

Attachment A: Best in Class Program Description 2024-2025

North Dakota’s Best in Class program represents a targeted state investment in early childhood 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 made has an impact.

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Best in Class Program Design

Programs Eligible to Apply

North Dakota early childhood programs that provide quality experiences and serve children who have reached **age four before August 1st in the year of enrollment** are eligible to apply. This includes:

Program Types	Licensed Child Care 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.	Head Start Grantee Federally funded Head Start programs.	Local Education Agency Public/Private 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. Four-Year Old Program Approval Health and Human Services North Dakota
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AND

North Dakota Early Childhood Quality Improvement Systems	Licensed child care programs participating in Bright & Early ND (ND QRIS) with a current rating of Step 3 or 4, and in good licensing standing. Licensed child care program meeting the standards and expectations of a nationally recognized early childhood accrediting entity.	Head Start Grantees in compliance with Federal Head Start Monitoring Protocol.	Local Education Agencies 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; has obtained approval for Pre-K grade configuration from the Department of Public Instruction.
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Program Expectations

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

- Operate each section for a minimum of 400 hours over 32 consecutive weeks. Programs operating at least 800 hours over 32 consecutive weeks are prioritized.
- Admit children of all learning abilities who are **four years old before Aug. 1st, 2024**.
- Prioritize 50% of the slots in each section to assure inclusion of all children. See section Enrollment/Randomized Selection Process for more information.
- Charge tuition based on Best in Class sliding fee scale (unless tuition fees are less or waived).
- Be 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.
- Participate in 15 hours of early childhood specific professional development (lead teachers are required).
- Adhere to expectations established by HHS for coaching, monitoring, fiscal oversight, and data collection/reporting (Teaching Strategies GOLD).
- 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 awarded funds to meet Best in Class Environment Standards upon completion of an environment needs list.
- Use Teaching Strategies GOLD® for ongoing observation and assessment under HHS Teaching Strategies™ license.
- Implement a research-based curriculum of the program's choosing. Creative Curriculum is offered to participants at no cost.
- 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 November 30th.
- Participate in programmatic research, including randomized studies that examine core components of program design and program outcomes.

Awards

A primary purpose of the ND Best in Class award is to offset the revenue difference a program may experience as a result of using the Best in Class Sliding Fee Scale.

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 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 awarded 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 awarded amount. All funds are subject to availability of funding.

Award Baseline

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

Tier 1 calculation

- Tuition Dependent* and/or School District with 50% or more Free and Reduced Priced Student Enrollment = 100% of award dollars
- Not Tuition Dependent or a School District with 49% or less Free and Reduced Priced Student Enrollment = Award decreases by 50%

**If the total budget to operate your Best in Class classroom is made up of 75% or more of tuition from families, your program is considered tuition dependent.*

Tier 2 calculation

- Part-time program (400-799 hours) = 50% of Tier 1 amount
- Full-time program (800 hours+) = 100% of Tier 1 amount

Disbursement of Funds

Disbursement of funds are directly correlated with the Best in Class deliverables which are awarded four times throughout the funded year. Deliverables ensure each program is meeting the expectations of Best in Class.

See Attachment A.1 to review the 2023-2024 deliverables. The business manager, director, administrator, and teacher are expected to complete the deliverables. The official 2024-2025 deliverables will be provided with the contract.

Budget and Eligible Use of Funds

HHS will request a budget upon award and upon project closeout; a template will be provided. Best in Class requires awardees to invest a portion of their award into improvement of classroom environments.

New large group programs will be expected to budget a minimum of \$20,000 for classroom environments. New small group programs will be expected to budget a minimum of \$10,000. All returning programs will be expected to budget a minimum of 5% of their award for the classroom environment. **All** programs will be expected to work with their assigned Best in Class coach to create a purchasing plan after completing an Environment Needs Assessment. See The Learning Environment section below for more information.

Awardee budget will also need to include evidence of matching/in-kind funds, equal to 15% of award amount to demonstrate compliance with program requirement that each Best in Class award must be matched with cash match or in-kind match contributions equal to 15% of the total award.

Awarded 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. Awarded funds may not be used for construction.

Examples: Eligible Uses of Funds

Personnel Costs

- Salary and benefits for teacher and assistant teacher/para could include a small percentage of other teaching staff (physical education, librarian, music) if services are offered to the Best in Class classroom
- Qualified substitute teachers
- Cost of background checks for new teachers

Health/Screening/Referral Services

- Cost of vision, hearing, dental, & physical screenings
- Gas cards for families to attend referral appointments

Professional Development

- Registration fees, food, lodging and transportation

Education Equipment & Supplies

- Instructional materials and supplies
- Classroom furnishings
- Classroom electronic/technology equipment
- Curriculum Costs
- Playground equipment and supplies

Other Operating Expenses

- Classroom maintenance and cleaning supplies
 - Computer support for classroom
 - Family engagement activities
 - Safety equipment and supplies
 - Advertising and Outreach
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- 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, a qualified substitute must be present.

Small Group Size 8-10 Staffing requires a minimum of one qualified teacher – who must always be present. If the teacher is absent, a qualified substitute must be present.

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

	Licensed Child Care	Head Start Grantee	Local Education Agency Public/Private
Lead Teacher	Must meet Bright & Early of ND Step 3 or 4 lead teacher qualifications	Must meet Head Start teacher qualifications	Must have the credentials to teach preschool through the ND Education Standards & Practices Board
Auxiliary Teacher (para, aide, assistant)	Must meet Bright & Early of ND Step 3 or 4 auxiliary teacher qualifications	Must meet Head Start auxiliary teacher qualifications	Must meet Paraprofessional requirements held by the school

Staff Turnover

Best in Class understands unknown circumstances happen which results in turnover of teachers. The Best in Class team must be notified if there is a change in staff. Once a qualified replacement is hired an orientation meeting will be scheduled with a coach to determine next steps and individualize professional development. All lead teachers must be trained and reliable in Teaching Strategies GOLD® in 90 days. If the lead teacher is working towards her reliability in Gold® when a checkpoint is due, the program is expected to identify a staff reliable in Gold® to observe, document and finalize checkpoint ratings. All three checkpoints are required to be completed to receive payments and to continue participating in Best in Class.

Long Term Substitutes

Best in Class requires substitutes to follow all requirements of deliverables. This includes implementing a comprehensive research-based curriculum, attending coaching visits and finalizing checkpoints (by a reliable staff).

Family Participation

Best in Class is committed to partnering with families to support children’s early learning, development, and well-being. We recognize that parents are their children’s first teachers, and we encourage families to be engaged in their child’s learning at home and in his or her early care and education program because it positively impacts health, development, and educational outcomes.

Family Participation Packet Best in Class requires programs to disburse Family Participation Packets upon enrollment to all families which includes the program design and releases of information. Best in Class Family Participation Packet includes:

- Welcome Letter to Families
- Health Screening Permission Form
- Family Engagement Permission Form
- Ready Rosie Flyer

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
- Other research-based family engagement (SEEDS for learning etc.), programs will be expected to provide and report additional family engagement opportunities

Attendance

Regular attendance ensures children benefit from participating in a Best in Class program and is a good measure of family engagement. It also establishes a routine that will benefit children and support their success in school and as lifelong learners.

Best in Class End of the Year- Family Survey

Best in Class participants will be provided with a link to the Best in Class-End of the Year- Family Survey for parents/guardians to provide feedback on their experience with Best in Class. Teachers will be asked to distribute the link to parents/guardians and strive for a 50% or higher completion rate.

Health Screening & Referrals

Best in Class awarded programs are required to offer on-site screenings and referrals for each child enrolled. Best in Class coaches will help coordinate health screenings with community partners as needed. Award funds may be used to ensure screenings are completed.

The Health Screening Permission form must be signed for each child and on file before screenings may be completed. Screenings are to be completed no sooner than six months prior to the first day of attendance and no later than November 30th. If documentation of a child's well visit from a physician, dentist, or eye doctor is provided within 12 months of the first day of attendance, this may serve in place of screenings.

Physical Health Screenings includes measuring a child's height, weight, blood pressure, and calculating body mass index (BMI).

Vision Screenings includes, but is not limited to, checking for visual acuity. The screening is a way to find out if a comprehensive (complete) eye exam is needed.

Hearing Screenings includes using an audiometer to measure hearing.

Oral Health Screenings are completed by using a flashlight and small mouth mirror to look for any signs of dental disease. The screenings are not dental examinations.

Developmental Screening

As part of Best in Class, each program will complete a developmental screening using an approved 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).

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 awarded funds and on-going throughout the year.
 - Programs will review the Best in Class Environment Standards.
 - Coaches will initiate an on-site review of the program classroom, to ensure that the program is meeting Best in Class Environment Standards and to help guide additional purchases.
 - Programs will be required to use awarded funds 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.

Classroom Environment

Best in Class believes that the learning environment has an important impact on children's efforts to learn through play and build relationships with others. Best in Class programs are expected to provide high quality learning environments with developmentally appropriate furnishings, materials, and activities.

The Environment Standards are designed to ensure that all learning experiences and environments are delivered with intentionality to promote strong child outcomes aligning with the North Dakota Early Learning Standards. Best in Class requires all programs to follow the Environment Standards and work with their coach through the Best in Class Environment Cycle:

1. Review Environment Standards located on Best in Class Website [Best in Class | Health and Human Services North Dakota](#)

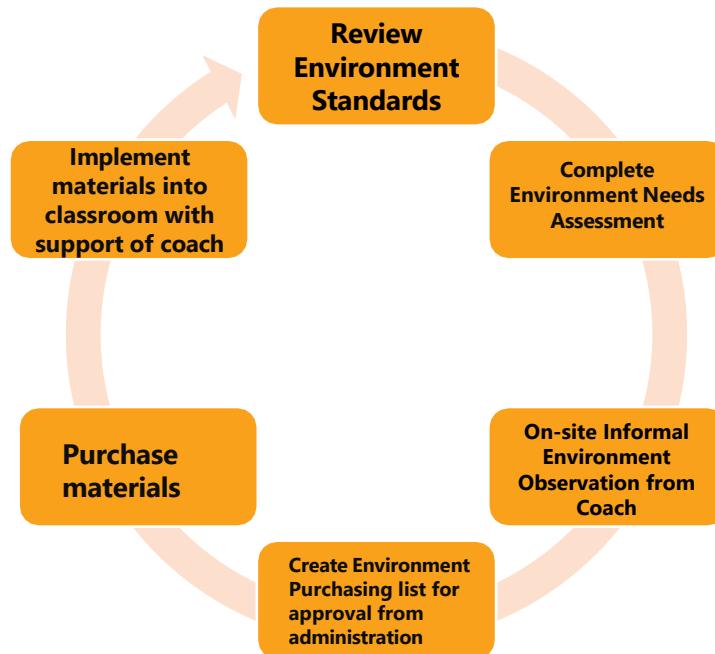
2. Complete an Environment Needs Assessment with the current materials and equipment available.

3. Coach will conduct an onsite informal environment observation of classroom to determine any additional needs.

4. Coach and Teacher will work together to create a purchasing list based on needs and prioritize materials based on program's budget. Once this is completed, the purchasing list will be sent to administration for approval.

5. Program will purchase materials.

6. Coach and Teacher will work together to create a plan to implement new materials into the environment.



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). Teachers must collect enough documentation, with preliminary levels, to accurately support assessment of each child's knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Professional Development

Lead Teachers must complete a minimum of 15 hours of early childhood specific professional development face-to-face or virtually by June 1st of the contracted year.

First year Best in Class teachers must complete Teaching Strategies™ Introduction to GOLD®. 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.

Interrater Reliability Teachers are required to obtain Interrater Reliability Current certification through Teaching Strategies by November 15th to ensure accurate completion of Teaching Strategies GOLD checkpoints. If the lead teacher is working towards her reliability in Gold® when a checkpoint is due, the program is expected to identify a staff reliable in Gold® to observe, document and finalize checkpoint ratings. All three checkpoints are required to be completed to receive payments and to continue participating in Best in Class.

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

Community of Practice (COPs) Best in Class Coaches offer professional development opportunities monthly to all participants. The topics are specific to program requirement and coaching content. COPs bring teachers together to learn and grow from each other and find value in networking with other early childhood educators. The professional development schedule is released in August for the upcoming school year. Teachers are highly encouraged to participate.

Auxiliary Teachers are highly recommended to complete early childhood specific training if they will be assisting with the assessment process.

Children with Special Needs and Individualized Education Plan

Best in Class awardees 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. Licensed child care programs can access inclusion support services from USpire ND to include getting connected to your LEA.

Data Collection

Awarded programs are required to enroll all students into the North Dakota State Automated Reporting System (STARS) and Teaching Strategies™ (GOLD® & ReadyRosie). Guidance and TA will be provided to support the access and on-going reporting needs of each program. See Best in Class Program Deliverables. Best in Class programs will participate in ongoing program study to support long-term child outcomes.

Program Supports

Coaching

All Best in Class participants will receive onsite and virtual coaching visits from a Best in Class coach throughout the funded year. Best in Class coaches support teachers in all components of the Best in Class program including, but not limited to, environment and materials, Teaching Strategies curriculum and GOLD assessment, professional development, family engagement, and health screenings and referrals. Coaching will include observation, dialogue, inquiry/reflection, goal setting and action planning to maximize child outcomes and provide quality experiences for children.

Coaches will facilitate Community of Practices to build knowledge and skills or for in-depth studies on topics of interest to participants and to foster networking with other early childhood professionals.

Best in Class Coaching Visits

Coaching Level	Participation level	Number of Visits
Tier 1- Beginning Participant	New participant and/or new program	4 Onsite (minimum) & Virtual
Tier 2- Progressing Participant	Returning participant	2 Onsite (minimum) & Virtual
Tier 3- Refining Participant	Returning participant 3+ years	1 Onsite (minimum) & Virtual

*** Coaching visit frequencies may vary based on needs of the program.*

Health Consultation

Research shows that children thrive in a healthy and safe environment. Best in Class awardee is expected to provide a healthy and safe environment by following the Best in Class Health and Safety Standards. Upon completion of a Health and 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. Health consultants may provide health screenings if programs have exhausted all options. The health consultant will share best practices to health and safety related topics.

Health Consultant Visits

Consultant Level	Participation level	Number of visits
Tier 1 Participant	New participant and/or new program	One Onsite Visit and One Virtual Visit
Tier 2 Participant	Returning participant	One Virtual Visit
Tier 3 Participant	Returning participant 3+ years	One Check-in (e-mail or phone)

Programs will have access to health specialists as needed throughout the year

Program Monitoring and Evaluation

All Best in Class participants 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. Programs can expect virtual and a minimum of one on-site visit from the Best in Class monitor.

Attachment A.1: 2024-25 Best in Class Program Deliverables (DRAFT) Official deliverables will come with contracts

Milestone #1: Planning

Deliverable Due: September

Payment: 30% of Awarded Funds

- Submit a Four-year old program calendar (includes days scheduled and days off, start and end dates and Best in Class operating hours)
- Complete and Submit Environment Needs Assessment to assigned Best in Class Coach
- Submit a preliminary budget using program budget template, including documentation of required matching/in-kind funds, to Best in Class Program Administrator
- Evidence that teacher has fulfilled required meetings with Best in Class Early Childhood Coach
- Completed child and program level data entry in STARS & Teaching Strategies
- Submit a classroom roster, including children's first and last name

Milestone #2: Implementation

Deliverable Due: December

Payment: 35% of Awarded Funds

- Enroll families into Ready Rosie
- Provide current Teaching Strategies™ Interrater Reliability Certification (renewal every three years)
- Completed required monitoring visit (including verification that child information form has been completed)
- Demonstrates ongoing participation in Best in Class coaching sessions
- Teacher completes and finalizes Fall Checkpoint (November 30)
- Submit a classroom roster, including children's first and last name

Milestone #3: Implementation

Deliverable Due: March

Payment: 30% of Awarded Funds

- Teacher completes and reviews required Health & Safety Self-Assessment
- Demonstrates ongoing participation in Best in Class coaching sessions
- Verification of completed health screenings and referrals
- Documentation of matching / in-kind funds as per program requirements
- Teacher completes and finalizes Winter Checkpoint (February 28)
- Submit a classroom roster, including children's first and last name

Milestone #4: Award Close-out

Deliverable Due: June

Payment: 5% of Awarded Funds

- Demonstrates ongoing participation in Best in Class coaching sessions
- Teacher completed 15 hours of early childhood related professional development
- Report out how Best in Class affected your program
- Share Best in Class End of the Year Family survey link to families and strive for a 50% or higher completion rate
- Report out how funds were spent compared to the initial budget
- Teacher completes and finalizes Spring Checkpoint (May 31)
- Submit a classroom roster, including children's first and last name