

## Out-of-School-Time Standards for Program Quality

MISSION & GOALS	
Stating a clear mission for the program	Includes statements of program philosophy and goals.
Establishing clear goals and conducting frequent evaluations, assessments or reviews accordingly	Goals should be tied to the mission statement and provide a framework for developing more specific program components/activities. Administrators should ensure that the effectiveness of the program, related to the stated goals, is evaluated on an ongoing basis; and that any reviews or evaluations should consider what the individual needs of children are and how the program is addressing those needs. The results of frequent evaluations should relate back to the training needs for staff. Tools that are used by high quality programs include: National Institute on Out of School Time (NIOST) Standards; Desired Results Developmental Profiles (CDE); Program Administration Scale; individual child observations, and parental reports on children's interests.
STAFF	
Hiring educated staff; retaining stable, trained personnel	Staff are qualified to work with school-age children and receive ongoing training to develop skills. Recommended are: child development coursework on ages and stages of development, school-age specific courses, and health, safety, and nutrition. Staff should have criminal clearances. A thorough orientation into policies and practices should be given to all new staff.
Providing attractive compensation	It is recommended that compensation practices consider the following: 1) the County of Los Angeles living wage standard (\$10.00/hour) as a basic starting wage; 2) a wage scale that increases compensation based on education and training; 3) that school district policies allow staff to work two part time jobs (ex. classroom aide and after-school worker), which may make them eligible for benefits in order to attract and retain highly qualified personnel. Staff should also be paid for time spent on planning, program and/or child evaluations and observations.
Training staff	On-the-job-training and support can be provided through a multiple-day orientation at the beginning of each year, and through other training offered at least quarterly related to results of ongoing evaluation of program effectiveness and children's needs. Core training topics include: working with parents; promoting children's development; using program space effectively; designing activities that promote program goals; promoting health, safety and good nutritional practices. Programs should partner with their local community college, and staff should be made aware of college courses and other professional development events.

PROGRAM: ACTIVITIES AND STRUCTURE	
Providing a sufficient variety of activities* and sufficient materials of good quality	There is a planned programmatic framework based on the program goals. The framework is the foundation for planning and implementing more specific program activities. While variety is important, activities should be selected based on the relationship to the framework and how they address individual children's needs and interests. Activities and materials should be age appropriate and engaging. General activity areas will include: active, physical play; creative arts and dramatic play; relaxed socializing, quiet activities; and enrichment activities. Activities should allow for autonomy, encourage responsibility, and provide meaningful challenges that help build skills and promote higher level thinking.
Ensuring that programming is flexible*	Programming is child-centered, meeting the needs of each child. Children contribute ideas so that activities reflect their interests. Programming is stable but not rigid, allowing children to meet their physical needs in a relaxed way. Children are usually able to change activities at their own pace. Transitions from one activity to another by the whole group are smooth.
Having a mix of older and younger children	There is an advantage in mixing age groups so as to promote the idea of older children caring for younger ones as a positive social norm. This may not be as important for children coming from families where older siblings care for younger children on a regular basis, and the older children need time to interact with their age peers in a non-academic setting.
Keeping total enrollment low	The total enrollment is a function of the facility size and whether licensing restrictions are involved. Capacity should reflect functions and funding requirements. In general, group size within the enrolled population should not exceed 30 children.
Maintaining a low child to staff ratio	Ratios fall between 1:8 and 1:12 for children under the age of 6; between 1:10 and 1:15 for children over age six. Ratios need to be lower for a mixed age group to address the various developmental needs in the group; or for more complex activities. Volunteers should not be counted in the ratio. They can add support for, but not replace, trained staff.
FACILITY	
Providing adequate space	There can be flexibility considering the various types of facilities used. For non-school based programs, Community Care Licensing requires 35 square feet of activity space and 75 square feet of outdoor space per child. All programs should consider the following: sufficient indoor and outdoor space to allow for several activities at the same time; enough storage to maintain materials and equipment in good condition; children are able to access most equipment and materials on their own; space for quiet pursuits with soft, comfortable furniture.

Providing a safe, healthy environment	Creating a safe and healthy environment involves policies and practices related to: supervision, nutrition, infection control, and facility maintenance. Key policies and practices are: noting when children arrive and depart and ensuring that children leave with authorized individuals; adequate supervision of children based on the ages of children, the types of activities, and whether children are moving from one area to another (ex. going to the bathroom); promoting good health through provision of nutritional snacks ( <a href="http://www.teamnutrition.usda.gov">www.teamnutrition.usda.gov</a> ), and following approved infection control policies such as comfortable isolation of ill children and frequent hand washing by staff and children. The facility and materials maintenance policies should ensure a clean and hazard free facility both indoors and out; indoor temperatures, lighting, ventilation, and noise should be at comfortable levels.
<b>SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL ENVIRONMENT</b>	
Establishing and maintaining a favorable emotional climate*; a supportive environment with high expectations and positive social norms	This is the result of cooperation and respectful behavior involving all three program partners: program staff, parents, and the children. Children and families are welcomed and made comfortable. Staff model cooperative and respectful behavior at all times, and speak the languages of the families served. Staff and parents interact with each other positively in ways that demonstrate an understanding of, and sensitivity to the culture and values of the individual families. The ultimate goal for the children is to promote positive, independent behavior, healthy choices, and a sense of belonging. Strategies that promote a favorable emotional climate include: staff engaging positively with children, treating them respectfully and listening to what they say; staff support child's initiative and assist children without taking control; staff offer many options and help children make informed choices; staff set appropriate limits and do not use harsh discipline methods; children are expected to show respect for one another, cooperate and work together; children are encouraged to think for themselves and staff help children use and develop their language skills through frequent conversations; children are given attention when they cooperate, share, care for materials or join in activities; children are encouraged to resolve their own conflicts with staff assisting as needed.
<b>FAMILY/COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS</b>	
Maintaining continuity and complementarity with regular day school	Administrative leadership is key in building relationships among school personnel, after school staff, and parents to jointly address the well-being of the children. Together staff and families communicate and work with school personnel to ensure the continuity of goals and values. For example, program activities complement current study topics; and there are shared nutrition and safety standards. Recommended activities may include joint open houses and inviting teachers to after school program/family events.

Integrating and involving families into program planning and decision-making	Families are viewed as the program's clients and their concerns and preferences affect program and administrative decision-making. There is an open and accessible method for obtaining family input. Staff make families feel welcome and comfortable by speaking the languages of the families served and respectfully acknowledging the culture of the families and the community. Families are part of the planning for successful arrivals and departures and may visit the program at any time. Families participate in an orientation to the program, are kept informed about program policies and events, and are encouraged to become involved. Staff make it a policy to communicate about child's well-being with the family on a regular basis.
Using community-based organizations and facilities; as community partners	Staff plan activities to help children know their community and link with organizations offering community service options in order to promote the notion of community citizenship. Community resources are brought to the program through partnerships to enrich the options and activities available. Staff are familiar with community resources that families may be referred to as needed.
Using volunteers	Volunteers are given an orientation so they can become familiar with the goals, values, and policies of the program. Staff identify community volunteers with special talents or skills that enrich the options and activities available to the children. Volunteers should not be counted in the official program ratios of staff to children, or left to supervise children alone. Programs should have all regular volunteers undergo a criminal clearance check.

Sources for Best Practices and Standards:

- 1 Making Out-of-School-Time Matter, Evidence for an Action Agenda, Susan Bodilly, Megan K. Beckett, RAND Education and RAND Labor and Population Research Brief.
- 2 Evaluating After-School Care, RAND Labor and Population Research Brief.
- 3 Standards at a Glance, The National School-age Care Alliance (NSACA), now National Institute of Out of School Time (NIOST).
- 4 Getting the Most from Afterschool Programs in a High-Stakes Learning Environment, Sam Phia and Beth Miller, NIOST.

\* Note: In Rand Research Brief, Evaluating After-School Care, the following were noted as strongly supporting a quality program based on Rand's qualitative scoring:

- ☒ Ensuring Program Flexibility
- ☒ Establishing and maintaining a favorable emotional climate
- ☒ Providing a sufficient varieties of activities