

North Dakota Best in Class Grant

Program Description

2023-2024

The North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is now accepting Best in Class applications for the 2023-2024 academic year.

North Dakota’s Best in Class program represents a targeted state investment in programs that are committed to delivering the highest quality experiences to the children and families they serve, and whose actions can demonstrate the return on investment that is possible with intentional, research-supported investments in early childhood. Best in Class is built on program characteristics that drive results – high quality, supported interactions between adults and children based on developmentally appropriate experiences.

Teaching staff will be coached and supported in implementing developmentally appropriate environments, play based curriculum, and authentic observation-based assessments to drive individualized experiences to support children in reaching widely held expectations in the year before kindergarten.

The work done in these programs will be monitored, evaluated, and supported to help ensure that the investment we make has an impact.

PROGRAMS ELIGIBLE TO APPLY

North Dakota early childhood programs that provide quality experiences and serve children who have reached **age four before August 1st, 2023** are eligible to apply. This includes

- Programs that are operated by educational facilities, public or private that are committed to completing the Four-Year-Old Program Approval ([SFN 1304](#)) every two years.
- Federally funded Head Start programs. If not also licensed by HHS, program must have completed the Four-Year-Old Program Approval ([SFN 1304](#)).
- Licensed child care settings (center or group), inclusive of those operated in connection with a church, business, or organization, that are in good licensing standing.

NORTH DAKOTA EARLY CHILDHOOD QUALITY IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS

<u>Licensed Child Care</u>	<u>Head Start Grantee</u>	<u>Local Education Agency Public/Private</u>
Licensed child care programs participating in Bright & Early ND, our state’s QRIS, with a current rating of Step 3 or 4 and in good licensing standing.	Head Start Grantees in compliance with Federal Head Start Monitoring Protocol.	Local Education Agencies must be in compliance with ND Department of Public Instruction Desk Audit Approval System, in good fiscal standing, and in compliance with all Federal Title Program Monitoring.

PROGRAM EXPECTATIONS

Awarded programs will operate in compliance with the grant requirements and research evaluation criteria. Programs must:

- Each section must operate for a minimum of 400 hours over 32 consecutive weeks. Programs operating at least 800 hours over 32 consecutive weeks are desired.
- Admit children of all learning abilities into their program, that are **4 years old before Aug. 1st 2023**.
- Prioritize 50% of slots in each section for children whose family's household income is less than 60% of state median income or children who have an identified developmental delay or disability.
- If charging tuition it must be based on Best in Class program sliding fee scale.
- Willing to admit children who receive child care assistance.
- Maintain teaching staff to child ratio, 1 teaching staff to every 10 children. Comply with current North Dakota requirements related to qualifications, training, and professional development of staff delivering services.
- Adhere to expectations established by HHS for coaching, monitoring, fiscal oversight, and data reporting (Teaching Strategies GOLD) and collection.
- Incorporate at least ten hours of research - based family engagement (Ex. Teaching Strategies - Ready Rosie).
- Ensure families are aware of Best in Class family participation components.
- Purchase materials and equipment with grant dollars to meet Best in Class Environment Standards upon completion of an environment checklist.
- Utilize Teaching Strategies GOLD for observations and assessment under NDDHS Teaching Strategies license.
- Implement a research-based curriculum. Creative Curriculum is offered to program participants at no cost.
- Lead Teachers must participate in professional development trainings/community of practices.
- Coordinate and/or offer onsite health screenings and referrals (developmental, hearing, vision, dental & physical). Screenings are to be completed no sooner than six months prior to the first day of attendance and no later than 90 days after the first day of attendance.
- Participate in programmatic research, including randomized studies that examine core components of program design and program outcomes.

BEST IN CLASS PROGRAM DESIGN

Grant Amount

New Best in Class programs approved with a large group size of 11-20 children and operating at least 800 hours are eligible for an annual award of \$120,000; programs approved to operate with a small group size of 8-10 children and operating at least 800 hours will receive an annual award of \$60,000. Based on group size, programs operating 400 to 799 hours in at least 32 consecutive weeks will receive half the grant amount.

Returning Best in Class programs funding model will be based on four levers - group size, tuition dependence, school district's free and reduced priced student enrollment and schedule of operation to determine grant award amount.

Baseline:

- Group of 11-20 - \$120,000
- Group of 8-10 - \$60,000

Tier 1 calculation:

- Tuition Dependent or School District with 50% or more Free and Reduced Priced Student Enrollment = 100% of grant dollars
- Not Tuition Dependent or a School District with 50% or more Free and Reduced Priced Student Enrollment = Award decreases by 50%

Tier 2 calculation:

- Part-time program (<25 hrs/wk) – 50% of Tier 1 amount
- Full-time program (25+ hrs/wk) – 100% of Tier 1 amount

All funds are subject to availability of funding.

Budget

An itemized preliminary budget format will be provided once you have been awarded the grant. New large group programs will be expected to budget a minimum of \$20,000, new small group programs will be expected to budget a minimum of \$10,000, and all returning programs will be expected to budget a minimum of 5% for the classroom environment. **All** programs will be expected to work with their coach to create a purchasing plan based on the environment needs. See The Learning Environment section below.

Eligible Uses

Each grant award must be matched with cash match or in-kind match contributions equal to 16.6666% of total grant reimbursement.

Grant funds will support the provision of quality early childhood experiences, including expenditures related to staffing, training, equipment, and supplies; as well as supporting families to participate in referral activities that result from screening. Programs request reimbursement on a quarterly basis using SFN 1763.

Allowable use of funds

Personnel Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Salary and benefits for teacher and assistant teacher/para• Qualified substitute teachers• Cost of background checks for new teachers
Health/Screening/Referral Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cost of vision, hearing, dental, & physical screenings• Gas cards for families to attend referral appointments
Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Registration and Fees
Education Equipment & Supplies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instructional materials and supplies• Classroom furnishings• Classroom electronic/technology equipment (not to exceed 5% of the grant awarded)• Curriculum Costs• Playground equipment and supplies

Other Operating Expenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom maintenance and cleaning supplies • Computer support for classroom • Family engagement activities • Safety equipment and supplies • Advertising and Outreach • Indirect Cost (not to exceed 10% of the total of all other expenses per reimbursement)
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Enrollment / Randomized Selection Process

Awarded programs will adhere to program requirements related to selection of children for enrollment in the grantee's Best in Class section.

Each Best in Class group will establish an enrollment set-aside to assure inclusion of children who are most likely to benefit from the Best in Class program.

- 50% of a program's classroom slots will be set-aside for children whose household income is less than 60% of state median income or children who have an identified developmental delay or disability.
 - Income will be determined utilizing categorical eligibility established via other federal programs (ex. SNAP, CCAP, Free/Reduced Meals) or via documentation provided by the family
 - Developmental delay or disability will be determined by utilizing existing eligibility for other federal programs, including receipt of services through an IEP under early childhood special education, eligibility for DD services, or other documentation deemed appropriate by NDDHS.
- The Child Information form collects the information needed for the program to prioritize children who meet the 50% set aside slot criteria. Child information form found on the website should be completed by each family at the time of application for a four-year-old program. [Best in Class | Health and Human Services North Dakota](#)
- If a program has more applicants in the set-aside pool than it has set-aside slots available, students will be selected through a randomized selection process within the set-aside pool.
- Any students not selected in the first-round randomized selection (i.e., set-aside pool) will then be included in the non-set-aside pool.
- Students in the non-set-aside pool will then be selected for enrollment based on a randomized selection protocol.

Staffing & Ratio Requirement

Large Group Size 11-20 Staffing must include a minimum of two adults – a qualified teacher and an auxiliary teacher – who must always be present. If either staff is absent, the Best in Class program must provide a qualified substitute.

Small Group Size 8-10 Staffing requires as minimum one qualified teacher – who must always be present. If the teacher is absent, the Best in Class program must provide a qualified substitute.

Best in Class requires participants to follow the ratio of one staff to every 10 children and a maximum of 20 children.

Teaching Staff Qualifications

	<u>Licensed Child Care</u>	<u>Head Start Grantee</u>	<u>Local Education Agency Public/Private</u>
Lead Teacher	Must meet Bright & Early of ND Step 3 or 4 professional development requirements.	Must meet Head Start teacher qualifications.	Must have the credentials to teach Pre-Kindergarten.
Auxiliary Teacher (para, aide, assistant)	Must meet Bright & Early of ND Step 3 or 4 professional development requirements.	Must meet Head Start auxiliary teacher qualifications.	Para's are expected to meet requirements held by the school.

Tuition

Programs are not required to charge tuition. An awarded Best in Class program may charge tuition to families who participate, tuition charged must follow Best in Class Sliding Fee Scale.

- Families with household income of 61% to 100% of state median income will be subject to a maximum tuition charge per child of 3% of household income.
- Families with household income of 100% to 150% of state median income will be subject to a maximum tuition charge per child of 5% of household income.
- Families with household income greater than 150% of state median income will be subject to a maximum tuition charge of 7% of household income, not to exceed the maximum CCAP rate for preschool age.

2023-2024 Best in Class Monthly Sliding Fee Scale

Household Size	60% of SMI			100% of SMI			150% of SMI			>150% SMI		
	Co-pay capped at 1% of household income			Co-pay capped at 3% of household income			Co-pay capped at 5% of household income			Co-pay capped at 7% of household income		
	Annual Income	Max Fee (full time)	Max Fee (part time)	Annual Income	Max Fee (full time)	Max Fee (part time)	Annual Income	Max Fee (full time)	Max Fee (part time)	Annual Income	Max Fee (full time)	Max Fee (part time)
2	< \$43,687	\$ 36	\$ 36	\$43,687 - \$72,812	\$ 182	\$ 182	\$72,812 - \$109,218	\$ 455	\$ 455	>= \$109,218	\$ 811	\$ 566
3	< \$53,966	\$ 45	\$ 45	\$53,966 - \$89,944	\$ 225	\$ 225	\$89,944 - \$134,916	\$ 562	\$ 562	>= \$134,916	\$ 811	\$ 566
4	< \$64,246	\$ 54	\$ 54	\$64,246 - \$107,076	\$ 268	\$ 268	\$107,076 - \$160,614	\$ 669	\$ 566	>= \$160,614	\$ 811	\$ 566
5	< \$74,525	\$ 62	\$ 62	\$74,525 - \$124,208	\$ 311	\$ 311	\$124,208 - \$186,312	\$ 776	\$ 566	>= \$186,312	\$ 811	\$ 566
6	< \$84,804	\$ 71	\$ 71	\$84,804 - \$141,340	\$ 353	\$ 353	\$141,340 - \$212,010	\$ 811	\$ 566	>= \$212,010	\$ 811	\$ 566
7	< \$86,732	\$ 72	\$ 72	\$86,732 - \$144,553	\$ 361	\$ 361	\$144,553 - \$216,829	\$ 811	\$ 566	>= \$216,829	\$ 811	\$ 566
8	< \$88,659	\$ 74	\$ 74	\$88,659 - \$147,765	\$ 369	\$ 369	\$147,765 - \$221,647	\$ 811	\$ 566	>= \$221,647	\$ 811	\$ 566
9	< \$90,586	\$ 75	\$ 75	\$90,586 - \$150,977	\$ 377	\$ 377	\$150,977 - \$226,466	\$ 811	\$ 566	>= \$226,466	\$ 811	\$ 566
10	< \$92,514	\$ 77	\$ 77	\$92,514 - \$154,189	\$ 385	\$ 385	\$154,189 - \$231,284	\$ 811	\$ 566	>= \$231,284	\$ 811	\$ 566

* If household received funding from Child Care Assistance, Co-pay requirements of CCAP supersede BIC fee schedule

**SMI = State Median Income

Note: Full time rate applies if program operates 25 or more hours per week; Part time rate applies for programs less than 25 hours per week

Health Screening & Referrals

Best in Class grantees are required to offer on-site screenings and referrals for each child enrolled. Best In Class coaches will help coordinate health screenings as needed. Grant funding may be used to assure screenings are completed. Screenings are to be completed no sooner than six months prior to the first day of attendance and no later than 90 days after the first day of attendance. If the program provided screenings during a recruitment phase or if the parent has documentation of the child's well visit from physician, dentist, or eye doctor, programs will monitor to assure screenings happen annually.

Physical Health Screenings. Best in Class grantees must coordinate/offer physical health screening through community partnerships. These screenings must be offered by trained professionals onsite if the family does not have means to access a community provider. Physical screening includes height, weight, blood pressure, and BMI.

Vision and Hearing Screenings. All programs must offer vision and hearing screenings by trained professionals onsite and can choose to partner with a provider in the service area as appropriate.

Oral Health Screenings. All programs must offer dental screenings by trained professionals and can choose to partner with a provider as appropriate in your area. Screenings are not examinations and do not involve making diagnoses that lead to treatment plans. An oral health screening is using a flashlight and small mouth mirror to look for any signs of dental disease.

Developmental Screening. As part of Best in Class, each program will complete a developmental screening using an improved tool to pinpoint developmental progress and catch delays in young children – paving the way for meaningful next steps in learning, intervention, or monitoring. If the child is already on an IEP a developmental screening is not needed.

Suggested screening tools include, Ages & Stages Questionnaire Third Edition (ASQ-3), Brigance Early Childhood Screen II or III, or Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning, Third or Fourth Edition (DIAL-3, 4).

Family Participation

Family engagement is a required component of Best in Class. The Best in Class coaches will work with awarded programs to identify a minimum of 10 hours of family engagement opportunities per enrolled child. Family engagement might include:

- *Ready Rosie* at-home strategies tool, through the program's participation in Teaching Strategies
- *Waterford Upstart* kindergarten readiness program is available in ND at no cost to preschool children
- Other research-based family engagement (SEEDS for learning etc.)

Programs will provide and report additional family engagement opportunities.

Best in Class requires programs to disburse Family Participation Packets.

Best in Class Family Participation Packet (this will be on the website)

- Cover letter to families
- Health Screening permission form
- Family Engagement permission form
- Waterford Upstart
- Ready Rosie flyer

The Learning Environment

Best in Class programs shall provide high quality learning environments that align to the Best in Class environment standards. The Best in Class Environment Standards are a list of materials and equipment that support developmentally appropriate high quality hands-on learning experiences for children. Having a developmentally appropriate environment and scheduled time promotes the implementation of play throughout the day. Play provides benefits for cognitive,

social, emotional, physical, and moral development (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2006; Elkind, 2007) for children from all socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds (Zigler, E. & Bishop-Josef, S., 2006).

- **Purchasing materials and equipment to meet BIC Environment Standards will be a priority use of grant dollars and on-going throughout the year.**
 - Programs will review the BIC Environment Standards
 - Coaches will initiate an on-site review of the program classroom, to assure that the program is meeting Best in Class Environment Standards and to help guide additional purchases
 - Programs will be required to use grant dollars to purchase materials and equipment to meet Best in Class Environment Standards and implement adequate free play into their daily schedule

North Dakota Early Learning Standards and Curriculum

The [Early Learning Standards](#) promote the understanding of early learning and development; provide a comprehensive set of expectations for children's development and learning; and guide the design and implementation of curriculum, assessment, and instructional practices with young children. Best in Class programs shall use the ND Early Learning Standards to guide and inform their planning and facilitation of comprehensive, developmentally appropriate, high-quality learning experiences for children and in their work with families.

Best in Class programs are **required** to use a comprehensive research-based curriculum that aligns to the ND Early Learning Standards. Teaching Strategies Creative Curriculum will be provided and includes Ready Rosie a family engagement tool. Professional Development will be accessible and highly recommended to support teachers in implementing Creative Curriculum. Programs that choose not to implement Teaching Strategies Creative Curriculum are required to provide evidence that the curriculum being used aligns to the North Dakota Early Learning Standards. Evidence may be available from the curriculum publisher.

Assessment

Best in Class programs are **required** to use Teaching Strategies GOLD, a formative assessment tool, for observations and assessment under the HHS contract and cannot use a private license while participating in Best in Class. Teaching Strategies™ GOLD® guides the appropriate alignment of the standards with teacher's instruction. Assessment informs professionals' practices.

Full implementation of GOLD® is expected through the assessment cycle - Teachers observe children throughout the day, document their development/skills, and use the information to plan instruction.

Programs will be required to implement ongoing assessment of their children and complete three GOLD checkpoints throughout the school year (Fall 9/1-11/30, Winter 12/1-2/28, Spring 3/1-5/31.

collecting enough documentation to accurately support your assessment of each child's knowledge, skills, and abilities

Professional Development

Best in Class participants will have access to Teaching Strategies Quorum e-learning platform. This offers training to support implementation of curriculum, assessment and many other early childhood specific courses.

Lead Teachers must complete a minimum of 15 hours of early childhood specific professional development face-to-face or virtually. **First year BIC teachers** must complete Introduction to GOLD® Live Course.

Teachers are required to obtain Interrater Reliability Certification through Teaching Strategies within the first six months of the school year to ensure accurate completion of Teaching Strategies GOLD checkpoints.

- Completion of Interrater Reliability takes a minimum of five hours
- Teachers will be required to recertify every three years.

Auxiliary Teachers are highly recommended to complete early childhood specific training.

Children with Special Needs and Individualized Education Plan

Best in Class grantees must plan for children with disabilities to ensure that materials and equipment are available to support children with differing abilities. Children who are identified as having a disability should receive services and staffing in accordance with their IEP. Best in Class teachers should have a copy or access to all IEPs for the children in their classroom. Teachers should attend all IEP meetings and work directly with the Local Education Agency (LEA) to ensure progress is being made towards meeting IEP goals for any child with a current IEP in place.

Data Collection

Awarded programs are required to enroll all students into the North Dakota State Automated Reporting System. Guidance and TA will be provided to support the access and on-going reporting needs of each program.

Best in Class programs will participate in ongoing program study to support long-term child outcomes.

NDDHS will supply awarded programs with information to share with families upon enrollment, that describe the program design, including releases of information.

PROGRAM SUPPORTS

Coaching

Best in Class coaches will be supporting teachers in all components of the Best in Class program including, but not limited to, environment and materials, Teaching Strategies curriculum and GOLD assessment, family engagement, health screenings and referrals, and coordination of other coaches currently assisting programs. Coaches will provide onsite and virtual support to teachers in providing quality early childhood experiences to maximize child outcomes. Coaching will include observation, dialogue, inquiry/reflection, goal setting and action planning.

Health Consultation

Research shows that children thrive in a healthy and safe environment. Best in Class grantees are expected to provide a healthy and safe environment by following the BIC Health and Safety Standards. Upon completion of a Health & Safety Self-Assessment, programs will receive an on-site or virtual visit(s) by a health and safety specialist to discuss the self-assessment and goal implementation.

Program Monitoring and Evaluation

All Best in Class grantees will be assigned a monitor to work closely with the program administration, coaches, health consultants and other key program staff to ensure the fiscal, operations, and programming is being implemented with fidelity.