Using the NYSAN Quality Self-Assessment Tool to Improve Program Quality

Presented by:
Nora Niedzielski-Eichner
Agenda

- About NYSAN
- Overview of self-assessment
- QSA Tool Structure and Outcomes of Use
- Conducting a Self-Assessment
  - Facilitation
  - Logistics
- Planning for Continuous Improvement
- Questions
New York State Afterschool Network (NYSAN)

NYSAN is a statewide public-private partnership dedicated to promoting young people's safety, learning and healthy development outside the traditional classroom.

NYSAN defines afterschool broadly, to include structured activities that take place in school and community-based settings, and are offered before school, afterschool and during summer and holiday breaks.
# NYSAN Partners

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<th>Public Partners</th>
<th>Nonprofit Partners</th>
<th>Regional Networks</th>
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<tr>
<td>Association of NYS Youth Bureaus</td>
<td>AfterSchool Works! New York</td>
<td>After School Network of Western New York</td>
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<td>NYC Department of Education</td>
<td>The Children’s Aid Society</td>
<td>Central New York Out-of-School Time Network</td>
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<td>NYC Department of Youth and Community Development</td>
<td>Cornell University Cooperative Extension</td>
<td>Expanded Learning Network of the Southern Tier</td>
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<td>NYS Education Department</td>
<td>NYU Metro Center for Urban Education</td>
<td>Greater Rochester After School Alliance</td>
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<td>NYS Office of Children and Family Services</td>
<td>Partnership for After School Education</td>
<td>Hudson Valley Afterschool Network</td>
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<td>NYS Student Support Services Center</td>
<td>The After-School Corporation</td>
<td>Long Island Partnership for After School Education</td>
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<td>NYS 21st CCLC Technical Assistance Resource Center</td>
<td>Alliance of New York State YMCAs</td>
<td>North Country Afterschool Network</td>
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<td>NYS Center for School Safety</td>
<td>Liaison to Private Funders</td>
<td>Upper Hudson Afterschool Network</td>
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What is Program Quality?

Ten Essential Elements of a Quality Afterschool Program

- Environment/Climate
- Administration/Organization
- Relationships
- Staffing/Professional Development
- Programming/Activities
- Linkages Between Day- and After- School
- Youth Participation/Engagement
- Parent/Family/Community Partnerships
- Program Sustainability/Growth
- Measuring Outcomes/Evaluation
Program Self-Assessment

Why Self-Assessment?
- It helps program providers to understand overall program quality and to identify steps needed for improvement.
- It is a low-stakes process.
- It can focus on program needs and priorities while keeping areas outside the focus from slipping.

What is the QSA Tool?
- The QSA Tool is organized around 10 elements of quality.
- It uses a set of indicators to help program providers determine their strengths and areas in need of improvement.
- It is structured to lead to an action plan for increasing program quality.
- The tool was developed by experienced program and TA providers to be relevant and reasonable.
NYSAN QSA Tool and Evaluation

**NYSAN QSA Tool:**
- provides structure for dialogues around outcomes and quality.
- strengthens communication between stakeholders.
- helps build a collective vision.
- uses data gathered to inform practice and build capacity.
- is often facilitated by program staff and/or other stakeholders.

**Formal Evaluation:**
- takes a more formal approach to assessing programs to determine what their outcomes are.
- often uses data gathered for accountability and compliance.
- has higher stakes and less gray areas.
- is often facilitated by an external observer.
QSA Tool and Other Quality Frameworks

- QSA Tool is aligned with:
  - School-Age Care Environmental Rating Scale (SACERS)
  - Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA)
  - National AfterSchool Association standards.

- The QSA Tool is aligned with the NYS Program Accreditation framework, and can be used as the first step toward achieving accreditation from AfterSchool Works! New York.
Benefits of Using QSA Tool

- Self-assessment helps develop consensus and strengthens buy-in from stakeholders.
- Self-assessment directly connects to quality improvement through creating an action plan and professional development plan.
- Funders and advocates recognize and/or require use of self-assessment tools.
- Prepares programs for meeting expectations of funders, which are generally increasing.
Results of Self-Assessment

Results of NYSAN Survey, August - September 2009

- 83% reported benefits from using the tool
- 77% reported a change in their program after using the tool
- 55% reported an improvement in program quality as a result of using the tool
Opportunities to Recognize Staff and Stakeholder Value
Cycle of Improvement

1. Assess Program (External or Self Assessor): Collect data about your program.
2. Create Improvement Plan: Develop a plan based on collected data.
3. Attend Professional Development: Staff attends professional development sessions that align with what they want to improve.
4. Assess Program Again (External or Self Assessor): Reassess the program and see if areas have improved.
5. More Professional Development: If the plan was successful, have more staff attend the professional development.
A quality program provides a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment for all participants.

**A quality program:**

1. *Provides a stimulating, welcoming, and supportive environment for young people.*

2. *Uses program space that is safe and clean.*

3. Has program space that is appropriately equipped and suitable for activities being conducted.

4. *Develops, implements, and shares approved safety plans and procedures with staff and families.*

5. *Provides adequate security for program.*

6. *Develops and manages effective arrival and dismissal procedures and plans for safe travel home.*

7. *Provides healthy and nutritious snacks and/or supper.*

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<tr>
<th>Performance Level</th>
<th>Plan To Improve</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Right Now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>This Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Next Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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Performance Levels

4: Excellent / Exceeds Standards
- Is prepared to help and work with others in this area.

3: Satisfactory / Meets Standards
- Needs help to prepare staff to work with others in this area.

2: Some Progress Made / Approaching Standard
- Could use additional focused assistance in this area.

1: Must Address and Improve / Standard Not Met
- Needs significant support in this area.

• Organizations are expected to strive for a Satisfactory level (3) and, over time, continue to strive for an Excellent level (4).
QSA Supports

ZOOMING IN
QUALITY INDICATOR #10

Integrates opportunities for the development of personal responsibility, self-direction, and leadership throughout the program.

**Performance Level 1:** Young people need daily reminders of program routines. Opportunities to reflect on personal attributes, set goals, and take on formal and informal leadership roles are not part of program activities. Young people are not verbally recognized for their efforts and accomplishments. Youth are not encouraged to work with their peers to ask questions and resolve disagreements. If youth struggle with a task, adults are quick to take over.

**Performance Level 2:** Although some staff have made an effort to establish routines, most of the participants continue to need daily reminders. Some verbal recognition is provided for young people’s efforts and accomplishments. Young people are consistently told how to resolve disagreements and a process for working together with peers around solutions is not established.

**Performance Level 3:** Most of the program participants are able to follow daily routines without reminders. Staff are beginning to create leadership roles for youth. A majority of the staff are able to support youth as they complete a task on their own. Constructive feedback is provided to challenge youth to move beyond their current level of competency.

**Performance Level 4:** Daily routines are reinforced throughout all program activities. Written exercises and small group discussions are used as vehicles to encourage youth to discover their strengths and set personal goals. Staff refrain from taking on challenging tasks. Verbal and public recognitions are provided to encourage self-direction and success.

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**TRY THIS!**

Through the Years

It is essential that staff have a basic understanding of youth developmental stages as they design and implement program activities. Consider using a staff meeting to facilitate a mini-workshop that introduces staff to the stages of development.

Divide meeting participants into small groups. The facilitator assigns each group a specific age range and asks them to brainstorm a list of developmentally appropriate program environments and activities, keeping in mind emotional, cognitive, social, and physical needs. Participants are then asked to share a few examples.

As a large group, brainstorm the activities currently offered through your program and identify how they support youth development. What core academic skills are being strengthened and developed through these activities? In what ways do these activities support emotional learning and self-expression? How do these activities promote health and physical well-being?

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**TAKING ACTION**

RIGHT NOW: ADDRESSED WITHIN THE FIRST 30-40 DAYS OF ASSESSMENT. Staff are trained on strategies and activities that promote youth leadership. A staff meeting is set up to discuss and identify leadership roles for youth in the program. A plan is developed for how these roles will be encouraged and supported.

THIS YEAR: ADDRESSED BY THE END OF THE PROGRAM YEAR. Staff participate in ongoing training to provide the tools and skills needed to empower young people to creatively resolve conflicts and develop activities that intentionally develop youth leadership. Staff meet on a quarterly basis to share promising practices and determine new strategies for creating opportunities for young people to take personal responsibility, become self-directed, and natural leaders.

NEXT YEAR: ADDRESSED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW PROGRAM YEAR. Staff and young people need to build on what has worked from the prior year. A youth council is created to institutionalize youth leadership positions across the agency. Community meetings and annual events are scheduled to be led by youth and used as a tool to build community.

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**TIPS FOR SUCCESS**

- Afterschool programs are positioned to provide young people with a myriad of rich activities and experiences that support their overall well-being and health. Below are some basic principles that can be incorporated into all activities regardless of content.
- Afterschool professionals should:
  - Provide a clear overview, learning objectives, and rationale for activities.
  - Engage young people in hands-on activities and discussion.
  - Allow young people to tap into their individual strengths and talents.
  - Provide young people with multiple opportunities to reflect upon what they have experienced.
  - Prone young people with positive reinforcement.
  - Be able to adapt to different learning styles.
  - Employ strategies that engage young people who may be resistant to participating.
Facilitating the Self-Assessment

Thinking About How

- Determine who will lead the process.
  
  A good facilitator:
  - Provides opportunities for everyone to contribute ideas and suggestions.
  - Actively listens and connects ideas and themes as they emerge.
  - Is prepared to answer questions about policies and procedures.
  - Avoids personalizing what is shared in the process.
  - Remains non-judgmental.
  - Helps bring consensus and closure to discussions.
Facilitating the Self-Assessment

Thinking About Who

- Invite all key stakeholders.
  - Youth participants
  - Program staff
  - Parents, guardians, and family members
  - School administrators
  …and anyone else involved with your program!
Facilitating the Self-Assessment

Thinking About When

- Self-Assessment Timing
  - Beginning of Year
  - Middle of the Year
  - End of the year

- Self-Assessment Structure
  - Retreat/Full Day(s)
  - Series of Weekly Meetings
  - Series of Monthly Meetings
Developing an Action Plan

IMPLEMENTING IDEAS WITH AN ACTION PLAN

PROGRAM QUALITY SELF-ASSESSMENT ACTION PLAN

Program: ___________________ Date of Assessment: ________________ Self-Assessment Team: ___________________

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<tr>
<th>PROGRAM ELEMENT</th>
<th>QUALITY INDICATOR</th>
<th>PERFORMANCE LEVEL</th>
<th>IMPROVEMENT STEPS &amp; STRATEGIES</th>
<th>PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE</th>
<th>TIMELINE FOR IMPROVEMENT PLAN (RIGHT NOW, THIS YEAR, NEXT YEAR)</th>
<th>RESOURCES NEEDED</th>
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Continuous Improvement

- Programs should know:
  - Staff skill sets
  - What other skills do they need?

- PD can be offered through a variety of venues:
  - Program observations;
  - Peer mentoring/coaching;
  - Supervision;
  - Staff meetings;
  - Conferences;
  - Networking events; and
  - Higher education courses.

- **RESOURCE:** PASE Professional Development Planning Tool
Cycle of Improvement

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Access to the QSA Tool and User’s Guide

- Quality Assurance menu
  http://nysan.org/section/quality
  - Includes links to program quality resources and detailed definitions of the performance levels
  - Download User’s Guide and Tool as PDFs
  - Multiple languages available
Questions?

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