

Response to Comment Submitted by GLSEN

Dear Aaron Ridings and Joseph Kosciw:

Thank you for your comments on the proposed information collection for the National Evaluation to Inform the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) Program. We appreciate the information and perspectives you shared on the potential for afterschool programming to support LGBTQ+ students, disparities in afterschool program participation between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ students, barriers to participation such as harassment, and the potential for practices that promote social and emotional learning (SEL) to enhance inclusion. We would like to describe the changes we made and did not make to the proposed data collection instruments in response to your input.

Gender identity question. Based on your input, we amended the question on gender identity in both the afterschool center staff survey and afterschool center director interview protocol. The response option that originally said “Other gender” was replaced with “Another gender identity.”

Sexual orientation question. Thank you for suggesting a voluntary question on sexual orientation for the afterschool center staff survey. We understand this information could be useful for measuring the representation of marginalized groups among afterschool center staff in the study. However, this information is not central to the focus of the study, so we do not have plans to collect it. To keep the study instruments to a manageable length, we have needed to prioritize asking only those questions that are central to the focus of the study.

The existing demographic questions—such as those on race/ethnicity and gender identity—will provide contextual information on how closely the characteristics of afterschool center staff (measured from the survey) resemble the characteristics of the students they serve (measured from administrative data). This may influence how staff implement SEL-focused practices. Since we will not have information on students’ sexual orientation, collecting information on center staff members’ sexual orientation would not have a clear purpose for the study.

Practices to promote social and emotional skills. We agree that helping students understand and respect people with diverse characteristics or backgrounds is an important set of practices on which afterschool center staff might receive training and coaching. In fact, some of the SEL trainings offered as part of the study’s continuous quality improvement system focus on helping staff learn strategies to (1) promote inclusive relationships among students and (2) cultivate students’ empathy.

In the afterschool center staff survey and afterschool center director interview protocol, based on your input, we have clarified and expanded the list of SEL-focused practices for which we ask about training and coaching received. In a response option that originally focused on “fostering positive relationships between students”, we have added a reference to inclusive relationships. We have also added a response option on “helping students understand the emotions and experiences of other individuals” to capture practices aimed at cultivating empathy.

In our revisions, we did not name the specific diverse groups that you suggested (race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.). Our aim is to ask about training topics on which centers that implement the study’s continuous quality improvement system might differ from those not implementing the system. Since the

study's SEL-focused trainings address inclusion and empathy more broadly, we focus on asking about these broad topics in the survey.

We also did not change the list of training topics in the afterschool center director survey. As part of the national snapshot of afterschool centers' strategies for addressing students' needs, the survey asks about many more training topics than just SEL-focused topics. Given the long list of topics, each SEL topic is defined more broadly than in the other instruments discussed earlier. At a broad level, the SEL topics in the afterschool center director survey already encompass the concept of respecting others, particularly the topic on "Helping students work together, build community, and show empathy."

Demographic questions in the center director survey. Although we understand the rationale for your suggestion to include demographic questions in the center director survey, these questions would not be directly relevant to the purpose of the survey. Our main goals for this survey are to collect information on (1) which types of student needs centers have identified as most important to address and (2) how their programming and staff supports are related to addressing those needs. Information on the demographic characteristics of center directors is not central to advancing these study goals.

Self-reported SEL skills on the student survey. Thank you for the information you provided about the prevalence of bullying and name-calling, as context for the importance of measuring students' skills at getting along with others. Several items in the instrument we have selected—the SSIS Social and Emotional Learning Brief Scales, Student 3-12 Assessment—capture very relevant concepts. Although we cannot share the exact wording of these proprietary items, we can confirm that there are items capturing students' skills at getting along with others, considering others' emotions, and intervening when others are mistreated. Given that the SSIS developer has validated the scales based on these items, we plan to use these items without substantive revisions, because changing or adding to these items would risk weakening the scales' reliability and validity.

Student demographic characteristics. We do not plan to collect information on gender or race/ethnicity in the student survey, as this would largely duplicate information we plan to collect from school districts' administrative records.

Again, thank you for your thoughtful input. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Erica Johnson