



Maryland Out-of-School Time Programs' Quality Standards Framework

*Supporting Continuous Program Improvement for
Quality Out-of-School Time*

APRIL 2010

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Funding Support for the Maryland Out of School Time Network

Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
Annie E. Casey Foundation
Associated Black Charities
Baltimore Community Foundation
Family League of Baltimore City
Open Society Institute - Baltimore
United Way of Central MD



A decade of research, evaluation, and literature review provides powerful evidence that out-of-school time (OST) programming - or youth programming that occurs beyond the school day - makes an important difference in the lives of young people. This is not surprising considering that 40% of a young person's day is discretionary after accounting for school, homework, eating, chores, or paid employment.ⁱ According to the Afterschool Alliance's Household Survey on Afterschool, in the State of Maryland 28% of our K-12 youth are responsible for taking care of themselves after school.

There is now growing recognition that participation in high quality OST programs is associated with better grades, task persistence, and social skills; and that benefits appear to intensify as youth continue their involvement over a succession of years.ⁱⁱ A recent eight state study tracking 3000 disadvantaged elementary and middle school students found that regular participation in high quality afterschool programs is linked to significant gains in standardized test scores and work habits, as well as reductions in behavior problems.ⁱⁱⁱ Locally, there is evidence of this with Baltimore's Out-of-School Time (BOOST) programs. An independent evaluator of BOOST programs in the 2005-2006 school year concluded that youth enrolled in BOOST "...demonstrated a number of positive outcomes related to school success and experienced many benefits of a quality afterschool program." This included 89% of participating youth reporting that their afterschool program had taught them to do something really well, and 86% of youth reporting that their afterschool program helped them to "have a positive feeling about their future."^{iv}

While high quality OST programs have significant positive effects on student outcomes, it is also true that low quality programs fail to show positive effects, and may even have negative impacts. States are now seeking to support high quality OST programs by developing definitions of quality embodied in program standards, creating measures of afterschool quality, and improving quality at the program level through licensing and accreditation, professional development, and incentives for reaching higher quality levels.^v Although Maryland is just beginning a systemic quality initiative, our efforts are bolstered by the fact that a consensus on a core set of OST practices has emerged.^{vi}



According to the 2007 National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) Issue Brief, "Making the Case: Quality Afterschool Programs Matter," quality after school programs are those that incorporate a youth development approach. The Community Network for Youth Development (CNYD) defines youth development as "the natural process through which all young people seek ways to meet their basic physical and social needs and to build knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in adolescence and young adulthood." While OST providers might all agree that we want this for our young people, the challenge is translating the concept into our programming.

A 2005 study by the RAND Corporation entitled *Making Out-of-School-Time Matter* identified the following programmatic indicators of a youth development approach: 1) a clear mission, 2) high expectations, 3) a safe environment, 4) supportive emotional climate, 5) small total enrollment, 6) stable, trained personnel, 7) appropriate content and pedagogy, and 8) frequent program assessment. The following document incorporates and builds on these quality indicators, gleaned what has been learned from national work and our local experts.

What is the MOST Quality Framework?

The OST field is broad, encompassing everything from seasonal chess leagues to comprehensive afterschool programs that include healthy snacks, homework help, learning opportunities, and a variety of enrichment activities. While it is difficult to identify the common threads of quality that cut across this diversity of programming, doing so will enable the OST community in Maryland to develop a common language of program quality - allowing us to discuss, clarify and encourage deep, sustaining improvement. However, just as importantly, it will help us make the case that additional dollars are essential to continue these important efforts.

The MOST Quality Framework is a clear and accessible tool to assist OST programs in the State of Maryland as they serve youth ages 5 to 19. The framework can serve as a guide for program leadership and staff to build or enhance a culture of continuous learning and improvement, focused on effectively serving the young people of our state. The framework is both foundational, setting standards for baseline program quality, and broad, providing a framework general enough for all types of programs. The framework can serve as a springboard to:

- Develop or refine program policies and procedures
- Promote staff conversations about program quality: areas of success and needed improvement
- Share and compare concerns about programming and the organization
- Develop, revisit, and refine a collective vision, language, and message amongst staff
- Strengthen communication to external funders and stakeholders



Quality Framework Structure

The document is broken into 2 sections: administrative quality standards and program staff quality areas. Under each section there are foundational areas (FAs) with aligned core competencies. We consider the FAs to be the essential elements of program quality improvement (which are briefly explained by corresponding, explanatory statements in the document). The FAs under the section areas are:

MOST Quality Standards Framework

Administrative Quality Standards

- I. Youth Program Design and Accountability
- II. Youth Program Leadership and Sustainability
- III. Health, Safety and Program Space
- IV. Youth Program Staffing and Professional Development

Program Quality Standards

- I. Youth Program Climate
- II. Youth Development
- III. Family/Caring Adult and Community Engagement

Under each of the FAs are a series of Indicators demarcated by number and, in some cases Sub-indicators demarcated by roman numerals. The Indicators seek to provide further explanation of the FAs and the Sub-indicators seek to provide further explanation of the Indicators. Please see the example below:

Standard Format Exemplar:

I. Youth Program Design and Accountability (FOUNDATIONAL AREA): **Quality youth programs are mission driven - program design and evaluation flow explicitly from the program's mission.** (DESCRIPTION OF FA)

(CORE COMPETENCY ALIGNMENT)

Communicate within the organization and to external stakeholders the program's mission and its relationship to program activities, goals and outcomes

Youth Program Design (SUB-FOUNDATIONAL AREA)

1. The youth program has: (INDICATORS)
 - a. Identified an out-of-school time need in the community
 - b. Created and communicated a vision/mission statement based on the identified need
 - c. Used the vision/mission statement to set forth program philosophy, goals, and related outcomes, and staff members know and support it

Background of Document

The Maryland Out-of-School Time (MOST) Network, formed in 2007, is one of 38 statewide networks funded and led by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (with matched funding from local investors). The Network is comprised of citizens and organized groups working collectively to campaign for: 1) resources, 2) training, and 3) effective policies to ensure all children and youth in Maryland have access to developmentally appropriate activities in the out-of-school hours. For more information about the MOST Network, please visit our website at <http://mdoutofschoolttime.org/Overview.html>.

All Mott funded networks are charged with improving the quality of programming in their state. The Maryland Network decided to begin this effort by developing a set of statewide standards. This process began in the Spring of 2009, with a one day retreat including participants from the Governor's Office of Children, the Maryland State Department of Education and OST administrators and program staff from across the state (see the beginning of the document for the complete list). The retreat group reviewed the Maryland After-School Opportunity Fund (MA-SOF) standards, a document developed by afterschool and licensed child care providers under the auspices of Lieutenant Governor Kennedy Townsend, and provided comment and updates. This feedback then became the foundation of the new MOST Standards. After being drafted formally and sent back to the retreat group for additional comment, the draft Standards were presented at the After-School Institute's annual conference, and sent out on the MOST Network listserv and website for additional comment. A finalized version was published on the website in July of 2009.

Next, we began to think about how we could embed the Standards within a quality improvement process to help providers apply them to their work. After researching a variety of quality improvement approaches and talking with our colleagues around the state, we decided to establish a partnership with the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, developers of the YPQA or Youth Program Quality Assessment. The Weikart Center's work has an impressive research backing and is highly regarded by several of our partners in the state. The YPQA is a validated assessment tool designed to evaluate the quality of youth programs and identify staff needs. The center has also embedded it within a quality improvement system designed to authenti-

cally engage program staff in improving themselves. As a pilot effort, we decided to wed our Standards with the YPQA and adopt their quality improvement process to assess its effectiveness with providers around the state. The first step in this process was "cross-walking" our Standards with the YPQA to assess areas of overlap and difference. There was a great deal of alignment between our Standards and the YPQA, however for complete alignment we needed to increase our emphasis on youth voice and governance. We made adjustments to the MOST Standards to address all of the discrepancies between our documents, with the exception of areas regarding local health and safety codes and staff qualification. We intend for local health and safety code to be assessed through compliance visits or via licensing protocol. In the case of staff qualification, we found the indicators too aspirational for a document designed to identify a baseline of quality.

Our last addition to the Standards was to align core competencies, or what staff should know and be able to do, to our document. We believe it is important to tie our vision of program quality to the specific skills staff need. Specifically, we hope that by identifying which core competencies connect to our foundational areas we can provide program leadership with a 'roadmap' for staff training. The core competencies we included are a hybrid formed from the C. S. Mott Foundation's core competency document and work done in Baltimore by the Safe and Sound Campaign in partnership with the local provider community.



MOST NETWORK CORE COMPETENCIES

Administrative Core Competencies (from the C.S. Mott Foundation document)

- Communicate within the organization and to external stakeholders the program’s mission and its relationship to program activities, goals and outcomes
- Gather and review program data for timely program improvement
- Incorporate needs and interests of program participants, their families and the broader community
- Access resources within the broader community
- Communicate and ensure implementation of health and safety expectations
- Successfully manage program staff
- Promote the professional growth and development of program staff
- Engage and support program staff in implementing program activities to achieve program goals

Program Staff Core Competencies (from the Safe and Sound Campaign document)

- Create a positive and productive environment
- Build and sustain positive relationships
- Interact professionally and as a member of a team
- Approach work with self awareness and as a learner
- Possess cultural competence with regard to youth, their families and the community
- Understand current, relevant research on how the brain learns, child and youth development and resiliency theory
- Develop youth programming that is outcome-based and applies youth development research
- Facilitate youth participation and voice

How Can You Get involved?

SPREAD the word about OST quality! Send the Standards materials to a colleague. The Quality Standards Framework and related resources are available for download at www.mdoutofschooltime.org/quality .

CONTACT the Maryland Out-of-School Time Network at 410-625-7976 or email info@mdoutofschooltime.org.

ADMINISTRATIVE QUALITY STANDARDS

Youth Program Design and Accountability

Quality youth programs are mission driven – program design and evaluation flow explicitly from the program’s mission.

Core Competency Alignment:

- Communicate within the organization and to external stakeholders the program’s mission and its relationship to program activities, goals and outcomes
- Gather and review program data for timely program improvement

Youth Program Design

1. The youth program has:
 - a. Identified an out-of-school time need in the community
 - b. Created and communicated a vision/mission statement based on the identified need
 - c. Used the vision/mission statement to set forth program philosophy, goals, and related outcomes, and staff members know and support it

Youth Program Accountability

2. The youth program has a corresponding plan for evaluation and assessment. The youth program:
 - a. Conducts assessments and evaluations using appropriate evaluation designs and methodologies
 - b. Uses assessment and evaluation data to refine program design and implementation
 - c. Involves key stakeholders, including staff, board of directors, families, and youth in long-term planning, fiscal management and decision-making
 - d. Implements a formal system for getting feedback from young people about the program (e.g. every program year, youth surveys are given in each offering that address satisfaction with the program)
 - e. Solicits verbal or written feedback from all past participants regarding satisfaction with services



ADMINISTRATIVE QUALITY STANDARDS



Youth Program Leadership and Sustainability

A quality youth program provides effective management that ensures successful implementation of program goals and sustainability.

Core Competency Alignment:

- Incorporate needs and interests of program participants, their families and the broader community
- Gather and review program data for timely program improvement
- Access resources within the broader community

Youth Program Leadership

1. Plan, implement and engage in continuous assessment and improvement in each of the quality program areas:
 - a. Youth Program Design and Accountability
 - b. Program Leadership and Sustainability
 - c. Physical Environment and Youth Program Climate
 - d. Health and Safety
 - e. Program Staffing and Professional Development Youth Development
 - f. Family/Caring Adult and Community Engagement
2. Develop policies and procedures that are responsive to the needs of youth and families:
 - a. Hours of operation are based on the needs of youth and families
 - b. Program fees are made affordable based on the needs of youth and families
 - c. Program activities are based on the needs and interests of youth and families
 - d. Program staff are culturally competent, dedicated to serving the program community and, where possible, representative of the youth and their families
3. Maintain accurate and accessible documentation of:
 - a. Participant attendance data
 - b. Emergency/medical information for each participant
 - c. Activity schedule with room assignments
 - d. Any document required by law

Youth Program Sustainability

4. Fiscal management systems are planned and implemented:
 - a. Create clearly defined procedures and processes to ensure sound fiscal planning and management
 - b. Maintain a budget with accurate records of funds received and dispersed
 - c. Project revenues and expenses based on historical data, new info and trends
 - d. Complete reports in an accurate and timely manner
5. The program plans for sustainability:
 - a. Develops a strategic plan for sustainability
 - b. Pursues new opportunities for community members to support the program (e.g., in-kind donations of space and materials, financial support) and puts partnership agreements in place
 - c. Seeks new funding to maintain and expand the program
 - d. Participates in advocacy efforts to increase program quality and availability
 - e. Creates an effective marketing strategy that publicizes the program

ADMINISTRATIVE QUALITY STANDARDS



III. Health, Safety and Program Space

A quality youth program ensures the health and safety of all youth and staff.

Core Competency Alignment:

- Communicate and ensure implementation of health and safety expectations

Health and Safety

1. Program policies and procedures are in place to protect the safety and health of youth:
 - a. Establish procedures and train staff to prevent accidents and manage emergencies (including training on mandatory reporting and identifying signs of abuse)
 - b. Establish policies to transport youth safely and comply with all legal requirements for vehicles and drivers
 - c. Create documentation of participant location during program hours
 - d. Ensure all staff have undergone and passed criminal background checks
2. Systems are in place to protect youth from physical and emotional harm:
 - a. Ensure youth have adult supervision from program opening through dismissal and hand off to parent/guardian through monitoring/enforcement of program policies and procedures
 - b. Ensure youth do not harm each other, physically or emotionally, during program activities and transition times on or off site through monitoring/enforcement of program policies and procedures
 - c. Create age appropriate policies and procedures to support safe travel to and from programs
3. The program offers food and drink that meet the nutritional needs of youth:
 - a. Ensure potable drinking water is readily available at all times
 - b. Ensure snacks and meals, if provided, are healthy, appropriate to the ages and sizes of youth and timed appropriately

Program Space

4. The program's indoor and outdoor space meets the needs of youth:
 - a. Program space is suitable for all activities offered (e.g., furniture and room support small and large groups; if athletic activity is offered, then program space supports this)
 - b. Program space is divided by or has access to well-defined interest areas (e.g., materials in areas match purpose; spaces are clearly marked and/or labeled)
 - c. Program space meets or exceeds local health and safety codes
5. The program's indoor and outdoor space meets the needs of staff:
 - a. Program space is sufficient for planning and storage needs of staff
 - b. Guidelines regarding the use and maintenance of the program facility and equipment are written and available
6. There are sufficient materials to support program activities. Materials are:
 - a. Adequate for the number of youth in the program
 - b. Complete, safe and in good repair
 - c. Developmentally appropriate for the age range of youth in the program

ADMINISTRATIVE QUALITY STANDARDS

IV

Youth Program Staffing and Professional Development

A quality youth program ensures competent, child-centered staff through effective employment procedures and professional development efforts.

Core Competency Alignment:

- Successfully manage program staff
- Promote the professional growth and development of program staff
- Engage and support program staff in implementing program activities to achieve program goals

Youth Program Staff

1. Recruit, hire, train and retain staff who like and are committed to youth, have the skills/experience (competencies) to identify and meet youth needs, and realize program goals
2. Implement defined strategies to prevent turnover and reduce its negative impact
3. Utilize community volunteers to maintain a low staff to student ratio and increase the individual attention provided to youth
4. Design staff/participant ratios and group size to meet the needs of youth:
 - a. Ratios vary according to the ages, abilities and needs of youth
 - b. Ratios and group sizes vary according to the type and complexity of the activity
 - c. Plan is in place to provide adequate staff coverage in case of emergencies
 - d. Substitute staff are used to maintain ratios when regular staff are absent

Youth Program Professional Development

5. Identify appropriate, effective resources for professional development
6. Create on-going professional development opportunities aligned with program goals, staff needs, and principles of adult learning
7. Provide staff (paid, volunteer and substitute) with:
 - a. Written job descriptions that outline responsibilities to youth, families and the program
 - b. Staff handbook with all relevant policies and procedures
 - c. Comprehensive orientation to the program discussing the program philosophy, standardized evaluation of their performance, routines, personnel policies and procedures of the program
 - d. Ongoing written evaluation of their performance annually
 - e. Relevant professional development activities (e.g., child/youth development, behavior management, CPR, first aid, abuse and neglect prevention); more than half the staff participate in at least one activity each year
 - f. Pre-service orientation activities that include elements of youth development; new staff receive 8 or more hours
 - g. At least one relevant professional development activity outside of the organization each year; more than half the staff participate
 - h. Regular opportunities to meet with staff from different program offerings during the program cycle

PROGRAM STAFF QUALITY STANDARDS

Youth Program Climate

A quality program requires the establishment of a respectful and nurturing environment.

Core Competency Alignment:

- Create a positive and productive environment
- Build and sustain positive relationships
- Interact professionally and as a member of a team
- Approach work with self awareness and as a learner
- Possess cultural competence with regard to youth, their families and the community

Youth Program Climate

1. Leadership and staff set the tone for program climate. Leadership and staff:
 - a. Treat each other with respect
 - b. Model positive behavior including healthy debate and appropriate conflict resolution
 - c. Communicate cooperatively with each other
2. Leadership and staff relate to youth in positive ways. Leadership and staff:
 - a. Treat youth with respect and listen to what they say
 - b. Make youth feel welcome and comfortable each day
 - c. Encourage youth to try out new skills or attempt higher levels of performance
 - d. Respond to youth with acceptance and appreciation
 - e. Engage positively with youth
 - f. Seek input from youth in order to determine both the cause and solution to conflicts and negative behavior (e.g., youth generate possible solutions and choose one)
3. Leadership and staff encourage youth to interact. Youth:
 - a. Appear relaxed and involved with each other
 - b. Show respect for each other
 - c. Cooperate and work well together
4. Leadership, staff, families and the community interact with each other in positive ways. Leadership and staff:
 - a. Make families/community feel welcome and comfortable
 - b. Treat families/community as a part of the program (e.g., there is an open door policy; families are given opportunities to volunteer or participate in activities; there is an orientation for families upon enrollment into the program)
 - c. Provide staff mentoring and training that supports working with program population (e.g., youth with disabilities or special needs, or youth of different genders, races, cultures, and religions)
 - d. Use various strategies to communicate with families who do not speak English (e.g., bilingual staff and materials)
 - e. Create opportunities and encourage family members to be involved in program/organization decision-making (e.g., family representatives on board, yearly evaluation of program, input in program planning)

PROGRAM STAFF QUALITY STANDARDS



Youth Development

A quality program employs research-based youth development strategies that reflect a complementary, holistic approach built on participant strengths rather than on repairing deficits.

Core Competency Alignment:

- Understand current, relevant research on how the brain learns, child and youth development and resiliency theory
- Develop youth programming that is outcome-based and applies youth development research
- Facilitate youth participation and voice
- Build and sustain positive relationships
- Possess cultural competence with regard to youth, their families and the community

Youth Program Relationships

1. Staff respond appropriately to the individual needs of youth; staff:
 - a. Know that each participant has special interests and talents
 - b. Recognize and appreciate each participant's abilities
 - c. Respect each participant's culture and home language
 - d. Are supported in encouraging youth to share personal concerns and in effectively addressing those concerns (i.e., "safe zone" posters are displayed; staff are trained to address youth concerns; staff devote time to youth with concerns; counselors or referral lists are available)
2. Staff encourage youth to make choices and to become more responsible; staff:
 - a. Offer assistance and encourage participant's initiative without taking control
 - b. Encourage youth to take leadership roles
 - c. Give youth opportunities to make choices
 - d. Provide all youth with the opportunity to make at least one open-ended process choice (e.g., youth decide roles, order of activities, tools or materials, or how to present results)
3. Staff use positive techniques to guide the behavior of youth; staff:
 - a. Praise positive participant behavior such as cooperating, sharing, caring for materials or joining in activities
 - b. Set appropriate limits to avoid negative, disrespectful or isolating disciplinary methods
 - c. Encourage youth to take responsibility for resolving conflicts
 - d. Guide youth to seek staff assistance in resolving conflicts when necessary

Youth Programming/Activities

4. Possess and communicate high expectations of all youth in regards to their behavior and program performance
5. Design and plan intentional activities that:
 - a. Match participant interests
 - b. Are developmentally appropriate
 - c. Are relevant
 - d. Reflect promising practices around learning theory

PROGRAM STAFF QUALITY STANDARDS



Youth Development (continued)

A quality program employs research-based youth development strategies that reflect a complementary, holistic approach built on participant strengths rather than on repairing deficits.

Youth Participation and Engagement

6. Young people have structured opportunities to influence the format or content of program offerings based on their interests, preferences and/or satisfaction
7. Daily schedule is flexible and offers enough independence and stimulation in a secure manner to meet the needs of all youth
8. Youth and staff share responsibilities on program governing bodies (e.g., boards, advisory panels, standing committees, task forces)
9. Staff interact with youth by:
 - a. Asking questions that encourage youth to think for themselves
 - b. Sharing skills and resources to help youth gain information and solve problems
 - c. Providing activities that balance concrete experiences involving materials, people and projects (e.g., field trips, experiments, interviews, service trips, creative writing) with abstract concepts (e.g., lectures, diagrams, formulas)
 - d. Providing one or more opportunities to talk about (or otherwise communicate) what they are doing and what they are thinking to others



PROGRAM STAFF QUALITY STANDARDS



Family/Caring Adult and Community Engagement

A quality program establishes strong partnerships with families/caring adults and the community to achieve program goals.

Core Competency Alignment:

- Build and sustain positive relationships
- Possess cultural competence with regard to youth, their families and the community

Family/Caring Adult Engagement

1. Involve parents in out-of-school time programs by:
 - a. Ensuring parents receive clear communication (in writing and verbally) of program policies/procedures, expectations of participation, programmatic updates and events
 - b. Utilizing various strategies to increase parental involvement including parent to parent outreach and incentives (i.e. child care, transportation, potluck dinners)
 - c. Providing family members with opportunities and encouragement to be involved in program/organization decision-making (e.g., family representatives on board, yearly evaluation of program, input in program planning)
 - d. Involving multiple family members and extended family members
2. Staff and families/caring adults share important information to support the well-being of youth:
 - a. Program policies require that staff and family members communicate about children and youth's well-being

Community Engagement

3. Work with various community-based organizations, agencies and schools to network and enhance the program:
 - a. Communicate with school partners (where appropriate) to ensure complimentary programming between the school day and through out-of-school time programming
 - b. Provide information about community resources to meet the needs of youth and their families
 - c. Develop a list of community resources to expand program offerings
 - d. Take collective action to sustain the program
 - e. Plan activities to help youth get to know the larger community
 - f. Offer community-service options, especially for older youth
4. Collaborate with community schools, service agencies, churches, businesses, law enforcement agencies, etc.:
 - a. Share personnel, space, programs, materials, etc.
 - b. Establish active, representative program Advisory Council

Resources used in the creation of this document:

California After-School Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool

Core Competencies for Afterschool Educators (CS Mott Foundation)

Maryland After-School Opportunity Fund Advisory Board Recommended Quality Standards (MASOF)

Missouri Afterschool Program Standards

National Afterschool Association (NAA) Standards for Quality School-Age Care

New York State Afterschool Network (NYSAN) Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool User's Guide

Standards for Baltimore After-School Opportunities Implementation Guide and Work Book

Standards for Effective Out-of-School Time (Extended Learning) Programs, Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS)

ⁱ Carnegie Commission's report, *A Matter of Time: Risk and Opportunity in the Non-School Hours* (1992).

ⁱⁱ Vandell, D., Reisner, E., Pierce, K., Brown, B., Lee, D., Bolt, D., & Pechman, E. (2006). *The study of promising after-school programs: Examination of longer term outcomes after two years of program experiences*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin – Madison.

ⁱⁱⁱ Vandell, D., Reisner, E., Pierce, K., (2007) *Otucomes Linked to High-Quality After School Programs: Longitudinal Findings from the Study of Promising Afterschool Programs*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin – Madison.

^{iv} BOOST Evaluation Highlights, 2005-2006.

^v Durlak, J.A., & Weissberg, R.P. (2007) *The impact of after-school programs that promote personal and social skills. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning*. Retrieved January 17, 2007 from <http://www.casel.org/downloads.ASP-Full.pdf>

^{vi} Granger, R., Durlak, J.A., Yohalem, N., & Reisner, E. (2007). *Improving after-school program quality*. New York, NY: William T. Grant Foundation.





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