



Project Excel Year-end Evaluation Report

2025-2026 Academic Year

August 2026

Pontiac Project Excel is a grantee in Cohort N (09/01/2023-06/30/2028) and Cohort O (09/01/2024-06/30/2029) of the 21st Century Community Learning Center afterschool enrichment grant at seven public school sites. Cohort N includes Herrington Elementary School, Whitman Elementary School, and Pontiac Middle School. Cohort O includes Pontiac High School, Alcott Elementary School, Owen Elementary School, and Rogers Elementary School.

The 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) Grant Program creates community learning centers for times when school is not in session and provides expanded academic enrichment opportunities for children attending low-performing schools. Michigan's 21st CCLC program is administered by the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP). Michigan State University conducts the statewide program evaluation.

Project Excel Chronology: 2025-2026 Academic Year

Compliance Status: Six Site Coordinators returned for the 2025-2026 academic year, and one new site coordinator was hired. The Program Director and Local Evaluator remained consistent throughout the year.

Data Submissions: Student Outcomes Data for Pontiac High School and Pontiac Middle School were provided for the 2025-2026 academic year in June 2026. MiLEAP did not request elementary school data. Seven SEL PQA self-assessments were completed during November and December 2025, and a seven-site aggregate assessment was prepared in December 2025. Michigan State University 2025-2026 Site Data Reports were completed for all seven Project Excel sites and included program participation, youth, family, teacher, and staff surveys, and PQA results.

TACSS Coach: The coach provided by the Weikert Center for Youth Program Quality, assigned to Project Excel, provided two trainings for staff in alignment with the Program Director's requests.

Staff Professional Development: Staff professional development during the 2025-2026 program year continued to support consistent program implementation, program quality, and continuous improvement across Project Excel sites. Training included CYPQ observation training for site coordinators and program observers, site activity naming and coding training for site coordinators, and Program Improvement Plan training for the Project Director and Site Coordinators, including use of the Scores Reporter platform. In addition to formal training opportunities, the local evaluator provided ongoing technical assistance and informal training as needed, responding to questions from the Project Director and Site Coordinators by phone, text, and email.

Community Partnerships

The 2025-2026 Grantee Profile documents community partnerships supporting Project Excel programming. Pontiac Middle School reported partnerships with 14 organizations and destinations: Ascend Foundation, Canterbury on the Lake, CJ Barrymores, Classic Lanes, Dave and Buster's, Detroit Institute of Art, Detroit Pistons, Emagine Theater, Jadorable Kreationz, Legoland, Rolladium, Urban Air, Yates Cider Mill, and Zap Zone.

Quantitative Evaluation

Before the pandemic, Project Excel youth were annually monitored for improvement in Math and/or Reading scores by one-half a letter grade during the academic year. In recent grant years, student outcomes have

been collected for designated grade levels. For the 2025-2026 academic year, student outcome data were provided for Pontiac High School and Pontiac Middle School.

Pontiac High School: Of the 54 high school students included in the 2025-2026 student outcomes file, 23 had GPA data available for both the 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 academic years. Of those students, 35% maintained or improved their GPA, with eight students improving their GPA and 15 experiencing a decline. The average GPA among students with comparable data decreased from 2.00 in 2024-2025 to 1.73 in 2025-2026. Because fewer than half of the students in the outcomes file had GPA data available for both years, these results are interpreted cautiously and should not be generalized to all Pontiac High School Project Excel participants.

Pontiac Middle School: Middle school grades provided were insufficient to conduct analysis and draw conclusions. MDE planned to use its database access to match previous academic year grades across schools/districts for further analysis but has not shared that output or result with Project Excel or the Local Evaluator.

During the 2025-2026 grant year, Project Excel served 590 unduplicated youth who attended at least one day of programming across its seven sites. This represents an increase of 55 youth, or approximately 10%, compared with 535 youth served during 2024-2025. Project Excel operated regular activities on 186 days and all activities on 206 days. Across all activities, participants generated 25,083 participant-attendance experiences, with an overall average daily attendance of 121.76.

Attendance Analysis

Project Excel implemented programs strongly during 2025-2026, with summer programming operating on all scheduled days and school-year programming operating on most scheduled days. EZReports summary identifies 590 unique participants served. Summer attendance was particularly strong for Rogers, Alcott, and Owen students, while school-year attendance was strongest at Alcott, Rogers, and Whitman. Rogers demonstrated especially strong attendance across both periods, with an 82.32% ADA during summer and 72.56% during the school year.

Attendance patterns also identify opportunities for targeted improvement. Project Excel Average Daily Attendance (ADA) aligns with peer sites across Michigan while being below the US Dept. of Education target for “Regular Attendance.” This is defined as a student who attends afterschool or summer programming a minimum of 30 days. The State of Michigan MiLEAP office has funding guidelines at two tiers: a minimum of 20 youth ADA or a minimum of 30 youth ADA. Alcott Elementary met both thresholds, while Herrington, Rogers, Whitman Elementary School, and Pontiac Middle School met the baseline threshold of 20 youth ADA. Two sites, Pontiac High School and Owen Elementary, were below the 20 youth threshold. The primary driver for the ADA challenges is the lack of program-paid transportation. These differences suggest attendance improvement strategies may need to be tailored by site.

Demographics of Youth

Among the 590 youth who attended Project Excel during 2025-2026, 335 were female, 254 were male, and one was reported as other. Black or African American youth represented the largest reported racial group with 383 participants. Other reported categories included 134 youth identified as some other race, 26 multi-racial youth, 14 White youth, four Asian youth, two Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander youth, two American Indian or Native Alaskan youth, and 25 for whom race was unknown.

Measure	2025-2026 Result
Female	335 (57%)
Male	254 (43%)
Other gender	1
Economically Disadvantaged	411 (69.7%)
Economic status unknown	169
Total unduplicated youth attending	590

Participants ranged from kindergarten through Grade 12. The largest grade-level groups were Grade 4, with 106 participants; Grade 3, with 98; Grade 5, with 97; Grade 7, with 54; and Grade 2, with 40 participants.

Qualitative Evaluation

The Social Emotional Learning Program Quality Assessment (SEL PQA) assessed program quality across all seven Project Excel sites. PQA scores range from 1.0, indicating that a practice is not in place, to 5.0, indicating that the practice is widely available and/or occurs with great frequency.

During the 2025-2026 academic year, all seven Project Excel sites completed SEL PQA self-assessments between November 12 and December 16, 2025. Local Evaluator Observations were completed at Pontiac Middle School on November 12, Whitman Elementary on November 17, Owen Elementary and Pontiac High School on November 20, Alcott Elementary on December 9, Rogers Elementary on December 15, and Herrington Elementary on December 16. The Scoring Meeting was held on December 17, 2025, when the Site Coordinators and Local Evaluator reviewed observation notes, discussed practices, and entered scores into Scores Reporter. The Michigan 21st CCLC Manager was present to observe the Scoring Meeting process.

District-Wide PQA Results

Domain / Scale	2025-2026 Score
Safe Space	4.14
Interactive Environment	3.50
Supportive Environment	3.47
Engaging Environment	2.93
Scaffolding Learning	4.00
Fostering Teamwork	3.86
Supporting Youth Interests	3.86
Cultivating Empathy	3.36
Supporting Plans and Goals	2.57
Furthering Learning	2.37

Safe Space was the highest-scoring district-wide domain. At the scale level, strengths included Scaffolding Learning, Fostering Teamwork, and Supporting Youth Interests. The primary opportunities for improvement were within the Engaging Environment domain. Furthering Learning and Supporting Plans and Goals were the only district-wide scales below 3.00.

Progress from 2024-2025

Measure	2024-2025	2025-2026	Change
Safe Space	3.86	4.14	+0.28
Cultivating Empathy	2.79	3.36	+0.57
Supporting Plans and Goals	2.14	2.57	+0.43
Furthering Learning	2.89	2.37	-0.52

The results demonstrate improvement in several areas identified for growth during the prior program year. Safe Space, Cultivating Empathy, and Supporting Plans and Goals all increased. Although Supporting Plans and Goals remains below 3.00, the increase represents progress in an area specifically identified for improvement in 2024-2025. Furthering Learning declined and is the lowest-scoring district-wide scale in 2025-2026.

Site-Level PQA Findings

Results varied across sites, supporting the use of both district-wide professional development and site-specific coaching. Safe Space was consistently strong, including scores of 4.67 at Alcott, Pontiac Middle School, and Rogers; 4.33 at Pontiac High School; and 4.00 at Owen.

Several sites demonstrated practices that may support peer learning. Alcott scored 5.00 in Emotion Coaching and Fostering Teamwork; Owen scored 5.00 in Scaffolding Learning; Pontiac High School and

Pontiac Middle School each scored 5.00 in Supporting Youth Interests; Rogers scored 4.60 in Furthering Learning; and Whitman scored 5.00 in Supporting Youth Interests.

The differences are notable for the Furthering Learning domain. While the district average was 2.37, site scores ranged from 1.00 at Herrington and Pontiac Middle School to 4.60 at Rogers. Supporting Plans and Goals ranged from 1.50 at Alcott and Rogers to 3.50 at Owen, Pontiac Middle School, and Whitman.

State Evaluation and Survey Findings

Michigan State University's 2025-2026 site evaluation reports provide additional information about participants' and stakeholders' experiences. Across the seven sites, the reports include 188 youth survey responses, 71 family survey responses, 276 teacher survey responses, and 37 staff survey responses. Youth survey data were not available for Alcott, and family and teacher survey data were not available for Pontiac High School. State reports require at least five responses before youth, family, or teacher survey results are reported.

Survey	Project Excel Responses	Notes
Youth	188	No youth survey data reported for Alcott
Family	71	No family survey data reported for Pontiac High School
Teacher	276	Teacher data not requested for Pontiac High School
Staff	37	Site reports include staff implementation feedback

Youth Feedback

Youth survey results provide evidence of positive experiences across several Project Excel sites, particularly related to STEM engagement, relationships with adults and peers, school connections, and opportunities for youth voice.

Owen's youth ratings were high or very high compared to other Michigan 21st CCLC sites across all four STEM engagement indicators. Youth also rated the program high for adults caring about them, helping them make friends, and liking the program. Owen received very high comparative ratings for helping youth understand and express themselves and for all three school/job connection measures, including helping youth do better at school and think about their education and career futures.

Whitman youth rated opportunities for voice and choice as high across all three measures and collaboration as high. STEM ratings were high or very high for the availability of interesting STEM activities, adult encouragement to participate in STEM, and increased confidence in STEM subjects.

Pontiac Middle School youth reported the program was high relative to comparable sites in increasing interest in STEM, allowing youth to choose activities based on their interests, helping youth plan activities, helping them do better at school, and helping them think about education and career futures.

Open-ended comments across sites frequently identified friendships, staff relationships, field trips, physical activity, arts and crafts, STEM, homework support, and opportunities to learn new things as favorite elements of Project Excel. At Pontiac High School, youth specifically described tutoring, time to complete assignments, academic assistance, and staff support as valuable program experiences.

Family Feedback

Family surveys indicate that Project Excel serves both youth-development and practical family-support functions. Depending on the site, families reported that without Project Excel their children might remain home without needed support, parents might need to reduce work hours, or families might have to pay for other services. Whitman received a very high comparative rating for families reporting that their child would otherwise have to stay home without needed support. Owen received high ratings for reducing the need for parents to reduce work hours or pay for other services or programs.

Open-ended family responses described improved social skills, friendships, time management, exposure to careers and STEM, assistance with school assignments, and support that helps parents and caregivers maintain work and family responsibilities.

Teacher Feedback

The evaluation included 276 Project Excel teacher surveys for youth across six sites. Pontiac High School teacher data were not requested. The state evaluation examines reported improvement in school behaviors, including attendance, engagement in school-day activities, homework completion, and grades, as well as soft skills such as growth mindset, emotional regulation, perspective-taking, friendships, and helping others. Additionally, youth who attended 21st CCLC programming more frequently demonstrated greater improvements in school behaviors and soft skills according to school-day teachers. This statewide analysis supports Project Excel's continued emphasis on increasing the frequency and duration of youth participation.

Staff Feedback

Staff surveys provide another measure of program implementation and organizational climate. At Pontiac High School, all four staff respondents reported being satisfied with their jobs, 75% reported having enough time to prepare for the activities they led, and staff reported spending approximately four hours per week planning activities.

Professional Development Priorities

District-wide PQA results show that Furthering Learning and Supporting Plans and Goals are the clearest priorities for continued professional development. The Weikart Center identifies scales below 3.00 as potential candidates for improvement action. Recommended methods for Furthering Learning include YW 1 Active Learning and SEL 7 Facilitating Problem Solving. Recommended methods for Supporting Plans and Goals include YW 7 Planning and Reflection and SEL 7 Facilitating Problem Solving.

The site-level variation supports targeted professional development rather than relying solely on district-wide training. Rogers' strong Furthering Learning score, for example, may provide an internal opportunity to identify effective practices to share with other sites.

Conclusion

The 2025-2026 evaluation data show continued growth in Project Excel, with 590 youth attending programming compared with 535 during the prior year. Project Excel operated across seven public-school sites and provided more than 24,000 participant-attendance experiences during the year. Nearly 70% of participants were identified as economically disadvantaged, although economic status was unknown for 169 participants.

Program quality scores demonstrate a strong foundation in creating safe environments for youth and measurable improvement in Cultivating Empathy and Supporting Plans and Goals, two areas identified for growth in the prior year. Furthering Learning, however, declined at the district level and remains an important improvement priority. Significant differences among sites create an opportunity to combine targeted coaching with peer learning among site staff demonstrating particularly strong practices.

The Michigan State University evaluation adds important evidence from youth, families, teachers, and staff. Youth feedback reflects positive relationships, opportunities to build friendships, academic support, STEM engagement, and connections between Project Excel activities and school and career interests. Families describe both developmental benefits for their children and practical support that helps them maintain work and family responsibilities. Statewide teacher-survey responses also reinforce the importance of sustained attendance, with stronger reported improvement among youth who participate more frequently.

The 2025-2026 results point to two complementary priorities for Project Excel: increasing sustained youth participation and continuing to strengthen the quality of learning experiences once youth are in the program.

Dawn Palmer-Van Camp, Local Evaluator to Pontiac Project Excel

August 2026

