

# SPOTLIGHT ON QUALITY: WHAT IS QUALITY AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

**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?

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### 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://tea.texas.gov/Texas\\_Schools/Support\\_for\\_At-Risk\\_Schools\\_and\\_Students/21st\\_Century\\_Community\\_Learning\\_Centers](http://tea.texas.gov/Texas_Schools/Support_for_At-Risk_Schools_and_Students/21st_Century_Community_Learning_Centers)

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