School-Age Child Care Trend Report
Views from the field

by Roger Neugebauer with assistance from Mike Wilson and Tracey Ballas

In the portion of this status report published in the September 2007 issue of Exchange, we looked at what major reports are telling us about school-age care today. In this online continuation of this status report, we look at what school-age professionals are telling us about their field. In preparing the status report we surveyed professionals about...

- What are the major challenges facing the school-age care field?
- What are parent expectations for school-age programs?
- What are the goals of school-age programs today?

We surveyed over 200 school-age professionals; the comments below represent a sampling of the views they shared with Exchange.

What are the major challenges facing the school-age care field?

As can be seen in Figure 1, finding qualified staff continues to be the prime challenge for school-age providers. Finding space, which in the past has ranked high on the list of concerns, still is seen as a challenge, but less so than finding funding and training staff.

![Figure 1 — Major Challenges for School-Age Care](source: Survey conducted on the Exchange web site, [www.ChildCareExchange.com](http://www.ChildCareExchange.com) for directors of school-age programs.)

**Julie Mathieu**, George J. Mitchell Before/After School Program, Waterville, Maine:

“Our child care program overall is in really great shape, however, the biggest challenge is always to keep rates low for families, while at the same time being able to pay staff properly. I would like to be able to pay my staff more money and also provide assistance with health insurance.”

**Saundra Walden**, Beanstalk, North Highlands, California:
“State funding serving the same population of school-age children, on the same school campus for a low fee or no fee and being viewed by school districts as a viable part of school success.”

Tamre Roberts, Brewerton Community Child Care, Brewerton, New York:
“Not enough emphasis on ‘SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE’ in our area. Research, training, studies, etc. focus primarily on Early Childhood Education. State and Federal monies are usually granted to Early Child Care. School-Age Child Care is viewed as a babysitting job, not a profession.”

Cheryl Zagorski, Milestones Programs for Children, Milwaukee, Wisconsin:
“Our major challenge is recruiting and retaining quality part-time teaching staff. Money is not as great an issue as is the part-time nature of our programs. Our staff members are often university students and when they graduate, we lose them. Or, when their university schedules present too many scheduling conflicts, we lose them.”

Debra Jones, Oceanspray Family Center/Housing Authority of Lincoln County, Newport, Oregon:
“Enough funding to hire teachers at a living wage rather than a low wage. Other expenses can be absorbed by program costs, but there is a lack of financial support for out-of-school time providers to hire experienced teachers. Head Start offers a starting wage of $12 per hour plus benefits; the 21st Century programs pay similar wages, plus pay other youth as classroom aides. When you are running a business and are not subsidized, you cannot pay teachers wages they deserve and charge fees families can afford.”

Jackie Buxton, Saint John’s Episcopal Day School, Harrison, Arkansas:
“Enough space for the children. We have to use our cafeteria. There are too many children needing care and not enough places providing it.”

Valerie Goodman, Saugus Union School District, Tesoro Child Care & Preschool, Santa Clarita, California:
“Our district needs to recognize the importance of the after-school time: children need opportunities to participate in more than additional ‘classroom’ experiences. However, our district is leaning towards the extended day where staff with little or no teaching experience are expected to lead academic lessons with academic outcomes.

While education is extremely important, as a school-age leader for the past 11 years, I see more and more how we are forgetting to provide the social, emotional, and physical experiences that children need to thrive for the sake of passing standardized tests in academic realms.”

What are parent expectations for school-age programs?

We interviewed school-age professionals about current expectations of parents in programs, as well as about how these expectations may have changed over time. Two topics topped the list when it came to current expectations: parents want their kids to be safe and they want them to do their homework in the school-age program. Other expectations of note were: having fun, learning academics, and developing social skills.

Lisa Cain-Chang, Child Educational Center, La Canada, California:
“Many parents are focused on wanting their children to complete their homework after school. We maintain that children need opportunities to rest and play after a full day of school. Academic expectations in this district are extremely high. Parents (and some children) grow anxious over quantities...
of homework. This has only increased over the years. Beyond homework support, parents expect a safe environment, friendly teachers, interesting things for children to do, and hours that match work and school closure schedules.”

Jan Stange, Great After-School Place, Brookings, South Dakota: “Parents expect us to do everything. Parents seem to be over-extended and their children are not getting what they need at home, so parents want us to provide it. Homework help, discipline, values — these were all things that were taught or happened at home that are now being expected from OST programs. Parents are losing touch with their kids.”

Allison Gorman-Young, Harrisburg Area YMCA, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: “I have been in this business for 25 years. Parents still want quality care at an affordable rate. However, today’s parents seem to have more personal and/or work related issues. As a result, more parents today rely on child care providers to solve many child-related concerns on their own rather than on a partnership basis.”

Martha McCartney, Playcare, Inc., Lawton, Oklahoma: “Parents expect that children should have all of their homework done before they pick them up and that it should all be checked and correct. We serve dinner at our center and they will also sit in the lobby to wait for their child to eat so family communication at the dinner table in most of our families is nonexistent.”

Anne Gleason, Mary Johnson Children’s Center, Middlebury, Vermont: “Parents expect a consistently safe environment as a first expectation, and seek enriched activities and experiences as a second; lastly, parents hope for the nurture and development of social skills and relationships. Amazingly, over 20 years’ worth of my own experience with school-age programs, parents’ expectations have had similar components and issues. As an example, ‘the great homework debate’ still plays out in school-age programs. What I might be able to say is that there seems to be an urgency for placements, a result of the tenuous nature of our times for families and children. School-age programs are called upon to be the places where the answer to parents’ needs and problems is a flexible ‘Yes, we can do that!’”

Michelle Ware, Corry Child Development Center, Cantonment, Florida: “Get homework done, keep my child clean, and keep them out of trouble. Yes, I feel that parents are over-taxed and tired at the end of the day and do not want to deal with their children’s homework because it is a battle and they would rather let someone else deal with it.”

What are the goals of school-age programs today?

The goals of the school-age providers surveyed do not square exactly with parent expectations. Both parents and providers place high emphasis on safety, but providers place a much higher priority on social, emotional, and recreational experiences.

Claudia Lopez, Santa Clara Unified School District, Ponderosa Extended Day Program, Sunnyvale, California: “Our major goal is to be a bridge between home and school. We believe that the family and the school are the primary influences on the child’s growth and development. Therefore, we strive to provide unique experiences that are complementary to home and school. Students attending the Extended Day Program will have opportunities for supervised indoor and outdoor activities including a snack period, clubs, interest groups, reading and writing centers, science and cooking projects.”

Donna M. Denette, Children First Enterprises, Inc., Granby, Massachusetts: “We believe that the societal loss of ‘neighborhoods’ and all that they entailed (unstructured play, fully child-directed, mixed-age groups, and an emphasis on problem-solving, creativity, and group dynamics, as well as a high degree of play out in nature) is harmful in many ways. We seek to fill in the gaps of that loss through building group dynamics in a mixed-age group setting, increasing our children’s time and ability to problem-solve, strategize, and resolve conflict, and increasing their positive experiences with nature.”

Lori Murdock, 21st Century Wayne County Community Learning Centers, Huntington, West Virginia: “To provide a safe, fun learning environment for students of all ages. We want children to be life-long learners. We offer programs such as tutoring, recreation, Lego Lab, 2nd Step counseling with a community counselor, drama club, computers, hip hop club, dance revolution, after-school detectives (science and math activities), as well as service learning projects, community field trips during out of school time, 4-H Fridays, and much much more.”

Pat Mendoza, Glendora Unified School District, Glendora, California: “The major goals of our program are to provide a safe and supportive active learning environment where highly trained, responsive, and caring staff meet the needs of each child’s growth and development, extend learning, play, curiosity, exploration, innovation, and problem solving to becoming responsible, contributing, positive members of our community.”

AnneMarie Hebert, The After School Special, Inc., Westbrook, Maine: “Our state is really trying to combat childhood obesity. We have a huge play-
ground. We feed good food, and get everyone outside. Our students are in constant motion!! It’s beautiful to see that nature takes over when children are given the tools they need to stay healthy. In the summer camp program we swim every day, weather permitting. Field trip activities are roller skating, playground hops, etc. Do we have the ice cream truck? You bet! But, we are active without planning exercise classes. If we let our kids be kids — obesity will not be such a problem.”

Sharon Tarry, Hobart Family YMCA, Hobart, Indiana:
“Help children to develop a strong character and healthy self-esteem. Help children to improve their literacy skills and read for pleasure. Help children to improve their math skills. Involve children in planning their own activities. Offer developmentally appropriate activities that help children develop physically, emotionally, intellectually, and socially.”

Dr. Betsy Fulmer, Orange County Public Schools, Orlando, Florida:
“To keep children safe by offering affordable, enriching care for school-age children at school sites supported solely by user-fees (tuition) and not tax dollars.”

David Lindsay, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, Houlton, Maine:
“Ultimate goal would be to have all of our children graduate high school and go on to college. To give the child all the tools he needs to graduate and to succeed in life.”

James Robertson, Plowshares Education Development Center, Inc., Newton, Massachusetts:
“To maintain a safe, creative, enriching, nurturing environment, staffed by the highest qualified professionals, which supports and supplements the holistic and DAP needs/interests of the school-age child and family. A sense of community within the community.”

Donna McAndrew, Little Meadows Learning Center, Dallas, Pennsylvania:
“Our program is ever changing as we make observations and evaluations of the curriculum and environment. We like to include parents and children in the process of change. We are working towards having a program that empowers the children to explore, experiment, and create. Curriculum that emerges from the activities and interests of the children and has the input and support of parents is a major goal. Creating space that welcomes and accommodates the school-age children is being created and assessed at this time. Health and safety issues are always monitored. The highest quality care possible is a constant goal.”

Ramie Case, Time to Explore, Sunland, California:
“Provide a safe place (emotionally and physically) for children to develop and explore their world. Get kids outside in as natural a setting as possible (allow ‘free exploring’ in that setting). Help our children develop into explorers and ‘life long learners.’”

**Figure 3 — School-Age Care Program Goals**

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