

## SACERS-U: Tips & Clarifications

### ITEM 1 – INDOOR SPACE

**Question:** Are you able to elaborate on the meaning of “ample indoor space”?

**Answer:** The manual gives the examples of ample indoor space as “spacious areas that allow children to move freely; space for furnishings and activities without limiting children’s movement” (Harms, Jacobs, & White, 2014, p. 8). The authors have used the illustration of being in an airport restroom. Many spaces in airport restrooms are tight and difficult to maneuver with your luggage; however, ample space in the restroom would provide for you to easily maneuver with luggage and still have extra space. The expectation for ample space in the classroom is much the same. Consideration is also given to the number of children enrolled in the classroom, not just the children present on the day of the observation, and if all the spaces in the classroom are able to be used by teachers and children.

Ample space allows children to play and move freely without interfering with other children’s play. Ample space ensures satisfying play experiences with materials children choose, fewer behavior issues, and great engagement.

**Question:** Is credit given if natural light flows from a large window in one classroom into a second classroom that does not have windows or a skylight?

**Answer:** For Indicator 5.2, natural light must be present in each classroom through a window or skylight. In this way, the light is direct. Artificial lighting does not provide natural lighting.

### ITEM 2 – SPACE FOR GROSS MOTOR ACTIVITIES

**Question:** Does a program need a separate gym or room designated for gross motor play in addition to an outdoor playground?

**Answer:** For Indicator 5.1., an indoor space for gross motor activities is required in addition to an outdoor space for gross motor activities. A gym or classroom may be used as indoor space for gross motor activities. Air hockey, Wii/Switch Dance, and a ping pong table with an appropriate amount of space is considered as indoor spaces at Indicator 5.1, but not for Indicator 7.1.

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## ITEM 6 – FURNISHINGS FOR LEARNING AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

**Question:** For furnishings for routine care and furnishings for learning and recreational activities, school-age care provides for children of differing ages. What are some tips for providing child-size tables and chairs for every child, regardless of their height?

**Answer:** The Notes for Clarification states that “...children’s feet should be able to rest on the floor when seated. Table height should allow children’s knees to fit under the table and elbows above the table” (Harms, Jacobs, & White, 2014, p. 12). A variety of ages would require tables and chairs at different heights to meet the children’s needs. In a classroom with 20 children ages 5-8, there will be a variety of sizes needed.

Child-sized tables and chairs may be purchased in a variety of sizes. If a classroom has four tables for the 20 children, consider purchasing tables with adjustable legs to vary the heights of the tables to meet the needs of children in the classroom. A variety of chair sizes should be present, as well. Children and teachers can work together to find the perfect fit for each child. A great tip is to label each chair with a child’s name. This can become a child’s designated chair for the year, or until the child outgrows it.

## ITEM 7 – FURNISHINGS FOR RELAXATION AND COMFORT

**Question:** What types of softness should be in a school-age classroom to provide enough comfort for children?

**Answer:** School-age children need a place to relax and find relief from the busyness and stress of their day. Teachers should arrange the room to include a cozy area for reading, listening to music, or relaxing. The cozy area should be located away from busier centers such as blocks and dramatic play. This is important so that the space is protected from any active play. A cozy area for school-age children should include a considerable amount of softness and allow several children to use it at the same time. Some examples include:

- A couch that is large enough for a few children to relax at the same time.
- Soft cushions placed on a soft rug.
- Pillows placed on a soft rug.
- Several carpeted areas throughout the room with comfortable, soft seating.
- Comfortable beanbag chairs with a soft surface underneath.
- Several soft chairs for relaxing, such as a recliner or soft dish/butterfly chair.

## ITEM 8 – FURNISHINGS FOR GROSS MOTOR ACTIVITIES

**Question:** If a school-age program is only in session for 2 1/2 hours after school, does it need separate gross motor equipment and materials, or may they share these items with preschool classrooms?

**Answer:** Stationary equipment, such as slides, swings, climbers, and basketball hoops must be sturdy, age appropriate, and stimulate many skills for the children who are using them. Equipment that is appropriate for a 3-year-old may not be appropriate for a 10-year-old. Older children need larger equipment to accommodate their height and weight.

The equipment used by school-age programs needs to be the correct size to stimulate gross motor activity. When children’s legs are too long for a swing, they cannot properly pump their legs while swinging to exercise fully. Gross motor materials should provide children with opportunities to be creative in gross motor activities, rather than using equipment and materials in only one way. For this reason, a variety of materials should be accessible as children grow to meet their changing needs. At all times, equipment and materials should promote a variety of skill levels to accommodate the diverse ages and abilities of school-age children.

Below are age-appropriate equipment and materials to consider for school-age children:

- Arch climbers, free standing climbers, and climbing equipment up to 84”in height
- Fulcrum seesaws
- Overhead rings up to 84”
- Merry-go-rounds and ring treks
- Vertical sliding poles and spiral slides with more than one 360° turn
- Balance beams up to 16” high
- Hopscotch squares
- Basketball hoops of appropriate height
- T-ball stands with bats and balls
- Soccer balls and net
- Hula hoops and jump ropes
- Roller skates, scooters, and tennis racquets
- Indoor activities such as a ping-pong table, Wii Fitness or Dance, and air hockey

Children should have access to gross motor equipment, materials, and play for at least one-sixth of the time they are in the program. During the summer months, when children are present for a longer period of time, gross-motor access should be extended in the same proportion. If a summer program is open for 12 hours, from 6:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m., gross motor activities should be provided for a minimum of 2 hours of the day.

## ITEM 19 – ARTS AND CRAFTS

**Question:** Sometimes programs offer coloring sheets to school-age children. How can I help teachers expand the choice of art materials and projects to include more individualized art and more complex projects that continue over several days?

**Answer:** At the end of a long school day, children need to unwind and engage in less structured activities. When offered as an optional activity, coloring sheets may be a soothing way for children to relax. More complex designs and patterns may provide stress relief. Coloring sheets may be provided as one activity option for school-age children; however, this is not considered an art activity, as it does not allow children choice in the way they will creatively express ideas or use materials.

School-age children should be able to choose from a variety of art materials to encourage creativity. Examples include paints, markers, 3-dimensional materials, collage materials, various colored pencils, markers and crayons, yarn for knitting or weaving, origami, playdough or clay, building materials, recycled materials, and beads. Teachers may rotate materials to provide a variety of choices for children.

Children should have a protected space to store ongoing projects that take more than one day to complete. A small cubby or shelf system may be designated for this work. Children should be confident that they may return to work on a project on consecutive days.

## ITEM 23 – LANGUAGE/READING ACTIVITIES

**Question:** What are some strategies teachers can use to support language, reading, and writing?

**Answer:** Teachers should be attentive to support children who are involved in language games or reading and writing activities. Item 23 requires teachers to respond, participate, and encourage language and reading skills while children are playing games and during daily situations. When children are playing a board game, the teacher should participate or read the instructions with the children. When children ask a question, the teacher can help them find information on age-appropriate websites or in informational books and resources.

Teachers should encourage the use of books. Teachers may read age-appropriate books to children daily to individual children and in small or large groups. They should ask children to choose books that will be read to the group. Children may be invited to bring a favorite book from home to be shared with the group. Teachers should model respect for books and a love of reading for pleasure.

A school-age classroom can provide enrichment opportunities for learning that go beyond what children experience in their regular classroom. Children may participate in writing a blog, a newspaper, poetry, or a play they can perform for younger children or parents. Teachers in this setting have many opportunities to make language and reading meaningful and enjoyable.

## ITEM 24 – MATH/REASONING ACTIVITIES

**Question:** What are some strategies teachers can use to support interest and skills in math and reasoning?

**Answer:** Teachers can use the environment and daily activities to connect math concepts to children’s lives. The SACERS book offers concrete examples such as, “...look for use of numbers during meals or when fixing own snacks, setting the table for correct number of children, transition times, using a timer to take turns, keeping score in ball games, taking attendance by children...” (Harms, Jacobs, & White, 2014, p. 31). There are many opportunities to talk about math concepts throughout the day.

School-age classrooms should provide a shelf designated for a variety of age-appropriate math and reasoning games. Children should have access to these materials for free play daily. Games and materials can include the following: puzzles, number games, dominoes, chess, checkers, backgammon, board games such as Monopoly and Chutes and Ladders, and card games. Games and activities should be appropriately challenging for the ages of the children. A variety of games should be available for various skill levels. Games and activities should be labeled with a sticker to indicate skill level. For example, a red sticker may be placed on games for Kindergarten and a yellow sticker placed on games for children in first through third grade.

In a classroom with a variety of ages and abilities, teachers should encourage more experienced children to demonstrate new games and assist younger children with homework.

## ITEM 25 – SCIENCE/NATURE ACTIVITIES

**Question:** What can programs do to provide more opportunities for children to engage in science and nature activities?

**Answer:** Every classroom should include a well-planned science/nature center for school-age children. Because school-age classrooms serve children of various ages, the materials and activities should provide engagement for a variety of interests and skill levels.

Science/nature centers should include the following activities and opportunities.

- Books about science and nature extend children’s information about topics in the center and in their world. To support a leaf and pinecone collection in the center, include books about trees or arboretums. To support learning about a display of insects, provide books that offer information about insects. Local libraries will allow teachers to check out multiple books. Librarians can assist teachers in finding books that are appropriate for multiple ages. Teachers may call the library and ask the librarian to set aside and hold appropriate books. Parents and community partners may be asked to donate informational books to the classroom.
- Equipment and tools related to science and nature will enhance children’s learning experiences. Equipment and tools include measuring tools, magnifying glasses, magnets, scales, and microscopes. Children will want to use drawing materials and paper or journals to record what they observe. School-age children can access tools kept in a shelving or drawer unit in the science/nature center. Teachers should instruct children on the proper way to use all of the equipment, so it can be used independently.
- Materials related to science and nature, such as natural objects, living things, posters, pictures, and games or activities interest and engage children. Include several collections of natural objects, such as leaves, rocks, insects, shells, or nests. Aquariums and terrariums invite children to observe living animals and plants. Children enjoy caring for plants and class pets.
- Posters and pictures related to the natural collections or science themes help extend children’s learning.
- Science activities and games capture children’s interest when these provide realistic pictures or photos of living creatures and plants. Nature puzzles, activities with magnets, matching games, and science board games and puzzle games are appropriate.
- Science activities may include planting seeds and recording growth, observing caterpillars and butterflies, and caring for an outdoor garden.

Teachers should aim to extend children’s learning about how science affects their daily lives. The class may participate in recycling and conservation of electricity and water. They may engage in a group learning project about the environment or endangered animals. Field trips and special speakers may enhance children’s learning. Trips to a local botanical garden, science museum, or planetarium will expose children to additional concepts and learning.

## ITEM 27 – GREETING/DEPARTING

**Question:** What can we do to make children feel safe and comfortable?

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**Answer:** When children get off of the bus or are dropped off by a parent, teachers should be prepared ahead of time to focus on greeting children. When entering the classroom, teachers should observe carefully to be sure children are successful in getting engaged in activities. Special attention should be given to ensure that *each* child is greeted and given personal attention as they come into the program and leave the program.

### References

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