

A Practitioner's Guide

Building and Managing QUALITY AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS



NATIONAL CENTER FOR QUALITY AFTERSCHOOL

Advancing Research, Improving Education



This publication funded by C.S. Mott Foundation

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Suggested citation in APA format:

Jordan, C., Parker, J., Donnelly, D., Rudo, Z. (Eds.). (2009). *A practitioner's guide: Building and managing quality afterschool programs*. Austin, TX: SEDL.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to acknowledge the contributions of the members of the National Partnership for Quality Afterschool Learning, 2003–2008.

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Funded by C.S. Mott Foundation



Introduction

As an afterschool leader, you know all too well the many challenges involved in managing, organizing, and operating a high quality program. Providing fun and engaging activities for students that boost their academic performance and motivate them to keep attending your program is definitely a primary focus. But so is knowing how to effectively oversee daily operations, support your staff, and sustain strong relationships with stakeholders. Often it's hard to find the resources and practices you need and can rely on to implement your goals. This Guide is designed to share with you the practices that can help you cover it all—great programming, terrific staff, positive relationships, and plenty of resources to lead and sustain successful afterschool programs.

What's Included in This Guide

Produced with the generous support of the C.S. Mott Foundation, this Guide is intended to share the insights of SEDL's National Partnership for Quality Afterschool Learning (the National Partnership) as well as information about both the academic and the organizational and management practices that successful afterschool programs use. We have organized these practices into the following four focus areas:

- program organization
- academic programming practices
- supportive relationships in afterschool
- achieving program outcomes

Within each focus area, we describe the key practices of successful programs. In addition, we provide a Quality-O-Meter tool to help you reflect on your practices. This tool incorporates what the National Partnership learned in its research as well as knowledge from its numerous content experts. We then provide a Planning for Action tool to help you document plans for implementing practices to increase your program's quality. This tool is a structured way to organize and manage the implementation of any new or enhanced afterschool practice.

How Practitioners Can Use This Guide

Anyone associated with what is often referred to as expanded learning time—whether afterschool, before school, Saturday, extended day, extended year, summer learning, or any other nontypical school-day learning situation—will find this publication useful. In particular, this Guide can help build the knowledge and skills of a variety of audiences.

With individuals, leaders can use this Guide as a self-study of the key practices that contribute to a successful program. With groups, leaders can use it to guide discussions and decision-making processes in a professional learning community. This Guide can serve as a continuous improvement and planning tool for staff or a program advisory group. Furthermore, it can be used to inform the ongoing discussions between school-day programs and afterschool or other expanded learning programs.



The Research Base for This Guide

This Guide is based on a 5-year research study funded by the U.S. Department of Education and conducted by the National Partnership, a collaborative of eight organizations. This exploratory study examined high quality afterschool programs having evidence suggesting a strong connection to increased student academic achievement sustained over several years.

The study had three major goals:

- To identify practices the programs were using successfully to increase student performance in the six content areas of literacy, mathematics, science, the arts, technology, and homework/ tutoring assistance
- To explore trends in the practices across the programs in the study
- To share the practices observed across the sites with the larger afterschool community

To select sites for the study, National Partnership staff reviewed annual performance reports and a variety of other data for 21st Century Community Learning Center grant recipients and other successful afterschool programs. On the basis of data from these sources, 53 programs in 33 states were identified as providing quality afterschool practices. National Partnership staff and program leaders worked together to select from each program two sites that had been in operation for at least 3 years, were focusing on the content areas, and had evidence of success in promoting student learning. A total of 104 individual sites were chosen for the study. For a more detailed description of the site selection methodology, see the Appendix; and for the full research report, go to www.sedl.org/afterschool/commonpractices.pdf.¹

The National Partnership then sent teams trained in the study protocols to spend time at each site. Using the National Partnership protocols, the teams collected survey information from parents, school-day staff, and afterschool staff; conducted scripted interviews with a variety of staff; and made organized observations of activities focused on one of the study’s six study areas. The teams also

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1. Huang, D., Cho, J., Mostafavi, S., & Nam, H. (2008). *What works? Common practice in high functioning afterschool programs: The National Partnership for Quality Afterschool Learning final report*. Austin, TX: SEDL.

requested and collected from the sites any available internal or external evaluations as well as details about attendance, specific learning results, or student behavior. All of the information was then transcribed, collated, and analyzed by the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) at UCLA.

The study validated that sites selected as successful were indeed providing quality afterschool practices in academic content and crosscutting areas. In addition, the research team identified many common practices for managing, organizing, and sustaining a high quality program. The sites met indicators of success established from the research literature and expert opinion for delivering quality content and sustaining an effective afterschool program.

The practices from these programs, combined with expertise from more than 40 nationally acclaimed afterschool and content experts, informed the creation of a set of online and print resources (see www.sedl.org/afterschool). These resources support professional development activities focused on enhancing academic practices in afterschool and other expanded learning programs. To add to these resources, we produced this Guide to provide a practical tool to help you reflect upon your program's strengths and limitations so you can take informed action to increase your program's quality.

Program Organization

As our study teams visited afterschool programs that were reporting improvement in student achievement, the organization of those programs emerged as a common characteristic. In examining program organization, we looked at the following key areas:

- program leadership
- program governance
- program structure
- staff characteristics
- student behavior

In this section, we describe what we learned in each area. We then provide tools to help you reflect on your practices and determine what actions you can take to increase your program's quality.



Program Leadership

What We Learned

Full-time leadership is key to the development, implementation, and sustainability of overall programs and individual sites. The high-functioning programs we studied were characterized by strong, full-time leaders who recruited quality staff and created positive work environments built on supportive relationships among staff and students. Similarly, individual sites with full-time site directors or coordinators reported receiving more support from school-day staff, more access to space and materials, and more support for student behavior issues than other sites.

Program leaders who are physically located near key administrators within a school district or community-based organization gain more access to resources and more support for their programs. Afterschool program leaders operate in a variety of locations. However, survey data, interviews, and site observations suggest that program leaders located in the central office of a school district or the headquarters of a community-based organization received more monetary support, more access to space and materials, and more help with staffing and student behavior issues than other leaders. In addition, the data suggest that leaders in these central locations were able to build and maintain more positive relationships with the school-day staff, families, and the community than leaders located outside of the central office.

Strong leaders articulate the program's vision, mission, and goals to staff, administrators, students, families, and community leaders to generate support. In the high quality programs we studied, leaders inspired support for the program's mission and fully engaged both staff and students in achieving that mission. Across both school-based and community-based programs, staff showed high motivation to fulfill the mission articulated by program leaders. In most cases, this mission was a variation on helping students to achieve in school and life. In addition, in programs where leaders deliberately emphasized the mission, staff and students alike held and expressed high expectations for student success.

Afterschool program staff who interact with the staff of sponsoring organizations (e.g., federal title, special education, and general academic programs) have greater opportunities for collaboration and successful partnerships with schools. Of particular note, afterschool programs, in both urban and rural areas, were able to expand support and resources when staff met regularly with senior district or community-based leadership to work on mutually supportive goals, the coordination of plans, and the shared use of available resources.



Collaborative, respectful, and knowledgeable leaders are key to program success and staff retention. Staff in high quality programs consistently reported that their program leaders collaborated with them, were respectful of their ideas, and supported their efforts. They said that the leaders in their organizations provided staff with appropriate levels of autonomy and showed confidence in their ability to work with students. Staff also reported that their leaders were knowledgeable about both the academic and youth development needs of students. Additionally, reports indicated that support from leaders who knew the students and their needs helped instructors motivate students to participate, stay in the program, and do well in school.

Regarding staff retention, staff across all positions reported in interviews and surveys that program directors' collaborative and cooperative behaviors, even more than monetary rewards, contributed to their willingness to stay in the program. The level of staff retention in the programs we studied was considerably more stable than in afterschool programs in general, based on national data such as the Annual Performance Reports and details provided by the Department of Education.

In a related in-depth study that we conducted of four programs experiencing high rates of overall academic success, we asked specific questions concerning staff stability. In all four programs, staff confirmed what we had heard across the other sites: a factor in staff members' decisions to stay with the program was that the program leaders demonstrated a collaborative and supportive style, personal dedication, organizational skills, and open communication.

An open leadership style contributes to an overall positive program climate and encourages nurturing staff-student relationships. Staff reported that open and supportive program leaders who listen to input and practice facilitative leadership serve as role models and encourage staff to use similar practices with students. By using open leadership practices, staff reported they in turn were able to serve as role models for students and create high expectations for student behavior, school attendance, work habits, and attitudes toward learning.

How is your program doing?

The next two pages provide tools to help you implement quality practices in your afterschool program.



Quality-O-Meter Program Leadership

Reflect on and rate how well you think your program or site is doing on each item.

Site coordinators/directors work full-time in the afterschool program.



Program directors/leaders' offices are located in the headquarters of the sponsoring organization.



Program leaders model listening and facilitation practices that encourage program staff to demonstrate confidence in students' abilities to accomplish program goals.



Leaders respect and support afterschool staff by providing an appropriate level of autonomy within a clearly defined set of goals and expectations.



Program and site leaders build and maintain positive relationships with staff, school-day leaders and staff, students, families, and community members.



Leaders develop and implement a positive work environment with open and supportive behaviors.



Program directors and leaders meet frequently with leaders from sponsoring organizations to develop and coordinate all program goals and resources.



Leaders develop relationships with a variety of audiences to maintain needed support in funding, space, materials, staff development, and student behavior issues.



Planning for Action Program Leadership

Use this tool with your answers on the Quality-O-Meter to help you prioritize your practices and plan your program improvement.

List the practices in this area that you would like to strengthen or adopt in your program.

List specific steps you can take to strengthen or adopt these practices in your program.

What individuals and groups need to be involved?

What information and other resources will be needed to implement the step(s)?

How will you build the capacity of staff and others to implement the practices?

Describe how you envision your plan of action being implemented, including specific actions, responsibilities, and timelines.

To build understanding and support for the steps you plan to take, what do you need to do, to whom do you need to talk, and what points will you need to stress? (What is in it for them?)

How will implementing the steps to strengthen leadership practices benefit your program? (What is in it for the program and for you?)

How will you determine if the step(s) have been implemented as planned and are achieving the expected results?

Other ideas for improving program leadership:

Program Governance

What We Learned

Building relationships with a diverse group of supporters helps govern and sustain afterschool programs. During the 5 years of the study, a practice we observed was the creation of “advisory” groups that included afterschool staff; school-day personnel; parents; community partners; community leaders; and, in a few instances, students. Some of these advisory groups participated in reviewing and revising the structure, direction, and types of activities a site or program offered. In interviews, staff said the advisory groups also provided the larger community with information on the importance of the afterschool program to student success. Additionally, the advisory groups provided direct support for the programs in dollars, materials, space, and/or individual time so that programs were less dependent on a single source of monetary support.



Regular staff meetings with written agendas make a difference in governing programs. Program leaders at both the site- and program-level in the high-performing programs we studied held regular staff meetings, most often biweekly or monthly. Meeting agendas were written and included management and organizational topics as well as specific learning topics. In these meetings, program leaders intentionally reinforced program goals, worked on team building, and kept everyone focused and on track to achieve the program’s mission.

Shared decision making creates buy-in and helps shape leaders and staff into a team for implementation. In virtually all the sites, staff reported a high degree of satisfaction with their involvement in decision making about the program’s academic components. Both site coordinators and instructors said they played active roles in decision making about curriculum development and instructional strategies. The exception tended to be programs where instructors were not part of the school-day staff or had limited formal education training. These programs tended to rely more on academic lesson models developed by either certified school-day teaching staff or commercial companies. When it came to day-to-day operations, leaders shared decision making with those staff who were more familiar with students and their needs. Shared decision making in these situations was guided by an individual’s level of knowledge, experience, and expertise.

How is your program doing?

The next two pages provide tools to help you implement quality practices in your afterschool program.



Program Governance

Reflect on and rate how well you think your program or site is doing on each item.

The program includes an advisory group to provide input on overall program governance.



Program and site leaders schedule and conduct meetings at regular intervals with all staff at the program or site level.



Program and site meetings include written agendas.



Meeting agendas include management, organizational, and specific learning topics.



All program leaders play active roles in decisions concerning curriculum and instructional topics.



Based on their individual knowledge, experience, and expertise, instructional staff are involved in the development, review, and refinement of learning activities.



Leaders and staff cooperate and collaborate in developing curriculum-related activities.



Sites consider the knowledge of staff and student learning needs in decisions concerning the use of self-developed or commercially available academic activities.



Program and site leaders work with site instructional staff to make decisions about specific instructional strategies.



Planning for Action Program Governance

Use this tool with your answers on the Quality-O-Meter to help you prioritize your practices and plan your program improvement.

List the practices in this area that you would like to strengthen or adopt in your program.

List specific steps you can take to strengthen or adopt these practices in your program.

What individuals and groups need to be involved?

What information and other resources will be needed to implement the step(s)?

Describe how you envision your plan of action being implemented, including specific actions, responsibilities, and timelines.

To build understanding and support for the steps you plan to take, what do you need to do, to whom do you need to talk, and what points will you need to stress? (What is in it for them?)

How will implementing the steps to strengthen these practices benefit your program? (What is in it for the program and for you?)

How will you determine if the step(s) have been implemented as planned and are achieving the expected results?

Other ideas for improving program governance:

Program Structure

What We Learned

Program time is most often organized around four specific activities: academics, homework, enrichment, and snacks. Most programs conducted academic activities 3 to 4 days a week for 45 to 105 minutes a day, on average. Almost every program provided homework assistance and/or tutoring each day, and most sites offered daily enrichment activities and snacks as well.

Programs and sites across the study have similar operating schedules. Most of the 104 sites in the study offered programming 5 days a week for 2.5 to 3 hours per day. A small number of the programs offered programming 4 days a week. Most programs dedicated time and staff to planning, preparation, assessment, and professional development activities in support of program and site goals.

Programs use similar staffing patterns to implement their activities. Many of the programs we studied used staffing patterns that included a full-time program director who reported to a school or community-organization administrator. Many programs also had full-time site coordinators who provided day-to-day planning and management for one or more sites. Instructors and activity leaders were often part-time staff who worked directly for the afterschool program or a partner organization. In some cases, we visited programs that used volunteers to provide instruction or lead activities.



Academic activities address specific learning topics and standards that are linked to the school-day goals, particularly in literacy, math, and science. The majority of sites we visited were observed using staff-developed or adapted academic activities that had obvious links to school-day expectations and state standards. Fun, engaging activities that were different from those offered in the school day were observed across the sites. A smaller number of programs purchased and used commercially developed curriculum and/or materials, which also were linked to school-day expectations and state standards. In addition, a few programs were developing and implementing multidisciplinary project-based learning activities focused on the arts or science.

Programs offer a balance of a wide variety of enrichment activities in addition to academics and homework help. Almost every program in the study offered a variety of what the staff labeled enrichment activities, such as arts, crafts, cooking, gardening, health and nutrition, cultural activities, and computer skills. Some staff also described recreation activities, such as sports, dance, drill team, and outdoor games, as enrichment activities. These activities were organized and provided by a combination of program staff and external providers who were qualified and well trained. These external providers included the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, YMCAs, technology companies, environmental groups, and others. Students, according to interviews and surveys, often had input into what activities were provided.

How is your program doing?

The next two pages provide tools to help you implement quality practices in your afterschool program.



Program Structure

Reflect on and rate how well you think your program or site is doing on each item.

The afterschool program offers a range of activities each day of operation.



Program and site leaders are assigned full-time to the afterschool program.



Academic-related activities, homework help, enrichment activities, and nutritious snacks are provided on a regular basis.



Academic programming is focused on specific learning objectives that are linked to the school day and appropriate learning standards.



Academic activities—both those developed commercially or by program staff—support school-day goals and expectations through fun, engaging activities that differ from those offered during the school day.



Students attending the program provide input into the activities to be offered.



Project-based activities that focus on multiple-learning disciplines are a regular part of the afterschool program.



Time for planning, preparation, assessment, and staff development is a regular part of the afterschool program.



Planning for Action Program Structure

Use this tool with your answers on the Quality-O-Meter to help you prioritize your practices and plan your program improvement.

List the practices in this area that you would like to strengthen or adopt in your program.

List specific steps you can take to strengthen or adopt these practices in your program.

What individuals and groups need to be involved?

What information and other resources will be needed to implement the step(s)?

Describe how you envision your plan of action being implemented, including specific actions, responsibilities, and timelines.

To build understanding and support for the steps you plan to take, what do you need to do, to whom do you need to talk, and what points will you need to stress? (What is in it for them?)

How will implementing the steps to strengthen this practice benefit your program? (What is in it for the program and for you?)

How will you determine if the step(s) have been implemented as planned and are achieving the expected results?

Other ideas for improving program structure:

Staff Characteristics

What We Learned

Program staff are experienced. The majority of program staff in the sites we studied had 3 or more years of experience in afterschool programs and had been employed at the current program or site for at least 3 years.

Program staff are highly qualified.

Interviews and surveys indicated that more than half of the program leaders and site staff had at least a 4-year degree. Degrees in education, like teaching, counseling, and administration, were most common. Staff, particularly administrators, also reported having degrees in fields like social work, criminal justice, and the social sciences. A few of the programs participating in the study said they hired site instructors with little or no formal educational background or training mainly because of budget issues. However, these programs acknowledged that this strategy meant that staff with less experience and training needed more direct support in areas like discipline management, acceptable interactions with students, and academic “best practices.”

Program leaders hire staff who have specific skills that predict success. When hiring staff, program leaders reported seeking individuals with characteristics that seemed to predict success and retention. These characteristics were the ability to manage groups and individuals well, engage a variety of students in activities, and interact positively with students and adults. Program leaders said that getting help from school-day personnel and other afterschool program staff in the hiring of new staff contributed to choosing people who would be successful and stay with the program.



Monetary incentives are not the primary motivators for staff members. Leaders and staff of high-functioning programs regularly said that monetary incentives were not what attracted them to the program or encouraged them to stay. Rather, the opportunity to interact personally with students, implement creative learning activities, have sufficient time to work with other staff, and be flexible in how they used instructional time encouraged leaders and staff to remain with the program. In addition, some staff reported that they remained with the program to gain experience working with students while completing a formal degree program.

How is your program doing?

The next two pages provide tools to help you implement quality practices in your afterschool program.



Quality-O-Meter Staff Characteristics

Reflect on and rate how well you think your program or site is doing on each item.

The majority of program staff have multiple years of experience working in afterschool programs.



Most of the staff have a formal degree or related certification beyond the high school level.



Input for staff selection comes from a variety of knowledgeable individuals within the afterschool and school-day programs.



Potential staff are screened and interviewed for evidence they can manage groups and individuals well.



Potential staff are screened and interviewed for evidence they can successfully engage a variety of students in activities.



Potential staff are screened and interviewed for evidence they can build positive relationships with students and adults.



Staff receive the time, materials, and support needed to plan and implement creative learning activities.



Staff have sufficient scheduled time to interact and work with other program members.



Planning for Action Staff Characteristics

Use this tool with your answers on the Quality-O-Meter to help you prioritize your practices and plan your program improvement.

List the practices in this area that you would like to strengthen or adopt in your program.

List specific steps you can take to strengthen or adopt these practices in your program.

What individuals and groups need to be involved?

What information and other resources will be needed to implement the step(s)?

Describe how you envision your plan of action being implemented, including specific actions, responsibilities, and timelines.

To build understanding and support for the steps you plan to take, what do you need to do, to whom do you need to talk, and what points will you need to stress? (What is in it for them?)

How will implementing the steps to strengthen these practices benefit your program? (What is in it for the program and for you?)

How will you determine if the step(s) have been implemented as planned and are achieving the expected results?

Other ideas for improving staff characteristics:

Student Behavior

What We Learned

Programs have a discipline policy in place and consider having one to be critical. Approaches to student behavior expectations and discipline varied across the programs we studied. Some programs provided detailed and specific guidelines about what was expected of students and how to address behavior problems. Other programs were fairly general in describing their discipline policies. The programs also varied in their level of adoption or adherence to the school-day discipline policy. Some programs adopted the school policy; at other programs, staff thought their discipline policies should be more lenient because of the typically less-structured afterschool environment. No matter the policy, all the afterschool programs we visited had discipline policies in place to deal with student behavior issues and shared those procedures with their students.

Knowledgeable staff are able to address student behavior issues efficiently and effectively. Program leaders ensured that staff were familiar with their program's discipline policy and how to implement it. Most programs indicated that they had an established process for working through student behavior problems that generally began with the instructor and moved up the ladder through the site coordinator to the project director, as needed. Program staff also included students' parents in this process, particularly when problems persisted. All programs reported few discipline problems among students and that little staff time was needed to address problematic behaviors.

Programs receive support from school-day staff and administration in dealing with student behavior issues. School-day and afterschool staff worked together to address student behavior issues and thought this cooperation contributed to fewer discipline problems. Program leaders, including site coordinators, program directors, and school administrators, worked with school-day and program staff to build and maintain this cooperation. In addition, the observations, surveys, and interviews we conducted indicated that program leaders and staff in general supported the discipline and behavior policies in place, including how they should be interpreted and implemented.

How is your program doing?

The next two pages provide tools to help you implement quality practices in your afterschool program.





Student Behavior

Reflect on and rate how well you think your program or site is doing on each item.

The program has a formal, written discipline policy, which is based on appropriate measures like age, location, and program structure.



All staff have received training on the discipline policy and understand how to interpret and implement it.



All staff know what to do and whom to contact when student behavior or discipline issues arise.



Staff have the knowledge and skills to address student behavior or discipline issues quickly and effectively.



Program staff have formally shared student behavior expectations and consequences with students and parents.



Students are familiar with the program's discipline policy and the behaviors expected of them.



The school-day staff and administration are familiar with the program's discipline policy.



School-day staff and administrators directly support the program staff in addressing student behavior issues.



Planning for Action Student Behavior

Use this tool with your answers on the Quality-O-Meter to help you prioritize your practices and plan your program improvement.

List the practices in this area that you would like to strengthen or adopt in your program.

List specific steps you can take to strengthen or adopt these practices in your program.

What individuals and groups need to be involved?

What information and other resources will be needed to implement the step(s)?

Describe how you envision your plan of action being implemented, including specific actions, responsibilities, and timelines.

To build understanding and support for the steps you plan to take, what do you need to do, to whom do you need to talk, and what points will you need to stress? (What is in it for them?)

How will implementing the steps to strengthen these practices benefit your program? (What is in it for the program and for you?)

How will you determine if the step(s) have been implemented as planned and are achieving the expected results?

Other ideas for improving student behavior:

Academic Programming Practices

Most of the afterschool programs in this study specifically targeted students who were struggling academically. Nearly all of the staff we interviewed described the merits of an afterschool program that combined academic skill development with opportunities to explore and encourage students' social development.

All of the programs used evidence-based practices to encourage and facilitate student learning. Three common components for quality academic programming emerged from the study:

- goal-oriented programs
- standards-based learning activities
- research-based curriculum and instructional practices

In this section, we describe what we learned in each area and provide tools to help you reflect on your practices and determine what actions you can take to improve your program.



Goal-Oriented Programs

What We Learned

Programs set specific goals for students' academic achievement. Most of the programs we studied focused on helping students meet academic expectations by using different instructional approaches than those used during the school day. To do so, programs intentionally set specific, well-articulated instructional goals based on students' academic data. In most of the programs we observed, these goals were written and shared with all staff so that everyone understood what they were trying to accomplish academically with students.

Programs design learning activities to address specific learning goals in content areas. The programs we studied connected their academic goals to the school district's instructional goals for specific content areas. Goals emphasized specific learning expectations that linked to the standards and strongly concentrated on improving basic skills. Program leaders encouraged instructional staff to use project-based learning models that integrated content across areas. Sites and programs that emphasized the arts generally had goals to encourage student creativity and expression by extending exposure to a variety of arts experiences. The science programs had goals to awaken or strengthen student curiosity about science and the world while addressing academic improvement and achievement in specific science areas. Programs that focused on the arts or science also usually incorporated learning goals and activities tied to multiple content areas, like literacy and math. The technology programs had goals to provide students with hands-on experience with the mechanics of a broad range of technology skills that could enhance learning in other academic content areas. Homework and tutoring goals focused on



using well-trained staff to help students understand their assignments and be more motivated to complete them.

Program leaders and staff regularly communicate with school-day staff. Afterschool staff developed, adapted, or selected tools and methods to maintain contact at regular intervals with school-day staff. The intent of the contact was to keep an integrated focus on academic achievement goals. Interviews, surveys, and observations indicated that programs and sites with full-time leaders were most successful in developing and maintaining ongoing communication with school-day staff.

How is your program doing?

The next two pages provide tools to help you implement quality practices in your afterschool program.



Quality-O-Meter Goal-Oriented Programs

Reflect on and rate how well you think your program or site is doing on each item.

All program and site staff have access to a printed or electronic copy of the program's student learning goals and academic expectations.



Afterschool staff meet regularly with school-day staff to coordinate and cooperate on meeting the program's goals for students' academic achievement.



Afterschool activities addressing academic goals and expectations do not directly extend the same instructional approaches used during the school day.



The program's academic goals for students connect to the school day or district's instructional goals for specific content areas.



Program leaders and site coordinators work with the instructional staff to construct and use project-based learning models and strategies tied to multiple content areas.



Program staff utilize self-developed or purchased tools to enhance regular communication with the school-day staff.



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Planning for Action Goal-Oriented Programs

Use this tool with your answers on the Quality-O-Meter to help you prioritize your practices and plan your program improvement.

List the practices in this area that you would like to strengthen or adopt in your program.

List specific steps you can take to strengthen or adopt these practices in your program.

What individuals and groups need to be involved?

What information and other resources will be needed to implement the step(s)?

Describe how you envision your plan of action being implemented, including specific actions, responsibilities, and timelines.

To build understanding and support for the steps you plan to take, what do you need to do, to whom do you need to talk, and what points will you need to stress? (What is in it for them?)

How will implementing the steps to strengthen these practices benefit your program? (What is in it for the program and for you?)

How will you determine if the step(s) have been implemented as planned and are achieving the expected results?

Other ideas for better orienting your program around academic goals:

Standards-Based Learning Activities

What We Learned

Program leaders are knowledgeable about standards and purposeful in ensuring that standards-based learning activities are being provided.

All of the programs we studied had incorporated state or national standards into their curriculum to some degree. However, staff in school-based programs were more familiar with standards and better able to develop specific activities to address them than staff in community-based programs. Some programs, usually those in which instructors had a limited background in formal learning techniques, had staff with classroom experience develop and/or monitor the standards-based academic activities being offered.

Instructors describe attributes of learning activities that tie to the standards.

Afterschool program staff appeared knowledgeable about linking the curriculum to standards and were purposeful in the delivery of the standards-based curriculum. In many sites we visited, certified teachers were hired and they modeled quality instructional practices connecting activities to standards. In a number of programs, again more often those in which instructors had little or no formal educational training, survey data indicated that staff had little direct knowledge of the state standards. But when asked questions that included a standard, virtually all staff members described in detail how they tied activities to that standard. At the same time, in our observations, staff knowledge of content-area standards varied by content area.

Site coordinators are the most familiar with content standards in programs where mathematics is the focus. Staff that helped students with mathematics reported using activities that incorporated standards for using basic numerical functions (e.g., addition and subtraction of whole numbers, pattern recognition). In addition, half of the staff providing mathematics assistance reported using activities that incorporated higher-level standards (e.g., problem solving; using equations and understanding or applying mean, range, and median), particularly when working with students who had stronger basic mathematics skills.

Program science instructors intentionally use a standards-based curriculum for their activities and can provide reasoning for the focus on specific standards. Most science instructors in the programs we studied reported using specific state and national science standards for particular age groups as the basis of their instruction. For example, a number of science program staff reported using standards for basic scientific understanding and technology use to help students conduct various projects.

Literacy program staff incorporate standards into their programming. In the programs we studied, almost all of the literacy program staff reported using standards related to vocabulary and fluency development in read-aloud or silent-reading activities. In addition, some upper-grade-level staff said they used self-correcting strategies to help students decode text and understand literary techniques.

Academic Programming Practices

Technology activities include national standards. Although technology staff described their knowledge of standards as weak to moderate, the majority used activities or methodology that clearly reflected national or state standards or both. Observations and interviews also indicated that most programs used technology activities and materials for the following, all of which tie directly into the national technology learning standards:

- productions and creative projects and exercises
- communication of information and ideas
- student research
- solving real-world problems

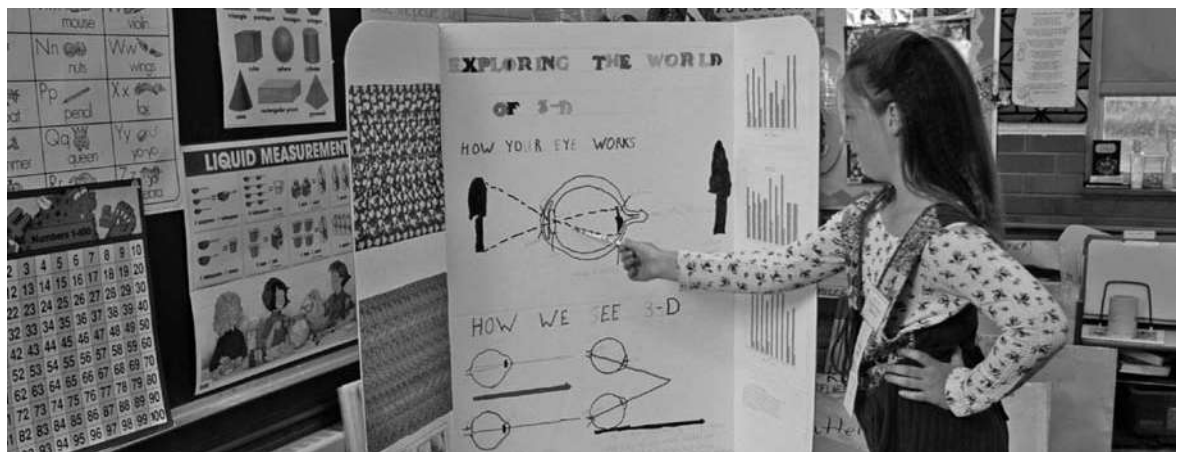
Additionally, most technology staff said that they provided students with opportunities to practice responsible behavior in the use of technology, and almost half of the staff reported applying a national standard in which students research and evaluate the accuracy and bias of digital information.

Arts program staff incorporate national standards. In the programs we studied, virtually all of the arts staff reported that they incorporated national standards for applied art techniques and processes into literacy, math, and science activities. In addition, about one third of the arts staff indicated that they used technology activities that incorporated the standard to use technology as a creative tool.

Program staff are more knowledgeable about and attentive to academic standards over time. The study involved site visits conducted over a period of 3-and-a-half years. During the first 18 months, the data we collected suggested that a number of program staff in the literacy and mathematics sites we visited had a limited knowledge or understanding of academic standards. During the final 2 years of visits to arts, science, technology, and homework help sites, program staff were able to describe the academic standards and explain how activities were designed to meet specific standards. Program leaders in these sites reported that an increased emphasis on academic standards in federal program regulations and professional development that targeted strategies for improving students' academic achievement contributed to staffs' ability to articulate knowledge about content standards. During the final year of the study, most of the technology and arts sites we visited had developed and implemented projects that included integrated learning activities that clearly addressed specific standards in multiple content areas.

How is your program doing?

The next two pages provide tools to help you implement quality practices in your afterschool program.





Standards-Based Learning Activities

Reflect on and rate how well you think your program or site is doing on each item.

Program and site leaders are knowledgeable about state and national learning standards.



Program and site leaders are able to facilitate curriculum planning linked to state or national standards as well as to school and district goals.



Academic activities offered at program sites intentionally address specific content learning standards that are linked to the school day.



Structured professional development on ways to integrate academic content standards into learning activities is provided for site coordinators and instructors.



Program learning activities address student learning goals based on student data.



Program leaders and staff communicate regularly with school-day staff about student achievement goals.



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Planning for Action Standards-Based Learning Activities

Use this tool with your answers on the Quality-O-Meter to help you prioritize your practices and plan your program improvement.

List the practices in this area that you would like to strengthen or adopt in your program.

List specific steps you can take to strengthen or adopt these practices in your program.

What individuals and groups need to be involved?

What information and other resources will be needed to implement the step(s)?

Describe how you envision your plan of action being implemented, including specific actions, responsibilities, and timelines.

To build understanding and support for the steps you plan to take, what do you need to do, to whom do you need to talk, and what points will you need to stress? (What is in it for them?)

How will implementing the steps to strengthen these practices benefit your program? (What is in it for the program and for you?)

How will you determine if the step(s) have been implemented as planned and are achieving the expected results?

Other ideas for improving your program's offering of standards-based learning activities:

Research-Based Curriculum and Instructional Practices

What We Learned

Programs of different sizes, physical locations, and structure intentionally use research-based academic activities to enrich learning. All of the programs we visited, regardless of their size, location, rural or urban setting, or community and program demographics, intentionally incorporated academics by using research-based strategies and practices to enhance student academic achievement.

Programs that emphasized any of the six content areas—literacy, mathematics, science, the arts, technology, and homework/tutoring—used research-based learning activities. Regardless of size or location, staff could find resources to support research-based practices. We frequently saw instructors using direct instruction, various exploration activities, and models where students constructed meaning through a variety of engaging hands-on activities. Some specific examples of research-based practices we observed include the following:

- Programs focused on enhancing literacy skills incorporated practices such as read alouds and literacy circles/groups to improve specific reading skills, including language fluency, vocabulary development, comprehension, and interpretation.
- Mathematics programs used math centers, research-supported math activities, and math encountered in everyday activities to strengthen students' ability to use mathematical tools, understand basic numerical functions, analyze word problems, and interpret instructions for problem solving.
- Science programs used research-supported activities such as describing and conducting scientific procedures, using tools to gather and analyze data, designing and conducting investigations, and conducting experiments and using evidence to predict and explain.
- Technology programs used the most content-integrated curriculum and reported frequently using research-supported practices such as building skills and understanding, gathering, and sharing information.
- Programs in the arts used research-based practices such as building arts skills, expressing yourself through the arts, and developing arts skills like interpretation. All the arts activities involved students creating products that were then shared and critiqued, either by the students themselves or their peers.
- The programs visited during the later portion of the study were developing and using project-based learning models. Evidence, cited by the programs and supported in the literature, indicates that integrating learning goals across content areas with an expected product can positively affect academic achievement and youth development goals. Interviews in the programs with project-based activities indicated that the participating students had improved academic performance and school-day attendance, and fewer behavior issues than prior to the use of projects as a learning focus.

Academic Programming Practices



Programs use homework and tutoring assistance to develop increased academic knowledge and skills as well as youth development skills. Programs and sites where homework and/or tutoring activities were observed used practices consistent with current research evidence defining quality academic assistance. These programs and sites relied on staff with strong content knowledge and interpersonal skills to provide direct academic assistance to meet the needs of students, either individually or in cooperative, collaborative groups. A number of the sites paid particular attention and time to strengthening students' study skills, work habits, and organizing practices. Additionally, these programs addressed issues such as time management, locating and using source material, note taking, and test preparation.

Staff in almost every program that focused on homework or one of the content areas indicated concern about the amount and type of homework assigned by school-day staff. Afterschool staff said the homework assigned to students often was not reflective of quality practices described in the current research literature on homework. For this reason, staff reported incorporating additional learning activities into their homework assistance or tutoring.

How is your program doing?

The next two pages provide tools to help you implement quality practices in your afterschool program.



Research-Based Curriculum and Instructional Practices

Reflect on and rate how well you think your program or site is doing on each item.

Program staff use a range of research-based learning practices to support increased academic improvement.



The program or site uses a research-based curriculum with an emphasis on hands-on instructional practices.



Program staff locate and utilize resources that support research-based practices.



Learning activities include project-based strategies that focus on multiple content areas and extend beyond a single lesson.



Program staff use research-based knowledge and skills to provide homework and tutoring assistance that appropriately supports students' academic needs.



Homework and tutoring assistance reflects current research on the best use of time, space, and materials.



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Planning for Action **Research-Based Curriculum and Instructional Practices**

Use this tool with your answers on the Quality-O-Meter to help you prioritize your practices and plan your program improvement.

List the practices in this area that you would like to strengthen or adopt in your program.

List specific steps you can take to strengthen or adopt these practices in your program.

What individuals and groups need to be involved?

What information and other resources will be needed to implement the step(s)?

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How will implementing the steps to strengthen these practices benefit your program? (What is in it for the program and for you?)

How will you determine if the step(s) have been implemented as planned and are achieving the expected results?

Other ideas for improving the use of research-based curriculum and instructional practices in your program:

Supportive Relationships in Afterschool

The afterschool programs in this study were adept at building supportive relationships that ultimately benefited all stakeholders. Positive relationships with school-day personnel, families, community members, and between and among program staff and students helped the programs thrive. In this section, we describe what we learned in these areas and provide tools to help you determine what actions you can take to build and sustain relationships to increase your program's quality.



Linking to the School Day

What We Learned

Programs use informal communication to create a strong foundation with the school-day program. The most common link reported and observed between afterschool program staff and school-day staff was communication in the form of brief discussions or the exchange of notes about a student's academic progress or behavior. Program staff reported that this type of communication occurred frequently—almost daily, in fact—and in a mainly informal way. Homework was the topic most often mentioned as the main reason for this contact.

Full-time site coordinators link to the school-day program through the sharing of goals and frequent progress reports. Another common link to the school day involved informally sharing program goals and progress reports about student achievement. A few programs we saw had more formal, organized linkages, such as passing assignment books back and forth between the school-day and afterschool staffs. The link with the school-day program was strongest in those afterschool programs that employed full-time site leaders who were on campus and able to see that the linkages happened. These individuals usually were responsible for coordinating academic programming and for addressing student behavior, attendance, and youth development with school-day and afterschool staff. Full-time site leaders also were responsible for communicating regularly with other program leaders and school-day administrators.

In addition, all the school-based programs and most of the community-based programs that we studied sought input from school-day staff to fine-tune academic learning activities. We observed that science programs, in particular, worked to link to the school-day program because the afterschool programs' science experiences often represented the majority of the time that students had to devote to science.

School-day and afterschool programs collaborate on curriculum planning and development to strengthen continuity around student learning. Although we saw this kind of planning and development in several of the content areas, one noteworthy science program provided an excellent example of how this practice works. The program was designed around the district's science curriculum, grounded in the state and national science standards, and supplemented with purchased science-kit materials. The result was a program that provided students with a sense of continuity between their school-day science instruction and afterschool science enrichment. School-day activities focused on vocabulary, subject comprehension, and related cognitive goals; afterschool activities focused on hands-on projects that enabled students to use basic scientific principles, test hypotheses, and conduct experiments.



School-day and afterschool programs use formal communication tools to help strengthen their link. During visits to technology and homework help sites, we saw more programs developing or purchasing formal communication tools to strengthen the link between school-day and afterschool program staff. These tools included agendas, planners, and homework logs, which many of the programs used to communicate progress reports and needs among school-day teachers, afterschool staff, students, and families.

How is your program doing?

The next two pages provide tools to help you implement quality practices in your afterschool program.

Supportive Relationships in Afterschool



Quality-O-Meter Linking to the School Day

Reflect on and rate how well you think your program or site is doing on each item.

Informal contact between school-day and afterschool program staff happens on a frequent basis.



The afterschool and school-day programs also have formal communication strategies in place to help link school-day and afterschool goals and expectations.



Formal and informal communication between afterschool and school-day staff is focused mainly on student academic achievement.



Each site has a full-time leader, preferably a site coordinator, assigned to the location during both the school-day and the afterschool program time.



A full-time site coordinator meets regularly with school-day administrators and other staff to build and maintain cooperation between the programs.



The afterschool and school-day staff collaborate to plan and develop complementary learning activities intended to provide continuity in student learning.



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Planning for Action Linking to the School Day

Use this tool with your answers on the Quality-O-Meter to help you prioritize your practices and plan your program improvement.

List the practices in this area that you would like to strengthen or adopt in your program.

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How will implementing the steps to strengthen these practices benefit your program? (What is in it for the program and for you?)

How will you determine if the step(s) have been implemented as planned and are achieving the expected results?

Other ideas for improving the link between your program and the school-day program:

Professional Development

What We Learned

Programs work to provide professional development opportunities for staff. More staff reported participating in multiple professional development activities during a program year than those indicating only a single experience. However, less than a third of the afterschool staff reported participating in any formal afterschool professional development activity during a typical year. Program and site staff often expressed a need to enhance the knowledge and skill level of afterschool staff in a variety of areas. Budgets and staff time for professional development presented a challenge for most programs. Part-time, hourly-wage employees staffed the majority of the programs we visited. Thus, the amount of time available for staff to participate in typical professional development was limited, as was the program budget to fund staff development. Frequent comments in interviews, for all job roles, indicated a significant level of concern about how to strengthen program quality with what the interviewees considered to be inadequate time and financial resources for providing quality professional development.

Professional development occurs via conferences and/or attending expert-led presentations. Traveling to conferences and attending expert-led workshops were the ways in which most afterschool program staff reported receiving professional development. Our interviews and surveys indicated that program and site leaders were the staff that most frequently attended these events. Limited evidence was reported,

provided, or observed to suggest these activities led to specific improvements, particularly in the area of academic practices. However, programs did report and could document changes in how leaders managed or organized their programs based on attending conferences or expert presentations.

Programs are beginning to develop job-embedded professional development. Many program staff, regardless of whether they were project directors, site coordinators, or instructors, defined professional development as attending either conferences or expert presentations. A significant majority did not recognize that professional development could be job-embedded by using such activities as weekly or monthly staff meetings or interactions among staff members. However, some programs and sites reported in interviews that they had begun using some staff meeting time for group discussion and/or sharing of experiences and practices to help build direct, job-related knowledge and skills.

Professional development focuses on program organization and management issues. Staff reported that most of the professional development offered was on organization and management issues, topics geared toward program leaders rather than instructional staff. Additional information collected from site staff indicated that the knowledge program leaders gained from professional development had a limited transference to the staff that regularly interacted with students.

Professional development for instructional staff addresses general rather than academic topics.

Professional development for instructional staff, according to surveys and interviews, was reported as most often addressing such topics as behavior management, record keeping, and health and safety, all of which are necessary for quality program operation. A few programs reported tailoring professional development for instructors to address the specific needs of the student populations they served—needs such as language development and related issues.

School districts or school-day programs provide the majority of academic, content-specific professional development.

Program staff did report that they could participate in professional development on academic topics provided by the school-day programs. The bulk of this professional development, whether formal or semiformal, did not address afterschool specifically. School-day staff working in an afterschool program automatically received professional development with other school-day staff. Staff who did not work in the school-day program often were invited to participate in school-day professional development, but few reported actually doing so.

Some professional development emphasizes helping students reach academic goals.

Some programs emphasized not only program organization and management but also how to help boost student academic achievement. Programs and sites became more interested in providing quality staff development on helping students reach academic goals and on tying learning to student and school needs. Professional development also began to focus more on using technology to support academics, which staff reported as useful.

Most professional development on academic content areas focused on literacy and mathematics as well as on how to implement specific practices and tie learning to school-day needs. Staff development focused less on science, the arts, homework help, evaluation, assessment, and assisting special populations. Additionally, surveys and interviews indicated, across locations, that staff perceived a need for more development in classroom management, motivating struggling learners, working with special needs students, dealing with bullying and abuse, and working with distressed students and families.

How is your program doing?

The next two pages provide tools to help you implement quality practices in your afterschool program.

Supportive Relationships in Afterschool



Quality-O-Meter Professional Development

Reflect on and rate how well you think your program or site is doing on each item.

Staff participate in professional development opportunities.



The program offers, at regular intervals, job-embedded professional development opportunities during staff meetings or at other convenient times.



Staff share their individual knowledge and expertise with each other.



The program uses one or more of these job-embedded professional development strategies that go beyond conferences and workshop presentations: train-the-trainer, online opportunities, self-directed learning, and professional learning communities.



Professional development opportunities are shared between afterschool and the school-day program.



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Planning for Action Professional Development

Use this tool with your answers on the Quality-O-Meter to help you prioritize your practices and plan your program improvement.

List the practices in this area that you would like to strengthen or adopt in your program.

List specific steps you can take to strengthen or adopt these practices in your program.

What individuals and groups need to be involved?

What information and other resources will be needed to implement the step(s)?

Describe how you envision your plan of action being implemented, including specific actions, responsibilities, and timelines.

To build understanding and support for the steps you plan to take, what do you need to do, to whom do you need to talk, and what points will you need to stress? (What is in it for them?)

How will implementing the steps to strengthen these practices benefit your program? (What is in it for the program and for you?)

How will you determine if the step(s) have been implemented as planned and are achieving the expected results?

Other ideas for improving professional development:

Building and Maintaining Relationships

What We Learned

Adults and students develop positive personal and educational relationships, which provide motivation for students to expand their learning and do well in school.

Across the 104 program sites, the quality of staff interactions with students was observed to be very positive. Interviews and surveys confirmed that program staff understood the need to build mentor relationships with their students. In general, all of the programs provided an emphasis on social development. Site-visit teams, by and large, observed positive, age-appropriate socialization among students and in student-adult interactions. Youth-to-youth interactions also were observed to be generally positive and respectful.

Staff have high expectations for students' academic performance, behavior, and democratic participation in the program.

Staff effectively communicated high expectations for students participating in the programs we observed. One third of the programs expected grade-level or better performance from their students. A fourth of the programs said they expected and encouraged students to make the best grades possible in school. In specific content areas, science and arts programs expected students to increase their exposure to and engagement in science and arts experiences. Similarly, technology programs expected students to use technology as a tool for continuous learning.



Student input is regularly sought and used in decision making and in planning program activities.

The programs we studied offered a wide range of activities that maintained student interest and encouraged students' continued participation. Some literacy, mathematics, and homework programs allowed students to select their own activities instead of assigning work. One program gave students a voice in decision making by allowing them to determine where to locate an upcoming service-learning project. Another program gave students the option of either reading for pleasure or doing homework. In specific content areas, arts, science, and technology programs placed heavy emphasis on youth autonomy and decision making. Arts programs, in particular, seemed to value student input on arts curriculum content. Students who had a voice in an afterschool program's design demonstrated a higher level of "buy in," engagement, and continued participation.

Programs intentionally help build positive student behaviors and increase students' ability to work collaboratively.

Many of the programs provided specific activities to support students' social development, increase their self-esteem, and help them develop positive self-images. These social development offerings were designed to demonstrate expected behaviors and healthy lifestyles, and help students develop positive relationships and learn to interact appropriately with different types of people. A few programs used predesigned or purchased curricula to build youth character skills. At least one program used the gender-specific curriculum *Smart Girls*, which focuses on topics related to girls' personal hygiene and life changes during puberty. Another program adopted the companion curriculum, *Passport to Manhood*, which focuses on the same topics for boys. Additionally, one of the programs adopted *Character Development*, a curriculum for developing the character traits of honesty, respect, responsibility, and caring.

Programs emphasize real-world activities to increase levels of student and staff motivation for learning.

In the programs we studied, learning opportunities linked to real-world situations helped connect the school-day curriculum to student's lives outside of school. For example, program instructors tied content to current events by using newspapers and magazines, and to popular culture by studying trends and fads like hip-hop, gadgets, television, and movies. Programs also provided real-world activities designed to help students develop and apply marketable technology skills.

Program activities are rotated to motivate students to attend and participate daily.

Virtually every site visited provided multiple types of activities during every program day. Most offered a combination of homework help or tutoring along with academics, enrichment, or recreation on a rotating schedule. Most individual activities lasted 30 to 60 minutes. Some programs used a learning-center approach, allowing students to move between activities at their own pace; others used a more time-structured arrangement. Embedded-learning strategies, like cross-content integration, dialogic (discussion of concepts and ideas) and cooperative learning, culturally significant programming, youth choice, and the incorporation of enrichment and recreational activities all helped to motivate students to participate and to meet academic and social expectations of the school day.

How is your program doing?

The next two pages provide tools to help you implement quality practices in your afterschool program.

Supportive Relationships in Afterschool



Quality-O-Meter Building and Maintaining Relationships

Reflect on and rate how well you think your program or site is doing on each item.

Program staff relate well to students and establish positive mentor relationships with them.



Staff effectively communicate high expectations for students' academic performance, behavior, and democratic participation in the program.



Students have a voice in program planning and decision making.



Activities are offered that are intentionally designed to foster positive student behavior and develop students' collaboration skills.



Real-world activities are offered that connect academic learning to students' lives and interests.



More than one type of activity, such as homework help, tutoring, academic enrichment, and youth development activities, are offered each day to motivate student participation.



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Planning for Action Building and Maintaining Relationships

Use this tool with your answers on the Quality-O-Meter to help you prioritize your practices and plan your program improvement.

List the practices in this area that you would like to strengthen or adopt in your program.

List specific steps you can take to strengthen or adopt these practices in your program.

What individuals and groups need to be involved?

What information and other resources will be needed to implement the step(s)?

Describe how you envision your plan of action being implemented, including specific actions, responsibilities, and timelines.

To build understanding and support for the steps you plan to take, what do you need to do, to whom do you need to talk, and what points will you need to stress? (What is in it for them?)

How will implementing the steps to strengthen these practices benefit your program? (What is in it for the program and for you?)

How will you determine if the step(s) have been implemented as planned and are achieving the expected results?

Other ideas for building and maintaining relationships:

Peer Collaboration and Cooperative Learning

What We Learned

Collaborative activities with peers and others provide positive motivation for students to improve academically, attend school more regularly, and adhere to acceptable behavior standards. Almost all the programs studied offered enrichment activities in which youth worked with peers and cooperated in various groupings to develop, create, and practice social skills. Many of these group activities involved performance art activities like poetry, dance, drama, and choir; or visual arts activities like craft making, painting, drawing, and sculpting. One program instituted an innovative art class, *Fun With Junk*, in which youth collaborated with peers in cooperative learning teams to create art from recyclable materials. Other sites provided opportunities for peer collaboration and cooperative learning through the development of dramatic, dancing, and singing productions. Group discussions and journal writing activities also engaged youth in intentional cooperative learning activities, and some sites used sports activities and games to demonstrate cooperative practices like teamwork.



Field trips provide valuable collaboration and cooperative learning opportunities for students. Program and small-group field trips to community sites engaged students in peer collaboration and cooperative learning opportunities as well as providing real-world connections to school-day learning. Students often participated with their peers in planning cooperative learning activities, including follow-up activities, for these trips. Field trips included visits to fire stations, libraries, local businesses, museums, technology centers, and zoos. One site coordinator took students to hear the local orchestra and paired youth with orchestra members for the purpose of learning about the instruments and the principles of teamwork required of members.

Grouping strategies help create positive relationships among students and teach collaboration skills. The programs also encouraged students' social development through the use of grouping strategies during formal academic activities. Virtually every program used a variety of student grouping strategies across grades, ages, and gender. The goal was to help students learn, to demonstrate how to work collaboratively, and to teach students how to use group skills to attain specific outcomes.

How is your program doing?

The next two pages provide tools to help you implement quality practices in your afterschool program.



Peer Collaboration and Cooperative Learning

Reflect on and rate how well you think your program or site is doing on each item.

Students have regular opportunities to participate in learning activities requiring collaboration and cooperation with other students.



A variety of grouping strategies are used to encourage positive student-to-student relationships.



The program regularly offers performance activities that require students to collaborate and to develop and practice social skills.



The program offers multiple ways for students to participate in group activities, like sports, games, and project-based learning activities, that are intended to enhance cooperation and teamwork.



The program offers field trips as a way to provide additional collaboration and cooperative learning opportunities for students.



Students work together to plan activities.



Staff structure activities and homework help using a variety of student-grouping models intended to build and strengthen collaboration and cooperation in learning.



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Planning for Action Peer Collaboration and Cooperative Learning

Use this tool with your answers on the Quality-O-Meter to help you prioritize your practices and plan your program improvement.

List the practices in this area that you would like to strengthen or adopt in your program.

List specific steps you can take to strengthen or adopt these practices in your program.

What individuals and groups need to be involved?

What information and other resources will be needed to implement the step(s)?

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How will implementing the steps to strengthen these practices benefit your program? (What is in it for the program and for you?)

How will you determine if the step(s) have been implemented as planned and are achieving the expected results?

Other ideas for improving peer collaboration and cooperative learning:

Family Engagement

What We Learned

Programs regularly encourage families to volunteer on-site. More than half of the programs regularly encouraged families to volunteer on-site in some capacity. Likewise, similar numbers of families indicated they were invited to volunteer in their child's program at least once a month. These volunteer opportunities included providing classroom support or expertise in an area and chaperoning at events and on field trips. However, despite efforts to encourage volunteering, actual family involvement as volunteers was low across all 53 programs we studied. Staff suggested that the main reason for the low levels of volunteering was that most family members worked, often at multiple jobs, making it difficult for them to spend time at the site. In addition, staff interviews suggested that language issues and family members' own less-than-favorable experiences in school also had a limiting effect on volunteer rates.

Programs offer programming for families to increase their involvement. To help families feel welcome, some programs offered evening and weekend classes designed for adults or families, including crafts, cooking, English as a second language, and General Education Diploma courses. A few programs offered special events at times and locations convenient to families. In addition, some programs, mainly in large urban areas, shared and utilized a school-based family center that was available during both the school-day and the afterschool program time. These family centers operated a range of programs to strengthen job, life, and parenting skills and to build the capacity of families to support students' education.

Site coordinators and program staff use a variety of formal and informal means to share program and student information with families. Staff and families consistently reported that programs provided language-appropriate communication in written documents, formal meetings, and informal contact situations to disseminate information to families and to encourage them to volunteer. Formal communication between program staff and families included monthly/bimonthly newsletters; program orientations at the start of the year; family nights; community outreach activities (e.g., potlucks and student performances); afterschool nights, usually with a specific focus; letters, notes, and phone calls regarding student progress, attendance, or behavioral issues; and individual scheduled meetings as needed (although many programs did not schedule regular formal meetings with families). Most programs reported that the most in-depth, face-to-face contact with families occurred during registration at the beginning of the program year. Informal communication included regular and frequent family chats and discussions on issues affecting individual students. This type of communication typically occurred at the end of the program day, when many families arrived to pick up students. Some programs also reported that families participated as members of advisory committees that provided input for program plans.

Supportive Relationships in Afterschool



Families' perceptions of program efforts to share information and promote participation are mostly favorable. Families gave high marks to their interaction, both formal and informal, with program staff. In addition, some family members indicated that staff interactions and behavior clearly showed that staff cared about their children. Families also gave high marks to program efforts to communicate information about the program and individual students. A strong majority of families surveyed indicated receiving some form of information about the afterschool program on a regular basis. About one-third of families stated that their children's program provided information at least monthly in their home language. Overall, families thought that the programs made an effort to encourage their participation and to keep them abreast of program rules and practices.

Families consider the program to be of high quality. Families reported that they thought the afterschool programs their children attended were of high quality. Surveys at all sites during the period of the study showed a very high degree of family satisfaction and support for the quality of the afterschool programs. In particular, families reported that their children who participated in the programs showed improved behavior, increased attention to school assignments, more interest in learning, and an increased desire to attend both school and the afterschool program.

How is your program doing?

The next two pages provide tools to help you implement quality practices in your afterschool program.



Family Engagement

Reflect on and rate how well you think your program or site is doing on each item.

Families are encouraged to become involved in the afterschool program.



Each program site regularly provides activities or events to address specific needs of families (e.g., ESL, GED classes).



Meetings and events are held at times and locations convenient for families.



Staff use multiple means, like newsletters and formal and informal meetings, to inform families about program activities, rules, and expectations for their children.



Communication with families is provided in their own language whenever possible.



Program pick-up time is used to discuss student progress and behavior with students' families.



Staff behavior demonstrates to families that the staff members care about their children.



Families at each site have opportunities to provide input on program plans.



Planning for Action Family Engagement

Use this tool with your answers on the Quality-O-Meter to help you prioritize your practices and plan your program improvement.

List the practices in this area that you would like to strengthen or adopt in your program.

List specific steps you can take to strengthen or adopt these practices in your program.

What individuals and groups need to be involved?

What information and other resources will be needed to implement the step(s)?

Describe how you envision your plan of action being implemented, including specific actions, responsibilities, and timelines.

To build understanding and support for the steps you plan to take, what do you need to do, to whom do you need to talk, and what points will you need to stress? (What is in it for them?)

How will implementing the steps to strengthen these practices benefit your program? (What is in it for the program and for you?)

How will you determine if the step(s) have been implemented as planned and are achieving the expected results?

Other ideas for improving family engagement:

Community Connections

What We Learned

In-kind and financial support are the most common forms of community connections with afterschool programs. All 53 of the programs we studied built connections with a variety of community individuals and groups, and in return received what program staff considered to be valuable support. Community involvement predominantly consisted of groups, organizations, businesses, or individuals providing a program with financial assistance, supplies and materials, or services. Many staff members commented in interviews that support from community members and groups is mandated by program funding requirements.

Community partnerships enhance the academic content of afterschool programs. Many programs benefited from sharing resources and staff with other community organizations. For example, community partnerships provided materials and supplies to arts, science, and technology programs, which enhanced their academic offerings. Some arts programs benefited from donations to fund arts-related field trips. Artists-in-residence groups contributed to arts activities in almost every program, regardless of the community's size or economic status. Likewise, community science experts helped programs provide real-world science experiences for students. Field trips to museums, universities, science centers, agricultural centers, or other community sites with a formal learning focus also provided students with learning opportunities beyond the school building, even in the most rural areas.

Mentoring and tutoring are popular ways for community groups, businesses, and individuals to support afterschool programs.

A large number of the programs and sites we visited reported that individuals or groups from the community volunteered as mentors and tutors, providing both academic and recreational assistance for individuals and small groups. Local universities and high schools provided volunteers for tutoring and homework help. Community groups such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs, and faith-based organizations provided volunteers and mentors. These community mentors and tutors provided students with a variety of role models and enriching learning experiences. At the same time, community members reported that their interaction with students was a positive experience and increased their support for afterschool programs.

Service-learning projects engage local communities in afterschool programs.

Programs that used project-based learning generally included a service-learning component that involved some segment of the community. In addition, a small number of programs did activities that supported community groups, such as producing newsletters, maintaining Web sites, or even helping to raise fish for a state conservation agency. In the programs visited later in the study, students were observed participating in a range of service-learning projects, such as designing get-well cards and making visits to nursing home residents. Other service-learning projects included recycling, community beautification projects, community gardens, and ecosystem projects to build students' understanding of biology and conservation concepts. All of the observed and reported service-related activities or projects had standards-based educational goals and expectations in addition to building an understanding of local community needs.

Supportive Relationships in Afterschool

Students benefit from involvement with their communities. By engaging community members and resources, programs provided students with the opportunity to explore career interests and benefit from professional expertise in content areas they were studying in school, such as science or mathematics. Students also received opportunities to identify and associate with community role models and to become more immersed in their community. Other benefits reported included strengthening students' self-concept, character, creativity, and feelings about the value of community involvement.

Community support increases when students give back through various projects. Programs that contributed time and effort to help school and community groups meet mutual goals reported much stronger levels of support than the programs where community involvement was focused only on receiving goods and services. Program staff we interviewed reported that the number and range of individuals and groups, including political officials, who provided overall program support increased when students in the program did service-learning projects for those individuals and groups.

Regardless of community size, social background, and financial situations, programs are able to use local community resources to support student learning.

Virtually every program we visited, regardless of location and community size, utilized a variety of local individuals, groups, and organizations to provide expertise, knowledge, and additional learning opportunities for students. Arts programs created connections with cultural centers and conducted field trips to art exhibits. Science and technology programs favored field trips that supplemented the science and technology curriculum. One science program sponsored a trip to a multinational aerospace manufacturer and to an advanced technology company. Programs in smaller rural areas located and visited local resources such as agriculture companies to support learning in areas like science.

How is your program doing?

The next two pages provide tools to help you implement quality practices in your afterschool program.





Community Connections

Reflect on and rate how well you think your program or site is doing on each item.

Program staff have identified community businesses, groups, and individuals that are able and willing to commit to providing in-kind or financial support to the program.



Community partners regularly provide materials and other resources that the program needs.



The program has created connections with informal learning organizations, such as museums and arts and science centers, to provide a wide range of enrichment learning opportunities for students.



Staff have built relationships with community groups and individuals who have a willingness to serve as volunteer mentors, tutors, or activity experts.



Program staff are involved with a wide variety of community organizations and leaders so that they can structure student activities designed to support community-wide projects and goals.



Students in the program have the opportunity to participate in service-learning projects to benefit the community.



Service-learning and other community projects are connected to education standards and student learning expectations.



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Planning for Action Community Connections

Use this tool with your answers on the Quality-O-Meter to help you prioritize your practices and plan your program improvement.

List the practices in this area that you would like to strengthen or adopt in your program.

List specific steps you can take to strengthen or adopt these practices in your program.

What individuals and groups need to be involved?

What information and other resources will be needed to implement the step(s)?

Describe how you envision your plan of action being implemented, including specific actions, responsibilities, and timelines.

To build understanding and support for the steps you plan to take, what do you need to do, to whom do you need to talk, and what points will you need to stress? (What is in it for them?)

How will implementing the steps to strengthen these practices benefit your program? (What is in it for the program and for you?)

How will you determine if the step(s) have been implemented as planned and are achieving the expected results?

Other ideas for improving community connections:

Achieving Program Outcomes

The programs we studied acknowledged their need and desire to be accountable for program outcomes. They were able to report positive results in several areas based on various internal and external evaluation methods used to measure their efforts. The goal was continuous program improvement and a way to communicate their results to their stakeholders. In this section, we describe what we learned about program accountability and evaluation. We have provided one Quality-O-Meter and one Planning for Action tool for all four areas in this section. Use these tools to reflect on how to apply these practices to your program.



Accountability

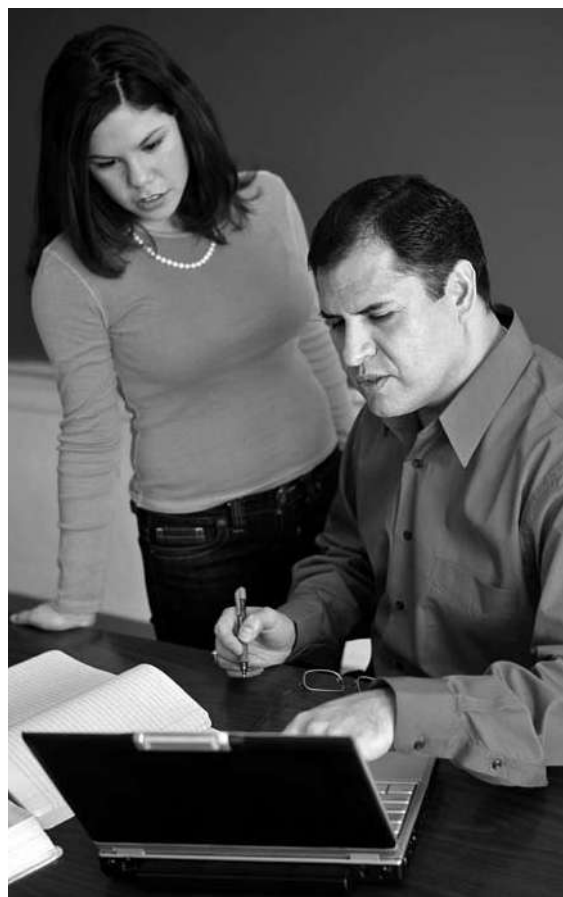
What We Learned

Programs focus on improving students' attendance, behavior, classroom grades, and achievement scores. All the programs we studied reported positive impacts on student outcomes, such as attendance and learning. A significant majority of the programs also reported improved youth efficacy, confidence, engagement, and attitudes toward school. However, our teams observed that going forward many programs will need more rigorous evaluations to support their reported results. Noteworthy was that staff perceived their programs as positively affecting school-day success. In the case of some district-based mathematics and literacy programs that experienced improvement in district test scores or classroom grades, the homework help provided by the afterschool program was credited by school-day staff, afterschool staff, families, and students for the results. In general, the program successes staff shared with our teams highlighted the transformational potential of afterschool programs to improve students' study skills, attitudes, and behavior as well as their self-esteem and social competencies.

School-day teachers attribute student improvements to the afterschool programs. For students in the programs we studied, a majority of their school-day teachers reported an improvement in the students' overall interest in literacy, mathematics, science, and the arts. Likewise, for students who participated in homework help in one of the programs we studied, a majority of their school-day teachers reported improvements in the students' performance on tests and their ability to complete homework assignments. In most of the 53 programs, school-day teachers also reported positive changes in students' behavior in terms of

school attendance, frequency of classroom participation, effort on schoolwork, attentiveness in class, and discipline.

Families perceive and attribute student improvements to the afterschool programs. Families from all of the programs in the study reported that their child's participation in the program resulted in improved academic skills, increased interest in specific content areas and school-day work in general, and improved on-time completion of homework. Families frequently mentioned as well that they experienced fewer discipline issues with their child, both at home and at school, as a result of regular participation in the afterschool program.



Internal Evaluations

What We Learned

Programs conduct formal and/or informal internal evaluations. Virtually all of the programs in the study reported using both formal and informal internal evaluations. The methods of internal evaluations observed included informal conversations between afterschool staff, school-day staff, and families; the formal administration of surveys to staff, students, and families; and the tracking of school-day test scores, grades, behavior, and attendance records. For example, one program conducted a formal internal evaluation that included quarterly assessment briefs from staff, pre-post testing, the tracking of students' school-day grades and progress, and student surveys on program satisfaction. Community-based programs reported using more specific goal-focused evaluations of outcomes for specific activities. Frequently, community-based programs used activities from a vendor who then expected to receive some feedback on what students learned through participation in a specific activity or project.

Programs generally do not use student testing as a means to evaluate their day-to-day activities. Those programs utilizing self-developed academic activities, in particular, did not report any significant use of formal student testing as a method of internal evaluation. However, the programs using commercial academic products did report some use of pre-testing and post-testing, usually provided by the product developer, to measure the success of the learning program. However, many of the programs reported using one or more of the following methods to evaluate individual and program growth: instructor observations; student responses; student products like digital year books; project results; the production of useable goods or services; and integrated activities like student presentations and the use of the arts to describe learning results.

Both school- and community-based programs collect evaluation input from families and students in addition to staff. Informal means of internal evaluation in school-based programs included student input and feedback via conversations with staff; feedback from families and school-day teachers; and informal student data, often from observations, regarding levels of peer collaboration and participation. Community-based programs' internal evaluations sought feedback via surveys of families, staff, students, and school-day teachers. These programs also appeared to use the results of these evaluations for program improvement more than school-based programs did.

External Evaluations

What We Learned

Programs employ an external organization to conduct evaluations. About one third of the programs we visited conducted external evaluations and reported using multiple sources of information as input for these evaluations. The types of data included some formal pre-post testing, school-day teacher evaluations, comparison groups, surveys, focus group discussions, and observational assessments. School-day information, when available, included report card grades, standardized test results, behavior reports, and attendance records. In interviews and observations, a majority of the programs provided little evidence that formal external evaluations were used to guide decisions on program improvement because the data were often not provided in user-friendly formats.

Technology programs use content-specific external evaluation models. Several of the technology programs used external evaluations to track the overall effectiveness of the program's technology use and any related results in the school-day curriculum. Some of the external evaluators utilized software to monitor student progress in the school day, the results of the technology use in the afterschool program, and the results of adjusting the technology programming to fit into the afterschool time.



Evaluation Challenges

What We Learned

Staff have limited experience with accountability methods and how the results can be used to determine how any factor, such as an activity, staffing, or a budget expenditure, affects program success.

In general, all 53 programs in the study reported conducting varying degrees of internal and external evaluations. Program leaders were often either the only person or one of the very few people aware of any formal evaluation procedures or of the results of any external evaluations of the program. Overall, program directors were the most knowledgeable about the program evaluation processes, particularly those related to external evaluations. Only a few program leaders used their evaluation results to build support for their program in any structured or formal way, such as through regular presentations to the local school board or other school leaders. Site coordinators were usually most familiar with their individual sites' internal evaluation processes and any quality-assurance procedures in place. Most often, their knowledge of accountability practices was tied to the state reporting systems. Instructional staff were most familiar with the informal student assessment procedures and tools used to monitor progress at the activity level and within their individual site.

Obtaining student achievement data is challenging for programs. Overall, both school-based and community-based programs frequently reported difficulty collecting students' academic, attendance, and behavior data because of school concerns about confidentiality. School district-based programs had somewhat easier access to students' academic information and, therefore, were better able to establish baselines, identify areas of academic need, and determine academic

progress through their evaluations. A significant number of programs said performance data were collected directly from students because of difficulty obtaining data from other sources. In these programs, staff asked students for report cards, testing results, and other forms of academic reports after receiving permission from their families.

Programs use the information from external evaluations to provide instructional baselines, monitor student progress, and document program impact. Of the programs that used evaluations for program improvement, they most commonly used report card and assignment grades and any formal testing results that students provided. Programs used these data sources as outcome measures in determining student academic growth and progress. This approach was especially seen in programs with the explicit goal of raising students' achievement scores. Interviews indicated that much of the data were collected to provide information to the afterschool program funding sources.

How is your program doing?

The next two pages provide tools to help you implement quality practices in your afterschool program.



Quality-O-Meter Achieving Program Outcomes

Reflect on and rate how well you think your program or site is doing on each item.

The program reports positive impacts on student outcomes.



The program has data to support impacts on student outcomes.



Teachers and parents attribute student improvements to afterschool programs.



The program conducts internal and external evaluations.



Families, staff, and students provide input for evaluations.



Program staff know how to interpret and use evaluation data.



The program can obtain data needed to conduct evaluations.



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Planning for Action Achieving Program Outcomes

Use this tool with your answers on the Quality-O-Meter to help you prioritize your practices and plan your program improvement.

List the practices in this area that you would like to strengthen or adopt in your program.

List specific steps you can take to strengthen or adopt these practices in your program.

What individuals and groups need to be involved?

What information and other resources will be needed to implement the step(s)?

Describe how you envision your plan of action being implemented, including specific actions, responsibilities, and timelines.

To build understanding and support for the steps you plan to take, what do you need to do, to whom do you need to talk, and what points will you need to stress? (What is in it for them?)

How will implementing the steps to strengthen these practices benefit your program? (What is in it for the program and for you?)

How will you determine if the step(s) have been implemented as planned and are achieving the expected results?

Other ideas for achieving program outcomes:



Conclusion

In this Guide we have reported on practices for building and managing quality afterschool programs based on a 5-year study of 53 afterschool programs and 104 sites reporting gains in students' academic achievement. Although there is little scientifically based evidence available about the effectiveness of specific practices, the programs and practices in this study were rigorously identified and observed. In this Guide we have analyzed and described the practices these successful programs were using at the time of our visits.

Consistently, across programs we saw high levels of staff motivation to help students succeed. Strong leaders who recruited qualified staff and created programs built on relationships between staff and students were characteristic of what we observed. Program leaders inspired and engaged both staff and student support for the afterschool program missions. As a result, the staff said they felt respected, supported, autonomous, and confident to work with the students they served. These programs were able to achieve low turnover rates and retain staff. In turn, staff and students were able to build supportive, caring, mutually respectful relationships that promoted the staff's ability to role model, coach, and mentor. Consequently, high expectations for student achievement measured by improved school attendance, work habits, grades, and a zest for learning became the benchmark for their program quality.

Additionally, across programs the staff consistently did the right thing to impact student development and achievement. School-day teachers and parents praised the achievement and developmental differences they saw in students who regularly attended these afterschool programs. Although the programs we studied attained a considerable level of quality in many areas of afterschool programming, as a field we must build opportunities to help all programs think reflectively about what they do and implement new practices so they can generate the evidence needed to make lasting improvements in quality and sustainability.

We must adopt a tactical, strategic, and intentional approach to scaling up the ability of all afterschool and expanded learning programs to do what the high quality programs in this study are already doing. We must provide continuous professional development and program evaluation that will enable afterschool programs to take more intentional and strategic approaches to attain high quality programming designed to support student success in school and in life. This Guide is intended to provide a tool to build a reflective practice that leads to such continuous improvement. We wish to thank the C.S. Mott Foundation for supporting the development of this Guide and its complementary professional development opportunities.

Appendix

Study Overview

SEDL and its partners defined quality practice sites as those showing evidence of success in promoting student learning and studied their academic practices in four content areas—literacy, mathematics, science, and the arts—and two cross-cutting areas—technology and homework help. A rigorous validation process was established to identify and select prospective sites for the study. The first step in this process was to conduct an extensive literature review and get guidance from National Partnership experts and advisors on key curriculum content to determine common variables and processes associated with positive afterschool program outcomes. This process resulted in identifying indicators of success in delivering quality content and maintaining effective functionality in an afterschool setting. These indicators, along with the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) annual performance reports for 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) programs, teacher survey results, participant academic performance data, and recommendations from leaders in the afterschool field, served as the basis for developing the indicator system used to validate quality practices for site selection. The National Partnership used this system and additional selection criteria to cull approximately 120 21st CCLC grantees in the six content areas from an initial pool of more than 1,600 grantees.

Selection Criteria for Study Sites

For initial site selection, several program prerequisites were established. These prerequisites included serving 100 or more students, operating for at least 3 years, and having at least three sites that offer

the requisite content practices at least three times per week. Once these factors were considered, the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) at UCLA conducted an in-depth analysis of data from program performance reports that included program objectives, grade levels served, number of students served, student demographics, student hours/days per week of specific programming offered, number of staff, and percentage of credentialed staff. A composite program ranking was also established on the basis of percentage gains in student academic achievement over the previous academic year, the number of program attendees, and the percentage of project goals that were met. This analysis and composite ranking resulted in sites that exceeded one or more of their goals and demonstrated academic success.

After this initial selection process, per ED's instructions, non-21st CCLC afterschool programs that were nominated by recognized afterschool leaders and content experts as outstanding were added to the list to ensure a wider diversity of coverage. To further validate the program selection made earlier, a telephone screening process was added that included a formal protocol and a request for additional supporting materials. Programs that did not meet the initial selection criteria were added to the pool before phone screening took place. None of these randomly selected programs passed the phone screening process, with this part of the analysis blinded to phone screeners. This rigorous process presents further evidence that the selection process was successful in identifying strong practices, particularly as selected programs scored higher than all the randomly selected programs in both the formal data analysis and the phone screening.

Another form of validation involved aggregating the 10-question teacher survey data from the annual performance reports and comparing the results for the selected grantees to the general population. This analysis also favored the selected grantees. Finally, SEDL's National Partnership Leadership Team, its Steering Committee comprised of afterschool leaders and researchers, and ED reviewed and approved the list. In the end, 53 afterschool programs in urban and rural areas from coast to coast were identified and agreed to participate in the study. In composite, these rigorous identification and validation procedures made SEDL confident that the afterschool programs studied were outperforming the average 21st CCLC grantee and were, in fact, those programs using quality academic practices to achieve documented results with students.

Use of a Multimethod Approach

SEDL and its partner CRESST developed and used a multimethod approach to data collection and analysis, combining quantitative and qualitative data—including staff and parent surveys; in-depth interviews with program directors, site coordinators, principals, and instructors (lasting approximately 1 hour on average); and direct observation of afterschool instruction. Instruments and protocols used to collect data incorporated the indicators of success established for the site identification and selection process. The data were collected during visits to 104 sites throughout the nation. SEDL staff and partners, on the basis of a structured observation protocol that included scales, checklists, and open-ended questions, focused primarily on the content and quality of instructional practices.

The following sites participated in the study.

Literacy Sites

- Bladen County Schools, Elizabethtown, North Carolina
- Children's Aid Society, New York, New York
- Citizen Schools, Boston, Massachusetts
- Columbine Elementary, Denver, Colorado
- Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation, Evansville, Indiana
- Foundations, Inc., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Grinnell Community Learning Center, Grinnell, Iowa
- LA's Best, The Literacy Loop, Los Angeles, California
- The Northside Learning Tree, San Antonio, Texas
- Ontario Middle School SUCCESS, Ontario, Oregon
- San Bernardino Unified Schools, San Bernardino, California

Mathematics Sites

- The After-School Corporation, New York, New York
- Anaheim Achieves, Anaheim, California
- Dillon School District, Latta, South Carolina
- Estherville STAR, Estherville, Iowa
- Harris County Department of Education CASE, Houston, Texas
- Passaic Public Schools, Passaic, New Jersey
- Van Buren Schools, Van Buren, Arkansas

Science Sites

- After School Youth Development Program, Newark, New Jersey
- Brighton and Curley Afterschool, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts
- C.A.S.E. Harris County Department of Education, Houston, Texas
- Fort Worth Independent School District, Fort Worth, Texas
- G.R.A.S.P. DeKalb County, Atlanta, Georgia
- My House, Inc., New Orleans, Louisiana
- Operation SMART, Oakland, California
- Project SAFE, Wewoka, Oklahoma
- USD 309 Nickerson-South Hutchinson, Hutchinson, Kansas

Arts Sites

- Arts Corps, Seattle, Washington
- Chicago Public Schools, Chicago, Illinois
- Children's Aid Society IS 90, New York City, New York
- KEWA, Santo Domingo, New Mexico
- Kids Quest, Englewood, Colorado
- LA's BEST, Los Angeles, California
- Prime Time, Independence, Oregon
- Project Shine, Tucson, Arizona
- SPARKS, Coatesville, Pennsylvania

Technology Sites

- Boys and Girls Club of Menlo Park Clubhouse, Palo Alto and Redwood City, California
- Afterschool Learning Center, San Francisco, California
- SAFE and SAFE and Cool Programs, Danbury, Connecticut
- Long Beach YMCA, Long Beach, California
- Worland Community Center, Worland, Wyoming
- School of Hearts, Syracuse, New York
- DeKalb County School System, DeKalb, Georgia
- Comanche Public Schools, Comanche, Oklahoma
- USD 309 Reno Valley, Hutchinson, Kansas
- Austin Independent School District, Austin, Texas

Homework Sites

- Anchorage School District, Anchorage, Alaska
- Tukwilla Community Schools, Tukwilla, Washington
- Howard County Community Center, Chicago, Illinois
- The Tapestry Program, Rutland, Vermont
- Berlin Schools, Berlin, New Hampshire
- DARE2XL, Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania
- Leon County School District, Tallahassee, Florida

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This publication funded by C.S. Mott Foundation