School-Age Care Environment Scale (SACERS)

How to Improve Your Score!

In North Carolina, the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale is the official assessment tool used to evaluate quality in licensed school-age programs. It is a reliable and valid resource tool that aids in quality assessment as well as program improvement strategies. In fact, many unlicensed school-age programs use the SACERS to evaluate and improve their progam's quality.

Every employee of a school-age program should recognize the SACERS as an assessment and program development instrument and familiarize themselves with its various components. The scale is arranged into the following seven categories: Space and Furnishings, Health and Safety, Activities, Interactions, Program Structure, Staff Development, and Supplementary Items (for children with special needs). Within each category are several quality identifiers that help assess a school-age program.

What are the main components of high quality care in out-of-school time and how is it measured? How can programs improve their rating once a SACERS assesment has been conducted? Knowing the answers to these questions will help determine a program's strengths, weaknesses and a plan for quality improvement. While quality assessment can be an overwhelming task for any program, its effectiveness relies on a staff's knowledge about how quality is measured, the SACERS assessment tool, and some basic tips for improving a SACERS score.

So how is quality measured? It is measured two ways — **structural indicators** and **process quality assessment.** Strutural indicators can be regulated, such as staff-child ratios, group size and teacher education. They provide a minimum basis for quality, but can not guarantee that quality care is present in a program. Process quality assessment is based on observing the daily program or activities of

a program, such as interactions among people, space arrangement, and materials present in a classroom.

Read the SACERS and do a self-evaulation of your program for quality indicators. Use the following tips for the first category of the SACERS, Space and Furnishing, to asses your own program. The results may surprised you!

Out-of-school time programs or activities should evaluate thier program quality annually. Once an assessment is completed, the program should develop a plan of action to improve program quality and improve the SACERS score. Here are some basic tips for improving your SACERS score in the category of Space and Furnishings.

Indoor space
- Space should be in good repair (no peeling paint, no damaged floors)
- Lighting and temperature in the space/ facility should be controllable by you
- Indoor space should be set up in a way to allow children to move freely

Space for gross motor activities
- Outdoor space should have a variety of surfaces and protection from the elements (trees, a tent)
- Try to have separate space for younger and older children

Space for privacy
- Design a space/area for children to be alone (make sure the space can be supervised/ observed by staff)
- Allow children to create their "own space" (i.e. a fort made out of cardboard boxes)
- Allow children to bring other items into their "own space" (a book, cd player)

Room arrangement when homework is part of the program

- Define at least three spaces/activity centers and their contents (pens, paper/reading)

- All supplies should be easily accessible to children (within their reach)

- Furnishings should not overcrowd the rooms

- Activity centers should promote multiple learning experiences

- Have additional materials in a storage closet ready and available to change out as desired

- Create a separate center or area for doing homework or quiet study, stocked with reference materials and computers if possible

Furnishings for routine care

- Furnishings should be available for eating, napping, storing of children's possessions and that they are in good repair

- Furnishings should be are appropriately sized (no dangling feet trying to touch the floor)

- Carpets, tables, chairs, cots should be cleaned DAILY

Furnishings for learning and recreational activities

- Tables, art easels, and open shelves for storage of materials should be available

- Display all work done by children (a letter, art work, spelling test)

- Do you have a water table, woodworking bench, computers?

Furnishings for relaxation and comfort

- Various soft spaces (carpets, cushions, upholstered furniture, curtains, pillows, area rugs, carpet squares) should be available

- All items should be in good repair and cleaned regularly

Furnishings for gross motor activities

- Portable and stationary gross motor equipment should be available

- Stationary equipment needs to stimulate 7-9 skills

- A variety of portable equipment (balls, bats, jump ropes, bikes) should be available

Access to host facilities

- Try to have dedicated space solely for school-age children and youth to use

- Two or more spaces in addition to normal use of space to main play/routine and space

- Access to other areas of shared facilities (computer room in church)

Space to meet personal needs of staff

- A separate bathroom for staff

- A locker for staff to place pocket books, and cell phones

- A lounge with adult furniture for staff to retreat to when taking a break

Space to meet professional needs of staff

- Is there a phone where staff can make a phone call in private?

- Are there file cabinets or office space for staff?

- Is there space for a parent/teacher conference separate from classroom space?

Cost effective ways to enhance indoor environments

- Ask parents to donate old couches, pillows, sheets, pillow cases

- Have children make curtains, pillows, covers for old couches

- Get contact paper from wallpaper stores or dollar stores to cover shelves

- Purchase tablecloths and silk flowers from a dollar store, pottery store, etc.

- Have children do a penny drive and use funds to purchase portable gross motor equipment and supplies

- Purchase lava lamps to change and enhance lighting in soft/quiet areas