

Program Standards of Excellence

Based on a comprehensive review of standards that have been developed for after school and youth development programs in this country by the national accreditation bodies, and feedback received from service providers in a series of focus groups, site visits and interviews, OCFS has adopted the standards below. ***All funded programs will be expected to meet these standards.***

1. Program Staffing:

a. Number of Staff

- Sufficient number of staff to supervise all children and youth at all times
- Staff ratios 1:10 and group sizes of up to 20 for children and youth 4-9 years and for children and youth ages 10-12 years, staff ratio of 1:15 and maximum group size of up to 30, and for children and youth 13 and older, staff ratio of 1:15, to support a variety of program activities and to offer individualized attention.
- Staffing patterns take into consideration coverage for emergencies, staff absences and breaks.

b. Staff Qualifications (paid and volunteers)

- Staff meets OCFS regulations for school age child care programs (Part 414)
- Staff is knowledgeable about school age children and youth and have received training in child/youth development or related fields.
- Staff is oriented to job before working (job description, program policies, program philosophy and mission).
- Staff is trained to work with families and how to relate to children and youth in ways that promote their positive development.
- Staff is trained to identify possible signs of abuse and maltreatment and how to report it.

c. General Staff Behavior

- Staff treat children and youth and parents with respect and
 - listen to what they say;
 - make them feel welcome and comfortable;
 - respond appropriately to their individual needs; and
 - recognize the range of abilities, feelings, temperaments and cultural differences.
- Staff interacts to help children and youth learn by providing children and youth with
 - problem solving skills,
 - conflict resolution skills, and
 - opportunities to learn how to think for themselves and make responsible choices.
- Staff engages children and youth in program design and helping each other.
- Staff uses positive techniques to guide behavior of children and youth to help them through difficulties and to feel good about themselves.

- Staff models healthy behavior by
 - setting appropriate limits,
 - using positive discipline methods, and
 - working well together to meet the needs of children and youth including providing a consistent and reliable environment that children and youth feel they can count on.

2. Program Activities

- Children and youth are offered a wide variety of activities that meet the needs of all children and youth. Activities incorporate input solicited from children and youth and parents.
- The daily schedule offers multiple activities at the same time, is flexible and provides stability without being rigid.
- Program hours of operation are based on families' needs.
- A balance of activities is provided including quiet and active play, large and small muscle activities, small and large group, cooperative and competitive activities.
- Activities are provided that encourage youth to think, question, reason and experiment, develop social skills, practice and refine literacy and computational skills, enhance physical development and skills, encourage sound health, safety, nutritional practice and wise use of leisure time, encourage creative expression and appreciation of the arts and develop a respect for cultural diversity, encourage awareness of and involvement in the community at large.
- Activities include special events and field trips, help children and youth get involved in their community and use community resources.
- The program has an intentional design to promote violence prevention and conflict resolution.
- Program activities are provided that foster pregnancy prevention through encouraging children and youth to be aware of and explore positive future options vocationally and educationally, develop an ability to make positive choices and to protect themselves.

3. Special Populations

- Staff is aware of special needs of children and youth and provide accommodation, assistance and encouragement when needed.
- Staff is aware of quiet, withdrawn children and youth and make a special effort to help them be comfortable.
- Staff keeps records of frequent, unusual or problem behavior and takes appropriate steps to help children and youth to work through difficulties.
- Staff incorporates activities within the program that follow through on specific intervention plans for children and youth identified with physical, mental or emotional disabilities or developmental delays.

4. Safety and Health

a. Safety

- Systems are in place, which promote a safe and secure environment for children and youth, as they move from place to place, on active play equipment, and which prevent unauthorized people from having access to children and youth in the program.
- Children and youth are carefully supervised to maintain safety and staff knows the whereabouts of all children and youth at all times.
- Norms which include clear rules prohibiting violence, tobacco, drug and alcohol use, carrying weapons, etc., are developed with input from the young people served. Norms are published and distributed on a regular basis and are enforced.

b. Health

- The program environment protects and enhances the health of the children and youth.
- Food and drink is served that meets the nutritional needs of the children and youth.
- Staff are alert to the health of each child and youth.

5. Environment/ Space and Equipment

Meets all OCFS school-age child care regulations for Building and Equipment, Fire Prevention and Sanitation (Part 414). Examples:

- Safe, suitable, sanitary
- Well lighted, ventilated, heated
- Well proportioned rooms (at least 35 square feet per child)
- Readily available and safe outdoor space
- Toilets and running water (hot and cold)
 - The environment (space and equipment) is structured to facilitate a variety of simultaneous activities without interference. Private areas are available where children and youth can study or play alone or with a friend.
 - Adequate and convenient storage space for equipment, materials and personal belongings of staff and children and youth is available.
 - Program staff have access to a designated space prior to program start-up. There is some space that is designated for the exclusive use of the after-school program.
 - Indoor and outdoor equipment/furniture and materials are suitable for the sizes and abilities of all children and youth (i.e., developmentally appropriate).

6. Youth Involvement

- Children and youth contribute ideas for projects, activities, etc., which are accepted and acted upon, and children and youth play a role in implementing parts of program.
- Paid employment or volunteer opportunities within program such as clean-up crews, security patrol, mentoring younger children, assisting with supervision, are available.
- Youth are involved in community projects, and ongoing relationships between youth, police, fire, schools or other community agencies are supported.
- Youth leadership is included through formalized youth councils or committees, or as members of board of directors or regularly scheduled meetings with youth council and program administration (for programs serving youth 13 years or older).

7. Parent Participation

- The program welcomes parents at all times.
- Staff work to build parent/provider relationships, recognizing that the parent is the most important person in the child's life.
- There is frequent and regular communication with the parents related to the child's experiences in the program, both positive and problematic, and about the program in general.
- Parents and other family members are encouraged to be involved in the program, and a variety of options are available that respects their skills and strengths and which takes into consideration the needs and problems of working parents.

8. School-Community Collaboration

- Collaborates with community agencies to provide family supports and adult learning opportunities.
- Collaborates with local business and service groups to advance student learning and assists the program, school and family, including mentoring activities.
- Community service opportunities are provided which are structured activities in which youth, with staff support, participate in community services such as peer tutoring, counseling, education with people outside the program, helping the homebound or homeless, neighborhood landscaping and clean-up, etc.

9. Program Leadership and Management

- A written mission statement sets forth the program's philosophy and goals.
- Financial management of program supports the program goals.
- A written manual or handbook of policies and procedures includes guidelines on professional standards and conduct, health and safety procedures,

- accountability procedures, attendance record-keeping, handling of custody conflicts, program development and behavior management.
- It is the program's policy to enroll children and youth with special needs.
 - Programs have written guidelines for the use of facilities, including the specific responsibilities of the organization housing the after-school program.
 - Management gathers and uses program information for program improvement purposes.

Staff Training

Research consistently documents professional development as the crucial underpinning for ensuring quality care. Such training is critical to the ability of providers to operate quality early childhood and youth development programs. OCFS funding supports the training of child care providers in New York State. Further support for providers of School-Age Child Care includes the publication of a quarterly newsletter as well as a series of Technical Assistance Papers which address a variety of issues related to the provision of care to school age children.