
MATCHING AFTER-SCHOOL STAFF TO PROJECT NEEDS AND ACTIVITIES

A Resource Brief

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When the staff of your after-school program includes an assortment of workers—certified teachers, classroom aides, professional artists and performers, parents, community members, college students, and high school volunteers—it isn't always clear how to use them most effectively. "I was really overwhelmed at first," recalls one coordinator of a TASC project. "All these people had different skills, interests, weaknesses. That was my biggest job—to make use of their strengths but also respond to what students needed."

Site coordinators interviewed for this Brief described four practices for deploying staff effectively. First, they assign staff roles that enhance communication with students, parents, and the school. Second, they pair inexperienced staff with veteran role models who can provide support. Third, they give volunteers meaningful, important responsibilities that support the work of other staff. Fourth, they use job sharing to ensure that an adequate number of staff are always on hand and key roles are always covered.

1. Make Communication a Priority

Some site coordinators say it is just as important for a staff member to be good at talking with students and parents as it is for that person to be a skilled instructor—maybe even more important, because the after-school program offers a chance to connect with students and families who are not involved in the regular school program. For this reason, successful coordinators often assign staff roles that emphasize their communication skills.

For example, at the project sponsored by Educators for Social Responsibility at P.S. 24 (Brooklyn), where English is the second language of many students and parents, the school's bilingual parent coordinator serves as an after-school group leader. In this role, she not only leads activities but also learns about after-school issues, events, and staffing needs, which she then shares with the school's parent committee. In addition, all group leaders (each of whom is bilingual) escort students to the cafeteria at dismissal time, where they wait for parents or designated caregivers to sign the children out. By including all staff in an exercise that could probably be managed by only a few, the coordinator increases the chance that staff and parents will communicate about students' progress or concerns.

2. Match Inexperienced Staff with Mentors and Role Models

TASC projects have many ways of linking inexperienced staff with veteran role models, including daily opportunities for shadowing experienced teachers, team teaching, and frequent meetings at which the mentors and mentored staff jointly solve problems. For example, the project operated by Citizens Advice Bureau at P.S. 130 (Bronx) makes three "head teachers" available to the 14 staff who lead group activities (most of whom are college students, community members, and paraprofessionals). The head teachers, two of whom are members of the regular school staff, support the group leaders by answering questions about lesson plans and classroom management.

Every other Friday, the new and veteran instructors meet for an hour and a half to

discuss and critique each other's work. "As you brainstorm [with experienced teachers], you really see what's going on," one group leader says. Additional examples of promising practices for pairing staff are described in two other TASC Resource Briefs, *Training and Supervising After-School Staff* and *Helping After-School Staff Solve Problems and Apply New Skills*.

Pairing staff is a nonthreatening way for new staff to get help. "New staff prefer to visit with teachers to get pointers," says the coordinator of a project sponsored by Children's Aid Society at P.S. 146 (Bronx). "I found that when they came to [staff supervisors instead of teacher mentors], they worried about how we would view them—as perhaps not capable."

Role modeling also gives inexperienced staff concrete skills they can apply immediately. The coordinator of the project sponsored by Sports and Arts in Schools Foundation at P.S. 122 (Queens) recalls the trouble a high school tutor had as he tried to help a student with math homework. "I went in and helped explain it differently, using pictures," the coordinator said. "I gave the tutor a new way to look at it."

3. Give Junior Staff and Volunteers Useful, Meaningful Roles

Junior staff—high school tutors, college students, and other young staff—can be valuable role models for after-school participants. But project leaders often struggle to use them effectively because they usually don't have the maturity, teaching skills, and authority of other staff. At least one TASC project addressed this concern by giving its youth workers carefully supervised opportunities to demonstrate initiative and leadership. The staff "counselors" at the project operated by Henry Street and University Settlements at P.S. 110 (Manhattan) are expected to propose and design weekly club activities that they would like to lead. The leaders

who submit the strongest lesson plans are rewarded by having their activities selected. To help counselors develop their plans, the site coordinator provides an Activity Handbook that gives ideas for appropriate activities and sample lesson plans.

Volunteers are another affordable staffing option often chosen by coordinators trying to reduce their student-staff ratio. Although volunteers can't always match the quality of professional staff, they often have special interests and abilities that complement the program. It's up to the site coordinator to use these resources creatively.

The project operated by Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation at P.S. 7 (Brooklyn), for example, recruited four high-school students as after-school volunteers. These staff members, who receive community service credits for their work, serve as reading buddies. Twice a week, under the site coordinator's supervision, the volunteers read aloud to after-school participants and provide one-on-one homework help. The children in the program benefit from the extra literacy support, and the student volunteers gain concrete teaching experience.

The TASC project sponsored by the American Museum of Natural History at C.E.S. 42 (Bronx) designated a volunteer to serve as a parent liaison. Her responsibilities included communicating with parents by telephone and at dismissal time and preparing letters to send home notifying parents of school events. Although the arrangement faltered because the first volunteer proved unreliable, the role itself proved useful and the coordinator intends to continue it when she finds a qualified replacement.

4. Use Job Sharing to Ensure Adequate Coverage

Job sharing can help counteract staff absenteeism or turnover, reduce staff

burnout, and ensure that all essential tasks are covered. There are two main types of job-sharing arrangements used at promising TASC sites. First, instead of hiring 15 or 20 staff to work Monday through Friday, a site coordinator might hire 25 or 30 part-time staff and rotate their work days to fill the available slots. This is the practice used by New York University’s Metro Center for Urban Education at P.S. 123 (Manhattan), where each part-time staff member works about two days a week. The arrangement is ideal for college students, who often need days off to attend their own afternoon classes, and for teachers from the school day who want to help out after school but would burn out if they worked extra hours every day. Coordinators who use this approach, however, need to make sure there is enough consistency and continuity in staffing that children get to know their instructors and have a stable sense of belonging in the program.

A second tactic, used by several TASC sites, is to divide some of the site coordinator’s duties among one or more assistant directors. While the site coordinator focuses on student recruitment and attendance, staff hiring and training, and logistical issues, the assistant directors typically assume responsibility for curriculum development, special projects planning, staff supervision, or other essential but time-consuming activities.

“I have more time, and my expertise is in this area,” explained one assistant director responsible for after-school curricula and special projects. “Plus, as a teacher in the school, I know better what our resources are and which of my colleagues I can turn to for ideas. For example, if we’re planning a culminating event, it’s easy for me to contact a teacher in each department to see how they can contribute. We do more reaching out and suggesting ideas now, and less just taking what we can get [from staff]. In that sense, by using me this way [the coordinator] gets more than his money’s worth.”



Staff invest in a program or philosophy when they share its vision and believe that they have an important part to play in making it a reality. By using staff effectively— by assigning roles in ways that foster communication, personal growth, job satisfaction, and healthy project management— site coordinators help to build that investment. The promising practices described here are the first, but not the last, to emerge, as TASC sites seek ways to attract and *keep* good staff.

Where Can I Get More Information?

Publications

Costley, J. *Building a Professional Development System that Works for the Field of Out-of-School Time*. Boston: Wheelock College, Center for Career Development in Early Care and Education, 1998.

De Kanter, A., et al. *Keeping Schools Open as Community Learning Centers: Extending Learning in a Safe, Drug-Free Environment Before and After School*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1997.

The Future of Children. *When School Is Out*. Vol. 9, no.2. Los Altos, CA: The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, 1999.

School-Age Child Care Project. *School-Age Care Out-of-School Time Resource Notebook*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1997.

U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice. *Working for Children and Families: Safe and Smart After-School Programs*. Washington, DC: Author, 2000.

Organizations

Afterschool Alliance
P.O. Box 65166
Washington, DC 20035-5166
(202) 296-9378
www.afterschoolalliance.org

Families and Work Institute
330 Seventh Avenue
New York, NY 10001
(212) 465-2044
www.familiesandwork.org

National Association of Child Care Resources
and Referral Agencies
1319 F Street NW, Suite 810
Washington, DC 20004
(202) 393-5501
www.childcarerr.org

National Center for Schools and Communities
Fordham University
33 West 60th Street, 8th Floor
New York, NY 10023
(212) 636-6699

National Institute on Out-of-School Time
The MOST Initiative
Center for Research on Women
Wellesley College
Wellesley, MA 02181-8259
(781) 283-2547
www.wellesley.edu/WCW/CRW/SAC

The National Mentoring Partnership
1400 I Street NW, Suite 850
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 729-4340
www.mentoring.org

National School-Age Care Alliance
1137 Washington Street
Boston, MA 02124
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Partnership for After-School Education
120 Broadway, Suite 3048
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www.pacesetter.com

In 1998, The After-School Corporation (TASC) launched an initiative to improve the quantity and quality of after-school programs for students in the public schools of New York City and State. Through grants to nonprofit organizations that sponsor school-based projects, TASC now serves students in kindergarten through twelfth grade at almost 200 sites. This Resource Brief shares some of the promising practices used by TASC projects. We hope that it helps your planning, program improvement, and further exploration into the world of after-school services. For more information on the Resource Briefs or the companion Tool Kits, which contain checklists and other practical materials, contact TASC's Research and Education Policy staff at (212) 547-6950 or www.tascorp.org. This brief was prepared for TASC with support from The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and Carnegie Corporation of New York.