Summary of IES Recommendations for
Structuring Out of School Time to Improve Academic Outcomes

The recommendations included in the practice guide are for programs that (1) serve elementary and middle school students, (2) are organized by or conducted in partnership with a school or school district, and (3) aim to improve academic outcomes. These recommendations were developed by a panel of experts in Out of School Time (OST) programs and research methods. They developed these recommendations by focusing on high-quality experimental and quasi-experimental studies (i.e., those meeting the criteria of the What Works Clearinghouse as well as those practices used across programs).

Recommendation 1: Align the OST program academically with the school day.	
Tips for Carrying Out Recommendation:	**Examples of Specific Ideas:**
OST program coordinators should develop relationships and maintain ongoing communication between schools and the OST program	• Develop a logbook to facilitate communication with teachers about homework assignments, areas of struggle, etc. • Attend planning periods or meet with teachers to discuss practices and materials that address the curriculum
Designate a school staff person to coordinate communication with OST programs and help them support school needs	• Develop standard operating procedures for distributing student data to OST staff • Observe and communicate with OST staff to identify opportunities for greater coordination with the school day
Connect OST instruction to school instruction by identifying school-based goals and learning objectives	• Use field trips and cultural activities to support and reinforce what students learn in school
Coordinate with the school to identify staff for OST programs	• Hire classroom teachers who demonstrate success during the school day

Recommendation 2: Maximize student participation and attendance

Tips for Carrying Out Recommendation:	Examples of Specific Ideas:
Design program features to meet the needs and preferences of students and parents	• Gather information about parent and student preferences with a survey or meet with school staff to identify the needs of parents and students
Promote awareness of the OST program within schools and to parents	• Use websites, flyers, bulletin boards, newsletters, or word of mouth to communicate with parents
Use attendance data to identify students facing difficulties in attending the program	• Consider using reward incentives or special privileges to encourage regular attendance (e.g., monthly prizes or points for good behavior that can be redeemed for field trips, small prizes, or books)

Recommendation 3: Adapt instruction to individual and small group needs

Tips for Carrying Out Recommendation:	Examples of Specific Ideas:
Use formal and informal assessment data to inform academic instruction	• Pre- and post-lesson tests, school-based assessments, and techniques such as effective questioning and observation can be used to evaluate students' areas of strength and weakness
Use one-on-one tutoring if possible; otherwise, break students into small groups	• Students can be grouped based on their skill level for that topic or by grade. Instructors can also create heterogeneous groups so that students can help peers
Provide professional development and ongoing instructional support to all instructors	• Schools should discuss training options with OST program instructors in professional development courses at the school and district levels

Recommendation 4: Provide engaging learning experiences	
Tips for Carrying Out Recommendation:	**Examples of Specific Ideas:**
Make learning relevant by incorporating practical examples and connecting instruction to student interests and experiences.	• Field trips can help develop students' background knowledge and connect the real world to concepts taught during the school day. • Consider developing an overarching program theme or final project to reinforce different learning activities
Make learning active through opportunities for collaborative learning and hands-on academic activities	• Programs can encourage interaction among peers by pairing struggling students with more advanced partners • Include games, projects, manipulatives, and computers in activities
Build adult-student relationships among OST program participants	• OST programs can use relationship-building activities to help staff to get to know students • Programs can also assign staff to follow students across activities and thus serve as mentors

Recommendation 5: Assess program performance and use the results to improve the quality of the program	
Tips for Carrying Out Recommendation:	**Examples of Specific Ideas:**
Develop an evaluation plan	• Involve all stakeholders in the development of the plan (i.e., parents, teachers, OST program administrators, and OST staff)
Collect program and student performance data	• Observe implementation of the program; have program and school share responsibility for collecting student outcome data
Analyze the data and use findings for program improvement	• The school should look for inconsistencies between what OST providers proposed and how the program is actually implemented • Professional development should be chosen based on results of the evaluation
Conduct a summative evaluation	• Once formative evaluations conclude that the program is being delivered as designed, a summative or impact evaluation is appropriate