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# NJQSA AT-A-GLANCE



New Jersey's  
Quality Standards  
for Afterschool  
4TH EDITION

A Project of NJSACC: The Statewide Network  
for New Jersey's Afterschool Communities

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Please check out [njsacc.org](http://njsacc.org) for more information and regular updates and releases of supplemental materials regarding the NJQSA Self-Assessment process.



## FOREWORD

In 2010, 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?"

The Committee that designed the standards was a true reflection of the Garden State. Committee members represented public agencies and private organizations; afterschool programs both large and small; programs from the north, central, and southern parts of the state that represented urban, suburban, and rural settings. Over many months, we worked as a group to craft a comprehensive document that would cover the aspects that a quality program should strive to achieve - always keeping in mind the fundamental idea that creating quality programming is an ongoing process that shifts and changes with time.

It was a challenging and rewarding experience that led to the creation of a tool that has guided our work to help programs navigate their journey toward quality programming. As I said before, the road to quality is an ongoing process. Even the best programs understand that there is always room to improve and new things to learn as time goes on. As such, the tools that we use to assess quality must be revisited and redesigned to incorporate new information and ideas. In 2021, we began the important work of going through the standards with a fine toothed comb to incorporate diversity, equity and inclusion into each of the categories to affirm and ensure that the needs of youth and families throughout New Jersey are being addressed and met by providers of afterschool programs.

New Jersey is a state that is rich in diversity and as such, we need to be intentional about understanding the needs of the children and families that we serve and how we can provide the best care possible.

As I prepare for my retirement after 54 years in the field, I am thrilled to be able to share with you the fruits of our labor. The new and improved New Jersey Quality Standards for Afterschool are ready to be turned over to your capable hands so that you can continue to take the next steps in the journey toward quality programming. I am so proud of the work that all of you have done and continue to do. You have faced numerous challenges, but you have persevered because you know the importance of afterschool and the difference it makes in the lives of the children and families in your care.

Thank you all for being a part of so many wonderful memories. I am honored to have been a part of the important work that NJSACC has accomplished over the years and I know that I am leaving the field and the future of afterschool in good hands.

Fondly,



Diane Genco



## ABOUT NJSACC

NJSACC: The Statewide Network for New Jersey's Afterschool Communities had its beginnings 40 years ago as a grassroots coalition made up of stakeholders such as education, government, industry, not for profit, for profit, health and human services to improve the quality of the growing field of afterschool.

In 1993, NJSACC became incorporated as a not for profit organization. NJSACC is a founding member of the National AfterSchool Association and currently serves as the state affiliate.

In 2007, NJSACC was selected to join the National Network of Statewide Afterschool Networks funded by the Charles S. Mott Foundation.

## HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW JERSEY QUALITY STANDARDS FOR AFTERSCHOOL (NJQSA)

In 2010, NJSACC with support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the New Jersey 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 and small afterschool programs; programs from every part of the state representing NJ's diverse communities.

Over a period of 18 months, the committee discussed and defined all aspects of quality afterschool programming. To do this, we relied heavily on the years of experience and the expertise of the committee members and the NJSACC staff.

Additionally, they carefully reviewed 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.

Views of afterschool quality that the committee members brought to the table are reflected in a few key reports, research studies, and platforms. To find these, refer to the "Sources and Further Reading" section of this document.

The document that answered the question, "what does quality look like in an afterschool program," was drafted. The first draft of the New Jersey Quality Standards for Afterschool (NJQSA) was posted on the NJSACC website during the summer of 2012 and received feedback from all of the network members and partners across the state. The first edition of the Quality Standards was released in November 2012. In 2013, a diverse group of afterschool programs throughout the state utilized this resource and shared their experiences with NJSACC. After review, the feedback was incorporated and the Second (2nd) Edition of the Quality Standards was released in the Fall of 2013, the Third (3rd) Edition was released in Fall of 2018, and this Fourth Edition, in Spring 2022.

This NJQSA "At A Glance" Book is a tool for quick access to The Standards.

The full NJQSA and related tools are available online at: [njsacc.org](https://njsacc.org)



The updates to this 4th edition include:

- A screening of the latest edition for its attention to diversity, equity and inclusion at all levels for youth, staff, families and partners
- Specific process to include all children regardless of ability; in turn removing the former section Special Needs/Whole Child
- Six (6) categories, sixty-seven (67) Standards, three hundred (300) Elements
- The numbering has changed, now 1 - 67
- Crosswalk including references to licensing regulations, Search Institute Assets and National Afterschool Association (NAA) Core Competencies
- Combined Self-Assessment/Rubric
- Updated Surveys
- Updated Resources
- Updated Glossary

## THE STANDARDS: NEW JERSEY'S QUALITY STANDARDS FOR AFTERSCHOOL

New Jersey's Quality Standards for Afterschool (NJQSA), together with the Self-Assessment Tools, are resources which afterschool and out-of-school time programs can use for self-evaluation of their program's quality. It is referred to as "the standards."

The NJQSA includes six (6) Categories, sixty-seven (67) Standards and three hundred (300) Standard Elements.

The **Categories** are:

- Administration
- Healthy Behaviors: Nutrition and Physical Activity
- Human Relationships
- Indoor and Outdoor Environment
- Programming and Activities
- Safety and Environmental Health

The **Standards** for each category are numbered and in bold font.

The **Standard Elements** are listed under the bold heading with letters (a, b, c, etc.). The standard elements along with the self assessment rubric and survey results will help you understand how to interpret the standard and important details to pay attention to as you take action.

*Example:*



# HOW TO USE THE NJQSA: CONTINUOUS PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT-OBSERVATION, SELF-ASSESSMENT, SURVEY AND ACTION

The Standards are the basis of a self study process for program improvement. The Standards use self assessments and rubrics for stakeholders to observe and rate the quality of a program. Programs will rate themselves using the self assessment tools to make a program improvement plan, also referred to as the Action Plan.

Self assessment can be completed by all levels of the program stakeholders and the self assessment and rubric are included in the Tools for Continuous program improvement at [njsacc.org](http://njsacc.org)

To support collective feedback to use towards program improvement, surveys are taken by all levels of program stakeholders. Surveys are also included in the Tools for Continuous program improvement at [njsacc.org](http://njsacc.org)

Using the Standards and its accompanying Tools and Resources should be on-going and a team effort. New Staff should be introduced to the Standards at on-boarding and orientation. The Standards should be a part of the fabric of the program, used as reference in staff development and program planning.

The first step is to read and become familiar with the Standards and discuss them with a team of stakeholders.

Once the team is familiar with the standards and understand how they apply to the program, there are two courses of action that could be taken.

- Focus on targeted program improvement or;
- Implement full program improvement

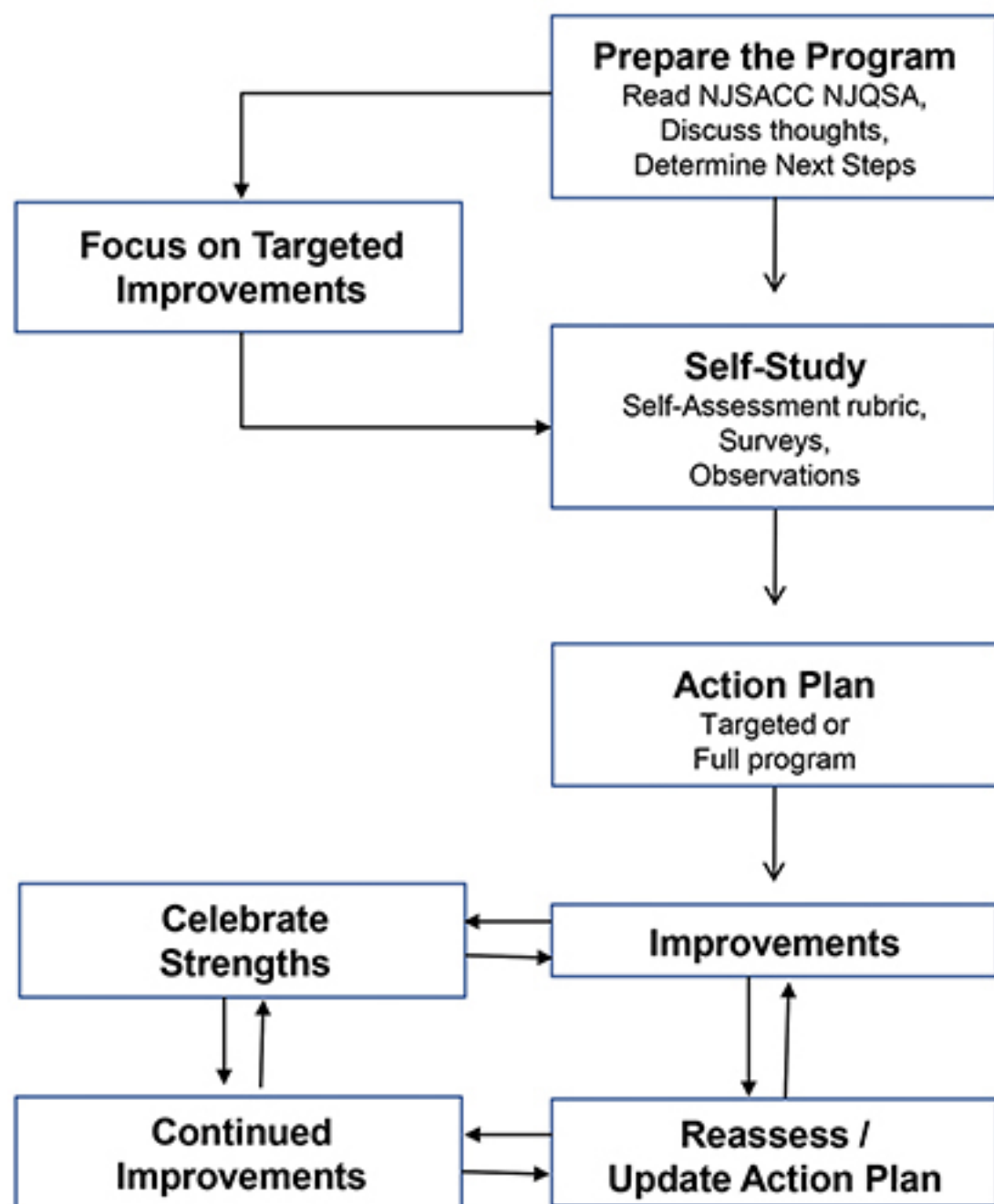
Whichever course is agreed upon by the team, consider the process to take place continuously from the point of starting with checkpoints in between. Because each program is unique, there is no time limit for when the steps are completed. The goal is to provide programs with tools to make effective decisions that will improve the quality of care. This is not a one time event, it is a commitment to continuous improvement.

For more information on the Self-Assessment process as well as the New Jersey Quality Standards for Afterschool, please visit [njsacc.org](http://njsacc.org).



# NJSACC PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

## STEPS IN THE PROCESS



This flow chart shows the sequence of events in the NJQSA Continuous Program Improvement concept. Programs decide which path they will take and can follow this sequence at their own pace.

## *Celebrate the Program's Strengths*

As you read the standards, which standards/elements do you know exist in your program? Acknowledge this and celebrate your program's strengths, recognize the people behind those strengths, and use the standards to define what makes the program special. Share this information with the entire program so everyone can share in the celebration.

Please check out [njsacc.org](http://njsacc.org) for additional tools for continuous program improvement that include:

- Self Assessment and Rubrics
- Surveys for Staff, Youth, Families and Partners
- Crosswalk between National Program Quality tools and NJ Office of Licensing requirements
- Professional Development options for the NJQSA and;
- Access to Quality Coaching and Technical Support



## ADMINISTRATION

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

### **1. The program has and uses a mission statement.**

- A. The program has a written mission statement that sets forth the program's primary purpose(s).
- B. The mission statement guides administrative decisions about the program, including decisions about curriculum, staffing, and policy.
- C. All staff, families and partners are aware of the mission statement. The mission statement is provided within internal and external communications including marketing, registration, and hiring documents.

### **2. The administration takes steps to facilitate continuous improvement in program quality.**

- A. The administration oversees the development of program goals and objectives.
- B. The administration conducts an internal monitoring or evaluation to continuously improve program quality.
- C. Evaluation methods specifically strive to help the program better serve young people of all backgrounds, abilities, and experiences.
- D. The administration incorporates input and feedback from program stakeholders as central components of the quality improvement process.

### **3. The administration offers staff the best possible working conditions and pay.**

- A. The program recruits staff with various methods of outreach to hire a staff that reflects the diversity of the program and community.
- B. The program offers staff paid preparatory and professional development time.
- C. The program facilitates opportunities for additional training that is related to a staff's professional growth plan, including paying for outside training, if appropriate.
- D. Staff have opportunities to discuss their own concerns regarding the program.
- E. Staff have opportunities within the program for self-direction, decision-making, and developing long-term program plans and vision.
- F. There are policies and procedures in place to give positive feedback and recognize the contributions of staff members.
- G. Maintaining a healthy workplace culture is a priority for the program. That health is assessed regularly using proven tools to gather information from staff, leadership, and other relevant stakeholders as appropriate. Based on that information, if necessary, appropriate, and timely action/response follows.



- 4. The administration provides a high-quality system of professional development and opportunities for professional growth through capacity building and career development.**
- A. The administration outlines the organization's leadership structure and the training and development needed to progress professionally in the organization and in the field of afterschool and out-of-school time.
  - B. The administration conducts consistent assessment of the staff's professional development needs.
  - C. The administration tracks the skills and experience of staff to target training and leadership development.
  - D. The administration develops an annual professional development plan with a timeline based on assessment and evaluations.
  - E. The administration uses qualified, experienced trainers that are representative of diverse populations and/or evidence-based training materials for professional development. There is consistent evaluation of professional development offerings and offerings are reviewed by a diverse group of stakeholders.
  - F. Professional development for staff includes mentoring, coaching and on-going, job-embedded learning in addition to formal training opportunities such as meeting organization leaders, networking events, attending conferences and relevant meetings.
  - G. There is a plan aimed at preparing emerging leaders for leadership/executive roles with target individualized support needed to prepare candidates for leadership roles.

- 5. Professional development includes content on disability, inclusion, and reasonable accommodations that are appropriate and high quality.**
- A. Staff training is provided that builds awareness of the importance of inclusion and the practices that support inclusion. The program trains staff on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the New Jersey Disability Law.
  - B. The program provides staff training, resources, and ongoing coaching to ensure youth with disabilities or additional needs are provided supports and individualized accommodations to be meaningfully included in the program.
  - C. Staff are trained in child and youth development and multiple learning styles.
  - D. When helpful, the program provides additional staff training to ensure respectful accommodations are provided to meet individual youth needs.
- 6. The administration manages volunteers effectively.**
- A. 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.
  - B. Guest speakers and volunteers have diverse backgrounds, cultures, careers, and abilities.

*Note: Standards related to staff conduct in the Human Relationships category should also apply to volunteers.*



**7. The administration takes steps to support effective communication.**

- A. There are policies, procedures, and resources in place, as well as appropriate training, when necessary, that support positive and effective communication between program staff and families. For example, communication may need to be translated into the family's preferred language or provided in paper format if access to digital format is limited.
- B. There are policies, procedures and resources in place that support regular and ongoing 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 when the program needs information.
- C. 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.
- D. There are policies or procedures in place that support effective communication between program staff and the host agency or other community stakeholders, if applicable.
- E. Communication is accessible and culturally responsive. Websites, flyers, and other outreach materials include images of diverse participants that reflect the community served and society as a whole. Outreach and registration materials are translated into the home language(s) of youth and families in the program and are written in accessible formats.

**8. The administration values input and feedback about the program and is responsive to it.**

- A. The program uses formal and informal methods to seek feedback and input from youth and families, host agencies or other community stakeholders, if applicable.
- B. The program is responsive to input and feedback from youth, families, the host agency, and other stakeholders.
- C. The program involves staff, families, and youth in decision-making and planning to ensure that the program is reflective of the community served and is representative of the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the youth and families served.

**9. There are policies or procedures in place that involve families in the life of the program.**

- A. Information for families is available in accessible formats for people with disabilities and provided to the extent possible in the language(s) the families speak, to the extent possible, and at the literacy level of most families. The program also takes into account the unique communication needs of parents or guardians with disabilities or additional needs.
- B. The program offers orientation sessions for new families with the ability for families to request accommodations in advance.
- C. The program involves parents/guardians in program events when possible, and there is a policy to welcome "drop-in" visits from family members to the program.



**10. The program respects the rights of the youth, parents/guardians, and staff.**

- A. There are confidentiality policies and protocols that are shared with families at the time of enrollment.
- B. The program does not release confidential information about youth without written authorization from the parent or legal guardian and child or youth (if applicable). When the law permits the release of confidential information without this authorization, the program at a minimum informs youth and families of the release.
- C. Staff are trained on confidentiality policies and protocols as part of the onboarding process and through periodic refresher training.
- D. 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 parents/guardians of youth in the program and to program staff.
- E. The program has and adheres to a nondiscrimination policy, which is reflected in all program activities, hiring practices, and communications.

**11. The program communicates a message of inclusion, that youth of all abilities are welcome.**

- A. Program materials include information that clearly demonstrates that the program is welcoming of youth of all abilities.
- B. Information related to disability or additional need is not required for acceptance into the program.
- C. Families are provided opportunities to share information about a child or youth including strengths, challenges, areas for support, past experiences, and medical needs.
- D. Program works with each family on a case-by-case basis to identify reasonable accommodations which do not fundamentally alter the nature of the program and do not place an undue financial burden on the program.
- E. Program provides clear guidance to families regarding access to information from other organizations (ex: Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) from schools).
- F. When necessary, the program seeks outside resources and professionals to aid in the process of identifying ways to make accommodations to include youth of all abilities.

**12. The administration maintains and updates program policies and records.**

- A. The administration maintains a parent/guardian handbook, an employee handbook, and a policies and procedures manual. This includes annually reviewing each of these documents, including input from diverse stakeholders and updating documents as needed.
- B. The administration maintains youth and staff files and other important program records in an organized and confidential manner.
- C. The administration ensures individual staff and youth records are checked at least twice a year and updated as needed.

**13. The administration acts responsibly regarding program finances and financial sustainability.**

- A. The administration conducts sound financial management 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/guardians, if applicable.
- C. The administration maintains awareness of possible funding streams to support the program and applies for funding when appropriate.

**14. The administration maintains sufficient staff, youth ratios and supervision of youth.**

- A. Ratios of staff to youth in the program should be between 1:10 and 1:15 when youth are ages six (6) and older. Ratios of staff to children should be between 1:8 and 1:12 when the program includes children who are age five (5). When possible, at least two (2) staff members are with a group of youth.
- B. There is a plan to provide adequate staff coverage in case of emergencies. This includes emergencies that require one (1) staff member to tend to the needs of a single child, including situations in which on-duty staff members become ill or experience an emergency.
- 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.

**15. The administration stays current on licensing and other relevant laws and regulations.**

- A. The administration ensures the program follows any relevant laws and regulations, including state licensing standards, local health department requirements and understanding the program's responsibilities under the American with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- 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.
- C. The administration is aware of changes that may impact relevant laws and regulation and other current issues related to laws and regulations that could impact the program.



**16. The administration researches and connects to potential community partners in order to facilitate staff, youth, and families in taking advantage of community resources.**

- 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 provides this information to staff and ensures that the information is current and high-quality.
- B. The program administration develops links with the community that staff may take advantage of when planning activities. Examples include activities that help children get to know the larger community, such as trips to a library or visits from leaders and mentors in the community, as well as community service projects.
- C. The program administration vets community resources, partners, vendors, and contractors to ensure that they utilize equitable practices.
- D. The program administration provides guidance to partners, vendors, and contractors to make accommodations and modifications for diverse abilities when needed.



## **HEALTHY BEHAVIORS: NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES**

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

### ***Nutrition:***

**17. The program environment supports healthy eating and nutrition awareness.**

- 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. When choosing food vendors, the program considers the nutritional value of the food options.
- C. The program facility and storage space is adequate to support healthy food options.
- D. Staff model and promote healthy eating. Staff sit and eat with youth, discussing health benefits of snack and meal components. Staff do not consume personal food and beverages that are not served by the program in front of the youth.
- E. The program follows a principle of balance according to USDA's Healthy-Eating Index <https://www.fns.usda.gov/healthy-eating-index-hei> with food providing nutritional offerings and including youth preferences when deciding what foods to serve youth.
- F. The program engages families in the program's emphasis on healthy eating. Healthy food is served at family events, celebrations and fundraisers should emphasize healthy food choices.



**18. The program considers nutritional value and youth needs when selecting food to serve to youth.**

- A. The program serves foods and beverages in amounts and types that promote healthy eating. Water is always accessible, a fruit and/or vegetable is served daily, foods do not have sugar as the primary ingredient, ingredients avoid artificial sweeteners, flavors or colors, and portion size is adequate.
- B. The programs' food choices are guided by an evidence-based source of nutrition guidelines for snack menus (USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program).
- C. The program offers various choices and accommodates dietary restrictions related to allergies and food intolerance.
- D. If there are vending machines, they include nutritional options (for example, fruit cups and pretzels) or a system for promoting healthy choices.
- E. 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 must be a consideration.
- F. School-based programs act as partners and respect the nutrition guidelines of the host school. For example, if the host school does not allow a particular food on-site for nutrition reasons, the afterschool program respects this and communicates it to families.

*Note: See the resource section for current nutrition standards according to the USDA.*

**19. The program considers families' cultures when selecting food to serve to youth.**

- A. The program is knowledgeable of the culture(s) of program youth when choosing food to serve.
- B. The program is prepared to offer alternatives to youth to accommodate dietary restrictions that may be present.
- C. The program introduces participants to food from around the world.

**20. If the program offers nutrition education to the youth, it is of high quality.**

- A. The nutrition curriculum is evidence-based or based on the best available research.
- B. The nutrition curriculum is hands-on, and activity based.
- C. The format of the curriculum is accessible to all program participants (example: large font, simplified text with pictures, alternative text for photographs and visuals).
- D. The curriculum recognizes diverse cultures and diverse dietary needs.

**21. Professional development around nutrition issues is appropriate and high quality.**

- A. All staff receive training on the role of healthy eating and physical activity for healthy living.
- B. All staff working with food or with youth around food are taught about nutrition related matters such as food impact on youth behavior.
- C. 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 only providing reading material to staff.
- D. Staff receive training to ensure youth with disabilities are provided appropriate assistance with food if needed.



**22. The program environment supports a physically active lifestyle for youth.**

- A. Staff encourage and work to help youth to enjoy and participate in a variety of physical activities.
- B. Program schedule, environment and equipment support physical activity options.
- C. The program offers at least 30 minutes of physical activity for every 3 hours of the program.
- D. The program provides short physical breaks between and/or within learning activities to invigorate children and eliminate long periods of sitting. The program incorporates physical activity into transition times.
- E. Physical activity takes place outdoors and indoors, whenever possible.
- F. The program engages families in the program's emphasis on physical activity.

**23. The program offers a variety of types of physical activity day to day and within each day.**

- A. Physical activity offerings consider youth of all abilities and include both youth-directed and staff-directed play and activities.
- B. Offerings include a range of competitive as well as non-competitive activities.
- C. Offerings include high and moderate intensity physical activities.
- 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 with different abilities to use for physical activities. For example, easy grip balls for youth with motor skill challenges.

- F. The program plans, in advance, to ensure activities include accommodations to support different abilities and needs. For example, game rules shown through movement for youth that do not speak the language or have difficulty comprehending verbal instructions.

**24. The program limits the use of screens for youth activities.**

- 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 truly promotes physical activity.

**25. Professional development around physical activity programming is appropriate and high quality.**

- A. Staff learn about different types of physical activities, are provided with curricular resources, and learn how to include physical activity through the program.
- B. Staff learn to lead activities, facilitate a game, and coach youth utilizing the youth's strengths and varying abilities.
- C. Staff learn ways to modify activities to ensure all youth have the opportunity to meaningfully participate including youth with physical, sensory, or intellectual disabilities.
- D. Staff are trained not to withhold opportunities for physical activity as a form of punishment or consequences.
- E. Professional development around physical activity follows the guidelines for appropriate and high-quality professional development outlined in the Administration section, standard #4.





## 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.

### **26. Staff relate to all youth in positive ways.**

- A. Staff make youth feel welcome and comfortable. A staff member is assigned the explicit responsibility of greeting and welcoming each youth at the beginning of each program day to “check-in”.
- B. Staff treat youth with respect and listen to what they say.
- C. Time is built into each program day for a group gathering where youth can share their thoughts and feelings. Youth know they can speak with an adult in a one-on-one setting, if necessary.
- D. Staff respond to youth with acceptance and appreciation.
- E. Staff are actively engaged with youth during activities.

### **27. Staff respond appropriately to individual needs of youth.**

- A. Staff implement ways to recognize each youth for their special talents and interests.
- B. Staff recognize the range of youths' feelings and temperaments and respond appropriately.
- C. Staff recognize the range of youths' abilities and adapt activities to be inclusive of the unique needs of each youth.
- D. Staff respect and embrace youths' cultural style and primary language incorporating aspects of their culture into the activities.

### **28. Staff encourage youth to make choices and to become more responsible.**

- A. Staff offer assistance without taking control and in a way that supports a youth's initiative.
- B. Staff encourage all youth to take leadership roles.
- C. Staff give youth many opportunities to choose what they will do, how they will do it, and with whom.
- D. Staff help youth make informed and responsible choices.

### **29. Staff intentionally engage with youth in developmentally age appropriate ways that build skills and help them learn.**

- 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 such as showing, telling and letting youth try on their own.
- D. Staff help youth use learned skills by providing opportunities for demonstrating what was learned.

### **30. Staff recognize youth as program collaborators and foster in youth a sense of program ownership and belonging.**

- A. Staff encourage input and feedback from youth regarding the program and youth have a formal way to offer feedback regarding the program.
- B. Staff involve youth in creating and agreeing on the community agreements and consequences for the program as a whole and for individual activities.
- C. Staff involve youth in creating activity plans.



**31. Staff use positive and effective techniques to understand and, when appropriate, to guide the behavior of youth.**

- A. Staff model positive behavior.
- B. Staff use positive feedback in response to positive behaviors, such as when youth cooperate, share, or care for materials and one another.
- C. Staff communicate consistent program expectations.
- D. Staff make sure youth understand the behavior expectations, rules, and consequences of the program.
- E. Staff enforce rules and expectations fairly and consistently.
- F. When youth break rules, staff use immediate, short-term, developmentally appropriate consequences that are directly related to the broken rule. Refer to the resources section for more guidance about using consequences.
- G. Staff do not use any discipline method such as shaming in front of peers, yelling, name calling, or mandatory physical movement such as running laps.
- H. Staff seek to help youth replace concerning or challenging behavior with new behavior skills. For example, this may include teaching and modeling conflict resolution skills.
- I. Staff encourage youth to safely and respectfully resolve their own conflicts. If needed, staff step in to discuss the issues and work out a solution together with the youth.
- J. The program provides an alternative space for youth to visit when they are overstimulated, upset, or desire a break from the group activity.

**32. Staff strive to eliminate concerning or unsafe peer interactions.**

- A. Staff are consistently observant of youth interactions.
- B. Staff intervene immediately to stop negative or unsafe peer interactions.
- C. Staff facilitate and teach conflict resolution steps to youth.
- D. Staff follow up to check on the emotional state of all the youth involved and to identify the source of the challenging dynamic.
- E. Staff educate youth in how to respond to negative or unsafe peer interactions and how to report it to an adult.

**33. Staff display respect and sensitivity to the diverse cultures and backgrounds of the youth.**

- A. Staff display sensitivity to youths' ethnicity, language, religion, and family make-up.
- B. Diverse family structures are honored, celebrated, and affirmed.
- C. The program creates opportunities to honor and celebrate the cultures of the youth in the program in a way that is meaningful and culturally responsive.

**34. The program structure supports strong staff-youth relationships.**

- A. The program and schedule are structured so that staff and youth have the opportunity to develop sustained, trusting relationships with each other.
- B. Youth are able to work with the same staff over extended periods of time.
- C. Youth are given the opportunity to spend time with different staff members.
- D. A confidential, emotionally safe protocol for youth to share concerns with leadership is established and consistently followed.



**35. Youth generally interact with one another in positive ways.**

- 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 have opportunities to mediate, repair the harm through a solution and restore relationships.

**36. Staff interact with each other in positive ways.**

- 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 self-direction within the program.
- E. Staff are provided a confidential and respectful pathway to voice program concerns with leadership without fear of retribution.

**37. Staff interact with families in positive ways.**

- A. Staff welcome families and treat them with respect and treat them with respect.
- B. Staff and families greet and acknowledge each other.
- C. Staff encourage and seek feedback and input from families.
- D. Families are provided a confidential and respectful pathway to share program concerns with leadership without fear of retribution.
- E. There are meaningful and inclusive family and community engagement opportunities to contribute to the program through planning and/or volunteering.

- F. There are different types and levels of family engagement available to address the needs and capacity of all families.
- G. Opportunities for families to participate in programs and events exist and are accessible. Events will be held in ADA compliant venues and advance opportunities for families to request accommodations such as American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation, audio description or captioning.

**38. Staff communicate with families about key matters concerning the individual child or youth.**

- A. Staff communicate with families on matters concerning the well-being of the child or youth.
- B. Staff work together with families to make arrivals and departures between home and the program go smoothly.
- C. Program materials are in the primary language(s) spoken within the community, including accessible formats such as large print.
- D. Staff provide information about community resources or other resources that address the needs of youth and their families.
- E. 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.
- F. Staff provide respectful and confidential opportunities for families to share information about their child.





## INDOOR/OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENT

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

**39. The program environment is accessible, welcoming, supportive, and respectful of all youth including those with disabilities or additional needs.**

- A. The space is clean, organized, well-lit, free of safety hazards and compliant with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- B. Program space, including room set up, furniture size, and equipment is suitable for all youth and can accommodate differing abilities.
- C. Program environments, materials, and activities are developmentally and age appropriate for all youth to participate fully and are inclusive of youth with disabilities.
- D. Program materials are safe, age appropriate and are accessible for youth to safely use independently.
- E. The space reflects the interests, cultures, and abilities of the youth.
- F. The space displays the work of the youth. If walls are not accessible, use three-fold boards for temporary displays.
- G. Program decorations, wall hangings, posters, etc. reflect the diversity of the youth in the program, the community, and society.

- H. Program materials, books, toys and games are free of stereotypical representations of any race, languages, culture, class, gender identity, religion, or ability. These supplies are kept up to date and are inclusive of and celebrate diverse familial structures, ethnic and racial backgrounds, languages, cultures, gender identities, religions, and abilities.
- I. Posters and other written materials are in primary languages spoken by the youth in the program.

**40. There is adequate indoor space for activities.**

- A. Space is large enough to accommodate all youth and activities.
- B. There are appropriate spaces for the different kinds of activities offered and multi-purpose rooms are divided into defined spaces by interest and/or activity areas. For example, there is a large space for sports or dance, a quiet and well-lit space for homework, and relaxing soft space.
- C. The set-up of the program space is appropriate for the activity and allows all youth to move freely during activities including those using wheelchairs, scooters, crutches, etc.

**41. There is adequate space for storage.**

- 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.
- E. There is space for long term projects to be stored for youth to work on continuously.

**42. There is a written contingency plan.**

- A. The administration has a written contingency plan to implement as many of these standards as possible, in the case that the program is temporarily displaced.
- B. If displaced, the contingency plan continues to provide the accommodations and supports for youth with disabilities in the program.

**43. Youth spend adequate program time outdoors.**

Youth have an opportunity to spend 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 prevent the program from providing 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.*

**44. There is a variety of outdoor spaces, equipment, and materials.**

- 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.

**45. Storage for outdoor equipment and materials is convenient for children and youth.**

- A. Youth can access equipment and materials easily.
- B. Storage for outside equipment and materials is close to the outdoor play area or readily accessible.

**46. Staff are actively engaged with children playing outdoors.**

- A. There are both staff-directed and youth-directed outdoor activities.
- B. Staff encourage youth engagement outdoors using a variety of strategies, including peer support and non-verbal communication such as with objects, actions, and pictures.
- C. Staff maintain adequate supervision of youth while outdoors.
- D. Outdoor activities are modified to accommodate youth of all abilities.

**47. The program enhances an appreciation for nature and the outdoors.**

- A. There are opportunities for all children and youth to discover nature.
- B. The program links outdoor play to experiential learning. For example, programs may incorporate gardening, nature journaling, and outdoor STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) activities.
- C. Staff occasionally move traditional indoor activities outside, weather-permitting. Examples are snacks, arts and crafts, and reading/stories.
- D. The program brings the outdoors indoors, especially when outdoor play is impossible. Examples are bringing in pebbles and pine cones, tending to a plant, and 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.

### **48. The program offers a variety of activities.**

- A. Activities are intentional and are aligned with the program's mission.
- B. Youth can choose which activity to participate in from among a variety of activities offered.
- C. There is a balance among types of activities offered. Examples of activity types include, but are not limited to, the following: literacy, the arts, STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math), cooking, community service/service learning, sports and games, health-promotion, quiet activity, socializing, and multicultural/global learning.
- D. Within the activities, whenever possible and necessary, there should be options and choices for a range of youth abilities, skills, and interests.
- E. There are both youth-directed and staff-directed activities.
- F. Youth of all abilities have opportunities to play/work individually as well as collaboratively in a small or large group.
- G. Diversity, equity, and inclusion is infused across program initiatives. If diversity is not widely represented among staff, diverse voices and lived experiences are integrated to inform programming and be present in the program via guest speakers and performers, advisory groups, volunteers, board members, and committee members.

### **49. Activities are modified for individual youth.**

- 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, developmentally appropriate and modified as needed to meet the needs of all participants.
- E. Programming content and lesson planning is inclusive of the voices of all stakeholders.
- F. Staff focus on recognizing youth for their effort versus their ability.

**50. Youth learning through program activities is experiential and related to real-world challenges.**

- A. Most activities are hands-on, interactive, project-based, inquiry based and/or encourage youth exploration of their world.
- B. Program activities, projects, and initiatives are modified to support participation of youth with a range of abilities.
- C. Program activities are culturally responsive and relevant to the needs and lived experiences of the communities served.
- D. When selecting curricula, the program considers how and if the curricula is culturally responsive and relevant to the communities served.
- E. When selecting curricula, the program considers how and if the curricula supports global education so that youth can learn about and appreciate diversity in society even if it is not prevalent in their communities.
- F. Curricular content and activities incorporate relevant community and society culture, climate, and current events.
- G. Curricular content and activities build upon and include youth's lived experiences.
- H. There is diverse representation in both fiction and non-fiction characters presented within curricular content.
- I. Staff facilitate conversations that allow youth to make connections between program activity and real-world experiences.

**51. Activities support the development of youths' social and emotional skills.**

- A. The program includes a strong focus on developing youths' social and emotional skills. These include self-awareness skills, self-management skills, social awareness skills, relationship skills, responsible decision-making skills, and other learning skills.
- B. The program is explicit about the specific social and emotional skills it seeks to develop and what program activities support these goals.
- C. Activities for teaching social and emotional skills revolve around giving youth opportunities to practice these skills.
- D. For building complex social and emotional skills, the program scaffolds learning by providing opportunities for youth to practice skills in a low-risk environment.
- E. Staff intentionally mix groups to prevent isolation and exclusion to foster cross-cultural skills.
- F. Staff provide opportunities for youth to reflect on activity content and its relevance in their daily lives.

**52. Programming includes, but is not limited by, homework and tutoring activities.**

- A. There is a 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/guardians.



**53. The program's use of technology and electronics is intentional and supports quality programming.**

- A. Activities encourage active versus passive involvement with technology and electronics.
- B. Activities and staff encourage youth to make safe, healthy, and carefully-considered choices in their use of technology and electronics.
- C. The program has established policies regarding use of technology that includes rules on sharing personal information, photos, social media etc.
- D. The technology needed for programming should be accessible to all youth.

**54. The daily routine is structured and stable, while flexible enough to meet the changing or individual needs of youth.**

- A. Most days follow the same basic structure.
- B. A daily schedule is posted where it can be viewed throughout different areas of the program and presented in formats which are understood by all participants such as use of pictures or in multiple languages.
- C. There are procedures in place for communicating about upcoming activities to families. Examples are monthly calendars or newsletters.
- D. The program allows adjustments to the regular schedule when appropriate.
- E. Staff incorporate strategies to address multiple learning modalities.

**55. Movement between activities is youth-centered.**

- 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.
- C. The program considers youth of varying abilities in the transitions of the program and makes necessary accommodations when needed.

**56. Materials are adequate for programming.**

- A. Materials are in good condition. They are stored in an organized manner to maintain them 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 developmentally appropriate for youth of all abilities.

**57. The afterschool program is linked to the school day.**

- 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 team building or instructional team meetings at the school(s). These collaborations may vary depending on whether the program site(s) is located at a school and whether it serves youth from one school or multiple schools.
- B. Program staff have a system to keep informed 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 and activities are informed by the needs of the individual youth.
- E. The program takes steps to communicate with school(s) the value of the afterschool program and what it offers to support the school day.

**58. Professional development around programming and activities is appropriate and high quality.**

- 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.
- C. The program links professional development opportunities for program staff and for school. The program aligns professional development opportunities for program and 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, job-embedded learning, in addition to formal training opportunities.
- E. Staff are trained in accommodations, offering choices appropriately, and modifying activities to support youth of all abilities.
- F. Reasonable accommodations are provided at professional development events to ensure content is accessible to learners.





## SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

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

### **59. Staff are aware of the individual health needs of the youth.**

- A. Staff are aware of youths' dietary restrictions, allergies, medications, and other individual health needs, and this information is kept confidential. Staff may carry a list of youth with food allergies during snack or meal time as an added precaution.
- B. A review of the individual physical and mental health needs of the youth is conducted from the information provided by the youths' families and caregivers at the beginning of each new program/season.

### **60. Staff are aware of potential hazards in the indoor and outdoor environment.**

Staff recognize potentially dangerous conditions for all participants, including those with disabilities, as they occur and take immediate precautions to protect youth from any hazards they see in the indoor and outdoor environment.

### **61. The program conducts regular inspections using checklists to ensure that the indoor and outdoor environment is clean and free of hazards that can cause injury or illness to the youth.**

- A. The program conducts daily, periodic, and bi-annual inspections and uses an appropriate checklist for each. See the resources section for sample checklists. (Note: NJ Licensing includes basic requirements in the areas of cleanliness and environmental hazards. In some cases, the NJ Quality Standards for Afterschool sample checklists go beyond licensing requirements.)
- B. The program addresses any problems with hazardous conditions 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.

### **62. The program strives to ensure facilities and spaces are accessible to all staff, participants, and families with disabilities.**

- A. The program conducts periodic inspections using relevant checklists (ex: [ada.gov](http://ada.gov)) to ensure accessibility.
- B. The program addresses any problems with accessibility by either making immediate accommodations or seeking guidance from subject matter experts. If the accessibility issues require longer term remediation, the program follows up as necessary.



**63. The program takes security precautions that exceed New Jersey Licensing regulations.**

- A. The program conducts annual state and federal background checks (or confirms that background checks have already 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 who has an approved background check 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.
- 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 of all abilities move safely from one space to another that includes sign in and out procedures for arrivals and departures to the program.
- E. Parents or guardians periodically update signed consent forms allowing non-parents/guardians to pick up youth.
- F. The program has a policy on the release of youth to walk home unaccompanied. 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 departure time and the developmental level of the youth.
- G. Staff periodically assess security at the program, identify potential problems, and address problems quickly.

**64. The program is prepared for emergencies.**

- A. The emergency plan has designated lead people, and these leaders review the plan on a regularly scheduled basis.

- B. 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 accessible in the case of an evacuation. See the resources section for "go kit" checklists and recommendations.
- C. The program has emergency information on file for 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 accessible in the case of an evacuation. The program follows established policy and procedure to keep emergency information about staff and youth confidential.
- D. The program has an "emergency preparedness plan," developed in consultation with the host agency, law enforcement, fire department, local health department, and the county Office of Emergency Management. This includes a plan for emergencies that occur during the arrival or departure portions of the program, special events, and for all off-site activities such as field trips.
- E. Staff are trained in emergency plans and procedures, and training is revised periodically to ensure all staff and youth needs are considered, including those with disabilities and/or medical needs.
- F. The program communicates the emergency plan to parents/guardians.
- G. Staff and youth practice emergency plans and procedures and conduct emergency drills. The emergency drills will include accommodations for staff and youth with disabilities.
- H. All emergency plans will include accommodations for youth, staff, and families with disabilities (ex: how to transport a youth in a wheelchair from a third-story building in the event of a fire).



**65. Transportation in vehicles is safe and accessible.**

- A. The program requires use of age-appropriate safety restraints.
- B. The program maintains documentation of vehicle inspections and the driving records of all drivers. Drivers have appropriate licenses and documentation in place at all times.
- C. For any transportation arrangement, the program provides a bus monitor. This person's role would include tracking youth and monitoring behavior and safety.
- D. The program provides accessible transportation for participants and staff with disabilities.

**66. Staff take special precautions during activities requiring an increased attention to physical safety.**

- A. Staff and youth use appropriate safety gear during these activities, and there is proper instruction about how to use it.
- B. Staff considers the safety requirements for all youth, including those with disabilities, and provides accommodations/modifications to equipment and safety gear as needed.
- C. If these activities involve the use of any special materials or equipment, staff and youth have adequate instruction for their use.
- D. There is increased supervision during these activities.
- E. The program conducts a risk assessment of these activities to determine what precautions are necessary.

**67. The program provides for the physical comforts of the youth.**

- A. All programs should follow the mandates and regulations of state agencies and local health departments, per current health conditions.
- B. The indoor temperature is within a safe and comfortable range.
- C. The indoor environment is well-ventilated.
- D. When outdoors, youth have access to shade.
- E. Youth always have access to drinking water, including when outside.
- F. Youth always have access to restrooms, including when outside.
- G. There is a supply of extra coats, gloves, and boots for winter, to the extent possible.
- H. Youth are provided sensory supports upon request such as noise-canceling headphones.

## SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

- I. 40 Development Assets (for youth ages 3-18), Search Institute:  
[www.search-institute.org/our-research/development-assets/](http://www.search-institute.org/our-research/development-assets/)
- II. 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)
- III. 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)
- IV. National Afterschool Association (NAA) Platform:  
[www.naaweb.org](http://www.naaweb.org)
- V. 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.
- VI. Indiana Afterschool Network Platform:  
[www.indianaafterschool.org](http://www.indianaafterschool.org)
- VII. The New Jersey Quality Standards for Afterschool (NJQSA) Glossary:  
[njsacc.org](http://njsacc.org)
- VIII. The New Jersey Quality Standards for Afterschool (NJQSA) Resources:  
[njsacc.org](http://njsacc.org)

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- Office of Licensing at the NJ Department of Children and Families
- Office of School Linked Services at the Department of Children and Families
- Rutgers University-Camden
- The Salvation Army
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- The YMCA (State Alliance, Fanwood-Scotch Plains, and West Essex)