

Promising Practices in Afterschool

NIOST is one of six national organizations across the country that has been funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation to collect promising practices in afterschool. Each organization collects practices from different geographic areas and program auspices.

NIOST's focus is identifying system building and infrastructure practices from the 20 cities across the country participating in the Cross-Cities Network. Practices are collected on an ongoing basis and are submitted to the AED Center for Youth Development and Policy Research where a review team evaluates the practices to ensure they are valid. Once practices pass successfully through the review process, they are posted to the www.afterschool.org web site so that others may learn from them.

To learn more about the Promising Practices Initiative or to submit your own practice, please visit www.afterschool.org

Or

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Promising Practices In Citywide Afterschool Initiatives

Creating Infrastructure to Support the Professional Development of School-Age Care Professionals

“With the implementation of skill standards we’ll be well positioned to be able to showcase that providers who work in afterschool programs are highly skilled people and we need to make sure that there’s funding to support their involvement.”
(Janet Frieling, School’s Out Washington)

Creating Statewide Skill Standards in Washington State

Washington State has a great opportunity to develop and sustain a skilled work force for out-of-school time programs because research-based skill standards have been developed and implemented statewide. Over the past few years Washington has been working on closing the qualification gap between the levels of preparation and skills held by professionals in the school-age care sector, and the higher levels of skills and competence that are desired in order to support high quality afterschool programs.

The process of creating statewide standards for school-age care professionals grew out of an initiative focused on creating standards for early childhood workers begun in 1997. Volunteer members from the Washington Association for Educators of Personnel in Early Childhood Programs came together to form a consortium in the fall of 1997 (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2000). Federal School-to-Work grant funds from the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges were awarded to the consortium to begin development of skill standards for the early childhood professional. Upon the encouragement of the Career Development subcommittee of the State Child Care Coordinating Committee, the skill standards process also included a school-age care category. This consortium of eleven early childhood faculty from nine Washington Community and Technical Colleges, together with representatives from local businesses, agencies and organizations that specialized in providing services for children and their families, developed a set of Volunteer Skill Standards for the school-age care professional.

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The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the author.

Research-Based Process

The Volunteer Skill Standards were developed using a specific research-based process for collecting data. A focus group of currently employed school-age care professionals spent two days identifying the major functions and related tasks of their jobs. These lists were then compiled into the resulting Summary of Critical Work Functions and Key Activities, which form the basis for the skill standards document. A SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) survey was then conducted in order to determine job-specific employability skills essential to carrying out occupations in school-age care at various programmatic levels. These employability skills have been determined by the U.S. Department of Labor to be necessary for all workers as foundation skills. These basic skills include: reading, writing, arithmetic, listening, speaking, thinking skills, and personal qualities.

After additional performance indicators were developed, the practitioners identified the technical and employability knowledge and skills that are necessary to perform each of the key activities. Then school-age care professionals developed scenarios. The scenarios captured real life work situations that demonstrate how skill standards can be directly applied. Finally, a mail survey process was conducted that asked recipients to rate each work function for the level of importance and frequency.

School's Out Washington, a statewide nonprofit leadership and advocacy organization, played a major role in the development process of the school-age skills standards. From the perspective of Janet Frieling, Associate Director of School's Out Washington, the most amazing part of developing the skill standards was the sense of empowerment felt by the providers. Providers spoke in meetings "about their passions and their fears, of how if we put this down on paper is it going to change our

lives." It was a powerful process for those who participated, with a sense of importance for what they were doing for their field. In the end, based on the feedback received, a final version of the Volunteer Skills Standards document was produced in 2000.

Skill Standards for the School-Age Care Professional (year long process)

The final document produced in 2000 by Washington state on the skill standards for school-age care professionals provided the basis of a job description as well as a list of critical work functions and key activities for those individuals working within this field. The job description incorporated those persons who work with children ages 5-12 in a variety of settings. The settings for the program may include before and afterschool care provided in family child care homes, profit or non-profit centers sponsored by community organizations, and agencies such as YMCA and YWCA, public schools, and community centers. In each of these settings, it is the

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responsibility of the school-age care professional not only to support the needs of the youth participating in the program, but also to provide developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant activities. The following is a summary of the critical work functions and key activities within each work function that comprise the skill standards for school-age care professionals (Washington State Board, 2000):

- **Ensure a Healthy and Safe Environment:** Includes both maintaining the physical site and developing and implementing health standards, safety procedures and precautions. Included is the inspection, and modifying if necessary, any indoor or outdoor equipment so that all safety standards are met.
- **Support Each Child:** Entails ensuring the

personal safety of each child while at the same time guiding and nurturing the cognitive, behavioral, emotional and social development of all participants. This may require collaboration with others so that the needs of each child are met.

- **Develop and Implement Program/ Curriculum:** Includes creating a daily schedule of activities that supports the developmental needs of all participants, and reflects the individual and cultural diversity of the group. It is necessary for children, staff and community to work closely together in this process.
- **Support Families:** Requires building partnerships with families by exchanging feedback, information, resources and referrals with appropriate family members and guardians.
- **Build Community Support and Resources:** Involves increasing public awareness of the needs of school-age children and programs through collaboration with site personnel and other community based organizations. It is also important for professionals to stay current on present knowledge within the field.
- **Develop and Support Staff:** Requires recruiting, managing and training staff, substitutes, and volunteers. Also includes providing orientation, ongoing support, performance reviews and ongoing opportunities for the professional development of staff.
- **Manage Program Operations:** Entails managing the budget and fiscal operations of the program as well as maintaining all necessary licensing, accreditation, and/or sponsoring agencies. It is important to always maintain accurate and suitable record keeping systems.

Support Professional Development

Creating infrastructure such as statewide skill standards affords many benefits to multiple stakeholders. Statewide skills standards provide a common language for workers, employers, trainers and policy makers to understand the work of a school-age care professional. They help to ensure that employers understand what knowledge and skills are needed for present and future success within

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the field. Skill standards provide a consistent framework that is based on best practices. The standards have multiple uses such as: (a) a basis for writing curriculum for college courses and community based

training, as well as at the programmatic level for developing job descriptions; (b) hiring guidelines, supervision and training; (c) performance reviews, and in some cases advocacy. Furthermore, because performance indicators have been clearly defined, skill standards provide staff with opportunities to assess their own skill levels, which will enable them to make decisions about job improvement and career mobility. Skill standards give individuals working in the field of school-age care a professional development plan which will enable them to grow professionally, and to enhance their current skills in supporting children and youth.

Next Steps - Expanding Application of Skill Standards

With increasing emphasis being placed on supporting learning activities in out-of-school time, new funding has been secured from the state Community College Board to develop the *Critical Work Function H* as an addition to the current skill

Benefits of Creating Infrastructure to

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standards. The focus of *Critical Work Function H* is on the technical skills and knowledge that staff need to support children's success in learning. Since this is also a research-based process, the same steps, including the validation, are being repeated. The validation process includes taking the initial skill standards document to three forums in different parts of the state, so that practitioners can validate the conclusions made on the critical work functions and key activities. Another future step is to develop a short-term certificate through the community college system, which would provide school-age care professionals with the recognition that they have taken the required courses and increased their level of professionalism. Funding is being sought to develop curricula for both community based trainers and community college instructors to provide technical assistance based on the framework of the skill standards.

With the framework of statewide skills standards in place, Washington state has better positioned itself to respond to other critical challenges involved in providing Washington's young people safe, fun places to learn and grow when not in school.

Resources:

Interviews conducted for this publication:

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References:

Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. (2000). Skill standards for early care and education professions: School-Age care professional. Available from Highline Community College, Skill Standards Resource Center, De Moines, WA.

Web resource: www.wa-skills.com (within early childhood section)