Learning Community SEL PQA Jargon

Updated September 2025

Youth Development
1) the science-based foundation of our field
2) in human development, the phase of development that happens after early childhood and before adulthood
3) the field of youth-serving organizations that support the growth, learning, introspective, and interpersonal evolution of young people

Program Quality
1) staff practices that create safe, supportive, interactive, and engaging learning environments where young people can thrive
2) policies and procedures within organizations that are created to maximize youth engagement while supporting staff and youth to thrive

Continuous Improvement
the mindset that improvement is a continuous effort, not something that happens overnight; no matter where we are at, we can always learn and grow more; "perfection" is not real and never the goal; encourages honest responses to identify opportunities for organizational and staff growth

Low Stakes Data / High Stakes Data
some data is "high stakes": people use it to judge your program, tell you if you are doing things right, give you funding, or take it away
"low stakes data" is the opposite: it is for your team, it helps you make decisions, but no one uses it to judge your program; *insights from the SEL PQA are "low stakes" - there are no consequences or external benefits for getting low or high scores*

Social Emotional Learning Program Quality <u>Assessment</u> (SELPQA)
a validated instrument designed to evaluate the quality of youth programs and identify staff training needs, but focused primarily on practices that enhance a students social and emotional learning; designed to empower people and organizations to envision optimal-quality programming for youth by providing a shared language for practice and decision-making. Sometimes called the PQA for short.

Youth Program Quality <u>Assessment</u> (YPQA)
an earlier version of the SEL PQA which was used widely throughout Oregon (and the country); a validated instrument designed to evaluate the quality of youth programs and identify staff training needs; designed to empower people and organizations to envision optimal-quality programming for youth by providing a shared language for practice and decision-making. Sometimes called the PQA for short.

Youth Program Quality <u>Intervention</u> (YPQI)
the big picture of what is happening (the assessment tool and observations + plus the workshops + plus the process of being led to building a team and doing continuous

improvement); it all works together to create a whole "intervention" we are implementing together *(AKA - the holistic whole of the tool, process, & practice)*

Weikart Center

the whole YPQ system that we are using was originally developed by camp staff and researchers who worked together to define quality. Eventually, the effort morphed into an organization, called the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. The Weikart Center is actually part of a bigger nonprofit, called the Forum for Youth Investment. The Weikart Center's work is widely recognized as the best in youth development; more than 30 other states have used their assessment tools.

SEL Handbook

the workbook providing details on each of the items assessed by the SELPQA

Assessment Tool

shorthand for the SELPQA (or YPQA)

organized by Domain > Scale > Item; each Scale will have multiple Items; each item will have a code associated with the Scale and Item
Example: "ES.1" – ES = Emotional Safety [scale]; 1 [item order]

Item

refers to a single question in your assessment, or a single row; each item is scored with a 1, 3, or 5; each item has unique scoring thresholds

Scale

mid-sized bucket made up of a grouping of similar items; the scales are helpful because they identify the topic you are working on (example: Emotional Safety); every scale is made up of multiple items

Domain

the biggest bucket; the name of big sections or categories we measure; also think of it as "the big picture of what we are focusing on"'

SELPQA domains are: Safe Environment,Supportive Environment, Interactive Environment, and Engaging Environment

Internal Observation / Assessment

refers to team members within your organization who observe other team member's programming to collect data; it is internal because it is just your team that works together to collect this data; during an observation, your staff members take *notes*, and later, those notes are compiled as an organizational assessment score in a scoring meeting. The Weikart Center uses the phrase "internal assessment", but learning community members from past years suggested we use the phrase "internal observation"

External Observation / Assessment

refers to a trained SEL PQA Observer who visits your program to observe program offerings; they will submit a score for that day of assessment. External observers are staff from other youth programs in the learning community, who have taken a course a passed a test with the Weikart Center. You can become an external observer! The Weikart Center uses the phrase

"external assessment", but learning community members from past years suggested we use the phrase "external observation"

Observation Notes (with no scoring)

are the set of notes that are used to later form scores. When you conduct your own internal observations, you will use a blank notebook and write down what you see and hear. We'll train you on how to take notes at our training in October. After multiple people are able to score multiple programs, the team will then work together to hold a group scoring session/meeting/effort; internal observers/assessors should have a sense of SELPQA Items to inform their notes

Scoring (from observation notes)

refers to the practice of taking all the observation notes created by all the staff in your organization, and then working together to turn those notes into scores for each item in the SELPQA. Remember – for internal observations/assessments the score will be informed by the collective observation (meaning many different staff observing many different offerings).

Improvement Plan

in January, your organization will receive reports that share your internal and external scores back with you. After reviewing the reports, your organization will pick THREE areas to focus on, and you'll develop a SMART goal for each of those three areas. You will need to turn those goals into us (in a portal called the Scores Reporter)

SMART Goals

SMART = specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound

3-Year Arch

refers to the recognition that change takes time; organizations have the possibility of participating in the YPQ learning community for up to three years, deepening their understanding of the assessment tool and identifying goals for continuous improvement each year; depth of understanding and use of key assessment tools are incorporated over time