A quality program provides a safe, healthy, and stimulating learning environment that promotes physical, social, emotional, and cognitive growth and development for all youth. Activities allow for choice, exploration, and discovery.

GUIDELINE 1: Program provides an emotionally safe environment that fosters positive physical, social, emotional and cognitive growth and development for all participants.

1.1 Nutritious meals and snacks.
1.2 Age-appropriate furniture and equipment that is in good condition and is used appropriately by staff and youth.
1.3 Age-appropriate, aesthetically appealing visual aids.
1.4 Space for showcasing youth work.
1.5 Effective communication of code of conduct to youth, staff, and families.
1.6 Emotionally safe space separate from the main room for youth to “cool off” or talk through conflict resolution.
1.7 Available staff member to offer emotional support and help youth work through conflict if and when it arises.
1.8 At least 30 minutes out of every 3 hour block of time while at the program to play outdoors, weather permitting.
GUIDELINE 2: Program offers rich, meaningful, and engaging experiences to enhance learning, promote student success, and provide opportunities for human development.

2.1 Activities that reflect the mission and philosophy of the program.
2.2 Project-based activities to encourage creativity and promote self-expression.
2.3 Experiential opportunities to allow youth to be exposed to new pathways for learning.
2.4 Quality academic tutoring for youth requesting help and quality alternative activities for youth not requesting tutoring.
2.5 A well-rounded menu of learning options offering opportunities for choosing and pursuing of personal interests.
2.6 Opportunity for discovery through trial and error.
2.7 An emotionally safe environment for youth to succeed and fail.
2.8 Youth ownership and pride.
2.9 Sufficient supplies and materials.
2.10 Activities divided by age or skill level.
2.11 Multi-age groupings where appropriate.
2.12 Opportunities for youth to work individually, in small groups, and whole group; opportunities to lead and follow.
2.13 Chances for older youth to mentor younger youth.
2.14 Inclusion of youth self-reflection.

GUIDELINE 3: Program supports learning and diversity through outreach to the schools, community, and volunteers.

3.1 Former participants to give back as volunteers or staff.
3.2 Promotional materials that provide details on program offerings, how to join, and how to partner with the program.
3.3 Exploration of community resources and issues through projects and activities.
3.4 Collaboration with school-day personnel to bridge academic connections and promote service learning.
3.5 Opportunities for community service/service learning and reflection on those experiences.
GUIDELINE 4: Schedule reflects offerings conducive to the needs of the youth, parents, and community served.

4.1 Flexibility of hours of operation to meet the needs of the youth and parents.
4.2 A schedule available to staff, youth, and their families.
4.3 Opportunities for youth voice and spontaneous learning to occur. Youth have formal and informal opportunities to express their opinions and concerns about program offerings.
4.4 Adequate, sufficient, and age-appropriate transitions.
4.5 Creative, seamless, and smooth activity transitions.
4.6 Youth and parent involvement in schedule creation.
4.7 Active program pacing.
4.8 Teacher-directed and student-directed leadership opportunities.

GUIDELINE 5: Program provides the platform for active youth voice.

5.1 Youth participation in program development and program selection.
5.2 Formal opportunity for youth to reflect and provide feedback on program and offerings.
5.3 Staff acknowledgement of youth input by utilizing feedback in creation of future program design and offerings.
5.4 Youth opportunities to lead others and experience different levels of self-management.