



VPOST

VIRGINIA PARTNERSHIP FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

Best Practices

About Our Best Practices

At current present, the Out-of-School Time field in Virginia is comprised of non-formalized networks of programs that are school and community-based, serving a wide spectrum of youth. The Virginia Partnership for Out-of-School Time (VPOST) is the state-affiliate for the National Afterschool Association and Afterschool Alliance. We are a collection of stakeholders that serve to promote quality and foster a statewide system of outstanding out-of-school time programs, including afterschool and summer programs. We want to ensure that all youth in Virginia have access to programing and also that the programs available to them are impactful and of high-quality.

In pursuit of this cause, the Best Practices were developed by VPOST in collaboration with leading afterschool and out-of-school time organizations across the Commonwealth, to set guidelines that illustrate the components of a quality program. Looking at both local and national models of quality, our Best Practices were purposefully crafted to be versatile. As such, they can be used in a broad array of settings, such as school-based or community-based programs, in rural and urban settings and for programs serving diverse youth populations of varying backgrounds, ages and abilities.

Out-of-school time providers and school districts can utilize the Best Practices as a tool for self-reflection and assessment either alone or in conjunction with other quality assessments. Parents and stakeholders can use them to identify if a program is of high-quality. The Best Practices are non-regulatory. Rather, they can provide context to the recommended standards of our field, particularly as they operate here in Virginia.

Endorsed By



BEST PRACTICES

BEST PRACTICE: ACTIVE AND ENGAGED LEARNING

Guiding Principle: Programming and activities are developmentally appropriate and serve the physical, cognitive, social, emotional and creative development of participants of all abilities.

An out-of-school program:

- Promotes discovery learning across all programmatic areas
- Supports participants to navigate the learning space independently
- Provides a wide variety of activities that promote youth choice
- Involves participants in planning, development and implementation
- Engages participants in project-based, hands-on experiential activities linked to learning
- Develops leadership among and provides leadership opportunities to all participants under the guidance of program staff

Activities of an out-of-school program:

- Are developmentally appropriate and support youth development principles
- Promote reflection, critical thinking, problem solving and independent thinking, among other key executive function skills
- Provide a fun and supportive environment for participants and staff
- Are youth-led with staff serving as facilitators of the learning experience whenever possible
- Build on participants' natural strengths and developmental assets and foster self-confidence
- Provide an intentional link to school-day learning
- Include both individual and group-based opportunities with a range of group sizes
- Provide new opportunities for participants that they would not have access to during the school day
- Build life skills in participants

The environment of an out-of-school program:

- Is fun and supportive for participants and staff
- Develops and supports resiliency

To the extent possible, an out-of-school program should adopt some of the following:

- Offer opportunities for participants to receive assistance and complete their homework
- Provide apprenticeship opportunities to participants if applicable
- Provide college and career readiness activities that also promote school completion if applicable

To the extent possible, activities of an out-of-school program should adopt some of the following:

- Promote and develop workforce skills that can be applied in the real world
- Incorporate financial literacy
- Provide participants opportunities to engage with technology
- Promote media literacy
- Provide opportunities for participants to engage in a wide variety of arts and music programming
- Provide opportunities for participants to engage in a wide variety of STEM programming
- Offer young people the opportunity to increase their physical activity
- Provide opportunities for participants to learn about other countries, cultures, languages, and global issues

BEST PRACTICE: LINKAGES TO THE SCHOOL DAY AND THE STANDARD OF LEARNING STATE STANDARDS

Guiding Principle: The program intentionally links afterschool curricula and activities to the school day to ensure programming is aligned with and enrich academic standards.

An out-of-school program:

- Ensures that program staff maintain two-way communication with the school principal, teachers and staff in a variety of ways
- Provides an opportunity for participants to have a voice in programming, structure and approaches to learning
- Provides participants with access to different means and types of communications and opportunities to communicate in multiple media forms
- Exposes participants to a diverse range of perspectives and cultures and encourages participants to respect and learn from them
- Offers participants access to adequate materials that support program activities and staff and participants' needs
- Provides opportunities for participants to improve their literacy skills by providing access to a diverse range of literature and topics that are developmentally appropriate
- Offers participants the opportunity to build strong content knowledge in a wide-variety of subject matter—such as math, science and social studies

Activities of an out-of-school program:

Provide opportunities for participants to build their vocabulary and practice their skills

Provide an environment for participants to demonstrate independence and become self-directed learners

Encourage the following habits of mind when participants use mathematics:

- Persevering in problem solving
- Reasoning abstractly and quantitatively
- Constructing viable arguments and critiquing the reasoning of others
- Modeling with mathematics
- Using appropriate tools strategically
- Attending to precision
- Looking for and making use of structure
- Looking for and expressing regularity in repeated reasoning

* Several of these standards come from the habits of mind of the Common Core Standards. The Virginia Partnership for Out-of-School Time plans to modify these standards periodically to ensure that they align with the Virginia Standards of Learning.

BEST PRACTICE: HEALTH, NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL FITNESS

Guiding Principle: The program provides a nurturing environment in which young people can be emotionally safe, physically active, and learn and practice healthy habits.

An out-of-school program:

- Promotes positive social-emotional development
- Promotes character development and healthy choices in response to peer pressure—including pressure to use drugs and alcohol
- Allows participants to choose from a variety of physical activities
- Demonstrates a strong commitment to promoting an active and healthy lifestyle
- Respects and positively promotes developmental and physical growth
- Displays menus publicly if providing meals
- Provides nutritious options if providing snacks and/or meals
- Ensures that staff are aware of the special physical and mental health needs of participants and that staff model respectful behavior with participants
- Ensure that staff use trauma-informed practices

BEST PRACTICE: ENVIRONMENT (INDOOR AND OUTDOOR SPACE)

Guiding Principle: Indoor and outdoor space provides safe environments that support the developmental, physical and emotional needs of diverse participants.

An out-of-school program:

- Provides a physically safe environment in which all participants can be active and freely express themselves without fear of harm
- Ensures that the space, equipment and materials meet the needs of participants, staff and the curriculum
- Provides developmentally appropriate indoor and outdoor activities
- Provides frequent access to outdoor space when possible
- Allows for and supports participant-driven activities in the indoor and outdoor space
- Ensures that program staff are trained and certified in CPR and First Aid
- Offers supervision of participants at all times during program activities
- Has emergency procedures in place that are clearly displayed and understood by participants, family, and staff, including but not limited to managing: natural and man-made disasters such as intruders, weather-related events, domestic violence and environmental hazards, along with procedures for family reunification. Programs should be in compliance with school or community organizational policy and procedures and coordinated with their local government and emergency services.

BEST PRACTICE: RELATIONSHIPS, CULTURE AND DIVERSITY

Guiding Principle: The program environment creates positive connections among all staff, participants, families and the community and beyond while celebrating culture and diversity.

An out-of-school program:

- Promotes a shared understanding of terms like respect, health, learning, youth development, diversity and civic responsibility among staff, participants, families and the community
- Engages staff, participants, families and the community in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner
- Promotes positive peer interaction among participants
- Strengthens conflict resolution skills in participants
- Promotes positive social and emotional development
- Makes participants feel emotionally safe and supported at the program
- Fosters an environment that promotes diversity
- Provides opportunities for participants to interact with or learn about role models of diverse backgrounds
- Offers opportunities for participants to become more globally aware and globally competent as a component of being ready for college and career

All staff members of an out-of-school program:

- Build positive relationships that are supportive, nurturing and consistent among each other, community partners, with the participants and with parents
- Build positive self-esteem in every participant
- Create open communication with participants, parents and the community around program mission and core values
- Build strong family engagement practices
- Connect participants and their families to the appropriate social services
- Model and reinforce positive behavior and use positive techniques to address negative behavior by participants

BEST PRACTICE: STAFFING, VOLUNTEERS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Guiding Principle: The program employs and supports the professional growth of highly effective staff and volunteers that are dedicated to creating a positive, developmentally appropriate and supportive learning environment.

All staff members and volunteers of an out-of-school program:

The administration of an out-of-school program:

- Has in place and utilizes a staff and volunteer performance evaluation system
- Holds consistent staff meetings
- Works to recruit the highest quality staff and volunteers and develops strategies to decrease staff and/or volunteer turnover
- Has in place a compensation and benefits package that all staff are eligible to participate in
- Offers a clear salary structure providing a livable wage to all staff
- Creates individual professional development plans with each of their staff members on an ongoing basis
- Provides all staff initial orientation and training, as well as ongoing professional development that supports individual growth and builds on strategy for effective program practice
- Selects a staff-to-participant ratio that meets the needs of participants

BEST PRACTICE: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Guiding Principle: The program displays effective leadership, sound fiscal management and coherent policies and procedures that support quality and sustainability.

An out-of-school program:

- Articulates program policies and procedures clearly and makes them available to participants, parents and the community for review
- Establishes clear and well-defined channels of communication—between staff members, between staff and participants, and between staff and parents
- Has a clear mission statement and philosophy that is widely understood and shared among staff, parents and the community
- Supports staff members on an on-going basis, including special training to best reflect population served
- Designs program elements to meet the needs of participants
- Supports the health and well-being of all participants
- Solicits frequent feedback from participants, families, staff and the community
- Has the appropriate insurance to protect staff, administrators, participants and parents
- Displays pick-up/drop-off procedures publicly and articulates them clearly to parents and participants
- Displays the hours of program operation publicly in a visible space

The administration of an out-of-school program:

- Receives written consent from the parents or guardians of participants before communicating with the school and teachers
- Creates and maintains an employee handbook that clarifies internal policies and procedures
- Provides a sound budget and strong fiscal management
- Makes clear the expectations for participant behavior and encourages active and consistent participation
- Keeps records on all participants up-to-date and accessible to staff
- Ensures that staff understand their roles in the community and opportunities for community leadership
- Articulates clearly the program costs and fees to participants, parents and the community

BEST PRACTICE: CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Guiding Principle: The program has mechanisms in place that promote continuous improvement and uphold high best practices of operation and accountability.

An out-of-school program:

- Has in place internal and external evaluation tools that are used to ensure effectiveness and share success with stakeholders
- Displays publicly a mission and vision that clearly connects to the activities in which participants are engaged
- Conducts a needs assessment of participants in order to target programming based on the needs and interests of participants
- Establishes measurable goals and objectives that are aligned with the mission and vision of the organization as well as research on effective out-of-school time programming
- Has a system of measurement to assess the quality of the program including staff performance and daily attendance of participants
- Has an action plan that is used and followed by staff to continuously improve the quality of the program
- Uses qualitative and quantitative data to inform decision-making and quality improvement
- Gives participants, parents, staff and all other stakeholders opportunities to assess the program through an annual survey
- Encourages staff to approach professional development as a journey rather than a destination