Acknowledgements

The Core Standards were developed by representatives from a wide variety of Philadelphia youth-related organizations with strong interest and expertise in positive youth development and youth workforce development. The Standards are grounded in a youth development framework that encourages a comprehensive asset-based approach to program planning and implementation.

Members of the public-private working group represented many diverse organizations including:

- Archdiocese of Philadelphia
- ASPIRA, Inc. of PA
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Metropolitan Philadelphia
- City of Philadelphia, Division of Social Services, Office of Children’s Policy
- City of Philadelphia, Department of Human Services
- Congreso de Latinos Unidos
- Drexel University
- Exploring Programs
- Fairmount Park Commission
- Foundations, Inc.
- Free Library of Philadelphia
- Greater Philadelphia Federation of Settlements
- Indo-Chinese American Council
- Lincoln Family Center
- Montgomery Early Learning Centers, Southeastern PA School Age Child Care Project
- New Frankford Community Y
- Pennsylvania School for the Deaf
- Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth
- Philadelphia Department of Recreation
- Philadelphia Futures
- Philadelphia Reads
- Philadelphia Safe and Sound
- Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation
- Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board
- Philadelphia Youth Council
- Philadelphia Youth Network
- Police Athletic League
- School District of Philadelphia, Comprehensive Day Care
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- School District of Philadelphia, Family Resource Network
- Temple University
- Tilden Middle School
- United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania/After-School Initiative
- United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, Center for Youth Development
- Universal Homes/University Center for Employment Training
- Youth Empowerment Services
Introduction

“Our children are our greatest hope and most meaningful legacy. Our children’s promise and potential rests firmly in our willingness and ability to protect them, provide for them, and prepare them for productive lives.”

Mayor John F. Street

For John F. Street, Mayor of the City of Philadelphia, the best interests of Philadelphia’s children and youth are a number one priority for his administration. The Core Standards for Philadelphia’s Youth Programs is just one component of an overall strategy to impact and improve the safety, well-being, and advancement of ALL Philadelphia children.

The Children’s Investment Strategy was being developed by the City of Philadelphia in response to the Children’s Report Card and Children’s Budget. These two documents, which look at the status of Philadelphia’s children, indicate both progress and room for improvement. The Children’s Investment Strategy uses out-of-school time (OST) as its point of entry: to fill children’s unstructured time with activities that promote health, well-being, and achievement. A major priority for the City of Philadelphia is to improve the coordination, capacity, and quality of OST services delivered or funded by agencies in Philadelphia.
Background

Research indicates that children who attend high quality (after-school) programs have better peer relations, emotional adjustments, conflict resolution skills, grades, and conduct in school compared to their peers who are not in after-school programs.

(Baker and Witt, 1996; Kahn, Nagaokqa and Brown, 1999; Posner and Vandell, 1999)  

After-school programs have come to the social forefront in the last few years. National polls indicate that American taxpayers are willing to pay more in taxes to support activities for youth. Millions of dollars in public and private funding are being invested on national, state, and local levels to insure that creative, supportive, and constructive programs for youth during their out-of-school hours are available.

In Philadelphia, OST are provided through a diverse network of organizations. These diverse organizations provide a wide range of services and a variety of experiences for young people. Some of Philadelphia’s after-school and youth development programs focus on the arts, job readiness, academic enrichment, life skills, sports, or a combination of them all.

Over the past 10 years, we have seen increased emphasis on program standards throughout education, health, and human service disciplines. Most recently, attention has been focused on setting standards for various kinds of youth programs and measuring the impact of those programs on youth through performance indicators and outcomes.
In response, various initiatives across the country are customizing existing standards to provide guidance and assistance to youth serving programs, especially those serving older youth. Public and private funders are beginning to use standards as base criteria for the programs they support.

Philadelphia’s Story …

The standards planning and development process began in Philadelphia in 1999 under the administration of Mayor Edward G. Rendell. The Mayor’s Children and Families Cabinet and its Executive Director, Jean Hunt, provided significant leadership to a movement designed to increase partnerships between government, the private sector, and community organizations to improve outcomes for children. The Children and Families cabinet included top level officials from nearly every city government department.

On January 6, 2000, representatives from the National Institute on Out-of-School Time and Baltimore Safe and Sound spoke to a group of key stakeholders at the forum “Are Our After-School Programs Good Enough”. The forum was convened by Mayor’s Children and Families Cabinet, Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth, Philadelphia Safe and Sound, the School District of Philadelphia, and the United Way’s Center for Youth Development.

The National Institute on Out-of-School Time described the nearly ten years of research, development, and testing that resulted in the National School-Age Care Alliance’s (NSACA) Standards for Quality School-Age
Care. The representative from Baltimore Safe and Sound spoke of that city’s efforts to adapt the NSACA standards to be more inclusive of older youth and youth development principles. The Baltimore standards were being used in conjunction with a capacity building effort to increase the number and quality of out-of-school time programs in the city.

Following the January meeting, the Center for Youth Development convened a group of public and private sector stakeholders to draft a set of standards that could be used to guide out-of-school programs in Philadelphia.

With the inauguration of Mayor John F. Street, the process moved quickly forward. The City of Philadelphia’s, Division of Social Services, new Child Policy Unit, convened a group of representatives from the majority of city government departments and agencies to continue the work begun on these standards for use in a new funding initiative designed to expand the quality and quantity of after-school opportunities for Philadelphia’s Youth.

Simultaneously, another standards identification and development process was in process. The Philadelphia Youth Council was also undergoing a process to identify standards and indicators for use by their constituency, many of whom served older youth in youth workforce programs.

The work and interests of the groups were merged and together they worked to develop The Core Standards for Philadelphia’s Youth Programs. Representation on this Joint Standards Committee is diverse, and includes individuals from city-sponsored agencies, the school district, small and large private youth-serving agencies, and sponsors of youth employment programs.
In the summer of 2000, this group issued The Core Standards for Philadelphia’s Youth Programs. The Core Standards are designed to assist in the development and implementation of high quality after-school and youth development programs. The Core Standards are built upon research-based best practices as well as the work of a number of national youth-serving organizations.

The Core Standards also reflect standards developed by Baltimore Safe and Sound, the U.S. Department of Labor’s regulations on the provision of the Workforce Investment Act and the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare child care licensing regulations.

The core standards were officially approved by Mayor Street and adopted by the City of Philadelphia in January, 2001.
The Core Standards

The Core Standards for Philadelphia’s Youth Programs describe best practices for youth first grade to young adulthood in organized out-of-school time programs. They provide a foundation for program quality and a benchmark for professionalism in the service delivered.

The Core Standards are divided into eight categories that represent the critical structural elements of youth programs. Each category contains a series of key statements for that category. Under each key is a standard that is a measure of the key statement.

The categories include:

A. Human Relationships
   The keys contained in human relationships are designed to help guide the interactions between staff, youth, and their families.

B. Program Planning
   Program planning is rooted in a program’s philosophy and mission. The keys in this category can guide the creation of programs to meet the needs of children, youth, their families, and the community.

C. Program Implementation
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The program implementation category describes the tools and structures needed to move planning into action.
D. **Activities**

If we visited the program, what would we see? The keys in activities describe the kinds of opportunities high quality programs provide for youth.

E. **Program Administration**

Program policies and procedures provide the infrastructure to quality programs. This section includes policies for the supervision and guidance of youth; guidelines for staff qualifications and training; and policies for program management.

F. **Indoor Environment**

Environment, a place to be, is a critical program element. The three keys in this category describe effective use of indoor space.

G. **Outdoor Environment**

Not all programs have access to outdoor space, but for those that do, this chapter describes considerations for outdoor environments.

H. **Safety, Health, and Nutrition**

Fundamental policies and procedures are outlined in this key. Guidelines include policies and procedures for health and safety hazards; risk management; transportation of youth; and snacks.
Meeting the Standards

The Core Standards for Philadelphia’s Youth Programs can assist organizations in developing new programs and increase the quality of existing programs. The Core Standards for Philadelphia’s Youth Programs identify which standards are easier to achieve and which are more difficult.
An Implementation Guide for use with the Core Standards for Philadelphia’s Youth Programs was completed and distributed in 2002. The purpose of the guide is to help Philadelphia’s youth programs meet the Core Standards. The guide will offer ideas and suggestions; resource lists and tip sheets; exercises and information. The guide will include tools to conduct a systemic self-study of how your program matches up with the Core Standards and guidelines for developing an action plan for moving your program forward towards meeting them. The materials in the guide are also designed for staff reflection and use during in-service training.

The Core Standards Implementation Guide and assessment and improvement tools continue to evolve. As programs use these documents there will be areas that need to be changed, edited, elaborated on, or eliminated.
Frequently Asked Questions

July 2001

The following are the most frequently asked or most commonly asked questions about the Core Standards for Philadelphia’s Youth Programs.

- **For whom are the Core Standards for Philadelphia’s Youth Programs designed?**

  The Core Standards are designed for all levels of staff and volunteers working towards increasing the quality of OST programs for youth, first grade through young adults.

- **Which programs are expected to meet the Standards?**

  It is our intent that all of Philadelphia’s OST programs will find the Core Standards a practical tool to help organizations improve the quality of their programs; ultimately leading to improved outcomes for our city’s youth.
• **How are programs evaluated on Standards compliance?**

Organizations utilizing the Core Standards participate in a self-assessment process and to develop an organizational learning plan to ensure continuous improvement.

• **Do our programs have to meet all of the Standards right away?**

Organizations are expected to work towards the achievement of all of the Core Standards for Philadelphia’s Youth Programs.

• **What if a program is not designed to meet all of the Standards?**

The Core Standards apply to a variety of program types for youth first grade to young adulthood. As a result, not all standards may be applicable to all programs. The Standards are designed to provide a foundation for program quality and a benchmark for professionalism in the service delivered. We encourage all programs serving youth, first grade through young adults, to read the Core Standards and reflect on how the standards could assist them in program development and improvement.

• **How do the Core Standards relate to Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare Licensing Regulations?**

The Core Standards contain the critical health and safety requirements of the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare’s Child Day Care Licensing regulations. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania requires programs providing out-of-home care at any one time, for part of a 24-hour day for seven or more children, fifteen years of age or under, to be licensed. For more information or a copy of the Child Day Care
Licensing regulations, contact DPW at 215.560.2541. Programs licensed by the DPW can register with the local Child Care Information Services (CCIS). Registration with the CCIS allows families eligible for subsidized child care (Child Care Works) to use this funding to pay for their child’s participation in a program.

**How are the Core Standards different from the National School-Age Care Alliance’s Standards (NSACA) and used to accredit after-school programs?**

The Core Standards contain elements of the National School-Age Child Care Alliance’s (NSACA) Standards for Quality School-Age Care. Programs interested in seeking accreditation from NSACA will need to comply with the NSACA Standards and its system for program improvement. For more information, visit the NSACA web-site at www.nsaca.org.
### Core Standards for Philadelphia’s Youth Programs

#### Mission
The goals and organizational vision that guide programs in the creation of activities and services for children, youth, and their families.

#### National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA)
NSACA is a national membership organization representing the entire array of public, private, and community-based providers of after school programs. NSACA promotes national standards of quality school-age care for children and youth 5 - 14 years old, and grants accreditation to programs meeting the standards. ([www.nsaca.org](http://www.nsaca.org))

#### Philadelphia Youth Council
A legislatively mandated subcommittee of the Workforce Investment Board established under the 1998 Workforce Investment Act (WIA), The Youth Council is responsible for policy and oversight of WIA funded youth programs. The Youth Council's vision is the development and implementation of a citywide coordinated youth workforce development system.

#### Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN)
Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN) is a not-for-profit, intermediary organization developed to broker services between major stakeholders in the youth workforce development system including, employers, schools and youth serving agencies.

#### Philosophy
A philosophy is what an organization believes, values, and respects as important in their work with children, youth, and their families. The philosophy states the principles, beliefs, and goals of a program.
### Core Standards for Philadelphia’s Youth Programs

**Sar Levitan Center for Social Policy Studies**

The Sar Levitan Center conducts research, issues policy papers, and is actively involved in systems building with urban areas around issues regarding support to out-of-school youth to address their education and labor market needs. ([www.levitan.org](http://www.levitan.org))

**School-Age Child Care (SACC)**

Organized and accountable programs for children and youth Kindergarten through fifteen years old operating between three and five days a week, before- and/or after-school and licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare.

**Youth**

For the purposes of the Core Standards, young people aged 7 through 21 years old.

**YouthBuild**

YouthBuild is a comprehensive youth and community development program as well as an alternative school. YouthBuild, designed to run on a 12-month cycle, offers job training, education, counseling, and leadership development opportunities to unemployed and out-of-school young adults, ages 16-24, through the construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing in their own communities. ([www.youthbuild.org](http://www.youthbuild.org))