



FLORIDA STANDARDS FOR QUALITY AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

Florida After School supports quality programming.

Florida After School, Inc., believes all children and youth deserve high-quality out-of-school time opportunities. Florida After School is the only statewide membership organization dedicated to supporting professionals who provide afterschool, before school, holiday, and summer programming to support the academic and personal growth of children and youth.

Florida After School promotes quality standards and best practices for out-of-school time programs through training and technical assistance and serves as the voice for afterschool programs and policies in Florida. We collaborate with public and private partners to share innovative resources with programs to accelerate learning and youth development. The following quality standards were updated to incorporate feedback from afterschool professionals in alignment with national quality standards. The standards are intended to serve as the benchmarks for high quality programs.



Quality programs make a difference.

Research shows that students who attend quality afterschool programs have higher attendance records during the school day, perform better academically, and engage in less risky behaviors. These programs have 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.

The Florida Standards for Quality Afterschool Programs define the core principles and best practices that lead to the delivery of quality programming for children and youth in afterschool programs. The Standards provide a framework for the development of a caring, dynamic, stimulating and safe afterschool environment for children and youth.

Quality Standards

1. Sound Management Practices

2. Knowledgeable and Qualified Program Staff

3. Positive Communication & Interaction

4. Intentional Programming

5. Safe and Healthy Program Environment

6. Purposeful Family & Community Engagement

7. Ongoing Quality Improvement

1. Sound Management Practices



WHAT?

Quality in organizational practices provides a solid foundation for the program to operate. The organization is streamlined and efficient in policies, procedures, recordkeeping, and financial management. It has a clear mission and measurable goals.

WHY?

To positively impact the youth served, it is vital that a robust organization starts with a strong structure to ensure every aspect of the organization is sound. Sound organizational practices contribute to staff and youth recruitment and retention.

INDICATORS:

- A. The mission statement is clear, easily accessible, and contributes to the success of children in the care of the organization. It is woven into the culture of the organization through training opportunities and repetition.
- B. Organization maintains records and clear policies and procedures for staff, volunteers, participants, etc.
 - » Policies and procedures ensure that the program is adhering to federal, state, and local guidelines.
 - » Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined for staff, families, program youth, and community members.
 - » Adequate risk management policy is in place to protect staff, administrators, volunteers, and participants.
- C. Organization has documents that lay out the way the program is governed.
 - » All staff, volunteers, and families have a handbook to reference.
 - Handbooks include topics such as youth pickup/transportation, attendance, any disciplinary protocols, etc.
- D. The program has a strong fiscal management system, including a detailed, documented budget with line-item expenses and clear revenue sources tied to program goals.
 - » Strategic management planning addresses program sustainability.
 - » The program's budget supports goals and is informed by input from stakeholders during the budgeting process.

2. Knowledgeable and Qualified Program Staff

WHAT?

Program staff are knowledgeable in out-of-school time (OST) best practices and youth development and are dedicated to developing and maintaining a positive and engaging environment for participating youth. Administrators provide program staff with a strong support system. Continuous learning is expected and offered through consistent professional learning opportunities. Learning reinforces the skills and knowledge necessary to work in a quality OST program. Program staff are focused on the needs of the children, families, and fellow team members.

WHY?

An out-of-school time (OST) program is only as good as the people who run it. It is vital to ensure staff are kept up to date on the newest learning trends in the OST space and are provided with opportunities to enhance their practice to better support youth.

INDICATORS:

- A. The program fosters a positive, culturally responsive work environment, where staff are respected and valued, and provides clear pathways for professional development.
- B. Staff have the appropriate education and experience to work with school-age youth.
 - » Staff have written position descriptions that outline the expectations of their individual roles, and the areas of expertise required.
 - » Site directors/coordinators have at least two years of experience working within an OST program or have at least a two-year associates degree in a early childhood education, youth development, or a related field.
- C. Staff meet the federal, state, and local requirements for working with children and school-age youth in an out-of-school time setting.
- D. The program follows National Afterschool Association's guide to a thriving workforce, section nine (OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME JOB QUALITY STANDARDS) and implements a written professional development plan based upon quality standards, local competencies, and individual needs.
 - » Annual professional learning plans are developed in consultation with each staff member and their supervisors.
 - » Staff are provided with a minimum of ten hours of professional learning opportunities annually.
 - This includes training in best practices, leadership, and new research in out-of-school time programs.
 - Staff are trained to help students learn perseverance and to overcome challenges in order to build character and resiliency skills.
- E. All staff and volunteers have passed background screenings and remain eligible to work with children.



3. Positive Communication & Interaction



WHAT?

Staff members use respectful communication with youth in the program to foster a sense of belonging and safety. Staff communicate positively and productively with each other and model positive relationships. They also encourage youth to form connections with each other.

WHY?

Good communication and positive interaction are shown to be key in determining retention and success in programs and support a safe environment for students. Ensuring that respectful, positive communication is at top of mind for the program encourages key relationship building for everyone involved. Research shows that positive staff interactions lead to more positive youth outcomes.

INDICATORS:

- A. Program leadership speaks to staff members respectfully and gives them opportunities to provide input.
 - » Communication takes place through multiple channels to ensure it is accessible to all.
- B. Staff encourage and allow youth to think and make safe choices for themselves.
- C. Staff members model appropriate communication by speaking respectfully to each other.
 - » Staff show youth how to practice resiliency traits such as kindness and respect to understand the feelings of others.
- D. The program structure fosters opportunities for staff and youth to develop trusting, appropriate relationships, promoting individual growth.
- E. Staff and youth share high expectations and adhere to consistent norms and behaviors, ensuring a positive and respectful environment.
- F. Staff use positive guidance to direct youth behavior, modeling respectful and constructive behaviors both to the youth and among themselves.
- G. Program youth are encouraged to work with each other for various active learning activities.
- H. Program staff and management keep families up to date on what is happening day-to-day.
 - » Families are encouraged to give input where applicable.

4. Intentional Programming

WHAT?

Programming is comprehensive with a variety of activities that support youth growth in all areas and has tie-ins to school day learning. Program design considers youth interests, needs, and learning styles. Staff, youth, and families give feedback to inform programming.

WHY?

The design of a program is vital to positive youth outcomes. Quality programming offers youth opportunities to gain real world knowledge and skills while also providing support for regular classroom learning.

INDICATORS:

- A. Programming aligns with the afterschool program's mission and vision for the organization.
- B. Activities and lesson plans are aligned with the abilities and interests of the program attendees.
 - » Youth are offered active learning activities.
 - » Program attendees are given opportunities to be creative and think critically while learning.
 - » Programming fosters autonomy, responsibility, leadership, and self-expression by integrating opportunities for youth to take on leadership roles and reflect critically on their experiences.
- C. Lesson plans and activities support program goals.
 - » Staff members and program management work to create lesson plans that continue classroom learning when applicable.
- D. A variety of planning methods are used to address different learning styles and keep youth engaged.
- E. Youth are encouraged to build life skills, make responsible decisions, and develop self-competence.
 - » Staff work to create a culture to teach youth how to work consistently toward understanding how their decisions impact others.



5. Safe & Healthy Program Environment

WHAT?

The program environment is clean and safe. The space adheres to state and local licensing requirements. The program provides access to healthy and nutritious foods for all youth who attend the program. Staff members are aware of any individualized needs for youth in the program.

WHY?

When youth are offered rewarding and challenging OST enrichment in a safe and healthy environment, they are less likely to engage in risky behaviors or to be victims of violence.

INDICATORS:

- A. Staff welcome all youth into the program environment.
- B. Staff ensure the safety and health of all youth in the program through constant supervision.
- C. Program management keeps thorough records on health and safety procedures and routines.
 - » Security protocols are in place to protect children.
 - » Program staff are CPR certified.
 - » The program maintains an accessible list of participants with up-to-date emergency contacts and ensures staff know the whereabouts of participants at all times.
 - » The program maintains safe staff to student ratios.
- D. Staff are trained in safety, first aid, mandatory reporting, and identifying signs of suicidality, child abuse, sexual abuse, and trafficking.
- E. Clear documentation is maintained for incidents, including written reports and phone records.
- F. Facilities, equipment, and materials meet state and local licensing requirements, and frequent access to outdoor spaces is provided where possible.
- G. The program provides a physically safe environment for all participants.
- H. The program maintains an environment free of bullying and harassment.
 - » Staff work with youth on resiliency building traits such as tolerance, respect, and integrity to increase character education.
- I. The program consults National Afterschool Association's Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Standards (HEPA) section one (https://cdn.ymaws.com/naa.site-ym.com/resource/collection/38DF3B2B-5AEF-4BF9-93C9-5516CFF6A2F1/HEPA_Standards_2.0.pdf) when making nutritional decisions regarding food and food safety.
- J. The program connects families to additional support services, such as food security, health, and mental health resources.



6. Purposeful Family & Community Engagement



WHAT?

A quality program fosters meaningful relationships with families and communities. Communication is engaging, intentional, and inclusive. The program engages the youth and families it serves through clear, purposeful, and consistent two-way communication. Youth voice is highly valued by the program.

WHY?

Youth have the most success when the adults around them listen to their ideas and encourage them to pursue new interests. Families and communities support OST learning opportunities everywhere they go.

INDICATORS:

- A. The program builds and maintains meaningful relationships with families and members of the community.
 - » Communications with these groups happen regularly across multiple channels.
 - » New participating families are offered an orientation to the program.
 - » The program actively engages families in their children's interests and development using culturally and linguistically appropriate strategies, ensuring meaningful involvement in program planning, implementation, and improvement.
 - » Program management finds new ways to engage communities and families.
 - » The program actively seeks input from the children and youth it serves and listens to their feedback.
 - » The program considers the community's needs when creating policies, such as hours of operation, fees, and location, to meet the needs of families, ensuring accessibility, and affordability.
- B. The program is responsive to the community it serves.
 - » The program regularly assesses the needs of families, the community, and participating youth.
 - » The program connects with new community partners.
 - » The program seeks out partnerships at local, regional, and national levels to leverage resources and maximize impact, while maintaining consistent communication and visibility in the community.
 - » Strong partnerships and written agreements with external partners clarify roles and responsibilities, contributing to program success.

7. Ongoing Quality Improvement

WHAT?

High quality programs have ambitious yet attainable goals with measurable objectives. They collect data and analyze results to inform continuous quality improvement. The programs promote best practices, uphold high standards, and demonstrate a commitment to ongoing improvement.

WHY?

Program evaluation examines youth outcomes, operational effectiveness, and staff retention and shows which elements of the program are working and which ones need improvement. Continuous quality improvement practices keep the organization accountable for what it strives to achieve in its mission statement.

INDICATORS:

- A. Staff collect results from the needs assessment to gather feedback from program youth, families, and the community.
 - » Feedback is collected through surveys that are given throughout the year.
- B. The program uses and analyzes any data and feedback collected to inform the strategic planning for the organization.
- C. Program management regularly assesses staff performance and programming.
- D. The program has a written plan to measure and track quality improvement using quantitative and qualitative data.
 - » The plan outlines goals and objectives and has actionable steps.
 - » The program uses a needs assessment to determine programming needs.



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The mission of Florida After School is to advocate for and equip out-of-school time stakeholders with resources to build the profession and support high-quality programs for all children and youth.

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