

# TEXAS STANDARDS OF HIGH QUALITY

Afterschool, Summer and Expanded Learning Programs



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# TXPOST

TEXAS PARTNERSHIP FOR OUT OF SCHOOL TIME

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# WHAT IS OUT OF SCHOOL TIME (OST)?

**Out of School Time (OST)** programs are academic, social/emotional, and physical health expanded learning opportunities that take place before school, after school and during the summer and school breaks. OST programs are often designed to complement the school day and can include a variety of activities, from homework assistance to hands-on science experiments to performing and fine arts. Schools, community and faith based groups, youth serving organizations, cultural institutions and city or county agencies most often provide OST programs.

One in five youth are regularly unsupervised during critical non-school hour periods (Afterschool Alliance, 2014). Tremendous financial and resource investments have been made in OST programming through both public and private initiatives.

In 2002, the Wallace Foundation began helping to coordinate new city wide systems of OST programming in five cities. The Wallace Foundation continues to invest heavily in coordination of afterschool initiatives, and in 2012 provided grants to strengthen and solidify already developing OST coordination efforts in nine new cities. In a recent study of large cities with greater than 100,000 residents, 77 of the 100 cities reported that they are actively coordinating afterschool programs (Simkin et al., 2013).

The C. S. Mott Foundation began supporting statewide afterschool networks in 2002, by offering technical assistance to new and existing networks through the Afterschool Technical Assistance Collaborative (comprised of representatives from Afterschool Alliance, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Governors Association, National League of Cities, Inc., and the University of South Carolina Education Foundation. To date, 42 current statewide networks exist.

In citywide and statewide networking efforts, technical assistance efforts are focused on coordinating programs, improving access and quality of programs, and encouraging decision makers to help support the sustainability of programs (C.S. Mott Foundation, 2014).

## THE CASE FOR QUALITY

Increasingly the research is clear and consistent; quality Out of School Time (OST) programs increase positive outcomes for youth. Standards are an essential component in defining what quality programming looks like. While high quality OST programs exist across the country, standards are often defined at the state level to accommodate the priorities of state agencies and local systems and to include

OST providers as key participants in the process of development and implementation. Defining quality through standards is a first step in assuring that all youth have access to high quality OST programs. The standards and indicators within this guide were designed to assist parents, families, funders, policymakers and any Texan who is interested in supporting the next generation of youth through high quality OST programs.

# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

These standards were developed by OST stakeholders with current and potential stakeholders in mind. Throughout this document, there are examples of the standards in practice, offering visual examples that demonstrate a program meeting a standard. These examples help providers to visualize what a high quality program can look like; provide a framework for funders to observe and evaluate quality; and and serve as a tool for OST advocates to work with policymakers.

1. Families + Youth	2. Programs + Providers	3. Schools + School Districts	4. State Agencies, Funders + Intermediaries
<p>Families are encouraged to use these standards to speak with school and program administration about how a high quality program could benefit your child and youth in the community. These standards can also serve as a guide in selecting an afterschool or summer program. For example, asking questions about how staff are trained to support youth can be an important factor in your child’s success and will help determine if the program is a good fit for your family and for the school or community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selecting a Program</li> <li>• Advocating for a Program in your school</li> </ul>	<p>Program quality standards can serve as a great place to begin a continuous quality improvement process. As you read through the standards and accompanying best practice highlights, think about your program. What are your strengths? How are you assessing your program? How do you communicate with stakeholders about the exciting work of your program? How do you demonstrate a commitment to quality?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Starting a continuous quality improvement process</li> <li>• Working with staff to improve quality</li> </ul>	<p>Partnership between schools and OST providers is an essential element to a quality program and this set of standards provides useful tips on a framework for collaborating and articulating a common message. This document can guide, support and strengthen the relationship between OST providers and schools. The standards can also provide a framework for accountability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a partnership agreement or memorandum of understanding between the OST program and school</li> <li>• Working with multiple programs at multiple schools within a district to achieve high quality</li> </ul>	<p>Program quality standards can assist state agencies, funders and intermediaries in developing a common language to use as well as a common framework for both funding and assessment of programs. These standards can support the work of established funders, state agencies and intermediaries as well as those looking to build a system in order to expand investments into new programs or new geographic areas. In addition to providing common language and definitions, we encourage intermediaries to align professional development offerings with the standards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring resources are dedicated to high-quality programs and quality improvement</li> <li>• Beginning a continuous quality improvement process</li> <li>• Aligning professional development and training opportunities</li> </ul>

5. Employers + Workforce	6. Policymakers + Advocates	7. Higher Education
<p>Employers can use this guide in a multitude of ways, from supporting working parents to make informed choices about OST to looking for high quality programs that could benefit from corporate volunteer programs. Workforce Development agencies also have a stake in the quality of OST programs as they work to build the 21st century skills of the next generation of employees. Additionally, many workforce programs serve older youth, who may also be served by an OST program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a focus on 21st Century skill development such as teamwork and critical thinking</li> <li>• Supporting employees in finding a high quality OST program for their child</li> </ul>	<p>The need for quality OST programs is clear, yet often it is hard to clearly communicate a definition of quality. The standards allow advocates to share definitions with policymakers to demonstrate the importance of quality. They provide examples of best practices in program-level implementation within districts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocating effectively to increase access to high quality OST programs</li> <li>• Making informed policy decisions about OST programs</li> <li>• Allocating state or local funding to systems, agencies or initiatives</li> </ul>	<p>Institutions of higher education are essential research partners for OST providers and systems. As universities create innovative programs to support learning outcomes, they often turn to OST programs as partners. For university programs that are new to the OST field, these standards can provide a broad overview of what to look for in high quality programs. For those that have established relationships with OST providers, this document can be used to continue to align research and practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aligning research and practice initiatives</li> <li>• Articulating the unique blend of positive youth development and education pedagogies that are used in OST programs</li> </ul>

### STANDARDS IN ACTION (SIA)

We have designed Standard in Action (SIA) sections to provide additional examples about how a standard may be observed in an OST program. Stakeholders have provided these examples and questions to guide practitioners on what to look for and how to satisfy the standard. Administrators and funding streams may place different expectations on programs. For this reason, we encourage you to use these standards as one tool for continuous quality improvement. The SIA sections are only guides; we encourage you to add additional questions and resources as you work to implement the standards.

## OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME EFFECTIVENESS

Research shows that participation in OST programs has helped youth to improve socio-emotional growth, positive identity, academic achievement, and positive developmental experiences (Balsano et al., 2009; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Larson et al., 2006; Lauer et al., 2006). Although not an absolute inverse relationship, results suggest that risky behaviors can decrease with OST program participation (Jelicic et al., 2007; Eichas et al., 2010).



Simply having an OST program does not guarantee effective impacts on participants. Results of OST impact studies suggest that accessible, consistent and sustained high-quality offering of programs are critical (Bodilly et al., 2010). In a review of research on 73 programs with an explicit focus on personal and social development, Durlak and Weissberg (2007) found that youth participants in evidence-based programs significantly improved in esteem and confidence, positive attitudes toward school, behavioral adjustment and academic performance. A rigorous meta-analysis of 35 OST

programs focusing specifically on youth at-risk for school failure (Lauer et al., 2006) found positive effects of participation on reading and mathematics achievement.

## DIFFERENT STATES, DIFFERENT NORMS

At the state level of system-building, some states are making greater progress toward the vision of sustainable, high-quality OST systems, through coordinated and well-funded statewide initiatives and standards in place, such as California and New York (Statewide Afterschool Network [SAN], 2013). States like Texas have newer but promising network-building initiatives, emerging standards, but no dedicated state funding. Most states have developed standards or some type of core knowledge and competencies to help guide OST programming (SAN, 2013). The range of content categories for state standards are listed below.

The first six are consistent with the National Afterschool Association Standards (SAN, 2013), while the remaining eight were regularly found among states:

- 1) Human Relationships
- 2) Indoor Environment
- 3) Outdoor Environment
- 4) Activities
- 5) Safety, Health and Nutrition
- 6) Administration
- 7) Staff Qualifications and Professional Development
- 8) Evaluation
- 9) Sustainability
- 10) Youth Development and Engagement
- 11) Diversity, Access and Equity
- 12) School Partnership
- 13) Family Partnership
- 14) Community Partnership

## TEXAS OST FACT BOX:

52% of Texas children in an afterschool program qualify for the Federal Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program.

On average, Texas families who pay for their child's afterschool program spend \$107 per week.

70% of afterschool programs in Texas are located in a public school building.

Almost one million children are unsupervised after school in 2014 for an average of 7.7 hours per week.

## HOW DO STANDARDS IMPROVE PROGRAM QUALITY?

Why have states established standards? Is there evidence that the process of quality improvement works? It is one thing to note that programs implementing standards of quality do better than others, however, it is another to state that it is possible to improve from lower quality to higher quality and to see subsequent benefits to desired outcomes (Granger, 2008).

Recent research from the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality sought to answer this question with a rigorous study on continuous quality improvement. They found that fidelity to continuous improvement strategies led to increased quality of staff instructional practices, commensurate with the degree of fidelity (Smith et al., 2012). Prior research using this model of quality improvement found that as networks pursue the path of continuous improvement, they find that staff retention improves, staff ownership of the assessment process increases, and staff become more reflective about their own work.

Research continues at the quality system improvement level to explore these questions. To capture quality improvement efforts and help answer these questions, several measurement tools exist that allow data collection at both the staff/program level and

the youth level. The Youth Program Quality Instrument (YPQI) was developed by the Weikert Center and is the foundation for measuring their quality improvement initiatives. Additional instruments include:

- Communities Organizing Resources to Advance Learning Observation Tool (CORAL) Public/Private Ventures
- Out-of-School Time Observation Tool (OST) Policy Studies Associates, Inc.
- Program Observation Tool (POT) National AfterSchool Association
- Program Quality Observation Scale (PQO) Deborah Lowe Vandell and Kim Pierce
- Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool (QSA) New York State Afterschool Network
- A Program Assessment System (APAS) National Institute on Out of School Time



## TEXAS OST FACT BOX:

18% of children in Texas participate in an afterschool program.

Another 1.5 million Texas children would be enrolled in a program if one were available to them.

On average, children spend 6.83 hours and 3.63 days per week in an afterschool program.

80% of parents support public funding for afterschool programs.

# TEXAS STANDARDS OF HIGH QUALITY AFTERSCHOOL, SUMMER AND EXPANDED LEARNING PROGRAMS

Quality in OST programs leads to better outcomes for youth.

The Texas Standards for High Quality Afterschool, Summer and Expanded Learning Programs were drafted with the understanding that each program is unique, serving diverse populations and subscribing to different missions while remaining committed to serving youth in grades K-12. The standards are designed to guide improvement in OST programs. The process of introducing and implementing the standards should include multiple levels of staff and community stakeholders.

The standards are both accessible and broadly defined to be used by multiple types of agencies and providers in rural, urban or suburban settings.

Under the leadership of Texas State University professor Dr. Raphael Travis, the Texas Partnership for Out of School Time (TXPOST) began recruiting OST leaders from across the state to serve as members of the Quality Standards Work Group (QSWG)\* in July 2013. These thirty-six participants represent five categories of OST stakeholders:

- Direct Service Providers
- Intermediaries and Technical Assistance Experts
- Government Agencies (City and State Level)
- Researchers/Educators
- Funders

This group worked for 18 months to research, debate and draft the standards contained in this document. Throughout the development of the standards, the work group drew inspiration and received guidance from other statewide afterschool networks, many of which have engaged in OST program quality improvement efforts across the country. In addition to working with diverse stakeholders to draft the standards, TXPOST hosted feedback sessions in communities across the state and solicited online feedback to gather input from providers, state agency representatives and OST advocates.

The publication of the standards is an essential first step in the process of quality improvement and system building. From this beginning, TXPOST will continue working to ensure that:

- Parents, funders, and other stakeholders recognize why program quality matters and what it looks like;
- Elected officials and government agencies support, develop and implement public policies needed to improve the quality of new and existing programs; and
- OST program providers have the resources and training needed to continually improve the quality of afterschool, summer and expanded learning programs for youth across the state of Texas.



\*Listed in the Acknowledgments section on page 26.

# TEXAS STANDARDS OF HIGH QUALITY AFTERSCHOOL, SUMMER AND EXPANDED LEARNING PROGRAMS

STANDARD	SUMMARY
Safe Environments, Health and Nutrition	A high quality program offers a safe environment where youth have opportunities to practice healthy behaviors and have access to nutritious food.
Staff and Volunteer Management	A high quality program has staff and volunteer management policies and practices that benefit youth and emphasize hiring and retaining qualified staff as part of their program implementation strategy.
Programming and Activities	A high quality program provides a variety of activities that support the cognitive, social-emotional and physical development of all participants.
Diversity and Inclusion in Programming	A high quality program allows all youth to thrive in the program, with the recognition of differences in youth abilities, family structure, cultural background and economic resources.
Family Engagement and Community Partnerships	A high quality program provides opportunities for meaningful participation by families and actively engages with other community organizations.
Relationships and Interactions	A high quality program supports diverse interactions among youth and creates an environment to develop and maintain positive relationships and consistently promotes social interactions among youth, staff and the community.
School Linkages	A high quality program engages in regular communication with the school day staff and leadership to share resources and work toward positive outcomes for youth.
Program Sustainability, Evaluation and Awareness	A high quality program conducts regular evaluation and uses the data to continually improve, promote sustainability and increase awareness of the program.



# SAFETY, HEALTH AND NUTRITION

OST programs help to provide a safe environment for youth when a parent or guardian is unavailable during non-school hours (Zief et al., 2006). Research consistently emphasizes the role of both physical and psychological safety in programming (Eccles & Gootman, 2002, p.89). Physical safety includes minimizing a range of physical risks from the threat of accident and injury due to equipment or furniture, to exposure to environmental hazards, to interpersonal issues like physical conflict/fighting, bullying/victimization, to sexual abuse (Karam et al., 2014). Safety is also an issue of concern for parents and

the community. Some preliminary research has shown a great deal of parent concern about child safety during out of school time (i.e., parental after-school stress) especially for parents of girls (Barnett & Gareis, 2006). Higher assurance of safety can alleviate parent concerns, promote well-being, and increase worker productivity, ultimately reducing net levels of home and workplace stress in addition to promoting active, healthy lifestyles. The long term effects of less healthy environments include inhibited physical activity and poor nutrition, factors which can lead to obesity, diabetes and heart disease.

## SIA Example 1: Standard 1.3.c

Having adequate resources does not mean that youth do not have to share supplies. To demonstrate that this standard has been met, youth should have access to balls or sports equipment during physical activity time, pencil sharpeners and extra paper during tutoring and paints or art supplies for art class or creative project time. If you observe multiple types of resources being used in alignment with the schedule, this program has met the standard.

# STANDARDS AND INDICATORS: SAFETY, HEALTH AND NUTRITION

A high quality program offers a safe environment where youth have opportunities to practice healthy behaviors and have access to nutritious food.

STANDARDS	INDICATORS
<p>1.1 The program provides consistent supervision of youth to ensure safety.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The program has a system for tracking attendance and staff are aware of the location of youth at all times, including a documented sign-in and sign-out procedure.</li> <li>b. The program’s space allows for careful supervision of youth, including protection and security from unauthorized pick-ups and unwanted visitors.</li> <li>c. The program complies with licensing, local and organizational standards regarding staff/youth ratios. d. The program follows safety precautions based on the type of activity and equipment used.</li> <li>e. The program supervises access to outdoor space during program hours.</li> </ul>
<p>1.2 The program has guidelines and procedures to identify and respond to potential and unforeseen emergencies and hazards.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. A site-specific emergency preparedness and response plan is written and accessible.</li> <li>b. The program has an emergency plan for dealing with inclement weather, including extreme heat.</li> <li>c. The program has a written plan for contacting families, guardians’ or designated adults in case of emergency.</li> <li>d. The program has a telephone which is always accessible for incoming and outgoing calls.</li> <li>e. The program posts emergency numbers for local emergency departments, including fire, ambulance, police and poison control.</li> <li>f. Program staff and volunteers are trained in emergency procedures.</li> <li>g. The program is staffed at all times with at least one first aid and CPR certified employee.</li> <li>h. Fire drills, disaster drills and lock-down drills are performed in compliance with licensing, local and organizational standards.</li> <li>i. The program has at least one complete first aid kit which is accessible to all staff and on field trips.</li> <li>j. The program has a policy in place for accommodating those youth who fall ill while attending the program including emergency contact information and health assessment information for all youth which is accessible to staff at all times.</li> <li>k. Program staff update relevant medical information for participants and distribute it in a manner that protects confidentiality.</li> <li>l. The administration and security of medications follows recommended practice and written policy.</li> <li>m. Program staff are aware of youth with food allergies and provide alternative food options.</li> </ul>
<p>1.3 The program’s indoor and outdoor space meets the physical, social and emotional needs of youth.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The space is clean, hazard free and meets local safety and health codes.</li> <li>b. There is enough space for all program activities and the space is large enough to allow independent and creative play and physical activity.</li> <li>c. The program has adequate materials and supplies for scheduled activities.</li> <li>d. There are clean restrooms and accessible water to meet the needs of youth and staff.</li> <li>e. There is securely locked storage space for equipment, materials and personal possessions of youth and staff during program hours.</li> <li>f. Program staff regularly inspect indoor and outdoor space for safety and maintenance issues and document concerns and maintenance requests promptly.</li> <li>g. The furniture is safe, age-appropriate and accessible to youth with varying abilities.</li> <li>h. Permanent playground equipment is safe, age-appropriate and accessible to youth with varying abilities. (If applicable)</li> </ul>
<p>1.4 The program creates and sustains an environment that promotes healthy choices and eating habits.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The program has a policy to model and promote proper nutrition, food safety and hygiene, and follows USDA nutrition guidelines. (If applicable)</li> <li>b. The program encourages and allows youth to bring healthy meals and snacks to the program.</li> <li>c. The program provides healthy meals and snacks for youth.</li> </ul>

# STAFF AND VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

Effective and supportive staff and volunteer management is essential to developing and sustaining a high quality program. The ability for OST programs to offer high quality program implementation is significantly associated with the knowledge and skills of its staff and administrative leadership (Mahoney et al., 2010). Strong program administration, organized policies and practices and retention of highly qualified staff is also a required foundation for effective data collection, evaluation and ultimately ongoing data-driven improvements.

When OST settings create environments for staff to be positive and supportive, with opportunities for youth to have a voice and be actively engaged, it increases the chance that youth will stay engaged (Deschenes et al., 2010; Greene et al., 2013). It also allows for group-based adult role modeling and peer modeling and individual peer-to-peer learning and modeling (Eccles and Gootman, 2002; p.100). The ability to establish a culture of positive relationships and interactions among

## SIA Example 2: Standard 2.1.f

Can the Project Director or Site Director tell you how often the staff meet? Are there sample agendas they are willing to share? What is a recent topic that was discussed at a staff meeting? Do the staff meetings ever include professional development workshops? A recommended best practice is to hold staff meetings on a weekly or bi-weekly basis depending on the size and type of program.

staff and peers can also reinforce program safety goals (e.g., self-regulation, unhealthy or disrespectful interactions and conflict resolution strategies).

Program implementation, especially fidelity to instructional practices/the theory of change, is critical for program quality and effectiveness (Boustani et al., 2014; Brunk et al., 2014). Thus OST standards that encourage the hiring and retaining of qualified, educated staff are essential to quality programming. These standards also encourage programs to take advantage of available OST system-level professional development and technical assistance resources in a timely fashion (Hayes et al., 2009; Simkin et al., 2013).



## STANDARDS AND INDICATORS: STAFF AND VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

A high quality program has staff and volunteer management policies and practices that benefit youth and emphasize hiring and retaining qualified staff as part of their program implementation strategy.

STANDARDS	INDICATORS
<p>2.1 The program is guided by clearly written policies and procedures of administration for staff and volunteers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Program policy handbooks are provided to staff to guide program operations and management are reviewed and updated on a yearly basis.</li> <li>b. Program policy handbooks are made available to other stakeholders upon request.</li> <li>c. The program documents that all staff and volunteers working with youth have passed a child abuse and neglect screening and criminal records checks for crimes that pose a threat to the wellbeing of youth and families.</li> <li>d. All staff and volunteers receive orientation training prior to working with youth.</li> <li>e. Program staff are trained on signs of youth abuse and neglect and common signs of physical and mental illness.</li> <li>f. The program conducts regular staff meetings.</li> <li>g. The program maintains up-to-date personnel records including background checks of all staff and volunteers.</li> <li>h. The program has established policies to transport youth safely and complies with all legal requirements for vehicles and drivers. (If applicable)</li> </ul>
<p>2.2 Staff recruitment, hiring and retention policies and practices are well defined and support program goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The program strives to recruit, hire and develop qualified staff at all levels who reflect the values of the program and demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the communities served.</li> <li>b. The program provides positive working conditions where staff are consistently treated with respect.</li> <li>c. Staff are compensated fairly and recognized for their achievements in order to support staff retention.</li> <li>d. Volunteers are recognized for their contributions to the program.</li> </ul>
<p>2.3 The program provides ongoing professional development and support for staff and volunteers that encourages high quality programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The program has a professional development plan that includes staff input and aligns with organizational goals.</li> <li>b. Professional development opportunities are accessible in multiple formats including workshops, observations, online opportunities, coaching and peer to peer learning.</li> <li>c. The program administration conducts regular staff and volunteer evaluations.</li> <li>d. Staff are provided opportunities for career growth.</li> <li>e. The program’s training menu includes offerings on youth-led facilitation, developing a positive social environment and appreciating culture and diversity in programming.</li> <li>f. The program conducts annual staff performance assessments that includes a professional development plan for each staff member.</li> <li>g. Professional development opportunities align with and supports quality standards for youth development programs.</li> </ul>



## PROGRAMMING AND ACTIVITIES

Intentional structure and organized activities can help promote desirable physical health outcomes, social emotional outcomes, linguistic outcomes and cognitive development. The most promising programs also add an evidence base (evidence or research based curriculum) to their schedule (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Opportunities for growth and development must be consistent and predictable and should inhibit risky attitudes and behaviors.

Amidst consistency and predictability in programming there is also a need for variety, innovation, social interaction and life relevance to help keep young people engaged (Halpern et al., 2013). Much of the renewed emphasis on quality standards within OST programming stems from the theoretical and empirical work investigating ingredients (activities) of positive developmental settings (Eccles & Gootman, 2002, p.91; Pittman et al., 2002). Substantial evidence follows the findings of Eccles and Gootman (2002) that programs do well when outcome goals are holistic and developmental (physical, social, emotional, linguistic and

cognitive), with recognition that academic success was but one feature of the overall picture of health and well-being (Durlak et al., 2011; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007), supporting the need for intentional design of programs with diverse activities. Many states, cities and towns recognize that continuous participation is a major emphasis in programming. In a recent six-city study to help understand what keeps older students engaged, investigators found that offering leadership opportunities and being community-based helped distinguish between programs with high and low rates of retention (Deschenes et al., 2010).

### SIA Example 3: Standard 3.1.f

Does the program have a Youth Council? Is there a time at the end of each project for youth to share feedback (written or verbal) with program staff? If you observe staff and youth interacting, do youth have the opportunity to share their ideas? Are there displays of youth work that demonstrate how they shaped the activity or project?

## STANDARDS AND INDICATORS: PROGRAMMING AND ACTIVITIES

A high quality program provides a variety of activities that support the cognitive, social-emotional and physical development of all participants.

STANDARDS	INDICATORS
<p>3.1 Program activities offered demonstrate intentional planning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Developmentally and age-appropriate activities are offered that reflect the mission and goals of the program.</li> <li>b. The program schedule includes a written activity plan which outlines the daily routines and lesson plans.</li> <li>c. The program offers activities that promote higher order skill development, such as problem solving, critical thinking, decision making, team work, goal setting and communication.</li> <li>d. Youth have the opportunity to develop new skills through participation in program activities.</li> <li>e. The program offers challenging activities for youth in a variety of disciplines including, but not limited to: community service or service learning, STEM, creative expression, visual and performing arts, fitness, health, nutrition, life skill development and academic support.</li> <li>f. Staff designate a role for youth in program planning and decision making, including regular opportunities for feedback on program components.</li> </ul>
<p>3.2 The program implements activities with fidelity and best practices in youth development and instruction.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The program offers ample materials and access to resources for implementing activities.</li> <li>b. Program staff employ a variety of grouping strategies, for both structured and unstructured activities including individual, small and large groups.</li> <li>c. Program staff consistently model 21st century skills, such as teamwork, clear communication and cooperation to participants.</li> <li>d. The program includes structured activities and experiences that promote youth leadership, such as a group facilitation or mentoring youth.</li> <li>e. Program staff intentionally implement strategies for smooth transitions and routines.</li> <li>f. The program provides a range of opportunities to showcase youth work.</li> </ul>
<p>3.3 The program has measurable goals and objectives which are aligned with the mission of the program and activity objectives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The program develops measurable goals and objectives that align with the organizational mission and identified needs as assessed by the youth, families and communities served.</li> <li>b. Program staff have dedicated planning time to develop the curriculum, implement activities and assess program results.</li> <li>c. All youth outcome goals are tied to indicators and data collection methods.</li> <li>d. The program's administration uses an evaluation process to measure the program progress toward goals and objectives.</li> <li>e. Formal and informal measures of program effectiveness are used with youth, staff and families.</li> </ul>

# DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN PROGRAMMING

Research is consistent about the importance of youth feeling a sense of belonging when in school and OST program settings (Georgiades et al., 2013; Eccles & Gootman, 2002, p.96). A sense of belonging helps promote active involvement in activities and reinforces a sense of community and collectivity. Programming must be inclusive, culturally responsive and illustrative of positive multicultural identities on a consistent basis. A sense of connectedness and community helps significantly with academics, confidence, behavior and other well-being outcomes (Travis & Leech, 2014). Recognizing student diversity is also about being able to understand participant and family needs within a variety of contexts.

Feelings of alienation can inhibit the quality of peer and adult relationships, compromise confidence and ultimately lead to high-risk behaviors and disengagement from school/work. Certain cultural identities and family backgrounds, such as the LGBTQ community (DiFulvio, 2011) and members of immigrant communities (Georgiades et al., 2013), are at higher risk of feeling disconnected due to stereotyping and stigmatizing from others. High quality programs will be able to recognize these characteristics and establish a system for youth to thrive amidst any challenges.

## SIA Example 4: Standard 4.2.b

The program should highlight leaders in all fields from a wide variety of cultures. Does the program regularly invite leaders of the broader community to interact with youth? Leaders can be store owners, elected officials or people who have started a community garden. If asked, can youth tell you about someone they have met recently? Do they define that person as a leader?



## STANDARDS AND INDICATORS: DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN PROGRAMMING

A high quality program allows all youth to thrive in the program, with the recognition of differences in youth abilities, family structure, cultural background and economic resources.

STANDARDS	INDICATORS
<p>4.1 The policies, practices and philosophy of the program are inclusive and support the diversity of youth, families and staff.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The program commits to understand, value and respect the backgrounds and experiences of the youth, families and communities served.</li> <li>b. Staff are in regular communication with community leaders and stakeholders about community needs and cultural concerns.</li> <li>c. Professional development for staff emphasizes the needs of diverse youth.</li> <li>d. The program creates policies to ensure a safe atmosphere for youth to explore their own identity, including cultural beliefs and practices.</li> <li>e. The program communicates (written and non-written) in the dominant languages of the communities served. f. The policy in place to determine what accommodations the program can safely meet uses the American with Disabilities Act and local regulation requirements as a framework.</li> </ul>
<p>4.2 The program provides culturally diverse activities and the development of positive identities, respect for differences and cross-cultural understanding among youth.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The program incorporates multi-cultural activities that explore a diversity of cultures and promote respect for a variety of perspectives.</li> <li>b. The program provides opportunities for participants to interact with and learn about role models with diverse backgrounds.</li> <li>c. Youth have intentional opportunities to express, explore, share and celebrate their own and each other's heritage and culture in the program.</li> <li>d. The program offers opportunities for participants to increase global awareness.</li> </ul>
<p>4.3 The program includes strategies for working with youth with varying needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The application process gathers information on youth's learning and safety needs and staff has access to information to serve the youth.</li> <li>b. The program uses the school as a resource to address the needs of youth with varying needs. c. Staff and administration make reasonable accommodations to serve youth with varying abilities, such as breaking activities into smaller parts, working in small groups and providing additional time for task completion.</li> <li>d. The program offers curricula accessible to all youth.</li> </ul>



# FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Families can participate in OST programs in a variety of ways, from ongoing two-way communication and information sharing, to active volunteering to meaningful decision-making roles. These are all program-driven opportunities, and high quality programming can facilitate these opportunities (Eccles & Gootman, 2002), especially with attention to multicultural perspectives. A recent study examining effective parent engagement in OST in North Carolina helps accentuate the programming roles. The study found that “programs with a dedicated staff person serving as a family liaison are more likely to have higher student attendance and parent event attendance, and programs with some form of required parent involvement are more likely to have higher parent event attendance and parent volunteering” (Forbes, 2013). These family engagement opportunities are possible by creating a respectful and welcoming environment for families - one that properly orients them to the program mission, objectives and participant expectations.

In some instances, family involvement with a program can encourage greater family involvement with school. Youth with family involvement in education and academic interventions, and with supportive positive relationships between parent and youth, are significantly more likely to report better academic outcomes (Bailey & Bradbury-Bailey, 2010; Hanushek et al., 2009).

Regular integration of community partnerships can help increase program resources and connect families to needed educational and service resources. However, these partnerships can also provide opportunities for youth to be civically active (Flanagan et al., 2012), another developmentally meaningful activity. Getting initial program participants involved is one step, but keeping youth involved (i.e., retention) is another.

## SIA Example 5: Standard 5.3.a

Does the program have a list of community partners they have worked with in the last six months? Are they used regularly or as special guests for specific presentations? The program should identify and use partners will demonstrate specialized knowledge or expertise regularly.

## STANDARDS AND INDICATORS: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

A high quality program provides opportunities for meaningful family participation and actively engages with other community organizations.

STANDARDS	INDICATORS
<p>5.1 The program develops, implements and encourages family engagement within the program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Programs integrate cultural and linguistic differences within the community into the strategies for activities with families.</li> <li>b. The program engages participants, families, staff and the community respectfully and consistently, scheduling events at different times of the day and year to encourage participation.</li> <li>c. Staff members encourage family participation with established visitation guidelines.</li> <li>d. The program provides families with opportunities and encouragement for leadership roles and are encouraged to be involved in program decision-making.</li> </ul>
<p>5.2 The program communicates regularly with families in a supportive manner.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Program staff strongly encourage new participants and families to attend program orientation.</li> <li>b. Program staff work with families to support youth's educational needs.</li> <li>c. The program integrates in their communication strategies a shared understanding of concepts like respect, health, learning, youth development and civic responsibility among participants, families, staff and the community.</li> <li>d. The program provides a family handbook including program policies, procedures and expectations for youth and families.</li> <li>e. The program follows a schedule that is available to all staff, youth and families and demonstrates flexibility to meet the individual or situational needs of youth.</li> </ul>
<p>5.3 The program works with community partners to leverage resources and support for the youth and families served.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Programming regularly integrates community partners when appropriate.</li> <li>b. The program collaborates with community organizations to offer a range of educational and service opportunities for youth and families.</li> <li>c. The program encourages youth to explore resources and issues in their community through projects and activities.</li> <li>d. Staff act as a liaison between families and community resources and organizations.</li> </ul>

# RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERACTIONS

Connection, as exemplified by positive and supportive interactions, is considered a prerequisite to success within a majority of research on positive developmental settings and youth well-being (Eccles & Gootman, 2002), and it continues to be reinforced among newer waves of positive youth development and OST research (Larson, 2014). Positive relationships and interactions between youth and staff are helpful for several reasons. At their most basic, these relationships can reinforce the positive developmental norms occurring across all other relationships and settings of a young person's life. At their most profound, these relationships may be the primary

influence for positive behavior and responsible choices by nurturing a positive sense of self and modeling prosocial attitudes and behaviors.

Too often, high quality relationships are absent early in life or absent within the present home environment. When available, these relationships have shown to help strengthen self-regulation (Drake et al., 2014) and inhibit offending behaviors (Ryan et al., 2013). The presence of positive supportive connections is also important to academic success (Hurd et al., 2012; Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2008; Toldson, 2008).

## SIA Example 6: Standard 6.4.b

Is there a code of conduct signed by youth that is displayed in the program space? This is one physical example of youth input into rules and consequences. If you observe multiple groups, does it appear that youth understand the rules and consequences consistently across groups—does each youth understand that they get a warning comment on the first discipline infraction?



## STANDARDS AND INDICATORS: RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERACTIONS

A high quality program supports diverse interactions among youth and creates an environment to develop and maintain positive relationships which consistently promotes positive social interactions among youth, staff and the community.

STANDARDS	INDICATORS
<p>6.1 Staff-Youth Interactions: Staff develop positive relationships with youth through caring, supportive and consistent engagement and interactions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Awareness of the varying needs of individual youth ensures respectful, appropriate, interactions with staff.</li> <li>b. Staff consistently demonstrate courtesy, respect, patience, support and acceptance when working with youth and model these behaviors.</li> <li>c. Staff use appropriate techniques to encourage positive behaviors and responsible choices among youth.</li> <li>d. Documentation and explanation for issues (behavioral, social emotional or physical) regarding youth are provided with suggested next steps, including recommended behavior modifications.</li> <li>e. Staff employ strategies to build self-esteem in every participant.</li> <li>f. Staff publically and individually recognize each youth’s abilities, interests and talents to increase a sense of belonging.</li> </ul>
<p>6.2 Youth-Youth Interactions: Youth interact with each other in positive, age-appropriate ways.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Youth interactions with each other are respectful and supportive.</li> <li>b. Youth use age-appropriate conflict resolution techniques with peers and staff.</li> <li>c. Youth engage actively with one another individually and in small and large groups.</li> <li>d. Youth hold each other accountable for respectful behavior as developmentally appropriate.</li> </ul>
<p>6.3 Staff-Staff Interactions: Staff interact with each other in a positive and professional manner.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Staff interactions with each other are respectful and supportive.</li> <li>b. Staff communicate with each other in ways that model respectful interactions.</li> <li>c. Staff model appropriate conflict resolution techniques with each other.</li> </ul>
<p>6.4 Social Environment: The program creates a safe, supportive environment where positive interactions are consistently encouraged.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The program provides a socially safe and supportive social environment for all participants.</li> <li>b. The program provides opportunities for youth input in the development of rules and consequences that are applied consistently.</li> <li>c. The program has a policy which prohibits bullying, harassment and hazing.</li> <li>d. The program communicates consistently with participants to foster problem solving and open communication.</li> <li>e. The program creates positive relationships with community partners based on clear and respectful communication and interactions.</li> </ul>



## SCHOOL LINKAGES

Similar to the relationship between families and programs, regular communication between schools and programs is essential. By talking regularly and sharing information, schools and programs can be partners in supporting youth progress, and identifying needs and opportunities. Ongoing communication can help develop a collective vision, help reinforce healthy attitudes and behaviors and assist with aligning activities for academic enrichment (Connelly & Young, 2013; Eccles & Gootman, 2002, p.110). Breakdowns in communication inhibit these processes and the effective use of available resources.

School linkages take on added significance when the OST system prioritizes expanded learning opportunities and emphasizes academic support and enrichment (Jacobson & Blank, 2013). Whether afterschool or summer learning, schools benefit from leveraging/mobilizing OST resources as opportunities to complement school-based strategies (Jacobson & Blank, 2013).

### SIA Example 7: Standard 7.1.c

Do program staff know the names of the teachers that youth have during the school day? Do they know if specific teachers have assigned homework that day? If you ask the Project or Site Director about communication with school administrators and school day teachers, can they describe the methods they use to communicate? Do you observe the communication between school day and program staff? If so, do they reference plans and other conversations to indicate a regular pattern of communication?

## STANDARDS AND INDICATORS: SCHOOL LINKAGES

A high quality program engages in regular communication with the school day staff and leadership to encourage resource sharing and to work toward positive outcomes for youth.

STANDARDS	INDICATORS
<p>7.1 For School Based Programs: Program and school leadership work to develop strong relationships and effective communication to ensure linkages with program activities and school learning goals and curricula.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The program and school develop a communication protocol that includes a multi-level contact list, troubleshooting/conflict management procedures and regular meetings.</li> <li>b. The program and school develop an information sharing agreement to assess program effectiveness on student performance measures such as academics, attendance and behavior.</li> <li>c. Program staff regularly communicate with school day teachers to monitor the behavioral and academic progress of youth being served.</li> <li>d. The program is formally involved in school improvement efforts.</li> </ul>
<p>7.2 The program is aware of the school day curriculum and state standards when planning and modifying program activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Program staff seek appropriate information from the school about individual youth to better understand specific educational needs.</li> <li>b. Program staff use information about the participant’s academic and behavioral needs in school to plan developmentally appropriate activities.</li> <li>c. Activities implemented are intentionally planned to align with school day learning objectives.</li> <li>d. Programming includes developmentally appropriate academic support and/or activities that are designed to reinforce and complement the academic curriculum of participating students as well as the Texas Education Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).</li> </ul>
<p>7.3 For Community Based Programs: Programs work with local schools to recruit youth and communicate regularly about the needs and trends of the communities served.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The program works to establish a presence as part of the resources of local schools.</li> <li>b. The program communicates with school administration about special events, community feedback and youth needs.</li> <li>c. The program supports families in communicating with school day staff.</li> </ul>

# PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY, EVALUATION, AND AWARENESS

Four factors are often associated with sustainability: (1) unique program variables, (2) the auspice organization, (3) the community and (4) the main funder (Savaya & Spiro, 2011). Recent research highlights variability in sustainability success across programs and teams working with youth and families (Brunk et al., 2014; Greenberg et al., 2013; Savaya & Spiro, 2012). A coordinated and high quality OST system can improve the infrastructure from within which individual programs operate. A robust infrastructure affords programs additional resources for support, for reinforcement of program goals, and for technical assistance; the latter three sustainability factors (Hayes et al., 2009).

Program level variables (the first sustainability factor by Hayes et al.) include funding and staffing issues. Staff directly influence issues like implementation fidelity, programming adjustments amidst times of austerity and

## SIA Example 8: Standard 8.4.c

In conversation, does the Program or Site Director mention a wide variety of funders and in-kind donations from multiple sources? Is the leadership of the program aware of recent changes in public funding opportunities and are they locally engaged? An engaged Director has sought out the opportunity to learn more and potentially developed a network of peers and colleagues to help stay up to date on current issues.

staying attuned to participant needs. In a study of fourteen prevention programs, predictors of financial sustainability included higher quality team functioning and an earlier onset of sustainability planning (Greenberg et al., 2013). However, to sustain quality across unique program level variables, programs must collect data and evaluate their own structure, practices and outcomes on a regular basis (Kuklinski et al., 2013).



## STANDARDS AND INDICATORS: PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY, EVALUATION AND AWARENESS

A high quality program conducts regular evaluation and uses the data to continually improve, promote sustainability and increase awareness of the program.

STANDARDS	INDICATORS
8.1 The program has a long-range plan for increasing the program's capacity to support sustainability and growth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The program has mission and vision statements that are grounded in the needs of the community and connected to a current strategic plan.</li> <li>b. The program engages advisory or governing boards, staff, youth and other appropriate stakeholders in goal setting, planning and evaluation.</li> <li>c. The program includes discussion and planning for sustainability as part of its strategic plan.</li> <li>d. The staff members responsible for program implementation are included in sustainability planning and have access to resources to promote sustainability.</li> </ul>
8.2 Program conducts a formative and summative evaluation annually with staff and stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Youth, administrators, families and staff are involved in an internal program evaluation that measures progress towards the program's goals and objectives.</li> <li>b. Focus groups, surveys and/or evaluations are regularly conducted with youth, staff, families, volunteers and stakeholders about the program's impact.</li> <li>c. The program compares its organizational and programmatic performance to relevant non-participants groups. (If applicable)</li> <li>d. The program assesses effectiveness of school-day performance measures such as academic attendance and behavior.</li> </ul>
8.3 The program has an organized data collection and reporting system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The program maintains confidential and accurate data on operational and program performance, services, progress and outcomes.</li> <li>b. The program has confidential, secure and effective processes and data systems for collecting and sharing data on individual youth and program activities.</li> <li>c. The program employs a strategy for managing data resources effectively.</li> </ul>
8.4 The program has an external communications strategy, including raising awareness of the program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Staff, youth, families and other stakeholders assist in the development of and can articulate the purpose of the program.</li> <li>b. The program has an effective strategy that publicizes the program, its achievements within the school and broader community, and the needs which it serves among youth.</li> <li>c. The program administrators stay informed of public policy issues and available public and private funding opportunities.</li> <li>d. The program regularly evaluates its communications strategy for effectiveness.</li> </ul>
8.5 Financial management policies and practices are well defined and follow required accounting practices of business and non-profit management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The program adheres to written policies and document procedures for fiscal management adopted by its Board.</li> <li>b. The program administration and Board regularly review the budget including revenue and expenses, revenue forecasting and cash flow and adjust as needed.</li> <li>c. The program funding is diversified and sustainable to operate within a budget over time.</li> <li>d. The program participates in an annual fiscal review where the external accounting firm presents the review or audit to its Board.</li> </ul>

# QUALITY OUT OF SCHOOL TIME PROGRAM CHECKLIST

Just getting started on a continuous quality improvement cycle for your program?

Looking for a quick resource to use on site visits as a funder?

Wanting to learn more about the components of quality?

This checklist can help you get started!

## SAFETY, HEALTH AND NUTRITION

- Does the program have a system of attendance tracking?
- Does the program comply with licensing, local or organizational standards regarding licensing or do they have documentation of licensing exemption?
- Does the program have a documented procedure for handling emergencies for example: inclement weather, fire and lock down drills?
- Is a complete first aid kit available?
- Is the indoor and outdoor space adequate for planned activities and the number of youth?
- Does the program support proper nutrition, food safety and hygiene?

## STAFF AND VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

- Does the program provide policy handbooks to all staff?
- Does the staff receive an orientation and have regular access to professional development opportunities?
- Has the program conducted background checks on all staff and volunteers?
- Does program management provide support and fair compensation to staff members?

## PROGRAMMING AND ACTIVITIES

- Does the program offer a variety of activities that align with the mission and goals of the organization?
- Does the program have a written activity plan/curriculum that it follows daily?
- Is there a strategy for implementing smooth transitions and routines?
- Does the program have an evaluation plan that aligns with organizational goals and objectives?

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN PROGRAMMING

- Does the program create a safe space for youth to explore their identity, culture and beliefs? Is
- there a policy in place to determine what accommodations can safely be made for youth with varying needs?
- Does the application process give caregivers an opportunity to explain any special needs and allow the program to speak with the youth's school?

## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- Is family participation welcomed at the program?
- Is a program orientation offered to new youth participants and families?
- Are community partners utilized regularly as a part of activities?
- Does the staff connect families with additional community support resources?

## RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERACTIONS

- Do staff use appropriate techniques to encourage positive behaviors and responsible choices?
- Does the program have a policy for addressing negative behaviors at the program?
- Do the staff follow the policy?
- Are youth respectful and supportive of each other?
- Are staff respectful and supportive of each other?
- Do staff interact positively with parents and families?
- Is there a policy to prohibit bullying, harassing and hazing?

## SCHOOL LINKAGES

- Does the program have a plan for communicating with the school(s) of participants?
- Does the program align with or support school day learning objectives and activities?

## PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY, EVALUATION AND AWARENESS

- Does the program have a sustainability plan?
- Are multiple levels of stakeholders involved in sustainability planning?
- Does the program conduct regular evaluations?
- Does the program have a communications strategy that ensures stakeholders are aware of the mission and vision?
- Is the program fiscally sound?

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# RESOURCES

## NATIONAL STANDARDS

- Military Standards for School Age Care
- National Afterschool Association: Core Competencies for Afterschool and Youth Development Professionals
- National Summer Learning Association: Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs

## STATE STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

Other published standards and resources of statewide afterschool networks were invaluable to work group members. The following documents were useful in developing the Texas Standards of High Quality Afterschool, Summer and Expanded Learning Programs

- Arizona: The OST Standards
- Arkansas Standards for Quality Afterschool Programs
- California After-School Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool
- Best Practice Guidelines for Connecticut Afterschool Programs
- Florida Standards for Quality Afterschool Programs
- Georgia Afterschool Quality Standards
- Iowa Afterschool Alliance: Standard Categories and Corresponding Indicators of Quality Afterschool Programs
- Indiana Afterschool Standards
- Kansas Afterschool Program Quality Guidelines and Self-Assessment Tools
- The Kentucky School-Age Quality Framework
- Maryland Out-of-School Time Programs' Quality Standards Framework
- Maine: Reaching Potential through Quality Afterschool
- Model Standards for Out of School Time Afterschool Programs in Michigan
- Missouri Afterschool Program Standards
- North Carolina Center for Afterschool Programs: Self- Assessment and Planning for Quality
- Nebraska: Elements of Quality
- New Jersey's Quality Standards for Afterschool
- OST Quality Standards for Nevada
- New York State Afterschool Network: Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool
- Quality Guidelines for Ohio's Afterschool Programs
- Quality Standards: Oregon Afterschool for Kids
- Rhode Island: Guide to Afterschool Quality Standards
- Utah Afterschool Quality Standards
- Washington Quality Standards for Afterschool and Youth Development Programs

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# TXPOST

TEXAS PARTNERSHIP FOR OUT OF SCHOOL TIME

## **ABOUT TXPOST**

The Texas Partnership for Out of School Time (TXPOST) is a statewide intermediary whose mission is to convene, educate, and advocate to improve the quality and increase the availability of out of school time (OST) opportunities for Texas youth. TXPOST works in partnership with vital leaders at local and regional levels who invest deeply in their own communities to offer professional development opportunities, engage in system building work, advocate for the OST field, and support local programs.

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