

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?**

“There are at least three areas of research that support the timeliness and importance of professional development in out-of-school time programming. The first provides evidence that caring, knowledgeable and consistent adults contribute substantially to positive youth development. Effective professional development activities cultivate these skill sets and, ideally, help retain staff over longer periods of time. Related to this is research regarding youth worker professionalism and how the out-of-school-time (OST) workforce is generally underpaid, under-trained and underappreciated. Again, quality staff support can begin to offset these challenges. Lastly, there is growing attention to and research in the field of teacher staff development, including the National Staff Development Council's quality standards. This element of “formal” education could and should be purposefully infused into out-of-school-time professional development efforts.”

- 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?).**

“Diversity: Effective staff development is comprised of more than conferences and workshops. Research demonstrates that different learners learn through different venues, yet the scope of OST professional development is remarkably narrow. In addition to trainings and technical assistance, practitioners and administrators must recognize the value of alternative professional development formats such as peer networking groups, listservs, resource centers, apprenticeships, adult mentorships and similar forms of support and enrichment.

Comprehensive Evaluation: Although satisfaction is a first step in evaluating professional development, thorough assessment should address multiple goals. Did the participants acquire new knowledge or skills? Did their organizations support their growth and allow them to apply their experiences? Did the participants share the new information with colleagues or adapt it to other settings? Most importantly, did their professional development experience positively affect

program youth? Authentic evaluation should include quantitative and qualitative methodologies and measure satisfaction, acquisition, integration, application, expansion and impact.”

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)?

“Support for OST professional development is increasing but inadequate. Funders and policymakers are finally convinced that significant investments in children and programs yield tangible outcomes—yet commitments of time, money or advocacy to professional development are still minimal and inconsistent. As described previously, the field should integrate research on teacher staff development, embrace a more diverse definition of professional development and take its evaluation seriously. Moreover, OST professional development standards should be developed and receive as much attention as program standards, frameworks, benchmarks and monitoring tools. Lastly, the fear of turnover—investing in staff when they rotate so quickly—should be addressed and overcome. We invest in children regardless of where they go next. Investments in out-of-school-time staff, if not applicable to the same program year after year, are sound investments in the OST workforce.”