

Conclusion

While the recipe for a high-quality after-school program is not precise, the six guiding principles highlighted in this report will surely help build quality after-school programs for preteens.⁸³ The research in the after-school field is still evolving; however, these guiding principles represent some common themes that have emerged. The relative importance of each principle may be debated and the exact thresholds for implementation are still being determined (and in some cases may not exist). Nevertheless, a program that implements these principles will likely achieve positive outcomes for preteens.

As noted, this report emphasizes strategies for implementation that have been linked to outcomes in research-based studies of after-school programs. In many cases, though, research lags behind practice. For example, most practitioners agree that cultural competence and family engagement in after-school programs benefit youth, yet the research to date tying these two principles directly to youth's results has been limited. Future studies will shed light on specific thresholds and best practices; meanwhile, many service providers already have moved beyond the existing research. It will be important to continue to update and refine these guiding principles over time as more research is done.