

Views from the Field:

**DANIEL PRINCIOTTA, SENIOR POLICY ANALYST,
NATIONAL GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION FOR BEST PRACTICES**

- 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?**

“Confronted with poor student achievement, persistent achievement gaps and dismal graduation rates, governors and other state policymakers are looking at afterschool, summer learning and other expanded learning opportunities (ELOs) as integral means to support student success. Increasingly, states are devoting more resources to expand and support ELOs.

State policymakers need to ensure that state investments in ELOs, and federal investments administered by states, are paying dividends in terms of improved outcomes for youth. An unfortunate feature of the current ELO landscape is that program quality varies widely. Although high-quality programs have positive effects on student outcomes, low quality programs do not, and they may even have detrimental effects. As a result, a relentless focus on ELO program results is an essential part of good public policy.

Given a results-oriented environment, professional development and continuous program improvement are critical. Research supports what common sense suggests: programs with well-trained personnel that make frequent use of assessment to inform their efforts demonstrate improved student outcomes. Thus, programs that make use of professional development and continuous program improvement are more likely to demonstrate positive results, and policymakers who fund these types of programs are more likely to receive a strong return on investment.”

- 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?).**

“It is crucial that policymakers realize that they can increase the prevalence of continuous program improvement, professional development and other effective practices in after-school programs by taking a comprehensive approach to ELO quality at the state level.

In a forthcoming report, I offer strategies, along with my coauthor Ayeola Fortune at the Council

of Chief State School Officers, to help states develop ELO quality systems that ensure and enhance program effectiveness and efficiency. Many states are already working to develop these systems, bringing together key ELO quality stakeholders, defining what quality means for ELO programs in their states, determining how to measure quality and how to generate it, and making sure that quality programs are available to those who need them most.

New York is a good example of a state where continuous program improvement is a key part of their quality efforts. Their department of education requires all programs receiving 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) funding to use the New York State Afterschool Network Quality Self-Assessment Tool. The tool, developed by over 200 after-school stakeholders over multiple years, uses a common set of quality standards to help programs assess, design and execute strategies for ongoing improvement. For more information, see: http://www.tascorp.org/policy_resources/advocacy_partners/nysan/NYSAN_Self_Assessment_Tool.pdf.”

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 Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) and the 21st CCLC program are the two largest federal investments in afterschool. Each of these programs has funding set aside that can help support state ELO quality infrastructure. According to a recent study on CCDF expenditures, in 2004 states invested more than double the required amount—\$920 million or 10 percent of total federal and state CCDF funds—in quality efforts, such as professional development.

States are making use of federal quality dollars, and they are also building quality funding into state programs. For example, the California Department of Education can set aside 1.5 percent of funds appropriated for the After School Education and Safety Program to provide technical assistance, evaluation, training services and local assistance funds to support program improvement.

Some states coordinate dollars across funding streams to support broad-based ELO quality efforts at the state level. As a case in point, Missouri uses quality dollars from both CCDF and 21st CCLC to support the Missouri Afterschool Resource Center, which provides technical assistance, support services and training to after-school programs in the state. By taking a systemic approach, states can make dollars invested in ELO quality go further.”