



# Guidance for Afterschool Learning at a Distance

*Standards and Self-  
Assessment Manual*



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# Introduction

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and crisis, school and afterschool systems, like all other aspects of our lives, have been dramatically impacted. Young people and their families are, in a sense, all functioning 100 percent in “out-of-school” time (OST) for the foreseeable future. “Learning at a Distance” has become the new normal for students who are engaging in virtual and non-virtual school and afterschool/summer programs in the absence of the “traditional” scenario.

There are critical needs both in the immediate crisis response and the structures required to transition to longer-term models and respond to the ramifications for our students over time. Many examples of responsive high-quality programming are happening as programs strive to continue providing positive relationships and relevant opportunities for students and their families. Despite the fact that it feels like navigating uncharted waters, OST programs will continue to play a vital role in helping communities reopen and redesign safe, supportive experiences and relationships for young people.

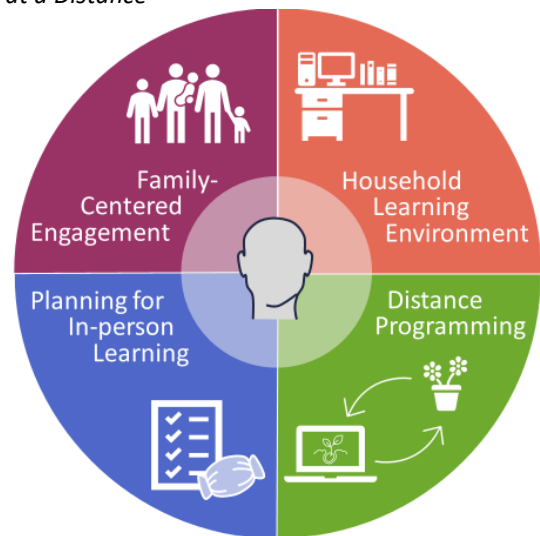
The purpose of the resources described here is to provide (a) a quality lens through which to evaluate promising practices for learning at a distance and (b) a self-assessment tool for getting specific about what and where supports are needed. This guidance is a work in progress, and the current self-assessment manual and rubric forms are the third iteration, with version 4.0 to follow. Version 4.0 will include real examples, drawn directly from the field, of promising practices related to each indicator.

*Guidance for Afterschool Learning at a Distance* (Guidance) is a set of program standards and self-assessment questions for afterschool program managers and staff who are responsible for delivering OST services to young people in a household learning environment. The standards described in the Guidance apply to a diverse range of program delivery models, including 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC) and other community-based programs (e.g., school-age child care, YMCA, 4H, Boys and Girls Clubs). Objectives for the Guidance include:

- Help program managers and staff adjust their mental models for “point of service (POS) quality” located in the new home learning environment;
- Disseminate promising practices for afterschool learning at a distance that harmonize with other field-level standards and competencies;
- Support afterschool leaders to assess program readiness and provide responsive training and technical assistance;
- Guide funders and intermediaries toward identification of systems-level supports for achieving high POS quality.

The Guidance standards include 4 domains, 10 standards, and 27 indicators. The self-assessment rubric requires approximately 1.5 hours to complete. Figure 1 shows four domains of optimal afterschool supports for young people’s development during circumstances of learning at a distance; that is, the afterschool practices that help produce optimal POS quality in the home learning environment. These domains represent a whole-child approach to afterschool learning at a distance: By explicitly engaging family strengths, assuring flexible supports, and sharing accurate information about the future (i.e., plans for school and afterschool in the coming months), the Guidance was specifically design to address both the young person’s socio-emotional wellness and the conditions of academic learning. Although the content of the four domains is still evolving, we offer the following conceptual definitions:

*Figure 1. Quality Wheel for Afterschool Learning at a Distance*



**Family-Centered Engagement:** Family-centered engagement is about shaping afterschool services to fit the needs, resources, and routines of young people and their families. During a crisis like COVID-19, many young people and families experience hardship and require a primary focus on basic needs. Because these hardships fall disproportionately on communities that are most at risk, an equity focus may require novel responses and new areas of emphasis.

**Household Learning Environment:** The household learning environment includes the resources, routines, and participants of the household. For the student, non-virtual and virtual learning supports must be integrated as they are received from both the school day and afterschool programs. Successful connections to families and students require reliable exchange of information and planning. Supporting the household’s successful connectivity (e.g., access, tech, apps) may become part of the afterschool service.

**Distance Programming:** High-quality distance programming blends virtual and material resources and methods to meet developmental needs and engage children, youth, and families. Programs that focus on socio-emotional learning (SEL) skills will need to connect with young people via video or phone on a regular basis to achieve relational depth. The transition to a new type of school will be a challenge for both young people and their families. Afterschool programs may want to increase their focus on supporting school day learning and guiding families to school day supports.

**Planning for In-person Learning Environments:** School districts are planning for resumption of in-person school programs. Changes to school day structure required to achieve social distancing (e.g., reduced cohorts, staggered schedules, temperature checks) or renewed shutdown (e.g., return to blended learning) will require integration between schools, afterschool, and child care programs around schedules, guidance to families, maintenance of personally protective equipment, and check-ins with children.

# Standards and Indicators

## Family-Centered Engagement

### Assess Needs and Advocate for Children and Families

**Shared Expectations.** Program staff communicate benefits of program participation to parents/caregivers and help co-create shared expectations for each child's engagement.

**Information and Advocacy.** Program staff provide information and advocacy to support families trying to meet basic needs (e.g., food, transit, housing, health, mental well-being) and connect with school (e.g., technology).

**Hygiene and PPE.** Program staff provide critical health knowledge (e.g., how viruses spread) and share federal and local guidance for hygiene and personal-protective equipment (PPE).

### Use Family-Centered Approaches

**Trauma Informed.** Program staff have training to understand the experience of families and communities (e.g., trauma informed) and design programming to optimize child and family engagement.

**Strengths Based.** Program staff are trained to be strengths-based and nonjudgmental when virtually entering children's households (e.g., cultural agility).

**Equity Data.** Program staff strive to use objective data and information to address inequitable access and/or outcomes (e.g., access to technology, school performance, housing status).

## Household Learning Environment

### Integrate with Family Resources, Routines, and Priorities

**Multiple Connections.** Program staff connect with children and families using a variety of methods (e.g., "afterschool inbox," virtual programming), technologies (e.g., phone, internet video apps, email/text, mail), times, and languages.

**Flexible Calendar.** Program staff use a flexible calendar of programming (e.g., virtual sessions, check-in calls, drop off packets) that balances the availability of children and families with the capacities of program staff at specific sites.

### Connect and Equip Workspace

**Updated Information.** Program staff maintain updated contact information and communication preferences for each student and family, including language, technology, and best times for program contact with children and/or families.

**Child-Centered Workspace.** Program staff coach students and families to set up a workspace that is designed to support the student's learning needs and preferences (e.g., work surface, storage, lighting, sound, privacy).

**Educational Supplies.** Program equips students with tools for learning, if they are not available in the household learning environment (e.g., markers, storage, electronic tablets).



### Support Access to/through Technology

**Virtual Access.** Program staff provide tech/app recommendations and support families' access to internet, tech, and apps, along with limited helpdesk support for program-selected tech/apps.

**Online Safety and Supervision.** Program staff provide cyber-safety training and have appropriate knowledge to assure child and family safety and supervision when interacting online with program staff.

## Distance Programming

### Provide Safe Space and Responsive Practices

**Social and Emotional Check-In.** Program staff build individual relationships through regular check-ins with child (weekly) and family (at entry and as necessary) to monitor well-being and reinforce the use of socio-emotional skills.

**Modeling SEL Skills.** Program staff explicitly and intentionally model and promote children's use of socio-emotional skills (e.g., emotion management, teamwork, initiative, problem solving, empathy, responsibility) during distance programming.

**Staff Wellness.** Staff well-being practices (e.g., effective program design, multiple staff per offering, opportunities to debrief programming, feedback loops) are a foundation for high-quality instruction and student socio-emotional skill building.

### Blend Learning

**Content Options.** Program staff include options for children to receive content that is (a) both non-virtual (e.g., packets) and virtual (e.g., online), (b) both guided and open-ended, and (c) both individual and group-centered.

**School Day Alignment.** Where possible, program staff intentionally emphasize alignment (e.g., content, time of day, workload, technology) with school day requirements for the enrolled child and other students in the household.

**Opportunities for Fun.** Program staff incorporate opportunities for fun (e.g., family SEL games, outdoor activities) and informal social interaction (e.g., supervised Zoom hangouts).

### Support School Success

**Connect Families with K-12 Services.** Program staff support the family's capacity to meet school day requirements and connect with K-12 services.

**Afterschool and School Day Partnership.** Where possible, program staff communicate regularly with school day staff regarding each student's academic and SEL progress, individual education plan (IEP) status, or referral to services under multi-tiered systems of support.

**Collaborative Leadership.** Program leaders join school district planning sessions.

## Planning for In-Person Learning

### Provide Plans and Procedures for In-Person Afterschool Services

**Integrative Program Plan.** Program staff develop a plan for delivery of in-person services that is (a) integrated, to the extent possible, with school district schedules, policies, and protocols and (b) includes, for example, temperature checks, small learning cohorts, staggered use of classrooms, and sanitizing surfaces.

**Social Distancing and PPE Guidelines.** Program staff are educated on federal and local social distancing guidelines (e.g., YMCA and CDC), and each site has posted routines and requirements for hygiene and use of PPE during the return to school and afterschool environments.

**Acquire and Maintain Supplies.** Program staff maintain a stock of cleaning materials and PPE, based on federal and local guidelines, for return to in-person services.

### Plan Supports for Re-Entry to Schooling

**Afterschool and School Day Partnership.** Program staff are informed of, and collaborate with, local districts' planning for in-person schooling and the daily/weekly transitions between the household learning environment, school buildings, and afterschool programs.

**Transitional Support.** Program staff provide supports for students' preparation for, and socio-emotional well-being during, the transition back to in-person schooling and/or continued learning-at-a-distance in fall 2020.

# Using the Self-Assessment Rubric

## Before starting the self-assessment rubric:



Have access to policy manuals, communication with parents/families, program and grantee calendars, and other official documentation or shared folders.



Set aside approximately 1.5 hours to go through the tool. We suggest going through the whole tool in one sitting. However, if that is not possible, we suggest completing one domain at a time.



The Guidance can be completed by program managers alone or with their staff.

## Once you are ready to begin the self-assessment rubric, approach each indicator by following the listed steps:

1. Read through the indicator, and identify each aspect of best practice described.
2. Think about the implementation of the practices described in the indicator.
  - Do the practices at your site(s) align with the indicator?
3. Next, locate existing descriptions of the indicator/practice in your existing documents and guidance (e.g., Policy Handbook, shared drive, shared calendar).
  - Are the practices defined by the indicator documented accurately?
  - Are parts of the indicator located in different sources?
  - If someone new stepped into your role, could they execute the indicator with success based on what is written down?
4. *If documentation and actual practice align with the indicator, skip to step 5.* If the indicator is not currently in practice, and you are not sure if the practice is included in written policy, determine if (a) the site team has the internal capacity to implement the practice, or (b) technical assistance is required.
5. Finally, briefly explain what this indicator looks like, in practice, at your sites and where the associated written policies and procedures are located.

Below is a diagram of the tool that aligns the steps listed here with the different questions asked.

**1** — **Shared Expectations.** Program staff communicate benefits of program participation to parents/caregivers and help co-create shared expectations for each child's engagement. **4a + 4b**

| <b>2</b> — Are the practices in this item currently being implemented with <b>high fidelity</b> ? | Are you aware of a <b>written policy</b> about this practice? | Do your program staff have <b>capacity</b> to implement this practice at high fidelity? | Do your program staff require <b>training or technical assistance</b> about this practice? |
|---|---|---|--|
| Yes   | Yes   | Yes   | Yes  |
| No  | No  | No  | No   |

**3** — What are the written policies (and the source documents), and where are they saved/located?

**5**

## After you have completed the self-assessment:

6. Set goals for improvement.
  - Determine which indicators you want to focus on, and set action steps for improving practice or updating policy.
7. Reach out to MDE and MASP if your team would like to receive support and resources.



## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

### ***What is included in the next version of the Guidance?***

The final version of the Guidance should be completed and available by the beginning of August. The final version will provide examples from Michigan expert practitioners for each indicator. Each example includes a description of the policy and/or practice that exemplifies the Guidance indicator.

### ***How long will it take me to complete the self-assessment rubric?***

Experience from the review process suggests that it will take approximately 1.5 hours to complete. The range of time required to complete the tool is dependent on the Project Manager's familiarity with site and grantee policies and procedures as well as the amount of detail provided in the responses. We suggest setting aside a 1.5 hour block to work through the entire assessment, without interruption.

### ***What if we have a policy that relates to one of the indicators but is not being implemented as it is written?***

If a practice is written policy but not being implemented, the Project Manager should review with their team the policy as it is written and consider potential revisions. If the Project Manager and their team do not currently have the capacity to implement the written policy, they should discuss and document the resources necessary to successfully implement the policy.

### ***What if the indicator describes practices we implement successfully, but these practices are not documented in a Policy Manual, Handbook, or other source?***

Time to preserve that institutional knowledge! Formalize successful practices by creating written procedures for how and when to implement them. Remember, Policy Manuals and Staff Handbooks are not the only places where things get written down. A range of different sources can be used for documentation (e.g., curriculum activity plans, calendars, shared drives) as long as they are saved and accessible to staff.

### ***If we need technical assistance in order to implement an indicator and/or update our policies to reflect it, what do I do and who do I reach out to?***

Connect with MASP or MDE and they will be able to provide guidance and technical assistance. They may have resources to quickly help enact change, or they may suggest speaking with a consultant or other Project Manager to help think about the next steps.

### ***What happens after I complete the self-assessment rubric?***

The Project Manager should prioritize areas for improvement and set goals for their practice going forward. Perhaps there is a particular area that requires substantial effort and concentration, so the team will focus efforts there. Or, perhaps there are a few small tweaks that can be made simultaneously. Either way, Project Managers should use the results of the self-assessment rubric to organize and prioritize their own improvement plans.

## Developing the Guidance

The Guidance was produced using qualitative methodology and with expert practitioners representing rural, urban, 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC, community-based, and licensed school-age child care. For version one, expert practitioners were interviewed about practices and challenges developed while learning at a distance, and relevant literature was reviewed. From the interviews and review of literature, initial codes (domains, standards, indicators) were developed. For version two, reviewers completed an online survey with sections of Guidance content; they reviewed indicator fit and provided open-ended responses. These responses are then collated, and reviewers joined a video-conference focus group to work toward consensus of meaning and language for each indicator.

For version three, we will use the same method of individual review and group consensus – this time with program leaders from around the state - to produce multiple narrative examples for each indicator; that is, best practices as described by Michigan afterschool program leaders. Finally, in version four, all prior reviewers will be invited to provide a final round of review and feedback.

The implementation timeline for four rounds of revision is provided in Figure 2. Version 3 of the Guidance is included in this document and will be replaced by Version 5, which will be delivered to MASP in mid-August, 2020.

Figure 2. Guidance Project Timeline

