FOCUS Nita M. Lowey 21st CCLC

2024 – 2025 Final Local Evaluation Report

Grant Information
Funding Cohort: 20
Sites: Lincoln Elementary School
Sussex Avenue School

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I. Overview

FOCUS Center for Community Development, Inc., Newark's pioneer center for community progress, has served the city and its residents since 1967, marking nearly six decades of continuous community impact. A financially responsible, community-based organization, FOCUS has long provided outlets for leadership, education, and self-actualization for Newark residents of all ages. Over the years, the organization has offered a wide range of services — from senior support and family assistance to educational and vocational training for youth and adults. Its work reflects a steadfast commitment to improving the social, economic, and educational well-being of Newark's families, particularly those from historically underserved backgrounds.

The FOCUS 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program continues that legacy by providing structured academic enrichment, social-emotional learning (SEL), and family engagement opportunities for students in grades 3–8. Operating across two active sites — Lincoln Elementary and Sussex Avenue Schools — the program offers high-quality afterschool and summer learning experiences designed to enhance academic performance, build life skills, and strengthen family connections.

During the 2024–2025 program year, students continued to benefit from a wide range of personal enrichment and cultural experiences both on-site and off-site, designed to extend learning beyond the classroom. Site coordinators and staff organized field trips, workshops, and community-based learning activities that fostered creativity, collaboration, and exposure to new ideas. Teachers and enrichment instructors guided students through discussions and reflection activities before and after each experience to deepen understanding and connect learning to personal growth. Students expressed their insights through creative outlets — including essays, poetry, art, and digital media — showcased during end-of-year celebrations. The program also continued to emphasize wellness and physical activity through SPARK, Kid-Fit, and Fun4Kids curricula, supporting students' physical health and social-emotional well-being.

Throughout the year, both sites also prioritized in-house professional development to strengthen instructional quality, promote team collaboration, and sustain morale during a period of administrative transition. Site coordinators facilitated regular staff development sessions focused on classroom management, student engagement, and trauma-informed practices. These trainings provided staff with practical strategies for maintaining consistency and high-quality instruction while navigating leadership changes. The ongoing investment in staff learning not only deepened team capacity but also reinforced the organization's culture of professionalism and continuous improvement.

Data collected and analyzed for the 2024–2025 evaluation were derived from multiple sources, including the PARS21, site coordinator narrative reports, family engagement logs, and evaluator observations. While traditional quantitative measures such as report card grades and formal survey results were limited due to leadership transitions, the evaluation placed greater emphasis on qualitative data to capture the full scope of the program's impact. Staff reflections, attendance patterns, student work samples, and family participation data were used to document progress toward goals and assess program quality. The shift toward mixed-methods evaluation —

integrating both numerical and narrative evidence — provided a deeper understanding of how the program maintained consistency and engagement despite administrative challenges.

Consistent with prior evaluation cycles, the table below summarizes the total number of students served by site during the 2024–2025 program year. These totals, drawn from PARS, represent students who attended the program for 30 days or more and reflect the program's ability to maintain high participation levels and strong family engagement across both active sites.

Students Served by Site (2024–2025)

Year	Sussex Avenue School	Lincoln Elementary School	Total Contracted	Total Served
2024–2025	155	127	210	282

Totals represent students who attended 30 days or more during the 2024–2025 academic year, as verified through PARS.

The 2024–2025 program year represented a period of profound transition and rebuilding for the 21st CCLC team. Following the departure of the long-standing Program Director who had led the initiative since its inception 16 years ago, the program underwent significant structural and leadership changes. A successor was appointed mid-year but did not remain through the full program cycle, resulting in the Executive Director and Program Associate collaboratively managing daily operations during the final months of the school year.

Despite this leadership gap, the program's summer 2025 session emerged as a powerful demonstration of its organizational strength and staff dedication. While this report typically focuses on the academic-year program, this year's evaluation includes highlights from the summer session to acknowledge the extraordinary work of site coordinators and staff who ensured continuity of learning, creativity in enrichment, and strong student engagement during a period of transition. Their collective resilience was evident not only in student outcomes but in their commitment to professional learning, teamwork, and maintaining program excellence under shifting administrative conditions.

In September 2025, Michelle Rivera was appointed as the new Program Director, marking the beginning of a new chapter defined by clarity, collaboration, and accountability. Working closely with the Executive Director and evaluator, she has begun shaping a more data-informed and inclusive approach to program management — one that ensures all staff understand their role in documentation, reflection, and continuous improvement.

While academic and survey data from the prior year were limited due to staff transitions, this evaluation draws on a robust mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence — including

attendance and participation data from PARS, staff observations, and family engagement reports — to provide a comprehensive picture of the program's performance and impact. The program's resilience during both the academic and summer sessions underscores the enduring strength of FOCUS's mission and its continued commitment to serving Newark's students and families with excellence and care.

II. Challenges and Changes

The 2024–2025 program year was marked by significant transition and a need for sustained adaptability. The most notable shift occurred with the departure of the long-standing Program Director, who had guided the 21st CCLC initiative since its launch sixteen years ago. An interim replacement was appointed at the beginning of the school year, but did not remain through the full cycle, leaving the Executive Director and Program Associate to jointly manage day-to-day operations for the remainder of the school year.

Despite these changes, both Lincoln Elementary and Sussex Avenue sites continued to operate without interruption. The leadership gap primarily affected the timing and consistency of data collection—specifically report card data and stakeholder surveys that required centralized coordination. Attendance reporting, enrichment documentation, and family engagement records, however, remained dependable and were key anchors for this evaluation.

The program's staff demonstrated exceptional resilience throughout the transition. Site coordinators and instructors maintained communication, shared responsibilities, and continued to deliver high-quality enrichment and academic supports. This collaborative spirit ensured that students experienced consistency and care even as administrative structures shifted.

To maintain program cohesion, each site expanded in-house professional development. Regular training sessions on classroom management, trauma-informed practice, and youth engagement helped stabilize instruction and morale. These professional learning efforts also advanced a broader goal: cultivating a team culture that values reflection, data integrity, and continuous improvement.

While gaps appeared in quantitative academic data, the evaluation team compensated by emphasizing qualitative evidence—staff reflections, attendance patterns, student work samples, and evaluator observations—to document progress toward program goals. This balance preserved the evaluation's integrity and provided a fuller understanding of how FOCUS sustained quality and engagement during a year of rebuilding.

The summer 2025 program became a clear demonstration of recovery and renewed strength. Staff collaboration, creative planning, and steady participation revealed a program that not only endured change but transformed it into an opportunity for growth.

III. Proposed Solutions and Strategies

In response to the administrative transitions of 2024–2025, FOCUS 21st CCLC adopted a targeted set of strategies to strengthen staff stability, streamline operations, and sustain program quality across both sites.

Staffing and Professional Development

Recruitment efforts were expanded through local college partnerships, community networks, and returning staff referrals to ensure consistency in staffing and continuity in instruction. Site coordinators continued to identify professional learning needs through observation and feedback, leading to in-house training on trauma-informed practices, classroom management, and youth engagement. These ongoing sessions built the confidence and cohesion of the instructional teams while also reinforcing staff accountability for data collection and student tracking.

Leadership and Communication

To maintain alignment during the leadership transition, the Executive Director and Program Associate established structured communication routines with both site coordinators. Weekly check-ins and shared document systems ensured that attendance, activity schedules, and reports remained consistent. These processes will continue under the direction of the new Program Director, Michelle Rivera, to institutionalize a more transparent and data-driven management structure.

Program Design and Student Engagement

Programming was intentionally adapted to reflect student interests and maintain high engagement. Student voice was incorporated through informal feedback and mid-year surveys, leading to the continuation and expansion of enrichment options such as African drumming, step, creative arts, and sneaker design. This responsive approach sustained high attendance rates and strengthened student ownership of the after-school experience.

Operational Supports and Family Engagement

The district's collaboration with FOCUS continued to be instrumental in supporting student access. Transportation services ensured safe travel to and from sites, while daily nutritional supports—breakfast, snack, and dinner offerings—were provided through Newark Board of Education partnerships. Family workshops and open-house events remained a cornerstone of engagement, ensuring parents were informed and connected to their children's learning experiences.

Systems and Data Management

In preparation for the new program year, the evaluation team and site staff implemented improved systems for attendance verification, survey administration, and documentation storage. The introduction of visual data flyers and quarterly reflection meetings will continue to promote data literacy and encourage all staff to view evaluation as a shared responsibility rather than a compliance task.

Collectively, these solutions are designed to stabilize program delivery, enhance communication, and ensure that the transition into the 2025–2026 cycle begins with clear processes, strong data systems, and an empowered staff.

IV. Program Evaluation Questions

1. What are the target population's characteristics?
   The 2024–2025 FOCUS 21st CCLC program served a total of 282 students across two Newark Public School sites — Lincoln Elementary School and Sussex Avenue School — providing academic enrichment and youth development opportunities to students in grades 3–8.

   At Lincoln Elementary, the program enrolled 127 students: 76 female and 51 male. The racial and ethnic composition included 1 Asian student, 116 Black/African American students, and 9 Hispanic/Latinx students. The majority of participants were enrolled in grades 4–6, representing a consistent core of returning students from prior years.

   At Sussex Avenue School, the program enrolled 155 students: 75 female and 80 male. The site population included 64 Black/African American students and 87 Hispanic/Latinx students, reflecting the diverse cultural and linguistic profile of Newark's West Ward community.

   Across both sites, more than 90% of participants qualified for free or reduced lunch, meeting NJDOE's 21st CCLC priority of serving economically disadvantaged and academically at-risk youth. These demographics illustrate the program's continued commitment to equity, inclusion, and targeted service to Newark's most in-need student populations.

2. Were Levels of Service met?
   Yes. Despite leadership transitions, the program surpassed its contracted level of service of 210 students, enrolling and serving 282 students (30-plus-day attendees) during the academic year. Attendance and participation data extracted from the PARS and EZ Reports systems confirm consistent engagement across both active sites.
3. Were activities conducted with the target population?
   Yes. Activities were implemented across all required NJDOE categories, including academic enrichment, social-emotional learning, personal development, family engagement, and health/wellness. Both sites continued to incorporate student voice and choice, offering enrichment such as African drumming, step, art, and sneaker design. (See charts and data summaries in Section V-C.)
4. What do students and families think of the services? Are they satisfied?
   Feedback collected through staff observations, family discussions, and limited surveys indicated strong satisfaction with program quality, safety, and enrichment variety. Staff

reported noticeable gains in student confidence, cooperation, and engagement among long-term participants. (See student and family feedback summaries in Section V-D.)

5. Were performance indicators achieved?
    - Leadership and Coordination: The Executive Director, Program Associate, and Site Coordinators maintained ongoing communication with school principals, teachers, and district partners to coordinate operations and evaluation efforts.
    - Instructional Quality: Site Coordinators and instructors used attendance and engagement trends to adjust instructional pacing and enrichment design.
    - Curriculum and Planning: Research-based curricula such as SPARK, Kid-Fit, and Fun4Kids supported wellness and social-emotional growth.
    - Evaluation and Oversight: The External Evaluator conducted site visits, documentation reviews, and professional learning sessions on data tracking and reporting.
    - Professional Development: Site staff participated in both in-house trainings and NJDOE technical assistance sessions to enhance instructional quality and compliance.
    - Data Collection and Analysis: Attendance, enrichment participation, and family engagement were tracked and reviewed through PARS/EZ Reports and qualitative reflection tools.
    - Stakeholder Engagement: Site teams contributed to quarterly evaluation meetings and NJDOE events to align practices with state standards.

V. Program Implementation

The following section provides a comprehensive overview of how FOCUS 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) implemented its program during the 2024–2025 academic year.
Findings and data were derived from the PARS reporting system, staff documentation, and evaluator observations.

Recruitment Efforts and Retention of Students

The 2024–2025 program year maintained FOCUS's open-enrollment policy. Students were selected based on 21st CCLC criteria—attendance at participating Newark Public Schools and interest in before- or after-school programming.
Site Coordinators collaborated with principals and teachers to identify students most in need of academic support and enrichment.

Enrollment remained strong across both active sites. Families were contacted promptly when openings arose, ensuring full utilization of program capacity.

FOCUS's retention plan emphasized:
• Clear orientation sessions for students and parents.
• Strong relationships between staff and participants.
• Regular and transparent communication with families.
• Targeted intervention for inconsistent attendance.

Interest-based enrichment—African drumming, creative arts, step, and career exploration—helped sustain student motivation and high attendance through leadership transitions.

Staffing and Professional Development

Professional learning continued as a cornerstone of quality and stability.
At the year's outset, an Evaluator & Site Coordinator Orientation introduced expectations, data procedures, and the PARS system.

Throughout the year, staff engaged in professional development on:
• Trauma-informed practice and classroom management.
• Lesson-plan alignment with academic standards.
• Data literacy—interpreting PARS reports for planning.
• Student engagement and positive-behavior strategies.

Staff also attended NJSACC's *Purposeful Pathways*, NJDOE technical-assistance sessions, and the Beyond School Hours National Conference.
These sessions built consistency and morale during administrative change and prepared staff for the future transition to EZ Reports.

A. Students Served

Year	Sussex Ave School	Lincoln Elementary School	Total Contracted	Total Served (30 + Days)
2024–2025	155	127	210	282

Student Enrollment by Site

Site	Female	Male	Total
Sussex Ave	75	80	155
Lincoln Elem	76	51	127
Totals	151	131	282

Demographics of Students Attending 30 + Days (by Site)
(PARS 2024–2025)

Site	Black/African American	Hispanic/Latinx	Asian	Other/Multiracial	% Free/Reduced Lunch
Sussex Ave	64	87	0	4	91 %
Lincoln Elem	116	9	1	1	93 %

Both sites exceeded enrollment targets and maintained consistent participation. Lincoln primarily served African-American students; Sussex reflected a balanced African-American / Hispanic population—evidence of FOCUS's reach across Newark's diverse communities.

B. Average Daily Attendance (ADA)

Site	Average Daily Attendance (ADA)	% Students Attending 30 + Days
Lincoln Elem	87	91 %
Sussex Ave	103	89 %
Average	190	90 %

Attendance remained strong despite administrative transitions. Consistent communication with families and integration with school-day staff sustained engagement throughout the year.

C. Program Activity and Review System (PARS)

Data from PARS summarize total activity hours by category and site for 2024–2025. The allocation of hours demonstrates a balanced model integrating academic support, enrichment, social-emotional learning, and family engagement.

Activity Category	Lincoln Hours	Sussex Hours	Total Hours
Academic Enrichment	139.00	121.25	260.25
Academic Improvement / Remediation	79.75	57.00	136.75
Career / Job Training	58.00	415.50	473.50
Character Education	55.50	147.00	202.50
Family Literacy Activities	2.00	2.00	4.00
Parental Involvement Activities	14.50	15.50	30.00
Recreational Activities	61.00	171.50	232.50
Tutoring / Homework Assistance	82.00	107.25	189.25
Youth Development Activities	63.50	157.00	220.50
Total Activity Hours	555.25	1,194.00	1,749.25

Source: PARS records, October 2024 – June 2025

Program Highlights

- Total Hours Delivered: 1,749.25
- Largest Category: Career / Job Training – 473.5 hours (27 %)
- Academic Reinforcement (Enrichment + Remediation + Tutoring): 586.25 hours (33 %)
- Character Education + Youth Development: 423 hours (24 %)
- Recreational Activities: 232.5 hours (13 %)
- Family Engagement Activities: 34 hours (2 %)

The combined 1,749 hours of structured programming demonstrate both depth and balance, sustaining NJDOE's 21st CCLC expectations for well-rounded student development.

Program Activity Distribution by Category (PARS 2024–2025)

(A visual summary of total program hours across both active sites.)

Category	Percent of Total Hours
Academic Reinforcement (Enrichment + Remediation + Tutoring)	33 %
Career / Job Training	27 %
Character Education + Youth Development	24 %
Recreational Activities	13 %
Family Engagement (Family Literacy + Parental Involvement)	2 %
Other	1 %

D. Student Satisfaction

Formal survey collection was limited, but qualitative evidence from focus groups and classroom reflections showed high satisfaction:
• Students consistently cited African drumming, step, art, and team-based games as favorite activities.
• Staff observed improved collaboration and confidence among returning participants.
• Students reported feeling supported and safe within the program environment.

E. Family Participation

Approximately 40 % of enrolled students had a family member participate in at least one event—literacy nights, showcases, wellness sessions, or parent workshops.
Families expressed interest in expanded bilingual and evening offerings for 2025–2026.

(Chart placeholder – Family Engagement Participation PARS data pending.)

F. School-Day Teacher Participation

Partnership with daytime educators supported continuity of learning.

Indicator	Teacher Reported Improvement (%)
Student motivation / school attitude	74 %
Student behavior / focus	68 %
Academic engagement	61 %

Teachers attributed improvements to the program's consistent SEL emphasis and enrichment opportunities.

G. Logic Model

Goals	Inputs	Outputs	Outcomes	Performance Measures
Improve academic development of at-risk students	Program staff, funding, school partners, curriculum	Academic and enrichment activities	Short-Term: 282 students enrolled; curriculum aligned with school-day	Improved attendance and engagement (PARS data)
Increase positive behavior	Mentoring, SEL curricula, PD	SEL sessions, family events	Intermediate: 75 % improved attendance; 60 % positive behavior	Staff observations, student feedback
Strengthen family and community engagement	Family events & partnerships	Workshops & showcases	Long-Term: 25 % higher family participation; 90 % retention	PARS logs, NJDOE reports

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System Transition Note:
PARS remained the primary data system for 2024–2025. Preparation for transition to EZ Reports began in summer 2025, ensuring continuity and improved data visualization in future cycles.

VI. Progress Toward Evaluation Goals

The 2024–2025 program year represented a period of strategic rebuilding and renewal for the FOCUS 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative. Despite leadership transitions, the program continued to meet key performance goals and maintain its focus on academic enrichment, social-emotional growth, and family engagement.

Evaluation results, drawn primarily from PARS data, site reports, and qualitative evidence, demonstrate the program's continued commitment to excellence in three core goal areas established by NJDOE:

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1. Adopting Intentional, Research-Based Practices

Throughout the year, staff integrated instructional strategies designed to increase students' knowledge of academic, career, and life-long learning skills.

- Both sites implemented project-based learning and hands-on enrichment activities connected to real-world applications.
- The Career and Job Training category accounted for 27 % of all recorded hours (473.5 hours), the largest single program component, reflecting strong alignment with NJDOE's career-readiness goals.
- Students demonstrated increased persistence and focus in academic sessions, particularly among those attending 30 + days.

Evidence:
Staff observations and focus-group reflections documented growth in confidence, teamwork, and problem-solving—critical markers of long-term academic engagement.

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2. Strengthening Family and Community Collaboration

The program sustained its long-standing partnerships with families, schools, and community collaborators despite administrative change.

- Approximately 40 % of enrolled students' families participated in at least one event.
- Family Literacy and Parental Involvement activities, while modest in total hours (34 hours combined), provided consistent opportunities for dialogue and partnership.
- Site coordinators continued collaboration with daytime teachers, principals, and support staff to ensure alignment between school-day instruction and after-school learning.

Evidence:
Families and staff described the after-school environment as a *stable, trusted space* for students, particularly during the transition between program directors.

3. Promoting Positive Behavior and Daily Engagement

Students benefited from daily participation in structured, supportive activities.

- 90 % of participants attended 30 + days, a strong indicator of program satisfaction and stability.
- Character Education and Youth Development activities comprised 24 % of total programming hours, supporting SEL outcomes.
- Staff reported noticeable decreases in behavioral redirections and stronger peer cooperation as the year progressed.

Evidence:
Teachers surveyed noted improvement in motivation (74 %), behavior (68 %), and academic engagement (61 %), confirming that the program continues to reinforce positive school-day habits.

Program Performance Snapshot

Focus Area	Indicators of Improvement (Qualitative & Quantitative)
Academic Engagement & Support	33 % of program hours in academic reinforcement; staff observed gains in persistence, organization, and confidence.
Career Exploration & Readiness	27 % of hours dedicated to career and job training; increased exposure to STEM, entrepreneurship, and creative-arts careers.
SEL & Behavior	24 % of total hours; observed growth in collaboration, empathy, and self-management.
Attendance & Retention	90 % of students attended 30 + days; daily ADA averaged 190 students.
Family Engagement	40 % family participation; steady communication between home and program.

Summary

Despite a year marked by leadership transition, FOCUS 21st CCLC made demonstrable progress toward its established evaluation goals. The program sustained student participation, expanded career readiness experiences, and maintained a nurturing, data-informed environment that fostered learning and stability.

The collaborative leadership of the Executive Director, Program Associate, and newly appointed Program Director has set the stage for continued growth. With systems now realigned and staff trained in data reflection, the program enters 2025–2026 positioned to strengthen academic outcomes, expand family partnerships, and continue its legacy of serving Newark's youth with excellence.

VII. Evaluation Methodology

Throughout the 2024–2025 program year, FOCUS 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) maintained a continuous evaluation process to assess program quality, effectiveness, and alignment with state and local goals. The program's evaluation activities were designed to ensure that data collected at each site informed both short-term improvements and long-term program planning.

The evaluation process combined quantitative data from PARS with qualitative insights gathered through site visits, staff observations, focus groups, and narrative reporting. This blended approach allowed the evaluator to capture the full scope of program impact—spanning student academic performance, behavioral and social-emotional growth, and the effectiveness of administrative systems.

The 2024–2025 evaluation emphasized how students were learning, developing, and engaging within the after-school and summer programs during a period of administrative transition. Key focus areas included:

- Student attendance, participation, and retention;
- Academic and enrichment outcomes;
- Social-emotional learning and behavior;
- Family engagement and communication;
- Staff collaboration and professional development.

The evaluation also examined how effectively data were being collected, analyzed, and used by site coordinators to improve daily practice. By supporting a shared understanding of evaluation tools and their purpose, the process became both a monitoring system and a professional learning mechanism for staff.

Data Sources and Tools

The evaluation drew upon a variety of instruments to document program performance and student progress, including:

- PARS data exports (attendance, enrollment, and activity categories);
- Staff narrative reports (monthly summaries of site progress and challenges);
- Evaluator site visits and observations (two per site during the academic year and one during summer programming);
- Focus groups and informal interviews with students, site staff, and families;
- Family engagement logs and participation records;
- Teacher feedback surveys and communication notes from daytime school partners.

Quantitative data (attendance and activity logs) were used to track progress toward contractual benchmarks, while qualitative findings provided context about student experiences, instructional quality, and staff collaboration.

VIII. Summary of Weaknesses

The 2024–2025 evaluation year revealed several challenges that impacted data collection, program continuity, and administrative coordination. These weaknesses, while significant, stemmed primarily from leadership transitions and structural changes rather than from a lack of staff effort or program quality.

1. Leadership and Administrative Transitions

The most substantial challenge faced by the program during 2024–2025 was the change in leadership. The departure of the long-standing Program Director early in the program year, followed by the interim management period prior to the hiring of a new director, created temporary gaps in coordination.

While the Executive Director and Program Associate provided exceptional oversight during this period, the absence of a dedicated program lead led to:

- Delays in the collection and submission of certain data (notably student report cards and survey instruments).
- Uneven communication between the program and school-day administrators.
- Intermittent disruption in implementation schedules, particularly during winter months.

These issues were mitigated through strong collaboration among staff and the evaluator, who worked collectively to stabilize reporting processes and maintain compliance with NJDOE requirements.

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2. Incomplete Academic and Survey Data

Due to staff transitions and timing challenges, the program was unable to collect a full set of academic performance and perception data for the 2024–2025 program year.

- Report card grades and standardized testing results (NJSLA) were unavailable for most participants.
- Student, parent, and staff surveys were distributed inconsistently, limiting quantitative insight into satisfaction and outcomes.

While these gaps constrained formal comparative analysis, the program compensated with strong qualitative documentation—monthly site reports, focus group findings, and evaluator observations—which provided a reliable account of performance and impact.

As the new Program Director and site teams settle into stable roles, a standardized data collection calendar has been established to prevent recurrence and ensure complete data capture in 2025–2026.

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3. Data Management and Reporting Consistency

Although PARS remained effective as the primary reporting tool, data entry and analysis practices varied across sites. Some discrepancies were observed in the timing and coding of activities, which occasionally delayed monthly report submissions and limited immediate access to complete data summaries.

To address this, the evaluator provided technical guidance and created visual data flyers and templates to help coordinators more effectively interpret and apply their PARS data in real time. This capacity-building approach proved successful in the second half of the year and will continue under the new data system (EZ Reports).

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4. Family Engagement Frequency and Documentation

While the program achieved consistent family participation rates (approximately 40%), documentation of those activities varied between sites. Family engagement logs were not always completed immediately following events, leading to occasional underreporting of attendance.

The evaluator recommends that family engagement data collection be integrated directly into the site coordinators' monthly report template to ensure completeness and uniformity across sites.

5. Limited Cross-Site Collaboration Opportunities

Because of the administrative changes and the program's focus on stabilizing core operations, opportunities for cross-site collaboration between Lincoln and Sussex staff were limited. Joint staff meetings and shared student events, which in prior years helped unify the program's culture, occurred less frequently during this transition period.

Plans are already in motion for joint professional development and cross-site enrichment days in the upcoming year to restore this vital program strength.

Summary Perspective

While these challenges affected portions of the data record, they also served as catalysts for growth and restructuring. The program team demonstrated adaptability, transparency, and a strong commitment to learning from the evaluation process.

By year's end, systems were in place to ensure that:

- Evaluation timelines are embedded in the program's operational calendar.
- Site coordinators are supported through regular technical assistance.
- Family engagement and data entry procedures follow consistent standards.

IX. Strengths and Recommendations

Despite administrative changes and data collection challenges, the FOCUS 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program demonstrated substantial organizational resilience, maintaining service consistency and quality across both active sites. The dedication of the staff, coupled with a renewed emphasis on communication, accountability, and professional learning, enabled the program to remain stable and impactful throughout the year.

Program Strengths

1. Staff Commitment and Stability

Even during leadership transitions, site coordinators and instructors remained deeply committed to program goals. Their ability to adapt to changing circumstances and continue providing structured, engaging programming ensured minimal disruption to students and families.

Staff flexibility and dedication were key to preserving continuity during a year that could have easily seen program decline.

2. Quality and Breadth of Programming
Across both sites, the program offered a robust balance of academic reinforcement, enrichment, and social-emotional learning opportunities.

- Career and Job Training accounted for 27% of total programming hours, reflecting strong alignment with 21st CCLC objectives related to career readiness.
- Academic reinforcement (enrichment, remediation, and tutoring) comprised 33% of total hours, providing consistent academic support across grade levels.
- SEL-focused activities, including Character Education and Youth Development, represented another 24%, reinforcing whole-child development.

The data reflect a healthy equilibrium of academic, enrichment, and SEL programming — a major strength of the FOCUS 21st CCLC model.

3. Collaborative Evaluation Culture
Evaluation was not treated as a compliance requirement but as an active, collaborative process.

- Site coordinators engaged in data reflection sessions with the evaluator and leadership team.
- Visual data flyers and brief evaluation summaries were shared during staff meetings, improving understanding of attendance and activity trends.
- The introduction of consistent reporting tools marked a shift toward a *data-informed culture*, positioning the program for stronger evidence-based decision-making.

4. Family and Community Relationships
Despite modest participation numbers, the program maintained meaningful relationships with parents and families. Family literacy events, wellness workshops, and student showcases provided opportunities for connection and community trust-building.

Families expressed appreciation for the program's consistency, communication, and staff presence during a time of leadership change.

5. Professional Development and Staff Growth
The 2024–2025 program year placed renewed emphasis on in-house professional development. Monthly staff meetings, state technical-assistance sessions, and evaluator-led reflections provided multiple layers of training and support.

This investment in professional growth directly strengthened staff cohesion and instructional quality, creating a foundation for more intentional PD planning in 2025–2026.

Recommendations for Program Improvement

1. Strengthen Academic Data Collection Systems

Reestablish a standardized process for collecting and integrating school-day academic data (report cards, test results, and teacher feedback) into quarterly evaluation deliverables.

- The evaluator and Program Director should coordinate with school-day administrators early in the academic year to establish a clear data-sharing protocol.
- Regular review meetings should occur prior to interim and final report submission deadlines to ensure all required data are in place.

2. Standardize Survey Administration and Analysis

Implement consistent mid-year and end-of-year surveys for students, parents, and staff.

- Use a digital format (Google Forms or EZ Reports survey module) to increase completion rates and simplify analysis.
- Align survey questions directly with NJDOE indicators to streamline future reporting.

3. Expand Family Engagement Opportunities

Diversify family activities and improve attendance tracking.

- Offer bilingual family sessions and flexible evening or weekend events to accommodate working parents.
- Integrate family engagement logs into the site coordinators' monthly reporting template to ensure real-time documentation.

4. Build Cross-Site Collaboration Structures

Reinstate regular collaboration between Lincoln and Sussex sites.

- Schedule quarterly "joint site days" or staff exchanges to promote shared learning, consistent practices, and program unity.
- Consider joint showcase events where students present work from both schools, strengthening the sense of community across sites.

5. Maintain Focus on Data Literacy and Continuous Improvement

Continue evaluator-led technical support sessions to help site coordinators and staff interpret and apply data to programming.

- Develop a "data reflection calendar" that aligns with NJDOE reporting deadlines and the internal evaluation schedule.
- As the program transitions to EZ Reports, ensure staff receive practical training on how to navigate, export, and interpret data from the new platform.

Closing Reflection

The 2024–2025 evaluation year highlighted both the resilience and potential of the FOCUS 21st CCLC program. The staff's adaptability, coupled with the leadership's willingness to restructure and align systems, has positioned the program for success as it enters a new cycle under stable direction.

The partnership between program staff, leadership, and the evaluator has fostered a renewed culture of communication, accountability, and reflection. Moving forward, FOCUS 21st CCLC is well-equipped to transform the lessons of this transitional year into lasting improvements in program design, data management, and student outcomes.