



FAQs: Observations Using the 3s

How long will observations last and is there still an interview?

Observations using the 3rd editions continue for 3 hours. If for some reason an assessor must step away from the group for a few minutes, that time will be added to the end of the observation to make sure there is a full 3 hours of observation. The 3rd editions are scored completely based on the observation and there is no interview with the teacher or provider afterwards.

The SACERS-U observation length continues to be the same (at least 2 hours for afterschool, at least 3 hours for full-day programming) and the interview process is also the same.

Which scale will be used in classroom for 2-year-olds?

The ITERS-3 will be used for classrooms where most children are two years of age. This is an important change with the updated editions.

Which scale is used to assess a small center in a residence?

In North Carolina, the FCCERS-3 is used to assess programs with a FCCH license and those classified as small centers in a residence.

In a center, how many assessments will be needed, and which classrooms will be assessed?

There are no changes to the number of assessments that will occur for a program. To determine how many assessments are needed, first consider the age ranges of the different classrooms and which rating scale they fit into (e.g., infant, toddler, and twos rooms use the ITERS-3, preschool classrooms for children 3-5 years use the ECERS-3). Then consider the total number of classrooms in operation. Use the steps below:

1. At least one assessment will be needed per applicable scale. If there is only one classroom that fits into the age guideline of a rating scale, then that classroom will be assessed.
 - For example, there is one toddler room, one preschool room, and one afterschool group. An ITERS-3, ECERS-3, and SACERS-U assessment will be needed, so each room will be assessed.
2. When there are several classrooms, at least 1/3 of the overall number of classrooms must be assessed, in addition to representing each applicable rating scale.
 - For example, if a facility has 1-4 preschool classrooms, then 1 ECERS-3 assessment is needed. However, if there are 5, 6, or 7 preschool classrooms then 2 ECERS-3 assessments are needed.
3. If additional assessments are needed to reach 1/3 of the total classrooms, additional assessment(s) will be needed starting with the age/scale group that has the most classrooms. When 1/3 of that age group has been represented, additional assessment(s) will be added for the next largest age/scale group, as needed, until the total number needed is reached.

- For example, there are 5 infant, toddler, and twos classrooms and 9 preschool classrooms. This means that 5 assessments are needed in total. These will include 3 ECERS-3 and 2 ITERS-3 assessments.
4. If there are equal numbers of classrooms in age/scale groups and an additional assessment is needed based on the total number of classrooms, the additional assessment and random selection will occur for the rating scale that assesses a younger age group.
- For example, there are 5 infant, toddler, and twos classrooms and 5 preschool classrooms. This means that 3 assessments are needed in total. These will include 1 ECERS-3 and 2 ITERS-3 assessments.

When there are multiple classrooms, the classroom(s) to be assessed will be selected on the day of the assessment by the assessor(s). All classrooms that are in operation will be included in the random selection process.

In a FCCH, how many assessments will be needed?

One FCCERS-3 assessment will be completed in a FCCH, and this includes small centers in a residence. There will be only one assessment, even if there are completely separate groups and different providers. The assessor will find out how many children are in each group. Typically, the group with the larger number of children will be observed and if groups have equal numbers, the assessor will go with the group led by the primary provider.

Are other supplementary documents needed

There are several standard documents that you should be aware of, and your consultant may have other documents related to the program standards portion of the NC Star Rated License. The supplementary documents for NCRLAP are available under the "Resources" menu and include:

1. NC Additional Notes for each rating scale
2. NCRLAP's Requirements for Gross Motor Space and Equipment
3. Meal Guidelines: Ages 1 - 12 and/or Infant Meal Guidelines: Ages 0 to 11 months

What to expect on the day of the assessment

Upon arrival of the assessor:

The assessor will arrive when children are arriving. Before the observation begins, the assessor will typically greet the owner/director and provide an overview of the day. In child care centers that have multiple classrooms for one or more of the rating scales, classrooms to be assessed are chosen on the day of each assessment using random selection and the assessor will also verify the usual morning schedule with the classroom teacher to help determine the start time for the observation.

The observation:

The observation will continue for 3 hours when using the ITERS-3, ECERS-3, and FCCERS-3. For after school assessments using the SACERS-U, the observation will continue for at least 2 hours but may last longer and during assessments that occur on full days such as during the summer a

3-hour observation occurs. During the visit, the assessor will observe and take notes on a wide variety of interactions, activities, and materials as required by the rating scale. For example, the assessor will observe indoor and outdoor spaces for play and routine care, materials used by the children, health practices, staff/child interactions, and so on. Assessors may also take photographs of the indoor/outdoor spaces and materials as part of their documentation. This generally occurs when children are not using the space, and children will not be photographed.

To ensure a valid assessment, the typical daily schedule should be followed and only the usual classroom staff should be present. Additionally, to minimize their impact on the child care environment assessors limit interactions with the children or staff during the assessment and will stay in the “background” as much as possible when conducting the observation.

Interview with staff:

The 3rd Editions of the Environment Rating Scales do not require an interview with the teacher or provider, so after the observation is completed, the assessor may confirm a few details if needed, stay for a short time to finish looking at materials or to visit another space used by the group if needed, but otherwise will leave shortly after the observation ends. However, an interview will still occur for SACERS-U assessments with the teacher. For after school assessments, assessors may conduct an interview before children arrive as well as a post-assessment interview.

How many children need to be present

This number has not changed, so more than half of the children enrolled must be present for more than half of the observation time for an assessment to be considered valid. If less than half of the children are present, the assessor will ask the teacher, provider, and/or director whether more children are expected to arrive. If the observation reaches the halfway point, based on the 3-hour observation) and too few children are present, the assessment will need to be completed on another day. In most circumstances the next assessment attempt will occur within the program’s scheduling window; NCRLAP schedulers will contact the program if their window needs to be extended for some reason.

- For example, 10 children are enrolled so 6 must be present for more than half of the observation time. Or if 9 children are enrolled, then 5 must be present for more than half of the observation time.
- The smallest number of children that can be assessed is two and if only two children are enrolled, then both must be present during the assessment. If only one child is enrolled, an assessment will not occur.

I know that there are more types of language and use of materials that the 3rd Editions focus on; how should I change my schedule to accommodate this.

It is always good to review what happens daily, across the entire time that children are there to make sure the program offerings are enriching and appropriate. For the usual 3s morning observation time period, in most programs there is already routine care such as snack, lunch, and diapering/toileting breaks along with indoor and outdoor free play, transitions, and teacher planned activities including group times when offered. All of these aspects contribute to a 3s observation, so

simply verifying what occurs daily during the time of a morning assessment should be sufficient. Becoming familiar with the expectations for different types of interactions and whether these are already a part of daily events or considering how often children playing in various areas are spoken with is helpful self-reflection. Ideally, small changes can be made gradually with consistency to create habits that become second-nature.

Depending on the day, the number of teachers and children, and the focus of children's play, every single center or area may not be used during an assessment and every single interaction may not occur, and that is fine. In quality environments, many of the interactions are likely to occur. The 7 point scoring structure where a 5 equates to good or developmentally practice means that there is room for lower scores, when there are also many higher scores.

Will each item be scored on the 3s?

Typically, all items on each of the 3rd Editions are scored. In a few cases there are items that may not be applicable based on a program choice, or ages of children enrolled. For example, there is a technology item in each scale, but if this is not part of the program the item is not scored. Likewise, in an infant room art is not required, so it will not be scored if children do not do art activities. Likewise, group activities are not required for any age group, so if they are not used, this item would be viewed as non-applicable.

What should I expect after the 3s assessment?

This process remains the same. For each observation, the assessor will complete a detailed report that identifies the program's strengths and areas that could be improved as determined by the Environment Rating Scale assessment. The completed report is sent to the DCDEE Child Care Consultant who contacts the owner/provider to review and discuss.

The summary report is designed to provide constructive feedback so child care providers and directors may enhance the program's quality through developing a plan of action. This may include brainstorming with staff, training, and technical assistance from local or regional resources, purchasing equipment, rearranging rooms, or reviewing and revising policies, procedures, and daily practices.

What if I have questions or disagree with assessment results?

It is common for child care providers to have questions about their assessment report(s). For DCDEE assessments, we encourage you to share your questions with your child care consultant. Then you and/or your child care consultant may decide to call our office with any questions; your call will be forwarded to the appropriate staff person to address your questions. Occasionally, child care providers raise objections or disagree with some aspect of the report. In this case they may choose to complete the grievance process and send their concerns about the assessment results in writing. Information about the grievance process can be found on our "Resources" list and the same process applies to assessments using the 3rd editions.

For Outreach Assessments, there is not a formal grievance process because these are not official assessments, but you will have a chance to talk to an assessor and address any questions you would like to bring up.

A program has NC Pre-K, Head Start, and some private-pay preschool classrooms. Is there a different assessment process for programs that may have different operating hours or requirements?

No, the ECERS-3 assessment is the same regardless of what type of classroom is assessed. The observation length is always 3 hours and scores are assigned based on the observation.

How should I prepare for a 3s assessment?

You are starting strong by reviewing documents such as this one! The best way to prepare is to become familiar with the various items and indicators. There are many similarities, so everything you already know about the Revised Editions will serve you well. There are also new details and requirements that will further elevate quality practices when caring for groups of children. We have various tips for learning more about the 3rd editions on our ["Get Ready for the 3s"](#) webpage.

It is also helpful to let the children and parents know there will be a visitor. For the children, this can help them feel more comfortable during the assessment. Often teachers are concerned that children act differently when there are visitors in the classroom. In our experience, children are often interested in new faces initially, but when their familiar adults can go about their day as typical, children settle down very quickly. Since assessors do not interact with them, most children quickly lose interest. Teachers and providers should be aware of their own reactions to the stress/pressure of an assessment and make sure to avoid changing their own behaviors or expectations for children when there is an assessor present. Children tend to react more-so to changes in their teacher's actions or expectations, than they do to the presence of a new adult, because teachers are the adults they know and trust.