

Out-of-School into the Workforce: An Innovative Approach to Extended Day Learning

Lenora T. Felder 18 June 2014

The literature on youth development posits that Out-of-School Time (OST) is an integral partner in providing equitable experiences for youth who live in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities and attend under-resourced schools. (AYPF, 2006)

Understanding that the equitable attainment of education and employment are key social determinants of health and upward mobility, the Department of Human Services (DHS) has identified college and career readiness as an important outcome for OST programs serving high school youth.

In recent years, economic hardships have caused school day programs to make difficult reductions in many career training programs that have been historically available to youth. The OST network funded by DHS continuously aims to serve as a collaborative partner to the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) by developing innovative and effective strategies to provide youth with meaningful and viable experiences. The extended day learning

approach to OST highlights the value of alternative learning spaces that provide supplementary support and reinforce school day curriculum.

Recognizing the benefits of OST programs that are housed in school district buildings, the OST network sought to provide an innovative approach to traditional extended day learning. In response, PHMC's Management Services and Metropolitan Career Center/Computer Technology Institute (MCC/CTI) have partnered to pilot the Out-of-School into the Workforce training program. Supported by PHMC's Public Health Fund and DHS, this pilot program provides youth in the OST network with hands-on computer technician training which results in an industry-recognized certificate (COMP TIA) which is equivalent to job experience.

Within the CTI A+ curriculum students are required to install, upgrade, repair, configure, optimize, troubleshoot, and perform preventative maintenance on basic personal computer hardware and operating systems. Youth also participate in a mathematics course that builds their speed, accuracy, and confidence in performing computational tasks common in business and industry. Youth may transfer credits for this certificate course to post-secondary programs.

In traditional job training programs, trainees typically receive training at the accrediting institution. However, literature on youth development and OST programming

highlight the benefits of providing school-day and OST programming at one location. Therefore, instructors from MCC/CTI, an approved and accredited training provider through the Department of Education, provide 120 hours of training to youth at the OST program site. This removes potential barriers to youth participation, including transportation and time conflicts with youths' other afterschool activities. When youth complete the required training hours, and have attained adequate skill levels, they are eligible to take the COMPTIA A+ Certification exams.

Recognizing the impact of positive relationships with OST programs and the School District of Philadelphia, United Communities of South Philadelphia (UCSEP) at Horace Howard Furness High School was chosen as the pilot site for this program. Horace Howard Furness High School is located in South Philadelphia, which serves a vastly diverse population of youth. The integration of career training skills offered at an OST program hosted inside of a school district building offers an innovative approach to the traditional "extended day learning." That is, youth receive academic support throughout the school day, while receiving career training in OST programs. This provides youth with an array of both academic and career training supports within a single institution of learning. Subsequently, youth identify the school day facility as a place of value that provides academic skills, as well as viable career training.

In addition to career training, this program was also designed with the intended goal of drop-out prevention. There is significant research that correlates youth participation in OST programs with increased school attendance and reduced drop-out rates. (School District of Philadelphia Evaluation Report: Out of School Time Participation and Student Outcomes, July, 2013)

Therefore, an essential requirement for participation in this training program is consistent school day attendance. The UCSEP staff and Furness High School administration and staff work together to ensure that enrolled youth are consistently attending and are engaged in school day activities. Therefore, youth understand that the benefit of obtaining career training through this program is contingent upon their school day performance. This collaborative relationship between the OST program and school administration creates a system of reinforcement and accountability based on shared interests. It also promotes positive partnership through the cultivation of mutual value. This promotes partnership and creates a positive environment that fosters youth development.

The Out-of-School-Time into the Workforce pilot program aligns with the literature on youth development by meeting the developmental needs of high school youth, while offering an active and innovative approach to learning. By eliminating barriers to the attainment of post-secondary skills, this program provides youth with the opportunity to obtain career skills and credentials that

allow them compete in the global economy. Under the supervision of Jesus Soto, High Program Director at UCSEP Furness and Principal Daniel Peou at Furness High School, the A+ training program currently has 19 youth enrolled, with the intention of increasing to 35 youth. Youth are progressing through the program and are preparing to take the COMPTIA A+ Certification exams by late summer. After a successful pilot, the OST network intends to expand this program, as well as other innovative career programs, throughout the Philadelphia region.

References

American Youth Policy Forum. (2006). Helping Youth Succeed Through Out-of-School Time Programs. Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum.