

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

**NOTES:** Although the SEL PQA can be used for the purpose of internal assessment, it can also be conducted as an external assessment by a SEL PQA trained and reliable Pennsylvania Key Program Quality Assessor (hereinafter referred to as “Assessor”).

When using the SEL PQA for an internal assessment to meet the expectations for one of the Keystone STARS Standards, please consult the most current version of the [Keystone STARS Performance Standards](#) and the [Keystone STARS Program Manual](#) for additional information.

## How to conduct an objective, authentic classroom assessment

The Keystone Stars Performance Standards expect programs to conduct internal assessments annually and, once every three years, engage their internal assessment team in discussion of their internal assessment results with a Program Quality Assessor from the PA Key.

- The internal assessment should be an observation; therefore, someone who has knowledge of the selected Program Observation Instrument (POI) and its expectations should plan to observe for the recommended amount of time (for the specific POI), in the classroom. Keep in mind, the internal assessment is not something to be given to the classroom teacher to complete as a checklist of things that the teacher feels occur in the classroom. Teachers cannot observe themselves in action and may not provide an objective picture of their classroom. The observer should be able to commit to observing and taking notes and should not have any classroom responsibilities during the observation.
- The observation should occur when most of the children are present and actively engaged in the classroom so interactions with peers, teachers, and materials can be observed; therefore, no part of the observation should occur during naptime unless naptime is a required component of the POI.
- The internal assessment should be viewed as an integral part of a program’s commitment to continuous quality improvement rather than just another piece of paperwork to be completed to meet an expectation. Information from an objective internal assessment can yield much information about the program’s practices, providing a foundation for the program to celebrate their successes and build upon existing practices

## Assessment at-a-glance

- Use with grades Kindergarten through sixth in out of school time settings
- 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

- [Social Emotional Learning Program Quality Assessment instrument](#)

## Supplemental materials

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

## Purchase/download the materials

- The required materials and some supplemental materials are available for download free of charge for use at your program. **NOTE:** Score sheets can be duplicated.

## Conduct the internal assessment (start to finish)

### 1. Learn about the SEL PQA

- Register for the Online self-paced: PA Foundations of the Social Emotional Learning Program Quality Assessment (SEL PQA) on the [Professional Development \(PD\) Registry \(papdregistry.org\)](https://papdregistry.org) (available sometime in 2024/2025).
- Request a [Facilitated Program Observation Instrument Orientation \(FPO\)](#). This one-hour session with an Assessor provides an opportunity to learn some of the basic information about the SEL PQA and ask specific questions. The FPO is structured to meet each individual's or program's specific needs and each person attending receives one hour of PQAS (Pennsylvania Quality Assurance System) credit. **Please note the FPO is not a substitute for the online self-paced Foundations of the Social Emotional Learning Program Quality Assessment (SEL PQA) course, but rather provides a basic overview.**
- Access additional information on the SEL PQA:
  - [SEL PQA: An Overview of Items and Scales](#)
- 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.
- 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.
- Clarify any questions with an Assessor.

### 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.

- It may be helpful to tell the children that a guest will be visiting their classroom for a special project. They will watch them play and do their work but will not be able to play with them while doing their work.

#### 4. Conduct the internal assessment

- Take ample notes. **There must be an anecdotal note to support each indicator scored.** Note taking will help you score accurately. If you are reviewing the assessment to check your scores, looking back at notes will help you. Second, note taking will help you/your teachers create goals based on observed data that was written down. Finally, your notes will assist the Assessor in understanding your program's practices and will support deeper internal assessment consultation meeting conversations. Remember, providing numerical scores is not enough to support your program's growth and development.
  - 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 and expanded explanation carefully to understand its full intent.
  - Refer to the handbook (if purchased) for item specific examples.

#### 5. Score the assessment

- 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 affect the scores.
  - If there are two or more staff present, the score is based on whether any one of the staff members engage in 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.
- Review your assessment findings with your Internal Assessment Team, Quality Coach and Assessor. They can celebrate your strengths with you.
- Identify goals to achieve growth and include them in your Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQI).

## 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 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.