

# SPOTLIGHT ON QUALITY: WHAT IS QUALITY AND WHY DOES IT MATTER? SCHOOL-AGE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE



ADMINISTRATION FOR  
**CHILDREN & FAMILIES**



Jointly funded by ACF's Office of Child Care & Office of Head Start  
Convened by the National Center on Child Care Professional  
Development Systems and Workforce Initiatives (PDW Center)

**This document is the first in a three-part series that summarizes:**

1. **What quality school-age care is and why it matters;**
2. The choices families make and why; and
3. How State and Territory subsidy policies can support increase options and support family decisions.

Research indicates that high-quality afterschool programs are showing important gains for children in terms of academic achievement, safety, discipline, attendance, and avoidance of risky behaviors (*Afterschool Alliance, 2013*). This brief summarizes program quality and its impact in the following two sections:

- **What Is a Quality School-Age Care Program?**
- **Why Does Quality Matter?**

## What Is a Quality School-Age Care Program?

Quality school-age care programs have strong staff-management practices; use best practices in program management; and facilitate communication between schools, communities, and homes.

**Quality programs have strong staff-management practices that:**

- Hire, train, fairly compensate, and retain staff; and
- Employ highly educated and well-paid program directors (*Child Trends, 2007*).

**Quality programs use best practices in program management that include:**

- Low child-to-staff ratios;
- A positive emotional climate;
- A clear program structure and appropriate supervision;
- Flexible programming and planned activities that promote autonomy and choice;
- Clear goals that link to data collection and evaluation; and
- Continuity with the regular school day (*Afterschool Alliance, 2013*).

**Quality programs communicate between school, community, and home to support consistency for children with practices that include:**

- Communication and outreach to families;
- Communication and coordination with schools; and
- Links with community-based organizations and facilities (*Afterschool Alliance, 2009*).



## Why Does Quality Matter?

### Quality school-age care increases positive child outcomes.

- Children who regularly participate in high-quality school-age care and summer programs demonstrate improved test scores, work habits, social skills, and behavior ([Durlak, & Weissberg, 2012](#)).

### Children who do not have quality school-age care may experience negative outcomes.

- Children and youth who are unsupervised after school, or who participate in intermittent and unstructured programs, experience negative outcomes with math achievement, work habits, task persistence, and social skills ([Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007](#); [US. Department of Justice, 2001](#)).
- Studies have shown that youth from economically disadvantaged households are more likely than their middle- and upper-income peers to lose ground in reading and math over the summer, leading to major differences in high school completion ([Alexander, Entwistle, & Olson, 2007](#)).

## References

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## Additional Resources

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- Validation of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems for Early Care and Education and School-Age Care, Research-to-Policy, Research-to-Practice Brief OPRE 2012-29*  
[http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/val\\_qual\\_early.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/val_qual_early.pdf)
- Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers Year 2 Evaluation Report Executive Summary*  
<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=2908>

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