NSW Department of Education

Zone Excellence Framework

Version 1

The Zone Excellence Framework (ZEF) is an optional self-reflection and planning tool designed to support continuous growth in the safe, inclusive and effective delivery of Zone sport. It is not a rating system. Zones can use it to identify current strengths and priorities for improvement. Movement between levels may occur over time as systems mature, staff change or new opportunities emerge.

Each theme is described across three levels of delivery:

- **Delivering** represents the minimum expectations for a Zone to function effectively and meet department requirements.
- **Sustaining and growing** reflects consistent practice supported by systems, shared processes and collaboration across member schools. Most Zones will aim to operate at this level for many descriptors, demonstrating coordinated and reliable delivery of school sport.
- **Excelling** is aspirational and demonstrates innovation, leadership and a strong culture of inclusion and improvement. Not all Excelling descriptors will be relevant or achievable for every Zone, but some may offer valuable opportunities to enhance outcomes for students and the wider community.

Zones make on-balance judgements across the themes to identify areas for improvement and adjust activities to achieve desired outcomes.

For support with using the ZEF or for assistance with Zone improvement in sport and physical activity, contact the School Sport Unit at schoolsportunit@det.nsw.edu.au.

November 2025

NSW GOVERNMENT

Organisation domain

Zone leadership and administration >

Facilities and resources

Program delivery domain

Teacher qualifications and expertise

Quality sport and physical activity

Partnerships domain

Family engagement

Community

Organisation

In zones that excel, strong governance and coordinated administration underpin the delivery of representative school sport. Leadership teams use reflection, planning and evaluation to ensure systems are efficient, inclusive and responsive to the needs of all students.

Themes	Delivering	Sustaining and growing	Excelling
Zone leadership and administration	All member schools are represented within the Zone and have access to information, meetings and decision-making processes.	Member schools are actively engaged in Zone operations through regular communication, meetings and shared responsibilities such as convening or officiating. At least one school principal is involved in Zone leadership.	Most member school principals play an active role in guiding and supporting Zone operations. Leadership is collaborative and aligned with department priorities, ensuring consistent governance, broad participation and sustainable delivery of Zone sport
	The Zone has a Constitution and By-laws outlining governance, membership, voting rights and meeting procedures. These documents guide decision-making and the delivery of Zone sport.	The Zone regularly reviews its Constitution and By-laws to ensure alignment with department policy, representative sport structures and the evolving needs of member schools.	The Zone's governance documents are reviewed through an evidence-informed process that supports long-term sustainability, continuous improvement and alignment with emerging priorities.
	The Zone holds regular meetings in line with its Constitution and By-laws. Minutes and action items are communicated to member schools through established channels.	Zone meetings follow established meeting protocols, with agendas circulated in advance that include financial and event reports, notices of motion and discussion items. Attendance by school delegates, executive members and principal representatives is consistently high.	The Zone runs highly effective, collegial meetings that build strong relationships across schools. Discussion is inclusive and solutions-focused, with respectful collaboration and shared ownership of decisions that strengthen the Zone's culture and governance.
	The Zone provides clear communication to schools through established channels, including access to a calendar, event information and key contacts.	The Zone maintains up-to-date digital platforms such as a website or shared online space where schools can access calendars, entry details, permission processes and contact information. Communication materials are accurate and timely.	The Zone applies a strategic approach to communication, using a variety of channels to strengthen engagement with schools and the wider community. Communication is inclusive and fosters collaboration and improvement.
	Complaints are handled in accordance with the department's Complaints Handling Procedure.	The Zone communicates clear processes for raising and resolving concerns. Staff and schools manage and escalate issues appropriately, ensuring they are addressed professionally, respectfully and in a timely manner.	The Zone fosters a culture where concerns can be raised safely and respectfully. Complaints are handled with sincerity and used as a source of feedback to strengthen processes, relationships and continuous improvement.

Organisation domain

Zone leadership and administration >

Facilities and resources

Program delivery domain

Teacher qualifications and expertise

Quality sport and physical activity

Partnerships domain

Family engagement

Community

Themes	Delivering	Sustaining and growing	Excelling
Zone leadership and administration (cont.)	Teachers involved in the Zone are aware of opportunities to contribute to the Representative School Sport Pathway (RSSP) at higher levels, including regional, state and national positions.	The Zone encourages and supports teachers to pursue development and leadership opportunities within the RSSP. Staff are provided with information and guidance on progression, accreditation and professional learning.	The Zone fosters a culture of mentoring and succession planning, supporting teachers to advance within the RSSP. Experienced staff mentor colleagues into leadership, coaching, managing and officiating roles, building depth, capability and sustainability across school sport.
	The Zone manages its finances responsibly and in accordance with the department's Professional and ethical standards.	The Zone maintains consistent financial processes with shared oversight and open communication among member schools. An annual financial report is prepared and reviewed at a designated Zone meeting.	The Zone engages an external reviewer or auditor to verify its financial records and processes. Findings are shared with all member schools, demonstrating integrity, strong governance and sustainable delivery of Zone sport.
	The Zone has its own designated finances and can meet its financial commitments, including Association affiliation fees and teacher relief costs to member schools.	The Zone has an annual budget that prioritises equitable participation and supports event delivery. Financial planning allows for contingency and reinvestment in key areas of need.	The Zone builds financial capacity through revenue sources such as affiliation fees, apparel sales and fundraising. Surplus funds are reinvested to enhance student opportunities and teacher development.
	Zone permission notes contain the current 'Permission must have' statements and relevant sport-specific inclusions where required.	The Zone's permission processes are informed by the guidance in the Permission for Representative School Sport Pathway events resource. Practices are consistent across the Zone, fit for local purpose, and support effective risk management and compliance.	The Zone takes an inclusive approach to permission processes. Information is shared digitally and in accessible formats, using plain English and translation support where needed. Materials are regularly reviewed to ensure clarity and continuous improvement.
	Risk management plans are completed and shared for all Zone events in accordance with the department's Risk management process and the Sport and physical activity procedure.	The Zone maintains a consistent approach to risk management plans across all events. Staff use department templates and guidance to identify, assess and control risks while maintaining duty of care and communicating actions effectively.	The Zone promotes a culture of proactive risk management. Staff collaborate to review practice, share learnings from incidents or near misses, anvd model continuous improvement to support safe and accountable delivery.

Notes:

Organisation domain

Zone leadership and administration

Facilities and resources >

Program delivery domain

Teacher qualifications and expertise

Quality sport and physical activity

Partnerships domain

Family engagement

Community

Themes	Delivering	Sustaining and growing	Excelling
Facilities and resources.	The Zone ensures sporting equipment used at events is safe, suitable and maintained in accordance with the Sport and physical activity procedure and Specific sport safety guidelines.	Equipment management systems record maintenance, replacement and usage across Zone events, supporting consistent, safe and efficient use of resources.	The Zone coordinates shared equipment and resources to support Zone events and school sport programs. Stored across member schools, they are maintained, inclusive and sustainable, enhancing participation and quality sport experiences for all students.
	The Zone has access to the required equipment to support participation of students with disability in multi-class events at swimming, cross country and athletics carnivals.	The Zone has access to a range of inclusive and adaptive equipment to support participation in activities beyond multi-class events. Equipment is available to staff for use across a variety of Zone sports and activities.	The Zone responds to emerging needs through innovative and inclusive equipment practices. Resources are shared across schools, promoting participation for all students. Staff are confident and skilled in using adaptive equipment.
	Students representing the Zone wear uniforms that are safe, appropriate and suitable for all activities.	The Zone has systems to manage the coordination and storage of representative uniforms. Processes support consistency, quality and timely access for all teams.	The Zone promotes inclusion and student voice in the design and selection of representative uniforms. Options reflect comfort, equity and participation for all students, fostering a strong sense of pride and identity.
	Zone facilities are suitable for the sport and provide appropriate amenities to ensure safety, accessibility and participant comfort.	A system is in place to ensure Zone facilities are regularly checked, with venue managers informed and maintenance or safety issues addressed promptly. Processes are in place for managing access, storage and handover.	The Zone works to enhance facilities for participants and spectators, seeking opportunities to add features such as clear signage, additional shade, banners and bunting that promote inclusion, enjoyment and school sport spirit.

Notes:

Organisation domain

Zone leadership and administration

Resources

Program delivery domain

Teacher qualifications and expertise >

Quality sport and physical activity

Partnerships domain

Family engagement

Community

Program delivery

In zones that excel, convenors, officials and teachers work together to plan and deliver high-quality representative school sport. Shared expertise, clear processes and ongoing reflection ensure programs are safe, inclusive and focused on student development and wellbeing.

Themes	Delivering	Sustaining and growing	Excelling
Teacher qualifications and expertise	All Zone staff adhere to the Sport and physical activity procedure and Specific sport safety guidelines. Staff involved in activities requiring additional qualifications, such as swimming or rugby league, hold the mandatory training and accreditation.	Staff have sport-specific expertise suited to the level of competition and use this to support students' skill, safety and performance development. The Zone encourages ongoing professional learning and engagement with recognised coaching and officiating pathways.	The Zone shares expertise across schools to strengthen the quality and consistency of sport delivery. Experienced staff mentor others and support succession planning for sport-specific roles, ensuring sustainability and improvement in participation and performance.
	All Zone staff are familiar with the Concussion management tool and the RSSP Suspected concussion follow up care to ensure consistent and appropriate responses to suspected concussion incidents.	All Zone staff have completed the Recognising and responding to concussion for conveners, coaches and managers e-learning module. Staff use this knowledge to make safe decisions and provide appropriate follow up.	The Zone demonstrates proactive leadership in concussion management. Staff promote awareness across member schools, model best practice at events, and share learnings to strengthen confidence and consistency.
	All Zone staff follow the department's Incident notification and response procedures when responding to incidents at events. The senior departmental officer coordinating the event takes on the line manager's responsibilities as outlined in the policy.	The Zone promotes consistent understanding and application of the procedures. Staff are supported in responding to incidents, communication with schools is prompt, and the Zone has its own system for securely storing documentation.	The Zone demonstrates strong leadership in incident management. Staff are confident in their roles, responses are well-coordinated, and reflection and learning from incidents are used to strengthen preparedness and communication across member schools.
	Time during executive, staff, faculty/stage, team and/or other meetings is dedicated to planning weekly sport and physical activity.	Teachers engage in scheduled professional discussions and collaboration to improve the provision of weekly sport and physical activity in their classes, year groups, stages, faculties or for specific student groups.	Local networks of schools (i.e. zones or communities of schools) share expertise, knowledge and resources related to sport and physical activity, supporting planning, implementation and evaluation at both the school and zone level.

Notes:

Organisation domain

Zone leadership and administration

Resources

Program delivery domain

Teacher qualifications and expertise

Quality sport and physical activity >

Partnerships domain

Family engagement

Community

Themes	Delivering	Sustaining and growing	Excelling
Quality sport and physical activity	The Zone provides safe and fair competitive opportunities in line with sport-specific rules and formats. For carnivals, trials and state-wide competitions (knockouts), the relevant PSSA or CHS Handbook is followed to ensure compliance. Any local rules are recorded and shared.	A mix of competitive, non-competitive and modified formats is offered to promote inclusion and engagement for all students, including those with disability. The Zone applies a consistent process for approving, recording and communicating any local rule or format variations.	The Zone leads innovative approaches to competition, exploring emerging sports and locally significant activities that broaden participation. Rules and formats are reviewed regularly to ensure quality, inclusivity and meaningful opportunities for all students.
	Sports and events for students with disability that require formal classification for progression have a clear process for checking eligibility. Any calculations or results are verified to ensure the integrity of the event and respect for all athletes.	The Zone supports inclusion by ensuring classification and eligibility processes are well understood by staff and clearly communicated to schools and families. Adjustments and modified opportunities are provided so students with disability can participate meaningfully at all levels of competition.	The Zone provides local opportunities in inclusive sports such as boccia, goalball and wheelchair sports, enabling students with disability to compete exclusively or alongside able-bodied peers. These events model best practice in inclusion, with expertise and resources shared to build staff capability and confidence.
	The Zone ensures appropriately experienced and qualified officials are appointed for all competitive games and events.	The Zone engages and supports students, teachers, community members and accredited officials to ensure consistent, high-quality officiating across all events.	The Zone implements a structured approach to developing student officials. Students are mentored and provided with authentic opportunities to officiate, supporting the development of their potential as officials.

Notes:

Organisation domain

Zone leadership and administration

Resources

Program delivery domain

Teacher qualifications and expertise

Quality sport and physical activity

Partnerships domain

Family engagement >

Community

Partnerships

In zones that excel, partnerships with schools, families and community organisations strengthen the reach and quality of representative school sport. Collaboration is purposeful and strategic, promoting shared responsibility for inclusive, safe and high-quality opportunities.

Themes	Delivering	Sustaining and growing	Excelling
Family engagement	The Zone acknowledges student achievement, effort and sportsmanship through basic forms of recognition such as event announcements or certificates.	The Zone promotes student participation and achievement through its website, social media and other appropriate communication channels, and informs schools so recognition can also be shared through school communication platforms.	The Zone has its own awards initiative to celebrate student achievement, effort and sportsmanship. Awards may be presented at a Zone ceremony, delivered virtually, or shared with schools to present locally, fostering Zone spirit and local connections.
	The Zone has a process in place to ensure all parent and community volunteers are screened by their member school in accordance with the department's Screening requirements for volunteers.	The Zone promotes consistent and effective volunteer management across schools. Expectations are clear, and schools are supported to engage volunteers who enhance the quality and inclusivity of events.	The Zone demonstrates a culture of appreciation and development for volunteers. Schools share practices for recruitment, briefing and recognition, building a supportive community that values safe, inclusive and high-quality delivery.
	The Zone has clear expectations for behaviour by families and spectators at all events.	The Zone regularly communicates these expectations through established channels. Staff and schools consistently reinforce positive behaviour to promote respectful and supportive environments.	Families are consulted on behaviour expectations and show leadership in upholding them. Their example fosters safe, inclusive and respectful environments that reflect the Zone's positive sport culture.

Notes:

Organisation domain

Zone leadership and administration

Resources

Program delivery domain

Teacher qualifications and expertise

Quality sport and physical activity

Partnerships domain

Family engagement

Community >

Themes	Delivering	Sustaining and growing	Excelling
Community	The Zone books venues appropriately through local councils or facility providers to ensure access, avoid conflicts and maintain positive relationships.	The Zone takes a coordinated approach with councils and facility providers, maintaining regular communication to plan events, resolve issues and support shared use. Partnerships promote access and inclusive participation for students across schools.	The Zone maintains strong, strategic partnerships with councils and community sport providers to ensure long-term access to quality facilities. Representatives contribute to local sport advisory groups, advocate for development and collaborate on initiatives that promote participation.
	The Zone engages with community, state and national sporting organisations as needed to support the delivery of Zone sport. This may include accessing facilities, equipment or development officer support for events	The Zone takes a coordinated approach to working in partnership with sporting organisations and development officers to share expertise, strengthen the delivery of Zone sport, and promote connections with community sport.	The Zone leads collaborative initiatives with community, state and national sporting bodies to extend pathways for high-potential students. Partnerships provide enrichment and talent development opportunities that foster excellence.
	Any Zone sponsorship or in-kind support must comply with the department's Commercial arrangements, sponsorship and donations procedures.	The Zone takes a coordinated approach to sponsorship and in-kind support. Decisions, including choosing not to pursue sponsorship, are made collectively, guided by educational benefit, student wellbeing and equity across schools, and reviewed regularly.	The Zone adopts a strategic approach to sponsorship and partnerships. Agreements are values-driven and contribute to the sustainable delivery of inclusive, high-quality sport opportunities for students.

Notes: