

I. Introduction

To improve out-of-school time¹ policy and enhance program quality, it is essential to address the compensation of the workforce. The quality, continuity, and stability of out-of-school time (OST) programs depend on a well-trained and fairly compensated staff. Without a skilled and stable workforce, OST programs cannot focus on providing high-quality, holistic programs for school-age children. They cannot partner with employers to alleviate work and family stresses. And they will not have the resources to prevent or ameliorate the many problems that beset today's youth, nor help families, communities, and society at large realize the cost savings from such crucial intervention.

This paper was written to stimulate fresh thinking and fuel discussions about how to increase compensation for out-of-school time staff. In it, we explore economic concepts as they relate to the field and describe compensation strategies and initiatives. We also profile out-of-school time compensation models and others from the early childhood education (ECE) field that could be adapted by out-of-school time advocates.

In this paper, we examine the compensation problem in detail and suggest some possible approaches to resolving it. In Section II, we describe the compensation problem from a variety of economic perspectives. In Section III, we propose ways to broaden the range of strategies we can use to craft solutions and we highlight promising initiatives that are under way to improve compensation.

We hope this paper will lay the groundwork for leaders in the out-of-school time field to engage in

meaningful conversations with economists about solutions to the compensation problem. We encourage researchers to gather data that will enable us to identify the full range of forces that impact OST compensation and turnover. And we urge all those engaged in providing services for children to join forces and work together for improved pay and working conditions.

Background: The Out-of-School Time Workforce

The growing public interest in after-school programming in the past decade has spurred an increase in support from federal, state, and local governments and schools. At least 26 states are increasing funding for OST programs and opportunities. In at least 30 states, schools are increasingly involved in extended learning programs during after-school hours (National Governors Association, 1999). A 2001 survey of 800 elementary school principals reports that 67 percent of elementary schools offer optional programs for children after regular school hours, compared to 22 percent in 1988 (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001). In 2001, OST programs received \$846 million dollars of targeted federal funding to operate school-based after-school programs through 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21stCCLC), representing a nearly 100 percent increase in funding from the previous fiscal year. In addition, 525,000 school-age children across the country were subsidized in OST settings under Child Care Development Fund Block Grants.

As the demand for more OST programs grows, the need for qualified staff is escalating. As reported in the National Institute on Out-of-School Time's (NIOST) March 2001 *Afterschool Issues: Focus on Staffing* brief, OST programs are

simultaneously experiencing an accelerated rate of growth and grappling with high staff turnover as a result of low compensation and other factors: “For many initiatives, staying fully staffed has become a frustrating exercise of laboriously finding and developing the skills of staff members, only to see them leave for higher paying, full-time work shortly thereafter.” Elementary school principals also reported that finding and retaining qualified staff was one of the biggest challenges facing their after-school programs (NAESP 2001).

In the midst of this steady expansion, as the out-of-school time field struggles to evolve toward becoming a more cohesive system for children, youth, families, and communities, there is still very little information about the element widely regarded as the critical link to program quality and outcomes: the workforce. What we do know is that the workforce is in a state of crisis plagued by chronic staff turnover, which can often cripple a program’s capacity to deliver services. We also know that the after-school workforce, which is composed primarily of part-time staff, receives very low compensation and lacks a professional development system unified by a core body of knowledge, a career matrix, a system of training, or a registry of providers.

Although OST programs share many of the same workforce development concerns that ECE programs are battling, they also have some unique workforce characteristics. As after-school advocates explore strategies to improve compensation, including modifying successful ECE compensation strategies, they will need to consider the following factors.

No Unified Worker Identity

Part of the difficulty in trying to develop an accurate profile of the OST workforce is that there is no categorical way to account for or describe staff. There are many paths that lead workers to a job or career in this field, but because there is no specific preparatory or career ladder, workers do not share a common knowledge base, are equipped with a variety of skills, and enter the workforce with a broad range of educational levels and training. Recently, the Department of Labor has created a new category called youth worker, which is intended to provide opportunities for better training, access to jobs, and higher pay (Children and Youth Funding Report, 2001). Although the new category holds promise, it is exclusive to workers in full-time positions, which eliminates a substantial portion of the OST workforce.

In order to accurately inform policy, OST advocates need more information about staff at all levels: who they are; their skills and credentials; how they are compensated for their work; how their work is organized; how they experience their day-to-day responsibilities; and what kind of support they need to develop professionally, stay in the field, and make a career out of the work. Several states do collect such data; however, methods vary and survey response rates tend to be low.

The issue of worker identity could also be addressed by those in the field itself, as they address the extent to which OST might continue its narrow self-identification or might be considered part of a broader field, such as youth work, early childhood care, or education.