North Dakota
AFTERSCHOOL NETWORK

ND Quality Standards
for Out-of-School Time Programs

NORTH DAKOTA'S GUIDE TO BEST PRACTICES
FOR EFFECTIVE YOUTH PROGRAMS

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This guide is designed to help your program be the best it can be.

That might mean going through this book from start to finish, or it might mean focusing on one standard at a time for a deep dive. As part of a staff training, continuous improvement plan or even grant reporting requirements, use this content at any time, in any order, and repeat as needed to flex with your program's needs.

Welcome

We all want North Dakota's young people to thrive.

Afterschool programs play a critical role in helping students succeed, keeping young people safe and supporting working families. We work hard to provide youth with a safe, nurturing environment where they learn, grow, try new things — and ultimately thrive.

This book acknowledges that work and is designed to help take it to the next level.

We dug into best practices from afterschool programs all across the country and years of research into what makes an effective afterschool program. We talked to a wide cross-section of program providers across our state — from those serving early childhood to high school students, and from programs that are just getting started to those that are well established. We aligned the data on best practices with the specific needs of North Dakota's students.

The resulting four standards and indicators are markers for an effective afterschool program.

We hope that each standard provides inspiration, reassurance and connection to resources that will help mold your program in ways that inspire youth to be their best selves and achieve positive outcomes. As a community of afterschool providers, together we're supporting North Dakota's young people today while strengthening our state's workforce of the future.

P.S. We've included **SEL Links** throughout this guide to highlight just a few of the many ways afterschool connects to students' social emotional learning.

Afterschool is more than "just" after school.

Afterschool programs — also called out-of-school time (OST) — take place before school, after school, summers, weekends and during school breaks. Programs provide PreK-12 students with regularly scheduled educational or enrichment activities in a structured, supervised environment. You'll find afterschool programs in schools, school-age childcare centers, community-based organizations, universities, libraries, museums, camps and many other locations in our community.

STANDARD 1:
Health & Safety

We've all heard the phrase "safety first." That applies to afterschool programs, too. In order to learn, grow and thrive, youth need a space that is safe and promotes their well-being. Same goes for youth workers and program staff — we need to keep them safe, too.

On this indicator, we are:
1 - Experiencing challenges
2 - Making progress
3 - Right on track
4 - Excelling

What does health & safety look like in our program space?	How are we doing?			
HS1 Our program environment is safe and free of hazards.	1	2	3	4
HS2 Our program space and equipment are appropriate for the ages and developmental stages of the youth we serve. All students are able to access and use the space.	1	2	3	4
HS3 We have enough staff to provide a safe youth-to-staff ratio for all planned activities. We've considered youth's ages, abilities and needs as well as the level of risk in the activities to ensure ample supervision.	1	2	3	4
HS4 Our space provides adequate facilities and supplies for hand washing.	1	2	3	4
HS5 Our first aid kits are fully stocked and easily available at all times.	1	2	3	4

Notes & Examples

What does health & safety look like in our processes and procedures?	How are we doing?			
HS6 Our program has a process for addressing health or safety hazards.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
HS7 We know what safety inspections (fire, heath, etc.) are required for our facility, and they are up to date.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
HS8 We have clear procedures in place for emergencies (fire, natural disasters, lockdowns, power outages, medical emergencies, etc.). Staff are aware of and are regularly trained on these procedures. (Consider staff training annually or every program cycle, depending on your program's needs and staff turnover.)	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
HS9 We know who to notify — and just as importantly, how to reach them — in case of emergency, illness or injury.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
HS10 Our staff are trained in CPR and first aid prior to working with youth. Or, there's always one CPR/first aid trained staff member with each youth group.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
HS11 We have clear procedures in place for reporting suspected abuse or neglect.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
HS12 We have a clear, written visitor policy. We have clear, written policies on how youth, staff, guardians and visitors enter and exit the program facilities. Guardians, program staff and youth are aware of these policies and are following them.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
HS13 We have procedures in place to ensure youth leave the program only with authorized adults. Our staff know what to do if an unauthorized person tries to remove a youth from the program.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
HS14 Our systems and routines mean that staff know where youth are at all times. We have practices in place that keep students safe, especially when they move from one place to another or use the restroom.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
HS15 We have clearly stated expectations about when it's okay for staff to use electronic devices (or not.) Staff keep their attention focused on the youth.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

Notes & Examples

What does health & safety look like when our program serves food? (If applicable)	How are we doing?			
HS16 Our program serves healthy and nutritious foods. The amount, type of food and schedule of snacks/meals is appropriate for the ages and cultures of youth we serve, as well as the length of time spent in the program.	1	2	3	4
HS17 If families are required to provide snacks, we have clear, written guidelines about what is permitted.	1	2	3	4
HS18 Youth have easy access to drinking water.	1	2	3	4
HS19 Our program follows appropriate food safety guidelines for preparation and storage.	1	2	3	4
HS20 We are aware of food allergy information — both what foods contain allergens as well as any young people in our program with food allergies/sensitivities. We have an action plan in place to address any allergic reactions to food.	1	2	3	4

How can we improve in this area?_____
_____

What are some easy things we can do right away?_____
_____

What changes do we need to work on long term? _____
_____

What resources, supports or partnerships can help us? _____
_____
_____

What is social emotional learning, or SEL?

As an afterschool community, we look to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) to help us understand SEL as an integral part of human development. They define SEL as "the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationship, and make responsible and caring decisions." (https://casel.org/what-is-sel/)

RESOURCE
Alert

(Use phone camera to scan this QR code to get connected to resources)

STANDARD 2:
Relationships & Interactions

When programs create an environment that is truly welcoming for all — youth, families, staff and visitors — and when relationships are deep and authentic, we're best poised to meet students' needs. Being intentional about our relationships and interactions will foster a safe, nurturing setting where youth can try new things, get extra support and be inspired to be their best selves.

On this indicator, we are:
1 - Experiencing challenges
2 - Making progress
3 - Right on track
4 - Excelling

	What do positive relationships & interactions look like in our program space?	How are we doing?
RI1	We use a friendly tone of voice and greet all youth by their preferred name.	1 2 3 4
RI2	We recognize parents or other adult caregivers, and acknowledge them by name.	1 2 3 4
RI3	Staff and students are comfortable and relaxed around one another. They are genuinely interested in spending time together.	1 2 3 4
RI4	Interactions between staff and students, staff and families, and amongst staff are affirming and supportive. That includes using positive language and avoiding sarcasm.	1 2 3 4
RI5	We establish trusting, supportive relationships with youth by meeting them "where they're at" with acceptance and appreciation.	1 2 3 4
RI6	Peer-to-peer interactions between youth are positive.	1 2 3 4
RI7	We treat all youth with respect and really listen to what they have to say; we show a genuine interest by paying attention when youth are talking, and by extending the conversation.	1 2 3 4
RI8	We use encouraging and affirming language when interacting with youth, that includes using phases like "please," "thank you," "you're welcome" and frequently referring to one another by name.	1 2 3 4

Relationships & Interactions
CONTINUED

How do we maintain positive relationships & interactions when things don't go as planned?	How are we doing?
RI9 Rules and expectations for behavior are clearly spelled out in our program policies, and so are the consequences when those policies aren't followed.	1　2　3　4
RI10 We set appropriate limits with youth, and enforce the same rules in a consistent and predictable manner.	1　2　3　4
RI11 We handle challenging situations with a calm demeanor and use positive behavior management tools, such as proximity, redirection, ignoring, re-teaching, restating the expectation, etc.	1　2　3　4
RI12 We're proactive about intervening or redirecting when youth are engaging in inappropriate behavior.	1　2　3　4
RI13 Whenever possible, we address inappropriate behavior in private rather than a group setting.	1　2　3　4
RI14 We support and encourage youth to resolve their own conflicts when appropriate.	1　2　3　4

Notes & Examples

| How do we build positive relationships & interactions with the broader community?	How are we doing?			
RI15 We recognize the importance of meaningful, ongoing engagement with families in our program as well as the larger community.	1	2	3	4
RI16 We have onging, collaborative, and meaningful relationships with families, schools and other community partners and stakeholders.	1	2	3	4
RI17 We provide information to families on a regular basis. ("Regular" will vary from program to program, and could mean daily, weekly or monthly communication.)	1	2	3	4
RI18 It's easy for families to provide feedback and communicate with us, and we encourage them to do so. (This could mean multiple communication channels, languages, etc.)	1	2	3	4
RI19 We welcome families' involvement with program events.	1	2	3	4
RI20 We are intentional about connecting youth, families and staff to resources in our community that may benefit them.	1	2	3	4

How can we improve in this area?_____
_____

What are some easy things we can do right away?_____
_____

What changes do we need to work on long term? _____
_____

What resources, supports or partnerships can help us? _____
_____
_____

RESOURCE
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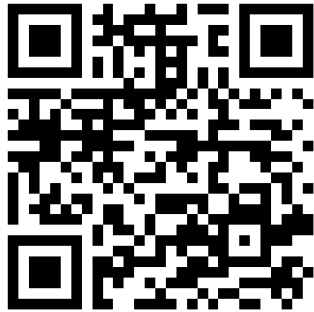
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SEL Link

Decades of studies prove that social emotional skills help young people succeed in school and in life. These students do better in school, have higher self-esteem, make healthier choices and have more positive relationships. At the same time, negative behaviors decrease.

Afterschool provides an ideal space for SEL skill development. The creativity and flexibility that is inherent to out-of-school-time programs provides a natural setting for young people to engage in activities like team-building, conversation, self-reflection and choice that build and reinforce SEL skills.

Check out the Afterschool Alliance's SEL Toolkit for resources specific to SEL in afterschool. (www.afterschoolalliance.org/SEL-toolkit.cfm)

STANDARD 3:
Youth-Centered Program Design

We know our programs aren't something we do "to" or "for" youth, but rather *with* youth. Add in a high-quality learning environment plus program activities that speak directly to students' needs and you've got the recipe for a program that really accelerates young people's academic, social, and emotional learning.

On this indicator, we are:
1 - Experiencing challenges
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	How does youth-centered program design incorporate youth voice?	How are we doing?			
PD1	Youth are included in program design. We encourage and provide meaningful opportunities for youth voice and choice.	1	2	3	4
PD2	We encourage youth to share their ideas, and listen with respect to contributions and feedback from students.	1	2	3	4
PD3	Youth have opportunities to lead program activities.	1	2	3	4
PD4	As a staff, we model leadership behavior.	1	2	3	4
PD5	We ask open-ended questions like "why?" "what if?" and "how can we?" to extend learning. We intentionally pause after questions to allow youth time to think before answering.	1	2	3	4
PD6	We encourage youth to solve problems and think creatively.	1	2	3	4

What does youth-centered program design look like in our program structure?	How are we doing?			
PD7 We're intentional about creating a positive environment that keeps students safe physically, and is also an emotionally safe space where students can be their authentic selves.	1	2	3	4
PD8 Our program is equitable. All are warmly welcomed, regardless of ability, cultural background, gender identity, race, ethnicity or income.	1	2	3	4
PD9 Our program is culturally responsive. Our activities reflect, incorporate and value the cultures of the youth we serve.	1	2	3	4
PD10 Our daily schedule provides structure, while also allowing for flexibility.	1	2	3	4
PD11 Students have enough time to complete activities and ensure smooth transitions.	1	2	3	4
PD12 We offer a variety of ways for youth to engage in activities – either as individuals or in groups.	1	2	3	4
PD13 We're ready for the day. That means we start with a plan for activities, and have all the information, tools and supplies needed for successful completion. (And when youth guide activities in a different direction, we follow their lead as appropriate.)	1	2	3	4
PD14 Our program curriculum is research or evidence based, and our day-to-day activities are informed by best practices in the field of youth development.	1	2	3	4
PD15 We take seriously our role in supporting and nurturing young people's cognitive, physical, social and emotional needs.	1	2	3	4
PD16 We regularly connect with schools and families to make sure our program offerings align with and respond to other aspects of students' lives.	1	2	3	4

Notes & Examples
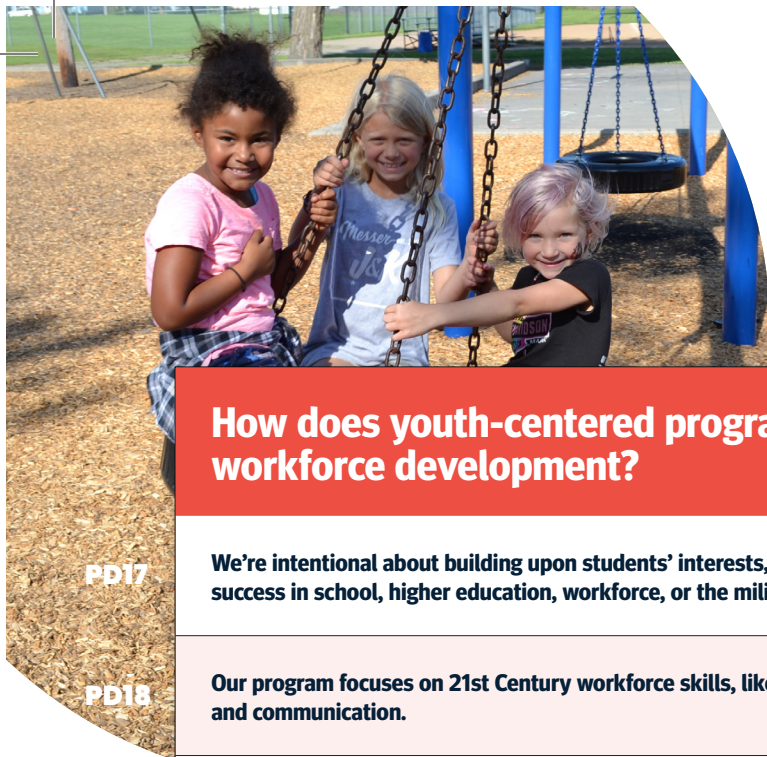
Youth-Centered Program Design
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How does youth-centered program design support workforce development?	How are we doing?			
PD17 We're intentional about building upon students' interests, talents and skills to prepare them for success in school, higher education, workforce, or the military.	1	2	3	4
PD18 Our program focuses on 21st Century workforce skills, like critical thinking, creativity, collaobration, and communication.	1	2	3	4
PD19 We cultivate partnerships and mutually-beneficial collaborations with colleges, employers and other professionals in our community to help youth envision themselves in a wide variety of potential career pathways.	1	2	3	4

How do staff reinforce youth-centered program design?	How are we doing?			
PD20 We use a variety of approaches when introducing a new activity (direct instruction, modeling, visual aids, etc.) to meet a variety of youth learning styles.	1	2	3	4
PD21 We clearly explain the goals, purposes and expectations for each activity and encourage youth to make connections to previous learning or concepts.	1	2	3	4
PD22 We use developmentally appropriate language when speaking with youth, and confirm that they understand what's being communicated.	1	2	3	4
PD23 We help youth connect program activities to real-world applications that are meaningful and relevant to them.	1	2	3	4

SEL Link

Social emotional learning isn't exclusively for young people — adults need it too.

Just as we're instructed to "put on our own oxygen mask before assisting others," so too must we take into account our own SEL development. Afterschool programs are best positioned to help young people develop strong SEL skills when adult SEL is part of the plan.
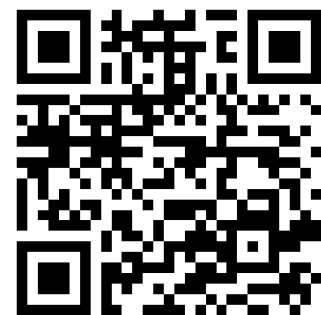
That means being intentional about creating an environment that supports SEL development for both students and adults. CASEL offers an online model for adult SEL development that focuses on three parts: Learn, Collaborate, Model.
(https://schoolguide.casel.org/focus-area-2/overview/)

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STANDARD 4:
Leadership & Management

An effective program starts with a strong foundation. It's easy to get caught up in meeting the day-to-day needs of youth and forget to look inward on a regular basis. When our administrative practices are solid, and our staff is well supported, our programs are better prepared to help students thrive.

On this indicator, we are:
1 - Experiencing challenges
2 - Making progress
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4 - Excelling

	What does sound leadership & management look like in the big picture?	How are we doing?			
LM1	Our program has goals that are aligned with our mission.	1	2	3	4
LM2	We regularly review those goals against progress, and are flexible enough to recalibrate as needed.	1	2	3	4
LM3	We have strong financial management that supports our program's goals.	1	2	3	4
LM4	We have a plan for long-term financial sustainability.	1	2	3	4
LM5	We seek and nurture mutually beneficial community partnerships.	1	2	3	4

Notes & Examples

Leadership & Management
CONTINUED

What does sound leadership & management look like when it comes to measuring youth outcomes?	How are we doing?			
LM6 We regularly share information about our goals and outcomes to key stakeholders, including staff, youth, families, schools and the broader community.	1	2	3	4
LM7 We collect data about our program on an ongoing basis. This information is reviewed regularly to look for areas of improvement. We make changes and adjust our program based on what the data reveals.	1	2	3	4
LM8 We proactively collect, review and respond to feedback from youth, families, staff and other stakeholders.	1	2	3	4
LM9 We have an advisory board or similar consultive body that includes perspectives from both parents and youth.	1	2	3	4

Notes & Examples

What does sound leadership & management look like in our staffing and professional development?	How are we doing?			
LM10 Our staff follow a code of conduct. We're clear about our expectations for staff behavior, and have well-defined disciplinary measures in place if the code of conduct is broken.	1	2	3	4
LM11 Our staff receive training that is relevant to their position and responsibilities. For new staff, we provide orientation and onboarding before staff begin interacting with youth.	1	2	3	4
LM12 We conduct ongoing staff trainings that include current research and best practices in youth development so we can better understand, nurture and support young people.	1	2	3	4
LM13 We make professional development a priority. Our staff is encouraged to participate in relevant professional development opportunities, and we have a budget to fund ongoing learning.	1	2	3	4
LM14 Our staff and volunteers have passed criminal background checks. This information is kept on file alongside hiring documents and job descriptions, performance evaluations, emergency contact information, training certifications and other key records.	1	2	3	4
LM15 Staff in supervisory roles receive extra training and support in program management and/or staff supervision.	1	2	3	4
LM16 As part of our efforts to retain quality staff, we regularly recognize and demonstrate appreciation for their work.	1	2	3	4
LM17 We conduct yearly performance reviews for all staff, including our director or CEO, which includes reflection on skills specific to youth work (ex: interactions with youth, fostering youth voice, etc.)	1	2	3	4
LM18 We have a process for recruiting staff, and strive to attract and retain quality staff who are representative of the youth we serve.	1	2	3	4

Notes & Examples

Leadership & Management
CONTINUED

What does sound leadership & management look like in our policies and procedures?	How are we doing?
LM19 We have clearly written policies that provide guidance for all aspects of our program. (Common policies include hiring, personnel, staff roles and responsibilities, data collection, technology, etc. Specific needs will vary based on your program.)	1 2 3 4
LM20 Staff and families are aware of our program's policies and are reminded of them on a regular basis.	1 2 3 4
LM21 We have a program handbook that is easily available (in print form or online, possibly in multiple languages.) It is shared with families at the time of enrollment and annually.	1 2 3 4
LM22 We regularly review and update our policies and our handbook. When updates are made, we communicate them to staff and families.	1 2 3 4

How can we improve in this area? _____
_____

What are some easy things we can do right away? _____
_____

What changes do we need to work on long term? _____
_____

What resources, supports or partnerships can help us? _____
_____
_____

SEL Link

Social emotional learning (SEL for short) is comprised of five core competencies — self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making — that are essential for healthy development.

Did you know that North Dakota has Social Emotional Learning Goals focused on these SEL competencies? Our state provides an online resource filled with detailed breakdowns of SEL goals by grade level to help educators – and afterschool program providers too! – recognize and support age-appropriate SEL skill development in students. (www.ndrea.org/index.php?id=103)

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Thank You

We are grateful to the many partners who contributed their time, knowledge and insights to the creation of *North Dakota's Quality Standards for Out-of-School Time Programs*

North Dakota Afterschool Network Quality Workgroup

Amber Carlsrud
Curriculum Coordinator
Boys & Girls Clubs of the Red River Valley

Elise Pforr
Program Director
Boys & Girls Clubs of the Red River Valley

Kayla Erickson
ENCORE Director
Grand Forks Public Schools

21st CCLC Afterschool Program Staff
North Central Education Cooperative (NCEC)

Kristin Knorr
Network Lead
North Dakota Afterschool Network

Rebecca Engelman
Arts in Education Director
North Dakota Council on the Arts

Becky Eberhardt
21st CCLC State Program Administrator
North Dakota Department of Public Instruction

Joel Hektner
Professor and Department Head, Human Development and Family Science
North Dakota State University

Lindsey Leker
Extension Specialist, 4-H Youth Development
North Dakota State University

Megan Jenson
Senior Community Impact Manager
United Way of Cass-Clay

Tania Zerr
Learning Centers Program Director
YMCA of Cass and Clay Counties

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- ACT Now!, *Illinois Statewide Afterschool Quality Standards*
- American Institutes for Research, *50 State Afterschool Network: Scan of Quality Systems*
- Bright and Early North Dakota, *Steps to Quality*
- Ignite Afterschool, *Believe It. Build It. Minnesota's Guide to Effective Afterschool Practices*
- National Afterschool Association, *Core Knowledge and Competencies*
- North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, *Choice Ready* framework and *North Dakota Early Learning Standards: Birth to Kindergarten*
- North Dakota Social Emotional Learning Network, *Social Emotional Learning Goals*
- Teachstone, *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)*

Most importantly, we are thankful for the dedicated OST program staff who work hard every day to provide quality programming that helps young people learn, grow and realize their full potential.

Inspiring learning.
Keeping kids safe.
Supporting parents.

We believe that every student deserves access to high-quality, safe and affordable afterschool programming. Through technical support, professional development and advocacy, we're strengthening the programs that are key to helping North Dakota's students succeed.

NORTH DAKOTA AFTERSCHOOL NETWORK

HTTPS://NDAFTERSCHOOLNETWORK.COM/

1305 9TH AVE S, FARGO, ND 58103

701-446-3195