

Evidence for Action:

**Strengthening
After-School Programs for All Children
and Youth: The Massachusetts Out-of-
School Time Workforce**



**A Research Report of Achieve Boston,
An Initiative of Boston After School & Beyond**

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INTRODUCTION

Growing evidence from research suggests that out-of-school time (OST) and after-school programs can promote youth's healthy development, improve academic success, encourage leadership, and actively support and strengthen families.^[3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 13] Additional research has demonstrated that OST staff are a critical link in achieving positive outcomes for youth by developing and sustaining supportive relationships between staff and youth.^[2, 13] With today's increased awareness and public resolve concerning the OST field, it is important to assemble a clear picture of the current staff and working conditions in OST programs. However, the last concentrated effort to assess OST staffing was the National Study of Before- and After-School Programs released in 1992.

This research brief, *Evidence for Action*, uses currently available data to outline the characteristics of the OST workforce in Massachusetts, and begins a discussion of the professional development needs of the field. Specifically, this research brief answers the question, **What are the characteristics—including educational qualifications, compensation, benefits, turnover or retention, and diversity—of the workforce serving youth in Massachusetts?**

Evidence for Action also contributes to Achieve Boston's mission to support the development of an evidence-based, comprehensive professional development system that strengthens the field and supports children and families in after-school and summer programs. In addition, with the launch of the new Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care on July 1, 2005 came the charge from the Legislature to develop a comprehensive, statewide professional development system for the early education and care workforce from birth through school-age. *Evidence for Action* attempts to support this process by providing essential data on the OST workforce.

Evidence for Action utilizes local studies and data to explore the reality behind assumptions made about the OST workforce. Commonly held beliefs include

- The field consists largely of part-time employees who lack training, are underpaid, and do not represent the culture and background of the children they serve.
- The turnover rates are so high that it is practically impossible to create an adequate, sustained, and knowledgeable workforce.

Achieve Boston

Founded in 2002 as an initiative of Boston After School & Beyond, Achieve Boston is a partnership of Mayor Tom Menino's Boston 2:00-to-6:00 After-School Initiative of Boston Centers for Youth & Families. Achieve Boston works toward advancing the training and professional development system of the after school workforce. A major step in creating such an infrastructure was the release of the Achieve Boston "Blueprint for Action,"¹ which outlines the components of high-quality professional development. Critical among these components is stabilization education of the workforce, yielding less turnover; increased compensation, benefits, and full-time employment opportunities; and access to higher education. For more information visit www.achievetoboston.com.

Despite the lack of an overarching staffing study that addresses these questions, there are a number of very significant data sources in Massachusetts available so we can piece together a coherent picture. This research brief relies on three primary sources of data:

- **The Boston After School & Beyond 2004 Provider Survey** with responses from 443 Boston-based, before- and after-school, and summer programs serving children and youth ages 5–18 years. By the study’s own estimates, the survey represents 60% of the Boston after-school field.
- **The Massachusetts After-School Research Study (MARS)**, conducted in the 2003/04 school year, observed and interviewed 78 after-school programs, including 675 staff, throughout Massachusetts. The programs included a cross-section of community-based and school-based school-age child care and after-school programs serving elementary and middle school students.
- **The Massachusetts Child Care Center and School Age Program Salary and Benefits Report**, conducted in 2000 by the Massachusetts Child Care Resource and Referral Network for the Massachusetts Office of Child Care Services and referred to as the “Salary and Benefits Report.” The study included 860 licensed school-age child care programs. With a response rate of approximately 47%, the study represents over 3,000 staff members.

Taken together these three studies provide a window into the conditions of the OST workforce in Massachusetts and a baseline for policy decisions. However, given the scope and limitations of each individual study, this research brief speaks most directly to school-age child care, and after-school program staff and working conditions. These studies do not include youth workers serving youth ages 14–18 in other OST programs; and there are no comparable youth work studies currently available in Massachusetts.¹ Therefore, throughout this report when referring to the general field we use the term OST (inclusive of school-age child care, after-school, summer program, and other youth workers). However when reporting on specific data findings we use the term that most accurately describes the specific staff considered in each study (i.e., after-school, school-age child care, etc.).

FINDINGS

1. Education

OST staff come to this field by many paths. Some enter into this work without any formal education and training and gain knowledge and skills on the job. Others have backgrounds in a variety of disciplines including social work, education, public health, community education, or psychology. All kinds of experience—formal and informal—are valuable in the professional development of practitioners.^[1] This diversity in

¹ Achieve Boston is currently developing a Youth Worker Survey to be distributed in February 2006. Results are expected in spring 2006 at www.achievetoboston.org.

knowledge, experience, and background is often a very positive element in OST programming.

However, strong and growing research demonstrates that a skilled, stable, and educated staff is the key to quality after-school programs. The 2005 Massachusetts After-School Research Study (MARS) and other studies have found that programs with more highly educated staff provide higher quality services and are more likely to help youth reach more positive outcomes.^[2,10, 13] This is supported by additional research reporting that high-quality programs have staff and program directors with strong educational credentials as well as extensive experience working with youth.^[2,10, 13] Although formal education is only part of the picture, reviewing the education levels of OST staff is an important starting point in understanding the OST workforce.

Finding 1: While many OST staff are skilled and educated in the field of child and youth development, a significant proportion of staff need further education and training in the field.

The Salary and Benefits Report found that 34% of school-age child care staff have a bachelor’s or advanced degree, and an additional 7% held an associate’s degree. (See Table 1 below.)

Table 1. School-Age Child Care Staff Education Level by Job Title ¹

Level of Education	Assistant Group Leader (n=827)	Group Leader (n=1,323)	Site Coordinator (n=513)	Single Site Program Admin. (n=216)	Multi Site Program Admin. (n=209)	All Staff
HS or GED	20%	18%	6%	4%	1%	15%
Some college	21%	40%	26%	12%	6%	29%
AA in child development or related field	2%	5%	7%	6%	5%	4%
AA in unrelated field	1%	4%	3%	1%	2%	3%
BA in child development or related field	5%	16%	36%	40%	49%	20%
BA in unrelated field	6%	8%	9%	10%	18%	8%
Master’s degree or higher in related and unrelated fields	2%	4%	7%	25%	14%	6%
None of the above	43% ²	5%	6%	2%	5%	15%

(1) Source: Salary and Benefits Report (2000)

(2) This figure includes 341 assistant group leaders who are currently enrolled in high school or GED programs.

Both the Boston Beyond and MARS studies reported similar findings on the education levels of program staff. Boston Beyond reported that 38% of all OST program staff in Boston have an associate's degree or higher (in unspecified fields of study, as this question was not part of the survey protocol).² Forty-eight percent of after-school staff in MARS reported having a bachelor's or advanced degree, and an additional 7% reported having an associate's degree.

The MARS study further analyzed workforce data based on after-school program approaches as defined by two primary models: school-age child care and academic enrichment programs.³ MARS reported significant differences in the findings between these models. According to this study, 39% of school-age child care staff held a bachelor's degree, as compared with 83% of staff in academic enrichment programs—the majority of which are staffed by certified school teachers. In addition, 21% of all staff in the MARS study had some college education but had not yet attained a degree. The combined data show that a significant part of the OST workforce has an extensive amount of formal education, a solid foundation for further development as program staff become more professionalized and increasing numbers of staff are supported in accessing higher education (see the Higher Education Afterschool and Youth work Roundtable (HEAYR) report at www.pearweb.org).

Program coordinators also play a vital leadership role in creating and maintaining high-quality OST programs. MARS found that 60% of all program coordinators reported having a bachelor's or advanced degree. Further, 26% of MARS program coordinators were in college during the 2003/04 academic year while serving as practitioners and leaders in their programs. The majority of these program coordinators (69%) were pursuing a bachelor's or advanced degree. These data suggest that educational mobility is an important ingredient in this field. Whether it is mobility that leads people out of the field once they achieve more credentials or allows coordinators within the after-school field to advance in the field is an important issue that needs to be understood through further research.

2. Compensation

As in most other fields, salaries and benefits are a significant consideration when OST workers are preparing for and planning their careers. According to a 2003 report published by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, the low wages that characterize the child care industry have been identified as the strongest predictor of instability among staff.^[14] This may also hold true for school-age child care and other

² The Salaries and Benefits Report is the only report reviewed that differentiated between a degree in the field (child development or related field) and those in unrelated fields.

³ Sixty-two of the 78 MARS programs were characterized as “school-age child care,” which tended to be licensed, community-based child care programs that were open longer hours daily to serve the needs of working parents. School-age child care programs had an average enrollment of 49 students and typically served grades K–5. Sixteen programs were identified as “academic enrichment” model programs, which tended to be located in schools and were open an average of two hours per day, staffed by public school teachers, and had stronger school ties; the primary focus of these programs was academics. The academic enrichment programs served an average enrollment of 116 students; 11 of these programs (69%) served middle-school-age youth.

OST workers, with the added disadvantage that OST jobs are predominantly part-time positions.

Finding 2: Two-thirds of OST staff work part time (fewer than 30 hours per week). The part-time nature of OST work greatly reduces staff earning power in their chosen field.

The Salaries and Benefits Report in 2000 demonstrated that the vast majority of school-age child care staff (67%) work part time (see Table2). Boston Beyond reports that 65% of Boston OST staff worked fewer than 30 hours per week at their programs. And, MARS found that 88% of program staff worked part time (fewer than 30 hours per week); however, the MARS sample included school-based academic enrichment programs (20.5% of the programs studied), which operate for fewer hours than other school-age child care and some other OST programs.

Table 2. School-Age Child Care Staff Employment Status by Job Title ¹

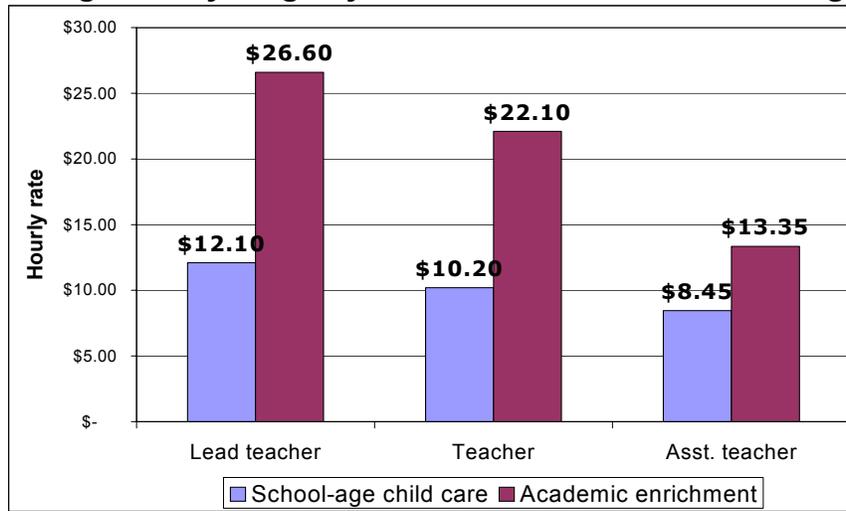
	Assistant Group Leader	Group Leader	Site Coordinator	Single Site Program Admin.	Multi Site Program Admin.	All Staff
Full-time	4%	23%	64%	80%	94%	33%
Part-time	96%	77%	36%	20%	6%	67%
Total Staff	827	1323	513	216	209	3088

(1) Source: Salaries and Benefits Report (2000)

Finding 3: There has been virtually no change in OST staff salaries in the past five years. In 2000 the highest paid assistant group leaders in Massachusetts earned \$7.50 per hour. When adjusted for inflation, this is equivalent to \$8.66 per hour in 2005 dollars. Today, the average hourly wage for an assistant group leader is \$8.45 per hour.

The MARS reports that the average pay for group leaders/lead teachers across the 78 sampled programs is \$15 per hour, with a range from \$7.75 to \$35.00. Staff in the academic enrichment programs—predominantly full-time classroom teachers—earn considerably more than teachers in the school-age child care programs. The average lead teacher in an academic enrichment program earns \$26.60 per hour, whereas a lead teacher in a school-age child care program earns an average of \$12.10 per hour. Chart 1, below, illustrates a comparison of average salaries by position.

Chart 1. Average Hourly Wage by Position and After-School Program Type ¹



(1) Source: Massachusetts After-School Research Study (2005)

Boston-based OST workers are paid slightly more than the statewide average, as shown in Table 3, below, from the Boston Beyond report; this is consistent with regional differences in earnings in other occupations and a higher cost of living in Boston.

Table 3. Boston-based Staff Highest and Lowest Hourly Salary by Job Title ¹

Job Title	Highest Hourly Pay	Lowest Hourly Pay
Director/Program Manager	\$21.65	\$16.5
Site Director/Coordinator	\$16.76	\$13.82
Group Leader/Teacher	\$14.96	\$11.75
Asst. Group Leader/ Asst. Teacher	\$11.08	\$8.68
Youth Worker/ Counselor	\$10.75	\$9.08
Paid Peer Leaders	\$7.41	\$6.55

(1) Source: Boston Beyond Provider Survey (2004)

Finding 4: Only one-quarter of OST staff receive health care benefits from their employer.

The MARS reported that 27% of staff receive health care benefits through their after-school program employer. This is roughly similar for both academic enrichment programs (30%) and school-age child care programs (25%). Boston Beyond reported that 24% of all paid staff are eligible for health care benefits through their OST employer. As a comparison, 44% of all part-time workers in Massachusetts receive employer-provided health insurance. ⁴

⁴ Massachusetts: Health Insurance Status. Kaiser State Health Facts. Kaiser Family Foundation. <http://www.statehealthfacts.kff.org>, accessed 11/09/05.

An important next step of investigation is to determine whether the noneligible 73% percent of the OST workforce remain uninsured or whether they tend to be insured through other family members' plans, MassHealth, or other sources. Equally important is the question of the degree of influence the lack of health benefits has on turnover rates in the field.

3. Recruitment and Retention

In order to realize the full potential of OST programs, staff must be stable, well trained, and well compensated. Staff turnover has historically been a major problem in OST program development and improvement. Low wages, poor working conditions, program isolation, and a lack of professional networking and advancement opportunities contribute to staff turnover. MARS and other studies have demonstrated that lower staff turnover rates are linked with higher program quality and more positive outcomes for youth.^[2,7, 13] Positive staff-youth relationships are paramount to creating high-quality programs, and constructive interaction with adults and other youth is key to attracting and retaining youth participation and has been linked to positive developmental outcomes. Stable, consistent staff are necessary to create the environment that facilitates the described positive staff-youth relationships.⁵

Finding 5: In recent years, Massachusetts has seen modest improvements in turnover rates for OST staff. In 2005, MARS found an overall turnover rate of 22% for the 2003/04 school year, whereas the Salaries and Benefits Report, published in 2000, reported a turnover rate of 34% in the previous 12 months.

Table 4. Turnover Rate by Job Title¹

Turnover for:	Assistant Leader	Group Leader	Site Coordinator	Single Site Program Admin.	Multi Site Program Admin.	All Staff
All Staff	36%	38%	28%	27%	32%	34%
Part-time Staff	35%	39%	34%	25%	31%	36%
	(n=799)	(n=1019)	(n=187)	(n=44)	(n=13)	
Full-time Staff	71%	35%	24%	27%	32%	31%
	(n=28)	(n=304)	(n=326)	(n=172)	(n=196)	

(1) Source: OCCS Salary and Benefits Report (2000)

The MARS found that school-age child care programs had a slightly higher turnover (24%) than academic enrichment programs (18%). MARS also reports that after-school staff have been employed in their current position an average of 2.8 years and

⁵ These studies cannot speak to the relationship directly, nor can we make any causal inferences; but it is important to note that the three studies reach very similar conclusions.

employed in the field an average of 7.2 years. Academic enrichment staff have been in the field slightly longer than school-age child care staff—8.0 years compared to 6.9 years—though this might be because enrichment staff comprises a higher proportion of teachers. This longevity implies that the majority of OST staff are committed to the field and to serving youth and children in their communities.

The Boston Beyond survey found similar turnover rates for Boston-based staff. Boston Beyond reported that 18% of program directors, 27% of site coordinators, 32% of group leaders/teachers, and 24% of assistant group leaders left their positions within the past program year (2003).

It is important to note that almost no difference was found between turnover rates for full-time and part-time staff. This challenges a long-held belief—that turnover in OST programs is primarily due to the part-time nature of the work—and requires further exploration. A less surprising finding is that leadership staff of programs tend to stay in their positions longer. Nevertheless, an annual loss of one-third of the total workforce is unacceptable and requires urgent attention. High turnover rates inhibit programs' ability to create educationally rich and safe environments where children spend up to 20 hours a week, and diffuse the influence of staff training to yield long-term gains. It is essential to further investigate the various causes of turnover, and whether departing OST workers are leaving their programs or the field altogether.

4. Staff Diversity

Massachusetts is racially and ethnically diverse, and also has a number of language groups—including Spanish, Chinese, Hmong, Cape Verdean, Haitian, and others—represented in its early care and education and OST workforce. Recognizing the value of a diverse workforce, in its report to the state legislature in December 2004 the Early Education and Care Advisory Committee reflected on that need and challenge, recommending that the General Court and the Council on Early Education and Care:

Facilitate access to higher education and on-going professional development opportunities for all sectors of the diverse early education and care workforce. In particular, accommodate for: the limited financial resources of the workforce; the need for career counseling; the need for general academic and literacy support; the linguistic diversity of the workforce; the unique needs of adult learners and non-traditional students; and scheduling and location difficulties.

—*The Report of the Early Education and Care Advisory Committee*, page 20

Finding 6: OST programs employ racially and ethnically diverse staff. However, supervisory and managerial positions remain predominantly white.

Table 5, below, outlines the race/ethnicity of Massachusetts school-age child care staff in 2000 by job title. What is especially troubling is that the diversity of staff decreases at the level of site program coordinators and multi site coordinators. In managerial

positions, 93% of the staff are white and only 5% and 3%, respectively, are black and Hispanic.

Table 5. School-Age Child Care Staff Race and Ethnicity by Job Title¹

Race/ethnicity	Assistant Leader (n=827)	Group Leader (n=1323)	Site Coordinator (n=513)	Single Site Program Admin. (n=216)	Multi Site Program Admin. (n=209)
White	78%	75%	78%	89%	93%
Black	10%	11%	7%	8%	5%
Hispanic	8%	9%	5%	2%	3%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2%	2%	1%	<1%	0%
Native American	0%	<1%	<1%	0%	0%
Biracial/multiracial	2%	1%	1%	<1%	0%
Other (undefined)	1%	1%	1%	<1%	0%

(1) Source: Salaries and Benefits Report (2000)

Further, Boston’s 2004 Boston Beyond survey reported that programs serving youth in grades 6–12 have the highest percentage of staff of color (78%), while those serving grades K–2 have the lowest (39%). Also, staff of programs that focus on younger children (K–2, K–6, and K–8) are 66% female, while women make up 50% of the staff of programs serving older youth (grades 6–8, 6–12, and 8–12).

Far more upward mobility is needed for staff of color. Clearly, Massachusetts OST programs would benefit from increased recruiting of racially and ethnically diverse staff at the supervisory and directorial levels.

CONCLUSIONS

This research brief outlines the most current and comprehensive understanding of the OST workforce available in Massachusetts today. Through the data presented in this report we have confirmed as well as debunked some of the long-held assumptions about the Massachusetts OST field.

Fact: The OST field consists largely of part-time employees. Approximately two-thirds of Massachusetts OST staff work part time—fewer than 30 hours per week.

Fact: OST staff compensation is problematic. OST staff salaries have not changed significantly in the past five years; for example, when adjusted for inflation, the hourly wage of assistant group leaders has actually dropped from \$8.66 in 2000 to \$8.45 in 2005, in real dollars. In addition, OST staff in school-age child care programs are paid significantly less than OST staff in academic enrichment programs – staff in academic enrichment programs are predominantly full-time classroom teachers. Finally, OST staff, across program types, are also much less likely than other workers to receive health

benefits; about one-quarter of OST staff receive employer-provided health insurance benefits, compared to 44% of all Massachusetts part-time workers.

Fact: While many OST staff are skilled and educated in the field of child and youth development, a significant proportion of staff need further education and training in the field. More than one-third of all OST staff in Massachusetts hold a bachelor's or advanced degree. Further, 60% of all program/site coordinators have a bachelor's or advanced degree and/or where pursuing additional education in the field. However, two-thirds of OST staff do not hold a college degree.

Fact: OST programs employ racially and ethnically diverse staff, similar to the youth populations they serve. It is critical for young people to be guided by adults who understand their communities and backgrounds. However, supervisory and managerial positions remain predominantly white, creating discrepancies that need to be studied further.

Fact: Turnover rates range from one-fourth to one-third of staff leaving their programs annually. Interestingly, the cited reports show little difference between turnover rates of part-time and full-time staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Future Research

This inquiry has uncovered additional questions and areas needing more research. For example:

- The three studies cited in this report focus predominantly on school-age child care and after-school programs (with the exception of the Boston Beyond survey, which also included Boston-based summer programs). A broader study of Massachusetts youth workers in various settings is vital to capturing the full picture of the OST workforce.
- Volunteer and work-study personnel in the OST field are also poorly documented. It is important to understand this important segment of the staff pool, its characteristics, and its contributions to after-school programs.
- If turnover is not directly linked to the part-time nature of OST work, as the cited reports suggest, what are the primary causes of turnover?
- Are staff who continue to pursue higher education being promoted within the OST field or leaving the field for higher paid positions elsewhere?
- What barriers do ethnic and racial minorities face in pursuing supervisory and managerial positions within the OST field?
- What can be learned from other industries with similar characteristics (low wages, part-time positions, etc.) that may help to improve working conditions for OST workers?

2. A Professional Development System

Recognizing the crucial link between young people's experiences in after-school and youth programs and the skills and knowledge of program staff, Massachusetts is seeking to improve the overall quality of these programs. The foundation for improving program quality is staffing.

Achieve Boston's goal is to create a professional development system that supports all OST workers—those with and without a college degree—to provide the best services possible for Massachusetts children and youth. Achieve Boston proposes a professional development system that is broad based, with accessible and affordable high-quality training, including access to higher education at many levels to meet the needs of current practitioners and lead to higher quality programming for children and youth. Achieve Boston has proposed a comprehensive approach to professional development that includes the following interrelated components:

- **Core Competencies** that define what staff need to know and do to work effectively with children and youth.
- **A Training System** that is grounded in the core competencies and is responsive to the diverse nature of the workforce.
- **A Training and Trainer Approval System** that ensures the quality of both the content and delivery of training.
- **A Professional Registry** that documents all relevant training and education completed by members of the field.
- **Career Lattice and Pathways** that link roles, responsibilities, and salary ranges.

These ambitious goals of training and professional development have to be tied to pathways of advancement and to compensations and benefit structures that will make it possible for staff to remain in the field and to achieve advancement over time. Obviously this is an enormous undertaking, but progress has been made in other states and recent developments in Massachusetts are also very encouraging (e.g., the formation of a new Department of Early Education and Care, and its aim to develop a professional development system for staffing of infant to school-age programs).

To support these goals, we recommend ongoing and reliable overall data collection that includes school-age child care, after-school programs, and youth work through the creation of an annual report on the state of the OST field. This report should be data driven and should help track educational and occupational issues for staff, such as retention, compensation, and advancement. This report would be greatly enhanced by the creation of a Professional Registry, which would allow after-school staff to track their professional development and careers as well as provide researchers and policymakers with an informational resource.

Clearly, the combination of compensation, high-quality training, and improved work conditions creates the basis for job satisfaction and interest in remaining in the field or in a specific OST program. It is important to distinguish those staff who want to work in OST programs for an educational experience but may have no intention to remain after a year or two from those who are committed to OST work as a career option. And it is important to appreciate that staff members themselves may not know in which category

they fall until they have had some experience in the field. Training for staff who stay in the field for a shorter time is equally as important as training for career OST workers. And many staff members who leave after a few years may end up in teaching and other child-related fields that can benefit from their youth development training and perspective.

Those who work in the after-school field need to be supported to achieve competence in youth development practice as well as educational credentials as a vital foundation for advancement. Therefore, we recommend support for Achieve Boston's efforts to develop a Youth Development Associate (YDA) credential which would provide youth development competency training and recognition for professional achievement. Achieve Boston is undertaking an initiative to pilot a YDA Credential for out-of-school time staff. This credential will be linked to higher education courses and will contribute to ongoing workforce development. It is also important that a similar higher education initiative designed for OST managers and executive directors be considered and implemented in order to address the needs of the full workforce. Watch www.achievetoboston.com for updates on the YDA and other Achieve Boston initiatives.

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