

9a. Environment Design and Organization Policy and Procedure

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Policy

The program's indoor and outdoor environments are designed and organized to support each child's physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development. Staff will utilize home environments to support each child's physical, cognitive, emotional and social development.

Procedure

Center-based learning environments include the physical environment, daily schedules, and routines. These components provide structure to the experiences and activities that occur in the classroom daily. Classroom environments, routines, and planned activities reflect the curriculum, developmentally appropriate practices, and individual child's needs. In addition to this procedure, the information provided in the DST Checklist, Creative Curriculum, Pyramid Model, Environmental Rating Scales (ECERS & ITERS), and Caring for Our Children will be used when designing classroom environments.

Learning Environments:

- The first level of curriculum implementation is ensuring that learning environments are safe, healthy, responsive, and engaging.
- Indoor and outdoor learning environments must be prepared daily before school starts to ensure optimal outcomes for children.
- Environments may be redesigned periodically throughout the year to reflect the growing and changing needs of the children.

Well-designed environments:

- Follow routine and daily schedule
- Reduce the likelihood of challenging child behavior
- Teach expectations of the learning environment
- Promote engagement and interaction with peers and adults
- Avoid overload
- Provide safe ways for children to practice physical skills in the classroom
- Provide a safe space or "get away space"
- Use visual cues

Classroom

- Learning centers are set up in the classroom and materials are changed a minimum monthly. The centers will reflect the study, skills, interests, and goals of children as well as the local culture and community.
- Required Learning centers are Dramatic Play, Blocks, Library, Sand and Water, Science, and Table Toys/Manipulatives except in the infant room.
- The indoor environment includes soft elements such as rugs and cushions. The "Circle/Group Time" area, of a classroom, always includes a large area rug or carpeted area able to accommodate all classroom participants and staff members.
- Low open shelves that allow children to see and select their own materials.
- Classroom space is arranged to facilitate a variety of large group, small group, and individual program activities. When organizing the classroom space, staff members: separate active or noisy areas from inactive, quiet spaces; place activity areas near necessary resources, such as the art area near water; and design indoor traffic patterns that keep the children from running, yet enable them to move easily between areas.
- Classroom lighting must be adjustable to fit the activities and the needs of the children; refer to lighting procedure (FACI 1r. Lighting Procedure - **link coming soon**).
- Each preschool classroom must have at least 35 square feet/child. Each infant and toddler classroom must provide 15 additional square feet above the 35 square feet for each infant or toddler using a crib or playpen if the crib or playpen is located or placed in the sleeping or play area. The best practice is to follow the Caring for Our Children guidelines. Bathrooms, halls, kitchens, staff rooms, and storage places floors that have built-in shelves may not be a part of the useable space count.
- Staff will stay diligent in actively supervising children. It is required that all actions and conversations among adults be directed to the children's needs and interests to facilitate interactions between children and families to ensure their health and safety. Staff, parents and community volunteers are encouraged to schedule time before and after classroom hours to meet with each other to discuss issues and/or concerns.
- For School Day classrooms: The classroom space allows for resting areas. Mats are provided for each child and will be placed at least 18 inches apart.
- For infant/toddler classrooms: The classroom space allows for resting areas. Mats or cribs are provided for each child and will be placed at least 36 inches apart.
- Space is available to separate an ill child from the other classroom children.

Staff use the questions in the table below to assess the design and organization of their classroom environment:

Think about safety, flow, and access:	Are materials:
• Is there a clear entry to each area? • Is there enough space to spread out and create?	• Labeled and Rotated at least monthly • Highly engaging and Relevant to children's needs, interests, and lives

Think about safety, flow, and access:	Are materials:
• Are the centers inviting? • Are children distributed throughout the room at center time? • Are emergency exits clear?	• Enough or too many • Developmentally appropriate for all children

Predictable Daily Schedule ([EDUC 9I \(lowercolumbia.edu/publications/head-start-handbooks/EDUC/09-lesson-planning/i-daily-schedule-guideline-procedure-center-based-3-5\)](https://lowercolumbia.edu/publications/head-start-handbooks/EDUC/09-lesson-planning/i-daily-schedule-guideline-procedure-center-based-3-5))

Create and post a schedule with visuals that: include photographs or clip art for each activity; represent all daily activities;

- is posted where children can view and manipulate; is designed to accommodate when changes occur; is designed to indicate the passage of time; and
- is visible the entire day.
- Develop and implement a classroom schedule that:
- Minimized the number of transitions across the day;
- Includes a balance of teacher-directed and child-directed activities that includes play; and
- Includes both large and small group activities throughout each day.
- Refer to, and review the classroom schedule with children throughout the day (e.g., when it is time to change activities, during transitions).
- Make a visual modification to the schedule when changes occur and review with children.
- Teacher children to clean up when done playing in an area.

Emergent Schedule and Space Changes

- When regular daily routine is interrupted or emergent activities happen, staff will communicate with children and other staff about the activities and process for interacting in the emergent space. Staff will give additional diligence to active supervision at transitions and throughout all activities.
- Examples of emergent schedule or space change could include inclement weather; child safety needs requiring a room clear where the class goes to a playground or gross motor room; emergent special activities; evacuations; etc.

Transitions

- Use [EDUC 7c. Active Supervision Procedure \(lowercolumbia.edu/publications/head-start-handbooks/EDUC/07-health-safety/c-active-supervision-procedure\)](https://lowercolumbia.edu/publications/head-start-handbooks/EDUC/07-health-safety/c-active-supervision-procedure) to make sure all children are accounted for when transitioning from one activity to another one.
- Provide transition warning to all children or a cue prior to transitions.

- Use transition strategies (e.g., games, songs, or other actions) to ensure that all children are actively engaged during the transition, including children who are waiting for the next activity.
- Teach the specific steps and expectations for transitions.
- Acknowledge and give specific positive descriptive feedback to children who transition appropriately.
- Provide individual support to children who have difficulty transitioning.
- Provide children with multiple opportunities to make choices across the day (e.g., during large group, small group, play).
- Support children to select centers and become engaged.
- Comment positively and descriptively on children's engagement.
- Redirect unengaged children and support them to become actively engaged.

Outdoor Environment

- Outdoor environments for children are to include: a variety of surfaces, such as soil or sand for digging, hills, flat grassy and hard areas for wheeled toys; areas of sunlight as well as shade or portable shade equipment, a variety of equipment for riding, climbing, balancing, and digging, and areas for individual and small group play.
- Outdoor space is designed to support the developmental progress of all children and to prevent injuries. Playgrounds are designed to ensure clearance space from walkways, buildings, and other structures, and to avoid crowding in any one area; and separate space is provided for each type of activity – throwing or kicking balls, climbing hills, digging, and using stationary playground equipment.
- Center playgrounds must have at least 75 square feet of usable outdoor play space per child.
- Outdoor time must be part of the classroom daily schedule and include all children present. If a child is not well enough to go outdoors, he or she should be kept at home.
- In the event of inclement weather, the class will remain in the classroom for gross motor activities or use the gross motor room. When the regular daily routine for outdoor time is interrupted during inclement weather, staff will have preplanned activities for the classroom and gross motor room. Staff will give additional diligence to active supervision at transitions and throughout all activities.
- Parents are encouraged to have their children wear play clothes that can withstand the rigors of outdoor play. Children will be outdoors as often as possible throughout the year. Staff should encourage parents to write children's names in jackets or coats with a permanent marker or pen.
- Staff will attempt to utilize outdoor environments to promote learning and development.
- See [EDUC 7e. Playground Safety/Behavior Policy & Procedure \(lowercolumbia.edu/publications/head-start-handbooks/EDUC/07-health-safety/e-playground-safety-policy-procedure\)](https://www.lowercolumbia.edu/publications/head-start-handbooks/EDUC/07-health-safety/e-playground-safety-policy-procedure) and the [EDUC 9i. Lesson Plan checklist \(lowercolumbia.edu/publications/head-start-handbooks/EDUC/09-lesson-planning/i-EHS_DST_Classroom-Center_Preparation_Checklist\)](https://www.lowercolumbia.edu/publications/head-start-handbooks/EDUC/09-lesson-planning/i-EHS_DST_Classroom-Center_Preparation_Checklist) for additional safety requirements regarding outdoor play.

Center

- Center lobbies will be kept organized, attractive, safe for children, and clean.
- Appropriate and sufficient indoor and outdoor space is provided for all program activities and support functions including office work, the storage of staff belongings, staff break rooms, food preparation, janitorial services, children's activities, and parent activities.
- Doors, gates, counters and/or walls are used to keep food preparation areas separate from other areas and children will be supervised when helping a teacher retrieve the food cart or get other items from the kitchen.

Gross Motor Rooms

If a gross motor room is available at the center:

- It will be kept clean and organized for children to use as needed.
- One class at a time may use the room and ratios must be kept.
- Classroom staff will follow an [EDUC 7c. Active Supervision Procedure \(lowercolumbia.edu/publications/head-start-handbooks/EDUC/07-health-safety/c-active-supervision-procedure\)](https://www.lowercolumbia.edu/publications/head-start-handbooks/EDUC/07-health-safety/c-active-supervision-procedure).
 - Counting and using name to face procedure with children when transitioning in and out of the room.
 - Staff will engage with and redirect children.
 - Staff will be zoned in the gross motor room.
 - Staff will listen and visually monitor children.

Home Environments

Staff will ensure that materials brought into the home are safe and developmentally appropriate for age they are working with.

- Staff will make efforts to utilize materials in home to promote learning and development.
- Staff will utilize natural environment of the family to promote activities that enhance development.
- Staff will facilitate activities between parent and child.