

# PROMOTING QUALITY THROUGH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## A Framework for Evaluation

*Harvard Family Research Project's (HFRP) Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation briefs highlight current research and evaluation work in the out-of-school time field. These documents draw on HFRP's research work in out-of-school time to provide practitioners, funders, evaluators, and policymakers with information to help them in their work. Recognizing the critical role that staff play in promoting quality out-of-school time (OST) programs, in this brief we examine OST professional development efforts and offer a framework for their evaluation.*

There is no question that staffing is a key component of quality in out-of-school time (OST) programs.<sup>1</sup> Many programs attribute their success to skillful providers, and research demonstrates the importance of positive staff-child relationships for youth outcomes (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; McLaughlin, 2000; Rosenthal & Vandell, 1996; Tolman, Pittman, Yohalem, Thomas & Trammel, 2002). Recently, when a set of leading experts in the OST field was asked to identify the single most important ingredient for creating and sustaining quality improvement systems in OST, five of the eight respondents articulated issues of staff recruitment, training, and development (Little, 2004).

Professional development initiatives have been a key mechanism for increasing the skills of everyone from new personnel to longtime staffers, in part because many OST workers are paraprofessionals who have little preservice training (Partnership for Afterschool Education, 1999). However, evaluating the effectiveness of these initiatives is a relatively recent development. Given the importance of staff development for both higher quality programs and better youth outcomes, it is critical that we design evalu-

ations that will help programs understand the benefits of their professional development efforts.

This brief offers a preliminary framework for understanding and implementing evaluations of OST professional development initiatives. In so doing, it draws on research from early childhood and elementary education and highlights the evaluation methods and results of recent OST professional development initiatives at both local and national levels.<sup>2</sup>

### What Is Professional Development?

*Professional development* is a broad term that can refer to a variety of education, training, and development opportunities. For the purpose of this brief, the term will be applied to a full range of activities that have the common goal of increasing the knowledge and skills of staff members and volunteers. Professional development programs target many specific outcomes, including increased staff knowledge about child and adolescent development, use of effective strategies for activity programming, and implementation of methods for promoting positive relationships with youth. Many professional development initiatives also have the secondary goal of improving the quality and sustainability of the out-of-school time workforce, by increasing providers' marketable skills and by garnering public support for the youth development field.

Professional development for OST providers can occur in many settings and at many stages throughout a provider's career. These activities may be formal or casual, highly structured or flexible, conducted before the job application process or throughout the career cycle. Pro-

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## DEFINING ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR YOUTH WORKERS

An increasing number of stakeholders are asking the question, what defines a skillful out-of-school time provider? The answer is a complex one, particularly given the diverse experiences, responsibilities, and needs of youth workers.

One way to address the issue is through youth worker competency standards. Several organizations have developed competency frameworks, and a framework from the National Collaboration for Youth aims to integrate these into one unified model (see Select Professional Development Resources on page 11). Competency standards come from several sources, including the voices of youth workers themselves, research from the fields of early childhood education and daycare, standards from the U.S. Department of Labor on successful workplace skills, developmental research on the needs of youth (e.g., the National Research Council's publication *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*), and, most recently, youth reports (e.g., qualitative research by Reed Larson from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign).

While no clear consensus yet exists, several factors have been consistently identified from these sources, including, but not limited to, possessing a strong knowledge of youth development; engaging in warm, positive relationships; promoting positive peer interactions; and encouraging youth to be actively involved in shaping their programs and experiences. Identifying other areas of overlap is an important area for future work, in order to provide a comprehensive picture of a skillful provider.

Professional development opportunities are diverse largely because OST workers represent a range of backgrounds—there is no standard route to becoming a provider. A large number of staff who work directly with youth have no preservice training and many programs do not require specific credentials or academic degrees; in fact, very few colleges and universities offer courses or degrees in OST or after school (Partnership for Afterschool Education, 1999). Therefore, a range of professional development opportunities can be beneficial, and overarching “professional development systems,” or combinations of various

development activities, are likely to show the largest and most sustained effects when they are evaluated (Costley, 1998). Professional development settings include:

- Higher education, such as continuing education courses and degree programs
- Preservice training and new-staff orientation
- In-service training provided by programs to current staff
- Training seminars and resource centers provided by external organizations outside the program setting
- Local and national credentialing systems and programs
- Local and national conferences
- Mentoring programs and relationships
- Ongoing informal resources, such as newsletters, online discussion boards, and “brown bag” lunches for staff members to share ideas and expertise

In many national organizations (e.g., Girls Inc. and 4-H), staff development is coordinated by a central office and integrated into the national infrastructure. For smaller local programs, access to professional development opportunities is often facilitated by regional “clearinghouses” and advocacy organizations. A recent and promising approach to professional development is to harness audio, video, and computer technologies to provide distance-learning programs for teacher and staff training.

From college courses to staff training seminars, professional development activities vary according to program characteristics and providers' needs. At the program level, operating budgets and program infrastructure have a large impact on the kinds of trainings and other opportunities offered. In addition, the type and setting of professional development activities depend, in part, on the program's staffing model (i.e., who is hired and for what purpose). OST staffing models range from employing full-time directors who harness volunteer energy, to engaging older youth as staff members, to contracting with content-specific consultants to work on special arts and music programs. Many programs incorporate several of these methods.

For example, the New York City Beacons Initiative<sup>3</sup> offers a career ladder, which can eventually lead from the volunteer level to paid employment. The program encourages youth to run many activities themselves and to become future providers, offers the MOSAIC Employment Club to provide job skills training to community members, employs only college graduates or current students to promote higher education for youth participants, and holds mandatory weekly training meetings. LA's BEST<sup>4</sup> provides opportunities for “alumni” to return to the program as volunteers and eventually as paid staff members, thus continuing to engage young people in the program

even after they have “graduated.” The San Francisco Beacons Initiative<sup>5</sup> also offers a variety of training models for their diverse staff, including a citywide training network for directors and administrators, weekly training for Americorps volunteers, and on-the-job training for contractual employees, such as visiting artists.

### How Does Professional Development Impact Program Quality?

Professional development activities can impact program quality on at least two levels. First, and most important, *staff development can affect youth outcomes*. Evidence of this process comes from other fields related to OST. Early childhood education studies have found that the quality of daycare children receive is associated with providers’ educational attainment and participation in training workshops (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2001; Norris, 2001), and that quality of care is in turn linked with children’s more positive social and cognitive outcomes (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2001). Similarly, an education reform study showed that elementary school students performed higher in reading and math when their teachers had participated in and given high ratings to a professional development program that provided content knowledge and instructional strategies aligned with state education standards (Westat & Policy Studies Associates, 2001).

The positive impact of staff development most likely operates through a chain of events: Professional development activities affect the practices that youth workers use in their programs, and these practices in turn affect youth participants. For example, well-trained providers use their knowledge of child and adolescent development to interact positively and effectively with youth. Research from developmental psychology has shown that having at least one positive and caring relationship with an adult can buffer children against risk factors in their lives, and in fact, can predict positive outcomes in later life (e.g., Gambone, Klem & Connell, 2002; Werner & Smith, 1982). OST programs provide a vital opportunity for such connections, whether the program’s focus is on academics, leadership skills, or other outcomes (Seligson & Stahl, 2003). Staff training can also help providers plan enriching activities, connect with participants’ families, and communicate with community stakeholders—all of which are elements of high quality programs (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Rosenthal & Vandell, 1996; Tolman et al., 2002).

Secondly, professional development is important because of its potential *impact on the sustainability of the youth development workforce*. OST providers who have professional development opportunities have reported feeling more confident and more satisfied with their jobs (Center for School and Community Services, Academy for

Educational Development, 2002; Girls Inc., 1996). These outcomes could lead to better staff retention and lower turnover rates. It is important to emphasize the possibility, however, that staff retention may improve only if staff who have training opportunities also have opportunities for increased responsibility and higher compensation.

One method for addressing this need is the career development ladder, a system that would tie increases in

#### THE APPRENTICESHIP MODEL

A new and promising approach to professional development is the apprenticeship model, in which youth organizations provide employment in out-of-school time settings, along with training and college-level courses. This model benefits both staff and programs: It provides staff members with training and experience, which will increase their skills and job opportunities, and provides programs with dedicated staffers who are committed to youth development.

The **Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship Program (YDPA)**<sup>1</sup> is a national initiative of the U.S. Department of Labor (DoL) to provide a special out-of-school time certification for current and future youth workers. Local YDPA programs combine mentoring, direct instruction, and on-the-job training, on topics ranging from youth development to program organization. DoL is working with organizations around the country, including 4-H,<sup>2</sup> to implement this initiative.

The **Teaching Fellowship Program**<sup>3</sup> is another apprenticeship model, run by Americorps, in partnership with Boston’s Citizen Schools, Lesley University, and local nonprofit and commercial organizations. Participating Teaching Fellows work at local organizations in the mornings, teach at Citizen Schools in the afternoons, and work toward a master’s degree in education with a special concentration in Out-of-School Time Education.

<sup>1</sup> For more information on YDPA, visit the National Clearinghouse for Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship Programs website at [www.ydpaclearinghouse.org](http://www.ydpaclearinghouse.org).

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the National 4-H Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship Certificate Program, visit [www.nae4ha.org/ydpa](http://www.nae4ha.org/ydpa).

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the Teaching Fellowship Program, visit the Citizen Schools website at [www.citizenschools.org/teachingfellows/index.cfm](http://www.citizenschools.org/teachingfellows/index.cfm).

**PROFESSIONALIZING THE WORKFORCE:  
WASHINGTON STATE'S  
CAREER LADDER INITIATIVE**

The Washington State **Early Childhood Education Career and Wage Ladder** is a pilot project run by the Economic Opportunity Institute. It uses public funding to tie salary increments for childcare workers to continuing education, experience, and responsibility. Its goals are to professionalize the status of childcare workers, increase job satisfaction and retention, and improve the quality of childcare. Evaluation results from the pilot study showed that childcare workers in centers with career ladders had higher job retention rates, exhibited higher morale, and were more likely to complete higher education courses than childcare workers in centers without career ladders. For more information on this project and its results, visit [www.eoionline.org/Policy-EarlyLearningAndCare.htm#ECE](http://www.eoionline.org/Policy-EarlyLearningAndCare.htm#ECE).

staff salaries and responsibilities to ongoing education and experience. Advocates propose that a career development ladder would increase the professional status of OST providers and, correspondingly, staff retention rates (Brown, 2002). Findings of a recent pilot study indicate that a wage ladder in early childhood education had positive effects on staff retention and morale (see the box on this page). Although there are some distinctions between early childhood and OST (most obviously, the age of the children served), early childhood education initiatives may serve as models for the OST field, and there is some evidence to suggest that including a career ladder is a key component for system building in OST (National Institute on Out-of-School Time & Academy for Educational Development Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, 2003).

**Why Evaluate Professional Development Initiatives?**

Despite the prevalence of professional development activities and their numerous potential benefits, the effectiveness of these efforts cannot be ensured by good intentions alone. Evaluations are needed to measure and verify their quality and usefulness. However, evaluations of professional development have been sparse. According to a scan of our Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database,<sup>6</sup> very few program evaluations include information about training or staff development, and staffing

information in these evaluations is usually limited to hiring qualifications and staff/child ratios. This could be due to a number of barriers, including limited time and resources for evaluation and limited evaluation skills. Educators and other youth workers often report feeling that evaluation of professional development wastes valuable staff time (Guskey, 2000). However, evaluation is a critical part of the professional development process because it identifies which program elements are (or are not) successful, which ultimately leads to the creation of more effective and efficient programs.

Although many core features of assessment are consistent across contexts, there are some features of evaluating professional development programs and initiatives that are unique. Most important, and unlike many other program elements, it is necessary to demonstrate the effect of professional development activities at multiple levels of outcomes. The next section of this brief describes a multilevel framework for understanding and implementing evaluations of professional development in OST programs.

**A Multilevel Framework for Evaluation**

Professional development experts agree that evaluations can and should assess the effects of professional development programs at multiple levels (Guskey, 2000; Killion, 1998; Kirkpatrick, 1998; Mizell, 2003). Some experts recommend three levels, while others add a fourth. Kirkpatrick's framework, which has been a model for evaluating training initiatives for several decades, details four levels of evaluation: (1) reaction to the training, (2) learning of information and practices from the training, (3) transfer of this knowledge into practice, and (4) results for key stakeholders. Table 1 below presents these four levels and applies them to professional development in OST.

As noted above, the reality of evaluation in the context of limited time, resources, and evaluation skills often translates into a scarcity of much-needed evaluation in-

**TABLE I  
THE FOUR-LEVEL EVALUATION MODEL  
APPLIED TO OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME (OST)**

Level	Applied to OST
1. Reaction	Feedback from OST providers about training needs and satisfaction
2. Learning	OST providers' knowledge of best practices
3. Transfer	The practices used by OST providers
4. Results	Positive developmental outcomes for youth and other stakeholders, such as families and communities

formation that programs can use for accountability and program improvement. The four-level model can facilitate professional development evaluations in OST, because it describes how evaluation can be conducted—and how it can be useful—at each level.

Before planning an evaluation strategy or choosing an evaluation level, it is important for professional development evaluators to define their goals. These goals may be affected by the program’s stage of development. For example, evaluation of a first-time program may place more emphasis on implementation and provider opinions; after implementation has been studied and improved, evaluators may then turn more attention to youth outcomes. Each of the four evaluation levels plays an important role in facilitating learning about the initiative and, ultimately, in improving it. The sections that follow describe the uses of each level, present examples of evaluations at each level, and, finally, offer recommendations for future evaluation.

Our review of evaluations reveals that most current professional development evaluations focus on the first level: They collect information about provider needs and program satisfaction that can be used to reflect on program practice. Only a few program evaluations have reported outcomes on the second and third levels of provider knowledge and program practices, and, to our knowledge, no completed studies have yet examined the fourth level—how professional development efforts impact participant outcomes. The results of our scan of OST professional development evaluations and their findings are provided below and are also compiled in Table 2 on page 8.

### **Level 1 – Reaction: Understanding Providers’ Needs and Satisfaction**

The first level of evaluation is quite common among OST professional development initiatives: Many initiatives describe the demographics of participating youth workers and their satisfaction with the programs. The question answered by these surveys relates to staff members’ perceptions of the training programs. As such, the results can be helpful in improving the professional development program from the perspective of its participants, which could lead to higher participation and higher levels of engagement.

Level 1 evaluations usually take the form of brief participant surveys, either immediately following the training or soon after. For instance, the After-School Corporation (TASC)<sup>7</sup> studies perceptions of their professional development programs from multiple perspectives, including feedback from the participants at the conclusion of the workshops, self-assessments by the contractors who run the trainings, and annual surveys of site coordinators at each OST program. Similarly, Bridging the Gap,<sup>8</sup> a

training program run by Boston Public Schools to link OST learning with school learning, administers surveys of perceptions about the training’s usefulness immediately after the program and also later in the year for follow-up. Both organizations report that this feedback has helped them to better understand the needs of OST providers and to improve their training initiatives.

### **Levels 2 and 3 – Learning and Transfer: Increasing Knowledge and Improving Program Practices**

Some evaluations conducted at both the state and national levels have taken additional steps to document the effects of professional development on the second and third outcome levels—OST provider learning and transfer of this knowledge into practice. The learning and transfer categories can refer to both general principles, such as youth development and effective management, and to specific content, such as the application of a lesson or activity that was taught during a professional development workshop. Level 2 and 3 evaluations can help establish the effects of professional development initiatives on OST providers, providing valuable information about whether the initiatives should be continued, how they work, and how they can be improved. Below we feature five efforts to examine increased knowledge and improved program practices through evaluation levels 2 and 3.

#### *Making the Most of Out-of-School Time*

Making the Most of Out-of-School Time (MOST)<sup>9</sup> was a multiyear initiative, designed to build community-wide support and infrastructure for OST programs in Boston, Seattle, and Chicago. As part of its system-building efforts, MOST supported the creation and availability of college-level courses, tuition subsidies, staff mentoring, on-site training, and other professional development activities. These professional development efforts were evaluated with a descriptive methodology, using observations, interviews, and surveys to collect information at participating programs (Halpern, Spielberger & Robb, 2001). Specifically, evaluators examined a variety of OST program features, including staff training and quality.

Evaluators of the MOST initiative found that the staff development efforts were effective, but more so for some staffers than others: Program directors benefited more than “front-line” providers. For front-line staff, workshops and college courses increased their knowledge of youth development, but this knowledge was not often integrated into their program practices. Furthermore, there were particular barriers to the effectiveness of college course offerings: Staff members were reluctant to enroll, frequently did not complete courses, faced time and financial constraints, and often found that course completion did not result in higher salaries.

### *San Jose 4 Quality*

A similar methodology was used to evaluate San Jose 4 Quality,<sup>10</sup> a multifaceted initiative for improving OST programs in the San Jose, California, area. San Jose 4 Quality was designed to affect four desired outcomes, including creation of a better-trained workforce in local programs. Staff improvement components included four staff trainings per year with follow-up meetings and presentations to discuss and reinforce implementation of training material, regular meetings of lead staff from local programs, and site-specific technical assistance. The initiative has been evaluated using a range of methods, from observations to interviews to surveys, with findings due out in an annual report in 2004.

Like MOST, preliminary results of San Jose 4 Quality suggest a pattern of positive results, accompanied by some challenges. Notably, staff members reported that the initiative broadened their horizons, heightened their sense of professional affiliation, and increased opportunities for networking and support. Other results of the initiative may also be related in part to the staff training component, such as improved staff interactions with youth.

### *Girls Inc. Strong, Smart and Bold Initiative*

An evaluation of Girls Inc.'s Strong, Smart and Bold<sup>11</sup> initiative used baseline data<sup>12</sup> to move the field toward a higher level of rigor (Girls Inc., 1996). The initiative provided intensive training for program directors in developing skills for planning, implementing, managing, and evaluating best practices, and in integrating the Girls Inc. mission at local affiliate programs. The training was grounded in a combination of theories of youth development, organizational change, and adult learning and was envisioned as a systems approach in which program directors and executive directors worked together.

The initiative was assessed using two types of evaluations. An internal evaluation conducted by Girls Inc. staff was used primarily for continuous program improvement, while a case study evaluation of four affiliate programs was conducted by external evaluators. The case study evaluation used a qualitative methodology<sup>13</sup> to assess organizational culture, operations, and programs of four representative affiliates. Data were collected from site visits at four time points, using semi-structured interviews (with directors, staff, youth participants, their parents, and community stakeholders), structured program observations, and site "portfolios" of program records and self-assessments.

The evaluation illuminated many positive effects at evaluation levels 2 and 3, including (but not limited to) increased confidence, enthusiasm, and understanding of Girls Inc.'s mission among program directors; increased capacity to serve traditionally underserved populations; implementation of more varied programming and increas-

es in youth participants' active involvement in program planning; and directors' use of more intentional planning strategies in both the short and long term.

However, the evaluation also revealed some less positive findings. Most notably, staff turnover remained a significant challenge for the affiliate programs after the initiative, and the goal of fostering teamwork between program directors and executive directors was not always fulfilled. In addition, although respondents reported increased awareness of the importance of parental involvement, diversity in staff recruitment, and ongoing staff training, little progress was made in these areas. Results revealed that front-line staff needed more ongoing training in youth development and appropriate activity structure.

### *North Carolina Quality Enhancement Initiative*

Baseline comparisons were also used in a study evaluating the North Carolina Quality Enhancement Initiative (NC QEI) (Hall & Cassidy, 2002), a project designed to prepare selected OST programs in North Carolina for the process of accreditation by the National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA) (now known as the National Afterschool Association). Like the MOST Initiative, NC QEI was a comprehensive program improvement project that included a professional development component. The initiative began with a 2-day staff workshop and provided ongoing consultation and support for 9 months.

Both before and after the initiative, standardized observations and staff interviews were conducted to obtain quantitative data on OST program environments and staff-child relationship quality. Participating programs showed statistically significant improvements in each of these areas. Furthermore, the largest improvements were in programs that initially scored lowest on a predetermined set of quality indicators, i.e., those which served larger numbers of youth, did not have state licenses, and were led by directors without college degrees. One caveat should be noted, however: It is possible that program improvements were due not only to the training program, but also to awareness of and increased effort for the ensuing accreditation process.

### *Building Exemplary Systems for Training Youth Workers*

An evaluation of the Building Exemplary Systems for Training Youth Workers (BEST) initiative<sup>14</sup> also reported statistically significant changes from baseline to follow-up at outcome levels 2 and 3 (Center for School and Community Services, Academy for Educational Development, 2002). To address the problem of fragmented, disjointed training efforts, BEST was created as a cohesive and theory-based approach to professional development. The primary goal of the program was to provide staff training, with a secondary goal of building a

community-wide career support infrastructure for youth workers (e.g., availability of college degree programs, accreditation systems, etc.). While the 15 national sites differed in minor ways, all relied heavily on a positive youth development curriculum, which emphasized the strengths and assets of youth.

Built in to the BEST initiative was an evaluation study that used surveys, interviews, and diaries administered before and after the program to assess whether the training program changed the practices of participating youth workers. Using this method, researchers found that, for the majority of youth workers (over 70%), BEST had a positive impact on the practices they used in their programs. Specifically, data indicated the following significant changes after the training: Youth workers (1) were more likely to integrate youth development knowledge and theory into their program planning, (2) were more likely to involve youth participants in the process of running the program, (3) learned a common language of positive youth development, which allowed them to communicate more effectively, and (4) experienced a greater amount of networking and information sharing with other providers.

The BEST program also partially achieved its second goal: Youth workers and community stakeholders reported an increase in the amount of support provided by their organizations in the form of staff mentoring and supervision. However, youth workers continued to request more support after the program. In interpreting these results, it is important to note that the BEST study assessed training participants' reports of whether they changed their youth work practices, and did not include more objective measures such as observations by external evaluators.

The level 2 and 3 evaluations reported here demonstrate both the potential of staff development initiatives and the need for additional strategies and investments to translate this knowledge into practice. A common theme across all the evaluations was that the staff initiatives were beneficial but not sufficient on their own, particularly for front-line youth workers. These studies also offer important lessons about evaluation design: Each evaluation approach had unique strengths (e.g., MOST provided rich descriptive information, BEST used baseline comparisons, Strong, Smart, and Bold used program observations), but none combined these methods for the most rigorous possible evaluation design.

#### **Level 4 – Results: Assessing Impact on Participants**

The studies described above represent important advances in evaluation. However, they do not demonstrate the impact of professional development initiatives on youth out-

comes. Clearly, level 4 evaluations play an essential role in demonstrating the ultimate goal of all staff work—to improve the lives of youth. These evaluations can also play an important role in supporting sustainability for professional development initiatives. However, program directors and evaluators should be aware that positive youth outcomes, while most conclusive, are also the most difficult to establish. A multitude of factors operate to influence youth outcomes, both within and outside of OST programs. Furthermore, OST programs aim to affect a broader range of outcomes and operate on a less structured and defined schedule than school-day programs. The complexity of these features makes it difficult to demonstrate that youth outcomes are due specifically to staff training. Evaluators should also consider the age and stage of their professional development initiatives; affecting youth outcomes takes time, and newer programs may wish to first investigate levels 1, 2, and 3. For these reasons, it is important to examine youth outcomes *in combination with* the other three levels of outcomes (satisfaction, knowledge, and practices).

To date no studies have reported on the fourth outcome level—whether professional development programs affect outcomes for the youth served by participating OST providers. Level 4 outcomes will be part of an in-progress evaluation of the New York State School-Age Care Credentialing Project (SACC). SACC, begun in 1999, promotes quality youth services by providing specific standards, training, and evaluation of school-age care providers. In 2002, the Cornell Early Childhood Program began to evaluate this new statewide credential, using a multistage evaluation approach similar to the framework we present in this brief.<sup>15</sup>

To date, this multifaceted evaluation has focused on three main goals. The first goal is to document the history and development of SACC through in-depth interviews with SACC development leaders. The second goal is to examine the effects of SACC on the following level 1 and 2 evaluation outcomes: school-age care providers' participation in professional development; beliefs and attitudes about providing school-age care; and employment characteristics, such as salary, responsibilities, and job retention. Pre- and post-questionnaires are administered to participating providers and a comparison group of providers for this purpose. The third goal is to assess the impact of SACC on the overall quality of school-age programs, with a particular emphasis on providers' practices and interactions with children (evaluation level 3), using pre- and post-program observations. Analyses of these questions are currently underway, with plans to disseminate findings widely.<sup>16</sup> With additional funding, the evaluation will expand to include an examination of evaluation level 4, i.e., how SACC affects the social and academic outcomes of children in school-age programs.

**TABLE 2: THE MULTILEVEL EVALUATION MODEL IN PRACTICE: EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD**

This table illustrates the four-level method of evaluating professional development through examples from out-of-school time (OST) professional development initiatives. This method can assess outcomes for OST providers participating in professional development, their programs, and the youth they serve.

	Evaluation Level and Purpose	OST Professional Development Initiatives	Sample Evaluation Questions	Sample Evaluation Methods and Sources	Select Evaluation Findings and Challenges
<b>Level 1: Reaction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding OST providers' needs (e.g., skills, knowledge, etc.)</li> <li>Assessing participating providers' satisfaction</li> <li>Improving professional development initiative from providers' perspectives and increasing participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bridging the Gap</li> <li>TASC</li> <li>Numerous other unpublished initiatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do staff and administrators perceive training workshops?</li> <li>What additional training is needed?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Surveys of workshop participants (pre/post or post only)</li> <li>Trainer surveys</li> <li>Participating providers' self-assessments</li> <li>Annual program coordinator surveys</li> </ul>	<p><i>Findings</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participating OST providers perceived workshops to be useful</li> <li>Trainers reported greater knowledge of participant needs</li> <li>Trainers reported workshop improvement due to feedback</li> </ul>
<b>Level 2: Learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessing whether participating OST providers learned new information from the initiative</li> <li>Determining how the initiative worked, how it could be improved, and whether it should be continued</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BEST</li> <li>Girls Inc. Strong, Smart and Bold</li> <li>MOST</li> <li>New York State School-Age Care Credentialing Project (in progress)</li> <li>San Jose 4 Quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did youth workers have greater knowledge of youth development principles after a multi-session training program?</li> <li>Did program directors have a clearer understanding of the national program mission following a leadership institute?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews</li> <li>Surveys of participating providers</li> <li>Diaries kept by providers during the professional development initiative and their OST programs</li> </ul>	<p><i>Findings</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Front-line staff reported increased knowledge of youth development after workshops and college courses</li> <li>Providers experienced a heightened sense of professional affiliation</li> <li>Program directors reported increased confidence, enthusiasm, and understanding of program mission</li> <li>Staff recounted "broadened horizons"</li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Front-line staff reported needing more training in youth development</li> </ul>
<b>Level 3: Transfer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessing whether participating OST providers applied the information from the initiative in their programs</li> <li>Determining how the initiative worked, how it could be improved, and whether it should be continued</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BEST</li> <li>Girls Inc. Strong, Smart and Bold</li> <li>MOST</li> <li>North Carolina Quality Enhancement Initiative</li> <li>New York State School-Age Care Credentialing Project (in progress)</li> <li>San Jose 4 Quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did front-line providers plan and implement age-appropriate activities after youth development training, and did they involve program youth in activity planning?</li> <li>Did staff and youth develop more positive relationships?</li> <li>Did the overall program environment improve?</li> <li>Was there an increase in networking and communication among program directors after attending a multi-session leadership institute?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews</li> <li>Surveys of participating providers</li> <li>Observations</li> <li>Case study method</li> <li>Site portfolios (program records and self-assessments)</li> <li>Diaries kept by providers during the professional development initiative and their OST programs</li> </ul>	<p><i>Findings</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff implemented more varied programming and increased youth's active involvement in program planning</li> <li>Participating providers were more likely to integrate youth development principles into program planning</li> <li>Program directors used more intentional planning strategies</li> <li>OST programs' capacity to serve traditionally underserved populations increased</li> <li>Staff-child relationships improved</li> <li>Program environments were rated as more positive</li> <li>Providers communicated more effectively</li> <li>Youth workers reported more support (e.g., mentoring and supervision) and networking</li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program directors benefited more than front-line providers</li> <li>Improved knowledge of youth development was not integrated into practices by front-line staff</li> <li>Front-line staff needed more ongoing training in youth development and appropriate activity structure</li> <li>Staff turnover continued</li> <li>Teamwork skills did not improve</li> <li>Staff members were reluctant to enroll in college courses, frequently did not complete courses, faced time and financial constraints, and often found that course completion did not result in higher salaries</li> </ul>
<b>Level 4: Results</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessing whether the initiative improved youth outcomes</li> <li>Determining whether the program should be continued</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New York State School-Age Care Credentialing Project (in planning stage)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did youth's social outcomes improve? (planned)</li> <li>Did youth's academic outcomes improve? (planned)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not available</li> </ul>

## Implications for Future Evaluation and Practice

Our review confirms that professional development initiatives are associated with positive outcomes, including providers' satisfaction and use of a positive youth development framework. Also of note, several of these evaluation reports highlighted the role of professional development in improving opportunities for networking, information sharing, and social support among providers. However, to date, evaluations of OST professional development efforts have often been limited to the first evaluation level—participants' immediate reports of satisfaction with the training (Killion, 1999; Mizell, 2003). The true prevalence of these satisfaction surveys is not known because most are unpublished and used internally by programs; however, our scan of the field reveals them to be a very common practice. This first evaluation level is an important level for learning; training programs and trainers can gain valuable information by attending to the voices of the providers they serve. However, to really understand the benefits of professional development efforts, programs need to engage in more comprehensive evaluations that will address issues of knowledge and skill building, best practice, and effectiveness.

To facilitate this goal and to demonstrate the important role that professional development plays in contributing to quality OST programs for young people, we make the following recommendations for future evaluation. These recommendations apply to all professional development initiatives, but some are more critical at specific evaluation levels, as noted below.

*Plan the evaluation before the professional development program starts.* Evaluation planning should begin at the same time as program planning. First, this improves the program by encouraging planners to develop a theory of how the program will affect outcomes. Second, it improves the quality of evaluation by providing the opportunity to collect baseline, or pre-program, measures of the intended outcomes. Incorporating this information into data analyses makes for a stronger research design. This recommendation is particularly important for evaluation levels 2, 3, and 4.

*Plan a timeline of evaluation.* Effectively assessing all four levels of outcomes requires strong organizational skills, a specific timeline outlining when each aspect of the process will occur, and a commitment to following this plan (Mizell, 2003).

*Use “backward planning.”* Evaluator Thomas Guskey (2001) highlights the importance of starting with the desired outcomes for youth and working backward to design activities that reflect these goals. This is particularly important in trying to affect level 4 (youth) outcomes. Many professional development programs use the oppo-

site method, starting with activities requested by providers, even if there is no proof that these activities are linked with outcomes (Killion, 1999). While the latter method may score highly on satisfaction, it may not affect youth outcomes. According to staff development expert Hayes Mizell (2003), “It is what students need rather than what adults want that should shape educators' learning.”

*Choose outcome indicators based on the goals of the program.* Outcome data at levels 2, 3, and 4 should be collected differently depending on the goals of the program. If the goal is to increase OST providers' tutoring skills, indicators might include providers' knowledge of tutoring strategies, as well as students' end-of-year grades. If the goal of the program is to increase positive relationships between students and staff, indicators might include staffers' and youth's communication skills and reports of mutual trust. Evaluators should consider using multiple outcome indicators, particularly if the program has multiple goals.

*Collect data from appropriate sources.* After choosing indicators, the next decision should concern the appropriate sources: From whom should the outcome data be collected? Data can be collected from OST providers, program youth, parents, school records, and other sources. The choice of data source largely depends on the evaluation level. For example, to measure satisfaction and knowledge (levels 1 and 2), evaluators should collect data from OST providers themselves. To measure youth outcomes (level 4), data should be collected from youth's own reports and also from archival documents, such as school records and police reports. (For more information on choosing appropriate sources and data collection measures, see our *Out-of-School Time Evaluation Snapshots*, available online at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources).)

*Assess long-term outcomes.* The process of developing and applying knowledge takes time; the results of professional development programs may not be apparent immediately after program completion. Accordingly, evaluations should assess outcomes for providers' practices (level 3) and youth (level 4) over multiple years (Guskey, 2000).

*Base professional development activities and evaluations on strong theory and research.* As in the field of education, there is a growing push for OST programs and practices that are based on rigorous research studies, which the government refers to as *scientifically based research* (Bouffard, 2003). Theory and research from youth development fields provide a reliable framework for understanding both what works and why. As such, research-driven practices are an important complement to the personal experiences and expertise that OST professionals bring to bear on staff training. They are

also an important part of establishing how to evaluate professional development programs, since evaluations should assess only those outcomes they intend to affect. Although the use of research-based trainings is increasing (e.g., the BEST initiative), it is not yet the norm across staff training programs.

Just as professional development initiatives play a key role in ensuring quality out-of-school time programming, evaluation plays a key role in ensuring effective professional development initiatives. Evaluation results can be used to understand and build on the strengths and weaknesses of these initiatives, to meet accountability requirements, and to advocate for more investment in professional development. As a result, they can help to establish a more coherent and consistent framework for professional development activities, including a common language and set of goals. This common framework has the power to bring information—and quality—to all professional development programs, regardless of size, location, or focus.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In this brief we use the terms *OST provider* and *youth worker* to refer to individuals who work with young people, ages 5–18, in programs that occur outside of school hours. These *out-of-school time* (OST) programs include before and after school programs, tutoring and mentoring programs, and community-based youth development programs.
- <sup>2</sup> This publication is designed to focus on evaluation rather than to provide a comprehensive portrait of professional development programs; for readers interested in professional development resources, a list is provided on page 11.
- <sup>3</sup> For more information on the New York City Beacons Initiative, visit the website of the Fund for the City of New York at [www.fcny.org/html/youth/school.htm](http://www.fcny.org/html/youth/school.htm).
- <sup>4</sup> For more information on LA's BEST, visit their website at [www.lasbest.org](http://www.lasbest.org).
- <sup>5</sup> For more information on the San Francisco Beacons Initiative, visit the website of the Community Network for Youth Development at [www.cnyd.org](http://www.cnyd.org).

- <sup>6</sup> Our database contains profiles of OST program evaluations, which are searchable on a wide range of criteria. It is available in the OST section of the HFRP website at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html).
- <sup>7</sup> For more information on TASC, visit their website at [www.tascorp.org](http://www.tascorp.org).
- <sup>8</sup> For more information on Bridging the Gap, contact Dishon Mills at 617-635-1578 or [dmills@boston.k12.ma.us](mailto:dmills@boston.k12.ma.us).
- <sup>9</sup> MOST was a collaborative effort by many stakeholders from 1994 to 2001, facilitated by the Wallace Foundation, the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, the Center for Career Development in Early Care and Education at Wheelock College, and local stakeholders in Boston, Chicago, and Seattle.
- <sup>10</sup> San Jose 4 Quality was a collaboration between the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, the California School-Age Consortium, San Jose area service providers, and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.
- <sup>11</sup> The Strong, Smart and Bold initiative was conducted from 1993 to 1996 with support from the Wallace Foundation.
- <sup>12</sup> Comparing data before the program—at baseline—and after the program can establish whether providers' knowledge and practices did in fact change over the period of the program.
- <sup>13</sup> Qualitative data provide descriptive details, often collected from a purposive sample of interviews, focus groups, or observations. In contrast, quantitative data provide objective, numerical data that can be quantified.
- <sup>14</sup> BEST was a 1996 national pilot program, funded by the Wallace Foundation.
- <sup>15</sup> The New York SACC evaluation is supported by funds from the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services.
- <sup>16</sup> For more information on the SACC evaluation, contact Lisa McCabe, Ph.D., Evaluation Project Manager, at [lam4@cornell.edu](mailto:lam4@cornell.edu).

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## SELECT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

**Achieve Boston**, a partnership of local public and private organizations, provides a Web-based clearinghouse of out-of-school time (OST) professional development trainings, seminars, college courses, and other offerings in the Boston, Massachusetts, area. [www.achieveboston.org](http://www.achieveboston.org)

**Bringing Yourself to Work: Caregiving in After-School Environments** is a program run by researchers at Wellesley College, which uses a research-driven framework to promote reflective practice and emotional intelligence among OST providers. For more information on the project and on the recent book written by project directors Michelle Seligson and Patricia Jahoda Stahl, see the program's website at [www.bringingyourselftowork.com](http://www.bringingyourselftowork.com).

**Harvard Family Research Project's Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database** is a compilation of profiles of evaluations of OST programs and initiatives. It provides accessible information about evaluation work of both large and small OST programs to support the development of high quality evaluations and programs in the out-of-school time field. [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html)

**The Massachusetts School-Age Coalition (MSAC)** has developed a set of Core Competencies for Massachusetts School-Age Practitioners through the PASS (Professional Advancement of School-Age Staff) Initiative. MSAC has also conducted training workshops across the state, posted a registry of professional development opportunities, and advocated for a career ladder system. [www.mass-sac.org](http://www.mass-sac.org)

**The National Afterschool Association** (formerly the National School-Age Care Alliance) Standards for Quality School-Age Care include standards for OST staff members among their six categories of program quality standards. [www.naaweb.org](http://www.naaweb.org)

**The National Collaboration for Youth** of the National Assembly of Health and Human Service Organizations has produced a set of Youth Development Worker Competencies. The competencies are "the knowledge, skills, and personal attributes needed by entry-level youth development workers to support the critical features of positive youth development settings." [www.nydic.org/nydic/documents/FinalCompetenciesI.doc](http://www.nydic.org/nydic/documents/FinalCompetenciesI.doc) (Word file)

The National Collaboration for Youth's special initiative, the **National Youth Development Learning Network**, is "designed to build and strengthen youth workers' performance by analyzing, synthesizing, and linking existing information and training." Information and professional development resources (including a professional development e-newsletter) are available at [www.nassembly.org/nassembly/2003/initiatives.htm](http://www.nassembly.org/nassembly/2003/initiatives.htm).

**The National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST)** at Wellesley College is a national voice for promoting a skilled and stable workforce. NIOST provides both in-the-field trainings and biannual seminars for OST staff members of all levels,

publications about the OST workforce and the field in general, and other resources. [www.niost.org](http://www.niost.org)

**The National Staff Development Council (NSDC)** provides extensive resources on professional development. Although focused primarily on education, many of the resources are also helpful for the OST field. They are available at [www.nsd.org](http://www.nsd.org). See also the fall 2003 issue of NSDC's *Journal of Staff Development*, which focuses on evaluating professional development.

A fall 2004 volume of ***New Directions for Youth Development*** will focus on professional development in the youth development field. Edited by Pam Garza, Lynne Borden, and Kirk Astroth, the volume will contain articles on the history and current state of professional development initiatives, the roles of various organizations and stakeholders, and recommendations for the field.

**The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL)** has created a National Awards Program for Model Professional Development to recognize schools with highly effective staff development programs. NCREL has carefully examined the programs and practices of these schools in order to compile a list of best practices in professional development. NCREL has also created a professional development toolkit that includes worksheets for planning and conducting all stages of the professional development process, including evaluation. Although focused on education, this resource can be used for OST as well. [www.ncrel.org/pd/toolkit.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/pd/toolkit.htm)

**The Out-of-School Time Resource Center** is housed in the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Research on Youth and Social Policy. The center aims to help connect OST programs with resources, and features professional development tools and research. The center's resources include the recent publication, *Out-of-School Time (OST) Professional Development Workshops: An Evaluation Framework*. [www.ssw.upenn.edu/ostrc](http://www.ssw.upenn.edu/ostrc)

**The Partnership for After School Education** is a "network of professionals ... committed to quality education in after school settings" and offers professional development resources. [www.pasesetter.com](http://www.pasesetter.com)

**The After-School Corporation (TASC)** has produced a toolkit, *Building the Skills of After-School Staff*, which includes worksheets for planning, evaluation, and more. It is available at [www.tascorp.org/publications/catalog/indrep\\_n](http://www.tascorp.org/publications/catalog/indrep_n). TASC has also published a series of resource briefs on staffing issues, which are available at [www.tascorp.org/publications/catalog](http://www.tascorp.org/publications/catalog).

**YouthNet of Greater Kansas City** focuses on promoting a set of youth worker standards, providing training and other professional development opportunities, and establishing a monitoring and assessment process. The organization has established a set of standards for providers who work with school-age children and another set for those who work with teens. Information on these standards can be found at [www.kcyouthnet.org/developing\\_standards.asp](http://www.kcyouthnet.org/developing_standards.asp). Also visit YouthNet's homepage at [www.kcyouthnet.org](http://www.kcyouthnet.org).

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### ABOUT HARVARD FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECT

Founded in 1983 by Dr. Heather Weiss, Harvard Family Research Project conducts research about programs and policies that serve children and families throughout the United States. Publishing and disseminating its research widely, HFRP plays a vital role in examining and encouraging programs and policies that enable families and communities to help children reach their potential.



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