

AFTERSCHOOL *news*



Why Leadership Matters

Strong leadership in afterschool and expanded learning programs is crucial to a program's success, and afterschool directors who try to provide quality leadership or cultivate this trait among their staff face unique challenges. First, afterschool leaders often work with a staff of more diverse ages, experience, training, and educational background than their school-day counterparts do. Second, afterschool programs often have a broad array of responsibilities, ranging from academic enrichment to youth development activities. These depend on development, coordination, monitoring, and adjustment to meet program goals, all of which require strong leadership.

What makes a good afterschool leader? Findings in a 5-year study completed by the National Center for Quality Afterschool indicate that the leaders who were most successful in developing, implementing, and sustaining afterschool programs shared some common skills and behaviors.* These included the ability to

- understand and share intricate program goals and expectations,
- use program knowledge to build and maintain positive open relationships with diverse groups of people and individuals,
- empower and motivate the staff to achieve the program objectives, and
- continually review and revise any piece of the program.

There are a number of ways to develop leadership skills or cultivate them among your staff. Try finding a mentor to provide guidance in the skills you want to acquire. You can network with other afterschool professionals who are leaders in the field. If you want something more structured, professional development is another way to develop strong leadership skills.

* The study was based on site visits to 53 afterschool programs, representing eight regional divisions of the nation, including rural and urban programs and community-based and school-district-related programs. Researchers at CRESST evaluated data collected from interviews, surveys, and observations during the site visits, and used the results in the study.



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The SEDL National Center for Quality Afterschool helps state education agencies and local practitioners develop high-quality programs for academic enrichment as well as youth development activities.

www.sedl.org/afterschool



RECOMMENDED *resource*

ASSESSMENT TOOLS IN INFORMAL SCIENCE (ATIS)

PEAR, or Program in Education, Afterschool and Resiliency, has created a searchable Web site providing assessment tools for informal science learning. ATIS provides practitioners, evaluators, researchers, and policy makers with the information to choose appropriate tools for assessing program quality and outcomes. Afterschool professionals can search by age, domain, assessment type, or custom search parameters.

<http://atis.pearweb.org/>



"Modeling the process and providing constructive feedback will help [afterschool staff] buy into the process."

TARA DONAHUE

senior program associate

Learning Point Associates

NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

To learn more about the role of leadership in afterschool, we talked to Learning Point Associates' (LPA) Tara Donahue, a senior program associate with the organization's Afterschool Services department. LPA was a member of the National Partnership for Quality Afterschool Learning and has also partnered with SEDL in providing professional development for afterschool leaders and instructors of all levels of experience. "We have learned so much about the afterschool and expanded learning field in the last few years that it is critical that program directors and instructors learn the most up-to-date information in a timely fashion," says Donahue about leadership and professional development. She also says that to be an effective leader a program director must understand day-to-day operations and program implementation to ensure high-quality results while also representing the program and its success to stakeholders, schools, administrators, and potential funders.

Donahue points out that one of the program manager's most important roles is to serve as a role model for the staff. In addition, she stresses that professional development is only effective if directors disseminate the information among their staff. "It is essential that the program directors learn how to take this information back to the staff, train them, and follow up with them to ensure successful changes to their practice," she says. Staff are also more likely to participate if they understand the benefits of what they are being asked to do. "If staff do not see how it applies to them immediately, they are more likely to be reluctant participants. Modeling the process and providing constructive feedback will help them buy into the process."

IN YOUR *words*

What are some of the ways that your afterschool program helps staff develop leadership skills? (Select all that apply.)

- District- or program-provided professional development
- Mentoring
- Consultant hired to provide on-site professional development to staff
- Conferences
- Recommended reading
- Other

To participate in this survey and view results, submit your vote at www.sedl.org/afterschool/afterwords/survey200908.html.

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TRAINING *tip*

Sharing Leadership

One indicator of a high-quality afterschool program is the practice of shared leadership and decision making. When appropriate, you can include instructors and site coordinators in decisions within their areas of expertise, such as curriculum and some of the day-to-day operations. When staff are involved in some decisions, they are likely to feel more ownership of their work and will continue to develop their own leadership skills.

EVENTS *calendar*

Oct. 19–20 School's Out Washington: The Bridge to Afterschool and Back 2009 Conference
www.schoolsoutwashington.org

VANCOUVER, WA

Oct. 22 Lights On Afterschool
www.afterschoolalliance.org/loa.cfm

NATIONWIDE

For more events, visit our calendar at www.sedl.org/afterschool/training/calendar.html.

Newsletter available online at www.sedl.org/afterschool/afterwords