

Thinking More about Learning Materials and Play



SACERS-U

Purpose: This document addresses many of the requirements that relate to various learning materials, areas, or activities. The focus is primarily on higher level indicators at the 5 and 7 level. It is important to review the entire item to ensure that no indicators at the 1 or “inadequate” level apply to the classroom, and requirements at the 3 or “minimal” level are met. Not all SACERS-U indicators and items are covered here, so relying only on these questions to prepare for an assessment will not be sufficient.

Preparation: Refer to the SACERS-U when completing the questions. To better understand the scale format and structure, review the instructions for scoring on page 4 of the SACERS-U and the definitions of common terms on pages 5-6. In addition, a copy of the most current NC Additional Notes (available at ncrlap.org) should be used with each item, when answering the questions. There are many questions, so it will likely take several reflection/review sessions to complete them all.

The items included here consider many aspects of the school-age program, whether afterschool or full-day, related to children’s play. The focus is specifically on required learning or play areas, the types and quantities of materials used, the amount of time dedicated to play, and the interactions that occur while children are engaged in play with learning materials. Free play with a variety of appropriate materials and choices is critically important in fostering positive developmental outcomes for children. In addition, the language and support that teachers provide related to play activities is essential in building relationships and fostering learning opportunities for children.

Tips:

- Using this document on an ongoing basis can help verify that the required types and categories of materials are present over time, as the environment changes and children’s ages change.
- When documenting materials in the classroom, look at what is provided for children’s independent use. Having additional materials for rotation may help meet some requirements for indicators at the highest level of quality, but these are not considered in scoring indicators that require access.
- Consider all accessible materials in the entire classroom that fit into a specific category. Not all materials have to be in a single area. For example, some math materials might be with games, and others might be included with nature/science materials. Some areas do have specific considerations for having materials organized together, like the block or cozy areas.
- If you are confused about a question in the worksheet, look at the item and any notes and try to identify the requirement it relates to.
- This document is likely to be used by teachers, administrators, and technical assistance specialists. Answering the questions with someone else promotes sharing of perspectives and may draw attention to different details.

Answer the questions based on the specific schedule and materials in the classroom. Use the SACERS-U and NC Additional Notes as you go to help increase understanding of the requirements.

The number of children currently enrolled in the classroom is _____.

Are there younger school age children (K-2nd) **Y / N** older school age (3rd-5th+) **Y / N** or both? **Y / N**

How many children usually attend each day? _____

ITEM 2 Space for gross motor activities (p. 9)

Describe the outdoor space(s) used for gross motor activities:

Describe the indoor space(s) used for gross motor activities:

ITEM 3 Space for privacy (p. 10)

Describe any areas in the classroom that are consistently limited for use by 1-2 children or small groups:

Are there barriers to visual supervision of these areas from other parts of the classroom? **Y / N**

Can children use these areas each day? **Y / N**

If so, when and for how long?

Total time a space for privacy is accessible daily:

ITEM 7 Furnishings for relaxation and comfort (p. 14)

Describe the provisions/furnishings for softness available in the classroom:

Is there a planned cozy area that includes much softness and appropriately sized furnishings gathered together? **Y / N**

The children can use the soft furnishings during these times:

Total time soft furnishings are accessible daily:

ITEM 8 Furnishings for gross motor activities (p. 15)

List the gross motor materials currently used by the children.

Outdoor Stationary Equipment	Outdoor Portable Equipment	Indoor Stationary Equipment	Indoor Portable Equipment

Are there appropriate materials present for each age group enrolled? **Y / N**

The outdoor gross motor equipment provided encourages the following skills (Hint: Check to see how many are required):

What are the conditions that prevent the group from playing outdoors?

What is the program's policy on outdoor play?

If children do not play outdoors they can:

What gross motor equipment is used indoors on these days and for how long?

What skills are encouraged by the indoor gross motor equipment?

ITEM 19 Arts and crafts (p. 26)

List the art materials for each category that children currently use. The required number of materials can be found in the SACERS-U.

Drawing materials	Paints	Collage	Sculpture	Crafts

Are there appropriate materials accessible for each age group enrolled? **Y / N**

The children can use art materials during these times:

Total time art materials are accessible daily:
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Are the children able to choose art materials and use them in their own way? **Y / N**

If planned, do art activities when children must follow an example or specific plan occur infrequently? **Y / N**

Describe any complex art projects and also any that include multiple steps over different days:

How often do these activities occur? _____

ITEM 20 Music and movement (p. 27)

List the music materials currently used. The required number of materials needed can be found in the SACERS-U.

Recorded music	Dance props	Instruments

The children can use music materials during these times:

Total time music materials are accessible daily:

Special music activities and music/movement instruction times are planned to spark children’s interest in music such as:

How often does music instruction occur? _____ What about more special music activities? _____

ITEM 21 Blocks and construction (p. 28)

List materials used for block play:

List interlocking construction materials:

List accessories used with blocks and interlocking construction materials and describe the space used for building:

Are the accessories stored near or with the building materials? **Y / N**

The children can use block/construction materials during these times:

Total time blocks and construction materials are accessible daily:

List functional carpentry tools and supplies, and how often these are used:

ITEM 22 Dramatic play/theatre (p. 29)

List dramatic play materials in the classroom:

List the different activities children can experience when playing with the dramatic play materials:

Are there appropriate materials that encourage more complex play, for each age group enrolled? **Y / N**

The children can use dramatic play materials during these times:

Total time dramatic play materials are accessible daily:

Children’s dramatic play is extended in the following ways:

Children are involved in developing drama/theater productions in the following ways:

ITEM 23 Language/reading activities (p. 30)

The classroom includes ____ appropriate books.

For older children, there are ____ chapter books.

Children are read to (or they read to each other) ____ days per week.

List the language games that are present in the classroom:

Are there appropriate materials (content and images), present for each age group enrolled? **Y / N**

The children can use language and reading materials during these times:

Total time language and reading materials are accessible daily:

Children are encouraged to use reading/writing for practical purposes in the following ways:

Are the children encouraged to share books from home with the group? **Y / N**

ITEM 24 Math/reasoning activities (p. 31)

List the math/reasoning games and activities that are present in the classroom:

Are there appropriate materials present for each age group enrolled? **Y / N**

The children can use math/reasoning materials during these times:

Total time math materials are accessible daily:

Practical events are used to teach about math/numbers in the following ways:

ITEM 25 Science/nature activities (p. 32)

List the science/nature materials and equipment present in the classroom:

Are there appropriate materials present for each age group enrolled? **Y / N**

Science/nature books are used with children in the following ways:

Are there any science/nature books set up with related materials? **Y / N**

The children can use science/nature materials during these times:

Total time science materials are accessible daily:

Are the children involved in caring for and observing living things? **Y / N**

Special, more extended science/nature activities are planned such as:

These activities are offered _____ times per year.

New science concepts are introduced to children such as:

ITEM 26 Cultural awareness (p. 33)

Circle the categories of diversity that are present in each column:

Accessible <u>books</u> show diversity, including different:	<u>Pictures and/or other displayed materials</u> show diversity, including different:	<u>Various play materials</u> show diversity, including different:
Races	Races	Races
Cultures	Cultures	Cultures
Ages (infant-elderly)	Ages (infant-elderly)	Ages (infant-elderly)
Abilities	Abilities	Abilities

Are there also materials that show non-traditional roles for males and females? **Y / N**

Is a non-biased approach applied to different activities (e.g., all children encouraged to participate equally, avoid assumptions, etc.)? **Y / N**

Special activities to promote diversity are planned and implemented, including the following:

Other Considerations:

What topics are the children in the group most interested in? In what ways can these interests be connected to their play experiences in the various activity areas?

Which areas are the most popular? Why?

Are there any areas that children tend not to use? Why?

What changes could be made to make these areas more interesting to the children?

If the school-age group shares a space with another group, are there any challenges in providing a variety of age-appropriate materials and experiences for the children enrolled? How is this handled and are there other strategies that could be used to mitigate those challenges to ensure children have a variety of experiences daily and across the week?

Would the group like to spend more time outdoors? If so, that is a great way for children to get fresh air, move around, and extend play and learning opportunities. What types of learning materials, in addition to gross motor equipment, are provided outdoors?

Are there other activities or materials that could be added to enhance outside time?

Want to find out more?

We encourage you to review other resources found on the ncrlap.org website to stay informed about any updates and continue to build your understanding of the SACERS-U and the assessment process.

- Look for general information about the assessment process and also specific SACERS-U resources. For example, there are videos with accompanying supplements, the NC Additional Notes, and many documents and webcasts about different topics. These resources may offer ideas about what to focus on or supplement ideas you were already considering.
- Check out the answers to Frequently Asked Questions or send a new question to ncrlap@uncg.edu.
- Register for free online training webinars. Some are live webinars; others are pre-recorded and offer training credits (contact hours). Call 1-866-362-7527 or register online at ncrlap.org by clicking on "Training" tab and then "Register for an event." Select the event and enter your information. You will receive instructions via email before the event.

When planning for program enhancement, always consider the unique features 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 CCR&R and/or Smart Start Partnerships, or other child care agencies.



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Resources:

Harms, T., Jacobs, E., & White, D. (2013). School-age care environment rating scale. (Updated edition). New York, NY. Teachers College Press.

NC Additional Notes (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.ncrlap.org>.