

Rhode Island After School Program Quality Standards and Indicators

HEALTH, SAFETY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The program's indoor and outdoor facilities are welcoming and accessible to children, youth and their families.

- Children, youth, and families are ensured safe access to the building.
- Staff greet children, youth, and families upon arrival at the program.
- Building facilities are handicap accessible.

The indoor and outdoor space provides an atmosphere of comfort, ownership, and respect for children, youth and their families.

- Indoor and outdoor space reflects the work and interests of youth.
- Space and materials reflect the diversity of participants.
- Distinct areas are defined for a variety of learning experiences (e.g., area for art or other messy activities, computer corner, table for board games, quiet area and reference materials for homework) and youth can get materials out and put them away by themselves.
- Heat, ventilation, noise level, and light in the indoor space are comfortable and can be controlled (e.g., through adjustable blinds, open windows, fans).
- Space is available for private conversations with families.
- Some areas have soft, comfortable furniture on which youth can relax.

Children and youth are physically safe in both indoor and outdoor space of the program.

- Current documentation is posted showing that the program has met or exceeds the state and/or local health and safety guidelines and/or regulations.
- There are no observable safety or health hazards in the program space.
- At least one person with a current first aid certificate, including CPR, is present at all times.
- The indoor and outdoor facilities are clean and well maintained (e.g., floors cleaned, carpets vacuumed, trash cleared).
- Written guidelines are in place regarding the use and maintenance of the program facility.
- Staff protect youth from potential hazards such as the following: caustic or toxic art materials and cleaning agents, medications, and hot liquids; overexposure to heat or cold.
- Adequate supplies and facilities exist for washing hands.

Program space and equipment fit the needs of participants, staff and the curriculum.

- Ample and varied indoor and outdoor space is regularly available for all program activities.
- Ample and varied equipment is available to support a wide range of activities.
- The space is arranged so that various activities can go on at the same time without disruption.
- Space available for staff that is separate from activity areas.
- Adequate, convenient, and accessible storage space is available for equipment, materials, and personal possessions of youth and staff.

The program protects and supports the mental and social/emotional health of all participants.

- Space is available for staff to have private conversations with children and youth.
- Supervised space is available for children and youth who need or want to work privately or independently.
- Younger children have a separate space from older children and youth as needed.

Participants are supervised during all program activities.

- There are written guidelines for children and youth arrival, departure, and transition times.
- In addition to written guidelines, a clear system is in place for staff to monitor children and youth arrival to the program (e.g., attendance procedure)

- In addition to written guidelines, a clear system is in place for staff to ensure that children and youth have a safe departure from the program (e.g., authorized parent/guardian, school bus, public bus, or other secure means).
- In addition to written guidelines, a clear system is in place for staff to monitor all transitions between activities, both on- and off-site.
- Staff know where children and youth are and what they are doing at all times.
- Staff supervise children and youth appropriately according to youths' ages, abilities, and needs and the level of risk involved in an activity.

When provided, snacks are well balanced and nutritious.

- Children and youth are served a variety of nutritious and appealing foods.
- Children and youth are provided with a sufficient amount of food (e.g., second servings, supplementary snacks for those who may have forgotten to bring food from home, extra snacks for children and youth who want them).
- When possible, youth input is actively sought in selecting and preparing snack.
- Participant's allergies and other food restrictions are well-documented and take into consideration in food preparation and service.
- Drinking water is readily available at all times.

RELATIONSHIPS

Participants interact with one another in positive ways and feel they belong.

- Children and youth demonstrate good social problem-solving skills and positive social behavior (e.g., can negotiate solutions, make compromises, work together toward a common goal, empathize with others' feelings, cooperate and work well together).
- Children and youth strongly identify with the program/organization (e.g., use ownership language such as "our program," wear gear with program/organization name on it, hold one another accountable for rules and guidelines).

Staff and volunteers collaborate to meet the needs of all children and youth.

- Staff have regular planning time together.
- Staff communicate with one another daily about children and youth.
- Staff communicate with each other while the program is in session to ensure that the program flows smoothly.

Staff and volunteers interact with families in positive ways.

- Staff use arrival and/or departure time to share information and develop relationships with parents and other caregivers where applicable.
- The program has a policy on parent/guardian involvement which is shared with parents/guardians regularly.

Staff and volunteers provide opportunities for meaningful engagement of participants' family members.

- Family members are welcomed as part of the program (e.g., there is an open door policy, families are given opportunities to volunteer or participate in activities, there is an orientation for families on enrollment into the program).
- Staff communicate with families regularly (e.g., parent/guardian conferences, communicate about youth academic and social/emotional goals, newsletters and calls home).
- Family members have opportunities and are encouraged to be involved in program/organization decision-making (e.g., family representatives on board, yearly evaluation of program, input in program planning).

Staff and volunteers respond in positive ways to the individual needs of children and youth.

- Staff respond to children and youth in a warm, supportive manner (e.g., staff and children/youth seem relaxed, staff listen attentively and do not discriminate).
- Staff talk to children and youth about ideas related to their activities and help elaborate and extend the activity.
- Staff are aware of and able to respond appropriately to the range of participant's abilities, feelings and emotions.
- During activities, staff are almost always actively involved with youth.

Staff and volunteers provide appropriate mentoring and/or role modeling to guide the behavior of children and youth in positive ways.

- Staff model good social skills (e.g., are calm, listen, empathize) and positive adult relationships (e.g., cooperate, show respect).
- Staff help children and youth express themselves during conversations.
- Staff help children and youth develop good social problem-solving skills and positive social behavior (e.g., help children and youth talk through social conflicts, help them to negotiate solutions).
- At least one staff member talks with each child/youth on a daily basis (e.g., listen to description of school day, including problems and successes).
- Staff share skills and resources with one another to help children and youth gain information and solve problems.

Staff relationships with participants are positive, supportive, nurturing, and consistent.

- Staff take responsibility for greeting, integration, and departure of children and youth (e.g., conversation on arrival, introduction to program for the day).
- Mutual respect exists among staff and children/youth.
- Staff work to ensure that each youth has consistent, ongoing access to at least one staff member who tracks his/her progress and plans over time.
- Staff use positive discipline methods effectively (e.g., no yelling or physical punishment, giving attention for positive rather than negative behaviors, redirecting child from unacceptable to acceptable activity).
- Each youth is consistently called by his/her name.

Staff and volunteers encourage participants to make choices and become more responsible.

- Where appropriate, staff give children and youth opportunities to choose what they will do, how they will do it, and with whom.
- Staff help children and youth make informed and responsible choices/decisions and resolve their own conflicts.
- Youth have opportunities to become increasingly responsible for planning, implementing, and leading programs.

PROGRAMMING AND ACTIVITIES

There are a variety of engaging opportunities for age-appropriate learning, physical activity, skill building and life skills development.

- There are regular opportunities for quiet activities, socializing, and physical activity.
- There are regular opportunities for exploration, practice, and reflection.
- Activities are fun and experiential.
- Youth actively participate in activities and are working toward a product or goal.
- Youth can articulate what they are doing and why in an age appropriate manner.
- Youth regularly attend the program.

The daily schedule offers activities that are engaging, varied, and flexible.

- The daily schedule is responsive to the developmental and physical needs of the age group being served (e.g., appropriate amount of time for activities, active activities before quiet time for high energy age groups such as middle school).
- Children and youth have opportunities for both independent and cooperative learning.
- Children and youth have opportunities to participate in both directed and self-directed activities.
- Flexibility is possible within the schedule and is responsive to youth input.
- There is a written schedule that includes enough activities for all youth in the program.

Participants have opportunities to make choices based on interests.

- Youth have a choice in the flow of activities in which they participate as program structure allows (e.g., can choose to have snack before doing outdoor activity).
- Youth have opportunities to make choices about activities (e.g., what materials to use, what topics to cover).
- Youth are encouraged to experience/try new activities and/or skills.

Activities are well supplied with materials, where needed.

- Materials are complete and in good repair.
- There are enough materials for the number of youth in the program.
- Materials are age appropriate.
- Materials are accessible and used appropriately.

Participants are involved in program planning, development and implementation.

- Youth and staff work together to select, plan, and implement activities of interest, which are consistent with the program's mission and resources.
- Youth have formal opportunities to evaluate/reflect on activities.
- Youth regularly give informal, verbal feedback on whether or not the activities and program structure are meeting their needs.

Program activities enhance the positive development of children and youth.

- Activity plans exist and indicate the outcome being addressed by any particular activity.
- Children and youth have access to enrichment activities that promote basic skills and higher-level thinking.
- Activities facilitate positive peer influence and interaction.
- Activities allow children and youth to develop new skills.
- Activities promote a strong sense of personal identity.
- Participants develop leaderships skills, including teaching/coaching others, facilitating groups activities or taking responsibility for activities.

Program staff are thoughtful about influencing learning and increasing knowledge for participants.

- Staff guide each participant through a self-assessment of personal interests and goals.
- Staff regularly recognize and celebrate individual youth achievements in relation to specific expectations.
- Written, verbal, mathematical, critical thinking and/or research projects are built into group and individual programs through a variety of teaching and learning strategies designed to address different learning styles.
- Children and youth have opportunities to integrate knowledge and to apply concepts and processes within and outside the program.
- Children and youth have competitive and non-competitive opportunities for cognitive development.

Participants experience and learn about diversity.

- Staff expose children and youth to different life situations, viewpoints, and cultures through a variety of programming in order to promote awareness of differences.
- Staff use an anti-biased approach to programming (i.e., intentionally working to break down cultural, religious, gender and ability stereotypes among others) and encourage all youth to participate in a variety of activities.

The program builds upon community resources.

- Youth are encouraged to recognize their part in the community through community service, civic engagement, and/or service learning opportunities created in conjunction with staff members.
- Administrators and staff actively seek out other organizations with which to collaborate (e.g., for field trips, guest speakers, and other expanded offerings).

STAFFING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

All program staff receive relevant training and attend ongoing professional development activities that support their own growth and build more effective program practice.

- Support is available for the director/program leader and other staff members to attend courses, conferences, or workshops (e.g., release time, travel costs, conference fees).
- The administration values, supports and encourages professional development and credentialing.
- All permanent/regular staff attend at least 20 hours of training annually.

- Program directors and administrators receive training in program management and staff supervision.
- Relevant training for program staff is provided regularly, either on- or off-site, on a variety of topics. Topics may include but are not limited to: positive youth development, conflict resolution, social and emotional development, how to design space and activities to support program goals, cultural competency, health and safety.
- Staff have access to professional development resources (e.g., library, organizational memberships, opportunities to visit other sites).

Program managers assess job performance and satisfaction among staff and volunteers and make improvements where necessary.

- Staff receive continuous supervision and feedback, including written and shared performance reviews on a regular basis, but not less than once a year.
- Staff participate in a self-evaluation at least annually, which includes identifying training needs and goals.

Staff and volunteers are familiar with their job roles and responsibilities prior to working with participants and their families.

- A written job description that outlines and clearly defines responsibilities is reviewed with each staff member.
- New staff are given a comprehensive orientation to the program philosophy, routines, and practices. Staff are personally introduced to the people with whom they will be working.
- Written program policies and procedures, including emergency procedures and confidentiality policies are reviewed with all staff.

Staff and volunteers of all levels are eligible and well prepared to work with participants and their families.

- All supervising staff meet minimum age requirements for activities/programs offered as set forth by local regulations.
- Established criteria for position/job eligibility (e.g., education and experience levels) exist and all staff meet the criteria for their particular role.

Staff and volunteers are aware of cultural and individual differences in working with participants and their families.

- Staff mentoring and training supports working with diverse populations (e.g., youth with disabilities or special needs, or youth of different genders, races, cultures, and religions)
- Staff are oriented to the neighborhood and community in which they work and where children and youth live.
- Staff use various strategies to communicate with families who do not speak English (e.g., bilingual staff and materials).

Staff and volunteers receive the necessary support to work effectively.

- All full time staff are offered benefits (e.g., health insurance, paid time off, tuition reimbursement).
- Staff receive appropriate management and supervision to make their work experience positive and productive.
- Program strives to provide wages to promote stability and retention.
- Staff meetings include planned opportunities for staff to share new professional ideas and materials with one another.

ADMINISTRATION

Staff-to-participant ratios and group size enable the staff to meet the needs of participants.

- There are no more than 13 youth for every 1 adult in groups of children and youth ages 5 and older.
- Group sizes vary according to the age and abilities of youth and the type and complexity of the activity (i.e., group size for open gym may be larger than for homework help) but is never larger than 26. (Research shows that an appropriate group size for school age youth is no more than 30)

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

- Program policies seek to make the program accessible to all youth (e.g., makes accommodations for children and youth with special needs, makes an effort to be affordable, takes families needs into account when developing hours of operation).
- Family input is sought in program policies and procedures.
- Program policies require that staff and family members communicate about children and youth's well-being.

The administration sets clear expectations for participant behavior and active, consistent participation.

- A clear attendance policy is in place.
- Youth and staff together develop guidelines for behavior (e.g., attire and standards of respect and cultural awareness). There are clear policies for monitoring and enforcing these guidelines.
- Behavior guidelines are publicly displayed.
- All new staff and youth participants are oriented to the behavior guidelines for the program by selected youth currently involved in the program.

The administration provides sound leadership and management.

- Administrators provide sound fiscal management for the program.
- Administrators are involved in program implementation and are accessible to staff on a regular basis.
- Administrators oversee the recruitment and retention of program staff.
- Personnel files exist for all staff members and include, at a minimum, resumes, transcripts and background checks.
- The administration has established job categories with position, title, wage scale, and supervision. This document is available to all staff.
- The administration regularly evaluates the program's equal opportunity hiring and staffing practices and uses equitable promotion practices for staff who achieve higher levels of education and professional development/training.
- Administrators involve key stakeholders, including staff, board of directors, families, and youth in long-term planning, fiscal management, and decision-making.
- Administrators assist with ongoing evaluation.
- Administrators fosters a collegial environment (e.g., teambuilding activities, regular staff meetings to discuss concerns and successes).
- Where applicable, administrators recruit and manage an active advisory board.

The program engages families as partners in its success.

- Family members are made fully aware of program policies and practices.
- Staff and families join together to communicate and work with the schools.
- Staff and family representatives develop a community/family involvement plan.

Program policies and procedures exist to enhance the health and safety of all participants.

- There is a plan to provide adequate staff coverage in case of emergencies.
- There is an emergency management plan in place including procedures for fire drills and natural or other disasters, and all staff and participants are familiar with it.
- If the program provides transportation, there are established policies to transport youth safely; the policies comply with all legal requirements for vehicles and drivers.
- Smoking and drug/alcohol use are not allowed on program premises.
- All paid and volunteer staff are screened for prior criminal records, child protective service findings, and other improper conduct.
- Policies and protocols are in place to guide staff interactions and interventions with children and youth (e.g., behavior management, appropriate verbal and physical interactions with youth) and all staff are trained in them.
- Emergency information for each participant is on file and accessible.

The program solicits feedback from children, youth and their families about the program.

- There is a formal process whereby youth assess program; information is then fed back into activity selection, planning, implementation and relationships.
- Parent/guardian input in planning activities and reflection on practice is actively and regularly sought and documented.
- Regular opportunities exist for meetings between youth and program staff and administrators.

The program has a system for using information for learning and program improvement as well as for measuring outcomes relevant to program activities.

- The program has a written evaluation plan and monitors needs and collects data in ways consistent with that plan.

- The program has procedures for tracking enrollment and participation.
- Administrators share results of evaluation with staff, families, youth, and community.

The program builds links to the community.

- Program staff facilitate relationships between youth and police, fire, and community agencies.
- Program staff recruit and train community volunteers from diverse backgrounds (e.g., area college students, Americorps/VISTA volunteers, parents, etc.) to assist in program activities.
- The administration pursues new opportunities for community members to support the program (e.g., in-kind donations of space and materials, financial support) and partnership agreements are in place.
- Program staff build links to physical and mental health resources and providers in the community and provide families with referrals where appropriate.
- Where possible, the program builds connections to the schools (e.g., talks to teachers, sits on school improvement teams, etc.).
- Staff actively seeks new participants by reaching out to youth and families that are not yet enrolled in the program.

The program has a clear vision and mission and a plan to support continuous growth.

- A written mission statement sets forth the program's philosophy and goals and related outcomes and staff know and support it.
- The mission statement is clearly visible in the program space.
- The administration has a sustainability plan that is tied to the program's mission and goals.
- The administration actively seeks new funding to maintain and grow the program.
- The administration has a plan to improve staff sustainability and retention (e.g., improved working conditions, higher salaries).