



## The Afterschool Nutrition Standards of Excellence

### Overview

Serving nutritious snacks and meals at afterschool programs helps improve the health and well-being of children. Quality food helps attract children to afterschool programs, especially older children who have more of a say in determining whether or not they participate. Once at the program, snacks and meals give children the energy they need to benefit fully from the educational and enrichment activities that quality afterschool programs provide.

Healthy snacks and meals can also play an important role in combating obesity by reinforcing positive eating habits and ensuring that children have access to fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grains instead of filling up with high-fat foods and soda. Most afterschool programs also provide ample opportunities for physical activity, which further contributes to improved health and reduced obesity.

A number of afterschool providers that serve low-income children have found that if the children do not receive a snack or evening meal while they are at the afterschool program, they may not eat a balanced meal until breakfast at school the next day because of tight food budgets at home. Afterschool providers that serve these children feel an added responsibility to make sure the food they serve is of the highest nutritional content. If the children do not receive quality food at school and at the afterschool program, they may not be able to make up for it elsewhere.

The primary goal of evaluating afterschool nutrition sites and encouraging them to meet high standards is to increase the quality of food served and improve the program's environment so hungry children receive nutritious snacks and meals after school in an atmosphere that promotes healthy lifestyle choices.

### How to Implement the Afterschool Nutrition Standards of Excellence

The attached checklist is meant to be used to promote the Afterschool Nutrition Programs and positively reinforce quality food and healthy environments at afterschool programs. It can be used to evaluate sites serving snacks and/or meals through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) or the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). For more information on using these programs, visit [www.frac.org/afterschool](http://www.frac.org/afterschool).

The criteria can be used for any of the following:

- Distribute the checklist to staff at afterschool programs and ask them to perform a self-evaluation of their program.
- Give the Standards of Excellence to large afterschool sponsors in the community and encourage them to ask individual sites to fill out the checklist as a self-improvement tool; or the sponsor can set goal levels for all the sites to meet.

- Share these criteria levels with the state child nutrition agency and ask them to promote them at their afterschool nutrition trainings and meetings with school food service directors.
- Identify high-quality afterschool programs in the community and recognize them for their work.
- Identify afterschool programs that have room for improvement and encourage them to reach the next level of program excellence.

Most of the criteria levels will need to be assessed by staff members at the afterschool program, and the person conducting the review may need to look through a monthly menu to accurately evaluate the meal patterns.

### **Levels of Excellence**

The Food Research and Action Center has identified three levels of quality afterschool nutrition sites- bronze, silver and gold. In addition to meeting the state's nutrition, health, and safety requirements, these sites have gone above and beyond the basics to encourage high participation in the Afterschool Nutrition Programs and offer healthy environments and child-friendly snacks and meals of high nutritional quality.

**Bronze sites-** They go a step above the minimum requirements for an afterschool nutrition site. They ensure that a variety of food, including fresh fruits and vegetables, is served throughout the menu cycle; the food is appealing; the site is welcoming for children and there are opportunities for nutrition education and physical activity at the site.

**Silver sites-** They meet and move beyond the requirements of a bronze site. They include a greater variety of fruits and vegetables; incorporate low-fat dairy products and whole grains into the snacks and meals; offer opportunities for nutrition education and physical activity on a regular basis; maximize the number of meals allowable under the Afterschool Nutrition Programs and take steps to ensure that the environment promotes healthy choices such as limiting children's exposure to advertisements for foods high in salt, sugar and fat.

**Gold sites-** They meet the bronze and silver requirements but also take the site to a higher level. They offer children choices of meal components, additional servings of fresh fruits and vegetables, and more variety in the menu; offer nutrition education and opportunities for physical activity every day; and take multiple steps to ensure that the afterschool environment promotes physical activity and good nutrition such as providing opportunities for children to learn about where their food comes from, having staff eat with the children to model healthy behavior and providing at least 30 minutes for all children to participate in structured or unstructured physical activity.

## **Evaluating Sites**

To evaluate Afterschool Nutrition sites, a reviewer should visit each site, go through the Standards of Excellence criteria and mark off each item that the site meets. The Food Research and Action Center recommends that for a site to qualify as bronze, silver or gold they meet all of the criteria for that category. However, if necessary, the criteria can be modified or a certain percentage of compliance can be required for each category. (The person visiting the afterschool programs should always be sure to explain to the afterschool program staff that they are not with the state agency so they do not confuse them with the official state monitors.)

## **Acknowledging Quality Sites**

Consider giving quality afterschool programs an award or special recognition for all their hard work. Quality sites can be acknowledged with an award ceremony, mention in the local newspaper, or be given modest cash awards to put towards nutrition and physical education activities at the site. The state agency or state Action for Healthy Kids team may be able to help identify and honor quality sites in the community.

## **Building on Success: Taking Afterschool Nutrition to the Next Level**

For sites that have already met the Standards of Excellence, encourage them to take their programming to an even higher level, incorporating some of the following ideas:

- Provide additional educational and recreational programming at the site such as age-appropriate nutrition education activities, walking clubs, fitness circuits, and other opportunities for structured and unstructured physical activity.
- Start a children's garden, and if possible, serve some of the produce in, or along with, the snacks and meals at the site to introduce the children to new types of fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Host theme weeks throughout the year that highlight different types of food along with corresponding activities.
- Work with an area chef to design healthy and appealing menus.
- Plan nutrition education activities such as cooking lessons on a regular basis.
- Ask parents to come to the site and participate in nutrition related activities when possible.
- Invite guest speakers such as farmers, dentists, doctors, nurses, and nutritionists to the site to talk with students and lead activities.
- Encourage public officials and members of Congress to visit the afterschool nutrition site in order to further their understanding and support of the federal Afterschool Nutrition Programs.

## **Ensuring Access to Quality Food throughout the Year**

The Food Research and Action Center also has published Summer Food Standards of Excellence to evaluate summer nutrition sites. There is a clear link between the quality of food served at summer food sites and participation rates. Quality, child-friendly food attracts children to meal programs and makes them more likely to consistently participate throughout the summer. Visit [www.frac.org/afterschool](http://www.frac.org/afterschool) to learn more and consider evaluating both afterschool and summer nutrition efforts in the community.

The Afterschool Standards of Excellence were prepared by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). FRAC is the leading national nonprofit organization working to improve public policies to eradicate hunger and undernutrition in the United States.



## Afterschool Nutrition Standards of Excellence

### **CATEGORY 1: QUALITY FOOD**

#### **Bronze Level**

To qualify at this level, the site must meet all of the following criteria along with all federal and state CACFP or NSLP requirements and food safety regulations.

The site offers at least a 2 week menu cycle, which includes a variety of foods.

Two different types of fruits and/or vegetables (canned, frozen or fresh) are offered each week.

Food is served at the right temperature. (All cold foods are served cold and none are frozen. Hot foods are served hot and none are burnt or overcooked.)

No foods on the menu are deep fat fried. (Deep fat fried food is defined as any meal component that is cooked by total immersion into hot oil or fat, and foods that have been pre-fried or flash fried. This does not include foods that are stir fried or sautéed.)

Alternative menu items exist for children who cannot eat a component of the meal due to religious reasons or because of food allergies.

The food is culturally appropriate for the population of children being served.

#### **Silver Level**

To qualify at this level, the site must meet all of the bronze criteria and the following:

The site offers at least a three week menu cycle, which includes a variety of food.

Three different types of fruits and/or vegetables (can be canned, frozen or fresh) are offered each week.

Whole grain foods are offered during the week.

When milk is served, low fat (1%) milk and/or skim (nonfat) are available.

#### **Gold Level**

To qualify at this level, the site must meet all of the bronze and silver criteria and the following:

Fresh fruits and/or vegetables are offered five days a week.

Whole-grain foods are offered two or more times a week.

**Gold level continued...**

In addition to low fat (1%) milk and/or skim (nonfat) milk being offered on the menu, whole milk is not offered at the site.

The snack and meal serving sizes are appropriate for the age of the children being served, ensuring that they get enough food to eat after school.

Site offers children additional servings of fruits and vegetables (above and beyond USDA required amounts.)

Children are offered choices of components (Example: children are able to choose between yogurt or a cheese stick or an apple or banana.)

## **CATEGORY 2: HEALTH PROMOTING ENVIRONMENT**

### **Bronze Level**

To qualify at this level, the site must meet all of the following criteria along with all federal and state CACFP or NSLP requirements and food safety regulations.

The site is generally an attractive and welcoming environment for children to eat.

Safe drinking water is available at the site and the children have access to it at all times.

Vending machines, if available at or near the afterschool program, are turned off or inaccessible during the snack or meal service.

The site does not withhold physical activity as a punishment for children.

### **Silver Level**

To qualify at this level, the site must meet all of the bronze criteria and the following:

The site has held a food tasting event or surveyed the children to find out what foods they would like to have served.

If the site has vending machines, children at the site do not have access to them at any point during the afterschool program.

The site does not use food as a reward or as positive or negative reinforcement for students.

The afterschool program environment does not include any posters or advertisements for soda or foods high in salt, fat or added sugar.

If eligible and appropriate for the length of the program, the site serves suppers instead of snacks or both snacks and suppers through the Child and Adult Care Food Program- Outside School Hours Care Provision.

The staff engages in physical activity with the children.

Water is served along with the snack every day.

### **Gold Level**

To qualify at this level, the site must meet all of the bronze and silver criteria and the following:

If vending machines are located at or near the site they do not contain advertisements for foods that are high in salt, fat or sugar.

**Gold level continued...**

The site has hung posters or other materials promoting healthy food and physical activity.

Children help select and prepare the snacks and meals on a regular basis.

At the end of the school year, the afterschool program informs children and parents about summer nutrition sites in the community so they can access free meals when school is out.

The afterschool program staff eats the snack with the children to model healthy behavior.

### **CATEGORY 3: NUTRITION EDUCATION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OPPORTUNITIES**

#### **Bronze Level**

To qualify at this level, the site must meet all of the following criteria along with all federal and state CACFP or NSLP requirements and food safety regulations.

The afterschool program offers nutrition education activities throughout the month.

Children have opportunities to engage in physical activities at the site throughout the week.

Staff model healthy behavior by not consuming food that the children are not allowed to eat at the program.

#### **Silver Level**

To qualify at this level, the site must meet all of the bronze criteria and the following:

The site offers structured nutrition education once a week.

The site offers opportunities for physical activity three or more times per week.

The afterschool program has a variety of activities going on at the site and a schedule that encourages children to be active for at least part of the time they are at the program.

#### **Gold Level**

To qualify at this level, the site must meet all of the bronze and silver criteria and the following:

The site offers two or more nutrition related activities every week.

The site offers opportunities for physical activity every day of the program.

All children participate in structured or unstructured physical activity for at least 30 minutes each day.

The site provides opportunities for children to learn about where their food comes from through lesson plans, gardening activities, field trips or guest speakers.