COLORADO OUT-OF-SCHOOL
QUALITY GUIDELINES

CAP

COLORADO AFTERSCHOOL
PARTNERSHIP

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEFINING QUALITY IN COLORADO

Recognizing the possible impact of high-quality Out-of-School (OST) programs on young people, their families, and all communities throughout Colorado, the Colorado Afterschool Partnership (CAP) embarked on a journey to improve the quality of OST programs by developing the **Colorado OST Quality Guidelines.**

This inaugural version of the Colorado OST Quality Guidelines results from a collaborative effort to support all programs throughout the state serving school-age children and youth during the out-of-school time hours. They were developed based on solid national research, input from program providers throughout the state, and input from funders that are supporting organizations that are striving to make the largest impact on the lives of the young people they serve in their OST programs. CAP's Quality Action Team primarily carried out the breadth and depth of the work it has taken to create these guidelines.

Throughout the development process, the team also reviewed similar guidelines used by other states within the 50 State Afterschool Network and received consultation from the American Institutes of Research to ensure the guidelines included OST industry-recognized best practices.

MAKING A CASE FOR QUALITY

There is substantial evidence from research that out-of-school time (OST) programs promote positive social and behavioral outcomes (Durlak et al., 2010).

High-quality OST programs are linked to gains in social skills with peers, increased pro-social behavior, and reductions in aggression, misconduct (e.g., skipping school, getting into fights), and illegal substance use (Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007). High-quality OST programs also demonstrate promise because they have been shown to increase student engagement, intrinsic motivation, concentrated effort, and positive states of mind (Larson, 2000; Shernoff & Vandell, 2008).

Research findings such as these are significant because the social and emotional outcomes fostered through high-quality afterschool programs lay the psychological groundwork for the cognitive processes required for academic success.
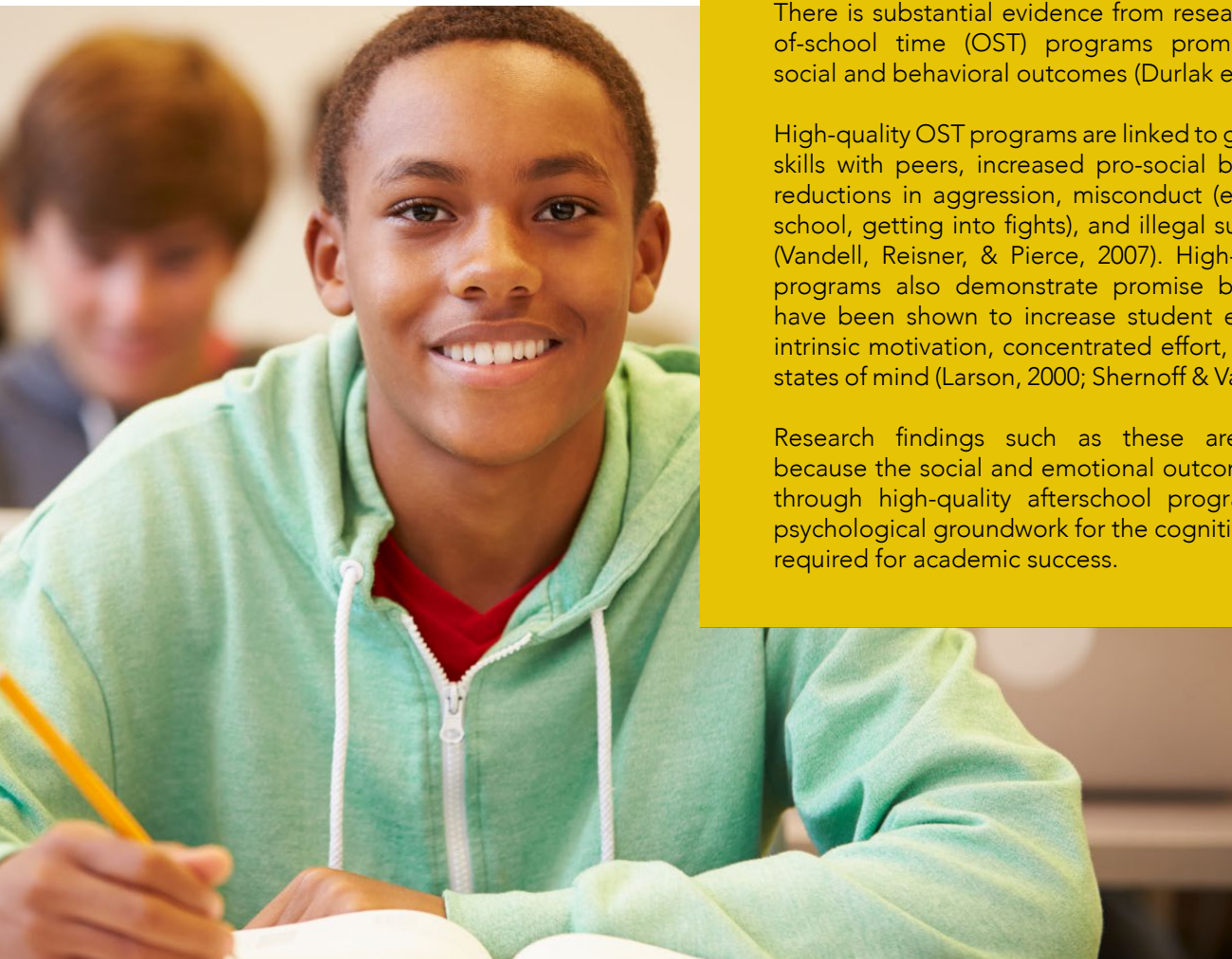
ABOUT THESE GUIDELINES

Out-of-School Time (OST) programming, often used interchangeably with "afterschool" and/or "summer learning programming," refers to youth development programming that occurs beyond the traditional school day, including before school, after school, holidays, weekends, and summers. OST programs present young people with positive learning environments that support their academic, social, emotional, and physical development when school is not in session. These programs must prioritize quality to reach their potential as a catalyst for holistic youth development.

The **Colorado OST Quality Guidelines** were created for any type of program where staff is dedicated to offering the best possible experiences for young people and their families beyond the regular school day. CAP recognizes that Colorado's OST programs are varied in location, funding, missions, and philosophies, serving broad and diverse populations. The goal is to make these guidelines intentionally broad and inclusive enough to be helpful to the many different individuals and groups that will use them. The guidelines are not intended to be a regulatory checklist or to dictate policy or practice. They are also not meant to be achieved all at once, knowing that continuous quality improvement occurs over time. They are intended to suggest and offer a strong foundation for quality programming to guide you as you embark on your own continuous quality improvement journey.

The guidelines are divided into domains representing the key quality areas for OST programs. We began by focusing on seven domains. Each domain begins with a statement defining intent, followed by both program and organizational practices. Program practices refer to practices that mostly occur at the level where staff and young people interact. Organizational practices more commonly refer to administrative practices that provide the back-end system supports that make quality at the program level possible.

CAP will continue to engage stakeholders and quality experts to review and provide feedback for these seven domains. After feedback is collected from OST Stakeholders and the initial seven domains are refined, additional domains may be added to include possibly:

- Activities - Ensure activities are age-appropriate, hands-on, and engaging.
- Administration - Including documented policies and procedures.
- Indoor and Outdoor Environment - the physical space in which the program operates.
- Sustainability - planning to ensure financially sustainable programming.

THE SEVEN DOMAINS INCLUDE:

1. **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**
2. **Assessment and Evaluation**
3. **Human Relationships**
4. **Partnerships**
5. **Staff Qualifications and Training**
6. **Youth Development and Engagement**
7. **Health and Safety Guidelines**

WHY CONSIDER USING THESE GUIDELINES?

These guidelines can help out-of-school-time programs leverage their quality improvement efforts. They do so by providing the following:

- A common language for organizations, programs, and their staff to discuss what it means to deliver quality programming.

- A guide for programs to assess their practices to help leverage their strengths and identify areas for improvement.

- A resource to identify staff training needs and professional growth opportunities.

- A complement to other standards of practice that focus on quality improvement (Some examples include Colorado's 21st Century Community Learning Center Monitoring Quality Improvement Rubric, Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA), and Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes (SAYO).

- A framework to message financial needs or demonstration of the supports necessary to impact and improve program quality.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A continuous quality improvement culture that embraces data-driven decision-making and is linked to measurable, outcome-based goals is at the heart of quality OST programs.

EFFECTIVE PROGRAM PRACTICES

QUALITY PROGRAMS:

- Regularly assess their effectiveness through various formal and informal evaluation activities (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus groups, town halls) and share the results with stakeholders.

- Implement an intentional process and outcome evaluation plan with measurable goals and objectives aligned with the program's mission and vision. The program ensures all relevant team members and stakeholders are aware of and involved in the plan.

EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

QUALITY ORGANIZATIONS:

- Embrace a continuous quality improvement mindset as part of their organizational culture and engage all stakeholders in the process.

- Involve stakeholders in the assessment, planning, and continuous quality improvement process.

- Utilize strong data management systems (e.g., tracking participation, school attendance, and quality assessment data) that track results and data to drive decision-making and quality improvement.

Quality programs...

...have systems in place to collect and reflect on both program and organization data.

Addressing the needs and affirming the assets of all young people and their families while building greater awareness and appreciation of the diversity of our global society is at the heart of quality OST programs.

EFFECTIVE PROGRAM PRACTICES

QUALITY PROGRAMS:

- Cultivate a program environment, content/curricula, and materials that are culturally responsive, appropriate, inclusive, and representative of both the young people and families served as well as relevant community and society culture, climate, and current events.

- Create intentional opportunities for young people to explore, share and celebrate each other's heritage, cultures, and identities.

EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

QUALITY ORGANIZATIONS:

- Articulate diversity, equity, and inclusion values in the program's guiding documents (ex., mission and vision statements, strategic plan, etc.).

- Promote equitable recruitment, hiring, retention, compensation, and career advancement practices that reflect the diversity of the program and the larger community.

- Provide staff, volunteers, board members, etc. ongoing training and support related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- Engage staff, volunteers, board members, etc. in meaningful and inclusive ways with families and community partners.

- Create policies to ensure a safe environment for young people to explore their own identity, including cultural beliefs and practices.

- Deliver communication, education, informational materials, and opportunities for families in a way that meets diverse needs (e.g., literacy level, language, delivery method, cultural appropriateness).

Quality programs…

…implement policies and support staff training that focuses on respecting and supporting diverse youth and their families.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Building and sustaining relationships between young people, adults, and peers that foster positive social interaction and establish a nurturing environment of trust and support is at the heart of quality OST programs.

EFFECTIVE PROGRAM PRACTICES

QUALITY PROGRAMS:

- Create a welcoming environment where staff and young people feel a sense of security, belonging, and ownership.

- Foster a sense of community by creating experiences encouraging young people to collaborate and work cooperatively with one another.

- Embrace young people as individuals to help them learn and develop a sense of autonomy.

- Communicate high expectations for young people and provide the support needed to achieve them.

- Engage staff and young people positively and respectfully through listening, acceptance, and appreciation.

EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

QUALITY ORGANIZATIONS:

- Promote a safe and welcoming organizational culture that fosters and nurtures positive, professional relationships and interactions among staff.

- Cultivate adults to be positive role models for and with young people and one another.

- Act ethically, maintaining confidentiality and impartiality.

Quality programs...

...purposefully create a culture and climate where young people and staff feel a sense of belonging and ownership.

Building and maintaining meaningful relationships amongst stakeholders to enhance programming and form an interconnected network focused on fostering the holistic well-being of young people and their families is at the heart of a quality OST program.

EFFECTIVE PROGRAM PRACTICES

QUALITY PROGRAMS:

- Build intentional linkages with schools to complement school-day instruction and advance academic progress through the alignment of in-school and out-of-school learning.

- Engage in family, school, and community collaborations to plan and implement intentionally designed programming based on youth needs and interests.

- Solicit and incorporate the input of stakeholders in decision-making.

- Implement program policies and procedures, including those regarding fees, hours of operation, and location, that are responsive to the needs of the young people and families served.

- Engage families appropriately in program planning, education, implementation, and evaluation.

EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

QUALITY ORGANIZATIONS:

- Build meaningful, mutually beneficial partnerships that value young people's contributions to the community.

- Make intentional connections with other organizations to enhance programming and make referrals as needed to resources for young people and their families.

- Work with community partners to leverage resources to support young people and their families.and community partners.

PARTNERSHIPS

Quality programs...

...recognize the importance of solid partnerships and actively pursue them.

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS & TRAINING

Investing in staff through ongoing, culturally responsive, research and evidenced-based, professional development that is focused on fostering positive outcomes for young people is at the heart of a quality OST program.

EFFECTIVE PROGRAM PRACTICES

QUALITY PROGRAMS:

- Employ diverse staff and volunteers who value each young person and understand their developmental needs.

- Assess the professional development needs of staff and provide appropriate training.

- Support staff in building and executing a professional development plan that reflects their professional goals.

EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

QUALITY ORGANIZATIONS:

- Recruit, hire, and develop staff who reflect the diversity and cultures of the community.

- Foster a commitment to continual professional growth and development and offer staff and volunteers a clear path to advancement.

- Train staff to plan and implement programming and activities that are appropriate for the age, skill level, culture, and interests of young people.

- Ensure access to relevant evidence and research-based professional development opportunities.

> **Quality programs...**
>
> ...recruit, hire, and train diverse staff members who value young people and form positive work relationships with them, their families, co-workers, and other partners.

Intentionally and proactively partnering with all young people to promote their sense of agency, develop their leadership skills, and center youth voice and choice is at the heart of a quality OST program.

EFFECTIVE PROGRAM PRACTICES

QUALITY PROGRAMS:

- Encourage and recognize youth input and contributions in activity planning, implementation, and evaluation.

- Recognizes that all young have the capacity for growth and development.

- Support young people through intentional skill-building opportunities that support their cognitive, emotional, social and/or physical development.

- Provide opportunities for young people to make meaningful content and process choices throughout the program.

- Provide opportunities for young people to reflect on and showcase their work.

EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

QUALITY ORGANIZATIONS:

- Afford young people the opportunity to express their ideas, concerns, and opinion.

- Encourage young people to recruit others to the program.

- Provide young people with developmentally appropriate leadership opportunities within the organization.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT & ENGAGEMENT

Quality programs...

...support young people in having a voice and choice in program design and implementation, as well as provide opportunities for youth leadership.

Supporting a physically and emotionally safe environment that promotes a healthy lifestyle is at the heart of a quality OST program.

EFFECTIVE PROGRAM PRACTICES

QUALITY PROGRAMS:

- Work with young people and their families to identify and support the individual needs of the young person so that they can succeed emotionally and physically in the program.

- Ensure that young people are properly supervised based on their developmental needs and activity type by maintaining local/industry-outlined staff-to-young people ratios.

- Use physical spaces and/or buildings that are in good repair and maintained in a safe condition.

- Develop and regularly practice emergency safety procedures relative to the program and its setting (ex. fire safety, lockdown drills, shelter in place, etc.)

- Ensure that potentially hazardous items (ex., medication, cleaning supplies, etc.) are secured and administered/used properly.

- Provide healthy food options that are properly stored, prepared and account for a young person's unique dietary needs.

- Communicate and reinforce positive behavioral interventions that outline clear and consistent expectations.

- Promote healthy digital habits and effectively monitor technology for safe usage.

- Develop and implement policies and practices in partnership with families that ensure the safety of young people's arrival and departure from the program.

EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

QUALITY ORGANIZATIONS:

- Minimize any threats that would endanger the health, safety, or well-being of young people by requiring staff that come in contact with young people to undergo proper screenings (ex. background check, fingerprinting, etc.)

- Ensure staff have and maintain the necessary certifications to support young people's safety (ex. CPR, First Aid, any necessary specialized programming certifications, etc.)

- Implement best practice standards to ensure that no bias is negatively targeted towards young people, colleagues, families, etc.

- Ensure that the necessary procedures, staff training, expertise, and transportation plans are in place to make certain that young people have rewarding and safe off-site experiences.

Quality programs...

...support a physically and emotionally safe environment that promotes a healthy lifestyle.

HEALTH & SAFETY

DEFINITIONS

- **Continuous quality improvement** - An ongoing approach where one reflects on standards of practice in order to identify strengths and areas for growth, and then uses such reflections to plan for improvement.

- **Developmentally Appropriate** - Program methods, materials, activities and goals that respond to the ages, developmental stages, culturally appropriateness, and individual differences of young people.

- **Diversity** - The wide range of dimensions around which people in society differ. These dimensions include race, culture, language, gender, religion, class, age, gender identity or expression, and learning/intellectual/physical ability.

- **Equity** - When each person or group has equal access to economic, social, and educational opportunity. This involves dismantling systems and structures that perpetuate inequities against marginalized groups and may include providing differentiated supports and resources based on current and historical inequities.

- **Evidence-based practices** - Uses current evidence derived from research studies and analysis, in combination with one's own experience and judgment.

- **Family** - All persons who are responsible for and involved with a young person and who the young person identifies as having significant impact in their lives.

- **Inclusion** - Being fully accessible, reflective, and representative of the diversity in a community and in society. This includes an attitude and approach that seeks to ensure that every person, regardless of ability or background, meaningfully participates in all aspects of life.

- **Organization** - The agency that operates services for young people. It may be a community-based non-profit, church or temple, school, neighborhood association, etc.

- **Out-of-School Time** - Often used interchangeably with "afterschool" and/or "summer programming", refers to youth development programming that occurs beyond the traditional school day, including before school, after school, intersession breaks, weekends, and summers.

- **Participant** - Also referred to as a "program participant", they are the individual enrolled in the out-of-school time program.

- **Program** - The physical location where activities for young people take place.

- **Programming** - The activities conducted with young people.

- **Research-based practices** - Parts or components of a program, curriculum, or method based on practices demonstrated effective through research.

- **Staff** - Individuals who provide actual ongoing supervision, instruction, and care for young people.

- **Stakeholders** - Anyone who has a "stake" or a vested interest in the success and welfare of an out-of-school time program. This includes individuals that are both directly involved in the program (ex. young people, families, program staff, etc.) as well as those indirectly impacted by the program (ex. business leaders, funders, policy makers, schools, etc.). All members of a community are stakeholders in afterschool and summer programs. .
- **Volunteer** - An individual who assists a program on an intermittent basis without pay.

- **Young people/person** - Also referred to a "program participant" this is the individual enrolled in the out-of-school-time program.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS & BIBLIOGRAPHY

- **Youth Development** - An approach that builds upon young people's assets and strengths rather than focusing on their problems, obstacles, or risk-taking behavior. The focus is on helping young people acquire the knowledge and skills they need to become healthy and productive adults.

- **Youth Voice** - Providing supports that center young people's identities, interests, needs, and perspectives in decisions that affect their lives and then taking action on what is said.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS & BILBLIOGRAPHY

COLORADO OUT-OF-SCHOOL QUALITY GUIDELINES CHECKLIST

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

A continuous quality improvement culture that embraces data-driven decision-making and is linked to measurable, outcome-based goals is at the heart of quality OST programs.

EFFECTIVE PROGRAM PRACTICES

☐ Regularly assess their effectiveness through various formal and informal evaluation activities (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus groups, town halls) and share the results with stakeholders.

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EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

☐ Embrace a continuous quality improvement mindset as part of their organizational culture and engage all stakeholders in the process.

☐ Involve stakeholders in the assessment, planning, and continuous quality improvement process.

☐ Utilize strong data management systems (e.g., tracking participation, school attendance, and quality assessment data that track results and data to drive decision-making and quality improvement.members and stakeholders are aware of and involved in the plan.

HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

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DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Addressing the needs and affirming the assets of all young people and their families while building greater awareness and appreciation of the diversity of our global society is at the heart of quality OST programs.

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PARTNERSHIPS

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