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This Practice Brief is the second in a periodic series published by the National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment (NCASE) to build awareness of promising practices in the field of school-age child care.

The goal of NCASE is to ensure that school-age children in families of low income have increased access to quality afterschool and summer learning experiences that contribute to their overall development and academic achievement. For more information, contact us at ncase@ecetta.info



Creating a Successful Formula to Engage Out-of-School Time Programs in Quality Improvement Systems

From December of 2016 through March of 2017 the National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment (NCASE) facilitated two cohorts of a Peer Learning Community (PLC) on Quality Improvement for 23 state teams. Participating states created cross-sector planning teams made up of Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) lead agency staff, representatives from state education agencies and 21st Century Community Learning Centers, State Afterschool Network leads, and representatives from licensing, family child care, and other relevant providers.

For many states, this PLC represented their first out-of-school time (OST) collaboration on:

- » Readiness and stages of change in building cross-sector partnerships
- » Quality Rating Improvement System participation and incentives
- » Leadership, technical assistance (TA), and Continuous Quality Improvement
- » Strengthening adult-child interactions and instructional quality

Examples from Georgia and Wisconsin are highlighted in this brief.



COLLABORATION

Readiness for change

State teams were asked to fill out a **questionnaire** about the current stage of development of the different components of their Quality Improvement System (QIS) to help them assess their readiness for the work ahead and think about possible next steps.

Identifying concrete ways to strengthen OST QIS by leveraging the power of the

partnerships formed in their cross-sector teams led states to develop action plans including three core strategies:

- » Expand and extend the work of the cross-sector planning team and partnerships
- » Create or revise an OST focus in QIS (including program quality standards)
- » Strengthen professional development (PD) systems.

Spotlight on Georgia

The Georgia team is composed of **representatives** from the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), including: the manager of *Quality Rated* (Georgia's Quality Rating and Improvement System) and a school-age specialist; the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network; 21st Century Community Learning Centers; and GUIDE, Inc., a prevention organization with a youth development focus.

In 2015, the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network, in partnership with GUIDE and a collaborative of state agencies, developed the *Georgia Afterschool & Youth Development Quality Standards* (see Resources), complementing DECAL's efforts to incorporate stand-alone school-age programs into *Quality Rated*.

The PLC helped to build on this partnership, strengthening relationships to support ongoing work. The team is especially excited that the School-Age Specialist is the first CCDF representative to receive the White-Riley-Peterson Policy Fellowship. She can now share CCDF information with other Fellows from the afterschool and 21st Century Community Learning Centers world.

Quality Rating Improvement System

Georgia's *Quality Rated* is a three-level point-based portfolio and onsite observation system that started in 2012. The state added school-age stand-alone programs in 2015. Thirty-nine programs have been rated, with the majority at

STAR 2. Ratings for 46 more programs are in process.

The state is now working with stakeholders on an "endorsement" for school-age classrooms that have already been rated. In addition, the DECAL school-age specialist is aligning the Afterschool & Youth Development (ASYD) Quality Standards (see Resources), which include standards on culturally and linguistically responsive practice, with *Quality Rated*. This work on alignment is an important step toward unifying quality efforts across sectors, as there are an additional 562 sites that receive 21st CCLC or TANF funds and are using the ASYD standards. All programs are using a Continuous Quality Improvement approach that includes self-assessment and action planning to advance quality.

Strengthening PD Systems

Georgia agreed that an action plan priority would be to strengthen PD supports for program leaders, building on existing Continuous Quality Improvement efforts. Action plan steps include identifying leadership supports, obtaining state approval for leadership training, and adding a leadership track to the bi-annual Georgia ASYD conference. Drawing more participants from licensed child care centers is another step in building a cross-sector approach. The team has also begun to provide peer learning opportunities called "Afterschool Community Conversations," a mix of virtual and face-to-face sessions.



QUALITY

Creating or revising an OST focus in QIS

Quality Rating Improvement Systems, known as QRIS, provide quality steps or levels with increasing standards, offer incentives and supports, and provide a way for families to understand a program's quality level. While nearly all states have developed QRIS, some may or may not include OST participation and may not have OST standards.

Six states have chosen to focus on creating or revising their QIS by doing the following:

- » **Incorporating a Continuous Quality Improvement approach** focused on an internal “owning” of the change process by the team that creates an action plan. As the authors of *Continuous Quality Improvement: An Overview Report for State QRIS Leaders* note, **Continuous Quality Improvement** means “going beyond meeting the externally applied regulations and standards”; it “moves the lever for change internally,” where
- » **Creating state program quality standards that capture the unique challenges in OST.** States have worked with cross-sector task groups to create OST program standards, and some states are adding a focus on equity and inclusion. States are also identifying ways to deal with challenges like facilities, PD requirements, and strengthening adult-child interactions, common challenges for school-age programs.
- » **Strengthening quality supports, such as training and TA.** An increasing number of states offer practitioners PD credit when they participate in training and TA.
- » **Improving financing strategies and incentives for participating.** Strategies include increased quality set-aside for OST programs, quality improvement grants to support program action plans, PD scholarships and bonuses, and tiered reimbursement for advancing quality levels.

the team itself identifies what is working and what needs to improve.¹

¹ Wiggins, K. & Mathias, D. (2013, April). Continuous quality improvement: An overview report for state QRIS leaders. Retrieved from <http://qrisnetwork.org/sites/all/files/resources/mrobinson%40buildinitiative.org/2013-05-06%2008%3A45/Continuous%20Quality%20Improvement%2C%20An%20Overview%20Report%20for%20State%20QRIS%20Leaders.pdf>.





CARE

Strengthening professional development systems

States discussed the strong correlation between quality and the professional knowledge and capacity of staff. While some states have developed core competencies, credentials, or career pathways for

OST, six PLC states have chosen to focus on increasing access to high-quality PD opportunities through strategies like:

- » **Supporting program leaders.** One state designed an initiative to support rural leaders with 16 hours of management training and a PLC. Another state developed a seven-session institute

Spotlight on Wisconsin

The Wisconsin team includes the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families and representatives of the Afterschool Network, the Afterschool Association, the Early Childhood Association, and Supporting Families Together. Through their conversations, the team learned that the different organizations bring differing perspectives to the work. As a result, they decided that their next step is to gather stakeholder input, especially from program directors, to better understand how to respond to all sector needs.

Wisconsin plans to use surveys and in-person presentations and discussions at the regular meetings of each participating organization and of the Child Care Administrators Association and the Family Child Care Association. This will ensure that the team designs an action plan that reflects the concerns and interests of all sectors.

Quality Rating and Improvement System

Wisconsin has a relatively high level of OST program participation in YoungStar, the state's child care Quality Rating and Improvement System, including many programs that have achieved the highest ratings (4Star or 5Star) among YoungStar's five levels. While programs that receive the Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy are required to participate in YoungStar, participation is otherwise voluntary.

Wisconsin state planners believe that a number of supports and incentives have increased participation in YoungStar, including 10 hours of TA per year, and micro-grant dollars for such resources as PD, additional TA, materials and curriculum, and salary bonuses for PD par-

ticipants. Wisconsin also provides enhanced subsidy reimbursement for the highest rated programs; 4Star programs receive up to 10 percent enhancement, and 5Star programs receive up to 25 percent.

The YoungStar 2016 *School-Age Evaluation Criteria* (see Resources) include some new directions for OST programs, such as program outcomes and business and professional practices. The *YoungStar School-Age Enrollment Inventory* (see Resources) collects information from children and families on their interests, growth, and development.

Strengthening PD Systems

Wisconsin has made multiple efforts to strengthen its PD system. The state has placed a priority on supports for program leaders in the area of business practices. This is already a key component of YoungStar. Staff use the evaluation criteria of the Program Administration Scale for center-based programs and the Business Administration Scale for family child care programs for reference to determine whether a program meets a particular indicator. (Programs are not scored on the Program Administration Scale or Business Administration Scale tools directly.)

YoungStar also focuses on developmentally appropriate practices and instructional quality. The Wisconsin Afterschool Network collaborated across sectors to develop a school-age OST program curricular framework to complement the core subjects that children learn in school (see Resources). OST programs participating in YoungStar are now being asked to identify and track individual child outcomes.

that helps program leaders explore their leadership style. Other states are working to increase the diversity of their leadership so that it is representative of the communities served.

- » **Strengthening TA that helps program staff apply best practices.** Some states have increased the number of TA professionals with deep backgrounds in OST. The PLC also explored the use of evidence-based approaches in building an early childhood and OST TA system.
- » **Strengthening interactions and instructional quality to achieve positive child and youth outcomes.** One state is working on strengthening its standards for adult-child interactions and social-emotional learning to foster social development. Research supports these

priority areas.² State teams also considered research on summer learning which shows that three to four summers of high-quality learning, starting in pre-K, can ensure that children are reading on grade level by grade 3, and increases the chance that they will graduate from high school.³

- » **Working cross-sector to strengthen PD opportunities.** Some states have worked on cross-sector certificates and credentials that translate into credit as part of a comprehensive career pathway. One state has a strong Professional Development Task Force that addresses the full age continuum of OST programs, starting from infant-toddler. A few states have created or adopted cross-sector quality standards.

2 Heckman, P.E. & Sanger, C. (2013). How quality afterschool programs help motivate and engage more young people in learning, school, and life. *In Expanding minds and opportunities*. Retrieved from <http://www.expandinglearning.org/expandingminds/article/how-quality-afterschool-programs-help-motivate-and-engage-more-young-people>

3 National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment. (2016). NCASE summer learning brief. Retrieved from <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/ncase-summer-learning-brief.pdf>





Summary

Partnerships are vital to strengthening quality improvement systems for OST. Whether states that participated in the PLC are just starting the process of building a system or working to revise an existing system, they have all embraced the chance to work in cross-sector stakeholder teams to build a unified system that reflects the needs of the entire field. Many states

plan to expand the cross-sector teams to work on action plan goals, such as creating and aligning standards, selecting assessment tools, and offering resources and incentives to increase participation. Others will work on broader goals of strengthening overall PD and QIS. A cross-sector approach to QIS engagement can help to raise awareness of the need to include OST and can support more efficient use of resources for improving school-age child outcomes.

Resources

Georgia Afterschool and Youth Development Quality Standards. (2015). Retrieved from http://georgiaasyd.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ASYD_Standards-Booklet.pdf

Georgia Quality Rated. (2016, June). Stand-alone school-age rating rubric. Retrieved from https://qualityrated.dec.state.ga.us/Content/Documents/PM_SchoolAgePortfolio.pdf

Mathias, D. (2015). Chapter 8: Impact of the early learning challenge on state quality rating and improvement systems. In *Rising to the challenge: Building effective systems for young children and families, a BUILD e-book*. Retrieved from <http://www.buildinitiative.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Chapter8Mathias.pdf>

McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership (2014, September). *Leadership matters*. Retrieved from <http://mccormickcenter.ni.edu/leadership-matters/>

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Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. *Resources for providers: School-age tools*. Retrieved from <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/providers/resources>

For more resources, see the NCASE Resource Library at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/ncase-resource-library>.

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