

Hiring OST Staff: Doing A Lot With A Little

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Proper staff recruitment and retention is a vital part of building a strong OST program infrastructure. Because staff turnover is often high, many OST programs are overwhelmed with the capacity to properly hire staff that encompasses the mission and vision of their OST programs. Many programs are then left with the question: *"How can OST programs get the most from their staff with a limited budget, and a limited capacity to properly develop their staff?"* This article will detail how two programs in the OST network funded by the City of Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS) utilize similar philosophical approaches and methods for staff recruitment and retention. Below, we not only detail how these OST programs implement some of these staff recruitment and retention strategies, but how they reflect best practices as well.

The type of staff and staff development procedures are just as important as the content driven curriculum of an OST program. In 2010, the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing conducted a study entitled *"Examining Practices of Staff Recruitment and Retention in Four High-Functioning Afterschool Programs"* This study and examination resulted in the

development of eleven characteristics that were shared by the four programs:

- Strong leadership and clearly established goals
- Program structure and content were aligned to meet the programs' goals
- A set schedule that allowed time for students to learn and practice
- Established relationships with the day school
- The curriculum reflected a linkage to standards
- Most used research-based strategies
- Some form of evaluative structures was maintained
- Low turnover rates of staff members
- Staff members related well to the students
- Staff members had built rapport, and maintained high expectations, ensuring that...
- Students are motivated and engaged

In addition, the study found the following:

"Although the majority of the programs in this study displayed these attributes, the most dominant characteristic that is consistently revealed in all programs was the high motivational level of the sites and the relationships that the staff established with the students and their families."

What these characteristics establish is a clear direction for OST providers to model their programs to reflect their true operational needs as it relates to programming. In

other words, staff recruitment and retention efforts are successful if the framework being used reflects the programmatic needs of the OST provider. In some cases, programs/providers may be implementing these strategies at their own sites. Sunrise, Inc. and Tolentine Community Center are two provider agencies receiving DHS funds to operate after school and summer programs within the OST network have utilized some of these best practices in their respective OST programs. Some of these best practices may be more informal than formal, but they provide site directors and staff a clear agenda for staff development.

Sunrise, Inc. operates programming for Elementary and Middle students at the School District of Philadelphia's Southwark Elementary school. Both program models enjoy a high retention rate as it relates to youth attendance and engagement. Of the eleven characteristics listed above, the following stand out the most for Sunrise:

- Program structure and content are aligned to meet the program's goals
- The curriculum reflects a linkage to standards
- Staff members relate well to the students
- Staff members build rapport, maintain high expectations, and keep students motivated and engaged

Sunrise's strength as an OST provider rests on its ability to

format content and curriculum to suit their youth's needs. Sunrise makes efforts to establish feedback systems that allow the program to operate from strengths based perspectives. As part of this system, they are implementing a middle school transition program for youth entering middle school. This initiative came about due to the feedback their host school received concerning the preparation of its middle school students. This type of opportunity is not only in line with DHS desired goals for youth participating in OST Middle School programming, but provides this particular program with a template to initiate future similar initiatives.

Tolentine Community Center operates an OST Elementary School Model. Their OST program also enjoys a high retention rate as it relates to youth attendance and engagement. In addition, the community center thrives from its longstanding stature and relationships within the South Philadelphia community. Of the eleven characteristics that Tolentine embodies, the following stand out the most as formally implemented practices:

- Low turnover rates of staff members
- The curriculum reflects a linkage to standards
- Staff members relate well to the students
- Staff members build rapport, maintain high expectations, and keep students motivated and engaged

As stated above, Tolentine's strength as it relates to staff

development rests on its relationship with the South Philadelphia community. In addition, they have implemented a staff identification process that has allowed them to hire staff that is not only familiar with the organization, but also the community and programmatic needs as well. Site Director Jamie Milorey is a product of this identification process. Prior to her hiring as Site Director, Jamie not only attended activities at the community center, but she spent a considerable amount of time volunteering with the OST program. In the third grade, she attended Tolentine Community Center's summer camp. In 2007, she was given the opportunity to become an employee at Tolentine as an after school aide. She is currently the Director of Tolentine's after school program and summer camp program. This relationship has led Executive Director Diane Zotti to continue this identification process.

The driving philosophy behind this types of recruitment processes concerns cultivating existing staff and their own content knowledge. Especially staff that may be familiar with child development and youth work. Although both programs utilize different methods as it relates to OST staff development, they share very similar characteristics:

Sunrise, Inc.	Tolentine Community Center
Identifies youth needs	Identifies staff needs and strengths
Provides emerging youth with leadership and development opportunities (e.g., the middle school transition initiative)	Provides leadership and development opportunities to emerging youth and staff
Strong OST curriculum and content	Strong OST curriculum and content

With a limited resources and time, these types of practices allow OST programs to cultivate their talent efficiently and effectively. In addition, these types of practices trumpet the strong idea that OST programs are only as effective as their staff.

Source(s):

**Huang, Denise; Cho, Jamie; Nam, Hannah H.; La Torre, Deborah; Oh, Christine; Harven, Aletha; Huber, Lindsay Perez; Rudo, Zena; Caverly, Sarah
National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) "Examining Practices of Staff Recruitment and Retention in Four High-Functioning Afterschool Programs" (2010)**