Lincoln Public Schools and other local organizations.

#### Lincoln Public Schools

Lincoln Public Schools provide in-kind support to Lincoln CLC sites in a variety of ways including:

- Use of school space to operate the sites
- Provision of LPS email account for the school community coordinator
- Use of LPS radio systems
- Inclusion in LPS professional development opportunities
- Access to LPS transportation for students (e.g., late activities bus)

#### Local Organizations

Many, many local organizations provide in-kind support to Lincoln CLC. In the majority of cases, the support comes in the form of **enhanced programming opportunities**. For example, employees from a local information technology business help students learn computer programming at three sites. Programming is provided by partners as diverse as associations, businesses, the faith community, governmental entities, institutions of higher education, not-for-profit organizations, and philanthropies. In a recent report about the Lincoln CLC, 71 organizations were listed as partners (Coalition for Community Schools, 2009).

## STRUCTURE AND SUPPORT HAVE CHANGED OVER THE YEARS

Lincoln CLC has evolved since its beginning in 1999. When Lincoln CLC began, some schools had multiple organizations offering before- and after-school programs at the same school. Lincoln CLC was key in streamlining the delivery of services at these schools.

Lincoln CLC leaders believe that the collaborative effort has improved programming for students a variety of ways:

- A greater number of sites serving many more students;
- Enhanced overall quality;
- A greater variety of opportunities for students; and
- Increased academic performance.

When Lincoln CLC started, it received 21<sup>st</sup> Century funding directly from the federal government. Now all 21<sup>st</sup> Century funding is administered, in Nebraska, by the Nebraska Department of Education. Current policies place limits on the length of time that sites may receive 21<sup>st</sup> Century funds; the philosophy is that federal funding will be replaced by local resources.

Locally, many philanthropic organizations have moved from funding programs to funding outcomes. Lincoln CLC's work fits well within outcome-focused funding: A recent national survey of funders of out of school programs suggests that grant makers' top goals for their investments are: 1) Improved academic achievement (84%), 2) Increased student engagement (78%), 3) Positive youth development (75%), and 4) 21<sup>st</sup> century skill building (70%) (Traphagen, 2014).

## LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

As leaders from Lincoln CLC look to the future, they have identified several emerging opportunities and challenges:

- In Nebraska, only about 6% of children eligible to participate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century programs are able to do so because of limitations in funding, indicating there are opportunities to reach more children (Afterschool Alliance, 2014).
- Greater education about the benefits of CLCs is needed in the community at large. There are still many residents who do not understand how CLCs contribute to important educational and community goals.
- New approaches to reaching parents are needed to ensure that every child has the opportunity to have a safe, fun, and educational environment during out of school hours. Parents with children at the Lincoln CLC sites should know that the CLC site is available to them, what financial assistance is available, and the benefits to children who participate.
- Over the past two decades, early childhood educators have made great strides in professionalizing their work. This type of professionalization is needed for school age care providers. Professionalization may mean more development opportunities, standardized requirements and credentialing, and greater pay.
- Out of school programs across the United States are struggling with diminished budgets and increased demand. Programs serving low-income populations are facing the greatest challenges. Funding sustainability and providing services to all children who would benefit continue to be challenges. In the near future, for example, it is likely that 21<sup>st</sup> Century funds will no longer be available to the sites that have been in operation the longest.

## CONCLUSION

Lincoln CLC has created a structure and web of support that have helped it grow from four sites to 25 over the past 15 years. Lincoln CLCs' strength has been the collaborative partnerships and its ability to flexibly respond to changing funding opportunities. Although there are challenges and opportunities in its future, Lincoln CLC is positioned to continue to support partners to provide safe, fun, learning environments for Lincoln's children.

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