



Questions to Consider When You Choose an After School Program

1. When is the Program Open?

The days and hours of operation vary from program to program. What is considered adequate depends on your schedule and your child's.

2. Who Staffs the Program?

In addition to **who** staffs the program--- also consider how many are present and their training and qualifications. A quality program often employs a site director who supervises the site and may have a college degree or a combination of related education and experience. Ideal ratios staff to student are 1:15 or less. Also look for the use of school teachers, community professionals and volunteers. Ask how volunteers and staff are selected and screened.

3. Do You Have a Parent Handbook?

You need information on the program, as much as the program needs to know about your child and how to reach you, you need to know just as much about the program. Who do you contact in case of an emergency (and how?). What are the policies on absences, late pick up and discipline?

4. May I Have a Copy of the Schedule?

A schedule can be very detailed or done in broad strokes, but it means that some thought and planning has gone into what your child will be doing for three to four hours every afternoon. Look for the use of themes and project based activities in the schedule; and the inclusion of physical activity, academic review and homework support.

5. What's for Snack?

Some after school programs get snacks through the USDA's Afterschool Snack Program and the school's food service. Others buy their own snacks. A quality program offers a variety of healthy and nutritionally balanced snacks.

6. How Does Your Program Link to the School Day?

The best after school programs intentionally connect to the school day. After school program staff should work and consult with teachers. The projects, themes and activities (especially academic enrichment activities), offered in after school should be connected to the school day. Look for programs that support and enhance classroom education, without duplicating it. Activities like music and art can help children do well in other subjects. Extensions of school day learning, like a project based activity, give time to reach youth with different learning styles and reinforce school day learning.

7. What Happens During Homework Time?

Many after school programs dedicate time to homework. A high quality program sets aside time every day, with certified teachers and trained professionals assisting students. A good homework area is not twenty desks in a row with no talking – it is an atmosphere where all students can get the help they need, from one on one tutoring to working in small groups of their peers. A good program has materials that students use in class, like Math rubrics, sight word lists, rulers, pencils and paper.

8. When and What Do You Offer for Physical Activity?

After school is not just about getting your homework done; it is important to ask what kind of games and activities are available-- free play (like recess) or organized games (like basketball and soccer.) Are there opportunities for youth to learn and improve skills? Is there a mixture of competitive and collaborative games? A balance of activities ensures all will be encouraged to be physically active, regardless of their ability to "win".

9. When Do You Hold Community & Family Events?

A good program will hold events (usually in the evening) where you can see what your child has learned. After school programs are often the strongest link between a parent and the school. Quality programs strengthen the parent and school connection by offering activities that encourage and support involvement.

10. What Is the Fee?

This is an important question - but notice that it is at the bottom of this list. If you think the program is a good fit for your child, but the fee is too high, do not hesitate to ask if scholarships are available. Many programs have funds set aside specifically for scholarships or you may be eligible for assistance in other ways. If you think this is the best place for your child, be persistent.

Some programs do not charge a fee, but remember, someone is paying for the program. It may be the South Carolina Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Center program or a private foundation. If this is the case, please do your part by participating in surveys and giving feedback, so the program will continue to be accessible in your community. Be an advocate for the programs in your community by participating in activities supporting after school.

For more information, contact the South Carolina Afterschool Alliance

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