

# CALIFORNIA AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

Supporting Continuous Program Improvement

for

Quality After-School Programs

Developed in collaboration by:

**After School Programs Office  
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Developed August 2007 – September 2009

## **CALIFORNIA AFTER-SCHOOL SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL**

### **Where the QSA Tool Comes From**

The California Afterschool Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool is a collaborative project of the California Afterschool Network and the California Department of Education. Network Staff engaged the CDE, Regional Leads, The California After School Demonstration Program (CASDP), California Tomorrow, The Alliance for a Better Community, The Network Quality Committee, The Network Nutrition and Physical Activity Committee, ASAP Connect, After School Providers, QSA Tool Implementation Pilot Sites, and national experts in the revision of the Tool.

### **What the QSA Tool is for**

- Engaging key stakeholders in meaningful conversations about program quality and continuous program improvement.
- Generating an Action Plan that identifies the immediate, mid-range, and long-term professional development and technical support needed to enhance program quality.
- This tool is not intended for use as an external evaluation tool; it is appropriate for self-assessment purposes only.

### **Programs must decide how best to use the QSA Tool**

The Tool is a comprehensive look at many areas of program quality. Programs will utilize the tool in different ways depending on time available and the developmental stage of the program. **There is no right way to use the QSA Tool!**

The QSA Tool can be used in many ways, such as:

- Reviewing single sections of the QSA Tool during staff meetings to inform program planning and professional development.
- Using the several sections of the QSA Tool as a staff survey to assess multiple dimensions of program quality.

The QSA Tool is a flexible, comprehensive self-assessment. As a result:

- Specific program quality elements may not apply to your program. For example, after-school programs that do not focus on academics may need to assess connections with schools.
- Some staff members may have limited familiarity with specific quality elements. Programs may choose to have staff complete sections of the Tool that are most closely aligned with their job duties.

**State-funded after-school programs cannot overlook grant compliance requirements.** For more information, visit the California Department of Education After School Programs Office web site at [www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ba](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ba)

***The User's Guide includes extensive guidance about implementing the QSA Tool. Please review it prior to distributing the QSA Tool to program staff and stakeholders.***

\*Drawn from the California After School Demonstration Program Site Assessment Tool.

\*\*Drawn from the Youth Program Quality Assessment.

## **What's inside the QSA Tool: Eleven Program Quality Elements**

The QSA Tool is organized into eleven program quality elements identified through review of current after-school literature and other research on program quality.

### **Quality Element**

Section 1: Program Design and Assessment	Section 7: Staff Recruitment and Support
Section 2: Program Administration and Finance	Section 8: Family Involvement
Section 3: Community Partnerships and Collaboration	Section 9: Nutrition and Physical Activity
Section 4: Alignment and Linkages with the School Day	Section 10: Promoting Diversity, Access, Equity, and Inclusion
Section 5: Program Environment & Safety	Section 11: Effectively Supporting English Learners
Section 6: Youth Development	

## **Scoring the QSA Tool**

The QSA Tool uses the following rating system to assess the degree to which each quality indicator is evident in the program.

- **Level 1:** Our program is just beginning to work in this area and has an urgent need to address this practice. Our program can be much better at this than we are currently.
- **Level 2:** Our program has done some work in this area but will need targeted support to move to the next level. Our program is making progress, but can improve further.
- **Level 3:** Our program has achieved a high level of proficiency in this area and needs only a little additional work to be proficient. Our program is very good at this practice.
- **Level 4:** Our program is clearly proficient in this practice and can demonstrate this in observable ways. This is an area of quality practice where our program serves as an example for others.
- **Don't Know:** I am not familiar enough with this aspect of the program to rate performance on this indicator or am just not sure how to rate it at this time.

After-school programs should strive to meet Level 3 or 4 for each indicator to demonstrate overall program quality. Assistance and support should be sought for areas scoring as Level 1 or Level 2.

### **Using the QSA Tool for Program Planning & Professional Development**

When developing an Action Plan based on the QSA Tool ratings, after-school programs should use the following rules of thumb:

Indicators at **Performance Level 1**: action is needed **RIGHT NOW** - within three months.

Indicators at **Performance Level 2**: action is needed **THIS YEAR** - within current school/fiscal year.

Indicators at **Performance Level 3**: action in this area should be addressed **NEXT YEAR** - as part of the routine planning and program improvement process.

Indicators at **Performance Level 4**: practices should be **SUSTAINED**, no corrective action is needed at this time.

Each program quality element includes a section at the end to record thoughts about technical assistance needs and planned next steps to improve program quality. The *User's Guide* includes a sample Action Plan that programs can use to summarize individual QSA Tool results.

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**For more detailed information on how to use the assessment tool, please see the California After-school Program Self-Assessment Tool User's Guide.**

**ASSESSMENT COVER SHEET**

**Assessment Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Program Site(s):** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Program Director:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Optional:*  
**Completed By:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Staff Member Type:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**SECTION 1: PROGRAM DESIGN AND ASSESSMENT**

Quality after-school programs are intentionally designed to include clearly defined and measurable goals and provide program activities and content strategically implemented to achieve its goals. Quality after-school programs conduct continuous improvement and outcome evaluations, using strong research-based designs, to determine the level of achievement of program goals and objectives and to determine overall program effectiveness.

	<b>In our program:</b>	<b>Level</b> <i>1-4, DK</i>	<b>Examples of this indicator in our program</b>
<b>Vision and Planning</b>			
1	There is a clearly-defined, well understood vision and mission in operation that has been agreed upon by our staff and stakeholders.*		
2	Program activities support the vision and mission.		
3	Activities are well-defined, hands-on, and student-centered and incorporate and combine academics, youth development, and recreation.*		
<b>Enrollment</b>			
4	Activities are enrolled at capacity (i.e. the program has reached full enrollment).		
<b>Evaluation and Assessment</b>			
5	Evaluation and assessment activities are guided by clearly defined, measureable, goals that are linked to participant and community needs.		
6	A qualified staff person or consultant conducts well-defined and regular self-assessments and outcome evaluations using strong research design.*		
7	Staff are trained in data collection processes to ensure effective collection of quality data.*		
8	Staff use assessment and evaluation data to continuously review and refine program activities, policies, staffing, and professional development.		
9	Key stakeholders receive accessible assessment and evaluation results in a timely manner (i.e. shortly after the information is available to the program).		

<i>Technical Assistance/Training Needed</i>	<i>Action Plan</i>

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**SECTION 2: PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE**

A quality program has an effective management and fiscal structure that develops and implements policies, procedures, and practices to ensure the successful operation of the after-school program based on the program goals, vision, and design.

		<b>Level 1-4, DK</b>	<b>Examples of this indicator in our program</b>
	In our program:		
<b>Program Administration</b>			
1	Staff recruitment, hiring, and retention policies and practices are well-defined and support our program goals.*		
2	Leaders at the district or organization level are familiar with the program’s funding sources and grant requirements.		
3	Activities meet funder-mandated content standards and hours of operations.		
4	All required evaluation and expenditure reports are accurate and submitted on time.		
5	There is clear evidence that the program adheres to local, state, and federal fiscal, accounting, recordkeeping and audit requirements, including keeping records for five years (ASES & 21 <sup>st</sup> CCLC).		
<b>Program Finance</b>			
6	There are clearly defined procedures and processes to ensure sound fiscal planning and management.		
7	Program administrators actively pursue new sources of funding and in-kind resources.		
8	A sufficient proportion of funds are allocated for direct services (85% for ASES and 21 <sup>st</sup> CCLC).		
9	Program leaders have timely access to resources and are able to allocate some resources to meet site-specific needs.		

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**SECTION 3: COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATION**

A quality program develops, maintains, and strengthens school-community collaborations that engage diverse community members, school administrators, business leaders, and community-based organizations in the development, implementation, and support of after-school programs.

		<b>Level</b> <i>1-4, DK</i>	<b>Examples of this indicator in our program</b>
	In our program:		
1	Program staff and leadership collaborate with partners to meet the diverse goals of our program, such as fundraising, administrative support, and expanding activity options for youth and families.		
2	Collaborative partners' roles and expectations are clearly defined and there are regular opportunities for partner participation and feedback.*		
3	Our collaborative has policies and procedures that provide clear governance and regular meetings to ensure effective engagement of partners.*		
4	Staff provide partners and stakeholders with regular updates about program events, activities, and achievements in a variety of formats and in multiple languages, as needed, such as through a program website, newsletters, flyers, and emails.*		
5	The collaborative supports long-term sustainability through joint fundraising and in-kind contributions of services and materials.		

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**SECTION 4: ALIGNMENT & LINKAGES WITH THE SCHOOL DAY**

A quality program supports, complements, and expands the school day through intentionally designed enrichment activities and student-centered academic assistance. School-based after-school programs and programs that focus intensively on youth’s academic development are especially likely to benefit from communication with the host school.

		<b>Level 1-4, DK</b>	<b>Examples of this indicator in our program</b>
	In our program:		
1	Staff communicate regularly with administrators and faculty to ensure alignment of program activities to the host school’s learning goals and curricula.*		
2	Staff seek input from school day teachers and from administrators on the impact of after-school programming for participants.		
3	Staff participate in school committees (such as the School Site Council and School Wellness Committee) and the program is included in the Single School Plan for Student Achievement and School Wellness Policy.		
4	Staff and participants have access to sufficient indoor and outdoor space, including classrooms, library, computer labs, gym, fields, kitchen, and storage.		
5	Staff have access to information about participants’ academic and behavioral progress in school, such as assessment results, attendance, language fluency, grades, and homework completion.		
6	Youth who need intensive academic support work with trained staff members in small groups (i.e. ratios of 10:1 or less).*		
7	Academic activities build on or complement school day curricula and are clearly linked to state content standards.		
8	Academic activities are engaging and build on youth’s interests.		
9	Academic activities incorporate a variety of age-appropriate instructional strategies to help youth master key academic skills and content.		
10	Participants have enough time to make substantial progress on their homework ( <i>where applicable</i> ).		

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**SECTION 5: PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT& SAFETY**

A quality program provides a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for all youth. It ensures that young people are physically and emotionally secure, respected and accepted for who they are.

		<b>Level 1-4, DK</b>	<b>Examples of this indicator in our program</b>
	In our program:		
<b>Physical Environment</b>			
1	Youth use equipment and space that is clean, well-maintained and safe.		
2	Youth receive a variety of healthy and nutritious snacks that meet California Education Code requirements ( <i>where required</i> ).		
3	There is access to enough equipment, supplies, and space to carry out a variety of academic, social, nutritional, and physical activities.		
4	There are effective safety plans and procedures in place, and these are known to staff, youth, and families. The program’s safety plan is aligned with school safety plans where applicable.*		
5	Fire and safety drills are practiced regularly.*		
6	Staff are aware of participants’ health and medical needs and adjust activities as needed.		
7	Staff members address youth by name.		
8	Youth-to-staff ratios do not exceed 20:1 to encourage youth engagement and motivation.*		
9	The emotional climate of the program is positive, characterized by mutually respectful, supportive, and relaxed interactions among staff and youth.**		
10	Staff intervene constructively when youth or adults make hurtful or negative comments.		
11	There are clearly defined expectations for youth and staff conduct that are well known to staff, participants, and parents.		

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**SECTION 6: YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

A quality program employs research-based youth development strategies that reflect a complementary, holistic approach that is built on youths’ strengths and capacity rather than simply on risk prevention and repairing deficits. Rather than a separate activity or strand of programming, youth development philosophy describes the manner in which programs do what they do – providing principles that can be incorporated into any kind of after-school program or activity.

The Youth Development Program Quality Element is divided into three sub-sections:

**Supportive Environment:** A quality program develops, nurtures and maintains positive relationships and interactions and supports young people as they try new things.

**Interaction:** A quality program is structured to encourage participation and ownership by youth.

**Engagement:** A quality program provides participants with an opportunity to play a meaningful, active role in their program, so that youth can have input into decision-making, opportunities for responsibility and leadership, and feel a sense of ownership.

		<b>Level 1-4, DK</b>	<b>Examples of this indicator in our program</b>
	In our program:		
<b>Supportive Environment</b>			
1	Staff understand youths’ interests, talents, backgrounds, life experiences, and developmental needs.		
2	The schedule addresses youths’ interests and needs and provides a variety of academic and non-academic activities.*		
3	Youth have the opportunity to try out new skills with support from staff.		
4	Staff provide specific feedback to youth about positive behavior and accomplishments (i.e. “The extra time you spent on the mural project helped it look great”).**		
5	Staff approach conflicts and negative behavior in a non-threatening way, taking care to approach youth calmly and acknowledging youths’ feelings while stopping hurtful or dangerous behavior.**		
6	Youth and staff demonstrate a strong sense of ownership and belonging, such as by holding one another accountable to behavioral expectations and sharing program traditions.**		
7	Activities are carried out in different groups, each one with a clear purpose.		
8	Staff have high expectations for youth and support youth as they strive for excellence.		
9	Youth and staff share control of most activities: adults provide guidance and facilitation while youth have the opportunity to lead activities and to work independently as part of a small group.**		
<b>Engagement</b>			
10	Youth have age-appropriate opportunities to make choices, such as picking books to read, joining		

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**\*\*Un-formatted draft for content review\*\***

	specific clubs or teams, or deciding on a project topic.		
11	Young people have structured opportunities to reflect on their goals and accomplishments.**		
12	Youth have multiple opportunities to provide input into the structure and content of the program, such as through youth councils, informal conversations or opinion surveys.		
13	Youth have the opportunity to give back to the community through service learning projects such as neighborhood clean-ups, peer-to-peer tutoring, or community needs assessments.		

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**SECTION 7: STAFF RECRUITMENT & SUPPORT**

The quality of after-school programs is directly related to training, and ongoing professional development for staff and volunteers that enhances their qualifications and motivation.

		<b>Level 1-4, DK</b>	<b>Examples of this indicator in our program</b>
	In our program:		
1	Staff are recruited and hired based on their experience and interest in working with youth and their familiarity with the program’s content areas.		
2	We strive to recruit a diverse group of staff who reflect the racial, ethnic, linguistic, gender, family, and community characteristics of participants.		
3	New staff are thoroughly oriented to the after-school program, including policies and procedures that affect youth safety or are required by funders.		
4	Professional development opportunities are available in multiple formats, including workshops, observation, coaching, and peer-to-peer learning.		
5	Staff participate in ongoing professional development to address the unique characteristics of youth and families. Examples include working with English Learners, supporting students’ academic success, discussing sensitive issues with parents, and learning culturally sensitive practices.		
6	Veteran staff have the opportunity for professional growth and development, such as by coaching other staff members, attending trainings and conferences, or representing the program in the community.		
7	Staff members participate in regular, performance-based, assessments of their work and have opportunities to build needed skills.		
<b>Program Leadership</b>			
8	Supervisors from the district or agency are available to meet with site level staff on a regular basis.		
9	Senior staff use shared leadership strategies to encourage ownership, accountability, collaboration, and learning among all staff.*		
10	Staff are fairly compensated and publicly recognized for their achievements in order to support staff retention.		

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**SECTION 8: FAMILY INVOLVEMENT**

High quality after-school programs build positive relationships with parents and caregivers to achieve program goals. Quality programs regularly provide families with opportunities to get involved with the program, link parents and caregivers with resources in the community, and communicate with families in a variety of formats and in multiple languages, if necessary.

		<b>Level 1-4, DK</b>	<b>Examples of this indicator in our program</b>
	In our program:		
1	Staff and leadership host regular orientations so that parents and caregivers can learn about the program and meet the staff.		
2	Parents and caregivers are encouraged to visit the program to observe and participate in activities or to interact with youth and staff.		
3	Staff make an effort to learn the names of all parents and caregivers and to greet them personally.		
4	Staff and leadership provide information about the after-school program in multiple languages to all parents and caregivers.		
5	Staff make a regular effort to share positive information with parents and caregivers about their child through both written updates and conversations.		
6	Staff communicate constructive feedback about children with parents and caregivers in a respectful way and in a confidential setting.		
7	Parents and caregivers have multiple opportunities to share their thoughts about the after-school program, such as through informal conversations, focus groups, or surveys.		
8	We offer a variety of family events at different times of day and year, ranging from potlucks and celebrations to field trips.		
9	Parents and caregivers have the opportunity to play leadership roles in the after-school program, such as by serving on the collaborative committee, organizing special events, or volunteering at the program.		
10	Staff refer families to community resources such as summer camps, food pantries, adult education classes, counseling services, local parks and family-friendly events.		

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**SECTION 9: NUTRITION & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

Quality after-school programs create and sustain environments that promote healthy choices in eating and physical activity among youth and staff. They may do this by providing a variety of developmentally appropriate, research-based nutrition and physical activity education experiences that engage students in active and meaningful learning to master new and life-long skills and behaviors.

	In our program:	Level <i>1-4, DK</i>	Examples of this indicator in our program
	<b>Food and Nutrition</b>		
1	Healthy food is available for youth (including snacks, vending machines, cooking classes, events).		
2	Safe drinking water is available to youth and staff at all times.		
3	Program staff model healthy eating habits for youth by eating well during program hours and encouraging youth to do the same.		
4	Youth have the opportunity to learn about healthy eating and positive food choices through activities such as cooking clubs, gardening, or visits to local grocery stores.		
	<b>Physical Activity</b>		
5	Youth regularly have the opportunity to engage in 30-60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity.		
6	Physical activities are physically and emotionally safe for youth: activity rules and equipment help to assure that youth are encouraged to do their best and are not physically harmed.		
7	All staff members participate in physical activities to model an active lifestyle for youth participants.		

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**SECTION 10: PROMOTING DIVERSITY, ACCESS, EQUITY & INCLUSION**

Quality after-school programs embrace and value diversity, and have a conscious commitment to helping all youth thrive by providing inclusive, accessible, responsive, and engaging services. Quality programs understand, value, and respect the myriad backgrounds and experiences of youth and their families. This commitment is reflected in program vision and leadership, and is woven throughout the program.

		<b>Level 1-4, DK</b>	<b>Examples of this indicator in our program</b>
	In our program:		
1	The mission statement, outreach materials, and policies emphasize our commitment to serving all youth and families in the community.		
2	No one is turned away from the program because they cannot pay enrollment fees ( <i>where applicable</i> ).		
3	Staff and leadership provide outreach and communication materials are available in the home languages of our youth and families.		
4	Participating youth represent the full diversity of the host school or neighborhood in terms of language fluency, gender, family income, and race/ethnicity.		
5	Staff and leadership make reasonable accommodations to serve youth with developmental differences, such as breaking activities into smaller parts, working in smaller groups, and providing extra time to complete tasks.		
6	Staff adapt activities to be accessible to English learners and encourage their active participation in the program.		
7	Youth have opportunities to explore, share, and celebrate their heritage and culture with others.		

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**Section 11: EFFECTIVELY SUPPORTING ENGLISH LEARNERS**

Quality after-school programs embrace the significant and growing English Learner (EL) population in the state of California and the nation. Quality programs understand the complexity and diversity of EL youth and work to be culturally responsive to them. They prepare staff to meet their specific socio-emotional, cultural and academic needs. They understand and utilize current research-based effective strategies to both teach EL youth English and keep a connection with their home languages and cultures.

	In our program:	Level <i>1-4, DK</i>	Examples of this indicator in our program
1	Activities are adapted to engage students with different levels of English fluency. For example, through visual cues for very limited English speakers or opportunities for discussion for students who have a greater degree of English fluency.		
2	Staff use academic support strategies for English Learners, such as taking time to explain common academic terms and providing content-based materials and instruction in youths' home language when possible.		
3	Youth are encouraged to develop and sustain their connection to their home languages and cultures. For example, the program can encourage the use of home language in the program and provide materials (books, music, posters) that represent the home cultures and languages of participants.		
4	English learners feel comfortable speaking English without fear of judgment or ridicule. For example, program group agreements explicitly encourage EL students to practice the language, and staff may encourage supportive interactions among EL and English-fluent students.		
5	Meets the socio-emotional needs of English Learners including those who have varied backgrounds and familiarity with American norms and customs.		
6	English Learners and English-fluent students interact regularly, both in structured program activities and during free time, which promotes inclusion and strengthens participants' English development.		
7	English Learners are encouraged and empowered to be more confident socially and academically. For example, programs may provide leadership opportunities for EL youth and acknowledge their academic and linguistic progress.		
8	Staff have access to data such as CELDT scores, assessment of participant's home language, and knowledge of participants' academic program (i.e. bilingual, English immersion or two-way immersion).		

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