

# Florida Standards for Quality Afterschool Programs



**Florida After School, Inc.**  
**FLafterschool.com**

**3RD EDITION**



Florida After School, Inc. (formerly known as the Florida Afterschool Network) was established in 2005 to provide unified leadership to advocate for the development, enhancement, sustainability and accessibility of evidence-based, high-quality afterschool and summer learning programs and policies statewide. Its vision is for every child in Florida to have quality afterschool opportunities that are accessible, affordable, accountable and inclusive.

The work contained in this publication would not have been possible without the input, advice and recommendations from multiple individuals, organizations and agencies. The culminating work, now in its third edition, is endorsed by the following:



- Association of Early Learning Coalitions
- Children’s Forum
- Florida After School Alliance
- Florida Alliance of Boys and Girls Clubs
- Florida Children’s Council
- Florida Department of Children and Families
- Florida’s Office of Early Learning
- Hillsborough County Public Schools
- Roundtable of St. Lucie County
- United Ways of Florida
- YMCAs of Florida

# FLORIDA STANDARDS FOR QUALITY AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

The Florida Standards for Quality Afterschool Programs define the core principles and best practices that lead to the delivery of quality programming for children in Pre-K through 5th grade afterschool programs. These standards provide a framework for the development of a caring, dynamic, stimulating and safe afterschool environment for children and youth. Research-based outcomes for such afterschool programs include: children and youth who are connected and engaged; parents who feel their children are safe and secure; and families who have a sense of pride and ownership of the program.

We recognize that each afterschool program is unique with varying missions, philosophies, and local/ state regulations; and that they serve wide and diverse populations, ethnicities, age ranges, interests and values. These standards are not intended to dictate policy and practice. They are intended to suggest and offer a strong foundation for quality programming.

**The standards are organized into seven (7) categories.**

- 1. Administration and Organization
- 2. Program Management and Staff
- 3. Communication and Interaction
- 4. Program Structure and Activities
- 5. Health, Safety and Nutrition
- 6. Program Environment
- 7. Family and Community Involvement

Each of the seven categories begins with a guiding principle that defines the intent of the category, followed by key indicators that reflect quality afterschool programming. There is a glossary at the end to help define commonly used words in the afterschool sector and clarify meaning. Collectively, the standards are broad-based, allowing for, encouraging and celebrating the uniqueness of each program.

Implementation is voluntary and a self-assessment tool is available on our website. It is our hope that the standards are of such value that afterschool programs will want to implement some, if not all, to ensure accessible, affordable, accountable and inclusive afterschool for all. Parents and guardians can also utilize the publication as a guide when selecting an afterschool program for their children.



# QUALITY STANDARD

# 1



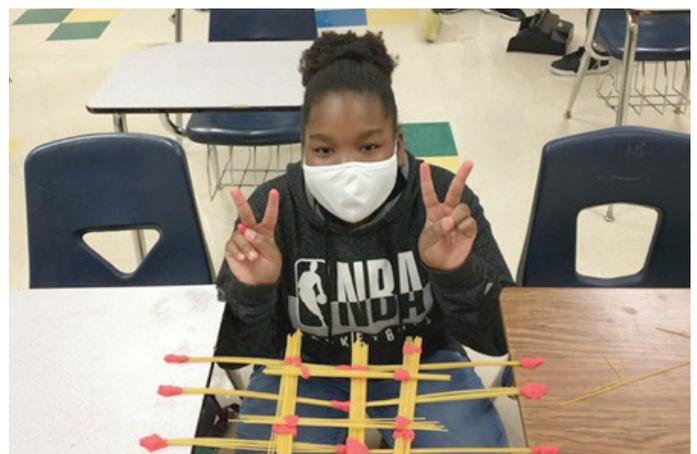
## 1. ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANIZATION

### Guiding Principle:

Provide a solid framework for equitable afterschool programming; state a mission, philosophy, and goals, in accordance with local and state regulations.

### Key Indicators:

1. The program has a written mission statement based on its philosophy and goals.
2. The program involves children, families and staff in planning and implementing safe, educational and inclusive activities that are consistent with the program's mission statement.
3. The program has established written goals that are measurable, aligned with the mission statement and help the program achieve sustainability.
4. The program has a written code of conduct, with policies and procedures for children, families, staff and volunteers.
5. The program has established sound fiscal and business practices to ensure continued and sustained program operations.
6. The program collects written feedback through surveys, parent conferences and/or other forms of communication.
7. The program has implemented a written evaluation system to determine whether its mission and goals are being achieved.
8. The program has developed relationships with community and business leaders to ensure program enhancement and sustainability.





# QUALITY STANDARD

# 2

## 2. PROGRAM MANAGEMENT AND STAFF

### Guiding Principle:

Employ qualified administrative and afterschool educators who are focused on the needs of children, families, and fellow staff.

### Key Indicators:

1. The program documents the daily arrival and departure of individual children. Children are released only to authorized persons designated by parent(s) or guardian(s) in writing.
2. The program provides qualified staff to supervise children at all times, recognizing that, staff-to-child ratios vary according to ages, abilities and the type and complexity of activities being presented. *Florida After School recommends the program maintains a minimum ratio of one (1) direct service staff member for every twenty (20) children.*
3. The program implements a written professional development plan based upon the **Florida Standards and Key Competencies for Afterschool Educators**, or local competencies, if in place. The professional development plan ensures staff meet all local/state regulated training requirements. *The Florida After School recommends staff participate in a minimum of fifteen (15) hours of relevant training per year.*
4. In addition to written job descriptions and personnel policies, the program has policies and a parent handbook that further explain staff roles. The program provides annual written evaluations for all staff.
5. The program has written documentation that staff and volunteers comply with all local and state regulated background screening and fingerprinting requirements as well as drug testing regulations and program policies.
6. The program conducts monthly staff meetings with agendas and documented staff attendance.
7. The program is ADA compliant and no child is excluded from the program, regardless of the level or severity of disability, provided they can be safely accommodated.

# QUALITY STANDARD

# 3



## 3. COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION

### Guiding Principle:

Provide ways to foster and enhance respectful communication, trauma-informed care, sense of belonging and safety, and positive interactions among children and youth, families and staff while recognizing that people often have many types of trauma in their lives.

### Key Indicators:

1. The program encourages appropriate verbal, non-verbal and written communication in a professional manner.
2. Afterschool educators engage with all children in positive and respectful ways through listening, acceptance and appreciation, and help children develop a sense of belonging.
3. As role models for children, staff engage other staff in an appropriate and professional manner.
4. Afterschool educators respond appropriately to the individual needs of children, recognizing their special interests, feelings, abilities and cultures. Staff understand, celebrate and reflect diversity and foster inclusion.
5. Afterschool educators encourage children to take initiative, make choices, be responsible and take on challenging tasks and activities.
6. Afterschool educators communicate and reinforce clear limits and rules, and apply an approach to behavioral management that includes positive reinforcement and intentional social-emotional skill-building. Positive techniques are used to guide the behavior of children by setting appropriate limits and encouraging children to choose positive behaviors.
7. Afterschool educators interact with children using various approaches to help them learn to think for themselves, develop problem solving skills and improve language skills through frequent conversation. Staff encourages children to resolve their own conflicts.
8. Afterschool educators provide opportunities for children and youth, families and other staff to interact with each other in positive ways.
9. Program services are delivered in a culturally competent way (i.e. bilingual staff members, forms available in multiple languages, culturally competent service delivery, and activities that reflect the language and culture of the families being served).
10. Program administrators communicate respectfully with all children, staff and volunteers.



# QUALITY STANDARD

# 4

## 4. PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND ACTIVITIES

### **Guiding Principle:**

Planning of safe, equitable, inclusive and developmentally appropriate social, recreational, and educational opportunities.

### **Key Indicators:**

1. The program offers developmentally appropriate activities that reflect the mission and goals of the program.
2. The program posts a daily schedule that is flexible and contains transitions that help children move smoothly from one activity to another.
3. The program allows children to choose their own activities from a daily schedule that offers both indoor and outdoor activities and variety of social, recreational, and educational opportunities.
4. The program offers supports in core academic areas and life skills as well as in broad enrichment opportunities.
5. The program offers scheduled time in an appropriate environment for academic support and/or homework assistance.
6. The program provides planned daily recreation, sports, or fitness activities.
7. The program includes a sufficient amount of materials and equipment that are developmentally appropriate, accessible, and in good working order.
8. The program has procedures for collecting observation and assessment data to inform improvement of instructional practices. Afterschool educators are responsive to information collected and trained to adapt and modify curriculum and the learning environment in order to reach all children.
9. Additional supports and assistive technology are provided, as needed.
10. When on field trips, all precautions are taken to ensure the safety of children, including additional staff supervision as necessary. The program has written policies and procedures to transport children safely and complies with all local and state requirements for vehicles and drivers.

# QUALITY STANDARD

# 5



## 5. HEALTH, SAFETY, AND NUTRITION

### **Guiding Principle:**

Provide developmentally appropriate environments that protect and enhance the safety, physical and social emotional health of children, and meet local and state requirements.

### **Key Indicators:**

1. The program has written health, safety and nutrition policies available to families.
2. The program establishes policies and procedures to comply with established laws for the documentation and notification of suspected abuse, neglect, and physical, verbal and sexual harassment.
3. The program has a written and accessible emergency management plan, which includes up-to-date, relevant contact information for everyone involved with the program.
4. The program has staff certified in CPR and First Aid available and accessible to the children at all times.
5. The program has a written medical policy, which includes, at a minimum, a plan to ensure medication is provided in the original container, maintained in appropriately secured storage, and dispensed as prescribed by a physician with parent(s)/guardian written authorization.
6. Children are separated at the first sign of illness and supervised by staff who take proper health precautions. Parents are notified when appropriate.
7. The program implements daily safety inspections and has procedures in place for dealing with hazardous conditions and equipment. Hazards are remedied in a timely manner.
8. Afterschool educators model, teach, and promote proper health, nutrition, safety and hygiene practices. Frequent handwashing is encouraged, especially after using the bathroom and immediately prior to snacks and meals.
9. The program encourages implementation of the 'Afterschool Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Standards' (HEPA). Drinking water is readily available at all times.



# QUALITY STANDARDS

# 6-7

## 6. PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

### Guiding Principle:

Provide safe, developmentally appropriate, and inclusive indoor and outdoor environments, meeting local and state requirements.

### Key Indicators:

1. The program environment provides dedicated usable safe space for all activities during hours of operation.
2. The space is arranged to be conducive for simultaneous social, recreational and educational activities, while actively supporting participants with diverse abilities.
3. There is adequate and convenient storage space for program equipment, materials, and the personal possessions of children and staff.



## 7. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

### Guiding Principle:

Provide program/family engagement opportunities connected to schools, businesses and community partners.

### Key Indicators:

1. The program develops, implements and maintains a current plan for family and community engagement. The plans include regularly scheduled activities for participation.
2. Families are welcomed within established policy guidelines, and are informed of their child's progress, both academically and socially.
3. The program supports families by linking them with individuals, organizations, and agencies for community resources.
4. The program provides a variety of communication offerings including newsletters, notes, electronic media, and/or bulletin boards.

# GLOSSARY

**Afterschool Educators:**

Staff who provide ongoing and direct supervision, instruction and care to children in an afterschool or out-of-school-time setting; may be called staff, coordinator, counselors, teachers, mentors, etc.

**Afterschool Programs:**

Safe learning environments for children and youth during their out-of-school time. Includes before and after school, full-day summer and holiday programs.

**American Disabilities Act (ADA):**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in several areas, including employment, transportation, public accommodations, communications and access to state and local government programs and services.

**Community:**

Commonly refers to the county, city, town or neighborhood in which a program is located. A quality afterschool program links with individuals, organizations and agencies in its community.

**Core Academic Areas:**

Includes language arts, reading, math, science and social studies.

**Curriculum:**

In a quality afterschool program, the curriculum is designed to support learning, development and growth. May include arts and crafts, music, social, recreation, tutoring and homework assistance. Program curriculum is determined by the overall philosophy, mission and the needs of enrolled children.

**Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP):**

Commonly refers to how a program responds to the individual differences of children and youth. In a quality afterschool program, everything it does is age-appropriate, individually appropriate and culturally appropriate for all enrolled children.

**Emergency Plan:**

A written document detailing how a workplace and its occupants manage an emergency.

**Family:**

Staff and administration need to be aware of the diversity of family dynamics represented in their program. Family may include children and adults living in the child's home, adults who are responsible for the care and well-being of the child, parents who may not live in the same household as the child, and the child's legal guardian.

**Florida Standards and Key Competencies for Afterschool Educators:**

A set of knowledge and skills that defines what afterschool educators should know and be able to do in order to facilitate growth and development of children, and partner effectively with parents, schools and community.

**Healthy Eating & Physical Activity (HEPA) Standards:**

These standards of the National Afterschool Alliance provide up to date, evidence-based, practical quality standards for providing children with healthy food, beverages and physical activity in out-of-school time.

**Level II Screening:**

DCF Clearinghouse required security background investigations of staff including, but not limited to, fingerprinting for statewide criminal and juvenile records checks through the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), federal criminal records checks through the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and may include local records checks through local law enforcement agencies. Section 435.04, Florida Statutes, outlines in detail the full Level II screening requirements.

# GLOSSARY

## **Out-of-School Time (OST):**

Any time that a child is not in school, including before and after school, weekends, and holiday/summer recesses.

## **Philosophy:**

Commonly refers to the program's stated principles and beliefs. The program bases its policies and practices on its philosophy.

## **Program Environment:**

The space where the program activities take place, both indoors and outdoors. How well a program utilizes its environment impacts the quality of the activities and care provided.

## **Quality Standards:**

A set of indicators used to measure excellence.

## **Relevant Training:**

Training designed for afterschool educators and administrators designed to improve job performance.

## **Social Emotional Learning:**

The process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

## **Special Needs:**

Physical, behavioral, medical, emotional or cognitive differences among children that may require additional supports.

## **Technology:**

Organizations, equipment and systems that allow us to control and adapt to our environment. Quality afterschool programs embrace technology and use it to improve the lives of children.

## **Volunteer:**

An individual who assists the program without pay. In a quality program, volunteers are under direct and constant supervision by program personnel.



## LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES?

Connect with national and state partners on the Florida After School website.



For more information on how to apply the Florida Standards for Quality Afterschool Programs or to access the Self-Assessment, visit [www.FLafterschool.com](http://www.FLafterschool.com).