



## Building an Afterschool Credential System

### AN INTERVIEW WITH KELLY STURGIS AND ERIN BRODERICK FROM NEW YORK STATE NETWORK FOR YOUTH SUCCESS

The New York State Network for Youth Success was among the first organizations to launch a school-age credential system. AIR interviewed Kelly Sturgis and Erin Broderick, who manage the New York State School-Age Care Credential, to learn about its development, use, and growth. Visit the [credential webpage](#) to learn more.

#### What motivated your network to develop the New York State School-Age Care Credential?

New York requires an associate's degree and credits in early care or related fields to supervise an afterschool program. Unfortunately, we were not finding enough qualified adults to work with school-age youth. Even people with early care certifications were not prepared to work with older youth or run an afterschool program.

As the School-Age Care (SAC) Credential continues to grow, we are finding that we have more qualified staff in New York. In some areas, including the Capital Region, we have high numbers of qualified individuals, which makes it easier for program administrators to find the site directors they need.

#### How does the credential system work?

Since 2002, the New York State Network for Youth Success has managed the SAC Credential, which covers 14 competency standards for afterschool professionals such as professionalism, child development, creativity, and families. SAC Credential candidates complete a 10-month course that covers the standards in detail. As part of the course, each credential candidate creates a portfolio and a resource file that documents his/her knowledge of the standards and how the standards are applied in his/her work with youth.

After completing the credential course, candidates earn a credential through a formal endorsement process that includes an observation, an interview, and a review of the portfolio and resource file—all conducted by a trained endorser. The process culminates with the endorser sending a formal recommendation to the Credential Review Panel to award the credential to the candidate or a request that the candidate reapply after further training. Once awarded, the credential is valid for 3 years.

#### How did you approach the development of the credential system?

The initial credential system was designed by the Credential Work Team. This group included partners from the New York State Network for Youth Success, Cornell University, and the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS).

The development and approval processes took nearly six years. OCFS is the approving body, and as such, it was integral to the credential system development. We involved OCFS early in the process and kept it engaged.



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Revisions to the credential system are ongoing to keep pace with the field. We formed the Statewide Credential Workgroup, which comprises eight members with rich expertise in school-age care. The workgroup meets quarterly to review the processes and procedures related to the credential system and make revisions as necessary. Typically, we make relatively straightforward revisions once a year.

### **What were the key resources, including people and policies, that helped to develop the credential system?**

The local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (CCR&R) allowed us to invest staff time into the credential system at a time when the project was not yet funded. At the time the SAC Credential was written, one of the authors worked at the local CCR&R. This expert was able to articulate the need for a statewide credential system, assemble the workgroup, and begin work with the support of the agency. This support was one of the most critical resources that we received. We continue to have a strong partnership with the CCR&Rs. Currently, one of our board members works for the Early Care and Learning Council, which is the membership organization of the CCR&R. The Council works to connect us to other CCR&Rs, and now several CCR&Rs are host agencies that offer the credential course.

To further our understanding of best practices in the field, we referenced the School Age-Care Environmental Rating scale, a research-based observation tool, and a book on best practices in school-age care called *Caring for School-Age Children* by Phyllis Click and Jennifer Parker.

### **How have you encouraged the use of the credential system in the field?**

We have had the most success from partnering with individual programs that have a broad reach in the afterschool community. For example, we have worked closely with the YMCA to promote the credential. From our partnership with the YMCA, we have recruited YMCA staff to become advisors and endorsers so they can work with other YMCA staff who would like to pursue the credential.

### **How has the field responded to the credential system?**

The response has been mixed. The growth of the credential system has been slow until recently. In the last few years, we have seen much more momentum. For example, we added more partners that teach credential courses to match

increasing demand. Our network has grown, and we now have the bandwidth to have one staff member oversee the credential. We think the change in momentum is a result of having a dedicated staff member to work on the credential.

We ask for feedback from the credential candidates and endorsers at the end of the process. From what we've heard, most are satisfied with the process and are especially appreciative of the support of the advisors. Earning their SAC Credential has made candidates more marketable. Many of our afterschool professionals feel more competent and well prepared to not only work with children, but to manage a program and staff. The candidates also graduate from the SAC Credential program with a network of other professionals to help them along their professional journey.

### **What successes are you most proud of?**

We are most proud of the work that the capacity-building director, Erin Broderick, has done. She manages the credential system, and we have seen so much progress since she stepped into that role.

Erin brings a wealth of experience to the position. She is a former instructor in the New York State School-Age Credential Preparatory Program. In that role, she advised credential candidates and coached programs through the accreditation process. Erin maintains her deep knowledge of the credential program by serving as an accreditation and credential endorser.

### **What challenges did you encounter and how did you overcome them?**

We have facilitated the Statewide Credential Workgroup for more than 10 years. Several times, in face-to-face meetings, it has been challenging to agree on various topics. Even when people have similar ideas, wordsmithing and decision-making can be difficult. When more people are involved, the process can be more complex.

Having Erin as the capacity-building director who manages the credential system has helped because she can make final decisions when needed.

### **What advice do you have for other states that may want to develop or implement their own credential system?**

The infrastructure has really changed everything. It is so important! If you don't want the credential system to be a secondary thought, then put it in the hands of a qualified staff member.