**Statewide Afterschool Quality Standards**

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 has undertaken an initiative to develop Quality Standards in order to improve afterschool programming around the state. Our Quality Standards capture practices that have been demonstrated, through research, to lead to quality programs and positive outcomes for children.

**Research shows that quality afterschool programs increase positive outcomes for youth.**

* Quality afterschool programming provides enrichment activities, opportunities that increase self-esteem and prevent risky behaviors, time for recreational activities that promote healthy development and team building, and a chance to build on school day learning by explaining academic concepts through hands-on activities.
* It is not enough for communities to just have access to afterschool programs. Communities need access to consistent and high-quality programs that benefit youth socially, emotionally, and academically.

**The Standards are broken into seven overarching categories or Core Areas that represent the key areas of quality for programs.** The seven Core Areas are:

* Indoor and Outdoor Environments
* Safety, Health, and Nutrition
* Administration
* Professional Development and Qualifications
* Family and Community Partnerships
* Youth Development, Programming, and Activities
* Partnerships with Schools

**The Standards were written for use by various groups.** The following is a list of ways different stakeholders can use the Standards:

* **Afterschool Providers:** Develop a quality improvement plan, determine areas of strengths and weaknesses, and decide on areas of professional development to pursue for staff
* **Parents and Families:** Understand the key elements of a high-quality program and be able to advocate for quality programs for their children and within their own communities
* **Funders and Policymakers:** Link funding to research-based practices that lead to measurable outcomes and evaluate and improve programs
* **K-12 Educators:** Understand the key elements of high-quality programs, provide a common language for partnership, and provide a guide to reinforce and advance key priorities
* **Higher Education:** Assist in designing content for courses related to youth development providers and in choosing strategic partners for research initiatives

**The following programs and organizations have committed to use the Quality Standards as a common language for describing quality and as a “high bar” to reflect upon on in improving their practices in order to promote quality improvement in the afterschool field and achieve better outcomes for youth:**

1. Illinois Collaboration on Youth
2. The Hub Project, Rochelle, IL
3. Holy Cross/Immaculate Heart of Mary Youth Program, Chicago, IL
4. Illinois Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs
5. Citizen Schools Illinois
6. United Way of Illinois
7. Fight Crime: Invest in Kids – Illinois
8. Children’s Home + Aid
9. Marillac St. Vincent Family Services, Chicago, IL
10. Spark Chicago
11. Illinois State Alliance of YMCAs
12. YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago
13. Columbia College Chicago Community Schools
14. After-School All-Stars of Chicago
15. Project Success of Vermilion County
16. American Institutes for Research
17. Project Scope (Springfield, IL)
18. Chicago Public Schools
19. Chicago Lights
20. Erie Neighborhood House, Chicago, IL
21. Gary Comer Youth Center, Chicago, IL