



Training Needs and Resources

Incorporating healthy food and physical activity into afterschool and out-of-school time (OST) programs is an integral component of a comprehensive strategy to prevent childhood obesity. This factsheet draws attention to staff training needs and pinpoints available resources. To learn more, please visit the Center's [*Minnesota Afterschool and Out-of-School Time Toolkit for Healthy Eating and Physical Activity*](#).

National perspectives on training needs

Staff training is an essential component of ensuring the successful implementation of healthy food and activity environments in OST programs. Training helps close the gap between the adoption of policies and their implementation.

In 2010, the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) conducted interviews with senior staff at 17 key organizations that either offer afterschool programs or work closely with afterschool programs, asking what it would take to incorporate healthy eating practices in afterschool settings. Six respondents said that training was vital to improving menu quality. Some emphasized the importance of ongoing training, noting that one-time training opportunities may be less effective due to staff turnover and because the necessary skills cannot be learned in a single session.¹ One representative of a national advocacy organization commented: “Without additional funding or training or resources or structure to help implement them, [guidelines] wouldn't really do much.”²

Physical activity and nutrition trainings should concentrate on skill building and instilling core competencies so that program staff can learn how to adapt activities and snacks or meals to fit their particular settings.



A report by the Partnership for Afterschool Education discusses key challenges for developing staff training. In addition to the challenge of high staff turnover, afterschool program staff members have a wide range of educational and training experiences — many programs are staffed, in part, by volunteers or by high school or college students who may have little or no prior training in child development. Afterschool program staff are often “part-time, poorly paid, and have no benefits,” and may see little professional benefit or have little incentive to attend trainings.³

Trainings for program staff must acknowledge the diversity and limitations of OST programming opportunities. Programs also have varying access to play and food preparation equipment and facilities; for these reasons, physical activity and nutrition trainings should concentrate on skill building and instilling core competencies so that program staff can learn how to adapt activities and snacks or meals to fit their particular settings. Developing core competencies will help staff learn how to adapt activities in response to daily environmental challenges, too, such as the onset of inclement weather.⁴



Non-commercial training framework

Researchers Robert Weaver and Michael Beets at the University of South Carolina have proposed a *non-commercial* training framework as an alternative to what they describe as *commercial* programs that require the purchase of equipment and curriculum. Weaver notes that two well-known, commercial afterschool training programs, *Coordinated Approach to Child Health* (CATCH) and *Sports, Play & Active Recreation for Kids* (SPARK), have demonstrated little impact in research studies.⁵

Weaver and Beets’ alternative, non-commercial training framework encourages afterschool program staff to provide safe, well-managed, and

fun programs that engage children and allow them to choose from a variety of activities and healthy snacks. Staff members are trained to be actively involved in activities and to praise children when they display extra effort. Physical activities are designed to be age-appropriate to encourage children to feel competent.⁶ The non-commercial training framework recommends aligning the training guidelines with a program’s overall mission. This alignment between staff training and program goals may have contributed to the success of the *Food & Fun After School* program in YMCA and YMCA-affiliated sites.⁷ (For more information on the *Food & Fun After School* program, please see the companion piece in this series, [Best Practices Guidelines](#).)

Training and academic resources for Minnesota practitioners

Two Minnesota-based organizations offer limited resources for afterschool program staff members who are interested in trainings in obesity prevention:

- The [Minnesota Center for Professional Development](#) maintains an online course registry that is searchable by keyword and county location. Registered courses include *ABC's of Obesity*, *Sleepless in America*, *Working with Parents to Protect Children's Sleep*, and *Little Kids, Little Bodies*. The *Little Kids, Little Bodies* training provides information on childhood obesity and focuses on teaching children how to be aware of their bodies through activities like making snacks using healthy recipes. Trainings are offered through [Child Care Aware® of Minnesota](#) or through the [Minnesota Licensed Family Child Care Association](#). Some trainings are available for general audiences and may not be specifically geared for afterschool program staff.⁸
- The [Minnesota School-Age Care Alliance](#) (MNSACA) and the [Minnesota Association for the Education of Young Children](#) (MNAEYC) maintain a joint website that posts a professional development training calendar and a resource brochure that describes available training opportunities. Trainings listed in the brochure are available on request. Also listed are trainings provided by the Minnesota Licensed Family Child Care Association, which currently offers several different courses on nutrition that might be useful for afterschool providers, including topics like snack policies and preparing familiar meals with low-fat substitutions. Since these training courses are listed in the child care section of the brochure, it is unclear how general they are in scope and whether afterschool providers are encouraged to attend. Adding descriptions that specify whether the obesity prevention trainings are relevant for OST providers would benefit the state's OST community.

National conferences sometimes offer training sessions for afterschool program directors and staff to strengthen skills in implementing healthy eating and physical activity policies.⁹ The costs associated with attending national conferences can be prohibitive, though, and recent national conferences have offered very few workshops dedicated to these purposes.¹⁰

Certification or related academic programs have emerged in some states. The [North Carolina Center for Afterschool Programs](#) worked with the state's community colleges for two years to develop a [School Age Care Certificate](#) program. This program includes a required course that addresses nutrition and physical activity needs for school-age children, as well as classes in child development and classroom management. Nine community colleges in North Carolina now offer the certificate.¹¹ The states of North Carolina, Kansas, and Missouri have also developed comprehensive lists of core competencies for afterschool professionals, which include knowledge and skills for promoting nutrition and physical fitness.¹²

Kansas and Missouri have co-developed afterschool training standards and have issued a common document, building on earlier work that led to the development of common core standards for early care and education (more commonly known as child care) and youth development professionals. The afterschool training standards cover eight content areas, including health and wellness. Each standard provides staff rankings for five skill levels, with the highest level (Level 5) representing acquisition of a skill level equivalent to a master's or other advanced degree in youth development. The lowest training level (Level 1) represents acquisition of skills expected of someone who is new to the field but has had some minimal training. The health and wellness content area describes skill levels that are relevant for obesity prevention. For example, when promoting healthy eating, Level 1 practitioners model healthy eating behaviors and Level 2 practitioners review the

nutrition program, making improvements as necessary and identify the roles and responsibilities of adults when providing food to children.¹³

Staff training is a necessary component of implementing healthy eating and physical activity policies in OST settings. Quality trainings help OST managers and staff members understand the rationale behind healthy eating and fitness policies, build competencies that help them implement best practices in diverse program settings, and offer program activities that are developmentally appropriate in order to engage children as well as teens. The trainings currently available in Minnesota appear to be targeted for child care providers who

often serve younger children, compared to OST providers. Minnesota's OST providers would benefit from having greater access to obesity prevention trainings that are designed specifically for the challenges and opportunities they face in OST programs. The University of Minnesota has an undergraduate program in [Youth Studies](#) and a graduate program in [Youth Development Leadership](#) in the College of Education and Human Development. Although nutrition and physical activity do not appear to be core elements of either curriculum, these programs may offer opportunities to address these topics and possibly develop related trainings for practitioners.

Last updated: January, 2014

The Public Health Law Center thanks Hanna Kite, MPH, Health Policy Workshop, for her assistance in writing and editing this series, as well as Cassie Benson for her work on the project. The Public Health Law Center would also like to thank Allison Anfinson, Senior Program Evaluator, Center for Prevention, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, for her assistance in reviewing this document.



This publication was prepared by the Public Health Law Center at William Mitchell College of Law, St. Paul, Minnesota, with financial support provided by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota.

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Endnotes

- ¹ JEAN L. WIECHA ET AL., NAT'L INST. ON OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME, HEALTH EATING IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME: THE PROMISE AND THE CHALLENGE (2012), available at http://www.niost.org/pdf/afterschoolmatters/asm_2012_15_spring/asm_2012_spring_2.pdf.
- ² *Id.*
- ³ CHARLES STEWARD MOTT FOUND., DEVELOPING THE AFTERSCHOOL PROFESSION AND THE PROFESSION: ADDRESSING QUALITY AND SCALE 4 (date unknown), available at <http://www.pasesetter.com/publicationResources/Publications/PDF/DevelopingAfterschoolProfession.pdf>.
- ⁴ Robert Glenn Weaver et al., *A Conceptual Model for Training After-School Program Staffers to Promote Physical Activity and Nutrition*, 82 J. SCH. HEALTH 186 (2012).
- ⁵ *Id.*
- ⁶ *Id.*

- ⁷ E-mail from Toben F. Nelson, Assistant Professor, University of Minnesota, School of Public Health (Oct. 20, 2012) (on file with author).
- ⁸ Minn. Child Care Aware of Minn., MNStreams.org, Training Catalog & Grant Information, Training, <https://www.mnstreams.org/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabindex=3&tabid=4>, (last visited January 31, 2014).
- ⁹ MO. AFTER-SCHOOL NETWORK, RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT 2012–2013 (2012), *available at* <http://portal.kidscarecenter.com/sites/DESEPortal/Lists/DESE%20Announcements2/Attachments/276/PD%20Recommendations%202012-13.pdf>.
- ¹⁰ BOOST COLLABORATIVE, BOOST CONFERENCE BROCHURE (2012), *available at* http://boostconference.org/PDF/2012_brochure.pdf; 21ST CENTURY CMTY. LEARNING CTR., SUMMER INSTITUTE AGENDA (2012), *available at* <http://www.seiservices.com/21stcentury/Agenda.aspx>; FOUNDATIONS, INC., BEYOND SCHOOL HOURS XVII (2013), *available at* <http://www.foundationsinc.org/beyond-school-hours-xvii>.
- ¹¹ N.C. CTR. FOR AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS, RESOURCES, TOOLS, OPPORTUNITIES, <http://www.nccap.net/increasing-quality/resources-tools-opportunities> (last visited Aug. 8, 2013).
- ¹² CHILD CARE AWARE® OF KANSAS ET AL., CORE COMPETENCIES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS (KANSAS AND MISSOURI) (2011), *available at* http://www.ks.childcareaware.org/provider_corecomp.html; N.C. Ctr. for Afterschool Programs, *supra* note 11.
- ¹³ CHILD CARE AWARE® OF KANSAS ET AL., *supra* note 12.