



## NC ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR THE SACERS-U

The NC Additional Notes provide supplementary information for the Environment Rating Scales so participants in the assessment portion of the North Carolina star rated license may correctly interpret and score items found within the scale. A primary aim for the notes is to further define or explain requirements of certain items to improve interrater reliability or consistency among assessors working with the North Carolina Rated License Assessment Project (NCRLAP).

The NC Additional Notes are developed by members of the NCRLAP's management team, especially by our state anchors. These notes include some of the Additional Notes posted at [ersinstitute.com/additional notes](https://ersinstitute.com/additional-notes) which are indicated with a parenthetical reference. However, the Environment Rating Scale Institute (ERSI) addresses questions from many different states and systems. Therefore, we include only the notes that will be helpful to participants in North Carolina's assessment process because of the relevancy to situations in this state, along with other specific details based on NCRLAP's assessment work and the NC Child Care and Sanitation Rules.

Participants in the NC star rated license system should be aware of the following:

- The NC Additional Notes may be updated (approximately) every 6 months and NCRLAP assessors conduct assessments using the most current notes. Child care professionals are encouraged to download and use the most current version of the notes from [ncrlap.org](https://ncrlap.org).
- NCRLAP assessors use only the NC Additional Notes for the SACERS-U. Due to modifications and additions that occur over time specific to the assessment process in this state, the NC Additional Notes may differ from notes created by the scale authors found on the Environment Rating Scales Institute website. Participants in the NC star rated license should replace older notes with the current NC Additional Notes.
- NCRLAP began using the SACERS-Updated Edition (SACERS-U) on July 1, 2014, for all assessments completed in North Carolina. For assessment purposes, this version replaced the SACERS.
- For NC SACERS-U assessments items *10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 33, 35, 39-41, 43-47* are not included in the overall score.

**Recent changes** (The most recent changes are italicized in this document):

|                                                                                                                          |                                                   |                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 4/11/2025: <i>4<sup>th</sup> bullet above re. items scored, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 28, 29, 30, 32, 37</i> | 10/2022: General notes                            | 10/2017: Item 16           |
| 10/25/23: General notes, 20, 23, 26 2/17/23: final Covid exemptions removed                                              | 3/2022: Items 16, 22, 23, 24, 25, 33, 36, 38      | 10/2016: Items 2, 3, 9, 23 |
|                                                                                                                          | 10/2020: Item 26                                  | 10/2015: Items 4, 8, 37    |
|                                                                                                                          | 3/2019: Item 2, 26                                | 3/2015: Item 12            |
|                                                                                                                          | 9/2018: General notes, Items 4, 5, 20, 21, 22, 25 | 10/2014: Items 8, 19       |

## GENERAL NOTES FOR THE SACERS-U

**Accessible:** All children in the group should have access to the required materials and activities, with appropriate modifications made based on developmental or chronological age differences. To determine whether materials are accessible several factors must be considered:

- Location of the materials and the type of storage provision: Materials are placed in spaces used by children, rather than outside of children's regular play areas (i.e. outside of the classroom or areas within the classroom used for teacher storage, routine care, or an area used only for group times, etc.).
- Materials within the play areas are easy to reach for children in the group. The lids on containers and drawers/doors on cabinets are easy to open for the children in the group.
- Children's ages and knowledge that the materials are intended for their use: How do children know what is stored where? Consider whether the children are observed using the materials. Look for other evidence that indicates the materials are used by the children.
- The overall structure of the program determines how much child choice is possible: Consider how much independence children have during play times. Do they select the areas that they play in? If not, how does the classroom system provide access to the specific materials for the required amounts of time? Within centers, are children free to use any of the materials? If unsure of whether children have access to a space that is not used during the observation, ask staff questions about how frequently the space is used, and how materials are made accessible, etc.

**Minimal required times for daily access to various areas or materials are as follows:** For programs operating 3 hours or more at least 30 minutes of access to materials is required. For programs that operate less than 3 hours, a minimum of 20 minutes of access is required. For some indicators additional time requirements may apply as specified in the indicator or Additional Notes.

**Developmentally appropriate materials:** For indicators that require certain types of materials, it is expected that these will be suitable and developmentally appropriate for the entire age-range of children enrolled. Specific materials may be beneficial for younger or older school-age children, but enough materials to provide appropriate choices as specified in the indicator, for all age groups enrolled should be provided. This means that materials obviously intended for younger age groups, that are unlikely to be stimulating for school-age children are not considered.

**Gross Motor:** NC assessors use the gross motor safety information sheet titled: "NCRLAP's Requirements for Gross Motor Space and Equipment". This document is available at [ncrlap.org](http://ncrlap.org)

**Handwashing:** In certain situations, when a sink with running water is not accessible for the group to use, hand sanitizing products may be used in lieu of handwashing. For example, hand sanitizer may be used while staff is supervising children outdoors, if hands are washed upon returning indoors. The following requirements must be met: the waterless wash or wipe must be used according to manufacturer guidelines (i.e., labeled as safe for use by children, used only with adult supervision, allowed to dry properly), and the waterless wash must be stored out of reach of children. Please note that this substitution is only acceptable in certain circumstances and that the requirements for adequate handwashing still apply for routine care activities and general classroom use.

Do not apply the information in the first paragraph or the last sentence of the SACERS-U hand hygiene section (page 6), which allows the use of hand sanitizer to replace handwashing in the classroom in some circumstances. NCRLAP requires washing with soap and water whenever handwashing is needed indoors.

Proper hand washing for adults and children: Includes use of running water and soap for approximately 15-20 seconds, followed by drying with an individual paper towel or air dryer.

**Younger/older school-age children:** Unless specified differently in an indicator, younger school age children are 5-7 years old and older school- age children are 8 years and up.

**Poor repair of materials and books:** Materials and books that are in poor repair, meaning that they cannot be used as intended, are excluded when determining whether the required numbers or examples for various categories have been provided. However, if there is an inappropriate image accessible to children this is always considered regardless of whether a material, picture, or book is in poor repair.

**Sanitation:** Child care providers and other professionals should be aware that compliance with NC's Sanitation of Child Care Center Requirements contained in 15A NCAC 18A Section .2800 must be maintained by licensed child care centers; therefore, if differences in wording regarding the use of various products, such as a sanitizing solution, as compared to a disinfecting solution appear in some of the rating scale items, the Sanitation Requirements must be followed. Consider the following:

- For chlorine bleach and water sanitizing solution to be effective, it must be mixed to the strength specified in 15A NCAC 18A .2801 Definitions (22) and be allowed to dry for a minimum of 2 minutes. Complete air drying is ideal. Other sanitizing solutions, as required and approved in 15A NCAC 18A .2812, Cleaning and Sanitizing Equipment and Utensils (5E) may also be used.
- For chlorine bleach and water disinfecting solution to be effective, it must be mixed to the strength specified in 15A NCAC 18A .2801 Definitions (7) and be allowed to dry for a minimum of 2 minutes. Complete air drying is ideal. Other EPA registered disinfectants or germicides may be used, based on the specifications found in the same definition (e.g., approved for equivalent setting and instructions for use are followed).

**General references:** Materials that are frequently used by NCRLAP to assist in decision making are [Caring For Our Children](#) (used for health, sanitation, and safety issues) and the [Handbook for Public Playground Safety](#), CPSC Publication No. 325 (for gross motor play issues). Links to these resources are found on our website [ncrlap.org](http://ncrlap.org) and providers are encouraged to access these; however, all information contained in these resources may not be applied during an assessment.

#### ITEM 2:

**Indicator 5.1:** The space required for this indicator must be provided daily outdoors for at least 30 minutes for programs operating 3+ hours unless severe weather prevents children from going outdoors. Provisions must also be made indoors for the same amount of time on those days when children cannot play outdoors.

**Indicator 5.2:** *Fall zone surfaces (protective cushioning required under and around gross motor equipment) cannot count as one of the two surfaces, and so that example should be removed from the scale. However, if a soft cushioning surface extends well beyond what is needed for protective cushioning around equipment so that children can use it for gross motor play away from the actual fall zone space, then it can be counted. In addition, for grass to count as a "soft surface" it must be well established. Hard-packed dirt with sporadic patches of grass is considered a hard surface and not soft (ERSI 2024).* The variety of surfaces required by this indicator must be provided daily, weather permitting.

#### ITEM 3:

**Indicator 1.1, 5.1, 7.2:** *Up to 3 children can be considered a "small group" (ERSI 2024).*

**Indicator 5.1:** The space required for this indicator must be accessible.

#### ITEM 4:

**Indicator 3.3:** Take children's ages and abilities into account. If the only area that presents a challenge is a space designated or created for privacy and the rest of the play area is easy to view, this indicator should not be scored negatively. To avoid considering this issue in two items, note the difficulties associated with supervision only in Item 3, Indicator 3.2 and 5.3. If the space for privacy creates problems for supervising other spaces in the play area (e.g., due to height or placement), then these issues will be scored in this indicator as well.

**Indicator 7.1:** *To give credit, 5 well-defined interest centers must be observed (ERSI 2024).*

**Indicator 7.2:** Additional materials must be added or rotated in most areas at least monthly.

**ITEM 5:**

**Indicator 7.2:** Furnishings need to be convenient to prevent supervision concerns and accessible to children.

**ITEM 6:**

**Indicator 5.2:** *To give credit, there must be two pieces of children's work displayed as well as two other materials of interest to the children (e.g., posters, photos) (ERSI 2024).*

**Indicator 7.1:** *At least 3 pieces of specialized furniture for different kinds of learning and recreational activities must be accessible weekly to score "Yes" (ERSI 2024).*

**ITEM 7:**

**Indicator 5.1:** Sufficient soft furnishings for at least three children to use must be present in one or more areas of the room.

**Indicator 5.2:** *Change the indicator requirement of "one-third of the time children are in care" to "30 minutes during the 3-hour observation (adjusted proportionately for programs operating for less than 3 hours)" (ERSI 2024).*

**Indicator 7.1:** *A "cozy area" is a clearly defined space with a substantial amount of softness that has been set up specifically for children to relax, read, or engage in other quiet play. The cozy area must provide enough softness for children to completely escape the normal hardness of a typical school-age setting (ERSI 2024).*

**ITEM 8:**

*Replace the original note in the scale with the following:*

**Indicator 5.1, 5.2, 5.3:** *Since these 3 indicators address the use of stationary and portable equipment separately, the number of skills encouraged should also be considered separately. To score 5.1 and 5.2 "Yes," the stationary equipment must stimulate 3 different age-appropriate skills; additionally, to score 5.2 "Yes," all accessible stationary equipment must be safe and appropriate for the children. To score 5.3 "Yes," the portable equipment must stimulate at least 5 different skills, with no more than 2 skills attributed to the same type of material (e.g, throwing and catching for balls), unless an additional piece of equipment is added to use with the equipment (e.g, a basketball hoop, plastic baseball bat, or soccer goal) (ERSI 2024).*

**Indicator 5.1:** The stationary equipment must be accessible daily, weather permitting.

**Indicator 5.3:** The portable equipment must be accessible daily so on days when children do not go outside, these materials must be provided indoors.

**Indicator 7.2:** *This indicator requires at least two different examples of equipment/materials that promote a variety of skill levels, for example large balls for kickball and small balls for wiffle ball, a rock wall climbing component and an arch climber, or overhead horizontal ladders and vertical sliding poles (ERSI 2024).*

**ITEM 9:**

**Indicators 3.2, 5.2:** Dedicated space also earns credit for indicators requiring that the school-age program is the primary user of shared space or has exclusive use of shared space.

**Indicator 5.3:** The group meeting space must be comfortable for adults; the space for individual conferences must be comfortable and private.

#### **ITEM 12**

**Indicator 3.1:** In this indicator “set aside” means that provision must be made for sick children to be separated from the well children and community activity areas; however, the sick child may be in the same classroom.

**Indicator 3.3:** This indicator considers medications and all non-food allergies. Food allergies are considered in Item 17 Meals/snack.

#### **ITEM 14**

**Indicator 3.1:** A fall zone with protective surfacing is not required for items designed/ intended for purposes other than gross motor play (e.g., picnic table, bench, retaining wall). If such items are used for gross motor activities such as jumping or climbing, this will generally be considered in item 30 as a supervision concern if these behaviors are encouraged or prevalent during the observation. However, if there are obvious safety issues (e.g., a fall onto another item or hard surface is likely), and use of the non-gross motor item is encouraged or prevalent, this may be considered in this item.

There can be no more than 5 minor hazards to earn credit.

**Indicator 3.2:** This indicator requires immediate access to a phone or other communication device for emergency purposes when there is one teacher throughout the time the program operates. A personal cell phone would earn credit.

#### **ITEM 15:**

**Indicator 3.1:** Parents of children are not required to call the staff if their child will be late or absent if the parents are responsible for bringing the child to the school age program. After-school programs located in the child’s school may rely on the absentee list to determine whether a child is expected to be present. However, for children who are bused to the program, parents must notify the program if their child is going to be late or absent.

**Indicator 3.2:** Attendance must be taken by a responsible staff person in writing.

**Indicator 3.3:** A staff member must call the parent the same day as the “unnotified” absence unless the parent is responsible for bringing the child to the school age program. If a child is on the school’s absentee list, staff do not need to call parents of children enrolled in after school programs located in the school the child attends. If children have left school without parents notifying the after-school program, then staff must contact the parents.

#### **ITEM 16:**

**Indicators 1.2, 3.1:** The sign-out process must include a record of the identity of the person who picked the child up from the facility (e.g., a name or signature, individual code rather than family code if electronic system is used). Requirements must be met by any adult who is responsible for children when departing from the program.

#### **ITEM 17:**

**Indicator 1.2, 3.2:**

- Credit can be given for nutritionally adequate meals or snacks if the children can serve themselves, but not if the food components are verbally offered, and not within reach of every child.
- NCRLAP no longer evaluates the nutritional adequacy of foods or beverages brought from home; however, for meals and snacks provided by the child care program, nutrition guidelines still apply.

**Indicators 1.4, 3.5:** Handwashing is not addressed in these indicators unless teachers or children serve food to other children without washing their hands or re-contaminate their hands before serving the food. This process contaminates food and would not be considered sanitary food service.

To maintain sanitary procedures, the table tops or other eating surfaces must be cleaned with a soapy water solution, wiped dry, and then sprayed with the sanitizing solution before and after eating. For bleach/water sanitizing solution to be effective, it must be allowed to dry for a minimum of 2 minutes and complete air drying is ideal. Manufacturer instructions for other sanitizers should be followed. Paper towels or a clean cloth, rather than sponges, should be used. The same cloth cannot be used to wipe the soapy water and the sanitizing solution. The use of a clean cloth to wipe sanitizing solution from more than one table is acceptable as long as the sanitizing procedure was carried out correctly. *If a table itself cannot be sanitized, then a placemat (e.g. vinyl) that is cleaned and sanitized may be used or a clean disposable placemat may be used.*

**Indicator 3.4:** For meals such as breakfast and lunch, substitutions must be equivalent to the nutritional components of foods they are replacing. For snacks: Two of four nutritional components from the USDA Meal Guidelines must be served to give credit for an appropriate snack. A child may be served any food that counts for a second USDA component as a substitute. For example, if the snack is milk and crackers, a child who is allergic to milk may be served juice and crackers because the child's allergies are considered, and the alternative snack still meets USDA guidelines.

**ITEM 18:**

Handwashing categories are: Upon arrival, after outdoor play, before and after eating, after messy activities, after toileting.

**Indicator 5.1:** Do not apply the portion of the Note for Clarification page 25 regarding use of hand sanitizer.

**Indicator 7.3:** Tooth brushing is only required for full-day programs during the summer. Score "yes" during the school year even if children do not brush teeth during after-school program or on teacher work days and holidays.

**ITEM 19**

**Indicator 5.1:** Materials must be age and developmentally appropriate to be considered.

**Indicator 5.2:** If children are expected to complete projects that do not promote individual expression/free choice no more than twice a week, and you observe many instances of children using art materials in their own way, you may give credit for this indicator even if much of the work displayed appears to be similar.

**Indicator 5.3:** If an activity where children are expected to follow an example occurs more than once a week, credit is not earned for this indicator, even if participation is not required.

**ITEM 20**

**Indicator 5.1, 5.2:** Materials/activities must be developmentally appropriate to be considered. Beyond the examples included, other devices that play recorded music can be considered such as Alexa or Siri. To be considered accessible children must know how to operate the device independently.

**Indicator 5.2:** *No specific number of materials is required to give credit, as long as 2 of the 3 types are accessible (instruments, recorded music, and dance props), and the materials are plentiful enough so that children do not have to compete over their use (ERSI 2024).*

**ITEM 21**

**Indicator 5.2:** Materials/activities must be developmentally appropriate to be considered.

**Indicator 5.3:** *To give credit for a variety of accessories for blocks and construction, at least 3 different types of accessories should be accessible (ERSI 2024).*

## ITEM 22

**Indicator 5.1:** *To give credit for a variety of materials, there must be plentiful props representing at least two themes. There should be enough materials for each theme to allow children to combine and use props together to engage in more complex dramatic play scenarios. The materials should go beyond the traditional home living theme and should include props to interest both boys and girls (ERSI 2024).* The materials required for this indicator must be accessible and developmentally appropriate.

**Indicator 7.1:** *If evidence is not readily observable, staff should report at least one example of using stories, trips, or videos to extend children's dramatic play.*

**Indicator 7.2:** *At least one example must be observed or reported to give credit.*

## ITEM 23

**Indicator 3.1, 5.1:** *To give credit for 3.1, there must be at least two appropriate language games and at least 10 appropriate books. To give credit for 5.1, there must be at least three appropriate language games and at least 30 appropriate books. Appropriate books match the children's developmental level and do not show graphic violence, have obviously frightening content, or show prejudice towards any group of people. In addition, the content does not promote a negative social message, such as using violence to solve a problem. Any inappropriate books cannot be counted to meet the requirements of 3.1 or 5.1 (ERSI 2024).*

## ITEM 24:

**Indicator 5.1:** A variety of materials is required for each age group enrolled.

## ITEM 25:

**Indicator 5.1:** *Replace the word "games" in the indicator with "materials/activities" (ERSI 2024).* Materials and activities must be developmentally appropriate to be considered. Additionally, equipment, tools, or other science/nature materials that do not have a related activity, clear purpose, or additional information (e.g., facts, instructions, etc.) are not considered at this quality level. Having and incorporating living things, such as plants or classroom pets, applies to indicator 5.2, but not this indicator.

## ITEM 26:

**Categories of diversity:** In addition to the categories listed in the scale, differing abilities and ages can also be considered towards meeting requirements if observed.

**Indicators 3.2, 5.3:** Biased or stereotypical statements and/or actions are considered, regardless of whether the statement or action was intentional or done with malice. In addition to statements or actions made by staff, when such statements or actions are made by other adults or children, appropriate intervention by staff is necessary. Biased/stereotypic statements and/or actions considered in this indicator are those that:

- Demean, mock, devalue, or threaten others based on preconceived opinions or feelings
- Disregard family preferences
- Perpetuate myths or misinformation about a group of people
- Demonstrate an attitude of negativity or fear, either verbally or nonverbally

**Indicators 5.1, 5.2:** Materials of any type that are stereotypical for any group prevent credit from being earned in the relevant indicator. Realistic images and/or content in keeping with children's academic grade level are not a concern when scoring these indicators.

**Indicator 5.2:** The materials required for this indicator must be accessible.

**ITEM 27:**

**Indicator 5.3:** If credit is not earned for 5.1, credit cannot be given for this indicator.

**ITEM 28:**

**Indicator 5.2:** *To “show respect for children” means that staff interact with all children in a way that lets them know they are valuable human beings. This means that staff treat children with the same politeness and concern they would show towards their own friends and colleagues. To score 5.2 “Yes,” staff must show, throughout the observation, that they accept children for who they are and treat them politely and kindly. This must be consistently observed across all children, with only a few minor lapses, if any (ERSI 2024).*

**ITEM 29:**

**Indicator 7.1:** *To give credit, there should be much social talk between staff and children observed. Most, if not all, of the children should be recipients of this frequent social talk, with no child obviously ignored (ERSI 2024).*

**ITEM 30:**

**Indicator 3.1, 3.2:** *To give credit, most supervision should be neutral or pleasant with only a few mildly negative interactions observed, and with no harsh interactions observed that cause undue distress to any child (ERSI 2024).*

**ITEM 32:**

**Indicator 3.1:** *To give credit, children should be able to move freely and experience natural peer groupings (indoors or outdoors, including play and routines, such as snack) for at least 30 minutes of a 3-hour observation (adjusted proportionately for programs that operate for less than 3 hours).*

**Indicator 3.2:** *To give credit, staff should intervene when any strongly negative peer interactions are observed. In addition, the intervention should be generally neutral or positive with no obviously harsh interaction observed. Small problems that the children are able to resolve themselves do not require staff attention.*

**ITEM 33:**

**Indicators 3.2, 5.3:** If families or caregivers cannot spend time at the program, alternative options that allow participation and engagement, such as collecting or donating materials, sharing information or participating in meetings/activities via zoom, etc., are considered.

**Indicator 7.2:** In this indicator, “regularly scheduled” means that the program takes the initiative to schedule individual parent conferences at least twice a year.

**ITEM 34:**

**Indicator 5.2:** This indicator only applies when one staff member is arriving to take responsibility for a group of children, and another staff member is leaving. To get credit for this indicator their time must overlap somewhat, so that information needed to meet the children’s current needs can be reported. This indicator does not apply when one staff member joins another and they work together for a long period of time, during which communication about the children could take place. Score this indicator yes if at least two teachers work with the children together for long periods or if the morning teacher and the afternoon teacher have a “time set aside” to communicate about the needs of the children.

**ITEM 35:**

For NC assessments, score N/A if assessing a summer program, or a program not hosted by the children’s school.

**ITEM 37:**

**Indicator 5.3:** *Since the intent of this item is to measure children's opportunities for free choice, this indicator requires that the children have the opportunity to experience different groupings throughout the observation, with an emphasis on self-selected small group or individual activities. Large group activities may also be offered, but they are not required to give credit (ERSI 2024).*

Indicator 7.2: Materials should be added or rotated at least monthly, and it must also be observed that some materials/experiences provided for free play relate to children's interest or current topics of interest.

**ITEM 38:**

**Indicator 5.1:** Regular use means at least twice during the year for programs operating year-round, once during summer programs and once during the school year. Having trips only during the summer would not earn credit.

**Indicator 5.2, 5.3, 7.1, 7.2:** Consider the process and planning for all uses of community resources, and not only field trips.

**ITEM 42:**

Score this item when there is a child in the group with an identified disability or special need. If the identification process is not complete, this item is N/A. If intervention or therapy services occur, this indicates that a child has special needs. It is not necessary for a child to have an IEP to score this item, nor is it necessary to know the identity of a child with a disability. Assume that parents want their privacy protected and simply ask the questions needed to score.

Requirements in this item apply to each child with an identified disability/special need or medical condition requiring special consideration.

**Indicator 3.2:** Upon enrollment or upon learning about a recent diagnosis, staff should seek basic information about the child's identified disability, medical condition or other special need.

**Indicator 5.1:** Staff should have that information within 30 days. In circumstances where staff report that a parent is reluctant to share this information, staff should be able to explain what continued follow-up attempts are occurring including providing explanations about the importance of having this information. This indicator does not require that staff have actual copies of any assessments or developmental plans. The information may be provided by parents/guardians, other staff or specialists who have specific knowledge regarding the child's needs.

References:

*School-age Care Environment Rating Scale, Updated Edition*, by Harms, T.; Jacobs, E.; & White, D. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2014).

SACERS-U Additional Notes for Clarification found on the Environment Rating Scales Institute website ([www.ersi.info/](http://www.ersi.info/)).