



Early Childhood/Family Education Programs Oklahoma State Department of Education

The Early Childhood Learning Environment

The learning environment is an important and powerful teaching tool. Much of the early childhood teacher's work is done before the children ever arrive. If the environment is set up with the knowledge of how children learn and develop it can positively support teaching and learning. A teacher experiencing difficulty with student behavior should carefully evaluate the daily schedule, classroom arrangement, materials within each learning center, and the curriculum.

Best Practices

In creating a positive early childhood environment, the following practices should be observed:

- The classroom should be organized to foster exploration with learning materials.
- Learning materials should be concrete and relevant to a child's own life experiences (open-ended but purposeful).
- The classroom environment should be set up for choices.
- Learning experiences should be planned so teacher-initiated or child-initiated opportunities exist in small group contexts for acquiring new skills.
- Schedules should reflect active and quiet learning activities; large group, small group and individual learning time; teacher-directed and child-initiated activities; and indoor and outdoor activities.





The Daily Schedule

A daily schedule is essential to the basic structure of each day. Consistency enables children to feel secure, giving them the confidence and freedom to explore the environment. Although consistency is important, it is also necessary to remain flexible. Extra time may be needed if children are particularly interested in an activity or topic of discussion.

At the beginning of the year, shorter blocks of time are planned for large and small group activities. As the year progresses, learning center time will encompass a smaller portion of the day. Large group activities become fewer in number and often longer in length. Sample classroom schedules are available on the Early Childhood/Family Education Web site at <http://sde.state.ok.us> under the “helpful forms” link.

A Well-Planned Schedule Will:

- Prioritize the need for children to interact with their peers, teachers, and learning materials.
- Allow sufficient time for children to initiate and complete activities, and participate in creative movement and self-expression.
- Alternate active and less active learning moments rather than lengthy periods of sitting still.
- Respect the need for young children to rest or be active as is appropriate and does not compromise quality learning time.
- Reflect integrated teaching rather than class time separated subject by subject.
- Provide ample time for children to learn through center-based instruction.
- Allow for smooth transitions between activities or classrooms, with the teacher capitalizing on these transitions as learning moments.
- Provide opportunities for children to share with the group and take pride in their accomplishments.
- Structure time for collaborative planning so that students develop ownership with classroom learning activities.

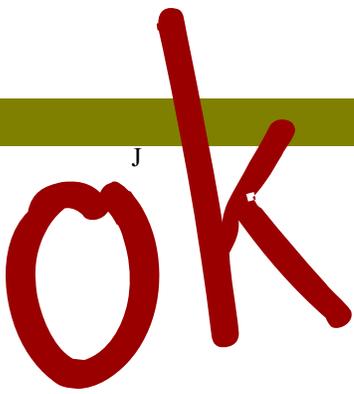


Transitions

Transition is the process of moving from one activity to another. This is often difficult for young children. The teacher must prepare and prompt children for the change. Teachers use “attention getters” such as songs, signals, fingerplays, rhymes, games and puppets to signal change. Teachers who use transition activities will have calm, organized classrooms with happy, cooperative children and when used properly can become the teachable moments. For examples of transition activities, please visit the Early Childhood/Family Education Web site at <<http://sde.ok.gov>> and look under the “helpful forms” link.

Helpful Hints for Smooth Transitions

- Give adequate warnings before the next activity.
- Follow the daily schedule as closely as possible. Young children thrive on routine when they know what to do and what is expected. Flexibility means shortening or lengthening a part of the day—not changing the schedule entirely. Always prepare children before “special” changes occur.
- Plan carefully. Collect materials before the activity. Think through each transition and build transition activities into your daily plan.
- Link transition signals to specific activities.
- Use songs and fingerplays.
- Keep a notebook or file box of transition activities.



Group Time

Group time is one of the most important times of the day. During this time the teacher, teacher assistant, and children come together as a community developing trust and acceptance as they share, learn, listen, and participate in meaningful activities. A group time that follows predictable patterns consistent throughout the year allows students to gain the confidence that comes from knowing what to expect. Group time provides children with information, skills, concepts, and strategies necessary for success when working independently and in small groups.

Guidelines for Group Time

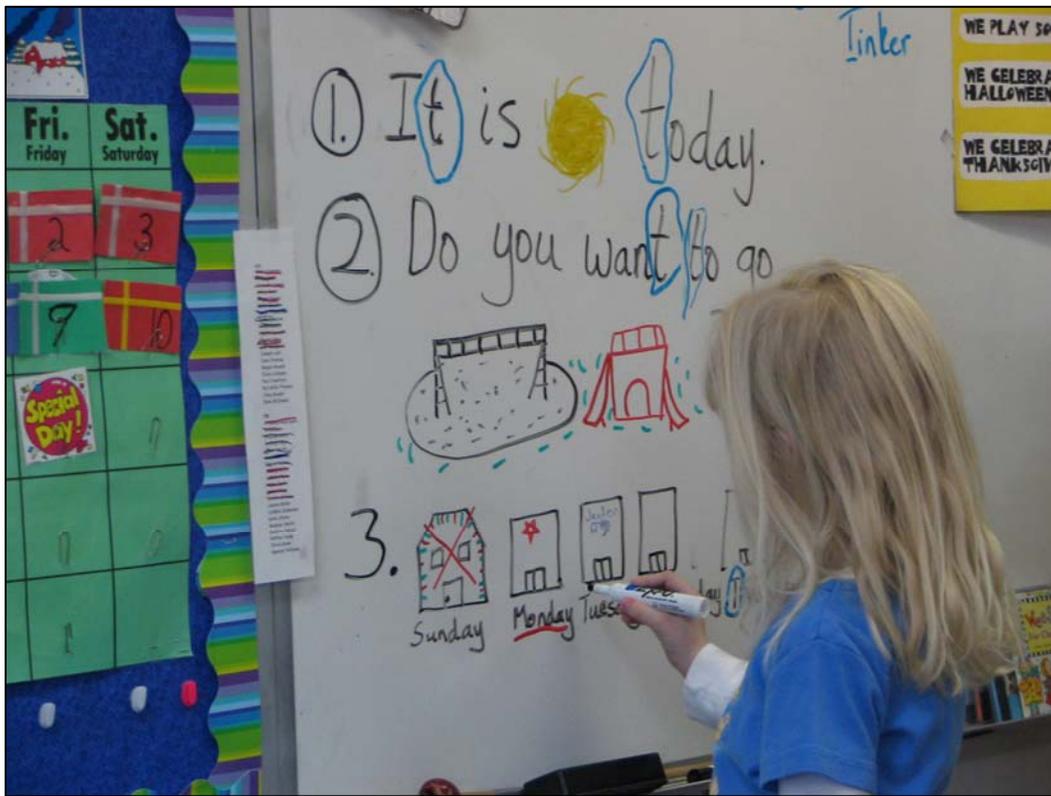
- The length of group time is determined by the age and development of the children. At the beginning of the year group time may last only ten or fifteen minutes.
- Have clear objectives for each group activity and gather all materials needed in advance.
- Create a balance of activities that include listening, singing, discussing and moving. Provide opportunities for choral and individual responses.
- Relate the activities to children's past experiences and prior knowledge.
- Let the children be the guide for determining the success of an activity. Lengthen or shorten the time as student interest indicates.

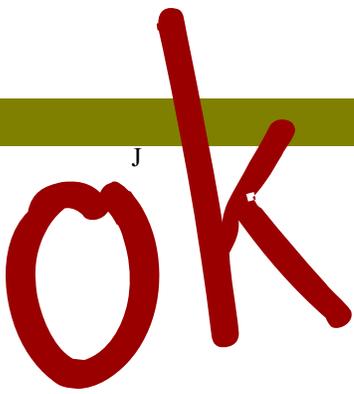
Suggested Activities for Group Time

- Morning meeting
- Calendar and weather
- Read aloud
- Picture/vocabulary development
- Rhyming activities
- Problem solving activities
- Phonological awareness for Pre-Kindergarten or alphabet and word wall activities in Kindergarten

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- Movement activities (songs, fingerplays, rhythms and games)
- Group games
- Student sharing
- Class community meeting
- Introduction of new concepts
- Guest speakers
- Modeling the appropriate use and care of classroom materials
- Group writing activities
- Review of classroom rules





Setting Up the Learning Environment

The environment of the classroom communicates to students what is expected of them. Independence and a joy of learning is what should be conveyed. In the early childhood classroom, the use of learning centers is a key component to ensuring the success of students.

Classroom Arrangement

When planning where to set up centers, take a close look at your classroom. Three basic settings are needed: a place for the whole class to work together, a place for students to work independently, and a place for teacher-directed small group work. It is helpful to use a map of the classroom with scale cutouts of furniture and equipment to try different arrangements. Once you have set up your room and observed students in the environment, it may be necessary to do some rearranging to better accommodate their needs.

Keep the following considerations in mind:

- Create logical traffic patterns so students can move about easily from one area of the room to another without disturbing others.
- Consider fixed items such as sinks, built-in shelves, carpeted and tiled flooring, and electrical outlets; use space efficiently.
- Separate quiet and noisy activities.
- Provide a large floor space for group activities.
- Create an area for teacher-directed small group activities.
- Provide spaces for individual work.
- Store appropriate materials and equipment near the center in which they will be used.

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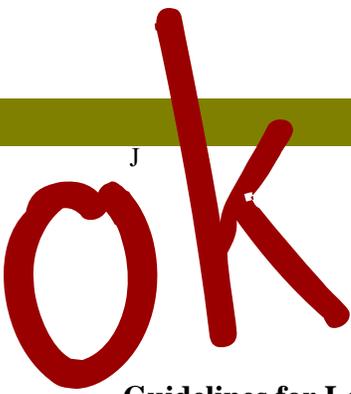
Suggested Learning Centers

The following is a list of centers that are typically found in the early childhood classroom. Suggested materials and activities are included in the discussion of the center areas.

- Art Center
- Literacy Center
- Library Center
- Listening Center*
- Writing Center
- Math Center
- Science and Sensory Center
- Block Center
- Dramatic Play Center
- Music and Movement Center
- Cooking Center
- Computer Center
- Woodworking Center

*Pre-Kindergarten classrooms may want to combine Language, Literacy, Math, and Science centers into one large Game Center.



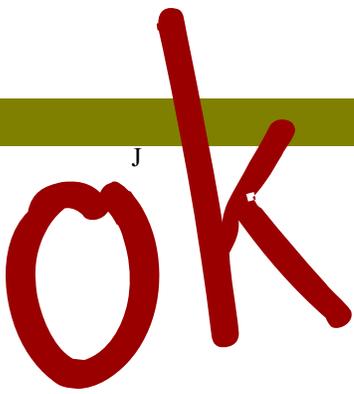


Guidelines for Learning Centers

Materials in learning centers are selected and arranged to foster involvement, independence, decision making, and responsibility. Students are given extended opportunities to practice these skills by selecting and using the materials offered at each center. To ensure the success of students and centers in the classroom, the following guidelines are suggested:

- Introduce each learning center with discussions regarding rules, use of materials, and responsibilities.
- Students can be scheduled into centers using a rotation system or a self-selected system. When using a rotation system, students move through centers in small groups in a systematic way. When using a self-selected system, students move themselves through the centers.
- All learning centers have a broad range of activities to accommodate each student's interest and level of development.
- The skill level in each center increases during the year through a variety of open-ended activities.
- Always model new activities.
- Define center boundaries with low shelves, carpet, or tape.
- Organize materials on low shelves close to their point of use so the materials in each center are always accessible to the students.
- Organize small items in labeled tubs or baskets for easy clean-up.
- Utilize a sign to describe the skills learned while working in each center.
- Place pictures, words, or outlines of objects on shelves to assist students in putting materials away when an activity is completed.





Art Center

Creativity is the process of putting together new ideas and products based on past experiences. It is a natural developmental process that begins during infancy and is at its peak during a child's early years. The use of self-expressive materials at the art center is one of the primary ways this creativity is developed.

Child Development

The Art Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: develop muscles used for fine motor skills, refine eye-hand coordination, fine motor control and the sense of balance.

Social/Emotional Skills: enhance self-expression of feelings, the ability to channel frustrations and anger in a socially acceptable manner, instill pride and confidence, foster an appreciation of differences, and promote cooperation and sharing on group projects.

Language Skills: enhance verbal expressions as projects are described, increase vocabulary through exposure to different materials, tools, colors, texture, and positional words are refined.

Intellectual Skills: provide opportunity for sorting, classifying, making choices, decision making, expressing knowledge of the environment; stimulate interest, imagination and creativity; and develop planning skills and concepts of cause and effect.

Points to Remember

- Begin with simple, basic materials and add more complex material as children's skills increase.
- Display children's work at their eye level.
- Treat children's work with respect. Discuss it with them by commenting on the colors and materials they have chosen or by saying, "Tell me about your picture." Never say, "What is it?"
- Model appropriate behavior for use and clean up of center.

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- Provide daily opportunities that encourage open-ended creative expression as opposed to assembly line or cookie cutter products.

Suggested Art Center Materials

Sink/water clean up

Glue or paste

Table

Modeling dough or clay and tools

Easels

Paint (tempera, finger, watercolor)

Paper (various kinds, shapes)

Brushes (various size and shapes, colors)

Craft sticks

Felt

Pipe cleaners

Collage materials (macaroni, string, buttons, pom-poms, ribbons, sequins, beads, tiles, marbles, feathers, wooden shapes)

Clothespins

Hole punch

Tissue paper

Coffee filters

Scissors

Markers

Pencils

Paper Clips

Chalk

Tape

Yarn

Crayons

Brads

Sand

Aprons or old shirts

Objects to print with including: scissors, stamps, pencils, markers, paper clips, chalk, tape, paper sacks, yarn, crayons, brads, sponges for cleaning, sand, wallpaper scraps, fabric scraps, cardboard, items found on a nature walk or the playground (leaves, twigs, straws, grass, nuts, etc.)

Paper cups

Lace

Rick-rack

Wiggle eyes

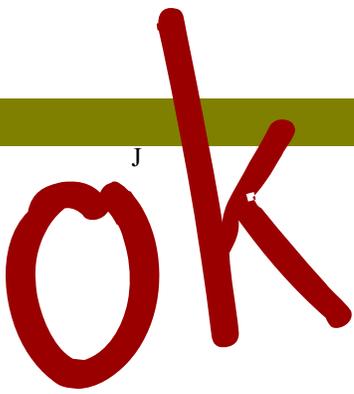
Glitter/glitter glue

Pie tins

Table covering

Paint tools (various sponges, cotton, potato masher, shower brushes, foam brushes, mini paint rollers, toothbrushes, eye droppers)





Literacy Center

Through the Literacy Center children practice essential skills for reading, writing and spelling. They have the opportunity to reinforce and extend these skills while working independently or in small groups. The Literacy Center activities enable children to confidently move toward becoming successful readers and communicators.

Child Development

The Literacy Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: strengthen eye-hand coordination, fine motor skills, visual discrimination and auditory discrimination.

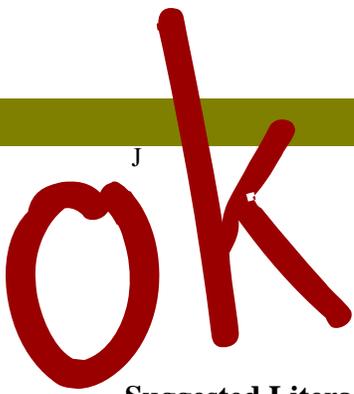
Social/Emotional Skills: develop cooperation, self-control, self-esteem and confidence.

Language Skills: develop an understanding of the importance of sounds and print in communication, build vocabulary, sound memory, comprehension, listening skills and verbal expression.

Intellectual Skills: provide opportunities for naming, identifying, recalling, predicting, sequencing, patterning, decision making and creativity.

Points to Remember

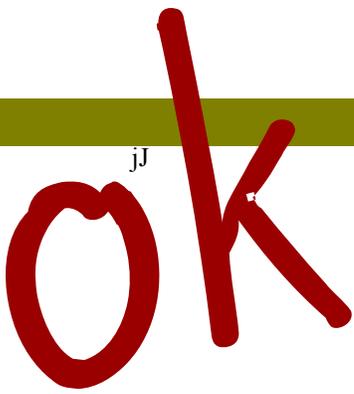
- Clearly define the literacy center area.
- Change activities to maintain and stimulate interest.
- Provide multi-level activities to accommodate children's abilities.
- Introduce items one at a time, explaining and modeling the care and handling of the equipment and supplies.
- Provide a system for student accountability.
- Children engage longer in activities that are meaningful, such as creating a menu, collecting phone numbers, or writing an original story.



Suggested Literacy Center Materials

Books of all sizes and types
Magazines and newspapers
Pocket charts
Sentence strips
Pictures, words, and objects for sorting
Letter tiles, stamps and stamp pads
Writing materials
Flannel board with pictures, letters and words
Reading-the-Room pointers and “glasses”
Tape recorder and blank tapes
Tape players
Commercial, teacher-created, and student-created tapes
Phonics phone
Wall charts (includes names, alphabet, environmental words, nursery rhymes, and poetry)
Magnetic letters and boards
Author’s chair
Eight-page mini books
Sight-word list
Picture dictionary
Wallpaper samples
Simple word searches
Hole punch
Class list of names
Graphs
Grids
Venn-Diagrams
Story maps
Flip books
Placemats
Popsicle sticks
Diary
Games

Overhead projector
Greeting cards
Sliding masks or flags
Story prompts
Sign language chart
Modeling clay
Letter and number cutters
Computer
Paper money and coins
School staff poster with names
Sand trays
Salt trays
Blank books for student-made books
Paper
Crayons, markers, pens, pencils
Interesting or unusual writing utensils
Maps
Magnifying glasses
Labels
Envelopes
Recipes
Menus
Mailboxes
Nameplates
Notebooks
Typewriters
Journals
Stapler
Sticky notes
Yarn
Shoelaces
Clipboards—full size and miniature
Flyswatters with hole cut on die-cut machine
for a pointer or sliding mask
White boards and markers
Pipe cleaners



Library Center

The Library Center should be a comfortable place where students can relax and enjoy a good book, fostering a love of reading. It is a place where students can interact with each other as they read with a partner or discuss books they have read.

Child Development

The Library Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: strengthen eye-hand coordination, eye movement, and fine motor skills.

Social/Emotional Skills: provide an opportunity to communicate feelings and deal with difficult situations, develop concern and understanding for others, enhance self-esteem, and encourage sharing time and materials with others.

Language Skills: build vocabulary, comprehension, listening skills, verbal expression, story telling, and reinforce the importance of print in communication.

Intellectual Skills: develop letter and word identification, understanding of symbols, prediction, sequencing, application of past experiences to new situations, and imagination.

Points to Remember

- Make the Library Center an inviting place.
- Model care and responsibility for books.
- Each week display “My Very Favorite Book” in the Library Center.
- Use mini-easels or cookbook holders to highlight featured books.
- Organize books thematically. Introduce new sets of theme books throughout the school year.
- Develop a system for families to check out books.

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- Provide a reading log for each child to keep track of books they have read at school.
- Encourage children to develop an organizational system to categorize books, such as animal books, plant books, and people books.

Suggested Library Center Materials

Picture books
Number books
Story books
Nursery rhyme books
Shape books
Poetry books
Big books

Student-made books
Theme-related books
Fiction books

Nonfiction books
Magazines and newspapers

Books with tapes
Tape recorder and headsets

Flannel board and props
Bookmarks

Read-the Room pointers
Pillows, beanbag chair, child-size rocker

Small tent or wading pool for reading
Small area rug

Lamp
Book display stand

Bookcases

Tubs for books

Author's chair

Sentence strips with text to songs, poems or stories

Charts, chants, songs, and poems

Book bags for checkout

Posters about book handling

Sing-a-long books

Cookbooks

Phone books

Puppets

Prop boxes with items related to particular stories

Eyeglasses

Computers

Bulletin board

Sign-in sheet

Reading log



Janet Barresi, State Superintendent of Public Instruction



Listening Center *

The Listening Center offers students opportunities for independent listening activities.

Points to Remember

- Use color coding to indicate buttons on the tape recorder, such as green for play, red for stop, and yellow for rewind.
- The Listening Center is for listening and recording. Let students record an original story or book.
- Label a blank tape for each student. Throughout the year, students can record themselves reading a story, singing a song, reciting a poem, etc.
- Let parent volunteers tape-record books.
- Make a tape as you read a book to the whole class. Leave the tape on as you discuss the story. Students love hearing themselves and their classmates.
- Store books and tapes in resealable plastic bags, large-size tin cans, or tubs. These are good ways to keep books and tapes together.

Suggested Listening Center Materials

Books and tapes	Sign-in	sheet
Sanitizing wipes	Storage	tubs
Teacher-made tapes	Shelving	
Blank tapes		
Student-made tapes		
Extension cords		
Tape recorder		
Head phones		
Individual tape players		
Class-made books and tapes		
Follow direction tapes		
Familiar sound tapes		
Table		
Power strip	*Could	be combined with Library Center

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Writing Center

Children love to write and read their writings to anyone who will listen. The Writing Center gives children the opportunity to communicate through writing in a variety of different experiences. The Writing Center encourages children's early interest in writing and provides a foundation that reinforces their beginning efforts and desire to write.

Child Development

The Writing Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: enhance fine motor skills, develop visual discrimination, and develop eye-hand coordination.

Social/Emotional Skills: allow for the expression of feelings and emotions, develop appreciation for the writing of others, and promote cooperation, teamwork, sharing and collaboration.

Language Skills: increase oral communication skills and vocabulary, develop spelling, phonetic skills, understanding of the purposes of writing, and extend reading skills.

Intellectual Skills: develop thinking, reasoning, questioning, creativity and imagination, and promote problem solving skills.

Points to Remember

- Establish the center with clearly defined boundaries.
- Model the appropriate use of materials.
- Provide a variety of real-life, purposeful, writing materials.
- Add additional items and props to enhance writing and the current theme.
- Provide a place to display children's writing.
- Participate when invited and model writing. Encourage children to read what they are writing to you and others.



- Use labels and pictures to show where items belong to facilitate clean up.
- Create a literacy -rich center with word cards , word walls, dictionaries, and appropriate books.
- Keep materials in good working order, such as replacing dried-out markers.
- Enlist the help of adult volunteers to help with publishing tasks.

Suggested Writing Center Materials

Pencils	Class list of names
Pens	Alphabet strips
Chalk and chalkboard	Date stamps
Magic slates	Computer
Acetate sheets	Table or desks
Stapler	Number stamps
Paste or glue	Journals
Sharpener	Writing prompts
Stationary	Props for office play, card shop, and post office
Colored pencils	Print materials from doctors' or dentists' offices
Crayons	Dry erase board and markers
Alphabet stamps	Chart tablets
Letter and design stencils	Easel
Hole punch	Notebooks
Tape	Sticky notes
Envelopes and cards	Folders
Markers	Labels/stickers
Stamp pads	Yarn
Index cards	Pipe cleaners
Scissors	Adding machine tape
Old magazines	Macaroni and spaghetti
Alphabet charts	Highlighters
Book binding materials	Picture prompts
Picture dictionaries	Word search
Paper	
Mailbox	
Sand and salt trays	
Word wall	

A large, stylized graphic of the letters 'OK' in a dark red color. The 'O' is a thick, hand-drawn circle, and the 'K' is composed of two thick, hand-drawn strokes.

Math Center

It is easy to get students involved with numbers, measuring, and problem-solving when the Math Center is equipped with a wide variety of concrete materials. This provides a solid foundation for exploring beginning math concepts, practicing new skills, and applying skills they have mastered.

Child Development

The Math Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: strengthen fine motor control, and refine eye-hand coordination.

Social/Emotional Skills: develop self-control, promote perseverance and confidence, enhance cooperation through sharing materials and working together to solve a problem.

Language Skills: introduce the language of mathematics and enhance the ability to ask questions and explain solutions.

Intellectual Skills: introduce and refine sorting, matching, classifying, sequencing, patterning, one-to-one correspondence, rote counting, number combinations, problem solving.

Points to Remember

- Introduce new math materials one at a time.
- Model appropriate use, care, and clean-up procedures.
- Let students freely explore the materials before asking them to do a specific task.
- Have students use a variety of math materials to work on the same skill or concept.
- Search out math materials that are fun and unusual.



- Make math meaningful. Examples: making change for a store, measuring for cooking, dividing snacks into equal shares, or graphing choices for a class field trip.
- Provide a variety of ways for students to record what they have done in the math center; drawing, charts, graphs, books, rubber stamps, stickers, or real objects.
- Observe and listen to students as they work in the center. This will give insight into their emerging concept of number.
- Extend student activities by introducing mathematical language during their play.

Suggested Math Center Materials

Collectible manipulatives: buttons, keys, colored pasta, shells, rocks, bread tags, colored paper clips, beans, toothpicks	Math-related books, songs, poems, charts or posters
Plastic counters	Toothpicks
Pattern blocks	Timers
Pattern cards	Dominoes
1" colored cubes	Calendar
1" wooden cubes	Shells
Color tiles	Keys
Attribute blocks	Beads
Multilink cubes	Nuts, bolts, washers or screws
Parquetry blocks	Paper clips
Sorting trays/bowls	Ice cube trays
Measuring instruments such as rulers, yardsticks, cups, measuring spoons	Shape templates and writing supplies
Balance scales and things to weigh	Spools
Geoboards and rubber bands	Clothespins
Pegboards and pegs	Straws
Stringing beads	Number stencils
Games and puzzles	Number stamps and pad
Dice and spinners	Number lines
Floor graph	Calculators
Magnetic board	Sorting containers
Magnetic shapes and numbers	Jars
Individual marker boards and chalkboards	Cans
Clock	Tubs
Play money	Zipper seal bags
Rubber stamps	Stickers
	Playing cards
	Adding machine tape for creating patterns
	Cash register

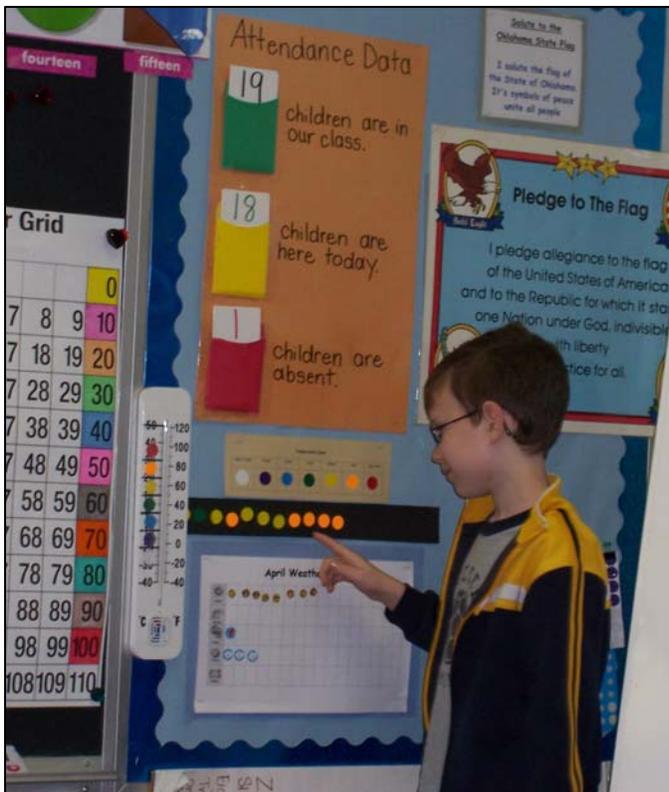
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- Price tags
- Coupons
- Math big books
- Counting charts
- Color word charts
- Shape charts
- Games
- Hula hoops for defining spaces

- Egg cartons
- Measuring cups
- Notebooks
- Placemats
- Trays
- Lunch bags or gift sacks
- Bulletin board



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Science and Math Centers





Science and Sensory Center

The Science and Sensory center is an integral part of the curriculum and stimulates children's natural curiosity and desire to learn about the world around them. It may be called the "Let's-Find-Out-Table" where children are encouraged to explore something about their world in more detail.

Child Development

The Science and Sensory Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: enhance eye-hand coordination, fine motor control and balance.

Social/Emotional Skills: develop cooperation with others, pride in seeing an experiment through to completion and responsibility for clean-up at the conclusion of play.

Language Skills: develop vocabulary, verbal expression, ability to ask questions and describe objects and events.

Intellectual Skills: develop thinking, reasoning, observing, exploring, questioning, discovering, decision making, conservation of volume, problem solving, comparing and contrasting, cause-and-effect, and creativity.

Points to Remember

- Introduce children to the scientific method which includes:
 1. Making observations
 2. Thinking of possible reasons why things happen
 3. Trying out these reasons or potential causes
 4. Observing the results
 5. Drawing conclusions
- Keep experiments uncomplicated and straightforward such as what happens when blue and yellow are mixed or ice is placed in the sun.
- Ask questions such as "What made that happen?", "What would happen if?", or "How could we find out?"
- Have children put their conclusions into words or represent them in drawings.



- Be prepared by doing research ahead of time about the topic.
- Follow children's lead as they design their own experiments.

Suggested Science and Sensory Center Materials

Plants	Water
Kaleidoscopes	Sand and water wheel
Books	Bowls
Shelves	Shovels
Items of nature	Popcorn
Color paddles	Pine cones
Feathers	Globe
Bird nests	Maps
Sand	Graphs, charts, posters, books
Measuring cups and spoons	Magnifying glasses
Rice	Sand table
Beans	Water table
Funnels	Sensory materials
Dried leaves	Tubs for storage
Soap bubbles	Rulers
Animals (as permitted)	Yard sticks
Animal supplies	Safety goggles
Thermometer	Flashlights
Binoculars	Pinwheels
Tape measure	Plastic animals/insects
Magnets	Lab coats
Rocks	Labels
Balancing scales	Discovery tubes
Tubs (sink or float)	Writing utensils
Tweezers, tongs, eye droppers	Multicultural artifacts
Mirrors	Class growth chart
Insects	Soil
Lab coats	Watering cans
Labels	Pump bottles
Discovery tubes	Water pumps
Writing utensils	Light table
Science journals	Shells
Paper towel tubes	Sink and float materials
Tables	Cooking supplies
Mirror	Rebus cards
Animal growth charts	

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Using Science Process Skills and Inquiry



Block Center

Blocks are a key example of how young children learn through play. Young children do not often preplan their structures. They just let it happen. Their creations are influenced by what has been seen in the environment.

Child Development

The Block Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: develop large muscles as they carry blocks from place to place, refine small motor skills, eye-hand coordination, and sense of balance as they stack and place blocks together.

Social/Emotional Skills: promote cooperation, working with others, sharing, acceptance of others' ideas, self-esteem, and confidence.

Language Skills: increase vocabulary and communication skills such as conversation, asking questions, labeling, making-up stories and using comparative language such as larger, taller, or bigger.

Intellectual Skills: develop concepts of number, size, shape, length, height, weight, area, part-to-whole relationships, problem solving one-to-one correspondence, sequencing, cause-effect relationships, fractions, adding, subtracting, testing ideas, estimating and measuring.

Points to Remember

- The Block Center should be well-defined with a rug, shelves, or tape.
- Introduce hollow blocks and unit blocks first.
- Have the children make simple rules concerning how many children can be in the area, who can knock a structure over, when can a structure be saved, and how tall can the structure be.
- Model how to take blocks off the shelf one at a time.
- Label the shelves with cutouts of the block shapes for easy clean up.

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- Introduce props and figures as needed to coordinate with the thematic unit and enhance the value of the play.
- Take pictures of what the children build to place in a portfolio.
- Use teacher-made materials to enhance the block center (boxes or milk cartons stuffed with newspaper, empty paper towel or tissue rolls for log cabins, and colored tape for roads and highways).
- Stimulate language by having the child dictate a story about the structure.

Suggested Block Center Materials

Cardboard blocks

Alphabet blocks

Bristle blocks

Unit blocks

Hollow blocks

Foam blocks

Family figures

Wooden cars and trucks

Dinosaurs

Paper towel or plastic tubes

Ramps

Area rug

Paper

Interlocking blocks

Parquetry blocks

Globes

Baskets or tubs for accessories

Signs and labels for buildings

Farm animals

Zoo animals

Community helper figures

Traffic signs

Prop boxes

Books

Hula hoops for defining boundaries

Writing supplies

Posters

Mirrors

Balls

Linking disks

Linking cubes

Pattern blocks

Multicultural blocks

Pictures of homes around the world



Janet Barresi, State Superintendent of Public Instruction

A large, stylized red graphic of the letters 'OK' is positioned in the top left corner of the page. The 'O' is a thick, hand-drawn circle, and the 'K' is composed of two thick, hand-drawn strokes.

Dramatic Play Center

Young children love make-believe activities. The Dramatic Play Center allows children the opportunity to act out their real world. They can experience different roles, express feelings, and imitate actions and character traits of those around them. It is a place where the most creative, spontaneous, and involved play occurs. The open-endedness of the dramatic play center allows each child to be successful on their own developmental level.

Child Development

The Dramatic Play Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: develop fine motor skills, extend gross motor development, and develop visual discrimination and eye-hand coordination.

Social/Emotional Skills: provide a means to express feelings and emotions; develop awareness of self, family, and society; promote cooperation, working with others, sharing and taking turns.

Language Skills: increase oral communication skills, extend and enhance vocabulary, extend gross motor development, develop pretend reading and writing.

Intellectual Skills: develop creativity and imagination, promote problem-solving skills, and extend symbolic use of items and abstract thinking.

Points to Remember

- Arrange the Dramatic Play Center next to other noisy active areas.
- Create boundaries on three sides of the area to keep materials contained.
- Place only a few items in the Dramatic Play Center when introduced.
- Add additional items and props to enhance play and the current theme.
- Keep props clean and in good repair.
- Use labels and pictures to show where items belong to facilitate clean-up.

OK

- Interact on the child's level by sitting or kneeling.
- Participate when invited and model the play. Encourage children to talk about what they are doing.
- Allow children to resolve conflicts independently.
- Provide small labeled boxes or baskets for small items and hooks or coat rack for clothes.
- Provide for literacy opportunities, such as books and writing materials.

Suggested Dramatic Play Center Materials

Cups

Dinnerware

Table and chairs

Kitchen items

Vase and flowers

Empty food boxes

Broom and dustpan

Phone and phone book

Silverware

Cookware

Kitchen furniture

Aprons

Plastic food

Dish towels

Belts, shoes

Living furniture

Dress up clothes

Wallets

Dolls and baby items

Toiletries

Old hair dryers without the cord

Full-length mirror

Lunch boxes

Child-safe tool belt, tools

Magazines

Suitcases

Purses

Notepad and pencils

Multicultural clothing and materials

Cell phones



OK

Prop Box Ideas

Provide dramatic play and prop box enrichments as opportunities to build upon skills and learn concepts.

The Beach

- Blankets
- Picnic basket
- Beach umbrella
- Sunglasses
- Beach ball
- Pretend suntan lotion
- Beach towel
- Buckets and shovels
- Shells
- Snorkels
- Fins
- Flip flops

Restaurant

- Tablecloth
- Napkins
- Tableware
- Menus made with food pictures
- Dishes
- Aprons
- Trays
- Play food
- Hats
- Sign for restaurant
- Order pads/pencils



Janet Barresi, State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Firefighter

- Yellow rubber raincoats
- Old vacuum hose
- Whistle
- Stepladder
- Phone
- Flashlight
- Boots
- Fire safety posters
- Gloves
- Baby dolls (to rescue)
- Walkie-talkies
- Fire hats

Post Office

- Envelopes
- Stamps (seals/stickers)
- Duffle bag
- Mailperson hat
- Cash register
- Old blue shirt
- Stickers
- Paper punch
- Postcards
- Scale
- Mailbox
- Pens
- Pencils
- Paper
- Junk mail
- Boxes
- Packages
- Checkbook
- Date book
- Play desk

OK

Grocery Store

- Play food
- Egg cartons
- Check out area
- Play money
- Grocery cart or basket
- Aprons
- Paper bags
- Cash register or scanner
- Sale flyers
- Purses and wallets
- Plastic fruit/vegetables
- Coupons

Police Officer

- Pad for writing tickets
- Stop signs
- Small clipboard
- Police hat
- License plates
- Whistle (siren)
- Steering wheel
- Black belt
- 911 signs
- Blue shirt
- Walkie-talkie
- Badge

Bank

- Play money
- Bankbooks
- Adding machine/calculator
- Rubber stamps/ink pads
- Teller window
- Deposit slips/checks
- Cash box
- Paper/pens
- Coin rolls
- Magnifying glass
- Newspaper



Bakery

- Fresh play dough
- Rolling pins
- Aprons
- Oven mitts
- Cookie sheets
- Chef's hat
- Muffin tins
- Cake pans
- Cake decorations
- Order pads
- Measuring spoons
- Pictures of baked goods
- Mixing bowls
- Spoons
- "Recipes"
- Cookie cutters
- Flour shaker
- Cookbooks

Veterinarian

- Stuffed animals
- Gauze
- Surgical masks
- Pamphlets on animals
- Cotton balls
- Plastic gloves
- Play money
- Needle-less syringes
- Exam table
- Empty medicine bottles
- Pet brushes
- White lab coat
- Pet carriers
- Magnifying glass



Music and Movement Center

Music delights young children and invites them to participate. A well-equipped Music and Movement Center is a place where children experiment with sounds while they create their own music. They gain an appreciation and love of music that will bring them enjoyment for years to come.

Child Development

The Music and Movement Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: enhance fine and gross motor skills, develop rhythm, balance, and spatial awareness.

Social/Emotional Skills: provide a means to express feelings and emotions, enhance self-concept, promote cooperation and working with others, and induces feelings of calm and relaxation.

Language Skills: increase oral communication skills, vocabulary growth and listening skills; develop an appreciation for poetry and rhyme, and increase auditory discrimination skills.

Intellectual Skills: develop creativity and imagination, promote problem solving skills, enhance concept development, and encourage exploration and promotes discovery.

Points to Remember

- Music can set the tone for the classroom. Soft music calms a busy room whereas loud or fast music stimulates the students.
- Music activates the brain. Learning set to music, like the “ABC” song, embeds learning more quickly and on a deeper level.
- Music is effective during transition times such as clean-up, calming down for a story or rest, or getting ready to begin or end the day. Do not limit music experiences to just center time.
- Music can be a tool of classroom management. Singing can often attract a child’s attention when a speaking voice cannot. Include classroom transition songs on charts for students to sing along with at center time.

OK

- Music can be experienced and enjoyed by a whole group during circle time, in small groups and individually.
- Use a voice range for singing that is comfortable for children.
- Let music be spontaneous, planned or an outgrowth of another activity.
- Music can be used to create appreciation of other cultures.



Suggested Music and Movement Materials

CD player and CDs

Rhythm sticks

Scarves

Radio

Books that are songs

Toy or real microphones

Charts with favorite songs

Cassette recorder, cassettes, and blank tapes

Drums

Bells

Cymbals

Piano

Song-based books

Shakers

Mirrors

Area rug

Multicultural musical instruments

Piano music

Staff paper

Costumes

Guitar

Recorders

Sanitizing supplies

Posters of bands and orchestras

Dance rug

Ballet shoes

Hats

Large ball

Keyboard

Materials for creating instruments

Mirror

Shelves

Tubs with labels

Posters of ethnic musical instruments or experiences

Exercise chart

Exercise mat

Rebus exercise cards

Work out props

Exercise records, tapes, and videos

Books

Journals

Plain paper

Writing utensils

Dance costumes

Maracas

Sand blocks

Chimes

Triangles

Television

Video player

Finger cymbals

Xylophone

Tap shoes

Canes

OK

Cooking Center

Everyone loves to eat! The Cooking Center provides rich, sensory experiences and gives children first-hand opportunities to practice skills in math, reading, science and communication.

Child Development

The Cooking Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: enhance fine motor skills, develop hand/eye coordination.

Social/Emotional Skills: promote good manners, develop awareness of other cultures through preparing and tasting different foods, promote cooperation, working with others, sharing and self-esteem.

Language Skills: increase oral communication skills and vocabulary, develop the ability to “read” picture recipes, extend understanding of the purposes of writing, and enhance left-to-right directionality.

Intellectual Skills: develop knowledge of nutrition and raises health awareness, promote problem solving skills, and develop math/science skills.

Points to Remember

- Provide a balance of independence and safety. The more children do, the more they learn.
- Provide symbolic picture recipe cards that give directions for tasks and can be read while cooking. The first direction is always “Wash hands.”
- Assemble all ingredients and materials ahead of time.
- Use individual portion recipes.
- Set up the cooking center near a sink whenever possible.
- Enlist outside volunteers to assist with shopping and supervising the cooking experience with children.

OK

- Link cooking activities and recipes to your thematic units.
- Use popsicle sticks with each child's name to label the portions.
- Fill small pitchers or measuring cups with liquids so the child is able to lift and pour easily.

Suggested Cooking Center Materials

Cooking utensils

Measuring spoons

Measuring cups

Bowls

Pot holders

Can opener

Cookie sheets

Strainer

Muffin tins

Popsicle stick spreaders

Hand mixer

Pots and pans

Potato masher

Cutting board

Rebus cards

Books

Writing utensils

Trash can

Multicultural posters and pictures

Allergy warnings

Favorite recipe charts

Popcorn popper

Electric skillet

Toaster oven

Wax paper

Recipe cards

Aprons

Whisk

Health and nutrition posters

Food pyramid posters

Crock pot

Electric burner

Refrigerator

Cookbooks

Clean-up supplies

Access to running water

Child-friendly serving supplies

Hand sanitizer and instruction poster

Class-made cooking safety poster

Sign-in sheets

Gloves



Janet Barresi, State Superintendent of Public Instruction

A large, stylized red graphic of the letters 'OK' is positioned in the top left corner of the page. The 'O' is a thick, hand-drawn circle, and the 'K' is composed of two thick, hand-drawn strokes.

Technology Center

The Technology Center is a valuable addition to the early childhood classroom if it is set up with knowledge of children's development as well as knowledge of the equipment and available software. Your Technology Center will only be as good as the materials in it, so consider this item carefully before purchasing equipment. Adult interaction is the key to a successful Technology Center.

Child Development

The Computer Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: enhance fine motor development by using the keyboard and manipulating the mouse, and eye-hand coordination and visual perception by tracking on the screen and moving the cursor.

Social/Emotional Skills: promote responsibility, cooperation, working with others and persistence.

Language Skills: increase vocabulary and knowledge of print by linking words to pictures.

Intellectual Skills: develop cause-and-effect by observing what happens on the keyboard, following directions, and a variety of other skills depending on the software selected.

Points to Remember

- Introduce the computer or other technology to one or two children at a time.
- Observe the children so you know how to discuss and interact with them to further their level of use.
- Ask open-ended questions which focus on what they are doing.
- Consult the *Survey of Early Childhood Software* by Warren Buckleitner, published by the High Scope Educations Research Foundation, for appropriate software.
- Consult *Creative Curriculum* by Dodge and Colker for comprehensive information about setting up a technology center.

J ok

Suggested Computer Center Materials

Computer screen	Magnifying	glasses
Mouse	Binoculars	
Hard drive	Telephone	
Surge protector	MP3	player
Computer table	Radio	
Sufficient power and electrical outlets	Speaker	
Mouse pad	Label	maker
Appropriate software programs	Light show props	
Table	Calculators	
Camera	Weather	station
Video cameras	Therm	ometer
Tape recorders	Analog	clock
Word processing programs	Digita	l clock
Class Web site	W	atches
Web design programs		
Educational video games		
Television		
Video player		
Compact disks		
Compact disk player		
Digital video disks		
Digital video player		



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Woodworking Center

If a teacher has never worked with wood, the thought of hammers and saws may be uncomfortable. However, with careful planning and knowledge, teachers can create an experience that will bring hours of joy, excitement and enthusiasm to boys and girls alike. When a young child announces proudly, "I made it!" the teacher will understand the growth a child has made physically, intellectually, socially and emotionally.

Child Development

The Woodworking Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: strengthen and enhance fine and large motor skills, and develop eye-hand coordination.

Social/Emotional Skills: promote self-esteem, develop self-confidence, and promote cooperation, sharing and collaboration.

Language Skills: develop sequencing skills, increase oral communication skills, and increase vocabulary.

Intellectual Skills: develop creativity and imagination, promote problem solving skills, develop concept building, thinking, reasoning and attention span, and promote understanding of size, shape, color and measurement.

Points to Remember

- Design the activity to the appropriate level of the child's development. For example, hammering into styrofoam instead of wood or sanding for enjoyment.
- Establish the center with clearly defined boundaries, away from quiet areas and heavy traffic. A corner space provides two walls to help contain noise and activity.
- The teacher must be knowledgeable and confident in the use of tools and model each step of the activity.
- Safety goggles must be worn at all times.



- Introduce one tool at a time, emphasizing safety.
- Check all tools regularly for damage and remove ones needing repair.
- Provide adult supervision at all times.
- Enlist the help of adult volunteers to help with woodworking.
- Limit the population at the Woodworking Center to two children.
- Create a literacy-rich center with labels for tools, appropriate books, and writing materials to name their creations.
- Choose high-quality hand tools.
- Sawing and hammering nails into large pieces of styrofoam and sanding wood (classroom blocks can be cleaned each year) are satisfying ways to practice beginning skills.
- An old tree stump is great for pounding nails.
- For a permanent center, hang a pegboard against the wall and mark an outline of each tool so children can return tools to a place of safety.

Suggested Materials for Woodworking Center

Workbench or table and tubs for organizing	Sandpaper
Safety goggles	Cloth scraps
Screwdrivers/screws	Vise clamp
Crayons	Pliers
Golf tees and Styrofoam	String
Brushes	Carpenter's pencil
Wood glue	Hammer (8 oz. claw)
Aprons to protect clothing	Markers
Rulers, tape measure, or yard stick	Paint
Bolts	Wood scraps
Egg-beater type hand drill	Objects to nail
Saw	Nuts
Nails (short with big heads or roofing nails)	Blueprints
Safety mat	Gloves
Books about construction	Tool belt
Chalk live	Class-made safety chart
	Level, angle, plane, chisel



Outdoor Environment

The development of motor skills is essential to the total growth process of children. Current research indicates that movement activates the brain and prepares it for learning. The outdoor environment is the natural place for this to occur. Carefully planning outdoor and motor activities is an opportune way to capitalize on children's natural motivation to move and learn.

Child Development

The Outdoor Environment offers experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: enhance large motor and eye-hand coordination, balance, strength, endurance and manipulation.

Social/Emotional Skills: nurture cooperation, negotiation, turn taking and role playing.

Language Skills: facilitate vocabulary development, positional words and conversational skills.

Intellectual Skills: reinforce sorting, classifying, creativity, imagination, problem solving, exploration, discovery, spatial relations and conversation through sand and water activities.

Suggested Outdoor Environment Materials

Slide (appropriate height)	Sand toys
Equipment for crawling and tunneling	Assorted balls
Trucks and cars	Low balance beam
Jump ropes	Hula hoops
Pouring and scooping materials	Wagons
Child-sized stilts	Scooter boards
Impact material (pea gravel or sand)	Teeter totters
Parachute	Outdoor easels
Games (ring toss or bean bags)	Tables and benches
Climbing structure	Sand and water table
Riding equipment	Science discovery tools
Push and pull toys	Garden and gardening tools
Walking path	First aid kit
Trash cans	Sidewalk or hard, smooth surface
Trees	Sidewalk chalk

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Shady or partially covered play area
Balls
Binoculars

Dramatic play materials
Buckets and paint brushes
Line-up area

Arrangement

Arranging the outdoor environment is essential for effective planning. A well-planned play space maximizes the freedom of choice and independence of children. Teachers must continually assess the overall effectiveness of the outdoor area and make adjustments when and where needed. Many of the same considerations used in planning the indoor environment can be used when planning the outdoor environment.

- Space is large enough to accommodate the number of children and equipment.
- Children are easily supervised from any position.
- Sufficient equipment is available so children do not have to wait in line.
- A variety of age-appropriate materials and equipment are provided.
- A storage shed is available to store material and equipment.
- There is a balance of sunny and shady areas.
- There are clear pathways for running and riding toys.
- The play area is fenced and protected from traffic.
- Bathrooms and drinking fountains are easily accessible.
- Accommodations for the specific needs of each child are considered and addressed when appropriate.

Safety

Children are exuberant with their outdoor play, therefore planning for safety is critical. The best protection against injury is prevention. Include the following in your safety plan:

- Provide continuous supervision.
- Provide sufficient impact material under climbing equipment.

OK

- Provide ample space around each piece of equipment.
- Maintain equipment regularly and report any equipment that is broken or unsafe.
- Select equipment and material that is appropriate for the child's intellectual, social/emotional, and physical development.
- Report accidents or hazardous situations to appropriate school staff immediately.
- Teach children the appropriate method for lining and exiting the play round quickly in the event of an emergency.

Classroom

The outdoor environment can also be an extension of the indoor classroom where learning blossoms. For this to be possible, add the following equipment to your classroom.

- Sand and water table
- Fence or free-standing easels (paint the flower you can see)
- Book tub on wheels (read in the shade of a tree)
- Dramatic play materials:
 - Barbecue Center
 - Picnic Table and Basket
 - Tent
 - Gardening Center
- Science discovery tools
(magnifying glasses, binoculars, butterfly nets, bug catching equipment)
- Woodworking materials
- Almost anything on wheels

