

Thinking Ahead: Being Prepared All the Time



Offering quality care to children is an on-going process, regardless of when an assessment occurs. While the ideas below are not all-encompassing and there are many approaches to continuous quality improvement, these suggestions can help increase understanding of the assessment process, whether it is for Pathway 1 or the NC Pre-K Program, and ease preparation for your assessment. Please share this information with other program staff to increase understanding of the assessment process throughout your program.

Read and study the assessment tools that will be used

It is extremely helpful for teachers and administrators to spend time reading and studying the Environment Rating Scale(s) or the School-Age Program Quality Assessment, when applicable, carefully, including any definitions in the front of the books. It will also be helpful to take a look at the most recent version of the NC Additional Notes (posted at ncrlap.org) since these include more information about specific requirements for many of the indicators that can help you more fully understand the expectations. Think about how the current arrangements, schedule, materials, and enrollment apply to the various items. Information on how to obtain and study the scale is available at ncrlap.org.

Explore resources to build understanding, general ideas, and address questions at ncrlap.org

To stay informed about any updates and continue to build understanding of the ERS assessment process, take advantage of the various training resources available at ncrlap.org. Encourage all classroom staff in the program to do this as well and share ideas about what is found. For example, spending a few minutes at regular staff meetings talking about any new ideas or questions about the various requirements in the assessment tools can help keep the topics current and familiar, while building strong, consistent practices.

- Look for general information about the assessment process and also scale specific resources. For example, there are videos with accompanying supplements, the NC Additional Notes, and many documents and webcasts about different topics. These resources may offer ideas about what to focus on or supplement ideas you were already considering.
- Check out the answers to Frequently Asked Questions or send a new question to ncrlap@uncg.edu
- 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 by clicking on "Training" tab and then "Register for an event." Select the event and enter your information. You will receive instructions via email before the event

Organize a self-study

Participate in a self-study process that involves reflection based on the assessment tool(s) and current program or classroom environment(s). This can help enhance the program based on developmentally appropriate practices, while becoming more familiar with the assessment tool(s) and various indicators of high-quality practices. Consider areas in the child care environment that may need enhancement, prioritize these areas, and make decisions about how to modify the environment, schedule, or daily practices and interactions for quality improvement. Ongoing planning and reflection, with organized documentation allows for greater understanding of which goals were completed, which ones need to be further adjusted, or simply need continued attention to build consistency.

- For Pathway 1, the specific requirements and various resources for the 3-month self-study process can be found at ncrlap.org. This includes the worksheets and forms that need to be completed before an assessment request can be submitted by the program's DCDEE Child Care Consultant.

Thinking Ahead: Being Prepared All the Time



- Self-reflection is beneficial on an ongoing basis and not only before an official assessment. There are various ways to do this informally. For example, the 3-month process can be replicated at different times, using different Thinking More worksheets, or other strategies can be used. Consider the following:
 - Has your program been assessed in the past? The previous assessment report(s) can be a helpful starting point for planning and reflection. Make sure to consider the 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 as you review and plan.
 - Study one or more of the ERS further and conduct a self-assessment using the scale and a scoresheet that can be found at the end of the scale. To assign scores, objectively determine whether the requirements of the indicators are present. Remember to give credit only for what is observed that day, even if you know at other times practices might be different. After scoring, make plans based on what was noticed. It may be beneficial to focus on a subscale (section) for a few weeks, before moving on to the next subscale, until the entire scale has been studied. Alternatively, you may decide to go more in-depth with a specific subscale or selected items for the duration of the self-study.
 - Program administrators may want to observe in each classroom using the assessment tool, to offer tips and support, and be aware of how various program policies and goals are being carried out. Ideally this will also include discussion between teachers and administrators to build a shared understanding and lead to continuous quality improvement.
 - Use the findings of a self-study to make positive changes, making sure that the changes reflect best practices for young children and improve the quality of the program on an ongoing basis.

Allow time for staff and children to adjust to change

When planning to implement quality improvements/changes to classrooms, make sure to do this well before the scheduling window to allow teachers and children time to adjust. This gives time to evaluate the effectiveness of the changes. For example, a change to the daily schedule, incorporating new materials, changing the room arrangement may be a good idea; however, these new ideas may create other challenges that need to be worked out. Therefore, allow time for the enhancement process to be successful before the day of the assessment.

Consider opportunities to increase communication across your program

Reflect on communication across the program. Identify areas for improvement with your staff. For example, what built-in opportunities exist for afternoon teachers to communicate critical information with morning teachers? Are all staff familiar with important program policies such as “weather permitting” or protocols for various sanitary practices? Use staff meeting time to talk about concerns, questions, or new ideas.

Use community resources

Get help and ideas for continuous quality improvement from local TA resources at the CCR&R or Smart Start Partnership in your area. Keep your eyes open for workshops on various early childhood topics; these will often spark new ideas and may provide inspiration to your program. The assessment tools are broad and include many topic areas, so it is likely there is a way to connect your interests or those of the children and families into your ongoing continuous quality improvement plans for individual staff and the program overall. While working with staff to make adjustments, discuss these with local Technical Assistance Specialists and/or your Child Care Consultant. This will help you feel ready when it is time for the Child Care Consultant to submit the request for an assessment to NCRLAP.