

# After School Program Quality Standards

**A Review of Standards Developed by Cities and States from Across the Nation**

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California AfterSchool Network

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## Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	2
Standards Reviewed .....	3
General Structure of Standards.....	4
Common Standards Across Cities and States.....	6
Learning & Activities .....	7
Human Relationships & Climate.....	9
Safety, Health, & Nutrition .....	11
Physical Environment .....	12
Program Administration.....	13
Conclusion and Future Work.....	14

## Standards Reviewed

This report presents the findings of a review of quality standards for after school programs across the nation. The main focus of the report is on the content of the standards, including an overview of the standards used by other cities and states, common standards across states, and unique standards that may be of interest to the California Quality Standards work group.

For this report, quality standards from 12 cities and states were reviewed. Personnel at Schools Out Washington who previously completed a similar review recommended these sets of standards.<sup>1</sup> They report that these quality standards represent a cross sample of the available Quality Standards and include standards a) of various lengths; b) those with assessments included and those without; and c) standards that were recently developed as well as those that have been in place for a longer period of time. In addition, California's Quality Self-Assessment (QSA) was included in the review. This report includes the standards from the following cities and states:

1. [Baltimore](#)
2. [California](#)
3. [Washington, D.C.](#)
4. [Florida](#)
5. [Georgia](#)
6. [Maryland](#)
7. [Michigan](#)
8. [Missouri](#)
9. [Nashville](#)
10. [New York](#)
11. North Carolina<sup>2</sup>
12. Center for Collaborative Solutions Guide to Developing Exemplary Standards<sup>3</sup>

In general, the standards included in this review were developed to provide a framework defining program quality. The standards were designed primarily to be used by program providers in order to identify aspects of their program that are in need of improvement. Furthermore, several states and cities included in this review mention that the assessment can be used by funders to hold programs accountable

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<sup>1</sup> Schools Out Washington also recommended that standards from Palm Beach, Rhode Island, and San Francisco also be included in our review, but they were excluded due to time constraints.

<sup>2</sup> North Carolina's Quality Standards are not available online

<sup>3</sup> This document followed a different format from the others. It includes a much more thorough description of the each standard. This description is then followed by indicators for each standard. The document is not available online.

to a defined minimum level of quality, by parents in making decisions about program enrollment, or by other stakeholders interested in program quality.

## General Structure of Standards

The majority of the quality standards from the cities and states reviewed follow the same general format. Most are structured to have two levels: standards grouped within key topic areas or categories. However, a few sets of standards (e.g., [Baltimore, DC](#) and [Michigan](#)) include 3 levels: key topic areas, standards, and specific indicators.<sup>4</sup>

Many of the cities and states' quality standards were grouped into common topical areas. The most common include:

- 11 cities/states have a topic area regarding **Safety and Nutrition** (e.g., Safety, Health, and Nutrition; Health, Nutrition and Physical Activity; etc.)
- 10 have a topic area regarding **Program Activities** (e.g., program and activities, program structure and activities, active and engaged learning, curriculum and activities, etc.)
- 10 cities/states have a topic area related to **Program Administration**
- 9 cities/states have a topic area related to **Relationships**
- 9 cities/states have a topic area related to the **Physical Environment**
- 9 cities/states have a topic area related to **Staffing and Professional Development**
- 6 cities/states have a topic area related to **Family and Community Involvement**
- Other areas include: Program Planning (3 cities/states), Link to School Day (3 cities/states), Program Improvement (2 cities/states), Program Participation & Attendance (2 cities/states), Climate (2 cities/states), Balance of Academics and Enrichment (1 city/state), Stakeholder Partnerships (1 city/state), Supporting English Language Learners (1 city/state)

Although the quality standards tended to follow the same general format, there were some unique features. First, the format for most sets of quality standards is a basic checklist, allowing the rater to indicate whether or not the program meets the criteria. In contrast, a few sets include a scale (e.g., [New York, California](#)) allowing the rater to indicate the degree to which the standard has been met (e.g., 4 = Excellent/Exceeds Standards; 3 = Satisfactory/Meets Standards; 2 = Some Progress

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<sup>4</sup> For states/cities that included both standards and indicators, standards were included in the review with the exception of the California QSA in which the standards were less specific and the indicators were more comparable to the standards in other states/cities.

Made/Approaching Standard; 1 = Must Address and Improve/Standard Not Met). This may help with planning and prioritizing for program improvement

Second, some states and cities provide comprehensive resources to help users complete quality assessments. For example, on its webpage, [New York](#) includes resources for calibrating the assessment team, planning for program improvement based on the results, creating action plans, prioritizing improvement efforts, and examples of how to use the assessment. These resources likely facilitate the process, making the results of the assessment more meaningful and useful for program improvement efforts.

Third, several states include indicators or rankings to highlight the importance of the standards. For example, North Carolina includes an asterisk next to standards that are considered “critical to address prior to program start-up, or for program currently operating, as soon as possible.” In addition, Missouri’s standards are shaded to indicate importance. Similarly, [Baltimore](#) includes three levels of standards. Level 1 indicates the minimum standards that should be in place prior to the start of a program. Level 2 indicates that the standard is “critical to providing effective youth programs” and should be implemented by the end of the first year. Level 3 may not be applicable to all programs, but if applicable, programs should plan to “aggressively work” toward meeting the standard. This system of ranking standards and highlighting critical standards is likely an effective model for facilitating the planning and prioritization of improvement efforts based on the results of the assessments.

Finally, some states include tools to facilitate planning for program improvement based on the review of the standards (e.g., North Carolina, [New York](#)). For example, after each set of standards, North Carolina includes space to create improvement plans, consisting of a table to record: 1) strategies, 2) responsibilities, 3) timeline, 4) resources, and 5) assistance needed. Similarly, New York’s website includes an Action Plan Template Spreadsheet where program personnel plan and record 1) the program element in need of improvement, 2) the quality indicator, 3) the performance level, 4) the improvement steps and strategies, 5) the person(s) responsible, 6) the timeline for improvement, and 7) the resources needed. Again, these resources likely facilitate programs in planning their improvement efforts based on the results of the assessment.

## Common Standards Across Cities and States

The remainder of this report presents the standards that are included in the 12 sets of standards reviewed. The standards from each city and state were grouped into five topic areas: 1) Learning and Activities; 2) Human Relationships and Climate; 3) Safety, Health, and Nutrition; 4) Physical Environment; and 5) Program Administration. For each of these topics, the most common standards<sup>5</sup> (i.e., standards that were included by at least 3 cities or states) are presented in a table, indicating which cities and states included the standard. After the table, additional standards that were less common, but may be of interest are discussed.

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<sup>5</sup> The exact wording of the standards varies from state to state. The wording in the tables represents the general area of the standard, for the specific wording of the standards please follow the hyperlink to the corresponding city or state's standards. In addition, to see a matrix of all the states/cities' standards with the exact wording, go to:  
<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/pub?key=0AuGf3AP4DbKAdGFoRGZDY25reG1pRIBBM3ZNQkFjcHc&output=html>

## Learning & Activities

All cities and states reviewed included standards relating to the program's learning goals and the activities (Table 1).

**Table 1. Learning & Activity Standards**

	California QSA	Baltimore	DC	Florida	Georgia	Maryland	Michigan	Missouri	Nashville	New York	North Carolina	Ex. Practices
Youth & cultural relevance of activities	x	x	x			x	x		x	x	x	
Link to school-day learning	x	x	x		x		x	x		x	x	x
Youth choice	x	x	x	x			x	x	x		x	
Physical activity	x	x	x	x	x		x	x				
Sufficient materials	x	x	x	x		x	x			x		
Skill development	x	x	x					x		x	x	
Career exploration & development of 21 <sup>st</sup> Century skills		x	x					x	x	x	x	
Age & developmentally appropriate	x			x	x			x		x	x	
Promote youth belonging and confidence		x	x					x			x	
Cognitive development		x	x	x				x				
Academic support	x			x						x	x	
Daily schedule				x				x		x	x	
Artistic development		x	x	x								
Free, unstructured time		x	x							x		
Opportunities for youth leadership	x		x							x		
Flexibility in schedule		x	x			x						
Accommodations	x			x						x		
Youth Participation			x							x		x

In addition to the standards that were included by several cities and states, there were several additional standards relating to Learning and Activities that may be important for program quality:

- **Access to technology:** Programs ensure access to technology including computers and the Internet, and promote understanding of information access ([Baltimore](#); [Michigan](#) has a similar standard)
- Other standards are related to civic development ([Baltimore](#), [DC](#)), character education ([Michigan](#), [New York](#)), college readiness ([DC](#)), entrepreneurship ([DC](#)), English skills for English Learners ([California QSA](#)).

## Human Relationships & Climate

Every city and state reviewed included standards related to the human relationships and climate within the program. These standards address how program staff, participants, families, and the community interact with one-another, as well as the culture and diversity within program (Table 2).

**Table 2. Human Relationships & Climate Standards**

	California QSA	Baltimore	DC	Florida	Georgia	Maryland	Michigan	Missouri	Nashville	New York	North Carolina	Ex. Practices
Behavior and rules	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
Staff-youth interaction	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		
Staff-staff interaction		x	x	x		x	x	x		x	X	
Relationships with community and businesses		x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x
Staff respond to participants' individual needs		x	x	x		x		x	x		x	
Staff encourage youth to make choices and become more responsible		x	x	x		x		x	x	X		
Culture and diversity	x	x	x		x		x			x	x	x
Family Involvement	x	x	x			x	x			x	x	
Share information, resources, and education with families	x	x		x		x		x		x	x	
Youth-youth interaction		x				x		x	x	x	x	
Staff-family interaction	x	x				x		x	x	x		
Plan for family & community involvement				x				x	x	x	x	
Staff interact with youth to help them learn		x	x	x					x			
General positive environment & interactions	x							x	x	x		x
Family visitation	x			x							x	
Collaboration with stakeholders	x								x	x		
Collaboration with school-day personnel	x									x	x	

In addition to the standards that were included by several cities and states, there were two additional standards relating to the Human Relationships and Climate of programs that seemed particularly relevant and like they may be of interest:

- **Expectations:** Staff have high expectations for youth and support youth as they strive for excellence ([California QSA](#))
- **Sense of Ownership:** Youth and staff demonstrate a strong sense of ownership and belonging, such as holding one another accountable to behavioral expectations and sharing program traditions ([New York](#))

## Safety, Health, & Nutrition

In general, most of the sets of standards include several standards that address how programs ensure the safety of program participants, as well as how they promote participants' health and nutrition. Common standards relating to safety, health, and nutrition are presented in Table 3 below.

**Table 3. Safety, Health, & Nutrition Standards**

	California QSA	Baltimore	DC	Florida	Georgia	Maryland	Michigan	Missouri	Nashville	New York	North Carolina	Ex. Practices
Program provides adequate nutrition	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	X	
Adequate supervision	x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
Program protects the safety of youth		x	x			x	x	x	x		x	x
Safe & sanitary environment	x	x	x					x		x	x	
Emergency management plan			x	x			x	x		x	x	
Written health & safety policies	x			x		x	x					
Staff protect health & safety of youth		x	x					x				
Respond to individual health needs		x								x	x	
Arrival and dismissal procedures				x						x	x	
Procedures for field trips and transportation			x	x							x	
System for tracking program attendance			x	x							X	

There were two additional standards relating to Safety, Health, and Nutrition that are potentially important for the quality of after school programs:

- **CPR and first Aid:** The program ensures that at least one staff member trained in CPR and First Aid is present at all times ([Missouri](#); [Florida](#) has a similar standard)
- **Emergency Information:** Emergency information for each child is on file and accessible ([Baltimore](#); North Carolina has a similar standard)

## Physical Environment

Although only 9 cities and states included a specific category relating to the physical environment of the program, as seen in Table 4, all sets of standards included in this review had at least one standard relating to the physical environment of the program.

**Table 4. Physical Environment Standards**

	California QSA	Baltimore	District of Columbia	Florida	Georgia	Maryland	Michigan	Missouri	Nashville	New York	North Carolina	Ex. Practices
The physical space is safe & conducive for learning	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
The indoor space meets the needs of youth		x	x				x	x		x		
The outdoor space meets the needs of youth		x	x				x	x				
The program's physical space meets the needs of the staff		x				x		x				

In addition to the standards that were common across several cities and states, there were several less common standards relating to the Physical Environment of programs that are potentially interesting, including:

- **Accessibility:** The environment is accessible to children and families with disabilities ([Michigan](#))
- **Diversity:** The environment reflects the diversity represented in the population of the community and gender equity ([Michigan](#))

## Program Administration

All cities and states included standards related to Program Administration (see Table 5). These standards address personnel and staffing issues, professional development and training, fiscal and budgetary practices, and program management.

**Table 5. Program Administration Standards**

	California QSA	Baltimore	District of	Florida	Georgia	Maryland	Michigan	Missouri	Nashville	New York	North Carolina	Ex. Practices
Staff professional development and evaluation	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Program evaluation system	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
Staff qualifications and diversity	x	x			x	x		x	x	x	x	
Sound fiscal and business practices	x			x		x	x	x		x	x	x
Sound management		x	x		x		x	x	x			x
Policies & procedures and responsive to youth and families		x	x		x	x		x	x			
Clear mission statement	x		x	x		x		x				x
Written policies and procedures			x	x			x	x			x	
Staff training and orientation	x	x		x		x		x				
Youth, families, and staff involved in planning				x	x	x	x	x				
Staff receive appropriate support		x	x						x	x		
Written job descriptions				x		x	x		x			
Personnel screening				x			x	x			x	
Sustainability	x		x			x				x		
Staff compensation	x							x		x	x	
Maintains accurate records						x		x		x	x	
Staff meetings				x						x	x	
Professional culture			x							x	x	
Staff recruitment and retention			x							x	x	

In addition, [Florida](#) and [New York](#) included one additional standard relating to Program Administration that may be important for program quality:

- **Written Goals:** The program has written goals that are measurable, aligned with the mission statement and help the program achieve sustainability ([Florida](#); [New York](#) has a similar standard)

## Conclusion and Future Work

This report provides an overview of the similarities in the standards developed by cities and states across the nation. Although this report only includes a review of 12 sets of standards, the content across these 12 cities and states is so similar that it is unlikely that there is much variation in the standards developed by other cities and states across the nation. However, if the committee feels that the inclusion of standards developed by other cities or states may contribute to this work, these can be added at a later time. Furthermore, additional work can include a closer examination of specific content areas and as well as interviews focusing on specific topics at the request of the committee.

Finally, additional related reviews of standards for after school programs completed by the American Institutes for Research as well as by Development Without Limits will be published in the near future. These documents will provide additional information on standards developed for after school programs across the nation and include reviews of cities and states that were not included in this report.