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Quality Matters in Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs

QUALITY PROGRAMS PROVIDE VALUABLE BENEFITS

Youth who regularly participate in high quality afterschool and summer programs experience positive outcomes. Positive outcomes include:

- ◆ Increasing 21st Century skills and experiences such as problem solving, teamwork, inquiry and leadership;
- ◆ Increased self-confidence and awareness about themselves including finding out their personal passions and developing self initiative;
- ◆ Improved attitudes toward school, increased attendance and improved academic performance;
- ◆ Avoidance of alcohol and drug use, decreased delinquency or violent behavior and avoidance of sexual activity.

ELEMENTS OF HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS

High-quality programs include all of the following elements:

- ◆ Safe and appropriate environments for program participants. Ensuring every child and youth is emotionally and physically safe.
- ◆ High interest programming. Programs will provide a variety of engaging, youth-centered activities, both academic and non-academic.
- ◆ Engagement and Choices. Children and youth are actively engaged in the program making choices about their own learning and experiences.
- ◆ Positive peer to peer and staff to peer relationships and interactions. Caring adults are purposefully connecting to and with children, youth, their families and the community.

ACCESS TO AND SUSTAINED PARTICIPATION IN PROGRAMS MATTERS

Children and youth experience the greatest benefits when they participate regularly in afterschool and summer programs. More time spent in a program increases the likelihood participants will gain a quality experience.

Maximizing time spent in afterschool or summer programs can be achieved in all of the following ways:

- ◆ Intensity = the amount of time in a program (typical is 2-4 hours per day)
- ◆ Frequency = regularity in which a program is offered (typical is 2-3 days per week)
- ◆ Duration = the length of time in a program (typical is over the course of the school year or summer)

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Participation in just *any* afterschool or summer program is simply not enough. The real benefits to children and youth are reached when they are engaged in high-quality programming. Research has shown there are negative consequences for the children and youth when involved in poor quality programs.

Knowing what to look for will help you identify the high-quality afterschool and summer programs available in your community.