



## 2008/2009 Leadership Roundtable Series Reflection

### Overview

For fourteen years, BOSTnet's Leadership Roundtables have been one of the many professional development services we provide to the out-of-school time (OST) field. **They are a key activity in our approach to quality improvement that focuses on building staff skills around identified field competencies.** This past year, we updated the format and began holding Roundtables in communities outside of Greater Boston that have limited networking and professional development opportunities. In the past the Roundtable relied on panel discussions in which participants discussed effective practices used in their programs. This season's offerings combined networking opportunities with research-based training presentations and collegiate conversations **to foster a more inclusive learning community.** Training topics were sequenced to build a body of core knowledge and to meet the needs of program staff for professional development credits through the Department of Early Education and Care (DEEC). Thanks to the generous support of For Kids Only After School, Inc., **BOSTnet re-launched the Leadership Roundtable on the North Shore** while the Shapiro Foundation, the Boston Foundation, State Street, and others provided support for the Boston series to continue into its fourteenth year.

### Review of Activities

It has long been recognized that staff at OST programs experience turnover during or after the summer and there is a need for refresher materials at the beginning of the academic year with older staff in new positions or assuming new program projects. To address this need to orient OST staff (including directors, coordinators, and new staff), BOSTnet launched the Fall Series with *Quality Environments for Youth*, **an overview of what makes OST programs a unique developmental setting for youth**, how it differs from formal education environments, and its potential as the primary pathway to healthy youth development. **This environmental approach to building quality programs represents BOSTnet's view of the field as a complimentary support for children and youth from what they receive during the school day.** The series continued with *Promoting Positive Behavior*, purposely front-loaded at the beginning of the academic year to address behavioral and group management issues as programs begin the year. Behavioral support training is consistently one of most requested and well-attended trainings we offer. As the year continued, *Project-Based Learning* provided a working structure for programs to intentionally frame enrichment activities, meet academic standards, and allow program staff to develop their own fun and engaging projects. The Spring Series offered the opportunity to dig down into more complex issues that are a constant challenge for providers, including **evaluation and inclusion.** To help support programs faced with shifting expectations and increasingly complex requirements, BOSTnet surveyed the many different



tools for measuring program quality and provided a forum for programs to discuss some current issues they are facing in obtaining meaningful data. Inclusion also raised many questions for programs that are seeing many disabilities manifest as behavioral challenges – especially as the definition of disability is shifting to include social-emotional or cognitive disorders. The final Roundtable in the 2008/2009 series set for May 7th, *Effective OST Communication in a Digital Age*, will discuss program communication, outreach, and new web-based technology.

The presentations built upon the knowledge we have gained over the past few years running the **Lead to Opportunities for Youth with Disabilities (LOYD), Promoting Positive Behavior, Engaging Families, the Facilities Initiatives**, as well as **best practices gathered from BOSTnet’s fieldwork**. Leadership Roundtables on the North Shore were hosted by different organizations such as Girls Inc., the YMCA of Greater Lynn, Boys and Girls Club of Salem, Community Teamwork, Inc., and the North Shore Community College department of Education who also generously provided refreshments. The Boston Public Library, where wireless Internet allowed for “real time” web searches and video feeds, hosted the Boston Roundtables. Every Roundtable was evaluated and reflected, **elevating key issues and capturing quotes and conversations**, while providing transparency as to effectiveness and participant satisfaction. Reflections were posted on the BOSTnet blog at [www.bostnet.blogspot.com](http://www.bostnet.blogspot.com) and indexed according to topic or initiative. Comments on these pages are welcome by interested parties and attendees, allowing for anonymous comments to create a higher level of input and dialogue from the field.

### **Observations**

Over the past year we have connected to many great programs and staff and heard inspiring stories from staff that are working hard to make a difference in the lives of children and youth. **Nearly 500 attendees participated in the 2008/2009 Leadership Roundtables in Boston and the North Shore.** The level of experience of attendees was on average ten years or more in the field. Some commented that they felt most professional development was not raising their abilities but “refreshing” strategies or approaches they already felt confident they knew. There was also consistent representation by “line staff.” However, this was more the case for Boston than the North Shore.

Programs are stressed by shifting and increasingly unrealistic expectations, inconsistent directions set by funders and policy makers, and, of course, the economy. Many see a diminishing of the community they found in the OST movement, and are interested in continuing to network and share ideas. A major obstacle to this is the limited funding strategies available to programs that creates a more competitive environment and less cohesion in the movement. Many current leaders (many attendees over 20 years in the field) wonder about the upcoming leaders that are needed to keep the field growing and strong. Response to the Leadership Roundtables was positive, as evidenced by solid attendance, increases in blog readership, and positive reviews collected in evaluations. With fewer professional development dollars available and increasing professional development



requirements for licensed programs, **many providers see BOSTnet's Roundtables as their primary staff-training option.** We will continue to use participant's feedback to improve our offerings to better serve the field. A few of the suggestions we are currently evaluating include providing specific Roundtables for different staff levels, and providing more afternoon trainings for direct staff when they have paid program time.

### **The Coming Year**

We are currently working with partners to plan the upcoming series and expand the Roundtables in the South Shore and Central Massachusetts for the 2009/2010-year. **As BOSTnet assumes its role as the Massachusetts' affiliate for the National Afterschool Association,** some changes may be made to both the delivery and geographic reach of our Roundtables. We are constantly developing new topics and refining old ones based on lessons learned from our fieldwork and research. In collaboration with the DEEC, Roundtables will be evaluated according to standard expectations of training organizations and other entities may be involved in delivering these events or informing the content. The series topics with locations and hours will be listed on [www.bostnet.org](http://www.bostnet.org).