

## 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?**

“Although we do not have great research to support this contention, I believe that programs are more likely to produce positive results if they are clear on their goals, track measures of progress (a.k.a. outcomes) against those goals, and continually use the information to adjust and improve their practices.

We have enough experience with post-program outcomes to know about their strengths and limitations. One limitation is that they are better for motivating program improvement than directing it. One promising approach is to go beyond tracking post-program youth outcomes and focus practitioners on things that should lead to improved youth outcomes but are within practitioner control, such as how hard they work and the quality of their interactions with young people.

Line staff in the out-of-school field have little formal training on how to work with youth, and that situation is not likely to change given the economic structure of the field. This means that policymakers and administrators have a special need to fund and implement policies, management practices, and other supports that improve how well line staff work with kids. As your question notes, these promising program practices include monitoring, coaching and feedback about what happens at the point of service between staff and youth.”

- 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?).**

“There are not a lot of good data on the techniques that produce continuous improvement. One thing that research on teaching in K-12 tells us is that staff experience does matter for a while, but the positive effect of more experience flattens out after about three years. The other thing is that if formal credentials and off-site training/education matter for teacher quality, they do not matter a lot. For example, teachers with master's degrees do not add value to student achievement more than teachers without a master's. Finally, we find from a number of fields that everyone learns well from peers who can model appropriate techniques.

My read of such findings is that if we want to improve program effectiveness we ought to be funding, implementing and evaluating on-site, ongoing staff development practices. These practices should allow line staff to observe effective youth work and to get feedback and coaching on their own performance.”

**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)?**

“The current investments are not enough. The press is for more program supply with too little attention to program effectiveness. And when people do get interested in staff development as a road to better services, it usually takes the form of short-term courses and workshops that are far away from the actual work with young people. We now have several observational measures of program practices that help staff know what good practice is. These can be used to give staff feedback on their staff/youth interactions. Staff then need the sort of on-site, ongoing observation, feedback and coaching that will help them improve. Funding and accountability systems that encourage such staff development practices are very promising.”