

July 2022
 Vol. 13

This Practice Brief is the twelfth in a periodic series published by the National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment (NCASE) to build awareness of research and promising practices in the field of school-age child care.

The goal of NCASE is to ensure that school-age children in families of low income have increased access to quality afterschool and summer learning experiences that contribute to their overall development and academic achievement. For more information, contact us at ncase@ecetta.info.

NCASE is funded by the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children & Families, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.



Key Considerations for Addressing School-Age Needs in Licensing Regulations

State child care licensing requirements establish baseline health and safety standards and set minimum professional development requirements for program staff. Licensing regulations are often framed around the developmental needs of very young children, but nearly half (45%) of all children served through Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) subsidies are school-age—ages 5 through 12—making it critically important that CCDF Lead Agencies and licensing requirements support child care providers' ability to serve the needs of this age group.

School-age children differ from younger children in terms of their developmental needs, capabilities, interests, and ability to safely exercise independence. Helping school-age children thrive in safe, supportive child care environments means ensuring that program staff are prepared to work with this age group through appropriate training and professional development, and that state licensing staff know how to appropriately assess school-age

child care environments. Ensuring that the licensing requirements are the right fit for the age and setting also facilitates child care providers' ability to engage in the subsidy system, expanding access to quality school-age programs for families as children grow. When school-age programs are able to attain licensure, they are able to serve families who utilize child care subsidies for their school-age children's care, and they are able to access additional



quality supports.¹ Thus, supporting school-age programs in becoming licensed helps to promote more equitable access to safe, affordable, quality school-age child care for families utilizing CCDF subsidies.

States interested in ensuring that school-age providers and children are well-served by their licensing requirements can examine the various ways in which school-age needs are addressed in their existing child care regulations.² When licensing requirements differentiate between the needs of programs serving only very young children and those serving populations with school-age children, providers have better options for ensuring that staffing and ongoing training, as well as curriculum and program activities, are aligned with the needs of the population they serve. In **New Jersey**, for example, the [statewide afterschool network](#) supports the training of licensors to work in school-age environments by creating a realistic school-age environment on the training site, which allows licensors to observe the ways in which school age can look and feel different from early childhood settings.

[Equity Considerations for the Child Care Licensing System](#) offers questions for licensing administrators and their staff to help identify and consider inequities in the licensing systems. While not specific to school age, this resource contains important equity considerations that affect licensing practices for all programs, including school-age providers.

This brief is based on a review of selected states' school-age child care licensing requirements and highlights a variety of ways these requirements can help support school-age providers and the children they serve. The brief draws on a scan of state child care licensing regulations conducted by the Afterschool Alliance; it also includes information from the National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment (NCASE) about state policies from its technical assistance work with states.

The brief offers state child care licensing agencies a list of key considerations for creating school-age licensing requirements that meaningfully address school-age needs. This means ensuring that licensing requirements, and licensors themselves, recognize what a safe, quality school-age environment looks like; that staff preservice qualifications are inclusive of school-age-related credentials and degrees; that ongoing staff development includes school-age topics; and that school-age programs include appropriate curricula and programming for children in this age group. While many school-age programs are license exempt, licensing regulations that are meaningfully tailored to school-age needs can make formal licensing more accessible and remove common barriers to licensure.³ The considerations listed below are examples of how to ensure that licensing regulations can address the needs of school-age providers and the population of children they serve; these considerations should not be considered an exhaustive list.

- ¹ This brief only addresses licensing regulations for centers serving school-age children, not family child care providers who serve mixed-age groups. It also does not offer guidance about quality standards or quality rating and improvement systems.
- ² [Seventeen states](#) have separate regulations for school-age child care centers. This brief is designed to help other states and territories consider how school-age child care is addressed in their current regulations and whether those regulations should be revised to better meet the needs of school-age child care providers and the children they serve.
- ³ While license-exempt school-age child care providers do not have to follow all licensing regulations, these considerations are equally important for those providers. States can decide whether licensors responsible for program monitoring should use these considerations as a framework regardless of a provider's licensing status.

Staff Qualifications and Professional Development Requirements

State child care regulations set forth minimum qualifications for program directors and other staff. When listing eligible college degrees or course credits that can serve as preservice qualifications, many states include degrees and coursework topics that are early childhood-focused, such as the Child Development Associate (CDA) or coursework in early childhood education.⁴ This helps to ensure that program staff understand the developmental needs of young children but does not address the needs of school-age children. Given that school-age programs can serve children up through middle school and early adolescence, it is important that licensing regulations are flexible enough to include the ability to hire staff with the appropriate training for the developmental ages and stages of the children they serve.

Some states specifically note that acceptable college degrees and/or coursework includes early childhood education or youth development or another school-age focus, which allows for a better fit between program staff's educational training and the population of children served by school-age providers. [Colorado's](#) requirements for school-age program staffing notes that a program director must have verifiable education or training in work with school-age children in such areas as recreation, education, scouting or 4-H (fields that are relevant to working with school-age children). In [Wisconsin](#), a director or teacher in a center serving only school-age children can use the Wisconsin Registry Afterschool & Youth Credential to meet the requirements for their role; a teacher can also meet entry-level requirements by completing a school-age focused course

offered by the Wisconsin statewide after-school network. And [Nebraska's](#) child care licensing requirements include a provision to make it easier for licensed school-age programs operating on school grounds to employ school day teachers without the need for them to meet additional staffing requirements.

In addition to including school-age credentials among their preservice requirements, some states include specific school-age focal areas as options in the continuing education and training hours required of program staff. For example, [Arkansas's Minimum Licensing Requirements for Out-of-School Time \(OST\) Facilities](#) include training on the Youth Program Quality Assessment tool as one way for OST program directors, assistant directors, and site supervisors to fulfill training requirements within the first six months of assuming their role. All staff must obtain 15 clock hours of professional development each year, with allowable topics including OST program planning management, leadership of OST programs, building partnerships with the larger community, and creating a culturally competent OST program. [Vermont's Child Care Licensing Regulations: Afterschool Child Care Programs](#) apply to afterschool child care programs in community-based centers and schools, and the state's staffing requirements for leadership and regular staff include a variety of school-age-specific experience and credentials. These include 10 months or more of direct work experience with school-age children; Vermont Afterschool Professional Credential; Vermont Afterschool Foundations Certificate; and the Vermont Afterschool Essentials Certificate.

⁴ Depending on the staff role, preservice qualifications do not always require a college degree or college coursework (often a high school diploma and experience working with children are the minimum requirements).

Group Sizes and Ratios for School-Age Children

Child-adult ratios and group sizes are important drivers of quality. Lower ratios allow for more adult-child interaction and guidance and allow staff to better manage the range of responsibilities they must juggle during their shift. School-age children, however, do not require the same amount of intensive supervision and guidance as do infants and toddlers, who need hands-on staff assistance for basic functions such as feeding and toileting. School-age children are also more capable of managing their own activities and peer interactions than younger children.

To help school-age providers meet recommended ratios, some states allow these programs to include staff members under the age of 18 in the staff-child ratio, provided the staff member is of a minimum age and is not left alone with the children in their care. [South Dakota](#), for example, allows school-age program staff members who are at least 16 years old to be included in the staffing ratio, provided they are under direct and constant supervision from the director or program planner until they are 18. This allowance not only helps programs adhere to recommended ratios to promote safety and children's development but allows for the career development of staff under 18 years of age. [Cross-age peer mentoring](#) in afterschool programs, such as high school-age staff working with younger children, has been shown to have positive effects on younger children's social skills, behavior, and self-efficacy. In addition, allowing [youth to work directly with school-age children](#) provides positive youth development benefits and can help put older youth on a pathway to becoming school-age program staff in the future. [Michigan's Youth Development Associate Credential](#), for example, is available not only to high school graduates, but to juniors and seniors enrolled in a career and

technical education program in the Education and Training Career Cluster. Thus, allowing staff members under the age of 18 to work directly with school-age children and including them in ratios offers a range of benefits: to the children in care, to the staff working with them, and to the program as a whole due to the increased ability to maintain a desired ratio.

Age-Appropriate Health and Safety Training

Several states have health and safety trainings tailored to school-age needs. [Colorado](#) requires program leaders to complete a Department of Human Services-approved course on playground safety for school-age child care centers, and [Kansas](#) allows school-age program staff who would like to give children the opportunity to participate in higher-risk recreational activities (such as those requiring specialized instruction or protective safety gear) to submit descriptions of those sports and activities to the secretary of health and environment for approval.

Developmentally Appropriate Programming

Another way that state licensing regulations can help ensure that school-age child care programs are best serving the children in their care is by offering guidance on developmentally appropriate programming. School-age programming provides a real opportunity to support families and schools with the academic, social, mental, and emotional developmental progress of their growing youth. [Arkansas's Minimum Licensing Requirements for Out-of-School Time Facilities](#) requires programs to "offer project-based, experiential activities that promote creativity and youth self-expression" and to offer both short- and long-term projects. Arkansas's

requirements also call for OST programs to “offer activities that target life skill development that encourages development of critical thinking skills and offers a progression of skill levels within activities . . . [and] activities that integrate opportunities throughout the program for participants to develop personal responsibility, self-direction, and leadership.” These programmatic requirements reflect the developmental needs of school-age children and help ensure that providers offer a range of enriching, developmentally appropriate activities for this age group. [Texas’s](#) school-age program licensing requirements include a section on the importance of youth development in afterschool environments and include suggestions of program activities that offer an enriching “contrast” to the formal school day environment, such as team sports, cooking, art, dramatics, music, crafts, and games. Research shows that consistent attendance in high-quality OST programs with these types of engaging curricula supports students’ long-term success, including their motivation for and performance in school, interest in careers, and behavioral attitudes.⁵

Closing: The Need for School-Age-Focused Training and Technical Assistance

The considerations outlined above should be accompanied by an examination of the training and technical assistance (TTA) providers with whom state agencies contract to offer support to school-age programs. For example, while some states include school-age-relevant credentials as ways for staff to qualify for their roles and successfully complete ongoing training, in most cases, these credentials are among a



number of qualifying degrees, coursework, or training topics which also include early childhood development or early childhood education. Thus, it is possible for staff to qualify to lead or work in a school-age child care program without having the background or ongoing training specific to the population they serve. This speaks to the importance of state-level leadership in providing guidance to child care programs about how to align staff preservice qualifications and ongoing training with the needs of the children served by school-age programs. In addition, states should ensure that there are school-age-focused TTA providers available to provide school-age-relevant professional development.

As another example, while licensing requirements can call attention to the needs of school-age children and offer ideas for enriching program activities, the ability of school-age programs to meaningfully implement such activities is contingent on program leaders’ and other staff’s understanding of how to design and implement activities that address school-age children’s developmental needs. The use of TTA providers with school-age expertise is a key way to ensure that the intent of states’ ongoing staff training and curriculum and programming requirements

⁵ Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., & Pachan, M. (2010). A meta-analysis of after-school programs that seek to promote personal and social skills in children and adolescents. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 45, 294–309.

for school-age providers can be carried out in practice. School-age children’s capacity for self-directed work, pursuing personal interests, and collaborating as part of a team is very different from the capacity of very young children. Staff benefit from tailored professional development to learn how to leverage school-age children’s more advanced capacity for independence and deeper engagement with learning and enrichment activities.

State CCDF Lead Agencies and other licensing entities should consider how school age is addressed in their existing licensing regulations and work with school-age collaborators, including [statewide afterschool networks](#), to examine whether this approach appropriately serves school-age providers and provides them with supports to create programming

environments in which school-age children can thrive. As states continue to discuss how to spend their supplemental Child Care and Development Block Grant Act funds, collaborators can consider how they might review, revise, or reimagine existing licensing regulations to best address school-age needs. For example, **Oregon** and **Montana** are currently undertaking school-age licensing revisions in partnership with their statewide afterschool networks. This work can lead to stand-alone regulations for school-age programs (such as what exists in [Vermont](#) and [Arkansas](#)) or school-age-specific sections of a state’s overall child care regulations.



This document was developed with funds from Grant #90TA00001 for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care, by the National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment. This resource may be duplicated for noncommercial uses without permission.