

Self-Study: Guidance for Administrators



What is the structured self-study process?

This document offers information that administrators can use as talking points with teachers to guide them through the self-study process for Pathway 1. Additionally, specific information and suggestions are provided for each of the steps to consider and use in a manner that best suits your program. This process should be completed before your DCDEE Child Care Consultant completes the Rated License Assessment visit, prior to requesting ERS assessments.

Structured self-study is a collaborative review of current practices by teachers and administrators. It includes reflection and planning to improve quality for children and families. It is required for Pathway 1: Program Assessment for North Carolina's Star Rated License and also supports individual and program-level CQI plans.

Using the Environment Rating Scales, programs assess how their practices align with developmentally appropriate standards. This helps identify strengths and areas for improvement, guiding goal setting. When used consistently, the process supports meaningful, lasting quality improvements.

An administrator's role

An administrator leads and supports staff through the various stages of the Structured Self-Study process. The main roles which are described in more detail in the following pages include:

- Introduction to the Process
- Check-In and Support
- Documentation and Verification

Each stage should foster staff collaboration and promote intentional, continuous improvement.

Getting started

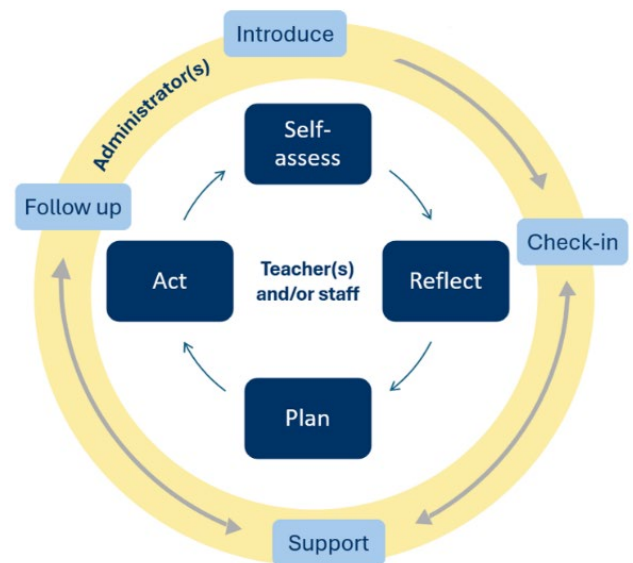
To get staff started with self-study, begin by explaining its purpose and steps. This helps them stay focused and engaged. Then, gather the needed tools and resources to guide the process. Have staff review the appropriate assessment tool—ITERS-3, ECERS-3, or SACERS-U—and highlight any items needing clarification.

Give staff time to reflect, ask questions, and consider how their classroom supports children and families each day. The structured self-study must be done over at least three consecutive months and include a formal self-assessment and other required steps. Free helpful videos and materials about each of the required steps are available anytime at ncrlap.org.

Need help? Connect with us:

Email: ncrlap@uncg.edu

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Introduction to Process



Share information about the process, steps, and expectations, including the timeline, with all teaching staff. Suggestions are provided below. When the introduction is done, document the date(s) on the verification form.

Make sure to include:

1. An overview of the process, why it is needed, and the timeline. This occurs before teachers can begin to self-assess as part of the first step. We suggest reviewing the Getting Started with Self Study for Teachers doc w/all participating staff and making sure they understand the four steps that will occur.
2. How teachers can access the **Environment Rating Scale (ERS)** that corresponds to the age group of children served in their classroom. It is very important to refer to the scale when completing any of the worksheets or looking at a completed assessment report from an Outreach Assessment. The current versions are the third editions, spiral bound along the top, for the ITERS-3 and ECERS-3, and the spiral bound (on the side) updated edition for the SACERS-U. The page numbers provided in the worksheets refer to those editions specifically.
 - a. For rated license observations, the scale used in each classroom will depend on the ages of most of the children enrolled on the day the assessor visits. Remember: ITERS-3 is used for children birth through 35 months, and ECERS-3 is used for children ages 3 to 5 years. This can be tricky in classrooms that include both two- and three-year-olds. For these mixed-age classrooms, we recommend using the self-assessment worksheet that corresponds to the children's ages during the anticipated timeframe of the rated license observations.
 - b. If there are questions about which Rating Scale a classroom should use, please contact NCRLAP.
3. For the first step all lead teachers will complete one of the required self-assessment options; however, it is good to encourage teachers to work together during this process to share ideas and build consistency. This could be with other classroom staff or other teachers who work with the same/similar age groups in a different classroom. The total time to complete one worksheet is estimated to be around 2-4 hours. The required documents (either Thinking More About Language OR Thinking More about Activities OR Self-Assessment: Using an Outreach Assessment Report form) can be found on our website and must be completed for **each** classroom.
4. Other helpful information at ncrlap.org:
 - Videos about each step of the process
 - Worksheets to guide the self-study process
 - Free webinars for each of the ERS (earn 1 contact hour each)
 - Additional resources about various topics related to each of the ERS.



Check-in and Support



Some teachers will move through the self-study cycle quickly, while others may need longer. The pacing and expectations can vary based on your knowledge of teachers who may need to get started quickly or may need more encouragement to finish on time.

Administrators can provide much guidance during the self-study. Being available to help teachers (or other staff) answer questions is key. During the 1st step when they complete one of the worksheets and the 2nd step when teachers reflect on what was learned from self-assessing, frequent check-ins are likely to be helpful. Staff may need specific resources or have questions about the process and the next steps.

As teachers move into the 3rd step of the self-study cycle, which is the planning process, they are likely going to need additional support. Talking with them about their reflection and plan of action to ensure that their goals align with program and/or individual focused goals will be important. Then during the 4th step of taking action, checking in to see what is working, has been noticed, or may need some adjustments will be very helpful.

Key reminders throughout the cycle for teachers:

- Refer to the appropriate scale with the most recent version of the NC Additional Notes while completing the worksheet of their choice.
- The entire process is not about a “right answer” but rather an honest reflection of what happens every day. For the worksheets specifically, the answers provided will not be evaluated by NCRLAP.
- Self-study is a cycle and a process that is designed to help identify and meet goals for the classroom, while providing the best quality care for the children and families served.

Key points for administrators to consider:

- Teachers will need time outside of the classroom to work and focus on the first step to complete a worksheet. Working in smaller increments of time, rather than trying to complete a worksheet all at once is recommended. This also allows time to think about the topics between work sessions. The reflection and planning steps will also benefit from focused thought, separate from child care responsibilities.
- It may be helpful to have more experienced teachers work with less experienced teaching staff for mentoring purposes throughout the entire self-study process.
- Step 1 and 2: Check in with teachers early on about their initial step. Discuss with them what they found in the self-assessment step and determine if it aligns with the program’s CQI plans. Continue to offer guidance as they move into the next steps: Reflection, Planning, and Action.
- Step 3: Since this is a new process, staff are likely to need help developing a SMART goal. Become familiar with what a SMART goal is and why it’s an important part of the self-study cycle.
- Step 3 and 4: Provide support for their plans including resources and materials.
- Step 4: As the plans are being implemented, check to see that everything is on track based on the SMART goal(s) or if something needs modification.

Follow Up and Verification



To complete the self-study process, administrators meet with teachers to review the completed self-assessment document(s) and reflect on the overall self-study cycle. These conversations help ensure that the insights gained through self-study lead to meaningful, ongoing improvements in classroom quality. Remember the goals are assessing practices, planning improvements, acting, and evaluating outcomes.

Discussions can include:

- Understanding of how the action step went, what was successful and anything that should be modified for the future (or something like this)
- Review of the Thinking More About worksheet OR Self-Assessment Using an Outreach Assessment Report form. These discussions should include noticing areas of strength and areas that may need improvement.
- An opportunity for teachers and administrators to ask questions of one another.
- A review of requirements in the relevant ERS.
- Making note of questions to ask your Child Care Consultant, TA, NCRLAP, etc.
- Initial planning for another self-study cycle or goal setting for future improvements. Thinking about ways to include this as part of CQI plans.

Questions to guide discussions:

- What was most valuable about participating in the self-study process?
- Were there any challenges or barriers that came up?
- What specific changes were made in the classroom as a result of the self-study?
- Have you noticed any differences in children's engagement or behavior?
- How can we maintain momentum and continue improving quality over time?

To complete the self-study process for your program:

- Gather all self-assessment documents from the 1st step and make sure they are fully completed with individualized responses for each classroom (as part of this process, your DCDEE Child Care consultant will review these during their visit prior to requesting the ERS assessments).
- Have discussions with teachers in each classroom about what they identify as their strengths, areas for growth, and the SMART goal they developed. You will also want to talk about what they implemented and noticed from the action step; basically, what will continue and ideas for any future actions.
- Complete and sign the Self-Study Verification Form that will be collected during your consultant's visit.

If there are any questions related to the completion of the Self-Study, please contact NCRLAP toll-free at (866) 362-7527.

Once the process is complete, you might choose to revisit the worksheets with new staff or use different ones to promote continued reflection on daily practices. All worksheets and forms are available anytime at ncrlap.org. Additional Thinking More worksheets for other subscales are also available and may be useful. The reflective habits built through the 4-step process can support long-term growth by helping staff learn from past experiences and set goals for future improvement.