Core Competencies for Youth Development Professionals

What youth development professionals need to know and do to provide quality services for youth and their families.
Welcome!

This is the first edition of the *Kansas and Missouri Core Competencies for Youth Development Professionals*. These core competencies represent the combined efforts of groups from Kansas and Missouri to define the core competencies for youth development professionals in our states - that is, what youth development professionals need to know and be able to do to provide quality services for youth and their families. Inside, you will find an introduction that explains why the core competencies are critical to the field. Next, the competencies are divided into content areas and levels. Note the convenient check boxes for self-assessment. Finally, a section is included for recording professional activities and training/education.

If you have any questions or need additional copies, please contact one the following organizations:

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(This document is modeled after the *Kansas and Missouri Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals* completed in January 2001.)

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We would like to thank all of the individuals who participated in the development, review, and revision of the core competencies, including more than 100 youth development professionals who completed a web-based survey.

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Reasons why core competencies are critical to the field

- Core competencies define what professionals need to know and do to provide quality youth programming.
- Core competencies serve as the foundation for decisions and practices carried out by professionals in all settings and programs.
- Core competencies establish a set of standards that support the professionalization of the youth development field.

Different ways core competencies may be used

| Group Leaders, Youth Workers, Youth Development Professionals | Assess level of knowledge and skill in each of the eight content areas |
| Directors, Program Administrators | Specify training/education requirements for staff job descriptions |
| | Develop staff training/education plans and policies |
| | Establish a salary scale based on staff achievement |
| Families, Communities, and Public Education (K-12) | Understand expectations of professionals working with youth in out-of-school time settings |
| Trainers, Training Organizations | Plan and organize training/education |
| | Promote training/education opportunities |
| Higher Education Faculty, Staff, and Administrators | Coordinate and design course content to facilitate transfer and articulation agreements |
| | Assess current program content to determine course development |
| Federal, State, and Local Agencies | Develop and implement policies that will enhance professionalism in the field |
| Professional Development Efforts | Create the framework for a career development system that provides access to competency-based training/education, ensures compensation commensurate with educational achievement, and allows professionals to achieve recognition in the field |

The Bi-State Core Competencies are organized by content areas and levels

The Kansas and Missouri Core Competencies for Youth Development Professionals complements the structure of the Kansas and Missouri Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals while addressing the wide variety of skills and abilities necessary to work with school-age children and older youth. The competencies have eight content areas ensuring a comprehensive approach and are broken into five levels to distinguish the expectations for professionals as they progress from new/untrained to experienced/trained in the field.

Content areas

Each content area describes the knowledge and skills professionals need in order to work with youth and their families. Each content area specifies ways in which professionals fully include youth from many ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds as well as youth with special needs. Professionals increase their knowledge and skills in the content areas through ongoing training/education.
Core Content Areas

■ I. Child/Adolescent Growth and Development: understand how youth learn and develop in each of the domains: physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and creative.

■ II. Learning Environment and Curriculum: establish an environment that provides learning experiences that meet each youth’s needs, capabilities, and interests.

■ III. Child/Adolescent Observation and Assessment: observe and assess what youth know and can do in order to provide curriculum that meets their developmental and learning needs.

■ IV. Families and Communities: work collaboratively with families and agencies/organizations to meet the needs of youth and to encourage the community’s involvement with youth development.

■ V. Health, Safety, and Nutrition: establish and maintain an environment that ensures the healthy development, safety, and nourishment of youth.

■ VI. Interactions with Children/Youth: establish supportive relationships with youth and guide them both as individuals and as a part of a group.

■ VII. Program Planning and Development: establish, implement, and evaluate youth development programs.

■ VIII. Professional Development and Leadership: serve youth and families in a professional manner and participate in the community as a representative of the youth development field.

The core competencies provide a framework of the knowledge and skills needed for each of the five levels of professional preparation; however, they are not exhaustive. Some competencies reflected in the content areas require professionals to perform specific actions, while others suggest areas for continued growth and knowledge. Moreover, professionals may find that satisfying some competencies requires further training/education.

Levels

The levels of competency establish a continuum from the preliminary skills necessary to enter the field to an advanced level of academic preparation and varied experience. Professionals progress from one level to another through a combination of formal study and reflection on practice. Depending on the professional’s role, setting, or experience, he or she may have skills at varying levels in the different areas.

The five levels are intended to be cumulative. For example, a professional working at Level 3 has knowledge and skills to meet the competencies at Levels 1, 2, and 3. At all levels, adults who work with youth continue their participation in professional development activities and increase their knowledge and skills within each of the content areas.

■ Level 1 includes the knowledge and skills expected of a professional new to the youth development field, with minimal specialized training/education.

■ Level 2 includes level 1 plus the knowledge and skills commensurate with a Youth Development Credential, a certificate in youth development, or equivalent training/education.

■ Level 3 includes levels 1 and 2 plus knowledge and skills commensurate with an associate’s degree in child/adolescent development or related fields.

■ Level 4 includes levels 1, 2, and 3 plus knowledge and skills commensurate with a bachelor’s degree in child/adolescent development or related fields.

■ Level 5 includes levels 1, 2, 3, and 4 plus knowledge and skills commensurate with an advanced degree in child/adolescent development or related fields.

Youth development professionals become increasingly specialized as they achieve higher levels of formal education. Therefore, these professionals are expected to demonstrate a general set of competencies with a specific area of specialization. In addition, these professionals are expected to assume a leadership role in the field, collaborating with professionals in other fields to promote awareness about youth development.
The Bi-State Core Competencies were developed in response to research findings

- Well trained and educated staff provide higher quality experiences for youth and more effectively facilitate youth engagement in the program (INCRE & NIOST, 2005).
- Youth who participate in quality out-of-school time activities are more likely to develop high self-esteem, leadership skills, and positive attitudes toward learning (McLauaglin, 2000).
- The out-of-school time field is broadly defined and lacks a clear professional identity. Youth workers need a common language and common expectations as part of a comprehensive professional development system (Dennehy et al., 2006).

The Bi-State Core Competencies are based on these premises

- Youth require a supportive environment in which to develop.
- Youth development professionals recognize that quality out-of-school time programs help support and bridge the gap between school and home.
- Cultural diversity impacts all areas of practice. Professionals recognize that each family is unique in its structure, values, beliefs, traditions, and interactions. Professionals respect each family’s worth and appreciate the richness of diversity that each family brings to the program.
- Professionals in youth development assume many roles (e.g., director, youth worker, group leader, aide) and work in a variety of settings (e.g., school-based, community-based, profit, not-for-profit).
- Professional development requires reflection on practices to identify strengths, recognize areas for future growth, and incorporate new learning experiences. Reflection heightens awareness of one’s own performance and leads to personal change and growth.

The Bi-State Core Competencies are the result of collaboration

The core competencies represent the combined efforts of professionals from Kansas and Missouri to define professional standards for the field. The competencies were developed with leadership from the following organizations:

- Opportunities in a Professional Education Network (OPEN) Initiative
- Missouri Afterschool Network (MASN) Quality Committee
- Kansas Enrichment Network (KEN)

Recognizing opportunities to pool resources, prevent duplication, and provide consistency, the organizations collaborated to develop one set of core competencies to serve as the foundation for the Kansas and Missouri career development systems. In partnership, the OPEN Initiative provided staffing support for the development of the content and funds for the graphic design, while the Missouri Afterschool Network (MASN) and Kansas Enrichment Network (KEN) encouraged workgroup participation by network members and provided funding to print and distribute the competencies throughout their respective states.
History

Beginning in the fall of 2004, the OPEN Initiative and the Quality Committee of the Missouri Afterschool Network convened several Missouri-based workgroup sessions to begin the development of the Core Competencies for Youth Development Professionals. The workgroup decided to build upon the existing core competency structure, utilizing the same eight content areas and five levels found in the early childhood version of the core competencies while revising the document to address the wide variety of skills and abilities necessary to work with school-age children and older youth.

In October 2004, The Kansas Enrichment Network and the Kansas Children’s Campaign published a report, “A Call for Quality Afterschool Programs in Kansas.” The report was a result of collaborative work between the Kansas Children’s Campaign Task Force and the KEN Quality Committee. One state recommendation was to create standards, training, and leadership credentialing (professional development) that enhance and build on the early care and education core competencies. The workgroup decided to build on the established bi-state partnership to create consistent core competencies for youth.

In June 2005, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education – Community Education Division sponsored a bi-state meeting held at the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation in Kansas City, MO, where MASN and KEN members thoroughly reviewed and revised the core competencies. A draft of the bi-state document was then put into a web-based survey so that professionals from both states could comment. The bi-state workgroup revised the competencies in response to reviewers’ suggestions, resulting in the first edition.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of the individuals who participated in the development, review, and revision of the core competencies, including more than 100 professionals who completed the on-line survey. Additionally, we would like to thank the following organizations/programs for contributing staff time to participate in workgroup sessions between 2004 and 2006:

- Adventure Club, Rockwood School District
- Behavioral Connections, LLC
- Geary County Schools
- Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City
- Kansas 4-H and Extension
- Kansas Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies – Professional Development Initiative
- Kansas Department of Health and Environment – Child Care Licensing
- Kansas Enrichment Network (KEN)
- Kansas Social and Rehabilitation Services
- Kansas State Department of Education
- Kansas State University – School of Family Studies and Human Services
- Local Investment Commission (LINC)
- Missouri Afterschool Network (MASN)
- Missouri Afterschool Resource Center (MOARC)
- Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education – Community Education Division
- Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services – Bureau of Child Care
- Missouri Department of Social Services – Children’s Division
- Missouri School Age Community Coalition (MOSAC²)
- OPEN Initiative
- Penn Valley Community College – Francis Child Development Institute
- St. Louis Community College
- St. Louis for Kids
- University of Missouri 4-H
- YMCA of Greater Kansas City
- YouthNet of Greater Kansas City
Content Area I - Child/Adolescent Growth and Development

Child/Adolescent Growth and Development

Level 1
- a. Is aware of the basic stages of youth development.
- b. Is aware of youth development frameworks pertaining to positive youth outcomes (e.g., 40 Developmental Assets, Positive Youth Development).
- c. Recognizes that youth learn and develop through experience.
- d. Values different personalities in youth.
- e. Recognizes cultural and environmental factors and the effects those factors may have on behavior and development.
- f. Responds to the individual needs of youth, including those with special needs.

Level 2
- a. Describes specific physical, cognitive, social, and emotional stages of youth development.
- b. Recognizes differences in personalities and development in youth and the ways in which those differences impact their needs and participation in the program.

Level 3
- a. Recognizes current theories and ongoing research related to family and youth development.
- b. Explains physical, cognitive, social, and emotional differences among youth.
- c. Creates environments and experiences that value, affirm, and respect cultural/linguistic diversity.
- d. Employs practices that support an inclusive philosophy.
- e. Utilizes appropriate resources and makes program adaptations for youth with special needs.

Level 4
- a. Applies major theories of family and youth development and establishes interrelationships across all curricular areas.
- b. Integrates information on growth, development, and learning styles of individuals and applies it to youth in group settings.
- c. Shares information with families about the general principles of child/adolescent growth and development.
- d. Ensures that the program’s policies and practices reflect an inclusive philosophy.

Level 5
- a. Articulates, analyzes, evaluates, and/or applies current theories and research related to child/adolescent growth and development.
- b. Researches and applies multiple approaches to youth developmental outcomes.
Creating the Learning Environment and General Curriculum

Level 1
- a. Follows a daily schedule.
- b. Gives youth choices.
- c. Supports and encourages youth participation in a variety of activities.
- d. Recognizes the importance of youth involvement in the planning process.

Level 2
- a. Maintains and monitors daily schedule.
- b. Provides an interesting, safe, and inclusive environment.
- c. Identifies assets and risk factors that may impact the success of youth.
- d. Encourages the engagement of youth in a variety of developmentally appropriate activities that facilitate fun and promote learning through experimentation, exploration, and simulations.
- e. Arranges effective and appropriate activity areas.
- f. Selects materials appropriate to the developmental levels of all youth.

Level 3
- a. Plans and adapts activities and the environment to make them appropriate for the developmental levels of all youth.
- b. Considers the physical environment when developing the curriculum.
- c. Uses appropriate materials, technologies, activities and strategies in an integrated curriculum that includes recreation and fitness, academic support, life skills, and personal growth and development.
- d. Creates opportunities for youth involvement in program planning and evaluation.
- e. Provides materials that expose youth to a variety of ethnic backgrounds.
- f. Plans activities that provide opportunities for youth to develop internal and external assets.

Level 4
- a. Creates a curriculum and learning environment using authentic materials, technologies, choices, and decision-making which incorporates experimentation, exploration, simulation, and play as a context for enhancing development and active learning.
- b. Ensures that the environment facilitates learning in all curricular areas, including recreation and fitness, academic support, life skills, personal growth and development, and technology.
- c. Plans and evaluates the learning environment and curriculum to maximize learning.
- d. Plans environment for youth with special needs and different learning styles.
- e. Takes advantage of opportunities to modify the curriculum in order to build on the interests and activities of youth.
- f. Develops strategies that allow youth to participate in curriculum planning.

- g. Provides space that accommodates both active and quiet, youth-directed and adult-directed, individual and group, indoor and outdoor activities.
- h. Uses materials that demonstrate acceptance of race, gender, culture, family, language, and special needs.
- i. Involves youth in developing activities and learning experiences.
g. Articulates and applies the major theories of youth development and learning.

h. Informs others, including families, about the importance of adult-youth and youth-youth interactions in all curricular areas.

i. Plans, uses, and evaluates appropriate materials, technologies, activities, and strategies in an integrated curriculum that includes all program components.

j. Collaborates with other agencies to maximize opportunities for youth in the integrated curriculum areas.

Level 5

a. Designs and shares curriculum with others.
b. Teaches others how to design curriculum.
c. Articulates, analyzes, evaluates, and/or applies current theories and research related to the design of curriculum and environment.
d. Ensures that program activities include opportunities for youth to develop internal and external assets.
e. Communicates major theories, research, and issues relevant to family and youth development.
f. Collaborates with other agencies to research and communicate information about the integrated curriculum areas.

Promoting Physical Development

Level 1

- a. Interacts appropriately with and supervises youth during physical activities.
- b. Models healthy behavior.
- c. Facilitates a variety of physical activities that meet the interests, development, and skill levels of youth.

Level 2

- a. Uses a variety of indoor and outdoor physical activities, including structured, unstructured, staff-directed, and youth-directed.
- b. Supports youth with special needs as they participate in physical activities.
- c. Uses a variety of equipment, activities, and opportunities to promote physical health and fitness.

Level 3

- a. Adapts physical health and fitness activities for youth with special needs.
- b. Incorporates physical activities into all curricular areas (e.g., recreation and fitness, academic support, life skills, personal growth and development).
- c. Provides an environment that is conducive to the exploration and development of physical skills.

Level 4

- a. Evaluates the appropriateness and effectiveness of physical development activities for groups and individuals.
- b. Articulates the importance and demonstrates the methods of integrating health and fitness activities into all curricular areas.
- c. Understands the impact of health and fitness activities on youth.
- d. Facilitates youth involvement in curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation.

Level 5

- a. Articulates, analyzes, evaluates, and/or applies current theories and research related to promoting physical development.
- b. Advocates for policies and practices that promote the physical development of youth.
Promoting Cognitive Development

**Level 1**
- a. Encourages youth to ask questions for understanding and actively listens to the responses given.
- b. Interacts appropriately with youth during cognitive experiences.
- c. Facilitates a variety of cognitive activities that meet different interest and skill levels.

**Level 2**
- a. Asks youth relevant open-ended questions to extend their learning.
- b. Engages in cognitive activities with youth while maintaining a supervisory role.
- c. Encourages the cognitive development of youth through experimentation, exploration, simulation, and play.
- d. Provides a variety of activities and opportunities that encourage exploration and problem solving appropriate for the different developmental levels of youth.
- e. Leads math, science, technology, and nature exploration in a manner that engages youth and builds on their interests.
- f. Provides literacy experiences, such as reading aloud to youth and modeling proper inflection and emphasis in speech.
- g. Facilitates learning opportunities that reflect the cultures represented in the community of the program.
- h. Follows the program’s philosophy on homework assistance.

**Level 3**
- i. Uses a variety of cognitive activities, including formal, informal, staff-directed, youth-directed, and instructional.
- j. Includes youth with special needs in cognitive activities.

**Level 4**
- a. Varies program strategies to correspond to multiple learning styles.
- b. Plans, implements, evaluates, and modifies activities/curriculum to encourage the cognitive growth of youth.
- c. Engages youth in planning problem-solving and critical-thinking activities.
- d. Evaluates the appropriateness and effectiveness of cognitive activities for groups and individuals.
- e. Articulates the importance and demonstrates the methods of integrating cognitive activities into all curricular areas.
- f. Communicates the impact of cognitive activities on youth.

**Level 5**
- a. Articulates, analyzes, evaluates, and/or applies current theories and research related to promoting cognitive development.
- b. Collaborates with other agencies to research and communicate information on cognitive development.
- c. Teaches how to integrate cognitive activities into all curricular areas.
Promoting Communication Skills

Level 1
- a. Models good listening and verbal skills including the use of proper grammar.
- b. Communicates appropriately and respectfully.
- c. Stimulates conversation with and between youth.
- d. Understands that youth communicate in a variety of ways.

Level 2
- a. Offers a variety of communication opportunities that meet individual interests and skill levels.
- b. Expands own and youth’s vocabulary through a variety of ways.
- c. Encourages youth to use appropriate verbal and nonverbal means of communicating thoughts and feelings.
- d. Recognizes barriers in communication.
- e. Provides an environment that is conducive to the exploration and development of communication skills.
- f. Includes youth with special needs in communication activities.

Level 3
- a. Offers programming opportunities for youth to learn effective communication skills.
- b. Plans and implements communication experiences and activities based on the population of the program.
- c. Adapts communication activities for youth with special needs.
- d. Incorporates communication skills into all curricular areas (e.g., recreation and fitness, academic support, life skills, personal growth and development).

Level 4
- a. Adapts and modifies interactions with youth based on their individual communication skills as determined through assessment.
- b. Evaluates the appropriateness and effectiveness of communication activities for groups and individuals.
- c. Develops and teaches strategies for integrating communication development activities into all curricular areas.

Level 5
- a. Collaborates with language specialists to modify and adapt curriculum activities and experiences to meet the language and literacy needs of each youth.
- b. Articulates, analyzes, evaluates, and/or applies current theories and research related to emerging trends in language acquisition, development, and literacy.
- c. Collaborates with other agencies to research and share information on communication development.
- d. Advocates for policies and practices that promote the communication development of youth.
Promoting Social Development

Level 1
- Engages in everyday conversations with youth.
- Treats youth as individuals with their own strengths and needs.
- Recognizes that periods of stress and transition may affect youth’s social development.

Level 2
- Helps youth learn to communicate and get along with others.
- Models recognition and expression of feelings.
- Promotes feelings of empathy and mutual respect among youth and adults.
- Helps youth feel valued as members of a group.
- Guides youth through periods of stress and transition.
- Encourages youth to perceive events and experiences in their lives as opportunities for growth.
- Emphasizes cooperation in games and activities.
- Provides many opportunities for youth to learn cooperation.
- Supports youth in developing awareness both as an individual and as a member of a family and ethnic or social group.
- Models awareness of and sensitivity to different cultural values and expectations.
- Encourages youth to exhibit empathy and respect for the rights and possessions of others.
- Provides an environment that is conducive to the exploration and development of social skills.

Level 3
- Guides youth in expressing their feelings and asserting themselves in positive ways.
- Facilitates youth participation in problem solving and conflict resolution.
- Helps youth navigate a variety of social settings.
- Intervenes appropriately to help the social development of youth.
- Adapts social activities for youth with special needs.
- Plans and incorporates social activities into all curricular areas (e.g., recreation and fitness, academic support, life skills, personal growth and development).

Level 4
- Provides a meaningful curriculum that emphasizes social skills and relationships, including friendships.
- Creates a sense of an inclusive community.
- Develops and implements strategies that encourage the social development of youth through various leadership and citizenship roles.
- Evaluates the appropriateness and effectiveness of social activities for groups and individuals.
- Facilitates youth involvement in curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation.
- Communicates the process for developing a curriculum that promotes the social development of youth.
- Develops and teaches strategies for integrating social development activities into all curricular areas.

Level 5
- Articulates, analyzes, evaluates, and/or applies current theories and research related to promoting social development.
- Collaborates with other agencies to research and communicate information on social development of youth.
- Evaluates the quality and effectiveness of curriculum, activities, and opportunities that support the social development of youth.
- Advocates for policies and practices that promote the social development of youth.
Promoting Creative Expression

Level 1
- a. Recognizes the value of the process as well as the product.
- b. Encourages individuality.
- c. Accepts cultural differences that may affect the ways in which youth express individual creativity.

Level 2
- a. Emphasizes the process of creating as well as the end product.
- b. Uses technology to support creative expression.
- c. Allows time for spontaneous activities.
- d. Provides materials for unstructured, self-directed activities.
- e. Models and encourages creativity through the arts.
- f. Develops curriculum and activities to promote creative expression.
- g. Provides opportunities that encourage youth to experiment with sound, rhythm, movement, language, materials, space, and ideas in individual ways.
- h. Recognizes the community as a resource for creative experiences.

Level 3
- a. Ensures that all youth have access to opportunities that allow for individual creative expression.
- b. Modifies curriculum and experiences to promote the creative expression of all youth.
- c. Involves youth in the development and implementation of creative and aesthetic activities.
- d. Uses the community as a resource for creative experiences.
- e. Values creative expression as necessary to the development of the individual.
- f. Adapts creative activities for youth with special needs.
- g. Incorporates creative activities into all curricular areas (e.g., recreation and fitness, academic support, life skills, personal growth and development).
- h. Provides an environment where youth feel free to explore and develop their creative skills.

Level 4
- a. Demonstrates leadership in establishing partnerships with community organizations that stimulate creative and aesthetic experiences for youth.
- b. Encourages and integrates creative expression throughout curriculum.
- c. Shows respect for creative expression through appropriate documentation and exhibition (e.g., displaying, publishing, creating portfolios).
- d. Educates families about the importance of individual creative expression.
- e. Advocates for the importance of youth representing their thoughts, feelings, and ideas through creative outlets.
- f. Introduces youth to and helps youth develop an appreciation for creative and aesthetic experiences in their community.
- g. Adapts time, space, and materials to support each youth’s creative development.
- h. Evaluates the appropriateness and effectiveness of creative activities for groups and individuals.
- i. Integrates creative activities into all curricular areas.
- j. Articulates the impact of creative activities on youth.

Level 5
- a. Communicates the theoretical concepts underlying the ways in which youth use the arts to express themselves.
- b. Articulates, analyzes, evaluates, and/or applies current theories and research related to promoting creative experiences.
- c. Identifies and uses specialists in artistic disciplines to incorporate the arts into the curriculum.
- d. Collaborates with other agencies to research and communicate information on creative development.
- e. Teaches the importance of integrating creative activities into all curricular areas.
Observation and Assessment

Level 1

- a. Acknowledges that youth develop at their own pace.
- b. Is aware of youth development frameworks pertaining to positive youth outcomes.
- c. Assists with collection of information about youth behaviors.
- d. Maintains confidentiality regarding observation and assessment information.
- e. Recognizes environmental factors that may place youth at risk.
- f. Shares concerns about behavior and environmental factors with authorized individuals.

Level 2

- a. Identifies various ways to get to know each youth as an individual, including his or her strengths, needs, interests, family, and life situation.
- b. Understands the behaviors of youth in the context of normal growth and development and uses age-appropriate expectations as the basis for observation.
- c. Recognizes indicators of positive youth development.
- d. Collects and organizes information to measure youth outcomes (e.g., using samples of a youth’s work, completing skill lists, recording anecdotal notes).
- e. Follows appropriate procedures for observing youth (e.g., remaining objective, asking open-ended and non-judgmental questions).
- f. Communicates observations in written and oral form.

Level 3

- a. Appreciates and accommodates the range of development and skills among youth.
- b. Continually observes youth, analyzes and evaluates findings, and applies learned knowledge to practice.
- c. Selects appropriate assessment methods.
- d. Engages youth, staff, and families in the ongoing assessment process.
- e. Recognizes the role of risk factors on youth development.
- f. Interprets observation information to develop services, opportunities, and supports for youth.

Level 4

- a. Communicates observations with staff, educators, youth, and families in a clear and supportive manner, while maintaining confidentiality.
- b. Plans relevant assessments.
- c. Incorporates observation information into program and/or individual plans (e.g., Individual Education Plans).
- d. Recommends that youth seek further evaluation, when needed.
- e. Works cooperatively with assessment, school, and health care teams for youth with special needs.

Level 5

- a. Articulates, analyzes, evaluates, and/or applies current theories, research, and policies relevant to assessment.
- b. Communicates major research and issues relevant to observation and assessment.
- c. Establishes criteria, procedures, and documentation methods for observation, assessment, and accommodation.
Core Competencies

Content Area IV - Families and Communities

Relationships with Families

Level 1

■ a. Respects the role of the family as central to the development of youth.
■ b. Establishes positive communication and relationships with families.
■ c. Acknowledges and accepts differences in the varying structures of families.
■ d. Maintains confidentiality.

Level 2

■ a. Encourages family members to participate in program activities.
■ b. Recognizes that families influence youth’s abilities and interests.
■ c. Creates and maintains open, friendly, and cooperative relations with families and communicates with them on a regular basis.
■ d. Provides opportunities for families to share skills, talents, and cultural backgrounds.
■ e. Supports the relationships of youth with their families.
■ f. Recognizes the stress factors that are affecting families.
■ g. Respects and supports cultural differences and diverse family structures.
■ h. Uses inclusive language that is respectful of all family types.
■ i. Identifies family strengths.
■ j. Communicates with families about program goals and activities.

Level 3

■ a. Communicates with families about the progress and development of their youth.
■ b. Partners with families in addressing developmental and behavioral issues experienced by their youth.
■ c. Strives to ensure that family and community diversity and cultures are reflected in all aspects of the program.
■ d. Works effectively with families from a variety of cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
■ e. Provides families with appropriate referrals to community resources.
■ f. Plans and conducts family meetings and conferences.
■ g. Implements effective conflict resolution techniques with families.
■ h. Involves family members as decision makers in the programs.
■ i. Builds on families’ strengths and creates opportunities for continual family involvement throughout the program.
■ j. Utilizes young people as resources for family involvement.

Level 4

■ a. Shares knowledge of child/adolescent growth and development with families.
■ b. Facilitates and models a strengths-based, family-centered approach.
■ c. Participates with families in the development of Individual Education Plans (IEPs).
■ d. Makes program adjustments based on cultural and structural differences of families.
■ e. Articulates the various theories of family systems and the effects of stress/crisis on families.
■ f. Assesses, plans, and conducts activities for family support and participation.
■ g. Creates opportunities for families and youth to be actively involved in program and policy development.
Use of Community Resources

Level 1
- a. Recognizes the community as a resource for services, activities, and volunteers.
- b. Values and uses community resources that support and assist youth and families.
- c. Works cooperatively and appropriately with volunteers and partners.

Level 2
- a. Helps families identify community resources specific to their needs and makes appropriate referrals.
- b. Supports families in obtaining clear and understandable information on legal rights, special needs, and developmental concerns.

Level 3
- a. Promotes public awareness about family and youth development.
- b. Assists with community outreach and mobilization.
- c. Participates in community asset mapping and needs assessments.
- d. Builds effective working relationships with families, partners, and volunteers.
- e. Understands the larger community context in which youth and families live.

Level 4
- a. Develops relationships with community partners and provides youth and families with resource information.
- b. Collaborates with community partners to meet the needs of youth and families.
- c. Implements and supports volunteer programs, as needed.

Level 5
- a. Works to develop community partnerships to expand or enhance resources for youth, families, and the program.
- b. Represents the youth development field in collaborative community endeavors.
- c. Develops and maintains a volunteer management system, as needed.
- d. Networks with professionals in the field of youth development and other related fields.
- e. Develops and implements strategies to strengthen community relationships through a greater understanding and engagement of staff, youth, families, and community stakeholders.
Knowledge of Regulations

Level 1
- a. Follows regulations or policies regarding health and safety, including emergency, illness, and injury procedures.
- b. Follows program policies and procedures on releasing youth.
- c. Completes basic first-aid and CPR certification.
- d. Uses emergency supplies and equipment, as needed.
- e. Practices and carries out disaster plans and drills (e.g., fire, tornado, earthquake, and lockdown).
- f. Follows supervision and ratio requirements or policies.
- g. Performs the mandated reporter role for child abuse and neglect.

Level 2
- a. Ensures that safety equipment, such as a smoke detector or fire extinguisher, is in place and operable.

- b. Maintains emergency supplies and equipment.
- c. Uses diagrams, pictures, and words understood by youth and adults to post instructions for emergency procedures.
- d. Identifies and reports problems regarding supervision and staff/child ratios.
- e. Follows regulations and policies regarding inclusion.
- f. Assists with and involves youth in health and safety assessments.

Level 3
- b. Informs others of emergency, illness, and injury procedures.
- c. Ensures adherence to regulations and policies regarding health and safety.

Level 4
- a. Articulates and adheres to regulations and laws pertaining to youth and families.
- b. Engages youth and families in the development and/or revision of health and safety procedures.
- c. Develops and/or documents contingency plans to meet supervision and ratio requirements in all situations.
- d. Assesses how regulations and policies affect the quality of the program.

Level 5
- a. Analyzes and corrects deficiencies found in supervision, health, and safety assessments.
- b. Articulates, analyzes, evaluates, and/or applies current theories, research, and policies related to health and safety.

Environmental Safety

Level 1
- a. Maintains and ensures safety in all areas, both indoors and outdoors.
- b. Selects safe materials and equipment for activities.
- c. Actively supervises and interacts with youth.
### Level 2
- a. Communicates characteristics of a safe environment, including equipment and materials to prevent and reduce injuries.
- b. Adapts the indoor and outdoor environments to maximize the independence of youth with special needs.
- c. Teaches safety precautions and rules to youth and enforces rules consistently.
- d. Shares up-to-date safety information and resources with families.

### Level 3
- a. Designs and assesses safe environments, both indoors and outdoors.
- b. Facilitates youth participation in a process to identify and assess environmental issues.
- c. Allows opportunities for youth to help improve environmental issues.

### Level 4
- a. Advocates for environmental safety.
- b. Develops policies and procedures for environmental safety.

### Level 5
- a. Participates in community groups to develop and implement strategies for improving environmental safety.
- b. Identifies opportunities to fund environmental safety improvements.
- c. Articulates, analyzes, evaluates, and/or applies current theories, research, and policies relevant to environmental safety.

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### Responding to Health Needs of Youth

#### Level 1
- b. Helps youth practice appropriate hand-washing techniques.
- c. Ensures that safe restroom and personal hygiene procedures are followed.
- d. Follows universal safety precautions.
- e. Responds to youth’s injuries and fear of injuries, documents any injuries, and notifies families while ensuring the comfort and care of other youth.
- f. Observes youth daily for signs of illness and possible signs of abuse and neglect.

#### Level 2
- a. Promotes good health and provides an environment that contributes to the prevention of illness.
- b. Seeks information on and demonstrates good practices for youth with healthcare needs.
- c. Plans and guides self-help activities.
- d. Follows instructions for administration of medicine and approved medical treatments, including related documentation.
- e. Identifies, documents, and reports suspected emotional distress, abuse, and neglect of youth in an immediate and appropriate way.
- f. Recognizes the natural curiosity of youth in human development and responds respectfully.

#### Level 3
- a. Designs and assesses sanitary environments, both indoors and outdoors.
- b. Models and provides directions on sanitary behaviors.
- c. Talks with and provides resource information to youth and families about healthy bodies, healthy lifestyles, and a healthy environment.
- d. Helps youth, families, staff, and others recognize and report abuse and neglect.
- e. Observes the effects of stress and trauma on youth and assesses their resiliency.
- f. Plans and conducts safe field trips.
Level 4
- a. Designs and documents sanitation policies and procedures.
- b. Works with health care professionals in the community to ensure that the needs of youth are met.
- c. Establishes policies and procedures for the documentation and notification of suspected abuse and neglect.
- d. Plans activities that teach youth techniques to deal with stress and develop resiliency.
- e. Designs and implements curriculum activities that emphasize healthy bodies, healthy lifestyles, and a healthy environment.

Level 5
- a. Collaborates with community groups to identify health issues or concerns.
- b. Articulates, analyzes, evaluates, and/or applies current theories, research, and policies relevant to the health needs of all youth.

Nutrition

Level 1
- a. Practices safe food handling and follows general sanitation practices.
- b. Maintains sanitary environments.
- c. Monitors the eating habits of youth to ensure a healthy diet, including the fulfillment of their need to eat frequently.
- d. Recognizes health hazards in meals (e.g., allergies, choking) and takes steps to prevent dangerous situations.

Level 2
- a. Provides healthy meals and snacks in a pleasant environment.
- b. Communicates with youth and families about nutritional needs and preferences.
- c. Plans and guides activities related to nutrition and cooking experiences with youth.

Level 3
- a. Identifies and responds to nutritional issues, including food allergies.
- b. Plans and evaluates menus.
- c. Includes food from various cultures.
- d. Involves youth in planning activities related to nutrition and cooking experiences.

Level 4
- a. Assesses the program’s nutrition plan and adapts practices accordingly.
- b. Incorporates activities related to nutrition and cooking experiences into all curricular areas (e.g., recreation and fitness, academic support, life skills, personal growth and development).
- c. Ensures that the staff knows how to respond if a youth experiences an allergic reaction to food.

Level 5
- a. Articulates, analyzes, evaluates, and/or applies current theories, research, and policies relevant to nutrition.
- b. Collaborates with community groups to identify nutritional issues or concerns.
- c. Advocates for policies and procedures that affect the nutritional welfare of the broader community.
Providing Individual Guidance

**Level 1**
- a. Avoids actions that would cause physical and emotional harm to youth.
- b. Provides appropriate supervision.
- c. Interacts in a manner reflecting respect for self and others.
- d. Interacts with youth in a positive, warm, nurturing manner.
- e. Uses positive behavior guidance.
- f. Addresses problem behaviors or situations, rather than labeling youth.

**Level 2**
- a. Modifies activities to ensure a safe, fun learning environment.
- b. Establishes and communicates limits for acceptable behaviors.
- c. Responds to youth’s behaviors in ways that encourage self-control.
- d. Provides a supportive environment in which youth can provide input on, learn, and practice appropriate and acceptable behaviors as individuals and as a group.
- e. Uses a variety of positive direct and indirect guidance methods.
- f. Provides an environment that helps each youth know, accept, and take pride in himself or herself and develop a sense of independence.

**Level 3**
- a. Demonstrates realistic expectations about youth’s attention spans, interests, social abilities, and physical needs.
- b. Facilitates youth participation in establishing program/group rules.
- c. Identifies strategies that involve youth in establishing guidelines, limits for behaviors, and natural/logical consequences.
- d. Selects guidance practices based on youth’s personalities and levels of development.
- e. Understands that there are reasons for the behavioral issues of individuals and responds appropriately.
- f. Uses knowledge of youth culture to connect appropriately with youth.

**Level 4**
- a. Adapts the learning environment and curriculum to minimize potentially disruptive behaviors.
- b. Applies theories of child/adolescent growth and development to improve guidance techniques.
- c. Uses child/adolescent assessments to individualize and improve guidance.
- d. Collaborates with families to develop individually appropriate expectations for youth behaviors.

**Level 5**
- a. Involves community, families, and youth in developing written policies for effective child/adolescent guidance.
- b. Articulates the principles of intervention and conflict resolution in youth activities.
- c. Develops individual guidance plans, using relevant professionals for support, as needed.
- d. Articulates, analyzes, evaluates, and/or applies current theories and research related to individual guidance.
Enhancing Group Experiences

Level 1
- a. Is aware of age-specific group dynamics.
- b. Uses prepared yet flexible plans.
- c. Leads activities in a positive, relaxed, and pleasant atmosphere.
- d. Alerts youth well in advance to changes in activities or routines.
- e. Understands the role of organization and flexibility when working with youth.
- f. Handles activities and changes in schedule with clear directions and patience.

Level 2
- a. Builds trusting relationships with youth as a foundation for providing positive guidance and fostering self-discipline.
- b. Anticipates and defuses disruptive behavior.
- c. Recognizes each youth’s abilities and uses guidance techniques accordingly.
- d. Discusses expectations and boundaries and ensures that youth understand.

Level 3
- a. Provides experiences that engage youth and respond to their interests.
- b. Involves youth in planning and leading activities to promote cooperative experimentation, exploration, simulation, and play.
- c. Involves youth in planning and leading activities that promote supportive relationships with peers, families, staff, and the community.

Level 4
- a. Encourages positive communication, problem solving, negotiation, and relationships.
- e. Adapts group experiences to ensure that all youth are engaged.

Level 5
- a. Applies theories of child/adolescent growth and development to group management techniques.
- b. Develops activities that foster cooperative group skills that focus on negotiating, compromising, and problem solving in both large and small groups.
- c. Designs and develops cooperative group activities based on current research and the curriculum.
- d. Articulates, analyzes, evaluates, and/or applies current theories and research related to group experiences.
## Program Planning and Evaluation

### Level 1
- a. Contributes to the program team.
- b. Keeps appropriate records.
- c. Complies with program policies and standards.
- d. Knows and understands the program’s purpose.
- e. Values involving youth in the planning process.

### Level 2
- a. Understands and supports the program’s mission.
- b. Organizes, plans, keeps records, and communicates effectively.
- c. Involves youth in developing activities and learning experiences.
- d. Identifies goals and objectives for activities.
- e. Selects and uses appropriate equipment, materials, and resources.
- f. Assists in gathering information for program evaluation.

### Level 3
- a. Demonstrates the relationship between daily practices and the program’s philosophy.
- b. Plans family orientations and activities.
- c. Plans and acquires appropriate equipment, materials, and resources for the program.
- d. Participates in strategic planning and goal setting for the program.
- e. Conducts program observations.
- f. Recognizes the importance of evaluations and assists in evaluating the program’s effectiveness.
- g. Creates opportunities for youth involvement in program planning and evaluation.

### Level 4
- a. Applies knowledge of federal, state, and local legislations, regulations, and professional standards to provide healthy, safe, and effective practices for all youth.
- b. Designs and facilitates strategic planning and goal-setting activities that involve staff, youth, families, and the community.
- c. Develops and implements program policies and procedures.
- d. Develops curriculum framework and approaches for the program.
- e. Manages program resources effectively.
- f. Develops and works effectively with board members/advisory groups.
- g. Identifies program evaluation methods and understands their purposes and limitations.
- h. Facilitates the development of youth leadership in planning and evaluating the program.
- i. Incorporates programming that integrates and complements the school curriculum.
- j. Manages the program in a way that minimizes risk.

### Level 5
- a. Articulates, analyzes, evaluates, and/or applies current theories, research, and policies relevant to program planning and evaluation.
- b. Develops and implements a marketing plan to promote the program in the community.
- c. Ensures that the program respects and reflects the diversity of the community.
- d. Identifies and anticipates risk-management issues and develops strategies to address them.
- e. Promotes and builds relationships between school-day and out-of-school programs.
Personnel Management

Level 1
- a. Knows and follows the program's personnel policies and procedures.
- b. Works effectively with peers, support staff, volunteers, and supervisors.

Level 2
- a. Incorporates principles of teamwork into interactions with staff and volunteers.

Level 3
- a. Values and works to strengthen the program's team of staff, administrators, and volunteers.
- b. Facilitates communication among staff and administrators.

Level 4
- a.Recruits, screens, trains, supervises, and evaluates staff and volunteers.
- b. Plans and provides professional development opportunities for staff and volunteers.
- c. Provides strong leadership and visionary direction.
- d. Develops a recognition program for staff and volunteers.

Level 5
- a. Develops a staff recruitment, selection, and retention program.
- b. Designs and utilizes staff job descriptions, evaluation forms, and personnel policies and procedures.
- c. Ensures youth involvement in the process of evaluating staff and volunteers.
- d. Supervises interns, apprentices, and practicum students.
- e. Articulates, analyzes, evaluates, and/or applies current theories, research, and policies relevant to personnel management.

Financial Management

Level 1
- a. Follows the program's financial policies and procedures.
- b. Performs basic math computations and makes basic money transactions.
- c. Follows bookkeeping procedures.

Income/Expense Statement

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<th>Expense</th>
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<tr>
<td>Income/Expense</td>
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</table>

Level 2
- a. Utilizes commonly accepted business practices.
- b. Operates within budget.

Level 3
- a. Assists in planning the budget.
- b. Conducts and maintains the supplies, materials, and equipment inventories.

Level 4
- a. Develops the program's fiscal policies and procedures.
- b. Analyzes, plans, and maintains the budget.
- c. Communicates the program's budget and financial status.
- d. Involves youth in developing the program's financial strategies and priorities.

Level 5
- a. Develops and implements a business plan.
- b. Ensures that the budget reflects the program's goals and philosophy.
- c. Develops a marketing plan.
- d. Seeks and obtains additional funding opportunities.
- e. Articulates, analyzes, evaluates, and/or applies current theories, research, policies, and practices related to financial management.
Content Area VIII - Professional Development and Leadership

Displaying Professionalism in Practice

Level 1
- a. Acts as a responsible staff member.
- b. Enjoys working with youth and models a positive attitude.
- c. Exhibits good hygiene and a neat personal appearance.
- d. Demonstrates good work habits.
- e. Supports and complies with regulations and standards.
- f. Values performance improvement.
- g. Is aware of professional ethics for the youth development field.
- h. Acts ethically, maintaining confidentiality and impartiality.
- i. Knows and commits to the program’s philosophy and goals.

Level 2
- a. Balances demands of personal and professional commitments.
- b. Uses effective problem-solving skills.
- c. Demonstrates respect for self and others.
- d. Performs well as a team member.
- e. Promotes quality in programs for youth.
- f. Demonstrates a commitment to professional ethics.
- g. Values feedback on performance.

Level 3
- a. Engages in self-reflection on how practices affect the behaviors of youth.
- b. Stays informed about current trends in the field of youth development.
- c. Promotes professional ethics and seeks to diminish unethical practices.
- d. Participates in making program decisions based on accepted professional standards.

Level 4
- a. Participates in group problem solving of program issues.
- b. Articulates a personal philosophy of education based on knowledge of child/adolescent growth and development and best practices.
- c. Recognizes causes and symptoms of excessive stress and/or low morale and develops strategies to reduce stress and improve morale.
- d. Evaluates current trends in the field of youth development and revises practices as appropriate.

Level 5
- a. Initiates and mediates group problem solving.
- b. Advocates for the implementation of current research and policies relevant to child, adolescent, and family development.
- c. Revises practices according to research.
- d. Advocates for youth and families.

Ongoing Professional Growth

Level 1
- a. Seeks out knowledge to improve practice.
- b. Accepts advice and feedback to improve practice.
- c. Sets goals to improve skills and abilities in the field of youth development.

Level 2
- a. Is aware of professional resources.
- b. Builds personal and professional competence for the benefit of youth and families.
- c. Evaluates own performance and sets goals to increase skills and abilities in the field of youth development.
- d. Applies knowledge of best practices.
Core Competencies

Leadership and Advocacy

Level 3
- a. Uses professional resources to improve practice.
- b. Develops and carries out a personal professional development plan.
- c. Works toward credentials, degrees, and/or program accreditation.
- d. Actively participates in professional associations and builds professional relationships.

Level 4
- a. Articulates a professional value system and implements ongoing professional self-reflection.
- b. Identifies and works toward career goals.
- c. Fosters professional growth of others.

Level 5
- a. Explores models of professional development and evaluates/assesses opportunities to promote others’ professional growth.
- b. Designs staff development opportunities with colleagues.
- c. Disseminates knowledge at local, state, regional, and national seminars.
- d. Understands the change process and develops practices to support professional growth.
- e. Uses knowledge to shape practices and policies that positively influence the profession.

Level 1
- a. Recognizes professional behavior.

Level 2
- a. Demonstrates support for the youth development field.
- b. Models professional behavior.
- c. Understands the importance of providing youth with leadership opportunities.

Level 3
- a. Identifies community needs that affect youth.
- b. Exhibits knowledge of advocacy issues.
- c. Initiates problem solving and conflict resolution for the program and staff.
- d. Participates in activities or projects sponsored by professional associations and other boards, task forces, or committees.
- e. Supports youth in leadership roles.

Level 4
- a. Promotes best practices in youth development to families, administrators, colleagues, and the community.
- b. Describes the legislative process, including legal and advocacy issues, that impacts youth and their families and communicates this information to others.
- c. Explains how government policies affect family and youth development.
- d. Serves on professional association boards and/or other boards, task forces, or committees.
- e. Creates opportunities for youth to serve in leadership roles.

Level 5
- a. Serves as a spokesperson to the community and media about youth development.
- b. Develops and carries out advocacy plan.
- c. Provides a work culture that fosters staff initiative in solving problems and resolving conflicts.
- d. Holds a leadership position in professional associations and/or other boards, task forces, or committees.
- e. Advocates for youth-adult partnerships.
- f. Advocates for accessible, affordable, safe, and quality programs for youth.
Definitions

Cognitive/cognition
Cognitive/cognition refers to both the knowledge possessed and the youth’s ability to think, reason, learn, and understand. Younger school-age children usually think in concrete ways. Older school-age children (adolescents) begin to use more complex ways of thinking.

Community asset mapping
Asset mapping involves identifying and documenting the resources available in a community. Asset mapping is a positive experience where the community is viewed as a place with strengths rather than deficits to be overcome.

Curriculum
Curriculum in a youth development program refers to program content and how it is delivered. Although a program may select a particular focus, high quality programs incorporate all curricular areas (e.g., recreation and fitness, academic support, life skills, and personal growth and development) into program plans. Program curriculum should also include a positive youth development approach that allows youth to develop a positive attitude toward learning and a successful approach to living.

Daily practice
Daily practice is the day-to-day implementation of the program’s curriculum and a youth development approach.

External assets
External assets are the positive experiences young people receive from the world around them. These assets are about supporting and empowering young people, setting boundaries and expectations, and positive and constructive use of young people’s time.

Individual Education Plan (IEP)
An IEP is a written document that is developed for each public school child/youth who is eligible for special education. The IEP is created through a team effort and reviewed at least once a year. The IEP guides the supports offered to the child/youth.

Internal assets
Internal assets identify those characteristics and behaviors that reflect positive internal growth and development of young people. These assets are about positive values and identities, social competencies, and commitment to learning.

Learning styles
Learning styles are different approaches to or ways of learning. Most youth have a preference on how they take in and process information. The three primary learning styles are visual, auditory, and tactile/kinesthetic.

Needs assessment
A needs assessment is a process of collecting and examining information about an issue, program, community, or service and utilizing the data to determine priority goals, develop a plan, and allocate funds and resources.

Program philosophy
A program’s philosophy is the program’s approach to working with youth. Programs are encouraged to utilize a positive youth development framework.

Program purpose/mission
A purpose or mission outlines the program’s basic goals and/or reason for existence. The purpose or mission statement should be clear to participants, families, staff, and the community.

Transition plan
A transition plan specifically addresses the activities and supports that will take place as the youth leaves the public school system and enters adulthood. A transition plan is usually incorporated into the IEP of youth.

Youth
Youth are children and adolescents who are school-age through teen-age.

Youth culture
Youth culture includes the values, norms, institutions, and artifacts that are shared with others. Youth culture includes learned behaviors such as mannerisms, dress, language, rituals, and norms of behavior generally shared by youth.

Youth development framework/approach
A positive youth development approach builds upon the youth’s assets and strengths rather than focusing on his/her problems, obstacles, or risk taking behavior. A positive youth development framework includes opportunities for youth to develop self-confidence, practice leadership skills, and to improve in a variety of ways.

Youth outcomes
Youth outcomes are the changes and gains made by youth as they grow and develop into adulthood. These include the knowledge, skills, attributes, and behaviors that youth must develop to be caring, healthy, and responsible adults.

References


# Professional Development Record

## Suggestions for using this record

After participating in a professional activity or training/education session, transfer the information to your Professional Development Record. This record and your training certificates should be used to document annual training clock hours. During the year, plan to complete training/education sessions in several content areas.

### Professional Activities

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### Training/Education Sessions

#### Content Area I: Child/Adolescent Growth and Development

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#### Content Area III: Child/Adolescent Observation and Assessment

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#### Content Area IV: Families and Communities

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#### Content Area V: Health, Safety, and Nutrition

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#### Content Area VI: Interactions with Children/Youth

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#### Content Area VII: Program Planning and Development

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#### Content Area VIII: Professional Development and Leadership

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The OPEN Initiative, Missouri Afterschool Network, and Kansas Enrichment Network thank all of the professionals involved in the creation of these core competencies. We appreciate your dedication and hard work.