

Putting It All Together: Summary of Guiding Principles

Guiding Principles	Definition	Why It Is Important	Key Indicators
Focused and Intentional Strategy	Programs have a clear set of goals, target specific skills and deliberately plan all aspects of the program with a youth development framework in mind.	This is the foundation for a quality after-school program. Successful implementation of all of the other strategies rests on a well designed and implemented program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs should have a limited set of goals. • All staff should be able to articulate the program goals. • Staff should be familiar with the developmentally appropriate set of tasks that will help preteens reach the goal. • Programs should have a clear curriculum with activity plans that outline explicit connections between activities and the skills to be learned from them.
Exposure <i>(intensity, duration and breadth)</i>	Programs are designed to: a) provide preteens with a sufficient number of hours per week over an extended period of time to achieve program outcome goals; and b) allow preteens to attend a variety of activities.	It takes time to establish supportive relationships and develop healthy behaviors. A variety of activities leads to better outcomes and may also help attract and retain youth in programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide long-term programming. • Track attendance and respond when a student has missed the program. • Analyze why youth leave and see if there are potential program improvements that would keep youth involved. • Have an attendance policy that staff and parents are aware of and that is enforced by staff.
Supportive Relationships	Programs emphasize positive adult-youth relationships regardless of the curriculum.	This may be the most critical component of an after-school program. Supportive relationships—youth who have at least one do better than youth with none—provide emotional support and guidance that enables them to feel connected to others, navigate day-to-day life and engage in productive activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure a low staff-to-child ratio. • The program schedule provides young people with opportunities for positive, informal social interactions with adults and peers. • Allow for one-on-one time with youth. • Teach youth the skills to build healthy relationships, including active listening, conflict resolution and cooperation.
Family Engagement	Programs strive to include families through various strategies, such as clear communication and a welcoming environment.	Family engagement may promote student involvement and positive behavior and also may help draw youth from cultures that place a premium on family relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have regular communication with families, in their own language whenever possible, by email, telephone, flyers and in person. • Have staff skilled in working with youth and families and trained in the cultures of participating families.
Cultural Competence	Programs have diverse staff whose backgrounds are reflective of participants' backgrounds and who create practices and policies that: a) make services available to (and inclusive of) a variety of populations; and b) help participants understand and value a broad range of cultures.	A culturally competent organization will draw and retain youth from diverse backgrounds. Developing a strong cultural identity can help youth build self-esteem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a diverse staff that youth can identify with in terms of race, gender, culture, sexual orientation and language. • Be physically accessible and culturally and linguistically inclusive. • Provide activities that encourage youth to affirm their cultural and ethnic heritage. • Provide youth with opportunities to interact and learn from others with different cultural identities. • Collect data on demographics and reach out to underserved youth.
Continuous Program Improvement	Programs strengthen quality through an ongoing and integrated process of targeted staff training, coaching and monitoring, and data collection and analysis.	Continuous program improvement is the glue that holds everything else together. Training is important to ensure the quality of the adult leadership and the program; coaching and monitoring make training effective; and data collection and analysis help programs know what's working and target what needs to be improved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training is ongoing and based on program goals, lessons learned through coaching and monitoring, and data analysis. • Program activities are regularly observed to monitor program quality and to ensure that training is effectively implemented. • Data on youth outcomes are collected regularly and used to guide program improvements. • Data should be analyzed to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the program on an ongoing basis.