



## New Jersey's Quality Standards for Afterschool Section II: The Standards



### Special Needs/The Whole Child

The program environment is welcoming, supportive, and respectful of youth and their families with any special or unique needs and their families.

**1. The program views a “special need” as any special situation or unique need of a child.**

The program implements the concepts outlined below for any special situation or unique need that a child or youth has, not just those that are formally classified or for which the program has record of a classification.

**2. The program advertises itself as welcoming to youth with special needs.**

- a. The program advertises its policy to enroll youth with special needs in writing where it is visible to families and staff.
- b. Program materials include information that clearly demonstrates that the program is welcoming of youth with special needs. For example, materials may explain that there is a section of the [“Individualized Education Program” \(IEP\)](#) that can include afterschool and encourage families to look into their options for care. make all one sentence. Or, if applicable, materials may say that the program has special education teachers on site.

**3. Professional development around special needs is appropriate and high quality.**

- a. The program trains staff on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the New Jersey Disability Law.
- b. The program provides staff with training on ways to individualize activities or routines for youth with special needs that are applicable to a wide variety of situations.
- c. Staff training builds awareness of developmental milestones and signs that may indicate a child has a unique need and requires a different approach.
- d. Staff training builds awareness of the importance of inclusion and the practices that support inclusion.
- e. When necessary and appropriate, the program conducts specific training for staff on how to accommodate the specific special needs of youth in the program.
- f. Professional development in this area follows the guidelines for appropriate and high quality professional development outlined in the Administration section, standard #4. For example, professional development around special needs is ongoing, reinforced, and integrated into the day to day operations of the program.

**4. The program takes steps to ensure communication with families about youth is respectful and as effective as possible.**

- a. There are opportunities for parents or guardians to provide information about a youth's special need or situation in a safe and confidential environment.
- b. Staff do not ask about special needs prior to accepting a youth into the program and at no point violate a family's privacy or pressure a family to give information not offered to the program already.
- c. Staff make sure families are aware of what the program can provide for youth with special needs.

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- d. Staff or materials make clear to families that the program doesn't have information about youth that the family has not explicitly provided. For example, information that the family has provided to the school.
- e. The program maintains and demonstrates the philosophy that strong, trusting relationships with families is the foundation for information-sharing about a youth's special need or situation.
- f. There are strategies in place for effective communication with the family about a youth's special need or situation when necessary and appropriate. Communication should include discussion of the youth's interests and skills, as well as opportunities for the family to share with staff effective strategies for helping the child or youth succeed.

#### **5. The program's response to youth with a special need or situation is well-planned and appropriate.**

- a. The program has a procedure to follow when staff recognize that a youth needs special attention.
- b. The program supports the goals set by a youth's [Child Study Team](#), if applicable.
- c. The program makes reasonable accommodations in order to be able to include youth with special needs and facilitates their success in the program.

*(Note: the definition of "reasonable accommodations" is taken from the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). "Reasonable" indicates that the program is not required to dramatically change its structure, and what is defined as "reasonable" varies according to the specific situation. Accommodations may include modifications to the environment, activities, materials, or methods of interaction. Examples of modifications to the environment are placing picture cards on activity centers so youth can identify activities without reading and designating a "safe" area for a specific child or youth to go to alone when needed. An example of a modification to an activity is having a peer buddy system to provide extra support, for example if a child in a wheelchair is pushed around the bases in a baseball game. A material modification might be having soft balls with bells in them where a youth who is blind could use to play catch. Examples of modifications to methods of interaction are using more non-verbal communication such as with objects, actions, and pictures and making rules very simple. See the resources section for more examples of accommodations.)*

- d. Program administrators and staff consider the unique circumstances of each youth and each situation when coming up with responses.
- e. Activity planning includes consideration of the multiple ways a youth with special needs might approach the activity and what accommodations might help in each scenario. The plans should be flexible enough to make immediate accommodations or changes as needed.
- f. Responses or modifications allow for maximum possible participation, inclusion, and independence for youth with special needs.
- g. Staff behavior accurately reflects the program's policies regarding youth with special needs.



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- 6. The program makes use of outside resources and professionals when necessary and appropriate.**
- a. When necessary and appropriate, the program conducts a dialog with relevant professionals outside the program regarding youth with special needs in the program. This may include the [Child Study Team](#) and other school-day staff. The program ensures it has obtained the permission of the parent or guardian when discussing an individual child or youth.
  - b. When necessary and appropriate, the program seeks outside resources to aid in the process of identifying ways to accommodate youth with special needs in the program and implementing those accommodations.
- 7. To the extent possible, the program's physical space is accessible and welcoming to people with special needs, even if there are no youth enrolled in the program who currently have this need.**
- a. All newly constructed facilities are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). For older spaces, programs make reasonable accommodations to create pathways with room for wheelchairs, crutches, and walkers, even if there are no youth enrolled who currently use these.
  - b. Newly constructed or altered playgrounds are complaint with the ADA. Programs consider what would be fun and challenging for youth with special needs when constructing or altering outdoor space.

Program administrators consider this category when reviewing all other standards categories, so the points here are integrated when the program addresses the quality of the indoor and outdoor environment, human relationships, safety and environmental health, programming and activities, nutrition and physical activity, and administration.

<b><u>Cross-References</u></b>		
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Standard Number</b>
Individual and emergency health information that staff should be aware of	Safety and Environmental Health	1, 5
Interacting and communicating with families more generally	Relationships	12, 13
	Administration	6, 7, 8, 9

<b><u>Licensing</u></b>	
<b>Subject</b>	<b>NJ Licensing Section</b>



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Obtaining information from parents about the special health conditions or other special needs of youth	10:122-7.3(b)
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