

Self-Study: Guidance for Administrators



What is the structured self-study process?

This document offers information that administrators in school-age only programs can use as talking points with group leaders 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 administrators, ideally involving all of the group leaders. 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 supports individual and program-level CQI plans.

Using the SACERS-U or the School-Age Program Quality Assessment with Supplemental Scales (SAPQA), 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 collaboration and promote intentional, continuous improvement.

Getting started

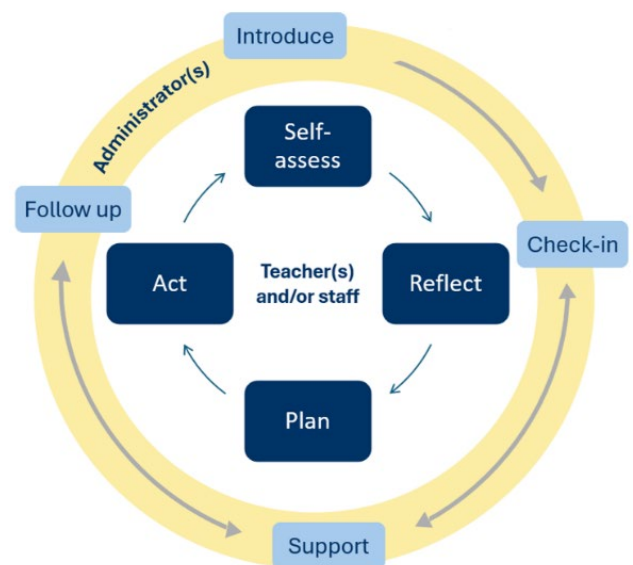
To get started with self-study, begin by explaining its purpose and steps to other staff who will be involved. This helps them stay focused and engaged. Then, gather the needed tools and resources to guide the process. Review the appropriate assessment tool—SACERS-U or SAPQA—and highlight any areas needing clarification.

Give yourself and staff time to reflect, ask questions, and consider how current practices support 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

Phone: Toll Free [\(866\)-362-7527](tel:866-362-7527)



Introduction to Process



Share information about the process, steps, and expectations, including the timeline, with other administrators and group leaders. 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 starting to self-assess as part of the first step. We suggest reviewing the Getting Started with Self Study document with all participating staff and making sure they understand the four steps that will occur.
2. How to access the tool that the program chooses to use, either the SACERS-U or SAPQA. It is very important to refer to the SACERS-U or SAPQA when completing any of the worksheets or looking at a completed assessment report from an Outreach Assessment..
 - a. The tool used to assess the program will either be the SACERS-U or the SAPQA for rated license observations in school-age only programs.
3. For the first step, the administrator makes sure that one of the required self-assessment options is completed for each group. The administrator can do this in conjunction with each group leader or could have the group leaders do this. It is also good to encourage other staff to work together during this process to share ideas and build consistency. 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 Thinking More About the SAPQA OR Self-Assessment: Using an Outreach Assessment Report form) can be found on our website and must be completed for each group.
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 tools (earn 1 contact hour each)
 - Additional resources about various topics



Check-in and Support



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

Administrators can provide much guidance during self-study, whether they are doing the self-assessment themselves or supporting the group leaders through the process. Taking time to research your own questions and being available to help staff answer questions is key. During the 1st step completing one of the worksheets and the 2nd step of reflecting on what was learned from self-assessing, frequent check-ins with other staff are likely to be helpful. Specific resources may be needed along with answers to questions about the process and the next steps.

Move into the 3rd step of the self-study cycle, which is the planning process, additional support may be needed. Talking with group leaders, other staff or administrators about reflections and plans of action to ensure that 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.

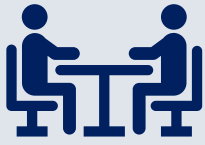
Key reminders throughout the cycle for participating staff:

- Refer to the appropriate tool, either SACERS-U or SAPQA, 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 each group, while providing the best quality care for the children and families served.

Key points for administrators to consider:

- Group leaders who will be completing the first step (e.g., one of the worksheets) will need time away from their group to work and focus. It is also true that an administrator will need to plan some focused time either to complete this step or check-in with those who are working on it. 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 program responsibilities.
- It may be helpful to have more experienced staff work with less experienced staff for mentoring purposes throughout the entire self-study process.
- Step 1 and 2: Check in with group leaders early on about the initial step. Discuss the findings with them, either theirs or your own and determine if it aligns with the program’s CQI plans. Continue to offer guidance as moving 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; if an administrator is developing the goals, including the group leaders/staff who will be implementing the changes and getting buy-in and building understanding is essential. Become familiar with what a SMART goal is and why it is an important part of the self-study cycle.
- Step 3 and 4: Provide support for the 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 group leaders 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 program 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.
- 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 group leaders and administrators to ask questions of one another.
- A review of requirements in the relevant tool.
- 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 group.
- Have discussions with each group leader about what they identify as their strengths, areas for growth, and the SMART goal. You will also want to talk about what was 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 the DCDEE Child Care 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 for the SACERS-U 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.