

Thinking More About:

School-Age Program Quality Assessment

Purpose: This document addresses many of the requirements found within the School Age Program Quality Assessment tool (SAPQA). It is important to review each domain and scale in its entirety to ensure a full understanding of the expectations. Reflecting on the questions will help build familiarity with the assessment tool while providing opportunities to examine current practices, policies, and program experiences.

Preparation: Refer to the specific domains, scales, and items when completing the questions. As you work through the questions, it may be helpful to have access to relevant program policies, procedures, and documentation related to health, safety, supervision, and emergency preparedness. Because there are many questions to consider, completing this reflection will likely require multiple review and discussion sessions.

The School-Age Program Quality Assessment (SAPQA) supports programs in examining the practices and conditions that promote positive experiences and outcomes for children. It is organized into specific domains, each focused on a different aspect of program quality. Together, these domains encourage reflection on how program environments, policies, procedures, daily routines, and staff interactions create a safe, respectful, and engaging setting. As you work through the questions in this document, reflect on the experiences of children, families, and staff within your program. Think about how daily routines, program spaces, and interactions work together to support learning, exploration, and growth. This process is intended to promote continuous quality improvement by highlighting program strengths and identifying opportunities for enhancement.

Tips:

- If you are unsure how to answer a question, review the related domain, scale, and item. Reading the full item and its indicators can provide additional context and help clarify the intent of the question.
- Answer the questions based on what typically occurs in your program. The goal is not to identify "correct" responses, but to increase awareness of current practices and how they support children's experiences.
- Using this worksheet over time can help you monitor practices, identify areas of strength, and recognize opportunities for improvement. The information gathered can support ongoing quality enhancement efforts and program planning.
- It is important to check in with an administrator while completing this worksheet as there are some aspects and questions, they may be better able to respond to or could need to review during the self-study process.
- Completing the questions with colleagues, administrators, coaches, or technical assistance providers can encourage meaningful discussion and provide different perspectives on program practices. These conversations often lead to a deeper understanding of how children experience the program environment.

Date(s) Completed: _____ Group name/age group: _____

Worksheet completed by: _____

Safe Environment

Emotional Safety

Overall, is the emotional climate of the program that is experienced by the children positive, neutral, or negative? _____

When considering children’s experiences while they are at the program, what intentional practices help create a welcoming, supportive, and positive environment? _____

Are positive communication, empathy, and respect modeled for children? **Y / N** if yes, how? _____

Do staff help mediate or diffuse behaviors such as joking, teasing, or rough housing that may be playful for some children involved but negative for others? **Y / N**

What practices are in place to help children understand that their words and actions have an impact on others? _____

If children use slurs or express bias, how is this handled? _____

Healthy Environment

List any health and safety hazards that are present in your environment: _____

What steps are taken to maintain sanitary conditions? _____

Can ventilation and lighting be controlled such that the temperature is comfortable, and lighting is adequate for all activities? **Y / N** If not, what can be done to make changes? _____

Emergency Preparedness

Check all that are accessible at the program and use the line to describe where they are located:

- ☐ Emergency procedures _____
- ☐ Fire Extinguisher _____
- ☐ First aid kit _____

Does the program offer any activities that require special safety/emergency equipment? **Y / N** What equipment is provided? _____

Is access to the indoor and outdoor spaces supervised or secured during program hours? **Y / N** If Yes, describe how for each location? _____

Accommodating Environment

Does the overall space for indoor activities allow for children and staff to move around freely? **Y / N**

Are there areas that are more crowded than others? **Y / N** If yes, describe these areas: _____

Do the space and furnishings meet the needs for all activities offered? (Ex. Larger space for whole group activities) **Y / N** If not, what improvements could be made? _____

What types of furnishings do the children use for activities while in the program? _____

Are there enough comfortable furnishings for each child? **Y / N** Are they appropriately sized? **Y / N**
Can the physical environment be modified for different types of activities? **Y / N** How so? _____

Nourishment

Is water easily accessible to children in the spaces used by the program? **Y / N** Where is it located? _____

What types of food and drinks are available for children for meals or snacks? **Y / N** _____

Do they meet USDA guidelines? **Y / N** If not, what improvements could be made?

How often are foods or beverages that are high in added sugars, saturated fats, or sodium served?

Daily / weekly / very rarely

If daily or weekly, are there any options for healthier choices? **Y / N** What might these be?

Is there additional food or drink if children want seconds? **Y / N**

Supportive Environment

Warm Welcome

Describe how children are welcomed when they arrive each day: _____

Do these practices ensure every child feels acknowledged and valued as they enter the program? **Y / N**

How are warmth and respect demonstrated throughout the children's day? _____

What non-verbal behaviors (smiles, eye contact, gestures, body language) support a welcoming environment? _____

Session Flow

Do activities consistently begin and end within 10 minutes of the scheduled times? **Y / N**

Are materials prepared before the activities begin? **Y / N**

Are there enough materials so every child can begin participating immediately? **Y / N** If not, what challenges occur? _____

How are expectations explained so children understand before they begin an activity? **Y / N**

How do you know the length of activities is appropriate for children's interests and abilities? _____

If activities take more or less time than expected, can adjustments be made to the schedule? **Y / N** If yes, give a recent example of when more or less time was needed for a planned activity and what happened: _____

Active Engagement

Describe a recent activity that actively engaged the children: _____

What strategies were used to ensure each child was interested or engaged? _____

In general, do the daily activities allow children to engage with various materials and ideas? **Y / N**

How are children given opportunities to explain their thinking or share their thoughts with others during activities? _____

During activities, how are children encouraged to make connections between learning new topics and their own experiences? _____

Skill Building

How are children encouraged to build and improve skills during activities (check all that apply):

- ☐ Children are told about the specific skills they will be focusing on during activities.
- ☐ Staff give support as children try new skills.
- ☐ Children are encouraged to try hard.
- ☐ Staff model the skills for children.
- ☐ More difficult tasks are broken down into different steps

Are there other ways that children's skill building is encouraged? **Y / N** Please describe: _____

How is instruction adjusted to meet the different skill levels of children? _____

Describe factors that are used to determine whether children are ready for more challenging skills:

Encouragement

How are children recognized for their effort, persistence, and improvement, beyond only successful outcomes? _____

Describe feedback recently given to a child during an activity: _____

Is this feedback non-evaluative (e.g. does not pass judgement, factual, confirm what children are doing)? **Y / N** How so? _____

What strategies are used to encourage children who become frustrated or discouraged? _____

How are open-ended questions used to encourage children's engagement and idea sharing? (Provide examples from a recent activity): _____

Child-Centered Space

List interest areas available to children in the top boxes and materials in each area below:

Are there enough materials in each area? **Y / N**

Are most of the materials open-ended? **Y / N**

Consider the schedule, what time periods of the day allow children to choose activities? _____

Does this meet the 30-minute requirement? **Y / N**

Are the materials organized so children can easily access and return them? **Y / N** If yes, what systems are in place to ensure this occurs: _____

Categorize displayed materials:

Teacher Directed/Created	Child Chosen/Created

Are there primarily teacher-selected displays, child created displays, or a mixture of both? _____

How do children contribute to what is displayed in the environment? _____

Interaction

Managing Feelings

How are children's feelings recognized and acknowledged when they are upset, frustrated, angry, or disappointed? _____

Do all children involved in conflict have an opportunity to express their feelings? **Y / N**

How is this done? _____

How often are questions asked such as, "What happened?" or "Can you tell me more about why you feel that way?" _____

How are respectful and appropriate emotional responses to conflicts modeled consistently for children? _____

How can children be guided to learn from conflicts and develop skills to prevent similar situations in the future? _____

Are they asked for their ideas about solutions and then encouraged to try out at least one idea? **Y / N**

Describe one recent conflict that was handled well and what made it successful? _____

What is one recent conflict that could have been handled differently if given another opportunity? _____

Belonging

In what ways are intentional opportunities created for children to learn about each other? _____

What strategies are used to help children include others in play and conversations? _____

If a child excluded another child how would this be handled? _____

What routines, traditions, or shared experiences contribute to a sense of belonging in the environment? _____

Describe intentional opportunities that are provided for children to work or play in small groups: _____

How are positive interactions and cooperation within these small groups encouraged? _____

Think about a child who appears highly connected to the group. What contributes to their sense of belonging? _____

Think about a child who may be quieter or less connected. What support could help them identify more with the program? _____

School-Age Leadership

How and when are children helped to use group process skills (e.g., work on tasks with other children, contribute to group ideas or plans)? _____

Do they collaborate to solve problems? **Y / N**

Do they ask for help or help others in the group? **Y / N**

In what ways are children intentionally encouraged to explain or demonstrate tasks, strategies, or ideas to each other? _____

How often do children have opportunities to lead activities, discussions, or projects? _____

Think about a recent activity. How did children demonstrate leadership during the experience? _____

What opportunities are intentionally created for children to lead, teach, or support a group of other children? _____

Interaction with Adults

Consider the interactions that occur with children throughout the day:

Are staff consistently next to children and at their level during activities and conversations? **Y / N**

When children are engaged in activities, what are staff doing? _____

Do staff move to various areas to interact with all the children? **Y / N**

Do staff primarily watch or comment on activities or do they engage in the activity with children?

Does every child receive positive attention during the day? **Y / N** If no, list strategies to ensure these interactions happen for everyone:

Think about a recent interaction with a child that had a positive impact and briefly describe it. What made it successful?

Engagement

School-Age Planning

In what ways do children have opportunities to make plans about how they will complete activities rather than simply following a pre-determined plan?

What strategies are used to promote children's planning each day?

Are children encouraged to share their plans? **Y / N** If yes, how does this occur?

School-Age Choice

Do most activities allow children to make choices and direct their own engagement or play? **Y / N**

During planned activities, can children make authentic, rather than only basic choices such as selecting a paint color, about how they will complete the activity? **Y / N** Give an example:

Are some planned activities open-ended, meaning that children can make many choices within the activities such as what to make, how to complete it, etc.? **Y / N** Give an example:

Reflection

Are there times for children to think about and discuss their experiences at the program? **Y / N**

How and when does this occur? _____

What strategies are used to encourage children's reflection? _____

Do all children have a chance to reflect on their program experiences? **Y / N**

If a child is not comfortable sharing their reflections or has different opinions, how is this supported? _____

Are children ever asked to share their feedback about the activities at the program? **Y / N**

When/if shared, is that input welcomed? **Y / N** How do children know? _____

Responsibility

Are there opportunities for children to help with daily tasks or practical responsibilities such as maintaining the classroom or program environment? **Y / N** If yes, list examples: _____

In what ways are children guided while still being allowed to make decisions and learn from mistakes as they take responsibility for various tasks or activities? _____

Are there any classroom responsibilities currently handled by adults that children could safely take on themselves? **Y/N** If yes, list them: _____

Supplemental Scales

Activity Structure

Are a variety of activities intentionally planned with a clear learning purpose offered each day? **Y / N**

If yes, List the examples and their purpose:

Activity	Purpose
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

Does the daily schedule include:

☐ Intentional time for free play? **Y / N** If yes, how long? _____

☐ Intentional opportunities for physical activity? **Y / N** If yes, how long? _____

Are the children aware of the schedule? **Y / N**

Does the schedule create a familiar structure that helps children anticipate daily activities and transitions? **Y / N**

How do children know what activities are available to them throughout the day? _____

Homework Help

(If homework is not part of the program, skip this section)

What are staff doing while children complete homework? _____

Are children helped during a homework session? **Y / N**

If yes, does the support that is provided encourage children's learning? **Y / N**

What strategies are used to promote children's learning, discovery, and success? _____

How are distractions minimized to create a space where children can successfully complete their homework? _____

Recreation Time

During physical/gross motor activities how are interactions with children handled? _____

When it comes to interactions or other encouragement provided for children's activities, does this occur regularly or infrequently? _____

Do interactions address children's safety while also encouraging participation and fun? **Y / N**

If yes, describe some successful examples: _____

Transitions

When children change locations or activities how is this handled? _____

Are these transitions smooth? **Y / N**

Are there times when children have to wait? **Y / N** If yes, how long? _____

When transitions become disorganized or children have to wait, what strategies could be used to help children stay engaged or involved? _____

Are expectations for transitions communicated? **Y / N** List some examples of how this occurs: _____

Departure

Does each staff member follow an organized departure process? **Y / N** If yes, describe the process: _____

What activities are available to children who are waiting to leave the program? _____

Are parents/guardians acknowledged during departure? **Y / N**

Is departure used to share information with families? **Y / N** If yes, what is discussed? _____

Congratulations on completing the assessment of your program using the SAPQA as a guide. Go back and review any questions where improvements may be made in preparation for the next page.

Reflection for future planning: After completing this worksheet, it can be helpful to go back and think more about the answers. Were there any questions that were answered “no” instead of “yes”? Were there any questions where you struggled to provide written examples, or where the specific interactions that could be improved to benefit the children? If so, this could help identify areas to work on. It can also be helpful to break bigger topics into smaller steps so that changes and progress can be easily recognized. Hopefully, this worksheet was a helpful tool in an ongoing self-study practice and will be useful in continuing with an action plan after completing the reflection questions below.

List areas where strengths were noted in activities: _____

List areas where improvements could be made or there are new ideas to think about: _____

Are there any issues you will work to change right away? Describe how so: _____

Are there issues that will take more time to change? What were these and what resources/support may be needed? _____

Want to find out more?

Review the SAPQA carefully and seek out other resources, as needed, since relying on these questions alone to prepare for an assessment will not be sufficient. We encourage you to review other resources on the ncrlap.org website to stay informed about any updates and to continue to build your understanding of the SAPQA and the assessment process.

Register for free online training webinars. Some are live webinars; others are pre-recorded and offer training credits (contact hours). Call 1-866-362-7527 or register online at ncrlap.org.

Look for general information about the assessment process and specific SAPQA resources. These resources may offer ideas about what to focus on or to supplement ideas you were already considering. Check out the answers to the Frequently Asked Questions or send a new question to ncrlap@uncg.edu.

When planning for program enhancement, always consider the unique features of the classroom and facility such as ages and abilities of the children enrolled, the number of group leaders at the program, and overall goals and/or philosophy. Programs may also seek advice from their DCDEE Child Care Consultant, local CCR&R and/or Smart Start Partnership TA specialists, a Child Care Health Consultant, or other child care agencies.

For a free copy of the tool, click the link below and complete the form:

[Link to free SAPQA with Supplemental Scales](#)



References:

Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. (2017). *School-age program quality assessment with supplemental scales*. The Forum for Youth Investment.

NC Additional Notes (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.ncrlap.org>.