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Greater Rochester After-School Alliance (GRASA) After-School Assessment 2011-2012 Seventh Annual Report

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OCTOBER 2012

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	i
Introduction	1
Description of the GRASA After-School Assessment	2
Program Observations	2
Program Observation Process	2
Collaborative Review Process	3
Partner Development	4
Quality of After-School Programs	5
Youth Program Quality Assessment (Youth PQA)	5
Overall Quality of GRASA Program Offerings	6
How do GRASA Programs Compare with other After-School Programs	7
Scores by Subscale	7
Scores by Agency	9
Scores by Grade Level	14
Reliability of the Youth PQA	15
Inter-Rater Reliability of the Youth PQA	17
Summary of Findings and Recommendations	18
Program Youth PQA Observations	18
Recommendations	18
Limitations	18

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This report would not be possible without the contributions of many partners, including after-school programs, foundations and other organizations – each consisting of individuals who gave their time, ideas, hard work, energy, resources, and support to the GRASA After-School Assessment.

Financial support was provided by Rochester Area Community Foundation. Other contributing partners include ArtPeace, Inc.; Boys and Girls Club of Greater Rochester, Inc.; Cameron Community Ministries; Charles Settlement House; Children's Institute, Inc.; City of Rochester Bureau of Parks, Recreation and Human Services; The Community Place of Greater Rochester, Inc.; EnCompass: Resources for Learning, Generations Child and Elder Care; Greater Rochester After-School Alliance (GRASA); Ibero-American Action League, Inc. School-Age Program; Quad A for Kids; Railroad Junction School-Age Program and Summer Day Camp; Rochester Childfirst Network (RCN); Rush-Henrietta School District's School-Age Child Care Programs; Society for the Protection and Care of Children (SPCC); Wilson Commencement Park Early Learning Center; and YMCA of Greater Rochester.

We thank the after-school program staff and administrators in Monroe County who work closely, on a daily basis, with thousands of children when they are not in school. Their personal attention to the children's health, safety, development, and enjoyment is a major contribution to the overall well-being of our community. We appreciate GRASA members who provided feedback and helpful insights to inform our processes and overall support of our work in the youth program community.

This project could not be a success without the skillful Master Observers who achieved a highly respectable level of inter-rater reliability.

We are excited about the GRASA Assessment and its impact on youth through improving the quality of after-school programs. With a shared vision, we will continue to work towards a unified standard of quality for after-school programs that will enrich the experiences of youth, parents, and staff.

Introduction

The GRASA Assessment began in Rochester, New York in 2005 as part of a community-wide initiative to learn about the quality of after-school programs in Monroe County. This partnership is supported by the Greater Rochester After-School Alliance (GRASA), including program staff members, administrators, parents, policymakers, and funders. The three-fold mission of GRASA is to improve the quality of after-school programming, to increase children's access to quality programs, and to understand the funding streams that are available to improve quality and access.

The GRASA Assessment provides an integrated process for ensuring that after-school programs have the information they need for making informed decisions to improve practice and outcomes. It provides useful data analysis on the status of after-school program quality. Confidentiality of all participants is maintained in all areas and is of the utmost importance to our partnership.

Twenty-five (25) after-school program observations took place at seventeen (17) sites this year. Observations took place in programs serving youth in two age groups: grades four through six and grades seven through nine. The content of programs observed ranged from sports programs to tutoring, leadership development to theater, representing the broad spectrum of positive youth development opportunities in Monroe County. The participating programs include:

- ❖ ArtPeace, Inc.
- ❖ City of Rochester Department of Recreation and Youth Services
- ❖ The Community Place of Greater Rochester, Inc.
- ❖ EnCompass: Resources for Learning
- ❖ Quad A for Kids
- ❖ Railroad Junction School-Age Program and Summer Day Camp
- ❖ Rochester Childfirst Network
- ❖ Rush-Henrietta School District's School-Age Child Care Program
- ❖ Wilson Commencement Park Early Learning Center

Description of the GRASA After-School Assessment

Program Observations

Program observations took place throughout the months of March to June of 2012. Program offerings were observed one time using the Youth Program Quality Assessment (Youth PQA, David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality). The observations were completed in approximately two hours and were followed by a brief interview with the program staff in order to score indicators that were not observed. Scoring of the measure was completed off-site and required approximately one additional hour. The Master Observers submitted the observation score sheets to Children's Institute within two business days. Within five days, the score sheet was reviewed for accuracy and processed. A report was generated and returned to the program staff members who were observed, along with a photocopy of the score sheet. Staff members were able to immediately access observation feedback and use the information to affirm and promote good practice, and to identify areas for improvement and goal setting.

Program Observation Process

- The Master Observer contacts the program staff member to schedule an observation date.
- The program observation occurs (2 hours).
- The observer(s) conducts an interview (10-15 minutes) with program staff member(s) immediately after the observation to obtain information not evident during observation.
- The observer(s) completes the score sheet and submits it to Children's Institute for processing.
- The project coordinator reviews the score sheet for accuracy, following up with the observer as necessary.
- The score sheet is checked again for accuracy by a data clerk, and the information is entered into the database. A summary report is produced.
- A photocopy of the original score sheet and summary report are mailed directly to the program staff member.
- The program staff member reviews the information and shares it with his or her supervisor (optional).
- If a program staff member disagrees with any item(s) in the report and wants to address this formally, he or she may initiate a collaborative review process (outlined below).

Collaborative Review Process

As part of the classroom observation process using the Youth PQA, Children's Institute provides a review opportunity, so that if any program staff member believes that the report does not accurately represent the program, there is a formal method to address the issue. Program staff members are welcome and encouraged to raise questions they have about the score of any of the quality indicators.

1. After an observation is complete, the independent observer returns the completed score sheet to Children's Institute for processing. Copies of the score sheet and summary report are returned directly to the program staff member, accompanied by a cover letter that serves as a guide in reviewing the report. Included in this letter is an invitation to contact the project coordinator if the program staff member feels a score does not accurately represent the program.
2. If a program staff member disagrees with the scoring of any item(s) and wishes to address this formally, he or she contacts the project coordinator to obtain a Collaborative Review Request Form. Using this form, the staff member outlines the details of the item(s) in question and provides additional supporting information. This must be submitted within 15 days of receipt of the original score sheet.
3. Upon receipt of the Collaborative Review Request, the project coordinator reviews the information provided by the staff member, consults the independent observer who completed the observation, and conducts a detailed re-examination of each quality indicator score. After consideration of these references, a determination is made as to whether any items are to be scored differently.
4. In a detailed letter to the program staff member, the project coordinator formally addresses each questioned indicator and whether the indicator score has been changed. A revised copy of the score sheet is returned with any applicable adjusted scores as well as a new summary report.
5. If scores are revised, they are entered into the database.
6. If the staff member remains dissatisfied with the results of the process thus far, the project coordinator will arrange for a second independent observer to conduct a complete observation and submit a formal report.

There were no formal collaborative review requests from program staff during the observation period.

Partner Development

Introductory Youth PQA Training

All program and administrative staff members were invited to attend an Introductory Training session where they were introduced to the Youth PQA. The session provided an in-depth overview of the scale and the observation process. Participants learned observation and scoring techniques, discussed the benefits of using the scale in program assessment and quality improvement processes, and reviewed the observation process and overall logistics. Program staff members were encouraged to complete a self-assessment on their program as part of their familiarization with the scale.

Nine program staff members and administrators participated in the introductory training session.

Master Observer Training

Master Observers were selected based on their experience in youth programming, program observation, and interest in participating. The training included a fifteen-hour program in the first year of participation. Knowledge of the scale, refinement of observation skills, inter-rater reliability standards, logistics of the observation process, observation guidelines, and protocol were studied in depth.

Master Observers were trained to attain and maintain a high level of inter-rater reliability ($a/a+d > .85$). For observers beginning a second year of participation and in each subsequent year, an additional training of four to five hours was required.

Seven Master Observers returned to conduct observations, and two new Master Observers were recruited, trained, and completed observations in this cycle.

Quality of After-School Programs

Youth Program Quality Assessment (Youth PQA)

The Youth PQA was developed by HighScope Educational Research Foundation (2005), and is currently licensed and distributed by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. The tool is a landmark in the emerging field of youth program quality assessment, in both validity and reliability. The measure is scored through program observations and focuses on the experiences of youth, using rubrics for scoring. Each of the four subscales contains three to six items for a total of 18 items. Each item contains two to six indicator rows for a total of 60 indicator rows. Each indicator row is scored 1, 3, or 5, with 1 representing low quality and 5 representing high quality. The indicator row scores are averaged to determine the item's score. The item scores are then averaged to find the subscale score. Independent, well-trained master observers rated the quality of GRASA programs measuring four subscales, with the following items:

I. Safe Environment

- A. Psychological and emotional safety is promoted.
- B. The physical environment is safe and free of health hazards.
- C. Appropriate emergency procedures and supplies are present.
- D. Program space and furniture accommodate the activities offered.
- E. Healthy food and drinks are provided.

II. Supportive Environment

- F. Staff provide a welcoming atmosphere.
- G. Session flow is planned, presented, and paced for youth.
- H. Activities support active engagement.
- I. Staff support youth in building new skills.
- J. Staff support youth with encouragement.
- K. Staff use youth-centered approaches to reframe conflict.

III. Interaction

- L. Youth have opportunities to develop a sense of belonging.
- M. Youth have opportunities to participate in small groups.
- N. Youth have opportunities to act as group facilitators and mentors.
- O. Youth have opportunities to partner with adults.

IV. Engagement

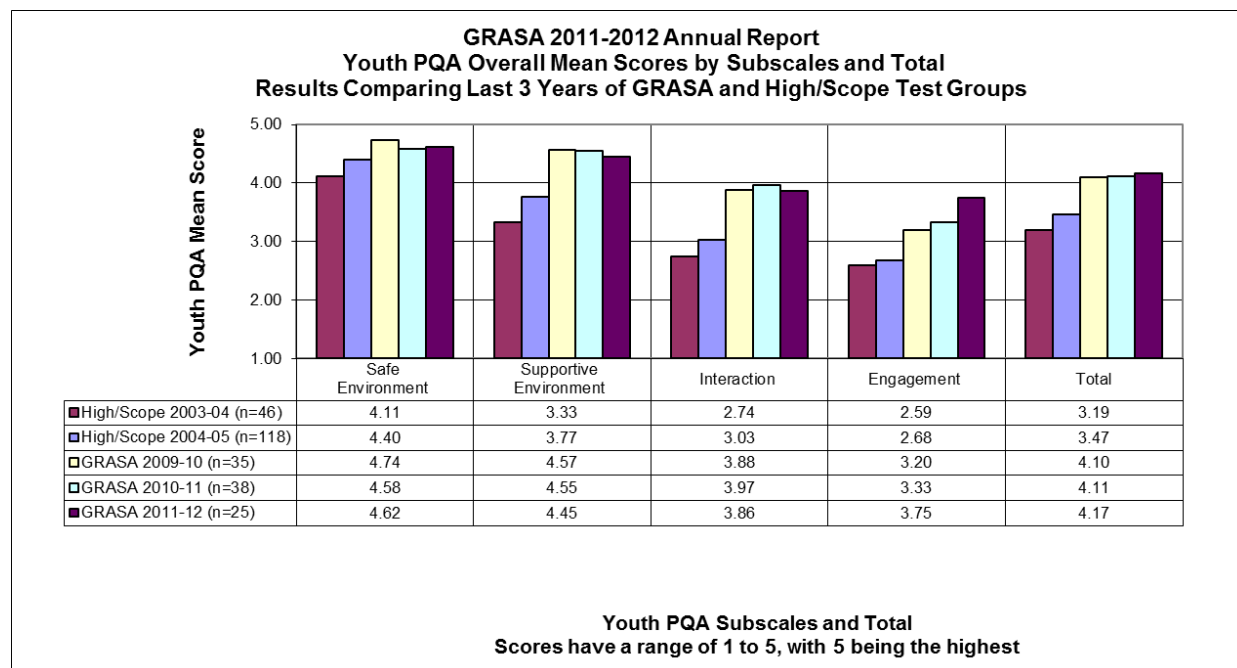
- P. Youth have opportunities to set goals and make plans.
- Q. Youth have opportunities to make choices based on their interests.
- R. Youth have opportunities to reflect.

Overall Quality of GRASA Program Offerings

The overall quality of 25 GRASA program offerings in grades four through nine was 4.17 in 2011-12. The overall quality of 14 GRASA programs grades four to six was 4.11 and the overall quality of 11 programs for grades seven to nine was 4.24. Evaluations for programs for grades seven to nine started in 2009-10. HighScope Educational Research Foundation (the authors of Youth PQA) performed a Youth PQA validation study during 2003-05. They reported results on two waves of data from two years. For comparison purposes, the resulting mean scores using the Youth PQA are shown for both GRASA and HighScope's findings in Figure 1 below.

When comparing the GRASA programs to the HighScope programs, the difference in scores for Year One are not statistically significant. However, there is statistical significance (at or equal to .05) in the scores from GRASA the subsequent years, which are higher than either HighScope years (significant at $\leq .05$ in t-tests).

Figure 1. Overall Quality of GRASA Program Offerings



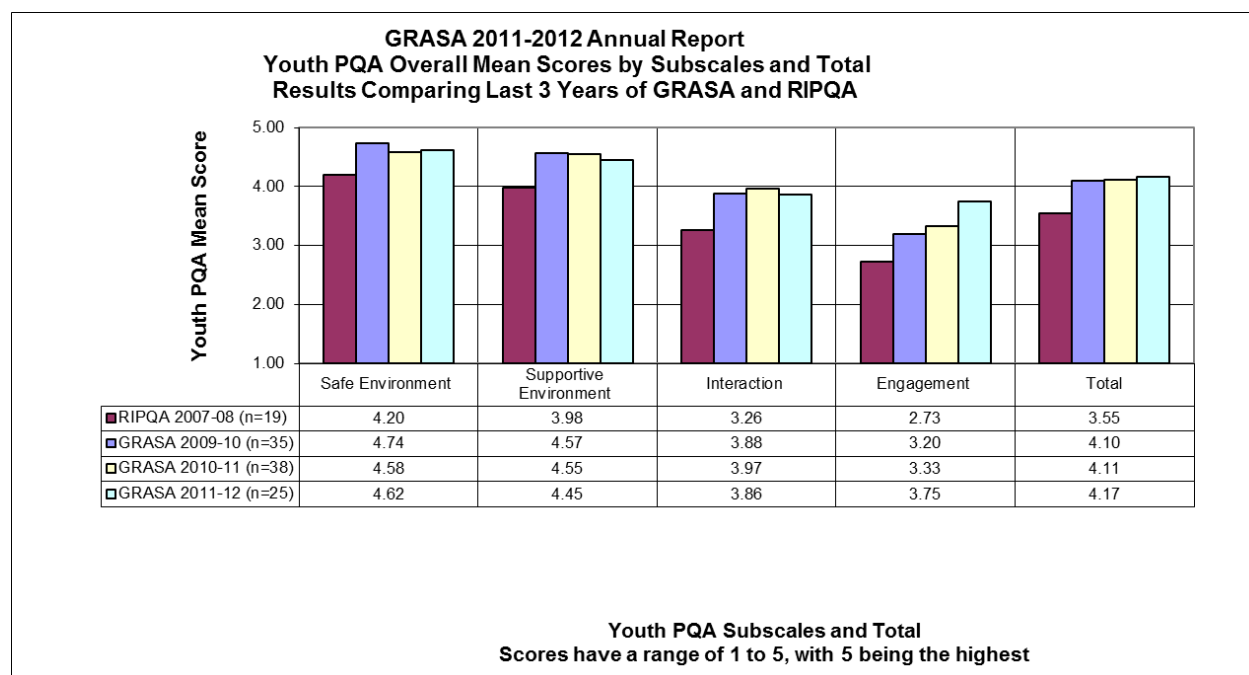
How do GRASA programs compare with other After-School programs?

The Youth Program Quality Assessment (Youth PQA) is an instrument that many after-school programs and researchers use to measure constructs and elements; the Youth PQA has psychometrically-derived constructs that substantiate what is working and identify areas requiring additional supports. Continuous improvement systems, such as GRASA and the Rhode Island Youth Program Quality Assessment (RIPQA), further serve their constituents with feedback reports.

Two networks in Rhode Island form the RIPQA: the Providence After School Alliance (PASA) and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (RI 21st CCLC). In its first year of pilot administration during the 2007-08 school year, quality ratings were secured for 77 activities in 19 organizations; the Youth PQA was the chosen quality assessment tool.¹ Youth PQA data were collected by both external and self-assessment teams.

In Figure 2 below, Youth PQA domain scores for GRASA are compared with RIPQA. The 25 GRASA programs achieved a total score of 4.17 this year. For comparison, RIPQA obtained a total score of 3.55.

Figure 2. GRASA Overall Mean Scores by Subscale



¹ Sugar, S., Devaney, T., & Smith, C. (July 2008) *Center for Youth Program Quality (CYPQ) Report - Results from the RIPQA Quality Improvement System: Quality Standards Implementation in 19 After-School Programs*. Providence, Rhode Island. Providence After-School Alliance. http://forumfyi.org/files/RI_PQA_Baseline%207-24-08%20Final.pdf

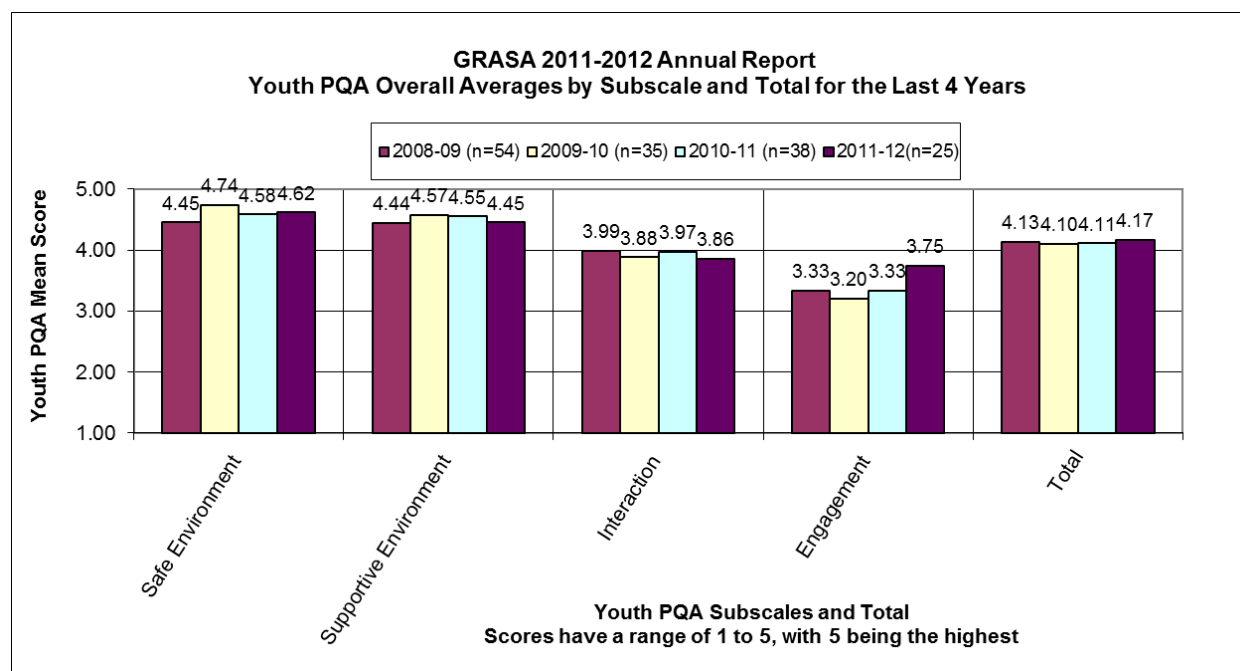
Scores by Subscale

Table 1. GRASA Overall Mean Scores by Subscale

GRASA 2011-12 Annual Report					
Youth PQA Overall Averages by Subscale for the Last 4 Years					
School Year	Subscale				
	Safe Environment	Supportive Environment	Interaction	Engagement	Total
2008-09 (n=54)	4.45	4.44	3.99	3.33	4.13
2009-10 (n=35)	4.74	4.57	3.88	3.20	4.10
2010-11 (n=38)	4.58	4.55	3.97	3.33	4.11
2011-12 (n=25)	4.62	4.45	3.86	3.75	4.17

Note: 7th to 9th grade programs started to be evaluated in 2009-10; previous years only included 4th to 6th grade programs.

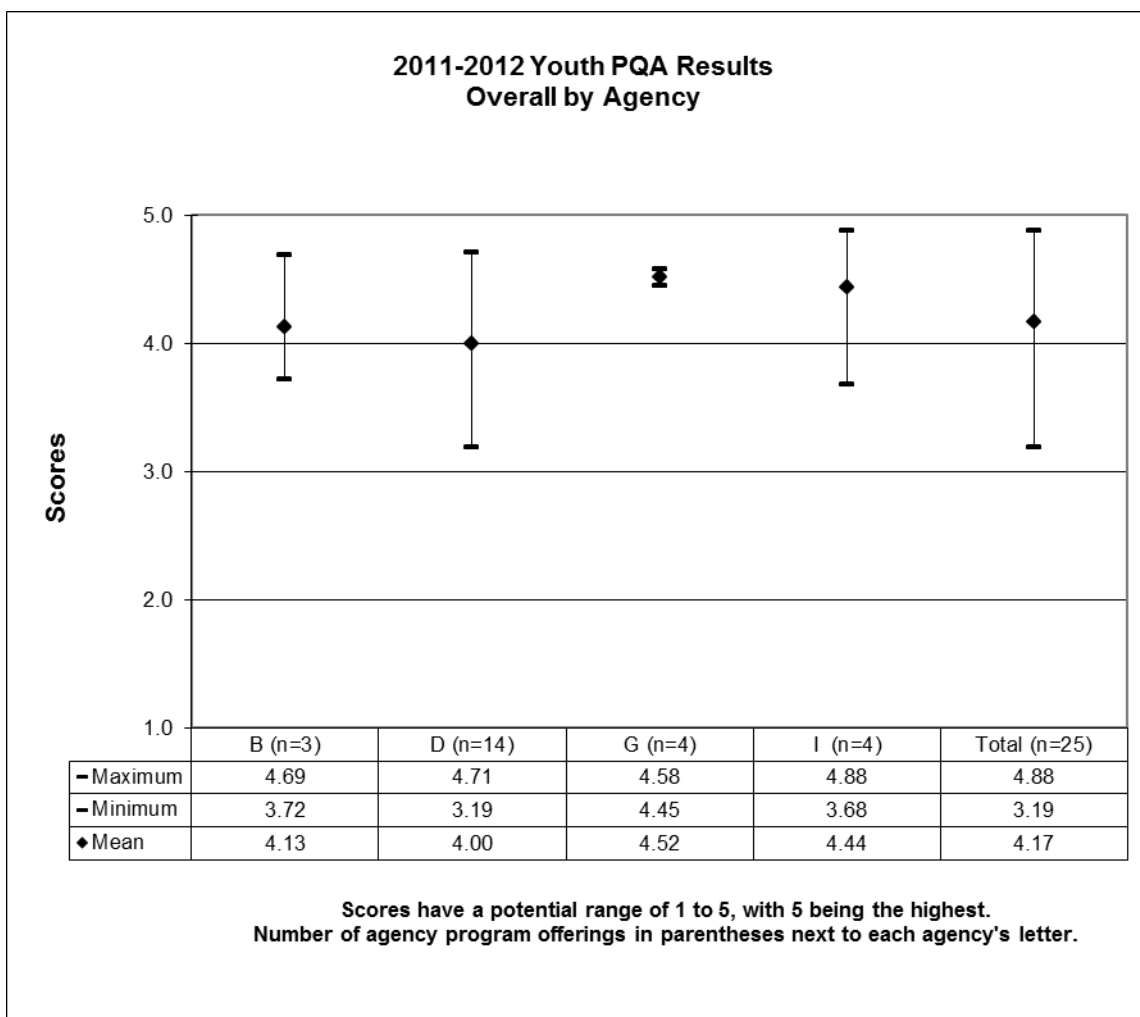
Figure 3. GRASA Overall Mean Scores by Subscale



Year Seven saw a large increase in the Engagement subscale score as compared to the previous year. There was a very slight increase in the Safe Environment subscale score. The Supportive Environment subscale showed a slight drop back to scores seen in 2008-09. Additionally, the Interaction subscale saw a decrease in scores as well. There is evidence that a trend toward a program quality improvement process is emerging as can be seen with the continued small increase in the total score on the Youth PQA.

Scores by Agency

Figure 4. Overall Score for all Four Subscales Combined

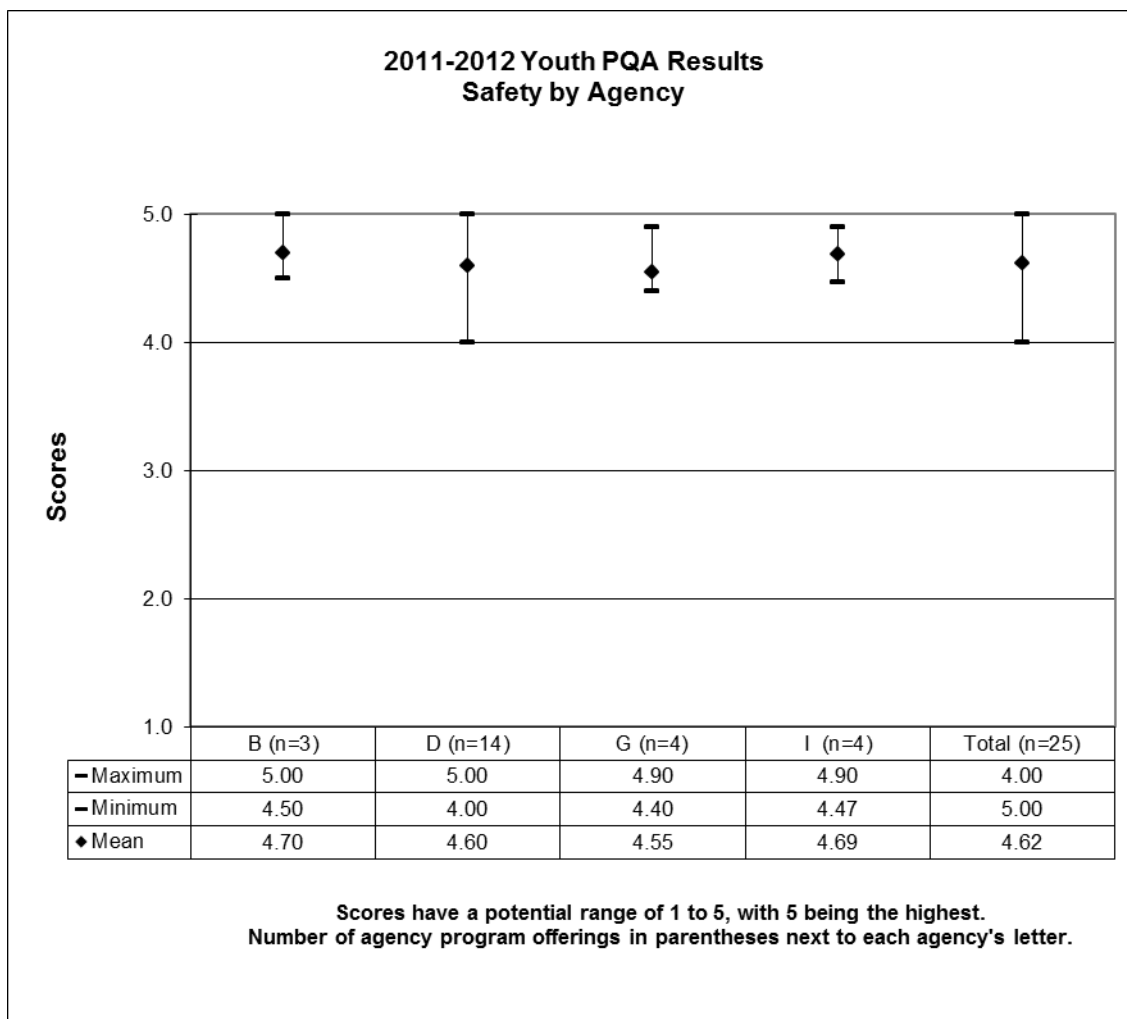


Number of Program Offerings Within Score Range by Agency							
Score Range	B	D	G	I	Total	Percent	Score Range
1-1.9	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	1-1.9
2-2.9	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	2-2.9
3-3.9	2	8	0	1	11	44.0%	3-3.9
4-4.9	1	6	4	3	14	56.0%	4-4.9
5.0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	5.0
Total	3	14	4	4	25	100.0%	Total

Note: In order to maintain the confidentiality of individual programs, agencies are identified in this report with letters, e.g., “B.” GRASA program administration receives program identifiers under separate cover for effective decision-making in support of maintaining program strengths and planning relevant program improvements based on Youth PQA quality indicators.

All programs in all agencies scored above the 3.0 average. This is an indicator of program quality.

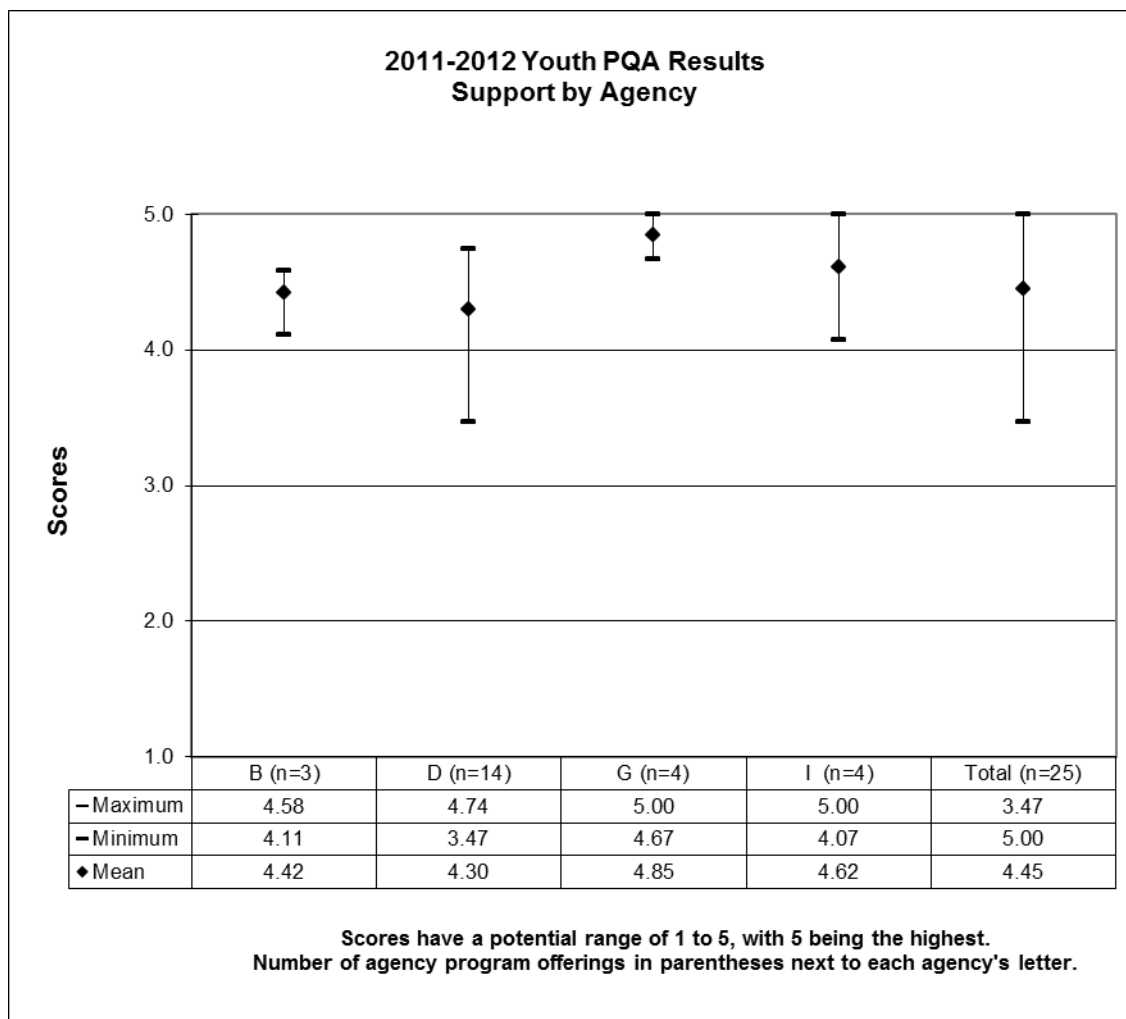
Figure 5. Safe Environment Subscale



Number of Program Offerings Within Score Range by Agency							
Score Range	B	D	G	I	Total	Percent	Score Range
1-1.9	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	1-1.9
2-2.9	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	2-2.9
3-3.9	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	3-3.9
4-4.9	2	12	4	4	22	88.0%	4-4.9
5.0	1	2	0	0	3	12.0%	5.0
Total	3	14	4	4	25	100.0%	Total

Agencies scored fairly well in the Safe Environment subscale with little variability in scores for most. The minimum item score of 4.00 is above the 3.0 average and the overall mean of 4.62 indicates that agencies are providing safe after-school options for youth.

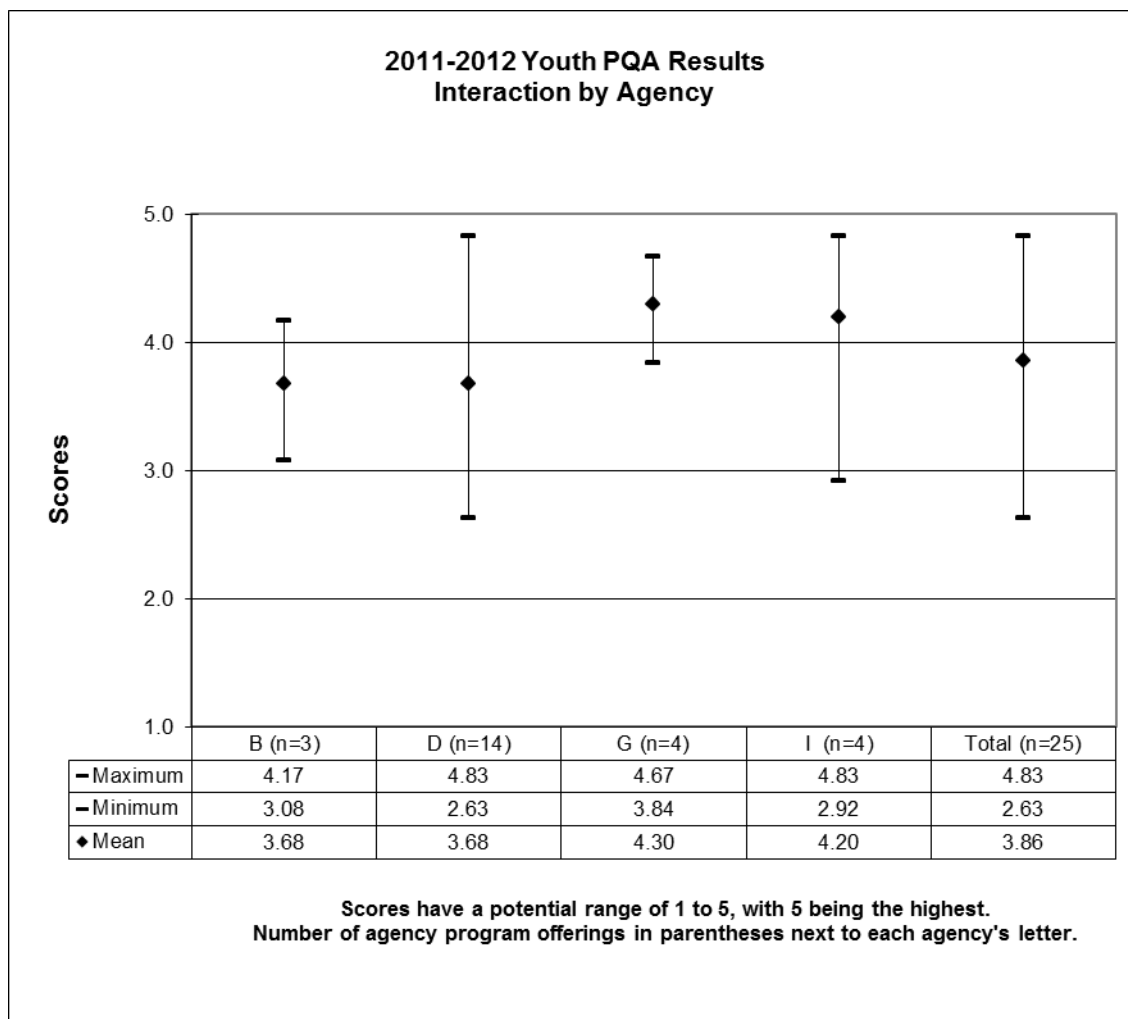
Figure 6. Supportive Environment Subscale



Number of Program Offerings Within Score Range by Agency							
Score Range	B	D	G	I	Total	Percent	Score Range
1-1.9	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	1-1.9
2-2.9	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	2-2.9
3-3.9	0	1	0	0	1	4.0%	3-3.9
4-4.9	3	13	3	2	21	84.0%	4-4.9
5.0	0	0	1	2	3	12.0%	5.0
Total	3	14	4	4	25	100.0%	Total

In general, agencies scored fairly well in the Supportive Environment subscale. The minimum score of 3.47 is above the 3.0 average and the overall mean of 4.45 shows that programs are supporting the development of the young people in their programs.

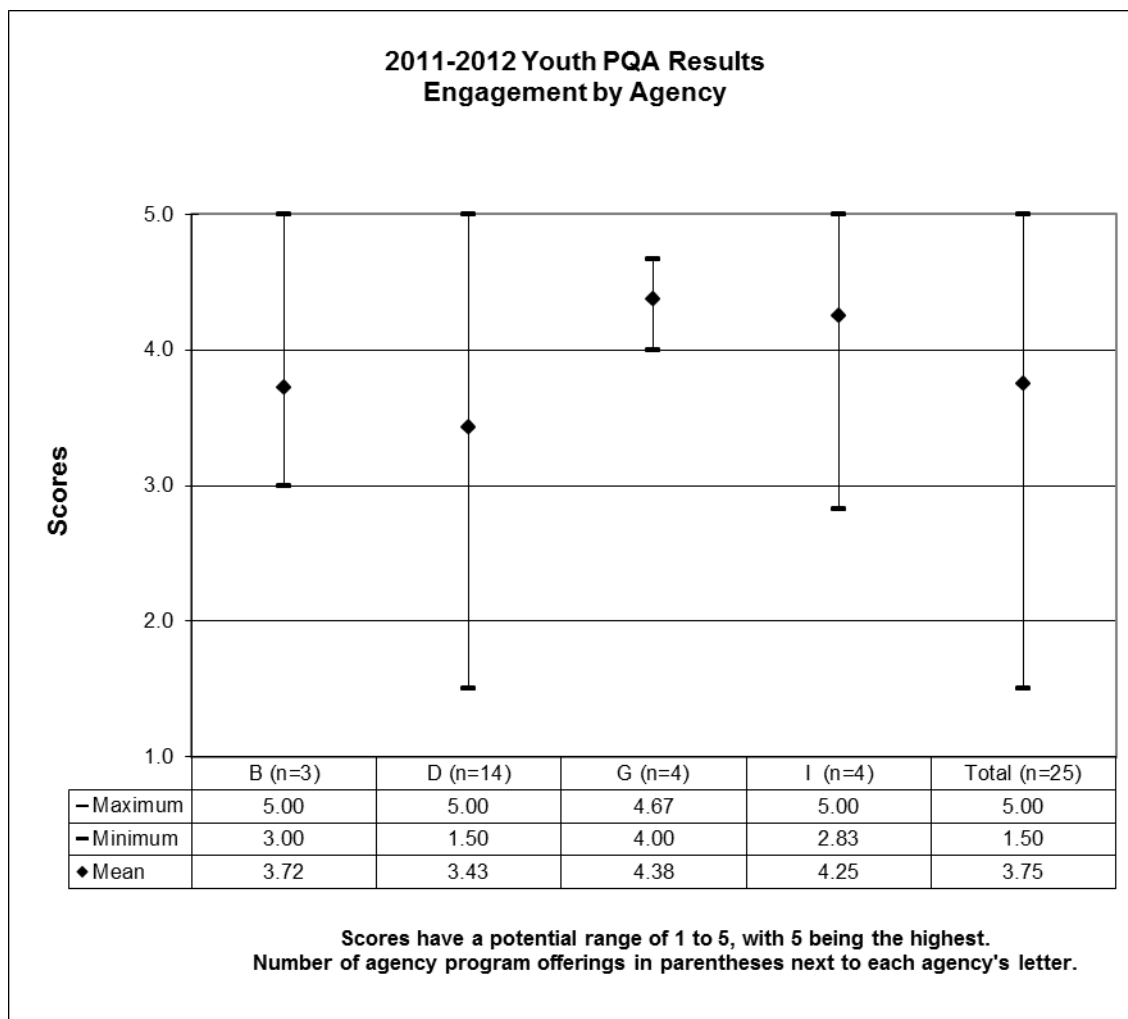
Figure 7. Interaction Subscale



Number of Program Offerings Within Score Range by Agency							
Score Range	B	D	G	I	Total	Percent	Score Range
1-1.9	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	1-1.9
2-2.9	0	2	0	1	3	12.0%	2-2.9
3-3.9	2	6	1	0	9	36.0%	3-3.9
4-4.9	1	6	3	3	13	52.0%	4-4.9
5.0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	5.0
Total	3	14	4	4	25	100.0%	Total

Some programs are struggling with the items in this subscale, however, all agencies have a mean above 3.0 average. Note that some of the items on this subscale deal with small groups and those items do not fit well with child care center-based programs, as they do not use exclusively small groups in their programming structure.

Figure 8. Engagement Subscale

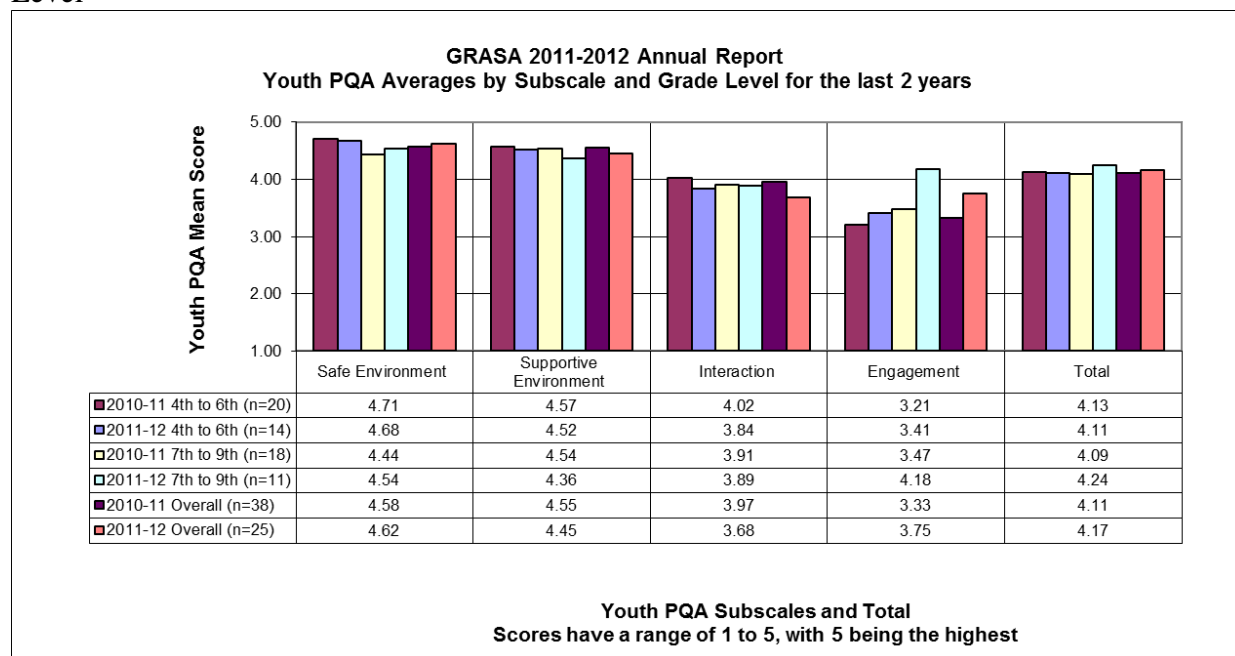


Number of Program Offerings Within Score Range by Agency							
Score Range	B	D	G	I	Total	Percent	Score Range
1-1.9	0	2	0	0	2	8.0%	1-1.9
2-2.9	0	3	0	1	4	16.0%	2-2.9
3-3.9	2	3	0	0	5	20.0%	3-3.9
4-4.9	0	5	4	2	11	44.0%	4-4.9
5.0	1	1	0	1	3	12.0%	5.0
Total	3	14	4	4	25	100.0%	Total

Even though scores this year for Engagement were higher than those attained last year, it is still the lowest scoring of the four subscales and an area to focus on for future quality improvement efforts. Continued efforts to improve may be made in many ways, e.g., youth may participate in planning projects and activities, participate in decision-making regarding activities, reflect on activities, publicly present their work and/or accomplishments, or have structured opportunities to share feedback on activities.

Scores by Grade Level – 4th to 6th and 7th to 9th

Figure 9. GRASA Subscale Mean by Grade Level



Compared to overall scores from 2010-11, scores rose by 0.04 for the Safe Environment subscale. The Supportive Environment subscale score saw a slight decrease in 2011-12, having dropped 0.10 from the previous year. Interaction also showed a decrease this year of 0.29 whereas Engagement showed an increase of 0.42.

Fourth to sixth grade classrooms remained mostly stable in their total score from 2010-11 to 2011-12 with a slight decrease of 0.02. Scores in Safe Environment, Supportive Environment, and Interaction all had a lower score than last year at this grade level in 2011-12 with decreases in scores of 0.03, 0.05 and 0.18 respectively. Engagement was the only subscale score to show improvement at this grade level with an increase in score of 0.20.

In 2011-12, seventh to ninth grade classrooms were evaluated for the third year in a row. Based on the 2011-12 scores, progress was noted for the Safe Environment and Engagement subscales, 0.10 and 0.72 respectively. There was essentially no change in the Interaction subscale this year with a slight decrease of 0.02 while the area of Supportive Environment decreased by 0.18. As was suggested last year, areas for improvement included Safe Environment and Engagement which both saw increase in their scores. This year, it is recommended that the area of Interaction be a focus for improvement.

Reliability of the Youth PQA

Cronbach's alpha

Cronbach's alpha is a test of a measure's internal consistency. It is sometimes called a "scale-reliability coefficient." For any assessment process, it is important to know whether the same set of questions measures a similar construct – do the items in the subscale fit well together? Are they referring to the same thing or are they unrelated? Are the items, when grouped together, measuring what they are designed to measure?

Measures are declared to be reliable only when they provide consistent responses. Cronbach's alpha assesses the internal reliability of a measure's answers. By measuring and reporting Cronbach's alpha values, we have what is considered a numerical coefficient of reliability. Table 2 below displays the Cronbach's alpha values for the last four years of the GRASA Youth PQA measure results. For comparison purposes, the HighScope reported results from their testing are also included in Table 2.

Table 2. Internal Reliability of the Youth PQA

2011-12 GRASA Annual Report Youth PQA Internal Reliability Sample Size and Cronbach Alpha Values												
	GRASA								HighScope			
	2008-09		2009-10		2010-11		2011-12		Test Group 1 2003-04		Test Group 2 2004-05	
Youth PQA	N	Alpha	N	Alpha	N	Alpha	N	Alpha	N	Alpha	N	Alpha
Safe Environment (5 items)	54	-0.03	35	0.36	38	0.35	25	0.12	22	0.84	118	0.74
Supportive Environment (6 items)	54	0.62	35	0.55	38	0.60	25	0.33	22	0.38	118	0.43
Interaction (4 items)	54	0.49	35	0.64	38	0.64	25	0.48	22	0.85	118	0.84
Engagement (3 items)	54	0.79	35	0.75	38	0.83	25	0.73	22	0.72	118	0.64
Total - All Subscales	54	0.76	35	0.81	38	0.81	25	0.73	22	0.71	118	0.70

Note: The Youth PQA was developed by HighScope Educational Research Foundation (2005), and is currently licensed and distributed by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. The HighScope Test group's results were reported in the Youth PQA Administration Manual, published by HighScope Press 2005.

In previous years, the Youth PQA has consistent internal reliability with the exception of the Safe Environment subscale. The reason for this involves the content of the five items: 1) psychological and emotional safety promoted, 2) environment free of health hazards, 3) emergency supplies and procedures present, 4) space and furniture accommodates activities, and 5) healthy food and drinks provided. This year, the Youth PQA showed less internal consistency in the Supportive Environment subscale that includes the items: 1) staff provide a welcoming atmosphere, 2) session flow is planned, presented, and paced for youth, 3) activities support active engagement, 4) staff support youth in building new skills, 5) staff support youth with encouragement, and, 6) staff use youth-centered approaches to reframe conflict. The items for these 2 subscales are not closely correlated, thus the subscales are not as reliable as they could be if the items were closer in content.

Inter-Rater Reliability of the Youth PQA

As part of an ongoing effort to assure the accuracy of the measures used, approximately 25% of program offerings are observed by two observers so that we can calculate the level of agreement or inter-rater reliability between different observers.

Table 3 below shows the inter-rater reliability of Youth PQA total score and subscales using a simple correlation (r) and the median inter-rater reliability for exact matches (a/a+d); where a=agreement and d=disagreement. The GRASA inter-rater reliability for exact matches was found to be 0.92 for six observations. For comparison, the developers of the Youth PQA reported an inter-rater reliability 0.65 (N=48). The inter-rater reliability findings for each subscale and total in Table 3 show that the administration of the Youth PQA by GRASA conforms to high standards and is of high quality. HighScope's test findings are also included in Table 3 for comparison.

Table 3. Inter-Rater Reliability of the Youth PQA

2011-12 GRASA Annual Report Youth PQA Inter-Rater Reliability					
	GRASA				HighScope
	2008-09*	2009-10*	2010-11*	2011-12*	Test Group 1 2003-04
Sample size N	7	4	6	6	48
Median Inter-rater Reliability for Exact Matches ¹	0.86	0.93	0.93	0.92	0.65
Safe Environment (r)	0.74	0.49	0.85	0.93	0.48
Supportive Environment (r)	0.80	0.91	0.98	0.81	0.69
Interaction (r)	0.95	0.94	0.93	0.99	0.83
Engagement (r)	0.98	0.87	0.99	0.92	0.72
Total Youth PQA (r)	0.98	0.90	0.99	0.99	0.66
Notes: ¹ Inter-rater reliability for exact matches is equal to a/a+d, where a=agreement and d=disagreement. * Signifies that all GRASA inter-rater reliability values are significant at p<.05 except those designated. (r) Signifies that these values are Pearson Correlation Coefficients.					

Note: The Youth PQA was developed by HighScope Educational Research Foundation (2005), and is currently licensed and distributed by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. The HighScope Test group's results were reported in the Youth PQA Administration Manual, published by HighScope Press 2005.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Program Youth PQA Observations

- This is the fourth year the after-school assessment included programs serving youth in grades seven through nine. Results indicate quality programming in place.
- A consistent strength in program quality continues to be within the Safe and Supportive Environment subscales. However, there is a need for focus upon improvement within the Engagement subscale as this is the subscale with the greatest variability of quality including scores within the low range.
- The Youth PQA and program observation process continues to be reported by participating agencies as a valuable component of their program improvement processes.

Recommendations

The domains assessed by the Youth PQA are hierarchical in nature, so the areas of Safety and Support are viewed as being predecessors to the areas of Interaction and, finally, Engagement. It remains our primary recommendation that program directors determine which Youth PQA stage to address first with their programs, and not attempt to impact all areas at once. Given the sequential aspect of the domains, trying to increase Engagement (for example) before adequate levels of Safety, Support, and Interaction are in place, would be difficult to achieve. However, we do recommend that program directors begin work with their staff to develop specific strategies to address engagement issues, and formulate an implementation plan and timeline that aligns with and supports current progress in other areas. Such a step would also facilitate proper assessment of required resources in light of broader program goals, and help ensure that current gains across the subscales will be maintained. Lastly, we encourage program directors to conduct an assessment of their professional staff development needs as they design plans to improve quality in their programs.

Limitations

This evaluation has a number of limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results presented in this report.

The program observations, using the Youth PQA instrument, were conducted by highly trained independent observers using a valid and reliable instrument. However, each program offering was observed only one time. While provision was made for challenges to the accuracy of the Youth PQA scores by program staff and administration, it is possible that any single assessment might not be representative of a particular program offering. We note however that we received no review requests for Youth PQA assessments in 2011-2012 for the observations considered in this report.