



Afterschool Quality Matters

A Call to Action

Expectations for afterschool programs are high. Mounting evidence and research confirms the power of afterschool and summer programs to close achievement gaps, increase third grade reading proficiency and improve community outcomes. However, the field cannot achieve these outcomes without quality programs staffed by highly qualified professionals.



The good news is that we know what quality afterschool is, how to measure it and how to help programs and practitioners achieve it. However, public and private funding is critical to making sustainable improvements in afterschool quality. There are several concrete investments that can be made to achieve measurable and lasting impact.

Development of Quality System Elements

Quality system elements such as afterschool standards and assessment tools are more likely to be embraced by the field if leaders and practitioners have played a role in their development. Funding can support work and writing sessions, literature and research reviews, vetting among practitioners, dissemination and professional development to support implementation.

Tools and Technical Assistance

Dissemination of newly developed tools is most effective through in-person or online small group training. Follow-on technical assistance and coaching ensure that tools are being successfully utilized and providing reliable assessments of quality.

Professional Development

There is a need to align and revise existing, or develop new professional development curricula and coursework to support the implementation of quality standards and assessment tools. Professional development coursework needs to be part of a comprehensive system that meets the needs of all afterschool providers and articulates to career advancement and higher education opportunities.

Incentivizing Participation

Managing change is difficult. Funders can encourage the use of quality standards and assessment tools by offering incentives. Tiered subsidy reimbursements, professional development scholarships and low-cost loans or grants to programs to upgrade facilities have proven to be attractive incentives for participating in quality improvement initiatives.

Conducting Research and Evaluation

Many grants require recipients to complete evaluations of the effectiveness of the programs they fund. Quality data collection, analysis and dissemination of findings are cost-prohibitive for most programs. Current funding is paying for data collection, but stops short of supporting the analysis, synthesis and perhaps most importantly, application, of this data that will make a real difference in child outcomes.

Sustaining Afterschool Networks and Intermediaries

Intermediary organizations and networks have proven to be effective vehicles for shepherding afterschool quality improvement efforts. City and state level networks and intermediaries have direct access and regular communication with afterschool programs and providers and are trusted allies. Successful intermediaries break down silos among the web of agencies providing afterschool programs (such as schools, social services, juvenile justice and workforce development), help eliminate administrative duplication and as a result, push more funding to direct service.

We are at a critical juncture. Our current approach to education and learning is failing large numbers of students across the country. Afterschool has emerged as one solution to this seemingly intractable challenge. Our expanding knowledge of what children need to be able to develop into healthy, productive adults, coupled with a new understanding of what activities and behaviors contribute to a quality afterschool program, create an imperative that is hard to ignore. The National AfterSchool Association is committed to work with its affiliates and the afterschool field at large to ensure all children have access to quality afterschool and summer programs.