

# **Workforce Development in Out-of-School Time: Lessons Learned & Innovative Strategies**

## **A Literature Review**

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**TO:** Learning in Communities / Providence Leaders  
**FROM:** RI KIDS COUNT and Community Matters  
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**RE:** Workforce Development in Out-of-School Time

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*Abstract: This paper details key lessons and promising practices from around the country in the professional development of the out-of-school time (OST) workforce. First, the paper examines the nature of the field and the inherent challenges for both staff members and the programs that employ them. Next, it identifies critical lessons and challenges to implementing a workforce development system that supports a stable and skilled workforce in OST programs. Finally, the paper profiles model approaches and innovative strategies to develop and sustain effective workforce development systems. This memo is a companion to the PowerPoint slide deck detailing key lessons learned and promising practices in out-of-school time workforce development.*

## **Why focus on workforce development for out-of-school time?**

Out-of-school time (OST) programs are uniquely positioned to support children's learning and overall healthy development. Regular attendance in high-quality programs contributes to improved achievement and positive outcomes for participating children and youth.<sup>1</sup> An extensive body of research indicates that the fundamental ingredient in creating quality programs is an OST workforce with the knowledge and skills necessary to understand and meet the diverse needs of children, youth, and families.<sup>2</sup>

A skilled and stable workforce plays a significant role in the quality and continuity of OST programs and their impact on young people.<sup>3</sup> Research reveals that qualified staff are trained and better prepared to meet diverse needs; well-compensated staff are easier to recruit and retain; and consistent staff offer strong, predictable, and lasting relationships with children, youth, and families. However, realities of the OST field present many obstacles to creating and sustaining this type of workforce:<sup>4</sup>

- **Low wages and minimal, or nonexistent, benefits** – The lack of adequate compensation, including competitive wages and benefits, is perhaps the greatest barrier to creating a skilled and stable OST workforce.<sup>5</sup> Some believe that poorly paid caregivers who forgo decent wages and benefits are making a hidden sacrifice, one that effectively acts as an invisible subsidy for an under-funded OST system.<sup>6</sup> As many as 56% of school-age practitioners who have changed jobs

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<sup>1</sup> Blank, Martin J., Melaville, Atelia & Shah, Bela P. *Making the Difference: Research and Practice in Community Schools*. Washington, DC: Coalition for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership, May 2003; Miller, Beth. *Critical Hours*. Quincy, MA: Nellie Mae Education Foundation, 2003; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (Jacqueline Eccles and Katherine Appleton Gootman, eds.). *Community Programs for Youth Development*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Costley, Joan. *Building a Professional Development System that Works for the Field of Out-of-School Time*. Wellesley, MA: National Institute on Out-of-School Time, November 1998; National Institute on Out-of-School Time & AED Center for Youth Development. *Building a Skilled and Stable Out-of-School Time Workforce: Strategic Plan*. Wellesley, MA: Authors, May 2003; Tolman, J., Pittman, K., Yohalem, N., Thomases, J. & Trammel, M. *Moving an Out-of-School Agenda, Task Brief #2: Staffing*. Takoma Park, MD: The Forum for Youth Investment, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Duff Campbell, N., Appelbaum, J.C., Martinson, K. & Martin, E. *Be All that We Can Be: Lessons from the Military for Improving Our Child Care System*. Washington, D.C.: National Women's Law Center, April 2000; NIOST & AED, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> NIOST & AED, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Tolman et al., 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Duff Campbell et al., 2000.

cite low pay as the number one reason for leaving their jobs.<sup>7</sup> In fact, data indicates that the lower the hourly wage, the higher the turnover rate among OST caregivers.<sup>8</sup>

- **Part-time nature of the work** – Since OST programs operate for a limited number of hours each day, the majority of OST positions are part-time. Many positions do not compensate for time spent planning and evaluating programs/curriculum, attending professional development opportunities, working with schools, building partnerships, or participating in a host of other activities necessary to promote quality programming. The part-time nature of the work often limits practitioners’ access to benefits. Perhaps more importantly, when paired with the low wages typical of the OST field, part-time positions make it difficult for providers to earn sustainable wages.
- **Limited training and professional development opportunities** – Some communities have a limited supply of trainings for providers. Although other communities may offer a number of trainings for OST practitioners, existing opportunities may not adequately address caregiver needs. Many caregivers have difficulty accessing trainings due to prohibitive cost, inaccessible location, lack of transportation, or other barriers.
- **Limited options for advancement** – The lack of an established career ladder limits options for upward mobility in the OST field.
- **High turnover** – Low wages, minimal or non-existent benefits, poor working conditions, program isolation, low status, and the lack of professional networking and advancement opportunities contribute to the current OST staffing crisis. Turnover in OST programs averages 35% each year nationwide; constant change of this magnitude makes the attainment of a stable workforce virtually impossible.<sup>9</sup> Cities with higher costs of living face even higher turnover rates. In Boston, for example, the annual turnover rate recently reached as high as 56% among Boston school-age child care providers.<sup>10</sup> High turnover threatens program quality and leads to instability that can adversely affect practitioners, children, youth, and families.
- **Lack of agreed-upon core competencies** – The defining characteristic of any profession is a specialized body of knowledge and competencies shared by all of its members.<sup>11</sup> Despite efforts to establish core competencies for OST practitioners, there remains little agreement on what knowledge and skills are required for OST providers to meet the diverse needs of children, youth, and families. As a result, programs and staff have no common foundation on which to assess performance and improvement, and trainings lack a common core that links one professional development opportunity to the next.
- **Absence of comprehensive professional development systems** – Comprehensive professional development systems establish a core knowledge base, coordinate trainings, identify avenues for career advancement, and link further education and experience with additional compensation.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> National Institute on Out-of-School Time. *Making the Case: A Fact Sheet on Children and Youth in Out-of-School Time*. Wellesley, MA: Center for Research on Women, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> NIOST, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Center for the Child Care Workforce. *Creating Better School-Age Care Jobs: Model Work Standards*. Washington, DC: Author, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Boston EQUIP. *Facts in Action*. Boston, MA: Associated Early Care and Education, March 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Costley, 1998; National Association for the Education of Young Children. *A Conceptual Framework for Early Childhood Professional Development: A Position Statement of the NAEYC*. Washington, D.C.: Author, 1993.

<sup>12</sup> Costley, 1998; NAEYC, 1993.

Currently, many OST professionals gain training through a fragmented approach which 1) makes it difficult to integrate or apply new information and 2) results in duplication of some topics and gaps in others. Although there are individual initiatives throughout the country, in general, the OST field lacks comprehensive professional development systems at the local, state, or national level.

- **Lack of incentives to pursue professional development opportunities** – In the absence of comprehensive professional development systems, the pursuit of additional training frequently does not result in increased compensation, career advancement or additional responsibilities. Furthermore, staff are rarely compensated for time spent in professional development experiences. These realities provide little incentive for individuals to seek specialized preparation for jobs since they receive minimal or no return on their investment in education.<sup>13</sup>

Together, these challenges make it increasingly difficult to attract and retain a skilled OST workforce. As a result, program quality decreases, and children, youth, and families suffer the consequences.

Workforce development systems and strategies help to address these challenges. Initiatives around the country demonstrate that investment in a continuum of training, leadership development, networking, and on-site technical assistance supports the enhancement and sustainability of quality OST programs that meet the diverse needs of children, youth, and families.

## What is the research basis for workforce development in OST?

The focus on workforce development in out-of-school time stemmed from extensive research in the early childhood education field. Research in early childhood education demonstrates that:

### **Program Quality Matters**<sup>14</sup>

- Program quality affects a child's development across the range of language, academic, and social skills. Children in high-quality programs have fewer behavioral problems and perform better in math, language, and reading than children in low-quality programs.
- High quality care has a particularly significant impact on children at risk of school failure.

### **An Educated and Stable Workforce is a Key Component of High-Quality Care**<sup>15</sup>

- Teacher education and training contribute to positive outcomes for children, including better language and social skills.
- High-quality programs have lower staff turnover rates, increasing programs' ability to offer good-quality, consistent services to children.
- Centers which pay better wages are rated higher in quality and experience less staff turnover.

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<sup>13</sup> Mitchell, Anne & Morgan, Gwen. *New Perspectives on Compensation Strategies*. Boston, MA: Wheelock College Institute for Leadership and Career Initiatives, 2000; NAEYC, 1993.

<sup>14</sup> NICHD Early Child Care Research Network. *The NICHD Study of Early Care*. Bethesda, MD: National Institute of Child Health and Development, 1998; Helburn, S. *Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers*. Denver, CO: University of Colorado at Denver, Department of Economics, 1995; Peisner-Feinberg, E.S. *The Children of the Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study Go to School*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Whitebook, M., Howes, C., & Phillips, D. *Worthy Work, Unlivable Wages: The National Child Care Staffing Study, 1988-1997*. Washington, D.C.: Center for the Child Care Work Force, 1998; Helburn, 1995; Howes, C. *Children's Experiences in Center-Based Child Care as a Function of Teacher Background and Adult:Child Ratios*. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 43, 1997; NICHD, 1998; Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes & Cryer. *The Prediction of Process Quality from Structural Features of Child Care*. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12, 1997.

- Children attending centers with more staff turnover are less competent in linguistic, intellectual, and social development.
- The education of child care teaching staff and the arrangement of their work environment are essential determinants of the quality of services children receive.

Building on this research base, there have been some empirical studies and reports specifically related to workforce development in out-of-school time. The references cited in this paper, as well as those listed in the resource section at the end, provide a representation of those resources. In addition, existing OST initiatives around the country have documented their learnings and strategies. This paper draws from those resources as well in order to identify promising practices in OST workforce development.

## What are the key lessons?

**A comprehensive workforce development system supports quality programming by preparing and retaining staff.** Coordinated staff training and preparation improves program quality, effects positive outcomes for children and families, and supports the recruitment and retention of a stable and skilled OST workforce.<sup>16</sup> A review of multiple OST studies found that hiring and retaining educated staff, offering staff training, and providing attractive compensation each support quality OST programs and positive child outcomes.<sup>17</sup>

**Cities need to face multiple challenges simultaneously.**<sup>18</sup> – The challenges facing the OST workforce are intricately related. Only an integrated solution will help to address problems that are so interdependent (e.g., pay, professional reputation, training, career advancement, and turnover). An isolated focus on one issue is not enough. For example, although the establishment of an OST credential may be desirable, underpaid workers are unlikely to remain in the field if participation in a rigorous credentialing program does not lead to increased compensation, responsibility, or advancement.

According to the Wheelock College Institute for Leadership and Career Initiatives,

System thinking means correcting problems in the system as a whole, rather than believing that a simple solution to the problem at hand will work or that a collection of unconnected solutions will do the trick... A narrow problem-solving approach aimed at any one aspect of our system problems will make the others worse.<sup>19</sup>

**Comprehensive workforce development systems have several interrelated components.** – There are five distinct elements of a professional development system:<sup>20</sup>

- **Core knowledge base** that outlines the knowledge and skills school-age practitioners need in order to provide high quality services to children, youth, and families. This base frequently takes the form of “core competencies,” whereas the characteristics of quality programs are outlined in established program standards. Together, these professional standards serve as a foundation for the rest of the workforce development system.

<sup>16</sup> NIOST & AED, 2003; Tolman et al., 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Beckett, Hawken, & Jacknowitz. *Accountability for After-School Care: Devising Standards and Measuring Adherence to Them*. RAND, 2001.

<sup>18</sup> Costley, 1998; Noonan, Anne. *After School Issues: From Contrast to Concrete: Issues In Building a Skilled and Stable Out-Of-School Time Workforce*. Wellesley, MA: National Institute on Out-of-School Time, June 2001; Tolman et al., 2002.

<sup>19</sup> Mitchell & Morgan, 1993.

<sup>20</sup> Costley, 1998; Noonan, 2001.

- **Clearly defined, linked system of training** that meets the needs of staff members in a range of roles, at different levels of responsibility, and with varying amounts of experience in the field. The system should link various training opportunities so that practitioners 1) get credit for past experiences, 2) do not need to start over to train for a new position or role, and 3) earn credit that counts toward the next certificate, credential, or degree.
- **Training approval system** that sets standards on the content, conduct, and quality of training and trainers. Such a system ensures that the content of the training is up-to-date, accurate, and presented in ways that are clear and useful to participants.
- **Career lattice** that links roles, responsibilities, qualifications, and compensation. This career lattice (also known as a career ladder or matrix) defines the amount and kind of training and experience that people need in order to be able to work in, or move into, specific roles within the field. The lattice illustrates various career pathways for advancement in the field and ideally defines compensation levels for different roles, training, and experience.
- **Registry of OST practitioners** that documents all relevant training and education completed by members in the field. Some registries list caregivers' experience and qualifications as well. These registries provide essential documentation and recognition for OST practitioners.

All of these pieces link together. The core knowledge base serves as a foundation for the entire workforce development system. The trainings build around the core knowledge, skills, and experience needed to work in different roles in OST. The training approval system ensures that practitioners have access to quality trainings that meet their needs. The career lattice links additional education and experience with increased compensation. Finally, the registry documents all of the training practitioners pursue as part of their individual professional development.

**Core competencies identify the specialized knowledge and skills that are unique to OST.** – Two questions can determine the parameters and guide the development of the competency base: 1) Is this knowledge or skill required of *every* OST professional, regardless of level or setting or professional role? 2) Does the sum of this body of knowledge and competencies uniquely distinguish an OST professional from all other professionals?<sup>21</sup> Once the CORE competencies are developed, they can be expanded and deepened with specializations at higher levels of preparation and training.

**Existing core competencies share several common elements.** In general, they tend to address the following:<sup>22</sup>

- Child and youth development – Demonstrate an understanding of child development (including social, emotional, intellectual, and physical development) and apply this knowledge in practice
- Program content, activities, and curriculum – Plan and implement developmentally- and culturally-appropriate curriculum that advances all areas of children's learning and development
- Observation and assessment – Observe and assess children's behavior and use this information to plan and tailor teaching practices and curriculum
- Behavior guidance – Implement developmentally appropriate techniques of guidance and group management
- Safety, health, and nutrition – Establish and maintain a safe and healthy environment for children

<sup>21</sup> Adapted from NAEYC, 1993.

<sup>22</sup> Based on a review of existing school-age child care and youth work competencies; NAEYC, 1993.

- Program environment – Create program environments that are engaging and conducive to learning and relationship development
- Family engagement – Establish and maintain positive, supportive relationships with families and provide meaningful opportunities for family involvement
- Partnerships with communities and schools – Actively “bridge” the gap between schools, OST programs, and community agencies and resources
- Program management – Demonstrate the skills necessary to run and sustain effective programs
- Professionalism – Demonstrate an understanding of the OST profession and make a commitment to professionalism and ongoing growth and development

**Coordinated workforce development provides a coherent, systemic approach to address staff needs.**<sup>23</sup> – Professional development experiences must address the diverse needs of OST staff members. Training, networking, and technical assistance opportunities should enable staff members in all roles at all levels to expand their knowledge, strengthen their skills, and advance in their career. When gains in knowledge link to recognition, increased compensation, and career advancement, staff have an incentive to pursue training and stay in the OST field.

The most effective workforce development systems provide a seamless continuum of training that links or articulates five types of professional development:

- Community-based, noncredit training
- Credit-bearing higher education, including college certificates and degrees
- Independent learning, including assessment of prior learning and experience
- Distance learning
- High school training programs

In addition, regular provider networking opportunities are crucial as an informal mechanism of training and information sharing. To be most effective, training should follow a clear sequence from entry-level to advanced and count toward some type of licensing requirement, credential, or degree. Practitioners are most likely to attend trainings when such experiences are made available at times and locations that are accessible.

**Effective professional development experiences:**<sup>24</sup>

- Respond to an individual’s background, experiences, and current role – Practitioners may feel frustrated when training does not link to their needs.
- Acknowledge existing skills and resources – Building upon existing strengths increases the likelihood that new information and skills will be implemented in practice. Such acknowledgement also promotes positive self-esteem and reduces feelings of inadequacy or self-doubt.
- Clearly link theory and practice – Without this linkage, practitioners may reject new knowledge, assuming that it is unrealistic or too difficult to implement.
- Use an interactive, hands-on approach – Adults learn best when they are able to contribute and learn from one another. This approach also models teaching practices that are effective with young people.

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<sup>23</sup> Costley, 1998; NAEYC, 1993.

<sup>24</sup> Costley, 1998; NAEYC, 1993.

- Are facilitated by individuals with OST (or other relevant) experience – Trainers who are knowledgeable and experienced establish credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the participants. Such experience also ensures the quality and relevance of the presented material.
- Provide opportunities for implementation and reflection – Learning is most clearly integrated into practice when practitioners have regular opportunities to utilize new information, reflect on its application to practice, and receive constructive feedback.
- Engage participants in the planning and design of the professional development program – Involvement helps to ensure that professional development experiences meet actual needs and creates a sense of ownership for learning.

**The provision of student support increases the effectiveness of professional development initiatives.**<sup>25</sup> – Long-term professional development initiatives – including higher education certificates, degrees, credentials, and ongoing seminars – are most effective when they are paired with ongoing student support. In order to adequately meet the needs of the out-of-school time workforce and help participants succeed, varied student supports must be structured, regularly available, and integrated into the coursework. Such support includes technical assistance, communication with worksite supervisors, resource dissemination (e.g., access to updated information and best practices), and personal and career development support.

**Investment in the core OST leadership produces sustainable results.** – Frequently, talented staff members get promoted into administrative and management positions. Although these individuals are skilled at working directly with children, youth, and families, they may lack the necessary training and experience to manage an OST program. Directors and emerging leaders benefit from training and consultation in fiscal and personnel practices (e.g., hiring, training, and supervision approaches; budget management). Such support can impact and improve staff recruitment and retention.

**Established workforce development systems can increase public and private support for OST.** – The identification of professional standards for OST programs, staff, and trainers promotes consistency, coordination, and quality. Established workforce systems and professional standards can drive funding and resources and create an avenue toward increased recognition and respect.

## **What are the key challenges to developing and implementing a workforce development system?**

In addition to the existing challenges that confront the OST workforce (listed above), there are unique challenges to building, implementing, and sustaining an OST workforce development system.

**OST professionals have varied needs.** – It can be difficult to establish workforce development systems that meet the needs of OST professionals in a range of roles, in a variety of settings, at different levels of responsibility, and with varying amounts of experience in the field.<sup>26</sup> In addition, different types of people work in OST, including career-oriented, “permanent” OST professionals, program/curriculum specialists, short-term staff members, and volunteers. The designers of workforce development systems must determine how much training people in all four categories need in order to work effectively with children, youth, and families.

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<sup>25</sup> Breslin, Tracy; Gredler, Marta & Lindamood, Judy. *Achieving Program Excellence: Linking Professional Development and Practice – An Evaluative Report*. Boston, MA: Parents United for Child Care, November 2000.

<sup>26</sup> Costley, 1998.

**Terminology can present a barrier to developing effective workforce development systems.** – OST encompasses school-age child care as well as youth work and youth development programs. Despite the overlap in essential knowledge and skills, different types of programs may use different terminology to describe their practices and goals. Workforce development systems must overcome language barriers and use terminology that people in all settings can relate to and understand.

**The diversity of practitioners and populations served calls for workforce development systems that promote and support diversity.**<sup>27</sup> – Despite general consensus on the need to support diversity, the OST field faces the challenge of:

- Ensuring that field leadership and staff mirrors the children, youth, and families being served,
- Providing access to high-quality training that meets the needs of a racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse group of practitioners,
- Incorporating anti-bias training content, and
- Including trainers from diverse backgrounds.

**Staffing issues make it challenging to connect professional development to OST reality.** – The current reality in out-of-school time presents many challenges to establishing accessible workforce development systems that positively impact staff practice in programs.

First of all, many staff cannot attend trainings or do not have incentives to attend. Trainings may occur at hours or in locations that are inaccessible for providers. Few, if any, substitute teachers are available for trainings during program hours. Practitioners rarely are compensated for time spent at trainings, and many trainings do not link to increases in compensation, responsibility, or advancement.

Secondly, some trainings are less effective because there is not a clear link between training content and implementation in practice. Some trainings are too theoretical for front-line staff and do not demonstrate clear application to practice. Others are designed by individuals who are too far removed from direct service, making the content seem unrealistic because it is not grounded in day-to-day reality. Some trainings may be practical and reality-based, but staff may require additional materials and resources in order to apply the lessons they learned at the trainings and implement them at their program sites.

Lastly, some executive and program directors may not understand the needs of front-line staff. Directors may find it necessary to: 1) learn strategies to supervise and support staff in implementing new knowledge and 2) dedicate time for supervision and feedback.

**Workforce development systems must develop strategies to:**

- Address the growing tension between the call for increased regulation of out-of-school time programs and the ongoing demand for programmatic diversity. These are two different approaches to promoting program quality, and they frequently have different ramifications for the expectations and responsibilities of program staff.
- Promote collaboration and coordination among sponsors of training programs and instructors/training facilitators
- Connect to other related professions, including youth development, early childhood, and education

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<sup>27</sup> Costley, 1998.

**There is limited funding for workforce development initiatives.**<sup>28</sup> – The actual cost of providing high-quality OST care is much higher than is commonly understood. The cost of ongoing professional development and training, let alone adequate compensation, typically is not included in calculating the cost of care.

OST programs and systems need dedicated funding for workforce development. Most existing funding resources support direct services for children and only buy access to OST programs, rather than support overall program quality. Infrastructure costs that contribute to program quality (e.g., staff wages and benefits, workforce development) often are not funded at all. At best, they are only partially funded. This problem is exacerbated in programs that rely heavily on public subsidies and have limited access to private fee-paying families and/or funding from foundations and corporations. The lack of financing stability threatens program quality, staff retention, and sustainability.

## **What are the promising practices and innovative strategies?**

Many existing strategies successfully address staff needs and promote professionalism in out-of-school time.

**Collect and analyze OST workforce data.** – Some communities collect information about the current OST workforce (e.g., existing positions, qualifications, turnover, etc.), conduct research to determine who is entering and leaving the workforce and why, and analyze the utilization of existing professional development opportunities, as well as unmet needs. They then use these findings to develop appropriate recruitment, education, and retention programs.

**Catalogue and coordinate existing professional development opportunities.** – Many cities keep an updated listing of all existing trainings, technical assistance, and networking opportunities. By including OST professional development opportunities as well as early childhood, education, and youth work opportunities, communities can inform practitioners of trainings, increase attendance, and identify gaps in the workforce development system.

**Develop an information clearinghouse.** – An information clearinghouse can facilitate the sharing of best practices and dissemination of available resources. Communities use different mechanisms to distribute this information, including OST websites, e-mail list-servs, meetings at intermediary organizations, or lending libraries. The National Institute on Out-of-School Time has a website clearinghouse that includes information on existing core competencies and credentials, career development and compensation initiatives, and demographic data on the OST workforce.

**Host regular networking meetings.** – A number of cities assert that regular (usually monthly) networking meetings are a crucial resource for OST practitioners. Such meetings provide a forum for training, information sharing, resource dissemination, and the sharing of best practices and innovative approaches to common OST challenges. Some networking meetings are limited to program directors, some are limited to OST staff (including both director and front-line staff), and others bring together OST practitioners, community members, and representatives of cultural institutions, foundations, or other resources.

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<sup>28</sup> Halpern, Deich, & Cohen. *Financing After-School Programs*. Washington, DC: The Finance Project, May 2000; Wechsler, Kershaw, Fersh, & Bundy. *Meeting the Challenge: Financing Out-of-School Time Programming in Boston and Massachusetts*. Boston, MA: Parents United for Child Care, February 2001.

**Establish core competencies that address *both* practitioners serving younger children and those serving older youth.**<sup>29</sup> – Significant developmental differences between younger and older children make it important that practitioners implement age-appropriate practices. At the same time, there exists a strong need for practitioners to share a common language and understanding across age groups, in a way that addresses all programs. The key concepts underlying quality programming are frequently the same in programs for younger and older children, even though age-appropriate practices may differ. Instead of creating one core competencies document for staff serving younger children and another for staff serving older youth, cities can create one document that addresses staff in both types of programs. A common knowledge base makes it easier to build one comprehensive system serving all practitioners.

**Create one document that links core competencies to program standards.** – Most cities and states developing accountability measures work with two, or frequently more, separate documents: one that defines *core competencies* (the knowledge and skills individual practitioners must possess in order to provide quality programs) and one that defines *program standards* (elements of quality programs). While these differ in focus – individual practitioners vs. organizations/programs – they are linked in practice. The successful attainment of high program standards depends largely on the capacity and skills of the staff. The existence of separate, unrelated standards and core competency documents creates more fragmented systems. As a result, funding and policies tend to focus on either standards or competencies, but rarely on both. Several city leaders have suggested that creating a document that links practitioner skills to program standards would promote a more seamless, comprehensive system of professional development and quality improvement.<sup>30</sup>

**Develop a seamless continuum of competency-based training.** – Cities have used a number of innovative strategies to promote the utilization and effectiveness of their training systems:

- Re-design existing trainings and develop new trainings based on a shared set of standards and core competencies.
- Provide technical assistance alongside trainings to promote implementation at the program level.
- Provide hands-on, experiential training. Assign “homework” or projects to encourage implementation at the program site. Set aside time for participants to share, reflect on their work, and receive feedback and suggestions from other participants.
- Develop a Leadership Institute for staff supervisors focusing on how to support and supervise staff, help students implement their learnings from trainings and courses, utilize staff’s strengths and interests, address challenges, and share ideas and resources.
- Provide implementation grants to help practitioners apply new ideas in their programs.
- Increase the availability of scholarships and/or loan forgiveness programs to help practitioners afford and attend trainings.
- Work with higher education institutions to:
  - Design for-credit courses and degrees specific to OST,
  - Establish articulation agreements between two-year and four-year colleges, and
  - Grant credit for prior work experience and community trainings.

**Design tracking and assessment tools for both individual practitioners and programs.** – Design a booklet or tracking sheet to help staff document which professional development experiences they have completed. Create self-assessments to help practitioners identify strengths and areas needing improvement. Provide tools to help practitioners outline and chart their professional goals. These tools

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<sup>29</sup> Based on discussions with city and state leaders at the Achieve Boston Summit on Citywide Professional Development Systems in July, 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Based on discussions with city leaders at Achieve Boston Summit in July 2003.

can also help program directors assess current and potential staff, identify workforce needs, and design trainings to address those needs.

**Implement a training approval system.** – Identify a framework for trainers and trainings without dictating curriculum or approach. Publish guidelines for training content and design. Establish trainer registries to identify which individuals and organizations have been approved as trainers.

**Design comprehensive workforce development systems.** – Some comprehensive workforce development systems already exist. Here are three examples that can serve as models:

- **Connecticut Charts-A-Course**<sup>31</sup> – Statewide School Readiness legislation in 1997 called for a statewide professional development system. Since then, Connecticut has created core competencies, a career ladder, an articulation plan linking different training opportunities, and a practitioner registry. Connecticut Charts-A-Course has 8500 members who have access to valuable benefits including: a personal registry file, scholarships for training or education, access to quality and affordable training, opportunities to become a trainer, and career counseling. In addition, the Accreditation Facilitation Project (AFP) offers a variety of resources and supports to early care and school-age programs seeking accreditation.
- **Washington STARS (State Training and Registry System)**<sup>32</sup> – Washington STARS is a career development system designed to improve child care through basic and ongoing training for child care providers. Established through statewide legislation, STARS serves both early childhood education and school-age care. STARS hosts a registry database on the internet and provides scholarships to training participants. STARS also has a trainer approval system and provides manuals and other supports for trainers. Trainers must meet specific qualifications (including education, field experience, and training experience) for approval and complete an application process including referrals.
- **United States Military Child and Youth Development Programs**<sup>33</sup> – The US Military has one of the most extensive workforce development systems in the country. This system includes core competencies, extensive training, and a career ladder that links training, education, and compensation. The competency-based training system requires that staff complete 36 hours of training in their first year and 24 hours in all subsequent years. The military developed a base rate of compensation that is comparable to that of other individuals (including those outside of OST) with similar training, seniority, and experience. A mandate requires that salary increases be tied to the completion of training milestones in order to promote a higher quality and more stable workforce. The system is standardized so that individuals can move between military child care installations while continuing along the same career development ladder. The majority of funding comes from the Department of Defense budget.

**Establish one comprehensive professional development system that serves *both* OST practitioners and youth workers.**<sup>34</sup> – Many cities currently operate one system for practitioners in more traditional OST programs serving younger kids and another for workers serving older youth. As a result, there is a great deal of redundancy. One comprehensive system provides many benefits: increased access to

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<sup>31</sup> Connecticut Charts-A-Course website: [www.ctcharts-a-course.org/](http://www.ctcharts-a-course.org/).

<sup>32</sup> Washington STARS websites: [www2.wa.gov/dshs/stars/default.asp](http://www2.wa.gov/dshs/stars/default.asp) and [www.waeyc.org/web%20page/washington%20stars/stars.html](http://www.waeyc.org/web%20page/washington%20stars/stars.html).

<sup>33</sup> Duff et al., 2000; United States Military Child and Youth Development Programs website: [www.mfrc-dodqol.org/MCY/aboutus.htm](http://www.mfrc-dodqol.org/MCY/aboutus.htm).

<sup>34</sup> Based on discussions with city leaders at Achieve Boston Summit in July 2003.

trainings, greater understanding and communication among practitioners, credibility, consistency, and a tool for funding and advocacy. There is also a movement to incorporate/build on early childhood professional development systems.

**Enhance OST jobs.** – Implement Model Work Standards at program sites. The Center for the Child Care Workforce led a multi-year effort engaging OST practitioners around the country in identifying the elements of a high-quality work environment.<sup>35</sup> These work standards are divided into 13 categories, ranging from Wages and Benefits to Professional Development, Decision Making, Diversity, and the Physical Setting. In addition to implementing the work standards, programs can use creative strategies to expand OST roles, including 1) pairing a part-time OST role with another part-time role to create a full-time position with benefits and 2) attaching additional work hours for planning, curriculum development, and evaluation to extend part-time positions.

**Launch an advocacy campaign.** – Some cities and states have launched major advocacy campaigns to establish workforce development systems, raise salaries, provide benefits, and create full-time jobs. Some strategies include:

- Determining the true cost of operating high-quality OST programs, taking into account the cost of adequate compensation and staff development
- Publicizing the link between high-quality staff and high-quality programs and the subsequent impact on children, youth, and families
- Actively organizing stakeholders to advocate for public and private funding and pursue policy agendas

## Resources for More Information

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<sup>35</sup> Center for the Child Care Workforce. *Creating Better School-Age Care Jobs: Model Work Standards.* Washington, D.C.: Author, 2001.

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#### **Creating Better Jobs**

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#### **Higher Education and Credentials**

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Morgan, G. *Credentialing in Out-of-School Time Programs*. Wellesley, MA: National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 1998.

Nilsen, E. *On the Road to SAC Professionalism: Emerging models, trends, and issues in credentialing: A working paper*. Wellesley, MA: National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 1999.

#### **Existing Initiatives**

Connecticut Charts-A-Course. Statewide professional development system for early education and school-age care. [www.ctcharts-a-course.org/](http://www.ctcharts-a-course.org/) and [www.ctcharts-a-course.org/forms/AtAGlance.pdf](http://www.ctcharts-a-course.org/forms/AtAGlance.pdf) for the career ladder.

United States Military Child and Youth Development Programs. Includes core competencies, professional development system, and a career ladder that links training, education, and compensation. [www.mfrc-dodqol.org/MCY/aboutus.htm](http://www.mfrc-dodqol.org/MCY/aboutus.htm).

Washington STARS. Statewide career development system with registry, scholarships, and trainer approval system. [wvs2.wa.gov/dshs/stars/default.asp](http://wvs2.wa.gov/dshs/stars/default.asp) and [www.waeyc.org/web%20page/washington%20stars/stars.html](http://www.waeyc.org/web%20page/washington%20stars/stars.html).

Core Competencies – For examples, see documents from Achieve Boston, Chicago MOST & Chicago Youth Agency Partnership, Connecticut Charts-A-Course, Indianapolis, Massachusetts School-Age Coalition, New York State, School's Out Washington, United States Military, and United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania.

Credential, Certificate, or Degree Programs – For examples, see Concordia University's School-Age Child Development Bachelor and Master degrees, New York State's School-Age Child Care Credential, California's Child Development Permit with School-Age Emphasis, and Indianapolis's Youth Development Credential.

Trainer Approval and/or Support Systems – For examples, see Washington STARS, United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, and Connecticut Charts-A-Course.

Training Systems – For examples, see above initiatives plus The After School Institute in Baltimore, Building Exemplary Systems of Training (BEST), and TEACH.