

◆ 2026-2027 USER GUIDE



ND QUALITY STANDARDS FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMS



NORTH DAKOTA
OUT-OF-SCHOOL
TIME NETWORK



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Out-of-school time (OST) programs play a critical role in helping youth succeed, keeping young people safe, and supporting working families. The **ND Quality Standards for Out-of-School Time Programs** are designed to acknowledge the work OST programs do and help take programs to the next level.

High-quality out-of-school time programs:

- Have clearly defined and measurable goals
- Engage multiple stakeholders in meaningful conversations about program quality and continuous quality improvement
- Use multiple kinds of data to assess their progress

SELF-ASSESSMENT

The **ND Quality Standards for Out-of-School Time Programs** self-assessment is designed to assist your program at any stage of development, provide you with timely and meaningful feedback on program quality, and help you determine program priorities.

The self-assessment provides a framework for staff in your program to:

- Reflect on achievement
- Identify specific areas for professional development or training
- Plan specific actions that will lead to improvement

It is important to remember that while standards provide a shared language and framework, they alone cannot change the quality of programs or the skills of program staff. By taking the self-assessment as part of your continuous quality improvement process, you will improve the quality of your program and improve outcomes for youth.

The **self-assessment** is best utilized if viewed as an opportunity to identify areas for improvement. There is no penalty or negative impact for self-assessment ratings.

SELF-ASSESSMENT RATINGS

1 - Experiencing challenges

Our program is just beginning to work in this area. A better understanding, more information, and/or more support is needed to fully meet this indicator.

2 - Making progress

Our program has done some work in this area but may need targeted support to move to the next level. Our program is making progress but can improve further. This is implemented inconsistently or only with guidance. It is partially met. With more practice or support, this could be fully met.

3 - Right on track

Our program has achieved a level of proficiency in this area. Our program is very good at this practice. We have data to support that our program is meeting the needs of youth, staff, and families on this indicator.

4 - Excelling

Our program is exceptionally proficient in this practice. This is an area where we can serve as an example for others. Evidence of excelling is clearly observable. This is always in place and consistently implemented.



The self-assessment rating scale pictured above is included at the beginning of each domain. If you are unsure about answering any particular indicator, score it as a "1".

Each indicator contains examples of what a rating of "3" could look like. A rating of "4" would go above and beyond the provided examples.

2026-2027 USER GUIDE

DOMAIN 1: HEALTH & SAFETY

The Health & Safety domain has **17 indicators**. All indicators are answered with a "yes" or "no" within this domain. Examples of a "yes" are included within each indicator.

	Quality Indicator	Examples	Are we doing this?
HS1	Our program space and equipment are safe, free of hazards, and appropriate for the ages and developmental stages of the youth we serve. All youth are able to access and use the space.	- Checklists are utilized for routine (daily, weekly, etc.) safety checks. Safety check assignments and duties are clearly defined and reporting procedures are established. Safety checks include, but are not limited to the following: dry/clean floors, cleaning supplies stored appropriately, furniture free from loose parts or anchored, playground equipment free from debris and damage, play areas blocked/fenced off from traffic, etc. - Program space fits or can be modified to meet the needs of program/activities. - Handicap accessibility is available at all programming and playground areas.	☐ YES ☐ NO
HS2	Our program follows guidelines that identify appropriate youth-to-staff ratios to ensure safe and adequate supervision for activities.	- Programs keep the youth/staff ratio to a maximum of 15:1. Program may be staffed by program coordinators, licensed teachers (as far as practical), youth development staff, paraprofessionals and volunteers who have cleared federal background checks. - Program accommodates special needs as appropriate, necessary, and feasible.	☐ YES ☐ NO

DOMAIN 2: RELATIONSHIPS & INTERACTIONS

The Relationships & Interactions domain has **13 indicators**. All indicators are answered with a 1, 2, 3, or 4. Examples of evidence for a rating of "3" are included, but not limited to, evidence written within each indicator.

	Quality Indicator	Example of Rating 3	How are we doing?
RI1	We use a friendly tone of voice and greet all youth by name.	- Every child is greeted by name upon arrival to the program. - Friendly and positive tones of voice are used in conversations with students indicating they are known and welcome. - Youth names are used during program activities and operation.	1 2 3 4
RI2	We acknowledge and greet parents/guardians using positive language.	- Every family is greeted upon arrival to the program. - Friendly and positive tones of voice are used during conversations with parents or other adult caregivers indicating they are known and welcome.	1 2 3 4

2026-2027 USER GUIDE

DOMAIN 3: YOUTH-CENTERED PROGRAM DESIGN

The Youth-Centered Program Design domain has **19 indicators**. All indicators are answered with a 1, 2, 3, or 4. Examples of evidence for a rating of "3" are included, but not limited to, evidence written within each indicator.

	Quality Indicator	Example of Rating 3	How are we doing?
PD1	Youth are included in program design. We encourage and provide meaningful opportunities for youth voice, choice, and leadership.	- Youth complete an interest inventory at the start of the program. - Program offers opportunities for youth to engage in activities that compliment their interest and desired focus. - Program incorporates opportunities for youth to be leaders (Ex: learning buddies, teacher helpers, assigned lead roles, leading activities, etc.). - Staff encourage and support youth-led projects.	1 2 3 4
PD2	We encourage youth to share their ideas and we listen with respect to their contributions and feedback.	- Programs implement a consistent sharing/meeting time for youth to communicate ideas that contribute to the overall success of the program. Norms are in place to allow for a safe sharing environment. - Youth are offered ways to provide feedback.	1 2 3 4

DOMAIN 4: LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

The Leadership & Management domain has **20 indicators**. All indicators are answered with a 1, 2, 3, or 4. Examples of evidence for a rating of "3" are included, but not limited to, evidence written within each indicator.

	Quality Indicator	Example of Rating 3	How are we doing?
LM1	Our program has goals that are aligned with our mission.	Goals aligned with mission are visible and regularly communicated with staff, youth, families, and stakeholders.	1 2 3 4
LM2	We review goals against progress at least annually, and are flexible enough to recalibrate as needed.	Goals regularly reviewed by advisory council and leadership. Continuous quality improvement model used to determine what is to be accomplished, changes that need to be made, and progress toward goals.	1 2 3 4

SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

1) Select your review team.

Include at least three to five stakeholders as part of your Review Team for each program site. Each person will bring their own knowledge and experience, and it is okay if a team member only has strong knowledge of a certain domain. Consider including stakeholders from the following groups:

- Program site staff
- School day teachers
- Organization administration
- Community/business partner
- Parents/guardians
- Program volunteers
- Youth

It is imperative to quality improvement efforts that your Review Team includes individuals who are directly working with youth at a program site. Administrative staff can play an important role in continuous quality improvement, but the self-assessment is not effective or valid if completed only by individuals who do not work directly in the program.

2) Familiarize your review team with the ND Quality Standards for Out-of-School Time Programs.

Best practice is to complete the self-assessment together and come to a consensus on a rating for each indicator. The updated 2023 standards include additional guidance on assigning ratings and examples of evidence for a “3” rating, indicating a program is proficient in that indicator.

Contact the ND Out-of-School Time Network for guidance or to request assistance in completing the self-assessment process.

SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

3) Submit self-assessment results.

Submit self-assessment ratings to the ND Out-of-School Time Network once per program year. For ND 21st Century Community Learning Center grantees, each site will **submit self-assessment results between October 5 - November 20, 2026.**

Submit data at: <https://fs29.formsite.com/1jusg9/8rqueskydrz/index>

The data submission form has been simplified based on stakeholder feedback. You will only need to submit evidence of your rating if selecting a rating of "4" for any indicator.

Program sites will only submit self-assessment results once per program year.

4) Identify and submit at least two quality indicators to focus on for each program site.

Select at least two indicators that your program site will focus on for the program year. These indicators may be aligned with goals your program has already established or indicators that were prioritized through completing the self-assessment process. If your program has multiple program sites, your selected indicators may be the same across all sites or you may select different indicators for each site based on needs and priorities.

Use the **ND Quality Standards Goal Setting Template** to record two quality indicators your program site will focus on for the program year and submit this document with your self-assessment results (you will be able to upload this attachment as a PDF or picture).

SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

5) Engage in continuous quality improvement.

The ND Out-of-School Time Network will meet with each ND 21st Century Community Learning Center grantee at the beginning of the program year to provide a self-assessment report, guidance on next steps, and identify any coaching, resources, or supports needed throughout the program year.

New ND 21st Century Community Learning Center sites or program directors, and sites identified as high-risk by ND Department of Public Instruction, will receive additional coaching and supports throughout the program year.

6) Submit progress on your two quality indicators toward the end of the program year.

Program sites will submit progress on their two selected indicators between March 29 - April 30, 2027. Use the [ND Quality Standards Follow-Up Goal Report](#) to report on progress of the two quality indicators your program site submitted with your initial self-assessment.



The ND Out-of-School Time Network and its partners anticipate developing additional supports and resources over time as stakeholders share their feedback. The Quality Standards are one step in the process of helping to provide resources to the afterschool community to increase quality and improve outcomes.

Feedback of any kind on the Quality Standards and implementation process is welcome and analyzed with stakeholders.