NYS
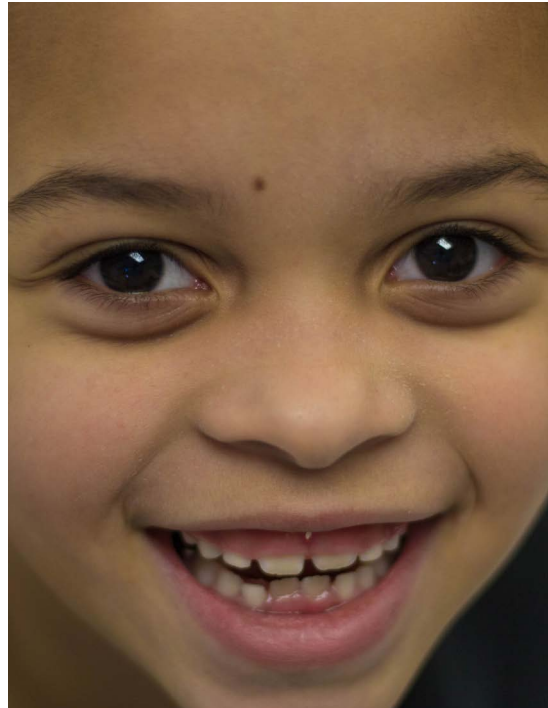
NEW YORK STATE
**NETWORK FOR
YOUTH SUCCESS**

QUALITY
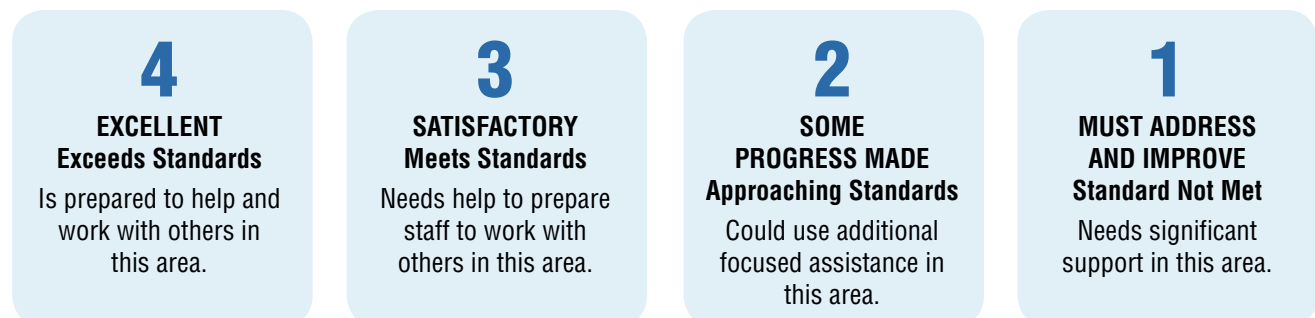# SELF-ASSESMENT (QSA) TOOL

WELCOME

Welcome!

The New York State Network for Youth Success' Quality Self-Assessment (QSA) Tool is an instrument used by afterschool, summer, and expanded learning program providers to assess the quality of their programs and to assist staff and stakeholders to create an action plan for continuous program improvement. The QSA Tool is a resource that builds upon the experience, knowledge, and research of afterschool practitioners and policymakers from across the country.

QSA Tool Structure

The QSA Tool is organized around the essential elements of an effective afterschool program, all of which come from evidence-based practice. Under each element, you'll find a list of characteristics that describe this practice. We call these "Quality Indicators." An asterisk (*) next to an indicator denotes that it is critical to address prior to program start-up or, for programs currently operating, as soon as possible.

Each indicator is broken down into four levels of mastery. At each level, you'll find examples that describe what that level of mastery might look like in a real program. These examples are there to help take the guesswork out of the self-assessment process. You should use them to help you determine which level sounds most like your program/organization. At each indicator, you should ask yourself, "Is my program most like a 1, 2, 3, or 4?" As part of the self-assessment aspect of the QSA Tool, you will use this rating system to assess your program's success in practicing each of the indicators within an element. The results of these ratings should be discussed as a group in order to gain a full perspective on a site's programming, operations, and management. This will help you see where your program excels, and where it needs some work.

The performance level rating system is as follows:

4	**3**	**2**	**1**
EXCELLENT **Exceeds Standards**	**SATISFACTORY** **Meets Standards**	**SOME** **PROGRESS MADE** **Approaching Standards**	**MUST ADDRESS** **AND IMPROVE** **Standard Not Met**
Is prepared to help and work with others in this area.	Needs help to prepare staff to work with others in this area.	Could use additional focused assistance in this area.	Needs significant support in this area.

Organizations are expected to strive for a satisfactory performance level (3) on all of the quality indicators within each of the elements of program quality. Over time, programs should continue to strive for an excellent performance level (4). At this level of performance, organizations consistently show evidence of promising practices throughout all program elements, serve as a model for other afterschool programs, and develop and support staff such that they could serve as coaches and mentors for other practitioners.

Program Planning and Improvement with the QSA Tool

The self-assessment process offers all of the core components of program planning and improvement, including identifying areas in need of improvement, setting goals and timelines, finding resources, and assigning responsibility for strategies. For programs that already have a process for program improvement, such as annual meetings, the use of or findings from the QSA Tool can be integrated into the process and can help guide your conversations. Embedded in the QSA Tool are places to prioritize improvement efforts by marking them as in need of improvement "right now," "this year," or "next year." Every program should create an action plan for improvement after the self-assessment is conducted.

For more information, tools, and resources to help with your QSA process, visit http://networkforyouthsuccess.org/qsa/

ELEMENT 1
Environment & Climate

A quality program provides a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment for all participants, staff members, and families.

A QUALITY PROGRAM:

Physical

	PERFORMANCE LEVEL				PLAN TO IMPROVE		
	1	2	3	4	RIGHT NOW	THIS YEAR	NEXT YEAR

1. *Provides a stimulating, engaging, welcoming, and supportive environment for all participants.

2. *Ensures program space is safe, clean, and appropriately equipped.

3. *Develops, implements, and shares approved safety plans and procedures with staff, families, and host school as applicable.

4. *Provides effective supervision of participants by an approved adult at all times.

5. *Develops and manages effective arrival and dismissal procedures and plans for safe travel home.

6. *Provides healthy and nutritious snacks and/or supper.

Emotional

7. Is aware of, records, and supports staff to address the mental and physical needs of participants in compliance with HIPAA and FERPA.

8. Establishes, maintains, and communicates a respectful, inclusive code of conduct with staff, participants, and their families.

9. Applies an approach to behavior management that includes positive reinforcement and intentional social-emotional skill-building.

10. Intentionally plans for, welcomes, and creates an environment that actively supports participants with diverse abilities.

11. Embraces dignity for all participants, fosters a sense of belonging, and promotes physical and emotional safety through a culture of support, inclusion services, and mutual respect.

NOTES:

ELEMENT 2
Administration & Organization

A quality program has well-developed systems and sound fiscal management to support and enhance programming and activities for all participants.

Note: Some of the administrative indicators below are measured by a checklist rather than on a scale of 1-4. For these indicators, check off those that your program has in place, and leave blank those that are still in need of completion.

A QUALITY PROGRAM:

☐ a. *Maintains all required documents (e.g., permits, security clearances, insurance, etc.) where applicable.

☐ b. *Has complete and current enrollment/registration documents for all participants.

☐ c. *Maintains accurate and accessible medical records on participants that are shared on a need-to-know basis and in compliance with HIPAA regulations.

☐ d. *Completes all required reports and submits them in a timely manner.

☐ e. *Has site director and staff who comply with state training regulations where applicable.

☐ f. *Maintains staff-to-participant ratio as per state regulations when applicable.

☐ g. *Conducts all required fire/safety drills.

☐ h. *Communicates about policies and expectations, including attendance, with parents.

☐ i. *Creates, consistently uses, and updates an employee handbook that clarifies internal policies and procedures, including a clear salary structure for program staff.

☐ j. *Has a clear policy for inclusion of all youth, including those with diverse abilities.

	PERFORMANCE LEVEL				PLAN TO IMPROVE		
	1	2	3	4	RIGHT NOW	THIS YEAR	NEXT YEAR
1. *Establishes and maintains a centralized database of participant and program information, including participant attendance data, which is regularly updated and monitored.							
2. *Documents where participants are during program hours, including arrival and dismissal.							
3. *Provides adequate security for the program.							
4. *Has approved budget; reviews and adjusts budget periodically.							
5. Negotiates optimal use of school, community-based organization, and community resources to best meet the needs of participants and their families.							
6. Builds trust and transparency for all participants, families, and staff through clearly communicated policies and procedures for data sharing.							

NOTES:

ELEMENT 3
Relationships

A quality program develops, nurtures, and maintains positive relationships and interactions among staff, participants, families, and communities.

A QUALITY PROGRAM:

1. *Has staff that respect and communicate with one another and are role models of positive adult relationships.

2. *Interacts with families in a comfortable, culturally sensitive, and welcoming way.

3. *Treats participants with respect, listens to what they say, and has structures in place to encourage participant/adult relationships.

4. Encourages and supports participants to interact with one another in positive ways and builds a sense of community among participants.

5. *Is sensitive to and embraces the diversity of the cultures and languages of participants.

6. Schedules meetings with major stakeholders, including staff, participants, families, and others as appropriate.

7. Encourages and supports former participants to become mentors, volunteers, or staff.

8. *Is sensitive to and embraces the diversity of gender expression/ identity and sexual orientation.

PERFORMANCE LEVEL				PLAN TO IMPROVE		
1	2	3	4	RIGHT NOW	THIS YEAR	NEXT YEAR

NOTES:

ELEMENT 4
Staffing & Professional Development

A quality program recruits, hires, and develops diverse staff members who understand, value, and promote high-quality practices.

A QUALITY PROGRAM:

Ongoing Professional Development

1. *Is committed to professional development and a culture of learning, as evidenced by the director and staff attending training and facilitating post-training group reflection as part of a continuous improvement system.

2. Provides opportunities for professional growth and meaningful skill development through the provision of supports such as training, coaching, mentoring, and peer learning.

3. Develops and supports staff to plan suitable activities that correspond to the developmental needs of participants, including participants with diverse abilities and English language learners.

4. Works with staff to achieve credentialing and accreditation where available.

5. Where appropriate, develops and supports staff to provide educational opportunities for and work with adult learners, including peer staff members and/or participants' family members.

Hiring/Onboarding Staff

6. *Recruits, hires, and develops staff who reflect the diversity and culture(s) of the community.

7. *Implements a standard orientation including organization/program culture, mission and goals, handbook, and professional expectations.

8. *Ensures staff members have competence in instructional strategies and content specific areas where appropriate.

Programmatic Structure

9. Has leadership who provide appropriate supervision, support, and opportunities for staff feedback and collaboration.

10. Has regular staff meetings that include sharing and reflection.

Staff Evaluation

11. Uses a transparent method for assessing staff performance.

12. Engages staff in continuous improvement based on evaluation results and stakeholder feedback.

PERFORMANCE LEVEL				PLAN TO IMPROVE		
1	2	3	4	RIGHT NOW	THIS YEAR	NEXT YEAR

NOTES:

ELEMENT 5
Programming & Activities

A quality program provides a well-rounded variety of activities and opportunities that support the physical, social, and cognitive growth and development of all participants.

A QUALITY PROGRAM:

1. *Provides activities that reflect the mission and goals of the program.

2. Uses a program design and schedule that address the needs of the whole child, including physical, social and emotional, and academic needs of all participants.

3. *Features activities that are developmentally appropriate for the age and skill level of the participants and allow participants to develop new skills during the program year.

4. *Offers project-based, experiential activities that promote creativity, reflect the interests of participants, and provide opportunities for skill development and application of knowledge.

5. Regularly elicits feedback from participants to determine enrichment offerings.

6. *Offers a blend of high-quality academic support, including tutoring, study hall, and/or homework help as appropriate to the program as well as enrichment opportunities in arts, recreation, and health.

7. *Includes activities that reflect the languages and cultures of the participants and families.

8. Integrates opportunities for responsible decision-making and the development of social and emotional skills.

9. Provides reasonable accommodations and special materials as necessary for all participants during the program and at special events.

10. Employs varied instructional strategies.

11. Provides regular opportunities to be outdoors, including field trips off site.

12. Provides supports as participants transition across age groups, school grades, and/or school day to afterschool.

13. Offers activities that develop global competencies in participants, build 21st century skills, and prepare them for college, career, and citizenship.

14. *Uses intentional programming, lesson plans, and curriculum.

15. Uses a program schedule that limits participant wait time and disruption between activities and when transitioning from one space to another.

16. Ensures that supplies are organized, maintained, accessible, and set up prior to activities.

17. Maintains current and accurate activity schedule with room assignments that is accessible to participants, staff, and families.

PERFORMANCE LEVEL				PLAN TO IMPROVE		
1	2	3	4	RIGHT NOW	THIS YEAR	NEXT YEAR

NOTES:

ELEMENT 6
Establishes Strong Links to the School Day

A quality program has its staff work closely with school staff to ensure that afterschool academic components and activities are aligned with learning standards and contribute to the overall positive development of program participants.

A QUALITY PROGRAM:

School-Based Programs and Center-Based Programs, When Appropriate

	PERFORMANCE LEVEL				PLAN TO IMPROVE		
	1	2	3	4	RIGHT NOW	THIS YEAR	NEXT YEAR

1. *Meets regularly with principal(s), school administrator(s), and/or designated liaison(s), and teachers from the school(s) attended by program participants.

2. Incorporates programming that aligns with and/or complements learning standards for the different age groups served.

3. Communicates regularly with school day staff to remain informed of the academic and behavioral progress of participants.

4. Allocates sufficient time in the activity schedule for homework help, study hall, and/or tutoring, and has adequate resources, including knowledgeable, well-trained staff and a space that is conducive to a positive learning environment.

5. Is represented and actively participates in the schools' planning efforts.

6. Employs, or the school designates, an educational coordinator to serve as a "bridge" between the school day and the afterschool program.

7. In collaboration with the school administration, allocates time and resources for joint professional development that facilitates the participation of both community-based organization and school day staff.

School-Based Programs

8. *Plans for and secures commitment of resources with school principal, when appropriate, and uses a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or School Partnership Agreement (SPA).

9. Communicates with the school and aligns around policies for working with participants with diverse abilities.

10. Works together to establish and follow a common behavioral code of conduct and language that support the social and emotional development of participants.

NOTES:

8

ELEMENT 7
Youth Participation & Engagement

A quality program provides opportunities for participants to engage in planning, to exercise choice, and to participate in a rich variety of offerings.

A QUALITY PROGRAM:

1. Engages participants and adults to promote consistent and active participation.

2. Engages participants and adults to develop and promote a culture of respect and co-constructed disciplinary policies.

3. Involves participants in program design and implementation in a meaningful way.

4. Involves participants in data collection and evaluation for program reporting and continuous improvement purposes in a meaningful way.

5. Engages participants and adults to make activities meaningful, applicable to the real world, and developed around participant interests.

6. Has a culture that encourages youth to take initiative, explore their interests, set goals for personal achievement, and work to meet them.

PERFORMANCE LEVEL				PLAN TO IMPROVE		
1	2	3	4	RIGHT NOW	THIS YEAR	NEXT YEAR

NOTES:

ELEMENT 8
Parent, Family, & Community Partnerships

A quality program establishes a strong partnership with families and communities in order to achieve program goals.

A QUALITY PROGRAM:

1. Communicates with families on matters concerning the well-being and development of the participant.

2. *Develops, reviews, and updates plan for family involvement.

3. Involves families, the community, and elected officials in program events.

4. Views parents and families as educational partners, and communicates opportunities for literacy and other adult educational workshops to help families support child and youth development outside of the program.

5. Works with families to identify needs, provides families with information about community resources to meet their needs, and makes referrals as necessary.

6. Builds relationships with arts, cultural, and other community institutions to expand and enhance program offerings.

7. Has a parent information area in the program space that is well organized and easy to locate.

8. Involves families in advocacy efforts.

9. Provides a range of opportunities in which participants' work and/or skills can be showcased to peers, families, and community.

PERFORMANCE LEVEL				PLAN TO IMPROVE		
1	2	3	4	RIGHT NOW	THIS YEAR	NEXT YEAR

NOTES:

ELEMENT 9
Program Sustainability & Growth

A quality program has a coherent vision/mission and a plan for increasing capacity that supports continual growth.

A QUALITY PROGRAM:

	PERFORMANCE LEVEL				PLAN TO IMPROVE		
	1	2	3	4	RIGHT NOW	THIS YEAR	NEXT YEAR
1. *Has a written, program-specific statement of mission, vision, goals, and intended outcomes.							
2. Involves participants, families, staff, and other appropriate stakeholders in long-term decision-making and planning efforts.							
3. Has a long-term plan for sustaining the afterschool program, including a multi-year funding plan with diversified sources of funding.							
4. Accesses resources within the community and beyond by building relationships with and seeking support from local businesses and institutions.							
5. Cultivates and maintains relationships with advocates for program quality and availability, such as community leaders, businesses, and elected officials at all levels.							
6. Has an effective marketing strategy that publicizes the program and its achievement within the school(s) and broader community.							
7. Invites board members, elected officials, and other VIPs for afterschool program visits.							
8. Participates in broader organized advocacy opportunities to market the afterschool program.							

NOTES:

ELEMENT 10
Measuring Outcomes & Evaluation

A quality program has a system for measuring outcomes and using that information for ongoing program planning, improvement, and evaluation.

A QUALITY PROGRAM:

	PERFORMANCE LEVEL				PLAN TO IMPROVE		
	1	2	3	4	RIGHT NOW	THIS YEAR	NEXT YEAR
1. *Has measurable program goals and intended outcomes that are aligned with the organizational mission, vision, and identified needs.							
2. *Develops and/or plans for program evaluation that includes gathering both qualitative and quantitative data.							
3. Measures participant progress by quantitative and qualitative data to identify outcomes.							
4. Identifies and shares promising practices.							
5. Makes summaries of evaluations and/or other collected data available to the general public.							
6. Creates an internal method for assessing program activities.							
7. Creates an internal method for assessing staff performance.							
8. Creates an internal method for assessing participant engagement levels.							
9. Includes feedback from stakeholders in the program evaluation.							
10. Uses evaluation findings for continuous program improvement.							

NOTES:

SUPPLEMENTAL ELEMENT
Informal STEM Learning

A quality STEM program engages participants in exploring, creating, and building skills and knowledge that are applicable in real-world situations and future careers, and that spark lifelong interest in STEM activities.

Note: *Some of the indicators below are measured by a checklist rather than on a scale of 1-4. For these indicators, check off those that your program has in place, and leave blank those that are still in need of completion.*

A QUALITY PROGRAM:

☐ a. *Has staff who prepare the room and materials ahead of time to maximize participant time and participation.

☐ b. *Matches STEM materials and equipment to participants, considering interest, ability, and safety.

	PERFORMANCE LEVEL				PLAN TO IMPROVE		
	1	2	3	4	RIGHT NOW	THIS YEAR	NEXT YEAR
1. Arranges space to encourage collaborative STEM explorations with staff and each other.							
2. Has structures, such as scheduling, staff development, youth development, etc., which support all participants having access to STEM learning enrichment activities.							
3. Structures STEM activities to move purposefully towards the understanding of a STEM idea or development of a STEM practice.							
4. Provides participants with opportunities to engage in hands-on activities that require critical thinking.							
5. Ensures STEM facilitators demonstrate an accurate understanding of STEM content.							
6. Provides opportunities for participants to use authentic methods that STEM professionals use in age-appropriate, supported ways.							
7. Dedicates time for participants to reflect on their actions and development throughout each STEM activity.							
8. Includes all participants in STEM activity, at all levels of the activity.							
9. Supports participants in recognizing the meaning and importance of STEM activity in their lives.							
10. Supports participants in taking ownership of their STEM learning and sharing their ideas with their community.							
11. Connects participants with STEM professionals from diverse backgrounds to encourage STEM career attainment and/or lifelong interest in STEM pursuits.							

The PEAR Institute developed a 12-dimension framework to define quality for STEM programming in afterschool (Dimensions of Success, or DoS). The indicators in this self-assessment tool were heavily based on those 12 dimensions, and consultation with the DoS researchers at PEAR led to the four performance level definitions as well. While these do not exactly match the DoS rubrics and scoring structure, they are well-aligned and much of the language used here is borrowed from the DoS framework. The STEM indicators were also heavily influenced by the DoS Program Planning Tool, which is available from the PEAR Institute web site (http://www.thepearinstitute.org).