



Afterschool Nutrition Standards of Excellence

Overview

Serving nutritious snacks and meals at afterschool programs improves the health and well-being of children. Quality food attracts 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 also play an important role in combating obesity by reinforcing positive eating habits and ensuring that children have access to fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains instead of filling up with high-fat foods and soda. Afterschool programs often provide ample opportunities for physical activity, which further contributes to better health and reduced risk of obesity.

Afterschool providers that serve low-income children often find that if children do not receive a snack or evening meal 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 children feel an added responsibility to serve food of the highest nutritional content. If children do not receive quality food at school or 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 used to promote the Afterschool Meal Program and positively reinforce quality food and healthy environments at all programs. Use it to evaluate sites serving snacks and/or meals through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) or the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).

The criteria can be used for any of the following:

- Ask staff at afterschool programs to perform a self-evaluation of their site.
- Encourage large afterschool sponsors to request that individual sites use the checklist as a self-improvement tool; or set goals for all sites to meet.

- Ask the state child nutrition agency to promote the criteria 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 need improvement and encourage them to strive for a higher 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 inspect a monthly menu to accurately evaluate the meal patterns.

Levels of Excellence

FRAC identifies 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 strive to encourage high participation in the afterschool nutrition programs and offer healthy environments and greater nutritional quality child-friendly snacks and meals.

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

Silver sites exceed the requirements of a bronze site. The site offers a greater variety of fruits and vegetables; incorporates low-fat dairy products and whole grains into the snacks and meals; offers opportunities for nutrition education and physical activity on a regular basis; maximizes the number of meals allowable under the Afterschool Meal Program and ensures that the environment promotes healthy choices such as limiting children's exposure to advertisements for foods high in salt, sugar and fat.

Gold sites surpass bronze and silver requirements. Children have a choice of menu items, additional servings of fresh fruits and vegetables, and more variety in the menu. The program offers nutrition education and opportunities for physical activity every day; and takes multiple steps to ensure that the afterschool environment promotes physical activity and good nutrition. For example, it provides lessons for children to learn the origin of their food; the staff eats with the children to model healthy behavior; and there is at least 30 minutes for all children to participate in physical activity.

Evaluating Sites

To evaluate afterschool nutrition sites, a reviewer should visit each site, review the Standards of Excellence criteria and confirm that it is met by the site. FRAC recommends that a site meet all criteria for that category in order to qualify as bronze, silver or gold. However, if the criteria are not realistic for your community it can be modified or a certain percentage of compliance can be required for each category. Be certain to explain to the staff that you are not with the state agency so as not to be confused with the official state monitor.

Acknowledging Quality Sites

Give quality afterschool programs an award or special recognition for their hard work. Acknowledge quality sites with an award ceremony, a mention in the local newspaper, or give a modest monetary reward to put towards nutrition and physical education activities at the site. The state agency or state Action for Healthy Kids team may help identify and honor quality sites in the community.

Build on Success: Take Afterschool Nutrition to the Next Level

For sites that already meet the Standards of Excellence, encourage them to advance their programming by 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 opportunities for structured and unstructured physical activity.
- Start a children's garden, and serve some of the produce with the snacks and meals to introduce the children to new types of fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Host theme weeks throughout the year to highlight different foods and offer corresponding activities.
- Work with area chefs to design healthy and appealing menus.
- Plan regular nutrition education activities such as cooking lessons.
- Ask parents to visit the site and participate in nutrition related activities.
- 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 to further their understanding and support of the afterschool nutrition programs.

Ensure Access to Quality Food throughout the Year

FRAC also published the 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 results in more consistent participation throughout the summer.

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 and staff must meet all following criteria, all federal and state CACFP or NSLP requirements and food safety regulations.

- Offer at least a two week menu cycle, which includes a variety of foods. Offer two different types of fruits and/or vegetables (canned, frozen or fresh) each week.
- Serve food at the right temperature. (Serve cold foods cold and not frozen. Serve hot foods hot, not burnt or overcooked.)
- Exclude deep fat fried food from the menu (food cooked by total immersion in hot oil, fat and pre-fried or flash fried). Stir fried or sautéed foods are acceptable. Offer alternative menu items for children based on religious observances or food allergies.
- Serve culturally appropriate food for the population of children.

Silver Level

To qualify at this level, the site and staff must meet all bronze criteria and the following.

- Offer at least a three week menu cycle, which includes a variety of food.
- Offer three different types of fruits and/or vegetables (canned, frozen or fresh) each week.
- Serve whole grain foods during the week.
- Serve low fat (1%) milk and/or skim (nonfat).

Gold Level

To qualify at this level, the site and staff must meet all bronze and silver criteria plus the following.

- Serve fresh fruits and/or vegetables five days a week.
- Provide whole-grain foods two or more times a week.
- Serve low fat (1%) milk and/or skim (nonfat) milk. Whole milk is not offered.
- Ensure appropriate serving sizes for the children's age and that they get enough food.
- Offer additional servings of fruits and vegetables - beyond USDA required amounts.

- Offer a selection of menu items (e.g. a choice between yogurt or a cheese stick; an apple or banana).

CATEGORY 2: HEALTH PROMOTING ENVIRONMENT

Bronze Level

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

- Provide an attractive and welcoming environment for children to eat.
 - Make safe drinking water is available at all times.
 - Make vending machines inaccessible during the meal service.
- Do not withhold physical activity as a punishment for children.

Silver Level

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

- Hold a food tasting event or survey the children to learn what foods they want to eat.
- Make vending machines inaccessible during the entire afterschool program.
- Do not use food as a reward or as positive or negative reinforcement for students.
- Eliminate posters and advertisements for soda and foods high in salt, fat and sugar.
- Serve suppers instead of snacks or both if the length of the program allows.
- Engage in physical activity with the children.
- Serve water with the meal every day.

Gold Level

To qualify at this level, the site and staff must meet all bronze and silver criteria plus the following.

- Prohibit vending machines, with advertisements for foods high in salt, fat or sugar.
 - Display posters or other materials promoting healthy food and physical activity.
 - Allow children to help select and prepare the meals and snacks on a regular basis.
- Inform children and parents about summer nutrition sites in the community, so they can access free meals when school is out.
- Eat meals with the children to model healthy behavior.

CATEGORY 3: NUTRITION EDUCATION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OPPORTUNITIES

Bronze Level

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

- Offer nutrition education activities throughout the month.
- Offer opportunities for children to engage in physical activity throughout the week. Model healthy behavior - not consuming food that the children are not allowed to eat.

Silver Level

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

- Offer structured nutrition education once a week.
- Provide opportunities for physical activity three or more times per week.
- Make a variety of activities available and encourage children to be active for part of the time they are at the program.

Gold Level

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

- Offer two or more nutrition related activities every week.
- Provide opportunities for physical activity every day of the program.
- Allow children to participate in physical activity for at least 30 minutes every day. Provide lesson plans, gardening activities, field trips or guest speakers so children can learn the origin of their food.