



# Clear Policies for Career Pathways: Lessons Learned

By Elizabeth Starr, Ellen Gannett and Pam Garza with Suzanne Goldstein and Nicole Yohalem

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nextgeneration

**YOUTH  
WORK  
COALITION**

## About the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition

The Next Generation Youth Work Coalition brings together individuals and organizations dedicated to developing a strong, diverse after-school and youth development workforce that is stable, prepared, supported and committed to the well-being and empowerment of children and youth. The primary role of the Coalition is to inform and support ongoing discussions about the public policy, institutional, organizational and individual changes needed to create a stable, prepared and supported workforce. The Next Gen Coalition is supported by Cornerstones for Kids, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the Lilly Endowment. The Coalition is currently housed within the Forum for Youth Investment.

## About the Authors

Elizabeth Starr is a Research Associate with National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) at the Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley College.

Ellen S. Gannett is the Director of NIOST.

Pam Garza is a consultant with the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition and was the Director of Professional Development for the National Collaboration for Youth (NCY).

Suzanne Goldstein is a Writing and Research Consultant with NIOST.

Nicole Yohalem is a Program Director at the Forum for Youth Investment.

# Introduction

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Ensuring a workforce that is stable, prepared, supported and committed to the well-being and empowerment of youth is the national agenda of the Next Generation Work Coalition. Formed through support from Cornerstones 4 Kids, the Lucile and David Packard Foundation, the Lilly Endowment, the Johnson Foundation and other contributors, the Coalition is a collective of national, state and local organizations that focus on the development of the youth work workforce. In 2006 the Coalition conducted a linked set of surveys that provided the country with the clearest, most comprehensive picture yet of the youth work profession. Findings from *Growing the Next Generation of Youth Work Professionals* suggest that:

- While training is available, links between training and tangible rewards are weak.
- Most youth workers say there are not clear opportunities for promotion within their organizations.
- For many frontline staff, career advancement and recognition — in particular, salary increases — require job changes.

Three-quarters of the survey respondents said that compensation is the primary factor influencing their decisions to stay in or leave the field, regardless of demographics, employment status, job satisfaction or place of employment. In addition, both youth workers and program directors said that raising wages would be the most important factor in helping to advance the profession.

While causal research is not available, these findings strongly suggest that the youth work workforce could be stabilized and strengthened through shifts in organizational, local and state policies and systems that intentionally connect adequate compensation packages with career pathways. This is an important strategy for

ensuring *a stable, prepared, supported and committed workforce* and it has served as the central premise of the Career Pathways Project.

In response to these findings, the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition launched the Clear Policies for Career Pathways project to identify and build upon efforts underway around the country to establish comprehensive workforce development systems for the youth work field. Nine sites across the nation — Illinois, Missouri, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Vermont, New York City, Baltimore, MD, Long Beach and San Diego, CA — joined together in a learning community to focus directly on improved compensation and working conditions for youth workers. By pushing beyond discussions of professional development to intentionally address issues like compensation, retention and education, the project aimed to take the workforce development conversation in the youth work field to a new level.

Over the course of the project, participating sites received targeted technical assistance from the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition, with leadership provided by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOS), and engaged in rich cross-site sharing and peer learning which included monthly conference calls as well as one face-to-face meeting. In reflecting on their experiences in the project and progress made over the course of the year, sites described the value-added in terms of three broad areas: heightened visibility, new relationships and increased awareness.

While workforce issues were already a priority for selected stakeholders in each site, being part of a national initiative and linked to a national coalition brought heightened visibility to the issues, infusing new momentum and new resources, often at a critical time. “[The project] gave us greater impetus to bring partners together and focus on these issues as high priority instead of them being

brushed aside as something we can't do anything about," said one site lead. New relationships were developed over the course of the project in all sites. One site lead put it this way "...building a system required the establishment of meaningful and engaged relationships with key stakeholders and leaders from organizations ranging from the Department of education, Public Welfare, Labor and Industry, United Ways and national youth-serving organizations like Boys and Girls Clubs and 4-H." Finally, through increased awareness about workforce issues, the youth work field and innovative efforts underway in other communities, specific opportunities emerged that allowed sites to make concrete progress. For example, "We have used the Career Pathways Project to open doors and begin new dialogue about how we can help shape the implementation of 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC in our state."

These three developments — heightened visibility, increased awareness and new relationships — begin to capture the kinds of progress that occurred across sites over the course of the project. Not surprisingly, they also reflect the kinds of outcomes often associated with place-based projects that combine significant network support with light technical assistance. Rather than chronicle the activities of each site during the project, this paper discusses cross-cutting lessons learned that we hope can help inform efforts underway in the field. Based on our experiences working with these sites, we have attempted to identify a variety of practical, system-building strategies that others can adapt and implement in

# Building Comprehensive Workforce Development Systems

the context of state and local efforts to strengthen the youth work workforce.

Understanding that progress on these thorny issues is developmental, progressive and incremental is key to providing appropriate support and assistance. Progress is dependent on a foundation of already established policies and systems and it happens in stages. It is also important to keep in mind that this work is very situational — the political and economic context in each particular place has a significant influence on what changes can be made, when, how and by whom. We intentionally chose sites that we considered to be at varying levels of “developmental readiness” to take on this challenging work. While each site took a different approach to the work, all began by taking a close look at existing systems both within and beyond the borders of the youth development field to identify opportunities to build on and leverage existing strengths.

Some sites, like Pennsylvania, Illinois and Missouri already had well-established Quality Rating Systems for early childhood and school-age practitioners. As a result, they chose to focus on making progress toward incorporating youth workers into those systems. Minnesota had strong supports in place for youth workers and focused on establishing a more responsive system that would include all sectors of the field. Baltimore and New York City are working to address compensation issues by linking wage-related strategies to existing higher education and training systems, while the two California sites began by focusing on the immediate crisis in the supply of youth workers.

Despite their differences, the approaches of these states and localities share three common features that set them apart as systemic efforts to develop the youth work workforce:

1. New programs and collaborations are embedded in public systems and policies. They are not temporary projects of a few highly specialized groups, but long-term initiatives backed by an array of public and private agencies and sustainable funding sources.
2. Compensation and retention issues are an integral, if not primary, focus of these initiatives. While expanding education and training may be a major component, it is not undertaken in isolation. Instead, there are clear links to wage incentives and career advancement opportunities.
3. System-building goals are comprehensive. Though the initiatives typically began by launching one or two specific projects, e.g., creating retention incentives or developing a standardized credential, these initial projects

## IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH WORKERS

A young woman joins the staff of a youth program after completing high school. She has a talent for working with youth and loves the job, though she has no formal education or training. In fact, she has had negative experiences with schooling in the past and figures she can't afford it. After a few years of working at the same program, she gets married. Concerned with supporting a family, she realizes she has little opportunity for advancement and decides to leave the field for a better paying job.

Some of the innovative strategies states are working to put in place could change this story. As we describe progress made in each of the sites, we will return to our hypothetical youth worker to explore the impact these changes could have on her decisions.

are framed as a base from which to build other components of a comprehensive workforce development system.

The remainder of this paper profiles successful system-building efforts of some of the Career Pathways project states and cities, with a focus on cross-cutting strategies that *connect education, compensation and retention*. While all are still works in progress, these examples demonstrate what can be accomplished by taking a comprehensive, systemic approach to youth work workforce development. Most of these system-building efforts are only just beginning to impact youth workers directly. Throughout the paper we have included a set of sidebars that describe the potential implications that these kinds of changes in policy and practice could have

for individual youth workers, illustrating how this progress could play out (and in some cases is already playing out) in real people's lives.

## Pennsylvania

In Pennsylvania, a statewide collaborative is working together to establish a system that provides a range of education and training opportunities which lead to recognized credentials that are linked to retention incentives for youth workers. Participating workers are employed in different settings, serve children of all ages and are supported by an array of public and private funding streams. The Pennsylvania system is building on existing workforce development and quality rating systems in the state for early childhood care and education providers. The

## T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Project

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) Project improves training of child care workers by linking additional training and education to higher wages. By compensating child care workers for receiving more training and education, the program improves quality and retention of child care workers. Begun in North Carolina, T.E.A.C.H. is now a national initiative through license agreement with several other states.

T.E.A.C.H. has four components:

- **Educational Scholarships:** Scholarships include stipends for tuition, books and travel. The student/child care worker and his/her sponsoring employer must each contribute 10% of the cost of tuition and books and the employer must provide paid release time.
- **Formal Education:** Each state uses the existing educational system to establish a program of college coursework leading to a credentialed degree.
- **Compensation Incentives:** Workers who complete credential programs are eligible for raises or bonuses funded through the T.E.A.C.H. project.
- **Retention Commitment:** Scholarship recipients must commit to remaining employed at their sponsoring childcare programs or in the field for a specified period of time.

In each participating state, T.E.A.C.H. is supported by a partnership of public and private agencies, including corporations and business organizations such as the United Way, foundations and public agencies that help bring state and federal funding to the project.

strong partnership developed between after-school and youth development leaders and their early childhood care and education counterparts is a key component of their success.

Pennsylvania is exploring how the T.E.A.C.H. model (see box on page 6), which provides incentives for childcare workers to seek additional education and training and remain in the field, can be expanded to provide support to staff from regulated school-age care programs who currently do not meet the program's guidelines. Pennsylvania is identifying the barriers to and solutions for providing youth workers (in self-regulated programs) with T.E.A.C.H. or similar scholarships and supports. Originally in place for early childhood program teachers, a key barrier for some youth workers is the minimum requirement of 30 work hour per week. To expand the program to youth workers and include the many staff who are employed part-time, a key adjustment may include lowering the number of required work hours from 30 to 25 hours a week.

Currently Pennsylvania has 1,200 individuals participating in T.E.A.C.H., about a third of whom are working with school-aged children. Pennsylvania is also working to incorporate school-age programs into Keystone STARS, the state's quality-rating system for early childhood programs.

The momentum for these policy changes are being brought about through the development of a strong and diverse public-private partnership that successfully advocates for needed changes to state policies and funding. The Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development Network (PSAYDN) includes providers, foundations, state agency representatives, the United Way and intermediaries such as Pennsylvania Key, an organization that works with the state's Office of Child Development and Early Learning to provide statewide leadership in the development of an integrated and coordinated

## IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH WORKERS

Our PA youth worker is aware that she might be able to get a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship because of expanded regulations allowing for the participation of part-time workers. But she is still intimidated by the idea of college and isn't sure that she will make more money if she attends.

She learns the state is working to develop a career lattice that is tied to compensation. Not only could she get access to higher education, but her employer would recognize that education with a stipend and provide release time to participate in classes. And the new core competencies the state has embraced have helped her understand her role and see youth work as a legitimate skill set. Encouraged by progress that has been made so far, she decides to stay in the field at least another year to see what opportunities arise.

system of program-quality improvements and professional development supports for early childhood education. Pennsylvania Key representatives have served as critical champions for PSAYDN's policy agenda to build a career-pathways system for youth workers.

### New York City

In New York City, a coalition of leading after-school intermediaries, higher education institutions, public agencies and private funders has created an innovative workforce development program that links worker education to compensation and retention and builds connections across existing professional development and credentialing systems for youth workers. The Center for After-School Excellence, an initiative of the After-

## IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH WORKERS

In New York, our youth worker hears about the Center for After School Excellence and their new certificate program and decides to look into it, even though she always thought college was out of reach. She learns she can get the support needed (a scholarship for tuition and books as well as remedial help), along with a guaranteed wage increase (stipend of up to \$750). Convinced the education might pay off, she pursues it.

She is immediately able to apply what she learns at CUNY with youth in the program, which impresses her supervisor. She is soon offered a promotion and now aspires to complete her degree (the Center provided counseling on an individual plan) which will allow her to apply for site coordinator or program director — jobs that pay \$40,000 per year or more.

Imagine the state has already linked the certificate to the NY State School Age Care Credential and begun its master's program. Now this youth worker sees herself on a broader career path, is optimistic she can support her family, identifies with a "real" profession and continues to do the work she loves.

School Corporation, is developing credit-bearing college programs for frontline youth workers and providing scholarships, educational supports and career-advancement opportunities to participating students. The initiative works on several fronts simultaneously to address the barriers that have historically inhibited frontline youth workers from seeking and completing advanced education and

training. In partnership with the City University of New York (CUNY), the Center has developed professional certificate programs offered at four CUNY campuses that allow after-school workers to advance toward college degrees and earn universally recognized credentials.

The Center is working with after-school program providers across the city to identify potential candidates for the CUNY program and provide them with financial assistance, orientation, counseling and other supports to help them enroll in and complete their education programs. The initiative is made possible through private funding from Atlantic Philanthropies and scholarships from the New York State Child Care Educational Incentive Program, which the Center helps its students to access. In addition, the Center has arranged wage and job incentives to encourage students to complete their certificate programs and go on to work in the field. The Center provides a stipend of \$1.50 per hour (up to a total of \$750) on top of current wages for participants who complete the new certificate program. Furthermore, many of the largest nonprofit after-school providers in New York City have committed to offer hiring preferences to applicants who earn professional certificates through the Center.

Beyond its college-based certificate programs, the Center is also beginning to coordinate with the New York State School Age Care Coalition to link its credit-bearing coursework to the competency-based training sequence that comprises the New York State School Age Care Credential. This is helping to further "connect the dots" into a comprehensive system.

## Vermont

Vermont has been moving forward on multiple fronts to define a common set of competencies for youth workers and develop a professional

## IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH WORKERS

In Vermont, our youth worker applies to be a part of the On the Job Training program currently being piloted by The Vermont Child Care Industry and Careers Council. She knows that the apprenticeship program will provide her with an educational scholarship and wage increases.

Knowing she will earn more money and develop skills that will help her be more successful in her role working with kids, she decides to stick with her current position and give the after-school field a chance.

credential that is accepted by the state's various child development and youth worker stakeholders. The state is also succeeding in leveraging several different existing compensation-based retention incentives for early childhood and other youth services to incorporate the after-school workforce.

Encouraged by participation in the Career Pathways project, Vermont after-school leaders have reached out to and deepened partnerships with several key stakeholder groups during the past year — higher education officials, youth services (e.g., foster care and juvenile justice programs) and the state department of education. These partnerships have provided expanded venues for introduction of Vermont's "Core Competencies for Afterschool Professionals," which is now serving as a guide for the development of higher education coursework, community-based training and the eventual creation of a Vermont Afterschool Professional Credential.

Simultaneously, Vermont has been exploring routes to provide scholarships to youth workers for

higher education and training and compensation bonuses to individuals who pursue education in the youth development field. One especially notable achievement has been the expansion of a new on-the-job training (OJT) initiative being piloted for child care workers to include after-school program staff as well. The OJT initiative is run by the Vermont Child Care Industry and Careers Council (VCCICC) with support from the Vermont Department of Labor. The OJT initiative operates rather like an apprenticeship program. Participants must accumulate 1,000 hours of supervised work experience and 55 hours of training to receive a certificate of completion and a financial bonus. The model is especially attractive for employees who may not have the time or financial means to attend a more formal education program.

## Missouri and Illinois

Many states are looking to existing early care and education workforce systems as a base upon which to build a workforce development system for youth workers. Missouri and Illinois are two examples of how to go about this work. Missouri in particular has been highly effective in expanding its Opportunities in a Professional Education Network (OPEN) initiative to include school-age/after-school workers.

The OPEN Initiative serves as an umbrella for the development and implementation of many career development efforts for early childhood and school-age/after-school professionals. Initially focused on the early childhood field, OPEN integrated school-age/after-school and youth development professionals into all of its projects beginning in 2003. It also frequently collaborates with other statewide agencies focused on school-age/after-school systems-building. OPEN includes a Trainer Registry and Professional Achievement & Recognition System (PARS), which allows the state to collect and verify training and education data for all participating youth workers. OPEN

## IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH WORKERS

Our youth worker learns about Illinois Gateways to Opportunity through a friend who teaches preschool and recently earned a credential that led to her promotion to lead teacher. When her friend mentioned that Gateway was expanding its focus to include supports for those working with older youth, it caught her attention. The youth employment program where she works has her working with 18-21 year olds who have dropped out of high school and this is her real passion. She didn't realize that working with young adults was really considered part of youth work or any profession, for that matter.

Through a combination of a scholarship and a loan she accesses through Gateways, this youth worker is able to enroll in the I-SAY credential. Her employer provides her with release time to participate. Over time, the wage supplement opportunities that are currently available to early childhood workers seeking higher education may be just the thing that helps her stay in the field.

has also developed a set of core competencies for youth workers (part of a full continuum that encompasses competencies for early care workers) and includes youth programs in a comprehensive career lattice that identifies professional growth and advancement opportunities for workers in the early care and after-school fields.

The reach and sustainability of OPEN is attributable to its inclusive membership and broad funding base. Current funders include the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the state

Departments of Social Services, Health and Senior Services and Elementary & Secondary Education, as well as community-based partners. Continuing to build out the state's workforce development system, OPEN's next stage of work will involve introducing a comprehensive Quality Rating System and a new credential tailored to program directors.

While their efforts are at an earlier stage than Missouri's, stakeholders in Illinois have been similarly successful in building a strong coalition with early childhood leaders and jointly advocating for the expansion of existing workforce development systems to include youth workers. The Illinois School-Age & Youth (I-SAY) Committee was formed to work directly on these issues. This year, I-SAY has been primarily focused on the development of school-age and youth credentials and aligning these credentials with Gateways to Opportunity, the existing professional development system for early childhood in Illinois. The Professional Development Advisory Council (PDAC), the guiding body for Gateways to Opportunity, has realigned to incorporate members from I-SAY and has expanded its vision and membership to include staff working with school-age children, youth and young adults up to age 21. Much progress has been made in the collaboration between I-SAY and PDAC as the Gateways system has evolved to integrate new credentials relevant for those working with older populations into the system. Compensation and retention are topics of particular interest to the I-SAY Committee as it continues to develop a career lattice that will provide pathways for job advancement and a statewide practitioner, trainer and training approval registry.

## Conclusion: Only the Beginning

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The Career Pathways project has helped uncover a set of cross-cutting strategies that can contribute to the development of comprehensive workforce development systems for youth workers. These include:

- Building on existing systems, especially existing early-care and -education workforce development programs and higher education infrastructures or existing systems that work effectively on behalf of older youth.
- Defining “youth workers” broadly and creating inclusive coalitions of public and private stakeholders across the entire child- and youth-development continuum.
- Maintaining focus on the need for incentives and rewards — such as scholarships, bonuses, compensation increases and promotion opportunities — to encourage youth workers, especially part-time workers, to pursue additional education and continue working in the field.
- Leveraging a range of public and private funds to design new system components, model new funding strategies and ultimately sustain a comprehensive system.

The project also uncovered a number of important questions that need further investigation:

- How can providers who fall outside state regulatory requirements, including members of national youth organizations such as YMCA and Boys & Girls Club, be part of workforce development systems?
- What are the opportunities to promote changes in regulations that currently limit youth worker eligibility for publicly funded workforce development programs?
- How can funders, especially the public agencies that provide the most sustainable

support for after-school programs, be encouraged to increase investment to the levels necessary to support a more prepared and stable workforce?

- How can we ensure that policymakers think beyond professional development to the broader system-building issues that are necessary to increase workforce retention?

The Next Generation Youth Work Coalition will continue to learn from the experiences of the states and cities that have participated in the Career Pathways project as it continues to share lessons with stakeholders across the country and works to collect new information as it emerges from these and other system-building efforts going on around the country.