

## Autism Program Environment Rating Scale (APERS) Self-Assessment Companion Tool Preschool and Elementary Version

### Background:

The Autism Program Environment Rating Scale-Preschool/Elementary (APERS-PE) 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 64 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 11 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	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> The classroom/setting design and the distribution of team members across the classroom/setting allow all students to be monitored at all times.	<i>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.</i>

**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	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> The classroom/setting design and the distribution of team members across the classroom/setting allow all students to be monitored at all times.	
2	<input type="checkbox"/> Students do not have their own space to store personal items (e.g., locker).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> No physical structure or clear physical or visual boundaries exist to support students' understanding of what activities take place in particular locations.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> 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.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> Team members often interact with students using a negative tone and do not appear respectful of students' cultural or linguistic diversity.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> Team members do not acknowledge students' efforts and positive behaviors.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> Team members are not aware of student engagement levels and do not respond to off-task behavior in a timely manner.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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.	

**Assessment**

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
9	<input type="checkbox"/> Team members do not invite parents and/or family members to be involved in the assessment process.	<input type="checkbox"/> Team members invite parents and/or family members to be involved in parts of the assessment process (e.g., interview, questionnaire).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> 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.	<input type="checkbox"/> There are some elements of data-based instruction. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Key team member is able to articulate how he/she uses data to guide instructional decisions and planning.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> Data-based instruction drives instructional planning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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).</li> <li>• When appropriate, students are involved in monitoring of IEP goals</li> </ul>	

**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	<input type="checkbox"/> Assessments do not include information related to transitions between grades, programs, or other transitions.	<input type="checkbox"/> Assessments include information on skills needed for successful transitions (between grades, programs, etc.) and provide specific information about upcoming transitions. Team members make consistent efforts to involve families in assessment and transition planning.	<input type="checkbox"/> Comprehensive assessments for transition are conducted that include the following elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessments include information on skills needed for successful transitions (between grades, programs, etc.) and provide specific information about upcoming transitions.</li> <li>• Team members make consistent efforts to involve families in assessment and transition planning.</li> <li>• Practitioner(s) from student's next educational program is invited to contribute to assessment and transition planning process.</li> <li>• Assessment results are shared with students' next educational program.</li> </ul>	

**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	<input type="checkbox"/> Team members do not plan and implement instruction that directly targets IEP goals.	<input type="checkbox"/> During the course of the school day, a key team member plans and implements instruction that directly targets IEP goals.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> One of more of the following is a problem: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructional periods are too long or too short to maintain students' attention and engagement</li> <li>• There are a lot of distractions</li> <li>• Team members do not address the distractions that occur during instructional times.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> 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.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> 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.	<input type="checkbox"/> When needed, key team member uses a clear prompting hierarchy during instruction (e.g., less intensive prompts followed by increased support as needed).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> 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.).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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.	



**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	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> Team members do not use consistent instructional strategies for promoting student communication (e.g., prompting, appropriate wait time, reinforcement).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> Team members do not ensure that communication systems are available for students who do not have other means to functionally communicate.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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) <b>OR</b> 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.	<input type="checkbox"/> Team members conduct weekly (self-contained) <b>OR</b> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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***

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
24	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> When interfering behaviors occur, team members do not use a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) to understand the cause of the behavior.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> Team members do not develop an intervention plan to address interfering behaviors.	<input type="checkbox"/> One member of the team (e.g., special 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.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> Key team member has no communication with family outside of the IEP conference.	<input type="checkbox"/> Key team member sometimes communicates with parents by sending home weekly to monthly reports of activities in the classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> Few decisions are made at team meetings. When decisions are made, team members often do not follow through with implementing the decisions.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> Key team member (e.g., special education teacher) has no collaborative relationship with other team members. Team meetings are rare.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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.	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> Paraprofessionals have had no training about special education, developmental disabilities, or ASD (e.g., district in-service, college course).	<input type="checkbox"/> Paraprofessionals have had general training related to developmental disabilities and special education, but not specifically about ASD (e.g., district in-service, college course).	<input type="checkbox"/> Paraprofessionals have had formal training related to ASD (e.g., district in-service, college course). Paraprofessionals regularly participate as members of the team.	