

Thinking More about Program Structure



SACERS-U

Purpose: This document addresses many of the requirements for items found in the Program Structure subscale. The focus is primarily on indicators found at the 3, 5, and 7 level. It is important to review each item entirely to ensure that no indicator at the 1 or “inadequate” level applies to the classroom. Answering the questions and referring to the SACERS-U will build familiarity with requirements, while offering a chance to reflect on current practices and situations.

Preparation: Refer to the SACERS-U (spiral bound edition, published in 2014) when completing the questions. To better understand the scale format and structure, review the instructions for scoring on page 4 in the SACERS-U and the definitions of common terms on pages 5-6. It will also be helpful to refer to a copy of the most current NC Additional Notes (available at ncrlap.org). There are many questions, so completing them all will likely take several reflection/review sessions.

The items included consider many aspects related to how the school-age program structure contributes to children’s opportunities to explore, learn, and become increasingly independent. There is a focus on the ways classroom structure creates a predictable sequence of events that include regular routines, significant opportunities for complex play, smooth transitions, ample time for interactions with adults and peers, responsive group activities, and inclusion of children with disabilities. These aspects provide a strong foundation for fun and enriching experiences, and strong relationships.

Tips:

- If you are confused about a question in the worksheet, look at the item in the SACERS-U and check any Notes for Clarification and/or NC Additional Notes to identify the specific indicator and requirement to which it refers.
- Describe the current practices that occur when answering the questions. Remember, this is not about a “right answer” but rather a way to build understanding about what occurs every day.
- Using the worksheet on an ongoing basis can help verify that the classroom structure is supportive and developmentally appropriate. This process also emphasizes how specific aspects of program structure support the teachers in providing experiences that are positive and enriching.
- Answering the questions with someone else (co-teachers, administrators, technical assistance specialists, etc.) promotes sharing of perspectives and may draw attention to different details.

Date(s) completed: _____ Classroom name/age group: _____

Worksheet completed by: _____

ITEM 36 Schedule (p. 43)

Is there a familiar, daily routine or schedule? **Y / N** Is the written schedule posted? **Y / N**

Is there a fine motor or language activity scheduled each day? **Y / N** If **yes**, list recent examples:

Does play occur outdoors, every day, weather permitting? **Y / N** **Hint:** See Terms Used Throughout the Scale on page 6 of the SACERS-U for a definition of “weather permitting” and/or refer to the Child Care Weather Watch Chart at ncrlap.org.

What conditions prevent outdoor play from occurring?

Who is involved in making decisions about when outdoor play will occur and how are decisions made?

Is there active gross motor play every day, including indoors when weather prevents outdoor play? **Y / N**

Is there flexibility in the schedule? **Y / N** If **yes**, what activities or routines sometimes need more or less time? _____

Does each day include both teacher-planned and child-initiated activities? **Y / N**

Are these two different types of activities offered simultaneously, meaning children have a choice between teacher-planned and child-initiated activities at the same time? **Y / N**

Describe how transitions keep children engaged and reduce waiting times:

ITEM 37 Free choice (p. 44)

Hint: Only times when children can choose both the materials they use and peers to interact with, are considered free choice.

Does free choice time occur each day? **Y / N**

Does free choice time occur for the majority of time children are present? **Y / N**

Are children allowed to opt out of any activity? **Y / N** How is this handled? _____

During times children have free choice, are there many types of materials, games, and activities for them to use? **Y / N**

Are the materials suited to ages and abilities of the school-age children? **Hint:** Especially in school-age programs that use shared spaces, consider whether most materials are appropriate for school-age children vs. another age group that attends at a different time of day. **Y / N**

Are children able to choose whom to play with? **Y / N**

Are there opportunities for individual, small group, and large group play? **Y / N**

Are there ways children are encouraged to extend activities they show interest in? **Y / N** If **yes**, give an example: _____

Are there materials to rotate or add for the children to use during free choice times? **Y / N** If **yes**, how often are materials added or rotated? _____

Do any rotated (newly purchased or homemade) materials relate to the current themes or children's interests? **Y / N** If **yes**, give two examples: _____

ITEM 38 Use of community resources (p. 45)

Are community resources used? Describe:

Are field trips taken? Describe:

Is parental permission required for all field trips? **Y / N**

Are there at least two community resource visits and/or field trips planned yearly? **Y / N**

Is at least one of these an off-site field trip? **Y / N**

For programs that operate year-round, does at least one of the visits/trips occur during the school year? **Y / N**

How is supervision handled when children are away from the program? _____

Are the current group of children's interests considered when planning field trips? **Y / N** If **yes**, list examples of how this occurs. _____

Describe plans for preparing children for field trips:

For safety:

To enhance children's experiences:

Does follow-up with children occur after trips are taken, and if so, what sorts of things are done? _____

ITEM 42 Provisions for children with disabilities (p. 49)

Only complete the questions in this section if there is a child with a diagnosed disability and completed assessment, or if there is a child receiving services, such as speech therapy. If there are multiple children with special needs, respond to the questions keeping each child in mind.

Do school age staff/teachers try to get information about each child's needs and/or assessment(s)? **Y / N**

Do school age staff/teachers have information about each child's needs and/or assessment(s)? **Y / N**

If **yes**, how is this information used? _____

Is each child able to fully participate in the classroom experiences? **Y / N**

Describe anything special that is done to help each child participate: _____

Does staff consult with professional special educators or therapists for information to use in planning for children? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe:

If professionals recommend specific activities or experiences for the child, describe how these are implemented: _____

Reflection for future planning: After completing this worksheet, it can be helpful to go back and think more about the answers. Were there any questions that were answered “no” instead of “yes?” If so, this could help identify areas to work on. It can also be helpful to break bigger topics into smaller steps so that changes and progress can be easily recognized. Hopefully this worksheet was a helpful beginning to an ongoing self-study practice and suggest continuing with an action plan after completing the reflection questions below.

List areas where strengths were noted in program structure:

List areas where improvements could be made or there are new ideas to think about:

Are there any issues you will work to change right away? Describe how so:

Are there issues that will take more time to change? What are these and what resources may be needed?

Want to find out more?

Not all SACERS-U indicators are covered in this worksheet, so review the scale carefully and seek out other resources, as needed, since relying on these questions alone to prepare for an assessment will not be sufficient. 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. For example:

- Look for general information about the assessment process and also specific SACERS-U resources. 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.

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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References:

Harms, T., Jacobs, E., & White, D. (2014). 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>.