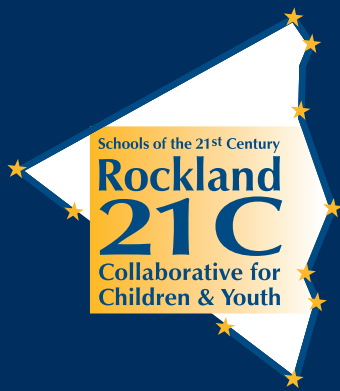


THE DREAM BECOMES REAL:

All children cared for, nurtured, and ready to learn



1998



2008

Each school day in Rockland County ...

... forty-one schools hum with teaching and programs for children and youth, their parents, and students, while where needed – after encountering a ‘curve ball’ or facing chronic problems – a few adult family members get information about services or attend programs developed to meet both their interests and needs. In the initiative’s office, someone is writing a grant proposal that would fund a new program. Elsewhere, a team assembles to plan a symposium...

These activities arose from a vision that all Rockland children would be cared for, nurtured, and ready to learn.

A Foundation of Collaboration

On a snowy day in December of 1995, a group of 20 people who had accepted an invitation from Rockland County Legislator Harriet Cornell went to Yale University to learn about “The School of the 21st Century.” Created by Dr. Edward Zigler, one of the co-founders of Head Start, the program’s concepts were simple and yet revolutionary: children start learning at birth; parents must be involved in their child’s education; children need to be nourished in order to learn; care, play and learning must take place in and out of school hours; and all community institutions must support the healthy development of children. From that day onward, Rockland began to nurture the fine art of collaboration and Rockland 21st Century Collaborative for Children and Youth was born.

At the start, Rockland County had the distinction of being the only county in the United States to initiate a countywide model for school-based or school-linked services, including early education and care, school age care, family support, mental health, health and social services. While collaboration has been called “an unnatural act between consenting adults,” all Rockland School Districts, BOCES, teachers’ centers, parents, early childhood organizations, government, public and private agencies, and business leaders agreed to work together “to ensure the optimal development of every child through a comprehensive support system, an array of opportunities, uncompromising advocacy and dedication of community resources.” **Children were, and are, the priority of this unique partnership. How would all children come to be cared for, nurtured, and ready to learn?**

In 1998, the founders began a rigorous strategic plan process to set initial goals. Thirty-three representatives of school districts, county agencies and nonprofit organizations that worked with children, families, or education, spent three days developing strategies to address that goal.

The next step involved looking closely at those strategies in the context of what supports were already in place and what were not. Over 150 people

The strategies:

- 1 Ensure quality health and mental health care for all children.
- 2 Ensure that every child is in a safe, secure, and caring environment.
- 3 Provide opportunities and support for all children to learn and achieve, in and out of school.
- 4 Promote family support for, and involvement with, their children.



Early supporters of Rockland 21C (From left to right: Larry Peterson, Judith Johnson, Harriet Cornell, Richard Mills, and Dr. Edward Zigler)

Dr. Edward Zigler addressing supporters of Rockland 21C at its celebration for becoming incorporated (From left to right: Scott Vanderhoef, Harriet Cornell, Dr. Edward Zigler, Dr. James Ryan, Ron Anagnostis, and Sherry Gothman)



grouped into seven teams labored to create fifty different action plans. They were referred to the planning team for further shaping, approval, and prioritizing. Many of the resulting Phase One plans supported the work of school Family Resource Centers (or FRCs, a signature element of a 21C school), by focusing on the development of programming that could be delivered to students and families in school environments that they trusted. One by one, the county's school districts had been opening FRCs and their popular reception led district administrators to multiply their number.

Seed money from the county boosted these early district investments, and financed pilot programs like free story hours for preschoolers and family fun nights, customized by principal-coordinator teams who experimented within Yale's formula to respond to their suburban settings. The county investment grew as districts stepped up their investment.

At the same time, implementation teams were working on clusters of related plans for inside and outside schools. These teams were made up of "doers" representing various agencies. Projects from the strategic plan began rolling out. A growing movement was afoot.

Schools cannot do it alone, and the original leaders renamed the initiative **Rockland 21st Century Collaborative for Children and Youth**. They guided the initiative through its incorporation. Board members were chosen to represent key county agencies. Members of the board have contributed their wisdom and

time to support schools and their FRCs; they have aided in the implementation of strategies and models; they have worked as partners; they have provided inexpensive office space; and they have helped to build the institutional capacity it takes to support an effective, responsible cross-boundary movement. Many members have served since the original trip to Yale, including Harriet Cornell, whose unwavering commitment to the initiative is recognized throughout the county.

- 5 Provide a comprehensive means of receiving and disseminating information.
- 6 Ensure that children in trouble get help.
- 7 Attain the community support and involvement necessary to achieve these goals and objectives.
- 8 (Later) Design an organizational structure to support the plan.

Ten years after starting the plan...

Rockland 21C undertook to examine the results of this foundational planning effort with the assistance of evaluators from ActKnowledge, who interviewed project participants and convened several focus groups. ActKnowledge's complete report – largely in narrative form – is available from 21C. What follows is 21C's synthesis of the achievements in implementing plan items. It incorporates results of its own internal analysis and is also informed by ActKnowledge's conclusions. Issues to consider while moving forward are suggested.

KEY PARTNERS FROM THE BEGINNING:

- Clarkstown Central School District
- Nyack Central School District
- East Ramapo Central School District
- Rockland BOCES
- South Orangetown Central School District
- Ramapo Central School District
- North Rockland Central School District
- Pearl River School District



Harriet Cornell at Rockland 21C's benefit night at the Big Apple Circus



L-R: ????, Mimi Hoffman, Debi Thomas, ????, Harriet Cornell, Mark McNeill, ????, ????, and Gail Fleur.

Top Systemic Achievements

Family Resource Centers

Grown in influence from an idea to 8 school districts maintaining FRC programs that “provide opportunities and support for all children to learn and achieve” in 41 schools, adapting the Yale Schools of the 21st Century model. The programs are institutionalized at the elementary level and have spread to several middle schools. These programs are key, though not sole, delivery platforms for the initial strategies (in varying degrees and in varying ways, depending on location), building on the faith that young parents in particular have in their schools and the relationships that centers foster between families and schools. Thousands of families are welcomed and integrated into schools. ***In a few schools, the FRC is fully integrated into the school’s system of supports and/or planning. Annual aggregate attendance at FRC-sponsored activities grew by 275% over five years, to 102,066.***

Informal learning amongst parents occurs across the county as a hallmark of FRCs’ strength-based programs, particularly in programs for young parents such as story hour. Parents are then able to return home with a ‘recharged battery’ or new parenting strategy to try, which helps them remain supportive of their children (strategy 4). Formal parent education programs are much less well attended, and programs strictly related to academics have not been substantial in number.)

Parent-Child Home (PCHP)

A national research-proven early literacy program, Parent-Child Home (PCHP), was selected by school districts from a roster of options presented by 21C, and is implemented by 5 districts. 21C partners with the county’s Youth Bureau so that members of its Literacy Corps can provide many of the home visits (maximizing existing county resources, and establishing a new national model). 21C has also provided partial funding thanks to Senator Morahan and the United Way of Rockland County. National research indicates that participating children enter school as ready to succeed as middle-class children. By empowering the parents through twice-weekly home visits over a two-year period PCHP provides rich verbal interaction environments for very young children. PCHP combines the second, third, and fourth strategies for families who need access to more opportunities so that their children arrive ready to thrive at school. In September 2008, one district analyzed the student performance data of program graduates. ***Of those still living in the district and attending school, 92 percent were reading at or above grade level. (Similar results can be expected of other Rockland participants.) Approximately thirty-nine children are visited on an average week day.***

Toward Healthier Kids

21C’s earliest work with the county’s department of health to use FRCs to promote free and low-cost health insurance programs to families grew into a complex multi-year, multi-organization partnership to support 80 percent of Rockland schools as they assessed and improved their health environments, leveraging state Steps to a HealthierNY funds. Rockland’s combined efforts have interlocked with federal health initiatives aimed at schools, and today even without ongoing funding, a School Health and Wellness Coalition continues to maintain an ongoing initiative and plan joint programs in response to the critical mass of interest and effort that has been built. Also, several FRCs in high need communities have received health department funding for nutrition and exercise programs. The initiative also supported a healthy afterschool program. These partnerships provide an example of maximizing county resources, and how 21C can assist in building schools’ capacity. The first 21C strategy named provision of health and mental health care; on balance, mental health has largely been addressed through the widespread implantation of preventive programs and/or those that promote positive development. One district has a deep partnership with the Mental Health Association, which provides students with supportive programs and staff, and can act flexibly.

School Preventive Services

Experienced DSS caseworkers, who were a part of the School Preventive Services unit, were placed in elementary school buildings to work with families and to provide case management and crisis intervention activities. They partnered with the Family Resource Centers Family Resource Center coordinators in a variety of boundary-crossing roles. Better access to community services, increased parental involvement, higher academic achievement, and improved classroom behavior were consistent outcomes.

Graduates of the
Parent-Child
Home Program





Dr. James Comer at 21C's fifth year anniversary celebration.

Elsewhere in the County

- Rockland County followed through and implemented Information Rockland (*InfoRock*), a comprehensive information and referral service, with a staffperson from 21C's planning effort leading the county's initial implementation steps (strategy 5). In schools, families recognize FRC coordinators as trusted sources of information. 6,397 information and referral requests were answered by FRCs during the 2007-08 school year, an increase of 20 percent compared to five years prior.
- In the process of drawing attention to specific needs of youth courting trouble, the planning process created impetus – albeit continuing in their development under the steam of other organizations – for the creation of: a new homeless shelter for runaway youth (RCYB), and Bridges Academy, providing pre-employment training (RCYB, MHA, BOCES, Cornell Cooperative Extension) (strategy 6).

In addition

- 12 other action plan items are successfully implemented in independent school buildings, if not systemically.
- At least 7 schools offer regular school-age afterschool or before-school care programs that did not exist before. Enrichment activities are offered in almost every school with an FRC, during lunch/recess or after school. (Regular programs for school-age children, be they enrichments or care programs – but mostly care – have matured and attendance has grown steeply, by almost a multiple of 10, and total, in the aggregate between 2003 and 2008, 210,947.)
- As for building community support (strategy 8), 21C's plan itself helped the county “get smaller.” 21C continues to connect families, schools and community. Moreover, 21C is widely recognized as a conduit between county nonprofit organizations and agencies and families. Two hundred and fifty different groups worked with their school FRCs in 2007-08. Rockland 21C works on a variety of projects on behalf of schools, such as Rockland YouthFest, Ready by 21-Quality Counts, etc.

Educational Symposia

Through its annual Educational Symposia, Rockland 21C (in collaboration with the Rockland Teachers' Center, Rockland BOCES, and other county agencies) brought best practices, professional development opportunities and innovative solutions to the attention of its partners. Speakers of national significance such as Dr. James Comer of Yale University's Child Study Center, leaders of the national Coalition for Community Schools, and Dr. David Katz from Yale University's School of Public Health have enriched the practices in Rockland.

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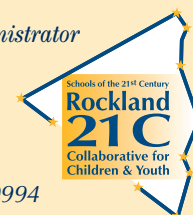
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Leverage 2000-2008

A county investment between 2000 and 2008 of \$1,371,367 given to districts leveraged district investments totaling \$4,068,005, and a substantial amount of in-kind contributions estimated at \$950,000. Operating as a 501(c)3 and maintaining a nonprofit's fiduciary responsibility has allowed 21C to garner and share support from government, towns, and nonprofits between 2000 and 2008 in the amount of:

- \$2,812,002- Rockland County (An estimated 87% of funds were used to support program costs).
- \$240,000 – NYS/Coser funding received through a partnership with Rockland BOCES and eight school districts (100% of funds were used to support the professional development of FRC coordinators, community members, and Rockland 21C board members and staff).
- \$192,540 – Fundraising dollars are garnered by a multi-year relationship with the nonprofit Big Apple Circus, aided by districts and local nonprofit partners who promote and sell tickets for the circus on its 21C Benefit Night.
- \$157,082 – Rockland County Department of Health (RCDOH) (78% of funds were directed to schools to support initiatives that increase access to physical activity and better nutrition for children and youth).
- \$96,880 – Member Item grants (89% of funds were directed to schools/nonprofits to support FRC programming).
- \$54,750 – Towns (100% of funds were directed to schools/nonprofits to support FRC programming).
- \$47,000 – United Way of Rockland County (UWRC) (88% of funds directed to schools/nonprofits to scale up the Parent-Child Home Program).

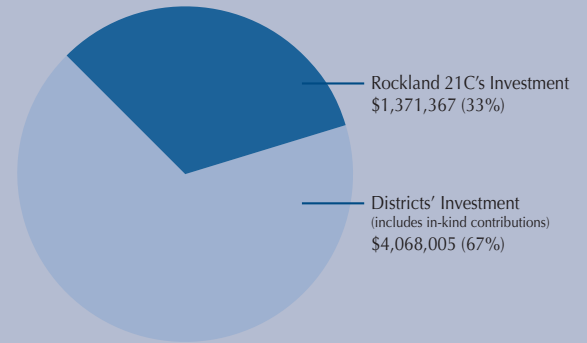
Looking Forward

Moving forward, contributors to the ActKnowledge assessment recommended additional attention being paid to programs and institutional concerns:

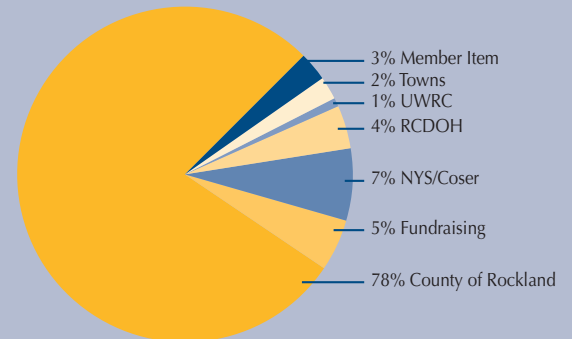
- Increasing assistance to parents so they can be more involved in their children's education.
- Extending school FRC hours and providing more on-site services where needed.
- Recommitting efforts for children's health care.
- Outreach on availability of assessments for very young children.
- Increased out-of-school-time programs, especially where access is most challenged by obstacles of transportation and affordability.
- Job stability and workload of FRC staff.
- Sustainability of funds.
- Increasing communication efforts.

These recommendations raise questions about the capacity to take next steps. Thanks to the increase in districts' commitments and the stability of support from the county in particular, program use has grown steadily. Members of focus groups convened by ActKnowledge said that centers seemed to them to be operating at capacity – an issue of concern to them, but also an achievement to celebrate. Rockland 21C would like to take the entire countywide initiative to the next level. There are several ways to consider doing so: work on infrastructure and re-focusing the initiative around new goals; arranging for new deep partnerships at the district and at the initiative level; or finding other substantial sources of funds that can be added to diversify the existing mix.

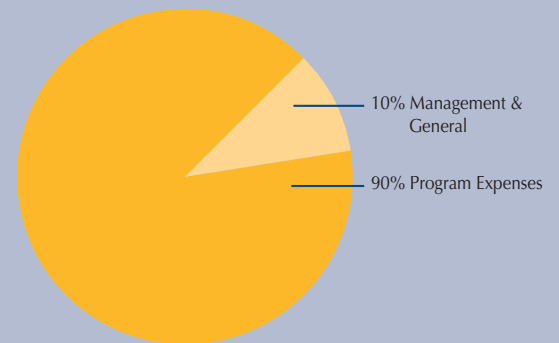
FRC Investment (1/00 - 12/08)



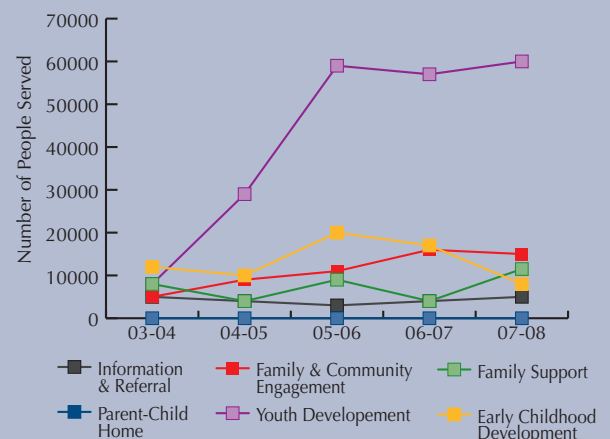
21C Funding (1/00 - 12/08)



Allocation of 21C Expenses (1/00 - 12/08)



Growth in FRC Programs: (1/03 - 12/08)



Opportunities

In 2008, the federal department of education announced the Full Service Community Schools (FSCS) Program, designed to encourage “coordination of education, developmental, family, health, and other services through partnerships” between public elementary and secondary schools, and community-based organizations and public-private ventures. The floodgates having finally swung open, the department was deluged with applications – but the funding stretched only far enough to support ten awards. Today, under the new administration, talk of education is omnipresent; in addition, at the highest levels, there have been discussions about increasing inter-agency collaboration to better support and link early childhood, school, and neighborhood-enhancing strategies.



Funding has begun to be allocated to back up these policies. House Majority Whip Steny Hoyer has been part of a charge to re-authorize the FSCS Program. President Obama has called for increased support for home-visiting programs such as PCHP. The federal Education Department released new guidance for districts that specified that community school strategies are an allowable use of Title I stimulus dollars, saying that these Title I dollars could go to hiring community school coordinators, for out-of-school-time programs, for parental involvement, and for early childhood education and family literacy, etc. (See the October 2009 *NCLB Advisor*). Details on the so-called Race to the Top funds, which is the biggest pot of funds left to distribute, may yet be revised to make it possible to for a community school approach to be a solution for schools that are failing – none of which, of course, are in Rockland.

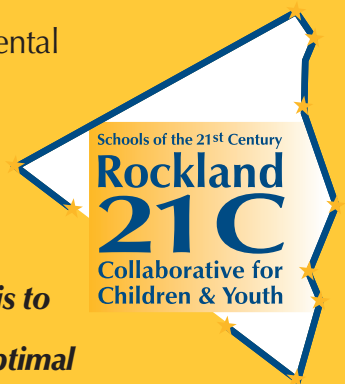
Particularly heartening to initiatives that include nonprofit partners such as ours was the October release of draft guidelines for the Investing in Innovation Fund, known as “i3.” Six hundred and fifty million dollars will be available to districts and to districts and nonprofit partners to “support local efforts to start or expand research-based innovative programs that help close the achievement gap and improve outcomes for students.” ***Rockland 21C is evaluating the feasibility of taking the county initiative to the next level through applying for one of these grants.***

Summary

Through a collaboration of family, school, community and government, the 21C model has helped create a better connection to county resources for families, schools, and the larger community, and has helped families link to early childhood education and care, out of school time programs, family support, health and mental health services, and the school.

And back to a typical day in Rockland ...

... 39 early literacy home visits are made to young families
... hundreds of other parents and children attend free story hours at school Family Resource Centers (FRCs), or off-site at playgrounds and community centers
... 36 information requests are answered or referred; and services such as translations, and the occasional dental check-up.



Our mission is to ensure the optimal development of every child by building a comprehensive support system that links family, school, and community.



Rockland's efforts are not just rhetoric, but true social change. It has made words into a community reality and created a national model. Yale has learned more from Rockland 21C than Rockland has learned from Yale. No other of our 21C communities anywhere in this country can boast of what you have accomplished and I can't compliment you enough that you have involved over 50 public and private agencies in your partnerships and collaborations. You are improving and enriching your programs, and moving forward. You have already greatly impacted the lives of many children and their families, for the better."

— Dr. Edward Zigler,
Yale University, Edward Zigler Center
in Child Development and Social Policy



The real miracle is when people tie it all together and Rockland has done just that. Its innovative, collaborative (the 21C) approach should be studied, copied, and recognized as a model for success.

— Richard Mills
Former N.Y.S. Education Commissioner

I have had the honor of being an FRC Coordinator in the Nyack school district for the past 11 years. Working on the front line of family involvement, I have the distinct privilege of seeing the value of Rockland 21C on the faces of children and parents every day.

— Julie Kassel
Valley Cottage Elementary School



You are trailblazers and lamplighters in Rockland, and we hope you will light the way for communities throughout the State. What really makes the difference is that you took all the pieces, resources and tools available out there and brought them together, into a coherent, functioning whole. You stood back and took the time to think about what was needed, and you created it. That courage, that foresight to build a structure that carries us from where we are to where we want to be is something we are in awe of, we are grateful for.

— Suzanne Sennet
Director of the Early Childhood Bureau of
the NYS Office of Children & Family Service



There is so much 21C-related activity going on in our schools and in our community. We are witnessing great momentum.

— Debi Thomas
Rockland
Teachers' Center

Rockland 21C has fostered many wonderful school/community partnerships designed to give our children the tools and opportunities they will need to grow and to be the best they can be.

— Harriet Cornell
Rockland County Legislature

Rockland 21C celebrates a cross connection that is uncommon in government and among institutional organizations. 21C partners sacrifice the notion that they each are the best resource for the child. People and services have come together from every segment of the County in collaboration as a community focused on our children and families. This is a wonderful opportunity. It's historic. And I'm very proud that it has happened in Rockland and that it is working so well.

— C. Scott Vanderhoef
Rockland County Executive

In the coming years, Rockland BOCES will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary, rooted in the community. Rockland 21st Century Collaborative for Children and Youth (Rockland 21C) is a thriving, strong and vital partner in this community. It has created safe harbors within our component districts, caring for our families and nurturing their growth. As BOCES' partner, 21C continues to work to make a difference in the lives of families. For our families here in BOCES the family resource center has become the core to our children and family services. The 21C initiative countywide has brought families together with their individual school communities to meet the needs of all learners.

— Mary Jean Marsico
Rockland BOCES