

Out-of-School Time Program Standards

A Literature Review

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Learning in Communities / Providence

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TO: Learning in Communities / Providence Leaders
FROM: RI KIDS COUNT and Community Matters
DATE: September 2003
RE: Out-of School Time Program Standards Literature Review

This paper details key lessons learned in other cities, and most promising practices in the use of out-of-school time (OST) program standards. It is a companion to the attached PowerPoint slide deck.

Why develop local program standards for out-of-school time?

Standards are the hallmark of professional fields, providing justification for recognition and investment. The out-of-school time field, however, is extraordinarily complex. A diversity of organizations serves a variety of populations and focuses on an array of different outcomes. As a result, it is difficult to identify the key attributes that promote quality out-of-school time programming in multiple settings.

In an age where youth, families, schools, funders, and policy makers continue to demand more of OST programs, it becomes increasingly important for the OST field to define itself. It is better for OST agencies to set their own standards rather than to have standards dictated to them by outside forces.¹

Standards promote consistency, enhance quality, and increase recognition. Standards serve as a tool to:²

- **Establish a common language** – Programs, providers, and stakeholders use a wide range of words and phrases to talk about the purpose, goals, and programming in OST. Consequently, people must constantly “translate” their ideas into a terminology that is readily understood and accepted by other stakeholders. By bringing different stakeholders to the table to discuss what happens in OST programs, standards can help bridge the different languages used by practitioners (in both “school-age child care” and “youth development” programs), families, schools, funders, policy makers, and other stakeholders.
- **Develop a shared understanding of quality** – By discussing and agreeing upon core elements that constitute quality programming, providers and stakeholders develop shared expectations for OST. Furthermore, standards promote a common understanding of what it takes to deliver on expected outcomes and meet the diverse needs of children, youth, and families.
- **Guide strategic planning and continuous improvement** – Programs can use standards to identify their strengths and weaknesses and develop ongoing goals and strategies for improvement. By developing a deeper understanding of what they need to improve, programs can seek appropriate supports for their given circumstances. For some programs, standards can also serve as a tool to work towards accreditation.
- **Demonstrate program effectiveness and ensure accountability** – Standards serve as a tool to assess programs and evaluate results. Clear demonstration of program effectiveness can lead to the engagement of community collaborators, retention and expansion of funding, staff recruitment, increased public recognition, and greater program participation. In addition, standards can serve as a mechanism to hold the entire system accountable. By indicating what it

¹ Tolman, Pittman, Yohalem, Thomases & Trammel. *Moving an Out-of-School Agenda, Task Brief #3: Quality Standards, Assessments and Supports*. Takoma Park, MD: The Forum for Youth Investment, 2002.

² Ideas stem from Hall, Georgia. *After School Issues: Citywide After-School Initiatives Share Their Experiences Developing and Implementing Standards*. Wellesley, MA: National Institute on Out-of-School Time, March 2002; Tolman et al., 2002.

takes to achieve program quality, standards 1) hold programs accountable to produce desired results and 2) challenge funders and policy makers to invest in necessary, proven approaches.

- **Streamline workforce development efforts** – Standards can serve as the foundation for staff training and professional development. Instead of perpetuating a system of fragmented trainings that are not currently linked, standards can help to ensure that trainings and technical assistance are more consistent and build upon one another. Standards also serve as the basis for staffing plans and goals.
- **Provide a context for fundraising and public policy** – Standards provide a mechanism to discuss OST programming and quality with funders and policy makers. Advocates, donors, and elected officials want to ensure that significant public and private investment is not compromised by programs that fail to provide meaningful services for children, youth, and families. To this end, standards serve as a tool to promote consistency and quality across a wide variety of programs. Standards support discussions with funders and policy makers in a number of ways:
 - By providing a clear context, standards can align conflicting assessment measures currently used by many funders and policies. In the absence of established standards, programs may feel the need to “chase the funding” and adjust their programming and outcomes based on the most recent funding fads. Established standards, however, clearly identify the outcomes for which OST programs are accountable, making programs more resistant to constantly changing requirements posed by funding streams and “hot issues” of the moment.
 - Quality standards can help to document the true cost of quality.
 - In some cases, standards can guide allocation of funds.³
 - Standards can stabilize funding. For funding and policies that allocate dollars based on program quality, improvement initiatives, and/or adherence to program standards, standards can serve as a tool to secure sustainable funding.
- **Increase public recognition of OST** – Program standards mark OST as a professional field and help emphasize the important role OST plays in the lives of children, youth, and families.

What is the research basis for OST standards?

OST programs must meet the diverse needs of children, youth, and families. A large body of research indicates that participation in high-quality programs yields more positive outcomes for children, youth, and families. Although there is no shared agreement on the specific practices and elements that enhance the quality of OST programming, research demonstrates that programs can promote quality through:⁴

- Consistent, trained, and caring staff
- Developmentally- and culturally-appropriate programming designed around youth’s interests and needs
- Attention to safety, healthy, and nutrition
- Safe, accessible facilities
- Sufficient equipment and materials

³ See addendum for a description of the policy match for funding in Baltimore.

⁴ Elements of quality are derived from multiple sources including Children Now. *After School Care for Children: Challenges for California*. Oakland, CA: Author, April 2001; Eccles & Appleton Gootman (eds.). *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2002; National School-Age Care Alliance. *Standards for Quality School-Age Care*. Boston, MA: Author, 1998; Peter, Nancy. *Outcomes and Research in Out-of-School Time Program Design*. Philadelphia: Best Practices Institute, 2002.

- Strong management and administration
- Family engagement
- Effective partnerships with community-based organizations, cultural institutions, public agencies, and others
- School alignment
- Ongoing evaluation and improvement

There are several existing models of standards at both the national and local levels. In the national landscape, there are three widely used sets of standards. Practitioners that identify as out-of-school time child care providers look to the National School-Age Care Alliance's *Standards for Quality School-Age Care*. First published in 1995, the NSACA standards are designed to describe the effective practices in out-of-school time and to institute guidelines for programs and public policy. The National Association of Elementary School Principals created *After-School Programs and the K-8 Principal: Standards for Quality School-Age Child Care*. The National Youth Employment Coalition established standards for workforce development programs.

When programs strive to implement these national standards at a local level, many assert that individual sets of standards are limited in scope because they are designed with only a certain age group (e.g. young children vs. adolescents) or setting (e.g., schools) in mind. Others state that national standards are too broad and difficult to implement at the program level, especially because they were developed without input and buy-in from the front-line staff.

Based upon a desire to establish a local, shared definition of OST program quality, many cities have developed their own standards. Such cities include Baltimore, Chicago, Columbus, Denver, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Philadelphia, and St. Louis.

What are the key lessons learned?

Programs have difficulty attaining elements of quality alone. – Programs are constrained by insufficient human, physical, and financial resources; limited access to information, best practices, and strategies; and lack of common expectations and accountability systems. Systems can promote quality programs through a variety of program improvement strategies; developing a shared set of OST standards is a critical step in that process.

Professional standards can help promote positive youth outcomes. – The identification of professional standards – including both program standards and practitioner core competencies – can raise awareness among providers, families, funders, and other stakeholders about which strategies promote positive outcomes for children and youth. Kansas City has an interesting model which demonstrates the links between program standards, provider competencies, and youth outcomes.⁵ The model consists of three concentric circles, with youth in the center, practitioners in the next circle, and programs in the outermost circle. The model poses the following questions:

- What outcomes do we want for children and youth?
- What knowledge and skills must staff possess in order to help youth attain these outcomes?
- What characteristics must programs possess to equip staff and youth with the necessary tools and resources to attain these outcomes?

⁵ Based on discussions with Kansas City representatives at the Achieve Boston Summit on Citywide Professional Development Systems in July, 2003.

Existing standards that are not comprehensive or relevant for all youth-serving organizations may have limited effectiveness. – Programs currently work with a wide variety of standards. As mentioned above, national standards are limited in scope and often difficult for programs to implement. Local affiliates of the YMCA, Boys & Girls Clubs, and similar agencies work within the national standards of their parent organizations. Many programs do not use standards at all.

When standards seem irrelevant, programs may not strive to attain them. Standards can seem irrelevant when providers: 1) do not understand how standards strengthen children's outcomes, 2) are not part of a larger organization that uses the standards, or 3) do not relate to the language used in existing standards.

Cities must be strategic in how they approach OST standards. – Establishing local standards can increase buy-in and compliance, thus enhancing the quality of OST programming. However, it is critical to consider timing when developing professional standards for programs or staff.⁶ Communities may not be ready for this work until strong relationships and trust exist AND stakeholders are meaningfully and substantially involved. Some city leaders warn against beginning the standards development process too early, noting that standards can become a divisive issue and damage efforts to build community and collaboration. Others thought it was helpful to identify standards early on in order to establish a common language, promote quality, and create an accountable system. Participants agreed that, in order to be productive and effective, the process to develop local standards should not begin until 1) strong relationships exist among collaborators and 2) the voices of children, youth, families, and practitioners are represented and heard. Funders need to be involved in this process so that they share a common language, understand the principles underlying quality, and are prepared and committed to fund quality. Cities need to also recognize that developing standards takes time.⁷ Most cities that have created local standards dedicated at least one year to the process.

Standards should provide a clear framework without dictating specific program design or curriculum. – Standards can identify core elements of quality and still be relevant for a wide variety of programs and settings. Current thinking recommends an approach that defines results but allows individual programs to determine the process and structure for delivering services.⁸ By providing a clear framework that is not overly cumbersome or specific, standards can promote consistency and quality programming without limiting providers in practice.

An analysis of existing standards indicates that most documents address a core set of central issues including:⁹

- **Program management and administration** – program organization, policies, and planning, fundraising for sustainability, fiscal management, supervision
- **Program activity** – flexible daily schedule that offers security, independence, variety, and stimulation to meet the needs of all children and youth; some standards include separate programming areas whereas others focus on programming and activities as a whole
- **Human relationships** – the nature of interactions among youth, families, staff, and other stakeholders; staff:child ratios
- **Environment** – characteristics of indoor and outdoor environments and facilities; sufficient equipment and materials to provide an engaging program and help children learn new skills

⁶ Ideas based upon discussions at the Achieve Boston Summit with leaders from across the country who have established or managed workforce development systems.

⁷ Hall, 2002.

⁸ Schorr, 1997 as cited in Miller, Beth. *Critical Hours: Afterschool Programs and Educational Success*. MA: Nellie Mae Education Foundation, 2003.

⁹ Based upon a review of existing national and local standards; Children Now. *After School Care for Children: Challenges for California*. Oakland, CA: Author, April 2001; Tolman et al., 2002.

- **Safety, health, and nutrition** – sanitary conditions, removal of safety hazards in program space, food and programming that meets youth’s nutritional needs

Other standards are included inconsistently:

- **Youth engagement and leadership** – This standard is often neglected despite evidence that programs with effective youth involvement and youth leadership in program planning and implementation often achieve better outcomes for their participants.¹⁰
- **Family involvement** – encourage family participation and engagement
- **Community engagement** – partnerships with community-based organizations, schools, cultural institutions, public agencies, and others
- **Evaluation** – program performance criteria, assessment of program progress and effectiveness
- **Child and youth development** – activities and processes to promote holistic child and youth development (cognitive, social, emotional, creative, physical, etc.)

Programs move through developmental stages and require different supports in different phases.¹¹

– Program improvement is a developmental process. Programs are more successful when they 1) undertake program improvement initiatives that are appropriate for their developmental stage and 2) receive training, resources, and technical assistance that match their level of readiness.

A framework by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time suggests that there are four stages of program development, each of which requires a different set of resources and supports.

	Program Characteristics	Approach to Program Improvement
Stage 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Program struggles with structural issues (i.e., a new program or program in crisis) ▪ Lack of systems ▪ Staff turnover ▪ No sustainable funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop systems to stabilize program (e.g., by reducing turnover or stabilizing finances) ▪ Staff development (e.g., staff meetings & trainings) ▪ Clarify purpose ▪ Coaching / technical assistance ▪ Visit good programs
Stage 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some staff stable and want to improve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continued staff development ▪ Targeted program improvement (e.g., adapt space, engage families, increase variety of programming & materials) ▪ Introduction to NSACA standards (or other local standards)
Stage 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stable staff ▪ Stable program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Program self-assessment ▪ Staff development linked to program improvement action plan ▪ Structural changes (e.g., increase staff salaries, create more full-time positions, incorporate enrichment curriculum)
Stage 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stable staff ▪ Shared leadership ▪ Program has vision & best practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Model program ▪ Mentor other staff ▪ Play an advocacy / leadership role ▪ Ready for accreditation

Program improvement takes time. – In order to improve program quality, programs must dedicate time and resources to hiring and training staff, renovating facilities, purchasing materials, and making other

¹⁰ Eccles & Appleton Gootman (eds.), 2002; McLaughlin, Milbrey. *Community Counts: How Youth Organizations Matter for Youth Development*. Public Education Network, 1998.

¹¹ National Institute on Out-of-School Time. *Developmental Stages of OST Programs*. Wellesley, MA: Author, 1998; National Institute on Out-of-School Time. *Supporting Program Improvement Findings from the NIAS Pilot and June 1999 Reflections*. Wellesley, MA: Author, 1999.

program improvements.¹² Hall suggests that quick program improvements designed to satisfy immediate funding requirements are not sustainable. Instead, gradual, supportive implementation strategies keep programs focused on long-term, sustainable improvement.¹³

Accountability requires further investment.¹⁴ – As noted above, sustainable change and program improvement requires time and resources. In order to hold programs accountable, funders and systems need to invest in capacity-building, assessment, and evaluation. Otherwise, agencies are measured against expectations that they cannot meet.

Provision of resources and support increases program compliance with standards. – Key elements support programs in attaining standards, including:¹⁵

- Funding for program improvements – funding to invest in necessary staff, materials, facilities improvements, partnerships, etc.
- On-site evaluation and technical assistance – assessment to help programs identify strengths and areas for improvement, individualized support to help programs make improvements
- Capacity-building assistance – networking groups, training
- Information sharing on strategies and best practices – newsletters, websites and/or listservs
- Systemic infrastructure – supports to programs, systems to monitor compliance

In addition, cities note that making standards a fluid document increases programs’ desire to comply. By gaining ongoing input from end users and updating the standards document accordingly, cities can assure that standards are relevant and realistic for OST programs.

Linking funding to standards has pros and cons. – When standards become criteria for funding, they take on new significance.¹⁶ In situations where funders are realistic about expectations, understand what time and resources are required, and invest in the necessary inputs, standards can support program improvement. However, without such involvement and buy-in from the public and private funders, linking standards to funding can exacerbate current inequities as programs with minimal resources get penalized despite their capacity to improve (e.g., programs in poorer communities receive less investment while programs in wealthier communities qualify for dollars).¹⁷

What are the promising practices and innovative strategies?

Communities employ many promising strategies to create local standards.¹⁸ – Cities have used a wide variety of strategies to develop local standards. The following list includes common strategies and suggestions:

- Start by visioning and defining quality. Ask, “What do people want? What would it look like?”
- Design standards that address two questions: “What is our vision for the city? What are the components of a quality program?”
- Use existing national and city standards as the foundation for local adaptation.
- Seek community input.

¹² Thomas Hatch (2001) as referenced in Hall, 2002.

¹³ Hall, 2002.

¹⁴ Thomas Hatch (2001) as referenced in Hall, 2002; Tolman et al., 2002.

¹⁵ Hall, 2002; Discussions with city leaders at Achieve Boston Summit in July 2003.

¹⁶ Tolman et al., 2002.

¹⁷ Discussions with city leaders at Achieve Boston Summit in July 2003.

¹⁸ Hall, 2002; The After-School Institute. *Quality Standards for Baltimore’s Afterschool Opportunities*. Baltimore: Author, 2003; Discussions with city leaders at Achieve Boston Summit in July 2003.

- Establish an inclusive citywide committee to oversee the standard development process.
- Host community forums for public feedback.
- Conduct focus groups/interviews with youth, families, and providers.
- Identify a key leader to champion the cause.
- Identify standard areas and associated detailed indicators.
- Specify levels of standards so that programs can assess their mastery of each standard. For example:
 - St. Louis uses two levels: 1) minimum basic standards – standards every program should have in place and 2) quality indicators – program activities, staff interactions, operating procedures, and administrative structures needed to deliver effective, high-quality programs.
 - Philadelphia uses three levels: Minimum/Level 1 should be in place at the start of a program; First Year/Level 2 should be fully implemented by the end of the 1st year of operation; Continuous Improvement/Level 3 are tailored to particular characteristics of the program and serve as longer term quality goals.
- Regularly re-assess and revise standards based on community input and additional research and information. For example, Baltimore views its standards as a fluid document and continually re-assesses them based on program feedback and updated information. The city is willing to update the standards if and when appropriate.

(See attachment for more details on how individual cities created and implemented local standards.)

Involve youth in planning program standards. – When young people are at the table as standards are developed, the odds increase that standards will be relevant to their needs and experiences.¹⁹ By actively incorporating youth in the standards creation process, cities:

- Model practices to programs and their sponsoring organizations that demonstrate the effectiveness of increasing meaningful youth participation and
- Increase the likelihood that youth will value the program standards.

In Kansas City, YouthNet actively engaged teens in developing the city’s standards for teen programs. YouthNet distributed teen surveys in schools, hosted brainstorming sessions on “what makes a good program,” and reviewed national resources on teen programs. Using this information, the agency drafted teen standards and disseminated these standards to teens for input and review. The final document incorporated teen voices as well as the voices of agencies, providers, and other stakeholders.

Establish program standards that address both programs serving younger children and those serving older youth.²⁰ – Significant developmental differences between younger and older children make it important that programs implement age-appropriate practices. At the same time, there exists a strong need for practitioners to share a common language and understanding across age groups, in a way that addresses all programs. The key concepts underlying quality programming are frequently the same in programs for younger and older children, even though age-appropriate practices may differ. Instead of creating one standards document for programs serving younger children and another for programs serving older youth, cities can create one document that addresses both types of programs. Common standards make it easier to build one comprehensive system serving all practitioners.

Create one document that links program standards to core competencies. – Most cities and states developing accountability measures work with two, or frequently more, separate documents: one that

¹⁹ Tolman et al., 2002.

²⁰ Based on discussions with city leaders at Achieve Boston Summit in July 2003.

defines program standards (elements of quality programs) and one that defines core competencies (the knowledge and skills individual practitioners must possess in order to provide quality programs). While these differ in focus – organizations/programs vs. individual practitioners – they are linked in practice. The successful attainment of high program standards depends largely on the capacity and skills of the staff. The existence of separate, unrelated standards and core competency documents creates more fragmented systems. As a result, funding and policies tend to focus on either standards or competencies, but rarely on both. Several city leaders have suggested that creating a document that links practitioner skills to program standards would promote a more seamless, comprehensive system of professional development and quality improvement.²¹

Provide time for programs to attain standards. – Recognizing that change is a gradual process over time, Baltimore grants programs three years to attain program standards.²² During this period, programs prioritize which standards to implement first and which are most do-able at a given point in time. The only exception to the three-year phase-in period is the safety standard; programs must meet this standard immediately. The After-School Institute in Baltimore then provides support for implementing the standards and evaluating programs.

Provide a variety of resources and supports to promote program improvement and adherence to standards.²³

- **Create user-friendly assessment tools**, workbooks, and check-off lists to help youth-serving programs assess which standards have been met, are in process, or have not yet been addressed.
- **Provide hands-on, experiential training** to support programs in meeting standards. When possible:
 - Encourage teams of providers from the same program to attend trainings. This increases buy-in, promotes a common understanding of new information across staff members, encourages staff to share ideas of how to implement the standards, and reduces the risk of losing training “investment” to turnover.
 - Link training to technical assistance
- **Provide technical assistance** and support to programs. Individualized technical assistance helps programs realistically assess their strengths and weaknesses and develop plans for improvement.
- **Host peer networking meetings.** Bring together OST practitioners (including directors and front-line staff) to reduce program isolation and provide a forum for problem-solving, sharing best practices, and identifying available information and resources. Consider grouping programs by developmental levels²⁴ so that programs facing similar issues can troubleshoot and share ideas.
- **Provide implementation grants** to help programs invest in necessary program improvements. Grants should link to program-specific action plans and goals. Have programs apply for the grants in order to clarify what programs aim to do, their rationale, and specific strategies to reach each goal.
- **Provide facilities grants.** Grants that focus on facilities enhancements can serve to enhance programming, make program space safer and more interesting for youth, and increase the number of children served.
- **Provide fiscal management consultation.** Such technical assistance can be a critical support for directors who may have weaker management and budgetary skills.

²¹ Based on discussions with city leaders at Achieve Boston Summit in July 2003.

²² Hall, 2002.

²³ Based on discussions with city leaders at Achieve Boston Summit in July 2003; National Institute on Out-of-School Time. *Supporting Program Improvement Findings from the NIAS Pilot and June 1999 Reflections*. Wellesley, MA: Author, 1999.

²⁴ See page 5 for NIOST chart of program developmental stages.

- **Develop director mentoring programs.** Pair new directors with more experienced OST directors. The more seasoned directors can provide necessary support, resources, and encouragement to help new directors in the program improvement process. Provide training and compensation to the directors who serve as mentors.

Resources for More Information

Alliance for Early Childhood Finance. *A Model for Child Care Quality Improvement (draft)*. Alliance for Early Childhood Finance, September 2001. www.earlychildhoodfinance.org

Beckett, Megan, Hawken, Angela & Jackowitz, Alison. *Accountability for After-School Care: Devising Standards and Measuring Adherence to Them*. RAND, 2001.

Eccles, Jacquelynne & Appleton Gootman, Jennifer. (eds.). *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2002. <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/10022.html>

Hall, Georgia. *After School Issues: Citywide After-School Initiatives Share Their Experiences Developing and Implementing Standards*. Wellesley, MA: National Institute on Out-of-School Time, March 2002. http://www.wellesley.edu/WCW/CRW/SAC/cross_cities_brief6.pdf

The Search Institute. *Forty Developmental Assets*. Minneapolis, MN: Author, 2000. <http://www.search-institute.org/assets/elementary.html>; <http://www.search-institute.org/assets/forty.htm>

Tolman, J., Pittman, K., Yohalem, N., Thomases, J. & Trammel, M. *Moving an Out-of-School Agenda, Task Brief #3: Quality Standards, Assessments and Supports*. Takoma Park, MD: The Forum for Youth Investment, 2002. <http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/grasp/taskbrief3.pdf>

Existing National OST Standards

The NSACA Standards for Quality School-Age Care. Boston, MA: The National School Age Care Alliance, 1998. www.nsaca.org

- ▶ National standards for school-age child care programs

After-School Programs and the K-8 Principal: Standards for Quality School-Age Child Care. Alexandria, VA: National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1999. <http://www.naesp.org/afterschool/asplinks.htm>

- ▶ National standards for school-age child care programs located in schools

Promising & Effective Practices Network (PEPNet) Criteria for Effective Practice. Washington, DC: The National Youth Employment Coalition, 1996. <http://www.nyec.org/PEPNetCriteria.htm>

- ▶ National standards for workforce development programs

Existing Local OST Standards

Baltimore – *Standards for Baltimore After-School Opportunities in Youth Places*. Baltimore: The Safe and Sound Campaign, August 1999. <http://www.afterschoolinstitute.org/pdf/workbook.pdf>

Chicago – *Youth Program Standards*. Chicago: Chicago MOST.

Columbus – *After-School Program Standards*. Columbus: Mayor's Office of Education. <http://mayor.ci.columbus.oh.us/edu/forum.htm>

Indianapolis – *After School Programs Basic Standards*. Indianapolis: Urban After School Programs Coalition, 2002. <http://www.uwci.org>

Kansas City – *The Standards of Quality Performance for Teen Programs*. Kansas City. http://www.kcyouthnet.org/standards_teen.asp

Philadelphia – *Core Standards for Philadelphia's Youth Programs*. Philadelphia: Division of Social Services Office of Children's Policy, October 2001. http://www.phila.gov/dhs/pdfs/Attachment_C_Core_Standards.pdf

St. Louis – *Quality Standards: A Guide for Non-School-Hour Programs for the St. Louis Metropolitan Region*. St. Louis: St. Louis for Kids & St. Louis Metropolitan Agenda for Children and Youth, October 2001. <http://www.stlouis4kids.org/pdfs/quality%20standards.pdf>

Out-of-School Time Standards Memo Addendum Standards Development & Implementation City-Specific Strategies²⁵

Baltimore – Baltimore’s standards were developed by the ad hoc After-School Strategy Team. This team was composed of after-school partners and program providers, community leaders and members, funders, youth, and parents. The Standards are based on the national standards developed by the National School-Age Care Alliance. The indicators were identified by best practice literature review and by local experience. The *Standards for Baltimore After-School Opportunities in Youth Places* include Human Relationships, Indoor Environment, Outdoor Environment, Safety/Health & Nutrition, Administration, Activities, and Program Areas. The standards are revised and updated regularly.

In implementation, the standards are formatted as a workbook checklist in order to increase ease of use. Funding is linked to program standards (i.e., Baltimore has a policy match that requires all newly funded and currently funded OST programs to comply with standards). Programs that receive funding conduct a self-assessment and create a plan to reach standards within a three-year period. Youth and families at each program determine priorities and focus for program improvement. During the three years, programs receive training and technical assistance, tools for self-assessment, and evaluation assistance. In addition, contract managers visit all funded sites to observe practitioners and facilities, review records, and monitor progress.

Chicago – Chicago developed OST standards through a pilot initiative. OST programs self-selected to participate, and the city gave \$5000 to each program in return for the time and resources dedicated to this initiative. The participants merged existing standards documents to look for trends, similarities, differences, and omissions. The initiative held focus groups with youth and parents to determine what these stakeholders looked for in OST programs. Using information from existing documents, program feedback, and input from youth and parents, Chicago created a new document for both programs serving younger children and those serving older youth. In implementation, programs have no punitive repercussions if they do not meet the standards. The city provides support to help programs improve.

Columbus – The Mayor championed the cause to develop OST standards. A committee (based in the Mayor’s Office of Education) scanned the community to identify needs and issues. They worked to establish a consensus on what after-school should look like and which major issues should be addressed. The *City of Columbus Standards for Creating Successful Out-of-School Opportunities for Columbus Youth* include Program Management, Program Components, Academic Assistance, Enrichment Activities, Prevention Units, Recreation & Socialization, Strong Family Involvement, Nutritious Snack, and Program Performance Criteria.

Denver – A citywide committee was organized through a partnership between the Mayor’s Office and the Denver Public Schools Superintendent’s Office. The committee used two questions to guide the standard development process: “What is our joint vision for Denver? What would be the components of a quality program?” The standards development process took over six months, and the committee expects full implementation of the project to take about two years.

Indianapolis – Indianapolis used the NSACA Standards as a guide in developing its citywide standards, *After-School Program Basic Standards*. The standards were then broadened to allow for inclusion of a

²⁵ These descriptions are based on conversations with city leaders, copies of citywide standards, and the following two sources: Hall, Georgia. *After School Issues: Citywide After-School Initiatives Share Their Experiences Developing and Implementing Standards*. Wellesley, MA: National Institute on Out-of-School Time, March 2002; Tolman, J., Pittman, K., Yohalem, N., Thomases, J. & Trammel, M. *Moving an Out-of-School Agenda, Task Brief #3: Quality Standards, Assessments and Supports*. Takoma Park, MD: The Forum for Youth Investment, 2002.

variety of programs. The city looked at the forty developmental assets identified by the Search Institute and incorporated some of these into the program standards. The Urban After School Programs Coalition surveyed programs for feedback and got a 75% return rate. Programs in Indianapolis then signed off on the standards, which promoted program accountability and increased buy-in.

Kansas City – The Greater Kansas City area has locally defined standards for both school-age and teen programs. The *Kansas City Youth Program Standards of Quality Performance* were adapted from the NSACA Standards and developed by 24 local youth-serving agencies. These standards apply to programs serving children and youth between the ages of five and ten. The *Standards of Quality Performance for Teen Programs* were based on youth input and surveys of 1,600 teens.

Philadelphia – The *Core Standards for Philadelphia's Youth Programs* were based on a number of national youth advocacy organization standards, including NSACA's. The standards are divided into eight categories – Human Relations, Program Planning, Program Implementation, Activities, Program Administration, Indoor Environment, Outdoor Environment, Safety/Health & Nutrition. There are three levels of standards, and the city provides support based on programs' current circumstances and level of achievement.

St. Louis – The St. Louis Metropolitan Agenda for Children and Youth partnered with St. Louis for Kids to create a task force on non-school-hour programs. The task force, with representation from a diverse array of program providers, spent two years researching and developing *Quality Standards: A Guide for Non-School-Hour Programs*. St. Louis used the National Association of Elementary School Principals' *After-School Programs and the K-8 Principal: Standards for Quality School-Age Child Care* as a primary foundation. The standards are divided into two categories: 1) minimum basic standards – standards every program should have in place and 2) quality indicators – program activities, staff interactions, operating procedures, and administrative structures needed to deliver effective, high-quality programs. The indicators are divided into four levels – almost always evident, frequently evident, seldom evident, almost never evident – and programs perform self-assessments to ascertain where they are.