



March 12, 2009

Sherri Killins, Ed.D.  
Commissioner of the Department of  
Early Education and Care  
51 Sleeper Street  
Boston, MA 02210

Dear Commissioner Killins,

On behalf of the *Achieve Boston* partnership, welcome to Massachusetts! With the recent passage of the Economic Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the partners of *Achieve Boston* see a unique opportunity for the Department of Early Education and Care to focus investments in a professional development system for school age providers that includes expanded training opportunities and a statewide youth development credential. Now is the time to build on the important work the EEC is already doing to design a Quality Rating and Information System for school age programs in Massachusetts.

The *Achieve* collaboration began in 2001 to create a professional development infrastructure for out-of-school time (OST) youth workers and others who work with young people in the city of Boston. We share a goal to improve the quality of youth programs by providing staff access to comprehensive training and educational opportunities to build their skills and create viable career pathways. The partnership is grounded in an understanding that high quality youth development work helps youth become empowered, set acceptable boundaries, become more engaged in their community and learning, and develop positive values, social competencies and self-identity. Research in youth development has long made the connection between the extent to which children have these assets and their resiliency—the skills and behaviors necessary to cope with life's challenges.

It is widely understood that positive youth outcomes are directly linked to both the quality of relationships staff have with children and youth every day, and the quality of the programming that supports learning, engagement and creative expression. Yet, despite this Massachusetts lags nationally in providing a professional development system for OST providers working with

school age and older youth. Many states are actively piloting youth development credentials that include a combination of college courses for credit, online training, community-based training and a professional practicum. In New York, for instance, 500 youth development credentials have been awarded to school age providers. This work is supported by statewide scholarship funds through the Educational Incentives Program. Other states, including Connecticut, Vermont, Pennsylvania and Missouri are creating collaborative partnerships with higher education to provide a mechanism for credential credits to carry into bachelor degree programs in youth development. These states, moreover, are working to link their competency frameworks to QRIS and compensation rates, understanding that credentialing efforts are most effective when integrated into a broader system of workforce development, incentives and career opportunities. It is clear that Massachusetts needs to rise to the challenge of building an integrated professional development system for school age and youth workers. Only then can we ensure that all children and youth have access to quality learning environments that provide the developmental supports needed for them to achieve in all aspects of life.

Together with the Higher Education Afterschool and Youth Roundtable (HEAYR), the *Achieve* group created the *School Age Youth Development* (SAYD) credential with the support of public and private funders. Twenty-five workers took part in the original pilot in 2007-2008 that included an 18-month session of college courses (main topics: child and youth development, resiliency/student support, and curriculum/activities/program practices), community-based training and direct program work experience. Of these, eleven received the SAYD credential at a graduation ceremony in June 2008. More recently, Commonwealth Corporation began piloting a Professional Youth Worker credential under its *Pathways to Success by Twenty-One* (P-21) initiative. This pilot, based on the SAYD standards and competencies, was run in Hampden County in western Massachusetts and recently graduated 23 of the original 25 workers who entered the program. Commonwealth Corporation is expanding this pilot in Brockton this year with funding through Labor and Workforce Development. In western MA, moreover, the WestMOST Network has developed a college-based leadership training initiative—*Continuing Education for Afterschool Leaders* (CEAL)—to support the work of professionals who manage youth-serving organizations. All of these initiatives have taught us much about developing an effective credential program. The time is now for the EEC to invest in professional development solutions that strengthen the field.

The *Achieve* group respectfully suggests that the EEC consider the following recommendations to begin building a professional development infrastructure for school age youth workers:

- Invest a portion of the non-targeted quality improvement funds from the CCDBG stimulus money to begin implementing elements of the Workforce Development plan, such as:
  - A train-the-trainer initiative for new worker orientation training.
  - A training initiative to create adequate behavioral and emotional supports to programs, children and families.
  - Expand the pool of training vouchers for school age providers to access fee-based training.
- Develop an initiative to train quality coaches to provide school age programs with support in assessment and improvement plan development. This initiative will help

leverage training by providing on site support for programs to implement what they learn in the above-mentioned trainings.

- Relax the CDA scholarship requirements to allow school-age youth workers access to college courses or a youth development credential. Create incentives for colleges to develop related courses.
- Collaborate with the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development to fund a unified youth development credential that provides a mechanism for participants to specialize in selected content areas, including school-age youth development, older youth workers (P-21), leadership (i.e., CEAL director's credential), and behavioral support.

We would like to schedule a meeting with you to discuss these ideas in more detail and provide you with an overview of the evaluation findings from the credential pilots. We look forward to working together to strengthen the school age workforce.

Sincerely,

***The Achieve Boston Partnership***

Maryellen Coffey, Achieve Chair and  
Executive Director, Build the Out-of-  
School Time Network (BOSTnet)

Ellen Gannett, Director  
National Institute on Out-of-School  
Time (NIOST)

Dr. Gil Noam, Director  
Program in Education, Afterschool  
& Resiliency (PEAR), Harvard University  
and McLean Hospital

Adam Shyevitch, Teen Initiative Director  
Boston Afterschool & Beyond

Mo Barbosa, Project Coordinator  
The BEST Initiative, The Medical  
Foundation

Susan O'Connor, WestMOST Network/  
Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative

Gwynn Hughes, Executive Director,  
Massachusetts Afterschool Partnership (MAP)

Joanne Russo, Executive Director, Early  
Childhood and Youth Resources Department  
YMCA of Greater Boston

Khita Pottinger, Senior Program Manager,  
Pathways to Success by 21  
Commonwealth Corporation

Dishon Mills, Senior Manager  
Department of Extended Learning Time,  
Afterschool, and Services (DELTAS),  
Boston Public Schools

Rachel Green, Program Coordinator  
Department of Extended Learning Time,  
Afterschool, and Services (DELTAS),  
Boston Public Schools