

Georgia Afterschool *Quality Standards*



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Introduction

The Georgia Afterschool Investment Council (GAIC), in collaboration with over 70 partners, works to ensure that Georgia's youth have access to high-quality, affordable expanded learning opportunities, including school and community-based afterschool and summer learning programs. Over one million young people, at least half of Georgia's school-age youth, spend time away from their parents between the hours of 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. and during the summer months. In Georgia, 80 percent of children's time is spent outside of the classroom and, in the majority of families, parents' and children's schedules do not align, which results in a gap of up to 25 hours per week. Too often, these youth do not have access to the quality out-of-school time experiences that can help them develop into educated, engaged citizens.

Research shows youth who participate in expanded learning opportunities are less likely to drop out of school, have higher rates of school-day attendance and engage in less risky behavior. Participation in afterschool and summer programs also helps to boost academic achievement, strengthen self-esteem and improve attitudes towards school and learning. Further, afterschool and out-of-school time opportunities allow the child to explore her or his own interests and discover new approaches to learning that enhance the school experience.

Stakeholders across the state recognize the positive impact expanded learning opportunities have on school-age youth. However, they also recognize the lack of uniform statewide standards for quality across the range of afterschool and summer programs in Georgia. The absence of statewide standards makes it difficult for youth, parents, policymakers and funders to determine what quality means and how it varies across programs. At the same time, without quality standards, programs struggle to demonstrate they are meeting the needs of the children and youth they serve; because quality is connected to outcomes and funding, this gap can have long-term negative effects on the availability of programs. The value in creating quality standards is that providers, families and funders all have quality benchmarks by which to measure programs while creating a common language around what quality means in Georgia.

Defining Expanded Learning Opportunities

Afterschool is an inclusive term referring to programming that takes place during the out-of-school time hours, which includes before school, after school, summers, holidays and weekends. Afterschool programming is structured, providing a diverse range of programming to enrich learning experiences, promote healthy living and support positive emotional, social and cognitive development in children and youth.

Purpose of the Standards

The Georgia afterschool quality standards are a framework to help program providers identify areas needing improvement and create an action plan for improvement. The standards are also a means for funders to hold providers accountable to a defined standard of quality. Finally, the standards are a tool to help educate Georgians about what quality afterschool programming looks like.

These standards do not offer specific attributes and features of a high quality afterschool program. Indicators being developed during a second phase of this project will provide more specific information on what a high quality program looks like. Nor are these standards meant to be achieved all at once upon adoption. Rather, the standards are a tool by which programs can self-assess and funders can hold programs accountable. Achieving high quality programming in all eight competency areas is an on-going process that takes an intentional commitment by program leadership and staff. The goal is for programs to voluntarily participate by setting realistic goals along a path toward continuous improvement.

Georgia Afterschool Quality Standards are:

- A framework of clear expectations for all stakeholders
- A guide for program providers to assess their own programs in what they are doing well and what needs improvement
- A tool for parents and youth to identify quality programming
- A set of recommendations that, when adopted, can act as an assurance to funders that programs they fund will be of high quality
- A compliment to other standards in the State of Georgia focused on quality improvement—such as the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) standards of the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning
- A symbol of Georgia’s commitment to provide children, youth and families access to a diverse range of programming that will enrich and support the positive development of young people across the state

Process

In the spring of 2011, with funding from the Governor's Office for Children and Families, GAIC convened a small group of stakeholders to establish a quality committee charged with creating Georgia's afterschool quality standards. The quality committee, composed of representatives from across the state, came together to identify standards of quality against which all Georgia afterschool programs would be measured. After months of research, examining best practices within the field, discussion and editing, the committee established eight categories of quality standards that will drive afterschool quality in Georgia.

The stakeholders in the process included:

- After-School All-Stars Atlanta
- Gwinnett County Public Schools
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Atlanta
- Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning
- Carl Vinson Institute
- Center for a New Generation at Connally Elementary School
- Children's Aid Society Carrera Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program
- Color Wheel After School Art Studio
- Columbia County Community Connections
- Communities in School of Georgia
- DeKalb County School System
- Fulton County Schools
- Georgia Department of Education/21st Century Community Learning Centers
- Georgia Department of Human Services
- Georgia Department of Labor
- Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students
- Georgia Family Connections Partnership
- Governor's Office for Children and Families
- GUIDE, Inc.
- H.O.M.E. Training Institute
- Quality Care for Children
- Richmond County School System
- YMCA of Metro Atlanta
- UGA Fanning Institute
- United Way of Metro Atlanta
- Woodruff Arts Center

How to Use the Standards

Afterschool quality standards are a guide for practitioners, parents, participants, funders and policymakers to what quality should look like in afterschool programming. The standards are meant to be all-inclusive, acknowledging the diversity in programming across the state of Georgia. Perhaps most importantly, the standards provide a common language in which stakeholders from across the state can discuss the status of afterschool programming and identify the next steps for the future of afterschool in Georgia.

The standards are arranged into eight categories, each with a guiding principle that defines the focus of the category and followed by the quality elements.

Afterschool Providers can use these standards to:

- Examine the strengths of their program and identify areas needing improvement
- Understand the outside constraints that may or may not impact the program's ability to adopt all of or part of the standards
- Create an adoption plan of the standards
- Engage staff, administration and board members about the support needed for the program to achieve the standards
- Use the standards as a way to monitor progress and identify a plan for continuous improvement

Youth and Families can use these standards to:

- Understand the different elements that contribute to a program's level of quality
- Identify which program activities and components to be looking for when visiting an afterschool program
- Compare different programs to each other using the standards as a guide

Next Steps

The development and release of the Georgia afterschool quality standards marks the completion of the first phase of a multi-stage process. The GAIC will develop indicators for these standards during a subsequent phase beginning in 2012. These indicators will clarify more specifically how afterschool programs can incorporate these standards. A third phase of this process will focus on the development of a measurement and monitoring tool based on these indicators.

Visit our website for more details about the [Georgia afterschool quality standards](#) and the [Georgia Afterschool Investment Council](#).

Active and Engaged Learning

GUIDING PRINCIPLE:

Programming and activities are developmentally appropriate and serve the physical, cognitive, social, emotional and creative development of all participants.

An afterschool program:

- Promotes discovery learning across all programmatic areas
- Supports participants to navigate the learning space independently
- Provides a wide variety of activities that promote youth choice
- Involves participants in planning, development and implementation
- Engages participants in project-based, hands-on experiential activities linked to learning
- Develops leadership among and provides leadership opportunities to all participants under the guidance of program staff

Activities of an afterschool program:

- Are developmentally appropriate and support youth development principles
- Promote reflection, critical thinking, problem solving and independent thinking, among other key executive function skills
- Provide a fun and supportive environment for participants and staff
- Are youth-led with staff serving as facilitators of the learning experience whenever possible
- Build on participants' natural strengths and developmental assets and foster self-confidence
- Provide an intentional link to school-day learning
- Include both individual and group-based opportunities with a range of group sizes
- Provide new opportunities for participants that they would not have access to during the school day
- Build life skills in participants

The environment of an afterschool program:

- Is fun and supportive for participants and staff
- Develops and supports resiliency

To the extent possible, an afterschool program should adopt some of the following:

- Offer opportunities for participants to receive assistance and complete their homework
- Provide apprenticeship opportunities to participants if applicable
- Provide college and career readiness activities that also promote school completion if applicable

To the extent possible, activities of an afterschool program should adopt some of the following:

- Promote and develop workforce skills that can be applied in the real world
- Incorporate financial literacy
- Provide participants opportunities to engage with technology
- Promote media literacy
- Provide opportunities for participants to engage in a wide variety of arts and music programming
- Provide opportunities for participants to engage in a wide variety of STEM programming
- Offer young people the opportunity to increase their physical activity
- Provide opportunities for participants to learn about other countries, cultures, languages, and global issues

Linkages to the School Day and the Common Core State Standards

GUIDING PRINCIPLE:

The program intentionally links afterschool curricula and activities to the school day to ensure programming is aligned with and enrich academic standards.

An afterschool program:

- Ensures that program staff maintain two-way communication with the school principal, teachers and staff in a variety of ways
- Provides an opportunity for participants to have a voice in programming, structure and approaches to learning
- Provides participants with access to different means and types of communications and opportunities to communicate in multiple media forms
- Exposes participants to a diverse range of perspectives and cultures and encourages participants to respect and learn from them
- Offers participants access to adequate materials that support program activities and staff and participants' needs
- Provides opportunities for participants to improve their literacy skills by providing access to a diverse range of literature and topics that are developmentally appropriate
- Offers participants the opportunity to build strong content knowledge in a wide-variety of subject matter—such as math, science and social studies

Activities of an afterschool program:

- Provide opportunities for participants to build their vocabulary and practice their skills
- Provide an environment for participants to demonstrate independence and become self-directed learners
- Encourage the following habits of mind when participants use mathematics:
 - Persevering in problem solving
 - Reasoning abstractly and quantitatively
 - Constructing viable arguments and critiquing the reasoning of others
 - Modeling with mathematics
 - Using appropriate tools strategically
 - Attending to precision
 - Looking for and making use of structure
 - Looking for and expressing regularity in repeated reasoning

* Several of these standards come from the habits of mind of the Common Core Standards. The Georgia Afterschool Investment Council plans to modify these standards periodically to ensure that they continue to align with any changes made to the Common Core.

Health, Nutrition and Physical Fitness

GUIDING PRINCIPLE:

The program provides a nurturing environment in which young people can be physically active and learn and practice healthy habits.

An afterschool program:

- Promotes positive social-emotional development
- Promotes character development and healthy choices in response to peer pressure—including pressure to use drugs and alcohol
- Allows participants to choose from a variety of physical activities
- Demonstrates a strong commitment to promoting an active and healthy lifestyle
- Respects and positively promotes developmental and physical growth
- Displays menus publicly if providing meals
- Provides nutritious options if providing snacks and/or meals
- Ensures that staff are aware of the special health needs of participants

Environment (Indoor and Outdoor Space)

GUIDING PRINCIPLE:

The indoor and outdoor space provides safe environments that support the developmental, physical and emotional needs of diverse participants.

An afterschool program:

- Provides a physically safe environment in which all participants can be active and freely express themselves without fear of harm
- Ensures that the space, equipment and materials meet the needs of participants, staff and the curriculum
- Provides developmentally appropriate indoor and outdoor activities
- Provides frequent access to outdoor space when possible
- Allows for and supports participant-driven activities in the indoor and outdoor space
- Ensures that program staff are trained and certified in CPR and First Aid
- Offers supervision of participants at all times during program activities
- Has emergency procedures in place that are clearly displayed and understood by participants and staff

Relationships, Culture and Diversity

GUIDING PRINCIPLE:

The program environment creates positive connections among all staff, participants, families and the community and beyond while celebrating culture and diversity.

An afterschool program:

- Promotes a shared understanding of terms like respect, health, learning, youth development and civic responsibility among staff, participants, families and the community
- Engages staff, participants, families and the community in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner
- Promotes positive peer interaction among participants
- Strengthens conflict resolution skills in participants
- Promotes positive social and emotional development
- Makes participants feel emotionally safe and supported at the program
- Fosters an environment that promotes diversity
- Provides opportunities for participants to interact with or learn about role models of diverse backgrounds
- Offers opportunities for participants to become more globally aware and globally competent as a component of being ready for college and career

All staff members of an afterschool program:

- Build positive relationships that are supportive, nurturing and consistent among each other, with the participants and with parents
- Build positive self-esteem in every participant
- Create open communication with participants, parents and the community around program mission and core values
- Build strong family engagement practices
- Connect participants and their families to the appropriate social services
- Model and reinforce positive behavior and use positive techniques to address negative behavior by participants

Staffing, Volunteers and Professional Development

GUIDING PRINCIPLE:

The program employs and supports the professional growth of highly effective staff and volunteers that are dedicated to creating a positive, developmentally appropriate and supportive learning environment.

All staff members and volunteers of an afterschool program:

- Promote positive youth development
- Create an inspiring learning environment
- Connect activities to academics
- Build positive relationships
- Create engaging learning experiences
- Are highly effective
- Receive training and practice using conflict resolution skills
- Are aware of individual differences of participants and their families
- Complete a criminal background check and a copy is kept on file

The administration of an afterschool program:

- Has in place and utilizes a staff and volunteer performance evaluation system
- Holds consistent staff meetings
- Works to recruit the highest quality staff and volunteers and develops strategies to decrease staff turnover
- Has in place a compensation and benefits package that all staff are eligible to participate in
- Offers a clear salary structure providing a livable wage to all staff
- Creates individual professional development plans with each of their staff members on an ongoing basis
- Provides all program staff with on-going professional development that supports individual growth and builds on strategies for effective program practice
- Selects a staff-to-participant ratio that meets the needs of participants

Leadership and Management

GUIDING PRINCIPLE:

The program displays effective leadership, sound fiscal management and coherent policies and procedures that support quality and sustainability.

An afterschool program:

- Articulates program policies and procedures clearly and makes them available to participants, parents and the community for review
- Establishes clear and well-defined channels of communication—between staff members, between staff and participants, and between staff and parents
- Has a clear mission statement and philosophy that is widely understood and shared among staff, parents and the community
- Meets the needs of participants
- Supports the health and well being of all participants
- Solicits frequent feedback from participants, families, staff and the community
- Has the appropriate insurance to protect staff, administrators, participants and parents
- Displays pick-up and drop-off procedures publicly and articulates them clearly to parents and participants
- Displays the hours of program operation publicly in a visible space

The administration of an afterschool program:

- Receives written consent from the parents or guardians of participants before communicating with the school and teachers
- Creates and maintains an employee handbook that clarifies internal policies and procedures
- Provides a sound budget and strong fiscal management
- Makes clear the expectations for participant behavior and encourages active and consistent participation
- Keeps records on all participants up-to-date and accessible to staff
- Ensures that staff understand their roles in the community and opportunities for community leadership
- Articulates clearly the program costs and fees to participants, parents and the community

Continuous Improvement

GUIDING PRINCIPLE:

The program has mechanisms in place that promote continuous improvement and uphold high quality standards of operation and accountability.

An afterschool program:

- Has in place internal and external evaluation tools that are used to ensure effectiveness and share success with stakeholders
- Displays publicly a mission and vision that clearly connects to the activities in which participants are engaged
- Conducts a needs assessment of participants in order to target programming based on the needs and interests of participants
- Establishes measurable goals and objectives that are aligned with the mission and vision of the organization as well as research on effective out-of-school time programming
- Has a system of measurement to assess the quality of the program including staff performance and daily attendance of participants
- Has an action plan that is used and followed by staff to continuously improve the quality of the program
- Uses data to drive decision-making and quality improvement
- Gives participants, parents, staff and all other stakeholders opportunities to assess the program through an annual survey
- Encourages staff to approach professional development as a journey rather than a destination