



Massachusetts Afterschool and Out-of-School Time Quality Indicators Alignment Study Final Report

Submitted to Massachusetts Department of Early Education and
Care and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Executive Summary

Study Background and Design

In Massachusetts, afterschool and out-of-school time (ASOST) programs are overseen by both the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE). These agencies, in efforts to improve overall quality, administer several initiatives designed to support afterschool programs.

To improve coordination across the existing quality initiatives, EEC and ESE initiated a process to create a common set of quality indicators for all ASOST programs. Recent research supports a common understanding that conflicting quality indicators create inefficiencies for programs attempting to engage in multiple quality initiatives as programs spend too much time attempting to meet and reconcile the multiple requirements (Maxwell et al., 2016). As a first step, EEC and ESE contracted with the Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) to conduct an alignment study of ASOST quality indicators in Massachusetts.

Between April and June 2016, a team of researchers at EDC in collaboration with representatives from EEC and ESE began with a close analysis of the following initiatives:

- » MA QRIS Afterschool Out-of-School Time Standards Guidance (QRIS)
- » MA ESE Quality Standards Public School Operated School Aged Child Care Programs (“Public School Child Care”)
- » ASOST-Q Grant Program (ASOST-Q)
- » 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC)
- » Council on Accreditation (COA)

Each of these initiatives has the goal of improving the quality of afterschool programs but approach the goal with different indicators and methods.

To address the question of alignment across initiatives, EDC created a database of the initiatives’ indicators, criteria, measurement methods, and verification protocols. The database organized the indicators into topic areas, including health and safety, curriculum, family engagement, and interactions. This process allowed the research team to see where these initiatives aligned and where there were gaps and major differences.



In addition to exploring the alignment of quality indicators, EDC researchers also gathered input about quality indicators from Massachusetts afterschool program administrators and state and national ASOST experts through interviews, focus groups, and surveys.

Findings

The research team created a quality indicator database to explore alignment across EEC and ESE initiatives. Overall, there was alignment of indicators related to Adult-Child Interactions, Curriculum, Family Engagement, and Evaluation. The alignment within these areas is promising, as these topics are frequently cited in research literature as key to successful afterschool programs. However, within these broad areas, differences in the use of specific measurement tools and methods will require further work. The database also highlighted many domains with a lack of alignment across the initiatives, for example, Health and Safety, Community Engagement, Professional Development Requirements, and Physical Environment.

Through focus group participation, survey, and interviews, ASOST Administrators gave voice to how the lack of alignment plays out in the day-to-day issues faced by programs. A survey answered by 169 ASOST providers found that 73% believe the current quality initiatives help improve the quality of programs. The providers also had suggestions for improvement. The most common topic raised was the misalignment of EEC licensing regulations and quality initiatives. Although the EEC regulations are beyond the scope of the current study, it is important to note that programs frequently cite regulations as a barrier to participating in quality initiatives. In addition, administrators offered examples regarding the use of different evaluation tools, representation on state-level boards, issues with hiring part-time staff, and competition for limited resources.

Recommendations

Afterschool and out-of-school time programs are challenged by the current use of multiple quality indicators and requirements from different state agencies. The task of aligning indicators across several initiatives housed in different agencies is complex and requires engagement among decision makers and program staff.



Recognizing that many of these changes will take time, agreement, and compromise, EDC developed six recommendations with short-term and long-term goals:

1. Ensure state-level systems and structures are in place to support ongoing coordination between EEC and ESE to support alignment of ASOST quality initiatives
 2. Engage ASOST stakeholders in articulating a common vision of high-quality ASOST services and associated definitions and terms
 3. Develop and deliver messages about the importance of quality in ASOST and the need for alignment
 4. Engage in a process to create a single set of ASOST quality indicators through a phased approach
 5. Address barriers to participation in EEC and ESE initiatives
 6. Support additional research
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Acknowledgments

The report is the result of a collaborative process among researchers, policymakers, and afterschool and out-of-school time programs.

Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) research staff would like to thank the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) for providing funding and support for this study.

The research team would also like to thank those who took time out of their very busy schedules to share their experiences. This includes researchers with expertise in afterschool and out-of-school time issues as well as policymakers from across the country and providers of this important service. Everyone was eager to participate and interested in the study.

The best part of conducting this research was hearing from afterschool providers who believe in the unique role afterschool and out-of-school time programs play in the lives of children. The research team is grateful for your time, honesty, and dedication to improving your programs.



Acronyms

21 st CCLC	21 st Century Community Learning Center
APAS	A Program Assessment System
APT	Assessment of Program Practices Tool
ASOST	Afterschool and Out-of-School-Time
ASOST-Q	Afterschool and Out-of-School Time Quality Grant
COA	Council on Accreditation
DHHS	U. S. Department of Health and Human Services
EEC	Department of Early Education and Care
EDC	Education Development Center
ESE	Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
MAP	Massachusetts Afterschool Partnership
NCASE	National Center for Afterschool and Summer Enrichment
NIOST	National Institute for Out-of-School Time
Public School Child Care	Quality Standards for Public School-Operated School Aged Child Care
QRIS	Quality Rating and Improvement System
SACERS	School Age Environmental Rating Scale
SAYO	Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes



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Research on child care quality indicators has revealed that conflicting quality indicators can create inefficiencies for programs attempting to engage in multiple quality initiatives as programs spend too much time attempting to meet and reconcile the multiple requirements (Maxwell et al., 2016).

STUDY BACKGROUND

The Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), in partnership with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), granted a contract to a team of researchers at Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) to conduct an alignment study of afterschool quality indicators. The EDC research team used multiple methods to address the urgent need for data, analysis, and recommendations for next steps. This report is designed to provide analysis and recommendations to support EEC and ESE as they create more relevant, streamlined, and effective indicators to improve the quality of afterschool programs in Massachusetts.

Currently, afterschool programs in Massachusetts are overseen and administered by both EEC and ESE. ESE has oversight over school-based programs and administers two funding initiatives with the goal of increasing quality in afterschool programs: the state-funded Afterschool and Out-of-School Time Quality grants (ASOST-Q) and the federally-funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC). Afterschool programs that are licensed through EEC follow the regulations set by EEC for group child care programs. The Massachusetts Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), created by EEC, provides criteria used to improve the quality of child care programs, regardless of whether the program is a child care program during or after traditional school hours.

Due to the different oversight and different origins, the quality indicators within each initiative were not aligned. EEC and ESE recognized that ASOST programs participating in multiple initiatives faced challenges due to the lack of alignment. For example, research on child care quality indicators has revealed that conflicting quality indicators can create inefficiencies for programs attempting to engage in multiple quality initiatives as programs spend too much time attempting to meet and reconcile the multiple requirements (Maxwell et al., 2016).



To provide information about the specific challenges faced by ASOST providers in the Commonwealth and to receive recommendations about how to address these challenges, EEC and ESE commissioned this study. The study findings and recommendations are designed to contribute to the ongoing work of collaboration between EEC and ESE to streamline and improve reporting requirements for ASOST programs.



OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, & METHODOLOGY

The EDC team conducted a study that was designed to address the following question: how can EEC and ESE align the current indicators used to improve the quality of afterschool and out-of-school time programs in Massachusetts? The EDC study team performed a rapid response study during a ten-week period from April to June of 2016.

The EDC team used a mixed methods approach to address the overarching study question. To determine the degree of alignment of existing ASOST indicators, the study team created an alignment database. To learn from existing research conducted nationally and in specific states, the study team developed a focused review of the literature. To obtain insights from ASOST stakeholders within the Commonwealth, the team gathered interview and survey data from stakeholders. Finally, to learn from national and state stakeholders engaged in similar efforts, the team engaged in targeted interviews.

These methods were employed to gather multiple data points and perspectives to address the overarching research question. The EDC research team analyzed the data sources to develop data-informed recommendations for EEC and ESE to consider to improve the quality of ASOST in the Commonwealth.

Creation and Analysis of an Alignment Database

To determine the degree of alignment of quality indicators employed across quality initiatives in Massachusetts, the EDC research team created database in the form of an Excel spreadsheet. This database (sent as a separate deliverable) was designed to allow for an analysis of the existing alignment of the indicators and measures used by the following programs and initiatives:

- » MA QRIS Afterschool Out-of-School Time Standards Guidance (QRIS)
- » MA ESE Quality Standards Public School Operated School Aged Child Care Programs (“Public School Child Care”)
- » Council on Accreditation Afterschool and Youth Programs (COA)
- » ASOST-Q Grant Program (ASOST-Q)
- » 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC)



After a preliminary review of quality indicators being use by each of the initiatives listed above, eleven domains emerged as the categories employed across quality initiatives:

1. Health and Safety
2. Interactions
3. Curriculum
4. Professional Development Requirements
5. Family Engagement
6. Business Practices
7. Community Engagement
8. Serving Special Populations
9. Physical Environment
10. Transportation
11. Evaluation

In consultation with EEC and ESE, the EDC research team created a database of each quality indicator within these eleven domains that are currently employed by each quality initiative (e.g. Health and Safety, Interactions, Family Engagement). The database was designed to include a separate section for each of the eleven domains and then each quality indicator was coded within each sub category. For example, under the domain "Health and Safety" there were the following subcategories: Emergency Information, Health Care Staff, Health Policy, Injury Prevention, Medication, Physical Fitness, and Preventive Health. The domains used to organize the spreadsheet are not mutually exclusive and therefore some overlap can exist. For example, one of the ASOST-Q standards refers to having highly qualified staff, work with special populations, and collaborative professional development. The one standard could be placed within the domains of "Interactions," "Special Populations," and "Professional Development."

For each initiative (QRIS, Public School Child Care, Council on Accreditation, ASOST-Q, and 21st CCLC), the spreadsheet listed the standard or indicator and a brief description. When available, each standard or indicator included a variable that provided information about the method or tool used for measurement and verification.



The database was designed to allow for analysis of the degree to which indicators are aligned within each domain across quality initiatives. In addition, it allows for analysis of the degree to which gaps exist across initiatives.

The research team analyzed the database to determine the degree to which existing indicators are aligned and gaps that exist across initiatives. The analysis was performed in Excel and resulted in an understanding of the domains that are and are not aligned as well as a description of differences in detail and level of indicators.

Conducted Review of Research on Afterschool Quality

The EDC research team reviewed key research related to ASOST quality and the relationship between quality, indicators, and measurement. EDC also reviewed state and national reports and documents related to afterschool quality indicators alignment based on a review of existing national databases such as the resources compiled by Child Care and Early Education Research Connections (www.researchconnections.org). The research team included peer-reviewed articles as well as publications produced by national, state, and local sources.

Part of the focused research review was to find similar cross-walk documents to inform the study's findings. For example, the research team reviewed resources developed by national organizations such as the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST), the BUILD Initiative, and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) that cross-walk different quality initiatives. These cross-walks provided examples for developing domains and categories that were used for the development of the database. In addition, the cross-walks provided examples of types of analysis that have been used by other organizations.

The research team also reviewed documents about afterschool quality indicators produced by other states including California, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and Washington. These documents provided information about methods employed as well as lessons learned in other states that are engaged in similar alignment activities.

Gathered Data from Stakeholders through Interviews, Focus Groups, and Survey

To gather stakeholder perspectives on the current status of alignment as well as recommendations regarding how to best align existing quality indicators, the EDC research team gathered data from stakeholders through interviews, focus groups, and an online survey.



Interviews. The research team conducted a total of fifteen telephone interviews of key informants with specific perspectives on each of the state's ASOST quality initiatives.

The research team interviewed twelve individuals in different roles related to afterschool issues. These key informants were selected based on expertise as researchers, administrators, or policy experts. Of note, the findings in this report include perspectives of representatives from the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST), the National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment (NCASE), and the Massachusetts Afterschool Partnership (MAP).

In addition, EDC researchers conducted key informant interviews with three ASOST leaders/staff working at EEC and two at ESE. These individuals also provided occasional input via email or short phone conversations.

Focus groups. EDC hosted two focus groups for ASOST program administrators: one online group using WebEx Meeting and one in-person group in Framingham, Massachusetts. To ensure a range of perspectives that represented each provider type as well as individuals engaged in the range of quality initiatives offered in the Commonwealth, EDC sought recommendations of individuals from EEC and ESE. Staff from these state agencies then provided recommendations regarding focus group participants. Those who participated represented different geographical locations, program type (e.g. non-profit, school-based), and funding sources.

The research team began each focus group by introducing to the project. Participants were then provided with an overview of the preliminary findings regarding alignment of quality indicators from an early analysis of the alignment database. Participants were asked to reflect on the findings and were asked: 1) to share their experiences adhering to requirements from different initiatives and 2) to make recommendations for improvements.

Survey. To include perspectives from a larger number of program administrators, EDC researchers collaborated with ESE on an existing survey of ASOST providers. EDC added questions to the existing survey sent to over 500 providers from all the program types represented by this study.

The ESE focus of the survey was on funding priorities, but the state agency agreed to include EDC's questions regarding participation in quality initiatives. The EDC research team added questions about the usefulness of the initiatives, experiences in dealing with multiple sets of requirements, and suggestions for improving the current quality indicators. A total of 174 of the 500 individuals responded to the survey, yielding a response rate of approximately 34 percent. The respondents



represented programs involved in EEC and ESE initiatives. A total of 75 were EEC licensed programs, 67 were in QRIS, 67 were ASOST-Q grant recipients, and 41 were 21st Century grant recipients.

The ESE survey included three questions added by the EDC research team:

1. To what extent do ESE/EEC quality initiatives in which you participate benefit the quality of your program? (select from Very Much, Somewhat, A Little, Not at all, and N/A)
2. If you participate in an EEC program (QRIS or subsidy) AND an ESE program (21st CCLC or ASOST-Q), please let us know about your experience working with multiple sets of standards and/or requirements. Provide specific examples if possible.
3. What ONE change to afterschool/out-of-school time standards/requirements would be the most helpful?
4. The data were analyzed to determine the frequency of responses and to assess whether differences were reported by program type and quality initiative that the program participated in.

Table 1 below presents the number of participants that provided input and Appendix A provides the interview protocol, focus group questions, and survey questions. Data gathered through the survey, focus groups, and interviews is presented in detail in the Findings from Stakeholder Feedback section.

TABLE 1. STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Method	Number of Respondents
Interviews	15
In Person Focus Group (participants)	7
WebEx Focus Group (participants)	5
Online Survey	174



FINDINGS

The research team analyzed alignment of existing quality indicators, the existing research literature, data from stakeholders and perspectives of leaders engaged in similar ASOST activities in other states. Findings reveal that Massachusetts is well positioned to enhance the quality of ASOST programs given the state's numerous quality initiatives and that opportunities exist to build on the existing efforts. The findings are presented below.

Analysis of Database Reveals Areas of Alignment and Gaps

The research team found areas of alignment across the quality indicators employed by each of the state's largest quality initiatives as well as gaps. Analyzing the degree of alignment presented a clear picture of which domains are currently aligned across initiatives and which require more work towards alignment. A summary table that highlights the alignment across initiatives is included as Appendix B.

Analysis of the quality indicators database showed alignment in four of the eleven domains. For the QRIS, Public School Child Care, ASOST-Q, and 21st CCLC quality initiatives alignment, the team found that at least one indicator was aligned in the following four domains: Interactions, Curriculum, Family Engagement, and Evaluation. The four domains that show the most alignment are often cited in research literature on creating high quality afterschool programs (Paluta, 2016; Afterschool Alliance, 2014). The alignment appears to reflect a shared understanding across EEC and ESE about core indicators of quality. Agreement about the importance of "Interactions" demonstrates the need for positive interactions between adults and students and supporting interactions among peers. Similarly, "Family Engagement" is a key component of all education programs, but particularly within ASOST programs which bridge the time at school with time at home and aim to create an environment that mimics qualities of both. All the EEC and ESE initiatives have quality indicators related to "Curriculum" and "Evaluation" defined broadly. This alignment, again, shows a shared understanding of what makes a high quality afterschool program and which components are essential to achieving quality. However, within these domains discrepancies exist regarding specifics such as what tools to use for evaluation and how to select a curriculum. Below are additional areas that show opportunities for better alignment.

Despite the levels of alignment in four of the eleven domains, gaps exist not only in the remaining domains but even in number of indicators and level of detail provided by each initiative. The research team found discrepancy in the breadth



and detail of indicators articulated by each quality initiative. Because of this, the research team recommended against counting the number of indicators across domains. For some quality initiatives, the indicators are quite broad whereas others are very detailed and specific.¹ For example, ASOST-Q guidelines are intentionally broad in order to support a wide range of programs in achieving higher quality. In contrast, QRIS provides structure to support programs in a process of continuous quality improvement and sets specific criteria for programs to meet each of the indicators. Public School Child Care similarly provides many specific criteria for each standard. Moreover, 21st CCLC quality indicators focus on what quality looks like in practice and provide examples that programs can work towards, as opposed to presenting specific criteria every program must achieve.

Similarly, analysis revealed that each initiative's use of measurement tools and verification methods differ substantially. QRIS and 21st CCLC programs articulate specific evaluation tools and verification methods for each quality indicator. In contrast, Public School Child Care offers no methods of verification or measurement. Therefore, even though Public School Child Care provides the most detailed list of quality indicators, programs are not required to use specific methods to substantiate meeting each indicator.

The final key finding related to lack of alignment is that differences exist in the type of language used by each of the quality initiatives. The difference in the way quality indicators are phrased is important because the use of slightly different language when referring to the same underlying construct can create a sense of greater misalignment than actually exists. For example, the QRIS and Public School Child Care are phrased as instructions for programs. However, the QRIS requires programs to use specific measurement tools (such as the SACERS and Arnett), but the Public School Child Care do not require programs to use tools to measure the quality of the program. In contrast, ASOST-Q and 21st CCLC primarily articulate the desired program outcomes as "guidance" or "examples" for achieving desired results. In the Recommendations section, the research team offers suggestions for creating shared language across initiatives to provide programs with a better understanding of the overarching goals of both EEC and ESE.

Research Literature Shows Limitations and Strengths of ASOST Quality Initiatives

Analysis of existing research and reports commissioned from ASOST leaders reveals that although ASOST as a formal and recognized field began in the 1970s,

¹ EDC researchers counted QRIS indicators (67), Public School Child Care (104), COA (92) ASOST-Q (7) and 21st CCLC (26). See Appendix A and Database for more details.



research on the quality of ASOST and the relationship between structural indicators of quality and desired outcomes is much more limited than in other fields. For example, formal, rigorous research on early reading and mathematics has been conducted for many decades. In contrast, a review of Research Connections (www.researchconnections.org) reveals that although some descriptive studies of child care mentioned afterschool as early as the 1970s, rigorous research on ASOST began in earnest only within the past two decades.

To better understand how the Massachusetts quality initiatives and the indicators of quality used by each initiative compare with the latest research, the EDC research team selected studies related to quality initiatives and funding for out-of-school and afterschool programs. The team curated key research on ASOST rather than providing a long listing of studies that are not of the highest quality or demonstrate the range of finding. The team selected studies with the aim of synthesizing findings that could inform the Commonwealth's next steps in aligning quality initiatives and indicators.

The review of the research begins with a review of the findings from a seminal report released in 2006, summarizes research on the effectiveness of quality ASOST, and concludes with findings related to the importance of alignment.

Although reviews of research on child care generally reveal that descriptive studies of afterschool programs were conducted as early as the 1970s through 1990s, it was not until the mid 2000s that researchers began conducting large-scale rigorous studies of ASOST. In 2006, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) released a seminal report—relevant to the issues currently faced by Massachusetts—based on data collected from ASOST providers who participated in interviews, focus groups, and surveys. The DHHS report argued that benefits exist in providing licensing flexibility for afterschool programs. For example, the report argued that a standard that requires training in early childhood might not be relevant for an afterschool teacher working with upper elementary school students who has extensive experience working with children of this age or who has substantial experience in a specific content area such as arts education. The report recommended that states determine which regulations should apply to certain programs or settings and not simply apply regulations for one type of program to other types of programs.

The 2006 DHHS report acknowledged that some programs faced barriers in meeting regulations, which could preclude their participation in offering out-of-school time or afterschool services. For example, smaller community-based providers that lacked resources or the authority to meet regulations, particularly those related to facilities, could face barriers to offering ASOST services even if a



need was expressed by parents. The EEC and ESE in Massachusetts have already used the findings from this study to inform efforts to align standards. The findings related to licensing could provide useful information for the state agencies as they consider next steps in aligning quality initiatives.

The Commonwealth's efforts to support higher-quality ASOST programming were complicated by a different research study—Commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education—that was released the previous year (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). The U.S. Department of Education study on the impact and effectiveness of the 21st CCLC reported mixed results and did not replicate positive findings from other research on high-quality afterschool programs. For example, this study found that elementary students who were randomly assigned to attend the 21st Century Community Learning Centers after-school program were more likely to feel safe afterschool, but no more likely to have higher academic achievement, no less likely to be in self-care, and experienced mixed effects on developmental outcomes relative to students who were not randomly assigned to attend the centers.

However, Mahoney & Zigler (2006) argued that the 2005 study had many limitations and missed opportunities for demonstrating the effectiveness of 21st Century programs. They argued that as one of the first studies to be conducted that employed the No Child Left Behind's (NCLB) definition of "scientifically-based research," the evaluation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers was conducted too early in the implementation of the program and was too focused on limited academic outcomes. Nonetheless, the report led to some questions about the relationship between ASOST programs and desired outcomes.

Despite the questions raised by the 2005 report, subsequent research reports found positive associations between high-quality quality afterschool programming and desired outcomes. For example, a meta-analysis conducted by Weissberg & Durlak (2007) reported that participants in afterschool programs improve significantly: feelings and attitudes, indicators of behavioral adjustment, and school performance. This research team also found that participation in afterschool programs is associated with improvements in self-confidence and self-esteem, positive attitudes toward school, positive social behaviors, grades, and achievement test scores. The meta-analysis examined findings from 73 separate studies of afterschool programs.

In recent years, research on afterschool programming, including 21st Century programs, has used creative methods to understand the importance of specific features of program implementation as well as the broader impact of afterschool on student, school, family, and community outcomes. For example, the Afterschool



Alliance (2011)² has summarized the results of over two dozen studies and reports that in recent years, researchers have consistently found that the quality of afterschool is predictive of desired outcomes.

Moreover, the current focus on contextualized research has produced more actionable recommendations. For example, Paluta and colleagues (2016) surveyed stakeholders on program quality and perceived outcomes related to academic learning, youth development, and family engagement. The researchers found that overall, most of the stakeholders were positive and confident about developing caring relationships with youth. The researchers concluded that “parent family engagement” had the strongest influence on the relationship between quality indicators and perceived outcomes. The researchers recommended that policies affecting ASOST go beyond facility safety and social-emotional health and instead focus on supporting programs’ engagement of families to create the outcomes that will benefit youth long-term. This research and the alignment across all quality initiatives in Massachusetts suggests that a continued focus on family engagement would benefit children in Massachusetts. The topic of engaging families in afterschool programs should be a common topic of afterschool specific professional development in the Commonwealth.

In the past decade, some research on Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS), which rate the quality of child care and early education programs, has also focused on some states that include “school-aged care” in states’ QRIS (National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, 2014). Moreover, recent validation studies conducted in selected states reveal that some states’ general QRIS indicators are predictive of observed quality and although some studies show a link between higher quality programs and child outcomes, others have not (Sabol & Pianta, 2015; Soliday-Hong et al, 2015; Tout et al, 2016). Nonetheless, research conducted by several states reveals that opportunities exist to use the QRIS to align the quality indicators used across ASOST programs but many states are currently in the early stages of developing their systems and aligning the indicators of quality (Blough-Orr et al., 2016).

Finally, studies of state that have successfully aligned the state QRIS system with other state quality initiatives, reveals that these states have a number of factors already in place. First, these states have state agency leadership that recognizes the importance of accountability systems across initiatives. Secondly, the states have clearly defined the roles and responsibilities of staff responsible for implementing the alignment activities. These states have also considered the role of regional and/or community organizations in overseeing and supporting implementation

² It is important to note that Afterschool Alliance is an advocacy group (as opposed to a research group) and may have a bias towards selecting or highlighting work that expands afterschool programs.



of the initiatives and have aligned the work at the regional or community level. Finally, sufficient time is allocated to ensure staff can carry out the work to align the systems (BUILD Initiative, 2015; Early Childhood Systems Working Group, 2016).

In sum, existing research provide solid descriptions of the design and implementation of ASOST programs. However, rigorous research on the links between specific ASOST quality indicators, observed quality, and student outcomes is fairly limited. This is at least in part due to the relatively new nature of formal ASOST programming and to the relatively recent attention among researchers to study the links. Nonetheless, descriptive studies reveal that programs offering afterschool and out-of-school time services report benefits from actions to align and streamline monitoring and accountability requirements. Additional summaries of ASOST research can be found in the annotated bibliography in Appendix C.

National and State ASOST Stakeholders Share Expertise

To obtain perspectives on how to best align afterschool and out-of-school time quality initiatives, the EDC study team identified key informants who are national experts in the field of afterschool as well as experts who are currently working in Massachusetts and selected other states. These ASOST experts expressed strong interest in the study commissioned by EEC and ESE. Yet most key informants cautioned that the process of aligning requirements is a complicated issue for programs and state policy makers across the country, in part, because of legislative and regulatory differences affecting existing quality initiatives.

Perspectives offered by national and state stakeholders reveal that many agree with the vision of developing a common accountability framework and system to be used across all ASOST quality initiatives. However, divergent perspectives were provided regarding the design and implementation of the system. The specific recommendations and reflections included the development of a common data dictionary or cross-walk to enable programs to clearly see the similarities and differences in language across initiatives, the development of an overall framework that would provide some flexibility for programs delivering afterschool services while nonetheless articulating a common set of indicators to be used across programs, the development of a common set of measurement tools and finally, a common process for collecting and reporting data.

Several key informants also reported that key barriers to an aligned system are the lack of a common language across initiatives and the lack of a similar understanding of the purposes of the quality indicators. For example, when referring to an assessment instrument, some initiatives refer to the tool as a “continuous quality improvement tool” whereas other initiatives refer to the same



tool as a tool for evaluation or monitoring. Further analysis of the qualitative data reveals the importance of creating a cross-walk of terms and definitions to create greater clarity among ASOST stakeholders engaged in quality initiatives.

A second recommendation, made by experts from the National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment (NCASE), was to incorporate the lessons learned by states engaged in similar efforts to align ASOST quality initiatives. One key informant suggested that the EDC study team include information in this report about the process and framework the Indiana Afterschool Network used to create aligned standards. (See <http://www.indianaafterschool.org/quality/standards>). This informant recommended that the Commonwealth reflect on the methods and process to incorporate promising approaches as a next step in aligning standards in Massachusetts.

The Indiana Afterschool Network created a process that recognized the lack of alignment across ASOST programs, and designed a “Top Ten” list for afterschool quality indicators (which they refer to as standards) for ASOST providers in Indiana. The “Top Ten” are a sub-set of the state’s existing 38 afterschool standards. The “top 10” represent three domains: 1) Human Relationships; 2) Health, Nutrition, and Safety; 3) Administration.

Indiana’s “Top Ten” are listed in Appendix D as an example of the work of other states. Within each standard are several specific indicators and instructions on how to measure the presence of each indicator using the Indiana Quality Program Self-Assessment Tool. This approach represents an innovative manner of creating a more streamlined system of accountability at the ASOST provider level while maintaining the unique quality indicators of each separate quality initiative in the state.

Our research team also reached out to the afterschool network lead in Wisconsin to learn about their approach to improving quality in afterschool programs. One strategy adopted by Wisconsin was the creation of a separate track for school aged programs in the state QRIS. This separate track allowed for different quality criteria for school aged programs and different training requirements for staff. The professional development is therefore more targeted to school aged programs and through partnerships with the afterschool network. Wisconsin provides training through webinars, face-to-face, technical assistance and communities of practice. While this separate track has addressed some of the issues around the lack of alignment, there are still different requirements for programs that are public school-operated and other community based programs, which causes some confusion and complications within the system. The state network lead in Wisconsin is eager to communicate again with Massachusetts to learn from the current report and future work.



Key informants also recommended that Massachusetts examine and align the monitoring and evaluation tools currently required by each of the state's quality initiatives. Specifically, NCASE recommended examining tools required by each quality initiative to discern if the required tools are consistent or conflict. These experts noted that an existing report—Measuring Youth Quality (Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2009)—provides an overview of the most commonly used tools, including strengths and weaknesses of each, and could be useful as a beginning point for examining alignment of tools. Moreover, key informants ranging from a state-level leaders with experience evaluating 21st Century programs to national experts recommended that leaders in the Commonwealth review the Program Quality Assessment (PQA) tool (<http://www.cypq.org/assessment>) as a tool that could be used across ASOST programs.

At the same time, national experts cautioned against requiring programs to adopt particular tools without also supporting the training that is required to use the tools effectively. For example, stakeholders noted that the APAS tools, designed by ESE with the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) at Wellesley College typically requires a two-day training, although recently an online version of the training has been made available. They noted that in the absence of including funding or other supports for the training, the requirement of a particular tool can create a barrier to participation in a particular quality initiative.

Several stakeholders recommended that an important goal for EEC and ESE would be to have a common tool, or at least shared items, among all ASOST quality initiatives. However, they cautioned that focusing on the right measurement tool before solidifying key quality indicators would be a misstep. In the Recommendations section, we provide guidance on how to incorporate a closer examination of measurement following the creation of a shared set of quality indicators.

Finally, a key informant who has provided technical assistance to states working on alignment of quality initiatives and associated accountability systems, reported the features of successful systems. Specifically, successful efforts have engaged in a process to ensure all stakeholders have a common vision and agreed upon short, intermediate, and longer-term outcomes. Moreover, the outcomes are clearly defined and measurable. In addition, to maintain progress toward desired outcomes, the states have articulated the roles and responsibilities of those engaged in the efforts, employ management systems that use workplans with detailed timelines to ensure progress toward goals, and have a process in place to ensure progress is maintained despite contextual contexts (such as changes in state agency leadership or budgets).



MA ASOST Program Administrators Share Experiences with Quality Initiatives

Through focus groups and interviews, EDC researchers gathered feedback from fifteen afterschool program administrators. The individuals represented EEC licensed programs from various geographic locations. Among the programs were three that received 21st CCLC grants, four that received ASOST-Q grants, and one program that was COA accredited, ten of these programs were participating in MA QRIS.

The program administrators were introduced to the purpose of the study and the structure of the alignment database. They were then asked to share their experiences working with multiple sets of guidance or quality indicators. The most popular topic raised by participants was a mismatch between afterschool quality initiatives and EEC licensing regulations. EEC program licensing and regulations are beyond the scope of the current study but some of this feedback is provided in Appendix E. It is important to mention this feedback here because the number of examples and specific stories about how licensing can limit participation in quality initiatives point to an urgent need expressed by providers. The recommendations section includes information related to this topic.

In addition to discussing EEC licensing, ASOST administrators provided qualitative data regarding the Council on Accreditation credential, evaluation tools, resources, getting a “seat at the table,” and comments regarding the ASOST workforce.

ASOST Providers Report Limited Familiarity with COA

During interviews and focus groups with ASOST stakeholders and program administrators, the EDC research team asked about stakeholders’ perspective regarding the Council on Accreditation (COA). All reported low levels of familiarity with the COA (aside from the one COA accredited program the team selected for participation in the study). In fact, on a 5-point scale with the lowest ratings being “not at all familiar” and “a little familiar,” all participants reported that they were not at all familiar or only a little familiar with the COA. The program administrators who were “a little” familiar with the COA reported that they had looked into the process of accreditation and decided it was prohibitively expensive and they were unclear about the benefits.

Separately, the EDC team interviewed one provider at a COA accredited program. The program director of quality improvement at the COA accredited program said that the program had been accredited since 1994. Moreover, she did state that acquiring and maintaining accreditation was a “very costly endeavor.” She explained that the guidance provided by COA has led to a continuous improvement process and the delivery of the highest quality standards.



Despite reaching out to COA accredited programs, only one participated in an interview and therefore, information provided by this key informant is more illustrative than reflective of a larger group. Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of programs that were not COA accredited reported that COA accreditation did not provide an affordable option. Given the low number of programs participating in this accreditation and the field's lack of interest in acquiring COA accreditation, COA appears to have a limited role to play in shaping Massachusetts' afterschool programs. EDC recommends further inquiry into the programs that are currently using COA to understand the benefits of participation.

ASOST Providers Highlight Various Issues with Evaluation Tools

Analysis of focus group data suggests that there are strengths and weaknesses with the tools currently used to evaluate programs. As mentioned above, Public School Child Care programs do not have proscribed evaluation tools or methods. On the flip side, as one focus group participant stated, the QRIS and 21st Century programs are especially strong around evaluation. However, QRIS and 21st Century programs require that ASOST programs use different tools to collect information on program quality. QRIS, overseen by EEC, requires ASOST programs participating in the QRIS to use the School-Aged Care Environmental Rating Scale (SACERS), APT-O, and Arnett. In contrast, the 21st Century programs, overseen by ESE, require the use of the APAS tools: APT-O and SAYO.

Administrators of programs that use APAS tools reported that they liked them and are finding the data useful for planning, goal setting, and professional development. As one focus group participant stated, "the APAS really understands afterschool programs and allows you to be flexible." However, to reliably use the APAS, training is required which is costly, time consuming, and not aligned with EEC requirements. Yet, as one director explained, "the APAS tools are geared towards program improvement, they aren't really program evaluation tools."

In one program that has both 21st Century funding and a licensed child care program, the administrator reported, "it's time consuming but the APT provides good, helpful data." At the same time, this key informant noted that teachers prefer to work in the child care center so that they are not required to complete the APT and SAYO. She reported that teachers feel that completing these tools requires "a lot of extra work." Yet the comment regarding the usefulness of the data is consistent with survey findings (presented below), that over 70 percent of providers find the APT useful. At the same time, the comment illustrates the push and pull between helpful data and feasibility—pointing to the importance of addressing the training and time costs faced by providers completing evaluation tools.



Another program director reported that the SAYO data is useful to create appropriate professional development for staff. She reported that, “it allows you to focus on areas you want to look at – and you can morph it into what you need for each group leader.” She added that she finds it helpful for supervision purposes. She completed the APT-O two-day training and said, “I am so glad my program paid for the APAS training. It shows an openness to the needs of your program.”

Although a number of key informants provided favorable report regarding the APT and SAYO, administrators’ perspectives on the SACERS and Arnett were not as positive. The SACERS and Arnett are the tools used most often by QRIS. One administrator who praised the APAS said of the SACERS and Arnett “I use it [sic] because I have to, not because it [sic] is informative.” Other ASOST stakeholders, administrators, and policymakers reported to the EDC study team that she believed (based on her personal experience) that afterschool programs, “do not like SACERS.” During one interview, an administrator said, “the SACERS is irrelevant to afterschool.” Another added, “SACERS is not appropriate for afterschool. It doesn’t mention homework.” Moreover, she was under the false impression that it does not mention communication with schools when in fact it does. This common misperception highlights a need to provide afterschool programs with information and training so they adequately understand the tools they are required to use.

ASOST administrators and stakeholders’ comments regarding evaluation and measurement tools demonstrate a range of reactions to the various options. Taken as a whole, these comments informed the recommendation for an incremental approach to choosing the best tools to measure an aligned set of quality indicators.

This statement regarding the difference between a continuous quality improvement tool versus an evaluation or monitoring tool reflects a broader set of challenges articulated by stakeholders around the use of the terms data collection, data use, validation, accountability, evaluation, continuous program improvement, and measurement. Thus, analysis of the qualitative data reveals the importance of the Commonwealth creating a cross-walk of terms and definitions to create greater clarity for ASOST providers.

Programs Report Competing for Limited Resources for all Afterschool Programs

Analysis of qualitative data reveals that many providers feel that the success of some programs with 21st CCLC funding has led other programs to feel as if they are competing for children. According to representatives from EEC licensed programs, when two programs try to attract the same population, programs with 21st CCLC funding can pay higher salaries and keep staff. One provider elaborated that, “As long as it’s not a licensed program, a 21st Century program can have different ratios.” The funding received from serving more children can be used to offer



higher salaries. Moreover, some administrators felt like they are losing staff and they are losing kids when a 21st CCLC program is nearby.

A focus group participant who runs many programs, some with 21st CCLC funding and some without, said the biggest difference is simply money—the funding to advance quality. They use the same assessment tools across programs, and thus can show the difference the financial support has made for the students with access to 21st Century programming. It is essential to keep this issue in mind when considering the expansion of quality initiatives.

Providers Advocate for School-Age “Seat at the Table”

Several focus group participants voiced concern that they believed ASOST issues are not a priority for state leaders. Specifically, a number of individuals reported that they believed state boards that make decisions about school-aged programs do not have representation from ASOST programs. Although BOSTnet and MAP representatives serve on the EEC Advisory Council, many key informants were not aware that they “had a voice at the table.” While a number of individuals who work in the field of education have commended recent efforts to increase access to and quality of early childhood programs, a number of focus group participants reported that they wanted to, “remind the Commissioner [Tom Weber] that school-age is a thing.”

Compensation and Retention Issues Further Exacerbated by Part-Time Workforce

A primary issue reported among ASOST programs, especially those without 21st CCLC funding, was the inability to pay competitive wages. Stakeholders reported that this is particularly difficult when considering that the programs operate in the hours for before and afterschool. By its nature, afterschool hires predominantly part-time staff. One participant reported, “We have high school grads and college grads while they are looking for full-time work. As soon as they find full-time work, we lose them.”

Key informants reported that although more families need the services provided by afterschool programs, programs face difficulty finding suitable staff. One program director stated, “I tell my Executive Director that we cannot grow because we don’t have the staff.” Many mentioned that they faced substantial difficulty finding and keeping staff at all, “let alone finding staff that meet the requirements for quality improvement initiatives.”

Many administrators expressed frustration regarding their ability to increase their QRIS ratings because of requirements related to workforce qualifications. Specifically, a number of administrators reported that the QRIS Level 2 requirement for staff degrees would present a barrier to their ability to increase



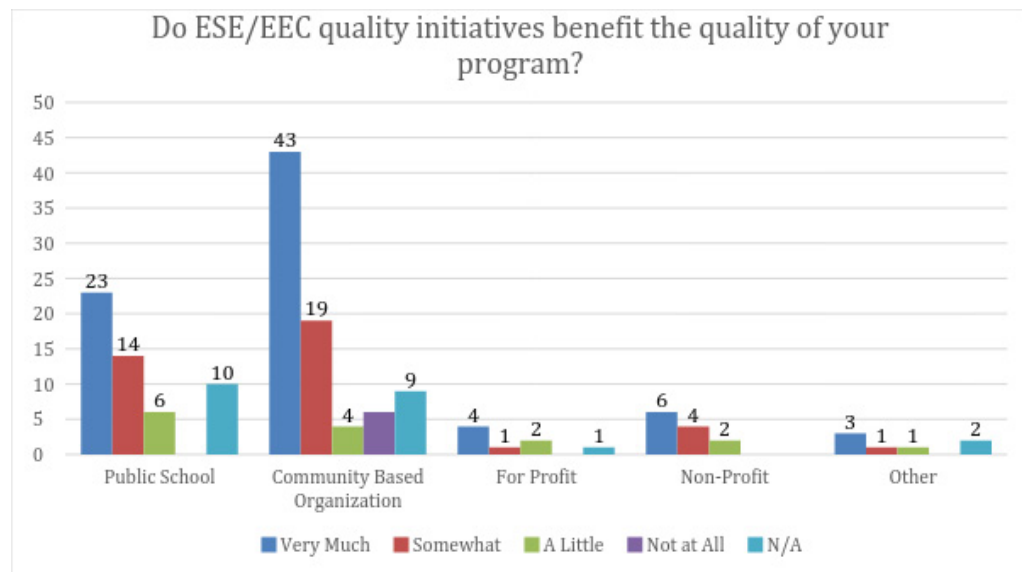
their QRIS ratings. Although some agreed that it would be beneficial for staff to have additional education and degrees, a number of key informants stated that they believed it is not feasible to hire educated and credentialed staff when hiring part-time employees. One key informant explained, “Rules like needing the site coordinator to have a degree. We try to hire people but we can’t find anyone... we are choking... I’m nervous about September.”

Survey Findings

The survey of providers revealed that a high percentage of respondents believe that the quality initiatives benefit their programs and that many had concrete recommendations for steps to improve alignment of quality initiatives.

The survey included a question about whether program administrators believe quality initiatives benefit their program. The answers to this question are displayed below in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1. ADMINISTRATORS REPORT BENEFIT OF QUALITY INITIATIVES



Analysis of survey data revealed that over 70 percent of respondents agree that the quality initiatives benefit the quality of programs either “very much” or “somewhat.” About half (49%) reported that the quality initiatives benefit the quality of programs “very much.” Nearly a quarter (24%) reported that they “somewhat” benefit the quality of programs and (9%) reported “a little.” Only (4%) reported that they did not benefit the quality at all and 14% selected “N/A.”



Qualitative data gathered through the survey provided insight into the experience of programs dealing with multiple quality initiatives. A number reported benefits of participation in multiple programs—especially QRIS and ASOST. For example, one administrator reported, “QRIS is great to help set the standards and guidelines for teachers to know the expectations. The ASOST grant has allowed for opportunities to meet other OST programs and share best practices with one another.”

However, many more administrators reported frustration with the differing indicators, instruments, and requirements and recommended that the Commonwealth take steps to align quality indicators and requirements. For example, one administrator of a 21st Century program that is also participating in the QRIS reported, “It can be frustrating, especially when using the same tools (e.g. the APT) but [when we are] asked to use them in two different ways. Wish there was more alignment between the QRIS standards and 21st Century requirements. For example, the SACERS does not seem very aligned with 21st Century program quality indicators.” Two other administrators provided similar comments related to the lack of alignment:

It is not easy to adhere to numerous requirements for different funders/ programs- and at times it seems as if people recreate the wheel when more standards evaluations might be effective. However, it is an inescapable part of running a youth development organization in 2016. [Community Based Organization, currently ASOST-Q, EEC licensed]

While we understand that EEC is looking to be comprehensive, the expectation to meet some of the requirements is virtually impossible given the state's reimbursement rates. [For-profit Community Based Organization, currently ASOST-Q, EEC licensed, QRIS]

A final survey question asked program administrators to name one change they would make to improve the current afterschool standards. Respondents offered suggestions related to aligning standards, physical space, funding, paperwork, professional development, and the unique position of afterschool programs. Several of these responses illustrating these topics are below:

[I recommend that the state] use the same measurement tools. Use APT observation tool for both 21st CCLC and QRIS (instead of Class/Arnett). Or, perhaps, if a program receives 21st CCLC funds, allow that to count as at least a Level 2 in QRIS. [Community Based Organization, currently EEC licensed, 21st CCLC, ASOST-Q, QRIS]



It is difficult to achieve higher ratings with QRIS when you share a space with public schools. You do not always have the ability and opportunity to enhance the space as required. [For Profit Agency, currently EEC licensed, ASOST-Q, QRIS]

Our program would be on Level 2 if it were not for a few minor requirements. [Public School or District, currently EEC contract, QRIS]

Given the number of new staff afterschool has each year there should be an online training to be done within the first 45 days that is specific to elementary school age children; their development, behavior management and supporting meaningful curriculum. What exists is very infant/toddler and preschool oriented. [Community Based Organization, currently ASOST-Q, EEC licensed, QRIS]

Data collection, reporting and analyzing take too much time away from giving our students what they need. [Public School or District, currently 21st CCLC, ASOST-Q]

More funding to help programs to easily reach higher levels of QRIS and providing higher quality programming. [Non-profit Organization, currently EEC licensed, QRIS]

Partnerships that provide quality after-school programming such as a public school and higher education partnership rather than drop-in programs. [Higher Education Institute]

The qualitative data provided by respondents reveal that many are faced with structural issues such as lack of funding, space, and access to high-quality staff. They reported an eagerness to provide high-quality services and a desire that the state take steps to provide more aligned and seamless quality initiatives to address the range of issues they face. Appendix F presents all of the qualitative responses edited to remove any identifiable information.

EEC and ESE Representatives' Perspectives on ASOST

As noted in the introduction, the EDC research team actively collaborated with key stakeholders from EEC and ESE to obtain early input regarding the study design, methods, analysis and preliminary findings. Moreover, state agency stakeholders provided a structure for the current study and set the schedule for deliverables. Throughout the duration of the study, EDC researchers engaged in active conversations with representatives from EEC and ESE to obtain input regarding



key research design and sample selection decisions and to obtain feedback on preliminary analysis and draft reports.

EEC and ESE staff reported that they see this study as contributing to the state's ongoing activities to create greater alignment and connections between EEC and ESE quality initiatives. EEC and ESE reported that they share a goal of creating a vision of aligned ASOST quality initiatives and also desire clear short-term, immediate, interim, and longer-term steps that can be taken to achieve the vision. All leaders who were interviewed expressed a commitment to reducing barriers and creating a shared language around quality ASOST. Moreover, these individuals reported a desire to ensure that aligned regulations, quality indicators, evaluation tools and reporting formats are used by ASOST programs participating in the range of quality initiatives sponsored by the state.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Afterschool and out-of-school time programs are challenged by the current use of multiple quality indicators and requirements from different state agencies. The task of aligning quality indicators across several initiatives housed in different agencies is complex and requires engagement among decision makers and program staff. Recognizing that many of these changes will take time, agreement, and compromise, EDC has developed six broad recommendations containing short-term and long-term action steps.

1. Ensure state-level systems and structures are in place to support ongoing coordination between EEC and ESE to support alignment of ASOST quality initiatives.

Ongoing coordination across EEC and ESE is essential to ensure steady progress in aligning the ASOST quality initiatives, associated regulations, and accountability systems that include the quality indicators. Through regular discussions with EEC and ESE leaders and staff, it is clear that each agency is committed to offering high quality ASOST programs. Leaders and staff reported a willingness to take actions to eliminate barriers to program participation in quality improvement initiatives. The EDC study team recommends that EEC and ESE continue to work together by ensuring specific state-level systems and processes are in place to support the work to align quality initiatives and quality indicators.

Recommended Short-Term Actions:

- » Assign specific EEC and ESE staff to an ASOST Cross-Agency Coordinating Team (subsequently referred to as the ASOST Team) charged with overseeing alignment activities. This team should meet on a regular basis to set an agenda for policy alignment and to oversee the progress of the alignment work. Specific staff should be responsible for coordinating the work and other members of the group should represent the range of stakeholders engaged in overseeing the design and implementation of ASOST programs. Members of the group should include not only those responsible for quality initiatives, but also those who provide ASOST programs not engaged in quality initiatives. For example, some child care providers offer ASOST services and are not currently participating in any ASOST quality initiatives, but represent an important voice of ASOST providers whose perspective could inform future work to align initiatives and indicators.



- » Develop a clear work plan with deliverables and timelines. The work plan, developed by the ASOST Team, should list the key action steps that will be taken in the short-term and longer-term. The research team recommends that ASOST Team begin the development of the work plan by incorporating the short-term and longer-term goals listed in this report. In addition, the research team recommends that the team use the template provided in Appendix G that has been used by similar cross-agency teams to support alignment of work in the Commonwealth.

Recommended Longer-Term Actions:

- » Develop a set of recommendation to the Commissioners regarding changes in administrative structures, laws, and regulations that could reduce or eliminate barriers to aligned ASOST programming. These recommendations, created by the ASOST Team, should be informed by the action steps noted below.

2. Engage ASOST stakeholders in articulating a common vision of high-quality ASOST services and associated definitions and terms.

While the ASOST stakeholders who participated in the current study share a broad perspective about the importance of quality programs and initiatives, many reported not understanding all of the components of all the ASOST quality initiatives. To enhance the alignment of ASOST quality initiatives, the research team recommends the following short and longer-term action steps.

Recommended Short-Term Actions for the ASOST Team:

- » Oversee the development of a framework that represents the vision of high-quality ASOST that can be used across all state ASOST quality initiatives as well as ASOST programs. Currently, QRIS, Public School Child Care, ASOST-Q, and 21st CCLC are separate initiatives with similar but slightly different visions of high-quality afterschool and out-of-school time programming and services. To develop a common set of quality indicators, it is important to first ensure that the indicators reflect the common vision of high-quality programming. The vision should be broad enough to incorporate all initiatives. Existing research and lessons learned from other states reveal that the process of creating a common vision is critically important for efforts to align systems.
- » Develop a logic model that provides a graphic illustration of the state's theory of how specific actions funded under each of the state's ASOST quality initiatives will logically lead to desired outputs as well as shorter-



and longer-term outcomes. This logic model can be used to frame the work of the ASOST Team and the activities that are needed to align the initiatives.

- » Oversee the development of a common 'data dictionary' that provides a cross-walk of definitions and terms used by QRIS, Public School Child Care, ASOST-Q, 21st CCLC programs as well as ASOST programs licensed through EEC that are not currently participating in the state's QRIS. Each of these initiatives and programs are subjected to their unique regulations and evaluation requirements. Moreover, even the use of terms and definitions differs, which is causing challenges for ASOST providers. The research team recommends that the dictionary also reference the law or regulation that uses the terms and definitions. The document could address the challenge expressed by numerous study participants that currently result from different uses of terms and definitions. Moreover, by providing references to the laws or regulations that define the terms, the dictionary can be useful to the ASOST Team in determining changes that could be made by agency staff and those that would require a change in regulation or statute.

Recommended Longer-Term Actions:

- » For ASOST stakeholders
 - Use the vision, framework, and logic model as a reference points for aligning and coordinating quality initiatives.
 - Use the data dictionary to facilitate the use of a common language around quality ASOST.
- » The ASOST Team
 - Engage in a process of reviewing the data dictionary to identify possible changes in regulations or legislation that would enhance communication among stakeholders engaged in the range of ASOST quality initiatives.

3. Develop and deliver messages about the importance of quality in ASOST and the need for alignment.

There is an overall trend in the field towards collaboration among federal and state level initiatives to enhance the quality of services for young children and their families. The message from the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Care is that funding streams supporting different quality initiatives



should not compete but should be designed to ensure higher-quality services to the same children. This message could be used to garner support for the ASOST Team's work to align quality initiatives and indicators across EEC and ESE. The study team recommends the following actions to develop and deliver messages about the importance of quality ASOST and the need for alignment.

Recommended Short-Term Actions:

- » Disseminate and use the vision and logic model widely (noted as short-term actions in recommendation 2 above) to communicate the importance of high-quality ASOST programming, regardless of the particular quality initiative a program is participating in. These materials can be useful in garnering support among stakeholders ranging from state-level leaders to program administrators to parents.
- » Provide information to state, community and program-level stakeholders about the benefits of an aligned and coordinated ASOST system of enhancing quality as well as associated accountability systems. The ASOST Team should disseminate short research summaries based on the annotated bibliography presented in Appendix F that highlight the value and benefits of ASOST programming as well as the need for alignment.

Recommended Longer-Term Actions:

- » Engage in a public relations and dissemination campaign to engage key stakeholders in understanding the importance of high-quality ASOST for children and families.

4. Engage in a Process to Create a Single Set of ASOST Quality Indicators through a Phased Approach

The vast majority of study participants—ranging from national experts to state leaders to ASOST program administrators—strongly recommended that the state take steps to align quality initiatives and indicators. Many noted that an important first step requires creating a common vision, framework and logic model to guide the work (as recommended above). Stakeholders in other states engaged in similar alignment activities reported success in developing a phased-in approach rather than changing the initiatives and associated indicators all at once. Moreover, many reported successes in requiring programs to meet a core set of indicators that are required by all ASOST programs but allowing some flexibility that acknowledges the unique aspects of quality that are valued by separate quality initiatives. To address this recommendation, the research team recommends the following short- and longer-term action steps.



Recommended Short-Term Actions:

- » Complete a thorough review of the key research associated with each possible common indicator to use the information to inform the selection of a common set of indicators. As noted in the research findings, there are currently four domains—Interactions, Curriculum, Family Engagement, and Evaluation—with at least one indicator required by ASOST quality initiatives. Although the curated review of research presented earlier in this report summarizes the benefits that have been documented of high-quality ASOST, the study authors recommend a thorough review of research associated with existing items to select a comprehensive list of indicators that are predictive of quality.
- » Engage in a process of garnering input from a broad range of stakeholders to inform the selection of a comprehensive set of indicators to be used across ASOST quality initiatives. The study authors recognize the importance of engaging stakeholders in reviewing any set of indicators to ensure that they are most relevant to afterschool program quality improvement. Therefore, rather than recommending that the ASOST Team adopt indicators based on either this study's findings or based simply on a review of research evidence, the research team recommends engaging stakeholders in the selection process.
- » Determine a comprehensive, agreed-upon list of core quality indicators that to be used by all ASOST programs in the Commonwealth, based on the steps above. In the short-term, focus on the four areas that currently have the most alignment: Interactions, Curriculum, Family Engagement, and Evaluation.

Recommended Longer-Term Actions:

- » Engage in a similar process for other domains (beyond the four noted above), once there is agreement around the domains and indicators, to be used by ASOST programs participating in multiple ASOST quality initiatives.
 - » Finalize, based on the recommended process, a list of quality indicators that have the same level of specificity as the current ASOST-Q indicators for all the domains that reflect the common perspective of quality (as obtained through the process described in detail). This set of indicators could be used by all ASOST quality initiatives in the Commonwealth.
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- » Support programs participating in multiple initiatives. The core set of indicators will allow each ASOST quality initiative to retain its own set of quality indicators, but will allow flexibility for programs participating in multiple initiatives. For example, a program participating in one program, such as a 21st CCLC program, could provide evidence of quality using the existing set of 21st CCLC quality indicators. However, a program participating in both QRIS and 21st CCLC would only be required to provide evidence of quality based on the core set of indicators and a selected set that meets the minimal requirements that were agreed upon by all ASOST programs.

5. Address Barriers to Participation in EEC and ESE Initiatives

One of the goals EEC and ESE had for the study was to learn how to increase participation across initiatives funded by each state agency. Specifically, the state was eager to hear what actions state agencies could take to support 21st CCLC provider participation in QRIS. Moreover, the state was interested in learning about ways to support EEC programs in applying for 21st Century funds.

Recommended Short-Term Actions:

- » Develop a guide of the existing funding streams and mechanisms for allocating funding for ASOST programs and disseminate information regarding the eligibility, application, and funding process. Currently, 21st CCLC offer an opportunity for programs to compete for funds. Because 21st CCLC funding is primarily allocated through local education agencies, many community-based organizations (CBOs) do not have a deep understanding of the application process. Providing descriptive information to all providers could be a useful first step in increasing participation in multiple ASOST quality initiative.
- » Provide guidance and technical assistance to ASOST providers to assist with the process of applying for ASOST funds. In recent years, ESE has provided technical support around the application and specifically offered guidance on how CBOs can apply. The ASOST Team should explore existing efforts to provide ASOST programs with information about quality initiatives and develop a matrix of opportunities that could be offered to all programs. This work could be completed by an organization outside of EEC and ESE, such as the Massachusetts Afterschool Partnership.



Recommended Longer-Term Actions:

- » Address the differences between the measurement and verification protocols of public school operated programs and community based organizations. EEC and ESE are committed to raising the quality of programs regardless of oversight. Therefore, there needs to be some form of shared data and school-based programs need to participate. A simplified, shared quality assessment tool specific to afterschool could be helpful, but requires additional research (see Recommendation 6 below).

6. Support Additional Research

This study provided EEC and ESE with information to support the process of alignment and to inform next steps in creating a single set of quality indicators for ASOST programs. However, the current study also uncovered several areas that would benefit from additional research and exploration. The EDC team strongly recommends additional research to inform the development of a final set of quality indicators that will be more relevant and useful for the ASOST field. The recommendations in this section are organized around short-term actions, a list of the recommended research studies, and suggestions for longer-term goals.

Recommended Short-Term Actions for the ASOST Team:

- » Review the proposed studies listed below and determine which research study would be most important to meet the needs of EEC, ESE and other ASOST stakeholders.
- » Support a single study, or a series of studies (listed below) based on existing priorities as well as funding available to support such efforts.

Recommended Research:

- » Support research on the alignment between EEC licensing and regulations and ASOST quality indicators. The current study focused on quality initiatives and did not include the EEC regulations. However, in every interview and focus group discuss with providers, the topic of licensing was raised. Many ASOST providers reported that they found the “extensive EEC regulations” “overwhelming” and “misaligned.” The EEC regulations’ relationship with early childhood programs is more directly aligned, but many providers in school buildings and who have hired part-time staff found the regulations prohibitive to participation in the QRIS. The research team recommends a study that examines licensing in relation to ASOST to identify lessons learned by other states and to leverage the work of



organizations such as the BUILD Initiative. This study would benefit from a cross-state focus group to learn from each other's experiences. A number of stakeholders reported that they believe this work is essential before making final decisions about shared quality indicators.

- » Conduct research on how to best address the needs of summer programs through the set of articulated quality indicators. The research team recommends another important area for future research on how the ASOST quality initiatives could be used to improve summer programs. EEC licensed programs that run afterschool often have affiliated summer programs with an additional set of regulations and indicators through the Department of Health. Education researchers have recently started to pay more attention to the potential of summer programs to support students and families in order to prevent "summer slide" as well as increase physical activity and social-emotional learning while school is not in session. Many of the lessons learned by aligning afterschool quality indicators could be applied to summer programs. The research team recommends a research study exploring how summer programs and their regulations could align with the work presented here and the proposed study on EEC regulations.
- » Conduct research to determine the evaluation and measurement tools that could be used across programs that best meet the nature and need of each ASOST quality initiative. After the Commonwealth has developed a shared set of core quality indicators across afterschool programs, selecting a set of tools, or creating a shared tool will take additional work and funded research. Throughout this report, the research team has shared resources and feedback about specific evaluation tools.
- » Consider supporting research to address other important questions and issues raised by study participants. The specific issues and questions raised are as follows:
 - How can the state best support the sharing of data so that programs are only entering it once even if participating in multiple initiatives?
 - What are the ASOST program administrator and providers' perspectives regarding the quality, relevance, and usefulness of training that is available for collecting data using required tools (including SACERS, APAS, etc.)? What are stakeholder perspectives regarding the new online training available for APAS? How effective are different types of training and is the cost of the training viewed as worthwhile?



- Do other measurement tools exist that could be used in the state's QRIS that provide useful data on the quality of afterschool programs and meet the needs of the range of ASOST programs? What are the tradeoffs in changing measurement tools?
- What measurement tools exist that can be used both for quality improvement and for monitoring, that are valid and reliable, and that assess similar constructs of ASOST quality?

Recommended Longer-term Actions:

The longer-term goal of supporting additional research is to build a body of work to support the continuous quality improvement of afterschool programs in Massachusetts. Data from ongoing research will provide needed leverage for additional funding for afterschool programs. In addition, as mentioned throughout this report, there are other states tackling very similar issues. The current study and additional research on this topic would position Massachusetts as a leader in using research to inform best practices.

The timing of these tasks is dependent many moving pieces. While some can be started immediately, others are dependent on some of the other recommendations and proposed additional research. The research team recognizes that this report provides the first step in a longer process. Based on what we heard from EEC and ESE and providers in the field, everyone is determined and excited to get started.



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Appendix A. Interview and Focus Group Protocols/ Survey Questions

Interview Protocol

We are conducting a study about the different standards that afterschool programs follow (QRIS, School-Aged Child Care, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, ASOST-Q grants, and Council on Accreditation).

1. Please tell me about your experience in working with these standards.
2. Please provide example/s of why it is difficult for your program to adhere to multiple standards
3. If you could create a new set of standards for AfterSchool, what would you keep? What would you change?

Focus Group

1. Please tell us about your experience working with multiple sets of standards in your work.
2. How familiar are you with the following programs? (QRIS, ASOST-Q...)
3. Which programs are you currently involved with (QRIS, ASOST-Q...)
 - a. Yes/No
4. How much does (QRIS, ASOST-Q etc...) benefit the quality of your program
1=not at all 5=very much so
5. What change to standards and quality improvement initiatives would you make first?

Survey

1. To what extent do ESE/EEC quality initiatives in which you participate benefit the quality of your program? (select from Very Much, Somewhat, A Little, Not at all, and N/A)
2. If you participate in an EEC program (QRIS or subsidy) AND an ESE program (21st CCLC or ASOST-Q), please let us know about your experience working with multiple sets of standards and/or requirements. Provide specific examples if possible:
3. What ONE change to afterschool/out-of-school time standards/requirements would be the most helpful?



Appendix B. Alignment Database Summary Table

Subdomain	QRIS	Public School Child Care	COA	ASOST-Q	21 st CCLC
Health & Safety	1	32	28	0	1
Emergency Information	0	12	1	0	0
Health care staff	1	2	0	0	0
Health policy	0	4	8	0	1
Injury Prevention	0	5	5	0	0
Medication	0	4	2	0	0
Physical Fitness	0	0	7	0	0
Preventative Health Procedures	0	5	5	0	0
Interactions	5	10	16	1	11
Peer/Peer Interactions	0	0	6	0	1
Staff/Child Interactions	5	10	10	1	10
Curriculum	6	3	15	2	10
Academics/ Curriculum	1	0	7	2	6
Activities/ Experiences	4	2	7	0	4
Materials	1	1	1	0	0
Professional Development Requirements	17	0	0	0	0
Education/ Experience	9	0	0	0	0
Professional Development	8	0	0	0	0
Family Engagement	9	8	9	1	2
Program tools and policies	5	3	6	0	0
Program/family interactions	4	5	3	1	2
Business Practices	16	19	11	0	0
Business Practices	16	19	11	0	0
Community Engagement/District Partnerships	4	0	2	1	0
Community Engagement/ District Partnerships	4	0	2	1	0
Serving Special Populations	3	8	1	1	0
Serving Special Populations	3	8	1	1	0
Physical Environment	3	19	10	0	1
Physical Environment	3	19	10	0	1
Transportation	0	2	0	0	0
Transportation	0	2	0	0	0
Evaluation	3	3	0	1	1
Evaluation	3	3	0	1	1
Grand Total	67	104	92	7	26



Appendix C. Annotated Bibliography

Afterschool Alliance. (2014). *Looking at the data: Afterschool programs using data to better serve students. Metlife foundation afterschool alert. Issue brief no. 66.* Washington, DC: Afterschool Alliance.

This report empathizes the need for afterschool programs to collect and analyze a variety of types of outcome data, program structure (operationalized through mission and vision statement), and “strong leadership in place.” It reviews various successful programs across the country. To help determine what to evaluate, the Harvard Family Research Project’s afterschool program evaluation toolkit recommends that afterschool programs consider: if the information collected aligns with the program’s goals and content, if the measures make sense in the context of the program’s lifespan, if the data are easily available and accessible, and if the data collected will be of use to the program or its stakeholders.

Afterschool Alliance. (2014). *Taking a deeper dive into afterschool: Positive outcomes and promising practices.* Washington, DC: Afterschool Alliance.

The goals of this report were to examine the role that afterschool programs play to support positive behavior, positive attitudes toward school and improved academic performance among children and to explore the afterschool program practices associated with positively influencing students in the aforementioned areas. The first section of the report focuses on positive outcomes related to afterschool related to school engagement, behavior, and academic performance. The second section highlights and outlines four “promising practices”: intentional programming/strong program design, staff quality, effective partnerships, and program evaluation and improvement. The third section is focused on highlighting programs that are good examples of the positive outcomes.

Grossman, J. B., Lind, C., Hayes, C., McMaken, J., & Gersick, A. (2009). *The cost of quality out-of-school-time programs.* New York: Public/Private Ventures.

This study examines the cost of quality out-of-school-time (OST) programs and how do costs vary in different types of OST programs. Quality programs were defined as programs with high attendance rates, high staff/youth ratios (1:8.3 elementary & 1:9.3 teen programs), highly qualified staff (84% 2 year or 4 year degree), and leadership opportunities for older youth. The key overarching finding of the report is that costs of quality OST programs vary greatly, driven by: program directors’ choices (when and how long—number of days and hours—the program operated; what activities it offered; the staff/youth ratio, etc.); available resources (funding, as well as donated goods and services); local conditions (such as the ages, needs and interests of children and cost structures in particular cities)



James-Burdumy, S., Dynarski, M., Moore, M., Deke, J. & Mansfield, W., & Pistorino, C. (2005). *When Schools Stay Open Late: The National Evaluation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program: New Findings*. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

This study examined 21st Century centers (N=26) in twelve districts within one state. These centers offered homework sessions, academic activities, enrichment (art, drama, music), recreation. Students were randomly assigned to 21st century group (N = 1,258) or a control group (N = 1,050). Treatment-group students were less likely to be in parent care, but no less likely to be in self-care compared to control group. Data was collected from parents, teachers, students, and school records in fall 2000, spring 2001, and spring 2002. Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) was administered at baseline and follow-up. The treatment group did not have higher levels of achievement, but there was evidence of higher levels of negative behavior among the treatment group. However, the treatment-group students did have improved feelings of safety afterschool. Implementation findings: these programs served mostly low-income schools that enrolled large proportions of minority students, many of center staff were teachers and staff turnover was high but program leadership was stable. Most elementary students attended 2-3 days/week, average middle school student attended one day/week.

James-Burdumy, S., Dynarski, M., & Deke, J. (2008). *After-School Program Effects on Behavior: Results from the 21st CCLC Program National Evaluation*. *Economic Inquiry*, 46(1) 13-18.

This study looked at after school programs in both elementary and middle school. At the elementary level, the study found that after-school programs contributed to behavior problems – 22% of treatment group students were disciplined for behavior compared to 17% control group students. Also a higher rate of suspensions was seen among the treatment group. At the middle school level, there was also evidence of increased negative behavior, but it was mixed. Program participants had higher values on a negative behavior composite, and were more likely to break things on purpose and take illegal drugs. The authors theorize that students may misbehave more due to fatigue and acting out because they are spending more time in school. Additionally, the authors also suggest that, the influence of peers with whom they spend time afterschool, or the lack of discipline in afterschool programs might also contribute. This final hypothesis was supported- students reported that schools had stricter disciplinary environments than the afterschool programs.



Leos-Urbel, J. (2015). What works afterschool? *The relationship between after-school program quality, program attendance, and academic outcomes*. *Youth & Society*, 47(5), 684-706.

After-school programs are one of the primary policy levers outside of the school day aimed at enhancing children's development and education, and an important component of the effort to close the academic achievement gap that persists along socio-economic and racial lines. While some research has found positive effects of participation in after-school programs on educational and behavioral outcomes, especially among high quality programs and other studies have found no effect. The Out-of-School Time (OST) Program Observation Instrument is used as the measure. Analyses presented in the study use a unique panel data set that includes observational measures of program quality, and rich student and school-level data for a sample of 29 after-school programs serving students in Grades K-8 in New York City in both 2008 and 2009. 5,108 program participants in Grades 4 to 8. The study finds that younger students are less sensitive to program quality in their attendance patterns. Middle school students attend programs with a greater focus on opportunities for purposeful engagement less often; a more supportive environment relates to increased test scores for elementary school participants, and greater opportunities for structured interactions between staff and participants are associated with improvements in reading scores for middle school students. A greater focus on purposeful engagement is associated with lower test scores for elementary and middle school students, even when including a strong set of controls. This may imply that after-school program activities that challenge students may not always be implemented in a productive manner. For instance, activities that do not meet students' needs for autonomy or adequately promote skill development may hinder the development of intrinsic motivation, which could negatively influence student outcomes.

Mahoney, J., & Zigler, E.F. (2006). *Translating Science to Policy under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Lessons from the National Evaluation of the 21st-Century Community Learning Centers*. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 27(4), 282-294.

This report looks at the impact of early evaluations of 21st Century Community Learning Centers. One of the first evaluations first year findings provided the foundation for a proposed 40% reduction in funding for the centers (\$400 million). The evaluation suggested that the 21st CCLCs had limited impact on academic or social outcomes, not congruent with broader literature on after-school programs.

Critical commentaries and detailed critiques of the proposed funding decision and the evaluation on which it was based followed—criticized in Harvard Family Research Project's *The Evaluation Exchange* (2003) and advocacy groups denounced the proposed funding reduction. The critics pointed out several important facts. Most of the sites in the evaluation were in the earliest stages of development and indeed there was evidence of low attendance (average 2 days/week) because many of the sites were not mature. In evaluation research, critics



pointed out, it is better to hold off on outcome evaluations until the program has completed the start up and innovation phases of program development. Funding cuts were proposed on the basis of one follow-up assessment during the course of the school year—even though the second year findings weren't available yet. Program-related impacts were only allowed to take place over a 5-8 month period in the evaluation's first year. Also, little attention was paid to program characteristics or implementation, so there was little information on program features that could be linked to outcomes. Evaluation began in the fall of 2000, prior to passage of NCLB in 2002—which changed funding, content, and operation of the 21st CCLC programs. So some programs assessed in the national evaluation either no longer exist or operate under substantively different guidelines thus limiting generalizability. Also, there were mismatched comparison groups—it was not possible to employ random assignment for the middle school sample, so propensity score matching was used to establish comparison groups. But the matching was based on limited information about the students and baseline assessment. There was also cross-over and contamination—among students originally relegated to comparison group, 8% of elementary and 14% of middle school students participated in 21st CCLC after-school program during the school year. No indication that cross-over was considered in middle school analyses.

The authors of this report argue that important policy decisions shouldn't be made on basis of any single evaluation. The posit that a study is not scientific until it passes professional scrutiny through a process of peer review- the first year findings from Mathematica's evaluation weren't published in a peer review journal before policy decisions were made. Scientists and evaluators have a responsibility to articulate strengths and weaknesses of their own research—limitations aren't mentioned in the executive summary—they should have had a limitations section of report.

Paluta, L. M., Lower, L., Anderson-Butcher, D., Gibson, A., & Iachini, A. L. (2016). *Examining the quality of 21st century community learning center after-school programs: Current practices and their relationship to outcomes*. *Children & Schools*, 38(1), 49-56.

In the United States, more than 8.5 million youths participate in after-school programs. A recent meta-analysis and numerous other studies have shown that these programs help: improve academic performance, heighten self-esteem, and diminish problem behaviors. Not all after-school programs achieve these outcomes: for example, some researchers found that only programs with SAFE (sequenced, active, focused, and explicit) features had significant, positive youth outcomes. Other research has found that participation in some OST settings, such as youth sports, may increase engagement in problem behaviors, such as substance use and violence. When defining quality, the study often cited features include psychological and physical safety, opportunities to develop academic and social skills, and strategies to engage families. The aim of this study was to identify which quality indicators and outcomes were most and least evident to stakeholders involved in one type of after-school program:



21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLCs), and to examine the relationship between perceived quality and outcomes, exploring which program quality components are most related to positive youth outcomes. CCLC model prioritizes: (1) youth development (for example, character education); (2) academic enhancement (for example, tutors); and (3) literacy and support programs (for example, parental education). The Ohio Quality Assessment Rubric (O-QAR) was used to measure program quality and outcomes. The study has found that 21st CCLCs excelled at developing caring relationships with youths, promoting prosocial norms, and enhancing participants' life skills. In contrast, stakeholders perceived PFE (parent and family engagement) indicators as less favorable, both in terms of quality and outcomes, suggesting that programs struggled with how to support caregivers and make a positive impact on home environments. Academic outcomes were not as low as PFE but still had room to improve compared with youth development. The findings reinforce the notion that the best after-school programs serve as more than just safe havens. Specifically, findings suggested that PFE had the strongest influence on the relationship between quality and outcomes. Both youth development and facilities/safety & equipment had less impact on the relationships between quality and outcomes. Some implications or suggestions of the study are in order to enhance PFE, for schools and their partners to consider (a) assessing and meeting families' basic needs; (b) building relationships with parents and other caregivers; (c) authentically engaging parents and other caregivers as experts and leaders; and (d) fostering parent-to-parent support networks.

Smith, C., Akiva, T., McGovern, G., & Peck, S. C. (2014). *Afterschool quality*. *New Directions for Youth Development* (144), 31-44.

Emerging consensus on several core components of afterschool service quality is supported by innovation by afterschool leaders and a scientific evidence base. Shared standards that describe best practices for instructional staff and site managers, and the application of these standards at scale through afterschool quality improvement systems (QIS), represent important translations of evidence-based practice into policy. The opportunity to follow the interests of children and youth—and to engage a wide range of expertise from local communities—is a unique and defining strength of afterschool programs. It states that practical theory development connects youth development and the afterschool experience. It also emphasizes time that youth development happens in both long and short cycles (arcs and “hot” episodes) and that program designs that integrate adult support through challenges (for example, difficulties that arise when planning a service project) are where skills advance. Connections with Schools are also highlighted when afterschool programs and school day classrooms provide continuity of expectations (for example, norms for social interaction; introduction and extension of subject matter) and relationships (for example, communication between school day and afterschool teachers), this can expect skills learned in one setting to transfer to the other.



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2006). *Promoting Quality in Afterschool Programs through State Child Care Regulations.*

Every state has child care licensing regulations (health and safety requirements) that specify a baseline of adequate quality as determined by each state. Implementation of state licensing regulations also varies widely across states. States inspect and certify facilities servicing children to ensure they provide an environment free from hazards and adequate space for age-appropriate activities. Regulations prohibit certain spaces (bathrooms, exit routes) from being used for multiple purposes. Child-staff ratios ensure that an adequate number of adults are present to support regular interactions between children and staff. Regulations may monitor safety and nutrition of food served, immunizations, maintenance of basic hygiene, CPR, first aid. However, there are challenges associated with licensing afterschool programs. Regulations need to be flexible enough to apply to the wide range of afterschool options (for example, when all teachers must have training in child development, it won't necessarily account for those with training as an elementary/secondary school teacher, or those with an arts education background). How do states determine which regulations should apply to certain programs/settings? States also have to acknowledge the barriers some programs will face in meeting regulations; smaller community-based providers may lack resources to meet regulations, particularly related to facilities.

Vandell, D. L., Reisner, E. R., & Pierce, K. M. (2007). *Outcomes linked to high-quality afterschool programs: Longitudinal findings from the study of promising afterschool programs.* Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates.

A new study by researchers at the University of California, Irvine, the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Policy Studies Associates, Inc. finds that regular participation in high-quality afterschool programs is linked to significant gains in standardized test scores and work habits as well as reductions in behavior problems among disadvantaged students. These gains help offset the negative impact of a lack of supervision afterschool. The two-year study followed almost 3,000 low-income, ethnically diverse elementary and middle school students from eight states in six major metropolitan centers and six smaller urban and rural locations. About half of the young people attended high-quality afterschool programs at their schools or in their communities. The study found theoretical linkages between afterschool experiences and student outcomes in the elementary and middle grades. The programs offered services four or five days a week and were free of charge to students. Program leaders expected students to participate regularly throughout the school year. The programs had strong partnerships with neighborhoods, schools, and community organizations. Through a mix of recreational, arts, and enrichment activities, programs were observed to nurture positive interpersonal relationships among students and to actively engage them.



Zhang, J. J., & Byrd, C. E. (2006). *Successful After-School Programs: The 21st Century Community Learning Centers*. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance*, 77(8), 3-6.

In concert with NCLB, the 21st CCLC funding was restructured into block grants for state departments of education to allocate as they saw fit. So 21st CCLC authority was changed from federal governance to a state formula grant. The 21st CCLC design specifically focused on being a jump start initiative to develop self-sustainable, locally supported programs. Funding is focused on start-up infusion, not longer-term support. Five year programs are funded with decreasing amounts each year (100%, 100%, 80%, 60%, 40%). Communities that hosted the 21st CCLC programs demonstrated high needs for educational programs and services in terms of academic enrichment, health/fitness, nutrition, character education, adult education, parental involvement, literacy education, safe haven for children. More than 50% of participants were African American, over 50% from households with less than \$30K annual income. Twenty- twenty five percent of youths were overweight, suggesting there is an important need for physical health education. This particular article says "the comprehensive evaluation project revealed that the 21st CCLC program represented a cornucopia of positive accomplishments. Program strengths lie in the areas of management, academic focus, program delivery, enrollment and attendance, sport and fitness activities, snack offering, and community involvement. One such program strength that should be expanded is within the realm of physical education and obesity prevention. Fewer than 30% of America's students receive adequate level of regular physical activities during the day- after-school programs play increasingly important role in providing opportunities for youths to fill needs for sports and fitness activities.



Appendix D. Relevant Work from Other States

Indiana's "Top 10" :

1. Staff relate to all children and youth in positive ways
2. Staff interact with all children and youth to help them learn
3. Staff use positive techniques to guide the behavior of children and youth
4. Staff support families' involvement in the program
5. The safety and security of all children and youth are protected
6. The program develops and implements a system for promoting continuous quality improvement
7. Program policies and procedures are in place to protect the safety of all children and youth
8. Staff are professionally qualified to work with all children and youth
9. Staff (paid, volunteer, and substitute) are given an orientation to the job before working with children/youth
10. The training needs of the staff are assessed, and training is relevant to the responsibilities

Documents from other state work on creating afterschool quality standards:

http://mdoutofschooltime.org/penn_station/folders/Documents/MOST_Standard_Core_Final_2010.pdf

<https://www.schoolsoutwashington.org/pages/quality-standards>

http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/CDD/Docs/Licensing/AS_Regulations_Final.pdf

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ba/as/documents/qualstandexplern.pdf>



Appendix E. ASOST Administrators' Comments about EEC Regulations

Most of the issues raised by ASOST program administrators were related to EEC licensing regulations as opposed to QRIS specifically or differences between any of the quality initiatives. As a group, administrators reported being frustrated by the application of “group child care” regulations to afterschool programs. They reported that during the school day, school-aged kids are in public school classrooms under the regulation of ESE. During afterschool, these same children are the responsibility of programs that are often licensed through EEC. Program administrators reported that differences in requirements for playgrounds, background checks, professional development, first aid and CPR certification, lead paint, supervision, and group size can create challenges for school-based ASOST providers. Moreover, they recommended that these EEC licensing can create a challenge in providing high-quality ASOST services.

Almost every ASOST program administrator spoke about challenges associated with playground regulations. Several administrators reported that they were located in schools with playgrounds that children can use during the day but because of regulations, these children are not able to access these before or afterschool. Some reported not allowing children to play on playgrounds during afterschool, a decision that restricts outdoor play and also leads to behavior issues with children in need of gross motor stimulation and who question why they can use the playground during the day but not before or afterschool.

The differences in regulations for EEC licensed programs working with school-aged children cause difficulty in supporting “seamless transitions,” one of the hallmarks of high quality afterschool care. For the staff and the youth in the afterschool program, lack of alignment leads to disruptions resulting from two sets of rules for the same physical setting. One program administrator reported that the students were so frustrated by the challenge that the staff suggested they turn their frustration into a service learning experience. The students learned how to communicate with local government, advocated for change, and were rewarded with improvements to their playground. This particular story had a happy ending, but underscores how the misalignment of standards affects the every-day experiences of children.

Several program administrators mentioned problems with regulations related to supervision. For example, children need to be escorted to the bathroom per EEC regulations but can go by themselves during the school day. This difference also has implications for group size mandates and staff roles. Focus group participants reported having to move staff around constantly throughout the afternoon in order to have the correct adult-child ratios, including an available adult for trips to the bathroom.

The group size and supervision regulations are especially frustrating when making hiring decisions. As one director explained, “I could hire someone with a lot of experience for \$40/hour who could



handle a group of 20 kids, but I need to hire two inexperienced people at \$20/hour because of regulations. Programs that have 21st Century funding or are School-based are not held to these regulations and therefore can hire the more experienced staff." Related to this issue, one focus group participant explained, "if you are school-based all you need is an R& R signature that says the program is 'meeting the intention' of the license."

Another frequent topic raised by providers was the different requirements for background checks. ASOST administrators spoke of this in regards to hiring someone who had experience teaching in public schools, but still required an EEC background check before starting work with an EEC licensed ASOST program. One administrator explained the issue by stating, "it duplicates effort." One administrator also mentioned the fact that background checks need to be paid out-of-pocket by the individual teacher.

Overall, there was an overwhelming feeling of a mismatch between EEC regulations and afterschool programs. As one administrator put it bluntly, "EEC regs are missing the point of afterschool." Another added that it was a mistake to put afterschool under the umbrella of group child care. The concerns voiced during interviews and focus groups argue for a comprehensive examination of the role of EEC regulations in afterschool and opportunities for changes that will make it easier to focus on increasing access and quality.



Appendix F. Additional Survey Data

Participants were asked to reflect on their experience working with multiple sets of standards and/or requirements.

Overall, many seem pleased with at least some of their experiences with standards and requirements

- » Because this is a new program, we are working toward getting the program started, we are working well with the QRIS and my coach is wonderful.
- » QRIS helps you to focus on the area of your program that need improvements and helps you to reach goals for the program quality.
- » Working with multiple sets of standards and requirements has been beneficial to the quality and sustainability of my programs as we grow and expand to better serve a greater population of children, families, and neighborhoods we work in.
- » Being a recipient of ASOST-Q grant we have had the opportunity to utilize the QRIS which helped us to see the weaknesses and strengths of the program
- » Standards for EEC OST and ASOST-Q programs are similar in the focus area our program addresses: parent engagement. Our parents are provided with the knowledge and experiences to create a new skill set for themselves, ultimately improving the lives of their families exponentially.
- » QRIS is great to help set the standards and guidelines for teachers to know the expectations. The ASOST grant has allowed for opportunities to meet other OST programs and share best practices with one another.

One of the repeated themes in participant feedback was the need for more alignment between standards:

- » Standards need to be streamlined
 - » Can be confusing and feel fragmented
 - » It would be easier if licensing and quality initiatives were more directly aligned.
 - » It can be frustrating, especially when using the same tools (e.g. the APT) but asked to use them in two different ways. Wish there was more alignment between the QRIS standards and 21st Century requirements. For example, the SACERS does not seem very aligned with 21st Century program quality indicators.
-



- » It would be a benefit if EEC regulations and QRIS standards were aligned so there would be 1 set of guidelines to follow
- » working with multiple sets of standards to offer quality programming is very frustrating. We need to streamline the standards and work together to follow one set of standards. Some of the professional development qualification for staff is just not feasible for part time positions. It seems we just get all group leaders set then we have staff turnover and have to start the process again.
- » QRIS standards: It is very time consuming to use multiple tools and the tools overlap in many areas. Doing them every year makes it hard to mentor staff and get goals completed.
- » It is not easy to adhere to numerous requirements for different funders/programs- and at times it seems as if people recreate the wheel when more standards evaluations might be effective. However, it is an inescapable part of running a youth development organization in 2016.
- » It can present a large time commitment, and sometimes the requirements conflict/ present challenges.

The other major theme that came from the responses was a sense of frustration at how difficult it can be to meet the standards, especially for programs in more economically disadvantaged areas.

- » We receive funding from ASOST-Q and are a vendor for 21st CCLC grant recipients in our region. Assessment and differing vision on target/program structure (for 21st cclc) create challenges for our small organization
- » We have found EEC quality initiatives to be unwieldy and ineffective. We have felt that EEC is trying to weed out small, community based providers with these initiatives because the requirements are unreasonable for organizations that have a small, hands-on staff. As one staff member stated "QRIS is more about proving to some outside person that our program is quality rather than improving our program quality." We already have licensing for "proving quality." We don't need both systems. ESE, on the other hand, has been a blessing. Our ASOST funding allowed us to add programming that we had no other way of funding. That programming, which focused on engaging families of high needs children, improved our overall program, came with networking and training and was, in general, a great and supportive experience - very much the opposite of our experience with QRIS.
- » My program participates in QRIS mainly and while I believe it is a wonderful system that will really enhances all programs involved, I do feel that the requirements and standards can be a bit harsh for programs who have older buildings and are established in more rural or poor areas. I believe to a certain extent that these things should be taken into



consideration and if a program cannot meet certain standards, such as an enclosed play area, QRIS should provide viable resources, such as where to receive grant monies that are specifically set aside for a program working towards a QRIS Level, who is working directly with the Quality Program Specialist and has an effective CQIP in place. These allocated funds would allow many programs to have an opportunity to meet QRIS requirement for efficiently rather than waiting for a grant opportunity where they are pitted against other programs in specific areas where perhaps they score higher in QRIS because of the means and communities they serve which may bring in more funding.

- » Currently we are using SACERS, APT, Strengthening Families and Arnett. The QRIS requirements include these tools but also ask for additional requirements. While we understand that EEC is looking to be comprehensive, the expectation to meet some of the requirements is virtually impossible given the state's reimbursement rates. Furthermore the time needed to successfully administer the tools and create financially achievable goals in the CQIP is challenging.

Participants were also asked what ONE change to afterschool/out-of-school time standards/requirements would be the most helpful

Some of the themes from the previous question were touched upon here as well, particularly in terms of aligning standards and the measurement tools

- » It would be great if ASOST-Q programs used the SAYO evaluations as is required by the 21 CCLC grants and had site visits to help improve program quality.
- » Streamline the data collection so that there are similar standards and easier collection.
- » Use the same measurement tools. Use APT observation tool for both 21st Century and QRIS (instead of Class/Arnett). Or, perhaps, if a program receives 21st Century funds, allow that to count as at least a Level 2 in QRIS.
- » Do not nest other standards within the EEC standards (QRIS contains several other sets of standards, all of which are very time consuming to use well). Instead take the time to CHOOSE what is MOST important to the state based on top priority needs of youth and families. Then incorporate those standards into your own tool. This process was done by the Agenda for Children in Cambridge, who took the NIOST tool and gelled it down to a smaller tool that is then used by program staff to evaluate programming based on observations. A coach is provided by the City to help staff decide on actions to implement based on their observations. Actions are focused and specific to the needs of the children in the program. There has been nothing else, hands down, that has improved our program more than the very concrete, direct ideas that came from those observations and that focused tool. The state should be replicating the Agenda for Children model. There should



be a program like Agenda for Children that exists in each major city and then for regions in areas made up of small towns. The state should fund and supervise the people who run these programs and hold them to a high standard around implementing a model that is connected to national standards but also to the specific needs of that community. Create pods of learning instead of trying to make every region and organization the same.

- » Have one set standards and one tool that aligns all the areas for QRIS.

In addition, a major theme from respondents was around requirements that they felt were difficult to achieve. Of particular concern were some of the education and physical environment requirements to meet certain standards.

- » I think the training requirement needs to be adjusted for part time staff, especially staff who are in college or are on a distinct career path separate from the world of education.
 - » Level 1 of QRIS is where we are now. Level 2 can be easily obtained with a few roadblocks. The assessment of students in our B/A school program is not something I think should be a requirement. Our program would be on Level 2 if it were not for a few minor requirements.
 - » The challenge we are facing to get the program to QRIS 2 is specifically the requirement of the Director needing a Bachelors Degree.
 - » Eliminating the requirement for the part time, afterschool Site Coordinator to hold a bachelor degree (required for QRIS level 2).
 - » It is very difficult for an afterschool program to hire someone with HS diploma or even college if they do not have 9 months experience working with school aged children.
 - » Ability to utilize school day educators in the OST program, without the challenges of duplicate background record checks and need for complete EEC staff files and QRIS expectations (training requirements, individual professional development plans, etc.)
 - » Reporting requirements for 21stC seem prohibitive for community-based organizations to administer, although we are well-equipped to deliver programming.
 - » It is difficult to achieve higher ratings with QRIS when you share a space with public schools. You do not always have the ability and opportunity to enhance the space as required.
 - » A recognition of the difference between operating a day care center and a school building.
 - » Educational requirements for staff members should be revised so that those with experience can still hold their current jobs even if they have no degree.
-



- » The one standard I would change would be the qualifications for a site coordinator. In our program, we do not have a site coordinator who has a bachelor's degree, and we can only offer 15-20 hours per week, and we are not a full day payment.
- » Lower educational requirements for staff for QRIS. Most of our staff has experience, but not the classwork required.

Suggestions around professional development and trainings were also popular

- » Training staff members regarding Social/Emotional learning and behavioral strategies.
- » More, More training's for OST programs! Training are not at conducive times for out-of-school time programs. More training's in Western MA.
- » On line PD for staff to meet very specific QRIS standards, like specialized feeding issues for 5CEU's. Those are very hard to organize to get all staff to them.
- » As a change to OST standards/requirements I think there should be an increase in professional development hours for educators and administration to increase the quality of the practitioners. This will benefit the program as a whole and the students as well.
- » Given the number of new staff afterschool has each year there should be an online training to be done within the first 45 days that is specific to elementary school age children; their development, behavior management and supporting meaningful curriculum. What exists is very infant/toddler and preschool oriented, This should be a required training.
- » Training for academic mentors on PARCC,
- » This isn't a "change" but - Please provide training at an administrative level to offer suggestions on how programs can meet all of the requirements on a fixed budget of both time and money.
- » I would like to see choices for the professional development portion of the grant. For example, we would really like to use the money to help develop evaluations, as we have done quite a lot of the service learning trainings (which are great!)

Participants also touched upon concerns around paperwork and more administrative issues

- » Analyzing the pre- and post-data - getting some help with converting the survey information in excel to the state data report. No one in our office knows how to do it well and we have to rely on another teacher to help us with the report.



- » Data collection, reporting and analyzing take too much time away from giving our students what they need. I think we rely too much on the data. I focus on the APT tool to assess and guide my programming.
- » End of year “load”. It seems that everything is due at the same time. Don’t know if that is something that can be fixed.
- » I found the change this year regarding the reduction in paperwork for end-of-summer evaluations and for continuation grants helpful.
- » Eliminate the amount of administrative paper with licensing to allow programs time to focus on quality and family engagement. Too much time chasing paperwork with families and details that don’t actually improve safety.
- » Knowing the deadline for mid year, final report and re-application as far in advance as possible. We would prefer the mid year application to be due in February as January is a very busy month for many other grants.
- » Allowing the program to run for the year rather than stopping the support during the summer, for CBO’s.

Funding was also a major focus

- » As a public school preschool we offer high quality NAEYC Accredited before and afterschool programming as well as summer programming yet we can only access 298 grant funding through EEC.
 - » The one change to the Afterschool would be more money for the summer where most learning loss happens.
 - » Being able to receive some state or federal funding
 - » More funding available for expansion of successful evidenced-based programs
 - » Funding for overhead
 - » I actually feel that there are no standards or requirements that should be changed but more monetary resources to help programs reach these standards should be offered more frequently.
 - » More funding to help programs to easily reach higher levels of QRIS and providing higher quality programming
 - » More funding for higher salaries
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Finally, several respondents touched upon issues that were specific to being an afterschool program, or a program that is distinctly different from daycare or school.

- » Being a public school we have many students who are on IEPs in the afterschool program. IEPs do not carry over into the afterschool program, but many times there is an expectation from parents that we provide the same level of care that happens during the school day. For example, we have children who require toileting, but we do not have access to a private bathroom such as a nurse's office. Or we have children who soil themselves and our policy is for parents to pick up. Parents feel that we should change their children if they soil themselves. I think that this rule is applicable in certain settings, but doesn't work in all settings. I don't feel that not changing a child who has soiled themselves is denying access to a program - in our case it is a result of a lack of proper space and staffing.
 - » The requirement for homework time severely limits programming time when you are contracted for only 1 hr/week with a partner organization.
 - » Partnerships that provide quality after-school programming such as a public school and higher ed partnership rather than drop in programs.
 - » For Summer OST, recognizing municipal summer programs as a program eligible for tuition subsidies. While these programs are not set up as child care settings, parents sometimes use the programs as such and are unable to use their vouchers. This is a particular problem in rural areas where there are no EEC summer programs for school aged children so the vouchers cannot be used!
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Appendix G. Decision Table



TABLE 1. RECOMMENDATIONS: WHY? WHAT? WHO? WHEN?

Steps to Increase the Likelihood of Articulating Achievable Recommendations	Recommended Action	Why? (Rationale)	What and Who? What is needed and who needs to be supportive to achieve this action?	When?
Description of the step	The action statement should be framed in terms of the concrete steps that need to be taken, and who needs to take the action	The rationale should include a brief review of existing research conducted nationally and within the state that provides a justification for supporting the recommended action.	To increase the likelihood that the recommendation will be acted upon, it is important to consider what steps need to be taken within and across each state agency and who needs to be engaged in order for the recommendation to be realized. Leaders within government as well as stakeholders outside of government should be considered.	For each specific sub-action, it is important to consider when the action will occur and important milestones.
Example	Amend the state's early childhood education licensure and credential model across sectors to ensure credentials and licenses are aligned and 'stackable'	Research shows that early care and education teachers face barriers to continued education including a misalignment in credentials and licenses. Some states have created aligned and stackable credentials. Ensuring credentials and licenses issued across state agencies will reduce a major barrier faced by early educators.	<p>State agency staff engaged a statewide stakeholder group (including IHEs and representatives of all state agencies) and reviewed existing credentials, certifications and licenses issued across state agencies and have created recommendations for each commissioner to consider.</p> <p>Commissioners will make recommendations to the board to align credentials and licenses.</p> <p>The board will vote on changes in the existing credentials and licenses.</p> <p>Each state agency will assign individual to make changes to align competencies and requirements</p>	<p>Spring 2016</p> <p>Summer 2016</p> <p>Late summer 2016</p> <p>Fall 2016</p>