

How to Conduct an Internal Assessment Using the Social Emotional Learning Program Quality Assessment (SEL PQA)

Assessment at-a-glance

- Use with grades Kindergarten through sixth
- At least one hour to observe (two to three hours are recommended)
- Assessment is based on observation
- At least four children need to be present

Required materials (click on link to download the assessment)

- The required materials are available for download free of charge for use at your program. [Social Emotional Learning Program Quality Assessment instrument](#)

Supplemental materials (click on links to access the following documents)

- [Observation Guide](#)
- [SEL PQA Handbook](#)

Purchase/download the materials

- The required materials are available for download free of charge for use at your program. [Social Emotional Learning Program Quality Assessment instrument](#)
- Note: Score sheets can be duplicated.

Conducting the Internal Assessment (start to finish)

1. Learn about the SEL PQA

- Using the [Program Quality Assessment Professional Development Catalog](#) (PD Catalog; scroll to second section of page), you will have options for professional development/learning articles, videos and other resources where you can learn about the SEL PQA.
- Read the SEL PQA cover to cover along with the handbook (if purchased). The more you learn about the quality practices of the SEL PQA, the more accurate your own internal assessment will be.
- This report, [SEL PQA: An Overview of Items & Scales - The Forum For Youth Investment \(forumfyi.org\)](#), walks through the history of the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality SEL PQA development and provides in-depth SEL PQA scale reliability and validity analyses to explore the statistical properties of the SEL PQA in order to demonstrate its success.
- Review [Introduction to Scoring the PQA for Self-Assessment - The Forum For Youth Investment \(forumfyi.org\)](#). Download the SEL PQA Practice Sheet and Guidance on Scoring Options handouts. Watch the SEL PQA recording.
- It is recommended that the teaching team from each assessed classroom and the internal assessment team become familiar with the expectations of the SEL PQA prior to conducting the internal assessment.

2. Prepare to conduct the Internal Assessment

- If time has elapsed since your download and review of the SEL PQA, re-familiarize yourself with the scale and expectations.

- Gather all materials needed to conduct the observation including a digital device or paper/pencil for note taking, a copy of the scale, and the score sheet.

3. When to conduct the Internal Assessment

- It is best to conduct the assessment when there is one to three hours of uninterrupted time. Ensure the person conducting the assessment can devote this uninterrupted time.
 - If timing and staff schedules do not allow for full observations, then try to observe at least one hour of programming, divided among internal assessment team members (e.g., three people each observe for 20 minutes, four people each observe for 15 minutes). Vary observation times so that your observations include the beginning, middle and end of different sessions.
- The internal assessment team should observe program offerings: structured activities that are led by regular staff with the same children over time. Enrichment classes or afterschool clubs that get together at the same time each week for the entire school semester are great examples. Avoid snack time, open gym, free time, drop off, and homework/tutoring. Always notify program staff of scheduled observations ahead of time. This is not a test!
- There must be at least four children present.

4. Conduct the Internal Assessment

- **Take ample notes.** Taking notes is extremely helpful for various reasons. First, anecdotal evidence is needed to support each score. Your notes will help you score accurately. If you are reviewing the assessment to check your scores, looking back at notes will help you. Finally, note taking will help you and your teachers create goals based on observed data that was written down.
 - As you are taking notes consider the intent of the item when scoring. Follow through and pay attention to an entire sequence of events.
- **Be objective.** It might be second nature to score based on what you know your teachers do on a regular basis. However, the SEL PQA is designed to look at quality in a specific time frame. If the practice is observed during your observation, count it; if it is not observed, do not consider it in scoring decisions.
- **Read each indicator of quality carefully.**
 - Refer to the handbook (if purchased) for item specific examples.

5. Score the assessment

- Take notes and score at the end of the observation.
- Scoring tips:
 - Match the content of written evidence to relevant scales on the SEL PQA and then fit evidence to the most appropriate item.
 - If the item assesses children's opportunity for something, score based on whether the opportunity was present or explicitly offered even if some children do not take advantage of the of the opportunity.
 - Score based on what you see that day, even if there are extenuating circumstances present that affected the scores.
 - If there are two or more staff present, score on whether any one of the staff members do a certain practice; otherwise, focus on the primary staff person.
 - In the SEL PQA, "some" refers to one or more people, children, opportunities, etc.
 - Look for the use of the word "and."

- SEL PQA is scored on a 5-point scale.
 - Scores of 1,3, and 5 are used (no 2s or 4s).
 - If evidence is present, score in favor of the higher score. Typically, a score of one means that the item was not present during the assessment in contrast to a five which is considered best practice and is observed regularly.
 - If it doesn't clearly fit a 5 or a 1, score 3.

6. Review findings

- Conducting a SEL PQA assessment is only the first step of the process for quality growth. Review your observation with those people responsible for implementing changes.
- It is important to celebrate strengths. Often improvements build upon strengths.
- Review your assessment with your internal assessment team including your Quality Coach and Program Quality Assessor. They can celebrate strengths with you and brainstorm areas for CQI goals/improvement.

7. Next steps

- Ensure everyone has contributed ideas and knows the next steps to take toward improvement.
- When planning for CQI goals, look toward implementing the next level's indicators.
- Start small. Focus on one indicator at a time.
- Be patient. Do not be discouraged if your initial scores do not meet your expectations. Growth takes time.
- Change what you can and accept those things that are outside of your program's ability to improve.
- Share your plan for growth/CQI plan with everyone involved on your team.
- Plan to revisit your goals and program's administrative practices regularly to assess and update as goals are achieved. The CQI process is cyclical as you continuously reflect on your practices and your drive for growth.