

Overview of Philadelphia Out-of-School Time Staff Competencies

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Introduction

In the fields of out-of-school time, afterschool, and youth development, “core competencies refer to the observable skills and dispositions needed by professionals to provide high quality care and education.” (Rhode Island Competencies for Afterschool & Youth Development Professionals). Core competencies are based on research that connects tangible staffing practices to enhanced program quality and student achievement. They “articulate what it is that adults working with children and youth need to know and do” (Youth Work Core Competencies: A Review of Existing Frameworks and Purposes). OST staff competencies also “establish a set of standards that support the professionalism of the field.” (Kansas/Missouri Core Competencies for Youth Development Professionals). Ultimately, “core competencies are used to define the content of professional development curricula, set goals and outcomes for training, and design mechanisms for the demonstration and assessment of a practitioner’s skills” (Rhode Island Competencies for Afterschool & Youth Development Professionals).

Specifically, OST staff competencies can serve as a framework for:

- Developing and assessing professional development systems.
- Creating or eliminating specific professional development activities.
- Designing certification programs and higher education coursework.
- Cataloging trainings, documents, and other staff resources.
- Hiring, orienting, instructing, and evaluating individual staff or groups of staff.

Existing OST Staff Competencies

Several sets of city, state, and national staff competencies exist. These competencies target early childhood educators, afterschool staff, and youth work professionals. This paper, and the proposed Philadelphia OST Staff Competencies, is based on 16 different published sets of competencies, listed in the bibliography. One particularly useful document, entitled “Youth Work Core Competencies: A Review of Existing Frameworks and Purposes,” was published in 2009 by Schools Out Washington and the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition. This paper reviewed 12 sets of staff competencies that target professionals working with a wide range of children and youth. Its cross-cutting analysis concludes that most sets of OST staff competencies agree on the following primary categories:

- Curriculum
- Environment
- Child and Adolescent Development
- Cross-Cultural Competence
- Guidance
- Connecting with Families
- Connecting with Communities
- Health, Safety, and Nutrition
- Professionalism
- Professional Development
- Program Management

The publication further emphasizes that “communities or organizations that are interested in developing a set of core competencies need not start from scratch.”

Creating Philadelphia's OST Staff Competencies

To develop its set of OST Staff Competencies, Philadelphia professional development practitioners:

1. Reviewed the research behind and summaries of OST staff competencies described in each of the 16 documents.
2. Reviewed 5 sets of youthworker higher education curricula and coursework.
3. Reviewed additional literature specific to area OST programming, such as the Pennsylvania Keys Core Body of Knowledge, The Pennsylvania State Afterschool Youth Development Network (PSAYDN) 2008 Proposed Staff Competencies, The Pennsylvania Keys School-Age Credential, and The Core Standards for Philadelphia's Youth Programs.
4. Reviewed and sorted the following sets of Philadelphia-area trainings:
 - a. Approximately 700 specific training titles, sorted into 44 content areas and representing information gathered from 19 different area training organizations in 2007.
 - b. 30 training topics suggested by a 2009 Philadelphia-area PD needs assessment, completed by 319 individuals.
 - c. The Out-of-School Time Resource Center's (OSTRC's) 2010 Training Directory, including publicly-assessable trainings offered by 28 different organizations.
 - d. The Center for Youth Development's Spring 2010 training calendar, containing approximately 50 distinct trainings.
5. Used the aforementioned research, summaries, and training topics to modify the 11 Competencies recommended by the Schools Out/Next Generation document, resulting in 9 Philadelphia OST Staff Competencies.
6. Created 50 Content Areas within the 9 Philadelphia Competencies.
7. Sorted approximately 350 documents from the OSTRC's 2010 Online Document Library into the 50 Content Areas.

The result is a list of 9 OST Staff Competencies, 9 Competency Definitions, and 50 Content Areas.

Considerations

When reviewing the Philadelphia OST Staff Competencies, it is important to recognize that:

- The Competencies must be broad enough to accommodate a wide variety of skills, topics, and uses. Thus, not every content area will apply to all programs, staff, or situations.
- Similarly, the Competencies span multiple job responsibilities and levels of experience. These distinctions will be articulated and addressed within the Content Areas.
- Absolute boundaries do not separate each Competency from the others. Therefore, some competencies and content areas overlap with others while some specific skills, trainings, and documents could be listed under multiple headings.
- In the ideal world, the Competencies would have been developed before and determine the specific Content Areas. However, the reality is that the Content Areas (trainings) were developed long before the competencies, so we have used each to shape the other.
- This classification system, like any other, reflects the unique opinions and perspectives of the individuals who created it. People, cities, and systems will inevitably sort the same items in distinctly different ways.

Next Steps

The next steps for modifying, adopting, and/or utilizing Philadelphia's OST Staff Competencies are to:

- Gather additional feedback from area OST professional development practitioners.
- Elaborate on the Competency and Content Area descriptions, thereby clarifying both staff expectations and classification mechanisms.
- Articulate specific ways in which these Competencies can be used to develop and assess *systems and activities*.
- Articulate specific ways in which these Competencies can be used to train and assess *groups and individuals*.