



NC ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR THE ITERS-3

The NC Additional Notes provide supplementary information for the Environment Rating Scales so that 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 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 are updated (approximately) every 6 months, as needed. NCRLAP assessors conduct assessments using the most current notes. The most current notes are available at ncrlap.org.
- NCRLAP assessors use only the NC Additional Notes for the ITERS-3 and, due to modifications and additions that occur over time, the NC Additional Notes differ from notes 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 Third Edition of the ITERS February 1, 2025. For assessment purposes, this version replaced the ITERS-R.

Recent changes (The most recent changes are italicized in this document): *11/11/2024 Items 2, 6, 14, 16 17, 24, 25, 29*

GENERAL NOTES FOR THE ITERS-3

Administration of the scale: For NC assessments, the ITERS-3 is used when more than 50% of children are birth through 2 years of age. This information replaces instructions for administration found in the scale on page 9.

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), and ASTM 2373 Standard Consumer Safety Specification for Public Use Play Equipment for Children 6 Months through 23 Months. Links to these resources are found on our website ncrlap.org and providers are encouraged to access these; however, all information contained in these resources may not be applied during an assessment.

Gross motor equipment and safety issues: 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.

Handwashing: Proper hand washing for adults and children includes use of soap and running water for approximately 15-20 seconds, followed by drying with an individual paper towel or air dryer. Since children develop head and body control at individual rates, observers cannot use a

chronological age to determine whether handwashing is required for young infants and older children with disabilities. If children can hold their own heads steadily upright while sitting or being held by a caregiver, then handwashing is required.

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 supervise 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. NCRLAP requires washing with soap and water whenever handwashing is needed indoors.

Ages: In all items where a particular age cut-off is given (e.g., Score NA when all children are younger than 18 months), the following rule applies. If there is only one child in the group that exceeds the age cut-off, and that child is less than one month older than the age requirement, then the item/indicator can still be marked NA. If the child is more than 1 month older than the age cut-off, or if there are two or more children who meet the age requirement, then the item/indicator must be scored. If a child with a disability is enrolled, the requirements will depend on the child's developmental level, rather than chronological age.

For indicators with a specific age requirement, if a child in that age group is enrolled but not present during the observation, score any indicators related to room arrangement, space, materials, and furnishings because these should be set up and accessible for when children attend. Indicators related to interactions and the schedule may be scored NA if a child in the specified age group is not present.

Appropriate language and interactions: Do not include examples when children receive criticism, negative social messages, or are ignored.

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).

Poor repair of materials and books: Materials and books that are in poor repair, meaning that they are not usable as intended, are excluded when determining whether the required numbers or examples for various categories have been provided.

ITEM 1:

Indicator 1.1, 3.1, 5.1: It is not required that the cribs/cots/mats be correct in their spacing during the observation. It is required that the space exists for the spacing to be possible without loss of other required space for routines and play (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 3.2: The noise level must be comfortable for children and staff. This means that conversation should be easy to hear when normal voice tones are used, and high noise levels should not be persistent. Noise from other indoor spaces can impact another classroom, and this should be considered when scoring.

Indicator 3.2: If the classroom has windows with dark shades or blinds on all windows that are closed throughout the observation, credit is not given since children do not experience natural light (ERSI 2024).

ITEM 2:

Indicator 3.1, 5.1: *If a smaller diapering table or other diapering surface is used, but it is not long and/or wide enough to accommodate the child's whole body, give credit for 3.1 but not for 5.1 (ERSI 2024).*

Indicator 5.1, 7.1: Any adult seating is acceptable as long as it is reasonably comfortable and prevents staff from sitting on the floor. A chair that meets the needs of one staff member may not meet the needs of another. Base the furniture needs on the highest number of children that the program would allow to attend at any one time. There may be fewer children present on the day of the observation, but score based on the most who would be able to attend at one time. For indicator 5.1, if no adult seating of any kind, is present or observed being used, and this causes problems, such as staff feeding a baby while sitting on the floor and hands become contaminated, score No. For 7.1, adult furnishings that adequately allow staff to sit comfortably while working with children are required to be used at some point in the observation (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 5.2: In a mixed age group, at least one appropriate example of furniture that supports self-help for must be used for each age observed. However, one furnishing may be appropriate for more than one age group. One example for play and one for routines must be observed being used (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 5.3: "Several areas" means soft furnishings are found in at least 2 play areas (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 7.2: Do not apply the last sentence of the NFC for indicator 7.2 on page 18 of the ITERS-3. This requirement only applies to toddlers and two's, even if older infants use small tables or chairs.

Indicator 7.3: Do not count multiple pieces of furniture that are designed for the same type of play, such as 2 pieces of housekeeping furniture or 2 separate easels. To give credit, the furniture must be used during the observation or obviously set up for child use even if no child chooses to use it (ERSI 2024).

ITEM 4:

Indicator 3.4: The intent of this indicator is to ensure that the display within reach of children is in good condition. To give credit, almost all the more permanent display, such as photographs and posters, should be protected from being torn. It is not required that most children's artwork within reach of children, be protected, as long as almost all of the unprotected artwork is not torn and no child is observed harming the artwork, for example by tearing or pulling it down (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 7.2: This indicator does not require that hanging display be suspended from the ceiling. Wall attachments, such as plant hangers, offer a safe means for providing this type of display. Hanging display may also be attached to windows, doorframes, or furnishings (such as backs of chairs, shelves, outside of cribs) so that the items extend over a play or routine care area. Safety for children who are pulling up must always be considered in these circumstances and should be noted in Item 8.

ITEM 5:

Indicator 1.2, 3.2, 5.2:

- When deciding whether foods observed being served at meals may be choking hazards, consider all foods offered. To score 1.2 Yes, most foods must be inappropriate, with many problems. For 3.2, generally appropriate means there may be a minor problem observed, but the children are not observed being affected. For example, there may be a food that might cause choking, but children eat the food with no problems. To score 5.2 Yes, there can be no safety issues with the appropriateness of the food (ERSI 2024).
- Portions of each required food component must be placed on each child's plate unless meals or parts of meals are served family style, in which case enough of the food served family-style must be available for all children to serve themselves required amounts. Verbally offering a food or beverage that is not within reach of a child is not sufficient.
- NCRLAP does not evaluate 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. Therefore, for NC assessments, do not apply the second and third sentences of the NFC for 1.2, 3.2, and 5.2 on page 24 of the ITERS-3.
- Written instructions from a child's health care professional for food or beverage substitutions are acceptable. For snacks: Two of four nutritional components from the USDA Meal Guidelines must be served. A child with food or beverage allergies 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. A food or beverage substitution must be made in cases when there is a family dietary preference or restriction, and the substitution must meet USDA guidelines.

Indicator 1.3, 3.3, 5.3: Consider the following components. Each component should be calculated separately and must be met as described in the indicator with only occasional lapses in practice.

- Handwashing is required for children who handle or hold their own bottles. Consider adult and child handwashing separately.
- Sanitary 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, if the sanitizing procedure was carried out correctly.
- Uncontaminated foods and beverages are served using sanitary utensils and containers.

ITEM 6:

For proper sanitary diaper change procedure, see the NC Health and Safety Resource Center Diapering Procedure Poster available at <https://healthychildcare.unc.edu/resources/posters/>

Indicator 1.1, 3.1, 5.1, 7.1: *Disinfecting sinks between uses for different purposes: According to Caring for Our Children (CFOC), to avoid the spread of disease, separate sinks should be used for food preparation/service, another should be used for toileting/diapering and one more should be used for all other purposes. However, it is unusual for early childhood program classrooms to be equipped with multiple sinks reserved for different uses.*

New information from CFOC shows that touching sink faucets after handwashing does not add to a substantial amount of contamination. Therefore, it is no longer required that faucets be turned off with a paper towel. In addition, if sinks are observed to be used for multiple purposes, and only the faucets are touched during handwashing (e.g., no food washed in sink, no touching sink surfaces occurs), it is no longer necessary to disinfect the sinks between different uses, except when soiled or during regular cleaning. Therefore, if a shared sink is used without disinfecting, consider the relative contamination that is observed, and if minimal, consider this a minor problem when scoring the handwashing/sanitation indicators (ERSI, 2024).

Indicator 3.4: To score No, an extremely negative interaction, or many mildly negative interactions must be observed (ERSI 2024).

ITEM 7:

Indicator 1.2, 3.2, 5.2, 7.1: The categories of handwashing considered in these indicators include 1) after arriving and re-entering a classroom following outdoor play, 2) before and after using shared wet materials such as water or playdough, 3) after playing with sensory materials or other messy materials (e.g., sand, many art materials), 4) after having contact with bodily fluids, and 5) after touching contaminated objects of any type.

Indicator 1.3, 3.3, 5.3: Adequate spacing between cots/mats/cribs or a solid barrier between nap provisions is acceptable for NC assessments. The solid barrier must extend the entire length of the sleep surfaces.

ITEM 8

Indicator 5.4: When few safety problems are observed that staff need to explain to a child, only one example is required to meet the requirement for "usually." However, if there are many issues observed, explaining the danger to the child must be a regular practice even though there can be some lapses observed for minor issues (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 1.1, 3.1, 5.1, 7.1: NCRLAP relies on the updated information found in the on-line version of Caring For Our Children standard 3.1.4.1 to define safe sleep practices. Therefore, no items other than the child and his/her pacifier should be in a crib that is in use. This applies to bedding such as flat sheets, blankets, etc. Refer to <http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView/3.1.4.1> for more information.

ITEM 9:

Indicator 5.2: To give credit, most observed informal talk with children should be social or to help children gain information, and not used mainly to manage their behavior (ERSI 2024).

ITEM 10:

Indicator 5.3: The two required examples can be either about past OR future experiences, or both; both past and future examples are not required. The talk about past or future experiences must relate to what children are able to understand. In the case of infants, it might be very

simple, such as saying “Your daddy told me that your grandma gave you this new sweater,” or “Your mommy brought you in this morning and you were asleep.” Toddlers who have more memory of time and anticipate upcoming events might respond to an idea such as “Mommy said you got new shoes at the mall this weekend” or “Remember we played in sand this morning.” Simply telling a child what is coming next in the schedule does not meet the requirement (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 5.4: The two required examples can be either comparisons OR contrasts, or both; comparisons and contrasts are not required. Contrasts or comparisons must be obvious to the child. Naming items or describing them with no obvious connection does not meet the requirement. For example, saying “This is a cat, do you see the monkey?” is not considered (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 7.3: Although it is expected that toys, materials, and display are changed to encourage vocabulary growth, the one required, observed example of staff talking about something new can be about a toy, materials and/or something in the display. However, there should be obvious evidence of ongoing changes in all three: toys, materials, and display (ERSI 2024).

ITEM 11:

Indicator 3.3: The intent here is that the staff remain calm and positive with children throughout the observation, even during more tense or hectic times. Even if some short more stressful periods are observed, with children crying and their needs not being immediately met, credit can still be given, if staff continue to respond positively to the children and attempt to provide comfort during these stressful times. However, there should be few if any long periods of heightened stress during the observation to score Yes (ERSI 2024).

ITEM 14:

Indicator 3.1, 5.1, 7.1: All books counted must be appropriate as defined in the NFC on page 42.

Indicator 7.3: *To give credit, there should be at least 3 books that have been obviously added recently* (ERSI 2024).

ITEM 15:

1.2: Score “Yes” if children do not use accessible materials and staff do not encourage use (ERSI 2024).

3.3: Change the example, “stack table blocks for children” to “stack nested cups for children.” Table blocks are considered in scoring Item 18, Blocks, and therefore are not considered in scoring Fine motor (ERSI 2024).

ITEM 16:

Indicator 1.1: *Score “Yes” if children 18 months and older are not observed using accessible materials and staff do not encourage use* (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 1.1, 3.1: Replace the word “accessible” with “used” for these indicators.

Indicator 3.1, 5.1: If children are observed to be mouthing materials, or using them inappropriately, the art materials should not be freely accessible, but only used under close adult supervision. The art materials should be accessible and supervised closely for long enough so that it is a satisfying experience for those who wish to participate (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 5.3: Although the talk can be brief, this indicator requires more than just naming colors (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 5.4: Most means almost all of the observed evidence of art activities used with the children is individualized, including observed use of materials and any displays of work done by the children in the class (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 7.2: To give credit, staff must be observed both talking about how to use of the material AND showing how to use it. The semicolons in the examples are typos and should be replaced with the word “and.” For example, the staff member explains that playdough is not to eat AND then shows a child how to pat it or roll it into a ball, talking about what she is doing (ERSI 2024).

ITEM 17:

Indicator 5.1: *If more than 10 children are allowed to attend at one time, then there must be at least one instrument per child. In addition, to give credit for this indicator, the required number of instruments cannot all be the same type* (ERSI 2024).

ITEM 18:

Indicator 3.2, 5.2: Different types of accessories are not required (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 7.2: Appropriate large hollow blocks for toddlers and two-year olds are those made of lightweight materials, such as cardboard or plastic and can include store-bought or homemade sets. The very large, heavy hollow wooden blocks are only appropriate if the children can use them safely. The time requirement of “accessible” is not required to give credit. Large hollow blocks may be accessible for a more limited amount of time, for example outside or in an indoor gross motor space, and be given credit, as long as the amount of time allows for a satisfying experience for the children (ERSI 2024).

ITEM 19:

Indicator 3.1: To give credit, at least 2 appropriate dolls and 2 appropriate soft animals must be accessible (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 7.2: The materials must be provided for children’s use during the observation, weather permitting.

ITEM 20:

Indicator 1.3: Consider obvious, extreme negativity about the natural world here. Positive statements or reactions can balance out minor comments.

Indicator 3.1: This indicator specifies “some pictures, books or toys” that represent nature realistically.” *Some* means at least two materials, in any combination from the three categories, which are developmentally appropriate. Even if other appropriate nature/science materials are accessible, credit cannot be given. Such materials might include plants and animals that children obviously show interest in or care for, nature science tools that are accessible and used to observe or experiment with, and natural objects children can easily access (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 3.2: Play with water or natural sand counts as an opportunity for children to experience the natural world or natural objects. Blowing bubbles with children, counts as a science experience; however, it is not counted as an experience with the natural world or natural objects and does not meet the requirement of this indicator (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 5.2, 5.3: The NFC on page 54 for indicator 5.2 applies to indicator 5.3 instead.

Indicator 5.4: Enough appropriate sand/water toys are required so that there is no competition among children. The access to sand/water can be limited, based on children's developmental abilities. If children are not able to use sand/water without many problems, such as constant drinking of water, or eating sand, then sand does not need to be accessible for long periods. It can be offered and then removed after children have had a satisfying experience with it. Or it can be offered indoors or outdoors but does not need to be offered in both (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 7.4: Score NA if sand/water is not used.

ITEM 21:

Indicator 3.2: The required talk does not have to be related to math materials required in 3.1. Math talk about any play materials can be considered. Staff math talk to children, about play materials/equipment being used outdoors, can also be considered here (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 7.2: In using math words to describe a sequence of daily events, staff must go beyond only saying "First." The words "second" or a more extended sequence of math words must be used to give credit for this indicator (ERSI 2024).

ITEM 22:

In some settings computer screen savers are used on monitors as a constant part of the environment. If children are not using the technology, or being made to watch it as an activity and are not observed to be attracted to it in any way then do not consider this in scoring. If a child spends a very brief time using screen time (less than 2 minutes) and this is a rare occurrence during the observation, mark the item NA (ERSI 2024).

NC assessment participants should be reminded that per the NC Child Care Rules, screen time is prohibited for children under the age of 3 years.

Indicator 7.2: The 2nd example for this indicator, "photos on tablet or cell phone showing children's everyday experiences," should not be considered here, as long as they are not animated or accompanied by sound. If staff only use devices to show children still pictures, do not count as use of technology for this item (ERSI 2024).

ITEM 23:

Indicator 1.3, 3.4: A prejudicial statement or action made by staff, other adults, or children should be addressed with appropriate intervention, whether the statement or action was intentional or done with malice. Prejudicial statements 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

Indicator 3.1, 3.3, 5.1, 5.2: If there are different types of dolls showing diversity (e.g., soft dolls and small toy people, the additional type of dolls can be counted in 5.1 once requirements for 3.3 are met.

Indicator 5.2: For the category of ages, old people or seniors should be evident, since their depictions are often underrepresented in children's programs (ERSI 2024).

ITEM 24:

Indicator 1.1, 3.1, 3.2, 5.1, 5.3, 7.1, 7.3: When considering any space used for gross motor, the space must be appropriate for the children being observed. Appropriateness will depend on the abilities of the children in the group as well as the safety of the space. If there are hazards in part of the space, but there are also safe areas that allow children to participate in gross motor play safely then credit for "some" space may be given if the safe portion allows children to play with few or no major hazards. When determining whether the space is "some" and "ample", consider only the safe portions of the space where children can play without facing major hazards (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 3.2, 5.2: Because of possible timing error, a two-minute exception is allowed because it is so difficult to track time to the second. However, no more than two minutes can be lacking to meet the time requirements in these indicators (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 3.3: This indicator considers the presence of serious safety concerns including adequate resilient surfacing and use zones, with only very minor exceptions. 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, a rock or stump that is away from the usual gross motor equipment). If such items are used for gross motor activities such as jumping or climbing, this may be considered in item 25 as a supervision concern if these behaviors are encouraged or prevalent during the observation and occur in an unsafe manner.

Indicator 3.5, 7.2 Evaluate the characteristics of the outdoor space typically used even if not used by children during the observation. If there is no outdoor space, outdoor specific indicators do not earn credit.

Indicator 5.3: *To give credit for this indicator, there can be no major hazards in the space used by the children and no more than 4 minor hazards (ERSI 2024).*

ITEM 25:

Indicator 3.1, 5.1: To give credit for these indicators, some outdoor gross motor play must be observed for children 12 months and older, weather permitting. There is no specific time requirement for outdoor gross motor play, but it must be enough time to be a satisfying experience for the children (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 7.1: *Vigorous activity requires that children are very active, although this will vary depending on children's ages and abilities. To give credit, staff should initiate this type of very active play across all ages and abilities observed (ERSI 2024).*

Indicator 7.2: The indicator requires that the staff help children develop a new gross motor skill and/or to use more challenging equipment. Only one of these needs to be observed (ERSI 2024).

ITEM 29:

Indicator 1.3: The discouragement of physical contact among children must be the consistent practice, observed frequently throughout the observation to score this indicator "Yes" (ERSI 2024).

Indicator 5.3: *To score Yes, staff must encourage gentle touch almost any time that children are aggressive with one another, and to do this, they must physically demonstrate gentle touching* (ERSI 2024).

ITEM 32:

Indicator 5.3: The intent of this indicator is that the play materials are picked up and reorganized as needed so that children can engage in productive play. Staff should be observed picking up clutter at least once during free play, and more often, if needed, so that children can easily move around the play space and find the materials they need to properly engage in productive play (ERSI 2024).

ITEM 33:

Indicator 5.3: Do not apply the NFC for indicator 5.3 on page 80 that says to see the definition of accessible at beginning of scale. The alternate materials should be accessible during group time(s) specifically.

Reference:

Harms, T., Cryer, D., Clifford, R.M., and Yazejian, N. (2017). Infant/toddler environment rating scale. (Third Edition). New York, NY. Teachers College Press.

ITERS-3 Additional Notes for Clarification found on the Environment Rating Scales Institute website (www.ersi.info/)