



School Age Care Ratios

Office of Licensing & Accreditation





Our Vision and Mission

Strong families – South Dakota's foundation and our future

The South Dakota Department of Social Services

is dedicated to
strengthening families to
foster health, wellbeing,
and independence.

State Seeking Input on School-Age Ratios

Why We're Here

The Office of Licensing and Accreditation is hosting **virtual listening sessions** to gather feedback on the **number of school-age children (ages 5 and older)** allowed per staff member in:

- Licensed child care centers
- Licensed school-age programs

Goal:

To collect input from **parents, providers, and stakeholders** to inform future decisions that support **child safety and quality care** in our state.

Historical Context & Current Data

In **2023**, South Dakota **updated administrative rules:**

- The “school-age” category now begins at **age 5** (previously age 6)
- The **staffing ratio** for these children **did not change** — it remains: **1 staff member for every 15 children (1:15)**.

Current Program Data

- 300 licensed centers
- 120 licensed school age programs
 - 46 of the 120 are operated by a school district



The Role of Staff-to-Child Ratios

- Ratios help ensure children receive safe, attentive, and high-quality care.
- They influence how programs are staffed, funded, and managed.
- Balanced ratios support positive interactions, supervision, and developmentally appropriate activities.

Options for Consideration

1. **Flat ratios increase** for all licensed programs and before and after school programs. Examples include:
 - One adult to every 15 children (current ratio)
 - One adult to every 20 children
 - One adult to every 25 children
2. **Different ratio** for licensed centers and before and after school programs
3. **Graduated ratios by age.** Graduated increase in ratio requirements to align with school age child development. E.g. Ages 5-6 = 1:20; Ages 7-9 = 1:22; Ages 9+ = 1:25.
4. **Different ratio** for before and after school **programs operating in a school building** versus licensed centers or stand-alone before and after school programs.
5. Other considerations

Flat Ratio Increase

Benefits

- ✓ May allow **more families** to enroll in programs
- ✓ Could help programs **serve more children** and remain **financially sustainable**
- ✓ The standard is **simple, clearly understood**, and requires minimal clarification for program implementation.
- ✓ Other benefits....

Challenges

- ⚠ May reduce **individual attention** for each child
- ⚠ A *one size fits all* model may be easier to regulate but risks **undermining quality for younger age children** in a mixed age grouping
- ⚠ May increase **safety concerns**, make it harder for staff to **monitor behaviors**, prevent accidents, and **address emergencies**
- ⚠ Other challenges...

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Share your insights

Higher Ratio School Age Program than a Center

Benefits

✓ **Physical Space:** School-age programs often operate in **schools, gyms, or community centers** with large, open spaces that are easier to supervise from a distance compared to smaller classrooms designed for younger children.

✓ Children experience the **same group size** in classrooms and in school age care

✓ Other benefits....

Challenges

⚠ **Inconsistency** across programs may cause confusion among parents and staff

⚠ May lead to **unequal expectations** of supervision, quality and safety.

⚠ May also lead to costs **disparities** within a community

⚠ Other challenges...

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Share your insights?

Graduated Ratio

Benefits

- ✓ Aligns the ratio with the needs and developmental age grouping
- ✓ Is a common ratio option in other states
- ✓ Flexibility to align activities and scheduled to age.
- ✓ Other benefits....

Challenges

- ⚠ Requires careful scheduling and planning
- ⚠ Increased costs for younger age groups
- ⚠ Potential for mistakes or unintentional noncompliance with ratios.
- ⚠ Other challenges...

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Share your insights?

Different ratio only for before and after school programs operating in a school building

Benefits

- ✓ Children experience the same group size in classrooms and in school age care
- ✓ Reinforces the perception that school age care is as safe and structured as the school day
- ✓ Reduces administrative burden and compliance confusion for providers partnering with schools
- ✓ Other benefits....

Challenges

- ⚠ Only benefits Before and After School Programs operated by a school district
- ⚠ **Inconsistency** across programs may cause confusion among parents and staff
- ⚠ May also lead to costs **disparities** within a community
- ⚠ Other challenges...

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Share your insights?

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What are your recommendations?

Next Steps

Administrative Rule Changes

Timeframe	Step
October	Listening session & gather feedback via survey
November	State analyzing feedback
December	State finalizing draft standards
January 2026	Draft Rules Are Posted
February 2026	Public Hearing
April 2026	Legislative Interim Rules Committee meeting
May 2026	Effective date

Stay Involved – Your Voice Matters

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/TJZKY2N>

We encourage parents, providers, and childcare advocacy groups to join the conversation and help shape the future of child care in South Dakota.

Use the QR code or the survey link to tell us what your recommendations are.





Thank You

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