

Notes from the Southeastern Pennsylvania School Age Child Care Project



Notes from the
Southeastern
Pennsylvania School
Age Child Care
Project

School-Age Curriculum – What Does it Look Like?

In today's arena of quality standards families are looking for more than just safe place to leave their child while they are at work. They want a program that is richer and contains learning components that help improve academic achievement as well as support their child socially, emotionally and physically. Funders investing in out of school time programs want to keep kids safe, help working families, but also seek to improve academic achievement.

The after school field is changing rapidly; with the focus on quality programs and outcomes for youth after school professionals need to become better at articulating their program activities and goals for youth. To complicate and enhance curriculum, school age programs are expected to use the Academic Standards developed for formal classroom education in the much less formal school age child care setting. School age practitioners know they need a curriculum but often struggle with how to explain and develop relevant curricula and programming.

Choices about which activities to pursue are often made without an understanding of why that particular choice was made. Perhaps it was because you liked it or because it is easy and fun to do, or the children like it, but this is just a starting point in planning. To be an effective planner it is necessary to develop your understanding of why you are doing a particular activity. It is important that children have fun, but this is not the sole criterion on which an activity is judged. Practitioners should ask these questions when planning activities: "How will this support learning?" "Does this activity meet the highest quality standards?" For school age care the National After School Association's NAA Standards for Quality School-Age Care and Frank Porter Graham's, Child Development Institute, School Age Care Environmental Rating Scale (SACERS) as well as Keystone STARS quality standards are among the best available tools for examining the activities we offer through the lens of quality.

Let's look at what we need to implement and plan curriculum that meets the needs of school age children. According to our experts at the National Institute on Out-of School Time (NOIST), choosing curriculum activities for an after school program should be based on these eight concepts:

1. An understanding of how children develop and learn
2. Attention to children's needs, interests, and input
3. The goals of the program

December 2008



4. The limitations such as assets of the space you are in, and the resources you have
5. The group leader's teaching style
6. The group leader's understanding of the activity
7. The day's schedule (structured and unstructured times)
8. A sense of what the kids must know, or be able to do in order to successfully participate in the activity.

During the school age years children develop hobbies and interests that often become life time activities or lead to career choices. Children need opportunities to make choices concerning their individual activities. By working with children to develop curriculum activities, you will allow them to develop a sense of ownership in the program and select activities that reflect their interests.

If the goal of your program is to help children grow and develop, understanding developmental learning theory is essential for best practice. While developmentally appropriate practice is not curriculum, it helps us to include physical, cognitive, social and emotional components. Good curriculum contains content that is meaningful, culturally relevant, and has clearly stated outcomes. Curriculum includes both planned and spontaneous learning activities. Appropriate curriculum provides a balance between teacher-directed activities and experiences that emerge from children's interests. Addressing the needs and interests of children and staff is essential. Ideally you want to plan activities that will appeal to both.

It is also important to consider the needs and distinct culture of the community you serve. Are you serving a community where children are at risk of school failure? Are reading scores a problem? If so, you may want to include a literacy component in your curriculum. If behavior is a concern, making it difficult for children to learn, then you may want to focus on social skills, conflict resolution, and emotional development. If high numbers of parents are non-English speaking or under educated and unable to assist their children with homework, a homework component might be an essential part of your curriculum. You may also want to link the after school curriculum to the in-school curriculum and offer enrichment opportunities that can not be achieved during the school day,

Developing a responsive curriculum requires a strong foundation based on your program philosophy. How do you believe children learn and develop? How will the staff support this learning? What are the goals of you school age program? How will you differentiate learning to meet the child's individual needs? What type of program will you offer? The next step is to select a curriculum framework that supports your program philosophy and learning goals.

In school-age care there are few ready-made curriculums that cover all the developmental areas and all academic standards. However, there are some research based curriculum frameworks that can help practitioners address the full range of children's development needs and intentionally connect and support their development and learning. The following are some after school curriculum frameworks suggested by Keystone STARS:

Bickart, Toni S., Judy R. Jablon, and Diane Trister Dodge. 2005. ***Building the primary class room: A complete guide to teaching and learning***. Washington, D.C. and Portsmouth, NH: Teaching Strategies, Inc, and Heinemann.

The National Institute on Out-of-School Time. 2005. ***Links to Learning: A curriculum planning guide for after-school programs***. Nashville: TN: School-Age NOTES.

YMCA of the USA. 2001. ***YMCA School-age care curriculum framework***. Champaign, IL: National Council of Young Men's Christian Association of the United States of America.

If we are to prepare children to become contributing members of society, we need to focus on basis skills. By intentionally planning learning opportunities that are different from school but support cognitive, social, emotional and physical development in a fun, and social, play-based setting practitioners will support both children's academic success and their overall development.

Curriculum is dynamic. It will change from program to program. I may also look different from year to year as you work with different groups of children. Continually review your curriculum and regularly evaluate and improve your program. By assessing and monitoring your program you will be able to support ongoing curriculum development and deliver the best services possible for children and families.

Additional Technology Resources for Curriculum ideas are:

National Partnership for Quality Afterschool Learning. "Afterschool training toolkit: Building quality enrichment activities." Web page. Available at

<http://www.seidl.org/afterschool/toolkits/>.

This website provides information on promising practices for implementing enrichment activities in your after school program. Content areas focus on the arts, literacy, math, science and technology. Also provides links to national and state standards. Also included are methods for linking to other subject areas and linking with families and community.

<http://www.operationrespect.org/>

Programs help sensitize children to the painful effects of behaviors - ridicule, disrespect, ostracism and bullying.

<http://www.circleofinclusion.org>

Activity ideas for children with special needs.

<http://www.learningpage.com>

Lesson plans, and themes

<http://www.kididdles.com>

Music resources and activities

http://www.afterschool.gov/xhtml/topic/t_2/html

Federal resources that support children and youth during out-of school time

<http://www.goodcharacter.com>

Free resources, materials, and lesson plans for teaching character.

<http://www.tolerance.org>

Anti-bias resources for teachers, parents, kids

<http://www.fitsource.nccic.acf.hhs.gov/fitsource/>

Physical activities and health and nutrition activities

<http://www.pakeys.org>

Curriculum statement template, lesson plan template, resources on curriculum, assessment, and standards.

<http://www.cfchildren.org/addresources/>

Teaching safety, social emotional learning

<http://mixinginmath.terc.edu>

Math activities

The Pennsylvania Key (www.pakeys.org) has also developed resources to assist school-age programs as they think about effective curriculum practices. You will find these resources in the Keystone STARS section of the website under document and tools. You will have to scroll down to the optional tools section for STARS 3 and 4. The templates and tools provided include:

1. School Age: Curriculum Statement Template
 2. School Age: Aligning Curriculum with the First Grade Standards
 3. School Age: Aligning Curriculum with the Second Grade Standards
 4. School Age: Lesson Plan Template
- School Age: Activity Schedule – Week-at-a-Glance by Key Learning Area

The Southeastern Pennsylvania School-Age Child Care Project (SEPA SACC) provides professional development opportunities and technical assistance in the area of curriculum for school-age practitioners in the Southeast Region. Please contact our office if you are interested in our resource, *Aligning Curriculum with Developmental Assets*. If you still have questions about school-age curriculum, please call us at 610-617-4550, option #4 and one of our school age associates will be happy to assist you.

Please excuse us if you have received duplicate copies of this publication.

Make sure you visit us at www.sepasacc.org!