

Spark Self-Assessment

Domain: Children's Learning and Development

The Spark Self-Assessment is a reflective tool designed to help you evaluate your program, identify areas for growth, and set improvement goals. The Domains, Standards and Indicators are identical to the Spark portfolio.

While it can support progress toward completing your portfolio, it is not required to use this tool. It can also serve as a valuable guide for setting goals for a Quality Improvement Cycle.

As you review the standards and indicators at each star level, use the 7-point rating scale to assess how well your program implements the practice.

- **Circle 7** if the practice is already a strong and consistent part of your program.
- **Circle 1** if the practice is not currently in place.
- **Use your best judgment** to determine where your program falls on the scale.

Evaluate your program at each star level, even if you don't plan to complete a portfolio for every level. You will decide which star levels to submit and which goals to focus on.

If you rate any standard at any star level **4 or lower**, you can choose it as a **Quality Improvement (QI) Cycle** goal to strengthen your program and make progress on completing your Spark portfolio.

Any terms in **GREEN** are defined after each domain.

Domain: Children’s Learning and Development (LD)			
Standard LD1: The program is guided by a written statement of philosophy.			
Why is this important?	Having a program philosophy communicates your values, goals, and approach to caring for and teaching children. Sharing this statement with families builds trust and ensures everyone understands and supports the program’s vision for children’s growth and development.		
Star Level	Indicators of Meeting the Standard	This is already a strong practice	There is room for improvement
3	The program has a written philosophy that is available to staff, families, and visitors that states the program’s values, beliefs, and program goals for children and families	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	
4	The program’s philosophy explicitly ensures the inclusion of all children.	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	
5	The program’s philosophy is used to guide decisions, including decisions related to curricular activities, activities to promote partnerships with families, professional development, and hiring of staff, if applicable	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	

Standard LD2: The program uses a curriculum that supports all children’s learning and development.			
Why is this important?	Using a curriculum ensures activities and lessons are designed to promote children’s cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. It provides a consistent framework, helping children feel secure and establishing clear routines that support learning. It can also give educators a roadmap for planning activities, assessing progress, and addressing the diverse needs of children.		
Star Level	Indicators of Meeting the Standard	This is already a strong practice	There is room for improvement
Meets 3-, 4-, & 5-star levels	<p>The program uses a curriculum that supports all children’s learning and development that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● is based on theory and research ● produces positive child outcomes ● specifies outcomes for key areas of development ● specifies instructional details for care and education provider/teacher to follow ● specifies adult-child interaction details for care and education provider/teacher to follow ● balances adult-directed and child-initiated activities 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	

Standard LD3: The program provides an appropriate indoor environment that supports children’s learning and development and is accessible to all children enrolled in the program.		
Why is this important?	A well-designed indoor environment helps children feel safe, comfortable, and ready to learn. It provides spaces and materials that encourage exploration, creativity, and skill-building at their own pace. Clear organization and defined areas for different activities, like play, rest, and learning, help children understand expectations and feel secure. When materials are accessible and activities are engaging, children are less likely to feel frustrated or bored, reducing challenging behaviors. Also, a calm, inviting atmosphere with thoughtful lighting, colors, and noise levels can help children stay focused and regulate their emotions.	
Star Level	Indicators of Meeting the Standard	This is already a strong practice There is room for improvement
3	<p>The program uses a basic indoor environmental arrangement that supports children’s learning and development, including physical space that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● is accessible to all children enrolled in the program ● is divided or arranged into interest or play areas ● can be arranged into quiet and active play areas as needed ● has a place for children to be alone ● allows children and adults to move around freely ● has enough room for equipment needed by children with disabilities 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1
4	<p>The program’s indoor environment includes at least one place to display materials related to learning. These displays:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● are at child’s eye level ● reflect current activities ● are age appropriate ● reflect primarily work created by children (not commercially-or adult-created) materials ● contain some three-dimensional items (for example, sculptures, textured collages, popsicle stick art, mobiles) 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1
5	<p>The program’s indoor environment includes displays that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● represent various cultures, ethnic groups, and races ● represent different ages, genders, and abilities ● show people in non-stereotypical roles 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1

Definitions for LD3:

- **Displays** include children's art and other projects they have engaged in as well as posters and other materials that may be present on walls or other surfaces.
- **Culture** Refers to how particular groups of people live. It is the way we eat, sleep, talk, play, care for the sick, relate to one another, think about work, arrange our kitchens, and remember our dead. It includes the languages we speak, the religion or spirituality we practice (or do not), and the clothing, housing, food, and rituals/ holidays with which we feel most comfortable." Derman-Sparks & Edwards. (2010). *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves*. National Association for the Education of Young Children: Washington, D.C. p. 55.
- A **stereotype** considers everyone in a particular group as having the same traits and ignores individual differences. They are often inaccurate and offensive and can lead to prejudice and discrimination. Some examples of stereotypes are that all girls like to play with dolls and all boys like to play with trucks or all people of Mexican descent wear sombreros. Stereotypes can be based on race, ethnicity, ability, age, gender, body image, family structure, class (socioeconomic status) and other characteristics of a group.

Standard LD4: The program provides appropriate indoor furnishings that support children’s learning and development.			
Why is this important?	Appropriate furnishings such as child-sized furniture, accessible shelving, and organized storage allow children to access materials, make choices, and clean up independently, fostering self-help skills and confidence. Well-placed furniture and open shelving provide clear visibility and easy access to toys and learning materials, inviting children to explore and engage in meaningful activities. Sturdy, well-maintained and age-appropriate furnishings help provide a safe environment where children can focus on learning and play without unnecessary hazards.		
Star Level	Indicators of Meeting the Standard	This is already a strong practice	There is room for improvement
3	<p>The program uses basic indoor furnishings that support children’s learning and development, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sufficient furnishings available for routine care • sufficient furnishings available for play • sufficient furnishings available for relaxation/comfort • sufficient furnishings available for learning • furnishings in good repair • shelves or containers with toys, books, etc., organized and within the reach of children • shelves or containers with toys, books, etc., labeled with words 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	
4	<p>The program uses indoor furnishings that support children’s learning and development, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shelves or containers with toys, books, etc., labeled with words in the languages of all children in the classroom, as appropriate. 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	
5	<p>The program uses indoor furnishings that support children’s learning and development, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shelves and/or containers with toys, books, etc., labeled with words in the languages of all the children in the program, as appropriate • shelves and containers labeled with pictures 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	

Standard LD5: The program provides an appropriate and well-maintained outdoor gross motor area with equipment that is accessible to all children in the program.			
Why is this important?	Encouraging gross motor skills like running, jumping, climbing, and balancing, is essential for building strength, coordination, and overall health. Large, open areas and engaging equipment inspires children to move and explore, supporting an active lifestyle. It allows children to connect with nature, reducing stress and improving mood and focus.		
Star Level	Indicators of Meeting the Standard	This is already a strong practice	There is room for improvement
3	Outdoor gross motor equipment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • addresses a variety of skills (for example, climbing, balancing, throwing, catching, pedaling, and steering) • is appropriate for the ages and abilities of all children in the program 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	
4	Portable gross motor equipment for play is available (for example, balls, sports equipment, tricycles, jump ropes, hula hoops, etc.).	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	
5	The program has adequate space for indoor gross motor activities when weather doesn't permit going outdoors.	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	

Standard LD6: The program uses materials that support children’s learning and development.			
Why is this important?	Using appropriate learning materials supports cognitive development, promotes language skills, encourages fine motor skills and stimulates creativity and imagination. Materials that encourage collaborative play help children practice sharing, taking turns, and resolving conflicts, encouraging positive social skills. Materials that reflect the local culture and diverse backgrounds help children develop a sense of pride in their community, while also fostering understanding and respect for people from other backgrounds.		
Star Level	Indicators of Meeting the Standard	This is already a strong practice	There is room for improvement
3	<p>The program uses basic materials that support children’s learning and development. These materials: support children’s development (including cognitive, language, motor, social, and emotional)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are accessible • are in sufficient quantity • are rotated periodically • include a variety of books • include writing utensils and materials (for example, pencils, markers, chalk, paper, chalkboards, small dry erase boards, etc.) 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	
4	<p>The program uses a variety of materials that support children’s learning and development. These materials (for example, play figures, puzzles, visuals, and pictures): show ethnic groups in non-stereotypical roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • represent the culture of the community • provide opportunities for self-direction and choice 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	
5	<p>The program uses a wide selection of materials that support children’s learning and development. These materials (for example, dress-up clothes, play foods, pictures, and other displays):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • represent two or more cultures • show similarities in day-to-day routines and activities • include some written materials in the children’s home language 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	

Definitions for LD6

- A **stereotype** considers everyone in a particular group as having the same traits and ignores individual differences. They are often inaccurate and offensive and can lead to prejudice and discrimination. Some examples of stereotypes are that all girls like to play with dolls and all boys like to play with trucks or all people of Mexican descent wear sombreros. Stereotypes can be based on race, ethnicity, ability, age, gender, body image, family structure, class (socioeconomic status) and other characteristics of a group.
- **Culture of the community** describes the cultures of the children and families in the program as well as the surrounding community.
- **Culture** Refers to how particular groups of people live. It is the way we eat, sleep, talk, play, care for the sick, relate to one another, think about work, arrange our kitchens, and remember our dead. It includes the languages we speak, the religion or spirituality we practice (or do not), and the clothing, housing, food, and rituals/ holidays with which we feel most comfortable.” Derman-Sparks & Edwards. (2010). *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves*. National Association for the Education of Young Children: Washington, D.C. p. 55.
- **Day to day routines** include activities such as eating, dressing, home keeping, caring for children, family celebrations.

Standard LD7: The program uses planned curriculum activities that support children's learning and development.			
Why is this important?	Planned activities are designed to focus on specific developmental goals, helping children build important skills such as language, math, social interactions, and motor skills. They provide a clear structure for the day, helping children understand expectations, routines, and transitions, which contributes to a sense of security and stability. They are engaging and cater to children's interests, encouraging active participation and fostering curiosity. This enhances learning and focus and can be tailored to meet the diverse developmental needs, abilities, and learning styles of all children.		
Star Level	Indicators of Meeting the Standard	This is already a strong practice	There is room for improvement
3	<p>The program uses basic curriculum activities that support children's learning and development that include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adaptations that allow all children, including those with disabilities, to participate • activities designed to promote understanding of cultures represented in the program • opportunities for children to use books independently • reading by adults to groups of children daily • opportunities for children to use writing materials 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	
4	<p>The program uses a variety of curriculum activities that support children's learning and development that include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • activities that promote understanding of cultures beyond those represented in program • activities that address content areas (math, science, social studies, etc.) • adults reading one-to-one with children daily • adults writing what children say and taking dictation from children 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	
5	<p>The program uses a wide selection of curriculum activities that support children's learning and development that include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interactions with persons who are culturally or linguistically diverse (these can be program staff, parents, or community members invited into the program) • some activities in children's home languages, such as singing or storytelling 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	

Standard LD8: The program uses daily routines that support children’s learning and development.			
Why is this important?	Daily routines create consistency, helping children understand what to expect throughout the day. This predictability promotes a sense of security and comfort, which is essential for young children’s emotional well-being. Routine activities, such as clean-up time or self-care tasks like washing hands, help children develop time management skills and a sense of responsibility for their actions. As children become familiar with daily routines, they are encouraged to take on age-appropriate tasks independently, such as putting away toys or getting ready for meals, building confidence and self-sufficiency.		
Star Level	Indicators of Meeting the Standard	This is already a strong practice	There is room for improvement
3	The program uses basic daily routines, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • child-initiated activities balanced with adult-directed activities • one-on-one activities • activities that are done in small groups of children • daily planned activities for outdoor play, or similar activities indoors when weather or air quality does not permit outdoor play 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	
4	The program uses a variety of daily routines, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whole-group activities (gatherings such as circle time) that are held for short periods of time appropriate for the age and individual needs of children • opportunities for children to be part of self-selected small groups 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	
5	The program uses a wide selection of daily routines, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extended blocks of time for children to engage in sustained interactions and explorations with adults and peers • few whole-group transitions • minimal waiting time • planning for outdoor activities 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	

Standard LD9: The program uses information from screening and assessment to measure children’s learning and development in order to make referrals and do program planning.

Why is this important?	Screening and assessment provide valuable insights into each child’s strengths, challenges, and developmental milestones. This helps educators identify any areas where a child may need additional support or resources, and timely referrals to support services can be made. Educators can track children’s growth and development over time, helping them recognize progress and adjust teaching strategies to meet evolving needs. Assessment results provide a concrete way to communicate children’s progress to families, fostering stronger partnerships between educators and families. It also promotes equity by ensuring that all children, regardless of background or ability, have equal opportunities for success.		
Star Level	Indicators of Meeting the Standard	This is already a strong practice	There is room for improvement
3	A developmental screening, using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) , is conducted on each child. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • within 45 days of when the child enters the program • on an annual basis • includes information to refer children for specialized assessment when indicated 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	
4	The program conducts assessment of learning and development for each child at least two times during the year and plans learning activities based on assessment information. <i>(The tool used can be Teaching Strategies Gold, The Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum, Assessment, Evaluation and Programming System (AEPS) or any assessment that aligns with the Oregon’s Early Learning and Kindergarten Guidelines and/or Head Start Early Learning Outcomes.)</i>	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	
5	Samples of children’s work, written accounts of specific observations, and information from family members are collected on an ongoing basis to supplement assessment.	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	

<p>LD10: Group size, child-staff ratios, and staffing patterns are appropriate for the children’s ages and positively affect children’s emotional development, cognitive development, safety, and health.</p>			
<p>Why is this important?</p>	<p>This is important to allow caregivers to provide more individualized attention to each child, meeting their specific needs and fostering stronger relationships. It helps ensure that children are properly supervised and creates a stable environment where children can develop secure attachments, which are essential for emotional well-being.</p>		
<p>Star Level</p>	<p>Indicators of Meeting the Standard</p>	<p>This is already a strong practice</p>	<p>There is room for improvement</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>Children spend a majority of their day with a consistent care provider.</p>	<p>7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1</p>	
<p>Meets 4- & 5- star levels</p>	<p>The program’s enrollment practices (child-staff ratios) exceed licensing standards.</p>	<p>7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1</p>	

LD11: The program facilitates and supports appropriate adult-child interactions in the areas of social and emotional support, organization and management of children’s behavior and instructional support.			
Why is this important?	Positive adult-child interactions help children develop secure attachments and a sense of emotional safety. When adults respond to children’s emotions with empathy, validation, and appropriate guidance, children learn to recognize and manage their own feelings. They help children understand expectations, routines, and boundaries and can promote desirable behavior and discourage challenging behavior. When adults provide responsive feedback, ask open-ended questions, and engage in conversations with children, they encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and language development.		
Star Level	Indicators of Meeting the Standard	This is already a strong practice	There is room for improvement
3	<p>The program has a written policy for adult-child interactions that support children’s social and emotional needs and that specifically encourage adults to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use open-ended questions to engage in frequent conversations with children • be in close physical proximity to children • join children’s activities • use positive comments and encouragement with children • acknowledge and validate children’s emotions • focus interactions on children’s activities and interests 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	
4	<p>The program has a written policy for adult-child interactions that support children’s learning, language, and concept development and that specifically encourage adults to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide feedback on children’s ideas, comments, and work • use repetition and extension • use self-talk and parallel talk • use scaffolding to help children understand concepts, answer questions, or complete activities 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	
5	Adults who interact with children make use of appropriate emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support.	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	

Definitions for LD11

- **Repetition and extension** – repeating what the child has said and adding to the language. For example, a child might point to a dog in a book and say “doggy!” The adult using repetition and extension might respond by saying “Yes, that is a doggy. It has brown fur and a long tail.”
- **Self-talk** is saying what you see or hear or describing what you are doing out loud, for example “I am putting on my coat.”
- **Parallel talk** is saying what the child may be seeing, hearing or doing out loud “You are taking off your socks.”
- **Scaffolding** is supporting a child’s learning by providing enough assistance or information for the child to complete a task. For example, scaffolding with a child who is attempting to complete a puzzle might be done by prompting “It looks like you might be looking for a red piece that is straight on one side.”

Standard LD12: The program facilitates and supports children’s positive social and emotional development.			
Why is this important?	When there are clear guidelines for managing behavior, both children and adults feel less stressed and confused about expectations. It helps ensure that all staff members are on the same page about how to handle behavior management and consistency in responses helps children understand expectations and feel secure. It also helps prevent disruptive behaviors before they arise. When challenges do occur, the policy ensures that they are addressed in a constructive, developmentally appropriate way, preventing escalation and supporting the child’s emotional needs. A written policy allows for clear communication with families about how behavior is managed in the program and strengthens the partnership between the program and the home, ensuring consistent support for children’s social and emotional development across environments.		
Star Level	Indicators of Meeting the Standard	This is already a strong practice	There is room for improvement
3	The program has a written policy on children’s behavior management that encourages the use of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear expectations • proactive/preventative strategies • redirection of misbehavior 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	
4	The program provides direct instruction and support on children’s social skills, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • empathy • self-regulation • problem solving 	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	
5	Adults who interact with children make use of appropriate adult-child interactions that support children’s positive social and emotional development.	7-----6-----5-----4-----3-----2-----1	

Goal Documentation

If you rated any standards as **4 or below** and wish to set a goal for that standard, please check the corresponding box in the table below. You can select multiple goals from the same standard or choose goals from different standards. Next, provide a brief description of the goal(s) you plan to work on for each standard. You don't need to have all the details yet, as you will have the chance to elaborate further when documenting your goals for the Quality Improvement (QI) Cycle.

Example:

Check the box if choosing a goal in the standard	Standards
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	LD2: The program uses a curriculum that supports all children's learning and development.
What goal/s would you like to work on?	<i>I would like to find a curriculum that meets the needs of the 3-year olds that are in my program. I would also like to take training on how to use it.</i>

Check the box if choosing a goal in the standard	Standards
<input type="checkbox"/>	LD1: The program is guided by a written statement of philosophy.
What goal/s would you like to work on?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	LD2: The program uses a curriculum that supports all children's learning and development.
What goal/s would you like to work on?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	LD3: The program provides an appropriate indoor environment that supports children's learning and development and is accessible to all children enrolled in the program.
What goal/s would you like to work on?	

Check the box if choosing a goal in the standard	Standards
<input type="checkbox"/>	LD4: The program provides appropriate indoor furnishings that support children's learning and development.
What goal/s would you like to work on?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	LD5: The program provides appropriate and well-maintained outdoor gross motor area with equipment.
What goal/s would you like to work on?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	LD6: The program uses materials that support children's learning and development.
What goal/s would you like to work on?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	LD7: The program uses planned curriculum activities that support children's learning and development.
What goal/s would you like to work on?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	LD8: The program uses daily routines that support children's learning and development.
What goal/s would you like to work on?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	LD9: The program uses information from screening and assessment to measure children's learning and development in order to make referrals and do program planning.
What goal/s would you like to work on?	

Check the box if choosing a goal in the standard	Standards
<input type="checkbox"/>	LD10: Group size, child-staff ratios, and staffing patterns are appropriate for the children's age and positively affect children's emotional development, cognitive development, safety, and health.
What goal/s would you like to work on?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	LD11: The program facilitates and supports appropriate adult-child interactions in the areas of social and emotional support, organization and management of children's behavior, and instructional support.
What goal/s would you like to work on?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	LD12: The program facilitates and supports children's positive social and emotional development.
What goal/s would you like to work on?	

Next Steps:

If you choose to use any of these goal/s for a **Spark Quality Improvement (QI) Cycle**, you can record them on the **QI Cycle Documentation Form**. This is an on-line form that is emailed to programs after they complete a **Spark Participation Application** and indicate they wish to do a **QI Cycle**. The link to the **Spark Participation Application** can be found at oregonspark.org.

In the **QI Cycle Documentation Form**, you'll find resources to support you in identifying and achieving your goals and a space to outline the steps you'll take to reach them. After 12 months, you will complete a **QI Cycle Reflection Form** to report on your progress and/or achievement of your goals. At that point, you can begin a new **QI Cycle** with additional goals.