



## **Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to assist CDE in the development and review of the quality self-assessment tool for after school programs.

The Quality Committee of the California After School Network works on policy, practices and approaches for ensuring quality after-school programs. Our ongoing efforts include development/discussion of quality indicators for California programs, identification of tools to support quality, promotion of these tools in the field, and coordination of a Research Speakers Series. We are delighted to bring the thoughts and experience of our statewide membership to this important process. A list of Committee members is enclosed with this packet.

In March 2007, the Quality Committee developed a list of key quality indicators through a collaborative process, and we have used these indicators to help guide all of our work. These indicators were based on extensive literature review and field knowledge. A copy is included in the packet. In reviewing the California Department of Education's Quality Assessment Tool, the committee expanded and focused its research review to include:

1. *Program Quality Self-Assessment (QSA) Tool Planning for Ongoing Program Improvement* (2005) The New York State Afterschool Network (NYSAN).
2. *High Quality Program Assessment for Afterschool Cluster*. (2005) San Francisco Department of Children Youth and their Families (DCYF).
3. Fletcher, Piha, Rose. (2005) *A Guide to Developing Exemplary Practices in Afterschool Programs*. The Center for Collaborative Solutions, the Community Network for Youth Development, and the Foundation Consortium for California's Children and Youth.
4. *Shared Features of High Performing After-School Programs: A Follow-Up to the TASC Evaluation*. Birmingham, Pechman, Russell, Mielke (2005) Washington D.C: Policy Studies Associates Inc. (PSA).
5. *The Quality of School-Age Child Care in After-School Settings*. Little, Priscilla. (June 2007) Cambridge MA: Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP).
6. *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. The Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth, Jacquelyne Eccles and Jennifer Appleton-Goodman Editors, The National Research Council, and The Institute of Medicine.
7. *Youth Program Quality Assessment (PQA)* High Scope Education Research Foundation.
8. Yohalem, Wilson-Ahlstrom, Fischer, Shinn. (March 2007) *Measuring Youth Program Quality: A Guide to Assessment Tools*. Washington D.C. Impact Strategies.

9. *Desired Results Development Profile*. (2005) The California Department of Education (CDE) Child Development Division [www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/documents/drdprps.pdf](http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/documents/drdprps.pdf). **Please note:** This tool was used in reference to *summary formatting* only – it was *not* used in relation to content.

We have structured our feedback into the three following content areas:

- **Overall feedback on structure, usability and tone**
- **Feedback on each specific content area**
- **Suggested new content area: “Promoting Diversity, Access and Equity”**

This feedback is based on the draft tool CDE shared with us prior to our joint June 21 meeting. Since you may have made some edits to the tool since then, we have included a copy with this packet for easy referencing of our comments about specific pages or indicator items.

We hope you find the Committee’s suggestions useful in creating an effective and useful tool for the field.

## **I. Overall Comments on Structure, Usability and Tone**

The Committee strongly supports CDE’s goals, as stated during our joint June 21 meeting, of creating a quality self-assessment tool that is: clear and easily accessible, geared toward continuous improvement, focused on *support* and *program improvement* rather than on rote *compliance*, and tailored to California’s unique needs. Our comments on structure, usability and tone are aimed at helping more fully achieve these goals.

We believe the nine content areas you have included provide a good framework; they are consistent with other assessment tools and in line with a growing consensus around the essential elements of quality programming. They are also consistent with many of the elements of quality programs that the CASN Quality Committee has developed.

We also feel that the inclusion of clear and detailed indicators is helpful in offering specific program and planning ideas that will inspire programs and give them concrete possibilities for improving their practices. An example is #6 in the section on Alignment/Linkages with the Regular Day, “Ensures that the after school program is represented on the School Site Council ...”

We further believe that having a section in the tool that addresses a plan for improvement is important, as in the column for “Improvement Plan” in the draft tool. Assessing need is obviously only the first step and is, in fact, far easier than developing and implementing strategies for change. Beyond this column in the tool, as we discussed together at our June meeting, there will need to be significant TA to the field in how to analyze assessment results, translate those results into a plan for change, and implement the identified changes.

And we support your inclusion in the introduction of some reflection on the need for multiple sources of data for assessment and evaluation. Particularly if this tool is used as a protocol for discussion, as we suggest below, it is important to suggest that grantees seek other methods of gathering perspectives and input from various stakeholders.

We offer the following suggestions to build on and expand what is currently in the draft tool, and to help CDE in creating an accessible, inspiring instrument that speaks to the needs and realities of California programs.

### ***Suggestions***

#### ***1) Revise the language, tone and framing to be more motivational to programs***

- **Revise the Introduction to give it a more inspirational tone, and to clarify the use of the tool.**

In order to accomplish CDE’s goal of creating a motivational tool that will inspire use by all programs, we recommend significantly shifting the tone of the introduction – and of the tool overall – to be friendlier and more accessible to different stakeholders. We believe the introduction needs to explain more clearly what programs are expected to do with the tool and how looking proactively at issues of quality can support their programming. It should provide guidance about when to use the tool, how to structure group discussions and who should be involved. Importantly, it also needs to clarify who

will NOT use the tool and that it will NOT be used for evaluation, monitoring of contract compliance, or funding renewal.

In addition, to make this tool specific to California and truly relevant for our state, we suggest adding language to the introduction about the diversity of children/youth our programs serve, and about how, because of the demographics of the state, quality programming in a place like California must be proactively inclusive, accessible, culturally competent, etc. In addition to providing general inspiration, we feel the framing language in the introduction and elsewhere can and should help create motivation for improving program quality as a way to help the diverse young people we work with succeed and thrive.

- **Modify the tone and language of indicators to make them more friendly and accessible to site-level staff.**

As CDE has noted, this tool is voluntary and there will be limited time for training. All staff who will be using it, therefore, need to be able to pick up the tool and digest it quickly. They need to feel that the language of the indicators is concrete and specific to their programs and situations, and that the tool will yield useful, relevant information. We recommend looking through all indicators with an eye toward simplicity and “warmth” of tone, as well as toward avoiding jargon. Some examples of tools we think do a good job at this include: High Scope’s *Youth Program Quality Assessment*; CCS/CNYD’s *Exemplary Practices In Afterschool Program Development: Rubrics for Tracking Internal Progress*, and San Francisco DCYF’s *High Quality Program Assessment for Afterschool Cluster*. Copies of all of these tools are included in this packet.

- **Change rating scale to be more positive.**

If the self-assessment tool is to be effective, we believe programs need to feel motivated, not discouraged, by it. We are concerned about the use of a rating system that includes terms like “adequate” and “inadequate”, and recommend that the scale be changed. The NYSAN tool’s scale provides a possible model. (See p. 2 of the NYSAN tool.) The DCYF tool has another version of a similar scale that positions programs well for on-going improvement. The scale is from 1 to 5, with 1 being “Our program is just beginning to work in this area and needs support to move to the next level” and 5 being “Our program is clearly proficient in this area, can demonstrate it in observable ways and is prepared to work with other programs to build their skills in this area.” (See p. 3 of DCYF)

## 2) *Clarify how the tool should be used*

- **Use the tool as protocol for group discussion, not as checklist to be completed by one person or as a direct observation tool.**

As noted in Yohalem et al’s review (2007), most tools in use around the country are effectively employed as group discussion tools. We recommend the CDE user guide or introduction suggest that the tool be used specifically to spark discussion among staff at different program levels. Site coordinators, for example, should meet with line staff to discuss site-level issues. District or Program-wide coordinators can bring together staff at the district level and site coordinators to assess program-wide areas. As part of our

committee's research, we spoke to the NYSAN Director, who said that NY programs reported this approach as an effective use of the NYSAN tool.

- **Develop strategies for making self-assessment results available to Regional Leads, CDE and other TA providers to inform training and support to programs.**

At the June meeting, you asked our Committee for our thoughts on how to move information from the self-assessment to the next level of support, so that TA providers can offer targeted help to programs on their specific needs related to improving quality. We suggest the following: Feedback to Regional Leads from the self-assessment tool can be shared at Regional Coordinators' meetings in an aggregate form to identify common needs for professional development and/or technical support. Regional Leads can provide opportunities for discussion between/among program directors who have developed expertise in various Program Areas and/or want ideas and suggestion on how to move staffs towards *exceeding* indicators. A list of coordinators or lead staff willing to offer technical assistance to other programs could be created for support.

Regional conferences can provide tiered professional development and opportunities to showcase through displays and presentations promising practices on specific Program Areas.

Regional Leads can also meet with CDE to provide input and update on feedback from Coordinators Meetings.

3) ***Increase the emphasis on site-level practices that have direct impact on young people and the program activities they are participating in.***

- **Break out the content areas differently in order to give more significance to the youth development and direct program practices that impact children.**

While administrative practices are important to effective operation, our committee feels strongly that if our ultimate goal is to improve young people's experiences in programs (and therefore outcomes), it is critical that the assessment focus at the primary level of direct service. For example, on items such as the relationship between youth and staff, the engagement of young people in activities, the range of learning opportunities provided, and the program environment. Many other tools we have reviewed weigh youth development and site-level program practices more heavily by devoting more of the content areas to these practices. For instance, the NYSAN Program Quality Self Assessment tool (upon which the CDE draft is based) includes content areas for "Relationships" and "Youth Participation/Engagement" that have been collapsed into "Youth Development" for the CDE tool. All of the quality assessment tools described in Nicole Yohalem and Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom's recently published article, "Measuring Youth Program Quality: A Guide to Assessment Tools," are primarily focused on direct program activities. The enclosed assessment tool from the S.F. Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) is devoted exclusively to program practices and provides a further example.

We will offer more specifics on how this could be done in Section II on indicators. In particular, we will suggest substantial revisions in the Program Environment section, changing its name to "Program Environment/Climate", and that the current Youth

Development section be replaced by the areas of “Relationships”, “Programming and Activities”, and “Youth Participation/Engagement”. These four program areas are the ones used in the NYSAN tool and reflect that tool’s approach to promote quality site-level practice.

- **Focus indicators on actions and behaviors of program staff, more than on documentation and procedures.**

In the current draft, when the tool offers specific and detailed indicators, it is often focused on *documentation*, not on indicators focused on program activities and staff practices. For example, on p. 6 under Program Environment, “9. Has clearly defined procedures to ensure that staff monitor and address student behavior, and there is an appropriate plan for student discipline.” We believe that research shows it is more important to look at how staff actually treat participants, rather than how the process is defined or documented. Additionally, when the focus of assessment is on program activities and staff practices, it is easier for staff to use the self-assessment experience as immediately instructive and to change what they are doing. Similarly, compared to the NYSAN Tool’s section on Programming/Activities, the CDE Tool’s section on Program Design focuses more often on the documentation of the design rather than the provision of activities. We recommend looking through the indicators in all program areas with an eye toward this.

#### 4) *Improve the ease and effectiveness of use*

- **Divide each content area into site-level indicators and program-wide or grantee-level indicators.**

As we discussed together at the June meeting, this structure would allow the tool to be used as modules for discussions at the appropriate level. It would help ensure that the appropriate staff people are involved in discussions most relevant to the activities and practices they can actually improve.

- **Reduce – as much as possible – the amount of subjectivity in the tool.**

As mentioned earlier, staff will not have significant training before implementing this tool. The “group think” of a group discussion may address some subjectivity. A normed rubric would help. Where possible, facilitation of group discussions by a person well-versed in program quality would also help. Given their extensive workloads, however, one cannot assume that the Regional Leads will have the capacity to oversee, or even provide much training to support, grantees in using this tool.

As much as possible, we recommend that indicators reflect actions that an observer can see and rate with some consistency. In many of the draft indicators, different staff people could assess performance levels very differently. As an example in the Youth Development content area is: “6. Ensures that program activities enable students to develop life skills, resiliency and self-esteem.” The DCYF assessment tool provides good examples of concrete, observable indicators.

In many cases within the current draft, the choice of words leaves room for different interpretations. For example, words like “relevant”, “active”, “clear”, “strong”, “well-defined”, “well-developed” are subjective. In some cases, this is unavoidable, yet many of the elements of program quality lend themselves to more specific descriptions. The

level of objectivity will decrease with more concrete and observable indicators. Again, the SF DCYF tool provides good examples. In the review of the NYSAN tool in “Measuring Youth Program Quality: A Guide to Assessment Tools,” the authors suggest that there may need to be more specificity for staff using the tool around determining ratings. “While some additional guidance is provided to staff in the tool’s introduction about how to determine ratings, developers acknowledge that this is one of the areas they may revisit in the future, based on feedback from the field.” (p. 51-52)

- **To increase inter-rater reliability and ease of use, construct survey items such that:**
  - Each indicator applies to one concept or activity only. (e.g. Item 6 under Program Finance would be separated into two)
  - Items have parallel structure.
  - Items are ordered consistently; we suggest first grouping them by grantee- and site-level, then by stage of development. (e.g. Progressing from foundational elements to aspirational.)

- **Include a summary page that supports analysis of the data collected.**

This additional piece of the assessment tool would allow programs to see the assessment results on one page in order to prioritize the areas that need help most immediately. See the last two pages of the *Desired Results Tool* from the bibliography as a reference for listing all of the factors in a way that facilitates big picture data analysis.

- **Consider developing protocols and tools to support planning and implementation of identified changes.**

After this first year, when programs have had experience with the assessment tool and CDE has had an opportunity to understand how well it works, it will be important to identify strategies to help programs use the data they are collecting. While the column for “Improvement Plan” is a possible approach, it may be too cursory and may not be useful to programs trying to define actual strategies. In the future, we think it could be more effective to have a separate tool that sparks thinking and talking about actions to improve specific practices, timelines and people responsible for implementation.

- 5) *Ensure that the CDE Quality Assessment Tool is aligned with the Academy of Sciences critical program features.*

California Education Code for the 21st Century and ASES initiatives requires that the statewide evaluation reports on, among other things, the quality of programs “drawing on the research of the Academy of Sciences on critical features of programs that support healthy youth” (SEC. 19. Section 8483.55.). The Academy of Sciences framework includes several critical features of program quality:

- Physical and psychological safety
- Appropriate structure
- Supportive relationships
- Opportunities to belong
- Positive social norms
- Support for efficacy and mattering
- Opportunities for skill building
- Integration of family, school, and community efforts

We recommend that the final Quality Assessment Tool be reviewed to ensure that the elements included in the CDE tool can be mapped to the Academy of Sciences critical features. This will ensure that as statewide evaluations are conducted there is alignment between their evaluation elements and the elements included in the CDE Quality Assessment Tool. We have included an initial crosswalking of elements of the CDE Draft Tool with the Academy of Sciences Framework in this packet. Please see Appendix.

6) *Weave issues of diversity, access and equity throughout the tool*

As CDE, SEDL and the Committee discussed together in our June meeting, here in California where our population is so diverse, it is extremely important that any discussion or tool related to issues of quality take into account considerations related to access, equity, cultural relevance, and inclusiveness, as research has shown that these factors are critical to ensuring success for the communities and students our programs are primarily serving. Your team has probably seen, as we have, that most quality assessment tools from other parts of the country deal with these issues minimally if at all; we believe that here in California, we have both the opportunity and the responsibility to provide national leadership on incorporating them into our definition of quality, and into the indicators we offer the field.

The Committee therefore recommends a three-fold approach to weaving issues of diversity and equity into the self-assessment tool:

- First, as noted in number 1 above, we recommend incorporating some framing language into the tool's introduction about California's diversity, and how this needs to inform our thinking and practice around quality.
- Second, we recommend looking at each set of program area indicators with an eye to ensuring they are appropriate to serving our state's diverse communities, as well as offering programs a vision for being proactively inclusive and equitable. As you will see, our Committee has done this in our own review, and the "program area" suggestions we offer include our ideas on this topic.
- Finally, in addition to ensuring that the indicators in each program area are consistent with the goals of effectively serving and supporting diverse children and youth, we recommend adding an additional section on "Promoting Diversity, Access and Equity." This will offer an overview of important practices in this area, and help promote proactive and intentional attention to these issues. More information on this is provided in Section III, near the end of this memo, where we also provide a sample set of indicators.

## **II. Comments on the Indicators**

In addition to our comments on the tool overall, the Quality Committee has reviewed the indicators for each program area in detail. In this section, we offer our suggestions for strengthening these areas – again, based on CDE’s stated goals, as well as on our knowledge of national trends and best practices in program quality assessment.

In terms of format, we have structured our comments on each program area in two parts. The *descriptor feedback* includes comments on the overall explanation of the program area from the top of each page in the draft tool. We follow that with *indicator feedback*, which for most program areas includes two pieces – proposed revisions to the current indicators, and suggestions for additional indicators.

Please note that we have not fully “wordsmithed” our indicators, and that they are not all in the proper format for this tool (e.g. following logically from “A quality program...”). Our goal was to share ideas for indicator *content*, and as we have incorporated suggestions found in a variety of other tools. We therefore recommend that your team edit any of the proposed new indicators you decide to use for clarity, formatting consistency, etc.

Comments on the indicators begin on the following page.

## PROGRAM AREA: Program Design

### Descriptor Feedback

The current descriptor of program design is clear about the need for program design to be research-based and for goals to be measurable. We support these elements, though we feel there are also some additional key features of quality program design that are currently missing. These include the idea that programs should be designed around a clear and powerful *vision/mission*, the idea that goals should reflect the *needs of students and communities*, and the idea that program design should be intentional about building in *cultural sensitivity and relevance*.

### Indicator Feedback

We recommend changing the current indicators in the following ways:

#### A quality program:

1. ~~Develops a program design based on the review of multiple data sources~~ **(REPLACE WITH #3, MORE SPECIFIC)**
2. Has very clearly defined measurable program goals that are linked to the needs of **ALL** students **SERVED** and to school and community goals
3. Has a program design that is data-driven with clearly defined processes to ensure program review and refinement based on program assessment and program results-**(PROMOTE TO #1)**
4. ~~Provides strong evidence that~~ **CAN DEMONSTRATE THAT** program goals are clearly understood and implemented by program staff
5. Provides a wide variety of age/grade level appropriate strategies/activities that are ~~research-based or~~ evidence-based and linked to program **VISION, MISSION AND** goals
6. ~~Ensures that statutorily required program components are in place~~ **THIS WOULD BE MORE HELPFUL, AND HAVE LESS OF A COMPLIANCE-ORIENTED FEEL, IF THE RELEVANT COMPONENTS WERE NAMED (E.G. “ENSURES THAT PROGRAM COMPONENTS RELATED TO ACADEMIC SUPPORT, ENRICHMENT AND RECREATION ARE IN PLACE.”)**
7. Provides hands-on, student-centered enrichment activities that incorporate and combine academics, youth development and recreational learning
8. Has a program design that reflects strong input from students, **PROGRAM STAFF**, families, school/administration/staff and collaborative partners
9. Has a design that clearly defines the desired level of staff experience necessary for effective implementation
10. Has a design that very clearly addresses how ~~English language learners and~~ students with special needs will be included in the program and receive the appropriate level of services
11. Has a design that very clearly addresses how English language learners ~~and students with special needs~~ will be included in the program and receive the appropriate level of services

#### Suggested additional indicators:

- Program has a mission and vision that includes an understanding of the needs and interest of young people and their communities, the importance of youth engagement, identity development and positive relationships among youth and staff.
- Program design is intentional and reflects the mission and vision of the program.
- Program design offers student choice in activities.
- There are clearly articulated high, clear, fair standards for young people’s behavior in programs that is consistently applied to all youth.
- Program literature and outreach materials should describe program mission and reflect its philosophy of working with young people.

## **PROGRAM AREA: Program Environment**

### **Feedback on name of Program Area**

As noted in Section I of this review, the Committee suggests enhancing the draft tool's focus on site level practice and young people's experience. One element of this is to substantially revise and expand the scope of the Program Environment section. To better reflect the full scope we are suggesting, we recommend changing the name of this area to Program Environment/Climate.

### **Descriptor Feedback**

We suggest revising the descriptor and adding indicators related to emotional safety, in addition to the current indicators of physical safety. Suggested language: A quality program provides a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for all participants. It ensures that young people are physically and emotionally secure, respected and accepted for who they are.

### **Indicator Feedback**

#### **Suggested Revised Indicators:**

##### Physical Safety

- Staff regularly refer to and communicate the rules and expectations of the program.
- Adult-child ratios vary according to the ages and abilities of children. The ratio is no greater than 1:20 for groups of children age 6 and older.
- Service sites are well lit and maintained and entrances ensure safe passage to programs.

##### Emotional Safety

- Staff members have created an atmosphere that reflects and celebrates youth of different ages and backgrounds, and their families.
- Physical spaces are decorated in an age- and culturally-appropriate manner that is welcoming to program participants and families.
- Staff members consistently acknowledge positive youth behavior.
- Staff members insure a socially equitable environment and use strategies to intervene and peacefully resolve negative comments, and/or physical and verbal harassment regarding a young person's culture, language, ethnicity, national background, gender, or sexual orientation.

## **PROGRAM AREA: Program Leadership and Administration**

### **Descriptor Feedback**

We recommend changing the first sentence as follows: “A quality program has an effective management structure that develops and implements policies, procedures and practices to ensure successful operation of the after school program based on the program **GOALS, VISION AND** design.”

### **Indicator Feedback**

#### **Suggested Indicator Revisions:**

- Several of the indicators in this program area overlap with the indicators in Program Design. We recommend looking at these two sections side by side and clarifying the differences. Along with this, we recommend wording all indicators in this program area clearly in terms of the leadership and administrative practices involved.
- Indicator #3 – we suggest adding that the program schedule provides for a variety of engaging activities.
- Indicator #8 – broaden to refer to on-going communication not only with school/district staff but also with community partners.
- In the spirit of having this be an aspirational, rather than compliance-based tool, we suggest deleting indicator #12, which is more about compliance than quality and has a very different feel from the rest of the indicators.

#### **Suggested additional indicators:**

- Program leaders treat staff as professionals and provide opportunities for advancement.
- Program Leadership offers consistent opportunity for staff development related to the needs of the program, the participants, and the staff.
- Program provides positive working conditions for staff and appropriate supervision, support, and feedback.
- All staff receive annual performance reviews/reflections that include assessment of how appropriately they interact with young people and model the behaviors and attitudes they expect of young people.
- Program develops and implements policies and procedures to protect the safety, comfort and fair treatment of all participants, families and staff (e.g., sexual harassment policy, anti-discrimination policy)
- Program leaders model respectful interaction with all staff, families and participants.

## **PROGRAM AREA: Alignment and Linkages with the Regular School Day**

### **Descriptor Feedback**

In the top paragraph, we suggest using language such as “support, complement and expand the regular school day through intentionally-designed enrichment activities and student-centered academic assistance” rather than language such as “aligned with regular day standards,” or “ensures that the after school environment can allow access to the content and standards targeted during the regular day through complementary research-based or evidence-based after school activities.” This language sounds much more compliance-related and gives the impression that after school programs are simply an additional class period. As noted in *Shared Features*, academically-successful after-school programs incorporate school-day materials and methods into a less formal environment to sustain student engagement while maximizing results.

### **Indicator Feedback**

#### **Suggested Indicator Revisions:**

- We suggest grouping indicators by function, such as those involving program/activity planning and those about communication with teachers.

#### **Suggested additional indicators:**

- Staff are knowledgeable about the academic levels and needs of the students with whom they work, including students with learning disabilities and other special needs.
- Staff use evidence-based strategies for providing effective learning support to English language learners and students from diverse backgrounds.

## **PROGRAM AREA: Staff Development**

### **Descriptor Feedback**

Our only suggestion on this descriptor is to change the term “instructional aides” to the word “staff”, as that encompasses staff at all levels of the program – from direct service to leadership and administration.

### **Indicator Feedback**

The focus of the current staff development section has to do with having systems in place to ensure a variety of staff development opportunities, and includes little on the *skills or characteristics* of a quality afterschool staff. For example: commitment to program vision, cultural competency/awareness, group management skills, positive relationships with youth etc. In much of the research it is shown that the skills and commitment of after-school staff substantially influence program quality (*Shared Features of High Performing After-School Programs: A Follow-Up to the TASC Evaluation* and *Quality Time After School: What Instructors Can Do to Enhance Learning* (Public/Private Ventures, 2007)). The NYSAN tool also supports this with the following indicators:

- Recruits, hires and develops staff who reflect the diversity and culture(s) of the community.
- Ensures staff has competence in core academic areas, where appropriate.

In addition to including indicators on staff development *systems*, therefore, we recommend including some language in the indicators on staff skills and characteristics.

### **Suggested Indicator Revisions:**

- #3 – Consider moving this indicator to the Program Leadership and Administration section, since it is generally an operational issue, rather than a staff development matter.
- #6 – Change as follows: “Provides participation in regular individual and group professional growth opportunities based on the needs of the program, **THE NEEDS OF PARTICIPANTS** and of individual staff “
- #10 – Clarify by changing to: “Provides opportunities **FOR STAFF** to provide input on program development and assessment.”

### **Suggested additional indicators:**

- All staff receive annual performance reviews that include assessment of how appropriately they interact with young people and model the behaviors and attitudes they expect of young people.
- Staff are provided opportunities to build their skills to listen and communicate effectively with youth promote active engagement, etc.
- Has regular staff meetings to conduct program planning, and to discuss issues such as: student, family and teacher feedback about impact; new school policies; how to connect and support the regular day to the program; expanding programming opportunities and community connections; etc.
- Staff are fairly compensated when they participate in ongoing training.
- Has a system in place for training and developing new staff when they are hired during the year
- Ensures staff understand the communities they serve, are culturally competent and are able to work with diverse populations.

## **PROGRAM AREA: Youth Development**

As noted in Section I, based on the importance of strong site-level practices and developmental support to achieving program quality, one of the Committee's strongest recommendations is a more expanded and practice-oriented focus on youth development. While a wide variety of assessment tools from around the country provide models for doing this, because CDE has relied most heavily on the NYSAN tool, we suggest **replacing CDE's current Youth Development section with three NYSAN categories:**

### **Relationships**

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

### **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.

### **Youth Participation / Engagement**

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

This is in addition to expanding and reframing the section on Program Environment, as noted earlier.

Following are our suggestions for framing, descriptors and indicators in each of the proposed new areas.

## **NEW PROGRAM AREA: RELATIONSHIPS**

### **Descriptor**

Promoting trust and confidence between participants and staff in a supportive environment so young people can experience guidance, emotional and practical support.

### **Suggested Indicators**

- Staff regularly use strategies for emotional guidance and support to get to know youth in the program.
- Staff know young people on an individual basis and can identify their interests, talents and developmental needs.
- Staff utilize strategies to promote a sense of belonging between peers in the program.
- Staff respect and communicate with one another and are role models of positive adult relationships.

## **NEW PROGRAM AREA: PROGRAMMING/ACTIVITIES**

### **Descriptor**

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.

### **Suggested Indicators**

#### *Activity Structure*

- Staff assess, formally or informally, the interests of participants, their current skills and abilities to tailor program design to reach the needs of their participants.
- Provides activities that reflect the mission of the program.
- Addresses academic, physical, social and emotional needs of the participants.
- Offers enrichment opportunities in core academic areas as well as in the arts, technology, recreation, health and other areas of student interest.
- Establishes and follows a schedule that is known to all staff, participants, and their families.

#### *Skill development*

- Features activities that are commensurate with the age and skill level of the participants and enable participants to develop new skills during the program year.
- Provides youth with opportunities to strengthen, explore, and practice new and existing skills, so that young people can acquire a wide array of skills and experience a sense of growth and progress.
- Staff provide youth with opportunities to identify and reflect on their learnings, goals and accomplishments

#### *Diversity and Inclusion*

- Includes activities that take into account the language and culture of the participants.
- Staff utilize a range of approaches and instructional strategies to reach youth with diverse learning needs and styles.

#### *Civic Engagement*

- Staff offer opportunities for youth to participate in activities that contribute positively to their communities.

### **NEW PROGRAM AREA: YOUTH PARTICIPATION/ENGAGEMENT**

#### **Descriptor**

Giving participants an opportunity to play a meaningful, active role in their program, so that young people can have input into decision-making, opportunities for responsibility and leadership and feel a sense of ownership.

#### **Suggested Indicators**

- The program provides opportunities for participants to make meaningful contributions to program development and continuous improvement of activities.
- Staff provide opportunities and support for youth to take on leadership roles.
- Youth have responsibilities within the program, such as planning events and leading activities.
- Affords participants opportunities to express their ideas, concerns and opinions.
- Enables participants to explore resources and issues in their community through projects and activities.

## **PROGRAM AREA: Community Partnerships, Collaboration, and Family Involvement**

### **Descriptor Feedback**

The committee liked this descriptor. We are only making one suggestion, change the word “parents” to “family members” or “guardians” to increase inclusion/ acceptance of each unique situation. We also recommend checking the entire document and substituting “family members” for “parents.”

### **Indicator Feedback**

#### **Suggested Indicator Revisions:**

- #5 – Revise as follows: “Provides well-defined interactive activities for families **OF MULTIPLE CULTURES** that encourage parental support for after school programs and for their child’s development and academic achievement.”
- In relevant indicators, we suggest including opportunity for family/guardian input, and youth input into program.

#### **Suggested additional indicators:**

- Families are welcome and feel emotionally safe at the program.
- Youth have the opportunity to learn about and contribute to their community through volunteer service, community mapping, and other activities.
- Activities designed to involve families are scheduled after work hours to support convenient family involvement.

## **PROGRAM AREA: Program Finance**

### **Descriptor Feedback**

Modify the second sentence of the introduction to read “Program financing operations should meet all statutory fiscal, accounting, record-keeping and audit requirements to ensure program stability.”

### **Indicator Feedback**

#### **Suggested Indicator Revisions:**

- The committee recommends deleting indicators #3 and #6, as we believe the elements they reference would be covered under #2. Including these elements more than once lends more of a feel of compliance monitoring than quality improvement to the finance section.

#### **Suggested additional indicators:**

- Continues to seek new partners, collaborations, potential funding and in-kind resources that match the needs of the program.
- Budgets sufficient resources for the hiring of staff with desired levels of experience, and for ongoing staff development.
- If program charges fees, be sure there’s a provision for making sure no child/family is turned away for inability to pay.

## **PROGRAM AREA: Program Accountability, Evaluation, and Research**

### **Descriptor Feedback**

We suggest modifying the tone of this descriptor to emphasize the importance of collecting and using data in order to improve programming and thereby enhance students' experiences and outcomes. The descriptor should emphasize that any evaluation should be aligned with program quality elements, so that evaluation activities will simultaneously support quality improvement. Deleting the last sentence in the descriptor would help with this issue.

### **Indicator Feedback**

#### **Suggested Indicator Revisions:**

- We suggest modifying the indicator order to better reflect the chronological nature of evaluation design and implementation. For example, place Indicators #3 and #4 at the beginning of the section.

#### **Suggested additional indicators:**

- Add after #7: Evaluations deliberately seek the perspectives of potentially excluded groups to determine barriers that may hinder their participation in the program or its activities.
- In evaluations, program collects and compares data across groups in the program (different ethnic groups, English learners, participants with disabilities, etc) to ensure all groups are being served effectively and to assess potential differences in satisfaction or outcomes.
- As appropriate, evaluation and research includes a focus on examining the quality of youth/adult relationships within a program and the level of youth participation and engagement.
- Program research and evaluation is conducted using culturally appropriate, sensitive and inclusive approaches and methods.

### **III. Suggested New Program Area: *Promoting Diversity, Access and Equity***

As noted in Part I, as a way to make this tool most effective and relevant for a highly diverse state like California, the Quality Committee strongly recommends adding an additional program area on diversity, equity and access. This is in addition to our suggestions – included above – on weaving elements of equity through other program area indicators.

We think the following list of indicators developed by California Tomorrow in partnership with programs and TA providers from around the state, is very strong and we recommend using something very similar, reformatted to match the CDE tool. California Tomorrow is an intermediary with 20 years of experience helping organizations and institutions honor diversity and create equitable, inclusive services.

#### **Promoting Diversity, Access and Equity**

**Overview:** Our program embraces and values diversity, and has a conscious commitment to helping all young people thrive by providing inclusive, accessible, responsive, and engaging services. This commitment is reflected in our vision and leadership, and is woven throughout all aspects of the program.

#### **Indicators:**

##### **A QUALITY PROGRAM...**

1. Has a conscious commitment to honoring diversity, promoting access and inclusion, and addressing equity challenges
2. Has a mission statement that includes goals relating to the program's equity and diversity values.
3. Ensures that staff understand, value, and respect the various backgrounds and experiences of participants and their families.
4. Has a staff that reflects the racial, ethnic, linguistic, gender, family, and community characteristics of participants.
5. Ensures that staff members are knowledgeable about the different learning styles and special needs of participating students.
6. Ensures that leadership and staff teams universally hold high and equitable expectations for all students in the program.
7. Has a program environment and program materials that are affirming and inclusive of different cultures, languages and communities.
8. Provides activities and experiences that increase young people's knowledge and sense of connection to their cultural, language, gender and other identity groups.

9. Consciously works to build respect and trust across boundaries of race, culture, gender, class and other areas of diversity.
10. Ensures that program activities are fully accessible to children and youth of all cultural, language and economic backgrounds, and to students with all types of disabilities and other special needs.
11. Uses outreach and communication approaches that are culturally and linguistically appropriate and inclusive.
12. Works toward reducing social disparities and inequities in the community.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Again, thank you for the opportunity to share our input with CDE and SEDL, and to help shape this important tool for programs across California.

We hope that the above suggestions will prove useful in helping you create a dynamic, inspiring and useful guide to quality assessment and improvement. We would also like to suggest two final things, which we believe would enhance the revision process:

-In our own research, we found it very helpful to talk with the NYSAN team from New York about their experience using the Quality Assessment Tool on which the new California tool has been based. We suggest that your team consider talking to them about implementation issues, success and challenges, etc.:

- Suzanne Goldstein – NYSAN Coordinator – [sgoldstein@nysan.org](mailto:sgoldstein@nysan.org).
- Chris Caruso – Assistant Commissioner for OST at NYC's Department of Youth and Community Development and responsible for field support in using the tool – [ccaruso@dycd.nyc.gov](mailto:ccaruso@dycd.nyc.gov), 212-676-9845.

- Once CDE and SEDL have edited the tool and incorporated changes from the field, we recommend convening a group of researchers/evaluators who are engaged in national quality assessment conversations for a final review of California's tool. This would help ensure that our tool is consistent with the most current best practices in evaluation nationally, as well as providing a more methodologically-oriented review than those of us in the field can provide. If desired, the Committee would be happy to suggest some researchers and evaluators to include in this process.

As you move forward with your revisions, please feel welcome to contact the Quality Committee for clarification of anything in this memo – or for further support. We are glad to be working with you, and look forward to seeing the next version.

**National Research Council’s Features of Positive Developmental Settings**

	<b>Total # of Relevant Indicators in Draft CDE Tool</b>	<b>Relevant Indicators in Draft CDE Tool</b>
<b>Physical and Psychological Safety</b>	11 (Note: all 11 focus on physical safety)	Program Environment #1-8; Leadership/Admin #1; Staff Development #3, #4;
<b>Appropriate Structure</b>	4	Program Design #2, 5; Program Environment #9; Youth Development #3
<b>Supportive Relationships</b>	0	
<b>Opportunities to Belong</b>	2	Program Design #10; Youth Development #6
<b>Positive Social Norms</b>	1	Youth Development #2
<b>Support for Efficacy and Mattering</b>	3	Program Design #8; Youth Development #5, #7
<b>Opportunities for Skill Building</b>	3	Program Design #7; Youth Development #1, #6
<b>Integration of Family, School, and Community Efforts</b>	16	Program Design #8; Alignment/Linkages #1-8; Community Partnerships/Collaboration #1-6.

The NRC framework intentionally is focused on features of the program setting itself, as opposed to addressing enabling conditions or more distal factors that influence the setting. The remaining indicators in the CDE tool are about those kinds of factors, and can be summarized as falling into the following additional categories:

	<b>Total # of Relevant Indicators in Draft CDE Tool</b>	<b>Relevant Indicators in Draft CDE Tool</b>
<b>Leadership, Management, Administration</b>	13	Program Leadership/Admin #2, 4-6, #9-11; Staff Development #10; Program Finance #1-5.
<b>Staff Development</b>	10	Program Design #4,9; Staff Development #1-2, 5-7, 9; Youth Development #4; Program Finance #7.
<b>Accountability, Evaluation</b>	15	Leadership/Administration #3,7,12; Staff Development #8; Program Finance #6; Accountability, Evaluation, Research #1-10
<b>Program Design</b>	3	Program Design #1,3,6.

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