

## Quality in Afterschool Programming

### **Quality Program Practices**

There are common practices in which afterschool programs must engage to provide quality programming. These practices have been associated with positive outcomes for children and youth and are measured by various program-level assessments. They include:

- The promotion of positive adult-to-child/youth and peer to peer relationships
- A safe and welcoming environment
- Actively engaging children/youth in activities
- Skill-building opportunities
- Youth-leadership opportunities
- Appropriate child/youth-to-staff ratios
- A well-trained, skilled workforce
- Appropriate organizational structure
- Family engagement
- Welcoming and inclusive environment for children and youth who are differently-abled
- Membership in national organizations, state affiliate associations, and other professional organizations to strengthen the professional voice of the field.

### **Curricular Framework**

High quality afterschool programs expand and supplement the traditional school day curriculum without duplication. Of utmost importance is the desire to foster an interest in continued learning by offering children and youth a variety of engaging academic, social, cultural, and recreational enrichment experiences that increase their exposure to new and varied content. These enrichment activities should:

- Be project-based, hands-on, and inquiry-based
- Be age- and developmentally appropriate
- Include 21st century skill-building and leadership activities
- Promote life skills and character education
- Be integrated across multiple curriculum areas
- Be conducted using a variety of grouping levels including individual work; small, cooperative group work; and full-group work
- Be intentional in scope and sequence.

The flexibility of the afterschool setting is ideal for using an integrated curricular framework drawing from many content areas that help children and youth make connections between

topics. This integrated approach serves to improve problem-solving and critical thinking skills, while establishing relevance and providing a foundation for youth to build upon throughout their lives.

### **Outcome Measures**

WAN supports measuring outcomes of afterschool programs on youth, program, and system levels using both quantitative and qualitative measures. Assessments aid in achieving high quality outcomes for youth, continuous program quality improvement efforts, advocacy, and funding efforts.

WAN supports the use of field-tested, research-based program-level tools to measure the quality of the environment, interactions, and skill-building opportunities afforded to children and youth in afterschool programs. Additionally, system-level measures should be used to ensure well-coordinated, quality-oriented regional afterschool systems.

Child/youth-level outcome measures may include, but are not limited to:

- Social and emotional outcomes such as leadership skills, conflict resolution, communication skills, and getting along with others
- Academic outcomes such as interest in learning, school attendance, on-time grade promotion, homework completion, task persistence, and grades
- College and work readiness outcomes
- Health and wellness outcomes, (e.g., physical activity, nutrition, mental/emotional well-being)
- Child/youth and parent satisfaction.

### **Content Areas**

Children and youth attending afterschool programs should be exposed to skills and learning that complement the core subjects taught in school and experience other interest areas that are crucial for them to become well-adapted, productive adults.

WAN recognizes the importance of play and play-based learning. Play is essential to address the needs of the whole child as it contributes to their cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being. Afterschool programs are an ideal venue to promote intentional learning opportunities through play. WAN encourages play that:

- Fosters each child's creativity and interests
- Is youth-directed
- Supports an awareness and appreciation of the youth world
- Engages children/youth in play that is developmentally appropriate.

## **WAN promotes the attainment of quality programming in the subject areas that follow:**

### **A. Language, Literacy**

Language and literacy skills are an essential and integrated component of any high quality school age program as imbedded within current activities and as separate stand-alone activities to increase language/literacy access and opportunities for all learners. These offerings should focus on teaching concepts and general skills, as well as increasing awareness and interest.

WAN supports the integration of the common core standards adopted by the Department of Public Instruction. These include:

- Demonstrating independence
- Building strong content and knowledge
- Responding to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose and discipline
- Comprehending as well as critiquing
- Valuing evidence
- Using technology and digital media strategically and capably
- Coming to understand other perspectives and cultures.

The values, attitudes, and expectations held by parents and other caregivers with respect to literacy are likely to have a lasting effect on a child's attitude about learning to read. Desired benefits to children when including literacy are:

- Increased enjoyment of literature and the desire to read
- Enhanced vocabulary
- Greater ability to express ideas
- Experiences in reading, writing, speaking, gathering information, using information, thinking critically, understanding others, and expressing oneself.
- Enhanced listening skills for stronger relationships with peers and adults
- Greater understanding of self and others
- Stronger commitment to shared values.

### **B. Numeracy/Math**

Proficiency in mathematics is essential for every student in Wisconsin. Students need to not only do the math they need to be able to use the mathematics they are learning.

In order to optimize student learning, the delivery system must be varied to allow access for all. School-age programs can convey the message that all students can learn mathematics. Effective mathematics in school-age programs offers flexibility of approach, and orchestrating discussions that allow every student to successfully access and understand important mathematical concepts. The curriculum should build from grade to grade and topic to topic so that students have experiences that are coherent. The connections of mathematical ideas in a well-designed curriculum allow students to see mathematics as important in its own right, and have relevant applications to the real world and to other disciplines.

WAN supports the integration of the common core standards in mathematics adopted by the Department of Public Instruction. These include:

- Making sense of problems and persevere in solving them
- Reasoning abstractly and quantitatively
- Constructing viable arguments and critiquing the reasoning of others
- Modeling with mathematics
- Using appropriate tools strategically
- Attending to precision
- Looking for and making use of structure
- Looking for and expressing regularity in repeated reasoning.

### **C. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Education (STEM)**

High-quality afterschool programs offer a STEM component to increase access and opportunities to all learners. STEM offerings should focus on a broad range of content areas with the goal of teaching concepts and general skills, as well as increasing awareness and interest. High Quality STEM offerings should:

- Provide 21st century skills that prepare children and youth for a global society
- Be hands-on and inquiry based
- Increase analytical and critical thinking skills
- Provide relevant professional development resources to staff facilitating the STEM program
- Set up partnerships with STEM content experts whenever possible
- Positively alter the perception of STEM fields, careers, and professionals.

### **D. Social-Emotional and Ethical Development**

Afterschool programs promote the development of the social and emotional health of each child. As an essential component of healthy child development, afterschool curriculum teaches the habits of thought and deed that help people live and work together as families, friends, neighbors, communities and nations. Children and youth are taught how to interact with a diverse group of people in school, in the community, and the workplace. The afterschool arena can integrate character education and social/emotional development within their programs and reinforce core ethical values such as respect, responsibility and citizenship. WAN supports:

- Training staff in the implementation of social/emotional and ethical development
- Partnering with schools to develop a consistent message about the character traits that lead to success in life
- Providing opportunities for educators, parents, and community partners to model exemplary behaviors in school and social settings
- Supporting the schools' effort to address bullying or implementing an anti-bullying curriculum
- Teaching children, youth, and staff how to resolve conflict without aggression and encourage children and youth to generate positive solutions to problems.

## **E. Arts and Culture**

Arts and culture programming that include dance, theatre, music, visual arts, and other types of creative expression are essential elements of high quality after school programs. Research has shown that these activities help children and youth think critically, solve problems, analyze and synthesize information, evaluate, and make decisions. In addition, the arts provide multiple opportunities for personal expression, foster creativity, and support the valuing of cultural diversity. High quality afterschool arts programming should:

- Support and enhance academic and socio-emotional curricula
- Include collaborative work with theaters, museums, libraries, poetry, and other community cultural venues to allow children and youth opportunities otherwise unavailable to them
- Encourage family participation in child/youth performances and art exhibits.

## **F. Global Learning**

Within an increasingly interconnected world, young people must be challenged to develop a deeper understanding of other cultures and perspectives. They need to be able to collaborate and communicate with diverse audiences across the globe, investigate the world around them, and translate their ideas into actions to improve global conditions. Afterschool is a natural place for exploration and investigation. In order to do this, the afterschool program should:

- Integrate global thinking and learning
- Provide a different lens through which young people can view the world around them
- Provide opportunities for individuals to learn strategies for incorporating a global learning component to their existing afterschool experiences.

## **G. Health and Wellness**

Providers must join with families and communities in nurturing competent, caring, and responsible children and youth. Without appropriate guidance, children and youth are at risk of engaging in behaviors that threaten their development. While there are a number of school and community programs that work to address these issues, afterschool programs must work within their programs to promote healthy living and well-being for children, youth, and staff alike.

WAN supports:

- Training staff on implementing evidence-based, healthy lifestyle curricula
- Ensuring that intentional physical activity is an integral part of daily activities in afterschool
- Serving healthy and nutritious snacks and meals in appropriate serving sizes
- Partnering with community organizations, parents, and schools in their efforts to address obesity, unhealthy dietary behaviors, inadequate physical activity, and behaviors that contribute to health risks, injuries, and violence.

## **H. Media and Technology**

Afterschool provides opportunities for children and youth to explore and learn through many different venues including media and technology. While research has identified areas of concern regarding inappropriate use of the media in children's lives, a goal in afterschool programming is to build and strengthen children's ability to make good choices in their daily use of media and technology. Professionals in afterschool should:

- Provide a healthy balance of learning and entertainment
- Encourage active vs. passive involvement with media and technology
- Provide child/youth-driven activities that promote good choices being made with children's use of technology.

Afterschool staff should be trained in positive uses of media. Information should be shared with parents about activities that develop their children's ability to make good choices when utilizing media and technology. Media/technology is inclusive, but not limited to, television, music, computers, video games, cell phones, etc.

## **I. Environmental Learning**

Environmental learning is a process that increases child and youth knowledge and awareness of the environment and associated challenges, develops the necessary skills and expertise to address the challenges, and fosters attitudes, motivations, and commitments to make informed decisions and take responsible action. Inherent in this is an appreciation and enjoyment of nature and the outdoors. It is essential that young people have knowledge of the earth as a dynamic, physical, and living system that is affected over time by various human societies.

## **J. Service Learning**

WAN supports service-learning as an instructional approach to give children and youth opportunities to increase their knowledge and skills while making positive contributions to the world. Because young people make a difference by meeting real community needs, service-learning gives them more motivation to learn, a greater understanding of how to put their learning to good use, and a sense of democracy in action. Service-learning works to promote academic, social, and civic development in children and youth. Service-learning experiences are natural asset builders because they empower young people to make a difference. Intentionally incorporating the asset framework into projects strengthens service-learning experiences. Service-learning projects can provide opportunities for diverse groups to come together to make meaningful change. By building relationships and practicing intentional reflection, diverse groups can gain a better understanding and appreciation of one another.