

# What does a high-quality, school-age program look like?

School-age programs can be found in a variety of different settings. Some before and after school programs may be offered on-site at your child's school. Others may be provided by a community organization, child care center or family child care home. In addition to providing child care before and after school, many of these settings offer summer camp programs or programming during school breaks.



Quality school-age programs offer positive learning experiences and nurturing relationships with trusted adults who understand child development. A quality school-age program setting will have caregivers who know how to meet the physical, emotional and developmental needs of school-age children. They also recognize that children in different age groups have unique needs.

A high-quality school-age program is enriching, caring, and fun, with the adult program leaders thoughtfully interacting with the young people. Activities are planned to ensure young people are developing important skills and achieving their goals.

## Finding the Right Fit

Each child is different, and it's important to remember there is no one-size-fits-all approach to caring for children. You know your child best, and it is important you use this knowledge when evaluating your child care options. Look for a program that will support and value your child's style while also providing responsive care to each child.

### Here are a few things to look for in a quality school-age program:

- **Caring environment.** A quality program creates an environment in which children feel safe and cared for, and their self-worth is nurtured. They also learn important skills that they will carry through the rest of their school career and into adulthood.
- **Emphasis on social development.** High-quality school-age programs are ideal places for children to develop their social skills. Opportunities should be created for them to understand and respect other students, practice conflict management in a safe environment and negotiate peacefully. Life skills such as sharing and meeting the needs of others should be fostered in a natural way with adults close by to step in if needed.
- **Program structure.** There should be daily opportunities for quiet and active play, homework, snacks, outdoor play and activities that spark curiosity and problem solving. Activities that support what they are learning in school will add another layer of understanding, which will help them succeed.
- **Appropriate supervision.** The program should maintain a child-to-staff ratio to ensure adequate supervision inside and outside.
- **Families as partners.** Quality programs communicate regularly with families and partner with them when challenges arise. Quality programs also include opportunities for family engagement, like family fun nights or opportunities to shape the curriculum.