

Getting to Know: School-Age Program Quality Assessment With Supplemental Scales



Stand-alone school-age programs may now choose to use the School-Age Program Quality Assessment with Supplemental Scales for Activity Structure, Homework Help, Recreation Time, Transitions, and Departure (SAPQA), in place of SACERS-U for Pathway 1 Program Assessment. This program assessment tool is available for school-age programs not located in a child care center or a family child care home.

The SAPQA is a research-based tool used to assess the quality of school-age programs serving children in grades K-6. It focuses on staff practices, program experiences, and interactions that support children's learning, engagement, and development. Developed by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, the SAPQA is used nationwide to assess program quality, guide continuous improvement, support staff coaching and professional development, and strengthen after-school and out-of-school time programs.

Scoring

Scores are based only on what is observed during the assessment, along with any follow-up questions asked at the end of the observation. Assessors take detailed notes throughout the observation and use SAPQA guidelines to objectively determine how each indicator is scored.

Indicators are scored on a 5-point scale:

- 1 = Low Quality:** Practices are rarely or not observed.
- 2 = Moderate Quality:** Some quality practices are observed, but not consistently.
- 3 = High Quality:** Quality practices are consistently observed throughout the program.

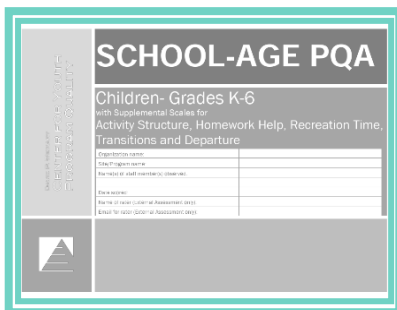
Highlights

A strong emphasis is placed on positive staff-child interactions while fostering a sense of belonging.

Children have opportunities to participate in goal setting, planning, leadership, and meaningful decision-making throughout the day.

Designed to measure developmental experiences and relationship-based practices.

Getting Started



- ✔ Ensure you have the correct version of the tool. North Carolina is using The School-Age PQA with Supplemental Scales. Complete [this form](#) to download a free copy of the tool.
- ✔ Read through the tool and become familiar with the scoring structure, each of the five domains, scale descriptions, and indicator requirements. Pay close attention to examples and guidance that clarify expectations for quality practices.
- ✔ Consider the “why” behind the requirements to better understand how they support children’s engagement, independence, relationships, and learning experiences.
- ✔ Spend time reflecting on current practices related to engagement between staff and children, activities provided, and children’s ownership within the program.

Using the School-Age PQA to Build Upon Current Practices



The left-hand side of this page describes the domains found in the SAPQA, while the right-hand side provides reflection questions to help think about current practices as they relate to the different domains. The reflection questions help guide thinking about the various domains and scale items within each domain. Upon reviewing the various scales and items within the scales, other, more specific questions for reflection will likely emerge.

The Safe Environment domain looks at how well the program provides a physically and emotionally safe, healthy, and supportive environment. Staff promote positive interactions, maintain a clean and hazard-free environment, and provide healthy food and drinks to support children's well-being.

- What procedures and resources are in place to support safety?
- How are the space, materials, and furniture arranged to support activities and meet the diverse needs of children?
- What healthy food and snack components are served to children?

The Supportive Environment domain focuses on how staff create a positive, engaging, and organized setting that supports children's participation, learning, and confidence. The physical environment is flexible, organized, and designed to reflect children's needs, interests, and choices.

- How are activities planned and implemented to keep children engaged and support smooth transitions?
- In what ways do staff support children in developing new skills through guidance, practice, and meaningful experiences?
- How do staff encourage and use positive reinforcement to build children's confidence and motivation?

In the Interaction domain, the focus is on the quality of relationships and social interactions within the program, including how children connect with peers and adults while building social-emotional skills. Children are supported in understanding and managing their emotions, and in resolving conflicts in appropriate ways.

- In what ways do children experience a sense of belonging and inclusion within the program?
- Are children given opportunities to take on leadership roles and responsibilities during program activities?
- How do staff build positive, respectful, and meaningful relationships with children?

The Engagement domain focuses on how programs involve children in their learning and experiences. It encourages decision-making, independence, and confidence by giving children meaningful choices and opportunities to reflect, share ideas, and make connections in their learning.

- How are children encouraged to make plans, set goals, and think ahead about their activities and experiences?
- To what extent are children supported in developing independence, using their voice, making decisions, and taking on responsibilities within the program?

The Extended Observation Scales focus on the flow and variety of the program day. They ensure children experience a balanced mix of engaging activities that support learning, exploration, participation, active play, healthy development, and overall wellness.

- In what ways do staff support children with homework and build their confidence in learning?
- What strategies are used to ensure that transitions are smooth, organized, and efficient?
- How is the end of the day structured to ensure a safe and supportive experience for children and families?