

# Arkansas Standards for Quality Afterschool Programs



*A resource for afterschool professionals which highlights the elements of quality programming that lead to positive experiences for youth and families during the out of school hours.*





## INTRODUCTION

The Arkansas Out-of-School-Network (AOSN) is a network of afterschool and summer program leaders and stakeholders from across the state. AOSN seeks to provide opportunities and supports to program leaders and policy makers as they work to strengthen and expand the field of afterschool. AOSN recognizes the fact that building an infrastructure of quality programs is essential to providing access to high quality, age appropriate Out-of-School-Time (OST) opportunities. Formulating an operational definition of OST program quality is also essential to strengthening programs at the point-of-service (POS). In *Afterschool Programs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Their Potential and What it takes to Achieve It* (Little, Wilmer, & Weiss 2007), it is suggested that sustained participation in well-structured, well-implemented, high quality programs and activities help youth attain the knowledge and skills necessary for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In the fall of 2005 and early 2006, AOSN began the process of reviewing and compiling best practice research in the field of OST program quality. The AOSN Quality Standards Committee was tasked with reviewing the research and identifying valid instruments that were being used as assessment tools across a broad range of OST programs. During the course of the creation of the Arkansas Standards for Quality Afterschool Programs, the Quality Standards Committee used the following core commitments to help define the principles and practices that lead to the delivery of quality programming for children and youth during the out of school time.

### **Core Commitments:**

- Meet the developmental needs of children and youth for the first two decades of their lives.
- Take a positive, asset-based approach to child and youth development.
- Ensure access for all to high-quality developmental opportunities.
- Create and support youth/adult partnerships in non-school opportunities.
- Require accountability at program, community, and state levels.
- Support out-of-school time opportunities through a combination of family, provider, and public contributions.

(Adapted from “Journeys to Community”, Minnesota Out-of-School Time Commission, 2005)

In the fall of 2006 the first draft of the AOSN Quality Standards was presented to stakeholders and program leaders for their review and input. After a series of committee meetings and successive meetings with program leaders, a set of comprehensive standards was distributed for additional comments. In August 2008, Governor’s Task Force on Best Practices for After-School and Summer Programs issued a final report titled *“Enriching Arkansas Children’s Lives Through High-Quality Out-Of-School Activities”* that identified the key elements for after-school and summer programs that must be addressed in any effort to improve quality. Upon the issuance of this report, the AOSN Quality Standards were aligned with the quality framework issued by the Task Force. The result of this due diligence was a set of comprehensive standards that could be used as a framework to assess the level of quality of the myriad of Arkansas’s OST programs.

The Arkansas Out of School Network recognizes that each afterschool program is unique with varying missions, philosophies, serving wide and diverse populations, age ranges, interests and values. The standards are intended to be flexible enough to apply to a wide variety of program types but concrete enough to offer some elements that, while adaptable, must be addressed by any program, regardless of the ages served, program type, or overall goal. The standards are intended to suggest and offer a strong foundation for quality programming that embraces the belief that quality should be the standard, for all ages, all communities, and all programs.

The Arkansas Standards for Quality Afterschool Programs has been established from a set of critical components which indicate program quality, including:

- **Safe and Appropriate Program Environments and Facilities**
- **Ongoing Training and Staff Development**
- **Program Monitoring and Evaluation**
- **Positive Youth Development**
- **Community Partnerships**
- **Sustainability Planning**

Each of the above components begins with a standard that further defines the intent of the component, followed by quality indicators. The quality indicators collectively serve as the measure of the correlating standard.





## SAFE AND APPROPRIATE PROGRAM ENVIRONMENTS AND FACILITIES

### STANDARD:

*Quality programs provide a safe, healthy, and appropriate learning environment for all participants.*

1. The program provides a stimulating, welcoming and supportive environment for participants.
2. The program's indoor space (when applicable) meets the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive needs of participants.
3. The program's outdoor space (when applicable) is large enough, appropriately equipped, and safe to allow participants to be active and independent.
4. The program implements, practice and shares approved safety plans and procedures with staff and families.
5. Appropriate emergency supplies are present.
6. Adequate security for the program is utilized.
7. Program staff supervise participants to ensure their safety.
8. The program serves food and drinks that meet the requirements as outlined by the National School Lunch Program or the Child and Adult Care Food Program.
9. The program develops and manages effective arrival and dismissal procedures and plans for safe travel home.
10. The program documents that all staff and volunteers working with participants have passed a child abuse and neglect screening and criminal records check for crimes that pose a threat to the well-being of youth and families.
11. The program ensures that at least 1 staff member trained in CPR and First Aid is present at all times.

12. The program's space meets the planning and storage needs of participants and staff.
13. Program staff apply rewards and consequences appropriately and consistently for participant behavior.
  - Positive reinforcement for correct behavior is utilized.
  - Behavior expectations are clearly communicated and consistently followed.
15. The program is aware of, records, and informs staff of special needs of participants.
  - When a participant with special needs is enrolled, staff receive training related to the special need when necessary.
  - Ratios are re-evaluated to see if any adjustments are needed.
  - Staff work with participants, families, and other identified community resources to support existent IEP and non-IEP needs.
16. Maintains staff-to-participant ratio as per state licensing regulations.
17. Ratios are adjusted to provide adequate supervision during higher risk activities. (Ex. field trips, swimming, etc.)



## ONGOING TRAINING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

### STANDARD:

*A quality program recruits, hires, and trains diverse staff members who value each participant, understands their developmental needs, and works closely with families, school partners, and staff.*

1. The program has an infrastructure for staff support.
  - The program provides positive working conditions where staff are treated with respect and as professionals.
  - Staff are provided adequate supervision.
  - Staff are provided opportunities for advancement.
  - Regular staff meetings are conducted.

2. Each staff member has a written Professional Development Plan.
  - The written Professional Development plan meets the specific needs of each individual staff member.
  - Plans address the core programmatic content areas, positive child/youth development strategies, appropriate guidance and discipline techniques, health and safety practices, etc.
3. Staff are provided ongoing staff development in order to engage and retain staff.
4. The program recruits, hires, and develops staff who reflect the diversity and culture(s) of the community.
5. Staff understand diversity, developmental, and cultural needs of the participants served.



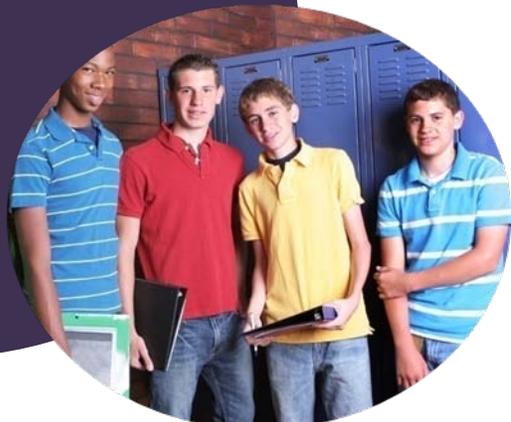
## PROGRAM MONITORING AND EVALUATION

### STANDARD:

*A quality program has a system for measuring outcomes and using that information for on-going program planning, improvement, and evaluation.*

1. Program conducts regular program evaluations.
  - The program has measurable program goals aligned with organization, mission, and needs.
  - The program has outreach to stakeholders in program evaluation.
  - The program has an internal method for assessing program activities.
  - The program uses findings from evaluations for continuous program improvement.
2. The program conducts regular staff evaluations.
  - The program utilizes an internal method for assessing staff performance.

3. The program conducts regular participant evaluation and assessment.
  - The program uses quantitative data to measure participant' progress towards stated goals.
  - The program utilizes and internal evaluation method for assessing participant engagement and participation.
  - The program regularly conducts focus groups, surveys, and evaluations with the participants and families.
4. The program offers high quality activities that are school-linked.
  - Promising/best practices are shared with staff.
  - The program has a method or access to provide participants academic support.
  - The program establishes strong links to the school day, incorporating programming that integrates and complements curriculum and academic activities.
  - The Arkansas Curriculum Frameworks are used as a resource when developing program activities and opportunities.
  - The program maintains ongoing communication with school personnel.





## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

### STANDARD:

*A quality program provides a well-rounded variety of activities and opportunities that support the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive growth and development of all participants.*

1. The program addresses the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional needs of the participants.
  - Activities are age and skill level appropriate for participants.
  - Activity content addresses specific developmental domains.
  - Offers project-based, experiential activities that promote creativity and youth self-expression.
  - Youth participate in short and long term projects.
2. Activities target life skill development.
  - Activities encourage development of critical thinking skills.
  - Participants have the opportunities to work individually, in small groups, and in large groups.
  - Activities provide participants with opportunities to develop and master new skills.
  - The program content offers a progression of skill levels within activities.
3. Activity content and structure has an intentional reflection process.



4. Program integrates opportunities for the development of personal responsibility, self-direction, and leadership throughout the program.
  - Participants work on self directed projects.
  - Participants have the opportunity to make content choices.
  - Participants have the opportunity to plan and conduct activities.
  - Participants have leadership roles throughout the program.
  - The program's policies and engagement strategies support participant leadership development.
  - Participants have the opportunity to form special clubs/groups within the program.
  - Participants have the opportunity to plan and participate in community service.
  
5. Participants receive recognition for their achievements and participation.
  - The program recognizes individual and group accomplishments.
  - Opportunities for recognition are planned and scheduled on a regular basis.
  - Program allows participants to set individual goals.
  - Recognition of individual achievement occurs formally and informally.
  - The program provides space for participants to display examples of their work.
  - The program provides opportunities for youth to make formal presentations of their work i.e. plays, poetry readings, art shows, talent shows, etc.
  
7. The program's activities and projects promote diversity in culture, religion, ethnicity, ability, etc.
  - Policies and practices prohibit bias of any kind.
  - Program content and activities are representative of the cultures of the participants.
  - Program activities and structure are adaptable for different levels of ability.
  - Displays in the program are reflective of the varying ages, cultures, and abilities of the program participants.



## STANDARD:

*A quality program provides the opportunities for youth to participate in planning, to exercise choice, and engage in a variety of offerings.*

1. Participants are provided with a variety of engagement strategies.
  - There are opportunities for participation in physical play, creative arts, hands-on learning, academically embedded activities, etc.
  - Program content and activities are inclusive of different learning styles.
  - Program structure allows for large group, small group, and individual work.
    - There are opportunities for peer mentoring.
  - Activities are conducted that involve the whole family and community.
2. Participants have the opportunity to exercise voice and choice.
  - The program provides intentional opportunities for participants to assist with program planning.
  - The feedback of participants is incorporated into the program.
  - The program maintains a functioning participant advisory board or council.
3. The program provides a supportive caring environment.
  - The staff offers verbal encouragement to the participants during the course of an activity.
  - Staff uses respectful voice tone.
  - Staff is engaged in activities with the participants.
  - Staff observes and monitors youth participation.
  - Positive guidance practices are used.
  - Staff model appropriate respect for all cultures, ages, and abilities.
  - Activities promote team work amongst participants
  - Participants are allowed input into the implementation of disciplinary practices.
4. The program establishes and follows a schedule that is known to all staff, participants, and their families.
  - Transitions are orderly, efficient, and minimal in duration.
  - There is an appropriate amount of time for all activities.
  - The daily schedule is flexible enough to provide adaptability but structured enough to provide predictability for the participants.
  - The daily schedule is posted and followed.
  - The daily schedule is shared with family members, participants and staff.



## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

### STANDARD:

*A quality program establishes strong partnerships with families and communities in order to achieve program goals.*

1. The program involves families and community in program decision making and planning.
2. The program seeks opportunities to share information and access to community resources with families.
3. The program provides educational experiences for the families of program participants.
4. The program coordinates staff development activities with those of school and community partners.
5. The program creates a community learning environment where program activities are linked to real-life/real-world application.
6. The program works with community partners to leverage resources and support for the youth participants and families served.





## SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING

### STANDARD:

*A quality program has a coherent vision / mission and a plan for increasing the capacity that supports sustainability and growth.*

1. Program has written policies and procedures for fiscal management.
  - Program has a written budget.
  - Program has a plan to review budget and adjust as needed.
  - Program participates in an annual fiscal audit.
2. Program has appropriate organizational structure.
  - Program has a written mission and goals.
  - Program has an organizational communication plan.
  - Program has a process for recruiting, retaining, and managing staff and volunteers.
3. Program encourages participants to recruit others to the program.
  - Participants are encouraged to ask other youth, family and community members to attend program activities.
  - Participants are involved in marketing and outreach to the program.
4. Program has a long-range plan for sustaining the program.
  - Maintains relationships with advocates for program quality and availability.
  - Establishes appropriate partnerships.
  - Has a written resource development plan.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following resources were consulted and to guide the development of the Arkansas Standards for Quality Afterschool Programs:

Arkansas Governor's Task Force on Best Practices for After-School and Summer Programs. (2008). *Enriching Arkansas Children's Lives Through High-Quality Out-of-School Activities: Final Report of the Governor's Task Force on Best Practices for After-School and Summer Programs*.

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Hammond, C. & Reimer, M. The Essential Elements of Quality After-School Programs. Dropout Prevention Center/Network. College of Health, Education, and Human Development, Clemson University. Submitted to Communities in Schools(CIS) January 30, 2006.

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Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA). High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. 2005.

## FUTURE ACTION

As the field of afterschool continues to evolve, so will the program practices and elements of quality that produce good youth outcomes. These standards are intended to serve as a starting point by which afterschool programs in Arkansas can leverage quality improvement efforts by providing a common language of quality for program administrators, frontline staff, legislators, families, community leaders, etc. to discuss the program components associated with a quality afterschool program. As part of these discussions, the following actions need to be taken to ensure that the Arkansas Standards for Quality Afterschool Programs are consistent with other quality measures that exist or are emerging in Arkansas:

- Crosswalk the Arkansas Standards for Quality Afterschool Programs with the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) developed by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. This tool is currently being piloted in various out of school time programs in Arkansas. It allows program staff (or external specialists) to conduct evidence-based research on programs via observation and interview methodologies. Notes, observations, and interview data are used as evidence to score items, and these item scores are combined to create an overall program quality profile.
- Adapt the current minimum licensing requirements for school-age care programs to meet the diversity of afterschool and summer programs in the state. These requirements provide the foundation by which the Arkansas Standards for Quality Afterschool Programs are built upon. As these requirements change to be more inclusive to the diversity of afterschool and summer programs in the state, subsequent modifications of these quality standards might need to occur.



## THE ARKANSAS OUT OF SCHOOL NETWORK

The Arkansas Out of School Network (AOSN) is a vehicle for bringing together policymakers, educators, childcare providers, youth development workers, program developers, advocates, parents and others interested in improving outcomes for children and youth through school-based/school-linked afterschool programs. AOSN provides a means to encourage local and state policymakers to invest additional resources wisely to expand quality afterschool opportunities and address particular needs to improve quality and sustainability. The networks also provides a means for joint planning, sharing of resources and best practices, building bridges to and between federal, state and local afterschool initiatives and forging partnerships necessary for comprehensive statewide afterschool policies. AOSN is committed to creating safe, healthy, and enriching experiences for Arkansas youth during out of school times by helping to strengthen, expand and sustain Arkansas' school-based and school-linked services to children and youth, ages 5-19, during out of school time. To learn more about AOSN visit [www.aosn.org](http://www.aosn.org).



For additional information contact:

ASU/Childhood Services

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1-888-429-1585

<http://chs.astate.edu>

Arkansas Department of Education

1-501-683-4497

1-501-682-4475

<http://arkansased.org>

Arkansas DHS Division of Child Care  
and Early Childhood Education

1-501-682-9699

1-800-445-3316

<http://www.arkansas.gov/childcare>

The Arkansas Standards for Quality Afterschool Programs are dedicated to the frontline staff, administrators and intermediaries who advance the afterschool profession while keeping kids safe, inspiring them to learn and helping their working families.