

3/26/21

Chairman Holmberg
Senate Appropriations
HB 1395 Testimony

Chairman Holmberg and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, my name is Luke Schaefer. I am the Director of the Central Regional Education Association, one of seven REAs in ND who were created by the ND legislature and serve schools in ND through providing training and offering services for which they need or want support. One such program that we offer in schools is running before and after school programs. Most of the before and after school programs in the state are operated as 21st Century Learning Centers, which is through the DPI and the Department of Education.

Several REAs operate 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21CCLC) afterschool and summer programming to directly serve students on behalf of their member school districts by applying for federal grant funding and completing all program administration, operation, and reporting. The REAs adapted their programs during the pandemic by creating virtual opportunities, in-person opportunities, and emergency personnel care programs. Further, there were some instances in which programming to ensure care for children occurred were not allowable expenses under the guidelines of the 21st CCLC. As the fiscal agent for these cost reimbursement grants, these REAs are responsible for all program expenses when there's a shortfall of federal funding. However, they were not eligible for the Child Care Emergency Operations Grant and did not receive emergency COVID funding designated for school districts.

21CCLC programs have been operating since mid-March in-person or virtually to meet the needs of students and families. Due to COVID-19, 21CCLC programs incurred and continue projecting increased expenses as students are in smaller groups to allow for social distancing which require additional staff members as there are more student groups to staff. There are also increased cleaning protocol costs. Further, additional staff are on the schedule to cover staff members who are out sick or in quarantine, to avoid closing programs. Finally, programs are seeing a decrease in revenue as they had to accept less students than last year due to health and safety space and staffing limitations, thereby reducing fee revenue. Federal 21CCLC rules also state that no family can be denied attendance in the program due to nonpayment and with many families experiencing economic hardship due to the pandemic, many families have been unable to pay their fees or have requested scholarships. To date, multiple schools have had to pause programming and only one had to lay-off employees for three months; a middle school who is operating outside of the grant as a fee-for-service site.

The REAs are requesting to be added to the list of agencies receiving funds for programs to ensure that before and after school programs can continue operating in a highly effective manner. As of December 1, 2020, the REAs have incurred nearly \$300,000 in additional costs, including additional staffing, temporary employees, FFCRA pay, additional supplies, and program revenue loss. We anticipate total costs to exceed \$699,699. We request a per-student payment for students enrolled in after school programs basis with a rate of \$233.

SEEC	CREA	NCEC	GNWEC	NESC
690 students	557 students	257 students	203 students	1225 students
\$160,770	\$146,324	\$59,881	\$47,299	\$285,425