

PROMOTING ENGAGEMENT AND THE SACERS-U:



APPROPRIATE MATERIALS AND ACTIVITIES FOR SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

First Things First!



The afterschool program is an opportunity for enrichment, since children have already spent a full day in school, mostly engaged in academic learning. Afterschool programs are a time when children can pursue their interests, socialize, relax, and continue learning with stimulating activities and materials. This same idea applies to school-age programming on full days, during children's school breaks or teacher work days. Having varied age-appropriate activities and materials, combined with intentional teaching can greatly enhance children's experiences during their time off from school in a more relaxed out of school environment.

Materials should be developmentally appropriate for the entire age-range of children enrolled, with enough materials to provide interesting and varied choices. Think about children's developmental abilities across the age range of 5-12 years. Materials that are age appropriate for younger school-age children will not be interesting or stimulating for older school-age children. Likewise, if the NC Pre-K classroom is used in the afternoon by school-age children, appropriate materials for the older age-range must be incorporated into the classroom when they are present.

For materials to be considered accessible for the SACERS-U, children need to be able to freely reach and use the materials every day. Make sure materials are unwrapped and ready for children to use; more complicated sets/items may need to actually be set up for children to see and understand their intended use. When children are allowed to access materials in cabinets or closets, make sure it is clear these areas are intended for their use with clear visuals (signs, labels, doors left open, etc.).

Active engagement from staff is vital. Once an inviting environment has been set up for school aged children, it is imperative that staff facilitate activities and encourage the children to engage with the materials. School-age staff enhance children's experiences by asking questions about what the children are doing and their interests, adding new information to what children already know or are learning, encouraging positive peer interactions, and providing positive guidance along with good supervision.

The remainder of this document includes **key points and reminders** for the SACERS-U items related specifically to children’s learning and play materials. It will be most helpful to review this information along with a copy of the SACERS-U. Many items and concepts are included here, so we recommend reflecting on **one** SACERS-U item at a time, while engaging in a self-assessment process. This allows for careful consideration your school-age environment and the related materials, activities, and interactions currently in place. Are there changes or additions that could be helpful?



Item 7 FURNISHINGS for RELAXATION and COMFORT (pg. 14)

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Are there soft furnishings for at least 3 children to use? Beyond rugs or carpets, are there other items such as bean bags, large pillows or cushions, or soft chairs/sofas?

Do the children have access to the soft furnishings for at least 1/3 of the time the program operates? Having long stretches of time to relax, as needed, helps support children’s self-regulation.

REMEMBER

Create a planned space with several soft furnishings gathered together for reading or quietly listening to music. (Indicator 7.1)

Being able to relax and have down time is important, so a space with soft furnishings should be separated from noisier or more active play activities. (Indicator 7.2)



Item 8 FURNISHINGS for GROSS MOTOR ACTIVITIES (pg. 15)

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Is there stationary gross motor equipment?

Is the equipment functional for the children enrolled? This means it is the right size and appropriately challenging.

Is there a variety of portable gross motor equipment or materials for the children to use every day?

What portable gross motor equipment can be used indoors? Make sure there is a variety of portable equipment to use indoors on bad weather days.

Overall, does the gross motor equipment stimulate a variety of gross motor skills? How many skills?

REMEMBER

Different equipment stimulates different skills and having many appropriate options is important.
(Indicators 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 7.2)

Encourage opportunities for creativity in gross motor activities, by providing materials that can be rearranged to provide new challenges. This can be achieved by incorporating portable equipment such as cones or balance beams to create an obstacle course with movable components.
(Indicator 7.1)

Materials should be stored for easy access, so children can choose them independently.
(Indicator 7.3)

Equipment that is too small/too big for most of the children enrolled, is not considered age appropriate when deciding if there is a variety of gross motor options and how many different skills are stimulated. Only age appropriate materials are counted.



Item 19 ARTS and CRAFTS (pg. 26)

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Are there several different types of materials for the children to use daily including items for drawing, painting, collage, sculpture, and crafts?

Art categories are slightly different in the SACERS-U than for preschoolers. The “crafts” category introduces opportunities for children to engage in activities such as jewelry making, weaving, origami, or embroidery.

REMEMBER

Most of the art and craft activities should allow individual creativity. Each child should be able to complete the activity in his/her own creative way.

Encourage children to use new or different art materials that require more complex skills.

(Indicator 7.1)

Offer projects that children work on over time, with different steps.

(Indicator 7.2)



Item 20 MUSIC and MOVEMENT (pg. 27)

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Are there several types of music materials for children to use including recorded music, dance props, and instruments, daily?

How often do children have music experiences?

REMEMBER

Weekly activities where staff encourage and lead children to learn the steps to dances and the words to songs are a great way to get kids up and moving! (Indicator 7.1)

Spark children’s interest in music by planning special monthly activities such as inviting a performer to the program. (Indicator 7.2)



Item 21 BLOCKS and CONSTRUCTION (pg. 28)

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Are there different types of blocks and interlocking building materials for the children to use daily?

Are there enough materials for the children to build large and complex structures?

Are there various types of accessories each day, to enhance children's building?

REMEMBER

With close supervision, monthly woodworking and carpentry activities are fun and beneficial to children. These activities enhance skills such as eye-hand coordination, dexterity/fine motor, problem-solving, and creative thinking.

(Indicator 7.2)



Item 22 DRAMATIC PLAY/THEATER (pg. 29)

THINGS TO CONSIDER

There is more to dramatic play than a housekeeping center. Are there several materials for both boys and girls that allow children to carry out play across several roles or themes daily? Get creative with dramatic play by providing prop boxes that are theme related (e.g., hair dressing, birthday party, a day at the beach, etc.)

For this age group, children tend to enjoy the process of developing different types of drama productions, such as writing scripts and costume/prop planning.

REMEMBER

Active staff involvement is important. This indicator requires more than merely setting up dramatic play props for children's use. This could include offering ideas for additional props to use, suggesting other places where children might play to enhance the experience, and/or helping children extend dramatic play roles and characters. This must be observed. (Indicator 5.2)

Use books, field trips, videos, or stories to enrich children's dramatic play themes and ideas. (Indicator 7.1)



Item 23 LANGUAGE/READING (pg. 30)

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Are there several books and language games for the children to use each day?

Are the books and games appropriately challenging for the age group? For example, in a shared classroom, there are often preschool books and games related to alphabet recognition but for school-age children, more complex stories, chapter books, crossword/language puzzles, and language games such as Scrabble Jr., Pictionary, or Apples to Apples Jr. are required.

Is there a time set aside when stories are read with or told to the children? For example, topic related stories or ones suggested by the children, or reading a chapter a day until a longer book is completed.

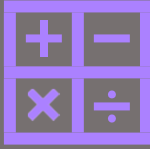
REMEMBER

Encouraging children to read posters/signs aloud to answer their own questions, reading the rules for games, or having children write down a list of places they would like to go to for field trips (or other lists/plans) are all great ways to encourage reading and writing in practical situations. (Indicator 5.3)

Get children enthusiastic about reading by allowing them to choose and check out books that interest them during trips to the library. (Indicator 7.1)

Help children spread the excitement about reading to others by allowing them to share their favorite books with friends in the group. (Indicator 7.2)

Images or text displaying/describing violence or prejudice are unacceptable for all age groups. Carefully check all books that are accessible and remove or replace as needed.



THINGS TO CONSIDER

Are there several math games and activities for the children to use each day?

Are the math materials and games challenging for the age group? For example, in a shared classroom usual preschool materials for counting, measuring, and learning shape/size might be accessible BUT these basic materials are not developmentally appropriate for the older age group.

For school-age children, think about math board games or other materials that involve complex use of numbers, problem solving, math/number language perhaps related to the function of currency, etc.

REMEMBER

Voting on activities, keeping score during games, talking about time and referring to the clock, or using rulers for measuring during an art activity are all great ways to encourage children to practice math/reasoning skills during daily activities. (Indicator 5.2)

Games should be labeled with indication of difficulty to show appropriateness for children's ages. (Indicator 7.1)

Math games and homework times are great opportunities to support peer engagement and leadership by encouraging children to learn from each other and share what they know. (Indicator 7.2)

Appropriate math/number materials should be provided for the entire age-range of school age children enrolled. There are many fun games and materials that extend what children are learning in the different grades and give them opportunities to explore math skills further.



THINGS TO CONSIDER

Are there several types of science/nature equipment accessible daily such as measuring tools, magnets, microscope with slides, magnifying glasses with items to view, science experiment kits, and STEM activities?

Are the materials more advanced than the usual preschool materials?

Are there science/nature materials present such as collections of natural objects, age appropriate books, and charts/posters about science topics?

Are there plants or pets present and are children involved in taking care of and observing them?

Do children have chances to observe changes in nature over time, such as through gardening or butterfly habitats?

REMEMBER

Books extend children's information about science materials. For example, place a book about using magnets next to a magnet set. Using science/nature books in this way reinforces learning and reading proficiency, while developing research skills. (Indicator 3.2)

Through experiences with plants and animals, children learn respect, empathy and responsibility. They also become more curious, respectful, and appreciative of living things. (Indicator 5.2)

Spark children's interest in nature and science by planning field trips that are focused on science topics. Trips to museums, parks, or zoos give children opportunities to observe and sometimes handle animals, plants, and technology that they see in books and pictures in the classroom. (Indicator 7.2)

Appropriate nature/science materials and equipment for school-agers link what children already know to new concepts they are learning. The materials should encourage children to question, be curious, do research, and take risks with nature/science experimentation and exploration.



Item 26 CULTURAL AWARENESS (pg. 33)

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Materials that show diversity may include books, pictures in the display, puzzles, or other learning/play items.

Are there several materials that reflect diversity in ethnicity, gender roles, culture, race, or differing abilities?

Do materials show males and females in non-traditional roles?

Are the materials easily visible, meaning that they are obvious in the environment?

REMEMBER

Plan activities that broaden children's awareness and appreciation of other cultures. For example, research holidays and celebrations from many religions or learn music and dance from different cultures. (Indicator 7.1)

Encourage acceptance and understanding of differences by discouraging derogatory or prejudicial remarks. (Indicator 7.2)

Materials that portray violence or prejudice toward any group are unacceptable for all ages.

An unbiased approach to children's activity choices and questions about differences is essential in developing understanding and appreciation of diversity. Challenge staff to be aware of how they respond to children's choices and interests, and how implicit bias related to gender, ethnicity, or ability impacts these responses. For example, are boys and girls supported to play in any of the centers, regardless of gender? Is everyone helped to select challenging activities, brainstorm, and problem-solve, regardless of language proficiency or ability differences ?

IDEAS FOR USING THIS DOCUMENT

- As you consider the information in this document and reflect on any changes or additions that could be helpful in your school-age environment, you may want to use the “Thinking More About Learning Materials-SACERS-U” worksheet found at ncrlap.org to organize and keep track of ideas.
- Always consider the unique features of your school-age environment. Think about the ages and individual needs of children enrolled, the number of teachers who work with the children each day, and any overall program goals or philosophy.
- Brainstorm with other staff and consider whether there is a similar understanding of the requirements and information included for each of the items.
- Seek advice from your DCDEE Child Care Consultant, local CCR&R or Smart Start Partnerships, or other childcare agencies.
- This document provides an overview of different SACERS-U items and concepts. However, to fully understand and meet the requirements of the various indicators, it is most important to carefully read the items and notes for clarification in the SACERS-U (page numbers are included), and the NC Additional Notes.
- Additional resources and webinars related to the SACERS-U can be found at ncrlap.org.

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We greatly appreciate the feedback provided by reviewers from Southwestern Child Development Commission, Martin-Pitt Partnership for Children, and EQUIPD.



REFERENCE:

Harms, T., Vineberg Jacobs, E., & Romano White, D. (2014). School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale, Updated Edition. New York: Teachers College Press.