

## **Afterschool Programs....Keep Kids Safe, Inspire Learning and Help Working Families**

### **What We Deserve: A Statement of Quality in Afterschool**

Quality out-of-school time programs inspire and promote learning and positive youth development by providing opportunities for autonomy and leadership; caring relationships; connections to families, communities and schools; safe environments; and engaging activities.

Our *Statement of Quality in Afterschool* defines the core elements that should guide afterschool programming, regardless of program goals or ages served. This statement provides a framework to define quality for Pennsylvania's afterschool programs and all other individuals and organizations that are interested in the quality of these programs, including public and private funders, parents, and youth.

The *Statement of Quality in Afterschool* has four core elements of youth program quality, with key principles under each quality element. These include:

#### **STRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT**

- Well-trained, consistent staff and volunteers that represent the community being served
- Written policies and procedures that are consistently used and updated and supported by management
- Sustainable funding and sound fiscal management
- Continuous improvement methods including: evaluation, outcomes measurement, participant/family input, strategic planning, and professional development

#### **POSITIVE CONNECTIONS**

- Positive relationships between and among youth and staff
- Strong partnerships with families, schools, businesses and other community stakeholders
- Opportunities for youth to contribute to the well-being of the community

#### **SAFETY AND HEALTH**

- Safe and accessible environment
- Clean & well maintained facilities
- Programming and environments which promotes fitness, good nutrition, and healthy choices

#### **ACTIVITIES**

- Activities which are intentionally designed, are age-appropriate, develop skills, promote learning, and foster positive youth development
- Activities which contain varied content, learning strategies and combine different academic, recreational, and cultural elements
- Activities which are youth-centered, are responsive to youth interests, and actively involve youth in program development, planning, and implementation
- Activities which promote understanding and respect for youth's and others' cultures

To help programs reflect on their levels of quality and provide specific indicators within each of the *Statement of Quality* elements, PSAYDN developed the *Quality Self-Assessment Rating Tool* and *Discussion Guide*. These tools may be used separately or together, to identify levels of quality within each of the core elements and to foster discussion among program staff regarding the program's current status, potential, and priorities for quality improvement.

In developing these resources, PSAYDN pulled from existing state and national quality standards and self-assessment tools including those used in California, New York, and Missouri, as well as the PA Keys and 21<sup>st</sup> Century quality standards, the School Age Childcare Environmental Rating Scale, and Highscope's Youth Program Quality Assessment.

### Getting the Most Out of Your Self-Assessment Process

Afterschool staff and leaders work to engage youth and sustain high quality program efforts under challenging conditions, with limited staff time and resources. Self-assessment and reflection can help programs focus their planning, action, and support on key elements of youth program quality. Engaging multiple program staff levels, participants, and/or stakeholders in this process brings a wider range of perspectives and contributions to a continuous quality improvement process.

The PSAYDN Quality Self-Assessment tools provide guiding questions and concrete examples of quality practices within each of the core youth program quality elements. Programs can use the tools in the way that makes sense for them—choosing to focus on certain quality elements or to review all four areas, as well as determining whether they want to identify numerical ratings and/or discuss quality practices and improvement strategies more generally.

While many programs do informal check-ins with staff and youth and make adjustments as needed, a more formal process will help sustain changes. Retreats, bi-annual or specially-scheduled planning sessions can be used for reflection around quality and improvement planning. Programs may want to form an internal assessment or continuous quality improvement team to lead the assessment and define goals and action steps for follow up. Having 1-3 members on such a team will require less time, but offers a limited perspective. An expanded, more diverse team ultimately increases the chances for sustainable improvements. Programs should define the participants, roles, and timelines for continuous quality improvement from the beginning. An outside facilitator can provide a neutral perspective to lead key discussions and/or keep work moving forward. For any surveys, assessment, or improvement planning discussions, programs should let participants know that their input is for the program's own improvement, with all opinions and participation remaining confidential if necessary.

### Administering the PSAYDN Quality Self-Assessment Rating Tool

Program managers or staff can complete the self-assessment ratings individually or through group conversation using the Discussion Guide. Ultimately, the assessment process should involve a range of perspectives, although programs may seek in-depth feedback only in certain areas such as Positive Connections or Activities.

To complete the quality ratings, managers and/or staff should read each item on the Self-Assessment Tool carefully, including the Quality Element, Supporting Evidence Questions and Rating Level Indicators. The Supporting Evidence Questions on this tool are meant to inform the numerical ratings; whoever is completing the assessment can write as much or as little in this section as they would like.

In order to complete the numerical ratings on the Self-Assessment Tool, all ratings have to be based as exactly as possible on the Rating Indicator Level descriptions provided. Ratings are based on the current situation, not on future plans and should be assigned in the following way:

- Read the descriptions beginning with those under 1.
- A rating of 1 is the maximum description given if any part of that description applies.
- A rating of 2 is given if no part of 1 and half or more of 3 apply.
- A rating of 3 or 5 is given only if all parts of the description are met. Please note that all descriptions in 3 must be met before any higher rating is given for an item.
- A midpoint rating of 4 is given when all of the items in 3 and half or more of the items in 5 apply.

### Using the Discussion Guide

Each program's assessment team can decide on which quality elements and tools to focus based on their available time and areas where reflection and discussion with multiple staff levels or stakeholders will be most valuable. The Discussion Guide can be used before or after the Rating tool or as a stand-alone process. The Discussion Guide is useful for more in-depth reflection and improvement planning related to targeted quality elements. When structuring discussion around targeted quality areas, using small groups will allow all voices to be heard. Programs may want to post the targeted questions on flipchart paper and then record the input, decisions, and next steps on separate documents.