

# SACERS Technical Assistance Papers

## Paper #1: EFFECTIVE SCHOOL-AGE ENVIRONMENTS

### Introduction to the SACERS and the Technical Assistance Papers

Purpose and Scope of the SACERS.<sup>1</sup> The School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS) is part of a series of program assessment instruments that originated with the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) (Harms & Clifford, 1980). The designers of SACERS recognized the need for an assessment tool with content specific to the school-age care group. They also recognized that school age programs take place in a broad range of diverse settings that typically serve children from 5 to 12. Given this broad age range, an underlying rationale for the SACERS is that it is essential for programs to provide activities that meet the widely differing needs and interest of children, regardless of program-type.

The authors of SACERS were committed to developing a comprehensive rating scale for school age child care. The SACERS is based on nationally accepted criteria for developmental appropriateness for school age children, research-based definitions of quality and best practices presented in literature to ensure that the scale would reflect current ideas of what should be done to meet the developmental needs of school age children.

The SACERS is composed of 43 items grouped under 6 subscales: Space and Furnishings, Healthy and Safety, Activities, Interactions, Program Structure, and Staff Development. Therefore, the SACERS embraces a broad definition of “environment” that includes, but is not limited to, the physical space used for the program. There is also a set of 6 supplementary items for centers that include children with special needs.

Pennsylvania’s SACERS Position Statements. The State of Pennsylvania Keystone Stars has developed Position Statements for the SACERS and has determined that “the SACERS will be the assessment tool in classrooms where at least 51% of the children are young school age or older school age (first grade through 15 years). In classrooms of mixed ages, the assessment tool will be determined by the age level that represents the majority of children in the group: infant/toddler; preschool; or school age. Group day care homes which are not located in a residence AND which only serve school age children will be assessed with the SACERS.”<sup>2</sup>

Programs should refer to the PA Position Statements for specific SACERS items before using the tool for program assessment.<sup>3</sup>

Using Technical Assistance Papers to Support a SACERS Assessment. This series of four Technical Assistance Papers provides guidance and information related to key issues and concepts addressed in the SACERS: 1) *Effective School Age Environments*, 2) *Health and Safety in School Age Care*, 3) *Building Community and Effective Relationships in School Age Care*, and 4) *Developing a Program Infrastructure That Supports Quality Experiences in School Age Care*. Exploring these issues and concepts in light of your own program will help you identify in

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpted and adapted from T. Harms, E. V. Jacobs, and D.R. White. *School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale*. New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1996. Page 1. (For more information on the development and use of the SACERS, refer to pages 1 – 4.)

<sup>2</sup> PA Position Statements for the SACERS, Keystone Stars. Issued 09.01.08. Page 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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advance some of your program's areas of strength as well as areas that may need improvement. As you proceed with the SACERS assessment process, use the Technical Assistance Papers as a source of information and as a tool for developing strategies and plans for making needed improvements revealed in the assessment.

#### **Why the Environment Matters**

*Addressing Space Issues in All Program Settings.* Planning for the effective use of space provides the foundation for an effective school age program. Whether programs take place in permanent, designated, auxiliary, portable, or shared space, how space looks and feels matters to children. When environments are attractive, well-organized, interesting, and comfortable, they provide a backdrop for a varied program that can address the diverse developmental needs of school age children. The look and feel of well planned environments send messages that let children know they are welcome and valued. Well planned environments are inviting, encourage productive play and positive relationships, stimulate imagination, foster learning, and promote children's development.

*Well Designed Environments Incorporate Sound Design Principles.* During a National Symposium on School Design in October of 1998, the U. S. Department of Education identified six principles for designing better learning environments. These principles were endorsed by several professional organizations representing educators and architects. The Department of Education presented the following statement about the principles: "To meet the nations' needs for the twenty-first century, school learning environments should 1) enhance teaching and learning and accommodate the needs of all learners; 2) serve as a center of the community; 3) result from a planning and design process that involves all community interests; 4) provide for health, safety, and security, 5) make effective use of available resources, and 6) be flexible and adaptable."<sup>4</sup>

The core ideas in these design principles are certainly relevant to school age programs as well as school settings that focus on academic learning. Regardless of where they are housed, quality school age environments have the following characteristics which mirror the six design principles:

- They enhance learning, encourage all children to be involved and engaged, and provide an atmosphere that respects individual and cultural differences among children.
- They provide a setting where children, parents, staff, and other program stakeholders feel welcomed and encouraged to participate in the experiences of the child care community.
- They reflect the interests, wants, and needs of all program stakeholders.
- They provide for the health, safety, and security of all children in the program.
- They make the most of resources available to the program.
- As children grow and develop, the environment is adapted to reflect children's changing needs and interests.

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Education. *Six Design Principles – Schools as Centers of Community: A Citizen's Guide for Planning and Design.* 1998.

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*Elements of a School Age Environment.* As noted in the introduction, the SACERS reflects a broad view of the program environment. School age expert Laurie Ollhoff uses the **ERE Theory** - **E**nvironment, **R**elationships, and **E**xperiences – to identify ways we influence children through the overall program environment. She stresses that “it is important to integrate inclusive practices and culturally relevant material in each aspect of the **ERE Theory**.<sup>5</sup> Highlights of the **ERE Theory** appear below:<sup>6</sup>

- ☞ **Environment:** Sends messages without words.....the environment is defined as “things” – room arrangement, color, furniture, supplies, signs, etc. Environment influences how/if/when children interact within its boundaries.
- ☞ **Relationships:** Refer to all types of relationships....relationships between children, children and staff, staff and parents, staff and colleagues. Positive relationships encourage positive risk-taking (trying new things) and help develop maturity through discussion and listening.
- ☞ **Experiences:** Include a variety of long and short term projects, spontaneous events, group and individual activities. Experiences may be new or repeated. The best experiences have a broad-based continuum where children can participate and grow in a variety of ways and allow children to make choices and decisions about their ongoing participation.

Ollhoff breaks down the broader school age environment into four Elements of an Environment:<sup>7</sup>

- 1) Physical Aspects of the Environment (physical aspects of the environment – fixed, unmovable fixtures and objects such as doors, windows, sinks, etc., and the moveable items such as tables, desks, chairs, etc.)
- 2) Organizational Aspects of the Environment (schedules, routines, procedures that facilitate the program’s operation)
- 3) Instructional Aspects of the Environment (enriching activities that support learning that is taking place during the regular school day as well as life-skills that foster independent behavior)
- 4) Social Aspects of the Environment (opportunities that encourage children to form relationships and interact with friends in an unstructured leaning environment where behavior guidelines and expectations are clearly stated and understood and where all children feel emotionally safe)

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<sup>5</sup> L. Ollhoff. *Ollhoff Theories #1, ERE Theory* (Adapted from *Effective Practices in SA/OST; Developing a Profession* by Nancy Dougherty).

<sup>6</sup> Adapted and excerpted from *Ollhoff Theories #1 l, ERE Theory*.

<sup>7</sup> L. Ollhoff. *Elements of an Environment.* (Adapted from *Effective Practices in SA/OST; Developing a Profession* by Nancy Dougherty).

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**Providing a Universal Environment That Meets the Needs of All School Age Children**

School age programs serve children who vary widely in age, talents, interests, backgrounds, abilities, and overall personal style. A major challenge facing school age programs is how to understand, manage, guide, and respond appropriately to varying individual needs in a group setting. We want to create a spirit of community in our programs where children and staff learn, play, and grow together in ways that respect both the needs of the group and the needs of each individual child. The following strategies will help programs create a universal environment that meets the needs of all school age children in our care.

*Creating Environments That Support the Continuum of Development.* School age children work on many different developmental tasks as they grow and change. It is important to create program environments that support school age children's continuum of development. Following is a chart of some major developmental tasks of school age children and how elements of physical environments can support them.

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Developmental Task	Elements of Environments That Support the Developmental Task (Examples)
Growing Physically	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Space offers areas for diverse physical activities as well as places to rest, relax, and unwind.</li> <li>• Environment offers equipment and materials that encourage children to use small and large muscles to challenge themselves and develop new physical skills.</li> </ul>
Developing New Thinking Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environment provides materials and equipment that provide opportunities to explore, categorize, investigate, experience, ask questions, test out ideas, focus attention, and use imagination and creativity.</li> </ul>
Developing Competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environment provides space and equipment that help children learn and practice new physical skills through sports, games, clinics, clubs, or individual activities.</li> <li>• Materials and equipment are available for children to develop arts and crafts skills such as weaving, calligraphy, gimp, origami, etc.</li> <li>• Complex board games are available to promote thinking skills.</li> <li>• A homework center offers materials and equipment to support development of study skills.</li> </ul>
Developing Social Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environment offers small areas where children can interact as they learn and use social graces and social skills such as listening, cooperating, problem solving, negotiating, compromising, and exercising self-control (E.g. dramatic play area, block and construction area, family-style snack area).</li> <li>• Boundaries for play areas are established to promote positive interaction among children.</li> <li>• Areas are available for group meetings.</li> </ul>
Developing a Positive Sense of Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environment provides materials and visual displays that reflect diversity and the cultures and backgrounds of children in the program.</li> <li>• Photographs, posters, and books portray men and women in a wide variety of societal roles; roles depicted are not stereotypical.</li> <li>• A wide range of materials and equipment is available to meet the needs of children with varying abilities, skills, talents, and interests.</li> </ul>
Exploring the World Beyond Home and Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Materials, resources, and displays provide opportunities for children to learn about other families, their community, and the world beyond the program.</li> </ul>
Growing Independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most materials are available and accessible to children.</li> <li>• Varied activity or learning centers offer children opportunities to make choices and decisions.</li> <li>• The environment offers opportunities for children to help with set up, clean up, and routines and responsibilities such as setting snack tables.</li> </ul>

*Creating Environments That Support Developmental Diversity Among School Age Children.* School age children have much in common, but they are also different from each other in many ways. While all school age children move through a continuum of developmental tasks, each child experiences development in his or her own way. *Developmental diversity* occurs within children when they vary widely in their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional maturity. Developmental diversity also occurs among individual children in the same age group. It is essential for

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school age programs to recognize these differences and plan environments that support *developmental diversity* among school-age children.

When designing and organizing the physical environment, it is important to ensure that the environment respects individual differences among children. Here is a checklist of important differences to consider when creating the program environment:

- ✓ Differences in INTERESTS. Provide an array of different activity areas (E.g. board and table games, arts and crafts, library corner, dramatic play, music and dance, blocks and construction, science and nature, homework support, group sports and games, and more)
- ✓ Differences in ABILITY, TALENT, and SKILL. Provide equipment and materials that offer a range of challenges. Organize materials in ways that help children choose activities that are both challenging and achievable for them.
- ✓ Differences in LEARNING STYLES. Develop activity centers that allow and encourage children to learn in different ways.
- ✓ Differences in TEMPERAMENT. Recognize that the level of visual stimulation and sound in the environment may be overwhelming to children who are very sensitive, have difficulty focusing, are easily distracted, tend to withdraw from new experiences, or act impulsively. Think about ways to create environments that are attractive, inviting, and interesting but also send a message that the program is well-organized, stable, and calm.
- ✓ Differences in BACKGROUNDS. Decorate the program with displays reflecting the backgrounds of children in the program. Provide props, music, and other materials that reflect racial and cultural diversity.
- ✓ Differences in AGES. Recognize that school age children in different age groups have widely varying different interests, needs, and skills. Provide varied equipment and materials that are appropriate for different age groups (e.g. a wide range of board, table, and card games, different types of manipulatives like Legos and K'nex that are suitable for different age groups). Provide special spaces for children of different age groups to gather. Provide areas where older children can help, teach, and mentor younger children.

#### **Arranging Indoor Space – Use a Systematic Approach**

Many different types of spaces are used to house school age programs – gymnasiums, classrooms, cafeterias, multi-purpose rooms, and more. Each space has its unique characteristics and challenges. To arrange indoor space effectively, it is important to take a systematic approach. What follows is a step-by-step process for making the most of your program space and creating an effective environment that will meet children's needs:

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1. Assess the Possibilities. Ask yourself: what are the best and worst features of our program space? (E.g. lighting, wall space, shelving, windows, access to water) Think about how to maximize the best features and minimize problem features?
2. Decide Which Interest Centers to Provide. (See chart: List of Typical School-Age Interest Centers.) Effective Interest Centers are clearly focused and purposeful. They are also well-defined and multi-dimensional, providing a wide variety of play and learning opportunities related to the area of focus. Interest Centers vary in charter and style; some are formal, others informal. Some feature soft items to create a cozy, comfortable atmosphere. Others provide more open space to encourage social interactions and active games for groups of children. Select a variety of centers that you think will match the needs and characteristics of the children enrolled in your program. The number of centers you select will also be determined by the size of your space, the amount of set up required, the number of children served, and the level of staff available to supervise the centers. (NOTE: Item 3.1 of the Pennsylvania Position Statements for the SACERS states: “There must be at least two clearly defined interest centers with materials specific to that center and sufficient space for materials’ storage and use.”<sup>8</sup>)

#### **List of Typical School Age Interest Centers**

- **Board and Table Games**
- **Manipulatives (small construction toys)**
- **Quiet Area (comfort zone with soft items)**
- **Block and Construction**
- **Large Movement**
- **Sand and Water**
- **Arts and Crafts**
- **Dramatic Play/Theater**
- **Science, Math and Nature**
- **Homework/Computer**
- **Language/Reading/Library**
- **Woodworking**
- **Music**
- **Project and Hobby Area**
- **Cooking**

3. Decide Which Additional Areas Are Needed (e.g. Functional Areas for storage of children’s belongings, snack, administrative, parent welcoming area, program bulletin board, etc.).

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<sup>8</sup> PA Position Statements for the SACERS, Keystone Stars. Issued 09.01.08. Page 1.

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4. Create a Floor Plan Diagram That Incorporates All Program Components. Use a large sheet of chart paper so that you have space to draw in all components of your room arrangement. Use the following guidelines to create your plan. (Include photos to illustrate elements of an effective plan or provide a sample floor plan or use – recommend photos).
  - Separate quiet areas from noisy areas, active areas from more passive areas.
  - Define Interest Centers. (Use tables, shelves, screens, carpet or carpet remnants, equipment, boundary markers, etc., to define the area for each center and sub areas within centers.)
  - Identify Functional Areas (Designate space and equipment for snack, storage of children’s belongings, parent welcoming and information, staff administrative and personal areas, storage areas, etc.)
  - Identify Storage Areas. (Plan to store related items near each other.)
  - Locate areas needing water or electricity near sources of supply.
  - Enhance the environment with items that create a comfortable atmosphere.

#### **Strategies for Creating Physical Environments in Shared Space**

The majority of school age programs are housed in shared space settings which are used for other purposes when the school age program is not in session. Some school age programs share space even during program hours. Even if you do not have exclusive use of your program space, it is important to create an environment that supports children’s play, learning, and development during program hours. Here are some additional guidelines to use when creating environments in shared space:

1. Assess the Space. Determine answers to the following questions about your program space as the foundation for designing the program environment.
  - Where is the space located? (How close is the space to entries, exits, outdoor play areas, and other resources such as media centers, gymnasiums, etc.)?
  - What are the best features: Natural light? Wall space for display? Built-in shelving? Closet? How can you make the most of it?
  - What are the worst features: Dim lighting? Immovable obstacles, Poor acoustics? Wide open spaces? Temperature? No closets or storage areas? What can be done to work around these features?
  - What other groups will use the space and when? How will you communicate with others who will use the space?
  - How much set up and take down of program equipment and materials will be required every day?
  - What areas are available for storage? (Hint – Building custodians can often be helpful in identifying storage areas.)

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- To what extent will your program have access to furniture, equipment, and materials already in the space? How will you protect items that are not accessible to you?
2. Identify Which Interest Centers to Provide.
    - Select areas which can be easily adapted for use in shared space.
    - Develop Interest Centers as organized, portable modules or kits that can be set up quickly and stored easily.
    - Collect portable soft items to create a comfortable atmosphere (pillows, inflatable chairs, carpet remnants or throw rugs – be sure these items comply with fire safety regulations). Small table lamps can also soften the lighting in large gyms, cafeterias, and multi-purpose rooms.
    - Secure types of furniture and equipment that can be set up, taken down, moved around, and stored with relative ease in a short amount of time. See chart: *Examples of Equipment, Furniture, and Materials for Shared Space* for ideas.
  3. Create a Floor Plan. Once you have decided what to include in your shared space environment, draw up a floor plan that illustrates where things will be located, following the general principles in number 4. in the previous section. Be sure to identify Interest Centers and Functional Areas (staff areas, storage for children's belongings, snack area, parent area, and storage areas for program materials, if available in the room). Illustrate how you will use portable furniture and other equipment to define each area. Enhance the environment with items that create a comfortable atmosphere.

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### Examples of Equipment, Furniture, and Materials for Shared Space

(Excerpted and Adapted from R. Newman. *Keys to Quality in School-Age Child Care, Viewer's Guide*. Union Bridge, MD: Summerwind Communications, 1993)

DESCRIPTION OF ITEM	SUGGESTED USES
<p><u>Tables</u> (Sturdy and light - Round, Fold Out, Wooden with Wheels)</p>	<p>Games, homework, projects, snacks, display areas, store materials underneath (camouflage with cloth), staff administrative area, parent information.</p>
<p><u>Chairs</u> (Folding, stacked on wheeled base)</p>	<p>In addition to seating, use to define areas for relaxation and work and to store coats, books, and personal belongings.</p>
<p><u>Shelves</u> (No more than two to four shelves per unit (higher limits visibility and may tip. Other characteristics: wooden with pegboard for display, wheeled, doors for storage)</p>	<p>Create borders to define and contain supplies for Interest Centers, divide room, cover backs and use for display, store staff supplies (cover open shelves of staff supplies with curtains).</p>
<p><u>Cabinets</u> (With built-in or attached locks, wooden on wheels, metal on rolling base)</p>	<p>Store supplies, divide the room, create displays on front or back.</p>
<p><u>Roll Carts</u> (Metal on wheels with two to three shelves)</p>	<p>Transport equipment and materials from storage to program, set up moveable Interest Areas, store equipment such as CD players.</p>
<p><u>Storage Containers</u> (Cardboard, clear plastic for easy viewing, wooden crates with tops for easy storage and stacking, portable file boxes with handles, unused pizza boxes)</p>	<p>Store materials for Interest Areas, general supplies for Functional Areas, program records, children's ongoing projects or portfolios.</p>
<p><u>Soft Items</u> (Bean bag chairs, large pillows inflatable chairs, area rugs)*</p>	<p>Create a warm, comfortable environment; add softness to room; provide places where children can socialize, listen to music, play games, relax; cut down noise levels.</p>
<p><u>Curtains</u> (Fabric hung from a dowel rod attached to the ceiling or window or suspended between cabinets; see-through shower curtains hung from dowel rods or PVC tubing)*</p>	<p>Create a soft feeling, create boundaries for Interest Centers and other areas.</p>
<p><u>PVC Tubing</u> (Available at plumbing and hardware stores, long lengths and joints to connect pieces together – stores will cut to size)</p>	<p>Build large cubes to create a focus for Interest Centers and other activities. Combine with clear shower curtains that children decorate with markers. Involve children in building their own mini-environments.</p>
<p><u>Styrofoam Sheets</u> (Light-weight insulation sheeting in 2' x 3', 3' x 5' or 4' x 6' sizes)</p>	<p>Create movable bulletin boards, screen storage areas, create private areas.</p>
<p><u>Heavy Cardboard/Triwall Cardboard</u> (Sheets of thick, sturdy, corrugated cardboard – recycled from appliance cartons or commercial product)</p>	<p>Create room dividers, private nooks, and clubhouses (designed, built, and decorated by children), create movable bulletin boards.</p>
<p>*Check your local fire regulations to make sure these items are permitted in your space.</p>	

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**Selecting Age Appropriate Equipment and Materials**

*The Importance of Providing Age Appropriate Equipment and Materials.*

While differences between children of different ages are not clear-cut, certain developmental needs and traits are associated with younger school age children, while others are typical of older school age children and youth. It is essential for school age staff to be knowledgeable about the typical differences among children of different ages.<sup>9</sup> When selecting materials and equipment for each Interest Center, it is important to provide materials that appropriate for the range of ages of children enrolled in the program. Presented below are suggested materials for two Interest Centers that would be appropriate in a program serving both younger and older school age children.

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<sup>9</sup> See Suggested Resources for books and other sources of information about the characteristics of children at different ages.

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### Age Appropriate Materials for Two Sample Interest Centers

#### 1. Arts and Crafts Center

- ✓ Materials to encourage artistic exploration and expression and help children of different ages learn and practice small muscle skills.
  - Papers of different colors, sizes, textures, and weight (E.g. construction, card stock, tissue, foils, etc.)
  - String, twine, staples and staplers, clips, paste glue, pipe cleaners, tape, tooth picks, wire (and other items for fastening things together)
  - Poster board of different colors and sizes
  - Cardboard
  - Rulers (Different levels of detail)
  - Paper punch
  - Markers (different sizes for grasping and different point sizes), crayons, pencils, charcoal, pastels, and chalks
  - Tempera and finger paints for younger children and special projects
  - Acrylic, water color paints, water-based printing paint for older children
  - Art brushes - different sizes for grasping and different widths for bristles)
  - Scissors for younger and older children
  - Art knives (for older children with guidance)
  - Clay, paper mâché, soap stone, plaster (adapt use for different ages)
  - Ink stamps/ink pads and stationery paper
  - Yarn of different types and colors, jute, raffia
  - Felt, flannel, burlap
  - A large assortment of collage items (commercial and recycled)
- ✓ Materials and equipment to help older children develop a broad range of skills and techniques and explore varied art media: calligraphy, wood carving, mask making, water color painting, weaving, crocheting, knitting, macramé, model building, sculpture (different types), pottery, origami, stenciling, paper flower making, sewing, embroidery, quilting, block printing, photography, and more. (NOTE: Rotate materials according to interests, abilities, and ages.)

#### 2. Board and Table Games Center

- ✓ A variety of board games for different age groups and abilities: Candyland, Chutes and Ladders, Bingo, Connect Four, Sorry, Chinese Checkers, Monopoly (short version), Boggle, Yahtze. Kids Day in Court, Kids on Stage, Junior Pictionary, Junior Scrabble, Junior Clue, Monopoly (long version), Scrabble, Chess, Carom, trivia games.
- ✓ Tic-Tac-Toe rug game and large floor puzzles for younger children.
- ✓ Decks of cards and card game book (standard deck of cards and a variety of specialized games for younger age groups)
- ✓ Table top games such as Dominos, Jacks, Pick-Up-Sticks, Dominos, Jenga (adapt level of difficulty for different age and skill levels)
- ✓ A variety of paper and pencil games for different age groups: mazes, word searches, crossword puzzles, etc.
- ✓ A mixture of puzzles of varying difficulty: puzzles with 30, 50, 100, 250, 500, and 1000 pieces. (Provide puzzle storage trays for storing ongoing puzzles with many pieces.)
- ✓ Materials for children to use to invent their own games.
  - Cardboard, card stock, and poster board
  - Old game pieces, buttons, marbles
  - Index cards (variety of colors)
  - Markers (fine and medium points)
  - Cardboard tubes from toilet paper or paper towels
  - Scotch (invisible) and masking tape
  - Clear Contac paper to cover and protect the games invented

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### Planning Functional Areas

In addition to designing Interest Centers and activity areas for children in school age programs, it is important to designate, design and organize Functional Areas that provide the foundation for the program or support program routines. Examples of Functional Areas are listed below:

1. Space for Children's Belongings
  - Storage of books, book bags, other items from the school day
  - Storage for personal belongings (coats, jackets, boots, toys, hobby projects, etc.)
  - Mail boxes for communications to parents and other take home items
2. Administrative Areas
  - Staff bulletin boards (for calendars, schedules, announcements, and other information that is not confidential)
  - Confidential files
  - Children's records
  - Recordkeeping
  - Program manuals and resource materials
  - Staff meeting areas
  - Telephone
  - Storage for First Aid Kit and Children's Medications
3. Personal Space for Staff.
  - Safe, accessible storage for personal belongings
  - Space to meet personal needs (place for breaks, lunch, bathroom facilities)
4. Areas for Storage of Program Materials and Equipment (including Portable Storage Options)
  - Portable storage options
  - Storage closets or areas (coordinate with program host and building manager)
5. Snack Area
  - Storage of food and food supplies
  - Service area
  - Decorations for service area
6. Parent Area
  - Parent bulletin board
  - Information table (for pamphlets, brochures, memoranda, newsletters)
  - Comfort area (place to sit, magazines, hospitality items)

### Arranging Outdoor Space to Facilitate Recreational Activities

The hours children spend in after school programs are often the best hours of the day for getting fresh air and enjoying the out of doors while it is still daylight. School age programs can provide safe, secure settings where children can enjoy the

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out of doors as they participate in a wide variety of activities in the open air. Planning how to use outdoor areas effectively will help you provide quality outdoor experiences in your program. Just as you do when designing the indoor environment, it is useful to take a systematic approach.

1. Assess the Basic Elements of Available Outdoor Space. Planning an effective outdoor environment begins with assessing characteristics of the space. Before planning your program's outdoor experiences, be sure to answer the following questions:
  - What is the size and number of play/recreational areas? What permanent spaces, facilities, and equipment are available to your program?
  - Do cushioning materials under play equipment and other areas meet required standards?
  - What is the availability of storage space for portable equipment?
  - How close are the play areas to your indoor program space?
  - What hazards exist in the play areas? What corrective action is needed? (See Technical Assistance Paper #2: Health and Safety in School Age Care for more information.)
  - How much shade is available? What sheltered areas are available?
  - What is the closest source of water? If none, how will children get water?
  - Will anyone else be using the play areas when you are using it? If so, how will you mark boundaries for safety and security?
  - What are the best and worst features of the outdoor areas? What are your ideas for making the most of the best and minimizing the worst?
2. Identify Outdoor Interest Centers That Support Physical Development. As you plan the outdoor environment, develop ideas for creating Interest Centers and other large areas where children can participate in the following physical activities:
  - Team Sports (E.g. baseball, kickball, soccer, field hockey, basketball, flag football, and others depending on space and facilities available)
  - Large Group Games (E.g. cooperative games, parachute games, tag games)
  - Small Group Games and Activities (E.g. small group cooperative games, ring toss, horse shoes, Double Dutch jump roping, fitness clubs like jogging or walking, relay races, obstacle courses)
  - Seasonal Activities (E.g. activities related to snow, hot weather, changing seasons)
  - Individual Activities and Challenges Experiences (E.g. jump roping, stilt walking, learning skills for different sports, balancing, baton twirling, hula hopping, and opportunities for children to set physical goals and work on physical skills.
3. Develop Ideas for Special Outdoor Interest Areas (E.g. camping as a dramatic play activity, fort building, bird sanctuary).
4. Develop Ideas for Moving and Extending Selected Indoor Interest Centers Outdoors. The following indoor Interest Areas can be adapted and packaged as portable indoor Interest Areas that can be moved outdoors and used to

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enhance the outdoor experience: Board and Table Games; Manipulatives; Quiet Area; Blocks and Construction; Arts and Crafts; Sand and Water; Dramatic Play; Science, Math, and Nature; Library/Reading Corner/Homework; Woodworking. Most operating tips for indoor Interest Centers are also applicable to the areas when they are moved outdoors (E.g. stocking the areas diverse, age appropriate materials, designating areas with clear boundaries, displaying materials attractively, making materials accessible to children, defining areas with equipment and materials related to specific activities). However, it's also important to think through the following questions:

- How many areas is it reasonable to offer, given the amount of time and space available?
- Is some outdoor storage space available to minimize the amount of transport necessary?
- How will items be transported? How can children be involved in helping to transport and set up outdoor Interest Centers?
- How much equipment can be provided when areas are moved outdoors? Should items or centers be rotated?
- Who will decide what to bring outdoors – staff, children, or both?
- How will wind, humidity, and heat affect some activities? What adjustments might be necessary?
- Are there distractions like nearby traffic that may affect the areas? How can distractions be limited?
- Will insects or other creatures affect how the areas are set up and operated?

For more ideas on creating effective outdoor school age environments, see *Developing and Implementing Effective Outdoor Environments and Interest Areas for School Age Programs*. This resource is listed under Suggested Resources at the end of this paper.

5. Create a Drawing That Illustrates How You Will Use the Outdoor Space. Once you have assessed the outdoor space and decided what kind of activities and Interest Centers you will provide, make a drawing that illustrates how you will use the available outdoor space. Label areas where you will incorporate rotating Interest Centers. Be sure to designate boundaries and safe zones for different types of activities.

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### Suggested Resources

Bender, Judith; Flatter, Charles H.; Sorrentino, Jeanette M. *Half a Childhood: Quality Programs for Out-of-School Hours – Chapter Six : What Do The Children Do? The Physical Environment Says “Welcome.”* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Nashville, TN: School-Age NOTES, 2000.

Blakley, Barbara; Blau, Rosalie; Brady, Elizabeth H.; Streibert, Catherine; Zavitkovsky, Ann; Zavitkovsky, Docia. *Activities for School-Age Child Care: Playing and Learning* (provides a variety of activity ideas and management strategies linked to interest areas). Revised Edition. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1989.

Harms, Thelma; Jacobs, Ellen Vineberg; White, Donna Romano. *School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (Space and Furnishings)*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 1996.

Kaiser, Barbara and Rasminsky, Judy S. *Challenging Behavior in Young Children (Understanding the Child’s Family and Culture, Preventing Challenging Behavior with the Right Physical Space and Program)*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc., 2007.

Koralek, Derry G; Newman, Roberta L.; Colker, Laura J. *Caring for Children in School-Age Programs (Module 3, Program Environment, Module 4, Physical)*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies, 2000.

National Institute on Out-of-School Time. *A Place of Their Own: Designing Quality Spaces for Out-of-School Time*. Video. Wellesley, MA: National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2000.

Newman, Roberta L. *Keys to Quality in School-Age Child Care (Video – Key #2, Organizing for Diversity and Choice)*. Union Bridge, MD: Summerwind Communications, 1993.

Newman, Roberta L. and SD Department of Social Services, Office of Child Care Services. *School-Age Certificate Modules: Designing Effective Indoor School-Age Play and Learning Environments, Developing and Implementing Effective Indoor Interest Areas, Developing and Implementing effective School-Age Outdoor Environments and Interest Areas*. Pierre SD, 2004. Modules available in Professional Development Institutes from PA Keystone Stars.

Ollhoff, L. *Ollhoff Theories #1, ERE Theory* (Adapted from *Effective Practices in SA/OST; Developing a Profession* by Nancy Dougherty).

Ollhoff, L. *Elements of an Environment*. (Adapted from *Effective Practices in SA/OST; Developing a Profession* by Nancy Dougherty).

PA Position Statements for the SACERS, Keystone Stars. 09.01.08.

*Playground Information to Use with the Environment Rating Scales*. Based on information from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), *Handbook for Public Playground Safety*, Pub. No. 325 and other national safety guidelines. These guidelines are a basic overview of areas to review when scoring playground and safety items in the SACERS (and other rating scales). Available from Pennsylvania Keystone STARS.

Romain, Janette, Editor. *The NSACA Standards for Quality School-Age Care (Standards for Indoor Environment)*. Boston, MA: National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA) – now National AfterSchool Association (NAA), 1998.

Spark Physical Education Programs. Web site: [www.sparkpe.org](http://www.sparkpe.org). Provides newsletter, training, and guidance for selecting recreation equipment for after school programs based on the philosophy: Include ALL youth, ALL youth ACTIVE, and ALL youth learning to enjoy movement.

U.S. Department of Education. *Six Design Principles – Schools as Centers of Community: A Citizen’s Guide for Planning and Design*. 1998.

YMCA of the USA. *YMCA School-Age Care Program Manual – Chapter 3: Environment*.