

How to Conduct an Internal Assessment using the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT)

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

When using the TPOT for an internal assessment to meet the expectations for one of the Keystone STARS Standards, please consult 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 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.
- Family child care providers, working alone, should discuss observation options with the Program Quality Assessor or Quality Coach.
- 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

- For use in center-based preschool settings serving children 2-5 years of age
 - NOTE: Although the TPOT is specifically designed to be used in classrooms where teachers are implementing the Pyramid Model, it is relevant in a variety of preschool classroom settings
- Observation and interview-based assessment.
- Focus primarily on the lead teacher, but other classroom staff will be considered
- 2-hour classroom observation
 - Must observe child-directed activities (e.g., centers or free play), at least one teacher-directed activity (e.g., circle time or small groups), and transitions between activities
 - Does not include outdoor play or mealtimes
- 20-minute interview which includes practices that cannot be observed
- 20-30 minutes to score at the end of the observation

Required materials

- Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool for Preschool Classrooms ISBN 978-1-59857-284-1 (TPOT scoring form - these forms are sold in packs of five)
- Overview of the [Pyramid Model for Promoting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children](#) and the practices associated with the Model

Supplemental materials

- Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool for Preschool Classrooms Manual, ISBN #978-1-59857-283-4

Purchase the materials

- There are typically multiple sources where the required and supplemental materials can be purchased. An online search by resource name or ISBN may result in several options from which to choose.
- Be sure to allow adequate time for ordering and delivery of the materials.
- The TPOT scoring form is sold in packs of 5; one form should be used for each classroom observed.
- Order a minimum of one TPOT Manual per program where TPOT will be used.

Conduct the internal assessment (start to finish)

1. Learn about the TPOT

- It would be helpful for each program staff involved in the internal assessment to have an understanding of the [Pyramid Model for Promoting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children](#) and the practices associated with the Model
- Register for the Online self-paced: PA Foundations of the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) on the [Professional Development \(PD\) Registry \(papregistry.org\)](#) (available sometime in 2024/2025).
- Request a [Facilitated Program Observation Instrument Orientation \(FPO\)](#). This one-hour session with an assessor provides time to learn some of the basic information about the TPOT and an opportunity to 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 ROSIE course, but rather provides a very basic overview.**
- Access [additional information](#) on the TPOT.
- It is recommended that each program staff involved in the internal assessment become familiar with the expectations of the TPOT including the 15 Key Practices, the 17 Red Flags, and the section about Responding to Challenging Behavior which can be found in this [recorded webinar on brookespublishing.com](#).
- Clarify any questions with a Program Quality Assessor.

2. Prepare to conduct the internal assessment

- Gather all materials needed: TPOT scoring form, pen/pencil, notepad, and timekeeping device (a visible classroom clock is sufficient).
- Set aside at least 2 hours of time for the observation; more time may be necessary if activities that are not included in the observation occur during the 2-hour timeframe.

3. When to conduct the internal assessment

- Schedule the internal assessment when the following areas can be observed: centers or free play, at least one teacher-directed activity, and transitions between activities. Ask for input from the teacher being observed about the best time in the schedule to view these activities.
- Note: Outdoor play and mealtimes are not considered in the observation.

4. Conduct the internal assessment

- The chosen classroom should maintain a typical schedule (as best as possible) while the observation is occurring.
- Be as unobtrusive as possible and refrain from interacting with children.
- Position yourself in a location where you can view the activities of the lead teacher.
- Record observation notes on a notepad:
 - Focus on what the teacher is doing (instead of watching the children).
 - Keep a running record of notes about actions that are related to the Pyramid Model practices and/or Key Practices.
 - Record the schedule of classroom activities that are observed including type of activity and start/end time of each activity.
- Do not score the indicators during the observation.
- Stop the observation if the teacher or children leave the room or engage in an activity that will not be observed for TPOT expectations.
- Stop recording notes when the 2 hours of classroom observation time is completed.
- Meet with the teacher to conduct the interview. The meeting should occur on the same day as the observation.
- Ask the questions exactly as stated on the scoring form.

5. Score the assessment

- The assessment should be scored immediately after the observation and interview are completed. All indicators will be answered Yes or No:
- Use the following scoring guidance:
 - Items 1 – 8 are based on observation only.
 - Items 9 – 11 include observation and interview questions.
 - Items 12 – 14 are based on interview only.
 - Items 15 – 31 are Red Flags.
 - Item 32 is only scored when challenging behavior occurs. It is scored for each incident of challenging behavior based on the definition on the TPOT scoring form.

6. Review findings

- Review the assessment findings with your Internal Assessment Team, PQA, and Quality Coach (when applicable).
- Discuss strengths in the practices that support social and emotional learning and Pyramid Model practices.
- Identify goals to achieve growth and include them in your Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQI).
- **NOTE about Red Flags:** They signify problematic practices that may need immediate attention; they may represent issues related to teacher training and support or to program policies and procedures. These may need to be reviewed with the classroom teacher and program leadership prior to the meeting with the IA team and PQA.

Next Steps

- Ensure everyone has contributed ideas and ensure everyone knows the next steps to take toward improvement.
- When planning for CQI goals, focus on those areas where you want to improve. Start small. Focus on one or two changes 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.