Illinois Statewide Afterschool Quality Standards
Resource Guide

ACT NOW!
Afterschool for Children and Teens

CONTENTS

Purpose of the Resource Guide

ACT Now is a statewide coalition that works to ensure that young people in Illinois have access to quality, affordable afterschool and youth development programs. ACT Now developed the *Illinois Statewide Afterschool Quality Standards* ("the Standards") to improve afterschool programming around the state. The Standards capture the practices that have been demonstrated, through research, to lead to quality programs and positive outcomes for children. The Standards were released in spring 2016 and can be found at www.actnowillinois.org.

This Resource Guide was developed to bring clarity and practicality to the Illinois Afterschool Quality Standards and to assist afterschool programs in implementation of the Standards. This Guide includes information to support programs that are just getting started, as well as programs that are further along the path to operating a high-quality afterschool program.

How to Use the Resource Guide

This Resource Guide presents resources, tips, activities, or reflection questions for each of the 30 Standards. The *Just Getting Started* area on each page contains introductory resources, tips, and information related to the Standards and is intended for new programs or staff who are new to their position. The other areas with reflection questions and tools are intended for all programs with varying levels of experience and at various stages of the continuous improvement process. It is not our intention for this Guide to be read cover to cover, but instead for individuals to access the sections of the Guide that are most useful to them at a given moment. For example, if you are looking for information on increasing the quality of professional development in your program, start in the Professional Development and Qualifications Core Area.

Standards and resources are always a work in progress. If you have resources or suggestions to add to the Guide, please send them to Susan Stanton (SStanton@voices4kids.org) at ACT Now.

TIP FOR USING THIS GUIDE: resources are in orange or green bold type hyperlinked for ease of use. If you are accessing a hard copy version of the Guide, type the key words of a resource into a search engine to access it.

Core Area 1 – Indoor and Outdoor Environments

The physical environment in which a program operates is a foundation for the youth's experience in a program. Indoor and outdoor environments should be able to adequately accommodate all program activities.

Program Standard 1

The program's indoor environment meets the needs of all youth and staff.

Program space should be conducive to the activities taking place during the afterschool program. This includes having appropriate storage space for all materials, as well as a safe and clean space for activities.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

➤ Have you addressed the needs of all youth in the program? Can youth manipulate the program space?

Can youth move furniture or choose to sit in large group, small group, or individual areas for different activities?

➤ Be creative!

Afterschool program staff make the most of all space available to them. For example, some programs use hallways for program activities when space is tight. Just be sure to maintain safety and align the available space with the activities you are offering.

JUST GETTING STARTED?

Check out the Community Investment Collaborative for Kids **Resource Guide: Creating Quality School-Age Child Care Space.**

Imagine: Afterschool Space That Works contains information geared toward programs serving youth age 5–14; however, it is applicable to all afterschool programs. The document includes information on designing your floor plan, things to think about when planning activities in your space, and tips on setting your indoor environment.

If you are operating a program in a GSA-owned or controlled space, access the U.S. General Services Administration **Federal Child Care Center Design Guide** for additional information.

➤ Many afterschool programs share space with schools and other programs. There are a number of things to think about when sharing space, including storage areas, flexibility of the space (e.g., are you able to move furniture?), and set-up time each day.

Refer to Standard 30, page 37, for an activity on connecting with the school-day principal about sharing space.

➤ Involve youth, especially middle and high school participants, in designing the space.

OTHER RESOURCES

Check out these **Commonly Asked Questions About Child Care Centers and the Americans with Disabilities Act**.

To see a school-based afterschool program set up their indoor space, check out this **YouTube video** from Children's Choice Child Care Services. You can read more about how they set up an inviting and engaging indoor space on their **Best Practices for an Afterschool Program Indoor Environment** page.

ACTIVITY

List your program activities in the space below. For each activity, determine the type of space you need.

ACTIVITY:	SPACE REQUIREMENTS:

Program Standard 2

The program's outdoor environment is safe and meets the needs of all youth (if applicable, as some facilities may not have access to outdoor space).

Afterschool programs operating in a school, a center, or a home should ensure that the outdoor space is safe and accessible for all youth in the program. While the following quote comes from an article focused on young children (**Benefits of Connecting Children with Nature**), it also applies to afterschool youth: "Children will be smarter, better able to get along with others, healthier, and happier when they have regular opportunities for free and unstructured play in the out-of-doors."

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

➤ As with the indoor space, the outdoor space should provide youth with choices to participate in large group, small group, or individual activities.

Think about the activities you do outside. How do you ensure that youth have choice in activities?

➤ All programs should have a procedure for how often outdoor equipment is checked for safety.

Even programs that operate in public schools should have the district and school regulations in their staff handbook.

It is important to visually inspect the outdoor space every time the group goes outside. Staff should look for debris, standing water or ice, sharp rocks and branches, ditches, and exposed power lines. A more thorough inspection should take place monthly.

➤ Program staff may find it helpful to have a checklist that includes each piece of equipment, date checked, condition of the equipment, and any follow-up items needed for each inspection. This checklist should then be kept on file to refer to.

*The **Virtual Lab School** has examples on the **Safe Environments** section of their website.*

OTHER RESOURCES

Playground Safety: Check out the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission **Playground Safety** website for additional resources. This website contains safety alerts, guides, posters, brochures, handbooks, and other materials to help you keep your playground safe.

Outdoor Activities: Tag, Red Light–Green Light, Sharks and Minnows, Hop Scotch, and Four Square are all examples of active outdoor activities. Find more **here** and **here** (or by searching "outdoor play activities for school age").

> **JUST GETTING STARTED?**
>
> While the Illinois Afterschool Quality Standards do not have a recommended amount of time for outdoor play, some states recommend that youth have a chance to play outside at least 30 minutes out of every three hours of programming. This will depend on the weather and may look different during the school year than it does during summer programming.

Core Area 2 – Safety, Health, and Nutrition

2   SAFETY, HEALTH, AND NUTRITION

Ensuring the physical safety and security of youth and staff is a necessary foundation for all programs. The Standards in this section outline the minimum needs for safe physical environments and adequate staff supervision, as well as Standards for promoting healthy environments.

Program Standard 3

The program protects the health and safety of all youth.

Programs not only provide indoor and outdoor facilities that are physically safe for youth but also have written policies that pertain to student safety and health.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

➤   Youth comments can often help staff gain a better understanding of the safety of a space. Listen for youth remarks about the temperature, light, and space.

➤   Do staff and students know where all safety and first aid equipment are located?

Consider having a designated central space, like an "information booth" or table where all safety, protocol, and pickup information can be found, including a first aid kit and other supplies.

➤   If a parent called to speak to their child in the middle of an activity, would staff know how to locate the child? It is critical to have a compre-hensive process in place to track the location of youth and how they enter and exit the program. Ensure staff conduct regular headcounts, especially when transitioning between locations.

➤   If you have your own space, consider protecting your space and youth by locking all entrances from the outside while the program is in operation. Provide staff with keys and be sure to have extra copies made that are kept secure by the site director or at another location.

➤   If you partner with a school or community center, work with them to ensure all entrances are secure. Ask for your staff to be involved in safety trainings at the school or community center.

OTHER RESOURCES

If your program operates in a school, the Illinois State Board of Education is responsible for school building safety. They have a **checklist** to identify important safety elements.

Refer to Program Standard 2 on page 5 for additional information about checking the outdoor environment. The *Things to Think About* section includes links to sample checklists for outdoor safety inspections.

JUST GETTING STARTED?

The Afterschool Alliance highlights a startup guide called **ABC…123 Starting Your Afterschool Program**. Appendix D of the Guide contains suggested items for program policies.

Program quality assessment tools often have sections that can act as a checklist for the types of procedures programs should employ to safeguard youth health and safety. One example is the Center for Youth Program Quality's **Youth Program Quality Assessment**.

Policies and procedures are discussed in more detail in the Administration Core Area, starting on page 11.

The **American Red Cross** has information related to **properly stocking a first aid kit**, as well as **Resources for Schools** with information to help educate youth (K-8th grade) on disaster safety and preparedness.

Program Standard 4

Youth are carefully supervised to maintain safety, and there are clear protocols for responding to emergency situations.

Staff and youth are familiar with supervision, health, and safety policies, including emergency procedures that may affect the entire group or an individual.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

> Afterschool programs that are housed in schools often have a policy to follow the same procedures that are followed during the school day. Be sure that all parties involved in the plan would be the same for the afterschool program.

For example, if the principal is the point person in certain situations, think about whether or not the principal will be available during the out-of-school time hours.

Partner with schools to have afterschool staff trained on school and district safety procedures and ensure staff are familiar with safety procedures and protocols.

> Program directors can set pre-scheduled emergency situation drills (e.g. fire, severe weather) to prepare staff and youth. Programs operating in a school often have this as an annual requirement.

Afterschool staff should be aware of on-site and off-site evacuation areas.

> The program should have a staff handbook that contains information related to emergency situations, including how to communicate with other staff and families.

Who will take attendance after the emergency situation? Who contacts families? Who will check the space if evacuation is necessary? Is there a designated meeting spot? Where is the program's crisis response kit (to include procedures for emergencies, contact information for key individuals, first aid kit, current roster)?

> Are there universal policies on how youth enter the program after school dismissal? Exit their activities to use the restrooms? Exit the program for final dismissal? Where do youth report after school dismissal? How do staff keep track of the youth in their activities for the day?

JUST GETTING STARTED?

Collect information prior to the start of program on authorized and unauthorized adults who should be contacted and can pick up youth either via the registration form or another method.

A staff member who is capable of representing the program should be near the site's phone at all times to take calls from parents or get in touch with the site director, as needed.

> Be sure to get feedback from staff and youth about the safety policies. If staff and youth don't understand or don't buy into these procedures, the procedures are much less likely to be enforced and successful. One way to garner buy-in is through a recipe for success described in more detail in Standard 25, page 31.

> Refer to **ABC…123 Starting Your Afterschool Program**, Appendix D, for basic information related to attendance policies in afterschool programs.

Use this space to list your program activities and transitions, the location where your activities and transitions take place, and supports needed during these times. Think about how to align your procedures for locating individuals with each location and transition.

ACTIVITY & TRANSITIONS	LOCATION	SUPPORTS NEEDED	PROCEDURES

Program Standard 5

Staff work to protect the health of all youth.

Staff receive training and support to deliver customized care that meets the needs of youth physical health.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

➤ Programs should develop a systemized way to collect and maintain information about individual youths' physical, mental, and dietary health needs across time. Be sure to discreetly share youth information with staff. There are multiple ways to collect this information:

- *Collecting from parents/guardians*
- *The youth may offer the information directly*
- *School districts are often willing to share data after signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)*

➤ While programs may have an overarching policy of no use of tobacco, alcohol, drugs, or weapons, make sure there are definitive guidelines on how to handle situations regarding possession of drugs and/or weapons by youth.

If your program operates in a school building, consult with school personnel on their policies and procedures for handling these situations. If you operate a standalone program, you'll need to determine your own policies and procedures in collaboration with your board, staff, families, and community members.

Many programs operate a "3 strikes and you're out" policy. Consider handling conflicts with youth before they happen through relationship building, peer mediation, and conflict resolution training for staff.

Colorado's Speak Now! *effort has information for parents and caregivers about how to speak with older youth (ages 9–20) about substance abuse. While the effort is geared toward individuals in Colorado, the information is relevant for a broader audience.*

OTHER RESOURCES

ABC...123 Starting Your Afterschool Program, Appendix D, has an example of a policy related to dispensing medication, which includes the following:

We will not dispense any medication to any child without advance written consent from the parent or guardian. Prescription medication may be given only to the child for whom it is prescribed. Over-the-counter medication must have the child's name clearly printed on the container. The parent must complete a "Parent Permission to Administer Medication" form, and give the form and the medication directly to the director in charge. All medication must be in its original container. If these steps are not completed, medication will not be administered.

Program Standard 6

If the program serves food, it meets the following indicators.

Food should be healthy, nutritious, and appealing to youth. Meals and/or snacks should be organized and delivered systematically. Even though the number of youth may fluctuate in an afterschool program, there should always be food and drink available for each individual.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

> If you have control over the food provided in your program, conduct a vote or poll with youth during snack/meal time about their favorite healthy snacks to help shape your purchasing decisions.

> Ensure all staff know where food allergy information for participants is located. Have a designated space where all safety, health, and protocol information can be found, including allergies and action steps listed alphabetically by participant name.

> Consider contacting local farms, or food distributors that partner with local farms, that can provide produce at affordable prices. To learn more about establishing partnership like these, go to the **Illinois Farm to School Network**.

> Afterschool programs can work toward establishing healthy food vendors for themselves and the school district and can even apply for **USDA grants**.

> For information on incorporating nutrition initiatives into your afterschool program, check out the **Healthy Choices Afterschool** publication from the National Institute on Out-of-School Time.

OTHER RESOURCES

Programs partnering with schools that offer the National School Lunch Program (through the USDA) can also get cash reimbursements to help afterschool programs serve snacks. Visit the **FAQ** page for additional information. The Illinois State Board of Education also provides more detailed information on afterschool snacks through the National School Lunch Program **here**.

The USDA and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released the **Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010** to be used when developing educational materials and to aid policymakers.

The National AfterSchool Association adopted **healthy eating and physical activity standards** in 2011.

JUST GETTING STARTED?

Afterschool programs are often eligible for free or reduced-price snacks and meals during the school and summer months. If at least half of youth participants are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch during school hours, your afterschool site can apply for the **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)** for food during the academic year. This program is run through the USDA and provides reimbursements for meals and snacks served to youth 18 or younger.

The Food and Nutrition Service website has additional information about the **School-Based Afterschool Snack Program**.

The **Summer Food Service Program** provides reimbursement for lunches during the summer months to organizations that run open- or closed-enrollment summer programs.

Core Area 3 – Administration

3 ADMINISTRATION

The program has sound administrative practices supported by well-defined and documented policies and procedures that meet the needs of staff and youth.

Program Standard 7

Program policies and procedures are responsive to the needs of all youth and families in the community.

The administrative practices of an afterschool program are its bedrock, and they provide necessary supports to the staff, youth, and partners.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

➤ While it is important to identify the needs of families when first starting a program, it is equally important to check in regularly with stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation of the program.

Consider checking in with families via phone in relevant languages to gather this information. Families' needs may include having a safe space to send their child(ren) before and after school, assistance with homework completion, serving food, or providing time for physical activities or arts.

> **JUST GETTING STARTED?**
>
> Collaborating with stakeholders to establish a clear and shared mission statement for the program is an important first step. According to the **Illinois Non-profit Principles and Best Practices** document, the mission statement should include the organization's purpose and the mission should be responsive to the constituency and communities being served.

➤ When was the last time you asked families about their child's interests and how they can contribute to the program? When they need the afterschool program (e.g., mornings, after school, weekends, during breaks, summer)? Did you ask them what would be most helpful? When will you have the opportunity to ask them again (e.g., upcoming open house, parent/teacher meetings)?

OTHER RESOURCES

A great way to collect information is through asset mapping, which is an interactive way to begin creating a vision by identifying strengths and resources in a community. The Federation for Community Schools has a tool called **Community Asset Mapping: Overview** that can get you started. There is no "right" way to make an asset map; you may find it helpful to search "asset mapping" online to find one that works for you.

Program Standard 8

The administration provides sound management of the program.

The administration should be focused on the long-term stability of the afterschool program and should include the board, director, staff, youth, and families in decision making.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

> Ensure your budgeting includes resources for program activities, as well as staff development. We know that staff are an integral part of high-quality afterschool programs. It is not only important to recruit the right staff; it is also important to provide resources for their ongoing professional development.

Be creative with resources — are there specific skills staff members have that can be shared with the staff as a whole? Are there parents or community members who will offer learning opportunities to your staff?

Have you asked staff what learning opportunities they would find most helpful?

Do you provide planning time for staff to talk with and learn from each other? Do staff have time to reflect, share how an activity is going, and seek feedback from their colleagues?

> Have your board members and staff met? Depending on the size of your organization, consider hosting an annual or bi-annual opportunity for board members and staff to mingle.

Inviting board members to a youth performance is a great way to get board members more familiar with your program.

> Think about how you can include staff, youth, and families in your evaluation activities. "Participatory planning" is a phrase that is being used widely now; it means including a broad range of stakeholders in planning processes. However, **participatory monitoring and evaluation** are just as important.

OTHER RESOURCES

The Minnesota Council of Nonprofits released a resource in 2014, **Principles & Practices for Nonprofits: A Guide for Nonprofit Staff and Board Members**, that outlines 11 accountability principles and 192 management practices.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN INVOLVE STAFF AND YOUTH IN YOUR EVALUATION ACTIVITIES?	WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN INVOLVE FAMILIES AND THE COMMUNITY IN YOUR EVALUATION ACTIVITIES?

Program Standard 9

The program develops and implements a system for promoting continuous quality improvement.

Running a quality afterschool program means having a clearly articulated plan in place, collecting data about how the program is doing, and making decisions for improvement of the program based on the data you collected.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

> A logic model is a great visual tool to show the steps that need to take place to make your program happen. Check out the Child Trends brief, **Logic Models in Out-of-School Time Programs: What Are They and Why Are They Important?** for a clear picture of what should be included in a logic model. Access the **Logic Models to Support Program Design, Implementation, and Evaluation** webinar from the Illinois Quality Afterschool website for more information. Additionally, the Afterschool Alliance has an example logic model for the **Bright Futures Program** that may be useful.

> Reference the Illinois Afterschool Quality Standards when developing your continuous improvement plan. Think about how your program is addressing each Standard to identify areas of improvement.

> There are two helpful guides to reference when selecting tools to use in your afterschool program:

- *Measuring Youth Program Quality* is a guide to use when selecting a quality assessment tool for your afterschool program. The guide provides information on 10 instruments.

- *From Soft Skills to Hard Data* is a guide to use when selecting a youth outcome measurement tool for your afterschool program. The guide provides information on eight instruments.

It is important to disseminate the results of your evaluation to key stakeholders. Think about all stakeholders who should receive information about your evaluation and then write down the best way for each stakeholder to receive the information. For example, your board and your staff should both receive information about your evaluation; however, the board might be interested in different information than your staff.

JUST GETTING STARTED?

To ensure your program has goals that are useful and meaningful for improvement, start by making all of the goals **SMART**:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**chievable
- **R**elevant
- **T**ime-Specific

Decide on an evaluation plan early on. A few questions to reflect on:

- What is the purpose of your evaluation?
- Who will conduct your evaluation?
- What are your evaluation questions?
- How will you collect program data?
- How will you collect school data?

STAKEHOLDER	DISSEMINATION STRATEGY

The purpose of your evaluation is for continuous improvement. To be used most effectively, different individuals should be involved in discussions and action planning for making changes.

WRITE DOWN EVERYONE YOU WOULD INVOLVE IN DISCUSSIONS ABOUT IMPROVING THE PROGRAM.

OTHER RESOURCES

The **Making Afterschool Programs Better** brief outlines five key components of effective afterschool programs:

- *Goals are clear*
- *Leaders are experienced*
- *The staff is experienced*
- *Program aligns to the school day*
- *Evaluation uses both internal (formative) and external (summative) methods*

Program Standard 10

Program policies and procedures are in place to protect the safety of all youth.

Afterschool programs need to establish and communicate their policies and procedures to provide the highest quality services.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

> You may need to revisit your policies and procedures throughout the course of your program. When new issues arise or new policies are implemented, you'll need to think about what makes the most sense for implementing the policies in your program. This might necessitate a new procedure.

As new policies and procedures are implemented, be sure to disseminate them to all key stakeholders.

> Think about how you communicate your policies and procedures to staff, youth, families, and partners. Many programs find it helpful to have a policies-and-procedures handbook that is distributed to all key stakeholders. Cover all policies and procedures during new-hire orientation and revisit them on a regular basis during staff meetings.

> **JUST GETTING STARTED?**
>
> **Policies** are the rules under which your program operates. **Procedures** are the ways in which your program will implement the rules.
>
> Referencing the Illinois Afterschool Quality Standards is a great place to get started. Use these as a guide when crafting your policies and procedures.
>
> You may also find it helpful to contact other afterschool programs in your area and ask them to share their policies and procedures.
>
> As mentioned throughout Core Area 2–Safety, Health, and Nutrition, refer to **ABC…123 Starting Your Afterschool Program**, Appendix D, for example policies you can reference as a starting point.

POSSIBLE CATEGORIES OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- *Facilities*
- *Development*
- *Accounting*
- *Staff/personnel*
- *Program and participant*
- *Data and evaluation*
- *External relations/liability*

DO YOU HAVE PROCEDURES FOR THESE CATEGORIES? ARE THERE ADDITIONAL AREAS OR CATEGORIES NOT LISTED HERE THAT ARE RELEVANT TO YOUR PROGRAM?

Program Standard 11

Staff receive appropriate support to make their work experience positive.

Having a positive work environment for staff at your program requires a coordinated effort that involves budgeting, management, and a process for continuous staff development.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

➤ Incorporate the Illinois Afterschool Quality Standards into your supervisory and staff meetings. The Standards can be used to inform performance and articulate to staff why certain staff behaviors and knowledge are important for the program.

➤ Think about how you track staff members' professional development plans. How are you developing a safe and supportive environment for staff so they feel comfortable talking with you?

➤ How do staff get engaged or feel invested in programming to support staff retention?

OTHER RESOURCES

The Afterschool Alliance website has a section on **Funding and Sustainability** where you can access an afterschool funding database, as well as information about sponsorship, connecting business with afterschool, and in-kind donations and partnerships.

The Wallace Foundation published a report on **The Cost of Quality Out-of-School Time Programs** that provides detailed information on what it costs to run a quality afterschool program. The study found that costs varied widely among programs and were driven by program directors' choices, available resources, and local conditions. There is an accompanying **Cost of Quality Out-of-School Time Calculator** that is an online tool similar to a student loan or mortgage calculator you can use to estimate costs.

Program Standard 12

The program maintains personnel records of all staff.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

> In addition to collecting emergency contact information, records of training and certifications, and references, think about keeping track of the skills that individual staff members possess. This information will help you stay informed about internal resources for learning events and program activities, and potentially for development opportunities.

> Develop a secure system that allows data and information to be easily accessed by identified program representatives. Some programs use online or digital systems to ensure the data is easily updated and accessible.

Programs can tailor these systems to run reports or track relevant trends that can inform program quality.

> **JUST GETTING STARTED?**
>
> Keeping updated information on staff and youth should be part of the policies and procedures in your program. Refer to Standard 10, page 15, for additional information on developing policies and procedures for your program.
>
> There are a number of ways to capture essential information (registration forms, permission or consent forms, accident report forms). An online search of any of these keywords will yield multiple examples and templates you can refer to when developing your own forms.

Program Standard 13

Files of youth contain accurate and sufficient information and are properly maintained.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

> In addition to the essential information kept on file, consider developing a portfolio on each youth participant that includes their interests, assets, and work (both in school and in the program). This will help staff members develop and strengthen relationships with all youth in the program.

WHAT TYPES OF INFORMATION DO YOU ALREADY COLLECT, EITHER FORMALLY OR INFORMALLY, ON YOUR PARTICIPANTS (E.G., GRADES, SCHOOL-DAY ATTENDANCE, SPORTS)?

WHAT ADDITIONAL INFORMATION COULD YOU COLLECT THAT WOULD BE USEFUL TO SHARE WITH STAFF?

Program Standard 14

Staff/youth ratios and group sizes permit the staff to meet the needs of youth.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

➤ Different activities will require different staff-to-youth ratios. Think about what activities are happening when determining the proper ratio.

For example, the transition time between the school day and program may allow for larger ratios (1:20), whereas a hands-on STEM activity may require smaller ratios (1:10). Ultimately, the decision about the proper ratio falls to you and your staff, and should be based on what is most helpful and safe for the specific activity.

➤ Keep in mind that volunteers will need the proper training and background checks to count toward the needed ratios.

➤ Consider participants with special needs when designating staff for activities.

> **JUST GETTING STARTED?**
>
> According to the **Illinois Early Learning Project**, for youth ages 5 and older in licensed programs, the minimum ratio is 1 staff member for every 20 youth.
>
> The Wallace Foundation's **Cost of Quality Out-of-School Time Cost Calculator** can help you think about how your ratios impact your overall costs.

HOW DO YOUR POLICIES AND PROCEDURES ADDRESS FINDING COVERAGE FOR STAFFING ABSENCES?

Core Area 4 – Professional Development and Qualifications

The program recruits and retains high-quality staff and volunteers who are focused on creating a positive learning environment, and who provide ongoing professional development based on assessed staff needs.

Program Standard 15

Staff are professionally qualified to work with all youth.

Positive relationships between youth and adults are critically important to a quality afterschool program. Developing and maintaining hiring practices for staff and volunteers will help ensure that the right staff are hired and retained.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

> Hire staff who are committed and passionate about working with young people.

As part of the interview process, have candidates facilitate an activity with a select group of young people. This will allow you to see them in action.

> Consider having a team, including other staff members and parents, interview candidates.

Questions to ask a candidate include questions about background and expertise (previous experience), as well as personal qualities (motivation, working under pressure).

> While it is sometimes tempting to allow anyone who shows interest to volunteer in the program, volunteers should also go through background checks and be selected based on their qualifications and fit with the program.

Be sure volunteers understand the mission and goals of the program.

JUST GETTING STARTED?

This report, **Examining Practices of Staff Recruitment and Retention**, found that the programs studied had hiring practices that were structured, with an application procedure and interviews.

According to **Getting It Right: Strategies for After-School Success**, the first priority of an afterschool program is to hire a full-time director.

Once a full-time director is in place, **Strong Directors/Skilled Staff: Guide to Using the Core Competencies** is a great resource for learning more about the competencies needed for staff who work in afterschool programs. This guide includes a self-assessment for both staff and supervisors.

OTHER RESOURCES

Keys to Quality Afterschool: Environments, Relationships, and Experiences has a chapter called "Using Relationships to Support Children" that includes "Tips on Building Community" and strategies staff can use to build positive relationships with youth.

The Child Trends brief **Staff Selection: What's Important for Out-of-School Time Programs?** provides additional information on recruiting and selecting staff, including the three major factors that should be considered when selecting staff: commitment to the program's mission, skills and abilities to work with youth effectively, and experience and credentials. This resource also highlights the importance of having culturally competent staff. Successful programs employ at least some staff who represent participants' cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Program Standard 16

Staff are given an orientation to the job before working with youth.

Once you hire qualified staff, you'll want to train and orient them both to the program in general and to their jobs specifically.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

> Beyond the standard requirements for orientation, what would be most useful for your staff to learn during orientation?

If you offer STEM activities, having staff actively participate in an activity that they will then facilitate is a great way to encourage engagement from the beginning.

Incorporate team building and icebreaker activities into orientation. This helps set the tone for the culture of your program and equips staff with activities to use in their activities.

> If you have experienced staff members, have them facilitate sections of orientation. This helps build capacity among staff, garners buy-in from new and experienced staff members, and provides an opportunity for experienced staff to act as mentors and coaches.

> Staff will be expected to learn a lot of information during their orientation. To assist with retention, ensure all information is documented in your staff handbook.

OTHER RESOURCES

Check out **3 Icebreakers That Will Make Your New Hire Orientation Anything but Dull** for activities geared toward adults. The three icebreakers in the article include a social scavenger hunt, a fill-in-the-blank activity, and a "new hire's got talent" activity.

JUST GETTING STARTED?

Topics to include in orientation:
- *Vision, mission, goals, and philosophy of the program*
- *Schedule, wage information, time off (sick and vacation days)*
- *Job responsibilities and reporting chain*
- *Mandated reporter training*
- *Emergency preparedness procedures and training*
- *Lesson planning and activity development*
- *Food policies (if applicable)*
- *Discipline and guidance policies*

Program Standard 17

The training needs of the staff are assessed, and training is relevant to assigned responsibilities as provided.

It is important for afterschool programs to provide time, space, and resources for ongoing and aligned professional development. Training should be offered for supervisors, front line staff, and volunteers.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

➤ To ensure professional development opportunities are aligned with staff needs, assess training needs annually.

Provide a list of categories (e.g., management, program delivery, STEM programming), as well as open-ended response options for staff to request specific types of training.

Ask staff what training they would be able and willing to provide to their peers.

➤ Be explicit about how the professional development opportunities you are offering align with staff needs and interests, as well as with the program offerings.

➤ If you are already using a program observation tool, incorporate the data you are collecting into your planned professional development offerings. For example, if you notice a theme of staff not incorporating time for reflection into program activities, consider offering a session on the topic. Or, if you see discrepancies among staff, where some staff are offering time for reflection and others are not, consider having those who are having youth reflect share their process in one of your monthly staff workshops.

JUST GETTING STARTED?
Be sure to incorporate regular professional development sessions into your staff schedule. Ideally, you should plan for: • Daily opportunities for staff to check in with each other. This can be prior to the start of or directly following activities.   • Weekly staff meetings for logistical information (e.g., upcoming holidays, new youth in the program) and peer-to-peer sharing.   • Monthly workshops for more in-depth planning and training opportunities.   The National AfterSchool Association's **Core Knowledge and Competencies for Afterschool and Youth Development Professionals** provides information related to 10 content areas needed for staff to be successful.

RESOURCES FOR ADMINISTRATORS

The National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) offers a number of **training programs**, several of which are geared toward program directors and site coordinators. The NIOST website includes descriptions of the programs and information on signing up for the sessions.

A Practitioner's Guide to Building and Managing Quality Afterschool Programs
has a section on program leadership, which includes a tool leaders can use to reflect on their own programs and practices.

RESOURCES FOR STAFF

The online **Afterschool Training Toolkit** and accompanying **Professional Development Guides** are for program directors, site coordinators, and others involved with afterschool programs. These resources can be used as guides for facilitating staff development sessions in six areas: literacy, math, science, arts, technology, and homework. The online toolkit contains videos, sample lesson plans, and research to support the practices.

A Conceptual Model for Training After-School Program Staffers to Promote Physical Activity and Nutrition describes a staff professional development training program focused on physical activity and nutrition. The model focuses on the "5 Ms": Mission, Motivate, Manage, Monitor, and Maximize.

The **Guiding Growth: Training Staff for Working With Youth in After-School Programs** is designed specifically for 4-H Extension professionals; however, it contains generalizable information and tools that all afterschool program staff can use.

CONFERENCES

While the "one and done" approach to training is not the most effective, having the opportunity to attend a statewide, regional, or national conference can be refreshing to staff who may not often have the opportunity to connect with others in a similar position. To properly incorporate conference participation into your overall staff development, develop a plan and process for individuals to share their learning with all staff. Consider these conferences:

- **Best Out-of-School Time (BOOST) Conference**

- **Coalition for Community Schools National Forum**

- **Federation for Community Schools Annual Forum**

- **Foundations Inc. Beyond School Hours Conference**

- **Illinois AfterSchool Network Annual Spring Conference**

- **National AfterSchool Association Convention**

- **21st Century Community Learning Centers Summer Institute**

Core Area 5 – Family and Community Partnerships

5	FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Meaningful family and community engagement are based on the premise that families, program staff, and community members share responsibility for the academic, physical, social, emotional, and behavioral development of youth. Family and community engagement occurs when there is an ongoing, reciprocal, strengths-based partnership. Family and community partnerships are fostered through a deliberate process that is embraced throughout the program and beyond.

Program Standard 18

The program has a systemic approach and structure for family and community engagement.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

➤ Conduct a survey of families to learn more about their needs for programming, as well as their interest in being involved. The Afterschool Alliance has **sample polling questions** to ask parents, teachers, community members, and other adults.

Find out if family members have skills (e.g., guitar, knitting, cooking) they would be interested in sharing with the program, keeping in mind that some family members may be more comfortable providing logistical or management supports (grant writing, marketing), engaging their children in learning at home, and advocating for your program to other families and community stakeholders.

➤ A **research review** examining the characteristics and activities that effectively support family engagement found that the most successful programs share a number of key characteristics. Many successful afterschool programs:

- *Promote a welcoming environment,*
- *Address misconceptions that may be held by teachers and parents about the role of parent engagement,*
- *Use resources toward supporting increased parent involvement,*
- *Understand the effect of children's home environment on their academic performance,*
- *Organize the program structure to encourage parent engagement, and*
- *Provide parents with the information and tools to support their children's academic success.*

JUST GETTING STARTED?

It is important to remember that family and community engagement is an essential component for building high quality afterschool programs and meeting student outcomes and that afterschool programs can be a critical broker between schools and families. **Afterschool: A Key to Successful Parent Engagement** contains information to help programs take a more systemic approach to family engagement in afterschool program implementation.

In the Illinois State Board of Education's **Family Engagement Framework: A Guide for Illinois School Districts, Schools and Families**, learn more about the four principles of family engagement:

1 Develop a family engagement system
2 Build a welcoming environment
3 Enhance communication
4 Include parents in decision making

The Guide also contains family engagement standards of effective practice that will be helpful as you plan, implement, and evaluate family engagement strategies. Meaningful and effective family engagement cannot be measured by the number of activity offerings or parent participation.

OTHER RESOURCES

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships provides information about the challenges to overcome and conditions needed to support partnerships, as well as desired goals and capacity-building outcomes.

Program Standard 19

The program builds a welcoming environment that is responsive to youth and family needs.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

> For some parents, particularly those who struggled in school themselves or may not have grown up in the United States, the school may not feel like a particularly welcoming place. After-school programs can help bridge the gap by offering a welcoming environment and more informal setting.

Developing relationships with parents and other family members can encourage them to communicate more frequently with school-day teachers.

> There is information related to creating an inviting and engaging indoor space for young people in Standard 1, page 3. Think about how this information also applies to working with families and community.

JUST GETTING STARTED?

Think about how your program looks from an outside perspective and the structures you put in place to establish a welcoming environment and relational trust with families. Is there someone greeting families as they enter the program? Do staff members call parents by name?

Think about hiring and developing family-focused staff members. **Focus on Families! How to Build and Support Family-Centered Practices in After School** provides tips on how to do this:

- Designate a staff member with family engagement responsibility.
- Hire staff with family engagement experience.
- Hire staff who share parents' experiences and backgrounds.
- Foster professional development.

REFLECT

HOW DO YOU AND YOUR STAFF CURRENTLY SHARE YOUTH ACCOMPLISHMENTS WITH FAMILY MEMBERS? BRAINSTORM ADDITIONAL WAYS YOU CAN SHARE THIS INFORMATION.

Program Standard 20

Staff engage in ongoing and meaningful two-way communication with families to support youth learning and healthy development.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

➤ Having a staff member who is in charge of family and community partnerships helps the program stay up to date with this information. A designated point person can maintain relationships, ensure the program is being responsive to family needs, and also help the program interact with the community.

➤ Think about how you can connect families to other services in the community. This may include affordable health benefits or dental care, adult education courses, assistance finding preschools for younger children, or housing assistance.

JUST GETTING STARTED?

Use these tips from **Focus on Families! How to Build and Support Family-Centered Practices in After School** to communicate and build trusting relationships with families:

- Make a regular effort to share positive news with each parent about their child.
- Welcome parents. Greet them in the front of the room or building when they arrive. Always call parents by name and make a point of smiling.
- Conduct periodic family orientations to familiarize new families with the program. Ask current program family members to help you present the materials.

Use communication practices that are sensitive to the diverse language and cultural backgrounds of the families they serve.

THINK ABOUT HOW THE STAFF IN YOUR PROGRAM CAN CONNECT WITH SCHOOL-DAY TEACHERS (E.G., STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAYS, HOSTING A TEACHER APPRECIATION EVENT). HOW CAN YOU ENCOURAGE SHARING BETWEEN SCHOOL-DAY TEACHERS AND AFTERSCHOOL STAFF?

OTHER RESOURCES

In addition to information about the different types of family engagement, **Focus on Families! How to Build and Support Family-Centered Practices in After School** also contains information on why it is important to engage families, promising practices for engaging families, profiles of programs that engage families, and using evaluation to improve family engagement efforts.

Program Standard 21

A quality program develops, nurtures, and maintains strong relationships with community organizations to fully support youth.

Afterschool programs that take the time to develop and put in place management and infrastructure supports to support family and community engagement and a shared responsibility for the success of youth are more likely to sustain initiatives over time.

JUST GETTING STARTED?	
Work with your advisory board to brainstorm the potential partnership opportunities in your community. Record your ideas below.	
Major businesses	*Public services*
Other afterschool programs	*Major civic and professional organizations*
Religious groups	*Media*
Colleges and universities	*Artistic organizations*
Organizations serving senior citizens	

OTHER RESOURCES

See **A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement** for information on the impact of parent and community involvement on student achievement.

Check out **Edutopia's Service Learning website** to learn more about how to design projects to boost civic engagement through service learning.

Core Area 6 – Youth Development, Programming, and Activities

| 6 | YOUTH DEVELOPMENT, PROGRAMMING, AND ACTIVITIES |

The program staff acts in partnership with youth to create a high-quality learning environment, and implements age-appropriate curricula and program activities that adhere to the typical benchmarks of growth and development and meets the multiple development needs of youth.

Program Standard 22

Staff encourages all youth to make thoughtful and responsible decisions.

Youth are provided with opportunities for input into their program and activities; they also participate in authentic leadership roles.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

➢ Staff should include designated time for youth reflection during daily program activities. These reflections can focus on the participant's feelings about the day's activities, summaries of what they have learned, and how this information connects back to prior knowledge or their lives. Here are some examples of different types of **reflection questions** and **reflection activities**.

➢ Through the **Mikva Challenge**, youth in the After School Matters program formed an advisory council, which created a guide to improve youth workers' program facilitation skills. Consider forming an all-youth advisory council or including youth in a stakeholder council that provides input into program decision-making.

➢ Allow youth to be "teacher for a day," where they lead an activity or a portion of an activity. This can be something as simple as choosing and leading an icebreaker or reflection activity.

> **JUST GETTING STARTED?**
>
> Provide a basic understanding of youth development to staff, with a shared definition of, and collaborative discussions about, how the program can support positive youth development. **The Community Action Framework for Youth Development** provides one broad model for how youth development can occur.
> **Keys to Quality Youth Development** uses a framework of eight principles of positive youth development and provides examples of how programs can incorporate them into daily practices.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

"In high quality programs staff share control of most activities with youth, providing guidance and facilitation while retaining overall responsibility (e.g., staff uses youth leaders, semiautonomous small groups or individually guided activities). Staff provide multiple opportunities for youth (individual or group) to make plans for projects and activities (e.g., how to spend their time, how to do a task). All youth have the opportunity to make at least one open-ended content choice within the content framework of the activities (e.g., youth decide topics within a given subject area, subtopics, or aspects of a given topic). All youth have the opportunity to make at least one open-ended process choice (e.g., youth decide roles, order of activities, tools or materials, or how to present results). Staff initiates structured opportunities for youth to give feedback on the activities (e.g., staff asks feedback questions, provides session evaluations)" (David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, 2012: **Download PQA**; Smith & Hohmann, 2005: **Full Findings from the PQA Validation Study**; High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2005: **Excerpt from Validation Study**).

Program Standard 23

Programs provide flexible and supportive activities for all youth.

While challenging and structured, programs still allow for flexibility in activities to allow youth to drive and complete work in a manner that is best suited to them.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

> Ensure the needs of all youth are met as soon as they enter the program. Design your space to cater to each type of youth:

- *Snackers – youth who need food as soon as they get to the program*
- *Rappers – youth who need to talk about their day*
- *Lappers – youth who need to be active (e.g., do laps)*
- *Nappers – youth who need time to decompress and rest*

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

Researchers have found that high-quality programs generally implement activities that are sequenced, active, focused, and explicit (SAFE). These high-quality programs sequenced activities to achieve skill objectives and used active forms of learning. At least one program component was focused on developing personal or social skills and explicitly targeted specific personal or social skills. Programs with these SAFE elements have demonstrated improved youth outcomes in areas of feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem, school bonding, positive social behaviors, school grades, and achievement test scores, together with reduced problem behaviors and drug use (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007: **The Impact of After-School Programs That Promote Social and Emotional Skills**; Larson & Verma, 1999: **How Children and Adolescents Spend Time Across the World**; Miller, 2003: **Critical Hours: Afterschool Programs and Educational Success**).

> **JUST GETTING STARTED?**
>
> Allow youth to select from a variety of interesting and developmentally appropriate activities of their choosing, working in groups or alone.
>
> Have clear activity goals but still "allow students to progress at their own pace to set and achieve their individual goals (**Afterschool Alliance, 2011**)."

TO DETERMINE IF ACTIVITIES ARE SAFE, ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1 IS THERE A SCAFFOLDED, STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH TO LEARNING THE DESIRED SKILL?

2 HOW WILL YOUTH PRACTICE THIS NEW SKILL?

3 ARE THERE CLEAR PERIODS OF TIME FOR EACH PART OF THE ACTIVITY, WITH PLANNED TRANSITIONS?

4 ARE THE SKILLS YOUTH WILL BE LEARNING MADE CLEAR TO THEM?

Program Standard 24

The program is intentional about creating a positive afterschool climate that is emotionally and physically safe and that supports and accelerates student academic, social, and emotional learning.

Staff ensure that youth are engaged in activities that develop interests and skills that prepare them for the future. To do so, there are intentional connections made between program activities and school-day learning, with an emphasis on social and emotional learning (SEL) and personal relevancy. These goals are shared with families in order to help facilitate continuous growth.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

➤ Preparing Youth to Thrive: Promising Practices for Social and Emotional Learning is a field guide for afterschool programs working with teens. The guide contains key practices for staff, narratives from staff and youth, and curriculum features important for supporting social and emotional learning practices.

➤ In Families and Expanded Learning Opportunities: Working Together to Support Children's Learning, the authors point out that tracking youth performance and learning progress at school, in the program, and at home and sharing the data will help tailor support services to individual needs.

➤ Working with middle and high school youth? Check out **Engaging Older Youth: Program and City-Level Strategies to Support Sustained Participation in Out-of-School Time**.

JUST GETTING STARTED?

Consider working with staff to recognize key areas in the program that align to relevant academic standards. Illinois has adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and its science standards are based on **Next Generation Science Standards** (NGSS). In particular, the CCSS **Standards for Mathematical Practice** and **English Language Arts capacities** and the **NGSS crosscutting concepts** offer skills and broad knowledge that are applicable to situations across content and are applicable to a variety of afterschool programs.

Visit the Illinois State Board of Education list on **SEL goals, standards, and descriptors for K–12 youth** to gain a better understanding of potential collaborations with schools. **The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning** also offers a variety of SEL resources.

OTHER RESOURCES

American Institutes for Research developed a series of briefs and accompanying tools on how afterschool programs can support social and emotional development. Information can be accessed on the webpage **Beyond the Bell: Turning Research Into Action in Afterschool and Expanded Learning**.

An additional, related resource from American Institutes for Research is the **Ready to Assess suite of tools**. This resource includes a brief, decision tree, and tools index to help schools, districts, and states decide whether and how to assess social and emotional development.

Asia Society's **Global Competence in Expanded Learning Time** is a guide for educators and school leaders that provides guidance on better preparing youth for participating and succeeding in a global society.

According to the **Partnership for 21st Century Learning**, 21st century skills are the essential abilities that are needed to successfully negotiate the worlds of school, work, and home. Learn more in **21st Century Knowledge and Skills in Educator Preparation**. Have your staff reflect on how they help build all of these competencies in youth:

- *Thinking critically and making judgments*
- *Solving complex, multidisciplinary, open-ended problems*
- *Creativity and entrepreneurial thinking*
- *Communicating and collaborating*
- *Making innovative use of knowledge, information, and opportunities*
- *Taking charge of financial, health, and civic responsibilities*

REFLECT

HOW ARE YOU CURRENTLY CONNECTING WITH FAMILIES ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN?

WHAT ARE SOME ADDITIONAL WAYS YOU COULD CONNECT WITH FAMILIES TO FACILITATE YOUTH ACADEMICS AND SEL?

Program Standard 25

Staff relate to all youth in positive ways.

In programs that foster positive environments, there is clear evidence of mutual respect between staff and youth. Staff think strategically about their personal actions and activities, and how these can foster inclusion of youth from different religions, ethnicities, classes, genders, abilities, appearances, and sexual orientations. Staff always aim to involve all youth in activities. For youth who appear disengaged, staff try to understand the cause and offer alternatives or help students ease into the activity at a slower pace.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

➤ Reflect on how your program exhibits some of the basic qualities of a positive environment. When you walk into an activity, are students and staff smiling and laughing? Do staff greet all students by name? When a student is absent for more than one day do staff let them know they were missed?

➤ On the first day of programming or at the beginning of each session, youth and staff can work together to create norms referred to as a Recipe for Success or Community Contract. Working on this together allows for greater buy-in from youth because there are agreed upon expectations of behavior and appropriate consequences. Have all youth sign their names, and place the contract in a visible place.

> **JUST GETTING STARTED?**
>
> Staff can encourage positive behaviors in youth by providing positive reinforcement that is timely, specific, and effort based. Instead of saying "good job," staff should consider saying something like, "It's clear that you put a lot of hard work and thought into this design, which helped it turn out so well," or "I am impressed by the way you are communicating your ideas clearly and listening to others."
>
> Choosing a detailed description of praise helps youth understand the specific behaviors that are valued, and that effort leads to skills — that they are not innate.

➤ Have staff use the **Self-Reflection Tool for Afterschool Staff** to think about their own social and emotional competencies and ability to support youth in the program.

Staff can observe each other and share observations from the activity. Staff members can then discuss how the activity was facilitated, what can be improved, and what they learned from each other.

➤ **Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships and Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools** is a toolkit to help educators incorporate restorative practices into their classroom, curriculum, and culture of the school. Restorative practices can help create safe learning environments. These practices can help address behavior issues and interpersonal disputes.

REFLECT

CONSIDER HOW YOU MIGHT GAUGE A POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUR PROGRAM. WHAT ARE SOME AREAS YOU CAN IMPROVE?

Program Standard 26

There are sufficient materials to support program activities.

In order to facilitate learning, a complete set of developmentally appropriate materials are provided to all youth.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

➤ Observe whether your materials are truly appropriate and interesting to youth. Just because youth are visibly excited and interested in materials does not mean they are age appropriate. Furthermore, offering hands-on activities does not necessarily mean that youth are challenged and developing skills. A first step to remember is, "whoever is doing the most talking is doing the most learning."

Do materials support multiple ways of learning and open-ended play? Are materials relevant to the community and the culture of youth in the program?

➤ Many national chains (e.g., grocery stores, Home Depot, Walmart) will donate gift cards of small amounts to non-profit organizations that can provide copies of their 501(c)(3) non-profit tax exempt status (usually at the beginning of the month). Banks will also often donate pens and local bakeries will donate baked goods at the end of the day. Track all donations for organizations' later tax purposes.

➤ Identify and help write grants in partnerships with schools, districts, or cities to win money or supplies that can be used collaboratively.

OTHER RESOURCES

The **California Afterschool Network** and **BOOST Collaborative** maintain a list of rolling funding opportunities for afterschool programs.

The Freecycle Network allows individuals to post items online they are giving away for free. Membership is free, and the movement is local to a specific community and is run by a team of volunteers. You can find your community by going to the website.

Age Determination Guidelines: Relating Children's Ages to Toy Characteristics and Play Behavior contains information on appropriate materials and toys for youth through age 12.

Program Standard 27

Program activities and curricula integrate a variety of areas (e.g., recreation and fitness, fine arts, academic support, life skills, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), and personal growth and development), ensuring that the physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and creative domains are addressed in a comprehensive manner.

Activities are developmentally and culturally relevant and based in best-practice research. Staff support individual learning styles, abilities, and interests of youth throughout the curricula.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

➤ Programs have better youth outcomes when they monitor and incorporate research-based best practices in the field of youth development and 21st century skills. Stay up to date on current research through organizations like **American Institutes for Research**, the **Afterschool Alliance**, and the **Forum for Youth Investment**.

JUST GETTING STARTED?			
It's easier than you may think to incorporate multiple subject areas and skills into activities. For a cooking program, staff can integrate life skills, math, science, chemistry, and fine arts through using and writing recipes, as well as creating experiments with different amounts of ingredients and chemical reactions. Youth can then create a final presentation that visually represents their findings. Regardless of subject matter, programs can integrate 10 minutes of active team-building activities each day to help build fitness and SEL. Have staff create a grid with their activities on the left side, and different subjects across the top. Once staff have identified the overlap, have them return and list the skills developed under each subject.			
ACTIVITY	MATH	HISTORY	LIFE SKILLS
Bracelet making	How many yards of string will youth need to make bracelet? Convert yards to feet. Review the importance of precision in measuring. *SKILL: conversion; using a ruler*	What types of bracelets do other cultures wear? *SKILL: public speaking; online research; possibly writing or drawing*	Ask students to determine the price they would sell their bracelets for. Ask for hypotheses and then work through the cost/profit margin. *SKILL: adding and subtracting; comparing and contrasting models*

OTHER RESOURCES

The **What Works Clearinghouse** provides research reviews on different academic products, practices, and policies in education. The research can help programs make decisions on whether certain curricula or strategies are evidenced based and an appropriate match.

If you are considering incorporating project-based learning into your program, visit the **Buck Institute for Education** for additional supports, including things to read (blogs, articles), things to watch (videos, webinars), and things to interact with (project planner, online classes).

Enhancing Cultural Competence in Out-of-School Time Programs: What Is It, and Why Is It Important? illustrates the importance of cultural competencies for afterschool programs, and a few recommendations on how to build it in your organization.

Core Area 7 – Partnerships With Schools

Quality afterschool programs create structures for formal and ongoing communication, collaboration, and information sharing with school staff to strengthen continuity in student learning. A program has its staff work closely with school staff to ensure academic components and activities are aligned with and complement school standards, curricula, and the continuous improvement planning process.

Program Standard 28

The program maintains two-way/reciprocal communication with school-day staff to monitor academic and behavioral progress of youth.

The program works to build relationships with the school that include regular communication between program staff, school-day educators, and the school administration. These exchanges help the program identify youth needs and monitor progress.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

➤ Communication with school staff at every level should be ongoing—not only when the program has a question or a request. Custodians, administrative assistants, and cafeteria workers are also vital sources of information about youth, school culture, and access to space.

➤ Many program leaders find it helpful to make presentations to school-day principals and teachers about the afterschool program. You can include information about your activity offerings, the youth you are serving, upcoming events, and evaluation results.

When scheduling meetings with principals, keep in mind how busy they are. It might be necessary to have a walking meeting with the principal during the principal's rounds in the morning or evening.

➤ Programs that offer homework assistance may consider having a form to encourage communication between school-day teachers and afterschool staff. You can include things like homework assignments, readings, and class projects, as well as an area for notes.

➤ You can stamp homework assignments with a "Completed in ABC Afterschool Program" stamp as a means of communication and a way to remind teachers about the good work of the program.

JUST GETTING STARTED?

Advocate for data sharing practices with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) about the types of data and ways the data can be shared. Student data provide valuable insight on program outcomes that helps shape program design.

Branding can help your program forge connections with schools. If staff recognize your branding and form positive associations, it will be easier to foster working relationships. Make sure school staff can accurately describe and represent your program, as they are often important liaisons with youth and parents.

OTHER RESOURCES

The **You for Youth website** contains a section on **Involving Day Schools, Families, and Communities** in homework time, including a **Conversation Starter on Homework Help** tool.

The online **Afterschool Training Toolkit** has information on school-day and afterschool program staff coordinating around homework.

ACTIVITY

Learn how you can better communicate school and program needs by first understanding how the school operates. Review responsibilities of the school and the program and develop shared expectations for program implementation. Some questions to consider include:

- *What is our regular schedule for meetings and how are we preparing?*
- *What is the budgeting process and responsibilities?*
- *What are the processes for obtaining adequate space?*
- *Who is involved in programming and staffing decisions?*
- *Who and what will be involved in recruiting youth?*
- *What materials will be provided and what are we expected to provide ourselves?*
- *What are procedures for dealing with serious youth issues or conflict?*

Program Standard 29

School-day and afterschool programs collaborate on curriculum planning and development to strengthen continuity around youth learning and development.

Program staff actively pursue opportunities to support the school's improvement processes. As part of this practice, program staff endeavor to understand the school-day curriculum and work to complement it with their own afterschool curriculum.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

> Develop a simple system for program staff and school staff to communicate about youth achievements, behavior, or attendance.

There are various ways to share information (e.g., forms that are sent between the program and school staff, a point person in the afterschool program checking in with teachers in the school for updates, afterschool staff attending school-day meetings and vice versa), and not all of them will work for your program. It may take a couple attempts before finding something that works for you.

> Ask to attend professional development sessions at the school. This will help you stay up to date on current social and academic school policies. Joining these sessions may also give you the chance to meet a diverse range of teachers. When appropriate, ask to present at a teacher meeting. Survey teachers and school leaders on their desired academic and SEL outcomes for the year, and use this information to help align your program offerings.

> Consider hiring a school staff member to act as a liaison between the program and school. This individual may serve in a professional development, administrative, or advisory role.

APPLY IT

Talk to teachers at the school(s) your youth attend during the day. What do they wish they had more time to address during the day? Use this information to inform activity planning. For example, are youth working on fractions during the school day? How might that be applied to hands-on and engaging activities during the afterschool program? A few examples include cooking, mosaics, and construction projects. Use this space to record your ideas about aligning activities with the school-day curriculum.

JUST GETTING STARTED?

If you partner with a school, read the school improvement plan to familiarize yourself with the goals and strategic plan.

Become familiar with the school's performance data by accessing the **Illinois Report Card**.

Program Standard 30

The program staff coordinates effective use of services and programs toward aligned goals.

Program staff maintain regular communication with the school principal and administration to align school goals with program goals.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

> Discuss the administration's goals for the upcoming year and how your program may be able to support them. Be firm in your established program goals, but recognize the areas in which you can collaborate with schools.

For example, there might be certain students that the administration would like to get involved in your program or a specific math concept that the school is trying to reinforce that your program can promote.

> If you have evaluations in place, be sure to share your data in a timely manner with schools. Often principals can include this information in their school progress reports to the district.

ACTIVITY

In addition to your ongoing communication, connect with the principal(s) at the school(s) you partner with at the beginning of each school year. Use this time to clearly outline, in writing, the responsibilities of the school, the responsibilities of the program, and shared responsibilities. Tasks to discuss include:

- *Securing space for afterschool activities*
- *Informing school-day teachers that their classrooms will be used*
- *Providing supplies and materials for the program*
- *Handling discipline issues that arise in the program*
- *Communicating with families about the content of the program*
- *Recruiting youth for the program*
- *Deciding on the type of activities to be offered*
- *Hiring and supervising program staff members*
- *Registering participants for the program*
- *Defining the program staff's training needs*

JUST GETTING STARTED?

Always have a clear agenda that is decided upon prior to a formal meeting with school staff, and summarize the decisions and next steps at the end of the meeting.

Attend and participate in school and community events. Parent nights are a great way to introduce families to your program and sign youth up. Once established, offer to host an event or student fundraiser for the school to demonstrate the reciprocal nature of your relationship.

You can use the **Illinois Report Card** to learn more about the unique landscape of the schools in your area. This background knowledge will be helpful in making plans to partner with the schools.

ACTNOW!
Afterschool for Children and Teens