



FORT WORTH SPARC QUALITY STANDARDS

The Quality Standards for Fort Worth After School or Out-of-School-Time Programs were completed in 2014 through the collaboration efforts of the Fort Worth SPARC Network. The SPARC network is working to ensure that every child in Fort Worth has access to quality after-school programs that promote intellectual, creative and healthy development leading to engaged and productive citizens.

These standards are meant to be a common guidepost for quality programming from which any organization can build upon. They provide a framework for expectations that have been proven to be effective for kids, spanning across all types and sizes of programs. Since quality standards are a part of the quality improvement system, the network will continue to assess and identify ways to improve the standards to sufficiently represent the diverse characteristics of each program.

RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are the “glue” of an after-school program. In order for children and youth to feel engaged and excited about the program and activities, staff and volunteers must work together to foster strong, respectful relationships at every level - among staff, youth, families and the community.

- 1 Staff to Participant: Through active engagement, staff creates a supportive, caring environment.
 - R.1.1 Staff acknowledge and welcomes participants.
 - R.1.2 Staff relate to participants with courtesy, respect and patience.
 - R.1.3 Staff interact and engage with participants in close proximity.
 - R.1.4 Staff model and reinforce positive behavior.
- 2 Participant to Participant: The program provides positive peer interaction among diverse participants.
 - R.2.1 Participants engage in positive interaction, relating to other participants with courtesy, respect and patience.
 - R.2.2 Participants practice age appropriate conflict resolution.
 - R.2.3 There is no evidence of behaviors of exclusion.
 - R.2.4 Program promotes a sense of belonging.
- 3 Staff to Families: The program fosters involvement to support the program's goals.
 - R.3.1 Staff implements a consistent and systematic communication plan that takes into account individual needs of families served.
 - R.3.2 Staff provides family orientation and opportunities for involvement.
 - R.3.3 Program provides enrichment experiences for the family per semester.
 - R.3.4 Families provide input for program.

- R.3.5 Staff helps families identify needed resources.
- R.3.6 Program policies require that staff and families communicate regarding children's well-being.
- 4 Staff to School: The program ensures that providers and schools work consistently to share information, resources and data to support the well-being of children and youth.
 - R.4.1 Consistent and systematic two-way communication exists between key personnel.
 - R.4.2 Staff documents meetings with school personnel.
 - R.4.3 There is evidence of communication with the broader school community, such as PTAs and Site-based Management Teams.
- 5 Staff to Community: The program establishes strong community partnerships to achieve program goals and to leverage resources.
 - R.5.1 There are resources obtained and used from outside the program.
 - R.5.2 Staff represents program at outside events.
 - R.5.3 Program maintains a list of available community resources and utilizes it when possible.
 - R.5.4 Program works to build communication platforms with other OST Providers.
- 6 Staff to Staff: Staff model cooperation, conflict resolution and positive relationships with one another.
 - R.6.1 Program provides regular training and team building opportunities.
 - R.6.2 Program provides opportunities for mentors and mentees.
 - R.6.3 Staff relates to staff with courtesy, respect and patience.
 - R.6.4 Staff encourages each other to model desired behavior.
 - R.6.5 Program has regular staff meetings.
 - R.6.6 Staff is given ample time to discuss their own concerns regarding the program.
- 7 Participants to Community: Participants engage in service learning projects and activities to foster community involvement.
 - R.7.1 Program provides opportunities to engage in community service projects.
 - R.7.2 Participants are given opportunities to explore and understand the community.

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

When surveyed, children and youth nationwide indicate that their number one criterion when selecting an after-school program is that it is FUN! Beyond being fun, after-school programs can contribute to positive learning and personal growth. Ongoing involvement in an after-school program is connected to the quality and variety of activities offered. Quality programming engages youth and attracts parents to the program.

- 1 Types of Development: The program provides a well-rounded variety of activities and opportunities that support the physical, social, emotional and cognitive growth and development of all participants.
 - P.1.1 If able, Program provides a variety of activities, including indoor, outdoor, and offsite activities.
 - P.1.2 Program provides participants with opportunities to increase their physical activity.
 - P.1.3 Program offers opportunity to increase participants' social / emotional skills.
 - P.1.4 Program provides leadership activities and opportunities to foster self-confidence.
 - P.1.5 Program provides activities and experiences to expand participants' worldview.
 - P.1.6 Program provides activities that increase participants' resilience.
 - P.1.7 Program offers opportunity to increase participants' cognitive growth and critical thinking abilities.
 - P.1.8 Program offers opportunities to improve participants' academic success.
 - P.1.9 Program reinforces desired ISD learning objectives.
 - P.1.10 Program provides future-oriented activities and new skills to encourage high school completion, higher education and career perspective.
 - P.1.11 Program offers opportunities for creative arts and dramatic play.
 - P.1.12 Program offers enough materials so that several activities can go on at one time.
- 2 Healthy, Active Living: The program provides opportunities for physical activity and education about nutrition and health.
 - P.2.1 Participants in full day programs engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day and 30 minutes for half day programs.
 - P.2.2 Activities take place outdoors whenever possible and weather permitting.
 - P.2.3 Digital device time is limited to less than one hour per day.
 - P.2.4 Nutrition and health education are offered as applicable.
- 3 Learning and Engagement Strategies: Participants are provided with a variety of developmentally appropriate engagement techniques to promote learning objectives.
 - P.3.1 Program involves participants in planning and running activities.
 - P.3.2 Program provides opportunities for hands-on, experiential learning in program activities.
 - P.3.3 Program promotes exploration, initiative, persistence, self-determination, the opportunity to learn from mistakes, and identity.
 - P.3.4 Program provides activities that meet participants' specific needs at appropriate developmental level.
 - P.3.5 Program uses promising practices and evidence-based curriculum when possible.
 - P.3.6 Program offers activities that allow children to work alone, in pairs, or in large or small groups.
- 4 Academic Support and Enrichment: The program provides academic assistance and enrichment that prepares participants for academic success.
 - P.4.1 Program reinforces links to school day.
 - P.4.2 Program provides age appropriate academic assistance, resources, and/or enrichment.
 - P.4.3 Staff communicates with school staff as necessary and encourages and assists participants with completing assigned homework.
 - P.4.4 Program allocates time for homework and homework help.
 - P.4.5 Staff understand and reinforce the behavior improvement approach used during the school day where applicable.
 - P.4.6 Field trips and guest speakers are used to supplement academic themes.
 - P.4.7 Program ensures staff has basic competence in the activities they are leading.

- 5 Voice, Choice and Leadership: The program provides intentional, age-appropriate opportunities for participants to be meaningfully involved.
 - P.5.1 Program provides opportunities for participants to voice their opinions and choose activities.
 - P.5.2 Participants have opportunities to shape plans for projects and activities.
 - P.5.3 Staff help participants make informed and responsible choices.
 - P.5.4 Staff encourages participants to share and reflect on their experiences.
 - P.5.5 Staff involve participants in program planning, implementation and evaluation in age appropriate ways
 - P.5.6 The program structure provides opportunities for participation in a team environment.

- 6 Participant Recognition: The program recognizes individual and group participation and achievement on a continual basis.
 - P.6.1 Staff recognizes each participant's abilities.
 - P.6.2 Staff supports participant accomplishments by acknowledging verbally what they have done or said.

ENVIRONMENT

The after-school environment has to do with how a program looks and feels: the physical space, its safety and security, the atmosphere it conveys, and aspects of health and nutrition. The environment helps an after-school “shopper” develop a first impression of the program and influences whether a youth and/or family member decides to participate. It also contributes to keeping young people coming back for more.

- 1 Physical Environment: The indoor and outdoor program spaces meet the physical, social, emotional and cognitive needs of participants and program staff.
 - E.1.1 The program's spaces, equipment and materials are large enough, appropriately equipped and safe to allow participants to be active and independent.
 - E.1.2 Buildings, grounds and equipment on the program site are inspected daily, cleaned, and maintained to protect participants' health.
 - E.1.3 All spaces meet safety standards and requirements as required by either district program, licensing or regulatory guidelines.
 - E.1.4 The program space meets the needs related to planning, activities and storage.
 - E.1.5 Access to any indoor and outdoor space is barrier-free.
- 2 Health and Safety: The program provides a safe and healthy environment for participants and program staff.
 - E.2.1 Participants are released to authorized persons only.
 - E.2.2 Staff plans for risks; policies for safety of participants and staff are clearly defined and are made available to families.
 - E.2.3 Program staff know how to take appropriate action regarding health and safety for participants.
 - E.2.4 The program ensures at least one staff member currently certified in CPR and first aid is present at all times.
 - E.2.5 Program staff has first aid supplies, health and emergency information available at each program site in a designated location. Supplies are inventoried and replaced accordingly.
 - E.2.6 Fire, weather, other natural and manmade disaster drills are conducted and documented according to program policy.
 - E.2.7 Staff and participants comply with program policies about hand washing and use of bathrooms.
 - E.2.8 Staff are aware of any participants with allergies and provide alternative options.
 - E.2.9 Drinking water is available at all times.
 - E.2.10 A telephone is accessible by staff to report emergencies.
- 3 Social/Emotional Environment: The program provides a fun, supportive atmosphere where participants and staff are emotionally safe and are building respect for the diversity of people and cultures.
 - E.3.1 Staff greet participants and family upon arrival and departure.
 - E.3.2 Staff and family members treat each other with respect.
 - E.3.3 The program develops and manages effective arrival and dismissal procedures.
 - E.3.4 The program has a system for the collection and monitoring of participant attendance when applicable.
 - E.3.5 When children arrive at the program, they are given time to transition.
 - E.3.6 Staff note when children arrive, leave, and with whom they leave.
 - E.3.8 Staff will acknowledge a child who appears hurt, upset, or disappointed.
- 4 Behavior/Discipline: The program's policies encourage positive behavior, and procedures for discipline.
 - E.4.1 Staff approaches conflict and negative behavior in a professional and non-threatening manner.
 - E.4.2 Staff responds with patience and understanding to the range of participant's feelings and temperaments.
 - E.4.3 The program establishes, maintains, and communicates a code of conduct to participants, staff, and families.
 - E.4.4 Staff applies rewards and consequences appropriately and consistently.
 - E.4.5 Staff involves participants in the development of disciplinary practices.

- E.4.6 The whole group is not scolded or punished when one child breaks a rule.
 - E.4.7 Staff encourages children to resolve their own conflicts, only stepping in when necessary.
- 5 Records: The program has accurate and current records regarding participants and the program.
- E.5.2 Program has complete and current enrollment/registration documents and attendance for all participants.
 - E.5.3 Program maintains accurate and accessible critical medical information on all participants.
 - E.5.4 Program establishes and maintains a centralized database of participant and program information that is updated and usable by staff.
- 6 Special Needs: The program is aware of, records, and informs staff of participants' special needs.
- E.6.1 Staff responds appropriately and gives attention to the individual needs and abilities of participants.
 - E.6.2 Every reasonable accommodation is made to address participants with special needs.
- 7 Supervision: The program provides supervision of participants at all times.
- E.7.1 Group sizes and staff-to-participant ratios are maintained in accordance with district, program or agency regulatory guidelines.
 - E.7.2 Group sizes and staff-to-participant ratios are maintained to permit the staff to meet the needs of participants.
 - E.7.3 Staff regularly re-examines staff-to-participants ratios. Recommendations for changes are provided to organizations' administration.
 - E.7.4 Staff closely supervises activities at all times.
 - E.7.5 Participants and staff are actively engaged in program activities.
 - E.7.6 Staff gives clear instructions at all times.
- 8 Schedule: The program follows a schedule that is known, flexible, and meets the needs of all participants.
- E.8.1 The program schedule must be easily accessible to participants, families and staff members.
 - E.8.2 The daily schedule is available for participants, families and staff members.
 - E.8.3 The daily schedule is structured enough to provide predictability for the participants, but flexible enough to meet changing needs or desires.
 - E.8.4 Transitions between activities are supervised, orderly, efficient and minimal in duration.
- 9 Nutrition: Meals and snacks provided will be healthy and nutritious. Water will be available at all times.
- E.9.1 Drinking water is readily available at all times.
 - E.9.2 Drinks served to participants and staff include water, low fat milk or beverages with no added sweetener.
 - E.9.3 Snacks and meals are timed appropriately and meet the nutritional needs, portion size and type of food that is appropriate for the ages and sizes of participants.
 - E.9.4 Snacks and meals do not include fried foods.
 - E.9.5 Snacks and meals are prepared and served in a safe and sanitary manner at all times.
 - E.9.6 Snacks and meals are not tied to disciplinary consequences.
- 10 Transportation: All laws, program policies and safety rules are followed when transportation is provided.
- E.10.1 Program staff are attentive and considerate of the participants' safety on the field trips and during any transportation arranged by the program.
 - E.10.2 Program staff has first aid supplies, cell phone, health and emergency information (including emergency medical authorization and emergency contact information for each participant) available during transportation and at any off-site activity.
 - E.10.3 Program staff have a written list of the participants in their group and must check the roll frequently, but is required before departure to and from destination with appropriate written documentation.
 - E.10.4 Where available, transportation is provided for participants with special needs.
 - E.10.5 Each driver holds a valid license appropriate to the vehicle driven.
 - E.10.6 Each vehicle used in the transportation of participants must be current on all inspections and licensing.

MANAGEMENT

As in any profession, after-school staff and volunteers require ongoing resources, support and training to provide high-quality programming in order to have a meaningful impact on participants' lives. Methods of recruiting, hiring, training and technical assistance are important to consider. Staff who are involved in delivering high-quality programming tend to be more satisfied with their jobs and stay at them longer; professional development can make a program more consistent and sustainable. There must be appropriate organizational supports in place to run smoothly and effectively and serve youth in the best way possible.

- 1 Mission Statement: The program/organization has a mission statement that fosters understanding of established program quality standards, evaluation, and program environment strategies that support sustainability and growth.
 - M.1.1 The mission statement is visible at each site and posted on websites.
 - M.1.2 Staff understand and can articulate the mission statement and relate it to their responsibilities.
 - M.1.3 Daily activities and materials support the mission.
- 2 Leadership/Organizational Structure: The organization has an effective structure that supports leadership, quality and sustainability.
 - M.2.1 Program has a current organization chart.
 - M.2.2 Program has a strategic plan.
- 3 Business Practices: The program incorporates strong business practices to achieve goals and objectives.
 - M.3.1 The organization utilizes a process that includes planning, implementation, evaluation and modification to achieve short- and long-term objectives.
 - M.3.2 Program/organization has an operation plan, written policies and procedures, and an employee handbook available to employees.
 - M.3.3 Program complies with government and regulatory mandates.
- 4 Fiscal Responsibilities: Financial management of the program supports the program goals.
 - M.4.1 Program creates a written budget annually.
 - M.4.2 Program ensures that the financial statements are reviewed regularly.
 - M.4.3 Fiscal policies are in place.
 - M.4.4 Program/organization has a marketing and development plan.
- 5 Program Improvement: The program has a plan which includes standards, measurable indicators, program assessments and use of data to improve programs.
 - M.5.1 Program has measurable goals, outcomes and outputs that address the needs of the participants and the community.
 - M.5.2 Program has an action plan that is used and followed by staff to continuously improve the program quality.
 - M.5.3 Program has a system of measurement including evaluation tools that involve parents, participants and stakeholders.
 - M.5.4 Program uses evaluation data to continuously drive decision-making and quality improvement.
- 6 Human Resource Policies and Procedures: Program has formal policies, procedures and processes for hiring, training, managing and retaining staff and volunteers.
 - M.6.1 Open job positions are posted and an interview process is used to fill open positions.
 - M.6.2 Job descriptions and staff qualifications are clearly written.
 - M.6.3 Hiring processes ensure staff values diversity and ensures staff understands the needs of diverse youth.
 - M.6.4 State and national criminal background checks are required and references are checked.

M.6.5 Staff completes all required training within established deadlines.

M.6.6 There is a plan for adequate staff coverage in emergencies.

7 Performance Reviews and Professional Development: All staff are provided with orientation, professional development, and performance reviews.

M.7.1 Program provides initial and ongoing training for current positions and training to advance to higher positions. Training is appropriate and relevant.

M.7.2 Organization conducts annual performance reviews of staff.

M.7.3 The program director and supervisor are committed to his/her own professional development and participates in training.

M.7.4 Program supervisor receives training in program management and staff supervision.

8 Staff Retention and Management: The organization provides and supports a positive working environment and infrastructure, in which staff is treated as respected professionals.

M.8.1 Program/organization has a system in place for fair compensation.

M.8.2 Program/organization has a system in place for employee recognition.

M.8.3 Program/organization has opportunities for advancement.