

NJ Quality Standards for Afterschool

Introduction

What are the NJ Quality Standards for Afterschool?

The NJ Quality Standards for Afterschool – together with the Assessment Tool – is a resource that afterschool programs can use for self-evaluation. It should be part of a process of continuous quality improvement.

About the NJ Quality Standards for Afterschool (First Edition):

- The NJ Quality Standards for Afterschool is organized into seven categories: Administration, Human Relationships, Safety and Environmental Health, Indoor and Outdoor Environment, Programming and Activities, Special Needs/The Whole Child, and Healthy Behavior: Nutrition and Physical Activity.
- The **Standards** for each category are numbered and in bold. The **Standard Elements** are listed under the bold heading with letters (a, b, c, etc.). The standard elements will help you understand how to interpret the standard and what the important things to look for are.
- Sometimes a topic could fit into multiple categories. In these cases, the topic appears in detail in one category, and the other categories include cross-references to help you find what you're looking for.
- The NJ Quality Standards is a companion to the NJ Licensing Regulations for Child Care, as developed by the Office of Licensing at DCF. The regulations outline the minimum a program should do, while the Quality Standards go beyond this. Although public schools are exempt from licensing, they should follow the licensing regulations to ensure quality. We have included footnotes for licensing regulations that relate to topics covered in the standards.

We use the term "afterschool program," but these standards are appropriate for before-school programs, summer programs, and other ELOs.

ELO stands for "Extended Learning Opportunity" and refers to the wide range of programs that seek to expand the opportunities that youth have to learn outside the regular school day.

This is a resource for use by ELOs regardless of funding source, tax-exempt status, or other defining characteristics.

Other Documents Included in the NJ Quality Standards for Afterschool Packet:

- An Assessment Tool – a tool for assessing your program in all seven standards categories
- A Glossary for terms in the Quality Standards that could have more than one understanding (note: Glossary terms are in blue throughout this packet)
- Tips for “Using a Team Approach to Assess Your Program”
- Sample surveys and discussion guides in the Appendix to “Using a Team Approach to Assessment Your Program”
- Tips for “Writing an Action Plan Based on Your Assessment”
- A Resources document to help you raise the level of quality in your program

Note: We use the term "youth" throughout this packet to include all K-12 program youth from young children through teenagers.

How to Use the Assessment Tool:

- The Assessment Tool allows you to rate each standard element from 1 to 4. 1 means "Needs improvement," 2 means "Some progress made/Approaching standard," 3 means "Satisfactory/Meets standard," and 4 means, "Excellent/Exceeds standard." You also can select "NA" for "Don't know or Not applicable."
- There next column encourages you to provide examples or a rationale to support the rating that you gave.
- When you're using the Assessment Tool, rate each standard element separately. This is because the standard elements will help you understand how to interpret the standard and what the important things to look for are.
- See “Using a Team Approach” for tips on making the evaluation process collaborative. This could mean having a committee of program stakeholders (for example, staff, parents, youth) to lead the process. It also could mean holding discussion groups or doing surveys with stakeholders based on the standards before formally filling out the Assessment Tool.

How Did We Develop the NJ Quality Standards for Afterschool?

- NJSACC (The Statewide Network for NJ's Afterschool Communities) – with support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the NJ Department of Education – convened a group of afterschool leaders to answer the question, “What does quality look like in an afterschool program?”
- Committee members represented public agencies and private organizations; large afterschool programs and small afterschool programs; programs from the north, central, and southern parts of the state; and programs in urban, suburban, and rural settings.

Participants included representatives from the following agencies, organizations, and afterschool programs: The NJ Department of Education, The YMCA (State Alliance, Fanwood-Scotch Plains, and West Essex), The Salvation Army, Archway Programs – Just Kids, Haddonfield Child Care, Academic Works (Trenton), Office of Licensing at the NJ Department of Children and Families, Office of School Linked Services at the Department of Children and Families, Professional Impact NJ, Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN), Mt. Olive Child Care & Learning Center, NJ Principals and Supervisors Association, Rutgers Camden, DASH/Impact 21 (Rahway), Catholic Charities Diocese of Metuchen, and La Casa de Don Pedro.

- The committee met and communicated over the course of 18 months to discuss and define all the aspects of what makes a quality afterschool program. To do this, we relied heavily on the years of experience and the expertise of our committee members and NJSACC staff. We also took time to carefully review Quality Standards developed by other states as well as those from national organizations, including the National Afterschool Association's National AfterSchool Standards, the Council on Accreditation's After School Standards, and the NIOST Healthy Out-of-School Time Standards.
- The beliefs about afterschool quality that our committee members brought to the table are reflected in a few key reports, research studies, and platforms. See the “Sources and Further Reading” section at the end of this introduction.
- We posted a draft of the NJ Quality Standards on the NJSACC website over the summer of 2012 and opened it for feedback from all of our network members and partners across the state.
- This document, released in November, 2012, represents the First Edition of the Quality Standards. In 2013, a diverse group of afterschool programs throughout the state will use this resource and share their experiences with NJSACC. After we review and incorporate this feedback, we will release a Second Edition of the Quality Standards in Fall, 2013.

Note for Parents/Guardians:

This tool was developed for use by programs. However, parents and guardians may use the standards to learn more about what to look for in an afterschool program. Ask your child's program staff if they use the NJ Quality Standards and Assessment.

Sources and Further Reading:

40 Development Assets (for youth ages 3-18), Search Institute
www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=10022

Community Programs to Promote Youth Development. National Research Council. 2002.
www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=10022

Durlak JA, Weissberg RP, Pachan M. A Meta-Analysis of After-School Programs That Seek to Promote Personal and Social Skills in Children and Adolescents. American Journal of Community Psychology. June, 2010. (Often referred to as the “SAFE” study; contact NJSACC for a full copy)

National Afterschool Association (NAA) Platform
www.naaweb.org/default.asp?contentID=628

Vandell DL, Reisner ER, Brown BB, Pierce KM, Dadisman K, Pechman EM. The Study of Promising After-School Programs: Descriptive Report of the Promising Programs. 2004.
childcare.wceruw.org/pdf/pp/study_of_after_school_activities_descriptive_report_year1.pdf