

Illinois Statewide Afterschool Quality Standards



OUT OF SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMS are academic, social and emotional, and physical health learning opportunities that take place before school, after school, and during summer breaks. Afterschool programs provide a variety of enrichment activities, such as homework help, hands-on science and engineering activities, and opportunities to participate in performance and fine art. The organizations that sponsor these activities range from schools to faith-based organizations, community organizations, or city or county sponsored groups.

ACT Now and the Quality Standards

ACT Now is a statewide coalition that works to ensure that young people in Illinois have access to quality, affordable afterschool and youth development programs.

ACT Now has undertaken an initiative to develop Quality Standards in order to improve afterschool programming around the state. Our Quality Standards capture practices that have been demonstrated, through research, to lead to quality programs and positive outcomes for children.

The Quality Standards provide afterschool programs with a common language for describing quality, as well as a “high bar” for individual programs to hold themselves accountable. The Standards are not intended to dictate policy and practices, but instead are intended to suggest and encourage a strong baseline of quality.



**VALUE TO STUDENTS
BEYOND THE TRADITIONAL
SCHOOL DAY**

Students who participate in afterschool programs have better school attendance, grades, standardized test scores, and behavior in school than those who do not go to afterschool programs.

The Core Areas

The Standards are broken into seven overarching categories or Core Areas that represent the key areas of quality for programs.

THE SEVEN CORE AREAS ARE:

- 1 *Indoor and Outdoor Environments*
- 2 *Safety, Health, and Nutrition*
- 3 *Administration*
- 4 *Professional Development and Qualifications*
- 5 *Family and Community Partnerships*
- 6 *Youth Development, Programming, and Activities*
- 7 *Partnerships with Schools*

Each Core Area is framed with a guiding principle that introduces the category. The Core Areas are then each broken into Program Standards and Quality Indicators which provide specific actions or initiatives programs can take to meet that Quality Standard. While most Standards will apply to all programs, some are specific to particular program settings and service delivery models and may not be as generally applicable.

Who Can Use the Standards?

The Standards were written for use by various groups. The following is a list of ways different stakeholders can use the Standards:

Afterschool Providers

Develop a quality improvement plan, determine areas of strengths and weaknesses, and decide areas of professional development to pursue for staff

Parents and Families

Understand the key elements of a high-quality program and be able to advocate for quality programs for their children and within their own communities

Funders and Policymakers

Link funding to research-based practices that lead to measurable outcomes and evaluate and improve programs

K-12 Educators

Understand the key elements of high-quality programs, provide a common language for partnership, and provide a guide to reinforce and advance key priorities

Higher Education

Assist in designing content for courses related to youth development providers and in choosing strategic partners for research initiatives

For More Information

To learn more about the Quality Standards and to see the full electronic text of the **Illinois Statewide Afterschool Quality Standards and ACT Now's Resource Guide**, go to www.actnowillinois.org.

For more information about ACT Now or the Quality Standards, contact Susan Stanton, *Network Lead* for the ACT Now Coalition, at sstanton@voices4kids.org or 312.516.5564.