

Thinking More about Space and Furnishings



SACERS-U

Purpose: This document addresses many of the requirements for items found in the Space and Furnishings subscale. The focus is primarily on indicators at the 3, 5, and 7 levels. It is important to review each item entirely to ensure that no indicators at the 1 or “inadequate” level apply 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 here consider the many ways the physical spaces, indoors and outdoors, are a foundation for children’s experiences. Appropriate furnishings and space for children’s activities support children’s behavior and development. There is a focus on various aspects of the indoor and outdoor spaces, including arrangement, furnishings and equipment to support routines, play, learning, and relaxation, and the spaces for staff, all of which form the physical environment in which quality child care takes place.

Tips:

- If you are confused about a question, look at the item in the SACERS-U and check any Notes for Clarification 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 space and furnishings function to support children’s positive experiences. It can help identify barriers in the child care environment for use in planning modifications.
- 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 1 Indoor space (p. 8)

Consider the indoor space used by children:

Is the space ample (e.g., furnishings do not crowd the space, it is easy to move around)? **Y / N**

Are the play areas large enough for the type of play intended in each space? **Y / N**

Can teachers easily access spaces needed to meet the routine care needs of children? **Y / N**

If **no**, describe ways furnishings can be rearranged, changed, or removed to address these issues:

Are there provisions for:

Sound absorption: Is the noise level controlled, such that it is not hard to hear conversations? **Y / N**

If **no**, what steps could be taken to absorb sound or otherwise reduce the volume? _____

Lighting: Is there natural light? If **yes**, can it be controlled, such as with blinds or curtains? **Y / N**

Ventilation: Is there good air circulation? **Y / N** Can ventilation be controlled by classroom staff, such as by opening screened windows, controlling a fan, etc.? **Y / N**

Are there any repair issues that need to be addressed such as peeling paint or cracked floor tiles? **Y / N**

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

Do the children have ample space outdoors for gross motor play each day, weather permitting? **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. **Y / N**

Is there also some space for indoor gross motor activities on bad weather days? **Y / N**

List the gross motor space(s) used outdoors:

Describe the indoor space(s) used for gross motor activities, such as on bad weather days? _____

Is the outdoor space convenient to the classroom? **Y / N**

Is there some protection from the elements outdoors? **Y / N**

List the types of ground surfaces outdoors and the types of play for which they are used: _____

Are the gross motor spaces pleasant and varied? **Y / N**

Is the gross motor space for K-3rd grade separate from the space for 4th grade and older? **Y / N**

ITEM 3 Space for privacy (p. 10)

Can children create their own private spaces? **Y / N** If **Yes**, describe: _____

List any areas in the classroom that are consistently limited for use by individuals or small groups:

What types of strategies are used to maintain these limits? _____

Can children using any space for privacy be easily seen from all other parts of the classroom? **Y / N**

Can children bring materials of their choice to these spaces? **Y / N**

What activities are set up in the space(s) for privacy? _____

ITEM 4 Room arrangement (p. 11)

Are similar materials organized together in defined interest centers? **Hint:** See the Notes for Clarification for the definition of an interest center **Y / N**

List the interest centers provided in the classroom: _____

The total number of interest areas is: _____

Are all areas easy to supervise? **Y / N** If **no**, list supervision challenges (high shelves, corners, etc.):

Are all of the quiet areas separated from loud or active areas? **Y / N**

Think about how play materials are stored and organized:

Are the materials stored so children can reach them? **Y / N**

Does organization allow children can see what is available? **Y / N**

Can children open storage containers independently? **Y / N**

Are there labels or other guidance provided so children know where materials are stored? **Y / N**

Is there a separate area that is quiet and has appropriate furniture to allow children to study quietly or do homework? **Y / N**

Do children have access to reference materials? **Y / N** If **yes**, where are these located? _____

List additional types of materials available to rotate into the centers: _____

How frequently are materials rotated or changed? _____

ITEM 5 Furnishings for routine care (p. 12)

Does each child enrolled have:

- ☐ A chair and space at a table for eating
- ☐ A cubby or other individual storage for personal belongings

While children are seated check to see:

If their feet can touch the floor easily (not just their toes) while seated back in their chair, without scooting forwards.

Number of children for whom the chairs are child-sized: _____

If the table is a comfortable height and children can place their arms on the table top without raising their elbows.

Number of children for whom the table(s) are child-sized: _____

Are all furnishings sturdy, in good repair, and clean? **Y / N**

If enrolled, do children with disabilities have any needed adaptive furniture? **Y / N / NA**

Are the provisions for storing children's belongings sufficiently sized and spaced so that belongings do not touch? **Y / N**

ITEM 6 Furnishings for learning and recreational activities (p. 13)

Are there enough furnishings such as shelves for materials and at least two furnishings for activities, such as sand/water tables, woodworking bench, computer center, easel, etc.? **Y / N**

Are the furnishings used to store extra materials convenient? **Y / N**

Are the tables and chairs used for play and activities the same used for routines in Item 5? **Y / N**, If **no**, complete the same check for chair and table height while these furnishings are in use during play.

Number of children for whom the chairs are child-sized: _____

Number of children for whom the table(s) are child-sized: _____

Are there provisions for displaying the children's work and materials that are of interest to them? **Y / N**

Does the storage of materials promote children's independent use? **Y / N**

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

List the soft furnishings (other than soft toys) accessible in the classroom, making sure to include only those that are clean and in good repair: _____

Are there enough appropriately sized soft furnishings for several children? **Y / N**

The children can use the soft furnishings during these times:

Total time soft
furnishings are
accessible daily:

Are soft furnishings gathered together to create a cozy area? **Y / N** If **yes**, Is the cozy area protected from active play, either by being physically separated in the space and/or teacher intervention if active play occurs? **Y / N**

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

List the gross motor equipment currently used by the children. **Hint:** Only include materials that are age-appropriate and in good repair.

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

The stationary equipment stimulates the following skills: _____

Are there at least five different, age-appropriate skills? **Y / N**

The portable equipment stimulates the following skills: _____

Is there portable equipment that stimulates at least five different skills used every day, including on bad weather days? **Y / N**

Does the gross motor equipment stimulate skills on different levels? **Y / N** List examples of this: _____

Can children choose their own portable equipment? **Y / N**

Are there any ways the gross motor equipment is rearranged or changed to offer children new experiences?

Y / N If **yes**, describe: _____

ITEM 9 Access to host facilities (p. 16)

List the indoor and outdoor spaces used by the school-age program by type:

Dedicated (e.g., school-age group is the sole or primary user of the space):

Shared (e.g., other groups use the space at other times):

If shared spaces are used, can the school-age program arrange for exclusive use, where they are the only group using it at a time? **Y / N**

List dedicated storage space(s) for school-age materials? _____

Where do conferences and adult meetings occur? _____

Are adult meeting spaces set up for privacy, when needed, and do they include adult seating? **Y / N**

ITEM 10 Space to meet personal needs of staff (p. 17)

Do teachers have access to a separate, adult bathroom? **Y / N**

Do teachers have access to a separate lounge area? **Y / N** If **yes**, are there adult furnishings? **Y / N**

Where do staff store personal belongings? _____

Is it large enough? **Y / N**

Is it convenient? **Y / N**

Are there security provisions? **Y / N**

Reflection for future planning: After completing this worksheet, it can be helpful to go back and think 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 space and furnishings:

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>.