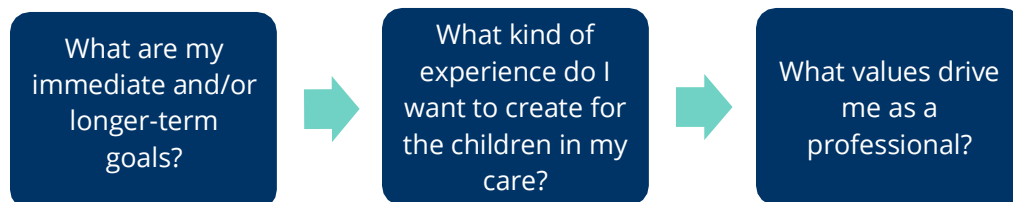


GETTING STARTED WITH A SELF-STUDY



Starting something new can feel overwhelming, but self-study does not have to be. Think of it as a personalized roadmap for growth. It is not about doing more—it is about doing what matters *most* to you. Focusing on your role as an educator of school-age children, this process is all about aligning your goals with your everyday practices. Think about:



Once you have reflected on the big picture, it is time to zoom in. Gather information collected on the Self-Assessment that you selected from the following three options: 1) Using an Outreach Assessment Report form if you have already had an Outreach Assessment or 2) Thinking More About worksheets: either Activities OR Language if you are using the SACERS-U or 3) Thinking More About the SAPQA if using that measure. Use the relative tools as your guide. Take a snapshot of where you are today, what is working, and what can grow. From there, your next steps will become clear.

What do I need?



Time: A self-study will take three months. Make sure to consider how much time to spend on planning and implementing the process and how this can be balanced with other obligations and priorities.



The tool: You will need a copy of either the SACERS-U or the SAPQA depending on which tool you choose. The SAPQA is available for download and SACERS-U can be purchased from Amazon.com, Barnes and Nobles, Kaplan, or Teacher's College Press. Local CCR&R's and/or Smart Start Partnerships may have copies you can borrow.



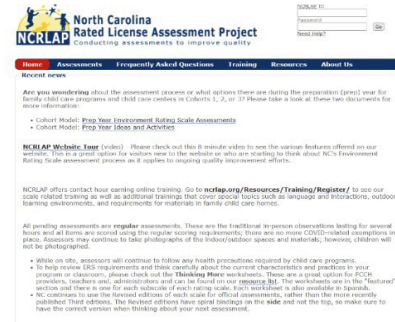
A plan and documentation: NCRLAP offers a variety of tools to support your self-study, including an introduction to self-study webinar, "Thinking More" worksheets, various training videos and recorded webinars, a reflection form, planning form, and an action plan document. Whichever strategies you use, remember to document your efforts over the course of 3 months.

Learning more about SACERS-U or SAPQA

The SACERS-U and SAPQA are assessment tools used as part of NC's Star Rated License. They are divided into subscales or domains that include various requirements related to different parts of a program. For the self-study process based on the SACERS-U you may choose to focus on language and interactions OR activities, or you may want to learn more about the SAPQA.

Here are some ideas to gather information and spend time learning about the tools. All of these are not required but picking a few is likely to be helpful.

- ❖ Visit the NC Rated License Assessment Project website, ncrlap.org. You do not need a user ID or password to access the site and there are many resources, including a section specific to each of the Environment Rating Scales. There are worksheets, videos, and documents that cover various topics. These resources can offer ideas about what to focus on or supplement ideas you already have for planning and changes.
- ❖ Watch a recorded, contact hour earning webinar (see ncrlap.org for more information) to learn about many of the items and requirements. Take notes about topics learned or ideas to try in your program and include the completed date (or the certificate) as part of your documentation.
- ❖ Read through the scales, noticing some of the details and requirements. Are there areas you know you already have in place? Are there areas you want to learn more about or already know you would like to focus on? Make notes as you read through the scale to begin planning.
- ❖ Did you participate in an Outreach assessment? Use your assessment report as a starting point. Make sure to consider your current arrangements, schedule, materials, and enrollment. Pay attention to the previous high and low scores to fully understand what may have changed since the previous assessment.



Pick a focus area

Both tools for school-age only programs are broad and cover many topics, so it is likely there is a way to connect your interests or those of the children and families. Using the Thinking More Worksheets or your Outreach Assessment along with the corresponding scale, pick one or two topics to start with and narrow your ideas down to manageable steps and actions. The steps of a self-study should be repeated, so focus on what is realistic right now. This will also help you notice accomplishments along the way.

- ❖ After reviewing the SACERS-U or the SAPQA, and thinking about your current practices, focus on a general topic, subscale, or even a specific item, making small easy changes first and implementing bigger changes along the way before moving on to another topic.
- ❖ Recent trainings or professional development trainings often spark ideas for improvement and may provide inspiration as you begin to develop a plan.
- ❖ Consider the interests and needs of the children enrolled in your program. This can be a way to incorporate their interests, especially if changes pertain to activities, materials, or interactions. There may be a portion of your schedule you want to focus on.

- ❖ Allow the parents of the children enrolled to give feedback about the program. Check to see if some of their ideas line up with the requirements you may already be starting to think about. If so, this could be an opportunity to address their ideas.

Use other resources

- ❖ Review past DCDEE visit summaries and seek advice from your DCDEE Child Care Consultant to identify topics you would like to include or that relate to a content area. This will help make connections between what you may already be working on and have discussed with your consultant.
- ❖ Get help and ideas for continuous quality improvement from local TA resources at the CCR&R in your area.
- ❖ Working with other staff in the classroom or someone else at the program to share ideas and brainstorm can be helpful and supportive.
- ❖ If you are not already involved in a professional organization, consider finding out if there is a local organization or work group in your area. Sharing ideas and information with a group of early childhood educators can be helpful. For example, questions that arise can be submitted to child care consultants or NCRLAP and the responses shared with the whole group, so everyone can use the same information vs. relying on the rumor mill.
- ❖ Are there other strategies that you have investigated that may benefit a part of your self-study process? Write them down and refer to them throughout the 3-month duration.

What comes next?

This document was developed to address initial questions about starting a self-study process for a school-age only program. Additional steps that continue beyond reading this document are required and should be documented accordingly. Refer to our website for more information.

Please remember that small changes ultimately lead to big changes along the way. While a 3-month self-study may seem overwhelming at first, take it day by day and focus on one task at a time. If you have questions or need directions on where to find information on our website at any point, do not hesitate to reach out to NCRLAP.

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