



HANDBOOK

Frequently Asked Questions about Bright & Early ND



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I. Overview

What is Bright & Early North Dakota?

Bright & Early is North Dakota's Quality Rating & Improvement System (QRIS). The Bright & Early ND 4-Star Rating System helps parents and providers assess how a child care program supports a child's early learning and development.

Bright & Early ND is an initiative led by the ND Department of Human Services (DHS) to ensure that North Dakota's children receive the quality child care and preschool they need for success in school and life. We recognize talented child care and preschool providers for going above & beyond and deliver professional rewards for a job well done.

Why is Bright & Early ND important?

Children have about 1,825 days from the day they are born until they enter kindergarten. Incredibly, 90% of brain development happens during this short time. You play a key role in preparing kids for school, work and life.

Who is behind Bright & Early ND?

The Department of Human Services (DHS) leads Bright & Early ND. DHS believes that together we're better. That's why they have partnered with Bright & Early ND and most importantly the child care and preschool programs across North Dakota. Together we prepare children for school and life.

Is Bright & Early ND voluntary?

Yes, Bright & Early ND is currently a voluntary system.

Is there a cost to join Bright & Early ND?

There is no cost to join Bright & Early ND.

What is "The Playbook"?

The Playbook establishes a statewide level of quality and contains four steps proven to deliver positive results for children. Commit to carry out the steps in the Playbook and children in your program are more likely to enter kindergarten with the skills needed to be successful in school and life. Review the [Playbook](#) online today!

Who can become a partner of Bright & Early ND? Are there eligibility requirements?

Child care programs are eligible to join if they are:

- Licensed by the ND Department of Human Services (DHS) for at least 6 months.
- Serve children between the ages of birth to five.
- Review of the program's license history for the past 6 months.

Please see the Bright & Early ND [Eligibility Requirements](#) for additional details on the verification process and licensing sections to be reviewed.



II. Step 1: Health and Safety

What is the goal of Step 1?

Provide a safe and healthy environment for children focused on preventing injuries and reducing the spread of germs.

Why is Step 1 important?

Children need to be healthy and feel safe to learn and grow. It's the first step in preparing children to be ready for school, work and life.

How do I show that I meet the Step 1 Quality Standards?

- Licensed by the North Dakota Department of Human Services for at least 6 months.
- Program serves children between the ages of birth to five.
- Review of the program's license history for the past 6 months.

Please see the Bright & Early ND [Eligibility Requirements](#) for additional details on the verification process.

- Meet [Professional Development Quality Standards](#).
- Gain recognition from parents as a program who is eager to go above and beyond for their child. Your status as a Bright & Early ND Partner is shared with the 3,000 parents searching for child care every year through Child Care Aware® of North Dakota.
- Earn exclusive Bright & Early ND [benefits](#).

Why should I pursue a Step 1 Quality Rating when I am already licensed?

Why do I need to be registered with ND Growing Futures Workforce Registry?

[Growing Futures](#) is North Dakota's workforce registry system designed to support rewarding and successful careers in the field of early care and education by validating individual professional achievements, heightening professionalism, and expanding career opportunities. Bright & Early ND will use the Growing Futures Registry to verify your Quality Standards Inventory as you advance through Bright & Early ND Steps 1-4.

After I apply, when will I receive my Step 1 Quality Rating?

Once your application is processed and verified, your Step 1 Quality Rating will be issued on the 1st of the month. For example, if you applied on March 12th, you will receive notice of your Quality Rating on April 1st.

When do I renew my Step 1 Quality Rating?

Programs will renew their Step 1 Quality Rating once a year. You will receive a reminder email when your expiration date is nearing. Programs are required to renew yearly to ensure that your program information stays current and you still receive the great benefits of Bright & Early ND.

III. Step 2: Space and Materials

What are the goals of Step 2?

- Offer a variety of materials to support play and learning experiences for children with different interests and abilities.
- Serve nutritious food to children.

Why is Step 2 important?

A child's work is play! Having enough of the right materials that are set up in a chosen space encourages children to play. When children develop good play skills, they are better prepared for school, work and life.

How do I show that I meet the Step 2 Quality Standards?

- Continue to meet the Health and Safety Quality Standards in [Step 1](#).
- Demonstrate how your program serves [nutritious food](#) to children. Choose 1 of 4 options that best fits your program.
- Demonstrate how you use your space & materials to support play and learning experiences through an [Environment Rating Scale® \(ERS®\)](#) observation. The Environment Rating Scale® is a reliable, valid, research-based observational tool, which is designed to assess the quality of the environment.

Programs will receive an onsite ERS® observation and must earn an average program score of 4.0 or greater (FCCERS-R™) or 3.5 or greater (ECERS-3™, ITERS-3™) for each tool used. Bright & Early ND will determine which ERS® tool to use in your program based off your program type.

Preschool and Center-Based Programs

- The Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale®, Third Edition (ITERS-3™) is used in classrooms with children age birth to 36 months.
- The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale®, Third Edition (ECERS-3™) is used in classrooms with children age 3 to 5 years.

Observations are conducted in 33% of randomly selected classrooms. Scores are averaged to calculate a program level score.

Family and Group Programs

- The Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS-R™) is used with mixed ages and accommodates the wider age range often found in family child care programs. One observation is conducted per family or group child care program. Please note, if your program separates by age groups, multiple observations may be conducted.
- Meet [Professional Development Quality Standards](#).

What are the Environment Rating Scales® (ERS®) and what do they measure?

The Environment Rating Scales® are a set of tools. They define environment in a broad sense and guide the arrangement of space both indoors and outdoors; the materials and activities offered to the children; the supervision and interactions (including language) that occur; and the schedule of the day (including routines). For more information about the Environment Rating Scales®, please visit the Environment Rating Scales® Institute [website](#).

How were the Environment Rating Scales® (ERS®) developed? Can I trust these tools?

You can trust the Environment Rating Scales®. The principal authors (Debby Cryer, Thelma Harms, and Richard Clifford) are current or former scientists at the University of North Carolina.

No one person can develop a tool like the ERS® alone, so the authors rely heavily on feedback from focus groups, pilot child care sites using the tools, researchers around the world, the Consumer Product Safety Commission, USDA, American Academy of Pediatrics, and the US Department of Health and Human Services.

The ERS® are used around the country in every state and internationally in England, Saudi Arabia, Japan, Canada, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Russia, Iceland, Portugal, England, Spain, Austria, Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea, Hungary and Greece.

In addition, the ERS® have undergone extensive testing and research. The tools are both reliable and valid. Additional information regarding the reliability and validity of the scales can be found at: <http://ers.fpg.unc.edu/> and <http://ersi.info/index.html>

Why do I need an observation?

Observations are the backbone of Bright & Early ND. It's the most accurate way to demonstrate and show others that you meet the Quality Standards in each Step. Observations bring fairness and consistency to Bright & Early ND. Our team is trained specifically to be respectful and to understand how much work you've done to get to this point. Remember, we're all here for the same reason – to prepare children to be successful in school and life.

Can I do a practice observation?

Absolutely! Bright & Early ND will work with your program to find a date that works best. After your preliminary observation, also referred to as the 'practice' observation, has been completed, your Coach will review your summary report details with you, and help set up a continuous quality improvement plan. Taking advantage of the preliminary observation allows you to make changes as needed and feel prepared for your final Quality Rating observation.

The thought of an ERS® observation scares me. How can I overcome this?

It's normal to be scared. In fact, it's weird not to be a little nervous! Use your feelings to your advantage by being well prepared. Consider tips to prepare for your observation:

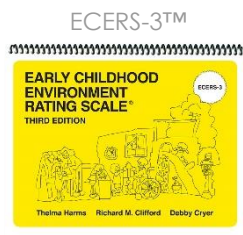
- Research [on-line](#) and start exploring!
- Talk with others who have used the ERS®.
- Purchase a copy of the ERS®.
- Learn about the Environment Rating Scale®. The Environment Rating Scale® Institute offers [5 online introductory courses](#) on the Environment Rating Scales®.

In Preschool and Center licensed programs, how are the classrooms selected for an observation?

When Bright & Early ND is conducting your preliminary observation, classrooms can be chosen at the Program Director's discretion. When Bright & Early ND is conducting your Quality Rating observation, classrooms are randomly selected. A chosen representative from your program will randomly draw a classroom name out of a jar on the morning of your observation. There must be at least one witness present to verify that the classroom was randomly selected.

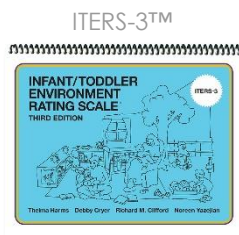
Will the Environment Rating Scale® work in my program? Family Child Care is different from Center Child Care.

All children need the same things regardless of where they spend their day. Each setting is unique. That's why we use 3 different versions of the Environment Rating Scale, each designed for a different segment of the early childhood field.



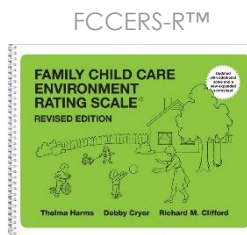
EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALE, THIRD EDITION®

Designed to be used in classrooms with children ages 3 to 5.



INFANT/TODDLER ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALE, THIRD EDITION®

Designed to be used in classrooms with children ages birth to 36 months.



FAMILY CHILD CARE ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALE, REVISED EDITION®

Designed to assess family child care programs conducted in a provider's home for children from infancy through school-age.

Some of the things in the Environment Rating Scale® seem unrealistic. I'm not sure I can do all of this. Help me!

Perfection is not required. They were purposely designed to be flexible. Sometimes, there may be areas you can't or don't want to change- and that is okay. The ERS® are based on a scoring system of 1-7. Every item won't score a "7". Debby Cryer, one of the authors of the ERS®, is fond of saying, "You should be willing to take your ones." The intent is for you to choose which areas are of value to you and focus your energy on being excellent in those areas. Avoid the tendency to feel like you are supposed to achieve perfection in all areas. Instead, reflect on the components that are of most value to you. As you go through the ERS®, ask yourself the "why" question. "Why is it important for children to have . . . [whatever criteria is being requested]?"

How do Bright & Early ND Assessors stay consistent?

To keep our commitment to be fair and accurate in all the observations we do, the Bright & Early ND Team uses multiple resources to stay consistent from one observation to the next.

On occasion we also contact the authors of the tools for further clarification. We have compiled all their responses into one document that helps guide consistency as we move forward.

The [Environment Rating Scales® Frequently Asked Questions](#) will help you understand the "How's and Why's" of the decisions behind the score.

In addition to the documents above, we also rely on the [Notes for Clarification](#) and the [All About ERS® books](#) (written by the ERS® authors). Collectively, these tools help our trained Assessors keep our commitment to you- to be fair and accurate in our observations.

I'm ready to submit my Quality Standards Inventory. Will I know when my Quality Rating observation will happen?

The Quality Rating Observation is also referred to as the 'actual' observation. A member of the Bright & Early ND Team will notify you of your 15-day observation window in which the observation will occur. You will not be allowed to select the actual date the observation will occur but will have the option to select three 'blackout dates' in which no observation can occur on. We encourage programs to use the blackout dates for holidays, appointments, or any non-typical

days (i.e. planned sub, field trip, etc.) Then, a Bright & Early ND Assessor will contact you by 5pm the day before each observation occurs.

What can I expect on my observation day?

Bright & Early ND has created a couple of resources to assist programs in understanding what your observation day will be like. Please see the [All About the Environment Rating Scales](#) page for tip sheets and other resources.

What do I need to do on my observation day to make my ERS® observation valid?

If any of the criteria below cannot be fulfilled, the observation will be void.

- At minimum, at least 50% of the enrolled children plus 1 child must be present for the majority of the observation.
- All children normally enrolled are allowed to be present. Removing a specific child for your observation will result in the observation being void and the program will be responsible to pay for the observation (\$225/observation).

If a Bright & Early ND Assessor arrives for a Quality Rating observation and discovers any of the above circumstances are not being met, the Quality Rating observation will not be conducted. The program is responsible for paying for the void Quality Rating observation (\$225/observation).

Please note that providing false information regarding staffing, current enrollment, or number of classrooms will result in a voided observation. The program will be responsible for paying the observation fee (\$225/observation) and may be ineligible to continue as a partner of Bright & Early ND.

I'm having an observation, why are there two assessors in my program?

Bright & Early ND goes above and beyond to make sure your program is scored fairly. For this reason, we require our assessors to go through 'rechecks' with their supervisor every 10 observations they complete.

For a FCCERS-R observation, how do the follow-up questions asked at the end of the observation affect my score?

The assessor asks questions at the end of the observation about items that weren't seen during the observation, or to clarify information, so they can give your program credit for all the things you do. If there is a discrepancy between a verbal answer and what was observed, the observation information (what was seen) will always be used first.

What if my observation score doesn't meet the required threshold score?

If your score does not meet the required threshold score needed, you can apply for the next cohort to try again.

What happens if a potential licensing violation is observed during an observation?

If an assessor observes a potential high-level violation during a Bright & Early ND observation the assessor will address the issue on the spot with the teacher/caregiver, children's safety is our top priority. The incident will also be detailed in the observation summary report given to programs. Bright & Early ND staff are also required to report this issue to the program's county licenser. Potential areas of concern would be:

- Unsafe infant sleep practices
- Inappropriate/unsafe infant care practices
- Inappropriate discipline used
- Putting children in imminent danger
- Unsanitary environment
- Multiple and/or serious fire, health, or safety hazards present
- Unsafe supervision
- Staff/child ratio is out of compliance

IV. Step 3: Activities and Experiences

What are the goals of Step 3?

- Use a curriculum that supports each child's development. The curriculum is aligned with the [Birth to Three Early Learning Guidelines](#) and the [Three to Five Early Learning Guidelines](#).
- Use the approved assessment tool to learn about each child's development. Use the results of the assessment to:
 - set goals with families for each child's learning and development
 - plan learning activities that build upon each child's strengths and provide opportunities for further growth
 - recognize any areas of concern regarding individual child development
- Demonstrate continued commitment to providing quality space and materials.

Why is Step 3 important?

Development is so important in the early years that we do not simply want to hope that children get all the experience they need to learn. Instead, we want to put a long-term plan in place to make sure learning happens. We call this plan for the children's learning the "curriculum". Assessment shows you if your curriculum is working. By using an assessment tool, you can see progress in children's development over time.

How do I show that I meet the Step 3 Quality Standards?

- Continue to meet the Health & Safety Quality Standards in [Step 1](#) and the Space & Materials Quality Standards in [Step 2](#).
- Complete an Environment Self-Assessment (ESA) proving your program continues to provide quality space and materials for the children in your care. One ESA must be completed for each separate classroom or group of children in the program.
- Use a curriculum that aligns with the North Dakota Early Learning Guidelines as reflected through the [Curriculum Alignment Worksheet](#). The Curriculum Alignment Worksheet is designed to help your program determine how your curriculum aligns with the ND Early Learning Guidelines. Bright & Early ND does not require programs to use a specific curriculum. Rather, curricula should be aligned to the ND Early Learning Guidelines and reflect the values and philosophy of the program, the children, and families served.
 - Bright & Early ND will use [Curriculum Alignment Rubric](#) to review the Curriculum Alignment Worksheet your program submits.
- Adopt Teaching Strategies GOLD® as your assessment tool and create a financial sustainability plan for ongoing use. There are many great assessment tools on the market but GOLD® fits our state the best due to the accessibility of online training, the compatibility with many curricula and the ability to prove interrater reliability for all users. Programs will access GOLD® online through [MyTeachingStrategies™](#).
- Observe children regularly and record information in [MyTeachingStrategies™](#).
- Program completes and finalizes GOLD® checkpoints during the three yearly periods (fall, winter, spring) in [MyTeachingStrategies™](#).
- Meet [Professional Development Quality Standards](#).



I created my own curriculum to use with my children. What should I do?

Don't worry! Even if you have created your own curriculum, you can still show how it aligns to the ND Early Learning Guidelines. Download the [Curriculum Alignment Worksheet](#), fill it out and submit it with your Step 3 Quality Standards Inventory.

Why should I use an assessment tool?

Assessment shows you if your curriculum is working. By using an assessment tool, you can see progress in children's development over time.

Why is Bright & Early ND supporting GOLD®?

GOLD® has proven that it is a well-rounded assessment tool that meets all the desired outcomes needed to show child growth and development. GOLD® is a formative assessment tool that guides teaching and learning. It uses multiple sources for collecting information to inform child development and adult-child interactions. GOLD® describes consistent and clear procedures for completing the tool and is consistent with the ND Early Learning Guidelines. GOLD® includes provisions for reporting results to parents and is designed to inform instruction and curriculum planning. GOLD® is a valid and reliable tool that provides interrater reliability testing for all who use it. GOLD® also provides guidance for meeting the needs of all children in the program, including children with disabilities, and children learning English as a dual language.

GOLD® has a fee for each child I have enrolled. How do I afford that?

Bright & Early ND understands how costly an assessment tool can be. That is why we covered all initial startup costs and worked with GOLD® to achieve a lower portfolio fee. By partnering with Bright & Early ND for GOLD® you are saving more than \$1500! Programs will be expected to pay for their portfolio fees at a discounted price and will be reimbursed for the cost of the first year of portfolios once they've achieved their Step 3 Quality Rating.

How do I show we implement our assessment tool correctly?

Once you have submitted your Quality Standards Inventory, a member of the Bright & Early ND Team will view specific reports in *MyTeachingStrategies™* and verify Learning Records through the ND Growing Futures Workforces Registry.

- Professional Development requirements will be verified via the individual's Learning Record in Growing Futures showing that all appropriate staff utilizing the tool have been trained on the tool.
- Bright & Early ND will view the children's Portfolios, verifying that documentation is entered objectively and linked to the proper objectives.

What evidence is needed to show that my program's staff are trained on GOLD®?

When programs purchase GOLD®, they also have access to online professional development through *MyTeachingStrategies™*. There is an assortment of courses available, however, Bright & Early ND is requiring that all Directors, Lead Teachers and Lead Caregivers take the course 'Objectives for Development and Learning'. Once a user has completed the course 'Objectives for Development and Learning', they need to become reliable. They do this by taking the Interrater Reliability Certification test. Users must submit their Professional Development Course Certificate and Interrater Reliability certificate to the ND Growing Futures Workforce Registry for verification. Bright & Early ND will verify professional development via the individual's learning record.

I'm ready to submit my Quality Standards Inventory. What does Bright & Early ND review in my program's MyTeachingStrategies™ account?

Once you have submitted your Quality Standards Inventory, a member of the Bright & Early ND Team will view your child portfolios in MyTeachingStrategies™. Bright & Early ND will use a random selection process to determine which portfolios will be viewed in each classroom or Family Child Care setting. To protect confidentiality, no identifying information will be collected or recorded. Please see Teaching Strategies® [Privacy Policy](#) for more details.

Documentation must be recorded objectively, and subjective documentation will not be counted. Examples of documentation include, but are not limited to:

- General Documentation (pictures, videos, general notes)
- Assessment Opportunity Cards
- On-the-Spot Observation Recording Tools

To meet this criterion, 33% of the documentation reports will be reviewed per classroom or Family Child Care setting.

Is there a certain number of documentation pieces required for each child?

Yes, Bright & Early ND has set a minimum requirement of documentation pieces per child in the following areas:

Minimum of 3 pieces of documentation per child are needed for the following areas:

- Social-Emotional
- Physical
- Language
- Cognitive

Minimum of 2 pieces of documentation per child are needed for the following areas:

- Literacy
- Mathematics

Will Bright & Early ND need to come into my program for Step 3?

A member of the Bright & Early ND Team will not need to come into your program for a review, unless you are unable to show proof of documentation electronically (for curriculum and assessment). If that is the case, Bright & Early ND will set up a time with you to come in to review your documentation.



V. Step 4: Relationships and Interactions

What are the goals of Step 4?

- Develop warm and supportive relationships with children and help children develop positive relationships with each other.
- Place an emphasis on children's interests, motivations and points of view in daily activities and interactions.
- Facilitate children's critical thinking and language development through interactions with children.
- Demonstrate continued commitment to providing quality space and materials to support play and learning experiences.
- Continued verification that your program is accurately assessing the needs of the children you care for.

Why is Step 4 important?

All children benefit from being in warm, supportive environments where they can develop strong relationships with their caregivers and peers. In addition, research shows that children in programs with higher CLASS® scores have better social, emotional, and academic outcomes.

How do I show that I meet the Step 4 Quality Standards?

- Continue to meet the Health & Safety Quality Standards in [Step 1](#), the Space & Materials Quality Standards in [Step 2](#) and the Activities and Experiences Quality Standards in [Step 3](#).
- Showcase your relationships and interactions through a Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS®) observation. CLASS® is a research-based method of measuring, evaluation, and improving interactions.

Programs will receive onsite CLASS® observations and must earn an average program score of the following:

Infant CLASS®

- Responsive Caregiving 4.0

Toddler CLASS®

- Emotional Support 5.0
- Engaged Support for Learning 3.5

Pre-K CLASS®

- Emotional Support 5.0
- Classroom Organization 5.0
- Instructional Support 3.0

Preschool and Center-Based Programs

- Observations will be conducted in each classroom with the tool that best reflects the age group in care. Classroom scores are averaged to calculate a program level score for each tool used.

Family and Group Programs

- Observations will be conducted program-wide with the tools that best reflect the age groups in care. A total of two tools will be used throughout the observation.

- Meet [Professional Development Quality Standards](#).

What is the Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS®)? What does it measure?

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS®) is an observation instrument that was developed to assess effective teacher-child interactions in infant, toddler and preschool classrooms and settings. The CLASS® was designed to create a common metric and vocabulary that could be used to describe various aspects of effective teaching across ages and contexts.

Continued on next page...

We know, through research, that structure is mediated by process—that the “whats” of quality teaching (structural features such as books, curricula, lesson plans) matter only through the “hows” of quality teaching (how teachers use time and materials to get the most out of every moment).

It is about fundamentally improving teaching and learning. From research, we know that interactions matter more than a teacher’s degree, length of experience, or number of toys and books in the classroom. It is teacher-child interactions that drive learning.

How was the CLASS® developed? Can I trust this tool?

Developed to make teacher-child interactions objective and measurable, CLASS® is based on many years of studies, publications, and replications across different classrooms. The research that the CLASS® is based on verifies that the interactions measured by the CLASS® tool make a real difference in children’s learning and development.

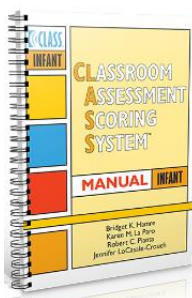
Can I do a practice observation?

Absolutely! Bright & Early ND will work with your program to find a date that works best. After your preliminary observation, sometimes referred to as the ‘practice’ observation, has been completed, your coach will review your summary report details with you, and help set up a continuous quality improvement plan. Taking advantage of the practice observation allows you to make changes as needed and feel prepared for your Quality Rating observation.

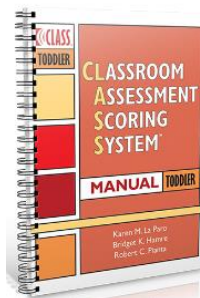
The thought of a CLASS® observation scares me. How can I overcome this?

It’s normal to be scared. In fact, it’s weird not to be a little nervous! Use your feelings to your advantage by being well prepared. Consider tips to prepare for your observation:

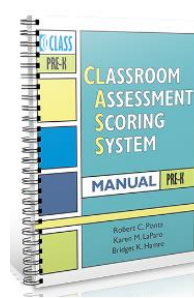
- Read through the CLASS® Manuals.
- Familiarize yourself with the CLASS® Dimension Guides that correlate with the age groups that you care for.
- Check out the CLASS® resources available on the [Teachstone® website](#).



The CLASS® for Infants
Ages birth to 18 months



The CLASS® for Toddlers
Ages 19 to 35 months



The CLASS® for Preschoolers
Ages 3-5 years

Will the CLASS® tool work in my program? Family Child Care is different from Center Child Care.

The CLASS® works with all different types of programs. There is a tool for each age group: Infant, Toddler, and Preschool aged children. Remember, CLASS® looks at interactions; provider/child and child/child interactions. There are many opportunities to engage in interactions with children regardless of the setting’s space, materials, or furnishings.

Why do I need an observation?

Observations are the backbone of Bright & Early ND. They are the most accurate way to demonstrate and show others that you meet the Quality Standards in each Step. Observations bring fairness and consistency to Bright & Early ND. Our team is trained specifically to be respectful and to understand how much work you've done to get to this point. Remember, we're all here for the same reason – to prepare children to be successful in school and life.

I'm ready to submit my Quality Standards Inventory. Will I know when my Quality Rating observation will happen? How much notice will I receive?

The Quality Rating Observation is also referred to as the 'actual' observation. A member of the Bright & Early ND Team will notify you of your 15-day observation window in which the observation will occur. You will not be allowed to select the actual date the observation will occur but will have the option to select three 'blackout dates' in which no observation can occur on. We encourage programs to use the blackout dates for holidays, appointments, or any non-typical days (i.e. planned sub, field trip, etc.) Then, a Bright & Early ND Assessor will contact you by 5pm the day before each observation occurs.

How do CLASS® observations work?

CLASS® observation procedures require observers to watch, without interruption, activities in the program and/or outside for 15 minutes. This 15 minute observation period is called a cycle, and it is the source of information that will determine codes or ratings assigned to the CLASS® dimensions. During an observation cycle, observers attend carefully to teachers' interactions and behaviors with the children. At the end of the 15 minute cycle, observers step out of the program area and assign numerical ratings for each of the CLASS® dimensions. After assigning ratings, observers begin a new CLASS® observation cycle. For each observation a total of (3) 15 minute cycles will be completed.

How many observations will I have? How do you determine which tool to use?

Observations will be conducted in each classroom/age group with the appropriate tool. The Bright & Early ND Assessor will conduct (3) 15-minute cycles. In Family or Group Licensed Programs, the assessor will rotate two CLASS® tools until (3) 15-minute cycles have been completed per tool. Classroom scores are averaged to calculate a program level score for each tool used.

What criteria is needed for a CLASS® Quality Rating observation?

Since the Quality Rating observation determines the program's Quality Rating outcome, there are certain criteria that must be met on the day of the observation(s):

- All classrooms or groups must be observed.
- At minimum, at least 1 child per classroom or age group served must be in attendance on the day of the observation.
- All children normally enrolled are allowed to be present. Removing a specific child for your Quality Rating observation will result in the Quality Rating observation to be void and the program will be responsible to pay for the observation (\$125/observation).

If a Bright & Early ND Assessor arrives for a Quality Rating observation and discovers any of the above circumstances are not being met, the Quality Rating observation will not be conducted. The program is responsible for paying for the void Quality Rating observation (\$125/observation).

Please note that providing false information regarding staffing, current enrollment, or number of classrooms will result in a voided observation. The program will be responsible for paying the observation fee (\$125/observation) and may be ineligible to continue as a partner of Bright & Early ND.

What can I expect on my observation day?

Bright & Early ND has created a resource to assist programs in understanding what your observation day will be like. Please see the [‘All About the Classroom Assessment Scoring System’](#) page for more information.

I’m having an observation, why are there two assessors in my program?

Bright & Early ND goes above and beyond to make sure your program is scored fairly. For training and reliability purposes, you may have two Bright & Early ND Assessors in your program.

What if my observation scores do not meet the threshold needed to become Quality Rated at Step 4?

If your scores do not meet the minimum threshold, you can apply for the next cohort to try again.

What happens if a potential licensing violation is observed during an observation?

If an assessor observes a potential high-level violation during a Bright & Early ND observation the assessor will address the issue on the spot with the teacher/caregiver, children’s safety is our top priority. The incident will also be detailed in the observation summary report given to programs. Bright & Early ND staff are also required to report this issue to the program’s county licenser. Potential areas of concern would be:

- Unsafe infant sleep practices
- Inappropriate/unsafe infant care practices
- Inappropriate discipline used
- Putting children in imminent danger
- Unsanitary environment
- Multiple and/or serious fire, health, or safety hazards present
- Unsafe supervision
- Staff/child ratio is out of compliance

How much do additional CLASS® observations cost?

Your first observation is free! However, due to funding we are unable to offer unlimited observations. Therefore, each program receives one free “observation package” per Step. This package includes all of the observations you need for each step. With each observation, you’ll receive a detailed summary report specific to your program. If you don’t meet your desired scores during your first observation, you may request additional observations. There is a \$125 fee per observation to help cover the cost. Programs with multiple classrooms will need multiple observations.

Is it appropriate to observe during meal times and transitions (i.e., washing hands after using the bathroom, lining up to go outside, etc)? It just doesn’t seem like there’s much going on during those times.

These times are indeed observable using the CLASS® tool. Recall that one of the goals of CLASS® data collection is to capture the experience of an average child in a classroom on a typical day. Since meals and transitions are activities in which children engage on a daily basis, they can and should be observed. Capturing these times helps us paint a full and complete picture. While meal times and transitions are different types of activities than, say, circle time or small group time, due to the fact that they are a bit more routine in nature, they can and should still be characterized by the same types of effective interactions.

Why is the assessor stepping out of the classroom/space we are using for 10 minutes?

CLASS® scoring should be completed immediately after each observation cycle. Each observation lasts 15 minutes, so the assessor can see a general sampling of interactions that happen in the program. After the 15 minute cycle the assessor needs to step out and score the cycle and record the rating accurately, without regard to how each dimension was scored in previous cycles. Each cycle is scored independently of the others. The assessor steps out of the space you are using so he/she can accurately score without being interrupted and as to not interrupt you. The assessor may take an additional 5 minutes to prep for the upcoming observation cycle.

VI. Quality Rating Review

What is a Quality Rating Review?

Bright & Early ND Partners gain recognition for doing great things for children, not just saying that they do great things for children. The Quality Rating Review is your chance to show how you meet the Quality Standards for each Step. It's not a test, it's not a worksheet- it's you doing what you do best everyday! The Quality Rating Review shows that you meet the Quality Standards stated in the Bright & Early ND [Playbook](#).

During this process, a member of the Bright & Early ND Team reviews your Quality Standards Inventory and evidence that you have submitted. Then, Bright & Early ND verifies that your program meets the Quality Standards of the Step you are working towards.

The Quality Standards Inventory must be submitted when a program is working towards a Step 2, Step 3, or Step 4 Quality Rating. If you are submitting a Quality Standards Inventory for a Step 2 or Step 4 Quality Rating, your program will receive an onsite Quality Rating observation. If you are submitting a Quality Standards Inventory for a Step 3 Quality Rating, you will be required to upload evidence and will likely be completed entirely online with no onsite observation. Please see the tip sheet titled, '[How to Submit the Quality Standards Inventory](#)' for step-by-step instructions.

Why do I need a Quality Rating Review?

Quality Rating Reviews are the most accurate way to demonstrate and show others that you meet the Quality Standards in each Step. Quality Rating Reviews bring fairness and consistency to Bright & Early ND. No one likes to feel as if "someone is looking over their shoulder." Bright & Early North Dakota takes this dislike seriously; we do everything in our power to put you at ease. Our team is trained specifically to be respectful and to understand how much work you've done to get to this point. Remember, we're all here for the same reason – to prepare children to be successful in school and life.

Will I know when my Quality Rating observation will happen? How much notice will I receive?

The Quality Rating Observation is also referred to as the 'actual' observation. A member of the Bright & Early ND Team will notify you of your 15-day observation window in which the observation will occur. You will not be allowed to select the actual date the observation will occur but will have the option to select three 'blackout dates' in which no observation can occur on. We encourage programs to use the blackout dates for holidays, appointments, or any non-typical days (i.e. planned sub, field trip, etc.) Then, a Bright & Early ND Assessor will contact you by 5pm the day before each observation occurs.

VII. Cohorts

What is a cohort?

The Bright & Early ND Quality Rating process is implemented during four cycles per year, referred to as cohorts. Think of this period as time where you will work with a Coach, learn from other programs, pinpoint your strengths, take trainings, and reach your quality goals! Cohorts are available throughout the year, specific dates are listed on the Bright & Early ND website.

I missed the application deadline. Can I still apply?

Step 1 has no application deadline so you can apply anytime. Due to the amount of applications that come into our system for Step 2, Step 3 and Step 4, we only process them four times a year. However, this doesn't mean you can't get started! You can work towards your goals anytime.

I want to start now, but the deadline isn't for a few months. Am I able to do anything?

Yes! You are able to work towards your goals at any time. A great place to start is with the Professional Development Quality Standards. Check out the Bright & Early ND [Playbook](#) to review the Quality Standards for each Step!

VIII. Professional Development

Do I have to pay for training?

Good question! Yes, programs will need to budget the costs of their Professional Development needs. However, Bright & Early ND has partnered with Child Care Aware® of ND to offer exclusive discounts and benefits to Bright & Early ND Quality Rated programs (see page 20 for more details).

What is the ND Growing Futures Workforce Registry?

Growing Futures recognizes early childhood professionals for the professional milestones you accomplish.

- Training Transcript: What used to be an endless pile of paper training certificates is now in 1 training transcript. You have access to your complete training records 24/7.
- On-line Training Calendar: Browse and choose from many trainings to renew your license.
- Career Pathways: Every career has certain education requirements. Now, child care does too! The Growing Futures Career Pathways outline the professional development qualifications expected for employment in various careers working with young children. This helps you plan your ongoing training in ways that increase your qualifications and knowledge over time.

Are Growing Futures and Bright & Early ND the same thing?

No. Growing Futures and Bright & Early ND are separate. However, both entities are led by the Department of Human Services. Growing Futures is for individuals and Organizations and recognizes personal and professional development accomplishments. Bright & Early ND is for programs and recognizes programs who achieve specific steps to create a quality child care environment that prepares children for school and life. We do work together. Growing Future's Career Pathways play an important role in Bright & Early ND. It's how we verify you meet the Bright & Early ND [Professional Development Quality Standards](#).

I'm a center director. I don't categorize my staff. What do I do?

Review the definitions of various staff positions in the Bright & Early ND [Playbook](#). Then, match your staff's job descriptions with the definitions outlined by Bright & Early ND to determine where staff best fit. If you don't have job descriptions in place for your staff, take some time to develop job descriptions. Samples are online at www.ndchildcare.org. A coach from Child Care Aware® of North Dakota is available to help.

Due to staff turnover, I don't meet the Professional Development Quality Standards. It's the only thing holding me back. What do I do?

Turnover is inevitable. If you don't meet the Professional Development Quality Standards, make a plan to achieve them. It's important to have a strong recruitment, orientation and training plan in place for staff. Turn your program in to a "well oiled machine", so all new staff have a set plan to meet the professional development requirements within a certain amount of time upon employment.




Programs that are currently in a Bright & Early ND cohort and experience turnover in the 90 days prior to submitting the Quality Standards Inventory must use the [Professional Development Action Plan](#) with all newly hired Lead employees. This includes the following positions: Program Director, Lead Teacher or Lead Caregiver.

The Bright & Early ND [Professional Development Action Plan](#) is to be used with all employees that have been hired within 90 days prior to submitting the Quality Standards Inventory. This allows the newly hired employee time to accomplish the requirements of licensing and those of the program's Bright & Early ND Step Goal. This plan is to be completed by the employee and will be used as evidence to verify Professional Development requirements for Bright & Early ND. All goals and action items must be within 1 year of the employee's hire date.

IX. Financial Incentives

Are there different incentives at each Step?

Yes! We have partnered with Child Care Aware® of ND to offer exclusive benefits to programs participating in Bright & Early ND. See chart below for details. Please note, benefits may change based on funding and budgets.

INCENTIVE	AVAILABILITY	VALUE	DETAILS
 Reduced Rates for Training Opportunities	Available to programs participating in a Step 2 cohort, distributed by Child Care Aware® of ND.	Valued at \$45 per Lead Caregiver or Lead Teacher	Participating programs will receive reduced registration for required Bright & Early ND Professional Development.
Material and Equipment Grants	Available to programs participating in a Step 2 cohort, distributed by Child Care Aware® of ND.	Between \$400-\$2000, based on license type	Grants will be limited and chosen through an application process.
Quality Rating Award	Awarded upon receiving your Step 2 Quality Rating, distributed by Bright & Early ND.	Birth to 36 months: \$75/child 3 to 5 yrs.: \$50/child	Awarded one-time and based on average enrollment over the past 6 months.
 Reduced Rates for Training Opportunities	Available to programs participating in a Step 3 cohort, distributed by Child Care Aware® of ND.	Valued at \$54 per Lead Caregiver or Lead Teacher	Participating programs will receive reduced registration for required Bright & Early ND Professional Development.
CDA Credential Scholarship	Available to programs participating in a Step 3 cohort, distributed by Child Care Aware® of ND.	Valued at \$425	Participating providers have an opportunity to apply upon completion of specific CDA requirements.
GOLD® Portfolio Reimbursement	Awarded upon receiving your Step 3 Quality Rating, distributed by Bright & Early ND.	Savings of \$15.95 per child	This reimbursement will cover the program's first year's cost of GOLD®
Quality Rating Award	Awarded upon receiving your Step 3 Quality Rating, distributed by Bright & Early ND.	Birth to 36 months: \$100/child 3 to 5 yrs.: \$75/child	Awarded one-time and based on average enrollment over the past 6 months.
 Reduced Rates for Training Opportunities	Available to programs participating in a Step 4 cohort, distributed by Child Care Aware® of ND.	Valued at \$27 per Lead Caregiver	Participating programs will receive reduced registration for required Bright & Early ND Professional Development.
CDA Credential Scholarship	Available to programs participating in a Step 4 cohort, distributed by Child Care Aware® of ND.	Valued at \$425	Participating providers have an opportunity to apply upon completion of specific CDA requirements.
myTeachstone™ Enrollment	Available to programs participating in a Step 4 cohort, distributed by Bright & Early ND.	Valued at \$125 per Lead Caregiver or Lead Teacher	Participating programs will receive CLASS® specific Professional Development at no cost to the program.
Aim4Excellence Director's Credential Scholarship	Available to programs participating in a Step 4 cohort, distributed by Child Care Aware® of ND.	60% off, valued at \$945	Participating providers have an opportunity to apply upon participating in a Step 4 cohort.
Quality Rating Award	Awarded upon receiving your Step 4 Quality Rating, distributed by Bright & Early ND.	Birth to 36 months: \$125/child 3 to 5 yrs.: \$100/child	Awarded on-going and based on average enrollment over the past 6 months.

How do the award amounts impact my taxes?

To receive any financial incentives, you must have a W-9 on file with our office. Quality Rating award dollars are taxable income. Please consult with a tax professional for more information.

How is my award amount determined? How do you verify how many children I serve?

All financial incentives are distributed based on your average enrollment over the last 6 months. Children that are enrolled on a part-time basis (24 or less hours/week) will be prorated. You will be asked to provide verification of enrollment and attendance. You may be asked to provide the following:

- Food Program Attendance Record
- Licensing Child Enrollment Form
- Program Sign-in and out sheets (only if there is a discrepancy in other records)

Where does this money come from?

Bright & Early ND is led and funded by the Department of Human Services in North Dakota.

X. Appeal Process

Can a program appeal their Quality Rating?

Yes. Programs will have up to 30 days to appeal a Quality Rating once it has been awarded.

What is the process for appealing a Quality Rating?

If the program feels an incorrect decision was made, they must submit a formal appeal that includes a typed narrative describing the concern. The narrative must address each point listed below. Include as much detail as possible, and attach any supporting documentation referenced in your description.

- What is your concern? Is it related to Professional Development, observation results, etc.?
- Why do you disagree with the decision?
- Please include your program name, contact person name, email address and phone number on the typed narrative.

Please send the typed narrative and any additional supporting documentation to Bright & Early ND at QRIS@brightnd.org. Within 30 business days, Bright & Early ND will issue a response, referring to items addressed in the appeal narrative and stating which determinations have been sustained or altered.

What if I don't meet the scores needed during my observation? Can I try again?

If you don't meet the scores needed, you try again for your desired Quality Rating by applying for the next available cohort. Programs are encouraged to work with a coach to improve the items that were challenging in the first observation.

I received my award results. What if I have additional information that I want Bright & Early ND to consider? Can I use the appeal process?

No. The appeal process is not for new information. Programs that wish to provide new evidence or demonstrate new practices should apply for the next available cohort.

What if I appeal my results and the outcome is lower than the original? Do I get to pick which one I want?

No. The most recent observation results are used.

XI. Other Important Questions

Are you saying that programs who choose not to participate are not good?

There are many programs that have not yet chosen to participate in Bright & Early ND. The simple truth is that it is difficult to showcase the quality of programs who choose not to participate.

We are proud to say that those who have joined Bright & Early ND have gone above and beyond in order to ensure their knowledge is current and their program is top-notch. All participants, whatever step they are on, have committed to providing the best possible care to prepare children for school, work, and life.

Is Bright & Early ND here to stay?

Bright & Early ND is based on a national movement in the child care and preschool profession. It's an initiative driven from the federal level that seems to be growing, not vanishing anytime soon. Learn more about other state initiatives at www.grisnetwork.org.

How often will my program renew our Quality Rating?

For programs with a Step 1 Quality Rating, renewal is once a year. We encourage programs to renew yearly to ensure that your program information stays current and you still receive the great benefits of Bright & Early ND!

For programs with a Step 2, Step 3 or Step 4 Quality Rating, renewal is every 3 years. Programs with a Step 2-4 Quality Rating will be encouraged to join a Bright & Early ND cohort prior to your expiration date.

Is there an alternate pathway for accredited programs?

Yes. Accredited programs may choose to follow the traditional steps in Bright & Early North Dakota, or complete the alternate pathway, sometimes referred to as the 'accreditation pathway'. Bright & Early ND honors accreditation from NAEYC, NAFCC, NAC and COA. A certificate of accreditation from one of these organizations serves as confirmation that the program meets the Bright & Early ND Quality Standards for Step 2 and Step 3 along with the Professional Development Quality Standards for Step 2 and Step 3. To qualify for Step 4, accredited programs must first become Step 1 Quality Rated and then can proceed to the Step 4 Alternate Pathway as laid out in the [Playbook](#).

When will information be shared with parents?

NOW! Parents are already using the Program Participation map on the Bright & Early ND website to see where quality programs are located in their counties. Information is shared on Bright & Early ND's Facebook page and Twitter. Child Care Aware® of North Dakota is also sharing the information with parents when they call in searching for child care.



How will parents know to look for the Bright & Early ND symbol?

Bright & Early ND has made a long-term commitment to marketing Bright & Early ND across North Dakota. In the future, a public information campaign will be launched. Parents will know to look for the Bright & Early ND symbol through a variety of ways:

- The Bright & Early ND website www.brightnd.org
- Child Care Aware® of North Dakota shares with the 3,000 parents during referrals both online and via phone.
- Public ads; such as newspapers and social media
- Promotional materials shared at community partners such as: given to new parents in the hospital, job service, local employers, etc.
- Public Presentations
- Social Media Outlets

My program is closed in the summer. Can we still partner with Bright & Early ND?

Yes, facilities that operate part-year programs are eligible to participate in Bright & Early ND and are encouraged to find a cohort that best suites your program. Please note, Quality Rating award dollars are prorated.

I am the owner/director of multiple sites. Can I enter one participation agreement for all sites?

No. Just as each site requires a separate license, each site requires a separate Bright & Early ND participation application. Please fill out a separate participation application for each site.

My program is a part-day program. Can we still partner with Bright & Early ND?

Yes. Quality Rating award dollars are prorated.

We run a preschool program and a child care program under one license. Can I only have my preschool program partner with Bright & Early ND?

No. Participation is based on the program license. All of the classrooms under the license will be considered. If a program has 2 separate licenses (one for their child care and one for their preschool) then they could just have their preschool or child care partner with Bright & Early ND.

What happens when my child care moves or changes locations?

When a program moves to a new physical location, the program must submit the Change of Location form to Bright & Early ND. In addition, an onsite Environment Rating Scale® observation(s) will be required to demonstrate the space and materials support play and learning experiences. The program must maintain an average score of 4.0 or greater for each tool used, as previously required in the program's Step 2 Quality Rating.

If a program does not earn an average score of 4.0 or greater for each tool used, the current Quality Rating will be transitioned to a Step 1 Quality Rating. The Program can reapply for a Quality Rating as soon as the next cohort allows. Programs are not eligible to receive any additional funds through this process.

What if my Quality Rated program receives a licensing violation?

Bright and Early ND Programs are considered the best of the best. When parents are looking for a quality environment for their child to thrive in, we want to ensure that the environment is also safe. If a Bright & Early ND Quality Rated program receives a high level licensing violation, it is brought in front of our review committee to determine if the program should still be listed as Quality Rated. For more information please read our [eligibility requirements](#).