



CONNECTICUT
NETWORK
FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

CONNECTICUT AFTER SCHOOL

Quality Standards and Guidelines

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☎ 203-483-1846
✉ info@ctncy.org
🌐 www.ctncy.org

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A Message for Staff and Leadership

As afterschool professionals, we play a powerful role in shaping young people's lives. Quality standards are the foundation that helps us deliver the kind of programming that truly makes a difference. They aren't just checklists—they're shared goals that guide our daily work and help our programs grow stronger over time. Quality improvement efforts require time, dedication and buy-in from leadership and staff with a commitment to see the effort through. Program improvements and self-assessment are not simply something to get to, it is an ongoing cyclical effort that nets better programming, more engaged staff, programming based on interest and voice, and the ability to meet parents' evolving needs and expectations. The Connecticut Network for Children and Youth is here to help with web resources, on-site technical support, and program assessment and action plan development. We hope this tool helps your program and the children and youth you serve thrive.

Why Quality Matters

Focusing on quality improvement efforts in afterschool programs is not a short-term, one-time process. For the program to make measurable progress, cycles of improvement must occur that build on the last. Afterschool professionals with an understanding of both Quality Standards and Guidelines and the Self-Assessment process are better able to contribute and have agency to make suggestions and help implement the ideas on the ground. Afterschool programs have the potential to increase school attendance, improve social and academic outcomes, foster higher wage earners in adulthood, and foster meaningful relationships and opportunities for the children and youth served.

To ensure success in achieving these outcomes, afterschool programs need to be intentionally designed, adequately equipped, and well managed. It is paramount that afterschool program staff participate in ongoing professional development and know the practices that practitioners recognize as the highest indicators of quality programming. These Quality Standards and Guidelines, along with the accompanying Quality Self-Assessment Tool, represent the most current research into afterschool programming. They incorporate the work of both nationally and locally respected individuals and agencies.

The tools are designed to provide the afterschool practitioner with a framework to guide them through the steps needed to recognize and achieve improvement goals. Through the quality improvement process, program leaders gather information, examine what staff and other stakeholders are doing, and assess the program. Both tools can generate meaningful conversations among all program stakeholders

about quality and continuous improvement. A willingness to reflect, self-assess, and take action will improve program quality and make good programs great.

Successful implementation requires a team approach. This is an ongoing process involving staff, youth participants, families, and other stakeholders, including school teachers and administrators, as well as other community partners/agencies. An important part of the quality improvement process is reflection and dialogue. No one individual can initiate or maintain quality improvements without the conversations and “buy-in” that need to occur regarding quality standards and self-assessment findings. The key is that it is low-stakes and approached as something to improve the program, not to observe staff and penalize them.

To keep the momentum moving:

- Build staff experience in quality standards who can share their knowledge with new staff. The message is strengthened by delivery and modeling from both colleagues and administration.
- Educate parents and board members about quality standards. They will then share the message repeatedly with neighbors and community partners, greatly enhancing the program administration's advocacy efforts.
- Encourage children and youth participation in a process that is inclusive of their voice. They will market the program to peers, thus supporting attendance and sustainability. The site directors and staff will implement the action plan.
- Keep in mind that professional development isn't just about workshops that present “new skills.” It allows for everyone to get on the same page, provides tools and resources for achieving program goals, examples of promising practices and supports, and builds a community of learners. The research is clear: A skilled, stable, trained, and motivated workforce is a key determinant of quality programming.

What Standards do for Afterschool Programs

Why Quality Standards Matter

1. They Support Positive Outcomes for Youth – High-quality programs help youth build skills, connect with caring adults, and succeed academically and socially. Quality standards give us a roadmap for creating intentional, meaningful experiences that help youth thrive.
2. They Keep Our Programs Safe and Supportive – Standards help ensure that every space we create is physically and emotionally safe, inclusive, and welcoming. This allows youth to take healthy risks, express themselves, and build trust.

3. They Build a Culture of Professionalism – Clear standards help define what excellence looks like in our field. They give staff opportunities to grow through training, coaching, and reflection—and help leaders support strong teams.
4. They Drive Continuous Improvement – Quality standards support regular self-assessment and goal setting. They encourage us to celebrate what’s working and identify where we can do better, together.
5. They Strengthen Our Program’s Reputation and Sustainability—Aligning with state or national quality standards builds trust with families, funders, and partners. It shows we’re serious about our work and committed to doing it well.

What Quality Standards Look Like in Practice

Quality standards typically focus on key areas that reflect best practices in youth development, including:

- Youth Engagement: Creating hands-on, age-appropriate, and inclusive activities that spark curiosity and creativity.
- Health & Safety: Ensuring safe spaces, strong supervision, and attention to physical and emotional well-being.
- Staff Development: Hiring qualified staff and providing ongoing training and mentorship.
- Family & Community Connections: Building strong relationships with families and local partners.
- Program Management: Using data, reflection, and planning tools to improve our work and support long-term success.

What This Means for You

Whether you're a direct service staff member or a site leader, quality standards are here to support your success. They help define your role, elevate your skills, and ensure that your work has a lasting impact. As a team, we can use these standards not as a set of rules, but as a shared commitment to giving every young person the best possible out-of-school time experience.

How to Use the Connecticut After School Quality Improvement Suite

The Connecticut After School Quality Improvement Suite (CT-ASQIS) is designed to help guide your program and staff through the program improvement process. This includes learning about what quality improvement means, what it looks like in programs, and how it can be implemented. The Quality

Standards and Guidelines (CT-QSAG) and Self-Assessment Tool (CT-QSAT) provide programs with the big picture view. Likewise the Working the Tool modules allow for a deeper dive into content specific areas. Finally, the Afterschool Toolkit allows programs to plan, learn, and grow with intention and is for those just starting or looking to revamp their afterschool programs.

The Eight Elements of a Quality After School Program

1. **Relationships** (Interactions and Engagement)—A quality program intends to build positive relationships with children and youth, which are the foundation of all other quality components.
2. **Family and Community Partnerships** – A quality program understands that families and communities are assets and partners in building the program’s learning environment.
3. **Environment**—A quality program strives to maintain a safe and supportive environment that addresses the physical, academic, social, and emotional spaces in which children and youth live and work.
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.
5. **Safety** – A quality program provides a physically and emotionally secure environment that supports the well-being, development, and engagement of all participants.
6. **Staffing and Professional Development**—A quality program ensures that staff are **equipped with** recruitment, qualifications, ongoing training, and support to ensure they are capable of delivering safe, engaging, and developmentally appropriate experiences for youth.
7. **Administration and Organization** – A quality program maintains the systems, leadership, and infrastructure that guide program planning, implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement. Strong administration ensures the program is well-managed, sustainable, and aligned with its mission to serve youth effectively.
8. **Sustainability and Evaluation** – A quality program ensures its ability to maintain long-term operations and continually assess its effectiveness to adapt, grow, and meet the needs of participants and stakeholders over time.

1. Relationships

The relationships shared by staff, children, youth and families are vital to achieving a program's mission and goals. This section includes staff to children/youth and staff to staff guides. It asks if the children and youth are happy in the program. It includes social emotional skills that include the capacity to communicate clearly, listen actively, cooperate, work collaboratively to problem solve and negotiate conflict constructively, navigate settings with differing social and cultural demands and opportunities, provide leadership, and seek or offer help when needed. Staff relate to all children and youth in positive ways:

1. Staff actively employ methods to make children and youth welcome in the program
 - a. *Staff treat children and youth with respect and listen to what they say.*
 - Staff encourage children and youth by using supportive language and showing appreciation for their efforts and accomplishments.
 - Staff actively listen to and take children and youth's comments seriously.
 - Staff do not intrude, interrupt, or belittle children and youth.
 - Staff connect with children by making eye contact at their level.
 - b. *Staff make children and youth feel welcome and comfortable.*
 - Staff project a welcoming tone in their voices and gestures.
 - Staff acknowledge children and youth when they arrive and depart.
 - Staff respond appropriately when children and youth show affection.
 - Staff stay calm in all situations. They handle conflicts in ways that reduce fear or disruption.
 - c. *Staff respond to children and youth with acceptance and appreciation.*
 - Staff are kind and fair to all children and youth.
 - Staff include all interested children and youth in activities and events.
 - All activities are open to all regardless of their athletic skill.
 - Staff do not discriminate based on race, religion, gender, ethnicity, family structure, appearance, disability, or any other factor.
 - d. *Staff are engaged with children and youth.*
 - Staff are energetic, enthusiastic and upbeat.
 - Staff talk and actively play with the children and youth.
 - Staff ask open-ended questions and show interest in what the children/youth say and do.
 - When youth speak, staff listen actively, attentively, and patiently.
 - Staff encourage daily attendance in the program and school.

2. Staff respond appropriately to the individual needs of children and youth:
 - a. *Staff know that each child and youth has special interests and talents.*
 - Staff spend time with individual children and youth, providing support when needed.
 - Staff provide materials related to participants' interests: pets, music, sports, computers, chess, etc.
 - Specialists are used for specific activities and to address the distinct programmatic needs of participants.
 - Staff are eager to hear about events in participants' lives outside the program.
 - b. *Staff recognize the range of participants' abilities.*
 - Staff vary their responses to match participants' ages and abilities.
 - Staff help children and youth stay on task and engaged.
 - Staff help children and youth pursue their interests and improve their skills.
 - Staff respond to children with age-appropriate conversations.
3. Staff encourage children and youth to make choices that build responsibility:
 - a. *Staff help in a way that supports a child's and youth's initiative.*
 - Staff help children and youth find ways to pursue their interests.
 - Staff say "yes" to reasonable requests and ideas for activities from children and youth.
 - Staff actively listen and help develop alternative activity ideas if theirs are not feasible.
 - Staff empower children and youth to plan and gather resources.
 - b. *Staff encourage children and youth to share control and responsibility and to take leadership roles.*
 - Staff give clear directions so that children and youth can proceed independently.
 - Children and youth help prepare snacks, serve themselves, set out materials for projects, etc.
 - Children and youth are encouraged to take the lead in selecting and initiating activities.
 - Staff are actively engaged in the activity and readily available to help children and youth.
 - c. *Staff give children and youth many chances to choose what they will do, how they will do it, and with whom.*
 - Children participate in activities with a mix of small and large group sizes.
 - Children and youth have frequent opportunities to choose their companions.

- Children and youth can independently gather resources, materials, and information or take steps to get help from peers or staff.
- Children and youth are offered several daily activity choices.
- d. *Staff help children and youth make informed and responsible choices.*
 - Staff remind children and youth to think about how their actions may affect others in the program.
 - When assisting children and youth, staff help them think through problems themselves rather than offer answers (e.g., asking “how,” “why,” and “what-if” questions) and brainstorm potential solutions.
 - Staff help children and youth understand the impact of their decisions on others.
 - Staff engage participants in structured time for reflection on how an activity went, what they learned, and what next steps are necessary.
- 4. Staff interact with children and youth to help them learn:
 - a. *Staff help spark children and youth’s interests/curiosity and encourage them to think for themselves.*
 - Staff encourage input and pursue children and youth’s ideas.
 - Staff start discussions by asking open-ended questions (e.g., “What if . . . ?” or “How can we . . . ?”) that pose a challenge and encourage participants to experiment and take risks.
 - Staff encourage creative writing, art projects, and group discussion to express ideas.
 - Staff take time to think about children’s and youth’s questions.
 - b. *Staff share skills and resources to help children and youth gain information and solve problems.*
 - Staff provide individualized help to children and youth.
 - Staff answer children’s and youths’ questions, explain how to do something, help find resources, and help think through problems.
 - Staff show children and youth how complex skills can be broken into smaller steps.
 - Staff encourage children and youth to practice basic life skills.
 - When children and youth face problems they cannot solve themselves, staff help them think it through and offer suggestions.
 - c. *Staff vary the approaches they use to help children and youth learn.*
 - Staff teach children and youth a new task or game by showing and explaining the steps.

- Staff write down instructions for activities so that children and youth can remember what to do.
 - Staff pay attention to variations in learning styles.
 - Staff recognize non-verbal as well as verbal responses.
 - Staff encourage children and youth to try new activities.
 - Staff help children and youth move beyond stereotypes in their choices.
 - Staff use pictures and visual aids to reach out to non-readers and speakers of other languages. Staff modify activities as needed so that all children and youth, including those with disabilities, can participate.
- d. *Staff help children and youth use language skills through frequent conversations and find effective ways to communicate with all children and youth.*
- Staff speak to children and youth on a level they can understand.
 - Staff are actively engaged in activities with children and youth.
 - Staff listen patiently as all children and youth try to express themselves.
 - Staff take extra time with children and youth who speak another language at home or have difficulty listening or speaking.
 - Staff sometimes use non-verbal signals to help children and youth understand.
5. Staff use positive techniques, assuming best intentions to guide behavior of children and youth:
- a. *Staff acknowledge and encourage children and youth when they cooperate, share, care for materials, or join in activities.*
- Staff show appreciation for positive behavior.
 - Staff teach children and youth how to communicate and cooperate.
 - Staff celebrate children and youth's efforts and progress.
- b. *Staff set appropriate limits for children and youth.*
- Staff set limits with children and youth to prevent physical or verbal harm.
 - If children or youth tease, scapegoat, threaten, or exclude others, staff intervene.
 - Staff take steps to ensure that each child and youth understands the set limits.
- c. *Staff use positive, respectful guidance strategies in their interactions with children and youth.*
- Staff consistently use a neutral (or positive) tone of voice.
 - Staff quickly and positively gain children's and youth's attention and cooperation when needed.
 - Staff use simple reminders to redirect behaviors.
 - When there is something to address, staff talk with the child or youth away from the other children.

- d. *Staff encourage children and youth to resolve their own conflicts. Staff step in only if needed to help mediate a resolution.*
 - Staff listen and observe carefully.
 - Staff use negotiation, reasoning, and redirection to help children and youth find alternatives. They do not impose their solutions on them.
 - Staff do not lecture children and youth.
 - Staff help children and youth express their feelings.
 - Staff help children and youth understand how their behavior affects others.
 - Staff teach children and youth specific skills for resolving conflicts (e.g., peace table or conflict resolution skills).
 - Staff intervene when negative peer interactions occur and are not resolved.
6. Children and youth interact with one another and with staff in positive ways:
 - a. *Children and youth are comfortable and engaged with each other and with staff.*
 - Peer interactions have a positive effect and tone.
 - Children and youth listen to one another and to staff.
 - Children and youth's interactions with staff have a positive effect and tone.
 - b. *Children and youth show respect for each other and the staff.*
 - Teasing, belittling, or picking on particular children or youth is uncommon.
 - Children and youth show empathy for each other and support each other.
 - Children and youth are respectful toward staff.
 - c. *Children and youth cooperate and work well together and with staff.*
 - Children and youth willingly share materials and space.
 - Activities are based on interest, and children negotiate roles and jointly work out the rules.
 - Children and youth actively include and embrace peers of all abilities, backgrounds, and languages in their play.
 - There is a strong sense of community among children, youth, and staff.
 - d. *When problems occur, children and youth often try to discuss their differences and work out a solution.*
 - Children and youth listen to each other's perspectives and try to compromise.
 - Children and youth know how to solve problems. Their solutions are reasonable and fair.
 - Children and youth seek help from staff when unable to resolve a conflict on their own.
7. Staff work together to meet the needs of children and youth:
 - a. *To keep the program flowing smoothly, staff communicate with each other.*

- Staff work together to meet the needs of children and youth.
 - Staff check with each other to make sure all areas are supervised.
 - Conversations about personal matters are brief and appropriate, and do not interfere with transitions and activities.
- b. *Staff cooperate with each other.*
- Staff are flexible about their roles and help each other with the children as needed.
8. Work is shared fairly.
- a. When problems occur, staff discuss their differences, use healthy decision making skills, and work toward fair solutions.
- b. Long or complicated discussions are saved for times when children are not present.
- c. Staff are respectful of each other.
- Respect is consistently shown to all.
 - Staff communicate their needs in a way that promotes cooperation.
 - Staff are aware of how their tone and demeanor convey respect.
 - Staff manage tense situations in a way that shows respect for other staff members.
 - Staff exhibit appropriate professional conduct around children, youth, and families.
- d. Staff are role models for positive adult relationships.
- Staff model and facilitate positive interactions to promote healthy relationships.
 - Staff check in with each other and stay in touch throughout the day.
 - Staff model positive adult interaction through cooperation, caring, and effective communication.
 - Staff notice and respond supportively to non-verbal cues and gestures.

2. Family and Community Partnerships

It is important that programs and families work together to achieve the best results for children and youth. They are children's first teachers, and bring deep expertise about their development, experiences, culture, and learning needs. These insights and perspectives are critical to informing, supporting, and sustaining SEL efforts. Research shows that when families become involved, children are more likely to have positive academic and social outcomes. This section addresses how to welcome families, respect their culture and language, and make them true partners in their child's success. It also includes providing families with supportive resources and links to the school and the broader community.

1. Staff and families interact positively, and the program offers opportunities to promote family involvement.
 - a. *Staff interact with families daily to make them feel welcome and comfortable.*
 - Staff and family members greet one another by name.
 - Staff use friendly voices, expressions, and gestures.
 - Staff are relaxed and represent the program positively with each other.
 - When possible, the program has a dedicated "Family Welcome Center" space with resources, sign in/out, and program information.
 - b. *Staff and families treat each other with respect.*
 - Staff and family members show interest in each other's lives.
 - Respect is shown to all without bias.
 - Staff communicate with families in a variety of ways.
 - Staff know to refrain from talking about confidential matters in front of the children or other adults.
 - c. *Staff are sensitive to the cultures and languages of families and communities they live in.*
 - The program's staff reflects the cultures and languages of the children and youth in the program.
 - Whenever possible, staff will speak with families in their home language.
 - Staff ask translators to help communicate with families during individual and large group meetings.
 - Staff avoid using children and youth as translators if possible.
 - Staff provide information written in the family's home language when possible.
 - Displays and signs reflect the community in which the children and families live.
 - Staff encourage families to share their skills, hobbies, or family traditions.

- Interpreters are provided when needed, if possible.
 - d. *Staff collaborate with community agencies to meet the needs of each family.*
 - Staff maintain a list of services that address the needs of children, youth, and families, and share services and community resources to enhance family well-being.
 - Staff actively refer families to partners and collaborations with community partners to create a web of support for the children and families they serve.
 - Staff actively develop deeper relationships between the school day administration, teachers, and staff through the afterschool program to support expanded learning opportunities both inside and outside of the school day classroom.
 - e. *Staff and families work together to plan and implement social interaction activities that are responsive to the needs and interests of the families served.*
 - Families will be provided with opportunities to visit the program site, enjoy social interaction, and meet and interact with staff.
 - Staff and families work together to plan special events such as picnics and field trips. The families' schedules and availability are considered in this planning.
 - Staff work with children and youth to plan and host family appreciation events.
 - The program facilitates opportunities for families to meet on a formal and informal basis, work together on projects to support the program, and learn from and support each other.
 - The program may arrange transportation for special events and meetings.
2. Program staff provide multiple opportunities for mutual communication between staff and families:
- a. *Staff establish intentional practices designed to foster strong reciprocal relationships with families from the first contact and maintain daily connections.*
 - Staff offer orientation sessions for all new families.
 - Whenever possible, staff offer orientation sessions in the families' home language.
 - Each family receives a copy of the written policies, including the program's hours of operation, fees, subsidies, illness policy, etc. This document also states the program's mission and philosophy.
 - When necessary, written material is translated for families into their home language. Pictographs are used as much as possible to convey written information to non-readers.
 - Translators are available when needed, if possible.

- b. *Staff use a variety of strategies and mechanisms to promote dialogue and become acquainted with and learn from families.*
 - Staff seek to learn about families' preferred child rearing practices as well as information families wish to share about their socioeconomic, linguistic, racial, religious and cultural backgrounds.
 - The program staff asks adults to translate or interpret communications as needed.
 - Staff send home notices and newsletters about program activities and events.
 - There is a bulletin board that displays information for parents.
 - Written notes and notices are in the language of the families in the program.
- c. *The program encourages families to regularly contribute to decisions about their child's goals and plans for activities and services.*
 - Program staff communicate any concerns with parents in a sensitive, supportive, and confidential manner.
 - Documentation and explanation for concerns are provided with suggested next steps.
 - Staff and family members work collaboratively to find mutually satisfying ways to meet the needs of children and youth.
 - When children or youth move into a different part of the program (e.g. the summer program or a special program for youth), staff meet with families to discuss the change.
- d. *Family members are welcome to visit anytime during the regular hours of the program's operation.*
 - Staff welcome families to the program whenever they visit.
 - When possible, staff interact with visiting family members.
 - Staff use online and print newsletters, posted notices on bulletin boards, phone calls, and/or communication apps to remind parents that they are welcome to visit at any time.
 - Families are encouraged to attend special events such as field trips and picnics.
 - Families are invited to share their skills, hobbies, and family traditions.
- e. *Staff and families work together to make arrivals and departures between home and the program go smoothly.*
 - Family members can easily find their children and their children's possessions.
 - Conversations with family members happen in ways that allow children and youth to continue their activities without interruption.

- f. *The program has policies and procedures to communicate with families about their child's well-being.*
 - Families are encouraged to inform staff of any major changes at home or at school.
 - Staff inform families in writing about injuries, accidents, illnesses, etc.
 - Staff provide parents with an opportunity for consultation or conference about their child's well-being or progress in the program.
 - Staff share information about how to support children and youth's development.
 - Staff maintain a parent library of relevant books and articles.
 - Staff inform families about timely opportunities related to childcare subsidies, parenting, medical, counseling and career services.
3. Program develops strategies to engage families in the program and create linkages for families in the school and community (see Appendix B for suggestions on engaging families):
 - a. *Families have frequent opportunities for input into program decision-making and policies.*
 - Staff ask families to comment on the program through notes, a suggestion box, informal and formal surveys, and parent meetings.
 - The program's advisory board includes families as members and active participants.
 - Staff or other families in the program encourage and support family members in taking on leadership roles.
 - b. *Program staff acts as a liaison between schools and families.*
 - Programs that share space have written agreements and communicate regularly with school teachers/staff/administration.
 - Staff develop relationships with school day staff and families by offering workshops to increase parent knowledge about school resources, activities, and expectations. For example, staff can invite a classroom teacher to talk to parents about grade-level expectations and appropriate activities for children and youth in different subject areas.
 - Staff keep informed about special school projects, curriculum and events. Staff share this information with families.
 - Staff help with homework and value children's and youth's academic efforts.
 - c. *Staff help parents develop advocacy skills.*
 - Program staff develop an advocacy board and encourage parents to attend meetings on a regular basis to create awareness of program needs.

- Staff invite parents to discuss and advocate for national and state policies for afterschool.
 - Program and families develop partnerships and professional relationships with agencies, consultants and organizations in the community that further the program's capacity to meet the needs and interests of the children, youth and families that they serve.
 - Program staff use information gathered from stakeholders to plan for continuous improvement, build stakeholder involvement in the program, and broaden community support for the program.
- d. *Program staff collaborate with local organizations.*
- Staff provide information and develop lists about community resources to meet the needs of children, youth, and their families. These include mental health, nutrition, child welfare, parenting programs, early intervention, special education screening and assessment services, and basic needs (housing and child care subsidies, violence, food programs, substance abuse, crisis intervention, domestic violence, child development, language classes, and counseling services).
 - The program collaborates with community organizations to offer community service options for children and youth.
4. The program has a plan for alumni engagement and long-term impact tracking
- a. *The program maintains connections with former participants to track long-term outcomes and build a supportive alumni network.*
 - b. *Alumni are engaged as mentors, volunteers, or donors to support future sustainability.*

3. Environment

The environment in which a program operates is fundamental to its quality. The program space is inspiring, engaging, meaningful, welcoming, supportive and safe for the children, youth, and adults who participate in it. The space, both indoor and outdoor, should be inspected regularly and adequate for the program's needs and activities.

1. The program's indoor space meets the needs of children, youth, and staff:
 - a. *There is enough room in the indoor space for staff to provide various program activities. The space can be adjusted accordingly for older youth.*
 - b. *Staff have access to adequate and convenient storage. The storage area is close enough to activity to obtain equipment in a timely manner.*
 - c. *The indoor space meets or exceeds local health and safety codes and is clean, safe, and inspected regularly..*
 - d. *Written guidelines are in place regarding the use and maintenance of the program facility.*
 - e. *The program is creative in meeting space constraints in shared spaces.*
 - f. *There are no observable safety hazards in the program space.*
 - g. *The indoor space allows children to take initiative and explore their own interests.*
 - h. *The space is arranged for various activities, and various activities can go on without disturbing each other, including, but not limited to, areas for group activities, individual activities, independent play, and quiet space. (When possible, programs move furniture and materials, use room dividers, and introduce "soft" elements to create activity spaces.)*
2. The outdoor space is large enough to meet the needs of children, youth and staff:
 - a. *There is enough room in the outdoor space for all program activities.*
 - b. *The outdoor space meets or exceeds local health and safety codes.*
 - c. *Staff use outdoor areas to provide new outdoor play experiences.*
 - d. *A procedure is in place for regularly checking the safety and maintenance of the outdoor play space.*
 - e. *There is an alternative plan in place for programs that don't have access to outdoor space on their premises that allows for regular physical activity.*
3. The program provides a stimulating, welcoming, and supportive environment for all children/youth.
 - a. *Materials are reflective of the children and families served.*
 - b. *Materials are rotated frequently to maintain interest.*

- c. If the program has its own space, children's artwork and projects are displayed.*
- d. Indoor spaces are designed to provide spaces for children who want to relax or be alone.*
- e. Indoor space is consistent and easy to interpret so that children know what to expect when they arrive. This includes signs, schedules, clear room design, and other visual cues.*
- f. Space is designed with materials and, when possible, displays that provoke thought, interest, questions, and creativity.*

4. Activities and Programming

Research shows that intentionally planning structured program activities contributes significantly to program quality. While afterschool programs take many forms—from those focusing primarily on recreation or enrichment, to those centered on academic skill building, many commonalities are hallmarks of high-quality programs. Afterschool programming and activities address the academic, physical, social, and emotional needs of the children and youth. For example, activities that are engaging to participants and reflect their interests are more successful at achieving their intended outcomes. Similarly, materials for activities should be safe, sufficient to meet the needs of the activity, and developmentally appropriate for the ages of the children and youth in the program. Programming and activities address the academic, physical, social, and emotional needs of the children and youth.

1. Activities reflect and support the program's mission:
 - a. *Programming and activities address the academic, physical, social, and emotional needs of the children and youth.*
 - b. *The program offers project-based, hands-on/minds-on activities that promote creativity and the development of participant self-expression.*
 - c. *The program provides opportunities to develop personal responsibility, self-direction, and leadership skills.*
 - d. *Single purpose programs, such as workforce development or academic enrichment programs have additional resources for self-evaluation.*
2. There are sufficient materials to support program activities:
 - a. *Materials are complete and in good repair.*
 - b. *Materials are appealing and age appropriate for the age range and ability of the children and youth in the program.*
 - c. *There are enough materials so that several activities can occur simultaneously.*
 - d. *There are enough supplies so that children and youth do not have to wait for materials to become available.*
3. The daily schedule is flexible, and it offers enough security, independence, and stimulation to meet the needs of all children and youth:
 - a. *The routine provides stability without being rigid.*
 - b. *Quiet activities or space is provided for socializing*
 - c. *Children and youth meet their physical needs in a relaxed way.*
 - d. *Individual children and youth transition from one activity to another at their own pace.*

- e. *When children and youth must move as a group, the transition is smooth.*
- 4. Children and youth can choose from a wide variety of activities:
 - a. *There are daily opportunities for active, physical play; including but not limited to non-competitive games and activities, sports, and unstructured play. Children have opportunities for daily outdoor play whenever possible.*
 - b. *There are daily opportunities for quiet activities.*
 - c. *The daily schedule has a balance of adult-led and child-led activities.*
 - d. *There are daily opportunities for socialization.*
 - e. *Children and youth can join enrichment activities that promote basic higher-level thinking, including but not limited to STEM.*
 - f. *There are regular opportunities for creative arts and dramatic play.*
 - g. *There are daily opportunities for adult led and child/youth led activities.*
- 5. Activities reflect and promote the development of all the children and youth in the program:
 - a. *Activities reflect the styles, abilities, and interests of the individuals in the program.*
 - b. *Activities reflect the individual child or youth's physical, emotional, and social well-being.*
 - c. *Activities are developmentally and age-appropriate.*
 - d. *Activities reflect the languages and cultures of the families served.*
 - e. *Activities promote reflection, problem solving, and independent thinking (active).*
 - f. *Activities reflect their increasing maturity and skill mastery (focused).*
- 6. The program uses assessment tools to identify individual learning needs and measure progress toward individual and program goals (explicit):
 - a. *The program provides opportunities for youth to engage in self-assessment and reflection on their learning.*
 - b. *The program helps children and youth identify their personal assets and needs and develop a strategy for support services and asset building.*
 - c. *The program connects youth to appropriate support services, activities, and opportunities at the program and/or within the community.*
 - d. *The program provides opportunities for all participants (staff, children, youth and families) to make meaningful contributions to program development, decision-making and continuous improvement activities.*
 - e. *The program regularly solicits and uses input from children, youth and families to tailor program offerings to their interests and needs.*
 - f. *The program is encouraged to build strong positive relationships with families to support individual participants' goals as well as program goals.*
- 7. Staff, children, and youth work together to plan and implement suitable activities which are consistent with the program's philosophy:
 - a. *Children/youth have an active role in activity planning and implementation.*

- b. *Staff ask participants to share their ideas for planning so that activities will reflect participants' interests.*
 - c. *The program's daily activities are in line with its mission and philosophy.*
 - d. *Staff keep their activity planning records on file.*
 - e. *Staff plan activities that will reflect the cultures of the families in the program and the broad diversity of human experience.*
- 8. The program provides opportunities for children and youth to know and build links to the community:
 - a. *Staff plan field trips such as walking tours, parks, museums, performances, and cultural events.*
 - b. *The program hosts visitors and special events from the community.*
 - c. *The program offers service-learning options, especially for older children and youth.*
- 9. A wide variety of activities are available that are:
 - a. *hands-on*
 - b. *minds-on*
 - c. *project-based*
 - d. *intentional*
 - e. *reflect the interests of children/youth*
 - f. *builds on previous activities (sequential)*

5. Safety

Safety is the foundation upon which all other quality elements are built. Children, youth, staff, and parents need to be physically safe within the program. The guidelines in this section stress that programs should have policies in place to address the health, safety, and nutrition needs of the children and youth who participate in them.

1. The safety and security of children and youth are protected:
 - a. *The program's policies should ensure that programs operate, at a minimum, within the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood Licensing Statutes and Regulations, even if not required to obtain a license to operate. Staff should be aware of licensing requirements regarding all health and safety procedures.*
 - b. *The program has established procedures to prevent accidents and manage emergencies.*
 - c. *All staff have current CPR, First Aid Training, and Bloodborne Pathogen Training.*
 - d. *During program hours, a telephone is always accessible for incoming and outgoing calls. Written emergency numbers for police, fire, ambulance, and poison control are posted near the phone.*
 - e. *First Aid Kits are available at all times, including field trips.*
 - f. *Children's emergency information is taken on all field trips.*
 - g. *Parents are contacted immediately in case of emergency.*
 - h. *Systems are in place to protect children and youth from harm when they move from one place to another or use the restroom.*
 - i. *Materials and equipment are safe for active play. Regularly planned and documented checks are made on equipment and program space.*
 - j. *A system is in place to manage effective arrival and dismissal procedures. For elementary school-age children, a system is in place to keep unauthorized people from taking children from the program.*
 - k. *The program has established policies to transport children and youth safely; it complies with all legal requirements for vehicles and drivers.*
 - l. *The program conducts all required fire/safety drills, so both staff and children know what to do in an emergency.*
 - m. *The program develops, implements, and shares with staff and families all approved safety plans and procedures regarding activities, emergency events and field trips.*
 - n. *The program maintains the current health and emergency contact information of each child.*

- o. *No smoking is allowed in the program.*
2. There are written policies and procedures to ensure the health and safety of children and youth contained in handbooks distributed to both staff and families. These policies contain the following:
 - a. *Administering medications (only trained personnel in licensed settings are authorized to administer medications).*
 - b. *Controlling communicable diseases.*
 - c. *Material Safety Data Sheet (handling toxic materials).*
 - d. *Responding to sick children and youth.*
 - e. *Dealing with children and youth with chronic health conditions, such as allergies.*
 - f. *Protecting children and youth from toxic materials.*
 - g. *Administering first aid.*
 - h. *Handling medical emergencies.*
 - i. *Responding to natural disasters or lockdowns.*
 - j. *Reporting suspected child abuse or neglect.*
 - k. *Dealing with difficult parents (ex., inebriate or aggressive behaviors) professionally.*
3. The program provides an environment that protects and enhances the health of children and youth:
 - a. *The indoor and outdoor facilities are clean.*
 - b. *There are no observable health hazards in the indoor or outdoor space.*
 - c. *There are adequate supplies and facilities for hand washing.*
 - d. *The heat, ventilation, noise level, and light in the indoor space are comfortable. *
4. The program staff try to protect and enhance the health of children and youth:
 - a. *Staff are responsive to the individual health needs of the children and youth.*
 - b. *Staff protect children and youth from communicable disease by separating children who become ill during the program.*
 - c. *Staff protect children and youth from potential hazards such as the following:*
 - *caustic or toxic art materials*
 - *cleaning agents*
 - *medications*
 - *hot liquids*
 - *over-exposure to heat or cold*
 - d. *Staff, children, and youth wash their hands frequently, especially after using the toilet or preparing food.*
5. Children and youth are carefully supervised to maintain safety:
 - a. *Staff note when children and youth arrive, when they leave, and with whom they leave.*

- b. *Staff know where the children and youth are and what they are doing at all times.*
 - c. *Staff supervise children and youth appropriately according to children's ages, abilities, and needs.*
 - d. *Staff closely supervise activities that are potentially harmful.*
- 6. The program serves food and drinks that meet the needs of children and youth:
 - a. *The program serves nutritious foods and drinks that are timed appropriately and are adequate for the ages and sizes of the children and youth.*
 - b. *Drinking water is readily available at all times.*
 - c. *The program recognizes and responds to nutritional preferences and values of the cultural communities being served.*
 - d. *Children and youth are encouraged to assist in planning and preparing meals and snacks so that they may learn healthy eating habits.*
 - e. *The program provides health and nutrition information to children and families through discussion, printed materials, and workshops.*
- 7. The program strives to encourage the health and well-being of staff so they may serve as role models:
 - a. *The program provides health insurance benefits for its staff.*
 - b. *The program encourages its staff to serve as role models for the children and youth regarding healthy behaviors.*
- 8. Program staff are aware of and record any special health needs of children/youth.
- 9. Program staff strive to be role models of healthy behaviors.

6. Staffing and Professional Development

The way a program is run creates the building blocks of quality. Appropriate administrative policies and managerial support are necessary for staff success.. This section addresses accounting, group size, teacher/child ratios, staff qualifications, supervision, and professional development.

1. The program is accountable for setting and meeting operational and programmatic quality goals:
 - a. *Prior to operation, the program should be aware of the CT General Statutes, which require licensure of child care programs, and its obligations under that law, C. G. S., Section 19a-80.*
 - b. *The program has an established mission and vision statement and operates by such.*
 - c. *The program has established written operating procedures/policies, which it reviews with staff upon hire, reviews regularly, and updates as necessary. Policies include but are not limited to the following:*
 - *Discipline Policy*
 - *Supervision of children and youth policy/guidelines, including supervision of the bathroom.*
 - *Arrival/dismissal policies/procedures.*
 - *Parent communication and involvement*
 - *Operating schedule and facility access.*
 - *Operating policies and forms: enrollment/admissions, parental access, withdrawal, food provision, vacation closures, and inclusion statement.*
 - *Personnel policies include information on: job descriptions, employee benefits, staff supervision and probationary period, sexual harassment, and non-discrimination policy.*
 - *Records are maintained for children, including the names of individuals authorized to pick up children and youth, emergency contact information, attendance, incident/accident reports, and medication administration.*
 - *Records are maintained on staff that include evidence of continuing education, staff background checks, and references.*
 - *Those policies are listed under Safety/Health and Nutrition # 22.*
2. Program policies and procedures are responsive to the needs of children, youth and families in the community.
 - a. *The program makes itself affordable to all families by using all possible community resources.*
 - b. *The program's hours of operation are based on families' needs.*

- c. *It is the program's policy to be inclusive of children and youth with special needs.*
- 3. Staff/child ratios and group sizes permit the staff to meet the needs of children and youth:
 - a. *Staff/child ratios are in accordance with the CT Office of Early Childhood Licensing Statutes and Regulations.*
 - *1 adult to 15 children.*
 - *The group size should not exceed 30 participants in one space (ie. cafeteria, gymnasium, outdoor play space, etc.).*
 - b. *There is a plan to provide adequate staff coverage in case of emergencies.*
 - c. *Substitute staff are used to maintain ratios when regular staff are absent.*
- 4. All staff are professionally qualified to work with children and youth:
 - a. *Staff meet the requirements for experience with children and youth in afterschool settings.*
 - b. *Staff meet the minimum CT Office of Early Childhood Licensing Statutes and Regulations for age and educational background requirements.*
 - c. *Enough qualified staff are in place to meet all levels of responsibility. Qualified staff are hired in all areas to:*
 - *Administer the program.*
 - *Oversee its daily operations.*
 - *Supervise children and youth.*
 - d. *The program employs staff with good communication skills and is qualified to communicate and connect with school personnel on all levels.*
 - e. *The program tries to hire staff who are professionally qualified to work with families, children, and youth.*
 - *Job descriptions include family, community, and school engagement as part of responsibilities.*
 - *The program employs staff who are responsible for engaging families, such as a parent liaison.*
 - f. *Programs licensed under the CT Office of Early Childhood are required to identify and have health, mental health, dental health, education, social service, and nutrition consultants available to assist staff.*
- 5. All staff members are given an orientation on the job before working with children and youth. This includes paid, volunteer, and substitute staff:
 - a. *A written job description that outlines responsibilities to children, youth, families, and the program is reviewed with each staff member.*
 - b. *Written personnel policies are reviewed with staff.*
 - c. *Written program policies and procedures, including emergency procedures and confidentiality policies, are reviewed with staff.*

- d. *New staff are given a comprehensive orientation to the program philosophy, routines, and practices.*
 - *They are personally introduced to the people with whom they will be working.*
 - *They are assigned a mentor to work with during the probationary period.*
 - *They receive a tour of the facilities, including meeting all staff, collaborating partners, and school personnel.*
 - *All routines, curriculum, discipline policies, and other program practices are reviewed before beginning work.*
6. *The training needs of the staff are assessed, and training is relevant to the responsibilities of each job. Staff receive training in the following areas:*
 - a. *Working with families, community members, and school personnel.*
 - b. *Ways to relate to children and youth in ways that promote their development.*
 - c. *Child assessment and program evaluation strategies.*
 - d. *Activity planning, activity center design, and space design that support program goals*
 - e. *Safety, health, and nutrition of children and youth.*
 - f. *Cultural diversity.*
 - g. *Staff receive training hours as required by the CT Office of Early Childhood.*
7. *The program leaders inspire and motivate staff to contribute, learn, and innovate:*
 - a. *Staff are regularly involved in setting and assessing staff performance goals.*
 - b. *The program nurtures promotion from within.*
 - c. *The program maintains a safe workplace climate that emphasizes respect and teamwork.*
 - d. *The program communicates information internally and externally about the results of its activities.*
 - e. *The program's improvement efforts are based on facts, including performance data and feedback from staff, youth, and other stakeholders.*
8. *Staff receive appropriate support to make their work experience positive:*
 - a. *The program has a plan to offer the best possible wages and working conditions to reduce staff turnover.*
 - *Compensation takes education and experience into account.*
 - *Staff are compensated for time spent in training and planning.*
 - *Wages are above the minimum hourly wage and are competitive with other human services jobs.*
 - b. *Full-time staff receive benefits including health insurance and paid leaves of absence. Staff are also given paid breaks and paid preparation time.*
 - c. *Staff are given ample time to discuss their own concerns regarding the program.*

- *Staff meet regularly to discuss program operations and the changing needs of children and youth.*
 - *Staff can communicate daily about issues that need immediate attention (e.g., family crises, behavior issues, changes in health or medical needs).*
 - *Staff discuss new strategies for rough transitions.*
 - *Staff plan program-wide activities and get-togethers.*
 - *Staff have a process for negotiating interpersonal differences.*
- d. *Staff receive continuous supervision and feedback. This includes written performance reviews on a timely basis.*
- *Staff participate in their own assessment.*
 - *The program keeps written, updated notes on staff performance and feedback.*
 - *The program keeps records on file of staff participation in continuing education and training (certificates, transcript, etc.).*
9. Programs have sound fiscal accounting policies and procedures:
- a. *Financial policies and the procedures to implement them provide evidence of sound fiscal accounting using standard accounting practices.*
- *Financial policies and procedures are consistent with the program's vision, philosophy, mission, goals, and expected child outcomes.*
 - *Operating budgets are prepared annually, and there is at least a quarterly reconciliation of expenses to the budget.*
 - *Budgets are reviewed and amended as needed.*
 - *Fiscal records are kept as evidence of sound financial management.*
 - *The program solicits external evaluations at a minimum of every 5 years.*
10. The program demonstrates a commitment to professional learning and personal growth through regular and ongoing opportunities for leadership and direct service staff.
- a. *The director is committed to his/her own professional development and attends and participates in training.*
- *The program provides staff with frequent, regular opportunities for professional development, and program administrators seek training in supervision and program management.*
 - *Professional development dollars include attendance at one national and one statewide afterschool conference/convention.*
 - *The director is a participant in the professional development experience alongside the staff and should not be the sole trainer for the program.*
- b. *Program leadership treats staff as professionals and provides opportunities for advancement and growth.*

- *Program staff are encouraged to talk openly about career development and aspirations.*
 - *Program leadership provides information for staff to take part in professional development opportunities.*
 - *The program budget includes dedicated funding for staff development.*
 - c. *The program assesses staff's professional development needs and provides appropriate support, such as training, coaching, mentoring, and peer learning.*
 - d. *Staff have access to professional development resources (CTNCY membership, National Afterschool Association membership, opportunities to visit other sites).*
 - e. *The program provides salaries that support consistency and continuity of staffing.*
11. The program has adequate safeguards in place to ensure the health and safety of the children and youth served
- a. *The program has a plan to provide adequate staff coverage in an emergency.*
 - *Natural disaster plan (Tornado, Hurricane, Earthquake)*
 - *Fire*
 - *Lockdown Procedure*
 - b. *All staff, including volunteers, are screened for prior criminal records, child protective service findings, and other improper conduct.*
 - *State and Federal Background Checks*
 - *Health Checks*
 - c. *Program staff uphold basic principles of trust, confidence, honesty, integrity, and respect in professional and business relationships and support using the NAA Professional Code of Ethics.*

7. Administration and Organization

Common sense tells us that programs that can create long-term plans are more likely to achieve their goals than those that are uncertain about how they will pay their staff next month. A high level of stability and clarity of purpose also builds staff morale, reduces turnover and builds community support. Incorporating social and emotional learning efforts both contribute to and depend upon a climate where all students and adults feel respected, supported, and engaged. Ongoing evaluation promotes accountability and improves program outcomes.

1. Programs have a clearly stated purpose that is consistent with their goals and activities and is based on the needs of the community and the youth they serve:
 - a. *The program has a written mission statement that accurately reflects its purpose as it relates to the needs of target youth and the community.*
 - b. *Staff, children, youth, families, and other stakeholders can easily articulate the purpose of the program.*
 - c. *All aspects of the program form a coherent strategy for supporting and accomplishing the mission.*
 - d. *The allocation of the budget and other resources supports the mission.*
 - e. *The person directly responsible for program implementation (administrator, site manager, program manager or supervising teacher) is included in this process.*
 - f. *Staff, youth, and other appropriate stakeholders revisit the mission every three to five years to ensure its continued relevance.*
 - g. *The program maintains current and accurate records, including, for example, schedules, enrollment registration documents, and personnel files.*
2. Programs employ a consistent strategy for managing resources effectively and achieving organizational longevity:
 - a. *The program has both long and short-term funding plans to support the mission and goals of the program.*
 - b. *The program seeks to have multiple sources of financial and in-kind support.*
 - c. *The program has sufficient resources, including staff, equipment, and supplies to meet its goals and objectives.*
 - d. *The program takes advantage of new opportunities and develops effective responses to potential challenges.*
 - e. *The program can adapt to meet the shifting needs of the community while remaining true to its mission.*

- f. *The program has an effective marketing strategy that publicizes the program and its achievements.*
 - g. *The program has sound fiscal accounting policies and procedures.*
- 3. Programs foster partnerships that strengthen connections to the program, community, and families.
 - a. *The program has policies, procedures, and schedules that are responsive to the needs of children/youth and families in the community.*
 - b. *The program establishes strong links to the school day that includes, for example, activity planning, sharing space and resources, and emergency procedures.*
 - c. *Collaborative partners' roles and expectations are clearly defined through Memoranda of Understanding or other documents, and they maintain regular and ongoing communication.*
 - d. *The program forges relationships with advocates for program quality and availability, such as parents, community leaders, businesses, and elected officials.*
- 4. Programs provide expectations for families and staff through handbooks and other written/published materials.
 - a. *The program has a handbook for families that includes policies and procedures for scheduling, fees, behavior, emergencies, field trips, linkages to the school day, and inclusion of special needs children/youth.*
 - b. *The program has a comprehensive staff handbook that includes, for example, clear expectations, behavior management protocol, and social media use policy.*
- 5. Programs have an established leadership development and succession plan
 - a. *The program has a leadership development plan to mentor and promote internal staff into leadership roles.*
 - b. *A succession plan is in place for key leadership roles to ensure continuity during transitions.*
- 6. The program engages staff, families, and youth to conduct continuous quality improvement efforts.
 - a. *The program uses data (attendance, youth outcomes, staff performance) to make decisions and guide improvement efforts.*
 - b. *Quality improvement processes are cyclical and involve staff, youth, and families in identifying areas of strength and needed growth.*
- 7. Staff Evaluation and Professional Growth
 - a. *Staff receive regular performance evaluations linked to clearly defined competencies and goals.*
 - b. *The program supports staff with ongoing professional development aligned with the program's mission and staff needs.*

8. Risk Management and Compliance
 - a. *The program conducts routine risk assessments to ensure child safety and organizational compliance.*
 - b. *Up-to-date documentation exists for liability insurance, licensing, and legal requirements.*
9. Internal Communication and Decision-Making Structures
 - a. *There are defined channels and schedules for staff communication, including regular team meetings and feedback loops.*
 - b. *The program has a clear decision-making structure, including input from frontline staff and youth when appropriate.*
10. Equity and Inclusion in Organizational Policies
 - a. *Policies and practices reflect a commitment to equity, diversity, and cultural responsiveness.*
 - b. *The program collects and reviews demographic data to ensure it meets all community members' needs.*
11. Technology and Data Management
 - a. *Technology is used effectively for communication, data tracking, learning, and administrative efficiency.*
 - b. *Data privacy and cybersecurity protocols are in place and reviewed regularly.*
12. Governance and Advisory Oversight
 - a. *An advisory board or governing body provides strategic oversight, supports fundraising, and evaluates progress toward goals.*
 - b. *Stakeholders such as families, youth, educators, and community members are represented in governance structures.*
13. Program Scalability and Replicability
 - a. *The program has documented practices and procedures that allow for successful expansion or replication in other communities.*
 - b. *Lessons learned and best practices are shared across sites (if applicable) and with the broader field.*

8. Sustainability and Evaluation

Making intentional investments in the sustainability of the program and in tandem, setting up a continuous improvement plan helps maintain programming over time and provides consistency to the children and community. In order to change, program leaders and staff need to objectively look at how the program runs. What is working, not working, could be tweaked, etc. Creating the infrastructure for low stakes, continuous quality improvement allows programs to proactively identify needs and locate funding that can support the effort. This includes goal setting, incorporating outside stakeholder voices, and collects data to help document progress and measure performance outcomes. This in turn helps develop a short and long term plan for organizational and program sustainability and growth.

1. Programs continuously examine themselves and seek ways to improve what they do:
 - a. *The program's improvement efforts are based on facts, including performance data and feedback from staff, youth, and other stakeholders.*
 - b. *At least annually, administrators, families, staff, and other routinely participating adults are involved in an internal program evaluation that measures progress toward the program's goals and objectives. This may include general meetings and/or surveys.*
 - c. *The program shares stakeholder feedback, performance data, and information about resulting organizational decisions through its quality improvement plan.*
2. Quality programs hold themselves accountable for setting and meeting operational and programmatic goals:
 - a. *The program establishes strategic organizational goals and creates action plans for achieving its goals.*
 - b. *The program engages members of related advisory or governing boards, staff, youth, and other appropriate stakeholders in goal setting, planning, and evaluation.*
 - c. *The program sets goals and measurable objectives for organizational and program performance.*
 - d. *The program compares its organizational and programmatic performance to relevant comparative data (i.e., available benchmarks).*
 - e. *The program solicits external evaluation when feasible.*
3. Quality programs develop systems to collect, store, analyze, and report complete and accurate data on operational and program performance, participant demographics, services, progress, and outcomes:
 - a. *The program has a user-friendly, confidential, and effective system for collecting and sharing data on individual youth and program activities.*

- b. *The program collects data that is relevant to documenting progress and measuring performance outcomes.*
 - c. *The program develops and/or plans for program evaluation that includes gathering both qualitative and quantitative data.*
 - d. *A quality program involves key stakeholders, including staff, board of directors, school administration and personnel, and families and children/youth in long-term planning, fiscal management, and decision-making.*
 - *advisory board*
 - *student council*
 - *quality improvement team*
 - e. *The program seeks active partnerships with higher education, businesses, arts and cultural institutions, and community organizations that can help to support the program's mission.*
 - *Program evaluation*
 - *Visiting artists/residences*
 - *Donations and contributions*
 - f. *The program forges relationships with advocates for program quality and availability with community leaders, businesses, other afterschool providers, and elected officials.*
 - g. *The program has an effective marketing strategy that publicizes the program and its achievement within the school and broader community.*
- 4. *The program has a demonstrated commitment to maintaining quality improvement cycles and sustaining a high-quality program.*
 - a. *The program establishes a regular and systematic method for assessment of all program aspects. (activities, staffing, student engagement) and uses these findings for continuous program improvement.*
 - *QSAT Self-Assessment*
 - *Quality improvement team observations*
 - b. *Fosters understanding and appreciation for established program quality standards, evaluation, and program improvement strategies among staff.*
 - *Regularly revisits Quality Standards and Guidelines with staff during staff meetings across the year (8 elements, 2 tools = 10 months)*
 - *Prioritizes quality improvement efforts in the program budget*
- 5. *The program has a plan for environmental and operational sustainability*
 - a. *The program incorporates environmentally sustainable practices (e.g., recycling, energy-efficient materials, and low-waste events).*
 - b. *Operational sustainability is reviewed annually to minimize waste and optimize use of time, space, and materials.*

6. The program regularly practices crisis management and emergency preparedness.
 - a. *The program has up-to-date emergency and crisis response plans (natural disasters, pandemics, financial crises).*
 - b. *Staff are regularly trained on these procedures, and plans are reviewed and revised annually.*
7. The program has a commitment to community investment and ownership
 - a. *The community is actively involved in program planning, implementation, and evaluation, fostering shared ownership and sustainability.*
 - b. *Program successes are celebrated publicly to build broad-based community support and investment.*
8. The program incorporates sustainability benchmarks and monitoring into planning.
 - a. *The program sets and monitors sustainability benchmarks (e.g., donor retention rate, annual fundraising targets, in-kind support growth).*
 - b. *Progress toward sustainability goals is reviewed annually and informs strategic decision-making.*

Field Resources

[Connecticut After School Quality Self-Assessment Tool \(CT-QSAT\)](#) - A quality program is one that is reflective and willing to improve, change, and grow. It believes in successful outcomes for its participants. It understands that improving program quality is an ongoing process. Self-assessment provides an important opportunity for programs to identify strengths and weaknesses free from the pressures of external monitoring and evaluation

[National AfterSchool Association Job Quality Standards](#) - The National AfterSchool Association's OST Job Quality Standards provide a standard structure for defining and discussing "good jobs." The Standards ground the conversation in the available empirical evidence demonstrating how job quality relates to worker outcomes and outline effective practices that support workforce development — including recruitment and retention — and workforce stability by promoting high-quality, equitable jobs.

[National AfterSchool Association Core Knowledge and Competencies](#) - The Core Knowledge, Skills, and Competencies for Out-of-School Time Professionals (CKSCs) outline what professionals who work with and for youth need to know, show, and grow to positively impact young people and the field.

[Wallace Foundation Out-of-School Time Cost Calculator](#) - This online calculator works like a student loan or mortgage calculator. It lets you determine the costs of various options for high-quality afterschool programs and the summer portions of year-round programs. The calculator's cost estimates, which come from the most detailed study to date on the costs of high-quality programs, were updated in 2021 to reflect both the change in the general cost of living nationally and changes in the relative cost of living across cities.