

SELQKII

Assessor's Guide to
Using
Saskatchewan's
Early Learning and
Child Care Quality
Key Indicator
Instrument
(SK Quality Tool)



Purpose

This document is intended to provide additional information and clarification of terms to provide consistent interpretation and scoring of items by all assessors.

General Information

Ten Quality Key Indicators make up the Saskatchewan's Early Learning and Child Care Program Quality Key Indicator Instrument (SK Quality Tool).

These ten quality key indicators were taken from previous studies conducted over the past 40 years by Dr Richard Fiene utilizing the Regulatory Compliance Key Indicator metric (RCKIm). The tool was validated in a study in the spring of 2023 in the Province of Saskatchewan. Observer notes from this project were used to make some final modifications to the tool to make the tool more user friendly. All this work was done as a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Education staff and the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA) consultant pool.

The details about how to obtain the necessary data to determine if a program meets the Key Quality Indicators are delineated in the appropriate indicator in the SK Quality Tool. Additional information is provided in this document including clarification of terms to ensure accurate and consistent data collection and scoring.

Part 1 - Quality Key Indicators (QKI) 1 – 5 will be collected via record or document review, interviewing individuals, or observation. Part 2 - Quality Key Indicators (QKI) 6 – 10 will be collected via observations in the classrooms throughout the assessment.

Some indicators will be assessed once, (for the entire centre) and some will be completed multiple times (for each room/group in the centre). Please read the indicator carefully to identify whether a single or multiple assessments/observations are necessary.

When an indicator is assessed multiple times (multiple groups), the score will be averaged to obtain a centre score. Individual scores are available to support a deeper understanding of the assessment process and to support follow-up planning for the centre and individual groups/educators.

Not all indicators will be completed for all age groups. Quality Indicators six and eight are not assessed for infant or toddler groups. Quality Indicator seven is not assessed for preschool groups.

Scoring for some indicators involves calculating the average for all groups/educators. This may result in an answer that is not a whole number (includes a decimal). If this occurs, round the answer to achieve a whole number (numbers with .1 to .4 would round down and numbers with .5 to .9 would round up. For example, 2.3 would round to 2 and 3.5 would round to 4.

There is a table on page 2 of the tool to record group information. This is very important to provide accurate and consistent information. Ensure you are recording data for the correct group for each item. This applies for every indicator, even those for specific age groups e.g. if group 5 is an infant group, then on Quality indicator 7, record the data for this group under Group 5, even if this means groups 1-4 are left blank.

Lines or columns can be added or removed from data collection tables as needed.

Assessors are not required to maintain a copy of the completed report. They should delete the assessment results after confirmation of receipt by the Ministry of Education has been received.

Reporting Concerns Identified During Observation

If you observe an instance where children are in immediate danger from [child abuse or neglect](#), you must contact the Ministry of Social Services.

If you observe health/safety concerns that are a significant concern but not immediate danger, contact ministry personnel (Early Learning and Child Care consultant and/or the Senior Consultant) the same day through a phone call or email.

Minor health/safety concerns should be noted in the comments or an attached page/document and submit as a separate document with the assessment. This information will be shared with the early learning and child care consultant to follow up on.

Definitions

Child care centre - a facility that provides child care services, but does not include family child care homes or group family child care homes.

Exemptions - Saskatchewan's Child Care Regulations require that 20% of staff must be certified as ECE III. An additional 30% must be ECE II. Centres that do not meet these requirements can apply for an exemption for a staff member who is taking classes towards achieving the certification. An exemption granted by the Ministry of Education to meet licensing requirements is not a certification level.

Infants - children aged six weeks to 18 months (children less than six weeks old may attend a teen student support centre). Ratio of one adult for every three infants is required. Maximum group size is six.

Mixed Age groups - various ages together in one group. (some centres are licensed for mix ages and all centres can do this at beginning or end of day) If there are mixed age groups present, then all relevant Quality Indicators must be assessed for the ages of the children present.

Preschooler/Preschool aged - children aged 30 months to completion of Kindergarten. Ratio of one adult for every ten children is required. Maximum group size is 20.

Room/group - many child care centres operate with one group per room and can be assessed in this way. In some cases, centres with large rooms may have multiple groups utilizing the same space. If these are independent groups then they are to be assessed separately. To determine if the groups are to be assessed separately consider if the children rarely interact/spend only a small portion of the day with each other and whether the educators have separate routines and activities for the children.

Toddler - children aged 18 to 30 months of age. Ratio of one adult for every five children is required. Maximum group size is ten.

Quality Indicator 1 Number of ECE III's (Educator Certification)

- This item is assessed for the entire centre, not by room/group.
- The centre director should have a completed the *Staff Certification Levels- SK Quality Tool* form and provide this to the assessor; or
- If the observer is an Early Learning and Child Care Consultant then the Staff Information Summary form, can be used to obtain the data for this item.
- Proof of certification levels can be requested from the centre director. A copy of the certification should be in each staff member's file. If documentation of certification is not available, then it cannot be credited for this indicator.
- Include only the staff who have a responsibility for working with the children and the programming. Staff who do not regularly work with the children are not included in the calculation. For example, a director who works the floor for one to two hours a day would not be considered teaching staff. They would have to be working with the children a minimum of 65 hours a month to be included in the calculation.
- Exemptions - An exemption granted by the Ministry of Education to meet licensing requirements is not a certification level. For example, an early childhood educator (ECE) with a level III exemption would not be counted as an ECE III in the indicator. There are no exceptions, even if they state they only have one class left, they have completed all the classes and just need to apply, or they have applied and haven't received it yet. Proof of application for certification is not equivalent to the actual certification. For example, a staff may have recently completed classes and provide a copy of the application for certification. This can be noted in the comments but is not to be credited as certification. Until they have the certificate from the Ministry of Education, credit cannot be given.
- No documentation other than a certificate from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education will be accepted as proof of ECE III certification. (e.g. B.Ed or other degree/certificate - these must be assessed by the Ministry of Education to determine if the courses taken are applicable to early childhood)

QUALITY INDICATOR 2): Stimulating and Dynamic Environment

This item is assessed for all rooms.

If two groups share one room, then make note of this in the comments section and only score the room once.

If groups rotate rooms, also note this in the comments section. Attempt the score the room the group spends the majority of their time.

1. **Co-teaching** - assessor observes, discusses or documents that indicates the staff collaborate and share information about planning, observations and reflections of children's activities/behaviours, decisions to be made, and/or materials to be used. A respectful partnership is evident, even if there is a discrepancy in certification levels and responsibilities, ideas of both educators are respected, and both members contribute to the planning and implementing of activities.

Simple decisions about whether to change activities or who will change a diaper are not sufficient. Sharing space and supervising play are also not sufficient. There must be evidence of higher-level collaboration and co-teaching which is directly connected to the children's learning experiences. (e.g. sharing observation regarding a child's development, suggesting an activity/material that would extend learning/add to a project).

2. **Children as competent learners** - depending on the age of the children, there may be variation in how this is evident. One consideration is whether materials are accessible to the children to access independently or whether they need to ask for the educator to get them. Language used by the educator can be another indicator with "I knew you could figure it out" or "you are really strong to carry that bucket by yourself" supporting competence and "Let me show you the right way" or "wait for an adult to help you" not supporting competence. Equipment and materials provided are also a factor. Are there child sized items to support children to complete tasks on their own (small pitcher so they can pour their own drinks, sink at a level they can reach) or materials to support independence such as a stool to be able to reach to the sink)?
3. **Authentic and meaningful materials** - having real items rather than 'toy' ones. Examples of this include real plates, flower vase, phone, shovel, etc. rather than plastic ones, having a class made alphabet or number chart, or emotion posters featuring the children. Also having quality materials to use in learning activities such as paint, clay, and a variety of loose parts to create art rather than just crayons and markers. Meaningful materials can also include culturally relevant materials such as empty food containers from a variety of items that the children would have present in their homes.
4. **Meaningful choices**- children can make decisions and have some control over their own learning and daily experience. This can include what activities/materials they would like to explore, whether they would like to participate or observe a new activity or when they are done eating. This does not mean children make all the decisions, adults still provide guidance and boundaries to ensure safety and positive learning opportunities for all children.
5. **Children's work displayed** - children's creations/art are displayed respectfully in the learning environment. This could include frames or other ways that show the importance and value of the items. One bulletin board of items held with tacks or sticky tack is not sufficient, items should also not be tattered or ripped. Consider placement, prominence and extra attention given to the display (frames, enhancements such as branches, natural materials, artifacts, lighting etc.).
6. **Family photos** - photos of the family are displayed in the early learning environment. This should be in a location that children are able to observe during the day. If there are more children than photos, assessor may ask about this. Credit can be given but a comment can also be added that acknowledges this and whether the centre would be able to take and add a photo for the missing children. *Please note the location of the display in the comments.*

- 7. Documentation** - of learning is displayed and discusses holistic development and learning. This should be recent enough to be relevant to the children who are present. This should include photos/images and/or examples of children's work accompanied with text to provide a description of the activities and learning. At least one example should be less than three months ago. Additional documentation may be displayed in other areas for additional purposes such as informing parents and visitors of development and learning as part of program information. Electronic documentation through apps (SeeSaw, HiMama etc.) can be given credit if they include specific content regarding the child's learning and development. A simple photo and description (e.g. photo with the following description - Ava being silly playing play dough this morning) does not get credit.
If the primary method for documentation is electronic, there should be at least one current example on display for each group (can be a printed version of an electronic creation).
- 8. Culture and beliefs** - the learning program includes images, artifacts, items, music, food, or printed materials that represent the cultures of the children, families and staff. If the population of the centre appears to be homogeneous, are there attempts to provide exposure/build awareness of other cultures. This includes First Nations children's literature, art etc. Consider whether there is information/materials present that provide information about who the people are/what is important to the people that spend time in this space?
- 9. Books and print materials** - there is at least one area where books are accessible and available to children. They are mostly in good condition (less than 10% ripped or missing pages). There should be a variety of quality literature including both fiction and non-fiction appropriate to the ages and interests of the children. At least two other examples of printed materials should be present (menu, magazine, flyer, open/closed sign, labels etc.).
- 10. Writing materials** - children have access to a variety of mark-making materials such as crayons, markers, paint, chalk, paper, whiteboards, clipboards as well as examples of text to imitate such as children's name cards or other meaningful and visible print. For infants and toddlers, credit can be given if educators provide at least one opportunity daily for children to explore these materials, which can be confirmed through observation of the activity or display(s) of art demonstrating this activity occurs.
- 11. Children's interests and projects** - evidence of the children's interest and current projects can be observed in the learning environment. This can include photos, materials, books, project plan etc. This could be as simple as materials for toddlers to dump and fill, photos and building materials in response to a new building going up in the neighbourhood etc. There should be some evidence that this came from observations of children's behaviour or questions they were asking rather than teacher-directed activities/seasonal crafts that all look the same.

QUALITY INDICATOR 3): Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum Based on Assessments of Each Child

This item is to be assessed for the entire centre.

The ten records to be examined must include samples from various ages and groups in the centre. These records can be formal, such as portfolios kept for each child or a more informal, anecdotal type of record keeping. The key is that there is a record that can be looked at. It is not adequate if the teacher says they do it from memory. It needs to be written down and documented. This can include electronically as long as the key elements are present.

Emergent Curriculum is Practiced (3.1)

The assessor will ask to see what is used to guide the curriculum. There should be a written document that clearly delineates the parameters of the philosophy, activities, guidance, and resources needed for the particular curricular approach. *Play and Exploration* and the *Essential Learning Experiences* are acceptable curriculum resources.

The developmental assessment can be home-grown or a more standardized off-the shelf type of assessment (e.g. Ages and Stages Questionnaire (*ASQ) - and add this to glossary -3), the key being its ability to inform the various aspects of the curriculum. The purpose of the assessments is not to compare children but rather to compare the developmental progress of individual children as they experience the activities of the curriculum.

To get credit for this item, the child's record must include a developmental assessment or observational notes as well as notes/documentation of adaptations or responsive planning that considers the child's development and/or interests.

Children and Educators are Co-learners (3.2)

In documentation of the children's learning or project planning documents, there must be evidence that the children and educators are exploring ideas together. Assessors can ask educators about the planning process. ***Educators who select the topics/themes and learning activities for the children do not get credit for this item.*** Educators who state that they use the ideas/questions from the children to inform planning must provide some evidence to support this in order to be given credit for the item.

Learning Activities are Documented and Displayed and Used to Plan Future Learning (3.3)

Documentation of the child's learning can be created electronically or in hard copy (paper). Documentation could be displayed either within the centre or through an electronic format. The documentation or an accompanying document must include reflection and planning of potential future activities to extend the learning of wither the individual child or the group. Add examples that there're is actual evidence - notes, sticky notes etc.

QUALITY INDICATOR 4): Relationships with Families

This indicator is to be assessed for the entire centre

Communications may originate from centre leadership or other single source to all families or from individual educators to families of children in their group. Assessors may interview various educators to confirm if the communication practices are completed consistently across all groups.

Communication with family members should be documented to enable early childhood educators to assess the need for follow-up communication and/or responsive program adjustments/additions.

Early childhood educators should have dedicated time when they are available to talk with family members either in person or by phone. Family members are encouraged to share their experiences and knowledge of their child as well as raise any questions or concerns.

1. Communication, education, and informational materials and opportunities for families are delivered in a way that meets their diverse needs. This information may include general information on child development, parenting support/services available in the community or invitations to meetings/activities connected to the children's learning. Meeting diverse needs of families can include having a translator for important conversations, translated materials available, hanging paper copies in the centres and sending electronic information, providing information at multiple entry points etc.
2. The child care centre communicates with families using at least two different modes (online app, emails, newsletters, posters etc.), and at least one mode promotes two-way communication. This provides options for families to use a method that they are comfortable with.
3. The program engages in ongoing two-way communication. Evidence of two-way communication must be confirmed. Communication examples must demonstrate respect for each family's strengths, choices, & goals for their children. Needs an example. May need to be translated. Response to parent not wanting child to nap

QUALITY INDICATOR 5): Families Receive Information on Their Child's Progress Regularly

This indicator is to be assessed for the entire centre.

Interviews. Assessors may interview various educators to confirm if the practices are completed consistently across all groups.

The sharing of developmental information can occur in person or in a written or electronic format. This can also include events where families and children can complete activities to learn more about child development.

The report/document with information on their child's developmental progress could also include a learning story.

#4 also states that all these interactions are done in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way representing the parents being served. This would include accommodating families who are English Language Learners (translating written documents, having a translator present if necessary). Options

should also be provided to make families comfortable (location, food/beverages, allowing additional people to be present).

PART 2 - OBSERVATIONS:

Quality Indicators 6-10 are to be observed to gather reliable and valid information.

Quality key indicators 6, 7 and 8, are taken from ECERS-3 or ITERS-3. Assessors can refer to these tools or All About the ECERS-3 or All About the ITERS-3 for further clarification if necessary. It is also recommended that these indicators assessed/observed throughout the observation and not just during key activity times.

QUALITY INDICATOR 6): Educators Encourage Children to Communicate

This indicator is only to be assessed for preschool aged or mixed aged groups that include preschool aged children. This indicator is not assessed for infant or toddler groups.

Interactions between children and staff need to be observed in the multiple interactions in various locations for credit to be given. Things to look for would be more back and forth conversations rather than one-way conversations/instructions where educators are telling children what to do. Are children encouraged to describe what they are doing, how they feel about what they are doing, and why they are doing particular activities? Educators should expand upon children's conversations. Children talk more when there is an interested person who listens to them.

These opportunities can occur anywhere in the classroom or outside, such as in the dramatic play area, tabletop activities or in the play yard.

Materials that encourage communication include telephones, puppets, dolls, flannel/magnetic boards, and dramatic play props such as small people and animals, with barns, or dollhouses. These create opportunities for conversation among children as they assume different roles. The staff in a high-quality early childhood classroom will use both activities and materials to encourage growth in receptive and expressive language skills.

QUALITY INDICATOR 7): Infant/Toddler Language Observation

This indicator is only to be assessed for infant, toddler or mixed aged groups that include infant and toddler aged children. This indicator is not assessed for preschool groups.

Conversations and questions should be used with all children, even young infants. Conversations using verbal and nonverbal turn-taking should be considered when scoring.

Most conversations and questions initiated by infants will be nonverbal, such as widening of baby's eyes or waving arms and legs. Observe staff response to such nonverbal communication. For infants and toddlers, the responsibility for starting most conversations and asking questions belongs to the staff. As children become more able to initiate communication, staff should modify their approach to allow children to take on a greater role in initiating conversations and asking questions.

Staff should provide answers to questions/commentary as to what the child may be thinking (based on observations on the child's behaviour) if the child cannot verbally respond. As children build an

expressive vocabulary, and are more able to respond, questions should start to include those that the child can answer.

QUALITY INDICATOR 8): Educators Use Language to Develop Reasoning Skills (Preschool)

This indicator is only to be assessed for preschool aged or mixed aged groups that include preschool aged children. This indicator is not assessed for infant or toddler groups.

Assessors will need to observe very carefully as this standard can be difficult to determine because it is tying language and cognition together. Again, this opportunity can occur in any setting in or out of the classroom because it is the basis for problem solving using language. Also look for educators redirecting children's conversations when appropriate. Staff should use language to talk about logical relationships using materials that stimulate reasoning. Using materials, staff can demonstrate concepts such as same/different, classifying, sequencing, one-to-one correspondence, spatial relationships, and cause and effect.

QUALITY INDICATOR 9): Educators Listen Attentively When Children Speak

This item is assessed for all rooms.

It is recommended that this indicator be assessed/observed throughout the observation period and not just consecutively to provide a more comprehensive view of the typical interactions in the room/group. It should be observed in two-minute blocks ten times for a total of 20 minutes.

For this item, ensure the observations are of the educators regularly assigned to the group/class (not any staff covering breaks etc.).

All educators in the room are observed (including full-time, part-time and casual staff) and their interactions observed as there can be variation in the interaction styles and practices.

Children should have the attention of the specific educator they are addressing. Educators should not be looking/walking away or unduly preoccupied with others. They should be at the child's level and making eye contact.

QUALITY INDICATOR 10): Educators Speak Warmly to Children

This item is assessed for all rooms.

Ten two-minute observations are to be completed for a total of 20 minutes.

It is recommended that this indicator be assessed/observed throughout the observation period and not just consecutively to provide a more comprehensive view of the typical interactions in the room/group rather than only during one activity.

For this item, ensure the observations are of the educators regularly assigned to the group/class (not any staff covering breaks etc.). If for some reason an educator leaves the group, the assessor may be able to

complete the observation at a later time in the day. If the educator is required to leave for an emergency etc. then this will be noted in the comments and this educator will not be included in the scoring.

All educators in the room are observed (including full-time, part-time and casual staff) and their interactions rated as there can be variation in the interactions styles and practices.

Scoring examples

- 1- Never/not at all - No interaction or harsh tone of voice/yell at child or
- 2- Somewhat /few interactions - Wandering and limited engagement or sitting with a child but ignoring or decent interactions but not on child's level
- 3- Quite a bit/Many instances - Fairly consistent but may have missed an initiation from a child
- 4- Very Much/Consistently - very responsive, smiling, maintain eye contact, warm tone of voice