Assessing Program Quality with the Autism Program Environment Rating Scale

National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders, FPG Child Development Institute, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Assessment → Implementation → Outcomes

- Program Quality
- Learner Goals and Present Levels (IEP)
- Learner Strengths, Interests, and History
- Team Member Experience and Knowledge
- Selection and Implementation of Evidence Based Practices
- Program Quality
- Learner Progress

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Program Quality Indicators and Evidence-Based Practices (EBP)

Program Quality

- Contextual features of the program that represent best practices
- Program quality as the house in which practices are employed
Program Quality Indicators and Evidence-Based Practices (EBP)

EBP

• Evidence-based practices as specific tools for specific skills
• EBP as the furniture or appliances designed for specific functions
Autism Program Environment Rating Scale (APERS)

- Designed to assess *quality indicators of programs* for children and youth with ASD
- Purposes of the APERS
  - Coaching & Consultation
  - Professional development
  - Program evaluation
Coaching & Consultation

• Purpose: to provide focused, direct feedback
• Process example:
  ▪ Collaboratively develop goals from report
  ▪ Define plan for change/coaching
  ▪ Define timeline for change/coaching
Professional Development

• Purpose: to expand understanding of quality programs for students who have ASD

• Process example:
  - Share APERS content
  - Broad self-evaluation
  - Incorporate peer/mentor coaching
Program Evaluation

• Purpose: to evaluate the quality of a program for purposes other than professional development
• Not an aspect of the NPDC’s use of the instrument
  ▪ Not for comparison between programs
  ▪ Psychometric properties not yet established
Features of APERS

- Two APERS formats: PE; MHS
- Organized by domains and subdomains
- Applicable in self-contained and inclusive programs
- Scored on a five-point scale with behavioral anchors at three points
- Results can be summarized by scores or graphs
Interdisciplinary Teaming

Program Ecology
- Learning Environment
- Structure & Schedule
- Positive Learning Climate
- Curriculum & Instruction
- Communication
- Social Competence
- Personal Independence
- Functional Behavior
- Assessment & IEP
- Transition (MHS only)

Family Participation

Program Quality

Learner Outcomes

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# APERS Components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APERS</th>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Type of Items</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preschool/Elementary</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Observation = 33, Interview = 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle/High</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>66</td>
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How Do We Collect This Information?

• Observation in program across the school day
• Review IEP
• Interview teacher(s)
• Interview parent(s)
• Interview team member
• Self-Assessment
Observations

• For inclusive programs with more than one class, observe two students for three hours each
• For self-contained programs observe for three hours
• Focus on taking notes on all content areas but not scoring
• Negotiate where to position yourself
• Find unobtrusive opportunity to scan entire classroom
• Limit interaction with classroom staff and students
Interviews

• Interview:
  ▪ A parent of a child with autism
  ▪ Teacher (usually special education)
  ▪ Team member (general education teacher, related service provider or other knowledgeable team member)

• Logistics:
  ▪ Approximately 30-50 min/interview
  ▪ Interview parties separately
  ▪ Work within the interview protocol to ask open-ended questions—avoid leading or forcing yes/no answers
Interview Protocol

1. Review purpose of APERS
2. Discuss the importance of interviewee’s perspective and information for developing a deeper understanding of program
3. Use broad questions first
   - Use follow-up probes to gather information that you do not get from the broad question
   - Use notes section to capture additional information that is useful but does not fit with a specific interview question.
Interview Intro

- Establish Rapport
- Purpose of Interview
- Structure of Interview

- See Interview Protocol to specific points to cover
Self-Assessment

• Completing the self-assessment
  ▪ Ask the practitioner to complete the self-assessment before you complete the full APERS
  ▪ Explain that the self-assessment provides valuable information for reflection and the professional development process
  ▪ The self-assessment results will be looked at later alongside results from the full APERS
  ▪ Takes 30 minutes to a few hours, depending on practitioner’s level of reflection
Scoring Process

• Scores should be based on the entire observation – not isolated interactions and occurrences

• During scoring process make note of overall themes and suggestions for debrief/report
Scoring System

• Some items contain specific instructions or are not applicable to students who receive services entirely in an inclusive setting.
• Additional instructions are provided for some items and should be scored using the directions at the bottom of the page.
• Ratings are based on a scale of 1-5.
Score Sheet

• Can be used for both inclusive and self-contained classrooms.
• Score each observation-based item for all settings/classrooms observed.
• Score each interview item for teacher, team member, and parent.
General Scoring Guidelines

- Scores for individual items should always be 1-5.
- For inclusive middle/high school programs, interview items, or when multiple settings are observed for an individual item, use your best judgment to derive a score that best represents the overall program.
- To derive a final score with multiple observers or in multiple settings do not average individual item scores; instead, reach consensus with the other observer and complete a consensus score sheet.
Assigning Ratings

• A rating of 1 – *any* indicator is observed and checked
• A rating of 2 – *none* of the indicators under 1 are checked and *at least one* indicator of 3 is checked
• A rating of 3 – *none* of the indicators under 1 are checked and *all* of the indicators under 3 are checked
• A rating of 4 – *all* indicators under 3 are checked and *at least one* indicator under 5 is checked.
• A rating of 5 – *all* indicators under 3 and 5 are checked.
Example: Score of 1
## Example: Score of 2

<table>
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**Example: Score of 3**

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Assigning Ratings: Inclusive Classrooms

• The Score Sheet is designed to help you organize this information by giving you separate spaces to score each setting observed.
• To obtain a score for each item, use your best judgment and/or reach consensus with another observer.
Debrief / Report

• Prior to meeting prioritize areas of focus for strengths of program and areas for growth
• Areas of focus become content for report
• Ensure that you have specific examples from the observation for each item to be discussed
• Use visual graphs to support discussion
  ▪ APERS graph
  ▪ Self-assessment graph
Components of Debrief / Report

• “What is the APERS and how does it work?”
  ▪ Not for comparison between programs
  ▪ Psychometric properties not yet established
  ▪ Effective as a tool for professional development and technical assistance

• Program Strengths
  ▪ General strengths and specific examples

• Areas for Growth
  ▪ Priorities areas to focus change
  ▪ Only choose areas that you have a constructive suggestion for change and growth
Debrief Intro

- Describe what the APERS is and isn’t
  - Is a professional development tool to help make decisions for program improvement
  - Is based on a snapshot of the program from what was learned during the day’s observation, interviews and records
  - One program’s APERS cannot be compared to another program’s APERS
  - Most important are the relative strengths and areas for growth of your program
Debrief Intro

• Describe Structure of the Debrief
  ▪ To compare self-assessment to APERS assessment
  ▪ To describe and discuss specific program strengths
  ▪ To describe and discuss specific program areas for growth and make recommendations for program improvement

• Explain that a written report will be sent shortly after the debrief
  ▪ Captures same information discussed in debrief
Debrief / Report

• Report is a record of the debriefing conversation; do not add content that was not covered during the debrief
  ▪ not necessary to have a complete report at the debrief
  ▪ A debrief shortly after the observation is most important with a report to follow

• See examples
Key Terms

- **Team Members**: two or more professionals directly involved in planning and implementing a student’s educational program

- **All Team Members**: all professionals directly involved in planning and implementing a student’s educational program

- **Key Team Member**: one team member who is expected to take key responsibility for the implementation of a student’s educational program or a particular aspect of that program
Key Terms

- **School Staff:** individuals who come into contact with a student during the course of the observation period
- **Peer:** any other similarly-aged student with or without disabilities. (A more specific descriptor (e.g., typically developing) will be used if an anchor describes a specific type of peers.)
- Other terms (e.g., few, some, multiple, sufficient, regularly) are defined in the protocol under ‘Key Terms’.
APERS Practice Videos

Score Item 25 (PE)

Preview Items 39, 40 (PE)
APERS Practice Videos

Score Items 39, 40 (PE)

Preview Items 24, 27, 28, 29 (MHS)
APERS Practice Videos

Score Items 24, 27, 28, 29 (MHS)

Preview Item 39-I and 43-I (PE)
APERS Practice Videos

Score Item 39-I and 43-I (PE)

Preview Items 48, 49, 50, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56 (MHS)
APERS Practice Videos

Score Items 48, 49, 50, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56 (MHS)
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