

A Crosswalk

Between the *Learning in Afterschool* Learning Principles and Afterschool Quality Measurement Tools

By Sam Piha and Corey Newhouse



Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Nicole Yohalem (Forum for Youth Investment) for her review and feedback on this paper. We also wish to thank the following organizations and individuals for their review and feedback on the sections related to their particular quality measurement tools.

- ❖ *David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality*: Barb Hillaker, Charles Smith, and Nicole Yohalem
- ❖ *Policy Studies Associates, Inc.*: Elizabeth Reisner and Monica Mielke
- ❖ *National Institute on Out-of-School Time*: Ellen Gannett and Wendy Surr
- ❖ *National Summer Learning Association*: Sarah Pitcock
- ❖ *The California Afterschool Network*: Jeff Davis
- ❖ *Program in Education, Afterschool and Resiliency (PEAR)*: Gil Noam and Anahit Papzian

A special thanks to the William T. Grant Foundation, whose funding made this paper possible.

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Introduction

Over the last two decades, we have seen an extraordinary increase in public and private investments in afterschool programs. As these investments and the number of afterschool programs grew, there was an increased demand that programs provide a consistent level of quality. As a result, many afterschool researchers and organizations developed tools that helped programs define and measure aspects of program quality.

During the roll out of the *Learning in Afterschool* project, several afterschool leaders asked how the *Learning in Afterschool* learning principles correspond to afterschool quality measurement tools that are currently being used in the field. In response, we offer this paper, which identifies the overlap between the learning principles promoted by the *Learning in Afterschool* project with items in six program quality measurement tools – tools that serve as good examples of quality measurement tools for afterschool programs.

Through this comparison, we hope to establish the strong relationship between the *Learning in Afterschool* learning principles and what you would expect to see in a quality afterschool program. We are also seeking to identify which learning principles are most aligned and which seem to be absent from the quality equation.

All of these tools examine aspects of program quality that go beyond the *Learning in Afterschool* learning principles. It is important to note that these other aspects of quality are also important. The selection of a tool for assessing program quality should be driven in large part by how the contents of the entire tool matches with the beliefs and goals of the program. For programs that are focused on learning or would like to increase their focus on learning, using a tool that aligns well with the LIA principles may be of particular importance. For an excellent review of well-tested afterschool program quality tools, see *Measuring Youth Program Quality* by Nicole Yohalem and Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom:

http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/files/MeasuringYouthProgramQuality_2ndEd.pdf.

Further, there are many program quality assessment tools currently being used in the field that are not detailed in this paper. However, we provide a listing of some of these other tools at the end of this paper.

About the *Learning in Afterschool* Project

The *Learning in Afterschool* project is an effort by afterschool advocates and leaders to unify the field of afterschool and focus the movement on promoting young people's learning. The supporters of the *Learning in Afterschool* project believe that if afterschool programs are to achieve their full potential, they must be known as important places of learning that excite young people in the building of new skills, the discovery of new interests, and opportunities to achieve a sense of mastery.

Learning in Afterschool Learning Principles

1. Learning that is Active:

Learning and memory recall of new knowledge is strengthened through different exposures – seeing, hearing, touching, and doing. Afterschool learning should be the result of activities that involve young people in “doing” – activities that allow them to be physically active, stimulate their innate curiosity, and that are hands-on and project-based. Hands-on learning involves the child in a total learning experience, which enhances the child’s ability to think critically.

2. Learning that is Collaborative:

Knowledge should be socially centered, as collaborative learning provides the best means to explore new information. Afterschool programs are well positioned to build skills that allow young people to learn as a team. This includes listening to others, supporting group learning goals, resolving differences and conflicts, and making room for each member to contribute his or her individual talents. Collaborative learning happens when learners engage in a common task where each individual depends on and is accountable to each other.

3. Learning that is Meaningful:

Young people are intrinsically motivated when they find their learning meaningful. This means having ownership over the learning topic and the means to assess their own progress. Motivation is increased when the learning is relevant to their own interests, experiences, and the real world in which they live. Community and cultural relevance is especially important to new immigrant youth and those from minority cultures. Rather than learning that is focused on academic subjects, young people in afterschool can apply their academic skills to their areas of interest and real world problems. Also, when learning involves responsibility, leadership, and service to others, it is experienced as more meaningful.

4. Learning that Supports Mastery:

Young people tell us they are most engaged when they are given opportunities to learn new skills. If young people are to learn the importance and joy of mastery, they need the opportunity to learn and practice a full sequence of skills that will allow them to become “really good at something.” Afterschool activities should not promote the gathering of random knowledge and skills. Rather, afterschool learning activities should be explicitly sequenced and designed to promote the layering of skills that allows participants to create a product or demonstrate mastery in a way they couldn’t do before. Programs often achieve this by designing activities that lead to a culminating event or product that can be viewed and celebrated by peers and family members. For older youth, many programs are depending on apprenticeship models to assist youth in achieving a sense of mastery.

5. Learning that Expands Horizons:

Young people, especially those from low-income families and neighborhoods, benefit by learning opportunities that take them beyond their current experience and expand their horizons. Learning about new things and new places promotes a greater sense of potential of what they can achieve and brings a sense of excitement and discovery to the learning environment. Afterschool programs have the flexibility to go beyond the walls of their facilities. They can use the surrounding community as a classroom and bring in individuals and businesses that young people may not otherwise come into contact with. Expanding young people’s horizons also includes helping them to develop a global awareness. This includes increasing their knowledge of other cultures and places and their understanding of the issues and problems we have in common across cultural and political divides.

The *Learning in Afterschool* project is promoting five core learning principles that should define afterschool programs. These learning principles are strongly supported by recent research on brain development, education, afterschool programs, and the growing science of learning. They are also well aligned with the 21st century learning skills and workforce skills that young people will need to succeed in the years ahead, as well as efforts to increase young people’s interest in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

Each of the learning principles, cited on page 4, support each other and together provide an important framework for afterschool programming. There are a number of exemplar afterschool programs that strongly draw upon and demonstrate the *Learning in Afterschool* principles.

Afterschool Program Quality Tools

Below we assess the overlap between the *Learning in Afterschool* learning principles and six program quality measurement tools currently being used in the field. The tools we examine are the Youth Program Quality Assessment (David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality), Out-of-School Time Program Observation Tool (Policy Studies Associates), The Assessment of Afterschool Program Practices Tool (NIOST), The Comprehensive Summer Program Observation Tool (National Summer Learning Association), The California After School Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool (California Afterschool Network), and The Quality STEM Assessment in Out-of-School Time: Dimensions of Success Observation Tool (Program in Education, Afterschool and Resiliency at Harvard University).

For each measurement tool, we offer an overall description of the tool, summarize the extent of alignment with the *Learning in Afterschool* learning principles, and include a table that rates the level of alignment and offers example items from the quality measurement tool that correspond with each learning principle. Though individual items are pulled out here for purposes of demonstrating alignment, it is important to note that individual items should not be pulled out and used in isolation, as this may affect the integrity of the scales and the eventual quality findings.

Below is a key that defines the levels of alignment we describe. These ratings are based on the number of items that correspond to the learning principle definitions and how well they align.

Strong Alignment	Assessment tool has multiple measures of and/or measures that strongly correspond to the LIA principle. Using this tool will provide a robust sense of the program's alignment with the LIA principle.
Moderate Alignment	Assessment tool has several measures that correspond to the LIA principle, though some elements are not covered. Programs may need more information about their activities to fully assess their alignment with the LIA principle.
Minimal Alignment	Assessment tool has few or no measures that correspond to the LIA principle; using this tool will not offer information about the program’s alignment to the LIA principle.

Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA)

Developed by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality

Overview: The overall purpose of the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) is to encourage individuals, programs, and systems to focus on the quality of the experiences young people have in programs and the corresponding training needs of staff. While some structural and organizational management issues are included in the instrument, the YPQA is primarily focused on what the developers refer to as the “point of service” – the delivery of key developmental experiences and young people’s access to those experiences.

Primary Purpose(s): Program Improvement; Monitoring/Accreditation; Research/Evaluation

Program Target Age: Grades 4 – 12

Relevant Settings: Structured programs in a range of school- and community-based settings.

Developer’s Website: <http://www.cypq.org>

Source: *Measuring Youth Program Quality: A Guide to Assessment Tools*, Nicole Yohalem and Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom, March 2007.

YPQA Tool Description: Subscales

The YPQA instrument is broken into four major subscales, each broken into different categories. These are listed below and those most closely associated with the five *Learning in Afterschool* learning principles are shown in bold.

- I. Safe Environment
 - A. Psychological and emotional safety is promoted
 - B. The physical environment is safe and free of health hazards
 - C. Appropriate emergency procedures and supplies are present
 - D. **Program space and furniture accommodate the activities offered**
 - E. Healthy food and drinks are provided

- II. Supportive Environment
 - F. Staff support a welcoming atmosphere
 - G. **Session flow is planned, presented, and paced for youth**
 - H. **Activities support active engagement**
 - I. **Staff support youth in building new skills**
 - J. **Staff support youth with encouragement**

- III. Interaction
 - K. **Staff use youth-centered approaches to reframe conflicts**
 - L. **Youth have opportunities to develop a sense of belonging**
 - M. **Youth have opportunities to participate in small groups**
 - N. **Youth have opportunities to act as group facilitators and mentors**
 - O. Youth have opportunities to partner with adults

IV. Engagement

P. **Youth have opportunities to set goals and make plans**

Q. **Youth have opportunities to make choices based on their interest**

R. **Youth have opportunities to reflect**

Summary: Alignment with Learning in Afterschool Learning Principles

The YPQA is strongly aligned with four of five *Learning in Afterschool* principles, and will provide robust information about the ways in which out-of-school time programs provide active and engaging activities that encourage youth to build mastery and work collaboratively on meaningful activities. The YPQA has multiple items that explore the extent to which youth are building conflict resolution and group process skills in support of collaborative learning.

The YPQA does not explore the extent to which young people are able to engage in their communities, nor does it explore the building of global awareness.

Youth Program Quality Assessment Tool – Table 1

LIA Principle	Level of Alignment and Observation Examples
Active	<p>Strong Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities incorporate both abstract principles and concrete objects (II-H) • Activities involve youth in engaging with materials or ideas (II-H) • Program activities lead to tangible products or performances (II-H) • Youth have multiple opportunities to practice group-process skills (e.g., actively listen, contribute ideas or actions to the group, take responsibility for a part)(III-N) • Program space allows youth and adults to move freely while carrying out activities (I-D)
Collaborative	<p>Strong Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth have structured opportunities to get to know one another (III-L) • Groups have a clear purpose and all group members cooperate in accomplishing it (III-M) • Youth have multiple opportunities to practice group-process skills (e.g., actively listen, contribute ideas or actions to the group, take responsibility for a part) (III-N) • Activities involve different group sizes (III-M) • Youth are encouraged to think about the consequences of their actions (III-K) • The program has conflict resolution practices in place that are used by staff and youth (III-K) • Staff approach conflicts calmly (III-K) • Staff seek input from youth in order to determine both the cause and solution of conflicts and negative behavior (III-K)
Meaningful	<p>Strong Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth make decisions about how they do things (process) and what they do (content) (II-H) • The program environment is inclusive and respectful of all youth (III-L) • Youth make plans for activities (IV-P) • Youth have the opportunity to reflect on their progress (IV-R) • Youth have the opportunity to talk about what they are doing (II-H) • During activities, all youth have one or more opportunities to lead a group (III-N)
Supports Mastery	<p>Strong Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth are encouraged to try out new skills or attempt higher levels of performance (II-I) • Youth receive support from staff despite errors and are encouraged to correct their mistakes (II-I) • There is an appropriate amount of time for all of the activities (II-G) • The activities include structured opportunities to publicly acknowledge the achievements, work, or contributions of at least some of the youth (III-L) • Activities culminate in a presentation or final product (II-G)
Expands Horizons	<p>Minimal Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth are encouraged to try out new skills or attempt higher levels of performance (II-I)

Out-of-School Time Program Observation Tool (OST)

Developed by Policy Studies Associates, Inc.

Overview: The Out-of-School Time Program Observation Tool (OST) was developed in conjunction with several research projects related to out-of-school time programming, with the goal of collecting consistent and objective data about the quality of activities through observation. Its design is based on several assumptions about high-quality programs – first, that certain structural and institutional features support the implementation of high-quality programs; and second, that instructional activities with certain characteristics – varied content, mastery-oriented instruction and positive relationships – promote positive youth outcomes.

Primary Purpose: Research/ Evaluation

Program Target Age: Grades K – 12

Relevant Settings: Varied school- and community-based after-school programs. The OST observation instrument is used in conjunction with related survey measures.

Developer’s Website: <http://www.policystudies.com/>

Source: *Measuring Youth Program Quality: A Guide to Assessment Tools*, Nicole Yohalem and Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom, March 2007.

OST Program Observation Tool Description

The OST Observation Tool is sub-divided into five sections, each of which between four and ten items. The OST Tool elements that are most closely associated with the five *Learning in Afterschool* learning principles are shown in bold.

- 1. Youth-directed relationships**
- 2. Youth participation**
3. Staff-directed relationships
- 4. Instructional strategies**
- 5. Activity content and structure**

Summary: Alignment with Learning in Afterschool Learning Principles

The OST Tool is strongly aligned with three of five *Learning in Afterschool* principles, and is particularly well-suited to assess the extent to which out-of-school time programs promote collaborative learning, provide meaningful experiences for youth, and support young people’s progress toward mastering specific skills and knowledge.

The OST Tool does not explore the extent to which young people are able to engage in their communities, nor does it explore the building of global awareness. It also does not explore the degree to which activities are active or expand horizons.

Out-of-School Time Program Observation Tool – Table 2

LIA Principle	Level of Alignment and Observation Examples
Active	<p>Minimal Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff employ varied teaching strategies. (Instructional strategies, W) • Activities require analytic thinking. (Activity content and structure, BB)
Collaborative	<p>Strong Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth assist one another. (Youth-directed relationships, D) • Youth are collaborative. (Youth-directed relationships, E) • Staff guide for positive peer interactions. (Staff-directed relationships, Q) • Staff plan for/ask youth to work together. (Instructional strategies, X)
Meaningful	<p>Strong Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth contribute opinions, ideas and/or concerns to discussions. (Youth participation, H) • Youth have opportunities to make meaningful choices. (Youth participation, I) • Youth take leadership responsibility/roles. (Youth participation, J) • Staff ask youth to expand upon their answers and ideas. (Instructional strategies, U) • Activities require analytic thinking. (Activity content and structure, BB)
Supports Mastery	<p>Strong Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff assist youth without taking control. (Instructional strategies, T) • Staff challenge youth to move beyond their current level of competency. (Instructional strategies, V) • Activity challenges students intellectually, creatively, developmentally, and/or physically. (Activity content and structure, Z) • Activity involves a progression of skills. (Activity content and structure, AA)
Expands Horizons	<p>Minimal Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff are equitable and inclusive. (Staff-directed relationships, L) • Activity challenges students intellectually, creatively, developmentally, and/or physically. (Activity content and structure, Z)

The Assessment of Afterschool Program Practices Tool (APT) Developed by National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST)

** Please note: The tool developers are currently conducting a study to test and refine this tool. This includes creating rating anchors for all items in the APT tool. A new version of the tool to produce reliable ratings is expected in Fall 2011.*

Overview: The Assessment of Afterschool Program Practices Tool (APT) is designed to help practitioners examine and improve what they do in their program to support young people's learning and development. It examines those program practices that research suggests contribute to youth outcomes (e.g., behavior, initiative, social relationships). A research version of the APT (the APT-R) was developed in 2003-2004. The current, more user-friendly self-assessment version was developed in 2005.

Primary Purpose(s): Program Improvement; Self-Assessment

Program Target Age: Grades K – 8

Relevant Settings: Both structured and unstructured programs that serve elementary and middle school students during the non-school hours. The APT uses a four-point, "how true?" rating scale, though flexibility is encouraged for users who find the scales not useful for their purposes. Depending on what part of the tool(s) is being used, the scales measure how characteristic an item is of the program, the consistency of an item or the frequency of an item. For each item, concrete descriptors illustrate what a score of 1, 2, 3 or 4 looks like.

Developer's Website: <http://www.niost.org>

Source: *Measuring Youth Program Quality: A Guide to Assessment Tools*, Nicole Yohalem and Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom, March 2007, and with minor edits from NIOST.

APT Tool Description

The APT is organized by time of day, including informal program times, homework, planned activities, and the overall program. It also includes targeted rubrics for content-specific practices to support skill building in academic areas, such as reading, mathematics, and science.

The sections of the APT are listed below. Those that are particularly applicable to the *Learning in Afterschool* principles are noted in bold type.

- I. Informal program times
 - a. Arrival
 - b. Pick-up
 - c. Transitions

- II. Homework time
 - a. Homework organization
 - b. Youth participation
 - c. Staff effectively manage homework time
 - d. Staff provide individualized homework support

III. Activity time

- a. **Organization and nature of activity**
- b. **Staff promote youth engagement and stimulate thinking**
- c. Staff positively guide youth behavior
- d. Staff build relationships and support individual youth
- e. **Youth participation in activity time**
- f. **Youth relations with others**

IV. Overall program ratings and impressions

- a. **Program space supports goals of programming**
- b. **Overall ratings of program schedule and offerings**
- c. Overall ratings of social-emotional environment
- d. Overall impressions of program

V. Academic Skill Building

- a. **Reading**
- b. **Written Communication**
- c. **Verbal Communication**
- d. **Mathematical Communication**
- e. **Mathematical Reasoning**
- f. **Mathematical Problem Solving**
- g. **Science**
- h. **Social Studies**

Summary: Alignment with Learning in Afterschool Learning Principles

The APT is strongly aligned with three of five *Learning in Afterschool* principles. It includes a variety of measures of the active, collaborative, meaningful, and mastery-oriented components of out-of-school time activities. It has a distinct emphasis on problem-solving and conflict resolution, contributing to its strength in exploring the collaborative learning principle. The Academic Skill building sections provide additional, concrete examples of high quality activities that focus on specific skills, aligned with the active and supports mastery principles.

The Social Studies activity supplement includes multiple elements on cultural and global exploration, and many of the Academic Skill building supplements incorporate a variety of hands-on and project-based learning principles.

Assessment of Afterschool Practices Tool – Table 3

LIA Principle	Level of Alignment and Observation Examples
Active	<p>Strong Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff help spark youth’s interest/curiosity (III, B, 2) • The environment is conducive to learning (IV, A, 2) • Program day offers youth a balance of instructional approaches (IV, B, 4) • Youth independently gather resources, materials or get information (III, E, 5) • When trying to solve a problem, youth try to identify the source, nature of the problem and/or try out potential solutions (III, E, 8) • Youth build/practice written communication skills (V, Written Communication) • Staff promote/encourage mathematical reasoning (V, Mathematical Reasoning) • Youth build/practice science skills (V, Science)
Collaborative	<p>Moderate Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth solve problems alone or in groups (III, E, 7) • Youth cooperate with each other (III, F, 4) • When minor conflicts occur, youth are able to problem-solve together to resolve conflicts without adult intervention (III, F, 7)
Meaningful	<p>Strong Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity is open-ended, requires that participants use creativity and draw on own ideas to participate (III, A, 6) • Staff engage youth in structured time for reflection (III, B, 6) • Program day offers youth a balance of activities, experiences (IV, B, 3) • Staff or activities build on the cultural/linguistic backgrounds of youth (IV, D, 2) • Activity is cognitively challenging, stimulates thinking (III, A, 5) • Youth help select, lead or contribute to the running of the activity (III, E, 6) • Staff promote/encourage mathematical problem solving skills (V, Mathematical Problem Solving)
Supports Mastery	<p>Strong Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is observable evidence that the activity is part of an ongoing project, theme, or curricular unit (III, A, 4) • Staff engage youth in structured time for reflection (III, B, 6) • Staff help youth think through problems themselves rather than offering answers (III, B, 5) • Youth build/practice written communication skills (V, Written Communication) • Youth build/practice verbal communication skills (V, Verbal Communication) • Youth build/practice mathematical reasoning (V, Mathematical Reasoning) • Youth build/practice mathematical problem solving skills (V, Mathematical Problem Solving) • Youth build/practice science skills (V, Science) • Youth build/practice social studies skills (V, Social Studies)
Expands Horizons	<p>Minimal Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Materials reflect a wide variety of cultures, ethnicities, races and/or religions (IV, A, 5) • Youth build/practice social studies skills (V, Social Studies)

The Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs (CASP) *Developed by National Summer Learning Association (NSLA)*

Overview: The Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs (CASP) is a set of assessments (interview and observation) designed for use by external assessors to capture information on the characteristics of a summer program and provide scores on nine domains of quality. The domains reflect both program infrastructure and point-of-service quality and are comprised of indicators scored using a 4-point rubric. Rubrics are based in research and informed by the practices of a range of summer learning programs documented by the NSLA. Scores are used to draft feedback reports with recommendations for improvement.

Primary Purpose(s): Program Improvement

Program Target Age: K-8

Relevant Settings: Structured, enrollment-based summer learning programs with a learning and/or developmental focus serving youth in grades K-8. Appropriate for a range of school, CBO, college/university, museum, park or library settings.

Developer's Website: <http://www.summerlearning.org>

Source: National Summer Learning Association

The Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs Tool Description

The CASP activity observation tool is sub-divided into four sections, each with between one and ten indicators. Those with the strongest alignment to the *Learning in Afterschool* principles are listed in bold.

1. Individualized
2. **Intentional**
3. **Integrated**
4. **Unique Program Culture**

Summary: Alignment with Learning in Afterschool Learning Principles

The CASP observation tool is strongly aligned with three of five *Learning in Afterschool* principles, offering users multiple measures to assess the extent to which programs promote active, collaborative, and meaningful activities. The CASP tool has a distinct approach toward assessing the program environment, exploring the extent to which space promotes active, youth-centered learning. Ways in which activities support mastery are only moderately addressed.

The observation tool does not assess the extent to which young people provide input into the activities, nor whether participants have formal opportunities to reflect on their progress. It does explore other facets of meaningful learning, however, including the chance to think critically and to develop leadership skills.

Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs – Table 4

LIA Principle	Level of Alignment and Observation Examples
Active	<p>Strong Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checks for learning – staff incorporate de-briefing, recall, and checks for understanding into activities (Intentional) • Inquiry-based learning – most activities involve hands-on, kinesthetic or project-based component (Integrated) • Physical environment- space promotes creative thinking and exploration (Unique program culture) • Flexible workspace – workspace accommodates different learning styles (Unique program culture) • Creative thinking –most activities foster creative development and allow youth to choose active or artistic expressions (Integrated)
Collaborative	<p>Strong Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavior management – youth engage in a discussion of the cause of the conflict and help to generate the solution (Intentional) • Collaborative learning –most activities promote collaborative learning and interdependence (Integrated)
Meaningful	<p>Strong Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical thinking- staff use open-ended questions and encourage youth to extend their answers (Intentional) • Shared facilitation – staff shares facilitation of most activities with youth; youth have opportunities to lead or self-direct (Integrated) • Creative thinking –most activities foster creative development and allow youth to choose active or artistic expressions (Integrated) • Thematic learning – activities are designed to connect to other experiences (Intentional)
Supports Mastery	<p>Moderate Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill-building – Activities are intentionally linked to age-appropriate skills and build participants’ subject-matter expertise (Intentional) • Advance Planning – Activity execution shows evidence of a clear lesson plan and realistic timeframe (Intentional) • Youth-produced work – All youth-produced work has a purpose or value in the program; presentation and sharing is a regular part of activities (Integrated)
Expands Horizons	<p>Minimal Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forward-thinking activities – Most activities are designed to expose youth to something new (Integrated)

The California After School Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool

Developed by The California Afterschool Network

Overview: The California After School Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool (QSA) is a collaborative project of the California Afterschool Network and the California Department of Education (CDE). Network Staff engaged the CDE, Regional Leads, The California After School Demonstration Program (CASDP), The California After School Inclusion Project, California Tomorrow, The Alliance for a Better Community, The Center for Afterschool Education, The Network Quality Committee, The Network Nutrition and Physical Activity Committee, ASAP Connect, after school providers, QSA Tool Implementation Pilot Sites, and national experts in the creation of the tool.

This tool is a comprehensive look at many areas of program quality. It can be used to engage key stakeholders in meaningful conversations about program quality and generate an action plan that identifies the immediate, mid-range, and long-term professional development and technical support needed to enhance program quality. Programs will utilize the tool in different ways depending on time available and the developmental stage of the program.

Primary Purpose: Self-Assessment/Planning for Continuous Program Improvement

Program Target Age: Grades K-12 (but may be most effective for K-8)

Relevant Settings: School and community based after school programs

Developer's Website: <http://www.afterschoolnetwork.org/>

Source: *The California Afterschool Network*

Quality Self-Assessment Tool Description

The QSA includes eleven program quality elements. These are listed below and those most closely associated with the five *Learning in Afterschool* learning principles are shown in bold.

1. Program Design & Implementation
2. Program Administration & Finance
3. Community Partnerships & Collaboration
- 4. Alignment & Linkages with the School Day**
5. Program Environment & Safety
- 6. Youth Development**
7. Staff Recruitment & Professional Development
8. Family Involvement
9. Nutrition and Physical Activity
10. Promoting Diversity, Access, Equity & Inclusion
- 11. Effectively Supporting English Learners**

Summary: Alignment with Learning in Afterschool Learning Principles

The QSA is strongly aligned with two *Learning in Afterschool* principles, and will provide users with varied information about the extent to which their programs provide meaningful activities that support mastery.

The QSA does not meaningfully explore the extent to which program activities are active, collaborative, or expand horizons. The QSA does not assess the sequencing of skill-building activities.

The California Afterschool Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool – Table 5

LIA Principle	Level of Alignment and Observation Examples
Active	<p>Minimal alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities are hands-on and student centered. (Program Design & Implementation, 3)
Collaborative	<p>Minimal alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff provide specific feedback to youth about positive behavior and accomplishments. (Youth Development, 3) • Staff approach conflicts and negative behavior in a non-threatening way. (Youth Development, 4) • Activities are carried out in different groups, each one with a clear purpose. (Youth Development, 6)
Meaningful	<p>Strong alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff use information about participants’ academic and behavioral progress in school to tailor activities. (Alignment & Linkages with the School Day, 6) • Academic activities are engaging and build on youths’ interests and individual learning styles. (Alignment & Linkages, 9) • Staff consistently strive to understand youths’ interests, talents, life experiences, and developmental needs. (Youth Development, 1) • Youth have age-appropriate opportunities to make choices. (Youth Development, 9) • Youth have multiple opportunities to provide input into the structure and content of the program. (Youth Development, 11) • Staff and leadership empower and encourage English Learners socially and academically. (Supporting English Learners, 7) • Youth have opportunities to explore, share and celebrate their heritage and culture with others. (Section 10, 7)
Supports Mastery	<p>Strong alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic activities incorporate a variety of age-appropriate instructional strategies to help youth build and master key academic skills and content. (Alignment & Linkages, 10) • Youth have the opportunity to try new skills with support from staff. (Youth Development, 2) • Staff have high expectations for youth and support youth as they strive for excellence. (Youth Development, 7) • Youth have structured opportunities to reflect on their goals and accomplishments. (Youth Development, 10)
Expands Horizons	<p>Minimal alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth have the opportunity to participate in community service projects. (Youth Development, 12) • English Learners and English-fluent students interact regularly. (Supporting English Learners, 6)

Quality STEM Assessment in Out-of-School Time: Dimensions of Success Observation Tool (DOS)

Developed by Program in Education, Afterschool, and Resiliency (PEAR)

* Please note: This instrument is currently being revised using a grant from the National Science Foundation.

Overview: The Dimensions of Success (DOS) observation tool is designed to help practitioners, evaluators and researchers assess the quality of any informal science programming. DOS was developed in 2007-2008 by the Program in Education, Afterschool and Resiliency (PEAR). The tool is based on National Science Foundation's Evaluation Framework, and also measures program quality facilitator preparation, materials, space and structure. The DOS observation tool is designed for program self-assessment or use by trained external evaluators.

Primary Purpose(s): Program assessment; monitoring and evaluation; program quality improvement; curriculum development

Program Target Age: Elementary through high school

Relevant Settings: DOS can be successfully applied in informal science education settings. It was pilot-tested in afterschool programs, field trips, science fairs and museum visits.

Developer's Website: www.pearweb.org

Source: Program in Education, Afterschool and Resiliency (PEAR) at Harvard University/McLean Hospital

DOS Observation Tool Description: Subscales

The DOS instrument is broken into twelve subscales, each of which has a rating rubric attached. The subscales most closely associated with the five *Learning in Afterschool* learning principles are shown in bold.

1. Planning and Preparation
2. Materials
3. **Structure**
4. Space
5. **Engagement**
6. **Interest**
7. Relationships
8. **Content learning**
9. **Exploration**
10. **Investigation**
11. **Broadening perspective**
12. **Relevance**

Summary: Alignment with Learning in Afterschool Learning Principles

The DOS is well suited as a self-assessment for out-of-school time programs that incorporate Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) into their offerings. It is strongly aligned with two of five *Learning in Afterschool* principles, and will provide a good picture of the extent to which a program has incorporated high quality science learning principles while adhering to core youth development practices.

The DOS includes a section specific to *Broadening Perspectives*, unique among the tools reviewed here. It has very limited coverage of collaborative learning principles, and does not address the program's connections to the community.

Dimensions of Success Observation Tool – Table 6

LIA Principle	Level of Alignment and Observation Examples
Active	<p>Moderate alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity provides opportunities for exploration (Exploration) • Facilitator’s instruction supports exploration (Exploration) • The activity is connected to children’s curiosities (Relevance)
Collaborative	<p>Minimal alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children have positive relationships with one another (Relationships)
Meaningful	<p>Strong alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The activity provides opportunities for children to scientifically investigate their own questions (Investigation) • The activity is connected to children’s curiosities (Relevance) • The activity is relevant to children’s experiences (Relevance) • Activity provides opportunities for exploration (Exploration) • Facilitator’s instruction supports exploration (Exploration) • Facilitator promotes practical applications of STEM learning (Broadening Perspective)
Supports Mastery	<p>Strong alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The activity creates opportunities for children to learn STEM content knowledge/procedural skills (Content Learning) • Children demonstrate understanding of STEM content knowledge/procedural skills (Content Learning) • The activity provides opportunities for children to scientifically investigate their own questions (Investigation) • The facilitator’s instruction supports scientific reasoning (Investigation) • The activity and program have an appropriate structure to support STEM learning (Structure) • Facilitator promotes inter-contextual thinking (Broadening Perspective)
Expands Horizons	<p>Minimal alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitator promotes inter-contextual thinking (Broadening Perspective) • Facilitator promotes practical applications of STEM learning (Broadening Perspective)

Summary

In examining the quality measurement tools, we found a great deal in common with the *Learning in Afterschool* learning principles. Most of the measurement tools utilized descriptors closely aligned with two learning principles: learning that is meaningful and learning that supports mastery. Some, but not all, of the tools were well aligned with learning that is active and collaborative.

The one learning principle that was not well addressed was the extent to which programs offer experiences that expand young people’s horizons. This includes exposing young people to individuals and businesses that they may not otherwise come into contact with, increasing their knowledge of other cultures and places, and helping them develop a global awareness. As existing quality assessment tools are refined and new ones developed, researchers and practitioners could help advance the field by developing and testing measures in this area.

Below is table 6, which summarizes the ratings of how well the different quality measurement tools align with the *Learning in Afterschool* principles.

Summary of Alignment – Table 6

LIA Principle	Level of Alignment by Tool		
	Strong	Moderate	Minimal
Active	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YPQA • APT • CASP 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OST • QSA • DOS
Collaborative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YPQA • OST • CASP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • APT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QSA • DOS
Meaningful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YPQA • OST • APT • CASP • QSA • DOS 		
Supports Mastery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YPQA • OST • QSA • APT • DOS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CASP 	
Expands Horizons			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YPQA • OST • APT • CASP • QSA • DOS

Other Program Quality Assessment Tools

This paper highlights six quality measurement tools that are currently being used in the field. However, there are many more tools that programs can use to measure quality. Below is a partial list of other tools that programs can use. We offer this list knowing that there are additional tools that are available, but not included on our list.

1. **Program Observation Tool (POT).** *Developed by National AfterSchool Association.*
2. **Program Quality Observation (PQO).** *Developed by Deborah Lowe Vandell and Kim Pierce.*
3. **Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool (QSA).** *Developed by New York State Afterschool Network.*
4. **Promising Practices Rating Scale (PPRS).** *Developed by Wisconsin Center for Education Research & Policy Studies Associates, Inc.*
5. **Quality Assurance System (QAS).** *Developed by Foundations, Inc.*
6. **School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS).** *Developed by Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute & Concordia University, Montreal.*
7. **Expanding Horizons: Global Learning in Afterschool Self-Assessment Tool.** *Developed by The Asia Society.*