



Military School-Age Assessment System and Competency Standards Book

COUNCIL
for
PROFESSIONAL
RECOGNITION



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Preface

The choice to work with youth is one of the most important career decisions that one can make.

A youth professional is a special person in a youth's life as they master skills, develop friendships, grow in independence, and move to new levels of thinking and understanding about themselves and the world. It is an exciting and challenging responsibility to set up a supportive learning environment for a group of youths, develop a relationship with each one, and meet their needs as individuals and as a group. Learning experiences during this period in their lives can increase their self-confidence and success in school. Hereinafter, the term youth is inclusive of children 5–12 years of age and teens 13–18 years of age.

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The number of youth in out-of-school time programs has multiplied in recent years. Families place great trust in the staff of these programs, for it is the daily performance of these professionals that determines the quality of the before and after school experience for youth. The Military School-Age (MSA) Assessment System Competency Standards support quality programs for youth by providing standards for training, evaluation, and recognition of professionals based on their ability to meet the unique needs of these age groups.

Applying for the Military School-Age (MSA) Credential is a big commitment and working towards the credential can be a rewarding experience. It offers professionals an opportunity to:

- Look at their own work in relation to Department of Defense (DoD) standards.
- Get feedback and support from people who have experience working with youth and knowledge about out-of-school time programs.
- Improve their skills in ways that are satisfying for themselves and beneficial for youth.
- Earn a professional credential that is recognized throughout the DoD.



Summary

The MSA Assessment System and Competency Standards were developed to promote quality services to families and youth by providing specific principles, training, and evaluation of youth professionals. It is an opportunity for adults working with youth to gain professional recognition for demonstrating competence in their on-the-job skills.

PART I

Presents an overview of the MSA Credentialing Program Competency Standards and Assessment system for MSA candidates.

PART II

Presents the eligibility requirements and information collection responsibilities of the members of the Local Assessment Team (LAT) that conduct the evaluation of the candidate for the MSA Credential.

PART III

Contains the complete MSA Competency Standards.



Part I

The Military School-Age Credentialing Program

The Military School-Age Credentialing Program

The Military School Age Credentialing Program is administered by the Council for Professional Recognition (Council). The Council evaluates/assesses educators who work with youth and their families. The purpose of the assessment is to identify individuals who have the necessary skills and knowledge to work competently with youth in a group setting, whether in a center-based program or Family Child Care (FCC) School-Age Home. The Military School-Age (MSA) Credential is only awarded to competent youth professionals. Unlike other forms of certification, the MSA Credential requires no paper-and-pencil exam. Rather, candidates have an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to meet the needs of youth and families daily on the job.

This credential differs from other forms of credentialing in several ways:

- First, **the assessment is based on performance**. A youth professional who wants to earn the credential is observed several times by members of the Local Assessment Team (advisor, Family/Community Representative, and Military School-Age Representative) while actually working with a group of youth.
- Second, **the candidate is a full participant** in the assessment. The candidate prepares a professional portfolio to demonstrate their knowledge and skill, collects a file of resources to be used throughout their career with youth, and participates as an active member of the Local Assessment Team.
- Third, a **Family/Community Representative participates in the assessment**. Youth families express their knowledge about the candidate by completing a questionnaire. The Family/Community Representative summarizes the families' assessments and brings their voice to the Local Assessment Team. The Family/Community Representative also observes and evaluates the candidate.
- Finally, this holistic approach ensures objective [examination/evaluation] of a candidate's professional competence. Observations attained through the candidate interview, professional portfolio, and the Family/Youth Questionnaire form this assessment.

The Military School-Age Competency Standards

Candidates seeking to earn the MSA Credential are assessed based on the MSA **Competency Standards**. The MSA Competency Standards are the national standards used to evaluate the youth professional's performance with youth, families, colleagues, and their community.

The MSA Competency Standards are divided into six Competency Goals which are statements of general purpose or goals for youth professionals' behavior. These goals are defined in more detail by **13 Functional Areas**, which describe the major tasks or functions that a youth professional must complete in order to carry out the Competency Goals. Each functional area is explained by a **developmental context**, which presents a brief overview of relevant child/youth development principles and provides a rationale for the functional area definition and examples of competent behavior that follow.

Table 1 presents the Competency Goals and Functional Areas for the out-of-school time program setting. The complete Competency Standards: Competency Goals and Functional Areas are presented in Part III of this book.

The Military School-Age Credentialing Program

TABLE 1

MSA Competency Standards: Competency Goals and Functional Areas

	COMPETENCY GOAL I To establish and maintain a safe, healthy learning environment	• Safe: Candidate provides a safe environment to prevent and reduce injuries. • Healthy: Candidate promotes good health and nutrition, and provides an environment that contributes to the prevention of illness. • Out-of-School Environments: Candidate uses space, relationships, materials, and routines as resources for constructing an interesting, secure, and enjoyable environment that encourages play, exploration, and learning.
	COMPETENCY GOAL II To advance physical and intellectual competence	• Physical: Candidate provides a variety of equipment, activities, and opportunities to promote the physical development of youth. • Cognitive: Candidate provides activities and opportunities that encourage curiosity, exploration, and problem solving appropriate to the developmental levels and learning styles of youth. • Communication: Candidate actively communicates with youth and provides opportunities and support for youth to understand, acquire, and use verbal and nonverbal means of communicating thoughts and feelings. • Creative: Candidate provides opportunities that stimulate youth to play with sound, rhythm, language, materials, space, and ideas in individual ways and to express their creative abilities.
	COMPETENCY GOAL III To support social and emotional development and provide positive guidance	• Self: Candidate promotes physical and emotional security for all youth and helps them to know, accept, and take pride in themselves and develop a sense of independence. • Social: Candidate helps all youth feel accepted in the group, helps youth learn to communicate and get along with others, and encourages feelings of empathy and mutual respect among youth, peers, and adults. • Guidance: Candidate provides a supportive environment in which youth learn and practice appropriate and acceptable behaviors as individuals and as a group.
	COMPETENCY GOAL IV To establish positive and productive relationships with families	• Families: Candidate maintains an open, friendly, and cooperative relationship with each family, encourages their involvement in the program, and supports the youth's relationship with their family.
	COMPETENCY GOAL V To ensure a well-run, purposeful program responsive to participant needs	• Program Management: Candidate is a manager who uses all available resources to ensure an effective operation. The Candidate is a competent organizer, planner, record-keeper, communicator, and a cooperative co-worker.
	COMPETENCY GOAL VI To maintain a commitment to professionalism	• Professionalism: Candidate makes decisions based on knowledge of child and youth development theories and practices, promotes quality in out-of-school programs, and takes advantage of opportunities to improve competence, both for personal and professional growth and for the benefit of youth and families.

The Military School-Age Credentialing Program

THE MSA ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

An assessment is the process by which a candidate's competence is evaluated by the Council for Professional Recognition. The evaluation is conducted by a group of people called the Local Assessment Team (LAT). This team includes:

- Youth professional (candidate)
- A youth development professional (advisor)
- Member of the local community (Family/Community Representative)
- Representative of the Department of Defense (Military School-Age Representative)

The candidate chooses people to serve as an advisor and Family/Community Representative and the Military School-Age Representative is assigned to the team by the Council. Each team member collects information about the candidate's work in relation to the MSA Competency Standards. This information is consolidated, and the final recommendation and assessment documentation is submitted to the Council where it will be reviewed and evaluated for final decision on credential award.

Stages of Assessment

In order to earn and maintain the MSA credential, candidates must follow the prescribed sequence of steps: (1) Preparation; (2) Team Formation/Information Collection; (3) Application for Assessment; (4) the Verification Visit; (5) Final Decision; and (6) Credential Renewal (if applicable). These stages are depicted in Figure 1.

The MSA Credential must be renewed before it expires. The MSA Renewal Application may be submitted no sooner than six months before the credential expires. Candidates must prepare in advance and be ready to submit a complete application with supporting documents when their renewal window opens. The MSA renewal procedures can be found online.

FIGURE 1

Steps to Earn and Maintain the MSA Credential



The Military School-Age Credentialing Program

Candidates can move through steps 1–5 of the assessment process as quickly or as gradually as they are able to complete the required responsibilities and facilitate the work of other team members. Some candidates complete these requirements in a few months, while many take the full year. Ideally, they will work in coordination with their local training team to synchronize training and prepare their portfolio of evidence simultaneously. When planning an assessment, the candidate should allow enough time for the Council to process the Request for Assessment. The Council may take up to four weeks to assign a MSA Representative to conduct the assessment. The Council may take up to two weeks to process complete assessment materials.

1. PREPARATION

Eligible individuals aspiring to earn the MSA credential should visit www.cdacouncil.org/educator-pathways/military/msa-document-library to download all of the materials needed to prepare for assessment. The materials will contain all the instructions and forms needed to prepare for the next stages of the assessment system.

2. TEAM FORMATION/INFORMATION COLLECTION

In addition to the candidate, three people: an advisor, a Family/Community Representative and a MSA Representative, serve as members of the Local Assessment Team (LAT). Each LAT member must meet eligibility requirements and perform specific responsibilities for collecting information about the candidate's work with youth. These are described in detail in Part II of this book.

3. APPLICATION FOR ASSESSMENT

When the candidate, advisor, and Family/Community Representative have finished information collection, the three Local Assessment Team members complete an Assessment Request Form, which the candidate submits to the Council, via email to: msa@cdacouncil.org.

4. VERIFICATION VISIT/FINAL RECOMMENDATION

The MSA Representative completes the verification visit and summarizes all the information received from the LAT members. The MSA Representative makes a final recommendation from the LAT to the Council.

5. FINAL DECISION

The MSA Representative collects the assessment materials and submits them to the Council. The Council reviews the results of the assessment and renders a credentialing decision. If credential award is recommended, the official credential is sent to the candidate. In the unfortunate event that the credential is denied, the Council will make recommendations on areas of improvement and let the candidate know the next steps to take to earn the MSA credential.

6. MSA RENEWAL

A Military School-Age Credential is valid for three years from the date of award, after which it may be renewed for three-year increments.

The Military School-Age Credentialing Program

All MSA renewal candidates must provide the following:

1. Documented proof of a **current** Red Cross or other agency First Aid and Adult and Child (Pediatric) CPR.
2. Documented proof of at least 4.5 Continuing Education Units (CEUs), 45 hours of professional development training, or a three-credit-hour course; all coursework must be in youth development, child development, family systems, recreation, or physical education. The CEUs must be obtained through an agency or organization with expertise in youth development. Note: Professional development training may include courses/seminars/workshops/webinars.
3. Documented proof of a minimum of 80 hours of work experience with youth within the past year; this should be a letter on official letterhead from a supervisor.
4. A completed Letter of Recommendation Form regarding the MSA's competence with youth prepared by a MSA Reviewer
5. Documented proof of membership within the past year with a national or local youth professional organization

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A Military School-Age Credential is valid for three years from the date of award, after which it may be renewed for three-year increments.



Part II

Eligibility Requirements and Information Collection Responsibilities for MSA Assessments

Eligibility Requirements and Information Collection Responsibilities

Part II contains the eligibility requirements and information collection responsibilities for members of the Local Assessment Team (LAT) for MSA Assessments.

The eligibility requirements that follow ensure that all Local Assessment Team members have sufficient knowledge and experience with out-of-school programs to assess the competence of the individual candidate. The information collection responsibilities for team members are designed to assure that accurate information about the candidate's performance as a youth professional will be gathered during the assessment process. Detailed instructions for information collection can be found in each team member's instruction guide. The team will evaluate the candidate's ability to meet the needs of the youth in their care.

Candidate

The candidate coordinates the responsibilities of the other Local Assessment Team members, prepares a professional portfolio describing their work, is observed by all team members while working with youth, and completes an interview with the MSA Representative.

CANDIDATE ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

The applicant must meet the following eligibility requirements:

Setting

- Must work in a Department of Defense out-of-school program and be able to be observed leading program activities.
- Must be able to be observed by all members of the Local Assessment Team while working with youth in an out-of-school program.

Education

- Must have successfully completed the Department of Defense prescribed Foundation Level training, which includes training in the 13 Functional Areas.
- Must have completed additional training agreed upon by the candidate's Training Specialist as part of an agreed upon development plan.
- Must be a current Department of Defense Child and Youth Professional, in good standing, working with youth in out-of-school programs or approved specialized volunteer at the time of the verification visit.

Experience

Must have had, within the past five years, at least 480 hours of experience working with youth in an organized out-of-school program, such as a school-age center, youth center, child development center, family child care, or civilian equivalent programs.

Eligibility Requirements and Information Collection Responsibilities

CANDIDATE INFORMATION COLLECTION RESPONSIBILITIES

The candidate's two major responsibilities in the assessment process are to coordinate the work of the Local Assessment Team and prepare the professional portfolio.

Professional Portfolio

The Professional portfolio contains examples that demonstrate the candidate's competence in each of the 13 Functional Areas of the Competency Standards for youth professionals and a collection of identified resources the candidate uses in their work with youth and families. All portfolio entries must be based on work within 12 months prior to the date the candidate submits the Application for Assessment. A detailed description of the professional portfolio requirements can be found in the **Candidate Instruction Guide**.

Advisor

*An advisor serves as a professional resource for the candidate during the assessment process and works closely with the candidate for at least 12 weeks. We highly recommend that the candidate's **Training Specialist** serve as the advisor. The advisor must observe the candidate at work and record these observations and recommendations for improvement on the MSA Assessment Observation Instrument. The advisor should give the candidate regular feedback about their performance during the assessment process and provide advice about preparation of the professional portfolio.*

ADVISOR ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

The advisor must meet the following eligibility requirements and provide verification on the candidate's Application for Assessment.

Personal

- Be knowledgeable about Department of Defense requirements, standards, and policies for out-of-school programs.
- Be familiar with the out-of-school program where the candidate will be observed and the needs of youth and families at the installation. Be able to conduct in-person observations of the candidate.

Education

- B.A., B.S., or advanced degree in child development, youth agency administration, recreation, home economics, physical education, elementary education, special education, secondary education, or other related field from an accredited college.

OR

- A combination of education and experience (e.g., courses equivalent to a major in education, recreation) or in a subject directly related to child development or recreation, plus appropriate experience or additional coursework, which provides knowledge comparable to that normally acquired through the successful completion of a four-year course of study.

Eligibility Requirements and Information Collection Responsibilities

Experience/Position

At least one year of experience in an out-of-school setting servicing youth in the same age range as the youth in the candidate's program and **one year** of responsibility for the professional growth of another adult. Must be employed in a program management or training position in a DoD Child and Youth Program.



Conflict of Interest

To promote objectivity and credibility, an individual serving as an advisor:

- Must not be the relative of a youth in the candidate's care at any time during the assessment process.
- Must not be related by blood, marriage, or other legal relationship to the candidate.
- Must not be working with the candidate in a co-teaching situation (with the same youth in the same room).

ADVISOR INFORMATION COLLECTION RESPONSIBILITIES

The advisor must fulfill the following information collection responsibilities:

Observations

- Formally observe and record the candidate working with youth on at least two separate occasions. On these occasions, the advisor must record observations of the candidate's performance in each of the 13 Functional Areas.

Family/Youth Questionnaires

The advisor distributes and collects Family/Youth Questionnaires to families of youth in the candidate's care. Questionnaires must be completed within three months prior to the submission of the Application for Assessment. The advisor tracks the number of surveys submitted and returned and ensures all questionnaires are given to the Family/Community Representative. The advisor works with the candidate to distribute minimum of 20 surveys to families. In programs with less than 20 families, all families must be surveyed. The advisor and candidate work to collect most questionnaires distributed—more than 50% of the total number of questionnaires distributed.



See the **Advisor's Instruction Guide** for more details on information collection.

Eligibility Requirements and Information Collection Responsibilities

Family/Community Representative

The Family/Community Representative serves as the spokesperson for the families and community during the candidate's assessment. The Family/Community Representative evaluates the candidate's work through observations and the Youth/Family questionnaires.

FAMILY/COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

The Family/Community Representative must meet the following eligibility requirements:

Personal

- Be a member of the local military community with personal experience with youth. The Family/Community Representative may have had experience with youth as a family member, coach, teacher, etc.
- Be able to read, speak, and write well enough to fulfill the responsibilities of a Family/Community Representative.
- Be able to conduct an in-person observation(s) of the candidate, prepare a written report of the observation, and evaluate and summarize information from the families of the youth in the candidate's care.
- Be willing to serve as a spokesperson for the families and community.

Knowledge of Program

- Be familiar with the programs servicing military youth and willingness to become familiar with the candidate's program prior to observing the candidate.



Conflict of Interest

To promote objectivity and credibility, an individual serving as a Family/Community Representative:

- Must not be presently employed by the Department of Defense Child and Youth Services.
- Must not have a youth in the candidate's care from the time the information and collection responsibilities are performed to the time of the Local Assessment Team meeting.
- Must not be related by blood, marriage, or other legal relationship to the candidate.
- Must not serve as a Family/Community Representative for a candidate who served on the Family/Community Representative's own Local Assessment Team. (No two people can serve on each other's Local Assessment Team.)

Eligibility Requirements and Information Collection Responsibilities

FAMILY/COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE INFORMATION COLLECTION RESPONSIBILITIES

The Family/Community Representative must fulfill the following information collection responsibilities:

Observation(s)

- Formally observe and record the candidate working with youth in the same out-of-school program where the MSA Representative will observe. The Family/Community Representative will observe the candidate's performance in each of the 13 Functional Areas.
- Use the Family/Community Observation Form to describe the candidate's performance. Multiple observations may need to be conducted to ensure all 13 Functional Areas have been observed.

Family/Youth Questionnaires

- Evaluates and summarizes the feedback from the questionnaires and shares this information with the LAT.

See the **Family/Community Representative Instruction Guide** for more details on information collection.



Eligibility Requirements and Information Collection Responsibilities

MSA Representative

The Military School-Age Representative has been specially trained by the Council to observe, interview, make fair judgments, conduct the Verification Visit, and summarize all the information received from the LAT to the Council, according to standard procedures. The Military School-Age Representative is assigned to an assessment by the Council.

MSA REPRESENTATIVE ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

The MSA Representative must meet the following eligibility requirements:

Personal

- Be knowledgeable about Department of Defense requirements, standards, and policies for out-of-school programs.
- Have successfully completed the required MSA Representative's training.

Education

- B.A, B.S, or advanced degree in child development, youth agency administration, recreation, home economics, physical education, elementary education, special education or other related field from an accredited college.

OR

- A combination of education and experience (e.g., courses equivalent to a major in education, recreation) or in a subject directly related to child development or recreation, plus appropriate experience or additional coursework, which provides knowledge comparable to that normally acquired through the successful completion of a four-year course of study.

Experience

- At least two years of experience in an out-of-school program servicing youth and at least one year of responsibility for the professional growth of another adult.



Conflict of Interest

To promote objectivity and credibility, an individual serving as a representative:

- Must not be the relative of a youth in the candidate's care at any time during the assessment process.
- Must not be related by blood, marriage, or other legal relationship to the candidate.
- Must not be employed at the same program site.

Eligibility Requirements and Information Collection Responsibilities

MSA REPRESENTATIVE INFORMATION COLLECTION RESPONSIBILITIES

The MSA Representative fulfills the following information collection responsibilities:

LAT Coordination

- Collects any information needed from team members in preparation for the verification visit.

Observation

- Observes the candidate leading activities with the youth in the out-of-school program for a period of two hours.

Interview

- Conducts an interview with the candidate designed to support the assessment. Interview questions will concern the candidate's work and professional portfolio content in relation to the 13 Functional Areas and the candidate's philosophy statement.

Summary

The MSA Representative summarizes all the information received from the LAT on each of the 13 Functional Areas and makes a final recommendation from the LAT to the Council. The MSA Representative collects the assessment documentation



Part III

Competency Standards for Youth Professionals

Competency Standards for Youth Professionals

The Competency Standards are the Department of Defense's standards used for evaluating a MSA candidate's performance with youth and families during the assessment process.

The Competency Standards are statements of a general purpose or goal for behavior. The MSA Competency Standards are divided into six Competency Goals which are statements of general purpose or goals for youth professionals' behavior. These goals are defined in more detail by 13 Functional Areas, which describe the major tasks or functions that a youth professional must complete in order to carry out the Competency Goals.

Each Functional Area is explained by a developmental context, which generally includes a brief overview of youth development and provides a rationale for the Functional Area definition.

Each Functional Area is further explained by a list of sample behaviors. These examples describe behaviors that demonstrate a candidate is acting in a competent way or exhibiting a skill in a particular functional area. During the assessment process, most candidates will exhibit other competent behaviors, and a competent candidate might not demonstrate all the examples listed under a functional area.

The samples of competence included in the standards should serve as a basis for recognizing other, more specific behaviors that are important to the individual candidate. Candidates, other members of the Local Assessment Team, and individuals conducting or participating in Department of Defense training will be able to think of additional ways to demonstrate skill in the six Competency Goals and 13 Functional Areas.

Competent youth professionals integrate their work and constantly adapt their skills, always thinking of the overall development of youth. In all Functional Areas, it is important for competent youth professionals to individualize their work with each youth while meeting the needs of the group. They consistently support multiculturalism, and support families with different languages and inclusive practices for all youth. While demonstrating skills and knowledge, competent youth professionals must also demonstrate personal qualities, such as flexibility and a positive style of communicating with youth and their families.



Competency Standards for Youth Professionals



COMPETENCY GOAL I

To Establish and Maintain a Safe, Healthy Learning Environment

1. FUNCTIONAL AREA: SAFE

Candidate provides a safe environment to prevent and reduce injuries.

Developmental Context:

One of the most essential services for school-age youth is to ensure their safety and well-being. Indoor and outdoor areas should be free of dangerous conditions and materials. Youth professionals should teach youth about safety and comfort youth when they are hurt or distressed. They should be attentive and have the skills and knowledge to prevent injuries and to handle emergencies, accidents, and injuries appropriately when they occur. In a safe environment, youth will learn gradually to protect themselves and look out for others.

For example, the competent candidate working with youth:

- Provides a safe learning environment where all youth can explore and develop cognitive, social, emotional, and physical motor skills.
- Communicates and follows emergency preparedness plans.
- Practices emergency plans with the youth in care regularly.
- Conducts safety checks (daily and monthly, indoor and outdoor); removes or repairs unsafe items, keeping safety equipment in good condition, and maintains first aid and safety supplies.
- Adheres to health and safety regulations and policies, including those regarding the inclusion of youth of all cultural backgrounds and abilities.
- Maintains appropriate staff-youth ratios and supervision in the facility, adapting for higher-risk activities.
- Maintains a supervision system that:
 - o enables personnel to know where children and youth are and what they are doing, at all times.
 - o allows personnel to see and/or hear all the children and youth they are supervising,
 - o includes special provisions for monitoring youth who have permission to be out of sight,
 - o protects younger youth when they transition from place to place or use the restroom,
 - o enables youth to access help at all times; and makes communication possible between different areas within the program site.
- Ensures materials and equipment are developmentally appropriate, well organized, in good repair, clean, well-stocked and stored properly. Youth are encouraged to help maintain materials and equipment.
- Ensures rules are posted. Teaches and explains rules through role modeling and interactions. Rules are applied consistently and fairly.
- Involves youth in developing safety rules and identifying the consequences.
- Assesses and adapts environments to ensure the safety of children and youth. Plans experiences to keep children and youth safe.

Competency Standards for Youth Professionals

- Promotes safety using appropriate methods, services, and resources.
- Communicates policies, procedures, and information to families and staff.
- Follows the program's guidance and touch policy.
- Knows the signs of child abuse and neglect in the home and in the program. Follows the appropriate procedures for reporting abuse and neglect.
- Responds quickly and calmly to youth in distress and follows appropriate behavior support guidance.
- Recognizes signs of stress and trauma on children and youth and makes appropriate referrals.

2. FUNCTIONAL AREA: HEALTHY

Candidate promotes good health and nutrition and provides an environment that contributes to the prevention of illness.

Developmental Context:

Good health involves sound wellness practices for physical and mental health. Youth professionals should model and encourage good health habits. Food should be nutritious, prepared carefully and served in a relaxed atmosphere. Prompt care should be given to school-age youth who are or become ill or hurt. Youth need a clean environment that is properly lighted, and heated or cooled. Indoor and outdoor areas should be free of materials or conditions that endanger health. Care of the youth's health related needs communicates positive feelings about their value and influences the youth's developing identity and feelings of self-worth. Families and professionals should exchange information about youth's physical and mental health frequently.

For example, the competent candidate working with youth:

- Follows illness and injury procedures and emergency preparedness plans.
- Adheres to health and safety regulations and policies, including those regarding the inclusion of children and youth of all cultural backgrounds and abilities.
- Promotes healthy eating practices by using appropriate methods, services, and resources.
- Helps youth to understand the importance of developing healthy habits that support both physical and mental wellness.
- Helps youth learn ways to recognize, reduce, and cope with stress.
- Works with youth to plan a flexible schedule that accommodates youth's needs to rest, relax, be active and eat.
- Follows practices to support the emotional well-being of youth.
- Promotes mental health using appropriate methods, services, and resources.
- Monitors the environment for healthy practices, making improvements as necessary.
- Plans a variety of experiences to promote health and fitness.
- Recognizes youth's exploration and curiosity about the human body and responds appropriately.

Competency Standards for Youth Professionals

- Facilitates age-appropriate discussions on healthy living topics.
- Checks the facility daily for adequate ventilation and lighting, comfortable room temperature, and good sanitation.
- Takes action to cut down on the spread of germs (i.e., wash hands, wipe down surfaces with bleach solution).
- Models good health practices (i.e., healthy food choices, proper handwashing).

3. FUNCTIONAL AREA: OUT-OF-SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

Candidate uses space, relationships, materials, and routines as resources for constructing an interesting, secure, and enjoyable environment that encourages play, exploration, and learning.

Developmental Context:

Youth of all ages learn from their own experience and by imitation. Professionals can guide and encourage youth learning by ensuring that the environment is emotionally supportive; invites active exploration, play, and movement; and supports a broad array of experiences. A reliable routine, together with a stimulating choice of materials, activities, and relationships, enhances youth's learning and development.

For example, the competent candidate working with youth:

- Creates developmentally appropriate learning environments and curriculum using appropriate methods, services, partnerships, and resources.
- Provides an engaging, physically and emotionally safe, and inclusive environment to encourage play, exploration, and learning across developmental domains.
- Provides an environment that offers choices.
- Creates environments and learning experiences to value, affirm, and respect diverse needs, abilities, and cultural backgrounds.
- Uses a broad collection of appropriate and effective teaching/learning strategies, tools, and accommodations to meet individual needs and enhance learning.
- Reflects on the effectiveness of learning environments and curriculum to meet individual needs, interests, development, and skill levels, and makes appropriate accommodations.
- Arranges for regular use of indoor and outdoor areas where youth can be involved in cooperative and competitive activities and sports.
- Offers various areas and spaces where youth can relax and enjoy a quiet break.
- Seeks input and assistance from youth in arranging the physical environment.



Competency Standards for Youth Professionals



COMPETENCY GOAL II To Advance Physical and Intellectual Competence



4. FUNCTIONAL AREA: PHYSICAL

Candidate provides a variety of equipment, activities, and opportunities to promote the physical development of youth.

Developmental Context:

Physical development is an essential part of the total development of youth. Developing physically includes fine and gross motor skills, coordinating movements, and using the senses. Gross motor development includes strengthening and coordinating the muscles and nervous system, controlling large motions using the arms, legs, torso, and/or whole body. Fine motor development involves the ability to control and coordinate small, specialized motions using the eyes, mouth, hands, and feet. Professionals should provide material, equipment, and opportunities for indoor and outdoor activities that encourage this development and recognize and respect the wide differences in individual rates of physical development.

For example, the competent candidate working with youth:

- Provides a safe learning environment where all youth can explore and develop physical motor skills indoors and outdoors daily.
- Offers structured activities designed to support the development of muscles, flexibility, balance, or other physical skills.
- Plans activities that provide opportunities for youth to learn and practice new physical skills
- Provides a variety of materials and activities to challenge a wide range of physical capabilities.
- Evaluates the appropriateness and effectiveness of physical development activities and interactions.
- Adapts physical motor activities and interactions to support diverse needs, abilities, and interests as well as social and emotional development.
- Demonstrates realistic expectations about the youth's physical needs.
- Supports the physical health of each youth.
- Provides oversight of the physical activities areas, so youth are participating in a safe, nurturing, and user-friendly environment.
- Ensures sports and fitness activities are designed to promote positive sportsmanship.
- Participates with youth in games and activities, so they see adults enjoying physical activity.
- Supports youth as they go through changes in their physical development. Provides encouragement to youth who may be struggling with body image issues or self-esteem.
- Encourages youth to engage in activities that are designed to build specific skills and foster the development of positive interests.
- Encourages youth to keep track of their own progress rather than comparing themselves to each other.
- Respects individualization and does not compare youth with others.

Competency Standards for Youth Professionals

5. FUNCTIONAL AREA: COGNITIVE

Candidate provides activities and opportunities that encourage curiosity, exploration, problem solving, and critical thinking appropriate to the developmental levels and learning styles of youth.

Developmental Context:

Exploring and trying to understand the world is natural and necessary for youth's cognitive or intellectual development. As youth learn and grow, their thinking capacities expand and become more flexible. Professionals should support and guide this process by responding to youth's questions with information, interest, and enthusiasm and by using routines and experiences as learning opportunities.

For example, the competent candidate working with youth:

- Provides a safe learning environment where all youth can explore and develop cognitive skills.
- Provides activities and interactions that promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- Offers opportunities that encourage youth to explore math, science, social studies, language and literacy, art, and technology.
- Extends learning through questions and conversations.
- Adapts cognitive activities and interactions to support diverse needs, abilities, and interests as well as social and emotional development.
- Demonstrates realistic expectations about the youth's cognitive abilities and needs.
- Encourages youth to solve problems by developing the ability to clearly identify a problem and a plan of action for resolving the problem.
- Asks questions that encourage youth to think or solve problems for themselves.
- Offers youth space and time to develop and carry out their plans.
- Offers a wide range of books, magazines, videos, and newspapers that reflect topics of interest to youth.
- Encourages youth to share ideas, suggestions, and solutions; and respects their viewpoint.
- Encourages youth to examine their reactions (i.e., asking them how they really feel about what is being said or done).
- Uses the experiential learning style process in activities to encourage youth to learn and apply information to new situations.
- Asks youth to evaluate information for a given purpose and to communicate information to others.
- Encourages youth to develop and set realistic goals. Helps youth develop the ability to choose among several alternatives in making decisions.
- Offers opportunities that encourage youth to explore math, science, social studies, language and literacy, art, and technology.
- Recognizes learning styles and how to apply them to adolescent learning.
- Provides homework assistance, adequate school supplies and reference books as needed. Encourages youth to attend the Homework Center.
- Praises youth on their efforts to learn/gain new information

Competency Standards for Youth Professionals

6. FUNCTIONAL AREA: COMMUNICATION

Candidate actively communicates with youth and provides opportunities and support for youth to understand, acquire, and use verbal and nonverbal means of communicating thoughts and feelings.

Developmental Context:

Communication between people can take many forms, including spoken words or sounds, gestures, eye and body language, and touch. Youth need to understand verbal and nonverbal means of communicating thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Professionals can help youth develop their communication skills by encouraging communication and by providing ample opportunities for youth to listen, interact, and express themselves freely with other youth and adults.

For example, the competent candidate working with youth:

- Models appropriate and respectful communication skills with appropriate eye contact and active listening.
- Responds appropriately to communication, body language, and gestures.
- Considers body language and tone of voice when speaking with youth.
- Encourages youth to communicate in a variety of ways, allowing them to represent their ideas nonverbally (ex., painting, drawing, music-making, singing).
- Gives youth ample time to talk and listens attentively to what they are saying.
- Teaches youth appropriate ways to use communication skills with peers, families and other adults.
- Addresses youth, respectfully, by name.
- Provides learning environments that promote the development and exploration of language and communication skills.
- Implements programming designed to build skills in reading and language arts.
- Asks open-ended questions to encourage youth to think and express their ideas effectively.
- Encourages youth to share information about their lives, cultures, feelings, perspectives, needs, and interests.
- Plans activities that develop and refine youth's communication skills.
- Adapts language communication activities and interactions to support diverse needs and abilities.
- Accepts youth's use of slang and popular expressions while serving as a role model for standard use of respectful language.
- Participates in meaningful conversations with youth, daily.
- Uses formal and informal communication methods in appropriate situations, accordingly.
- Avoids the use of sarcasm.
- Provides youth with opportunities to socialize with their peers and participate in community-building activities.
- Identifies youth that need support with communication and encourages and engages them in individual and group dialogue about subjects that are meaningful to them.

Competency Standards for Youth Professionals

7. FUNCTIONAL AREA: CREATIVE

Candidate provides opportunities that stimulate youth to play with sound, rhythm, languages, materials, space, and ideas in individual ways and to express their creative abilities.

Developmental Context:

All youth are imaginative and have creative potential. They need opportunities to develop and express these capacities. Creative play serves many purposes for youth in their cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development. Professionals should support the development of youth's creative impulses by respecting creative experiences and by providing a wide variety of activities and materials that encourage spontaneous expression and expand youth's imagination.

For example, the competent candidate working with youth:



- Recognizes and supports individual expression, including cultural influences.
- Encourages youth to try new skills and activities and to persist through difficulties.
- Provides a variety of equipment and materials that can be used to encourage imagination and creativity.
- Provides experiential opportunities for cross-over between technology, science, and the arts.
- Provides a learning environment where youth can explore and develop creative skills.
- Offers a variety of activities that expose youth to the visual and expressive arts.
- Encourages youth to express themselves through their art and communicate their ideas and feelings in their work in creative writing, drawing, painting, acting, music, and movement.
- Implements activities for youth to work together to achieve shared goals through collaboration.
- Adapts creative activities and interactions to support diverse needs and abilities.
- Identifies the community as a resource for creative experiences.
- Incorporates activities for self-expression that reflect diverse cultural traditions and beliefs.
- Shows respect and value for creative expression and differences among youth.
- Displays feature work created by youth.
- Emphasizes that success is the result of hard work, rather than innate ability.
- Surrounds youth with samples of creative works.
- Respects, promotes, and celebrates individual creation and does not compare youth creative work with others.

Competency Standards for Youth Professionals



COMPETENCY GOAL III To Support Social and Emotional Development and Provide Positive Guidance



8. FUNCTIONAL AREA: SELF

Candidate provides physical and emotional security and helps each youth to know, accept, take pride in themselves, and develop a sense of independence.

Developmental Context:

Sense of self encompasses a self-esteem, self-worth, identity, and self-image. It is a combination of the way youth see themselves, their experiences, their culture (language, values, beliefs), their environment, and how they feel about themselves. For youth, a sense of self is linked to their developing identities, which are becoming increasingly independent from their families. Professionals can create environments that are psychologically secure to support youth in developing self-regulation, self-concept, coping mechanisms, and positive interactions with peers and adults.

For example, the competent candidate working with youth:

- Supports youth in developing a positive sense of self.
- Models and practices a positive attitude and respect for self and others.
- Develops relationships with youth while respecting cultural and ability differences in participation style.
- Provides youth with opportunities to serve others.
- Develops the capacity for self-reflection, communication, empathy, and appreciation of diverse opinions and cultures in youth.
- Values and respects cultural differences in youth and families.
- Creates an inclusive, welcoming, and respectful environment for all youth and families.
- Supports the implementation of curricular activities that celebrate diversity and are informed by youth culture and voice.
- Provides youth with opportunities to share their family traditions and heritage with others.
- Helps youth to identify their unique talents.
- Provides genuine recognition to acknowledge youth's efforts and accomplishments.
- Engages with youth in a warm, friendly, and respectful manner that helps them feel welcome, comfortable, important, and supported.
- Supports the interests, experiences and cultures of youth.
- Introduces new ideas, people and places.
- Identifies and responds to individual differences in personalities, temperaments, development, learning styles, and culture.

Competency Standards for Youth Professionals

9. FUNCTIONAL AREA: SOCIAL

Candidate helps each youth feel accepted in the group, helps youth learn to communicate and get along with others, and encourages feelings of empathy and mutual respect among youth and adults.

Developmental Context:

Youth need to develop social skills that help them work and play cooperatively and productively with other youth and adults. To do this, youth need to feel secure themselves, value other people, and enjoy positive social interaction.

For example, the competent candidate working with youth:

- Provides a safe learning environment where all youth can explore social skills.
- Provides opportunities in the program for youth to belong to groups.
- Provides opportunities for youth to explore and discuss their culture and heritage with each other.
- Provides opportunities for youth to interact with others from different backgrounds.
- Offers opportunities for youth to be involved in the community.
- Models positive social norms with staff and youth.
- Encourages youth to act as role models and mentors for younger youth.
- Treats youth with equal respect and consideration regardless of their family's rank or background.
- Teaches youth resistance skills to avoid negative peer pressure.
- Helps youth to understand their feelings and communicate their values concerning peer relationships.
- Guides youth in expressing their feelings and asserting themselves in socially acceptable ways.
- Acknowledges youth's individual differences in their social-emotional development.
- Uses supervision strategies and positive interactions to prevent and address bullying.
- Models healthy ways of coping with stress and expressing emotions.
- Identifies and responds to individual differences in personalities, temperaments, development, learning styles, and culture.
- Models appropriate social interactions.
- Understands that family and community have different cultural experiences that play a role in how youth respond socially to adults and peers.
- Helps youth communicate and get along with others in a safe and inclusive environment.
- Accepts youth's need to create their own identities and create a "culture" separate from adults.
- Helps youth to recognize they are ultimately in charge of the behaviors and choices they make about their social interactions and consequences.
- Provides opportunities for youth to develop strategies for taking turns, sharing, compromising and problem solving as a group.
- Provides opportunities for youth to work together to achieve shared goals.
- Helps youth develop skills that support cooperative work, establishing expectations for group norms and participation.

Competency Standards for Youth Professionals

10. FUNCTIONAL AREA: GUIDANCE

Candidate provides a supportive environment in which youth can learn and practice appropriate and acceptable behaviors as individuals and as a group.

Developmental Context:

Knowing what behavior is appropriate or acceptable in a situation is an important skill. Youth develop this understanding when consistent limits, realistic expectations of their behavior, and consequences are clearly and positively defined. Understanding and following simple rules can help youth develop self-control. Youth feel more secure when they know what is expected of them and when staff and family expectations realistically consider each youth's development and needs.

For example, the competent candidate working with youth:

- Demonstrates age-appropriate guidance strategies and interactions.
- Identifies each youth's abilities and uses guidance techniques accordingly.
- Guides behavior in positive ways.
- Demonstrates realistic expectations about the youth's social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive abilities and needs.
- Models and practices a positive attitude, respect for self and others, and appropriate ways to express feelings.
- Provides a supportive environment in which youth can learn and practice appropriate and acceptable behaviors.
- Provides individual guidance and support using appropriate methods, services, and resources according to youth specific needs.
- Applies differentiated instructional, guidance, and support techniques to meet diverse needs and abilities.
- Responds quickly and calmly to youth in distress and follows appropriate behavior support guidance.
- Follows procedures for documenting behavioral issues, progress, and achievements.
- Posts and communicates clear rules and behavioral expectations for youth.
- Participates actively with youth in events and activities.
- Recognizes that all behavior communicates a message.
- Provides a safe environment for youth to experience the natural and logical consequences of their behavior.
- Involves youth in developing rules and behavioral expectations.
- Recognizes and praises youth positive behavior when it occurs.



Competency Standards for Youth Professionals



COMPETENCY GOAL IV

To Establish Positive and Productive Relationships with Families

11. FUNCTIONAL AREA: FAMILIES

Candidate maintains an open, friendly, and cooperative relationship with each family, encourages their involvement in the program, and supports the youth's relationships with their family.

Developmental Context:

Today's families take many different forms. Each family has primary responsibility for their youth, and parents may share this responsibility with others. The family and the youth professional become partners who communicate respectfully and openly for the mutual benefit of the youth, the family, and the youth professional. Youth professionals also recognize that parenthood is a developmental process and can support families in this role.

For example, the competent candidate working with youth:

- Identifies the role of the family as central to the development of youth.
- Respects choices and goals families make for their youth.
- Assures families that their youth will be in a safe, healthy environment where staff will strive to meet emotional, social, and physical needs.
- Protects youth and family confidentiality.
- Communicates respectfully and positively with families from a variety of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Develops and maintains open, friendly, cooperative, and respectful relationships with families.
- Identifies ways to support the relationship between youth and their families.
- Communicates with family members about program activities and goals and shares appropriate services and resources.
- Engages families in discussions regarding their child's development.
- Works effectively with families regardless of race, religious affiliation, cultural heritage, political beliefs, national origin, disability, marital status, financial status, or sexual orientation.
- Provides opportunities for continual family involvement throughout the program.
- Shares information with families about the relationship between learning activities, environment, and child development.
- Demonstrates support for families through reciprocal relationships.
- Engages in social conversations with youth about family and friends.
- Uses input from families to support programming decisions.
- Provides an orientation to the program for new youth and families.
- Responds respectfully to families' questions and concerns.
- Embraces the differences in the community of youth families and strives to foster an understanding and appreciation of all.

Competency Standards for Youth Professionals



COMPETENCY GOAL V

To Ensure a Well-Run Purposeful Program Responsive to Participant Needs

12. FUNCTIONAL AREA: PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

Candidate is a manager who uses all available resources to ensure an effective operation. The candidate is a competent organizer, planner, record keeper, communicator, and a cooperative co-worker.

Developmental Context:

Running an effective program requires a systematic and responsive approach. A systematic approach means that the candidate can determine the needs of the program, families, and youth; can make plans based on those needs; and can keep accurate records of needs, plans, and practices. Such an approach should be applied to keeping records of attendance, health status, and required forms. It should include specific plans for meeting the needs of youth and coordinating communication among involved adults through written information, meetings with families and resource persons, and frequent informal discussions.



Competency Standards for Youth Professionals

For example, the competent candidate working with youth:

- Recognizes that observation and assessment are ongoing processes.
- Participates in continuous quality improvement based on assessments and youth input.
- Maintains confidentiality regarding observation and assessment information.
- Collects and organizes information to measure youth outcomes while following appropriate procedures for observation, assessment, and referrals.
- Selects and uses observation results in planning and implementing learning activities.
- Individualizes and improves guidance and support through youth observation and assessment data.
- Recognizes the importance of evaluations and assists in evaluating the program's effectiveness.
- Supports and implements the program's mission and policies.
- Promotes program planning and evaluation using appropriate services and resources.
- Recognizes and uses community resources to support and assist families and enhance programming for youth.
- Demonstrates support for families through reciprocal relationships.
- Aligns daily practices with the program's philosophy, policies, and procedures.
- Participates in strategic planning and goal setting for program improvement.
- Reviews the effectiveness of activities and input structures, and recommends changes as needed.
- Interacts with others in a professional manner.
- Uses a broad collection of effective teaching/learning strategies, tools, and accommodations to meet individual needs and enhance learning.
- Models and practices a positive attitude and respect for self and others.
- Understands the importance of inspections and their relationship to maintaining a safe and healthy environment for youth.
- Uses inspection results to inform continuous quality improvement.
- Follows the programs systems for accurate and timely record keeping.
- Knows, follows, and communicates programs policies and procedures.



Competency Standards for Youth Professionals



COMPETENCY GOAL VI To Maintain a Commitment to Professionalism

13. FUNCTIONAL AREA: PROFESSIONALISM

Candidate makes decisions based on knowledge of youth development theories and practices, promotes quality in youth programing, and takes advantage of opportunities to improve competence, both for personal and professional growth and for the benefit of youth and families.

Developmental Context:

Professionals working with youth and their families make decisions based on knowledge of youth development, appropriate activities, and family life, and demonstrate a commitment towards quality programs for youth. The youth professional continues to set new goals and takes advantage of training or educational experiences that will help them grow more competent. They recognize the way they relate to others directly affects the quality of youth programs and sets an example for youth and adults to resolve issues and problems among themselves cooperatively and respectfully. They also work together with peers to educate the community at large about the needs of youth. The youth professional should develop relationships with other youth professionals and establish a network for information and support.



Competency Standards for Youth Professionals

For example, the competent candidate working with youth:

- Models a positive and respectful attitude when working with youth.
- Demonstrates positive relationships and supportive interactions when caring for youth.
- Promotes professionalism and ethical responsibilities by following a professional code of ethics.
- Works effectively with families from a variety of cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Articulates a personal philosophy of education based on knowledge of youth development, cultural competencies, best/promising practices, and a professional code of ethics.
- Acts ethically, maintaining confidentiality and impartiality, based on a professional code of ethics and other professional guidelines.
- Protects youth and family confidentiality.
- Completes all required training successfully and on time.
- Participates in training and other professional development opportunities to further knowledge in youth development.
- Creates opportunities to promote, build, and reinforce competencies in youth.
- Serves as a mentor to junior staff.
- Serves as an advocate for youth.
- Maintains appropriate behavioral boundaries with youth.
- Partners with others to develop and implement individualized guidance strategies.
- Respects the family's role in, influence on, and responsibility for education and development.
- Manages demands of personal and professional commitments.
- Promotes professionalism using appropriate skills, services, and resources.



2460 16th Street NW, Washington, DC 20009-3547 800-424-4310 |
www.cdacouncil.org