



**GRASA Quality Working Group
Report to Greater Rochester After-School Alliance
November 2012
Endorsed by GRASA December 2012**

Executive Summary

Recommendations

The GRASA Quality Working Group recommends to GRASA the following:

Quality Standards & Accreditation Process

- For our community to endorse and encourage use of the Council on Accreditation After-School Program standards and accreditation process as the most comprehensive and rigorous standards and process available for out-of-school-time programs.
- For our community to endorse and encourage use of the AfterSchool Works! New York Afterschool Program Accreditation Standards and process as the most accessible option for programs. It is easy to use, includes a thorough set of standards, and is a process that supports quality improvement.
- *Note: Quality Stars New York was eliminated as a potential set of standards for endorsement at this time as it is not yet complete and could not be fully evaluated.*

Tools and Assessments

- For the community to continue to use the Youth Program Quality Assessment Form A as a community-wide assessment and to complement Form A by also using the Youth Program Quality Assessment Form B as an important addition to the assessment process.
- To encourage utilization of the New York State Afterschool Network Self-Assessment Tool as an internal assessment option that is compatible with AfterSchool Works! New York standards, can be used with Council on Accreditation standards, is a requirement of major funders, and is easy to use.

Quality Improvement Process

- For the community to support and use the Youth Program Quality Improvement (YPQI) process which incorporates the YPQA tools, self-assessment, professional development, planning, implementation, re-evaluation, and additional planning to continuously improve program quality.

Note: These recommendations are deemed appropriate for all out-of-school-time programs, including before-school, after-school, summer enrichment, and expanded learning programs.

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Full Report

Introduction

The Greater Rochester After-School Alliance (GRASA) is a volunteer group made up of funders, policymakers, researchers, and family and provider representatives. Its mission is to strengthen the quality, quantity, and accessibility of out-of-school-time programs in Monroe County for school-age youth through community collaboration. GRASA's vision is that every school-age youth in our community (who chooses) participates in high quality out-of-school-time programming. GRASA is a Rochester Area Community Foundation Initiative.

In 2012, GRASA members determined that they define school-age youth as those of an age typically eligible for kindergarten through 12th grade.

Background on Standards, Accreditation, Tools, and Framework

When GRASA formed in 2001, the members identified an initial set of after-school program quality standards and a program accreditation process to endorse. GRASA then encouraged their use in the community and the Community Foundation provided competitive grant funding to support program accreditation or pursuit of quality standards. The standards endorsed in 2001 were the National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA) Standards for Quality School-Age Care. Since that time, NSACA has discontinued their accreditation program and their standards were subsumed by the Council on Accreditation (COA). In 2009 GRASA members decided to endorse the COA standards as they were determined to be a comprehensive blend of NSACA standards and COA's own standards.

At the same time that NSACA discontinued their accreditation process, a state-wide effort was launched in New York State to develop an affordable alternative to the COA process. Led by AfterSchool Works! New York (ASWNY) and informed by the New York State Afterschool Program Accreditation work group – a group comprised of direct service practitioners, program directors, trainers, evaluation specialists, policy experts, and agency leaders – the New York State Afterschool Program Accreditation model was designed to provide after-school providers in New York State with a viable, affordable, and meaningful accreditation option. GRASA members reviewed the options and agreed to endorse ASWNY standards and accreditation as well as COA's standards and accreditation.

The Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) was developed by High/Scope, a research organization in Ypsilanti, Michigan. In 2005 GRASA identified YPQA as the most promising and appropriate evaluation instrument in existence for measuring the quality of an after-school program. A low-stakes, community-wide assessment process was launched in partnership with Children's Institute in the 2005-06 school year.

Now launching Year Eight of the community-wide YPQA assessment, introductory training on the YPQA is provided to after-school program staff to facilitate understanding of the observation instrument and processes as well as use of feedback reports in support of program quality, resource allocation, and professional development. Master

Observers are trained by Children's Institute to observe after-school programs, write a running narrative focusing on 60 quality indicators, and interview program staff for approximately 15 minutes at the conclusion of the observation. The Master Observer then scores the observation. The YPQA measures four subscales (categories): Safe Environment, Supportive Environment, Interaction, and Engagement. The score sheet is then processed by Children's Institute, checked for accuracy, and a summary report is produced. The score sheet and summary report are mailed directly to the after-school program staff member who participated in the assessment. Children's Institute then meets with program staff and directors who request a meeting to support their interpretation of and use of program quality reports.

The New York State After-School Network (NYSAN) is a statewide public-private partnership dedicated to increasing the quality and availability of programs that support young people's safety, learning, and healthy development outside the traditional classroom. GRASA is a regional network affiliate of NYSAN. The NYSAN Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool is an instrument used by out-of-school time program providers to assess the quality of their programs and to assist staff and stakeholders to create an action plan for continuous program improvement. As of 2012 some programs in the Rochester region were using the NYSAN tool to conduct self-assessment and/or at the behest of funders, but the tool had not been reviewed nor endorsed by GRASA.

Quality Stars New York (QSNY) is a voluntary quality rating and improvement system that is designed to increase quality in early learning settings – centers, schools, and homes – throughout the state. QSNY's early childhood program quality process was launched in 2010. They seek to develop and pilot a comparable process for school-age care settings. As of 2012 the QSNY school-age care standards were in draft form and had not been reviewed or endorsed by GRASA.

In June, 2008, Mayor Duffy of the City of Rochester, Superintendent Brizard of the Rochester City School District, and after-school advocates met to discuss the creation of an after-school taskforce. It was agreed that the taskforce would spend the summer of 2008 working with facilitators with expertise in after-school system building to help develop a plan to address the after-school needs of every student in the Rochester City School District. The Community Foundation made a grant to The After-School Corporation (TASC) to facilitate the meetings of this taskforce.

The result was The Rochester After-School Plan which included a series of recommendations and two program models: One for after-school programs serving elementary school students (Rochester I) and a second for after-school programs serving secondary school students (Rochester II).

Per the report, "At the heart of the Rochester After-School Plan is the program strategy – the occurrences, plans, and day-to-day operations at a site serving children and families. Key components include people served, activities, staff, staff ratios, and location. Rochester I and II build on local resources and incorporate research-based policies and practices that have proven effective in increasing school engagement and achievement.

In combination, the critical core elements of these two models provide for:

- Access to and sustained participation in the program;

- Structured, varied, and intentional programming that is aligned with but different from the school day;
- Caring and well-trained staff that provide adequate supervision;
- Strong partnerships between program operators and children's teachers, families, and other community organizations; and,
- A cost that is both reasonable and sustainable."

The Rochester After-School Plan and Model continues to serve as the community's framework for out-of-school-time programming (Appendix G).

Promoting a Quality Youth Development System within Monroe County

Through partnerships with local funders and the youth services system in our community over the past ten years, there have been concerted efforts to improve the quality of youth services provided to our youth through professional learning opportunities, training, consultation, and coaching in youth development and after-school practices and conceptual frameworks; introduction of research-based and evidenced-based programs; and opportunities to participate in the Youth Program Quality Assessment project. The purpose of building capacity has been to ensure a learning environment that provides continuous, diverse opportunities for individuals and organizations to enhance positive youth development knowledge, skills, and attitudes resulting in effective engagement and partnerships with youth and to improve the quality of the youth development programs offered.

GRASA Strategic Goals

As part of the tenth anniversary strategic planning process (Appendix D), GRASA identified the need to develop a comprehensive framework that includes standards of excellence plus: quality standards for program; quality standards for front-line staff; quality standards for program management; and quality standards for a system. GRASA agreed to develop a comprehensive framework to achieve standards, with a focus on: knowledge and skills sharing; professional learning; and professional development (for individual and field). Further, GRASA would develop a comprehensive framework to measure achievement of program quality and identify and promote the use of appropriate tools to ensure program quality (e.g., program accreditation, credentialing, cultural relevancy); market quality standards to providers, families, stakeholders, and the community-at-large; and educate and build capacity of organizations to implement a comprehensive quality framework. A key goal of the plan over the next three years (2012-2015) is to strengthen the current professional development learning system and integrate the efforts of respective organizations to create and promote a Youth Program Quality Development System within our community.

This important goal will be achieved through implementation of the Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI) Initiative based on the framework, research, and evidence of the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality/Forum for Youth Investment (Appendix J).

Quality Working Group

In order to achieve the goals of the 2011 GRASA strategic plan related to youth program quality, a GRASA Quality Working Group was formed in 2012 to begin the process. Eleven members of GRASA representing a variety of funders, researchers, advocates, and providers agreed to advance the quality goals by recommending a set of out-of-school-time program standards to the full GRASA table for endorsement in the

community. Standards are one component of a multi-component quality system that needs to be developed.

The members included:

Leonard Brock, The Children's Agenda
Lauri Brugger, Children's Institute
Jackie Campbell, City of Rochester
Chris Dandino, Rochester-Monroe County Youth Bureau
Stephanie Fitzgerald, United Way of Greater Rochester
Mairéad Hartmann, Rochester Area Community Foundation
A. Dirk Hightower, Children's Institute
Lisa Hiley, EnCompass
Les Knox, Quad A for Kids
Caterina Leone-Mannino, Rochester City School District
Marie Watkins, Nazareth College

Why Begin with Standards?

It is believed that adoption of a set of quality youth program standards provides a shared foundation and benchmarks for all youth programs to move toward continuous quality improvement. Quality standards are guidelines that help out-of-school-time providers communicate their values and hold themselves accountable for the programs they provide. Youth and families can use standards as a reference when observing a program for the first time or to help understand what to expect from a program as time goes on. Quality standards also help educate the community as a whole about what high-quality programming looks like and how it can be achieved.

Standards alone cannot change the quality of programs or the skills of program staff and volunteers. Even for programs that have adopted standards, this process and practice takes time and must happen in stages. Out-of-school-time programs do not have the capacity or resources to tackle all standards at once. The idea is to set realistic and achievable goals so that over time, programs can meet standards in all areas, but in the short term, there are objectives to work toward. Eventually, with the right types of resources and support, quality standards can help a community increase the number and variety of out-of-school-time programs and encourage programs to involve young people in meaningful ways.

Methodology

In order to address their charge, the Quality Working Group members reviewed the following documents:

- AfterSchool Works! New York Afterschool Program Accreditation Standards (Appendix A)
- Council on Accreditation After School Programming and Services, After School Program Administration, and After-School Human Resources Standards (Appendix B)
- NYSAN Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool (Appendix E)
- Quality Stars New York School-Age Care Standards (Appendix F)
- Youth Program Quality Assessment Form A and Form B (Appendix H)

The Quality Working Group established criteria against which to review each of the documents. The criteria included:

Parameters

Age range

Gender

Ethnicity

Developmental Theory

Appropriate developmental theory

Integrated developmental theory

Research and evidence

Scope

Comprehensive or minimal

Usability by provider

Support possible

Sustainability / future use

Linkages to existing tools

Use locally now

Reflects diversity of program types

Context for Comparison

National, state, or local

Requirements by Funders

United Way

The Community Foundation

Costs

Internal costs reasonable

External costs reasonable

Accreditation

Tied to process

Affordability of process

Overall Score

As assessed by each reviewer

Comments

As assessed by each reviewer

Concerns

As assessed by each reviewer

The criteria were entered into a matrix against which each of the documents were reviewed by each member of the Quality Working Group (Appendix C).

During the course of several meetings, the Quality Working Group discussed their findings and recommendations until consensus was reached regarding the program quality standards, tools and assessments, quality improvement process, and accreditation process that would be recommended to the full GRASA table for endorsement in the community.

The section that follows is the culmination of the group process to date.

Recommendations

The GRASA Quality Working Group recommends to GRASA the following:

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Tools and Assessments

- For the community to continue to use the Youth Program Quality Assessment Form A as a community-wide assessment and to complement Form A by also using the Youth Program Quality Assessment Form B as an important addition to the assessment process.
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Conclusion

After a comprehensive process of establishing criteria, followed by research, evaluation, review, and discussion, the GRASA Quality Working Group respectfully presents these recommendations to GRASA in order to advance the GRASA strategic plan and goals related to improving youth program quality in the greater Rochester region.

Appendices

- A. AfterSchool Works! New York Afterschool Program Accreditation Standards
- B. Council on Accreditation After School Programming and Services, After School Program Administration, and After-School Human Resources Standards
- C. GRASA Quality Working Group Criteria / Review Matrix
- D. GRASA Strategic Plan 2011-15
- E. NYSAN Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool
- F. Quality Stars New York School-Age Care Standards
- G. Rochester After-School Plan and Model
- H. Youth Program Quality Assessment Form A and Form B
- I. Youth Program Quality Assessment Crosswalk with NYSAN Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool
- J. Youth Program Quality System Diagram