

VPOST

Quality Standards

For Virginia Out-of-School Time Programs

2nd Edition

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 WELCOME

2 ABOUT THE PROCESS

4 READING THE STANDARDS

6 TERMS

8 AUDIENCE & PROSPECTIVE USES

9 ADOPTIONS

10 QUALITY STANDARDS

- 11 ACTIVE & ENGAGED LEARNING
- 13 PARTNERSHIPS & NETWORKING
- 15 INCLUSION & BELONGING
- 16 SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS
- 17 LEADERSHIP & STAFF DEVELOPMENT
- 20 RELATIONSHIPS
- 21 CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT
- 22 HEALTH & WELLBEING
- 24 SAFE ENVIRONMENTS
- 26 CHILD & YOUTH VOICE

27 RECOGNITION & THANKS

WELCOME TO THE QUALITY STANDARDS

Welcome to the Second Edition of VPOST's Quality Standards for Out-of-School Time Programs! We are glad you are here.

Why do we need Quality Standards?
Virginia's Out-of-School Time (OST) programs come in many forms. They are in public schools and community-based organizations, parks and recreation centers and for-profit childcare or summer programs. Staff members, whether they're youth development specialists, teachers, coaches, or librarians, work with school-aged children and youth across the Commonwealth. Despite this variety of perspective, everyone agrees OST programs make a big positive impact by providing safe, structured environments for learning and growth, while giving working parents peace of mind.

The diversity of out-of-school time programs and staff is a strength that allows us to create unique and locally-driven solutions. But it also means we need a common language to define program quality in Virginia. To address this, the Virginia Partnership for Out-of-School Time (VPOST) released Quality Standards (Best Practices) in 2017. Now in 2024, we present the second edition of the Quality Standards.

ABOUT THE PROCESS

Both editions illustrate the components and indicators of a quality program. While some of the Standards have remained unchanged from the original version, others have been reimagined or newly added.

First Edition (2017)		Second Edition (2024)
Active and Engaged Learning	No change	Active and Engaged Learning
	New Standard	Partnerships and Networking
Relationships, Culture, and Diversity	Reimagined	Inclusion and Belonging
Linkages to the School-Day and the Standard of Learning State Standards	Reimagined	Support Student Success
Staffing, Volunteers, and Professional Development AND Leadership and Management	Reimagined	Leadership and Staff Development
Relationships, Culture, and Diversity	Reimagined	Relationships
Continous Improvement	No change	Continous Improvement
Health, Nutrition and Physical Fitness	Reimagined	Health and Wellbeing
Environment (Indoor and Outdoor Space)	Reimagined	Safe Environments
	New Standard	Child and Youth Voice

This edition of the Quality Standards, was created by the VPOST Quality Workgroup and reviewed by two user feedback groups. Members of the feedback groups represented various OST settings, geographic locations and also represented individual diversity amongst age, race, gender, educational background and time in the field.

As the Standards were revisited, we looked at national models of quality to ensure alignment. You may ask then, why do we need separate standards for Virginia programs? First, national and local quality models are not mutually exclusive and as such, our standards are intended to be used in conjunction with other quality metrics. Second, there are two main traits of the Virginia Out-of-School Time Quality Standards that provide unique value. To begin with, they were made by the field in Virginia for Virginia. Next, they have been crafted to be simple and straightforward. The structure and language is approachable enough for those new to the field, but comprehensive enough for the most seasoned leader.



READING THE STANDARDS

Our newest edition of the Quality Standards has a new structure designed to be easy to read and easy to navigate.

Each Quality Standard recognizes a component of OST programs.

It is followed by the *Guiding Principle*, which states the core actions and values for that component. It is a steady rule to follow in various situations.

Next comes *The Why*, which outlines the rationale and purpose for the Guiding Principle.

Last, *What It Might Look* Like gives observable indicators of what the standard may look like in a program as it's being implemented. Below is an excerpt of the Child and Youth Voice Standard.

Quality Standard	Guiding Principal	The Why	What It Might Look Like

Child and Youth Voice	Children and youth have authentic opportunities to plan, implement and provide feedback on programming.	Through authentic opportunities in programming, children and youth learn to engage with the world around them.	• Collect participants' interests and feedback. Use what you discover when planning and carrying out programming. Examples of ways to collect feedback include:
			  ○ Surveys
			  ○ Input from youth advisory board
			  ○ Conducting participant focus groups
			  ○ Provide youth opportunities for input into hiring practices
			• As developmentally appropriate, invite and allow participants to co-design the program and activities
			• Give youth the opportunity to lead their peers in open discussions or activities
			• Engage youth and adult participants with local, regional, and state advocacy.

It's important to note, there is a heavy emphasis on "might" in *What it Might Look Like*. This category gives an example for the standard in action but is not intended to be a comprehensive list of every indicator. Likewise, we don't expect or anticipate any one program to embody every single one of these characteristics.

> **There is a heavy emphasis on "might" in *What it Might Look Like.***



TERMS

Below is an elaboration on what we mean when we say...

- **Children and Youth:** We intentionally use both children and youth. In this guide children implies under age 13, while youth implies 13-19.

- **Participants:** Participants is a broad term referring to anyone participating in an OST program and can include children, youth, and family members.

- **Caregiver:** In the quality standards, this refers to any person with who lives with or provides regular care to a child/youth. Caregiver includes mothers and fathers, but is a broader more inclusive term that includes other adults raising children such as grandparents, other family members or foster parents.

- **Staff:** Throughout the Quality Standards there is reference to staff. This is a broad term that speaks to any adults working, both paid and volunteer, with children, youth and families on behalf of an OST program.

- **Leadership:** Leadership refers to people in positions of authority, influence and/or decision making power as it pertains to the context of the Quality Standard.

TERMS

- **Culture:** In the quality standards there are several context-dependent references to culture. In the workplace, culture is the overall atmosphere and environment which is shaped by the company's values and the interactions among employees. It's what makes staff feel comfortable and connected at work, influencing how people communicate, collaborate, and recognize each other's efforts. In reference to an individual's culture, we are referring to the collection of customs, traditions, beliefs, and values someone identifies with. It often includes things like language, food, holidays, and ways of thinking that are passed down through generations and shape how a person sees the world.

- **Professional Development:** This refers to in-person and virtual trainings, conferences, e-learning courses, webinars and coaching.

What's next?

Phase 2 of the Quality Standards will be the creation of a program assessment tool. Stay tuned!

AUDIENCE & PROSPECTIVE USES

Quality Standards were purposefully crafted to be versatile. As such, they can be used in a broad array of settings and for various purposes. The Quality Standards are non-regulatory as they serve as an assessment and information tool.



ADOPTION

Alternatives
Leader in Innovative Youth Development

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Virginia's most trusted child care resource.

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DEVELOPMENT GROUP

ForKids

SCHOOL of ROCK

Hopkins House
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PUBLIC SCHOOLS
ENGAGE • INSPIRE • THRIVE

KIDZ R COOKIN'
TEACHING KIDS ABOUT HEALTHY CHOICES

LITTLE SCHOLARS

MENTOR
VIRGINIA

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STEM EIC
AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS

R.E.A.L Girlz
RESPONSIBLE, EMPOWERED AND LOVED

Harrisonburg, VA
OSL Coalition

the YMCA
Rappahannock Area

Peter Paul
EDUCATE | ENGAGE | EMPOWER

CROZET SPORTS
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

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ON THE ROAD
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Falls Church City Public Schools
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Interested in adopting the new Quality Standards? You can find the **Adoption Form here.**

QUALITY STANDARDS

ACTIVE & ENGAGED LEARNING

Guiding Principle

Programming and activities are developmentally appropriate and serve the diverse needs and interests of participants of all abilities.

The Why

Participants who represent varying ages, backgrounds, and life experiences, and possess unique talents and abilities deserve responsive learning experiences.

What It ***MIGHT*** Look Like

- Staff identify the interests of children and youth to create appealing programming and experiences.
- Enrichment activities merge different learning subjects together such as math in music or science of cooking.
- When beginning an activity, staff clearly describe to participants what they should be able to know or do as a result of participating.

ACTIVE & ENGAGED LEARNING

What It ***MIGHT*** Look Like

- Staff ask participants questions that help them remember what they already know and encourage them to reflect and make decisions.
- Participants are given different choices on how to engage in an activity so they can decide what works best for their needs.
- Activities are hands-on and real-world based as much as possible.
- Children and youth are given opportunities to explore, experiment, imagine and use creativity.



PARTNERSHIPS & NETWORKING

Guiding Principle

Program leaders network, build and strengthen partnerships to leverage resources and create sustainability.

The Why

Each program has its unique strengths and assets. We are most effective when we work together towards the greatest collective impact. Sharing resources fosters increased collaboration, action, and results.

What It ***MIGHT*** Look Like

- To the extent possible within individual programs:
  - Program leaders and staff attend community events to build relationships and partnerships.
  - Leaders identify and build relationships with community, government, and business partners to leverage resources.
- Staff and leaders provide opportunities for practitioners and the communities they serve, to suggest resources and ways to meet their needs.

PARTNERSHIPS & NETWORKING

What It ***MIGHT*** Look Like

- Staff and Leaders respond to requests for info at local, regional, and state level such as participating in data collection surveys.
- If available, programs participate in such as regional networks and local stakeholder groups to allow for conversations that bring about change for the community and to serve the whole child and family.
- Stay engaged with VPOST.

Ideal local and state networks conditions:

- Multiple OST providers share training events and resources.
- Local program leaders build a list of OST programs in the community to see gaps and overlap of service. They share this resource with all OST organizations.



INCLUSION & BELONGING

Guiding Principle

Programs ensure there are systems in place that support a welcoming culture inclusive of all backgrounds and abilities, fostering a sense of belonging.

The Why

All people have value and deserve opportunities to succeed while being seen for who they are.

What It ***MIGHT*** Look Like

- Staff training is provided on diversity, inclusion, and trauma-informed practices.
- Hiring practices are reflective of the communities served wherever possible.
- Participants of all abilities, backgrounds and cultures are given inclusive access to opportunities in the program.
- Consistently provide a physically and emotionally safe space that follows a predictable and fun schedule.
- Staff and Leadership creates and maintains spaces that are accessible, trauma-informed, and sensory friendly.
- Program staff monitor participation and try to re-engage with anyone that they notice not participating frequently.
- Staff ensure communication is accessible and inclusive, such as providing written communication in multiple languages or using plain spoken language and using imagery that reflects the population it serves.

SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS

Guiding Principle

The program intentionally links afterschool activities and experiences to support and reinforce academic standards and the development of life skills.

The Why

Student success goes beyond the classroom. For children to thrive, programs and schools need to coordinate and communicate. We provide students new academic and social learning experiences that support their success/learning during the school day.

What It ***MIGHT*** Look Like

- To the extent possible, program and school day staff or administrators have a defined, agreed-upon communication plan. This allows them to collaborate on the needs and progress of the participants in the program or the community at large. This ***may*** include:
  - Afterschool staff and school staff share student data to inform programming and drive individual supports
  - Local OST leaders are invited to participate in school district conversations that guide local policy.
  - Utilize public data such as a school report card
- Out-of-school time programs provide services and activities that supports school-day success.
- Staff provide family engagement opportunities that invites caregivers to be partners in their child's learning.

LEADERSHIP & STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Guiding Principle

The program leadership implements coherent policies and procedures that support quality and sustainability.

The Why

We know that quality staff practices lead to positive youth outcomes and a thriving workforce.

What It ***MIGHT*** Look Like

- Leadership provides opportunity for front-line staff and program participants to have a voice in program development and policies.
- Program staff have a voice in their individual professional growth plan.
- All staff have opportunities for professional development and are recognized for advancing their growth.
- Program policies and procedures are clearly identified and communicated to program participants, including their caregivers.

LEADERSHIP & STAFF DEVELOPMENT

What It ***MIGHT*** Look Like

- Program specific policies and procedures to consider are:
  - General Information
  - Local regulations/requirements
  - Enrollment and Attendance
  - Safety and Security
  - Behavioral Expectations
  - Communication
  - Program Activities
  - Health and Nutrition
  - Fees and Payments
  - Inclusion and Accessibility
  - Partner agreements/Memoranda of Understanding

- Internal policies and procedures are clearly identified and communicated to staff. Program specific policies and procedures to consider are:
  - Employment and Code of Conduct
  - Training and Development
  - Child Safety
  - Program Implementation
  - Behavior Management
  - Communication
  - Confidentiality and Data Management
  - Professionalism and Accountability
  - Accessibility and Inclusion
  - Partner agreements/Memoranda of Understanding

LEADERSHIP & STAFF DEVELOPMENT

What It ***MIGHT*** Look Like

- Leadership serves as an advocate to create conditions that support a high-quality workforce, as defined by the National Afterschool Association Job Quality Standards.
- Leadership creates a culture in the work environment that promotes employee wellness in areas such as mental health resources, work-life balance, professional and personal development and recognition and rewards.



RELATIONSHIPS

Guiding Principle

The program provides opportunities for positive connections and interaction between all staff, children and youth, families, and the community.

The Why

Positive relationships are foundational building blocks to creating successful participant outcomes.

What It ***MIGHT*** Look Like

- Open doors to organizations and community members to offer their talents to program.
- Staff build in activities and routines that promote positive interactions and relationships at every level.
- Leadership provides staff with training for building positive, developmentally appropriate social skills.
- Staff asks participants their interests and needs, and offer modifications and adaptations as necessary
- Leaders and staff communicate through various outlets (ex: newsletters, bulletin boards, social media) to celebrate participant achievements
- Leadership facilitates a culture that values and encourages open and honest communication.
- Staff create opportunities to build relationships with the greater community.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Guiding Principle

Program staff regularly assess, plan, and implement improvements and review outcomes that engage all stakeholders to promote high-quality practices for service delivery.

The Why

Intentional reflection and response by staff promote high quality practices, which produce positive and measurable outcomes.

What It ***MIGHT*** Look Like

- Program leadership follows a continuous improvement process that has a cycle of assessment, planning, implementation and review.
- Data is collected and analyzed on a regular basis.
- Leadership and staff have identified program goals, as well as staff development needs and measurable outcomes, which are reviewed regularly
- Feedback is gathered from a variety of stakeholders including youth and family participants

HEALTH & WELLBEING

Guiding Principle

Program staff provide opportunities to promote and support the physical, mental, and emotional health needs of staff, children and youth, families, and the community.

The Why

Physical, mental, and emotional needs are foundational to having the capacity to thrive.

What It ***MIGHT*** Look Like

- Promote family well-being resources within communications like monthly newsletters.
- Staff provide safe (mental/physical) space for youth to share and thrive
- Staff are trained on how to engage struggling participants.
- Staff receive training on mental health, trauma-informed care and social-emotional learning (SEL).

HEALTH & WELLBEING

What It ***MIGHT*** Look Like

- Allow for participants to set the pace to have their needs met.
- Integrate SEL program with students and families. This includes:
- Staff modeling the ways families can have healthy social-emotional habits.
- Staff teach and model self regulating/self-reflection when engaging with children and youth.
- Share information that helps families connect to service providers that may aid with their individual and family needs such as the locations of community pantries, clothes closets, ESL classes, etc.
- Provide opportunities for movement and education on the benefits of physical activity.
- When providing meals or snacks, include healthy options.
- Provide opportunities for nutrition education to children, youth, and families.

SAFE ENVIRONMENTS

Guiding Principle

Program staff prepare and maintain safe and secure environments that support the needs of diverse participants.

The Why

We create safe and secure environments for children to be ready and available to learn.

What It ***MIGHT*** Look Like

- Ensure that your program is in compliance with state requirements to be a licensed Child Day Center or exempted from Child Care licensure.
- Conduct regular walk throughs to make sure the facility meets safety requirements of the organization and is accessible to all participants.
- Provide emergency and safety training such as CPR training, basic first aid, allergy response and Mandated Reporter training.

SAFE ENVIRONMENTS

What It ***MIGHT*** Look Like

- Program registration includes collection of safety information for each participant and is updated regularly.
- Emergency plans, procedures and training are in place such as fire drills, tornado drills, bus evacuations, and active shooter.
- Review safety plan or response after a safety incident occurs.
- Have a response plan in the event of a traumatic event.



CHILD & YOUTH VOICE

Guiding Principle

Children and youth have authentic opportunities to plan, implement and provide feedback on programming.

The Why

Through authentic opportunities in programming, children and youth learn to engage with the world around them.

What It ***MIGHT*** Look Like

- Collect participants' interests and feedback. Use what you discover when planning and carrying out programming. Examples of ways to collect feedback include:
  - Surveys
  - Input from youth advisory board
  - Conducting participant focus groups
  - Provide youth opportunities for input into hiring practices
- As developmentally appropriate, invite and allow participants to co-design the program and activities.
- Give youth the opportunity to lead their peers in open discussions or activities.
- Engage youth and adult participants with local, regional, and state advocacy.

RECOGNITION & THANKS

The Second Edition of the Virginia Quality Standards for Out-of-School Time Programs has been a collaborative effort. We would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their contributions.

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RECOGNITION & THANKS

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