



# ***Illinois Teen REACH Benchmarks***

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## Introduction

The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) seeks to ensure participants in Teen REACH programs are receiving comprehensive, high quality services. Since the inception of the Teen REACH initiative, all programs have been required to submit regular documentation as well as participate in a variety of evaluation efforts. However, assessing the level of quality of the various Teen REACH programs throughout the state in a uniform, systematic way has continued to be a difficult issue. In response to this challenge, IDHS contracted with Center for Prevention Research and Development (CPRD) in FY03 to develop a systematic review process that would provide a determination of program quality based on the most current information and research in the field of after school care.

In the spring of 2003, CPRD staff facilitated the Teen REACH Evaluation Advisory Group to undertake the development of the Teen REACH Benchmark document. The main purpose of the Teen REACH Benchmarks is to create a document that can be used to assess quality across a variety of programmatic areas. The ultimate goal of this effort is to operationalize the Teen REACH benchmarks by developing a review process using the document to assess the degree to which Teen REACH programs are meeting their goals and providing quality, comprehensive services.

The basis for the Teen REACH Benchmark document began with a thorough review of research and information regarding after school programs including program evaluations, accreditation standards, and best practice strategies. The reference section at the end of this document lists both references for which there are specific citations in the Teen REACH Benchmark narratives as well as documents which provided general ideas and guidance to the overall development of the Teen REACH Benchmarks. The Teen REACH Evaluation Advisory Group, made up of IDHS administrative staff, IDHS regional representatives, Teen REACH providers and CPRD evaluators participated in an ongoing process of developing, reviewing and refining principles, practices and indicators that have been linked to quality after school care.

The Teen REACH Benchmark document contains the following sections:

- Seven principles-Each principle is a broad statement identifying a key component of quality after school programs
- A brief narrative detailing the foundation for each principle
- Specific practices that are pertinent to the achievement of each principle
- Indicators of quality representing three levels of program development from minimum standards to exemplary performance

Currently, the Teen REACH Evaluation Advisory Group is working jointly with a committee made up of IDHS representatives to develop an assessment tool based upon the Benchmarks. The Teen REACH Benchmark document in conjunction with the assessment tool will be piloted with a subset of thirty Teen REACH programs in FY04.

The Teen REACH Benchmarks will be used in the following ways:

- Provide Teen REACH programs a concise review of the most recent after school literature regarding quality after school programs
- Provide Teen REACH programs with clearly identified practices and guideposts for increasing the quality of services they provide to youth and families
- Provide IDHS Regional Representatives critical information to assess the quality of Teen REACH programs
- Provide IDHS administrative staff vital information to enhance the overall quality of the Teen REACH program
- Assist the overall evaluation of Teen REACH by creating the ability to link program quality with youth outcomes

It is the hope of IDHS that the Teen REACH Benchmarks will allow for a more thorough assessment of programs including their strengths and challenges. Working in partnership with these programs, IDHS will use the information gathered from this assessment to promote movement toward

exemplary status throughout the Teen REACH after school network. By strengthening the quality of the after school services they provide, all Teen REACH programs will be better able to meet the needs of Illinois youth.

## Teen REACH Benchmarks

### **PRINCIPLE 1. Organizational structure, resources, and capacity are key elements of high quality after school programs.**

Much goes on “behind the scenes” of after school programs. After school programs need to set and communicate goals, develop a solid organizational structure, manage effectively, and plan for long-term sustainability. All of these areas should be addressed early in the development of the program as these are the foundational elements that must be in place for programs to have the most success. An organization’s ability to develop and implement a local Teen REACH Program depends upon many factors including the organization’s experience in administering grants of this size and in designing and implementing after school programs in particular. Much harder to assess, but equally important, is how the Teen REACH Program fits into the overall organizational structure – that is, how well the program integrates into the overall organization and how much it is highlighted and valued.

Another foundational element of building a quality after school program is the clear articulation of program goals. Some after school programs are designed primarily as safe havens, some focus on recreation, and others have a strong academic focus. Leaders, staff, parents, and community members should establish these goals through collaborative decision-making. Once the goals have been established, the program should be managed to meet those goals. By focusing on the goals, an after school program can set a course for continuous improvement in which direction is always clear, even though the goals may shift or be refined over time. The program’s goals should influence and guide the allocation of funding, the structure and activities of the program, the overall size and staffing, and plans for long-term sustainability. In addition, a clear set of goals lets families and community members know what the program offers to children and how they can support program efforts.

Another part of an organization’s capacity is its management structure. A solid organizational and management structure is an essential element of a sound program. Organization and management structures may vary across after school programs but the importance of such structure remains constant. A successful management structure combines hands-on, site-based management with regular oversight and accountability to all partners. Roles and responsibilities must be clearly delineated. Good management practices impact the services youth receive by reducing staff turnover and thereby creating a more stable program environment. Positive management efforts also help to create a favorable emotional climate for both staff and youth.

#### **Program Procedures**

Successful programs clearly delineate procedures and policies that protect children and promote and support their involvement in the program. Many such procedures and policies are outlined in the Teen REACH RFP and in the Policies and Procedures Manual. By meeting licensing requirements, addressing liability issues, carrying adequate liability insurance, maintaining appropriate records, regularly reviewing health and safety practices, and complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act, programs are protecting the youth participants they serve and promoting their involvement in the Teen REACH Program.

Program enrollment procedures must be designed so that the Teen REACH Program is accessible to all interested youth and families and to encourage targeted families to enroll in the program. In addition, procedures can be established to help ensure that, once enrolled, youth remain in the program.

Lack of transportation can be a major barrier to youth participation in after school programs, especially for urban and rural youth who rely on bus transportation to and from school. Even in areas in which program participants live within walking distance of home, transportation can be an issue –

especially when programs are located in unsafe neighborhoods. While transportation is a major cost for an after-school program, it is often a critical safety and logistical concern for families. Plans for providing transportation to and from program activities should reflect the needs of the children, families, and community served by the program. DHS requires that a written transportation plan exist if the Teen REACH Program provides transportation.

### **Sustainability**

Finally, program sustainability is one of the key elements of a high quality after school program. Sustainability refers to the long-term survival of a program. Successful programs use annual operating budgets, accurate bookkeeping systems, affordable fee structures, and multiple funding sources, including in-kind support. Ongoing, long-term resource development is a key role for program administrators. Program administrators must search for funding continuously and creatively, looking to both new sources as well as the more traditional sources. It is important to plan for sustainability throughout the program cycle or funding period – not just towards the end of the grant.

In addition to dollars, another critical element of sustainability is leadership. A cornerstone of quality leadership is the creation of a coalition of key stakeholders that work in partnership with the after school program to define, support and articulate a common vision and direction of the program. These stakeholders can play a vital role in creating a sustainability plan that includes strengths and challenges to sustainability as well as the articulation of strategies and resources to overcome the obstacles. Akerlund (2000) concludes that sustainable programs are the ones that remain adaptable, all other factors being equal.

Perhaps the ultimate objective of efforts to promote sustainability of a prevention program is institutionalization, or routinization. This means incorporation of the program into the ongoing life of the organization or community, so that sustainability becomes, in some respects, automatic. No routinization is completely permanent, but these larger systems changes do increase the chances that a program will survive over time.

PRACTICE	LEVEL OF IMPLEMENTATION		
	ENTRY LEVEL	ADVANCING	EXEMPLARY
<b>Administrative Organizational Experience</b>			
The administrative organization has the capacity to develop and implement a Teen REACH Program of the highest quality.	<p>Has access to adequate technology (e.g. computers, internet access)</p> <p>Has organizational chart that includes the Teen REACH program and it's organizational structure</p> <p>Has basic administrative structure &amp; accounting / bookkeeping systems in place in order to adequately administer program, comply with personnel laws, comply with fiscal requirements and produce required fiscal and administrative reports for funder</p>	<p>Has prior organizational experience successfully administering a grant of this size (a prior Teen REACH grant or other type of grant)</p> <p>Has 1-2 years organizational experience providing after school programming</p> <p>Has existing relationships with community stakeholders, especially those providing youth focused services</p> <p>Has an administrative or governing board (e.g. board of directors) made up of diverse community members</p>	<p>Is accredited by a nationally recognized accreditation organization</p> <p>Has 3 years or more experience administering after school programs</p> <p>Has broad based community support illustrated by fiscal and human resources support from a variety of community stakeholders and organizations</p> <p>The administrative organization through its tenure, outreach, administrative board and/or interactions with local media has established a reputation for being a provider of quality youth services (as evidenced by media coverage, media contacts, PSA's, phone logs, etc.)</p>
<b>Match Between the Administrative Organization and Teen REACH</b>			
Teen REACH Program goals are articulated and fit into the overall structure and mission of the administrative organization.	Organizational mission and goals are in alignment with Teen REACH and include youth and prevention focus	<p>Teen REACH program goals have been shared across all program and organization staff</p> <p>Orientation for new staff includes review of Teen REACH program goals</p>	<p>All program and administrative organization staff know the Teen REACH goals and can articulate how the program fits into the overall organizational structure</p> <p>Organizational staff not directly involved with Teen REACH can explain how and why Teen REACH has a positive impact on participants and their families</p> <p>Organizational resources (e.g. training opportunities, technology support) are shared across all programs, including Teen REACH</p>



			<p>Teen REACH participants and their families have easy access to all resources within the organization</p> <p>The Teen REACH Program is highlighted by the organization in written reports, documents, flyers and other media events and notices</p>
<b>Effective Teen REACH Management and Leadership</b>			
<p>Roles and responsibilities of Teen REACH Program staff are clearly defined.</p>	<p>There are written job descriptions for all Teen REACH staff, including the Teen REACH Coordinator and volunteers</p> <p>The program coordinator is employed at a level that allows him/her to adequately meet their assigned job responsibilities</p> <p>All program staff know to whom they report</p>	<p>All program staff are familiar with descriptions of key staff positions</p> <p>All program staff know and thoroughly understand their own project related responsibilities</p> <p>A Teen REACH specific organizational chart exists and is reviewed with all new staff</p>	<p>Performance reviews are done annually for all Teen REACH program staff</p> <p>Performance reviews are based upon job description and role</p> <p>Following performance reviews, action plans are established in response to identified areas of need</p>
<p>Effective systems of communication are in place for Teen REACH staff.</p>	<p>Teen REACH staff meetings occur on a monthly basis</p>	<p>Teen REACH staff meetings occur at least monthly and agendas and topics are developed in partnership with management and line staff</p> <p>Teen REACH line staff have scheduled common planning time – at least 30 minutes 1-2 times a week and includes programmatic planning as well as discussion regarding ways to support individual participants</p> <p>Teen REACH administrators are available to line staff and actively engage their resources as managers as well as the resources of the organization to address programmatic and</p>	<p>Teen REACH administrators and staff have ongoing communication resulting in leadership being well informed about program/participant issues</p> <p>Staff have daily opportunities to plan program activities and share ideas through a variety of formal and informal communication channels including email</p>

		participant needs	
The program has a culture of collaboration, trust, and respect.	<p>Language used between staff, administration, participants and families is positive and respectful</p> <p>Staff create a welcoming and warm environment as reflected in their behavior towards parents/participants as well as in their written communications</p> <p>Positive norms for youth behavior are posted in the program facility</p> <p>Staff are representative of the community served</p> <p>Program staff exhibit consideration/respect of different cultures/languages (such as providing materials in other languages, attending to religious-based dietary restrictions, awareness of attendance issues around various religious and cultural holidays)</p>	<p>Procedures/opportunities for feedback between staff, participants and families are in place</p> <p>Staff actively participate in staff meetings</p> <p>Program environment reflects organization and structure (basic rules, schedules, policies are in place) but maintains flexibility to meet individual needs (e.g. scheduling of events, addressing participant behavioral issues)</p> <p>For both staff and participants, feedback (both positive and negative) is provided in a constructive manner and documentation of this feedback exists</p> <p>Different cultures are valued and shared as learning opportunities (e.g. presentations, materials, cultural events)</p> <p>Challenges/problems are addressed in a solution-focused manner</p>	Collaboration, trust and respect are woven throughout the program as evidenced by written and verbal communication, program materials, scheduling, physical environment, etc.
<b>Teen REACH Program Procedures and Policies</b>			
Policies and procedures are in place related to program recruitment, enrollment and attendance.	<p>A clear program enrollment process is in place</p> <p>Individual level program participant records are maintained and daily attendance is monitored.</p>	<p>Procedures are in place for following up with participants/families for unexpected absences</p> <p>Program attendance data is reviewed to identify patterns of attendance and potential issues</p>	<p>Recruitment strategies have been designed and are in place for enrolling underserved populations</p> <p>Staff have input into refining policies and procedures to promote program attendance and enrollment</p>

	<p>Staff are provided written policies and procedures related to recruitment, enrollment and attendance as a part of orientation</p>	<p>are addressed in program development</p> <p>Staff have received training on all policies and procedures related to Teen REACH enrollment &amp; attendance</p> <p>Procedures are in place which encourage youth to continue in the program from year to year</p>	<p>Daily program attendance rates are high (80% or more of enrollment)</p> <p>Return rates from year to year for eligible youth are high (80% of enrolled and eligible participants)</p>
<p>A transportation plan exists.</p>	<p>For programs that provide transportation, there is a written plan/policy for transporting youth describing how youth are transported safely to and from the program regardless of distance</p> <p>For programs that provide transportation, liability is covered either by the program or the subcontractor and verification is on file</p> <p>A written plan exists for ensuring safe arrival/departure of youth to/from the program</p>	<p>Family needs are assessed (taking into account both distance and safety) to determine need for transportation services and these needs are considered in development of transportation plans</p>	<p>Creative solutions for providing transportation services and reducing barriers to attendance have been found through collaboration with community partners</p>
<p>Other procedures and policies are in place related to discipline/conflict resolution, supervision of participants during arrival/departure, visitor policy, child abuse neglect reporting, staff background checks.</p>	<p>All policies and procedures as required by the funder are developed</p> <p>The program has a formal process for hiring and screening staff</p> <p>The program has implemented the necessary staff background checks</p>	<p>All staff receive training on policies and procedures related to Teen REACH program operations</p> <p>Remediation is provided in instances policies are not appropriately followed</p>	<p>All policies and procedures are reviewed on an annual basis and refined as needed</p> <p>Additional policies and procedures are developed as needed</p> <p>Additional policies and procedures are approved by appropriate boards and administrators</p> <p>Ongoing training of Teen REACH staff occurs regarding Teen REACH policies and procedures</p>

**Sustainability**

The likelihood is high that the Teen REACH after school program will continue to operate even after DHS funding for Teen REACH ceases.

Programs adequately and appropriately administer their funding and meet all fiscal requirements

In addition to DHS, at least 2 other sources of funding exist to complement Teen REACH services

The Teen REACH Program has developed a detailed plan for sustainability after the grant period ends

Advisory council meetings include discussion of Teen REACH sustainability and resource development

The sustainability plan is regularly reviewed by management and the advisory council

Advisory council members contribute funding or in kind resources to the Teen REACH program

In addition to DHS, at least 3 or more sources of funding exist to complement Teen REACH services

Advisory council members are aware of additional sources of funding and develop proposals as they become available

Advisory council has established regular fundraising efforts including at least one fundraising event per year

The administrative organization has access to grantwriting resources or personnel to assist in resource development

Teen REACH is part of a larger community strategic plan

The collaborating schools work jointly with the program to seek other sources of funding

Teen REACH is part of a continuous school improvement plan

Teen REACH has linkages with partnering schools in the utilization of Title I funds

Individual(s) within the administrative organization have resource development as part of their job duties and work with Teen REACH staff to seek additional funding

## **PRINCIPLE 2. Community involvement and collaboration around Teen REACH development and implementation yields a stronger after school program.**

Running comprehensive after school programs requires solid support from a wide array of community members. Working together, schools, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, government agencies, civic organizations, businesses, foundations, and youth and their families can design programs best suited to meet the needs of local youth and to connect after school programs with community resources. These groups can provide a wide range of resources for developing high quality after school programs, such as funding, facilities, materials, expertise, volunteers, and community service and learning experiences. Given their knowledge of the community, community partners can help conduct an inventory of existing after school resources and resource gaps. The most effective programs tend to draw on all of these diverse resources in order to best address the concerns of the entire community. Clearly, after school programs will differ in order to fit the needs of the local community, but a key contributing factor to success across all programs is collaborative planning and implementation. Broad-based involvement helps communities to design and implement programs that can meet the wide range of developmental needs experienced by youth today.

Youth and families can play a key role in the development of after school programming. Programs designed to include families and youth in the planning draw greater support from participants and their families and from the community at large. When programs incorporate the ideas of parents and participating youth, programming tends to be more culturally relevant and tends to capture participants' interests better. The most successful after school programs involve parents in all phases of program development and implementation including board memberships, parent-advisory committees, orientation sessions, workshops, and volunteer opportunities.

In this document, the group of individuals who plan, develop, and implement the Teen REACH Program is referred to as the advisory council. Major functions of the advisory council include the following:

- Identifying local needs based on local expertise
- Prioritizing goals and building consensus around these goals
- Drawing on the existing local resources
- Avoiding service duplication and service gaps among youth-serving organizations
- Creating a stronger foundation for sustainability through local support, relationships with funders, and long-range planning efforts

To most effectively accomplish these functions, members of the advisory council must share common goals, a vision for what the after school program can accomplish, and an understanding of the community and youth to be served. The ultimate goal of such councils is to transform communities into places where all young people, and particularly those young people currently least likely to succeed, can achieve their fullest potential.

PRACTICE	LEVEL OF IMPLEMENTATION		
	ENTRY LEVEL	ADVANCING	EXEMPLARY
<b>Community Ownership / Local Development of Teen REACH</b>			
The Teen REACH Program has a local focus based on needs and resource assessment.	Local needs assessment is done using anecdotal information gathered from staff and participants/families	<p>A resource and needs assessment is done using both anecdotal information as well as at least one other data source</p> <p>Existing community resources are utilized to implement Teen REACH (e.g. local Y's, park districts, libraries)</p> <p>The program has strategies for working with local media and creating community awareness of the program</p>	<p>A comprehensive needs and resource assessment (one that uses multiple data sources and that is broad in scope) is done and problems are targeted based on priorities</p> <p>Needs/resource assessment is updated on a regular basis</p> <p>Teen REACH and other funding is pursued based on local needs, priorities, and resource gaps</p> <p>The importance of after school programming and efforts to promote after school programming are evident by inclusion of Teen REACH in agency and community strategic plans and community announcements</p>
The program has multi-sector involvement and broad-based representation.	<p>An advisory council which includes parents is in place to provide input into the program</p> <p>Youth participate in opportunities to inform the program such as advisory councils, focus groups, etc.</p> <p>The program has working relationships with local programs and services</p> <p>The program has working relationships with local schools</p>	<p>The advisory council includes both state funded agencies as well as other youth/family focused community groups</p> <p>Parents and youth are active partners and decision makers in the program advisory council</p> <p>Membership of the advisory council mirrors the makeup of the community</p> <p>School representatives participate in the advisory council</p>	<p>There is broad-based representation and participation from all community sectors in the implementation and refinement of Teen REACH</p> <p>The advisory council includes members from a variety of backgrounds and experiences</p> <p>The program has a broad scope of participation/contribution including advisory council membership, targeted partnerships, financial contributors and volunteers</p>

Structures are in place to ensure that Teen REACH program staff work with school personnel (principals, social workers, teachers) to meet the needs of participants.	Teen REACH program staff work with schools and parents to seek referrals to the program	Teen REACH program staff interact with school staff on an as needed basis  Teen REACH program staff present information about the program at school orientations/registrations/Teacher Institutes or other opportunities	Regularly scheduled meetings occur between school and program staff  Teachers and program staff are in regular contact to address issues regarding youth participants  Teen REACH program staff are invited by schools to attend formal meetings regarding how to best address youth needs
<b>Collaboration Around After School Programming / Teen REACH</b>			
Collaborative planning and implementation are a strong focus of the program.	An advisory council has been established to provide input into the program  An advisory council was utilized in preparing the proposal  The advisory council meets quarterly	The advisory council or subcommittees meet monthly to network, identify resources, and discuss issues around the Teen REACH Program  The advisory council members provide specific direct funding or in-kind services to Teen REACH  The advisory council provides other forms of support to the Teen REACH Program – for example, assisting with major decisions, service coordination  The advisory council members engage in outreach to attract high risk youth to Teen REACH	The advisory council members make both personal and organizational commitments to the Teen REACH Program (e.g. involvement in decision-making, providing program volunteers, contributing resources)  The advisory council members make significant decisions regarding program structure, program practices, personnel, budget, professional development, and resources  The work of the advisory council has resulted in the creation of policies and realignment of resources to support Teen REACH  The work of the advisory council has resulted in an increase in comprehensive multi-age after school care in the community of which Teen REACH is one of several providers
There is a clear formalization and structure by which the Teen REACH advisory council operates.	Advisory council members have received written documentation of the program’s mission, goals, policies, and procedures	The advisory council follows the mission and goals of the program to guide its work  The advisory council includes a	The advisory council has developed a comprehensive community plan for after school care that includes youth and families served by the Teen REACH Program

		<p>leadership structure and member roles are clearly defined</p> <p>The advisory council has 1-2 formal committees that are working to address various issues</p> <p>Meeting minutes are taken and distributed to members</p> <p>Monthly communication among council members occurs through meeting minutes and other standard updates (group e-mails, newsletters)</p>	<p>In addition to information/updates provided by the program, members of the advisory council regularly initiate communication with each other and the program staff and administration</p> <p>Work / activities / accomplishments of the advisory council are communicated to the community (e.g. newsletters, PSA's, etc.)</p>
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**PRINCIPLE 3. The quality of after school program staff has a clear impact on the program’s ability to achieve its intended outcomes.**

The staff of after school programs are one of the single most important ingredients of an effective program. Staff quality includes the aptitude, skills, experience, and beliefs that a staff member brings to the program, as well as the structures, processes, resources, and requirements that influence who becomes a staff member and what happens in the program classroom. Teen REACH programs need staff who are qualified and committed, who have appropriate experience and realistic expectations, and who are trained to work with the youth being served. In addition, Teen REACH Programs need staff who can interact productively with regular school staff, whether or not the program is school-based. Without program staff who meet these criteria, after school programs cannot expect to achieve their intended results. For this reason, ensuring that staff are fully prepared for their roles in after school programs is of central importance. Strong programs hire qualified staff and provide ongoing professional development and training opportunities. These opportunities not only help to maintain staff quality but can also help to prevent high rates of staff turnover (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

First and foremost, program staff must be given training in implementation of specific components of the after school program. This may range from maintaining high levels of fidelity in model programs to developing and implementing more “home grown” program components. In addition, training should include adapting activities and materials to meet the needs of children of different ages, races, or cultures and children with disabilities. Training can also provide program staff with ideas for enrichment and hands-on activities, greater expertise in academic subject matter, knowledge in assessing student progress, and strategies for the different program components of academics, enrichment, and recreation (Mental Health in Schools Training and Technical Assistance Center, 2001).

Professional development opportunities for after school program staff can be provided in a variety of ways (Grossman et. al. 2002). Effective training and development generally involves a blend of initial training and ongoing, follow-up support for all program staff. It is also important to help programs develop local expertise and establish structures that nurture continued learning (such as common planning time or study groups). After school program staff should have regular staff meetings. In addition to these group meetings, individual meetings between program staff and administrators are also important strategies for solving problems and evaluating program performance and effectiveness. Finally, program staff should have less formal avenues for the exchange of information as well. Such opportunities provide program staff with a mechanism for presenting and solving issues that often arise in after school programs, such as academic challenges, discipline issues, and other social problems. These exchanges give program staff a way to share ideas and generate new ones.

A key component of staff quality is reflected in the relationships that are formed between program staff and youth participants. Clearly, some program staff will have a special gift for connecting with youth. But these relationships can be fostered in other ways as well. In order for such relationships to develop, staff turnover must be kept to a minimum, and the program’s climate must be a supportive and caring one. Clearly defined staff roles and program procedures help to create such a climate.

In sum, a quality program staff member is someone who has the necessary subject-matter knowledge, can use multiple strategies or approaches based on youth needs, is sensitive to broader cultural and social conditions, knows and values youth participants as individuals, and is committed to professional growth and continued learning.

PRACTICE	LEVEL OF IMPLEMENTATION		
	ENTRY LEVEL	ADVANCING	EXEMPLARY
<b>Staff Qualifications</b>			
Educational attainment, training and experience of key program staff, including group leader / coordinator, site director, program administrator is appropriate to the level of responsibilities assigned.	Staff have formal/informal training and/or experience in the areas of child development, recreation, education or related fields	Program administrator/director has an Associate's or Bachelor's degree plus a minimum of one year's experience  All staff have post-secondary education credits in child development, recreation, education or related fields and experience working with youth	All staff have Associate's or Bachelor's degrees and experience working with youth
Demographic makeup of the Teen REACH Program staff reflects the demographic makeup of the community in which the Teen REACH Program is implemented.	Program staff appropriately reflect the population to be served  Efforts are made to recruit Teen REACH program staff from within the community being served	Most staff are from the community being served or a similar community  Most staff have cultural backgrounds similar to youth being served	One or more staff members have extensive knowledge / understanding of community needs and resources (what exists and how to access)
<b>Staff Training and Development</b>			
The topics of training provided to Teen REACH program staff are planned in advance, and the needs of program staff are taken into account in planning the trainings.	Teen REACH program staff attend trainings as required by the funder  A written training plan exists, listing the types of training to be provided to Teen REACH program staff	An informal assessment of staff training needs is conducted (based on staff feedback during meetings, etc.)	A written plan is in place for assessing staff training needs  Training needs are assessed on a regular basis  Training is provided that matches the identified needs  The training plan is revisited annually and updated as needed based on the

<p>Program staff receive training that supports their ability to effectively carry out the Teen REACH Program; there are opportunities for meaningful professional development.</p>	<p>Staff training occurs as needed for basic safety and procedural issues</p>	<p>All Teen REACH program staff are given the opportunity to attend 1 professional development opportunity per year</p> <p>Information learned in trainings is brought back to other program staff through handouts, materials, and/or inservices</p> <p>Administrators receive training in program management, budgeting, supervision</p> <p>Staff receive training on how to relate to children in ways that support their development; how to relate to families; how to design activities that support program goals and outcomes</p>	<p><b>assessment of training needs</b></p> <p>Staff training is provided on an ongoing basis</p> <p>Training is provided by experts in the field</p> <p>All staff have attended 1 or more professional development opportunities per year</p> <p>The agency supports professional development by granting paid time off and paying costs associated with the training</p> <p>Staff satisfaction with training received is assessed on a regular basis</p> <p>There is evidence that information learned in training was implemented (reflected in program plans, new policies, new program elements, new systems in place)</p>
<p><b>Staff Practices And Supports / Organizational Structures That Support Ongoing Staff Development</b></p>			
<p>Links have been established with other Teen REACH Programs and include visiting other program sites to gain insight on improving the program and outcomes for youth participants.</p>	<p>Teen REACH staff participate in DHS sponsored events and meetings with other Teen REACH staff and programs</p>	<p>Some program staff have visited other Teen REACH programs or have consulted via telecommunications</p>	<p>Program staff visit 1 or more Teen REACH Programs</p> <p>Professional relationships have been developed with program staff at other Teen REACH Programs focused on feedback and shared experiences</p>

			<p>Lessons learned from other sites are shared and integrated into their own Teen REACH Program</p> <p>The program is part of a cluster of sites that have initiated ongoing networking</p> <p>Joint programming is developed and implemented with other Teen REACH Programs</p> <p>Resources are shared between Teen REACH Programs</p>
Program staff at all levels receive supervision.	Monthly supervisory meetings occur	<p>Regularly scheduled supervision meetings are planned with input from the supervisee</p> <p>There is a standard agenda of key topics to be covered during supervision meetings</p>	<p>Regularly scheduled supervision meetings occur more than once / month</p> <p>Regularly scheduled supervision meetings utilize individual job descriptions and performance reviews to set goals, identify issues and provide feedback</p> <p>In addition to formal meetings, supervisors have daily contact with staff to provide information, feedback and support</p> <p>Administrative staff serve as mentors to line staff</p>
Efforts are made to retain staff and reduce turnover.	Majority of program staff stay with the program for 1-2 years	<p>There is a core group of staff who stay with the program for 2 years or more</p> <p>Administrators conduct exit interviews with program staff to</p>	<p>Experienced staff have leadership/promotion opportunities within the agency</p> <p>The organization has written</p>

		<p>better understand reasons for departure</p> <p>Where feasible, the organization actively attempts to address issues identified as impacting staff turnover</p>	<p>transition plans in place to promote smooth transitions when program staff leave</p>
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**PRINCIPLE 4. Program monitoring and evaluation are essential to developing, maintaining and refining an after school program of the highest quality.**

For a number of reasons, measuring outcomes and evaluating program effectiveness are essential components of high quality after school programs. First, periodic evaluation allows programs to be held accountable to parents, youth, funders, and other important stakeholders. Program evaluation findings can address such questions as *“does the program reach the intended audience?”* and *“is the program being delivered as initially planned?”* Second, evaluation activities keep the focus on outcomes – that is, the positive impacts that the program has on youth participants and their families. A strong focus on outcomes, program evaluation, quality assurance and continuous improvement strategies helps to ensure that program goals and targeted outcomes are met.

Relatedly, after school programs often have complex and multiple purposes, and evaluation can help programs crystallize their focus and establish realistic goals and levels of attainment. Evaluating after school programs assists project staff to reaffirm and build consensus around the goals and objectives of the program. Momentum and excitement among program staff are maintained when performance measures indicate that programs are on the right track toward attaining their ultimate, longer-term outcomes.

Finally, evaluation is an essential component of high quality after school programs because it helps to ensure that program development is data-driven with specific goals, objectives and milestones that can be used to regularly assess progress and provide feedback for program improvement. Conducting and using evaluation results should be viewed as an integral component for not only understanding how after school programs work, but also for helping programs understand their strengths and weaknesses and providing guidance for continuous quality improvement.

PRACTICE	LEVEL OF IMPLEMENTATION		
	ENTRY LEVEL	ADVANCING	EXEMPLARY
<b>Value Placed on Evaluation</b>			
The administrative organization has evaluation strategies and information systems in place to ensure continuous program improvement and accountability to the program's constituencies.	<p>The program director and other program staff submit all required reports and forms to DHS</p> <p>The program participates in formal evaluation efforts as specified by DHS</p>	<p>Understanding the program's evaluation system is a component of orienting / training new program staff</p> <p>Evaluation information is included in program documents, staff orientation and presentations to program constituents</p> <p>Staff have been identified who will be responsible for making sure program evaluation data are collected</p> <p>Staff understand why they are collecting the information and the implications of findings for their programs- how the information might be used to evaluate the program's effectiveness and/or to improve program practice</p>	<p>Time is regularly set aside for reflecting on what has been learned from the evaluation data</p> <p>Lessons learned from the evaluation and discussions around the data are documented in writing</p> <p>A plan exists for introducing new staff to the organization's approaches to evaluation and data-driven decision-making</p> <p>Systems for collecting and utilizing evaluation data are refined based on program, participant and constituent needs</p>
<b>Utilization / Dissemination of Findings</b>			
A data-driven process of inquiry and decision-making is in place.	Program staff have used process data to identify interests, challenges, and satisfaction with the program	<p>Some adjustments have been made to program practices based on program evaluation results</p> <p>Program staff have utilized data as part of marketing and publicity efforts</p>	<p>Program evaluation is conducted on a ongoing basis</p> <p>A plan / structure is in place to review data on a regular basis to monitor attainment of program goals</p> <p>Results are disseminated to the entire program community, which is then</p>

			<p>invited to participate in the data-driven planning process</p> <p>All program staff as well as representatives from youth and families are actively engaged in examining the data to establish and modify program practices</p>
The program publicly reviews evaluation findings.	Evaluation results/findings are shared among program leadership	Results / findings are shared with all program staff through meetings and documents	<p>Key evaluation findings have been published or presented in forums intended for widespread distribution. (For example: publication in education or prevention magazines, publication in a report or monograph form, presentation at regional or national conferences, prominent posting on a web site, journal publications)</p>



## **PRINCIPLE 5. A key element of quality after school programs is the provision of enriching and challenging learning opportunities.**

After school programs can be used as a vehicle for the delivery of a broad array of program elements and can differ widely in terms of their goals and focus. Because of this diversity in program focus and implementation, a number of factors contribute to a program's quality and ultimate effectiveness. These factors are described below.

### **Program Comprehensiveness**

*Comprehensive* refers to the scope and range of services and activities being provided through the Teen REACH Program. A program with a single focus (recreation, for example) would not be considered comprehensive. In addition, comprehensive also refers to a program's ability to meet the needs of a wide range of constituencies: the youth in the program, their parents, their teachers, and community members at large. For example, by providing family-focused recreational activities or parent-focused learning opportunities through Teen REACH, the program may be addressing the needs of families and parents. In addressing these needs, the Teen REACH Program can have both direct and indirect positive impacts on youth participants.

Teen REACH Programs should be comprehensive and holistic. Teen REACH Programs must be designed to have an impact on youth participants' social, creative, physical, and cognitive development. In order to have an impact on these various domains of youth development, DHS has outlined five core services which all Teen REACH Programs are required to provide. These are: services designed to improve academic performance; life skills education; opportunities for parental involvement; provision of recreation / sports / cultural and artistic activities; and provision of positive adult mentors to work with the youth participants.

In addition to improving academic performance, Teen REACH Programs are also expected to address the social, emotional, cultural, and physical development of their youth participants. Program elements must build social-emotional skills that support healthy development and cultivate leadership, and provide academic, cultural and artistic enrichment. Faced with many challenges, schools and communities have taken an increasingly active role in promoting positive mental, emotional and physical well being in youth and adolescents, particularly through the use of life and social skills training programs. Research indicates that youth with high levels of life and social skills often experience academic success, get along with peers and family, and meaningfully contribute to their communities. Youth with skills in these areas are more resistant to many high-risk behaviors and better able to succeed academically. Youth trained in life / social skills are efficient in problem solving and are more assertive, resistant to peer pressure, goal-oriented and effective in communicating than youth who engage in problem behaviors.

Life skills education provides youth with multiple experiences and increased exposure to different environmental settings, factors that influence opportunities to practice and reinforce life skills. Children and youth who go home to an empty house everyday after school typically spend more of their time watching TV or hanging out. In contrast, youth who attend high quality after school programs are more likely to have opportunities to interact with adults, peers, and friends. After school programs should provide developmentally and personally meaningful activities that require its young participants to use and practice life and social skills. Program participants can work together on a common goal such as a community service project. Such contact serves to reinforce the life and social skills being learned. Social and emotional competence in areas such as self-awareness, impulse control, cooperation and caring allows youth and adults to manage important tasks such as learning, forming relationships, and handling everyday problems.

Finally, after school programs should also provide youth with opportunities to explore and develop interests and express themselves through exposure to artistic and cultural activities. Exposure to the arts allows youth the opportunity for self-expression and development of their abilities. Participation in the arts is the reason, in some instances the only reason, that many youth give for being involved in school, and thus can often be a way to reach youth who might otherwise be disengaged from school. Involvement in the arts nurtures the development of cognitive, social, and personal competencies. Whether

it is creative writing, visual arts, dance, music, theatre, or other forms of artistic expression, these skills and abilities are strengthened through arts participation. Research has shown that involvement in the arts also has a positive effect on the academic success of youth. The arts provide youth with opportunities for personal expression and learning, which enable them to reach higher levels of achievement and enhance their development. Such chances may not be available during the regular school day.

### **Integration of Program Elements**

*Integrated* refers to the fact that the full range of services and activities provided by Teen REACH are tied together in a meaningful way and delivered in a seamless fashion. All the separate components are seen as a single program, and the participants in the program participate in all of the components – not just one or two of them. Integration of a wide range of program components requires that Teen REACH Programs have in place a conceptual framework for how their program operates. The framework details the relationships among the program’s philosophy, services and activities, and short and long-term outcomes. By reviewing the framework, it should be clear why this particular combination of programs, services, and activities were chosen to be implemented. The framework provides the foundation on which future program development and refinements are built. This framework might also be called the program’s theory – how and why the program works. Everyone involved in the program should understand the program goals, why the program is designed as it is, how the various program pieces fit together, what the expected outcomes are, and the timeline for achieving these outcomes. Communicating the goals and theory underlying the program is a primary function of the program leaders and staff. The program’s goals should influence and guide the structure and activities of the program, the overall size and staffing, and plans for long-term sustainability. In addition, a clear set of goals lets families and community members know what the program offers to youth and how they can help. The underlying theory ties all the pieces together and makes the Teen REACH Program a program, rather than a collection of separate events and activities.

One way that the underlying theory can be articulated is through the development of a logic model, which sets forth a chain of conditions for the interventions and their presumed results. The logic model can be compared with actual data gathered at each step, helping to establish a chain of causation that may be difficult to detect from simply looking at the intervention and the result achieved.

### **Program Intensity**

Program *intensity* refers to how often the program is offered as well as how much of the program each youth participant receives. The intensity, duration, and amount of programming provided to youth matters. Research has found that to be most effective, tutoring programs must ensure that participants attend at least 3 tutoring sessions a week, with each session lasting 30-60 minutes. Other studies have shown that the positive effects on cognitive and emotional development are greatest for youth participating in after school programs with the highest rates of attendance. Programs should do all that they can to ensure that youth participants entering the program remain in the program, and that all participants are attending the program on a regular basis.

### **Continuity with Regular School Day**

After school programs seek to promote knowledge, skills, and understanding through the provision of enriching learning opportunities that both complement and expand the school day. Indeed, this is one of the five core areas outlined by DHS. By augmenting the school day and adding to the number of hours in which children engage in learning activities, after school programs can be an important resource for improving academic achievement. They offer children – even those who struggle academically during the school day – a safe, less formal environment where they can practice and reinforce academic skills without competition or grades. After school programs also offer children the individualized attention that is often unavailable in traditional classroom settings. Academic assistance can take on many forms, including tutoring, subject-based programming, family literacy programming, enrichment programs, homework assistance centers, and open library.

The most successful programs make the programming (in particular, the academic-focused programming) challenging but not overwhelming. A challenging curriculum accommodates individual student needs, coordinates with in-school instruction, and focuses on more than remedial work. It also combines direct teaching with indirect instruction, such as computer use, scientific experiments, and other hands-on projects. Combining these approaches helps students acquire a set of skills useful in school but also in life.

After school programs must provide children and youth participants with developmentally appropriate programming. Quality programs give children the opportunity to follow their own interests or curiosity, and learn in different ways, such as through sight, sound, or movement. In after school programs, youth should be encouraged to try new activities, think for themselves, ask questions, and test out new ideas. Quality programming reflects the needs, interests, and abilities of youth, recognizing that these things change as children grow older.

To provide a continuity of learning experiences during the after school program requires coordination with the regular school day and communication with the classroom teachers and staff. In some programs, school teachers and after school staff work together to establish clear goals and outcomes for individual children. Other after school programs use interdisciplinary and thematic group projects that integrate and reinforce concepts children learn during the regular school day.

### **Positive/Supportive Peer Relationships**

A core element of the most effective after-school programs is the promotion and development of positive/supportive peer relationships between the youth participants (Gambone, et al., 2002; The Forum for Youth Investment, 2002; The Illinois After School Initiative Task Force Report, 2002). Indeed, interviews of youth participating in the Teen REACH after-school program reveal that youth in the program place a very high value on the positive/supportive peer relationships they have developed within Teen REACH (Illinois Department of Human Services and the Center for Prevention Research and Development, 2001 and 2002). After school programs must provide youth the opportunity to build consistent positive relationships with peers. These positive relationships help to create a foundation on which youth can build additional strengths, assets, and competencies. This is especially important as youth move into the teen years, when peers have an ever greater impact on each other (The Forum for Youth Investment, 2003).

Developing a program environment in which positive/supportive relationships are the norm can provide a healthy alternative to negative peer influences and pressures. Research clearly documents the powerful impact that positive relationships can have on youth development. A positive/supportive peer culture can also provide a space of emotional safety in which youth can take on the developmental tasks of adolescence.

To create a culture of positive/supportive peer relationships, after-school programs must be intentional about establishing it. Goals, objectives, and specific activities related to promoting positive peer relationships should become part of the program plan. Life Skills curricula, peer mentoring, mediation training, and peer leadership programs can all play a role in the creation of positive peer relationships.

### **Use of “Promising” or “Best Practice” Program Models**

Across all of the programming areas outlined above, to the extent possible, “best practices” curricula should be employed. In the Teen REACH RFP, DHS defines best practices as those strategies and programs which are deemed research-based by scientists and researchers; strategies and programs which have been shown through substantial research and evaluation to be effective at preventing and/or delaying risky behaviors. “Promising practices” are defined as programs and strategies that have some quantitative data showing positive outcomes in delaying risky behaviors over a period of time, but do not have enough research or replication to support generalized outcomes. Teen REACH Programs are expected to adopt program models identified by DHS as having met the criteria for “best practice” or “promising practice.” But it is important to keep in mind that implementing a “promising” or “best practice” program means more than purchasing the manual and following a written guide. In order for pre-existing programs to be implemented appropriately, materials must be obtained, those delivering the program must participate in the necessary trainings, and staff must access and utilize

ongoing technical assistance. Replicating a model program can be quite difficult, and given the limited supply of “best practice” curricula, adaptation of programs to meet local needs is likely. Indeed, adaptation promotes community ownership and involvement. Although modifying the program may more accurately address the needs of your community and may be more feasible based on available resources, it must be kept in mind that the likelihood of achieving the same outcomes as the original program are diminished.

Program fidelity is defined as the degree of fit between the developer-defined components of a program and its actual implementation in a given organizational or community setting. Fidelity is high when the number and nature of activities remain the same across implementation efforts, when activities are clearly linked to need and desired outcomes, and when program dosage is sufficient to yield the intended effect. The best results are achieved when fidelity to core features of a program is supplemented by adaptation that involves locally tailored additions or enhancements. Consultation with the original program developer can be useful in determining core components and assessing the desirability of specific adaptations. (Core components are those elements of a program that fundamentally define its nature.) Reviewing published literature on the program can also provide a description of its theoretical underpinnings. In addition to actual technical assistance from the program’s developer, it is helpful to seek out peers who have implemented the program in somewhat similar settings. Attention to adaptation, fidelity, and implementation should be a conscious process. Revisit fidelity and adaptation issues throughout program implementation.

PRACTICE	LEVEL OF IMPLEMENTATION		
	ENTRY LEVEL	ADVANCING	EXEMPLARY
<b>Integrated And Comprehensive Approach To Youth Services</b>			
A program plan/model should be developed.	In general, there is consensus among program staff around the goals of Teen REACH	A written Teen REACH program model has been developed and includes outcomes targeted and clearly articulated linkages between programming and outcomes	<p>All program staff are familiar with the model, understand it, and can explain it to others</p> <p>A media-friendly version of the program model is described in public awareness efforts</p> <p>The model is referred to every time program development / refinement work is done</p>
The program is comprehensive and offers a variety of youth-centered, engaging and enriching activities	<u>Programming is provided</u> in the areas of academics, life skills, and recreation, artistic and cultural enrichment	<p>A variety of life skills, recreational and academic focused programs is offered to meet the various needs and developmental stages of participants</p> <p>Programming is enhanced through the use of innovative strategies and services such as peer tutoring, field trips, community service opportunities, and project based learning</p>	<p>Concepts learned in different program components are actively reinforced across the various program components</p> <p>Participants are given opportunities to apply and practice skills taught in the program to new situations and environments</p> <p>Youth have the opportunity to interact with other caring adults through multi / inter-generational programming and mentoring</p>
<b>Program Intensity</b>			
Efforts are made to ensure high levels of program dosage.	The program is offered five days per week and is available to youth during summer and recognized school breaks	Written policies and procedures exist and are communicated to families regarding program attendance (e.g. how many days youth must attend, what happens when youth do not attend, etc.)	<p>Systematic efforts are made to keep / retain youth in the program from one year to the next</p> <p>Documentation exists that the efforts to retain youth described in the written policies and procedures were implemented 50% or more of eligible youth remain in the program from one year to the next</p>
Efforts are made to ensure low staff-to-	Efforts are being made to	Staff to student ratios do not	Plans are made for adequate staff

student ratio and small group size.	maintain a staff-to-student ratio of between 1:10 and 1:15 for groups of children age 6 and older  Efforts are being made to maintain a group size of 30 or less	exceed 1:15 and are adjusted down based on the type and complexity of the activity as well as participants' developmental needs  Group size does not exceed 30 participants and is adjusted down based on the type and complexity of the activity as well as participants' developmental needs	coverage in emergencies or staff absences to maintain appropriate staff to student ratios
<b>Program - School Linkages / Continuity</b>			
Linkages between the school and the after-school program are developed and maintained.	The Teen REACH program and the schools have formal linkage agreements which include coordinated use of facilities and resources where necessary	The Teen REACH Program receives referrals from schools  Teen REACH and schools coordinate use of facilities and resources  Program and schools work collaboratively to identify, attract and reach at risk youth	Joint trainings are held between the program and the school  Joint programming occurs between the school and the Teen REACH program including projects and instructional themes  Teen REACH staff and school personnel exchange specific suggestions / requests / ideas about shared participants.
<b>Supportive Relationships with Youth Participants</b>			
Staff and youth participants interact in ways that promote the development of positive relationships among staff and youth.	Staff relate to all children in positive ways  Participants show respect for one another and for the staff  The importance of staff participant relationships is highlighted during staff orientation	Staff understand basic child development principles  Staff receive training on understanding and relating to youth with different temperaments or who are facing various issues	Staff use their training and experience to respond to the needs of individual children.
Program staff use positive techniques to guide behavior of participants and handle conflict in positive ways.	The program has developed written policies and procedures for discipline and conflict resolution.  Conflict is handled in ways that	Specific training provided to all program staff on conflict resolution and appropriate discipline techniques  Youth and staff together develop	Formal training is provided to youth participants on conflict resolution  Problem solving approaches are utilized to reduce peer conflict including peer mediation and formal conflict resolution

	<p>reduce fear and disruption</p> <p>Staff develop and post group norms for appropriate behavior</p> <p>Staff encourage participants to resolve their own conflicts</p>	<p>and post group norms for appropriate behavior.</p> <p>Program staff model respectful, cooperative behavior in their interactions with each other and participants</p>	<p>training</p>
<b>Use Of “Best Practice” Or “Promising Practice” Program Models</b>			
<p>The Teen REACH program utilizes best or promising practice program models and guidelines.</p>	<p>Teen REACH staff participate in training of best and promising practice curricula being implemented.</p> <p>Manuals/materials on best and promising practices curricula are available to staff for their use</p>	<p>Teen REACH staff consult, as needed, with others who have implemented specific programs</p> <p>Before considering any adaptations to model programs, the staff identify and understand the “core” components of the model program</p> <p>The staff tailor program content to the culture, language and developmental needs of participants and families while maintaining program fidelity</p>	<p>Teen REACH staff consult, as needed, with original program developer</p> <p>Staff receive training from the model developer or individuals with at least 1 year experience implementing the model</p> <p>In addition to formal training, staff who are new to a specific program receive guidance/support from experienced staff members</p>

## **PRINCIPLE 6. Family involvement plays an integral part in the development and long term success of quality after school programs.**

There is substantial evidence regarding the positive impact of family involvement on youth academic success and avoidance of risk taking behaviors. Family involvement has been shown to increase learning and test scores, increase student attendance, reduce drop out rates and improve student behavior and motivation (Harvard Family Research Project, 2002). After school programs provide a unique opportunity to engage parents, especially parents of younger students, who may have more frequent contact with the after school program staff than they do with the school staff (Miller, 2003). Typically, after school programs involve families in four ways (Harvard Family Research Project, 2002):

- Adult educational development
- Shared after school experiences with families and youth
- Program governance and community leadership
- Providing an avenue for parents to learn about school practices/policies and to improve communication between schools and families

Practice and research have shown that there is no one best way to promote family involvement. Developing successful family-program partnerships requires moving beyond traditional parent involvement strategies. Successful family involvement efforts are well planned, comprehensive, and long lasting (Iowa Dept of Ed). Of equal importance is addressing barriers to family participation. Programs that are successful in their efforts to involve parents consider the schedule of working parents, program costs or fees, transportation, language and literacy issues.

A common thread throughout all family involvement efforts should be creating a welcoming, family-friendly environment. Developing close partnerships with families requires that after school providers examine all aspects of the program to determine impacts on parental perceptions. Efforts to create a family-friendly environment should take into account various areas of the program including physical environment, policies and procedures, language and culture, schedules, and daily interactions.

One way to involve families in the earliest stages of the Teen REACH Program is through initial program planning. Programs that include families and youth in the planning stages draw greater support from participants and their families and from the community at large. When programs incorporate the ideas of parents and their participating children, activities tend to be more culturally relevant, and tend to capture children's and adolescent's interests better. In established programs, parents can serve on Teen REACH advisory boards or other planning committees.

For some families, participation on committees or other groups is not feasible. Providing opportunities for all parents to express their concerns and needs may best be done through some type of needs assessment process. It is critical for Teen REACH programs to be aware of barriers to participation in this process. Language and literacy levels should be taken into consideration with any type of written material including parent surveys. Programs should be open to receiving parental input through a variety of avenues including phone calls, home visits and other personal contacts.

Establishing a strong partnership with families requires good communication. High quality after school programs keep families informed of program schedules and happenings, share and exchange important information about youth and work as a team with families to promote healthy youth development. Staff also share youth accomplishments with families and work to increase family awareness of community resources. Various methods are used to maintain communication with families such as sending notices home, newsletters, fliers, or personal contact through family-focused activities or home visits. Successful programs also find more creative ways to keep parents informed including supporting communication among families. These opportunities can include parent information centers, family web sites and parent support groups.

Research and practical experience have shown that families, youth, schools and after school programs benefit from parental involvement. There are countless ways after school programs can promote family involvement, even in the face of limited resources. Many information sources are available



describing specific family involvement activities as well as examples of family involvement in after school. Creativity and the willingness to explore ways which best serve families and youth are the keys to successful parental involvement within Teen REACH.

PRACTICE / INDICATORS	LEVEL OF IMPLEMENTATION		
	ENTRY LEVEL	ADVANCING	EXEMPLARY
<b>Family Participation in Overall Teen REACH Programming</b>			
Families are actively involved in program planning, development, implementation, participation and evaluation in ways that facilitate the improvement of program quality while respecting families' diverse interests and time constraints.	<p>Program activity calendars reflect the Family Involvement component through identified family functions and involvement opportunities</p> <p>Teen REACH sites /programs informally obtain input from families and participants related to overall program design and activities</p> <p>Teen REACH Advisory Council includes a minimum of 2 parent representatives</p> <p>Parent/families needs are assessed through a formalized process such as surveys or focus groups</p>	<p>Family orientation to the Teen REACH program is conducted</p> <p>There are formalized opportunities for family input regarding overall programming, implementation, and evaluation</p> <p>Family members serve as volunteers and/or paid staff in the program</p> <p>Family members actively participate on the Teen REACH Advisory Council or Youth Advisory Council as appropriate</p> <p>Identification of programs and activities to be implemented are based on results of parent/family needs assessment</p> <p>Sites support families in developing leadership skills through training and mentoring</p>	<p>Families assume leadership roles within the Teen REACH program in a variety of ways including orienting new families, serving as mentors and representing Teen REACH on local, regional, or state level committees or boards</p> <p>There is an active and strong separate Parent Advisory Board – or strong representation (1/3 or more parents) on the Advisory Council</p> <p>There are a variety of opportunities for parents to provide input to the program in addition to the Advisory Council and parents are made aware of these opportunities</p> <p>Parents are active partners in the review and discussion of needs assessments and evaluation results</p>
<b>Adult-Focused Programming/Learning Opportunities</b>			
<p>The program offers learning opportunities for the adult that will enhance his/her personal development and the development of the family unit.</p> <p>(Examples of personal development would include: GED Classes; ESL Classes; Job Readiness/Training; Skill Development; Sewing; Cooking; Computer Classes; Creative Arts; etc.)</p>	<p>Staff provide linkages/referrals to community providers and organizations offering requested activities or services</p> <p>Some adult focused programming/learning opportunities are provided on-site by staff or service providers</p>	<p>Multiple programming/learning opportunities are provided on-site by staff or service providers based on experiences and interactions with parents</p> <p>Staff develop additional programming/learning opportunities as identified by needs assessments and</p>	<p>Parents are active partners in developing and implementing adult-focused programming/learning opportunities</p> <p>Parents are active partners in the review and discussion of needs assessments and evaluation results</p> <p>Parents are active partners in</p>

<p>(Examples of family enrichment would include: CPR/First Aid; Parenting Support Groups; Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Groups; Parenting Classes/Seminars; Homework Help Assistance; Child Development; Drug and Alcohol Awareness; Domestic Violence Awareness; Mental Health Awareness; Parental Rights; Divorce Issues; Legal Issues; Health Issues; etc.)</p>	<p>Intentional efforts are made to create a welcoming environment</p> <p>Activities conducted are culturally sensitive</p> <p>Staff directs an evaluation of the activities and compiles the results</p>	<p>evaluation results</p> <p>Participation barriers are identified and discussed (Scheduling, childcare, transportation, cost etc.)</p>	<p>developing additional adult- focused programming/learning opportunities as identified by needs assessments</p> <p>Participation barriers are addressed (Scheduling, childcare, transportation, cost etc.)</p>
<p><b>Family-Focused Programming/Learning Opportunities</b></p>			
<p>The program offers family-focused activities/events that encourage positive family interactions and strengthens the parent-child bond.</p> <p>(Examples of activities and events include: Family Game Night; Family Math Night; Family Art Night; Family Picnics; Family Field Trips; Family Dinners; Recitals; Talent Shows; Family Computer Night; Family-focused Seminars, Health Fairs; Back-to-School Registration/Fairs; Year-End Celebrations; Lights On After School; Holiday Celebrations; National Days of Service; Recognition Month Celebrations; Carnivals; Annual Fundraisers; etc.)</p>	<p><b>Some</b> family-focused activity/events are provided on-site by staff or service providers</p> <p>Intentional efforts are made to create a welcoming environment</p> <p>Activities conducted are culturally sensitive</p> <p>Staff directs an evaluation of the activities and compiles the results</p>	<p>Multiple activities/events for families are provided on-site by staff or service providers based on experiences and interactions with parents</p> <p>Staff develop additional programming/learning opportunities as identified by needs assessments and evaluation results</p> <p>Participation barriers are identified and discussed (Scheduling, childcare, transportation, cost etc.)</p> <p>Staff and families work together to plan and participate in marketing and fundraising efforts to support activities/events etc.</p>	<p>Families are active partners in developing and implementing activities/events for families</p> <p>Parents are active partners in the review and discussion of needs assessments and evaluation results</p> <p>Parents are active partners in developing additional programming/learning opportunities as identified by needs assessments</p> <p>Participation barriers are addressed (Scheduling, childcare, transportation, cost etc.)</p> <p>Families work together to plan and implement marketing and fundraising efforts to support activities etc. with staff support as necessary</p>
<p><b>Effective Strategies for Communication</b></p>			
<p>Program staff and families share and exchange information regarding program scheduling, program events/activities and family and youth concerns/needs.</p> <p>(Modes/methods of communication may</p>	<p>The program provides families with information about community resources and services</p> <p>The program provides basic information to the parents</p>	<p>Written policy and procedures are given to staff and families regarding communication about program contact information, program and child specific information and conflict resolution</p>	<p>Staff will have regularly planned home visits or in person meetings to exchange child specific information and individualized feedback to families regarding their child's progress</p>

<p>include: documents, telecommunication, in person, email, newsletters, flyers, family handbook, family information centers, websites, neighborhood meetings and home visits)</p>	<p>regarding program activities and events</p>	<p>processes</p> <p>Regularly scheduled family informational meetings occur regarding programs, policies and procedures</p> <p>Written, verbal and electronic correspondence occurs to exchange child specific information (positive or negative)</p> <p>Written, verbal and electronic correspondence occurs to exchange information which is program specific (calendars, etc.)</p> <p>Staff regularly provide individualized feedback to families regarding their child's progress</p> <p>Staff and family work together to develop a system such as a telephone tree or e-mail to facilitate communication</p>	<p>A designated staff member serves as a "community representative" to meet personally with the families and the community</p> <p>Families are able to communicate with staff in their first language</p> <p>At least one family support meeting is provided on-site by staff or service providers</p> <p>Families work together to plan, implement and evaluate (with staff assistance as necessary) family lead support groups for families</p> <p>Support groups are made available in families' first language</p> <p>Families take the leadership role in developing phone trees, e-mail and other methods of family to family communication</p> <p>Families serve as mentors to new families</p>
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## **PRINCIPLE 7. After school programs promote positive learning opportunities by attending to environment, health, safety and nutrition.**

Good after-school programs protect and enhance the health and positive well being of their participants. These programs provide a safe environment through the quality of the facilities in which the programs are housed, through program staffing, and through the program policies and procedures designed to ensure safety and positive learning opportunities. Good programs also encourage and endorse healthy lifestyle behaviors including physical activity and sound nutrition. The National School Age Care Alliance (NSACA) provides clear guidelines regarding program environment, health, safety and nutrition.

### **Program Environment**

Key to the success of any after school program is the environment in which the activities are delivered. While Teen REACH programs exist in a variety of settings, the program location is but one aspect of the overall program environment. The “quality” of the program environment is not measured merely by the facility in which the program is housed. In fact, the program environment should include the larger context of the community. Many after school programs exist in less than ideal facilities but are still able to create an enriching program environment through the use of surrounding community resources as well as by creatively enhancing their own facility. For example, a program that exists in a facility without a computer lab may develop a cooperative agreement with the school down the street or the local library to ensure their participants have access to technology. Dreary surroundings can be overcome by posting student art work and donated posters. Room spaces can be arranged so that various activities can occur simultaneously to meet the needs of youth of different ages. Space that is shared can be transformed with the use of moveable storage units and small carpet remnants and bean bag style furniture that can easily be removed and stored.

Programs with immediate access to large open spaces (such as school based programs) have the advantage of scheduling gross motor, fitness and sports activities at their convenience. However, programs without this benefit, through planning and collaboration, can make use of local recreation facilities, parks and playgrounds. Programs without significant resources for equipment may look to volunteers, local businesses and civic organizations for donations of materials or construction of outdoor equipment. Since all Teen REACH programs are required to have linkage agreements with the schools of the youth they serve, there is a natural opportunity to combine the resources of the program and the school to better serve participants.

### **Healthy Lifestyle Promotion**

To address the needs of the whole child, after school programs must support and build awareness of a healthy lifestyle. Quality programs include opportunities for recreation and instruction on nutrition, fitness and other healthy behaviors. Because lifestyle choices made in adolescence can have an impact on health in adulthood, it is critical that after school programs be designed to promote the health and development of children and adolescents. These programs can promote positive behaviors as well as educate youth on the consequences of engaging in negative behaviors such as substance abuse and early sexual behavior. Additionally, participation in sports and fitness activities helps youth learn good sportsmanship and cooperation as well as develop problem-solving skills. Finally, youth involvement in these types of activities helps to develop self-worth and confidence.

### **Safety**

Safety is one of the common features of after school programs that support youth development. The primary responsibility of all programs is to ensure that safety procedures and protocols are in place, the facility and equipment are in good repair and free from observable hazards, and staff are trained to respond to general health needs as well as emergencies. In addition, protocols should be in place for all transportation related issues including youth arrival and departure, adult authorization to pick up children from the program, walking, public transportation and program-sponsored transportation and

check in/out procedures. While youth should be carefully supervised as a matter of routine, certain activities such as physical and sports programs as well as any activity that requires the use of potentially harmful materials (preparing food with knives, use of an oven, tools for crafts) requires closer observation and direction. A positive, safe and nurturing environment should be a priority at all Teen REACH programs.

### **Nutrition**

Coupled with the promotion of physical activity is the development of good eating habits and nutrition. A quality after school program promotes good nutrition for youth by teaching participants about nutrition and the preparation of healthy snacks and meals and by providing nutritious snacks or meals to youth each day. Meals and snacks should follow USDA guidelines, contribute to the health of children, and provide a model for good nutritional habits for life-long practice. In addition to sound nutrition, snacks should provide youth with an opportunity to relax and socialize.

Quality programs use food/meal preparation as both a learning opportunity and a way to engage both youth participants and families. Meals help to create a welcoming environment that connects families with the program. In addition, meals can provide excellent opportunities to engage parents in nutrition education and healthy eating behaviors that can be reinforced throughout the family. Meals and snacks also give families the chance to share cultural and familial customs and traditions with participants, program staff and other families.

PRACTICE	LEVEL OF IMPLEMENTATION		
	ENTRY LEVEL	ADVANCING	EXEMPLARY
<b>Program Environment</b>			
The environment in which the Teen REACH Program is delivered should be safe and secure and support the developmental and activity needs of the participants.	<p>Teen REACH facilities should meet local standards and codes for public facilities. Indoor and outdoor facilities must be safe and in good repair</p> <p>The program site carries adequate insurance for both on-site and off-site activities</p> <p>The program is accessible to program participants either by proximity or through affordable and safe transportation alternatives</p> <p>Space is sufficient and ample for a variety of activities</p> <p>The space should be clean, comfortable, and in good repair</p> <p>The outdoor space is suitable for a wide variety of gross motor activities</p>	<p>The program utilizes libraries, computers, art and music facilities and other community resources</p> <p>Space and materials are arranged and designed to allow for a wide variety of age appropriate activities that appeal to participant interests</p> <p>A quiet space is set aside for homework completion</p> <p>The space is arranged so that various activities can go on at the same time with limited disruption</p> <p>The program utilizes community resources which include playground equipment suitable for the sizes and abilities of youth in the program</p> <p>Youth can use a variety of outdoor equipment and games for both active and quiet play</p>	<p>There is adequate and convenient storage space for program equipment and materials</p> <p>Tables and chairs are appropriate size and sturdy and are adequate for varied needs including basic necessities, activities, and relaxation and comfort</p> <p>Space is available for youth to store their possessions</p> <p>Space for privacy should be available, protected from intrusion by others, and should be easily monitored</p>
<b>Health And Safety Issues</b>			
The Teen Reach site is safe and secure and maintains appropriate policies and procedures related to safety and security.	Policies and procedures in regard to participant health and safety have been developed and implemented. These include but are not limited to: medication, emergency procedures, personnel background checks, suspected abuse/neglect, hand washing, visitor sign in procedures, etc.	<p>Health and safety policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and revised</p> <p>In addition to initial orientation, staff receive ongoing and refresher training on safety procedures</p>	

	Program staff receive initial orientation and training on safety procedures/policies		
<b>Nutrition</b>			
Foods and drinks are served to meet needs of participants.	<p>Teen REACH programs offer nutritious snacks to the participants in accordance with established program guidelines</p> <p>Snacks are served in accordance with all relevant local and state health standards for food preparation and handling</p> <p>Drinking water is available at all times</p> <p>Amount and type of food is age and size appropriate</p> <p>Snack\meals are timed and delivered appropriately</p>	<p>The program integrates snacks/food into nutrition curriculum/education program involving both youth and their families</p> <p>Program utilizes a variety of food resources (e.g. food banks) to improve the quality and quantity of snacks/meals</p>	<p>Adult education is provided regarding nutrition, meal planning, food safety, etc.</p> <p>Meal time is used to enhance the program by providing fellowship opportunities among youth, families, staff and community members</p>



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