

## Views from the Field:

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- 1. In recent years, the out-of-school-time field has seen an increased push toward outcomes-based programming. What makes professional development and continuous program improvement (in this brief, defined as: training, monitoring, coaching and data analysis) especially important in today's out-of-school-time environment?**

“Increasingly, policymakers are expecting more for their investments, and after-school and out-of-school-time programs are no exception. The pressure of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) on school systems to increase student performance is also putting more pressure on OST programs as a way to supplement and enhance what happens during the school day. Policymakers believe that if they are funding a program, it should help meet important goals, such as increasing academic performance. Research indicates that there are practices and structures for OST programs that are more effective than others. But practitioners and policymakers don't always have the opportunity to learn about research on effective practices. That is where professional development and continuous program improvement come into play. Efforts to improve programs and enhance the skills of program leaders and staff should be based on research on effective practices and policies. A cycle of continuous program improvement also assumes that the program is data driven and uses data to determine how to make continuous improvements. Professional development needs to help program leaders and staff learn about data, how to collect, analyze, and interpret data, and how to respond to it. Professional development needs to ensure program leaders and staff have access to expert help (coaches for example) who can help them move through such a process.”

- 2. What are the most important things for policymakers and funders to understand about continuous program improvement in afterschool? Feel free to include some examples of best practices in professional development (provided for whom? implemented by whom?).**

“Policymakers and funders need to understand that continuous program improvement is not a one-time event, but rather a process that never ends. Oftentimes policymakers will be content to fund or support a one-time activity or event such as professional development, without understanding that a one-time event won't have much of an impact on quality and effectiveness. Policymakers and funders need to value professional and organizational development efforts and allow funding to be used to support those activities on an ongoing basis.”

**3. In your experience, are the current investments in professional development sufficient to meet the desired programmatic outcomes? What policies could better support the increased need for professional development (local, statewide, national)?**

“While I’m not an expert on how much money and effort is put into professional development for OST personnel, I’m quite sure that it is very limited. (It might be an interesting exercise to try to determine just how much money actually is used for professional or organizational development.) Given the need to have program directors and senior staff that focus on continuous program improvement and the wise use of data, increasing the investment in professional and organizational development would be a wise strategy in my opinion. Policymakers could make sure that program guidelines allow funding to be used to support professional and organizational development and they could also increase the amount of funding that could be put into these activities. I realize that policymakers usually want to ensure that the bulk of funds go to direct services for children and youth, but they should ensure that sufficient funds are available and that program authorizations allow for those funds to be used for development activities.”