



Why is Quality in Afterschool Important?

Iowa's youth are faced with many demands and challenges – more rigorous academic standards are expected within the current school day, and, in Iowa, most parents are out of the home working for several hours after the school day is over. The Iowa Afterschool Alliance promotes high quality programming for youth that leverages the learning day and links with the greater community, recognizing that afterschool programs in local communities provide essential learning and social supports that fill basic needs for many of today's students and families. Afterschool programs not only provide a safe environment for kids when parents are not home, but they are in a unique position to foster relationships among youth, parents, and their communities to maximize learning opportunities and provide much-needed guidance and support. We owe it to our children and youth to provide them with the tools they need to succeed in school, work and life – and afterschool programs are a primary opportunity to do so.

When undertaken in whole, the Iowa Afterschool Alliance's Standards and Corresponding Indicators of Quality Afterschool in Iowa provide a basic foundation for providing the most effective afterschool program – a program that prepares all its students to succeed in school, work and life.

About the Iowa Afterschool Alliance's Quality Research and Assessment Effort

In 2006, the Iowa Afterschool Alliance formed the Quality Work Group, tasked with enhancing the effectiveness and success of Iowa's afterschool programs by identifying opportunities to implement elements of excellence in programs throughout the state. After an assessment of quality initiatives from other states, as well as a review of current program needs in Iowa, the Iowa Afterschool Alliance Quality Work Group recognized a need to conduct additional research and design a document to assist programs of all types to meet fundamental targets and set and integrate goals for implementing best practices in quality programming.

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The IAA Quality Work Group has identified the following 10 standard categories* for quality afterschool programming in Iowa:

- » **Positive Human Relationships**
- » **Appropriate Indoor and Outdoor Environments**
- » **Effective Programming**
- » **Strong Partnerships**
- » **Effective Administration**
- » **Effective Staffing and Professional Development**
- » **Youth Development Principles and Practices**
- » **Outcome Measurement**
- » **Fiscal Management**
- » **Advocacy**

The IAA's quality research and assessment effort was undertaken by a diverse work group of afterschool and school-age care providers, school administrators, state agency representatives, community organizations, and youth development experts. Led by Keli Tallman, Iowa State University Extension 4-H Youth Development Specialist, the IAA Quality Work Group worked diligently over nine months to narrow a final list of standards and indicators of quality afterschool programs from an initial list of 40 standard categories and over 600 indicators. Research was drawn from a number of existing national and state resources including the National Afterschool Alliance, the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, Afterschool Investments, National Association of Elementary School Principals, and the Youth Program Quality Assessment, among many others.

Quality standards in afterschool programs ensure that children and youth in Iowa are safe and receiving the equivalent opportunities in education and enrichment before and after school throughout their elementary and secondary educational experience.

In addition to identifying common standards of quality afterschool programming in Iowa, the Quality Work Group compiled a resource directory to provide support for programs as they institute quality standards within their own programs. The directory includes resources for curriculum development, program administration, partnership development, and other areas of quality programming and administration. Also included in the resource directory are strongly-supported assessment tools such as the Youth Program Quality Assessment (Youth PQA) and links to various online resources on quality programming. The resource directory can be accessed at the following location on the Iowa Afterschool Alliance website: <http://www.iowaafterschoolalliance.org/about/resources.html>

Identifying a common vision for quality afterschool programming is only the first step in institutionalizing quality afterschool best practices statewide. The second phase of the Iowa Afterschool Alliance's quality research and assessment initiative will focus on assisting programs in implementing these quality standards. This will require tremendous capacity of the Iowa Afterschool Alliance and its many partners across the state to support programs in their efforts to enhance quality practices within their daily activities and oversight.

* **These standard categories align with those supported by the National Afterschool Alliance with the addition of the "youth development/participation/engagement," "measuring outcomes/evaluation/assessment," "fiscal management" and "advocacy" standard categories.**



Members of the IAA Quality Work Group:

- » **Jeff Anderson, Iowa Department of Human Services**
- » **John Border, Davenport Community Schools**
- » **Amy Croll, Iowa Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning**
- » **Emily Dvorak, Horace Mann Elementary, Iowa City**
- » **Dennis Haney, Iowa Department of Public Health**
- » **Joelle Kleihauer Fincher, YMCA of Greater Des Moines**
- » **Michelle Rich, Iowa Afterschool Alliance**
- » **Leslie (Glenn) Stonehocker, Iowa School Age Care Alliance**
- » **Keli Tallman, ISU Extension, 4-H Youth Development**
- » **David Welter, Holmes Junior High School, Cedar Falls**

What Does a Quality Program Look Like?

“**STANDARD**” – Something considered by an authority or by general consent as a basis of comparison; an approved model.

The Iowa Afterschool Alliance sought to develop standards of quality for Iowa’s afterschool programs because up until September of 2008, no single approach to quality programming and administration existed that could be utilized by the whole range of programs that provide services to children and youth in Iowa. In addition, a comprehensive explanation of quality in afterschool has not been available to those that fund, support, or utilize afterschool programs. The Iowa Afterschool Alliance Quality work group has developed a set of 10 standards and 88 corresponding indicators of quality afterschool programming and administration that can be immediately implemented by programs of all types, locations, and funding streams. Not all programs may be exemplary models for all standard categories. However, the Iowa Afterschool Alliance intends to support programs as they begin to implement best practices to work towards progress in all the standard categories.



The 10 Standards:

POSITIVE HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS – Caring relationships and interactions between youth and adults, youth and their peers, program staff and co-workers, and between program staff and family members.

APPROPRIATE INDOOR AND OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENTS – Healthy, clean, safe, nurturing, and accessible space for indoor and outdoor activities; attractive and welcoming furnishings; written emergency procedures; appropriate space, supplies and furnishings to support the program’s activities and youths’ needs.

EFFECTIVE PROGRAMMING – Purposeful, well-planned, age-appropriate, and balanced academic and enrichment programming schedules and activities that reflect the program’s mission and promote the development (physical, social, emotional, and cognitive) of all children and youth

STRONG PARTNERSHIPS – Partnerships built with youth, families, and varied community partners to address community and neighborhood needs; active engagement of school staff, parents, youth, volunteers, and community partners in managing the program.

EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATION – Sound fiscal infrastructure; program activities are aligned with school standards; program policies and procedures are understood by program staff, youth, and parents.

EFFECTIVE STAFFING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT – Diverse, educated, and well-trained program staff and volunteers; staff and volunteers regularly assessed regarding job performance and job satisfaction.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES – Youth development principles and practices integrated into programming; program provides opportunities for youth voice, choice, and decision-making.

OUTCOME MEASUREMENT – Measurable program and participant outcomes for ongoing program planning, improvement, and evaluation; user-friendly evaluation/measurement tools.

FISCAL MANAGEMENT – Program administration manages diversified funding streams; program budget monitored regularly.

ADVOCACY - Constituency building activities occur intentionally and effectively to increase capacity for continued support and growth.

How Can I Support Quality Afterschool Programs?

The Iowa Afterschool Alliance's Quality Research and Assessment effort closely aligns with the strategies outlined in Iowa's Blueprint for Afterschool, the policy document intended to be used by afterschool stakeholders as a tool to transform afterschool policy in Iowa. Supporting quality in afterschool programs is one approach that when undertaken in coordination with the additional strategies outlined in Iowa's Blueprint for Afterschool can make significant progress towards ensuring that all Iowa's children and youth ages 5-17 have access to high-quality, affordable afterschool programs in their community. The five strategies outlined in Iowa's Blueprint for Afterschool are the following:

» **Develop policies and sustainable funding to construct a statewide infrastructure that systemically strives to increase the accessibility and quality of afterschool programming.**

This statewide system will engage leadership to spur changes in statewide policy, funding, administration, oversight, and quality outcomes.

» **Ensure afterschool is community-driven.**

It is important for afterschool programs to be designed and sustained by meeting the needs of the community in which it serves

» **Develop and implement common standards of quality.**

As a larger statewide investment is made in afterschool programming, it is imperative for common standards of quality to be instituted to ensure that appropriate outcome measures are met.

» **Promote effective collaboration and partnerships among stakeholders.**

Local collaborations and partnerships can create opportunities for the highest quality programming at the lowest price: pooling resources and opportunities.

» **Provide technical assistance and resources to communities, families, and afterschool programs.**

Policy and community leaders are extremely important in supporting quality in afterschool programs and ensuring that quality is not something simply to aspire to, but to continuously implement within everyday program activities and administration.

For more information on the Iowa Afterschool Alliance's Quality Research and Assessment Effort, please contact Michelle Rich or Brooke Findley at 515-243-2000, or mrich@sppg.com and bfindley@sppg.com.

Visit the Iowa Afterschool Alliance website at: www.iowaafterschoolalliance.org for more information on afterschool in Iowa, statewide partners in afterschool, and how you can become a member of the Iowa Afterschool Alliance.

The Iowa Afterschool Alliance will work diligently to advocate for state support for institutionalizing statewide afterschool best practices. While the IAA believes that standards of quality in afterschool programs are vitally important to delivering the best services to our children and youth, these standards are not intended to serve as a punitive measure of a program's "effectiveness," rather, the IAA intends to provide a guide and avenue for sharing best practices statewide and communicating a common vision regarding the positive impact afterschool programs have on Iowa youth and their futures.

Leaders can:

- » **Set strategic directions in quality afterschool by encouraging community collaboration and support.**
- » **Encourage the establishment of state and local quality priorities.**
- » **Leverage state and local resources to provide funding, planning, and evaluation for high-quality afterschool programs that benefit students.**
- » **Empower afterschool advocates to initiate partnerships with businesses and community leadership and the creation of model quality afterschool programs.**
- » **Increase quality in afterschool programs through provision of training opportunities, providing access to tools, and incentivizing quality improvements.**

