

Florida Standards for Quality Afterschool Programs



Florida Afterschool Network

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qual·i·ty [kwä-lə-tē] *noun* The degree of excellence of a thing.



RECOGNITION

The FAN Board of Directors would like to recognize and thank the following organizations and agencies for their input, advice, and recommendations in the development of the quality standards:

- Children's Services Councils of Florida
- 21st Century Community Learning Centers
- The Children's Forum
- Florida After School Alliance
- National Afterschool Association
- The Agency for Workforce Innovation / Office of Early Learning
- The Florida Department of Children and Families / Child Care Licensing Office
- School Board of Hillsborough County
- Early Learning Coalition of Northwest Florida
- Boys and Girls Clubs of Florida
- YMCAs
- Local School Systems
- County Parks and Recreation Departments
- Local Early Learning Coalitions
- Public and Private afterschool practitioners.

Many of the recommendations received from the workshop participants were incorporated into the final standards document.

The FAN Board would also like to thank the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation for their continued support and encouragement during the standards development process.

The work, energy, and commitment of all participants truly make this document epitomize the term "quality."

STANDARDS FOR QUALITY AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

The Florida Afterschool Network's (FAN) standards for Quality Afterschool Programs define the principles and practices that lead to the delivery of quality programming for children of elementary school grade levels. The standards provide a framework for the development of a caring, dynamic, stimulating and safe environment for children and youth. Research-based outcomes for such programs include: children and youth who are connected and engaged; parents who feel their children are safe and secure; and families who have a sense of pride and ownership of the program.

FAN recognizes that each afterschool program is unique with varying missions and philosophies, serving wide and diverse populations, ethnicities, age ranges, interests and values. The standards are not intended to dictate policy and practice. They are intended to suggest and offer a strong foundation for quality programming.

The standards are organized in seven (7) categories.

- Administration and Organization
- Program Management and Staff
- Communication and Interaction
- Program Structure and Activities
- Health, Safety, and Nutrition
- Program Environment
- Family and Community Involvement

Each category begins with a guiding principle that defines the intent of the category, followed by quality elements. The elements are broad based, allowing for, encouraging, and celebrating the uniqueness of each program.

As part of the development process, FAN recognized the value of obtaining input from those who directly provide afterschool services. Five (5) regional workgroups were held and over 60 practitioners attended. Each proposed standard was discussed and revisions to initial drafts were made. Because the review process involved thorough input and deliberation, FAN is convinced that the standards represent the best thinking in the field and clearly outline what a quality program looks like.

Implementation is voluntary. FAN hopes the standards are of such value that programs will want to implement some or all of the elements. FAN envisions parents and guardians utilizing the document as a guide or tool when selecting an afterschool program for their children.



ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANIZATION

Guiding Principle:

Provide a solid framework for afterschool programming; sets forth mission, purpose philosophy, and goals.

Elements:

1. The program has a written mission statement that sets forth its philosophy and goals.
2. The program involves children and youth, families and staff to plan and implement suitable activities, which are consistent with the program's philosophy.
3. The program has established written goals that are measurable, aligned with the mission statement, and directed to achieve sustainability.
4. The program has established written family, staff and volunteer policies and procedures.
5. The program has established sound fiscal and business practices to ensure continued and sustained program operations.
6. The program collects written feedback through surveys, parent conferences, or other forms of communications.
7. The program has implemented a written evaluation system to determine whether mission and goals are being achieved.
8. The program has developed relationships with community and business leaders that ensures program enhancement and sustainability.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT AND STAFF

Guiding Principle:

Employ qualified administrative and direct care/instructional staff who are focused on the needs of children and youth, families, and fellow staff.

Elements:

1. The program has a system of documenting children and youth's daily arrival and departure. Policies shall include written departure authorization from parent(s) or guardian(s) and release of children and youth only to authorized persons.
2. Children and youth are supervised at all times. The Florida Afterschool Network (FAN) recognizes that staff to child and youth ratios vary according to ages, abilities, and type and complexity of activities. FAN recommends the program has an overall direct service staff to child ratio that does not exceed one (1) adult for every twenty (20) children and youth at any time.
3. FAN recognizes the importance of well trained, knowledgeable staff when working with children and youth. FAN recommends the program establishes and implements an overall training plan based upon competencies and position classifications. The training plan shall ensure staff participate in a minimum of fifteen (15) hours of relevant training per year. The program has written job descriptions, personnel policies, program policies, and a parent handbook. The program provides annual written evaluations for all staff.
4. The program has written documentation that all staff have received and been cleared through Level II screening as defined in s.435.04, Florida Statutes, and drug testing. The program has written documentation that all volunteers have received and been cleared through Level II screening as defined in s.435.04, Florida Statutes.
5. The program conducts monthly staff meetings with agendas and documented staff attendance.



COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION

Guiding Principle:

Provide ways to meet the needs of children and youth, families, and staff.

Elements:

1. Staff engage with all children and youth in positive and respectful ways through listening, acceptance, and appreciation. Children and youth have opportunities to develop a sense of belonging.
2. As role models for children and youth, staff engage other staff in an appropriate and professional manner.
3. Staff respond appropriately to the individual needs of children and youth, recognizing their special interests, feelings, abilities, and cultures. Staff understand, celebrate, and reflect diversity.
4. Staff encourage children and youth to take initiative, make choices, be responsible, and take on challenging tasks and activities.
5. Staff communicate and reinforce clear limits and rules. Positive techniques are used to guide the behavior of children and youth by setting appropriate limits and encouraging children and youth to resolve their own conflicts.
6. Staff interact with children and youth using various approaches to help them learn to think for themselves, develop problem solving skills, and improve language skills through frequent conversation.
7. Staff provide opportunities for children and youth, and families to interact with each other in positive ways.
8. Program administration communicates appropriately with all supervisory and direct service staff.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND ACTIVITIES

Guiding Principle:

Emphasize developmentally appropriate social, recreational, and educational opportunities.

Elements:

1. The program offers developmentally appropriate activities that reflect the mission and goals of the program.
2. The program posts a daily schedule that is flexible, enabling children and youth to transition smoothly from one activity to another.
3. The program provides a variety of indoor and outdoor activities for children and youth to choose from, which provide social, recreational, and educational opportunities.
4. The program offers enrichment opportunities in core academic areas as well as in cultural arts and technology.
5. The program offers scheduled time in an appropriate environment for academic support or homework assistance.
6. The program provides planned daily recreation, sports, or fitness activities.
7. The program includes a sufficient amount of materials and equipment that are developmentally appropriate, accessible, and in good working order.
8. The program makes reasonable accommodations to the program environment and schedule so that children and youth with special needs may participate.
9. When on field trips, all precautions are taken to ensure the safety of children and youth including additional staff supervision as necessary. The program has written policies and procedures to transport children safely; it complies with all legal requirements for vehicles and drivers.





HEALTH, SAFETY AND NUTRITION

Guiding Principle:

Provide developmentally appropriate environments that protect and enhance the safety, health and nutrition of children and youth.

Elements:

1. The program has written health, safety, and nutrition policies available to families.
2. The program has a written and accessible emergency management plan, which includes up-to-date contact information.
3. The program has staff certified in CPR and First Aid available and accessible to the children and youth at all times.
4. The program shall have a written medical policy, which include at a minimum, a plan to ensure medication is provided in the original container, maintained in appropriate storage, and dispensed as prescribed by a physician with parent(s) written authorization.
5. Children and youth are separated at the first sign of illness and supervised by staff who take proper health precautions. Parents are notified when appropriate.
6. The program implements daily safety inspections and has procedures in place for dealing with hazardous conditions and equipment. Hazards are remedied in an appropriate time.
7. Staff model, teach, and promote proper health, nutrition, safety, and hygiene practices. Frequent hand washing is encouraged, especially after using the bathroom and immediately prior to snacks and meals.
8. The program encourages healthy food options. Drinking water is readily available at all times.

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

Guiding Principle:

Provide developmentally appropriate indoor and outdoor environments.

Elements:

1. The program environment provides dedicated usable space for all activities during hours of operation.
2. The space is arranged so the variety of social, recreational and educational activities can go on at the same time without much disruption.
3. There is adequate and convenient storage space for equipment, materials, and personal possessions of children and youth and staff.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Guiding Principle:

Provide opportunities for family involvement and public/private partnerships.

Elements:

1. The program develops, implements, and maintains a current plan for family involvement. The plan includes regularly scheduled activities, so parents may participate as appropriate.
2. Family participation is welcomed within established visitation guidelines.
3. The program supports families by connecting them with community resources through information sharing.
4. The program provides newsletters, notes, and/or bulletin boards to share and communicate information.

GLOSSARY

Afterschool Programs

The provision of a safe learning environment for children and youth during out-of-school time. Includes before and after school programs, full day summer care, and holiday care.

Children and Youth

The Florida Standards for Quality Afterschool Programs were developed for programs that serve children and youth of elementary school grade levels.

Community

Commonly refers to the city, town or county where the program is located. A key factor in determining “community” is the ability for the program to link with individuals, organizations, and agencies.

Competencies

Includes training practices where theory is integrated with skill sets, and knowledge is gained to support the performance of skill.

Core Academic Areas

Includes language arts, reading, math, science, and social studies.

Curriculum

The overall program structure and activities; arts and crafts; music, recreation, tutoring, homework assistance. Program curriculum is determined by the overall philosophy, mission and student needs.

Developmentally Appropriate

Commonly refers to program methods and goals that respond to ages, developmental stages, and individual differences of children and youth.

Direct Service Staff

Staff who provide actual ongoing supervision, instruction, and care to children and youth.

Family

Family is defined differently for individual children and youth. Staff and administration need to be aware of the diversity of family dynamics represented in their program. Family may include: children and adults living in the home, adults who are responsible for the care and well being of the child, parents who may not live in the same household as the child, and the child’s legal guardian.

Level II Screening

Security background investigations of staff including, but not limited to, fingerprinting for statewide criminal and juvenile records checks through the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), and federal criminal records checks through the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and may include local records checks through local law enforcement agencies. Section 435.04, Florida Statutes, outlines in detail the full Level II screening requirements.

Out-of-School Time (OST)

Refers to all out-of-school care including; before and afterschool programs, full day summer care, and holiday care.

Program Environment

The space where the program activities take place, both indoors and outdoors. How well a program utilizes its environment impacts the quality of the activities and care provided.

Philosophy

Commonly refers to the program’s stated principles and beliefs. The program bases its policies and practices on its philosophy.

Relevant Training

The training is designed for specific classes of positions dedicated to improving job performance skills.

Special Needs

The individual differences of children and youth, be it physical, behavioral, medical, emotional, or cognitive.

Technology

The use and knowledge of current skills sets, techniques, organizations, equipment and systems that allow us to control and adapt to our environment.

Volunteer

An individual who assists the program on an intermittent basis without pay. Volunteers are under direct and constant supervision by program personnel.



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