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New Jersey Kindergarten to Third Grade Education Self–Assessment Validation System (K–3 SAVS)

Guide to Using the K–3 SAVS

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Division of Early Childhood Services
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Introduction

The NJ Kindergarten to Third Grade Self–Assessment Validation System (K–3 SAVS) is part of New Jersey's comprehensive commitment to an Early Childhood Continuum of High-Quality Education.

Prior to entering kindergarten in New Jersey, children have a wide variety of early care and education experiences. The state's high-quality education programs are designed and built upon all the experiences a child has before their first day of kindergarten and the quest for quality programming to meet every young child's needs doesn't wain after program planning is in place. Therefore, NJ's early education programs include regular collaborative reviews, program assessments, and continual improvement processes that inform program quality and student outcomes.

To help New Jersey's school districts continually and successfully improve the quality of their Kindergarten to Third Grade programs, the Office of Kindergarten to Third Grade Education at the New Jersey Department of Education, developed a Kindergarten to Third Grade Self–Assessment Validation System (K–3 SAVS).

The K–3 SAVS is a resource that includes tools and protocols designed to help New Jersey's early childhood educators and administrators voluntarily raise the quality of their K–3 education programs. It is an optional self–assessment that gives each program full autonomy over its own improvement practices.

The goal of the K–3 SAVS is continual quality review and improvement. It is implemented with tools and protocols that districts can use to autonomously identify, self-assess, and validate evidence of practice as it is aligned with quality criteria and indicators.

The K–3 SAVS is grounded in a framework of quality criteria and indicators, implementation tools, and protocols designed to support districts in conducting a voluntary self–assessment of the quality and effectiveness of their Kindergarten to Third Grade programs.

The tools and protocols are designed to be compatible with and anchor to the Self–Assessment Validation System utilized in Preschool programs. Used together as part of a comprehensive continuum of practice, early childhood education programs can operationalize a coherent system of practice from preschool to third grade.

The vision for the K–3 SAVS approach is to build upon high-quality preschool programming and enhance K–3 learning opportunities to help children prepare for the upper grades of elementary school. The overview section of this *Guide to Using the K–3 SAVS* contains a crosswalk of similarities, differences, and connections between the SAVS utilized in Preschool, K–3 SAVS, and other program quality assessments used throughout the entire birth to 3rd grade continuum of practice.

The K–3 SAVS is focused on children in kindergarten to third grade education programs from approximately five to eight years old. However, where appropriate, it refers to the value of aligning practices across the entire early childhood continuum which includes programs for children from birth through preschool. The purpose of including reference to very young children is to articulate the importance of teaching, learning, and high-quality programming across NJ's entire early childhood education system. For clarity purposes, the K–3 SAVS refers to five groups of children; birth to age three in out-of-home childcare programs, three to four-year-old children enrolled in a state–funded preschool programs, three to four-year-old children enrolled in any district-operated preschool program, children in kindergarten to third grade, and children in the early elementary grades.

Development of the K–3 SAVS

A K–3 SAVS quality framework, implementation support tools, and capacity–building protocols are grounded in research, evidence-based practices, educator expertise, and practical implementation in New Jersey schools. The development team and pilot districts included district, school, and program leaders, teachers, researchers, representatives from New Jersey's professional education organizations, higher education representatives, and staff across the Department of Education who have relevant expertise.

Four Years of Stakeholder Engagement

- Year 1 2019-2020 Developmental Year
    - Early childhood experts, practitioners, and stakeholders developed The Framework for Criteria and Indicators of a High-quality K–3 Education Program.
- Year 2 2020-2021 Pilot Year 1
    - Pilot districts focused on developing and evaluating K–3 SAVS implementation tools.
- Year 3 2021-2022 Pilot Year 2
    - Pilot districts focused on developing and evaluating K–3 SAVS sample protocols for implementation.
- Year 4 2022-2023 Planning and Implementation Year
    - The K–3 SAVS tools and protocols were finalized and made available for state-wide use.

The Kindergarten to Third Grade Self–Assessment Validation System (K–3 SAVS) is a set of support tools and protocols developed to help districts voluntarily raise the quality of their K–3 education programs. The implementation support tools and protocols should be reviewed and used according to the specific needs of the children in the program, the early childhood education community, and the practitioners using it. The protocols facilitate an optional self–assessment that gives each program full autonomy over its own decision-making and improvement practices and should be implemented with the understanding that the goal is continual quality review of the K–3 education program.

Conclusion

The K–3 SAVS is a comprehensive system of tools and protocols created around a *Framework of Criteria and Indicators of a High-Quality K–3 Education Program*. It is as much about the process of continual review and improvement as it is about identifying and validating evidence of quality practice. Increased knowledge of high-quality early childhood education and a collaborative commitment to employing a cycle of quality improvement helps ensure that a district's youngest learners receive the services, experiences, and foundation necessary to support optimal learning and development in their early elementary years of school. With leadership and practitioners' commitment, use of the K–3 SAVS can provide New Jersey's early childhood education communities with insight, support, and guidance to voluntarily raise the quality and alignment of their Kindergarten to Third Grade early childhood education programs.

The K–3 SAVS has two implementation support tools and several capacity–building protocols to support districts in continual quality review and improvement.

The K–3 SAVS is an open-sourced document. In addition to K–3 educators, the NJDOE Division of Early Childhood Services encourages preschool and fourth grade educators to review the philosophy, guidance, and implementation tools in the K–3 Self–Assessment Validation System to enhance their own vision, practices, and partnerships across the full continuum of early learning.

Descriptions: Implementation Support Tools and Protocols

Collaboration among experts in a variety of roles in the district brings many perspectives, ideas, and growth.

Tools

Tool 1 - Guide to Using the K–3 SAVS

The *Guide* is an introduction to and explanation of the K–3 SAVS. It clarifies the purpose and key components of the system. Information in the *Guide* can help districts build their understanding and capacity to effectively use research-based information about quality early childhood education programming so they can identify and self-assess their own evidence of practice, analyze domains of performance, and utilize the tools and protocols designed to shape continual improvement. The *Guide* contains Questions and Answers, elements of the tools and protocols, and supporting references that support K–3 SAVS implementation. District Professional Learning Communities can use it to consider, build capacity, contribute to the work of the K–3 SAVS Team, and assist with planning for change. The system tools are in the *Framework and Plan for a High-Quality K–3 Education Program* and on the K–3 SAVS webpage.

Tool 2 - Framework and Plan for a High-Quality K–3 Education Program

The *Framework* and Plan for a High-Quality K–3 Education Program document is a companion to the *Guide to Using the K–3 SAVS*. It is a multi-purpose document containing a *Framework*, *Analytic Rubric*, *Implementation Support Protocols*, and helpful *Growth Plan Templates*. It is intended to assist districts in using research-based criteria and quality indicators to develop and operate their kindergarten to third grade education program. The *Framework* was developed by state and national experts, New Jersey practitioners that have successfully implemented P–3 alignment, and stakeholders who prioritize the quality of New Jersey's early childhood education system.

The criteria include three critical multi-dimensional components and related indicators that articulate research-based quality practices in the following areas: Section 1 Program Leadership and Administration; Section 2 Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Professional Learning; and, Section 3 Family and Community Engagement.

The *Analytic Rubric* provides reference points for districts to self-assess the strength of alignment between their evidence of practice and the quality indicators.

Three brief *Growth Plan Templates* from each section of the *Framework* are resources to assist and guide district teams through reflection and begin the action planning. The templates help districts begin the process of self–assessment and prioritization of practices they want to consider for change or improvement.

Together the *Framework, Analytic Rubric, Growth Plan Templates*, and *Implementation Support Tools and Protocols* guide alignment of program development and practice across the full P–3 early childhood continuum.

Tool 3 - Optional Feedback on Using the K–3 Self-Assessment Validation System

The *Optional Feedback Tool* provides a way for districts using the K–3 SAVS to voluntarily share feedback about their experience using the tools and protocols. Districts are not responsible for state reporting, however, the Office of Kindergarten to Third Grade Education values partnerships with districts and offers opportunities for input that will contribute to the state's commitment to high-quality education. Teams may also choose to use the 10 questions as a self-reflection tool. Comments will be used for the sole purpose of improvements to the K–3 SAVS tools and protocols.

The tools and protocols of the K–3 SAVS guide districts through shifts in practice.

Protocols

Protocol: Building a Unique K–3 SAVS Team

The protocol can help districts build a district-wide team of experts with varying roles and responsibilities including those who have different perspectives and the authority to propose and implement change. Professionals who may not regularly engage in district discussions about quality early elementary education can provide important insight and value to continual program improvement efforts. Team members should serve in a variety of district capacities that are complimentary, not duplicative, to ensure that the team is able to effectively influence improvements in the system, structure, and operation of the K–3 program. Engaging with district-wide colleagues can build a larger, informed network that can advocate for the quality education of the district's youngest learners.

Protocol: Sample Agendas and Touchpoints for Teams

A meaningful self-assessment and improvement effort require time and thoughtful planning. The *Sample Agendas and Touchpoints* are planning suggestions created by the K–3 SAVS pilot districts as a practical guide to organize and support the work of the team. Whether districts consider a simple or complex evaluation of their program practices, the samples can help teams benefit from the organization of the pilot districts and adapt their own plans.

Protocol: Using the K–3 SAVS Analytic Rubric

The *Analytic Rubric* contains five descriptors and directly links the quality indicators in the *Framework* with evidence of program practice. Use of the *Analytic Rubric* guides K–3 SAVS teams through the self–assessment process.

The rubric is as much about the process of analyzing quality indicators in the *Framework* as it is about identifying and aligning evidence of district practice.

By deconstructing the indicators through discussion and using the *Analytic Rubric*, districts get insight into the quality of their current practices as they relate to the quality indicators. The analysis process inherent in the rubric helps districts paint a picture of the quality of their program, shape program goals, and inform decisions about continual quality improvement. Revisiting the rubric descriptors throughout the program review and improvement process allows the team to monitor progress, validate it with new evidence of practice, and recalibrate the strength of program alignment with the quality indicators.

Protocol: Sample Growth Plan Template

Three *Growth Plan Templates* are included at the end of *Tool 2: Framework and Plan for a High-Quality K–3 Education Program*. There is one template for each of the three sections of the *Framework*. As districts review the quality indicators in the *Framework* the *Growth Plan Templates* can serve as a starting point to collect information about the current practices and alignment with the quality indicators. The templates are basic and provide a place to process and organize information. This can help in merging the K–3 SAVS goals and strategies with larger district strategic plans. Each template begins with the *Analytic Rubric* so that districts can contemplate the strength of current practice with the quality indicators.

Protocol: Quality Review and Validation Cycle Infographic

The *Quality Review and Validation Cycle Infographic* is a detailed articulation of the District's Growth Plan. It is an extension of the plan intended to facilitate communication of the district's strategies to continually review and strengthen the alignment between evidence of practice and the indicators of a high-quality K–3 education program.

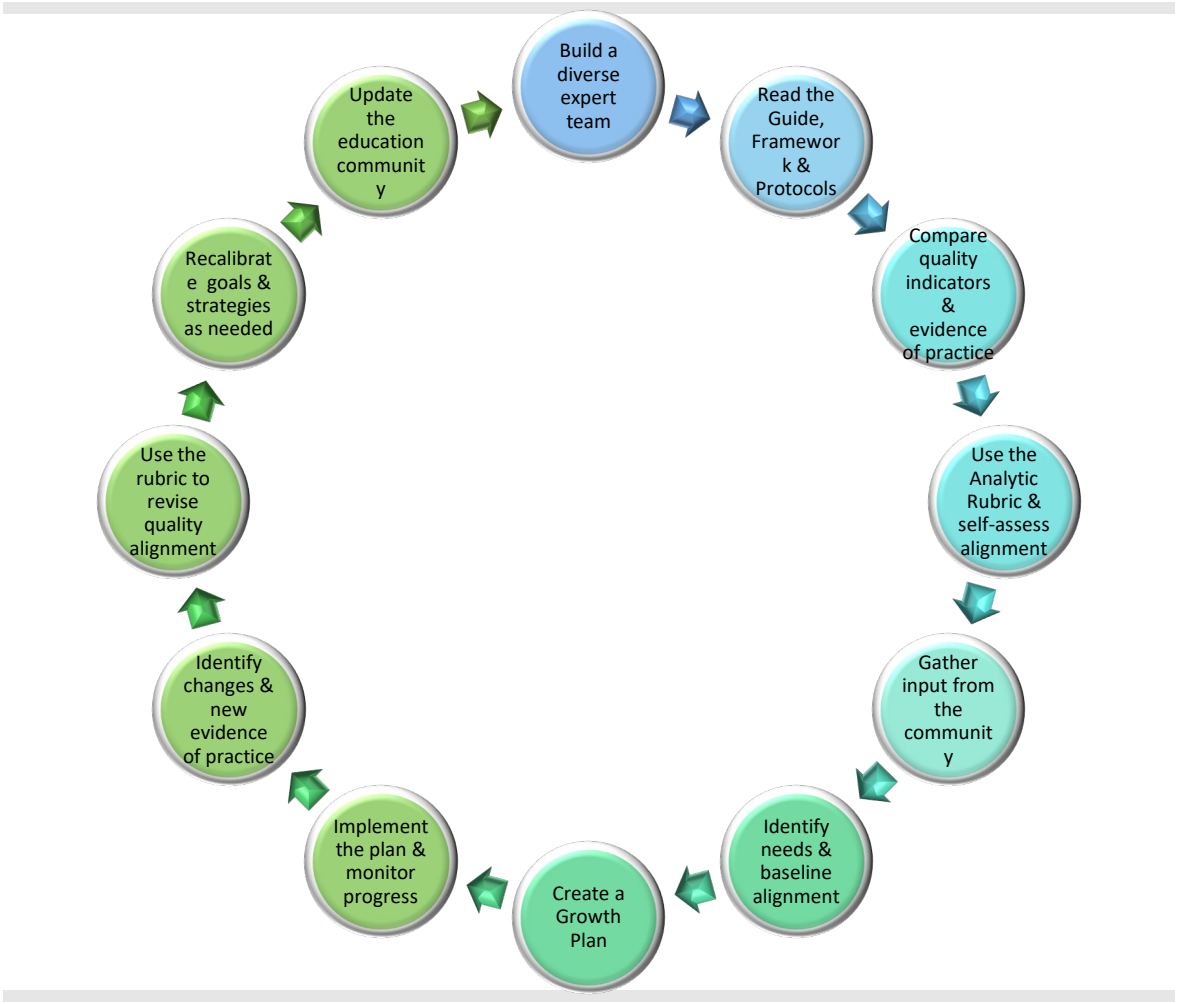
The *Growth Plan* is intended to be general enough to allow individualization, but not so abstract that the process of planning, implementation, and change become vague and immeasurable. Therefore, to communicate the *Growth Plan* more clearly, districts can use the infographic protocol to outline details of their *Growth Plan* and communicate the progression of a step-by-step cycle of their commitment to self-analysis and alignment between their practice and the program quality indicators.

The protocol contains a sample infographic utilizing all the K–3 SAVS tools and protocols. It contains a detailed text description of each element in the infographic. The protocol also includes directions to modify the sample and create the articulation of a district's individualized *Growth Plan*. The protocol is available on the K–3 SAVS webpage.

Text Description of the Sample Continuous Quality Review and Validation Cycle

1. Build a diverse expert team.
2. Read the Guide, Framework, and Protocols.
3. Compare quality indicators and evidence of practice.
4. Use the Analytic Rubric and self-assess alignment.
5. Gather input from the community.
6. Identify needs and baseline alignment.
7. Create a Growth Plan.
8. Implement the plan and monitor progress.
9. Identify changes and new evidence of practice.
10. Use the rubric to revise quality alignment.
11. Recalibrate goals and strategies as needed.
12. Update the education community.

The infographic is the articulation of a district's Growth Plan.



Protocol: Sample Practices of High-Quality Indicators for Family and Community Engagement

District practices shaped by the criteria and indicators in Section 3 can build effective home/school learning partnerships with positive results for student success.

Using the indicators as a guide to link program goals with high-quality partnership practices ensures that parents, families, and community partners can become involved in ways that directly support student learning and development. When those quality practices are delivered in equitable ways, the district can reach out to all families, and engage them in their child's learning and development.

The sample protocol identifies practices that reflect a variety of descriptors from across the Analytic Rubric. It is intended to prompt districts to become more aware of the impact their current practices have on student learning and development. Stronger alignment can create a positive impact for students such as school readiness, social-emotional competencies, reading and math skill development, student attendance, behavior, health, etc.

District K–3 SAVS teams can use the sample protocol as a tool for professional learning communities, district capacity–building, annual planning, the development of new strategies for improvement, etc. The sample protocol is located on the K–3 SAVS webpage.

Protocol: Sample Template for K–3 SAVS Communication with Families

Communicating with families about program quality heightens awareness and support for quality teaching and learning. Communication with families also demonstrates a willingness to be transparent and clarifies the commitment that a district makes to ensure their children receive a high-quality education. *The Template for K–3 SAVS Communication with Families* illustrates one way to communicate that the K–3 SAVS helps the district build a strong foundation for learning.

Overview: Questions and Answers about the K–3 SAVS

Implementing the Kindergarten to Third Grade Self–Assessment Validation System

What is the K–3 Self–Assessment Validation System (K–3 SAVS)?

The K–3 SAVS is a system of continual quality review and improvement supports developed to help districts voluntarily raise the quality of their K–3 education programs. Tools, protocols, and a framework of criteria and indicators guide and support early childhood educators with insight into quality practice. The K–3 SAVS is an optional self–assessment that gives each program full autonomy over its own decision-making and improvement practices and should be implemented with the understanding that the goal is continual quality review and improvement.

The K–3 SAVS is intended to support a comprehensive perspective on the district, program, and classroom-level systems, structures, and practices necessary to implement a high-quality K–3 program. It is a team-driven process that prompts districts to involve diverse stakeholders in protocols that bridge a variety of perspectives, align evidence of practice with quality indicators, and empower change.

The K–3 SAVS is designed for unique implementation in each early childhood program according to the specific needs of the children, the early childhood education community, and the practitioners using it.

What does the name mean?

The tools and protocols enable an autonomous self–assessment at every step in the system. The district can use the tools and protocols to increase their level of collective knowledge and understanding about high-quality early childhood education as it applies to the strengths and weaknesses of their own program. The self–assessment activities help districts build their capacity, develop unique growth strategies, and conduct their own progress mapping to ensure a high-quality early childhood education program for every child and their family.

The **V**alidation process occurs when the district analyses their practice in relationship to the quality criteria and indicators within the *Framework*. Districts validate quality or weakness in their program structure, policies, and practices by self-identifying and analyzing the evidence of practice and the quality indicators in the *Framework*. As programs implement intentional growth strategies, they create new evidence of practice. The validation process continues as practice becomes better aligned with the quality indicators.

The **S**ystem is a collection of implementation support tools and protocols that shepherd districts through their cycle of growth and improvement.

What do the terms "system," "structure," and "component" mean as used in the K–3 SAVS?

System: The system is a framework defined by the combination of all district functions, resources, and decisions that influence the early childhood program.

Structure: A quality program structure is created through the interrelationships between expertise in child development, relevant qualifications and experience, application of research and data-based decision-making, articulation of approaches to learning, dedicated resources, political will, and a commitment to the community's goals for the education and development of young children from five through eight-years-old (K–3). The program structure is defined by a critical mass of the construct and balance of each of those elements. (The K–3 SAVS also refers to a P–3 continuum of early childhood education that includes three and four-year-old children enrolled in preschool.)

Component: A component is a distinct yet interrelated structural element of a high-quality early childhood education program, a foundational asset, or practice that represents a building block or plan within a larger system.

The three terms also represent areas of function such as: A system is built and implemented at the district level; a structure represents the comprehensive functions at the program level; and, the components of the program become operationalized at the classroom level.

Note: The Protocol titled *Building a Unique K–3 SAVS Team* recommends including members from the system, structure, and operational levels of the early childhood program.

What is the purpose of using a Self–Assessment Validation System (SAVS)?

The K–3 SAVS is a unique system of tools and protocols offered by the NJDOE, Division of Early Childhood Services, Office of Kindergarten to Third Grade. Used as a guide throughout a continuum of quality practice, the K–3 SAVS helps early childhood educators operationalize quality components of a coherent system of practice from a child's preschool experience into kindergarten and through third grade to support student success in elementary grades.

The purpose is

The system is designed as a collaborative means of internal reflection and consideration about current practice as a base for continual improvement. The intent is for program stakeholders to reflect on quality criteria and indicators, use an *Analytic Rubric* of five quality descriptors, identify evidence from current practices, engage in goal-setting,

create strategies and opportunities for growth, utilize a reflective collaborative process to discover the extent to which growth has occurred, and inform new goals for continual improvement.

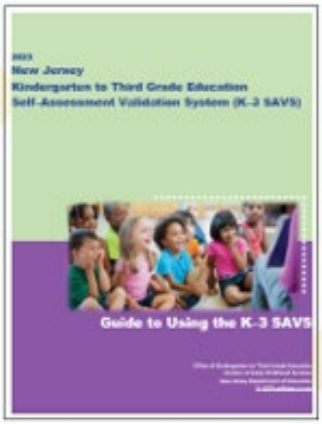
The purpose is not

The purpose of the quality indicators and tools within the K–3 SAVS is not intended for use as a program compliance checklist, evaluation of practitioners, a ranking or scoring system, or a public comparison of programs against each other. The K–3 SAVS is not a requirement or source for reporting program operation or quality to the state. (However, using the *Optional Feedback Tool* available located on the K–3 SAVS webpage, districts may choose to anonymously share feedback on their implementation of the K–3 SAVS. Any feedback a program chooses to share with the NJDOE will be used for system improvement only.)

Why does the K–3 SAVS have supplemental tools and protocols?

The K–3 SAVS is an autonomous system. The tools and protocols serve as guides and supports that allow districts to implement the K–3SAVS in the ways that are most helpful to meet their individual needs.

Over a four-year period, a group of NJ experts and pilot districts implemented the K–3 SAVS implementation tools and processes and developed ways to efficiently and effectively use them to strengthen and improve their programs. Their feedback was used to create the tools and protocols and can help other districts make similar achievements. The tools and protocols are intended to be useful together or as single documents to support districts in a variety of ways such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), annual planning, program redesign, etc.



Are there other uses for the K–3 SAVS tools and protocols?

Yes. The tools and protocols should be utilized according to the needs of the children in the program, the education community, and the practitioners using it. These are a few additional advantages to using the K–3 SAVS tools and protocols to strengthen the quality of a district's early childhood education program:

- The quality indicators and self–assessment outcomes can be used to inform program expansion and alignment.
- Diverse and expert team-building can engage multiple staff members across the district and provide an improved collaborative understanding of early childhood education, early childhood development, and developmentally appropriate practices (DAP).
- Identified or missing evidence of practice can contribute to decisions about changes in program design.
- The quality indicators can serve as a guide to create or strengthen a quality continuum of DAP in preschool, kindergarten, the early elementary grades, and to prepare children for academic success in upper elementary grades.
- The program's evidence of practice can inform decision-makers about the need for policy development, critical resources, research–based revision to the program design, and other items that require Board approval.
- The K–3 SAVS sample protocols can be continually referenced and practiced as a cycle of reflection, goal-setting, planning, capacity–building, authentic self–assessment, change management, and program improvement.
- The quality indicators articulate research-based practices and guidance to consider during professional learning.

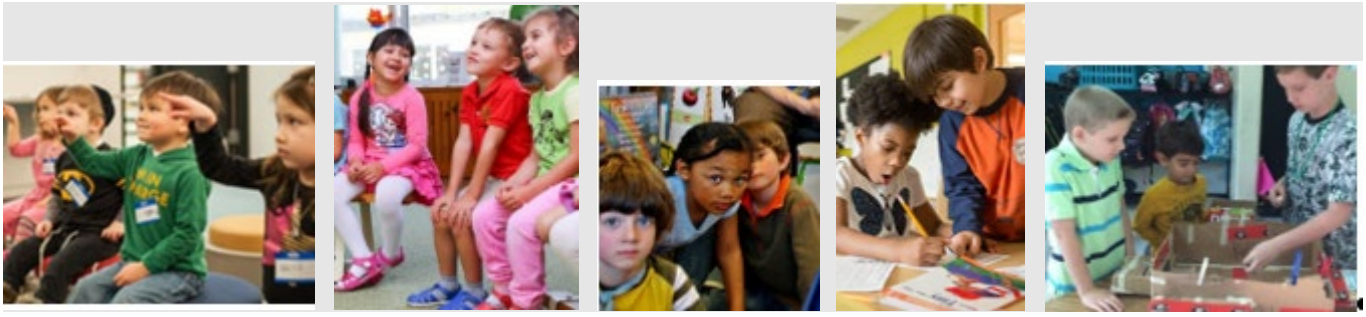
Is the K–3 SAVS a state requirement?

No. While the K–3 SAVS is not a state requirement, awareness of the quality indicators and familiarity with effective practices can inform district decisions and preparations for other requirements. For example, many preschool programs that receive state funds are required, by state code, to utilize a Self–Assessment Validation System. The structure of the SAVS utilized in Preschool is different from the K–3 SAVS; however, the goals and best practices can support the initial K–3 SAVS baseline. Two other examples of ways the K–3 SAVS links to state requirements are federal Every Student Achieves Act (ESSA) requirements and the New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC).

What is the difference between the K–3 SAVS and other state monitoring and self–assessment practices?

The K–3 SAVS is the only voluntary self–assessment system available to districts with K–3 programs. It is optional and autonomous for districts and serves as a link that fills a gap in the quality continuum of early childhood education.

As children grow and advance through each stage of their early education the state ensures that quality program assessments are in place. While every step is different, the goals are aligned, and the entire continuum of care and education is anchored in quality.



Four Quality Assessments Used Throughout NJ's Birth–3rd Grade Education Continuum

Grow NJ Kids

New Jersey's birth through preschool programs use the state's Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) facilitated by the NJ Department of Human Services. It is referred to as Grow NJ Kids (GNJK) and is referenced here to illustrate the state's commitment to assessing program quality for the youngest children in care and education programs. The Grow NJ Kids program is a state sponsored initiative to raise the quality of childcare and early learning throughout New Jersey. It is designed to assess programs, provide training and incentives for improvement, and communicate the level of program quality to the public.

Self-Assessment Validation System Utilized in Preschool Programs (SAVS)

Former Abbott and charter preschool programs in districts receiving Preschool Education Aid (PEA) are currently required, by state code, to complete an annual Self–Assessment Validation System (SAVS). The approach, tools, and protocols of the SAVS utilized in Preschool and the K–3 SAVS are different, however, if used sequentially they support an aligned P–3 approach to quality that has the potential to improve outcomes and prevent or close achievement gaps. Districts with preschool programs required to perform a SAVS are encouraged to consider subsequently utilizing the K–3 SAVS to build upon preschool quality practices and improve the alignment of the district's entire early childhood education program. Districts operating non-state-funded preschool programs are also encouraged to use the K–3 SAVS for planning.

Kindergarten to Third Grade Self–Assessment Validation System (K–3 SAVS)

The K–3 SAVS is an optional, voluntary, self-driven process based on a district's individualized needs. Using the *Framework and Plan for a High-Quality K–3 Education Program* districts identify and self-assess practice aligned with the indicators, create their own improvement goals and growth strategies, map progress, and validate improvement through evidence of practice. It is not compliance-driven, nor does it require state monitoring, reporting, or intervention. The K–3 SAVS self-reflection, growth, and improvement practices are as important as the outcomes. The three K–3 SAVS criteria are: Program Leadership and Administration; Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Professional Learning; and, Family and Community Engagement in Student Learning and Development.

New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC)

The self–assessment aspect of the K–3 SAVS can facilitate and inform other state self-study requirements, including the NJQSAC. The NJQSAC is the NJ Department of Education's comprehensive district self-evaluation and monitoring system for K–12 public school districts. It is a comprehensive accountability system that incorporates state monitoring requirements and compliance aspects of applicable state and federal laws. It is a single comprehensive accountability system that consolidates federal and state requirements and plans for improvement. The QSAC and K–3 SAVS are markedly different in process and philosophy but share the fundamental goal of quality improvement. The five monitoring and evaluating components of QSAC are Instruction and Program, Fiscal, Governance, Operations, and Personnel.

Crosswalk of Continual Quality Assessments: The Same Goal but Different Processes

Assessment	Specific Programs May be Required to Complete the Assessment	State Monitored	State Validated
Grow NJ Kids Programs serving children birth to 4-years-old	Yes	Yes	Yes
SAVS Required in Preschool Programs serving children 3 and 4-years-old	Yes	Yes	Yes
K–3 SAVS Programs serving children 5 to 9-years-old	No	No	No
QSAC Programs serving children in Kindergarten to 12th Grade	All are required	Yes	Yes

Note: Grow NJ Kids and QSAC are included here to illustrate the full picture of quality assessment practices that impact early childhood education programs. The K–3 SAVS process does not replace mandated quality assessments.

An effective K–3 SAVS team has diverse knowledge and expertise to impact the systems, structures, and operation of the district P–3 program.

Is the Kindergarten to Third Grade SAVS the same as the SAVS utilized in Preschool Programs?

No. The K–3 SAVS is linked to, yet different from the SAVS utilized in Preschool programs.

This crosswalk is intended to support P–3 alignment and assist early childhood educators with insight into some of the similarities, differences, and connections between the two documents and protocols. Sequencing the voluntary K–3 SAVS after the SAVS utilized in Preschool is a choice that can strengthen a district's early childhood continuum of quality. The NJ DOE Division of Early Childhood Services encourages all early childhood education programs to prioritize and implement continual improvement measures from preschool through third grade.

Crosswalk: The SAVS Required in Preschool and the K–3 SAVS Strengthen P–3 Alignment

Self–Assessment Validation System Utilized in Preschool Programs	**Kindergarten to Third Grade Self–Assessment Validation System**
The SAVS used in Preschool is required for state–funded former Abbott and Charter School preschool programs.	The K–3 SAVS is open for use by all NJ schools with Kindergarten to Third Grade programs.
The SAVS used in Preschool is mandated in the New Jersey state code. (Chapter 13A, Elements of High-Quality Preschool Programs)	The K–3 SAVS is not in state code and is an optional improvement system for any school district.
The SAVS is a program requirement.	The K–3 SAVS is voluntary.
Identified state-funded preschool programs complete their SAVS with support from a state liaison.	The K–3 SAVS is an autonomous self-improvement process.
The SAVS process, tool, and required evidence are consistent across every program.	The K–3 SAVS process, tools, and evidence are unique to each district and are based on individualized goals.
The state communicates with districts regarding mandates, SAVS requirements, acceptable evidence, and the state reporting process.	The state provides a *Framework and Plan for a High-Quality K–3 Education Program* so that districts can self-assess their practices, create their own goals, identify their own evidence, and choose strategies that will closely align their program characteristics and indicators of a high-quality K–3 education.
State-funded former Abbott Districts and Charter Schools are required to provide the NJDOE with a completed SAVS document.	Districts have no K–3 SAVS state reporting requirements.
The SAVS used in Preschool includes a numeric rubric. Districts are scored based on evidence of practices.	The K–3 SAVS includes an *Analytic Rubric*. Districts use it to align their self-identified evidence of practice with the quality indicators. There are no numeric scores.
An NJDOE SAVS Team monitors identified districts through a three-year cycle of desk audits, monitoring visitations, and face-to-face meetings.	The Division of Early Childhood Services provides support but does not monitor districts' K–3 SAVS process.

Why is parent, family, and community engagement a program priority in the K–3 SAVS?

Children's families and the communities in which they live create and sustain a child's learning and developmental foundation for success in school and throughout life. While educators and families may feel a divide as they serve the child in different roles, the domains of children's learning and development are interconnected. Dynamic learning occurs when a child experiences the security of home as they learn at school and the support of teachers as they learn at home. It is the responsibility of the adults in the child's life to ensure the integration of healthy and successful learning and development.

Section 3: Parent, Family, and Community Engagement is included as a priority because contingent upon the type of home school partnerships facilitated by the school, goal-focused family and community engagement can have a significant impact on student learning, instruction, and the overall quality of a K–3 education program.

The K–3 SAVS quality indicators raise awareness and guide educators through partnership practices that prioritize student learning and development both in- and out-of-school. The indicators provide districts with opportunities to reflect on and reevaluate the impact that their partnerships have on student learning and development.

Examples from the indicators include both traditional and non-traditional items.

- Traditional activities are often based on the school's agenda such as announcements and signature requests sent from the school, meeting attendance, volunteering at school, and a representative at school meetings.
- One example of a high-impact non-traditional activity in the indicators is for the school to build awareness, community connections, and equitable access to resources that enable strong, healthy families. This type of partnership is referred to as "2-Gen Support." A school provides 2-Gen Support focused on the child and family's well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives. The goal is to help strengthen the family to enable the educational success of the child. A district's approach may include support for multilingual learners, community resources for food or housing security, a connection between local job training programs and childcare, providing space so community services can meet in the school building, etc.)

The traditional and non–traditional quality indicators in Section 3 of the K–3 SAVS exemplify the purpose and processes of reflection, alignment to quality, self–assessment, goals for growth, and a continual cycle of improvement. Using the tools and protocols can provide a path to positively impact student outcomes, the strength of families, and the quality of the K–3 program.

Why is there a K–3 SAVS protocol to build a team?

The *Team-Building Protocol* is intended to prompt districts to select individuals who possess diverse knowledge and have decision-making authority in many areas of district and program operation. Inviting a variety of professionals who understand district operations, lead other areas within the district, or may not normally engage in discussions

about the quality of the early childhood program, can build a larger advocacy network that will increase knowledge and commitment to the value of growing and maintaining a high-quality program.

The *Team-Building Protocol* recommends including members from the system, structure, and operational levels of the early childhood program. The detailed protocol titled: *Building A Unique K–3 SAVS Team* provides guidance and recommendations about who should participate on the K–3 SAVS Team. The protocol is located on the K–3 SAVS webpage.

What is the K–3 SAVS Analytic Rubric?

The K–3 SAVS *Analytic Rubric* is a comparative analysis tool that helps districts identify their strengths, weaknesses, and needs. Districts use the tool titled: *Framework and Plan for a High-Quality K–3 Education Program* to explore the quality criteria and indicators and identify their related evidence of practice. The K–3 SAVS team uses the rubric to analyze the correlation between their current practice and the indicators. The self-assessment analysis across the descriptors in the rubric determines the strength of alignment.

It is important to note that comparing the similarities and differences between the indicators and current practice is a reminder that merely performing an activity does not validate high-quality programming. A diverse K–3 SAVS team serving in different district roles will have a variety of perspectives on the district's evidence of practice. A district may perform an activity, however, once they use the K–3 SAVS tools and gain an increased awareness of high-quality practice, they may find that their practice is unrelated to student learning and development and can be improved. Indicators with little or no aligned practices point to program needs. Descriptors in the Analytic Rubric provide the foundation for moving forward and validation of progress toward alignment.

Use the rubric to align quality indicators and evidence of practice, reveal program needs, shape program improvement goals, and inform decisions about continual quality review and improvement. For details on using the Analytic Rubric see the protocol titled: *Using the K–3 SAVS Analytic Rubric* on the K–3 SAVS webpage.

The Analytic Rubric is in Tool 2: Framework and Plan for a High-Quality K–3 Education Program and at the top of every Growth Plan Template.

The K–3 SAVS Analytic Rubric

No Evidence	Emerging	Developing	Approaching	Accomplished
There is no evidence in support of the criterion or indicators.	Very basic evidence exists to support the criterion and indicators. The need for change is recognized.	Evidence shows that the criterion and indicators are being supported but are still unmet. Plans and early steps have been developed and initiated.	There are several examples of evidence to show that the criterion and indicators are addressed, but not yet fully accomplished. Practice has shifted to the implementation phase.	There is an abundance of evidence to show that the criterion and indicators are being accomplished.

Why does the K–3 SAVS use an Analytic Rubric rather than a numeric rubric?

The *Analytic Rubric* was intentionally designed using descriptors that allow for nuanced examples of evidence of practice, reflect a clearer identification of needs, provide a foundation for setting specific goals, reflect progressive self-monitoring, and validate program growth with new, stronger evidence. Labeling evidence with a number can stop the reflection process when a specific score is achieved. Therefore, totaling rubric numbers to reach a higher score can become a distracting goal.

The *Analytic Rubric* does not include scores. There is no process for averaging numbers or totaling responses. The five descriptors were designed to expand choices and eliminate the assumption that a high or low score infers "good or bad" practice. Since the K–3 SAVS analytical processes are as important as the outcomes, there is no benefit of a numeric score.

To assist districts with their work, a stream–lined version of the *Analytic Rubric* is embedded in each *Growth Plan Template* located in the Framework and Plan for a High-Quality K–3 Program.

How does use of the Analytic Rubric fit into a Quality Review and Validation Cycle?

Qualitative analysis links all parts of the K–3 SAVS processes. Districts can use the *Analytic Rubric* as a tool to keep alignment and the continual cycle of growth moving forward.

There is not a beginning or end to the process and there are several places within the quality review and validation cycle where the tools and protocols prompt reflection, action, recalibration of historical practices, and program growth.

Initially, by using the rubric to reflect on the relationship of the quality indicators and evidence of practice – or lack thereof – districts can see strengths and weaknesses in their program. If a practice is not aligned with the quality indicator, it forms a baseline of needs to help districts set and monitor goals. As districts strengthen the alignment of their practices and quality indicators, validate new practices, and recalibrate goals, they continue to move across the rubric.

What is the purpose of a continual improvement cycle as opposed to a checklist of activities?

A K–3 SAVS Quality Review and Validation Cycle guides districts through the steps of program growth. Shifts in practice serve a larger purpose than the completion of tasks in a checklist. A cycle helps users think about current and historic practices, related student outcomes, a modification of goals and objectives, shifts in practice, and reflect on progress made rather than a simple snapshot when the checklist is completed. A cycle illustrates progression rather than random outcomes. There is no end in a cycle, meaning there is no hard stop of improvement activities.

Use of a cycle logically guides the operational processes required to shape change and create the conditions for systemic improvement.

What does a Quality Review and Validation Cycle look like?

The K–3 SAVS includes a template to support districts as they articulate their *Growth Plan*. It is an illustration of plan details and is built with key action steps identifying the district's commitment to continual quality review and improvement. The district creates their *Growth Plan* to identify needs and goals, then uses the template to organize the actions and conditions necessary to implement a detailed review and quality alignment process.

The template is an *Infographic of the District's Unique Growth Plan*. When creating action steps, project monitoring strategies, and communicating with stakeholders, it may be helpful to use the infographic and a brief outline of the *Growth Plan* to provide a clear explanation of the district's dedication to high-quality education.

The K–3 SAVS Quality Review and Validation Cycle Infographic articulates the flow of the district's detailed plans to strengthen the alignment between evidence of practice and the *Framework and Plan for a High-Quality K–3 Education Program*.

Directions and a text description of the infographic are available in the protocol titled: *Quality Review and Validation Cycle Infographic* located on the K–3 SAVS webpage.

Is there a protocol to help districts move through the cycle?

Yes. The steps are:

1. Build a Unique K–3 SAVS Team

- Identify individuals who have diverse knowledge, expertise, and authority to impact systems, structures, and operation of the K–3 program.
- Identify other district committees, groups, parents, and community members that can contribute information.

2. Guide to Using the K–3 SAVS

As a team, collaboratively review the K–3 SAVS tools, protocols, and Q&As. Supporting References for the Framework are included at the end of the Guide.

3. Framework and Plan for a High-Quality K–3 Education Program

- Review and discuss the quality criteria, indicators, Analytic Rubric, and Growth Plan.
- Consider and take notes on the district's evidence of practice as it relates to the quality indicators.
- Identify and highlight indicators that have little or no aligned evidence of current practice.
- At the end of each section, click: "Go to the Growth Plan Template for Section 1." (Section 2 and Section 3, respectively)

4. Analytic Rubric

- Review the Analytic Rubric at the top of each Growth Plan Template.
- Refer to the team's notes from each of the three sections.
- Self–assess evidence of practice and strength of alignment with the quality indicators.

5. Growth Plan Template

- Create and prioritize goals based on areas of need and district values for the K–3 program.
- Populate a Growth Plan Template for each section. (Enter as many plan components as desired.)
- Combine the three templates, and if desired, utilize the information in other district strategic plans.

6. Quality Review and Validation Cycle Infographic

- Articulate the details and flow of the district's Growth Plan by creating a step-by-step cycle of review and improvement.
- Use the Quality Review and Validation Cycle Infographic with the Growth Plan to communicate about how the district will strengthen alignment between evidence of current practice and the quality indicators in the Framework and Plan for a High-Quality K–3 Education Program.
- Update district leadership, practitioners, and the community. Use the Protocol titled: Sample Template for K–3 SAVS Communication with Families to further enhance 2-way communication.

Is there support to help districts identify which practices they want to change or improve?

Yes. *Tool 2: Framework and Plan for a High-Quality K–3 Education Program* contains the three main steps of the Self-Assessment Validation System. A triangulation of quality indicators, analysis using the rubric, and prioritizing areas of need in a Growth Plan provide the information districts need to identify which practices they want to modify or improve.

To support districts in creating a unique *Growth Plan,* templates and copies of the *Analytic Rubric* are included at the end of the *Framework*. There is one template for each of the three sections of the *Framework*. As districts review the quality indicators in the *Framework,* they note information about current practices that are weak or out of alignment with the quality indicators.

After reviewing each section in the *Framework*, teams move to a *Growth Plan Template*. Each template begins with the *Analytic Rubric* so districts can contemplate the strength of their current practice with the indicators.

The *Growth Plan Templates* are basic and provide a place to organize and process information. They are in a familiar structure that most educators use for planning which can support a merge of the K–3 SAVS goals and strategies with larger district strategic plans.

The *Growth Plan Templates* include: areas of need; evidence that validates alignment/nonalignment; goals/strategies to strengthen alignment; responsible person(s); resources required; evidence of change; timeline; and validation/recalibration of new alignment.

Is there a specific implementation timeline?

No. Based on individualized goals, needs, and values of their education community, districts are in full control of their implementation timeline.

The K–3 SAVS includes a protocol titled: *Sample Agendas and Touchpoints for Teams*. The ideas were successfully used and recommended by districts that piloted the K–3 SAVS tools and protocols and during in-person technical assistance sessions with staff in the Office of Kindergarten to Third Grade.

The questions and answers in this *Guide* provide additional ideas to help districts plan their implementation and observe changes to their program throughout the school year. Recommendations from the pilot districts helped prepare the questions and answers within this Guide.

If the K–3 SAVS process is optional without state reporting requirements, why does the system include a feedback form?

Spring 2023 is the first year of statewide availability of the K–3 SAVS. The K–3 SAVS is voluntary, and districts are not responsible for data collection or state reporting. However, the NJDOE Office of K–3 values partnerships with NJ school districts and offers opportunities for input that will contribute to the state's commitment to high-quality education for every young child in our state. Comments from the *Optional Feedback Tool* will be used for the sole purpose of improvements to the K–3 SAVS tools and protocols. Email: K-3Office@doe.nj.gov.

Supporting References for the K–3 SAVS Framework and Plan for a High-quality K–3 Education Program

The K–3 SAVS tools and protocols were developed using feedback from pilot districts, state and national experts, and New Jersey's early childhood education practitioners.

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