



Youth & Family Centers
in our Public Schools

Quality Standards and Evaluation: Building in Accountability

The Beacon Quality Standards support quality programming and ensure accountability to youth, parents and caregivers, schools, and public and private stakeholders. As a planning tool, the standards guide the policies and practices at the site level that help deliver positive outcomes for youth, families and communities. As an assessment tool, the standards provide a clear, consistent framework for ongoing evaluation that identifies strengths and challenges at each site and helps staff plan for continuous improvement.

The Core Principles: A Theory of Change

In the early stages of the San Francisco Beacon Initiative, the planning council realized that in order to achieve the vision of community centers in schools that improve the lives of youth and families, they needed a means to evaluate the quality and impact of programming and ensure accountability to stakeholders. The Initiative enlisted the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE) to develop a guiding theory that would reflect stakeholders' assumptions about the goals for the Initiative and outline each stakeholder's role in achieving these goals. IRRE gathered input from Beacon Center directors and staff, funders, partners, community members and youth participants. The resulting Theory of Change articulated the core assumption that if Beacon Centers provide a safe and welcoming environment and offer high-quality activities, then youth will attend and participate in positive developmental experiences that will contribute to their social well-being and productivity. The theory presents a vision of what the stakeholders hope the Initiative will accomplish and identifies desired outcomes.

Development of Quality Standards

In the Summer of 2003, a special task force of Beacon Center directors and staff, Initiative staff and San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) representatives set out to finalize early, intermediate and long-term outcome standards based on the general site-level outcomes identified in the Theory of Change. The specific standards were drawn from the National After-school Association's benchmarks for the field, as well as a broad review of other quality standards and related research, and were adapted to fit the unique Beacon model. The resulting Beacon Quality Standards were designed to serve as benchmarks for achieving desired outcomes and to provide a framework for evaluation. The draft Beacon Quality Standards were reviewed by Beacon directors and other key stakeholders in the Initiative, and the Beacon steering committee gave final approval. The Quality Standards for Beacon Centers were implemented in the Fall of 2003 and integrated into site-based planning and ongoing evaluation.

Components of the Beacon Quality Standards

To obtain copies of San Francisco Beacon Initiative: Quality Standards for Beacon Centers, a 23-page document with more than 180 specific site-level standards, please visit www.sfbeacon.org. The following is a brief overview:

Compliance Standards

All Beacon Centers must meet the minimum compliance standards. These standards outline policies that govern the safety and health of youth participants, Center location and hours and interaction among Center staff and partners in the school and community.



www.sfbeacon.org



- Education
- Career Development
- Arts and Recreation
- Leadership
- Health



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Early and Intermediate Outcome Standards

Early outcome standards focus on the start-up phase of the Centers and outline specific elements that must be in place. Policies and practices include those that address the emotional and physical safety of participants, maximize the visibility and accessibility of Beacon Centers, create a welcoming and inclusive environment and establish hiring and training practices that contribute to a diverse and well-trained staff.

Intermediate outcome standards outline expectations for high-quality learning experiences and optimal participation by youth in the Centers' programs. These standards focus on staff practices that foster supportive relationships, provide opportunities for youth leadership and participation, promote a sense of community and belonging, support youth involvement in their communities, and provide challenging and engaging opportunities for learning and skill-building.

Long-term Outcome Standards

Long-term outcomes are expected to be achieved after a Center has been in operation for at least five years. These standards outline expectations for increasing youth competencies in the core areas of leadership, educational support, career development, health, arts and recreation. They also set forth expectations for increasing youth well-being, health, positive connections to school, school performance and family support. The standards also require that Centers continually monitor key measures of academic success in order to assess and improve the efficacy of the Centers' educational support programs. In keeping with recent research, the standards link expectations of academic outcomes to both high dosage levels and multi-year participation in academically focused programming.

School Site Standards

Recognizing that Beacon Centers would need the support of their partners to meet many of the quality standards, the Initiative also developed a list of basic expectations of schools hosting Beacon Centers. These standards outline expectations for the availability and use of school facilities and interaction between Beacon and school staff.

A Work in Progress

The Beacon Quality Standards will be periodically reviewed based on new data and research, as well as the changing conditions for Beacon Centers. Further, the Initiative is examining ways to establish benchmarks for community engagement programs at Beacon Centers.

Quality Standards as a Yardstick for Evaluation

Resource Development Associates (RDA) works with the Initiative to collect and analyze program and participant data at all Beacon Centers, and to produce an annual evaluation report on youth participant outcomes that is directly aligned with the quality standards. Youth participants are surveyed at the beginning and end of the school year in order to assess their progress on the early, intermediate and long-term standards (the Youth Individual Assessment). A web-based data system allows both RDA and Center directors to track and monitor participation on a continual basis. With the help of school district data, RDA also measures each Center's progress toward meeting school-success standards. Audits are conducted at the beginning of each school year to ensure Centers meet the minimum compliance standards. At the end of the school year, an annual evaluation report informs the development of the Centers' annual strategic plans, helps the Beacon Initiative set priorities for technical assistance and training, and determines the course of continuing evaluation.

A place to be a kid.

A place to support families.

A place to build community.