

School's Out Washington's Quality Program Initiative

School's Out Washington believes that quality doesn't occur by accident. Some people may have a natural talent for connecting with youth or organizing fun activities, but ensuring that school-age children and youth are getting the best possible experience from a program takes intentionality.

Much research has been done in recent years to identify the program components that correlate to better outcomes for kids in one aspect or another. The focus of this research may be anything from academic outcomes to social/emotional health to increased attendance rates to generally positive experience. Some program components, like staff-youth relationships, appear as key items across several quality studies.

Since 2008, School's Out Washington with funding from the Raikes Foundation, has provided support to afterschool and youth development programs serving middle and high school aged youth through the Youth Program Quality Initiative.

We are currently supporting the *Raikes Foundation Youth Program Quality Initiative* in King County, Pierce County and Spokane and the *Washington Regional Afterschool Project (WRAP)* is implementing the School age Program Quality Assessment (SAPQA) in all regions.

Youth Program Quality

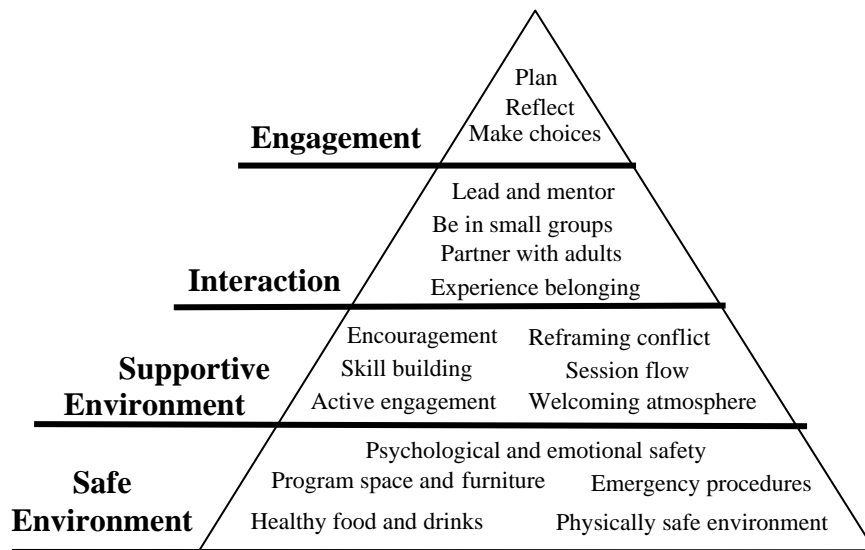
Quality Matters: Research has found that *high quality* out-of-school time programs are directly related to youth achievement of positive social, emotional, health, and academic gains.¹ Conversely, low quality programs show no benefit and can even have a negative impact, reinforcing asocial behaviors.

Quality is Measurable: While there is no single set of quality measures, there is much consistency in what researchers find most effective for youth development programs. Quality indicators, which look at program and staff practices, are an accountability measure that can be controlled by the program and can serve as a performance assessment as well as a predictable, interim measure of outcomes.² Key components of effective quality assessment tools include:

- A focus on point-of-service—the place where staff interacts with youth—because how staff structures the environment and activities has the greatest effect on youth outcomes.
- Unambiguous measures of quality that are low-inference and observation-based.
- Measures that also teach staff about what optimal practice is and have embedded descriptions about how to improve.

Quality is Malleable: When programs focus on strengthening instructional practices aligned with quality, they can influence program outcomes. To be most effective at improving quality, organizations should institutionalize continuous improvement targeted at practices known to impact youth experience.

The Youth Program Quality Assessment: The Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) is a research-validated observation instrument developed by High/Scope and the Center for Youth Program Quality. The YPQA has been used in after-school, community, camp, mentoring, and residential treatment programs and is a proactive approach to identifying an agency's strengths and staff training needs. The YPQA is targeted at programs that serve youth in 4th-12th grade and in groups rather than 1:1. The YPQA assesses practices framed by a pyramid of program quality. Trainings aligned with key concepts at each stage of the pyramid are available to strengthen staff practice in specific areas.



¹ *Making the Case: A 2008 Fact Sheet on Children and Youth in Out-of-School Time*, National Institute on Out-of-School Time, Wellesley Centers for Women at Wellesley College, 2008; *Outcomes Linked to High Quality Afterschool Programs*, D. Lowe Vandell, E. Reisner & C. Pierce, 2007.

² *Improving Afterschool Program Quality*, B. Granger, N. Yohalem, J. Durlak, E. Reisner, 2007.