**Iowa Afterschool Alliance Quality Standards**

**Revised July 2023**

**Text from website:**

When undertaken as a whole, the [Iowa Afterschool Alliance’s Quality Standards](https://d4a50dae-e8ad-4eaf-8698-aea6b5c4afd9.filesusr.com/ugd/1b1b6d_eddead5f8e544a2892052c9e29dfe413.pdf) provide a foundation for providing the most effective afterschool program – a program that prepares all its students to succeed in school, work and life. The goal of these Quality Standards is to reach each one as best as each site’s ability, considering time and experience, program size, number of staff, available funding, building or location restrictions, and so on. The IAA has also created a [self-assessment tool](https://d4a50dae-e8ad-4eaf-8698-aea6b5c4afd9.filesusr.com/ugd/1b1b6d_2a47324b0875485f9fb0c115b591ba8c.xlsx?dn=IAA%20Quality%20Standards%20Self%20Assessment%20Ru) that programs can use to evaluate their quality according to these standards and then develop a plan for improvement.

| **Standard Category** | **Indicator of Quality** | **What It Looks Like** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Positive Human Relationships | The program promotes and maintains a positive environment. | * All staff, youth, and volunteers engage with one another and in activities. * Respect is given and received among all program stakeholders. * Successes are regularly celebrated. * Good behavior is considered the norm, not something to be celebrated. * Staff ensure that all youth regardless of their English language fluency are able to participate in all program activities to the best of their abilities utilizing local or regional resources. |
| The program utilizes positive conflict resolution techniques. | * Staff consistently approach conflicts and negative behaviors in a non-threatening way, approaching youth calmly and acknowledging feelings while stopping hurtful or dangerous behavior. * Communication is prioritized first before disciplinary action taken. * Conflict resolution is based on brain science and takes into consideration youth development. * Conflict is seen as an opportunity to learn and understand emotions and the situation leading to conflict. * Corrective actions are identified that fulfill the needs of both perpetrator and victim. |
| Individualized conversations and interactions occur between adults and youth. | * Staff take time to understand each youth and their life circumstances. * Staff are able to individualize their attention to each youth while maintaining group control (ex. addressing youth by chosen name, high fives, and informal conversations with youth) |
| Youth needs are identified and provided for by a diverse team of stakeholders. | * There are formal processes to get participant feedback, assessments, and evaluations to guide the development of staff training, curricula, and projects that align with participants’ needs and interests. * Community and school partners work as a team to meet the diverse needs of youth. * Parents are engaged in programming as advisors, participants, and partners. |
| Ratios are appropriate to the needs and purposes of the program. | * The program maintains staff ratios that are appropriate to the age and unique needs of all youth. * Lower adult to youth ratios are used with younger youth or youth with high support needs. * Lower ratios are used based on the need of the activity, such as maintaining safety on a field trip or a complex activity requiring more adult support. |
| A safe, supportive environment is prioritized and maintained. | * Inclusion and diversity are encouraged and are practiced, not just given lip service. * Program adults and partners are approachable and are prepared to field youth questions and concerns as they arise. * Program leaders model safe and supportive environments through their supervisory practices and procedures. |
| Appropriate Indoor and Outdoor Environments | Program space is suitable for the program offered. | * The space is clean, hazard-free, safe, and provides enough room for all components of the activities offered. * Distractions are minimized as much as possible to ensure youth are able to fully engage in the activity. * Alternative spaces are sought that best align with a program activity, such as a location within the community or a school computer lab. |
| Program space is adequately supervised during program hours. | * Youth check-in and check-out procedures are in place and consistently followed. * Program spaces are monitored for entry by parents, partners, staff, and community members. |
| Adequate developmentally appropriate materials are accessible to youth. | * Activity materials are prepared and ready for use when needed. * Books are out and available for youth and reflect the breadth of reading levels in the program. * A diversity of resources are used over the program day to support program goals. |
| All program space is accommodating of children with special needs. | * Space is accessible to wheelchairs and other mobility supports. * Youth with mobility support needs are able to fully participate in programming. * Youth with sensory sensitivity have spaces where they are able to go with minimal distractions if necessary. * Staff encourage all youth regardless of their physical or developmental ability to engage in activities and use a variety of strategies to do so. |
| Effective Programming | Choice, creativity, independence, and responsibility are practiced. | * Program has a process for collecting input from youth and parents regarding programming and/or clubs to foster a sense of belonging and enable youth to meaningfully participate and feel valued in who they are. * Activities reflect the youths’ communities and provides hands on/minds on opportunities for youth to explore concepts on their own or within groups. * Activities promote critical thinking which empower youth by building leadership and social-emotional skills. * Staff serve as facilitators of activities but allow for collaboration among participants, such as having distinct roles or each person having a larger responsibility for a part of the larger project. Staff members intentionally assign roles that interrupt the dominant participation patterns (ex. girls as note takers or boys providing physical support). |
| Opportunities for growth and development, learning and reflection, and exploring interests exist. | * Activities have clear learning goals. * Staff create and facilitate activities consistently provide opportunities for youth to reflect on their learning and how it relates to their interests and lived experiences. * Staff intentionally integrate character building opportunities into physical activities (ex. playing a game that emphasizes trust and communication). |
| Intentional planning and consistent execution of program activities occurs while allowing for flexibility as needed. | * Staff are given time to develop high quality lesson plans at least once a week that celebrate participants’ stated interests and lived experiences. * Program has a monthly and weekly calendar. * Program has a “Plan B” in case original plans are not able to be executed. |
| Nutritional snacks and meals are offered. | * At minimum, USDA guidelines are followed for snacks and meals. * Staff have specific ways participants can share their knowledge and experience around nutrition, healthy lifestyles and physical activity with their families, peers, program and community. |
| Youth contributions and accomplishments are recognized and showcased. | * Program hosts youth performances or showcases at least once per year. * When possible, youth accomplishments are communicated both internally and externally. * Program has goals for youth and youth are recognized for achieving goals. |
| Strong Partnerships | Frequent and positive family communications occur. | * The program hosts regular sessions for parents and caregivers to learn about the program, meet the staff, and learn how the expanded learning program can support their child’s social and academic growth. Accommodations are made for those who cannot attend in person such using a virtual option. * Drop off and pick up times are used to converse with families. * Program has a regular newsletter that shares positive information about the program in appropriate languages. * Program maintains a social media presence to share good news and stories in appropriate languages. |
| Opportunities for family involvement/engagement exist. | * Specific programming is offered to engage family, such as family nights. * Services are geared towards family members’ needs, such as connections to community resources and high school completion classes. |
| Community resource lists are available to families in need. | * Flyers are easily accessible to families and are available in the language spoken by the families. * A resource board may be used to post information or online options such as a Virtual Backpack. |
| Families serve as advocates for the program. | * Families are considered primary stakeholders in the program, and the program offers a variety of culturally and linguistically responsive strategies for parents to engage with the program. * Parents and caregivers are regularly encouraged and feel welcome to visit the program to observe and participate in activities or to interact with participants and staff. * Program encourages families to speak up on behalf of the program at school board meetings and other community events. * Program collects stories from families and shares them out regularly. |
| Youth are actively involved in the community. | * The program incorporates a variety of community service projects, of which participants themselves are primary stakeholders, most of which encourage participants to learn about currentevents, to engage in thought-provoking conversations, and to engage with the community. * Service learning and community service projects get youth out into the community with goals to build problem solving skills and identify connections between the program activity and community need. * Field trips are offered. |
| Program information is effectively communicated to multiple stakeholders in support of youth development and of the program and to foster collaboration. | * Program coordinates an advisory group that brings together community stakeholders, including youth, that works to collaborate with partners to meet the diverse goals of their program (ex. fundraising, administrative support, inclusion of children with disabilities, etc.). * Program leaders regularly attend school board and other community meetings to share information on the program. |
| Effective Administration | Plans are created, executed, and reviewed for all aspects of program planning, budgeting, and sustainability by a diverse group of stakeholders. | * Program maintains checks and balances to ensure all program components are meeting stated goals. * Program engages all stakeholders in an advisory capacity. |
| Program offerings, policies, and procedures are based on research and/or evidence-based practices and are effectively communicated with a variety of stakeholders. | * Program leaders keep up-to-date on current research in the field. * Program has a process to update policies and procedures regularly. * Program communicates updates to policies and procedures with stakeholders. |
| The program is committed to continuous quality improvement. | * Program leaders keep up-to-date on current research in the field. * Program leaders and staff participate in internal and external professional development throughout the year. * Program leaders engage all stakeholders in program improvement throughout the year to ensure widespread adoption of best practices. * Program acknowledges accomplishments and shares them widely with stakeholders. |
| Adults are adequately oriented to the program before working/volunteering and are also offered ongoing professional development. | * Program has an established orientation and consistently provides orientation prior to service. * The program supports all staff in building their ability to have trusting, nurturing and supportive relationships with participants by providing form training in implicit bias, culturally responsive and trauma-informed approaches to child and youth development and through ongoing coaching and mentoring by supervisors. * Training opportunities are documented for individual staff members. |
| Appropriate documentation is obtained and kept to ensure health and safety as well as minimize any potential liability. | * Youth records are retained to ensure confidentiality and privacy. * Youth records are readily accessible in the case of an emergency. * Youth records are obtained as early as possible once the youth joins the program. * Youth records are regularly updated. |
| Program evaluation is conducted on regular basis with a variety of stakeholders. Changes made are reflective of the feedback given and are communicated with all stakeholders. | * The program communicates its vision, role, and impact to all stakeholders and to the broader community. * Program has an evaluation framework that is regularly updated based on current practice and intended outcomes. * All staff and stakeholders are aware of evaluation practices and procedures, purpose, and eventual use of the data. * Data is used for continuous improvement and outcome measurement. |
| Program stakeholders are advocates on behalf of the program and youth at large. | * Multiple and diverse participants share their experiences in communications with stakeholders and supporters, providing advocacy and voice to those who are not often heard. * Program leaders educate policymakers on the program’s purpose and results. * Program leaders engage in community dialogues around issues relevant to the program and youth served by the program. |