

MICHIGAN AFTER-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

Reimagine and Expand Out-of-School Time Professional Career Pathways

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Abstract

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The struggle to fill Out-of-School Time (OST) staff positions with diverse and qualified candidates who represent the communities they serve has raised alarm among stakeholders in Michigan and across the nation.

High turnover plagues most OST programs. Low pay, odd work schedules, and the social-emotional demands of working with youth create significant barriers to retention and recruitment of skilled OST professionals. These challenges become obstacles to attracting applicants to entry level positions and promoting the career pathways necessary to ensuring a recognized and stable profession.

The response to this dilemma resulted in a February 2018 statewide meeting of stakeholders that led to the formation of the Michigan After-School Partnership's (MASP) Career Pathways Workstream committee of nonprofit organizational leaders and administrators from youth-serving agencies. The intent was to identify appropriate solutions for consideration by state education administrators and policymakers, funders along with Career and Technical Education (CTE) and OST administrators. The committee explored existing relevant research and conducted surveys regarding most prevalent hiring practices, retention issues, and potential expanded entry points into the OST workforce.

The results of their research is encapsulated in this paper, "Reimagine and Expand: Out of School Time Professional Career Pathways." The paper addresses the need to expand the current pipeline of credentialed OST educators through diverse pathways, including those that begin in high school. This need to grow the number of credentialed OST professionals aligns with Michigan's "Sixty by 30" Goal, that by 2030, 60% of working-age Michiganders will have a certificate or college degree.

One important solution that has emerged includes a collaborative partnership to develop entry-level career pathways for high school students to obtain the Michigan School Age Youth Development (MiSAYD) Credential. Additional solutions explored in this paper include:

- raise awareness of the T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship;
- increase access to professional development; and
- provide incentives to obtain the MiSAYD credential.

Addressing these potential solutions will help to ensure an accountable workforce development strategy that leads to measurable education and compensation gains, and real career mobility and stability.

For the purpose of this white paper, the terms OST, after school, and youth development are used interchangeably. These terms refer to staff working in before- and after-school, summer, expanded learning, child care, school and community-based programs.

Issue

Long standing issues relating to access to a viable field of diverse and qualified youth development professionals have created barriers to the provision of high quality programs. In addition, it is anticipated that the COVID-19 pandemic will have an impact on current and future staff recruitment and retention.

Attention is needed to expand the pool of diverse, qualified professionals entering the field as well as developing the components of a robust career pathway to retain staff choosing a career in youth development. In Michigan, OST staff have access to the Michigan School-Age Youth Development (MiSAYD) Certificate and Credential which are currently underutilized. Expanding entry points into an OST Career Pathway and increasing utilization of the existing MiSAYD Credential by establishing a connection with CTE programs; creating incentives; and connecting with higher education will help to increase awareness of youth development as a professional career option.



Background

In February 2018 MASP convened statewide stakeholders to help address the shrinking supply of OST personnel.

A Career Pathways Workstream was then formed, consisting of nonprofit organization leaders and administrators from youth-serving agencies.

There is consistent research that reflects the positive impact OST programs have on youth. The opportunity to routinely connect with caring adults in a safe and engaging environment has propelled many youth to succeed academically and socially.

McCombs, Witaker, and Yoo (2017) noted that instructor-child relations were a key dimension related to youth development. Caring and supportive adults are what make OST programs successful. Staff are critical to teaching academic programming, supervising youth as they engage in physical activity, and helping youth develop social-emotional skills.

Despite the important role OST staff play, an unfortunate yet consistent concern is the lack of professionals in the field. The majority of OST positions are part-time and for many, the positions are often perceived as merely a stepping stone to other careers.

Carla O'Donnell-Rizzo surveyed OST staff in Omaha, Nebraska in 2018. In the article "OST Professionalism Pipeline: Why is it Leaking" (2018), she explores why it is so difficult to hire and retain OST professionals. The survey pointed to several possibilities for the high turnover of part-time staff:

- lack of marketing to highlight the profession;
- lack of youth development certification programs that offer incentives;
- the benefits of OST certificate programs are underreported or not marketed appropriately; and
- a lack of opportunities for advancement in the OST field.

O'Donnell-Rizzo's findings suggest that there needs to be greater emphasis on knowing more about the veterans in the field, what makes them stay, and what their career paths consist of. Additionally, she highlights the need for consistent job titles and definitions across the field. Most importantly, the survey findings suggest that competitive compensation and the development of "career ladders" are key to an OST pipeline.

Based upon the Omaha, Nebraska survey, only 20% of respondents were interested in pursuing the youth development certificate available to them. It was recommended that youth development certificates and degrees be incentivized to encourage staff retention to the OST field. O'Donnell-Rizzo concludes that if staff do not view the benefits of a certificate and professional opportunities, they will continue to leave the field for career advancement.



In July 2020, the MASP Career Pathways Workstream Committee surveyed stakeholders associated with OST programming regarding the challenges of attracting, hiring, and retaining qualified staff. This survey also probed whether OST employers were familiar with the MiSAYD Credential and asked whether the credential was promoted when hiring and advancing staff.

Respondents represented OST programs in 71 cities/towns from the Upper Peninsula, Northern, Central, and Southeast Michigan. A majority of respondents represented faith- and community-based programs such as YMCAs, 4-H, Boys & Girls Clubs and a few 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) programs.

Survey results indicated that the largest percentage of staff vacancies and those most difficult to fill were among front-line/group activity leaders. Barriers identified to filling vacancies were too few applicants attracted to the positions and a lack of applicants with the experience and credentials suitable to offer high-quality programming.

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The majority of respondents were somewhat familiar with the MiSAYD Certificate or Credential but had never hired anyone with it. All indicated that they would like additional information about the programs and that they would give preference in hiring staff with a MiSAYD Certificate or Credential. In addition, respondents stated that hiring staff with a MiSAYD Credential or Certificate would improve the quality of their program.

In 2019, the Governor set Michigan's "Sixty by 30" goal. By 2030, 60% of working-age Michiganders will have a certificate or college degree.

During Governor Whitmer's State of the State Address in 2019, the Governor set Michigan's "Sixty by 30" goal. By 2030, 60% of working-age Michiganders will have a certificate or college degree.

Reaching this goal will ensure that Michigan will be a talent leader — fueling the future workforce and providing opportunity for all. "Sixty by 30" seeks to build a stronger Michigan by closing the skills gap, increasing opportunity, and bolstering economic competitiveness. Setting a postsecondary achievement goal for Michigan will provide a clear metric to measure the economic health and competitiveness of Michigan and focus efforts across state government, educational institutions, and the community at large.

The struggles of the OST field mirror similar challenges faced decades ago by the early childhood field. The development and systemization of a career pathway and the development of the Child Development Associate or CDA certificate has



been a critical component in creating entry level-recognized certification. Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs offered to high school students across the state have been instrumental in broadening awareness of early childhood as a viable career option with a visible career pathway. Many CTE programs which are preparing students for careers in early childhood, education and youth development pathways currently have a birth to age-five emphasis aimed at obtaining a CDA.

Further supports for CDA obtainment include access to the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program. The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood scholarship program offers an example of increasing compensation and retention of staff working with children. The T.E.A.C.H. scholarships ensure an accountable workforce development strategy that leads to measurable education and compensation gains, real career mobility, and stability.

According to the T.E.A.C.H. 2019 annual report, staff turnover rate of T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients is at or below 3.6% compared to the statewide average of 30%. Scholarships for the college coursework necessary to achieve the MiSAYD Credential are currently available through the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program at participating colleges. However, requirements for minimum hours of employment and a lack of awareness of the scholarship create barriers to utilization by OST providers.

The Michigan State Board of Education was the first in the nation to adopt model standards for OST programs in 2003. The Michigan Out-of-School Time Standards of Quality (MOST Standards of Quality) have been widely distributed to encourage high-quality practice for OST staff. In addition, the Michigan Core Knowledge and Core Competencies (CKCC) were revised to reflect and align with the National AfterSchool Association Core Knowledge and Competencies.

The MiSAYD is based on these core competencies and is similar to the CDA in the combination of demonstrated competencies with successful field experience. However, the MiSAYD credential has not typically been required for staff in most OST programs. The exceptions are those programs that have entered into Michigan's Great Start to Quality, the quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) that evaluates the quality of licensed programs for children 0-12. Attainment of higher ratings within QRIS requires credentialed staff. Therefore, programs with higher ratings are eligible for higher child care subsidy reimbursement rates.

**Michigan was the first state in the nation to adopt model standards for OST programs:
The Michigan Out-of-School Time "MOST Standards of Quality."**

Recommendations

Solving the OST workforce crisis by creating diverse access points into the OST field as well as avenues for advancement are viewed as critical. Increased recognition and utilization of the MiSAYD Credential, valued by the field, will result in a growing number of diverse, qualified OST frontline staff (group/activity leaders). The development of a comprehensive career pipeline would include CTE programs, community colleges, universities and state and local partnerships. Increased wages or advancement to a higher position within an organization would provide incentives for staff of OST programs to earn a credential.



A larger pool of qualified OST staff will result in higher quality programs offered to youth and their families.

One avenue identified to address this growing crisis has been the creation of a pool of entry level candidates created by connecting to CTE programs in high school. MASP has partnered with the MDE to align efforts to expand pathways to the early childhood and school-age youth development profession in Michigan. The purpose is to develop the pipeline of credentialed early childhood and OST educators through career pathways that begin in high school, primarily through CTE programs but also through dual enrollment and early middle college programs. The outcome will support Governor Whitmer's goal of 60% of Michigan adults having a high-level credential by 2030.

The MDE Office of CTE is currently making changes under The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) that directly ties CTE curricula to credentials that allow employment upon graduation. Under its Perkins V plan, Michigan has chosen to require a credential as the outcome measure for each career pathway supported by CTE. Students in the Education General pathway will be able to work toward the CDA or the MiSAYD Credential.

Both CDA and MiSAYD credentials are based on similar competencies and require practical field experience, development of a portfolio, and a verification visit to observe candidates working with children. The plan is to roll out the new CTE Education General pathway in November 2020 for implementation in the following school year. School year 2021-2022 is the first year when all CTE programs will be operating under the new Perkins V requirements.

Another avenue to pursue that requires further exploration is the underutilized resource of the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program. Advocating for change is needed to address requirements of minimum hours of employment that are currently hindering utilization for the MiSAYD Credential. In addition, strategies to increase awareness of the scholarship by OST providers need to be developed. Addressing these barriers will help to ensure an accountable workforce development strategy that leads to measurable education and compensation gains, real career mobility, and stability.

Based on surveys and input from the field it is recommended that strategies are developed that will support increased compensation, benefits, and incentives. In addition, opportunities for staff to advance within an organization will result in higher staff retention.

Conclusion

The OST field is facing a workforce crisis and has identified the need to reimagine, and expand the current pipeline of credentialed OST educators through diverse career pathways, including those that begin in high school.

One solution includes creating a career pathway in CTE programs aimed toward attainment of the MiSAYD credential. This would increase diverse and qualified entry level candidates and positively impact OST staff recruitment and retention. Creating the pipeline would increase awareness and highlight the career pathway. Increasing incentives for certification by employers and supported by systems such as the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program will help to support achievement of a sustainable workforce development strategy.



FUTURE RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings in this white paper, it is suggested that the following topics may be relevant for future research:

- Analysis of the enhanced CTE pipeline.
- Further development of articulation into degree programs at higher education institutions.
- Potential to reconfigure compensation sources, structures and alternatives for all youth program professionals with special attention to low pay and low benefits for frontline workers.

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