

“Substantial Portion of the Day”

Key Points for North Carolina’s ECERS-R Assessment Process

Rationale: It is important for children to have access to a wide range of learning materials, for a large amount of time each day. Extended opportunities to select and use interesting materials allow children to develop skills and independence, explore interests, and complete or extend their play in a beneficial manner. This should occur not only in their primary indoor environment, but also in the other spaces used at a program, including classrooms used during early mornings or afternoons, as well as, outdoor learning environments.



Substantial portion of the day (SPOD) is defined by the authors on page 7 of the ECERS-R. To earn credit for an indicator that mentions SPOD, children must have access to the specific materials, spaces, or activities described in the indicator for one-third of the day, based on the program’s operating hours. This concept affects 11 different items, so it is an important consideration for programs using the ECERS-R to guide how they provide developmentally appropriate experiences for children’s learning and development.

The chart below provides an overview of common operating hours and the time requirements for indicators with SPOD requirements.

Calculating Substantial Portion of the Day	
<i>Program hours</i>	<i>1/3 of program hours</i>
4	1 hour 20 minutes
4.5	1 hour 30 minutes
5	1 hour 40 minutes
5.5	1 hour 50 minutes
6	2 hours
6.5	2 hours 10 minutes
7	2 hours 20 minutes
7.5	2 hours 30 minute
8	2 hours 40 minutes
8.5	2 hours 50 minutes
9	3 hours
9.5	3 hours 10 minutes
10	3 hours 20 minutes
10.5	3 hours 30 minutes
11	3 hours 40 minutes
11.5	3 hours 50 minutes
12	4 hours

Tip: These are the minimum times required. When there is additional play time built into the schedule, beyond the required one-third, teachers can be more flexible throughout the day. They can follow the lead of the children and accommodate the unexpected. For example, when there is “extra” play time it does not matter for SPOD if snack arrived late and impacted the timing of the next play period. Likewise, if the group decided to extend outdoor time and take a nature walk this can easily be accommodated because so much of their day is already spent learning through play.

Calculating Access for a Substantial Portion of the Day

How do assessors gather information about the schedule for the entire operating hours of the program?



The timing and sequence of the observed activities and events are the primary consideration. Assessors document the timing of events throughout the assessment.



During the teacher interview, the teacher is asked to describe what activities and routines typically occur before the observation began and after it ended.



If other staff take care of the children in the early mornings or afternoons, they will also be interviewed to find out about the typical activities and locations for those specific times.

The **daily schedule** is used only as a reference to consider whether observed and reported events reflect a typical day. Observed and reported times are used for scoring.

For example:

- The daily schedule showed 60 minutes of center play each morning; however, 45 minutes was observed before clean-up began. Therefore, 45 minutes rather than 60 minutes was credited.
- The morning group time continued for longer than the 15 minutes shown on the daily schedule, which reduced center play from the scheduled 30 minutes to 20 minutes. Only the observed amount of play time (20 minutes) was credited, even though this was different from the daily schedule.

How do assessors determine whether a preschool classroom meets SPOD requirements?



After the assessment is completed, the various increments of time that pertain to specific indicators, materials, and activities are added together. If the sum is equal to or greater than the amount of time required, based on the program's operating hours, credit is earned for the specific indicator, as long as the required materials were also provided.

When certain materials are accessible for more or less time than others, the SPOD calculations will differ for each type of material or center (see examples of this at the bottom of page 5).

Frequently Asked Questions about Substantial Portion of the Day

What are operating hours? Operating hours begin with the earliest time children are allowed to arrive for child care and continue until the latest time that children are allowed to stay in care.



Any time that staff are scheduled to provide child care is considered. The entire operating hours are considered even if there is a shorter curriculum day (e.g., Head Start, Developmental Day, or NC Pre-K with wrap-around or before/after care), or fewer children attend at certain times.

What if a classroom participates in a special class one day a week (or more)? Only daily access is credited positively. Therefore, when time is counted towards SPOD, the same amount of access time must be expected to occur daily across the week. Many programs offer special resource classes or activities to supplement everyday programming. Often these times are enriching and developmentally appropriate. Remember that if these activities occur on a weekly basis they should not reduce the amount of time that children can access many different materials. Adjustments to the schedule may be needed on these days to ensure children still have enough free play.



For example, center play occurs between 9:30 and 11:00 most days. On Wednesday's children have a dance/tumbling class from 10:30-11:00, so clean up starts at 10:20. Additional center play is not added later in the day; therefore, 50 minutes rather than 90 are credited for this time period. Some teachers choose to reduce the length of the regular group activities on days when resource or special activities occur, to avoid limiting children's hands-on learning times for the preschool age group.

Does open snack count as center play time since some children continue to play while others eat?

Open snacks allow children to choose when they want to eat, either individually or in small groups, while center play or other activities occur simultaneously. When planning for open snacks, allocate enough time for children to play in centers and also have time to eat since routine care time is not counted towards SPOD. If an open snack is not observed but is reported to occur, teachers will be asked how long it takes most children to finish the snack and this routine care time is deducted from the amount of free choice time credited. Open snack is a great way to promote independence in self-help skills, self-regulation, and positive social relationships; however, adequate time must also be planned for children's use of various materials and free choice, in addition to meeting their routine care needs.



Can outdoor play materials be counted for SPOD, in addition to indoor materials?

Yes! Outdoor time can be added to SPOD calculations if the required materials or activities specified in the indicator and/or any additional notes or resources are present each day. Importantly, outdoor



materials and times are only credited when the requirements for daily outdoor play, weather permitting, are met. Weather permitting is defined in the ECERS-R on page 7 of the ECERS-R and also by the Child Care Weather Watch Chart referenced at ncrlap.org and the NC Child Care Rules. If children do not typically play in a range of safe outdoor conditions, then the benefit of having additional materials outside is not realized. For some ECERS-R items such as fine motor, art, dramatic play, nature/science and math/number the requirements for materials outside are less than the indoor requirements. See chart on the next page for more information.



Access for a Substantial Portion of the Day

Putting the Pieces Together



Basic requirements for the various items that include SPOD requirements are shown below. Keep in mind the quantities listed are only a starting point. Additional materials, even if not required, will further enrich environments when they are provided based on children’s interests, skills, and developmental levels. Also, over time materials may get lost or broken, so providing additional materials beyond the minimum helps strengthen these learning areas. Staying aware of the current conditions and replenishing when necessary is important. The information below is simplified and summarized. Careful review the ECERS-R indicators and additional notes to find specific details about the various requirements is essential.

ECERS-R Item and Page	5 Level Requirements <i>(that apply to indoor materials)</i>	5 Level Requirements <i>(for outdoor materials when this time is used to supplement indoor materials each day)</i>
Item 3. Furnishings for relaxation and comfort (p. 14)	<i>Indicator 5.1:</i> A defined, protected space with much softness (e.g., a large item such as a mattress or multiple smaller items like bean bags or soft child-sized chairs and a rug).	Same
Item 5. Space for privacy (p. 16)	<i>Indicators 5.1, 5.2:</i> A protected space where 1-2 children can play alone.	Same
Item 15. Books and pictures (p. 34-35)	<i>Indicator 5.1:</i> At least 20 books with 3-4 in the various categories. For group sizes of 16 or more, there is an additional book per child.	Same
Item 19. Fine motor (p. 39)	<i>Indicator 5.1:</i> At least 3 examples of each of the 4 categories	At least 2 examples from 2 categories
Item 20. Art (p. 40-41)	<i>Indicator 5.1:</i> At least 3-5 examples from 4 of the 5 categories*	At least 1 functional example
Item 22. Blocks (p. 44-45)	<i>Indicators 5.1-5.4:</i> Enough blocks, accessories and space for 3 children to build independently. The space is organized and prevents interruptions.	Same
Item 24. Dramatic play (p. 48-49)	<i>Indicators 5.1, 5.2:</i> Varied materials and props to promote meaningful and complex pretend play for at least 3-4 children simultaneously, including dress-up clothes	Same, except dress up clothes not required.
Item 25. Nature/science (p. 50-51)	<i>Indicators 5.1, 5.2:</i> At least 3-5 examples from 3 of the 4 categories*	At least 2 examples from 2 categories
Item 26. Math/number (p. 52-53)	<i>Indicators 5.1, 5.2:</i> At least 3-5 examples from all 5 categories*	At least 2 examples from 2 categories
Item 34 Schedule (p. 63)	<i>Indicator 5.3:</i> Play activities for 1/3 of the day	Activities are considered both outdoors and indoors
Item 35 Free play (p. 64)	<i>Indicator 5.1:</i> Free play (children’s choice) occurs for 1/3 of day. Some of this time occurs indoors and some outdoors.	Same

* Can vary if all categories/types are represented and requirements can be met if there are more than five of one type and two of another type.

Tips and reminders:

- To meet SPOD requirements and provide rich learning environments for children, reflect on the variety of materials that children have access to each and every day. Think about which materials are accessible daily, both indoors and outdoors, weather permitting. If children combine in a classroom typically used by a younger or older group, materials may need to be added or removed to provide appropriate and safe materials during the times the preschool children use this space.
- Daily access for enough time is key, as are ongoing practices of rotating and adding materials to scaffold children's interests and skill development. Additionally, since only functional and complete materials are credited, making sure that materials in poor repair are replaced as needed is important.
- If outdoor play does not occur daily, weather permitting, outdoor materials will not apply to SPOD calculations, even if these are present in the outdoor areas at the time of the observation. Programs are advised to carefully consider their policy on outdoor play in various weather conditions, become familiar with the Child Care Weather Watch Chart, and make sure all teachers and staff are familiar with the policy.
- Routine care times (e.g., meals, snacks, nap, toileting and handwashing routines) are essential for young children's well-being. Appropriate transitions and group times support children's learning. The ECERS-R allows for ample time to be devoted to these events. However, for SPOD indicators, remember that only times when the specific, required materials are accessible are counted towards SPOD.
- The daily schedule should include realistic times for transitions, routines, play, and group activities across the indoor and outdoor environments. This leads to a predictable and balanced experience for children. It also allows teachers and administrators to have a good grasp on the actual timing of events that occur each day. In particular, when transitions are not reflected accurately on the written schedule, it is easy to incorrectly over-estimate the amount of time when children have hands-on activities. The schedule should be adjusted throughout the year as the needs of the children in the classroom and seasons change.
- Each indicator that includes a SPOD requirement is calculated separately and sometimes children have more access to certain types of materials than others. This means that specific indicators can earn credit for access times than others due to these differences. For example:
 - When children gather in the book area and look at books individually or with a friend during a transition, this 10-minute period counts towards SPOD in item 15 Books and pictures, indicator 5.1, but will not affect other items that require access to other types of materials.
 - If dramatic play and block areas are closed during the first 30-minute morning center play time, but other centers are open for child choice, only the centers that are open will have 30 minutes of time credited for SPOD.
 - Outdoors there is a science discovery station that includes magnifying glasses, small baskets of leaves and different types of bark, binoculars and a birdwatching chart, and pictures of various birds. There are also small rakes, pails, and shovels for children to weed and water plants in the playground garden. Outdoor times will be credited towards SPOD in Item 25 Nature/science, indicator 5.1 if this space is used daily, weather permitting.





Want to find out more? 

Beyond this information and reviewing the ECERS-R, we encourage you to review other resources found on the ncrlap.org website. There are videos, video supplements, worksheets, and other information about the NC assessment process and the Environment Rating Scales. Some specific resource suggestions for preschool classrooms include:

- NC Additional Notes: ECERS-R
- Stay and Play Outside All Day, parts 1-4
- Language for Learning: Preschoolers
- Summary of Lowest Scoring Items and Indicators for the ECERS-R
- Handwashing and Basic Health Considerations for the Assessment Process
- Thinking More about Learning Materials
- Participate in a free webinar - training calendar and registration on our website

This document provides an overview of a broad concept; however, it does not replace the need for familiarity with the ECERS-R. When planning for program enhancement, consider the unique feature of the classroom and facility such as ages and abilities of the children enrolled, the number of teachers in the classroom, and overall goals and/or philosophy. Programs may also seek advice from their DCDEE Child Care Consultant, local Resource and Referral and/or Smart Start Partnerships, or other child care agencies.

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We greatly appreciate the feedback provided by reviewers from EQUIPD and the Buncombe County, Randolph County, Stanly County, and Martin-Pitt Partnerships for Children.



REFERENCES:

- Harms, T., Clifford, R.M., & Cryer, D. (1998). Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Cryer, D., Harms, T., Riley, C. (2003). All About the ECERS-R. Pact House Publishing: Kaplan Early Learning Company.