



**Bright
& Early**
NORTH DAKOTA

Program Guide
JULY 2023



Introduction

Bright & Early ND is North Dakota's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). A QRIS is a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early childhood programs. Bright & Early ND was developed to help early childhood programs offer high-quality care that supports each child's learning and development.

Bright & Early ND is designed to:

- Ensure that children have high-quality early experiences that help them develop the skills they need to be successful in school, work, and life.
- Support early childhood professionals to provide high-quality care by offering resources such as professional development opportunities, coaching, and financial supports.
- Help families find high-quality in early childhood programs that fit their needs by providing information about program quality.

The North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services administers Bright & Early ND as a key strategy for quality improvement under North Dakota law ([NDCC 50-11.1](#)).

Framework


Bright & Early ND uses a block system approach which includes four levels, or steps, to quality. Each step focuses on a component of quality care and must be demonstrated by the program before moving to the next step. The outcome is a program that maximizes a child's readiness for school, work, and life.





Bright & Early ND Process

The Bright & Early ND Quality Rating process is a journey not a destination. The stages in the Quality Rating process are intentionally designed to celebrate programs for where they are; and provide the path they need to meet more rigorous and comprehensive standards. Bright & Early ND recognizes programs at all stages in their journey.

 Start your Bright & Early ND journey by establishing a child care license issued by the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services.

Step 1: Health and Safety



Quality Indicators

Step 1 Quality Rated programs are meeting and maintaining child care licensing regulations, this is the foundation of Bright & Early ND. These regulations are designed to protect and promote child safety and well-being in all types of settings.

Licensed early childhood programs are required to maintain at least minimum standards related to; physical space, safety features, cleanliness, staff qualifications and staff-to-child ratios. Children need to be healthy and feel safe to learn and grow. It is the first step in preparing children to be ready for school, work, and life.

All programs who hold a current license issued by the North Dakota Department of Health & Human Services are automatically welcomed into Bright & Early ND as a Step 1 Quality Rated program.



Navigate to the Early Childhood Workforce Registry, *Growing Futures*, and log in to your organization profile to access your Step 1 Quality Rating certificate.

Ready for the next Step?

The Bright & Early ND Quality Rating process for Steps 2-4 is implemented on three cycles per year, referred to as cohorts. Early childhood programs interested in renewing their current Bright & Early ND Quality Rating or pursuing the next step must submit an application through their [Growing Futures](#) organization profile.



Navigate to the [Bright & Early ND website](#) to learn more about the application process including specific cohort dates and deadlines.



Step 2: Space and Materials

Step 2 Quality Rated programs are on the path to continuous quality improvement. They continue to meet the requirements of Step 1 and provide a safe, responsive, and engaging environment that sets the stage for optimal early childhood experiences. An intentionally designed environment allows opportunities for children to experiment, practice their skills, analyze, socialize and problem solve. When the environment supports children's learning and development, they are better prepared for school, work, and life.



Quality Indicators

SM.1 Program serves nutritious meals and snacks to children.

Early childhood programs play a critical role in supporting the health and wellness of children through the provision of nutritious foods. Early childhood professionals have a powerful opportunity to instill healthy habits in young children that serve as a foundation for healthy choices throughout life.

To meet this indicator, programs will select one of two options and provide supporting evidence.

- Option 1) Program is actively participating in a national food program, either the [Child & Adult Care Food Program \(CACFP\)](#) or [National School Lunch Program \(NSLP\)](#) and is in good standing. Active participation means the program is fulfilling the requirements to receive potential benefits on a monthly basis.

To meet this indicator, evidence of current participation (billing statement, proof of payment, etc.) must be submitted. Evidence must include a valid date and should be within sixty (60) days from the date of Quality Standards Inventory submission.

- Option 2) Program is not actively participating in a national food program. To meet this indicator, evidence must include one (1) week of menus aligned with USDA guidelines and completed Go NAPSACC Self-Assessment(s).

Possible Evidence: Evidence of active CACFP or NSLP participation (i.e., billing statement, proof of payment), Menus aligned with USDA guidelines, Go NAPSACC Self-Assessment(s).



Navigate to the [Bright & Early ND website](#) for a copy of the Go NAPSACC Self-Assessment(s) and additional resources to support Indicator SM.1.

SM.2 Environment Rating Scale® (ERS®) observation conducted by an endorsed ERS® Assessor.

The ERS® is a series of reliable, valid, research-based observation tools designed to assess the early childhood environment. Programs must have a valid ERS® observation conducted every 3 years. For programs receiving an ITERS-3™ and/or ECERS-3™ observation, 33% of randomly selected classrooms will be observed.

To meet this indicator, evidence must be valid (dated within the previous 3 years) and represent, at minimum, 33% of the classrooms or groups served.

Possible Evidence: Copy of ERS® Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Report(s)



Navigate to the [Bright & Early ND website](#) for additional resources to support Indicator SM.2.

Step 2: Space and Materials



Quality Indicators

SM.3 Program develops a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) that:

- Is guided by ERS® assessments,
- Includes both short-term and long-term goals,
- Includes action items to support overall quality improvement.

The [Quality Improvement Plan \(QIP\)](#) is part of the continuous quality improvement process in which programs assess their strengths and opportunities for growth, set achievable goals, and develop realistic plans for improvement.

To meet this indicator, evidence must reflect all the indicator components above and be dated within the previous 12-months.

Possible Evidence: Copy of completed Quality Improvement Plan

SM.4 The Program Director, all Lead Teachers and/or all Lead Caregivers have verified employment in the program's Growing Futures organization account.

The North Dakota Early Childhood Workforce Registry, *Growing Futures*, is the source for training, education, and employment verification.

To meet this indicator, the Program Director, all Lead Teachers and/or all Lead Caregivers must have verified and accurate employment records in the program's Growing Futures organization account.

Possible Evidence: Growing Futures organization account report, *SM.4 Quality Indicator Report*



Navigate to the [Bright & Early ND website](#) for additional resources to support Indicator SM.4.

SM.5 The Program Director, all Lead Teachers and/or all Lead Caregivers have a current Growing Futures Career Pathway placement of Category A or Higher.

The North Dakota Early Childhood Workforce Registry, *Growing Futures*, is the source for training, education, and employment verification. All training must appear on an individual's Growing Futures Learning Record as approved clock hours. Programs that experience turnover in leadership positions must also submit a [Professional Development Action Plan](#).

To meet this indicator, the Program Director, all Lead Teachers and/or all Lead Caregivers must have a current individual membership in Growing Futures and current Career Pathway placement of Category A or Higher.

Possible Evidence: Growing Futures organization account report, *SM.5 Quality Indicator Report*; Professional Development Action Plan



Navigate to the [Bright & Early ND website](#) for additional resources to support Indicator SM.5.



Step 2: Space and Materials



Quality Indicators

SM.6 The Program Director, all Lead Teachers and/or all Lead Caregivers have completed professional development related to learning environments.

The North Dakota Early Childhood Workforce Registry, *Growing Futures*, is the source for training, education, and employment verification. All training must appear on an individual's Growing Futures Learning Record as approved clock hours. Programs that experience turnover in leadership positions must also submit a [Professional Development Action Plan](#).

To meet this indicator, the Program Director, all Lead Teachers and/or all Lead Caregivers must complete:

- At least 10 clock hours in Core Competency Area II. Learning Environment and Curriculum

Possible Evidence: Growing Futures Organization Profile Report, *SM.6 Quality Indicator Report*; Professional Development Action Plan



Navigate to the [North Dakota Early Childhood Training Calendar](#) to find current listing of trainings offered.

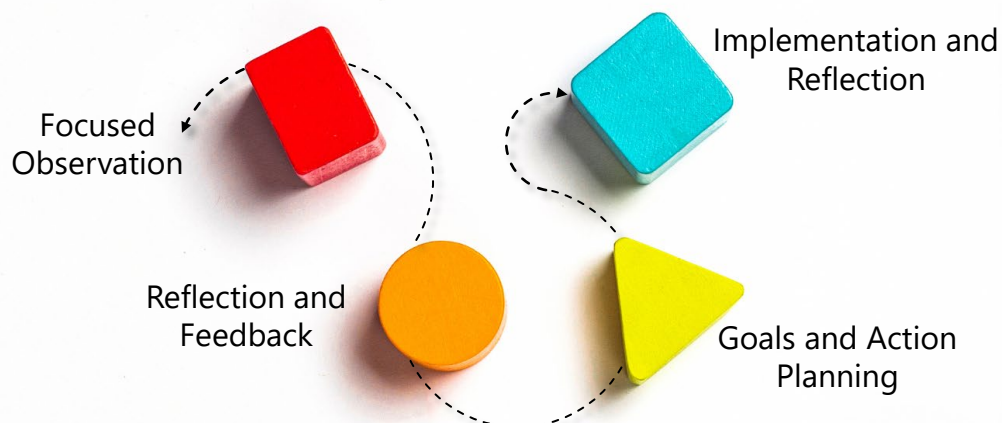
Program Quality Observations

Programs participating in Bright & Early ND receive the benefit of an onsite Program Quality Observation completed by a trained, reliable, and endorsed ERS® or CLASS® Assessor.

The Program Quality Observation provides valuable, relevant feedback in the form of a summary report. This information can be used by the program to help identify program strengths, as well as raise awareness to areas needing development. The information gathered can be used to help create the program's Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).



Navigate to the Early Childhood Workforce Registry, *Growing Futures*, and log in to your organization profile to access the application for a Program Quality Observation.





Step 3: Activities and Experiences

Step 3 Quality Rated programs continue to meet the requirements of Steps 1 and 2 and provide meaningful activities and experiences that build upon children's strengths and development. Using a curriculum to plan activities and guide teaching practices which align to the North Dakota Early Standards. In addition, they conduct observation-based assessments to ensure children are making progress toward the goals outlined in their curriculum. When children have meaningful experiences, they are better prepared for school, work, and life.



Quality Indicators

AE.1 Program implements a developmentally appropriate curriculum that aligns with the North Dakota Early Learning Standards: Birth to Kindergarten.

The Bright & Early ND [Curriculum Alignment Worksheet](#) is designed to help the program determine how the curriculum aligns with the [North Dakota Early Learning Standards: Birth to Kindergarten](#). Bright & Early ND does not require programs to use a specific curriculum. Rather, curricula should be aligned with the Standards and reflect the values and philosophy of the program and the children and families served.

Programs can request a review of their Curriculum Alignment Worksheet at any time. Once approved, programs will receive a copy of the Bright & Early ND [Curriculum Alignment Rubric](#) used to score the worksheet.

To request a review, upload a copy of the program's Curriculum Alignment Worksheet to the Growing Futures organization profile under the Document Vault. Next, send an email to the Bright & Early ND Team at QRIS@nd.gov and request a review.

To meet this indicator, evidence must be valid (dated within the previous 3 years).

Possible Evidence: Copy of completed and scored Bright & Early ND Curriculum Alignment Rubric

AE.2 Program utilizes GOLD[®], a developmentally appropriate observation-based assessment system.

Teaching Strategies GOLD[®] is the authentic, ongoing, observation-based assessment system that helps early childhood professionals, like you, focus on what matters most for children's success. Access to GOLD[®] is provided, at no cost, by the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

To meet this indicator, select the evidence that best reflects your program. For programs accessing GOLD[®] via HHS, no additional evidence is needed. For programs *not* accessing GOLD[®] via HHS, evidence of the program's current GOLD[®] subscription agreement and receipt of purchase must be submitted.

Possible Evidence: Copy of current GOLD[®] subscription agreement, Copy of GOLD[®] receipt of purchase



Navigate to the [Bright & Early ND website](#) for additional resources to support Indicator AE.2.



Step 3: Activities and Experiences



Quality Indicators

AE.3 Program completes GOLD® checkpoints during the three yearly periods (fall, winter, spring).

Programs will demonstrate ongoing assessment of children using GOLD® checkpoints. A checkpoint period is the timeframe where programs will observe, document, and assess children's development and learning. In order to produce a valid and reliable area level score, each classroom or group must complete, at minimum, 70% of objectives and dimensions in each area.

To meet this indicator, evidence must reflect the current or previously completed checkpoint period. Each classroom or group must complete, at minimum, 70% of objectives and dimensions in each area.

Possible Evidence: Copy of GOLD® Assessment Status Report, filtered by classroom



Navigate to the [Bright & Early ND website](#) for additional resources to support Indicator AE.3.

AE.4 Program develops a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) that:

- Is guided by GOLD® assessments,
- Includes both short-term and long-term goals,
- Includes action items to support overall quality improvement.

The [Quality Improvement Plan](#) is part of the continuous quality improvement process in which programs assess their strengths and opportunities for growth, set achievable goals, and develop realistic plans for improvement.

To meet this indicator, evidence must reflect all the indicator components above and be dated within the previous 12-months.

Possible Evidence: Copy of Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)

AE.5 The Program Director, all Lead Teachers and/or all Lead Caregivers have completed professional development related to observation and assessment.

The North Dakota Early Childhood Workforce Registry, *Growing Futures*, is the source for training, education, and employment verification. All training must appear on an individual's Growing Futures Learning Record as approved clock hours. Programs that experience turnover in leadership positions must also submit a [Professional Development Action Plan](#).

To meet this indicator, the Program Director, all Lead Teachers and/or all Lead Caregivers must complete:

- Introduction to GOLD® (14 clock hours)

Possible Evidence: Growing Futures Organization Profile Report, *AE.5 Quality Indicator Report*; Professional Development Action Plan



Navigate to the [Bright & Early ND website](#) for additional resources to support Indicator AE.5.



Step 4: Relationships and Interactions

Step 4 Quality Rated programs continue to meet the requirements of Steps 1-3 and foster relationships that support and emphasize children's interests, motivations, and points of view. All children benefit from being in warm, supportive environments where they can take risks, learn new things, and develop strong relationships with their caregivers and peers. When children experience high-quality interactions, they are better prepared for school, work, and life.



Quality Indicators

RI.1 Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS®) observation conducted by an endorsed CLASS® Assessor.

The CLASS® is a research-based method of measuring, evaluating, and improving teacher-child interactions. Bright & Early ND utilizes three scales, each designed for a different segment of the early childhood field.

- The [Infant CLASS®](#) is designed to assess effective teacher-child interactions in care environments serving children birth to 18 months.
- The [Toddler CLASS®](#) is designed to assess effective teacher-child interactions in care environments serving children 19 to 35 months.
- The [PreK CLASS®](#) is designed to assess effective teacher-child interactions in care environments serving children ages 3 to 5 years.

Programs must have a valid CLASS® observation conducted every 3 years. CLASS® observations will be conducted in every classroom or group with the tool that best reflects the age group in care.

To meet this indicator, evidence must be valid (dated within the previous 3 years) and represent every classroom or group served.

Possible Evidence: Copy of CLASS® Observation Report(s)



Navigate to the [Bright & Early ND website](#) for additional resources to support Indicator RI.1.

RI.2 Program develops a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) that:

- Is guided by CLASS® assessments,
- Includes both short-term and long-term goals,
- Includes action items to support overall quality improvement.

The [Quality Improvement Plan](#) is part of the continuous quality improvement process in which programs assess their strengths and opportunities for growth, set achievable goals, and develop realistic plans for improvement.

To meet this indicator, evidence must reflect all of the indicator components above and be dated within the previous 12-months.

Possible Evidence: Copy of Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)



Step 4: Relationships and Interactions



Quality Indicators

RI.3 The Program Director, all Lead Teachers and/or all Lead Caregivers have a current Growing Futures Career Pathway placement of Category E or Higher.

The North Dakota Early Childhood Workforce Registry, *Growing Futures*, is the source for training, education, and employment verification. All training must appear on an individual's Growing Futures Learning Record as approved clock hours. Programs that experience turnover in leadership positions must also submit a [Professional Development Action Plan](#).

To meet this indicator, the Program Director, all Lead Teachers and/or all Lead Caregivers must have a current individual membership in Growing Futures and current Career Pathway placement of Category E or Higher.

Possible Evidence: Growing Futures Organization Profile Report, *RI.3 Quality Indicator Report*, Professional Development Action Plan



Navigate to the [Bright & Early ND website](#) for additional resources to support Indicator RI.3.

RI.4 The Program Director has completed professional development related to business, management, and administration.

The North Dakota Early Childhood Workforce Registry, *Growing Futures*, is the source for training, education, and employment verification. All training must appear on an individual's Growing Futures Learning Record as approved clock hours. Programs that experience turnover in leadership positions must also submit a [Professional Development Action Plan](#).

To meet this indicator, the Program Director must have a verified and current [Aim4Excellence™ Director Credential](#).

Aim4Excellence™ is an online national director credential for early childhood administrators. The credential focuses on the essential knowledge and skills directors need to deliver high-quality programming for children. Aim4Excellence™ includes nine self-paced modules. Modules can be taken for credit or CEUs through University of North Dakota (UND) or for noncredit. Aim4Excellence™ is a project of the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership.

Clarification for FCC and Group Licensed Programs

This indicator is N/A for Family Child Care and Group licensed programs.

Possible Evidence: Growing Futures Organization Profile Report, *RI.4 Quality Indicator Report*, Professional Development Action Plan



Navigate to the [Bright & Early ND website](#) for additional resources to support Indicator RI.4.

Step 4: Relationships and Interactions



Quality Indicators

RI.4a All Lead Caregivers have completed professional development related to business, management, and administration.

The North Dakota Early Childhood Workforce Registry, *Growing Futures*, is the source for training, education, and employment verification. All training must appear on an individual's Growing Futures Learning Record as approved clock hours. Programs that experience turnover in leadership positions must also submit a [Professional Development Action Plan](#).

To meet this indicator, all Lead Caregivers must complete the following:

- At least 10 clock hours in Core Competency Area VIII. Program Planning and Evaluation

Clarification for Preschool and Center Licensed Programs

This indicator is N/A for Preschool and Center Licensed Programs

Possible Evidence: Growing Futures Organization Profile Report, *RI.4a Quality Indicator Report*, Professional Development Action Plan



Navigate to the [North Dakota Early Childhood Training Calendar](#) to find current listing of trainings offered.

RI.5 All Lead Teachers and/or all Lead Caregivers have completed professional development related to interactions with children.

The North Dakota Early Childhood Workforce Registry, *Growing Futures*, is the source for training, education, and employment verification. All training must appear on an individual's Growing Futures Learning Record as approved clock hours. Programs that experience turnover in leadership positions must also submit a [Professional Development Action Plan](#).

To meet this indicator, all Lead Teachers and/or all Lead Caregivers must complete one of the following:

- Introduction to the Infant CLASS® (2 clock hours)
- Introduction to the Toddler CLASS® (2 clock hours)
- Introduction to the Pre-K CLASS® (2.5 clock hours)

Possible Evidence: Growing Futures Organization Profile Report, *RI.5 Quality Indicator Report*, Professional Development Action Plan



Navigate to the [Bright & Early ND website](#) for additional resources to support Indicator RI.5.



Step 4: Relationships and Interactions

The Alternate Pathway is a streamlined process to achieve a Step 4 Quality Rating. This option is available because the requirements of accreditation and Head Start Performance Standards mirror or exceed the requirements of the Full Quality Rating Pathway process.

Programs with one of the following approved and verified designations, are eligible to pursue the Alternate Pathway:

- Head Start Grantee or Head Start Site
- Certificate of Accreditation from one of the following organizations: National Association for the Education for Young Children (NAEYC), National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) accreditation, Council on Accreditation (COA), or National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs (NAC).

Programs following the Alternate Quality Rating Pathway will complete all the required Quality Indicators within that pathway. Please see the respective Quality Indicator details throughout the Program Guide.



Alternate Pathway Quality Indicators

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> HHS License	<input type="checkbox"/> SM.1	<input type="checkbox"/> AE.1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RI.1
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SM.2	<input type="checkbox"/> AE.2	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RI.2
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SM.3	<input type="checkbox"/> AE.3	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RI.3
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SM.4	<input type="checkbox"/> AE.4	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RI.4
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SM.5	<input type="checkbox"/> AE.5	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RI.4a
	<input type="checkbox"/> SM.6		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RI.5

Questions? We can help.

The Bright & Early ND support team at Lakes & Prairies Community Action Partnership (CAPLP) is available to answer questions and help you successfully implement the guidelines outlined in the Bright & Early ND Program Guide.



Navigate to the [Bright & Early ND website](#) to make a connection!