



**NJSACC: THE STATEWIDE NETWORK FOR NEW JERSEY'S  
AFTERSCHOOL COMMUNITIES PRESENTS:**

# **NEW JERSEY'S QUALITY STANDARDS FOR AFTERSCHOOL ASSESSMENT TOOL**



# 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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://childcare.wceruw.org/pdf/pp/study_of_after_school_activities_descriptive_report_year1.pdf)



### Administration

The administration effectively manages the procedures, policies, **staff**, and other elements of the program framework that enable a high level of program quality.

**Please check here:**  
I am a....  
 Youth  
 Parent/Guardian/Family member  
 Program staff member  
 School staff member  
 Program partner

Rating Key:  
 1 = Needs improvement  
 2 = Some progress made/Approaching standard  
 3 = Satisfactory/Meets standard  
 4 = Excellent/Exceeds standard  
 NA = Don't know or Not applicable

Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>1) The program has and uses a mission statement</b>						
a. The program has a written mission statement that sets forth the program's primary purposes.						
b. The mission statement guides administrative decisions about the program, including decisions about curriculum, staffing, and policy.						
c. All staff are aware of the mission statement.						
<b>2) The administration takes steps to facilitate continuous improvement in program quality</b>						
a. The administration oversees the development of program goals and objectives.						
b. The administration conducts an internal monitoring or evaluation system to continuously improve program quality.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
c. The administration incorporates input and feedback from program <b>stakeholders</b> as central components of the quality improvement process.						
<b>3) The administration offers staff the best possible working conditions and pay</b>						
a. The program offers staff paid preparatory time.						
b. The program facilitates opportunities for additional training that's related to a staff person's professional growth plan, including paying for outside training if appropriate.						
c. Staff have opportunities to discuss their own concerns regarding the program.						
d. Staff have opportunities within the program for <b>self-direction</b> , decision-making, and developing long-term program plans and vision.						
e. There are policies and procedures in place to give positive feedback and recognize the contributions of staff members.						
<b>4) The administration provides a high quality system of professional development</b>						
a. The administration conducts an ongoing assessment of the program's professional development needs and evaluation of the professional development offerings.						
b. The administration develops an annual professional development plan with a timeline.						
c. The administration uses qualified, experienced trainers and/or <b>evidence-based</b> training materials for professional development.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
d. Professional development at the program includes mentoring and on-going, <a href="#">job-embedded learning</a> in addition to formal training opportunities.						
<b>5) The administration manages volunteers effectively</b>						
The program has plans for recruiting, orienting, training, supervising, and recognizing volunteers. The plan may be the same as what the program does for paid staff at times, but the program has a distinct plan when needed. Note: Standards related to staff conduct in the Human Relationships and Special Needs/The Whole Child categories should apply to volunteers.						
<b>6) The administration takes steps to support effective communication</b>						
a. There are policies or procedures in place that support effective and frequent communication between program staff and families. For example, the program may have a practice of calling the homes of a few families each week for regular check-ins.						
b. There are policies or procedures in place that support positive communication between program staff and families. For example, the administration sets the expectation that staff communicate with parents for positive reasons and not just when there is a problem or the program needs information.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
c. There are policies or procedures in place that support effective communication between program staff and the <b>host agency</b> or other <b>community stakeholders</b> , if applicable.						
d. Program policies and procedures support effective communication among program staff. This includes effective communication between administrative staff and non-administrative staff. For example, administrative staff use one-on-one and face-to-face communications with non-administrative staff as well as group meetings and written communication.						
<b>7) The administration values input and feedback about the program and is responsive to it</b>						
a. The program uses formal and informal methods to seek feedback and input from youth and families.						
b. There are procedures in place for the program to get input and feedback from the <b>host agency</b> or other <b>community stakeholders</b> , if applicable.						
c. The program is responsive to input and feedback from youth, families, the host agency, and other <b>stakeholders</b> .						
d. The program involves staff, families, and youth in decision-making and planning.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>8) There are policies or procedures in place that involve families in the life of the program</b>						
a. Information for families is available in the language(s) the families speak, to the extent possible, and at the literacy level of most parents or guardians. The program also takes into account the unique communication needs of parents or guardians with special needs.						
b. The program offers orientation sessions for new families.						
c. The program involves families in program events when possible, and there is a policy to welcome “drop-in” visits from family members to the program.						
<b>9) The program respects the rights of the youth, family members, and staff</b>						
a. The program has an internal process that program applicants, participants, and stakeholders can use to express and resolve a grievance or complaint. The program communicates this process to the families of youth in the program and to program staff.						
b. The program has and adheres to a policy of nondiscrimination, which is reflected in all program activities and communications.						
c. The program does not release confidential information about youth without informed, signed authorization from the child or youth and the parent or legal guardian. When the law permits the release of confidential information without this authorization, the program at least informs youth and families of the release.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>10) The administration maintains and updates program policies and records</b>						
a. The administration maintains a parent handbook, an employee handbook, and a policies and procedures manual. This includes annually reviewing each of these documents and updating them as needed.						
b. The administration maintains youth and staff files and other important program records in an organized manner. The administration ensures individual records are checked at least two times a year and updated as needed.						
<b>11) The administration acts responsibly regarding program finances and financial sustainability</b>						
a. The administration conducts <b>sound financial management</b> of the program, if applicable. If the program administration is not managing the program budget, then the administration maintains familiarity with the budget.						
b. The program has an established process for collecting funds from parents, if applicable.						
c. The administration maintains awareness of multiple possible funding streams to support the program.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>12) The administration maintains sufficient staff:youth ratios and supervision of youth</b>						
a. Ratios of staff to youth in the program should be between 1:10 and 1:15 when youth are age six and older. Ratios of staff to children should be between 1:8 and 1:12 when the program includes children who are age five. When possible, at least two staff members are with a group of youth that is in an isolated room.						
b. There is a plan to provide adequate staff coverage in case of emergencies. This includes emergencies that require one staff member to tend to the needs of a single child, as well as situations in which on-duty staff members become ill or suffer from other emergencies.						
c. There is a plan to use substitute staff to maintain ratios when regular staff are absent. This includes keeping an up-to-date list of adults qualified to serve as substitutes, as well as providing support for and evaluation of substitutes to maintain quality.						
d. The program plans for and provides different levels of supervision according to the type of activity as well as the ages and abilities of the youth.						
<b>13) The administration stays current on licensing and other relevant laws and regulations</b>						
a. The administration ensures the program follows any relevant laws and regulations, including state licensing standards.						



<p>b. The administration ensures that the program follows the rules in the state licensing standards over the recommendations in this standards document if the licensing rules are more stringent.</p>						
<p>c. The administration is aware of changes that may come to relevant laws and regulations and other current issues related to laws and regulations that could impact the program.</p>						
<p><b>14) The administration researches and connects to potential community partners in order to facilitate staff, youth, and families taking advantage of community resources</b></p>						
<p>a. The program administration researches services and resources within the community to which staff may refer families when appropriate and necessary. Examples are free dental screenings, fire-prevention seminars, parenting classes, health clinics, food programs, library services, language classes, counseling services, and crisis intervention services. The program administration translates this information to staff and ensures that the information is current and high-quality.</p>						
<p>b. The program administration develops links with the community that staff may take advantage of when planning activities. Examples are activities that help children get to know the larger community, such trips to a library or visits from leaders and mentors in the community, as well as community service projects.</p>						



## Health Behavior: Nutrition and Physical Activity

The program supports healthy youth behavior and choices in the areas of nutrition and physical activity.

**Please check here:**  
I am a....  
 Youth  
 Parent/Guardian/Family member  
 Program staff member  
 School staff member  
 Program partner

**Rating Key:**  
 1 = Needs improvement  
 2 = Some progress made/Approaching standard  
 3 = Satisfactory/Meets standard  
 4 = Excellent/Exceeds standard  
 NA = Don't know or Not applicable

### Nutrition

Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>1) The program considers nutritional value when selecting food to serve to youth</b>						
a. The program serves food and beverages in amounts and types that promote lifelong health and prevent chronic disease, based on currently accepted standards of childhood nutrition.						
b. The program considers the nutritional value of the food options when choosing food vendors.						
<b>2) The program considers multi-cultural values when selecting food to serve to youth</b>						
a. The program is sensitive to the culture of program youth when choosing food to serve.						
b. The program introduces participants to food from around the world.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>3) If the program offers nutrition education to the youth, it is of high quality</b>						
a. The nutrition curriculum is <b>evidence-based</b> or based on the best available research.						
b. The nutrition curriculum is hands-on and activity-based.						
<b>4) The program environment supports healthy eating</b>						
a. The vending machines include nutritional options (for example, fruit cups) or a system for promoting healthy choices (for example, displaying wrappers with nutritional information or using a color-coded system to highlight healthy options).						
b. If the program makes use of food company sponsors or advertisements to defray program funding costs, the nutritional value of the food the company sells is a consideration.						
c. Program facility and storage space is adequate to support healthy food options.						
d. Staff model healthy eating in front of youth.						
<b>5) Professional development around nutrition issues is appropriate and high quality</b>						
a. Staff are trained in general nutrition issues as well as trained to conduct nutrition programming for the youth.						
b. Professional development around nutrition issues follows the guidelines for appropriate and high quality professional development outlined in the Administration section, standard #4, and goes beyond giving reading material to staff.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
c. All staff working with food or with youth around food are taught about nutrition issues.						
<b>6) The program follows a principle of balance when approaching food issues</b>						
The program balances nutritional offerings, financial need, and youth preferences when deciding what foods to serve youth and to offer or model in the program environment.						
<b>7) School-based programs act as partners to host schools with nutrition guidelines</b>						
School-based programs respect the nutrition guidelines of the host school. For example, if the host school does not allow a particular food at the school for nutrition reasons, the afterschool program respects this and communicates it to families.						

**Physical Activity**

Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>1) The program provides enough time for physical activity</b>						
The program provides for at least 30 minutes of physical activity during the afterschool session.						
<b>2) The program offers a variety of types of physical activity day to day and within each day</b>						
a. Physical activity offerings include both youth-directed and staff-directed play and activities.						
b. Offerings include competitive as well as non-competitive activities.						
c. Offerings include high-intensity as well as moderate intensity physical activities.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
d. Offerings take into account what the individual youth in the program find interesting or fun.						
e. The program offers a variety of different equipment for youth to use for physical activities.						
<b>3) The program limits the use of screens for youth activities</b>						
a. Screen use is limited other than use of computers or mobile technology for homework or specific enrichment activities.						
b. If the program uses video games that include physical activity, the use is intentional and carefully monitored to ensure the game really does promote physical activity.						
<b>4) Professional development around physical activity programming is appropriate and high quality</b>						
a. Staff learn about different types of physical activities.						
b. Staff learn to lead activities, facilitate a game, and coach youth.						
c. Professional development around physical activity follows the guidelines for appropriate and high quality professional development outlined in the Administration section, standard #4.						
<b>5) The program environment supports a physically active lifestyle for youth</b>						
a. Staff encourage and work to help youth to enjoy and participate in a variety of physical activities.						
b. Program infrastructure and equipment support physical activity options.						



### Human Relationships

Staff relationships with youth, families, and other staff are supportive, respectful, and constructive, and youth interactions with each other are generally positive as well.

**Please check here:**

I am a....

- Youth
- Parent/Guardian/Family member
- Program staff member
- School staff member
- Program partner

Rating Key:  
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 NA = Don't know or Not applicable

Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	

**1) Staff relate to all youth in positive ways**

a. Staff treat youth with respect and listen to what they say.						
b. Staff make youth feel welcome and comfortable.						
c. Staff respond to youth with acceptance and appreciation.						
d. Staff are visibly engaged with youth during activities.						

**2) Staff respond appropriately to individual needs of youth**

a. Staff know that each youth has special interests and talents.						
b. Staff recognize the range of youths' abilities.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
c. Staff respect youths' cultural style and primary language.						
d. Staff recognize the range of youths' feelings and temperaments and respond appropriately.						
<b>3) Staff encourage youth to make choices and to become more responsible</b>						
a. Staff offer assistance without taking control and in a way that supports a youth's initiative.						
b. Staff encourage youth to take leadership roles.						
c. Staff give youth many chances to choose what they will do, how they will do it, and with whom.						
d. Staff help youth make informed and responsible choices.						
<b>4) Staff interact with youth to help them learn</b>						
a. Staff ask questions that encourage youth to think for themselves.						
b. Staff share skills and resources to help youth gain information and solve problems.						
c. Staff vary the approaches they use to help youth learn.						
d. Staff help youth use language skills through frequent conversations.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>5) Staff treat youth as program collaborators and foster in youth a sense of program ownership</b>						
a. Staff involve youth in creating rules and <b>consequences</b> for the program as a whole and for individual games.						
b. Staff involve youth in creating activity plans.						
c. Staff encourage input and feedback from youth regarding the program.						
<b>6) Staff use positive and effective techniques to guide the behavior of youth</b>						
a. Staff model positive behavior when with the youth.						
b. Staff use positive feedback in response to positive behaviors, such as when youth cooperate, share, or care for materials.						
c. Staff set appropriate limits for youth.						
d. Staff make sure youth understand the behavior expectations, rules, and <b>consequences</b> .						
e. Staff enforce rules fairly and consistently.						
f. When youth break rules, staff use immediate, short-term, developmentally appropriate <b>consequences</b> that are directly related to the broken rule.						
g. Staff do not use any <b>harsh discipline methods</b> .						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
h. Staff seek to help youth replace problematic behavior with new behavior skills. For example, this may include teaching and modeling conflict resolution skills. (Note: The understanding of “problematic behavior” should be up to the individual program.)						
i. Staff encourage youth to resolve their own conflicts. If needed, staff step in to discuss the issues and work out a solution together with the youth.						
<b>7) Staff strive to eliminate negative or unsafe peer interactions</b>						
a. Staff are observant of youth interactions.						
b. Staff intervene immediately to stop negative or unsafe peer interactions.						
c. Staff follow up to check on the emotional state of all the youth involved and to identify the source of the problem.						
d. Staff seek to educate youth in how to respond to negative or unsafe peer interactions and how to report it to an adult.						
<b>8) Staff display sensitivity to the culture and background of the youth</b>						
Staff display sensitivity to youths' ethnicity, language, religion, and family make-up.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>9) The program structure supports strong staff-youth relationships</b>						
The program and schedule are structured so that staff and youth have the opportunity to develop close, sustained relationships with each other. For example, youth are able to work with the same staff over extended periods of time.						
<b>10) Youth generally interact with one another in positive ways</b>						
a. Youth appear relaxed and involved with each other.						
b. Youth show respect for each other.						
c. Youth usually cooperate and work well together.						
d. When problems occur, youth often try to discuss their differences and work out a solution.						
<b>11) Staff interact with each other in positive ways</b>						
a. Staff communicate with each other while the program is in session to ensure that the program operates smoothly.						
b. Staff are cooperative with and respectful of each other.						
c. Staff see themselves as professionals and treat each other as professionals.						
d. Staff have opportunities for <b>self-direction</b> within the program.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>12) Staff interact with families in positive ways</b>						
a. Staff make families feel welcome and comfortable and treat them with respect.						
b. Staff encourage and seek feedback and input from families.						
<b>13) Staff communicate with families about key matters concerning the individual child or youth</b>						
a. Staff communicate with families on matters concerning the well-being of the child or youth. Staff work together with families to make arrivals and departures between home and the program go smoothly.						
b. Staff provide information about community resources or other resources that address the needs of youth and their families.						
c. Staff provide opportunities for families to share strategies that have been successful with the child or youth in the past. For example, families may share strategies that relate to behavior, learning, or health maintenance.						
d. Staff provide opportunities for families to inform them of major changes in the youth's life.						



### Indoor and Outdoor Environment

The program's indoor and outdoor environment are set up to facilitate youth development, play, and learning, as well as program success more generally.

**Please check here:**  
I am a....  
 Youth  
 Parent/Guardian/Family member  
 Program staff member  
 School staff member  
 Program partner

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 NA = Don't know or Not applicable

#### Indoor Environment

Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>1) The indoor space is welcoming and youth-centered</b>						
a. The space is clean and organized.						
b. The space is well-lit.						
c. Equipment is appropriate for the size of the youth in the program.						
d. The space reflects the interests of the youth. (Note: This may not be possible, depending on the degree of control the program has over this.)						
e. The space displays the work of the youth. (Note: This may not be possible, depending on the degree of control the program has over this.)						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
f. Youth can safely access materials, such as books and games, independently.						
<b>2) There is adequate indoor space for activities</b>						
a. Space is large enough to accommodate all youth and activities.						
b. There are appropriate spaces for the different kinds of activities offered, and single multi-purpose rooms are divided into defined spaces. For example, there is a large space for sports or dance, quiet and well-lit space for homework, and relaxing <a href="#">soft space</a> .						
<b>3) There is adequate space for storage</b>						
a. Storage space is lockable.						
b. There is space for program materials and equipment.						
c. There is space for staff to store personal items.						
d. There is space for youth to leave jackets and backpacks.						
<b>4) There is a written contingency plan</b>						
The administration has a written contingency plan accommodating as many of these standards as possible, in the case that the program is temporarily displaced.						



**Outdoor Environment**

Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>1) Youth spend enough program time outdoors</b>						
<p>Youth have at least 30 minutes outdoors for every 3 hour block of time. (Note: Exceptions may be necessary due to the weather, the special health needs of an individual youth, or circumstances that make the program unable to provide safe outdoor space. Programs should find other ways to access the outdoors in these situations. For example, the program may provide safe group transport to, and supervision at, a local public park.)</p>						
<b>2) There is a variety of outdoor spaces, equipment, materials</b>						
a. There is access to a variety of outdoor spaces. For example, there is access to open space to run and protected space for quiet play and socializing.						
b. There is access to a variety of outdoor equipment and materials.						
c. Small and large equipment and/or materials for outdoor play are age appropriate and developmentally appropriate.						
<b>3. Storage for outdoor equipment and materials is convenient for children and youth</b>						
a. Youth can access equipment and material easily.						
b. Storage for outside equipment and materials is close to the outdoor play area or readily accessible.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>4. Staff are actively engaged with children playing outdoors</b>						
a. The program offers opportunities for both <b>staff-directed</b> and <b>youth-directed</b> outdoor activities.						
b. Staff encourage youth engagement outdoors using a variety of strategies, including <b>peer support</b> and non-verbal communication such as with objects, actions, and pictures.						
c. Staff maintain <b>adequate supervision</b> of youth while outdoors.						
<b>5. The program enhances an appreciation for nature and the outdoors</b>						
a. The program provides opportunities to discover nature.						
b. The program links outdoor play to experiential learning. For example, programs may incorporate gardening, nature journaling, and outdoor STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) activities.						
c. Staff take the opportunity to do traditional indoor activities outside, weather-permitting. Examples are snack, arts and crafts, and reading/stories.						
d. The program brings the outdoors indoors, especially when outdoor play is impossible. Examples are bringing in a bird's nest or shells, tending to a plant, and even opening windows.						



### Programming and Activities

Programming and activities support youth development and learning, and they are fun, engaging, and tailored to the youth in the program.

**Please check here:**

I am a....

- Youth
- Parent/Guardian/Family member
- Program staff member
- School staff member
- Program partner

Rating Key:  
 1 = Needs improvement  
 2 = Some progress made/Approaching standard  
 3 = Satisfactory/Meets standard  
 4 = Excellent/Exceeds standard  
 NA = Don't know or Not applicable

Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	

**1) Activities are intentional and are aligned with the program's mission**

a. Staff choose activities based on careful consideration of the purpose.						
b. Staff consider the program's mission when choosing activities.						

**2) Activities are tailored to the individual youth in the program**

a. Activities are geared towards developing each individual youth's interests, talents, and skills.						
b. Activities are suited to the individual learning styles of youth in the program.						
c. Activities represent the languages and cultures of youth in the program.						
d. Activities are age appropriate and developmentally appropriate.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>3) Youth learning through program activities is experiential and related to real-world challenges</b>						
Most activities are hands-on, interactive, <a href="#">project-based</a> , <a href="#">inquiry-based</a> , and/or encourage youth exploration of their world.						
<b>4) Activities support the development of youths' personal, social, and emotional skills</b>						
a. The program includes a strong focus on developing youths' <a href="#">personal, social, and emotional skills</a> . These include <a href="#">self-awareness skills</a> , <a href="#">self-management skills</a> , <a href="#">social awareness skills</a> , <a href="#">relationship skills</a> , <a href="#">decision-making skills</a> , and other <a href="#">learning skills</a> .						
b. The program is explicit about the specific personal, social, and emotional skills it seeks to develop and what program activities support these goals.						
c. Activities for teaching personal, social, and emotional skills revolve around giving youth opportunities to practice these skills.						
d. For complex personal, social, and emotional skills, the program breaks these down into developmental steps and provides activities that help youth master the steps one-by-one over time.						
<b>5) The program offers a variety of activities</b>						
a. Youth can choose which activity to participate in from among a variety of activities offered.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
b. There is a balance among types of activities offered. Examples of types of activities include, but are not limited to, the following: literacy, the arts, STEM (Science Technology, Engineering, and Math), cooking, community service/ <a href="#">service learning</a> , sports and games, health-promotion, quiet activity, socializing, and multi-cultural/ <a href="#">global learning</a> .						
c. There are both <a href="#">youth-directed</a> and <a href="#">staff-directed</a> activities.						
d. Youth have opportunities to play/work individually as well as collaboratively in a small or large group.						
<b>6) Programming includes, but is not limited by, homework and tutoring activities</b>						
a. There is balance between time youth spend doing homework and time spent doing other activities.						
b. The program is accommodating to youths' different learning styles while completing homework. For example, students are allowed to do homework in a variety of spaces and positions.						
c. The program has a policy on how it approaches homework and shares this policy with parents.						
<b>7) The program's use of technology and electronics is intentional and supports quality programming</b>						
a. Activities encourage <a href="#">active versus passive involvement with technology and electronics</a> .						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
b. Activities and staff encourage youth to make safe, healthy, and carefully-considered choices in their use of technology and electronics.						
<b>8) The daily routine is structured and stable, while flexible enough to meet the changing or individual needs of youth</b>						
a. Most days follow the same basic structure, and a daily schedule is posted.						
b. There are procedures in place for communicating about upcoming activities to families. Examples are monthly calendars or newsletters.						
c. The program allows adjustments to the regular schedule when appropriate.						
<b>9) Movement between activities is youth-centered</b>						
a. Youth can move between activities on their own without waiting for the whole group to move, to the extent possible.						
b. When the group has to move as a whole, the program manages the movement so it is orderly and quick and youth waiting is limited.						
<b>10) Materials are adequate for programming</b>						
a. Materials are in good condition. They are stored in an organized manner to keep them that way and encourage youth to take good care of them.						
b. There are enough materials for the number of youth and the activities offered.						
c. The materials are age appropriate and <b>developmentally appropriate</b> .						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>11) The afterschool program is linked to the school day</b>						
a. Staff use formal procedures and/or information methods for communicating with the schools the youth attend. For example, the program administration may seek to develop a collaborative relationship with the school principal(s) or attend building team or instructional meetings at the school(s). These collaborations may vary depending on whether the program is sited at a school and whether it serves youth from one school or multiple schools.						
b. Program staff are aware of the content and skills the youth are learning during the school day.						
c. Activities complement the school day rather than repeat what youth do in the classroom.						
d. Program links to the school day are informed by the needs of the individual youth.						
e. The program takes steps to make the schools aware of the importance of the afterschool program and what it offers.						
<b>12) Professional development around programming and activities is appropriate and high quality</b>						
a. Program staff receive training to ensure that they are qualified to oversee program activities.						
b. Staff training around programming and activities is suited to the needs of the particular program.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
c. Wherever possible, the program links professional development opportunities for program staff and for school staff.						
d. 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 programming and activities includes mentoring and on-going, <a href="#">job-embedded learning</a> in addition to formal training opportunities.						



### Safety and Environmental Health

There are safeguards in place to protect youth from getting a major injury or illness while at the program and to provide for their basic comforts.

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**Standards/Elements**

**Rating**

**Examples/Rationale**

1	2	3	4	NA
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**1) Staff are aware of the individual health needs of the youth**

Staff are aware of youths' dietary restrictions, allergies, medications, and other individual health needs, and they keep this information confidential. Staff may carry a list of youth with food allergies during snack or meal time as an added precaution.

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**2) Staff are alert to potential hazards in the environment**

Staff recognize potentially dangerous conditions as they appear and take immediate precautions to protect youth from any serious hazards they see in the indoor and outdoor environment.

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Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>3) The program conducts regular inspections using check-lists to ensure that the indoor and outdoor environment is clean and free of hazards that can cause injury or illness to the youth</b>						
a. The program conducts daily, <b>periodic</b> , and bi-annual inspections and uses an appropriate check-list for each. See the resources section for sample check-lists. (Note: NJ Licensing includes basic requirements in the areas of cleanliness and environmental hazards. In some cases, the NJ Afterschool Quality Standards sample check-lists go beyond licensing requirements.)						
b. The program addresses any problems with hazards or cleanliness quickly by either making immediate corrections or ensuring youth are not exposed to the hazard. If the hazard requires longer term remediation, the program follows up as necessary.						
<b>4) The program takes security precautions that go beyond NJ Licensing</b>						
a. The program conducts annual state and federal background checks (or confirms that background checks already have been conducted) on enrichment providers, presenters, and volunteers who will be alone with youth at any time, in addition to regular staff. A staff person is present at all times when non-staff without background checks are with youth. Non-staff sign in and out when visiting the program. The program makes families aware of these policies.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
b. All of the doors to the program's spaces are locked to the outdoors and monitored from inside.						
c. The program's outdoor space is secured to protect youth from various hazards, including cars, strangers, and animals.						
d. There are policies or procedures in place to ensure youth move safely from one space to another.						
e. Parents or guardians periodically update signed forms allowing non-parents/guardians to pick up youth.						
f. The program has a policy on release of youth to walk home. If programs allow youth to walk home, it is based on an assessment of the safety of the walking route for that particular location and time and the developmental level of the youth.						
g. Staff <b>periodically</b> assess security at the program, identify potential problems, and address potential problems quickly.						
<b>5) The program is prepared for emergencies</b>						
a. The program has a "go kit," which contains essential information and items to take quickly in case of an emergency evacuation. The kit should be portable and reachable in case of evacuation. See the resources section for "go kit" check-list and recommendations.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
b. The program has emergency information on file about both youth and staff. This includes emergency contact information and information about necessary medications or extreme allergic reactions. Staff check that emergency information is updated at least two times a year. This file should be portable and reachable in case of evacuation. The program follows a policy to keep emergency information about staff and youth confidential.						
c. The program has an “ <a href="#">emergency preparedness plan</a> ,” developed in consultation with the host agency, law enforcement, fire department, health professionals, and the county Office of Emergency Management. This includes a plan for emergencies that occurs during the arrival or departure portions of the program.						
d. Staff are trained in the emergency plan, and trainings are redone periodically. The emergency plan has designated lead people, and these leaders review the plan <a href="#">periodically</a> .						
e. The program communicates the emergency plan to parents.						
f. Staff and youth practice the emergency plan and conduct emergency drills.						
<b>6) Transportation in vehicles is safe</b>						
a. The program requires use of age-appropriate safety restraints.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
b. The program maintains documentation of vehicle inspection and drivers' driving records.						
c. If the program uses <b>buses</b> to transport youth, the administration considers the number and ages of youth to decide whether to provide a bus monitor. This person's role would include tracking youth and monitoring behavior and safety. For any transportation arrangement with a driver who is not program staff, the program provides a bus monitor.						
<b>7) Staff take special precautions during activities requiring an increased attention to safety</b>						
a. Staff and youth use appropriate safety gear during these activities, and there is proper instruction about how to use it.						
b. If these activities involve the use of any special materials or equipment, staff and youth have proper instruction about their use.						
c. There is increased supervision during these activities.						
d. The program conducts a <b>risk assessment</b> of these activities to determine what precautions are necessary.						
<b>8) The program provides for the basic comforts of the youth</b>						
a. The indoor temperature is within a safe and comfortable range.						
b. The indoor environment is well-ventilated.						
c. When outdoors, youth have access to shade.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
d. Youth always have access to drinking water, including when outside.						
e. Youth always have access to restrooms, including when outside.						
f. There is a supply of extra coats, gloves, and boots for winter, to the extent possible.						



### Special Needs

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

**Please check here:**

I am a....

- Youth
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Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>1) The program views a “special need” as any special situation or unique need of a child</b>						
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.						
<b>2) The program advertises itself as welcoming to youth with special needs</b>						
a. The program advertises its policy to enroll youth with special needs in writing where families and staff can see it.						
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's a section of the IEP that can include afterschool and encourage families to look into their options. Or, if applicable, materials may say that the program has special education teachers on site.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>3) Professional development around special needs is appropriate and high quality</b>						
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.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>4) The program takes steps to ensure communication with families about youth with special needs is respectful and as effective as possible</b>						
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.						
d. Staff or materials make clear to families that the program doesn't have information about youth that the family has not explicitly given, for example, information that the family has given to the school.						
e. The program has 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.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>5) The program's response to youth with a special need or situation is well-planned and appropriate</b>						
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 <a href="#">Child Study Team</a> , if applicable.						
c. The program makes reasonable accommodations in order to be able to include youth with special needs and facilitate their success in the program. (Note that the language of “reasonable accommodations” is from the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). “Reasonable” means that the program is not required to dramatically change its structure, and what is “reasonable” varies according to the specific situation.) Accommodations may include modifications to the environment, activities, materials, or methods of interacting.						
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.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
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.						
<b>6) The program makes use of outside resources and professionals when necessary and appropriate</b>						
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 <a href="#">Child Study Team</a> and other school-day staff. The program ensures it has 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.						



Standards/Elements	Rating					Examples/Rationale
	1	2	3	4	NA	
<b>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</b>						
a. All newly constructed facilities are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). For older spaces, programs do what they can 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.						
<b>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>						