



## What is the School of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

### WHAT IS THE SCHOOL OF THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY?

The *School of the 21st Century* (21C), also known as Family Resource Centers in some communities, is a school-based child care and family support model that promotes the optimal growth and development of children ages 0-12. The 21C model transforms the school into a year-round, multi-service center providing services from early morning to early evening.

Since 1988, more than 500 schools in 17 states have implemented the program. The model has proven successful in urban, rural and suburban areas, as well as in affluent, middle class and poor communities. Both Connecticut and Kentucky have launched statewide initiatives based on the model, and with the growing public interest in early childhood development, more and more states are starting pilot initiatives.

### BACKGROUND

The *School of the 21st Century* was created by Yale University Professor Edward Zigler, one of the principal architects of the federal Head Start program. The 21C model provides a response to changes in patterns of work and family life in recent decades that have meant new concerns for parents, especially a pressing need for affordable, quality child care. The model also helps educators ensure that children arrive at school ready to learn and receive the support they need to succeed academically.

Although the wisdom of school-linked services is now widely accepted, when 21C was first launched in Independence, MO in 1988, it was the first national initiative to capitalize on the natural synergy of family and children's services connected to schools.

The flexibility of the 21C/FRC model appeals to many diverse communities; each school tailors the model to match its own needs and resources. In many communities, 21C serves as an umbrella for an expanded array of family support services including adult education, youth development and social services.

### MODEL COMPONENTS

Core components of the 21C/FRC model are:

**PRESCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE:** 21C schools provide high-quality, developmentally-appropriate child care services for children ages 3-5 at the school or at a school-linked site, laying the groundwork for positive relations between schools and families and children's later success in school.

**BEFORE-, AFTER-SCHOOL AND VACATION CARE FOR SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN:** Either on site or at a linked site, 21C schools provide diverse, supervised activities for children ages 5-12. School-age child care enables children to learn, grow and socialize in a safe environment during non-school hours while parents are working or otherwise unavailable.

**GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT FOR NEW PARENTS:** Based on Missouri's successful Parents As Teachers program, this family outreach service educates parents of children ages 0-3 in early cognitive, social, linguistic and motor development and provides regular opportunities for parents to meet.

**INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICES:** 21C schools inform families about community options for child care as well as the criteria for high-quality care. They also provide information about health care and other community services pertaining to the well-being of children and families.

**NETWORKS AND TRAINING FOR CHILD CARE PROVIDERS:** To strengthen the quality of local child care, 21C schools offer workshops, training opportunities, support groups and newsletters to support community child care providers, with a special emphasis on family day care providers in the neighborhoods served by the school.

**HEALTH EDUCATION AND SERVICES:** In collaboration with community-based health care providers, 21C schools can offer a range of services including: health, nutrition and fitness education, physical health services, care for children with special needs, developmental

assessments, dental assessments and mental health services.

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The School of the 21st Century is firmly grounded in the belief that all families in need of support and quality child care must be able to obtain these services. To achieve this goal, 21C/FRC sites uphold the following principles:

- strong parental support and involvement
- universal access to child care achieved through sliding scale fees
- programmatic focus on the physical, social, emotional as well as intellectual development of children
- quality programming as measured by staff qualifications, staff-child ratios, group size, staff turnover and other relevant criteria
- professional training and advancement opportunities for child care providers
- non-compulsory programming utilized at the discretion of the family.

### **FINANCING THE SCHOOL OF THE 21st CENTURY**

There is enormous variety in the ways that different schools and districts finance their 21C programs. Many schools are able to completely fund the child care components through sliding scale fees paid by parents. In less affluent communities, some 21C services are paid for through public funds such as Title I. 21C schools usually require some initial start-up funds to create or renovate space or pay for outreach components. Start-up grants often come from local foundations, businesses or through reallocation of existing school district funds. Several states including Kentucky, Connecticut and Arkansas have made funding available to launch and support 21C/FRC programs.

### **BENEFITS OF THE SCHOOL OF THE 21st CENTURY**

Evaluations of the 21C model at several sites have identified the following benefits:

For children:

- Enhanced school readiness and improved academic achievement
- Increased consistency of care and time spent with adult supervision
- Reduction in behavioral problems and decreased need for special services

For parents:

- Increased satisfaction and involvement with the school
- Reduction in missed work and stress due to failure of child care arrangements

For schools:

- Enhanced relationships with parents and community
- Greater understanding of the needs of incoming school populations.

### **21C NATIONAL NETWORK**

Schools interested in implementing the School of the 21st Century model are encouraged to become members of the *21C Network* established and maintained by the Yale Bush Center. Through the network, the Yale Bush Center keeps 21C schools informed about relevant research, new funding opportunities, and evaluation findings, and schools are able to communicate with each other regarding implementation strategies.

The 21C Network provides several different levels of membership tailored to meet the needs of sites just beginning implementation as well as mature sites interested in continuous quality improvement. For more information about membership options, contact the Yale Bush Center.

### **DEMONSTRATION SITES**

Ten 21C schools around the nation have been selected to serve as models for those interested in implementing the *School of the 21st Century*. If you are interested in visiting one of these sites, please contact the Yale Bush Center.

Paragould, Arkansas  
Leadville, Colorado  
Bridgeport, Connecticut  
Stamford, Connecticut  
Larned, Kansas  
Catlettsburg, Kentucky  
Somerset, Kentucky  
Ayer, Massachusetts  
Harwich, Massachusetts  
Independence, Missouri

### **THE ROLE OF THE YALE UNIVERSITY BUSH CENTER**

Since the inception of 21C, the Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University has provided leadership and technical assistance to 21C schools. In addition to ongoing consultation with 21C schools, the Bush Center also conducts annual training and comprehensive evaluation efforts.

For more information about the School of the 21st Century, please contact us at the address below.

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