**Common Elements of Quality After-school Programs**

Quality after-school programs can provide safe, engaging environments that complement the school day by promoting learning to improve student outcomes. While there is no one single formula for success in after-school programs, both practitioners and researchers have found that effective programs combine academic, enrichment, cultural, and recreational activities to guide learning and engage children and youth in wholesome activities. They also find that the best programs develop activities to meet the particular needs of the programs they serve.

The types of activities found in a quality after-school program include:

* tutoring and supplementing instruction in basic skills, such as reading, math, and science
* drug and violence prevention curricula and counseling
* youth leadership activities
* character education programs
* volunteer and community service opportunities
* college awareness and preparation
* courses and enrichment in arts and culture
* computer instruction
* language instruction, including English as a second language
* employment preparation or training
* service-learning and/or mentoring
* activities linked to law enforcement
* supervised recreation and athletic programs and events

Looking at the spectrum of after-school programs, researchers and practitioners have identified some common elements necessary to developing high quality programs that meet the needs of the diverse population of school-age children and youth.

**The common elements of quality after-school programs include:**

* **The program is a combination of academic, enrichment, cultural, and recreational activities that guide learning and engage children and youth in wholesome activities.**
* **Goal setting and strong management**
* Setting goals directed at addressing student outcomes
* Implementing quality programming focused on the goals
* Creating a solid organizational structure
* Adapting effective management strategies
* Meeting legal requirements
* **Planning for long-term sustainability**
* Accessing adequate and sustainable funding
* Building public will through advocacy
* Ensuring access and equity for all children
* Incorporating recognition for program and students
* **Quality after-school staffing**
* Hiring, retaining, and compensating qualified staff, including a dedicated program administrator
* Providing ongoing professional development for staff
* Using volunteers effectively
* Ensuring low staff-to-student (1:10 that may be achieved by combining professional staff with paraeducators and community volunteers) and small group sizes (30 or less)
* **Attention to safety, health, and nutrition issues**
* Creating safe places with adequate space and materials
* Meeting nutritional needs
* **Effective partnerships**
* Building on the strengths of the community by:
* Collaborating among diverse partners: parents, educators, community residents, law enforcement agencies, service providers, community and faith-based organizations, civic organizations, colleges, businesses, arts and cultural institutions, museums, parks and recreation, and public officials
* Using community resources effectively
* Building consensus and partnerships among key stakeholders
* **Strong involvement of families**
* Involving families and youth in program planning
* Attending to the needs of working parents
* Providing opportunities for both children and families within school and in the community
* **Extended learning opportunities**
* Providing engaging opportunities directed at learning and improving student outcomes
* Coordinating learning with the regular school day
* Offering a wide variety of activities to meet the diverse needs of students
* Linking school-day and after-school curriculum
* **Linkages between school-day and after-school personnel**
* Providing planning time to maximize opportunities to improve student outcomes
* Coordinating and maximizing the use of school and other community facilities and resources
* **Evaluation of program progress and effectiveness**
* Using data for program improvement and accountability
* Designing effective evaluations to address program and student outcomes

These characteristics of high-quality after-school programs help ensure children’s continued growth, development, and learning throughout the pre-adolescent and adolescent school years.