

# QUALITY STANDARDS

FOR AFTERSCHOOL & YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS



WASHINGTON STATE





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# INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

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## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Substantial research confirms that high-quality afterschool and youth development programs positively impact social skill development, academic achievement, and risk reduction for the youth they serve. While a variety of factors contribute to quality, research shows that trained and skilled staff are essential to creating safe, engaging, interactive, youth-centered programs. The Washington State Quality Standards for Afterschool and Youth Development Programs have been created to support Washington State programs in achieving positive youth outcomes by providing staff with guidelines for what quality looks like in a program setting.

The Standards are intended to be a clear and concise set of benchmarks that any program serving young people in the State of Washington can strive to meet. They are based upon those developed by dozens of other communities around the country and represent the priorities of a wide cross section of the youth-serving community in Washington. The Standards address the core ingredients that when combined, create a high-quality program.

## THE ROLE OF STANDARDS

Standards may be used by programs and local communities to stimulate conversation about quality, what it looks like, and why it matters. They also serve to assure funders, policymakers, and families that a given program is committed to quality and on-going improvement. They work best when they are part of an overarching quality improvement system. Such a system has been developed in Washington over the past six years under the leadership of School's Out Washington.

System components already in place include the Washington State Core Competencies for Child and Youth Development Professionals, high-quality professional development opportunities such as trainings and coaching, and quality assessment. The Standards are the final piece of a system that is based on research and grounded in three principles:

- Program quality matters: High-quality afterschool and youth development programs are directly related to youth achievement of positive social, emotional, health, and academic gains.<sup>1</sup>
- Program quality is measurable: There is great consistency in what researchers find most effective for youth development programs, and many assessments of program quality use similar indicators.<sup>2</sup>
- Program quality can be improved: When programs focus on strengthening instructional practices aligned to indicators of quality, the quality of programs can be enhanced to produce better outcomes for youth.

The missing piece in this quality system-building work has been a foundational set of quality standards that provide afterschool and youth development programs with a common language for describing quality, as well as a “high bar” for individual programs to hold themselves accountable to. With development of the Washington State Quality Standards for Afterschool and Youth Development Programs, that missing component has been provided, resulting in a comprehensive, systematic approach to support programs in improving program quality.

<sup>1</sup> Making the Case: A 2008 Fact Sheet on Children and Youth in Out-of-School Time, National Institute on Out-of-School Time, Wellesley Centers for Women at Wellesley College, 2008; Outcomes Linked to High Quality Afterschool Programs, D. Lowe Vandell, E. Reisner & C. Pierce, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Putting It All Together: Guiding Principles for Quality After-School Programs Serving Preteens, R. Metz, J. Goldsmith & A. Arbreton, Public/Private Ventures, 2008. Exploring Quality in Afterschool Programs for Middle-Age Youth, H. Westmoreland & P. Little, The Harvard Family Research Project, 2006; Building a Better Teenager: A Summary of “What Works” in Adolescent Development, K. Moore & J. Zaff, Child Trends Research Brief, Nov. 2002; Eccles & Gootman, 2002.

## STANDARDS & DOMAINS

The Washington State Quality Standards for Afterschool and Youth Development Programs are intentionally broad and inclusive applying to all afterschool and youth development programs serving youth ages five through young adult, regardless of program content or location. This document offers a voluntary set of benchmarks that go above and beyond basic childcare licensing. The Standards are not intended to be a regulatory checklist but rather a definition of quality that programs can use to pursue continuous improvement.

The Standards are broken into nine overarching categories or domains that represent the key areas of quality for afterschool and youth development programs. Each domain is framed with a guiding principle that introduces the category and then is followed by a series of standards that describe best practice for that particular domain. While most standards will apply to all programs, some are specific to particular program settings and service delivery models (e.g. school-based programs).

The nine domains are:

- Safety & Wellness
- Cultural Competency & Responsiveness
- Relationships
- Youth Leadership & Engagement
- Program & Activities
- Assessment, Planning & Improvement
- Ongoing Staff & Volunteer Development
- Leadership & Management
- Family, School & Community Connections

## HOW BEST TO MAKE USE OF THE STANDARDS FOR AFTERSCHOOL AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN WASHINGTON

The Washington State Quality Standards for Afterschool and Youth Development Programs are recommended, voluntary guidelines for afterschool and youth development providers. It is important to remember that while quality standards provide a shared framework for community collaborations and encourage programs to involve young people in meaningful ways, standards alone cannot change the quality of programs or the skills of program staff and volunteers. The Standards provide a research-based framework for providers to understand and measure program quality and to plan for improvement.

Building capacity to use the Standards in programs across Washington will take time. Critical first steps for program leaders include sharing the Standards with staff to ensure understanding, and identifying an individual or team to lead the process of creating a comprehensive plan to achieve the Standards. A program plan should incorporate realistic and achievable goals so that programs can work toward meeting the Standards gradually and systematically through tangible steps. Providers should consider integrating existing quality measures like the School Age or Youth Program Quality Assessment as well as available professional development opportunities.

Beyond program leaders, other afterschool and youth development stakeholders may find the standards useful in the following ways:

- **PARENTS AND FAMILIES** - To understand the key elements of a high quality program and to be able to advocate for quality programs in their own communities.
- **FUNDERS AND POLICY LEADERS** - To link funding to research-based practices that lead to measurable outcomes.
- **FORMAL EDUCATORS** - To understand the key elements of high quality programs and provide a common language for partnership.

## HOW THESE STANDARDS WERE DEVELOPED

The Washington State Quality Standards for Afterschool and Youth Development Programs were developed through a nine-month process involving key stakeholders with a vested interest in the afterschool and youth development field in Washington. In March of 2012, School's Out Washington hosted a statewide gathering that brought together stakeholders to develop overarching goals and key domains for the Standards. Participants from the stakeholders' gathering formed a smaller advisory committee and were charged with developing the individual standards based on the stakeholders' input, nationally recognized best practices, and feedback from youth.

A draft of the Standards was completed in June of 2012, publicly posted, and distributed to the afterschool and youth development field for comment. School's Out Washington then conducted in-person focus groups with community organizations, youth, and families from across the state to ensure the Standards were realistic and comprehensive. School's Out Washington also contracted with the Forum for Youth Investment to perform a research review on the draft document to ensure standards aligned with known best practice. A final version of the Standards document was completed in April 2013.

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# THE STANDARDS

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**GUIDING PRINCIPLE:** Quality programs provide safe, healthy, and developmentally appropriate learning environments for all participants.

- The program ensures a safe and developmentally appropriate physical environment for all activities.
- The program provides a variety of activities, information, education, and resources to help youth identify and manage their physical, social, and emotional needs.
- The program promotes positive health, nutrition, and safety.
- The program has clear policies and procedures in place to protect the safety of all children, youth, and staff, including abuse prevention guidelines and reporting protocol.
- Staff provide an emotionally safe, welcoming, and supportive environment free of violence, intimidation, aggression, or bullying for all participants.





**GUIDING PRINCIPLE:** Quality programs respect and are responsive to the diversity of program participants, their families, and community.

- The program provides an inclusive, welcoming, and respectful environment for all children, youth, and families.
- The program creates policies to ensure a safe atmosphere for children and youth to explore their own identity, including cultural beliefs and practices.
- The program provides all staff with ongoing practical tools and training for cultural competency and promoting professional self-awareness about power, privilege, and equity issues that impact youth in line with \* Washington State core competencies.
- The program recruits, hires, and develops qualified staff who reflect the diversity and culture(s) of the community served.
- Staff know and understand cultures of participating youth in their programs and are responsive to individual youth needs, recognizing their special interests, feelings, abilities, and cultures.
- Youth are encouraged to express their own cultural identity in the program.
- Youth have intentional opportunities to explore, share, and celebrate each other's heritage and culture in their program.

\*The Washington State's Core Competencies for Child and Youth Development Professionals can be found on School's Out Washington's website: [www.schoolsoutwashington.org](http://www.schoolsoutwashington.org)



**CULTURE:**

Culture encompasses the evolving identities, beliefs, and practices derived from the intersection of one's national origin, religion, language, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, age, gender identity, race/ethnicity, and physical/developmental ability.

**CULTURAL COMPETENCE:**

Cultural competency requires holding and practicing a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that enable effective interactions with youth within a cross-cultural framework. (Cross, T., and Bazron, B.J., Dennis, K.W. and Isaacs, M.R (1992). Towards a Culturally Competent System of Care. Volume 1. National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health, Georgetown University Child Development Center, Washington DC.)

**CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PROGRAMMING:**

"Because children's family and community backgrounds are core to who they are, how they learn, and what they may need from after school activities, successful programs are ones which are supportive, accessible, and responsive to the different aspects of their lives and identities. Such programs have staff who are sensitive to participants' backgrounds; materials which reflect diverse cultures, languages and experiences; and ties to young people's family and community resources. In addition, these programs recognize and respect diverse customs and traditions and do not tolerate bias or discrimination." (California Tomorrow. Addressing Equity and Diversity: Tools for Change in Afterschool and Youth Programs. Introduction to Toolkit.)

**MAINSTREAM APPROACHES:**

"Mainstream approaches reflect the values, norms, and behaviors of the predominant group in power." (SOAR. Multicultural Youth Leadership. Seattle, WA.) Mainstream approaches maintain current systems and ways of operating without regard for changing needs of individuals and communities.

*\* TAKEN FROM WASHINGTON STATE'S CORE COMPETENCIES FOR CHILD AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS.*





**GUIDING PRINCIPLE:** Quality programs develop, nurture, and maintain positive relationships and interactions among staff and participants.

- The program is structured to create appropriate and trusting relationships among individual youth and caring staff.
- Staff provide a welcoming environment with opportunities for youth to connect with each other and build community.
- Staff communicate high expectations to young people.
- Staff model professional relationships and safe, healthy boundaries.
- Staff and youth engage each other in positive and respectful ways through listening, acceptance, and appreciation.





**GUIDING PRINCIPLE:** Quality programs promote a sense of purpose and individual empowerment in youth through opportunities to engage in a rich variety of experiences, participate in planning, and exercise choice and leadership.

- The program encourages and recognizes youth input in activity planning, implementation, and evaluation at a level that is appropriate.
- The program supports youth to develop skills in decision-making, planning, and goal setting.
- Youth have authentic opportunities to practice and develop leadership skills.
- Youth have opportunities to make meaningful content and process choices during activities.
- Youth have opportunities to develop a sense of belonging to the program.





**GUIDING PRINCIPLE:** Quality programs offer a variety of activities that are active, developmentally appropriate, and culturally sensitive and enrich the physical, social, emotional, and creative development of all participants.

- The program activities have an appropriate schedule flow and duration, including a balance of structured and unstructured time, as well as individual, small and large group activities, where possible.
- The program provides opportunities for participants to develop a variety of communication skills to explore and express ideas, exchange information, solve problems, and derive meaning.
- Activities provide consistent, intentional opportunities for group discussion and personal reflection.
- Activities engage different learning styles (e.g. auditory-sequential, visual-spatial, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, etc.) and different skill levels, enabling all youth to participate, benefit, and experience success.
- Activities support active engagement through project-based and / or experiential learning in a real-world context.
- Activities are designed for youth to develop and build a wide variety of skills relevant to school, work, and life success (e.g. academic, cognitive, life, social, physical, leadership, and creative).
- Activities are designed to encourage youth to value, acknowledge, and celebrate their own and their peers' improvement and efforts.





**GUIDING PRINCIPLE:** Quality programs have policies and procedures in place that promote continuous improvement.

- The program or organization involves staff, volunteers, board members, youth, and families in the process of assessment, planning, and continuous improvement.
- The program establishes measurable goals and objectives that are aligned with the mission and vision of the organization.
- The program regularly assesses its effectiveness through various formal and informal evaluation activities (e.g. surveys, interviews, focus groups, town halls) and shares the results with stakeholders.
- The program uses strong data management systems (e.g. tracking participation, school attendance, Program Quality Assessment (PQA) scores) that track results and data to drive decision-making and quality improvement.





**GUIDING PRINCIPLE:** Quality programs ensure competent, motivated, youth-centered staff and volunteers through effective orientation, training, and a philosophy that views professional development as a journey rather than a destination.

- The program ensures staff have access to relevant professional development in best practices for working with children and youth.
- The program provides new staff with comprehensive orientation to the program philosophy, routines, and practices.
- The program provides staff with clear guidelines on organizational policies and procedures that are effective, fair, and in keeping with the mission and goals of the program. These guidelines are reviewed regularly. Written policies and procedures are reviewed with staff on an on-going basis (e.g. emergency procedures, abuse prevention, disciplinary procedures, and confidentiality).
- The program provides program directors and administrators with program management and staff supervision training.
- The program ensures each staff member builds a professional development plan that reflects her or his professional goals.





**GUIDING PRINCIPLE:** Effective organizations have a coherent mission, well-developed systems, and sound fiscal management to support and enhance quality programming and activities for all participants.

- The organization has a clear mission statement and philosophy that is widely understood and shared among staff, parents, and the community.
- The organization has a strategic plan, created with input from youth, staff, family, and community that supports their mission.
- The organization has strong fiscal management that supports program goals.
- Program policies and procedures are responsive to the needs of youth and families, with systems in place to meet day-to-day challenges.
- Program policies and procedures are clear and available to participants, families, and the community for review (e.g. posted at site, posted on website, in multiple languages as needed).





**GUIDING PRINCIPLE:** Quality programs establish and maintain strong, working partnerships with families, schools, and community stakeholders.

### **SUPPORTING FAMILIES**

- The program engages families appropriately in program planning, implementation, management, evaluation, and improvement.
- Program policies and procedures, including those regarding fees, hours of operation, and location are responsive to the needs of the youth and families served, including affordability, hours of operation, and location.

### **SCHOOL CONNECTIONS**

- The program provides support as youth transition across developmental stages, age groups, school grade levels, and from formal to informal educational settings.
- The program incorporates elements to support and promote academic behaviors, perseverance, motivation, learning strategies, and social skills.

#### ***SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMS***

- *The program appropriately engages school personnel in program planning, implementation, management, evaluation, and improvement.*
- *Staff maintains two-way communication with appropriate school staff (e.g. principals, counselors, and teachers) in a variety of ways.*

#### ***EXPANDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES***

- *The program builds intentional linkages to align in school and out-of-school learning, implements activities that complement and enrich classroom instruction, and uses measures of academic progress.*
- *Staff understand the Common Core State Standards \* and provide youth with opportunities to develop the skills they need to achieve them.*

### **COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS**

- The program makes intentional connections with other organizations to enhance program offerings and makes referrals as needed to resources and services for youth and their families.
- The program intentionally incorporates opportunities to help youth become engaged in the larger community.

\* Common Core State Standards (<http://www.k12.wa.us/corestandards>)

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# APPENDIX

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## WASHINGTON AFTERSCHOOL AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT QUALITY STANDARDS SUMMARY OF SUPPORTING RESEARCH EVIDENCE

The following summarizes theoretical and empirical research that supports the Washington Afterschool and Youth Development Quality Standards. Where possible, the summary cites research conducted in afterschool and youth development settings, though relevant literature related to schools and families has also been included. Key resources for this review include studies of the characteristics of effective afterschool programs, meta-analyses or research reviews that summarize indicators of program quality based on existing literature and/or authors' experience and knowledge, and theoretical work including foundational and more recent research on learning and development.

## SAFETY & WELLNESS

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE:** Quality programs provide safe, healthy, and developmentally appropriate learning environments for all participants.

### SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Safety is critical to young people's ability to engage with and enjoy a program. When youths' basic needs for physical and emotional safety are met and they feel supported by the adults in a program, they are more likely to feel confident and be productive and engaged (Bandura, 1997; Huang et al, 2008; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Goddard, 2001; National Research Council, 2002). Feelings of safety are established both through a physical environment that is appropriate and free of hazards and through an emotional environment that is clear, consistent, and where conflict is handled effectively.

Creating an appropriate environment for learning that promotes safety and wellness includes having space that is comfortable and age appropriate for participating youth, has enough and appropriately sized furniture, and has a low adult to youth ratio (Huang et al, 2008; Miller, 2005; National Research Council, 2002; Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007).

Both parenting and classroom management literature are clear on the effectiveness of environments that combine clear structure and limits with supportive and encouraging adults (Baumrind, 2005; Marzano, 2007). Of particular importance is establishing and clearly communicating consistent rules and expectations (Miller, 2005; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993). Another important aspect of safety and wellness involves addressing conflicts when they occur and in a consistent manner. In environments where young people do not feel safe, conflicts are more likely to occur and participants may see a decrease in their ability to solve problems (Plank, Bradshaw & Young, 2009; Remple & Fisher, 1997; Vandell, Reisner & Pierce, 2007).

Finally, youth programs that offer education and support related to nutrition and healthy living help build awareness and promote participants' ability to transfer healthy practices into their daily lives (Huang et al, 2008).

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## CULTURAL COMPETENCY & RESPONSIVENESS

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE:** Quality programs respect and are responsive to the diversity of program participants, their families, and community.

### SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Cultural competency involves the ability to work effectively with participants from diverse racial, ethnic, religious, socio-economic, and other backgrounds in a manner that acknowledges and respects culturally-based beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and customs (Child Trends, 2007; Olsen, Bhattacharya, & Sharf, n.d.). Culturally competent individuals and organizations are “engaged in an intentional and continuous process of learning about and responding to the cultural contexts of the communities and people they serve (Olsen et al, n.d.)”

The presence of culturally competent staff and culturally responsive practices can influence whether youth perceive a program to be a safe place where they will be accepted, and therefore can be an important factor in participation. Programs address potential barriers by creating a welcoming environment in which young people experience meaningful inclusion in activities regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability level, or any other characteristic (National Research Council, 2002).

Beyond inclusion, research suggests that in order to support young people's self-exploration and identity development and to promote cross-cultural understanding, adults must actively serve as role models and mentors and create contexts where youth can intentionally discuss aspects of their identity (National Research Council, 2002). Intentional efforts to incorporate and reflect aspects of culture and identity, such as multicultural curricular content, can promote healthy psycho-social development and academic achievement for youth of all cultures (Child Trends, 2007; Banks et al, 2007), and some evidence suggests young people with strong ethnic identities are less likely to engage in risky behaviors (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005).

Viewing youths' backgrounds as assets in program and staff development can diminish some risk factors and heighten participants' receptivity to various interventions (Child Trends, 2007; Goldstein & Noguera, 2006). Some studies further suggest that programs with staff who understand and are reflective of participants' cultural backgrounds are likely to achieve positive outcomes related to emotional and behavioral health (Metz, Goldsmith & Arbreton, 2008).

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## RELATIONSHIPS

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE:** Quality programs develop, nurture, and maintain positive relationships and interactions among staff and participants.

### SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

A substantial research base underscores the importance of supportive relationships between program staff and youth, among youth themselves, and among program staff (Birmingham et al., 2005; Bodilly & Beckett, 2005). Trusting, positive interactions between youth and staff help youth develop affirming relationships with caring adults outside of the primary adults in their lives. Research suggests such relationships are an important protective factor (Scales, Leffert & Lerner, 2004; Gambone, Klem & Connell, 2002). Positive relationships also contribute to positive social development and help create a sense of community and of personal belonging (Wright, Deich & Szekely, 2006).

Positive peer relationships and friendships are also key to shaping students' social-emotional development (Halpern, 2004), and relationships between staff are also important. Youth observe adult behavior and learn through modeling (Bandura, 1997); therefore interactions among staff are opportunities to model positive behavior and healthy relationships for students.

Programs with positive social norms, where adult expectations for youth are high, and where young people experience a sense of belonging are associated with improved youth outcomes in several research reviews (National Research Council, 2002; Bodilly & Beckett, 2005).

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## YOUTH LEADERSHIP & ENGAGEMENT

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE:** Quality programs promote a sense of purpose and individual empowerment in youth through opportunities to engage in a rich variety of experiences, participate in planning, and exercise choice and leadership.

### SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

As noted in the discussion of cultural competence, research has demonstrated the need for young people to have opportunities to develop a sense of belonging, including participating in meaningful activities where they feel safe and welcome (National Research Council, 2002). This is evident in the school literature as well, where researchers have found a connection between students' sense of belonging in school and their academic motivation and achievement (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Goodenow, 1993).

A sense of belonging can also be supported through opportunities for leadership and authentic engagement. Research supports the notion that young people do best in environments that are responsive to their needs and ideas, but also provide age-appropriate levels of structure and supervision (Day, Peterson-Badali, & Shea, 2002; Steinberg, 2001). Students in settings where instructors provide more opportunities for students to participate, be authentically engaged, and make choices show progress on a range of academic and social and emotional indicators (National Research Council, 2002).

A substantial body of research demonstrates that young people benefit when teachers, their family, and youth workers provide them with opportunities for autonomy. Improved outcomes include increased engagement in and connection to school (Assor et al., 2002; Reeve et al., 2004; Eccles, Early, Fraser, Belansky, & McCarthy, 1997), grade point averages (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2005), intrinsic motivation (Reeve & Jang, 2006), academic competence and values (Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 1998; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2005), intrinsic motivation and persistence (Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand, & Briere, 2001), strategic thinking, and sense of agency, belonging, and competence (Larson & Hansen, 2005).

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## PROGRAM & ACTIVITIES

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE:** Quality programs offer a variety of activities that are active, developmentally appropriate, and culturally sensitive and enrich the physical, social, emotional, and creative development of all participants.

### SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Classic learning and developmental theory (Piaget, 1954; Vygotsky, 1986; Fisher, 1980) promotes the idea that young people should be actively engaged in the learning process and have access to ongoing opportunities to better understand the world around them and their place in it. More recent work by Marzano (1998) and Gardner (2011) further supports the idea that experiential learning and education utilizing a variety of learning modalities can improve student engagement and achievement.

Afterschool programs that provide sequential, focused activities that require active participation have been shown to improve youth's academic achievement and social and emotional outcomes (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Research also demonstrates that youth are likely to be engaged in programs that are well-paced, where they do not have to rush from one activity to another and on the contrary, are not given so much unstructured time they become bored and disengaged (Miller, 2005).

In addition to being active, programming should be diverse. Offering a variety of activities that foster a range of skills is supported by research, which has found variety to be connected with higher participation and motivation as well as improved student outcomes (Bodilly & Beckett, 2005; Huang et al, 2008; Birmingham, Pechman, Russell & Mielke, 2005; Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007). Activities and instructional approaches that actively promote youth planning and reflection also appear to be successful (Hattie, 2009; Marzano, 1998).

Finally, research suggests that settings that employ cooperative learning and grouping strategies can improve relationships, support improved understanding, and improve student attitudes about learning (Elhoweris, 2001; Oortwijn et al, 2008; Cohen, 1994; Slavin et al, 1996; Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Lancaster et al, 1997).

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## ASSESSMENT, PLANNING & IMPROVEMENT

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE:** Quality programs have policies and procedures in place that promote continuous improvement.

### SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Research suggests that organizations that engage in continuous improvement practices, assessment, and evaluation are likely to be of higher quality and have better student outcomes (Huang et al, 2008; National Research Council, 2002; Metz et al, 2008). Further, high quality programs tend to have high levels of program organization, including the presence of a strong leadership team that uses inclusive decision-making practices, as well as open communication between staff, parents, school day staff, and community (Huang et al, 2008).

Research on afterschool system building has found that organizations or systems that use management information systems to track student participation and gather data tend to make more collaborative decisions and are better able to engage in data-driven decision-making (Marsh et al, 2010). A randomized trial testing the effects of a continuous quality improvement intervention in a wide range of afterschool programs demonstrated that a combination of performance assessment, data-driven planning, and aligned training improves the quality of instruction and that such improvements can be sustained over time (Smith et al, 2012).

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## ONGOING STAFF & VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE:** Quality programs ensure competent, motivated, youth-centered staff, and volunteers through effective orientation, training, and a philosophy that views professional development as a journey rather than a destination.

### SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Programs that achieve a variety of positive youth outcomes have been shown to have well-trained staff who report being satisfied (Bodilly & Beckett, 2005; Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007) and who have some connection to the community or student population that the program serves (Birmingham et al, 2005). Some evidence further suggests that programs with low staff turnover and credentialed staff (more higher education participation, teacher certification) have higher levels of quality (Bodilly & Beckett, 2005; Miller, 2005).

Staff satisfaction can be derived through a strong organizational leadership that promotes inclusive decision-making, communicates the mission, and involves staff in the development and implementation of program goals (Huang et al, 2008). Further, providing staff with adequate orientation to program mission and goals and supporting them through ongoing training and professional development in core content, cultural competency, and youth development all contribute to higher quality (Huang et al, 2008).

Similarly, studies on volunteer development suggest that adult volunteers are motivated by effective training that allows them to develop skills, receive rewards, and experience social affiliation. These key motivators help support adult volunteer participation and retention (Rouse & Clawson, 1992; Hall, 1995).

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## LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE:** Effective programs have a coherent mission, well-developed systems, and sound fiscal management to support and enhance quality programming and activities for all participants.

### SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Having a clear and explicit mission that is embraced by staff and families is a hallmark of high quality programs, as is creating mechanisms for staff to be involved in organizational decision-making (Huang et al, 2008). Programming that is supported by a strong sponsoring organization that offers fiscal and human resource supports is associated with improvements in student academic achievement (Birmingham et al, 2005).

In addition, as discussed in the family, school, and community connections domain, research shows that high quality programs make intentional connections with the community in order to build partnerships, offer additional programming, and connect young people with services and resources they may not otherwise be able to access (Huang et al, 2008, Harvard Family Research Project, 2005).

Sound financial management is also critical, and many non-profits lack the staffing and tools to effectively manage these and related tasks. Investments in core administrative infrastructure and financial management capacity building strengthen nonprofits' ability to carry out their missions (Kotloff & Burd, 2012).

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## FAMILY, SCHOOL & COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE:** Quality programs establish and maintain strong, working partnerships with families, schools, and community stakeholders.

### SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

A strong body of research demonstrates that parental involvement plays a key role in school success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002) and increasingly suggests that family and community involvement may be important features of quality afterschool and youth development programs. For example, staff engagement with parents, particularly at pick-up time, has a positive impact on youth engagement in programs and on youth outcomes (Miller, 2005).

In addition, research shows that high quality programs make intentional connections with the community in order to build partnerships, offer additional programming, and connect young people with resources they may not otherwise have access to (Huang et al, 2008; Harvard Family Research Project, 2005). Extensive research points to the benefits of youth having authentic opportunities to make a difference in their community, building skills as well as a sense of efficacy and mattering (National Research Council, 2002) through after-school community service projects.

Afterschool programs with intentional connections to schools also seem more likely to achieve positive youth outcomes (Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007), especially programs that are focused on academic goals. For example, programs that are housed in schools, such as 21st CCLC programs, have been shown to improve youth outcomes when program staff form strong relationships with teachers and principals (Miller, 2005). Although a newer wave of expanded learning opportunities (ELOs) are too new to be supported by extensive research, the literature indicates that like connections to community, intentional alignment with schools can contribute to student success.

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