

Common Measures of ELO Quality and Illustrations of this work in Nebraska

The Nebraska State Board of Education issued a policy statement in September 2013, and endorsed the national quality principles identified by the Afterschool Alliance. The following eight elements cut across all high quality programs and are the non-negotiable characteristics of program quality in school-based and school-linked programs

School-community partnerships and resource sharing—programs intentionally build and support collaborative relationships with schools, community members, municipal government, businesses and organizations that can form important partnerships in program planning and funding.

Indicators:

- Program builds partnerships as part of sustainability efforts.
- Partnerships are built for purposes of expanded volunteering, increased program quality, broadened resources/materials and visible advocacy for the program.
- Ongoing communication and linkages between and among staff, school staff, community members, youth advisory councils and families are established/active.

“Kids Who Code” introduces Lincoln’s elementary age youth to the world of technology through Coding Academies offered in ELO programs. It is a collaborative venture of the Lincoln CLC and Nebraska Global, a local IT business. At no cost to Lincoln CLC, Nebraska Global supplies a coding curriculum and their staff assist with teaching the clubs three days a week; they also bring in additional coding challenges and opportunities to expand the students’ experiences in the clubs. Students learn to think creatively, reason systematically, and work collaboratively as they learn and apply programming skills to design interactive stories, games, and animations. Nebraska Global staff have the opportunity to support youth and build a talent pipeline for future technology professionals.

Engaged, hands on learning—program design and activities reflect active, meaningful and engaging learning methods that promote critical thinking and expand student horizons.

Indicators:

- Youth have opportunities to learn and develop new skills through experiential learning and real world contexts.
- Youth explore, program plan, provide programming input and make choices based on their interests.
- Programming and activities facilitate positive and respectful relationships, peer-to-peer and adult-to-youth.

Kearney’s CLC program partners with UNK, a local community-based Astronomy club and Rowe Sanctuary to engage middle school students in hands-on learning projects. Students learn about astronomy during club time and have become “experts” on the night sky by working beside local astronomers during public and private events. Students have had the opportunity to share their knowledge through participation in public astronomy events and were recently guests on the local news station. During the annual crane festival at Rowe Sanctuary, the students provided visitors with presentations about how wildlife are impacted by light pollution and discussed preventative measures that can be taken in communities to reduce these negative impacts. By providing hands-on STEM learning through a number of engaging opportunities, students have become more comfortable with astronomy and STEM concepts. In turn, this leads to these students becoming the STEM literate citizens our society needs.

Family Engagement—programs promote positive communication with families, maintain an inviting environment and support parental involvement in the educational experiences of youth. Regular opportunities for parents to be involved are incorporated into the programming.

Family Cooking Nights are a part of the “Communities Together Can” ELO programming in Columbus. Students and their families participate in a healthy eating class, where good nutrition and meal ideas are discussed. The interactive classes are inclusive of Spanish-speaking families, as the materials and instruction are provided in both English and Spanish. Following the class, families have the opportunity to cook and enjoy a nutritious meal together.

Indicators:

- Educational experiences and family-focused activities are scheduled regularly.
- A parent advisory committee meets regularly; families provide informal and formal program feedback.
- A family handbook is distributed that includes such items as program information/policies, family support activities, a calendar of events and guidance in helping children in school.
- Community resources are regularly shared with families.

Intentional, age-appropriate programming aligned with the school day program—programs maintain high expectations for all youth, include developmentally appropriate academic support and enrichment activities that complement the school curriculum and intentionally links goals and curriculum with 21st century skills.

Indicators:

- Staff members demonstrate awareness of youth’s individual learning styles and plan to accommodate them in daily programming.
- Programming is considered to be added learning time that complements and establishes strong links to the school day.
- Learning standards are connected to programming, but different from the school day
- Activities have educational, social-emotional, physical or life-skills outcomes.
- Programming includes developmentally appropriate academic support and enrichment activities that complement the school curriculum.

The site directors in 21st CCLC programs in Omaha attend monthly data meetings at the school that includes structured discussion about curriculum and assessment outcomes. This has fostered the development of innovative after school programming which builds on school-day content. Site directors have access to the schools’ student information system so that they know how the participants are doing in their classes. This allows the site director to help the student participate in afterschool activities that are going to help them address their school day needs. As a result, the site director is better able to identify the academic needs and progress of program participants, become more familiar with curriculum and learn effective teaching strategies. Site directors are also a part of the administrative team in the building so that they are aware of additional concerns and needs that can be addressed through their programs. Because of this high level of collaboration, ELO programs are better able to identify the academic needs and progress of program participants, are more familiar with curriculum and learn effective teaching strategies and understand each student’s unique needs.

Diverse, prepared staff from a variety of backgrounds—programs recruit and retain high quality staff and volunteers who are focused on creating a positive learning environment. Staff members are diverse in their backgrounds and are representative of the youth population that is served in the program. Ongoing professional development is provided based on assessed staff needs.

Indicators:

- Program strives to recruit a diverse group of staff who reflect the racial, ethnic, linguistic, gender, family, and community characteristics of participants.
- Professional development is based on regular assessment of youth outcomes, staff performance and/or program quality.
- Staff receive training and attend ongoing professional development activities both within and outside of the organization that support their own growth; program staff maintain current knowledge of field.
- Mentoring and training supports working with diverse populations; program staff and volunteers are culturally aware in working with participants.
- Program director assesses job performance and satisfaction among staff, allows staff input, provides feedback and is a role model to improve staff performance.

At the Elliott Community Learning Center in Lincoln, attendance at monthly staff meetings is required of all staff. Professional development trainings and orientations are held before the start of the summer session and throughout the school year. Subjects offered at the trainings vary and are based upon staff needs assessments, as well as staff professional development needs identified by the director. Additionally, each individual staff member sets their own professional development goal. The staff are then observed, data is collected specific to their goal and they are given feedback. As part of the Lincoln CLC, Elliott CLC staff also benefit from the professional development provided to the program directors.

At Kids Club in North Platte, programming is provided for elementary school students from 3 - 6pm, Mondays - Fridays throughout the school year. Programming is available in all ten elementary schools in the school district. All-day programming is provided when school is not in session (i.e. parent conferences). During the summer, forty days of day-long programming is provided (breakfast and lunches are provided). There are minimal fees for participation in the school-year and summer programming; however, students who cannot afford the fees are not turned away from the program. Sliding scale fees, multiple child discounts and scholarships are available for students who qualify for the free and reduced lunch program. Program staff make a concerted effort to recruit youth these students and utilize child care subsidies to fund participation of high poverty youth. Nebraska youth participating in ELO programs like Kids Club spend on average almost 10 hours a week in these programs - the highest in the nation.

Regular participation and access—programs promote consistent and active participation. Programs embrace and value diversity, and have a conscious commitment to helping all youth thrive by providing inclusive, accessible, responsive and engaging services. The programs value and respect the myriad of backgrounds and experiences of youth and their families.

Indicators:

- Youth are not turned away from the program because they cannot pay enrollment fees (where applicable).
- Regularly scheduled programming hours throughout the school year and or/summer.
- The mission statement, outreach materials, and policies emphasize a commitment to serving all youth and families in the community.
- Participating youth represent the full diversity of the host school or neighborhood in terms of language fluency, gender, special needs or disability, family income, and race/ethnicity.
- Staff and leadership make reasonable accommodations to serve youth with learning differences or special needs.

Attention to health, wellness and safety—a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for all participants. The physical space and the atmosphere it conveys promote a healthy environment. Aspects of health and nutrition are incorporated into daily programming. The environment encourages both group and individual participation in the program. Programming is supportive, yet has clear boundaries.

Indicators:

- Indoor/outdoor facilities are welcoming and accessible to youth and their families, as well as provide an atmosphere of comfort, ownership, and respect.
- Youth are physically safe in both indoor/outdoor spaces and the program protects and supports the mental and social/emotional health of all participants.
- Program space/equipment fit the program's needs and participants are fully supervised.
- Well-balanced and nutritious snacks are provided on a daily basis to participants.

Fremont Kids Cooperative is making an intentional effort to partner with local food producers. The development of their Farm to School program will enhance classroom education through hands-on learning related to food, health, agriculture and nutrition. This school-farm partnership works on improving student nutrition, providing agriculture, health and nutrition education opportunities and supporting local farmers. Farm to school programs often open new markets for local farmers, as schools seek to serve local and fresh produce in the school cafeteria, and help expand their customer base by raising awareness about local food systems. Students are provided with hands-on natural science and agricultural education through regular field trips to local farms. Further, they apply these agriculture and math skills through planting and growing their own fresh produce in the cooperative school garden that the students oversee as part of the program.

On-going assessment and improvement—programs utilize data from multiple sources to assess its strengths and weaknesses in order to continuously improve program design, outcomes and impact.

Indicators:

- Program has a detailed plan for evaluation of program activities, staff performance, and student development.
- Plans for participant and program evaluation include gathering both qualitative and quantitative data, as well as formal and informal feedback from stakeholders (youth, parents, teachers, staff, advisory council, etc.).
- Participants' interests, needs, and satisfaction with program are regularly assessed.
- Evaluation findings are consistently reviewed and made readily available in order to examine program progress.
- Program has measurable goals/objectives that are aligned with the program vision, mission and identified needs; short and long term goals defined with program partners.

Crete ELO program, with support from partners at the Department of Education, developed a site self-assessment tool that staff utilize to address specific areas of need in their programs. An improvement plan is then created based upon those needs and re-visited on a regular basis. Additionally, student achievement data from an annual internal evaluation is utilized to revise curricula in the afterschool programs in order to align instruction with the standards and improve student performance. By intentionally working to match program offerings with student needs, Crete's ELO program ensures that afterschool complements school day learning and supports the development of the whole child.