

MAINE AFTER SCHOOL NETWORK



State of Maine

Quality Afterschool Programming





fterschool programs provide a new neighborhood for young people. The term *afterschool* encompasses a gamut of services offered before and after school operating hours for children between ages 5 and 14.

Although they go by different names—community learning centers, out-of-school time, extended day, school age care, recreation program, school’s out, or kid’s club, to list a few—afterschool programs seek to provide safe and secure places where children can go when school is not in session. Beyond that, quality afterschool programs seek to offer children the chance make friends; to find nurturing relationships; to form partnerships with schools, family, and community; to engage in projects and inquiry; to experience working toward becoming experts in a domain; to develop leadership skills; to offer academic support; to improve academic performance; to improve nutrition, health, and fitness; and to build 21st century technological skills. Programs operate in schools, community centers, parks, recreation centers, and activity or child care centers. Some serve children up to age 10; others provide environments specifically designed for young adolescents. While program focus all their attention around a central theme such as the arts, athletics, or community-building, others develop highly varied curricula that account for the full range of children’s interests and characteristics.

Typically, an enrolled child spends anywhere between ten and fifteen hours a week—about the equivalent of two full working days—in an afterschool program. A successful afterschool program comes about as the result of successful partnerships among administrators, parents, teachers, children, and members of the local communities. Success depends on recognizing the importance of helping children make the most of this substantial block of time. In today’s society, that means creating afterschool programs that boost academic achievement, improve physical fitness, develop leadership skills, and build 21st century technological skills.

As with any partnership, success also depends on the active efforts of each partner. Afterschool is the time in the children’s day to relax and stretch their bodies as well as their minds, to form positive relationships, to engage in meaningful learning, and to develop real-world skills. To create these opportunities requires each partner’s thoughtful answers to question such as:

- What do we wish to accomplish with our afterschool program?
- What kinds of experiences do we want to bring to children’s lives?
- How can we improve and enrich children’s academic experiences?
- How can we improve and enrich children’s self-esteem and social experiences?
- How can we improve children’s health, nutrition, and fitness?
- In which physical environments will children most benefit from our efforts?
- Who will join us in this endeavor, and in what capacity?
- How much money will it take to implement our ideas?
- What about the kinds of things that money just can’t buy?

This Technical Assistance paper seeks to frame the general considerations that make up the process of planning and implementing a successful, quality afterschool program. You need to determine your long-term goals for the program and then figure out how to get there, step-by-step.

The Characteristics of School-Age Children

Even when children belong to the same age group, very specific characteristics distinguish one child from another; each has his or her intelligences, abilities, physical capacities, and levels of emotional maturity.

Although patterns of development do vary, young school-age children generally possess a completely different set of interests and characteristics from that of preschoolers, and older children have other interests still. Each age group has its own cognitive, social, physical, and emotional characteristics. Afterschool programs must recognize these characteristics and developmental milestones, and promote children’s development in order to best meet the needs of the children they serve. (See Figures 1 and 2) [pages 7 & 8]

In surveys, school-age children frequently cite “recess, physical education, and lunch” as their favorite times of the school day. Why? One reason is that school curricula often address the cognitive aspect of their lives. During these other times, the non-academic developmental characteristics receive some attention, and children may have more choices at these times about what they want to do.

Youth develop their social identity by comparing themselves to others. Being able or unable to join a group can add to or detract from the sense of security they associate with that identity. With clothing, choice of activities, or specific behaviors, school-age children seek to gain the acceptance of those peers whom they desire as friends.

Like preschoolers, a school-age child continues to develop this sense of social identity through experiences with adults. When not immersed in television and video games, school-age youth work to make sense of the world around them and to figure out their place in that world. They exhibit great interest in most adults, especially those who share their gender, race, and ethnic identity. Those who demonstrate what appears to be admirable ways of coping with the world can be treasured role models.

School-age children find different ways of coping within a world that daily seems increasingly complex. One child may categorize and classify, one may test boundaries, while another will invent secret codes, all in order to define their position in the world. It is common for school-age youth to spend more time arguing about whose turn it is than they do playing the game.

As the resounding success of educational computer games demonstrates, children learn most easily and have the most fun with exploratory activities that challenge them to learn new skills. Creating opportunities for school-age children to perform real tasks with real tools helps them build their sense of



competency. Additionally, offering children the chance to engage in inquiry and project-based learning helps to develop their leadership skills and to awaken their sense of creativity and their motivation to learn.

Accreditation and Assessment:

The National Afterschool Association, Maine Roads to Quality, and Performance and Assessment Measures

The National Afterschool Association (NAA) promotes national standards of quality afterschool programs for children and youth between the ages of 5 and 14. The NAA and the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) collaborated with practitioners and experts from around the country to develop the NAA Standards. (See Figure 3) [page 9] The Standards outline 36 keys of best practices in out-of-school programs, organized under six categories: (1) Human Relationships, (2) Indoor Environment, (3) Outdoor Environment, (4) Activities, (5) Safety, Health, and Nutrition, and (6) Administration. The NAA also grants accreditation to programs meeting the Standards.

The Maine Roads to Quality Child Care and Early Education Career Development Center, funded by DHHS provides financial support and technical assistance to programs seeking accreditation within the state of Maine. The Center also promotes quality child care and early education, career development, and scholarships and training for professionals.

To create and maintain quality afterschool programs, site directors and staff members must work to develop performance and assessment measures for the program. This might include assessment of how the program meets its mission, goals, and objectives, as well as assessment of staff member performance, and assessment of the program's ongoing curriculum and projects.

Where to Find Quality: Administration

“As public investments in afterschool have surged, children across the country are spending an increasing number of their discretionary (non-school) hours in these programs, and they are returning to them year after year. As a result, these programs are becoming the third most important developmental influence in young peoples’ lives, after home and school. It is important that we hold high expectations for afterschool programs—expectations that are clear, realistic and achievable. It is equally important that we select the right measures to assess their success.”

Sam Piha, “Afterschool Programs: What Should We Expect and How Should We Measure Success?” (A Statement of the California Committee on Afterschool Accountability), 2005.

Afterschool programs may be run as public, nonprofit, or for-profit enterprises. Funding may come from a variety of sources: federal, state, local, foundations, the United Way and charitable organizations, private contributions, tuition and fees, and in-kind donations. In order to run a successful program today, administrators are likely to utilize different funding sources.

Regardless of the funding structure, the administration's first concern must be for the well-being of the children in their program. Decisions must be made regarding the administrative structure—who will run the program. This is particularly important for programs that involve collaboration among different entities in the community. To assure success, all groups must agree on the administrative structure chosen. Once the structure is chosen, then the degree of control by each group can be defined, clear lines of authority and accountability can be drawn, and staff roles can be designated. Decisions must also be made about what type of program will best serve the community. Creating a Community Assessment of Need and Resource Instrument (CANARI) for this purpose will set the foundation for a quality program, well-matched to the community and the families it serves.

To create a quality afterschool program, you should

- Develop program mission and goals
- Create structures that hire and support quality staff
- Have well-paid staff and low staff-to-children ratios
- Seek staff with higher education
- Offer opportunities for staff development and training through mentoring, workshops, and local and state resources
- Have a low staff turnover rate
- Develop performance measures for assessment, using data sources and data collection to evaluate progress toward short-term and long-term goals

Where to Find Quality: Human Relationships

“There’s two things that I automatically look for first... what’s happening with the staff and children; and what’s happening between children and children.... If you see staff really engage with the children, really working with them, doing a hands-on activity, or even sitting there doing something quietly, as they do their homework...then you can see that there’s some care and respect there...also how you see children treating children is also a direct reflection of what’s being talked about.”

Ditra Edwards, Consultant, Boston MOST, “Making the MOST of Out-of-School Time: The Human Side of Quality,” 1998.

What really makes a program worth going to is the daily presence of caring, competent, dependable, well-trained teachers and the opportunity for positive peer relationships.



Excellent afterschool programs only employ staff who possess authentic confidence in their interpersonal abilities. These staff have few or no self-esteem problems. They have no need to boss children around or to shout them down. They command attention and respect not with threats, but with empathy, patience, and understanding. They ask open-ended questions. These staff develop warm, nurturing, and relaxed relationships with the children they teach. And furthermore, they support and encourage positive relationships among the children in their program.

The best staff possess other personal characteristics that set them apart. They can make commitments. They have a talent for gentle organization and child guidance. They communicate well, they possess cultural awareness, and they tend to accent the positive side of life. They are oriented more toward process than product. Most importantly, they put a premium on spontaneity and flexibility.

Furthermore, quality staff seek to promote child development, create positive relationships, and partnerships with both families and schools. Thus, children learn the literacy's of home, school, and community through their afterschool experience.

Quality afterschool programs with the best staff offer children the chance to make friendships in a psychologically safe and nurturing social environment. Quality staff in this environment nurture conflict resolution skills, positive peer relationships, teamwork, and a sense of positive self-esteem.

Where to Find Quality: *Family Involvement*

Because of the current nature of society, parents must balance the pressures and responsibilities of work and raising a child. Given these constraints, it can be difficult for afterschool administrators and teachers to build relationships with parents.

However, quality afterschool programs seek just that: positive, supportive, nonjudgmental relationships with parents and families. Recognizing the varied structures of families today, these programs are inclusive of all who are fulfilling the role of a parent in children's lives. Furthermore, quality afterschool programs recognize that parents are the most important figures in children's lives.

When parents enroll their children in afterschool, they enter into a personal contract with both you and the other parents. They agree to abide by your registration procedures, your health regulations, and your payment or voucher schedule. For the program to function adequately as a service to all the children, it is vital to obtain parents' cooperation in these basic matters of program structure.

However, if excellence is what you are after, you will not want parents thinking that their involvement begins and ends with the minimums. What distinguishes an excellent afterschool program from an average program is the degree to which it offers parents the chance to participate in planning, design, and

activities. This converts your service into an extension of parental care. To achieve this, you will welcome and even encourage more direct parent participation.

To get parents more involved, you can:

- send out cover letter and response forms to form connections and encourage families to share children's interests, cultural backgrounds, talents, and hobbies
- conduct telephone surveys
- form parent discussion groups
- hold coffees, potlucks, and other social events
- form a parent board or parent advisory group
- organize parent seminars and focus groups
- establish a Family Resource and Energy Exchange (FREE) Network to help parents connect to exchange household items, such as clothing or toys, or to create support networks
- prepare and distribute biweekly or monthly newsletters
- maintain a bulletin board with notices and reminders and displays of children's work
- create a parent suggestion box
- make ongoing feedback forms available
- create a parent comfort corner, an area for parents to gather at drop-off and pick-up times
- provide information about program staff, including pictures and informal biographies

(Adapted from Roberta L. Newman, [Building Relationships with Parents and Families in School-Age Programs](#). School-Age NOTES, 1998)

Where to Find Quality: *Indoor Environment*

Physical site management presents some of the most inflexible obstacles to afterschool program excellence. Budget, insurance, transportation limitations, and licensing requirements can compel you to locate your program activities in school classrooms, converted closets, windowless basements, and other places.

This leads many programs to share space. Many community buildings may not be utilizing all of their space all of the time, giving opportunity to add in afterschool programs. Partnering with a community center, youth-serving agency, or full-time child care center may make more desirable space available. (See Figure 4 for basic strategies in dealing with shared space.) [Page 10]

Despite the challenges of sharing space, afterschool programs have the opportunity to create warm, comfortable, and devel-



opmentally appropriate indoor environments. Afterschool programs must have access to the basics: water, storage, phones, and electricity. But quality afterschool programs seek to go beyond the basics and to give children a creative space of their own. These programs offer children soft, peaceful spaces for privacy and quiet, open shelves with age-appropriate materials, artwork displays and exhibitions, and divided spaces and quadrants for separate interest areas to balance quiet and noisy areas. Programs should offer space for socializing, science and the arts, homework assistance and computers. Ideally, through these surroundings children should feel valued and feel a sense of neighborhood in their afterschool program. Bean bags, carpets, and table lamps all soften the space and offer a welcoming environment. Creating a comfortable, quality indoor space is a long-term investment. As the space improves, the staff morale may improve as well. The reality of creating this type of environment in a shared space may include hanging up artwork or bringing in soft bean bags just for afterschool, but in the end children feel respected, have a sense of ownership, and create a “place of their own.”

Where to Find Quality: Outdoor Environment

Children need daily access to safe and challenging indoor and outdoor gross motor activities. Some children prefer to spend much of their afternoon indoors, some benefit from more outdoor activities, and others like it best when they can freely choose between the two. However, having the opportunity to engage in health and fitness activities is essential. In the event of bad weather, an indoor gym or multipurpose room can give children the opportunity for recreation. In neighborhoods marred by frequent street violence, conditions may call for keeping children out of open yards. Recreation space should include play yards with age-appropriate play structures and equipment, and gyms or indoor spaces that can be used for cooperative games and sports or other physical activities such as dancing, gymnastics, and jump rope

Where to Find Quality: Challenging Activities

“Out-of-school time is bursting with opportunities for learning. Informed by an understanding of how children learn and what is important for their development, after-school programs can design myriad opportunities for children and youth to extend and enhance their learning beyond the school day.”

National Institute on Out-of School Time, Links to Learning: [A Curriculum Planning Guide for After-School Programs](#). National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2005, p.10.

Schedule: In a typical week, an afterschool program operates Monday through Friday, from 2:30 PM to perhaps 6:00 PM, or 17.5 hours a week. One model of an afterschool school-based program only operates when school is in session. The other model of an afterschool community-based program can expand to all-day service, or a full 40+ hour week during school vacations, or when school is out. How do you effectively divide and use time in worthwhile ways?

Creating a **daily activity schedule** is an important part of the afterschool program planning. (See Figure 5.) [page 10] When planning the schedule, keep it flexible and well-paced. Allow time for the casual explorations and conversations that you would expect to find in an excellent program. Establish a recurring pattern that still accounts for people’s natural tendency to take longer than they expect. (Note that the schedule in Figure 5 allows time for both planned and unplanned events.)

To stabilize your schedule, develop a weekly or monthly listing of planned optional activities, or a newsletter, and make the list available well in advance of the affected dates. Parents and children will enjoy the preview of what’s ahead, and teachers will appreciate the advance notice so they can prepare. Create a bulletin board with news and information about what is happening in the program and what is coming next. Parents and children will enjoy looking at children’s work and reading about the activities of the program.

Always keep in mind that everyone has to live with the schedule. To fulfill your program’s role as a service business, regularly invite suggestions from children and parents. To encourage employee commitment, invite teachers’ suggestions. Site directors should hold a staff meeting once a week to discuss ongoing questions, projects, and assessment measures. Also, at least once a week, site directors should meet with the teachers and children to discuss what is working and what is not.

Curriculum: In planning activities, the specific interests of each child deserve priority and consideration. This means molding the program experience around children’s natural interests, which will encourage creativity and afford opportunities for various small group activities, homework assistance, and more solitary interests. (See Figure 6: Note the connections between area design and activity. Different areas are arranged to afford children a variety of experiences at the same time.) [page 11]

Excellent afterschool programs create daily opportunities for:

- choices and decision-making
- participation in personal and small group activities
- use of various manipulatives (such as legos and duplos) and age-appropriate materials
- relative privacy
- quiet, relaxing activity
- playful, vigorous activity
- structured adult-guided activities
- unstructured child-directed play
- homework assistance



A quality afterschool environment uses developmentally based, age-appropriate, material-rich programs. Such programs support and promote child and youth development principles through active learning and emergent thematic curriculum, with curriculum ideas stemming from the children. These programs engage in project-based learning with links to educational standards and small group learning. For some programs, domain-based learning, an in-depth study of an area or discipline, offers children the chance to feel like an expert in an activity or learning area. Seeking excellence in afterschool programming also includes creating links to the wider community and making a commitment to community service.

The afterschool setting provides a unique flexibility and opportunity to explore areas of interest with children. With that recognized, today's afterschool curriculum should incorporate seven learning areas: 1) literacy, 2) science, 3) math and problem-solving, 4) arts, 5) social competence, 6) fitness and nutrition, and 7) technology. Curricula should be evaluated and assessed, as should the program as a whole. Additionally, afterschool programs should set aside time for academic and homework support, and seek to teach critical skills for the business world and for real-life applications with technology.

Project-based learning offers children the opportunity to enter into a theme or topic of interest to ensure that every child can participate. Using multiple entry points built out of the eight multiple intelligences means offering a variety of learning modalities, such as music, mathematics, science, or the visual arts, to ensure that every child can participate in a theme-based study. It offers the chance for children to ask and answer questions, engage in experiential learning, and use higher-level thinking skills, stimulating their engagement and motivation to learn. By providing multiple entry points, projects provide children the opportunity to engage in different learning areas within a theme study. Teachers develop a theme and possible activities, and then find out about children's activity interests through questions, charts, and tallies. Children and teachers may work in small groups to explore areas of interest. Theme studies end with a culminating activity or performance that encompasses different experiences from the unit and acts as a summation of the experience. (See Figures 7 and 8 for a sample of a theme-based project and an outline for project-based learning.) [Pages 12 & 13]

Where to Find Quality: Links to Community

An excellent afterschool program helps children engage with what is really going on in the world. The best programs use their primary site not as an isolated facility, but as a base of operations, a meeting place for children and those who care about them, an organized hub of interactions between the children and the community. Programs that are aware of their community enjoy many benefits that more isolated programs

do not. These benefits range from donations of books, games, and toys to the type of positive publicity that encourages outside financial support, direct parent participation, and teacher commitment.

If it is possible for your program to leave the premises, your neighborhood becomes part of the program. It could involve local sites such as the library, the YMCA, the fire station, or an occasional "big trip" to a show, museum, or college. Your program could engage in recycling projects, park cleanups, or visits to read with elderly citizens. It could engage in creating links with children's hospitals or local shelters. If your program does not engage in these trips and projects, then you should find ways of bringing the neighborhood and cultural attractions into your site: museums often have staff that bring exhibits to other places; a firefighter or police officer could come to visit; the drama or dance department of the local college can send students to perform and talk about their art.

In your role as a program administrator, encouraging participation in the real world means creative collaboration with other child care and human service programs. In one city, an afterschool program joined up with three programs to write a funding proposal to the local arts council. The council approved their joint proposal, making it possible for children across the city to enjoy visits by a puppeteer, a musician, a dancer, a craftsperson, a storyteller, and a kite maker. Many organizations and cultural institutions may have funds to come and provide services to your program site. Check the availability of these organizations and institutions to create educational and cultural resources for your program.

Where to Find Quality: Safety, Health, and Nutrition

A quality afterschool program will provide safety and security for children and protect their health. Afterschool programs should provide healthy and nutritious snacks, supporting children's healthy growth and development. They should also offer opportunities for children to build fitness through gross motor activities and exercise. Children should have routine health supervision to detect health problems early when they are easiest to treat. Child care health consultants should be actively engaged in the program to provide health and safety observations; to review health records of staff and children; to offer health and safety training for staff and parents; and to develop an overview nutrition, health, safety, emergency, and inclusion plans.

Quality afterschool programs work to create psychologically safe environments for children and secure environments in which to build friendships and grow. These afterschool programs ensure children's safety by creating environments without bullying, where teamwork and positive self-esteem are supported and recognized.



Where to Find Quality: Homework

With national concerns about children’s academic performance and learning, and with schools assigning children more homework, homework assistance has become an important part of most afterschool programs. Homework assistance can help to provide both academic support and academic improvement for children. Quality afterschool programs recognize that homework assistance is an integral part of afterschool today. These programs support communication gram,

where families decide how much homework a child will complete at afterschool. Still other programs make homework assistance a part of the daily schedule for every child. In addition, some programs offer tutoring, mentoring, or academic enrichment programs for children in need. Quality afterschool programs recognize the need to find a balance between academic pressures and children’s developmental needs. Providing a comfortable, quiet space with room for desks and chairs and tables for group projects is essential. Having access to a library or computer lab during homework time is also beneficial.

Figure 1

Characteristics of School-Age Children

Cognitive

- “Rule-bound”: may spend more time deciding and debating the rules than playing the game
- Learn quickly, memorize easily
- Can concentrate for increasingly long periods of time on activities that interest them
- Need time and space to explore ideas, develop interests
- Have lots of energy for learning, but may be turned off to school
- Enjoy playing games: surprising capacity to memorize and strategize
- Need to categorize and classify everything
- Not particularly interested in abstract symbols of ideas

Social

- Influenced more and more by peer groups
- Often form intimate attachments to one or two best friends
- Attribute increased importance to adults other than parents
- Have strong desire to make and keep friends
- Developing greater sensitivity to the needs and desires of others
- Desire increasing responsibility and opportunities to try out adult roles
- May have strong ideas about likes and dislikes, who they want to be with, and what they are interested in doing

Physical

- Have lots of energy
- Like physical challenges
- Need to build skills
- Gain a sense of independence from physical prowess
- Practice and develop new skills to build self-esteem

Emotional

- Are usually resilient: get upset easily and get over it just as readily
- Need to know that adults are in control, even if they are not
- Become increasingly self-conscious and self-critical
- May have difficulty verbalizing feelings, especially difficult ones such as rejections and sadness
- Are very concerned with fairness, with extreme sense of justice and morality
- See right and wrong as absolutes
- Gain self-confidence through successful completion of concrete tasks and products
- Gain self-esteem by being “good” at something; need to build skills
- Will tend to work out anxieties, fears, and feelings by “acting out” or withdrawing—will often honestly answer, “I don’t know” when asked why they did something
- Need adult support, nurturing, reassurance, encouragement, and limit-setting to help them feel safe and secure
- Need to be valued as special, accepted as part of a group



Figure 2

Children's Characteristics (Ages 6-10)	Adult Roles
The youngest children in this age group are often (but not always) very busy, sloppy, erratic, and in a rush to complete a task. As they get older, their interest in being both neat and correct grows.	Adults can set examples and model desirable behavior. Be patient with this phase in what is really a process.
Having and keeping friends becomes important. Children often have "best" friends or partners of choice.	Adults can encourage friends to sit together, play together, have snacks together, and work at resolving issues that threaten their friendships.
Children learn new things and need to constantly replace old ways of thinking with new ways. Leaving the familiar for new untried ways is difficult for some.	Adults can help children recall how successful they have been in the past during unfamiliar experiences and how normal it is to be unsure about alternative ways of thinking about something.
Children are generally more eager to learn, more curious, more enthusiastic, and more imaginative at this age than at any other time in their lives.	Adults can use these qualities to regularly introduce many new experiences to children.
Children begin to apply logic to solving problems and get good at using numbers, letters, and words.	Adults can provide children with lots of guidance and opportunities to solve problems; offer games that use numbers, letters, and words that support their learning.
Children need routine and consistency from adults in their lives.	With routine and consistency children do not have to worry or wonder what comes next or what behavior is expected. Flexibility is important, however.
Discovering things and inventing are favorite activities.	Adults can ask children to make or design things that solve real and immediate problems in the program.
Take-apart and put-together activities are popular.	Adults serve this interest when they bring in items that can safely be taken apart. Encourage using the parts in interesting ways.
Writing can be a favored activity, especially when it helps children get something they want or need.	Labeling, pen-pal writing, shopping lists, and program posters are all great writing experiences with potential payoffs.
Children enjoy math if it is connected to and supports what they are invested in.	Adults can use games, cooking activities, and problem solving to reinforce math skills.
Children are naturally curious about and generally highly motivated to use technology for learning.	Adults can facilitate the constructive use of technology through child-directed, project-based learning activities.
Science is seen by children as a way to explain the world they are becoming more curious about.	Adults can read up on the scientific issues children show interest in.

Adapted from *Links to Learning: A Curriculum Planning Guide for After-School Programs* (National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2005), p.21).



Figure 3

The National Afterschool Association Standards for Quality School-Age Care

Human Relationships

1. Staff relate to all children and youth in positive ways.
2. Staff respond appropriately to individual needs of children and youth.
3. Staff encourage children and youth to make choices and to become more responsible.
4. Staff interact with children and youth to help them learn.
5. Staff use positive techniques to guide the behavior of children and youth.
6. Children and youth generally interact with one another in positive ways.
7. Staff and families interact with each other in positive ways.
8. Staff work well together to meet the needs of children and youth.

14. Activities reflect the mission of the program and promote the development of all the children and youth in the program.
15. There are sufficient materials to support program activities.

27. The outdoor space is large enough to meet the needs of children, youth, and staff.
28. Staff, children, and youth work together to plan and implement suitable activities, which are consistent with the program's philosophy.

Safety, Health, and Nutrition

16. The safety and security of children and youth are protected.
17. The program provides an environment that protects and enhances the health of children and youth.
18. The program staff try to protect and enhance the health of children and youth.
19. Children and youth are carefully supervised to maintain safety.
20. The program serves foods and drinks that meet the needs of children and youth.

29. Program policies and procedures are in place to protect the safety of the children and youth.
30. Program policies exist to protect and enhance the health of all children and youth.
31. All staff is professionally qualified to work with children and youth.
32. Staff (paid, volunteer, and substitute) is given an orientation to the job before working with children and youth.

Indoor Environment

9. The program's indoor space meets the needs of children and youth.
10. The indoor space allows children and youth to take initiative and explore their interests.

33. The training needs of the staff are assessed, and training is relevant to the responsibilities of each job. Assistant group leaders receive at least 15 hours of training annually. Group leaders receive at least 18 hours of training annually. Senior group leaders receive at least 21 hours of training annually. Site directors receive at least 24 hours of training annually. Program administrators receive at least 30 hours of training annually.

Outdoor Environment

11. The outdoor play area meets the needs of children and youth, and the equipment allows them to be independent and creative.

Administration

21. Staff-child ratios and group sizes permit the staff to meet the needs of children and youth.
22. Children and youth are supervised at all times.
23. Staff support families' involvement in the program.
24. Staff, families, and schools share important information to support the well-being of children and youth.
25. The program builds links to the community.
26. The program's indoor space meets the needs of staff.

34. Staff receives appropriate support to make their work experience positive.
35. The administration provides sound management of the program.
36. Program policies and procedures are responsive to the needs of children, youth, and families in the community.

Activities

12. The daily schedule is flexible, and it offers enough security, independence, and stimulation to meet the needs of all children and youth.
13. Children and youth can choose from a wide variety of activities.



Figure 4

Tips on Sharing Space

- Purchase or build adaptable equipment: portable room dividers, locked storage closets, tables, chairs, cabinets, and even a sofa on wheels.
- Include set-up and take-down time in the daily routine. This may include hanging pictures on the wall, putting materials out on tables, rolling out rugs, and rolling in “soft” furniture.
- Make sure there is a clear arrangement about where each program will store equipment and supplies, who will clean the space, and the process for working out any conflicts that may arise. Regularly scheduled meetings, perhaps at the beginning and end of the school year, can help to clarify issues before they arise as problems.
- Develop “learning centers on wheels” for art, library, dramatic play, and so on. Small rugs will help establish boundaries between activity centers.

Adapted from *School-Age Child Care: An Action Manual for the 90's and Beyond* (Auburn House, 1993, Revised Ed.).

Figure 5

A Daily Activity Schedule	
<i>2:30-3:30</i>	Arrival of children, time to talk to staff one-on-one or in small groups about the school day. Free play with three or more activities set out, which are varied daily, and access to the activity areas such as art, creative dramatics, and table games. Outdoor free play. Make snacks available. Depending on your philosophy (and maybe your space arrangements as well), this can be a family-style sit-down affair at small tables or a small informal arrangement where children simply move to a central area to pick up juice and crackers as they finish with other activities. In programs where children arrive from different schools, arrivals may be ongoing or staggered, so plan to allow time for all of the children to settle in.
<i>3:30-4:15</i>	Homework assistance. Staff give children individual and small group assistance, and children engage in peer-tutoring while working on their homework for the day. Staff are responsive to the needs of individual children. If possible, the library can be made available for references.
<i>4:15-5:15</i>	Group meeting and small group project-based activities. In accordance with your schedule, the activities will vary each day. Children should be given the opportunity to make choices about what they do with their afternoon time: activities that are appropriate to their age and abilities, build on their interests, and encourage exploration of new materials and topics. Small group learning and both long- and short-term projects should be offered; participating in a theater production will require a bigger commitment than, say, making pancakes, which will be done (and consumed) by the end of the day.
<i>5:15-6:00</i>	Cleanup and quiet activities such as table games, puzzles, personal reading, and headset listening. Families arrive at varying times to pick up children, and some children may leave by buses. Staff check in with parents about their children and ongoing activities in the program.



Figure 6

Activity Areas for School-Age Children	
<i>Nature and Science</i>	Magnifying glasses, microscopes, bug boxes, ant farms, plant experiments, seashell and rock collections, mechanical take-aparts, magnets, animals, and more can be part of a science curriculum. Experiments and observational drawings will allow children to develop scientific skills. Nature and environmental activities can be integrated into the program with neighborhood walks, scavenger hunts, and trips to state parks and conservation areas. Special projects might include gardening, a cleanup day at a nearby park, or recycling.
<i>Creative Arts</i>	Have materials on hand that children can explore on their own and a separate closet or shelf of items for use in teacher-supervised and small group activities. Paint, glue, paper, felt, material scraps, wood pieces, clay, plaster of paris, markers, crayons, and so on should all be available. “Recycled” items are great fun: research the resources available in your community.
<i>Small Group Games</i>	Appropriately sized tables and chairs, with easy access to a variety of games, puzzles, and manipulative materials, will be used well and frequently, both for exploration and problem-solving. It is important that materials build on children’s wide range of capabilities. Fill the area with group charts and tallies, materials for measuring and recording data, and computers for ongoing problem-solving interests and activities.
<i>Literacy</i>	A quiet space with bookshelves and pillows for reading aloud, quiet reading, book responses, rewriting stories, descriptions, story-based games, and arts and crafts will give children the chance to construct meaning through stories and poems.
<i>Creative Dramatics</i>	Stock a room or area with costumes, puppets, and props for activities ranging from free (and silly) play to organized plays and productions presented for families. A single area may be altered weekly or monthly, serving as a store, post office, pizza parlor, fix-it shop, zoo, or school.
<i>Quiet and Homework Area</i>	This area is stocked with books of interest to the children in the program. Regular trips to the library can provide a changing collection. Comfortable furniture—a cushioned recliner, floor pillows, bean bag chairs, a comfortable sofa—will add much to the creation of a soft, informal, cozy corner. Tables and chairs provide some structure for completing homework assignments. Children should be encouraged to do “peer tutoring” and have access to grown-up help when needed.
<i>Computers</i>	A space with networked workstations and a high-speed Internet connection, stocked with technology programs and educational games for children to use, will allow children to develop 21st century technological learning skills through ongoing technology projects.
<i>Active, Large Group Space</i>	An indoor space, such as a gym, should be available to the program on a regular basis with activities to support heart and breathing endurance, muscular strength and endurance, flexibility, and wellness. Encourage active games, from the old stand-bys like dodgeball, kickball, and freeze tag to cooperative sports and games. (See Further Reading section.) School-age youth need sufficient outdoor space as well, preferably with climbing equipment such as “monkey bars” and areas for large group games.
<i>Special Events</i>	Songfest, backwards day, multicultural festivals, crazy Olympics, drama and dance performances, art shows, and family dinners are all possibilities that children can help plan and carry out.
<i>Other Areas</i>	Use of a kitchen is a real asset to any program, as cooking is one of school-age children’s most popular pastimes. A “life skills” area might include cooking as well as career exploration, health and safety education, and activities focused on current events. If the program is in school, access to the library, art room, and other areas can expand horizons of the program. Programs located in or near high schools, community recreation centers, or youth-serving locations may even be able to add the swimming pool to the mix.

Figure 7

Sample Theme-based Projects		
WEATHER		
<p><i>Science and Technology</i> Have Children and Youth...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and test a weather vane that measures wind direction. • Check out an Internet-based, extended weather forecast for your area. • Study weather maps to see how weather systems travel across the United States. • Interview a weather forecaster to learn how a forecast is constructed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to all the weather forecasters for your area. On a given day, how similar are they in their predictions? Note when they all say the same thing about the day. Describe the differences between each forecaster. Who among the forecasters is most accurate on a day to day basis? • Identify cloud formations by name. • Keep a chart showing rainfall for a month.
<p><i>Arts</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw a picture that shows a thunderstorm gradually moving into your city. • Listen to the old song entitled “Stormy Weather.” What images does the song bring to mind? Paint, draw or otherwise represent those images visually. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit a local museum to determine which kind of weather (or “bad weather”) is most often depicted in the paintings there. (This also relates • to data collection and mathematics.) • Use a variety of brushes and tempera paint to paint a rainstorm. • Record rain falling on a sidewalk to be listened to as you paint the rainstorm.
<p><i>Mathematics</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After studying a weather map showing a system of weather moving from west to east across the United States, determine how many days a system takes to reach a certain point. • How much rain falls into a dish in one rainstorm? How many days does it take to evaporate all the rain collected in a dish once you bring it indoors? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During a thunderstorm with lightning, measure how many seconds elapse between when you see the lightning and when you hear the thunder.
<p><i>Social Studies</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the library, research whether or not Benjamin Franklin really flew a kite in a lightning storm, and if so, why. • Research and deliver a report about tragic weather-related events that have hit your region over the years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look into the evolution of clothing meant to protect people from the rain over the years. Have raincoats changed much in color, design, or materials used?



Figure 7 continued

WEATHER		
<p><i>Literacy</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List every word you can think of to talk about weather. Discuss what you think is meant by the saying, "If you don't like the weather now, wait a minute!" Sing songs and read stories and poems about the weather. Read and discuss the reality of the children's book entitled <u>Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs</u>. Take photographs during a field trip during awful weather conditions. Once developed, hang them on a poster-size sheet of paper. For 	<p>every picture posted, tell the story about what is being depicted and describe how the viewer might feel if they had been there.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write a story that features one drop of water as the main character. The story can be about a journey this drop took either to the earth or one taken on the earth. For inspiration read <u>Paddle-to-the-Sea</u> about the journey a small, handmade canoe takes from north of the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean and beyond. Interview someone from the other side of town who experienced the same thunderstorm you did. How were the experiences similar or different?

Adapted from *Links to Learning: A Curriculum Planning Guide for After-School Programs* (National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2005), pp.79-80.

Figure 8

Project-based Learning		
PROJECT PHASES		
<p>Phase I: <i>Beginning the Project</i> Have Children and Youth...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brainstorm a topic to investigate. Develop a "Know? Want to Know? Learn" (K-W-L) chart. Explore various aspects of the topic, e.g., hands-on activities with tools, artifacts, ingredients, drawing, construction, pretend play. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a planning web that anticipates the concepts that children might learn in their topic investigations (e.g., pizza restaurants, kinds of pizzas, pizza ingredients, process for making, delivery, etc.) Link to learning standards by identifying the core curriculum areas that might naturally connect. (This might be done separately by adults.)
<p>Phase II: <i>Investigation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decide on some aspect of the topic to be investigated. Invite an expert to discuss the topic, or arrange a field trip to a place where the topic can be investigated. Beforehand, generate a list of what children or youth would anticipate seeing or learning. Decide on the "L" (what was learned), and 	<p>what else (the "W") could be learned in a second visit or discussion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sketch, draw, photograph, describe, interview, count, and record the investigation. Decide on what to do next with the information or knowledge. Do whatever is decided. Keep a record of experiences and learning.
<p>Phase III: <i>Concluding the Project</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct appropriate culminating activity in which children can demonstrate what they have learned (e.g., presentation, party, exhibition, fair, video, etc.) Determine expenses, 	<p>amounts, materials, space, and schedule for this event.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflect on learning for individuals/group using K-W-L chart on expected outcomes.

Adapted from *Links to Learning: A Curriculum Guide for After-School Programs* (National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2005)



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Resources for Afterschool Programs

Organizations and Web Sites:

National Afterschool Association (NAA)

www.naaweb.org

The National Afterschool Association (NAA) manages the accreditation system for afterschool programs in the United States.

National Institute on Out-of-School Time

www.niost.org

The National Institute on Out-of-School Time is a research, evaluation, training, and consultation organization and publication resource for afterschool programs.

The Harvard Family Research Project

www.hgse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources.html

The Harvard Family Research Project is a center for research, a source for out-of-school time publications, and the publisher of The Evaluation Exchange: A Periodical on Emerging Strategies in Evaluating Child and Family Services.

Boston's After-School for All Partnership

www.afterschoolforall.org/resources/

Boston's After-School for All Partnership is an organization that offers information on funding, practices and operations for afterschool programs. It provides resources and assistance with starting an afterschool program.

School-Age Notes

www.schoolagenotes.com

School-Age Notes is an organization that offers activity and curriculum resources, as well as publications and training materials for afterschool programs.

Coming Up Taller

www.cominguptaller.org/resource.html

Coming Up Taller connects organizations to federal resources that support children and youth in the out-of-school hours. It offers success stories, access to government guides and research, a database of grant and loan programs, and information about nonprofit organizations and publications.

Mentor

www.mentoring.org/program_staff/index.php?cid=61

Mentor is an organization that offers tools for adding a mentoring component to afterschool programs.

Promising Practices in Afterschool

www.afterschool.org/resources.cfm

Promising Practices in Afterschool is an organization that offers information about curriculum, legislation, reports, and publications for afterschool programs.

National Child Care Information Center

www.nccic.org/afterschool/me.html

The National Child Care Information Center offers a profile of the landscape and demographics of afterschool programs in the United States, including the state of Maine.

Afterschool Alliance

www.afterschoolalliance.org

The Afterschool Alliance Web site offers information about funding, advocacy, media, state information, and success stories, as well as about information about starting afterschool programs.

Child Trends

www.childtrends.org

Child Trends offers research and publications about child health and well-being and about program evaluation, and publishes the Child Trends Research Brief.

Maine School-Age Care Alliance (MSACA)

www.accessforme.org/MSACA

The Maine School-Age Care Alliance promotes safe, accessible, and affordable programs throughout Maine; advocates for programs that reflect standards of quality; and offers networking opportunities for school-age afterschool program professionals.

Maine Roads to Quality: Child Care and Early Education

www.muskie.usm.maine.edu/maineroads

The Maine Roads to Quality promotes quality child care and early education, supports the training and educational needs of child care and early childhood professionals, and increases links between training and formal education.

Spotlight

George J. Mitchell Before/After School Program

58 Drummond Avenue
Waterville, ME 04901

Director: Julie Mathieu

Ages: 5-9 years/K-4

Cost: \$35.00/week, with sibling discounts

Photo Credits:

Cover: *Hiking with Mahoosuc Kids Association, Bethel, Maine.*



A Maine Example of Excellence

In 2003, the George J. Mitchell Before/After School Program became the first accredited afterschool program in the state of Maine. This achievement came about through the tireless efforts of Julie Mathieu, the Program Director, and the program's staff. In September 2003, Julie Mathieu received the "Support Staff" Award from the Board of Education in Waterville. In their nomination of Julie for this award, the staff of the George J. Mitchell Before/After School Program wrote, "The children and the staff at the George J. Mitchell Program are extremely fortunate to have Julie...Julie works long hours to accomplish the high quality-run child care that she has. She puts everyone ahead of herself and never complains."¹

The goals of the George J. Mitchell program are to provide quality child care, positive adult and child interactions, safety, and affordability; to build and promote social skills; to offer a wide variety of enrichment, community service, and multicultural activities for children; and to collaborate with the school and the town.

The Before School Program is semi structured and runs from 6:45 to 8:15 a.m. Activities are offered, but the children always have choices. Choices include cooking, art, multicultural activities, and using the computer lab or the gym.

The After School Program includes outside play, a group meeting and planned activities, including the arts, gross motor activities, science, and multicultural activities. The children have free play and choices. Activity specialists come in to teach courses in areas such as karate, baton, or foreign languages. The program has a Fitness Finders fitness program, it puts on talent shows, and it engages in community service projects.

The program receives funding from the state, from vouchers, from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families benefits, and parent fees. The program has multiple dedicated, exclusive spaces to operate in, and it shares the kitchen and the gym with the school. The school district and administration understand the importance and value of having quality child care in schools, and they have created an advisory board and offered space and in-kind services to the program. Volunteers are a regular part of the program, including a foster grandparent from a community referral agency. The program also has community links with a nearby nursing home, and individuals from different organizations come in for one-time enrichments.

Julie Mathieu is especially proud of her staff. Many of the staff members have been working in the program for seven, eight, or nine years, and Julie has been with the program since its inception, eleven and a half years ago. She is also proud of the variety of activities that the program offers while still operating within a budget.

The George J. Mitchell Before/After School Program received a Lights On! Afterschool Award from the Maine Afterschool Network in the fall of 2005 for being an exemplary afterschool program.

¹ Pathways from Maine Roads to Quality, Winter 2004, p.6.



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