Voices from the Field

NATIONAL CENTER ON
Afterschool and Summer Enrichment

Early Childhood
National Centers

Strengthening, Supporting, and Sustaining the Out-of-School Time Workforce

From November 2017 through March 2018, the National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment (NCASE) facilitated a professional learning community (PLC) on the out-of-school time (OST) workforce.

States shared best practices related to the following:

» *Using data to make decisions* about how to increase access to professional development

» *Supporting the workforce* through technical assistance (TA), recruitment and retention strategies, and leadership support

» *Creating and leveraging partnerships* to move the work forward

Examples from **New Hampshire** and **New York** are highlighted in this brief, along with additional examples from the other participating states, including Delaware, Florida, Indiana, and Wisconsin.

Assumptions that Motivated this PLC

The OST workforce is unique

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) system supports children from birth through age 12, a large age range that includes school-age children (ages 5–12 years) served during out-of-school time. The OST workforce has unique features as compared to those professionals who work with younger age groups. This PLC considered the characteristics of several groups that make up the OST workforce. One group is part-time with little formal preparation, while another is full-time and highly educated. In addition, spe-

cialists, such as certified teachers, artists, and social workers, bring targeted expertise. The summer workforce has its own characteristics: temporary, with both young, less experienced staff and certified teachers. Recruiting and retaining well-trained staff remains a challenge across OST. It is important to consider ways to accommodate OST in workforce initiatives, such as offering online training and adjusting required hours of training for part-time staff.

System-level supports are needed

This PLC was designed to strengthen workforce systems to advance both individual career development and program quality. The Professional Development System Framework, from the National Center on Early Childhood, Development, Teaching, and Learning, outlines six components:[1]

1. Professional standards and competencies
2. Career pathways
3. An advisory structure
4. Articulation
5. Workforce information (data)
6. Financing

These components work together to create a strong child care workforce.

Cross-sector collaboration should be leveraged

OST includes several sectors: early childhood, formal education, and youth-serving organizations, etc. States participating in the PLC created cross-sector planning teams made up of representatives from both early childhood and OST, including CCDF lead agencies, state education agencies and 21st Century Community Learning Centers, state afterschool networks, and provider organizations. For some, creating these teams facilitated a first-time collaboration between early childhood and OST. These cross-sector teams set the stage for a successful peer learning community, while also laying the foundation for collaboration and the sharing of limited state resources.

Best Practices

Using data to make decisions

A first step to strengthening workforce systems is collecting data to understand the current workforce and to see where access to professional development can be enhanced. Workforce registries, which are information systems that capture data about practitioners, are one potential source of data. These registries (see the National Workforce Registry Alliance) can be helpful, with the potential to inform policy and practice. However, they are often voluntary and may not include (or have a way to disaggregate) school-age data.

Workforce surveys are another source of data. Recently, limited national surveys on the OST workforce have been conducted. For example, the National AfterSchool Association's 2013 Salary Benefits Survey included a sample of about 800 afterschool professionals, 90 percent of whom were executive or program directors. Among the findings from this subset, 34 percent of respondents had a master's or a doctorate degree, and 39 percent had been with their current employer for more than 10 years.[2] However, a survey of frontline staff may find very different characteristics.

State surveys can be more targeted. For example, New Hampshire recently conducted a pilot workforce survey. Through their statewide afterschool networks, both Delaware and Florida have received grants from the National Conference of State Legislatures to collect data related to OST, including some workforce data.

1   National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning. (2018, March). Professional development system frameworks. Retrieved from https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/professional-development-system-frameworks

2   National AfterSchool Association. (2013, December 4). New research shows afterschool workforce more stable, better educated. Retrieved from https://naaweb.org/professional-development/item/100-new-research-shows-afterschool-workforce-more-stable-better-educated?highlight=WzIwMTMsImJlbmVmaXRzIiwic3Vyd-mV5IiwiYmVuZWZpdHMgc3VydmV5Il0

Informed by data, states are using multiple strategies to increase school-age providers' access to professional development. Online training, effective for some topics such as health and safety, is one way to accommodate diverse schedules. Indiana supported the needs of those working with older children by hiring school-age specialists to partner with quality coaches who provided individual TA. There is also potential to expand access to professional development by sharing resources across sectors. Delaware is considering allowing staff from programs funded by different sources (such as CCDF and 21st Century Community Learning Centers) to attend the same trainings, which could be an effective way to leverage funding.

Spotlight on New Hampshire

New Hampshire has a strong cross-sector team, with many professional development system components in place to navigate common challenges, such as a shortage of school-age practitioners and turnover at several after-school partner organizations. In the meantime, the state is continuing to strengthen its work-force system for school-age providers.

Through the New Hampshire Professional Registry, the state collects data and documents professional development hours. School-age job titles are built into the menus to facilitate separate school-age reports. The registry is self-reported and voluntary, so data are limited. The New Hampshire Afterschool Network (NHAN) recently conducted a pilot workforce survey to collect additional data. Questions about benefits, pay ranges, and education were included. Although the sample of respondents was small, NHAN plans to expand the survey in the future.

New Hampshire provides both online and face-to-face trainings for afterschool professionals through ACROSS NH, an afterschool contractor. As of November 3, 2017, when the new licensing regulations passed, time devoted to TA is now recognized as professional development hours, and the required number of hours of ongoing professional development has been reduced for certain groups of professionals (many of whom are school-age professionals) who work fewer than 25 hours per week.

In 2010, New Hampshire (through the Child Development Bureau at the Department of Health and Human Services) introduced its Afterschool Professional Development System, which includes a credential. Since its inception, the credential has been revised twice. The most recent version is aligned with the current licensing regulations and professional development requirements and now includes a leadership endorsement. To date, more than 630 credentials have been awarded.

Building partnerships—sometimes with nontraditional players such as community businesses, the National League of Cities, and the NH Department of Justice—is a proven strategy that New Hampshire seeks to replicate. Partnering does not just mean asking for money, but looking for ways to start conversations and craft working relationships that are beneficial for all parties. By identifying where there might be intersections and potential for partnerships at the state level (e.g., around mental health issues) and finding ways to get connected to these state initiatives, they can ensure that the OST field can advocate for its needs.

New Hampshire's PLC action plan focused on building leadership in afterschool, for example, through the 2018 revisions to its credential. ACROSS NH is offering train-the-trainer Leadership Institutes, with graduates then working with mentors to train afterschool professionals. This will build a strong cadre of qualified trainers to provide professional development to afterschool professionals. At the same time, it is hoped that building leadership capacity will increase retention in the field by strengthening career pathways and helping programs quickly respond to turnover when it does occur. Recognized, emerging, and potential leaders in the afterschool community were invited to collaborate on revising the credential, an intentional design to continue to build and sustain leadership.

Supporting the workforce

The selection and training of TA providers is one of the key drivers of quality improvement initiatives, and it is an area where OST-specific supports can be targeted. The amount of school-age experience required, and the resulting qualifications of providers to support school-age programs, varies by state. For example, New Hampshire has several pathways to qualify as a TA provider. The minimum qualifications to provide TA are an associate's degree and five years of experience as a center director. New York prefers a bachelor's degree or an associate's degree in a related field (such as child development, elementary education, or physical education). Still others, such as Wisconsin, provide training before a TA professional can begin work but do not require school-age experience. Increasingly, states are recognizing the value of TA for staff, allowing staff to count TA hours (in addition to more traditional training hours) toward professional development requirements.

Recruitment and retention of school-age staff is a challenge many states face. Some have programs that are unable to operate due to staffing shortages, which is not unusual in times of low unemployment. Recruiting and retaining staff will most likely require multiple strategies, such as creating more full-time positions, increasing compensation, and partnering in recruitment efforts. Several states, including Florida, have formed relationships with community colleges and other institutes of higher education to recruit staff. For Indiana, conducting early planning for summer—at least by January—has been a helpful strategy in recruiting summer staff.

Supporting career pathways and conducting stay interviews (as opposed to exit interviews) to uncover issues may also help. For example, New York is strengthening orientation, or onboarding, of new staff. To ensure staff have the support they need from the start, supervisors can help create individual professional development plans informed by a planning tool. The tool, based on 10 elements of quality, asks what skills and knowledge are required for the job, what skills and knowledge the staff member already has and what are still needed, and what kind of training and support are appropriate (see New York State Network for Youth Success Quality Self-Assessment Tool User's Guide, Appendix V). The hope is that staff will be more likely to stay if they feel supported. (See Staff Recruitment and Retention from the National Center on Early Childhood, Development, Teaching, and Learning for more information and state examples related to early childhood.)

As efforts continue to recruit and retain staff, a crucial question may be, "How do you maintain quality through the inevitable turnover?" The PLC discussed several strategies, particularly around building leadership skills.

Leadership skills—which can support both retention and quality—are critical to the sustainability of the OST workforce. Some states are meeting the unique needs of the school-age workforce through specialized leadership training. For example, the Wisconsin Afterschool Network offers the Afterschool Leadership Academy for site supervisors. Other states are meeting the need through afterschool leadership credentials; for example, New Hampshire created a leadership endorsement for its afterschool credential.

National organizations also provide support to build leadership capacity for the early childhood and OST fields. The YMCA, as a large national organization focused on strengthening communities and youth development, created an internal system for growing its own leaders, which other sectors of the field could learn from or adapt. Their "cause-driven" leadership model identifies skills needed at four staff

levels. The model includes a learning and development program composed of on-the-job training, coaching, and a relatively small amount of formal training.[3] Another example is the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, which has developed many leadership resources for the field, including leadership competencies that may be helpful in designing professional development.[4] The competencies, or "essentials," include awareness of self, others, and the profession; communication and team-building skills; cultural competence; and ethical conduct.

3 Gale, S. F. (2015, July 28). Cause-driven leadership at the YMCA. Retrieved from http://www.clomedia.com/2015/07/28/cause-driven-leadership-at-the-ymca/
4 Bloom, P. J. (2007). From the inside out: The power of reflection and self-awareness. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Spotlight on New York

New York has an expansive workforce system. Though there are many professional development opportunities and resources available in New York City, there are far fewer throughout the rest of the state. Another challenge is the large number of child- and youth-serving entities, ranging from federal and state, to county organizations, departments, and funding streams. These diverse programs often present challenges in the way support is provided and made available.

The Network for Youth Success helps address these challenges, driven by a belief that investing in high-quality programs and staff development will contribute to youth success and, ultimately, the success of the state. Affiliated with the National AfterSchool Association and funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Network provides training and technical assistance, and administers a school-age care credential. This credential course, offered through either a face-to-face or distance learning program, teaches afterschool providers how to meet children's needs, work in collaboration with families and community partners, lead staff, and manage an afterschool program. New York has nearly 500 credentialed afterschool professionals, and the numbers have been increasing substantially over the past several years (most likely the result of dedicating staff time to quality initiatives).

Partnerships have been key to New York's successes on workforce issues. The credential was originally started in 2000 as a cross-collaboration representing different regions of the state and various sectors, ensuring that all voices are included. The SAC Credential workgroup, comprised of these various sectors, continues to ensure wide representation as the SAC Credential is updated. The Network and the New York Office of Children and Family Services also have a close relationship.

The Network has found some strategies to be helpful to move the work forward: developing processes and systems to track their credential process, preparing new host agencies to teach the credential courses, ensuring consistency between these host agencies, making sure host agencies have the resources they need, and having the internal and external capacity to do the work (which depends, in part, on funding). Perhaps most significant is having staff with the dedicated focus on quality and workforce development issues.

Overall, New York would like to identify sustainable ways to strengthen OST at the system level, with a five-year timeline. As part of their action plan, The Network:

» has added a special credential renewal process for advanced professionals to meet the needs of afterschool leaders.

» will assess how the professional development provided by the credential process is working. They are currently looking at a measurement system and, to this end, have added evaluations to every training.

» will focus on communication and marketing around the value of afterschool. A broad communication strategy will hopefully address staff recruitment and retention as well as better inform parents and others outside of the field about staff and program quality.

COLLABORATION

Creating and leveraging partnerships

Partnerships are a key strategy to building a strong workforce system, especially one that can sustain quality through turnover and change. Thinking of partnerships as falling on a continuum is helpful when considering how to move the work forward. The National Summer Learning Association uses a Collaboration Continuum.[5] As partnerships move through the continuum stages—networking (sharing information), coordinating (changing services), cooperating (sharing resources), collaborating (cross training), and finally integrating (merging structures)—trust grows and sense of "turf" decreases. Programs and organizations benefit from having a variety of partnerships that may fall in different places along the continuum (NSLA, 2017).[6]

Partners can work together on strategies to strengthen the workforce, such as supplying ongoing coaching and mentoring, offering competitive salaries, establishing benefits, improving leadership skills, promoting economies of scale with a shared services alliance, coordinating with other professional development systems, or repackaging resources to target supports for individuals and programs.[7]

Representatives from Maine and Michigan shared with the PLC their experiences leveraging such partnerships and collaborations. Maine's Early Childhood Division at the Office of Child and Family Services in the Department of Health and Human Services has worked with the Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network to develop several tools:

» A Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)

» A professional registry to track training, credentials, and education

» A career lattice inclusive of school age

In addition, they have collaborated on agreements with institutes of higher education for Maine credentials and data sharing. Michigan's Office of Great Start, created by the governor, includes the Department of Education and the Department of Human Services, thus combining OST and early childhood education. The office has been able to create an aligned system, including birth to age 12 licensing regulations, standards of quality, core knowledge and competencies, a QRIS, a professional development registry, and a career lattice. Both states cited building relationships as central to the work.

5 Act for Youth. (2018). Community collaboration. Retrieved from http://actforyouth.net/youth_development/communities/collaboration.cfm
6 National Summer Learning Association (2018). Partnerships. In Summer starts in September planning guide. Baltimore, MD: Author.
7 National Center on Child Care Professional Development Systems and Workforce Initiatives. (2014, January). Targeting early childhood and school age workforce investments. Retrieved from https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/strengtheningworkforce_targeting_investments.pdf

Summary and Next Steps

The uniqueness of the OST workforce presents opportunities as well as challenges, including recruiting and retaining well-trained staff and bringing together multiple sectors. By leveraging partnerships, building leadership capacity, strengthening school-age professional development, and using data to make informed decisions, cross-sector state teams are strengthening and sustaining their workforce systems and ensuring they are inclusive of school-age providers.

The six state teams that participated in the PLC created action plans to address their school-age workforce system priorities. These action plans cover several key areas:

» Building leadership in OST

» Including school age in QRIS

» Increasing professional development opportunities for school-age program staff

» Strengthening and sustaining an OST professional development system, including multiple supports

Building cross-sector teams, consistently cited by PLC participants as key, is the foundation for creating a strong workforce system that works for all our children.

Resources

PDW Center. (2013, April 1). Strengthening the early childhood and school-age workforce [Webinar recording]. Retrieved from https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/ncase-resource-library/strengthening-early-childhood-and-school-age-workforce-webinar-presentation

National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning. (2018, March). Professional development system frameworks. Retrieved from https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/professional-development-system-frameworks

National Summer Learning Association (2018). Partnerships. *In Summer starts in September planning guide.* Baltimore, MD: Author.

Tout, K., Epstein, D., Soli, M., & Lowe, C. (2015). A blueprint for early care and education quality improvement initiatives. Retrieved from https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/ncase-resource-library/blueprint-early-care-and-education-quality-improvement-initiatives

For more resources, see the NCASE Resource Library at https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/ncase-resource-library.