Autism Program Environment Rating Scale (APERS) Self-Assessment Companion Tool Middle and High School Version

Background:

The Autism Program Environment Rating Scale-Middle/High School (APERS-MHS) is an environmental assessment designed to be used by an outside observer for program improvement and/or research. The full version of the APERS includes 66 items, a complex scoring system, and requires at least 4-6 hours to complete.

This self-assessment companion tool is comprised of selected items from the APERS presented in a simpler, more straightforward format that can be scored much more quickly and easily. Using this tool, teachers can self-identify strengths and challenges in their own classrooms and programs. This information, in combination with a report from an outside observer using the complete APERS environmental assessment, enables teachers and coaches to gather information about program quality, and to develop a focused plan for program improvement.

Just like the APERS environmental assessment, this self-assessment companion tool is organized into 12 domains and the scores will result in a visual profile of classroom quality.

Scoring Directions:

For each item, check the box that corresponds with the statement that **best** describes your classroom or program. If you feel that the statement does not provide an entirely complete or accurate portrayal, use the notes column to more specifically describe your classroom or program.

Example:

Item	This is a challenge in our program.	This element is consistently in place, but we still have some work to do.	This is a real strength in our program.	Notes
1	The classroom/setting inhibits team members from seeing and monitoring student(s) from most areas of the room (e.g., high barriers or shelves are present throughout the classroom/setting).	☑ The classroom/setting design allows team members to see and monitor student(s) from most vantage points in the classroom/setting (no more than two areas in the classroom/setting where the staff is unable to see all students).	The classroom/setting design and the distribution of team members across the classroom/setting allow all students to be monitored at all times.	I can see everyone from most places in the room, but when students can go to the back table, the room divider blocks my view from the front of the classroom.

Learning Environments

Item	This is a challenge in our program.	This element is consistently in place, but we still have some work to do.	This is a real strength in our program.	Notes
1	The classroom/setting inhibits team members from seeing and monitoring student(s) from most areas of the room (e.g., high barriers or shelves are present throughout the classroom/setting).	□ The classroom/setting design allows team members to see and monitor student(s) from most vantage points in the classroom/setting (no more than two areas in the classroom/setting where the staff is unable to see all students).	The classroom/setting design and the distribution of team members across the classroom/setting allow all students to be monitored at all times.	
2	Students do not have their own space to store personal items (e.g., locker).	There are a sufficient number of classroom spaces so that each student has a place to store personal items. These spaces are labeled in a developmentally appropriate manner (e.g., picture symbols are used instead of or paired with written words versus written words only for students with limited language abilities, numbered lockers) so that students can readily identify their own space.	The learning environment is designed so that all students are able to independently access personal space (e.g., locker, desk) and materials (e.g., books, AAC devices, personal electronic devices, schedules, etc.)	
3	No physical structure or clear physical or visual boundaries exist to support students' understanding of what activities take place in particular locations.	Physical structure or boundaries exist in most activity/learning areas based upon individual student needs to support students' understanding of activities that take place in specific locations.	Physical structure or boundaries exist in all activities based upon individual student needs to support students' understanding of activities that take place in specific locations.	

Learning Environment Structure and Schedule

Item	This is a challenge in our program.	This element is consistently in place, but we still have some work to do.	This is a real strength in our program.	Notes
4	 Schedules and/or written instructions (e.g., classroom assignments, written reminders) are not posted in the classroom. No individual schedules of visual supports are used to support student transitions. 	□ Schedules and/or written instructions (e.g., classroom assignments, written reminders) are posted in the classroom. Some students have portable schedules (i.e. assignment notebook, planner, daily schedule) to support transitions.	Schedules and/or written instructions are provided in a variety of formats (e.g., picture, written) when necessary. Most students have portable schedules (i.e. assignment notebook, planner, daily schedule) to support transitions.	
5	Students are not forewarned or prepared for classroom/setting transitions, and are not provided with class instruction and/or community-based activities regarding how to handle unexpected transitions and unstructured periods of time (e.g., what to do while waiting for bus, waiting in line).	Students are regularly prepared for classroom/setting transitions or disruptions and changes in routines, and are sometimes provided instruction during school-based activities regarding how to handle unexpected transitions (e.g., fire alarm, power outage) and unstructured periods of time (e.g., what to do while waiting in lunch line, going to an assembly).	Students are always prepared for transitions or disruptions and changes in routines (e.g., informed in advance of changes in routine or activity), and are always prepared for handling unexpected transitions (e.g., fire alarm, power outage) and unstructured periods of time (e.g., what to do while waiting in lunch line, going to an assembly).	

Positive Learning Climate

Item	This is a challenge in our program.	This element is consistently in place, but we still have some work to do.	This is a real strength in our program.	Notes
6	Team members often interact with students using a negative tone and do not appear respectful of students' cultural or linguistic diversity.	Most key team member-student interactions are positive, respectful, and warm (e.g., show respect for student's feelings, listen attentively, make eye contact). These interactions appear respectful of students' cultural or linguistic diversity.	All team members in the classroom/setting engage students in positive, respectful, and warm interactions. These interactions appear respectful of students' cultural or linguistic diversity.	
7	 Team members do not acknowledge students' efforts and positive behaviors. 	Key team member consistently acknowledges students' efforts and uses effective approaches to acknowledge students efforts informally (e.g., pats on back, high fives) and/or formally (e.g., homework pass, soda, rewards, graded materials).	 All team members consistently acknowledges students' efforts in an individualized way, both informally (e.g., pats on the back, high fives) AND formally (e.g., notes, rewards, graded materials). 	
8	Team members are not aware of student engagement levels and do not respond to off-task behavior in a timely manner.	Key team member is aware of student engagement levels and responds to off- task behavior in a timely manner by redirecting students to task and remaining with students until they are engaged in an activity.	Team members are aware of student engagement levels and respond to off- task behavior in a timely manner by redirecting students to task and remaining with students until they are engaged in an activity.	

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Assessment

Iter	This is a challenge in our program.	This element is consistently in place, but we still have some work to do.	This is a real strength in our program.	Notes
9	Team members do not invite parents and/or family members to be involved in the assessment process.	Team members invite parents and/or family members to be involved in parts of the assessment process (e.g., interview, questionnaire).	Team members invite parents and/or family members to be actively involved throughout the assessment process (e.g., provide information about student performance at home, student's interests).	
10	Data does not drive instructional planning. This may be due to a lack of data collection, data tools that do not capture useful information, or the lack of a process to make decision based on data.	 There are some elements of data-based instruction. Data are collected on IEP goals in at least two formats (e.g., formal and informal assessments, direct observations, written narratives, criterion-referenced instruments, interviews with families), and during at least two activities. Key team member is able to articulate how he/she uses data to guide instructional decisions and planning. 	 Data-based instruction drives instructional planning. Data are collected on IEP goals in multiple formats (e.g., formal and informal assessments, direct observations, written narratives, criterion-referenced instruments, interviews with families) and during three or more activities. Common accepted standards for data analysis are used to evaluate student progress and guide instructional decisions (e.g., at least 3 data points are collected before evaluating and drawing conclusions from data; level, trend, and variability are examined when inspecting data; if the data show a flat trend or a trend in the undesired direction then instruction/intervention is altered). When appropriate, students are involved in monitoring of IEP goals 	

Assessment (Continued)

Item	This is a challenge in our program.	This element is consistently in place, but we still have some work to do.	This is a real strength in our program.	Notes
11	 Assessment and IEP development do not adequately address major transitions, including transition to adulthood. Assessments do not include information related to transitions between grades, programs, life stages, or other transitions. Team members do not develop appropriate, measurable postsecondary goals and services (e.g., training, education, employment and, where appropriate, independent living skills) on the IEP that support students' transitions to the next setting(s) (e.g., vocational, post-secondary education). 	 Assessment and IEP development address major transitions, including transition to adulthood. An initial assessment is completed before students are 16 years of age to determine skills needed to transition from high school to post- secondary education or a career. Team members make consistent efforts to involve families (e.g., soliciting ideas for goals, sharing draft goals, providing opportunities for feedback) and students (if appropriate), in developing transition plans and services on the IEP. The IEP includes some appropriate, measurable postsecondary goals and services (e.g., training, education, employment and, where appropriate, independent living skills). 	 There is evidence that transition planning is a priority. Transition plans and services emphasize the development of target skills to support students' access to the community. An initial assessment is completed before students are 14 years of age to determine skills needed to transition from high school to post-secondary education or a career. Assessment results are shared with students' next educational or vocational program. The IEP outlines appropriate and measurable postsecondary goals, and target skills and course of study that will be needed to prepare for the next setting(s). 	

Curriculum and Instruction

Item	This is a challenge in our program.	This element is consistently in place, but we still have some work to do.	This is a real strength in our program.	Notes
12	Team members do not plan and implement instruction that directly targets IEP goals.	 During the course of the school day, a key team member plans and implements instruction that directly targets IEP goals. 	During the course of the school day, team members plan and implement instruction that directly targets IEP goals. Team members implement instruction that is designed to capitalize on students' strengths and interests.	
13	 One of more of the following is a problem: Instructional periods are too long or too short to maintain students' attention and engagement There are a lot of distractions Team members do not address the distractions that occur during instructional times. 	Instructional periods and activities are usually the appropriate length to maintain students' attention and engagement. There are few distractions during instructional time (e.g., students using the restroom, students sharpening pencils, other staff coming in and out of classroom). Key team member addresses distractions during instructional times, but they continue to occur.	Not only are activities an appropriate length and distractions are minimized, but in addition students are positioned to maximize focus on task or person (e.g., team member stands behind student during instruction, student is seated next to teacher during small group activities).	
14	 Team members provide prompts for students, but tend to always give the same kind of prompts (e.g., physical, verbal, gestures). Sometimes team members prompt too much or not enough. 	When needed, key team member uses a clear prompting hierarchy during instruction (e.g., less intensive prompts followed by increased support as needed).	For each student, there is an individualized plan for what kind of prompt to use with the student initially, and what kind of prompt to use next if the initial prompt did not work. All staff understand this and consistently prompt the student in the same way.	

Curriculum and Instruction (Continued)

Item	This is a challenge in our program.	This element is consistently in place, but we still have some work to do.	This is a real strength in our program.	Notes
15	□ Team members do not provide opportunities to generalize skills by enabling student to practice skills in multiple settings and across multiple people (e.g., with multiple adults, and/or with multiple students).	Key team member provides opportunities to generalize skills by enabling student to practice skills in multiple settings and across multiple people (e.g., multiple adults, and/or with multiple students).	Team members provide opportunities to generalize skills by enabling student to practice skills in multiple settings and across multiple people (e.g., multiple adults, and/or with multiple students).	
16	No visual supports are used during instruction (e.g., outlines or notes for class period, teacher writes instructions for assignments on the board, PowerPoint during lectures, "First, then," timers, scripts).	Visual supports are available and are sometimes used during instruction (e.g., outlines or notes for class period, teacher writes instructions for assignments on the board, PowerPoint during lectures, "First, then," timers, scripts).	Visual supports are routinely used and are individualized and available across settings and activities (e.g., outlines for class period, teacher writes instructions for assignments on the board, PowerPoint during lectures, timers, "First, then," timers, scripts).	
17	 During instruction, team members give students few, if any opportunities to respond (communicate a response to a question or prompt) (e.g., answering a question verbally or with AAC, writing a written response, gesturing a response, demonstrating understanding by completing a task, etc.). 	During instruction, key team member gives students multiple opportunities to respond (communicate a response to a question or prompt), provides frequent feedback to student responses (correcting errors as appropriate), and adjusts instruction based on student responses.	 During instruction, all team members give students multiple opportunities to respond (communicate a response to a question or prompt), provide frequent feedback to student responses (correcting errors as appropriate), and adjust instruction based on student responses. 	

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Communication

Item	This is a challenge in our program.	This element is consistently in place, but we still have some work to do.	This is a real strength in our program.	Notes
18	Team members do not use strategies (e.g., environmental arrangement) to encourage student communication (e.g., students do not need to ask for items/materials to complete activities, environment is never altered/modified to encourage students to ask questions or comment).	Key team member arranges environment to encourage students to communicate (e.g., materials are placed just out of reach so student needs to ask for them, student must ask a peer for a calculator or notebook), creates consistent, predictable routines and manipulates established routines to promote communication (e.g., pausing or changing the routine), and creates opportunities within classroom activities for students to respond or initiate communication.	In addition to arranging the environmental arrangement to encourage students to communicate, and creating opportunities within classroom activities for students to respond or initiate communication, team members create opportunities for students to communicate with multiple partners (e.g., school staff, peers, community members) across multiple settings.	
19	Team members do not use consistent instructional strategies for promoting student communication (e.g., prompting, appropriate wait time, reinforcement).	Key team member consistently uses instructional strategies to promote student communication development (e.g., prompting, appropriate wait time, reinforcement) in at least two environments, and implements individualized systematic instruction (e.g., modeling the use of the communication system, teaching new vocabulary, role playing conversations) that emphasizes functional communication (communication that matches student needs as identified in assessment).	Team members consistently use instructional strategies to promote student communication development (e.g., prompting, appropriate wait time, reinforcement) across school and community environments, and implement individualized systematic instruction that emphasizes <i>functional and spontaneous</i> communication, whereby the student has the opportunity to initiate communication without the need for prompting or cueing.	
20	Team members do not ensure that communication systems are available for students who do not have other means to functionally communicate.	Key team member ensures that communication systems or supports are available and accessible in most activities, and promotes the use of communication systems in order for students to request basic needs (e.g., food, desired materials, desired activity, break) and for social communication (e.g., greeting, commenting, directing attention).	Team members ensure that communication systems serve multiple functions (e.g., requesting, greeting, commenting, protesting, gaining attention) and/or forms (e.g., different pictures, gesture, sign language, verbal), and promote the use of communication systems or supports throughout the day with multiple partners.	

Social Competence

Item	This is a challenge in our program.	This element is consistently in place, but we still have some work to do.	This is a real strength in our program.	Notes
21	No materials or activities that encourage communication and social interaction are implemented as part of the curriculum (e.g., group experiments/projects, group inquiry and problem-solving, vocational tasks that require two or more people to cooperate and work together).	At least two types of materials or activities that encourage communication and social interaction are implemented as part of the curriculum (e.g., group experiments/projects, group inquiry and problem-solving, vocational tasks that require two or more people to cooperate and work together). Materials and activities that support social interaction are appropriate for individual students' developmental levels and are used throughout the day.	 Multiple materials and activities that encourage communication and social interaction are implemented as part of the curriculum (e.g., group experiments/projects, group inquiry and problem-solving, vocational tasks that require two or more people to cooperate and work together). Opportunities are provided for students with ASD to participate in extracurricular activities with support (e.g., as needed from peers, school staff, etc.). 	
22	Key team member or other team members do not conduct systematic explicit instruction to promote the social skills development of students with ASD (e.g., social skills training, social stories, peer-mediated instruction).	Key team member conducts systematic explicit instruction to promote the development of social skills for students with ASD at least two times per month (self-contained) OR at least weekly (full inclusion) (e.g., social skills training, social stories, peer-mediated instruction).Typically developing peers are included in social skills intervention activities.	Team members conduct weekly (self- contained) OR daily (full inclusion) systematic explicit instruction to promote the social skills development of students with ASD in the classroom setting (e.g., social skills training, social stories, peer-mediated instruction). Social skills interventions are implemented within natural environments where they are needed (e.g., lunch, walking in the hall).	
23	Peer social networks are not implemented as part of the school's core curriculum (e.g., school does not provide instruction to typically developing peers about how to be peer buddies).	Formal peer social network activities are implemented during at least two school-based activities (e.g., students with ASD interact with typically developing peer buddies during lunch and during literacy instruction).	Formal peer social networks are part of the school's core curriculum (e.g., school provides instruction to typically developing peers about how to be peer buddies), and numerous typically developing peers are identified to be peer buddies for students with ASD across school- and/or community- based settings and activities (e.g., lunch, recess, going to football games, sitting in class, walking down the hall).	

Personal Independence & Competence

ltem	This is a challenge in our program.	This element is consistently in place, but we still have some work to do.	This is a real strength in our program.	Notes
24	No strategies are used to promote students' personal independence in routines and activities (e.g., picture schedules, transition objects, checklists, PDAs/personal organizers, assignment notebooks, binders, calendars, daily planners).	At least two strategies are used to promote students' personal independence in routines and activities (e.g., picture schedules, transition objects, checklists, PDAs/personal organizers, assignment notebooks, binders, calendars, daily planners).	Three or more strategies are used across classroom activities to promote students' personal independence (e.g., picture schedules, transition objects, checklists, PDAs/personal organizers, assignment notebooks, binders, calendars, daily planners).	
25	No strategies are used to promote self-management skills (e.g., helping students recognize their behavior by labeling it, helping students evaluate how they performed, including students in the reinforcement process, keeping track of assignments, keeping track of class grades).	 At least two strategies are used to promote self-management skills (e.g., helping students recognize their behavior by labeling it, helping students evaluate how they performed, including students in the reinforcement process, keeping track of assignments, keeping track of class grades). Students are involved in the determination of self-management skills and strategies during team meetings. 	Several strategies are used to promote self-management skills (e.g., helping students recognize their behavior by labeling it, helping students evaluate how they performed, including students in the reinforcement process, keeping track of assignments, keeping track of class grades). Students are involved in monitoring data for some IEP goals.	

Functional Behavior

Item	This is a challenge in our program.	This element is consistently in place, but we still have some work to do.	This is a real strength in our program.	Notes
26	 When interfering behaviors occur, team members do not use a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) to understand the cause of the behavior. 	When interfering behaviors occur, a member of the team conducts an FBA to determine the cause of the behavior. Team members observe the student and the interfering behavior in the context where the student displays the behavior (e.g., home, school, community) and include these observations in the FBA.	 When interfering behaviors occur, team members conduct an FBA in collaboration with family members, generate a hypothesis statement in the FBA about the potential function(s) of the behavior (e.g., behavior serves as an escape or tangible/access function), and identify possible replacement behaviors that can serve as the focus of the intervention to reduce interfering behaviors. 	
27	Team members do not develop an intervention plan to address interfering behaviors.	One member of the team (e.g., special education teacher, general education teacher, general education teacher, SLP) develops an intervention plan to address interfering behaviors when they occur and implements the identified strategies and interventions in a consistent manner when the interfering behaviors occur.	Team members develop a comprehensive intervention plan in collaboration with family that includes assessment of current skills and any interfering behaviors, instructional strategies for teaching replacement behavior and skills, practice strategies (e.g., environmental engineering), and a plan for what to do if interfering behavior continues to occur and implement the identified strategies and interventions in a consistent manner when the interfering behaviors occur.	

Family Involvement

Item	This is a challenge in our program.	This element is consistently in place, but we still have some work to do.	This is a real strength in our program.	Notes
28	Key team member has no communication with family outside of the IEP conference.	Key team member sometimes communicates with parents by sending home weekly to monthly reports of activities in the classroom.	Key team member has a system for regular communication that is individualized to each family and is consistently used. Teachers and team members avoid jargon and acronyms when communicating with parents/families, and when technical terms must be used, they are explained.	
29	Team members provide little information that is important to families (e.g., instructional strategies, community resources, post- secondary options, transition process, recreation/leisure, job fairs or other topics as requested by families).	Key team member provides some information that is important to all families (e.g., general instructional strategies, community resources, post- secondary options, transition process, recreation/leisure, job fairs).	Team members provide information that is important and individualized for families (e.g., specific instructional strategies, community resources, post- secondary options, transition process, recreation/leisure opportunities for individual student, or topics as requested by a family). Information provided to families by team members contains few technical terms and is easy for most parents to understand (e.g., little or no jargon, family-friendly websites).	

Teaming

Item	This is a challenge in our program.	This element is consistently in place, but we still have some work to do.	This is a real strength in our program.	Notes
30	Few decisions are made at team meetings. When decisions are made, team members often do not follow through with implementing the decisions.	Team members take responsibility for implementing actions determined by team that are relevant to their discipline (e.g., language/communication and SLP, sensory and OT).	Systems are in place for making decisions at team meetings (e.g., action plans, problem solving processes). Team members implement all actions determined by the team (e.g., SLP implements language/communication goals as well as sensory goals).	
31	Key team member (e.g., special education teacher) has no collaborative relationship with other team members. Team meetings are rare.	Key team members have an ongoing collaborative relationship with at least two other team members, who provide limited feedback, communication, and sharing of data (e.g., assessment data, ongoing data collected). Team meetings occur on an "as needed" basis, but more than 2 times a year.	 A key team member (e.g., special education teacher, SLP) is assigned and has an ongoing collaborative relationship with all team members. Key team members provide effective feedback, frequent communication, and data with other team members (e.g., assessment data, ongoing data collected). Team meetings are scheduled at regular, predictable times throughout the school year. 	
32	 Paraprofessionals have had no training about special education, developmental disabilities, or ASD (e.g., district in-service, college course). 	Paraprofessionals have had general training related to developmental disabilities and special education, but not specifically about ASD (e.g., district in-service, college course).	 Paraprofessionals have had formal training related to ASD (e.g., district in- service, college course). Paraprofessionals regularly participate as members of the team. 	

Transition Planning

Item	This is a challenge in our program.	This element is consistently in place, but we still have some work to do.	This is a real strength in our program.	Notes
33	Team members develop transition plans and services that do not include appropriate goals for teaching students with ASD self-advocacy and choice-making skills.	Key team member develops some goals and services on transition plans that include strategies for teaching students with ASD self-advocacy and choice- making skills, and implements instruction that targets these goals.	Team members provide learning activities and support for students with ASD in acquiring self-advocacy and choice-making skills in natural settings (e.g., vocational training, team meetings). Team members provide ongoing support to families about ways they can help students with ASD acquire self-advocacy and choice- making skills in the community.	
34	Team members do not provide support in acquiring and practicing target transition skills in natural settings (e.g., vocational setting, school, community) to families and students with ASD.	Key team member provides periodic opportunities for students with ASD to acquire and practice target transition skills in natural settings.	 Team members teach and provide opportunities to practice target transition skills in natural settings (e.g., vocational setting, community). Periodic support is provided to families (e.g., email, phone calls, and periodic meetings) on ways to teach and practice transition skills in natural settings. 	