

## A Holistic Approach to OST Staff Development

By Michael Waters

Too often professional development for out-of-school time (OST) front-line staff is an exercise in what is required rather than what is essential. The extent of our professional development time, resources and energy is designed to ensure the boxes are checked on requirements without focusing on the best practices involved in development of a well-rounded youth worker. Minimal consideration is given to areas an individual may need to strengthen along with content they are passionate about exploring. In order to develop the most well-rounded, engaged and effective front-line OST workers I believe a continuum of professional development that targets individual needs, fosters and develops specific talents, skill sets, areas of interest and expertise is vital.



There is significant research that indicates a high performing, dynamic and quality OST program is directly related to the competence and skill level of the front line direct care instructors. Staff members given the opportunity to reflect, develop interests and target improvement areas will exponentially lead to the continuous improvement of quality over the course of their tenure.



Our district set forth with the mission of developing a continuum of development that was no longer repetitive and linear but value-added and individualized - building upon itself in a targeted manner throughout an individual's course of employment. Staff completed a self-assessment of skills - individually targeted at their level of seniority, experience and education. They were then assessed by supervisors utilizing the same tool and each staff member was then observed. The data derived was utilized to collaborate with staff and develop an individualized staff development plan focused on required trainings, areas in need of development and areas of interest. Offering individualized staff development programs will

ensure staff receive training tailored to their needs and own interests – which will lead to more engaged, energetic and effective youth workers.



The youth workers engaged in our system of holistic staff development have been provided a framework for constant self-

reflection, continuous improvement and

professionalism that has immediately impacted the youth and families they serve. As well as creating a more skilled, effective and professional workforce - while carrying them in good stead throughout the course of their lives and careers and possibly even beyond the scope of the OST field.



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