

Introducing the Afterschool Program Assessment System (APAS)

The National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST), in conjunction with the Massachusetts Department of Education, is pleased to announce the *Afterschool Program Assessment System (APAS)*.



What is APAS?

The Afterschool Program Assessment System (APAS) is a new, comprehensive evaluation system designed to help afterschool programs improve their program quality and reach their desired outcomes for children and youth. The APAS is one of the only assessment systems available that helps afterschool programs link quality and youth outcomes together in a comprehensive, flexible and integrated fashion.

How does it work?

The *APAS Evaluation System* includes two measurement tools—the Survey of Afterschool Youth Outcomes (*SAYO*) and the Assessing Afterschool Program Practices Tool (*APT*). The *SAYO* measures changes in intermediary youth outcomes linked with long-term healthy development and educational success. The *APT* is an assessment tool that helps programs examine important aspects of program quality linked to the *SAYO* Outcomes.

Background & Development

Over the past five years, the *SAYO* and the *APT* tools have been extensively piloted, scientifically tested and used by nearly one hundred Massachusetts Department of Education 21st Century Community Learning Center program sites. As part of the statewide Massachusetts Afterschool Research Study (MARS) in 2004, links were found between *APT* program quality and *SAYO* youth outcomes.

Characteristics of the APAS System

- * Designed specifically for afterschool programs
- * Research-based, scientifically and field-tested instruments
- * Based on a menu approach, wherein programs measure those outcomes that fit best with their program design and goals.
- * Designed to help afterschool programs align program improvement efforts with desired youth outcomes, yet flexible in that the tools can be used together or separately
- * User-friendly format
- * Appropriate for use by afterschool programs (K-8) of all sizes and most types
- * Multiple internal and external uses for tracking, monitoring and measuring improvements in program quality and youth outcomes.

The Survey of Afterschool Youth Outcomes (SAYO)

The SAYO uses brief pre-participation and post-participation outcome surveys to collect data about youth from regular education teachers and afterschool staff. The SAYO is based on a menu approach in which programs collect data on outcomes that are most aligned with their goals for the young people they serve. The SAYO is designed for programs serving children from kindergarten through middle school.

SAYO Outcome Areas

Teacher Version: (SAYO-T)

- *Behavior in the Classroom*
- *Initiative*
- *Engagement in Learning*
- *Analysis and Problem Solving*
- *Communication Skills*
- *Homework*
- *Academic Performance*

Afterschool Staff Version: (SAYO-S)

- *Behavior in the Program*
- *Initiative*
- *Relations with Adults*
- *Relations with Peers*
- *Homework*

Each outcome area is measured by asking teachers and staff to respond to four or five questions related to observable youth behaviors. These items have been extensively tested and found to work as a single scale that effectively captures the outcome being measured. Teacher and/or staff responses to these surveys can be completed for all participating youth or for a sample of youth in a program.

Sample SAYO Behavior Items

Please circle the number that best describes how often this student:						
	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Usually	Always	N/A (√)
a. Is able to regain control of behavior when given warning.	1	2	3	4	5	
b. Works well independently when expected to do so.	1	2	3	4	5	

Programs that use SAYO will gain information on how their participants have changed and what gains, if any, they have made over the course of the year. However, as is true with all similar program evaluation research, the results cannot necessarily be attributed to program participation. We encourage those using the SAYO to collect additional data on youth which may enable their programs to better understand the ways in which it may be contributing to outcomes. It should be noted that SAYO was designed primarily as a program assessment tool which can help programs track changes in youth linked to participation. *SAYO should not be used as an individual youth diagnostic tool.*

The Assessing Afterschool Program Practices Tool (APT)

The APT is a quality assessment tool designed to help programs strengthen practices that research suggests are linked to SAYO outcome areas. The APT includes two tools: The **APT Observation Tool (APT-O)**, an observation tool which focuses on observable program practices; and the **APT-Program Questionnaire (APT-Q)**, a self-assessment tool which examines those aspects of program quality that occur “behind the scenes,” such as program planning and connections with schools and parents.

What does the APT Measure?

Positive Program Climate:

- Welcoming & Inclusive Environment
- Staff use Positive Behavior Guidance
- High Program and Activity Organization
- Space is Conducive to Learning
- Program Supports Staff

Supportive Relationships:

- Staff-Youth Relationships
- Peer Relations

Practices that Support Individualized Needs & Interests

- 1:1 support
- Varied/Flexible Approaches & Scheduling
- Opportunities for Autonomy
- Connections with Families

Practices that Stimulate Engagement & Skill Building

- Staff Promote Engagement & Thinking
- Opportunities for Responsibility & Leadership
- Connections with Schools
- Targeted SAYO Skill Building/Activities
- Youth are Positively Engaged in Program & Skill Building

Sample Items- APT Observation Tool

B. Staff Promote Youth Engagement & Stimulate Thinking	How true?	Notes
Staff are energetic, enthusiastic, and/or upbeat. <i>1=Staff appear distant, bored or “flat” in their demeanor.</i>		
Staff are actively engaged in activities with youth (e.g. interacting with groups, or individual youth; providing ongoing facilitation, participating with youth). <i>1=Staff do not engage with youth (e.g. chatting with other staff or engaged in own activity).</i>		
Staff encourage youth to share control/responsibility for activity (e.g. Youth help set out materials for art project, youth are encouraged to take the lead in selecting and initiating activities). <i>1=Staff maintain control throughout activity period, resist input from youth, do not seek youth involvement.</i>		

Is APAS right for me?

APAS tools work best when used by well-established programs that provide consistent programming and serve a stable group of youth over an extended period of time. The SAYO may not be appropriate for drop-in programs or programs that offer time-limited sessions, due to limited exposure of youth to the program and staff.

Currently, those interested in using APAS must have access to their own database system. Online database management systems are currently under development and should be available by Fall 2007.

How is APAS different from other assessment tools?

- * Includes outcome areas that research links to success in school and the workplace
- * Gathers data from teachers and after school staff—whereas most other youth outcome tools rely exclusively on youth perspectives
- * Allows programs to focus on assessing specific, observable practices rather than reflecting upon more general quality characteristics.
- * Allows programs to examine how youth are participating in the program
- * Results from the Massachusetts Afterschool Research Study found links between APT quality and SAYO-(S) youth outcomes.

How are programs using the APAS system?

- * Self-assessment of program practices by program administrators and multi-level teams
- * Help promoting greater consistency in practices across multiple sites
- * Pinpointing topics for staff development sessions and as a guide for delivering feedback to staff that is concrete and constructive
- * Using pre- and post- assessments of program practices to measure change over time
- * Using baseline youth behaviors in SAYO outcome areas to aid in program planning
- * Communicating with schools about the needs of individual youth.
- * Measuring change over time in youth outcomes areas to track program progress toward goals

How can I get started using APAS?

APAS is currently available for use by afterschool programs that have participated in APAS preparatory training and understand its proper use. A variety of training options are currently available through the *National Institute on Out-of-School Time* and can be customized to meet your needs and interests. Those interested in APAS training can host their own event, or register to participate in one of the regional sessions offered by the *National Institute on Out-of-School Time*.

For more information on APAS visit our web site, www.niost.org or call the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 781-283-2546