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This Practice Brief is the thirteenth in a periodic series published by the National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment (NCASE) to build awareness of research and 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.

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Equitable Strategies to Support Recruitment, Retention, and Rejuvenation of a Strong OST Workforce

In this brief, NCASE provides information, research, and examples of equitable strategies to support recruitment, retention, and rejuvenation of the out-of-school time (OST) workforce, a top concern for OST programs.¹ This information is provided with the recognition that quality jobs (which include livable wages, adequate preparation, and a positive work environment) are an avenue to advance equity.



OST plays a critical role in supporting working families and in providing children and youth with meaningful relationships, enrichment activities, and social and emotional learning (SEL), which lead to positive developmental outcomes. Additionally, there is a greater-than-ever focus on the potential for OST to support pandemic recovery efforts. To achieve that potential, there needs to be a new investment in the OST workforce.

Efforts to improve job quality through **increased compensation**; support for **preparation** (including professional development, training, and career pathways); and the creation of **positive work environments** can bring qualified people into

the field and keep them there and engaged. In addition, some shorter-term **targeted strategies**, such as sign-on bonuses and flexible hiring practices, can directly impact staff recruitment and retention. Although the COVID-19 pandemic brought increased attention to the needs of the OST workforce, the challenges around recruitment and retention are long-standing and will require multiple, long-term strategies. Hopefully regional, state, and national leaders will find new ways to work together as we expand and sustain innovative and equitable approaches to staff recruitment and retention.

¹ Afterschool Alliance. (2023). *Afterschool programs open but still recovering post-pandemic. More work remains for full return to normalcy: Findings from a fall 2022 survey of afterschool program providers.* <https://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/Afterschool-Programs-Open-But-Still-Recovering-Wave-8.pdf>

Listen to Providers

Before putting new recruitment and retention strategies in place, we first must understand why providers choose to stay in positions or leave. Recent research reveals that low pay is often the primary factor for staff leaving, along with workplace stress and systems-level challenges such as complex licensing regulations.^{2,3} By gathering input directly from center-based and home-based child care (HBCC) OST providers through surveys, focus groups, and representation on working groups, we have a better chance of selecting strategies that will effectively address staffing issues. Examples:

- » The [San Francisco Beacon Initiative](#) (SFBI), an organization that supports a network of youth centers, surveyed staff and learned that team members value pay, trust, transparent communication, and professional investment. Based on this information, SFBI is seeking additional funding for direct recruitment and retention efforts (including pay raises, merit increases, and referral bonuses) and professional development, especially around specific training pathways for new staff.⁴
- » [Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families](#) is engaging with the workforce about how to rejuvenate and learn together through community cafés and learning communities. The department uses a [liberatory design](#) approach that shifts power by co-designing policies with those who will be impacted by decisions. One outcome has been a commitment to offer training, webinars, and materials in multiple languages.



Increase Compensation

Increasing salaries through bonuses, stipends, and wage increases is a primary recruitment and retention strategy. Compensation also includes creating full-time positions and ensuring access to health care and other benefits such as child care. Examples:

- » **Creating full-time positions.** One of OST's biggest workforce challenges is that most positions are part-time. Many staff exit the field seeking a full-time job with better pay and benefits. Creating full-time positions may take creativity, as well as discussing the implications of full-time positions with funders and being strategic about budgeting. For example, multi-age programs may create full-time positions by having staff work with children ages 0–5 during the day and then work with school-age children in the afternoons. Partnering with school districts can allow a paraprofessional position and an afterschool staff position to be combined.
 - [FAB Youth Philly](#), a youth development organization in Philadelphia that supports youth and professionals,

2 Hall, G., DeSouza, L., Starr, E., Wheeler, K., & Schleyer, K. (2020). Sustaining passion: Findings from an exploratory study of the OST program workforce. *Journal of Youth Development*, 15(1). <https://jyd.pitt.edu/ojs/jyd/article/view/2020-15-1-SJA-01>

3 Bromer, J., Porter, T., Melvin, S., & Ragonese-Barnes, M. (2021). *Family child care educators' perspectives on leaving, staying, and entering the field: Findings from the multi-state study of family child care decline and supply*. Erikson Institute, Herr Research Center. https://www.erikson.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/FCD_DeclineStudy_2021.pdf

4 Frigiliana, A.J. (2022). Questions about workforce shortages? Your staff may have the answers! *AfterSchool Today*, 13(2), 18-19. <https://www.flipsnack.com/8857BBDD75E/fall-2022-afterschool-today/full-view.html>

has [made the case for and committed to creating more full-time positions](#).

- In Massachusetts, For Kids Only Afterschool program has launched an [apprenticeship model](#) with support from COVID-19 relief resources and private fundraising. The model combines the creation of full-time positions and increased salaries with professional development and a college certificate program.
- » **Health care and other benefits.** OST leaders are working to provide health care and other benefits that are meaningful to employees, such as [retirement](#), paid time off and sick time (even for part-time employees), and child care. Examples:
 - [Nevada Strong Start Child Care Services Hub](#) was created through the [Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations \(CRR-SA\) Act](#) and [American Rescue Plan Act Stabilization](#) funds. Multiple public and private partners collaborate to

offer shared services like small business administration resources and substitute teachers, technical assistance, and other resources such as small business loans and educational and professional development grants.

- Indiana, through their [Stronger Together](#) program, offers support for shared services hubs for early childhood providers. [The Indiana Afterschool Network](#) has also provided [information to OST providers](#) about accessing available health care options in the state.
- The [Massachusetts Early Education and Care Staff Pilot Program](#) provides immediate access to vouchers to income-eligible staff at licensed early childhood and school-age programs through the existing child care financial assistance system (subsidies). These staff will receive priority status on the waiting list to receive the financial assistance when funding is available.

Resources:

The [Center for the Study of Child Care Employment](#) has been tracking the use of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and other public funds for Early Care and Education (ECE) workforce for those who work with children birth to 5 years old. Some states include OST in their spending (notably [Nevada](#)).

[Improving Child Care Compensation Backgrounder 2021](#) outlines eight strategies with state examples for improving child care compensation. Although this issue brief is focused on early childhood, the strategies also apply to the school-age field. In addition, the [Improving Child Care Compensation Video Series: Interviews with State and Community Leaders](#) explores examples from California, Colorado, Illinois, Louisiana, New Mexico, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C., and Washington.

[Health Coverage Outreach Toolkit for the Early Care and Education Workforce](#). This toolkit includes five steps to improve health coverage for the early care and education (ECE) workforce, along with sample emails, social media graphics, and a Health and Human Services (HHS) train-the-trainer webinar.

Support Preparation

A well-prepared workforce is essential to quality childhood experiences and helps ensure staff feel confident and supported in their work. Preparation includes training and technical assistance, professional development, and career pathways. Keep in mind that OST providers benefit from new-hire orientation, training, and coach-

ing provided by OST specialists. Further, HBCC providers care for large numbers of children ages 5–12 and need training and coaching opportunities to strengthen their ability to support school-age children in mixed-age groups. Alternative pathways, such as apprenticeships, and leadership development are two innovative and equitable strategies to bolster recruitment and retention.

- » **Apprenticeships and high school pathways.** Apprenticeships are industry-driven career pathways that combine classroom instruction, paid on-the-job training, and mentorship, which generally lead to a nationally recognized credential or degree. Experiences for high school youth such as internships or other on-the-job-training opportunities in OST can serve as early entry points into the field.
 - The [California Expanded Learning Apprenticeship](#) is a first-of-its-kind partnership between [Girls, Inc. of Alameda County](#), the [Partnership for Children & Youth](#), the [California Afterschool Network](#), and [Early Care and Education Pathways to Success](#). It is a two-year program intended to support new and advancing providers with on-the-job training and free college coursework toward an associate's degree.
 - In North Carolina, the [Pathways to Early Learning](#) apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship program intentionally includes school-age providers and is a partnership between the [Southwestern Child Development Commission](#), [ApprenticeshipNC](#), [NC Community Colleges](#), and [Dogwood Health Trust](#).
 - The [Massachusetts 21st Century Community Learn Center \(CCLC\)](#) Program created a high school internship during which teens receive a stipend and job experience at an OST site to build career readiness and interest in professions that support learning.
- » **Leadership development.** Program leaders can have a direct influence on the retention of their staff.⁵ Further, ensuring that leaders feel well-equipped

for their roles can impact their retention. Workforce studies or scans can help lead agencies increase or maintain diversity. Following are several examples across the nation of innovative leadership support initiatives:

- Leadership credentials are offered in many states (e.g., [New Hampshire's Afterschool Leadership Endorsement](#) and the [Pennsylvania Key Director Credential](#) for early childhood and school-age providers).
- [South Carolina Afterschool Leaders Empowered \(SCALE\)](#) is a 10-month fellowship offered through a partnership between the Riley Institute at Furman University and the South Carolina Department of Education. The fellowship, using Department of Education and ARPA funding, prepares individuals across the state to be strong leaders in afterschool and expanded learning.⁶
- California's School Age Consortium's (CalSAC) [Leadership Development Institute](#) for Emerging Leaders of Color is an intensive year-long cohort-based program for emerging leaders in the OST field. One of this project's foundational components is understanding how power, privilege, and oppression manifest in the field.
- The [Thriving Leaders of Color Fund](#) in Kings County, Washington, offered one-time grants to projects "supporting members to 'advance, rejuvenate, and celebrate leaders of color.'"⁷ Examples included removing barriers and addressing challenges to retaining and sustaining leaders of color in the field or elevating and centering the voices, leadership, and power of leaders of color within organizations.
- The [National Afterschool Association](#)

5 Wilkens, M. (2020). Employee churn in afterschool care: Manager influences on retention and turnover. *Journal of Youth Development*, 15, 1, 94–121. <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/ncase-resource-library/employee-churn-after-school-care-manager-influences-retention-and-turnover>

6 Stevens, C. & Keely, A. (2022). Scaling up the afterschool workforce, one leader at a time. *Afterschool Today*, 13(2), 24–25. <https://www.flipsnack.com/8857BBDD75E/fall-2022-afterschool-today/full-view.html>

7 Arias, A. (2022, Fall). Rejuvenation and celebration of youth development field leaders of color. *Afterschool Today*, 13(2), 16–17. <https://www.flipsnack.com/8857BBDD75E/fall-2022-afterschool-today/full-view.html>

facilitated the [Professional Learning Community for Emerging Leaders of Color](#) to support their leadership and

equity analysis skills and help advance their careers in afterschool.

Resources:

[Exploring Ways to Engage and Inspire School-Age Children in Home-based Child Care](#). This no-cost online professional development module, part of the Early Childhood Knowledge Learning Center, addresses the benefits of and strategies for including school-age children in home-based child care (HBCC) settings.

[Strengthening the OST Workforce: A Guide to Developing Apprenticeships](#) is an NCASE guide that explores apprenticeships and makes the case for investing in apprenticeships as a workforce strategy. It presents advantages as well as potential challenges with solutions for OST apprenticeships programs, and also provides resources, information, and examples.

[Engaging Youth as Workers in Afterschool Programs](#), a paper by [Temescal Associates](#) and [How Kids Learn Foundation](#), explores how involving youth as OST workers can benefit both youth and programs. The brief includes recommendations for policymakers, particularly around identifying funds. An associated webinar can be accessed [here](#).

[The Out-of-School Time Leader's Guide to Equitable Hiring and Staff Development Practices](#). This National AfterSchool Association guide is designed to ensure a solid and equitable workforce pipeline of professionals.

Create Positive Work Environments

During the COVID-19 pandemic, child care workers experienced higher rates of depression, stress, and other health issues than the general adult population in the United States.⁸ A positive work environment can address these issues, enhancing programs' ability to recruit, retain, and rejuvenate staff. A positive work environment includes sufficient staffing, paid time for planning and reflection, team development and support from program leaders, and well-being and mental health support for staff.

- » Following are some examples of programs:
 - The [Indiana Youth Services Association](#) launched a three-year comprehensive approach to employee wellness. The [pilot project](#) addresses the overall wellness of youth workers with an eye toward staff recruitment and retention. The initiative includes monthly training (framed around

the [Eight Dimensions of Wellness](#) outlined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Admin-



istration) and provides participating organizations with stipends.

- The [Youth Worker Wellbeing Project](#) further supports youth workers in Indiana with a \$20 million investment from the Lilly Endowment, Inc., led by a coalition of youth-serving intermediaries. Comprehensive support

8 Elharake, J. A., Shafiq, M., Cobanoglu, A., Malik, A. A., Klotz, M., Humphries, J. E., Murray, T., Patel, K. M., Wilkinson, J. D., Yildirim, I., Diaz, R., Rohas, R., Cohen, A. K., Lee, A., Omer, S. B., & Gilliam, W. S. (2022). Prevalence of chronic diseases, depression, and stress among US childcare professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Preventing Chronic Disease, 19*, (220132). DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd19.220132>.

will include access to telemedicine and mental health counseling, peer support groups, leadership development programming, and services to improve working conditions.

- The New Jersey School Age Care Coalition’s (NJSACC) [Afterschool Conversations](#) are monthly virtual networking sessions that connect staff and provide an opportunity to exchange information and reflect on best practices.

Resources:

[The Model Work Standards](#). The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) revised these standards in 2019, which recognize that the needs of children and the needs of adults are interconnected.

[Educator Work Environments Are Children’s Learning Environments: How and Why They Should Be Improved](#). This article from CSCCE makes a case for why early educator work environments matter.

Targeted Strategies to Improve Recruitment and Retention

In addition to increasing compensation, supporting preparation, and creating positive work environments, programs and system leaders also need direct strategies that can immediately impact recruitment and retention:

- » **Sign-on and retention bonuses.** Recently funded through federal relief packages, states have provided direct financial support to ECE and OST staff. States and localities have also tapped into additional funding sources as shown in the following examples:
 - The [Nevada Early Childhood Stipend Incentive Program](#) provided \$1,000 grants to eligible workers (including OST workers) through the [Nevada Registry](#) to encourage workers to stay in the field and help with costs during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Maine [signed a bipartisan budget bill](#) that [included \\$12 million in state general funds to provide \\$200 monthly stipends for direct early care and education \(ECE\) workers](#), including school-age providers in licensed centers or family child care providers.

This bill is a continuation of funding for stipends launched in 2021 with money from the federal American Rescue Plan Act, which has already supported over 7,000 ECE workers. By July 2023, the state’s current stipend model will transition to a tiered career lattice system based on experience and education.

- The [Madison-area Out-of-School Time \(MOST\)](#) network piloted a “pay to stay” initiative after learning through a survey that low compensation was the primary problem impacting youth worker retention. They found that by providing cash assistance to staff, over 80 percent of these staff remained in their positions up to one year later. However, this elegant strategy addressed more than simple financial assistance. By providing this assistance through awards, bonuses, paid training, and subject matter expert contracts, MOST simultaneously addressed preparation (by supporting training) and workplace environment (by recognizing effort and expertise).⁹
- » **Flexible hiring practices.** Thinking creatively and critically can lead to new ways to address the staffing crisis, for example:
 - The Massachusetts [Department of](#)

⁹ Beck, N. (2022). Pay to stay: An initiative of the Madison-area Out-of-School Time network. *AfterSchool Today*, 13(2), 6-7. <https://www.flipsnack.com/8857BBDD75E/fall-2022-afterschool-today/full-view.html>

[Early Education and Care \(EEC\)](#) adopted two flexible hiring practices without sacrificing rigor:

1. Program administrators, leveraging their expertise, took on the role of validating staff requirements. This sped up the process, rather than relying on EEC for verification.
2. EEC also offered flexibility within those requirements, broadening how programs make determinations. For example, EEC accepted unofficial college transcripts and a broad range of youth development experience in addition to traditional school-age care experience.

» **Other targeted strategies.** States and localities are experimenting with other ways to improve recruitment and retention efforts. Centralized job boards (such as those established by the [California Afterschool Network](#) and the [Indiana Afterschool Network](#)) may help connect providers to job seekers and make the field more visible to job seekers. Intermediaries or lead agencies can help coordinate shared recruitment and hiring events. Additionally, including program staff in the hiring process (recruiting in the community, sitting on interview panels, and co-designing site-level trainings) may also improve recruitment and retention.

Resources:

[Understanding the Shortage of Workers in Afterschool Programs](#). This issue brief, published by Temescal Associates and How Kids Learn Foundation, explores the reasons for the staffing shortage and its impact, as well as the potential strategies that can keep equity at the forefront. A companion webinar, [Responding to the Afterschool Worker Shortage](#), further explores these issues.

The Afterschool Alliance created the [Staff Recruitment Toolkit](#) with tips and ideas for programs.

The Sperling Center for Research and Innovation offers the [Staffing Toolkit for OST Learning Programs](#), which includes tip sheets, a rubric for hiring enrichment staff, and other planning tools.

Conclusion

The OST field encompasses several sectors, such as school-age care, 21st CCLC Programs, and school or community-based programs funded by a variety of resources. Settings include licensed, unlicensed, license-exempt, school-year, and summer programs as well as home-based care. This presents opportunities to partner across agencies and sectors and to leverage the strengths the OST field brings, namely a deep connection to families and communities, a positive youth development approach, and a focus on SEL and enrichment. The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) lead agencies may find new ways to work with OST partners to expand

our reach and funding, including [statewide afterschool networks](#) and state [21st CCLC Programs](#).

Partnerships and collaborations have brought about many of the examples highlighted here, which include initiatives to increase compensation, to support and prepare the workforce, and to create positive work environments, as well as shorter-term approaches directly focusing on staffing shortages. Addressing recruitment and retention will take an all-hands-on-deck approach as we expand and sustain effective, innovative strategies. Ultimately, a strong workforce contributes to positive outcomes for youth and provides the infrastructure working families need.

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