


4. Activities and Programming

A quality program offers interesting, enriching, and engaging activities that foster creative thinking, spark curiosity, develop academic and social skills...and are fun!

A quality program is one where:

	PERFORMANCE LEVEL				PLAN TO IMPROVE		
	1	2	3	4	RIGHT NOW	SIX MONTHS	TWELVE MONTHS
1 Daily activities support the program mission and vision.							
2 Activities are linked to school day but offer expanded and enriched exploration of topics.							
3 Activities are hands-on, project-based, intentional, and build on previous activities (sequential).							
4 Activities promote reflection, problem solving, and independent thinking (active).							
5 A wide variety of activities are available that reflect the interests of the children/youth and their increasing maturity and skill mastery (focused).							
6 Children have an active role in activity planning and implementation.							
7 Activities build links to the community and include service learning projects.							
8 Activities are fun and engaging. Children and youth are active participants. 							
9 Staff facilitate and participate in all program activities with youth.							
10 Staff communicate with each other during program hours about youth and program needs as they arise.							
11 The program uses assessment tools to identify individual learning needs and measure progress toward goals (explicit).							

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS [CORESTANDARDS.ORG/THE-STANDARDS](http://corestandards.org/the-standards)

Activities in after school should align with what the children/youth are learning during the school day. Connecticut has adopted the Common Core State Standards in Language Arts and Math for preparing children/youth (K-12) to be college and career ready. After school programs that replicate the major goals of these standards are valuable partners in supporting that readiness to go out into the world. These goals, known as “Habits of Mind” are as follows:

Authors of the Common Core Standards add that a “belief in diligence and one’s own efficacy” are keys to mastering concepts in both math and language. Do the activities in your after school program support these concepts?

For more information on curriculum frameworks and guidelines, talk to the school day teachers and principals.

- INDEPENDENCE OF STUDY
- STRONG CONTENT
- UNDERSTANDING AND CRITIQUING
- KNOWING HOW TO USE TECHNOLOGY
- UNDERSTANDING CULTURES
- PERSEVERANCE
- CONSTRUCTING REASONABLE ARGUMENTS
- SEEKING PRECISION IN THOUGHT AND MEASUREMENT.



Zooming In!

Quality Indicator #8: Activities are fun and engaging. Children and youth are active participants.

PERFORMANCE LEVELS

1 = Entry

- Few choices are available and these do not address the children's interest areas.
- Only some of the children participate in these activities. Others are clearly not engaged in productive activities.
- There are a number of poor behavior issues as children/youth express "boredom."
- No strategies are used to invite participation or excite curiosity about the activity.
- Activities are mostly craft-based, one-day projects implemented to keep children/youth busy but have no relation to participant interest or school day content.

2 = Developing

- More choices are available and some are in direct response to interests the children/youth have expressed.
- Activities become more project based and are less craft based.
- Staff invite children to offer activity suggestions and include them in planning.
- As staff learn more strategies for engaging children/youth participation levels have increased (also leading to a decrease in poor behavior issues). Fewer children are observed as disengaged.

3 = Proficient

- Activity choices are project based and extend for a week or more at a time. These are based on the interests of the children/youth.
- Activities relate to school day content and are designed to stimulate curiosity and problem-solving skills.
- Staff create regular methods of collecting information about children's interests. This might include: monthly surveys, suggestion boxes, student councils.
- Most children can be observed as fully engaged in activities.

4 = Advanced

- Activity choices are project-based, suggested, planned, and implemented with the children/youth.
- Methods of collecting information on student interest are a regular part of program procedures.
- All children/youth are encouraged to participate in activities through multiple strategies.
- Both boys and girls are encouraged to be equally and actively involved in all activities.
- Children/youth with special needs are actively involved in all activities.
- Children express satisfaction with activities on surveys.

IMPROVEMENT EXAMPLES

RIGHT NOW:

addressed within the first 30–60 days of assessment

- Implement staff training on methods of engaging the interest of children/youth.
- Review activity planning procedures and research new resources.
- Survey the children/youth to determine areas of interest.

THIS YEAR:

addressed by the end of the program year

- Implement staff training on methods of inclusion so that all children with special needs can be full participants in program activities.
- Provide training on gender equity, particularly in STEM fields, so that all children have full access to activities.

NEXT YEAR:

addressed at the beginning of the new program year

- Establish a student council that will plan and implement project-based activities (service learning projects, fundraising efforts, special event planning, etc.).
- Orientate new staff on strategies that are successful in engaging children/youth participation.



Try This! Including children/youth in planning will most likely be a new challenge for all. Children/youth will need support in participating in planning processes.

Remember that this is also an opportunity to learn. Clarify roles, **be an active listener**, ask open-ended questions that will help children think about the possible ways to implement their ideas. Be sure to acknowledge the **contributions and efforts** of all children/youth involved in the process.