

SOUTHWEST HRA HEAD START

Section: Early Childhood Development
Subject: Learning Centers
Revised: March, 2000; February 2010

REGULATION REFERENCE:

45 CFR Part 1304 (Nov. 1996) Performance Standards 1304.21(c), 1304.21(a)(1)(iv),
1304.53(a)(3)

NAEYC Guide to Accreditation by the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs

POLICY:

Classrooms will be organized to include the following learning centers: library, blocks, housekeeping (which may include nutrition), science/math, art, writing, manipulative, sand/water, carpentry, large group area (which may include music). Learning center areas will be clearly defined through placement of furniture and dividers. Areas will be labeled with appropriate words, pictures, and/or symbols.

PROCEDURE:

Establishing Learning Center Areas:

1. The arrangement of work and play areas should make maximum use of the space available and should creatively take into account any fixed features or special limitations of the room. Teachers will be aware of potential hazards, such as heating units or electrical outlets, when arranging furniture or displaying paper materials.
2. Noisy centers will be located away from quiet centers whenever possible.
3. The art area will be located as close to a source of water as is possible.
4. Materials will be stored in an orderly fashion and accessible in order to promote independence.
5. Materials not intended for free access will be stored out of children's reach or in cabinets, rather than on open shelves.
6. Materials will be rotated with each theme unit to stimulate interest.
7. Materials will be checked regularly to be sure they are in good repair. Simple repairs will be made by teaching staff; more complicated ones will be reported to the Area Manager (See "Repair of Furniture and Materials"--Page E-48).
8. The arrangement of learning centers will not leave long, open spaces that invite running in the classroom.

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9. Flow of traffic in the classroom will be observed carefully and adaptations in room arrangement made as needed.
10. Boys and girls will receive equal encouragement to use all learning centers.

Using Learning Centers:

1. The daily schedule will provide as much time as possible for children to use the learning centers. Learning centers are most effective when children are given generous blocks of time during which to use these work/play areas. The daily schedule will allow at least 2 hours for learning center use (30 minutes early arrival time, 60 minutes Interest Center Time, and 30 minutes departure time), allowing children the time and support to finish the activities they begin.
2. Classrooms will follow a schedule with large groups consisting of eating together and going outside together. Teachers will plan and encourage large group activities (of no more than 10 minutes at a time twice a day), but children will choose to participate. If a child chooses not to participate, he/she may play in the interest centers during this time as long as the noise level is kept appropriate.
3. The teacher will circulate during learning center time as needed to provide guidance, interaction, and enrichment. This is a time to ensure meeting individual child needs and to observe and document the progress of the children.
4. During learning center time, there may be planned activities which the teacher encourages **everyone** to do. For example, the teacher may have in the writing area a "thank you" card which all children can sign.
5. "Small group" work in learning centers is done by children working together in small groups. For example, four children playing "Bingo" or involved in a cooking activity are involved in a small group activity. It is not necessary to reserve a separate time in the daily schedule to be used exclusively for "small group" work. The important thing is for each day's activities to include opportunity for children to work cooperatively toward a common goal, either indoors or outdoors.
6. Project experiences using classroom resources can be included during this time. Experience charts can be developed in small groups at this time, also.

Considerations for Specific Learning Centers:

Library Area:

1. The book center will include adequate space for book browsing by small groups of children and readers. The center will provide a comfortable atmosphere through means of pillows to sit and lie on, a carpet, or a table/chair set.

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2. Books will be neatly displayed, with cover visible to facilitate easy identification and selection.
3. Books displayed will be rotated with each unit theme to encourage interest.
4. The Southwest Head Start program provides books for each classroom. Additional books are available for checkout from local libraries in each county.
5. The books on display will be read and used with individuals or small groups of children to stimulate interest and independent book handling.
6. Other items in the library that promote language development could include: tape player with headsets, puppets, flannel board activities, magnetic board with letters and/or numerals, and a chalk board (these items and their accessories are rotated with unit themes).

Block Area:

1. Adequate space must be provided for construction on the floor with blocks.
2. The block center will include wooden unit blocks **at all times** with block accessories (people, animals, transportation toys, etc.) . Other materials which may be rotated according to unit themes should include: cardboard blocks, large locking blocks, foam blocks, pictures and items to support the unit, and etc.
3. The provision of orderly storage space for the unit blocks which will support independent access and will enhance the learning potential at cleanup time as children classify and make relationships regarding size and shapes. Placing "shadow shapes" on the shelves is the best way to accomplish this.
4. The block area should be carpeted for comfort, warmth, and to reduce the noise level.

Housekeeping Area:

1. The housekeeping area will be a flexibly-used area which can be transformed by adding, removing, or changing equipment as themes and children's interests suggest (example: chairs can be added to represent a bus ride, "store" items can represent a grocery store, etc.)
2. The housekeeping area will include items such as: child-sized furnishings that simulate a kitchen, bedroom, and/or livingroom, dolls of all sizes and ethnic origin, doll cloths, "pretend" and real food, dress-up clothing to include men and women accessories, jewelry, and community helper or occupations hats and accessories.
3. Children will be encouraged to keep the center clean by providing water, soap, and cloths periodically. Children will be encouraged to bathe the dolls and wash their clothes when they are dirty.

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4. The housekeeping area can also be used as the nutrition area where space in the Head Start center is limited. On the day of the planned nutrition activity, the housekeeping is closed until all the children that are interested in the nutrition activity have participated--then it becomes housekeeping again.

Science/Math Area:

1. The science/math area will contain a variety of items which invite investigation, experimentation, and counting, sorting, and classifying. These items will be rotated with unit themes to stimulate children's interest.
2. A science experiment **must** be planned every Monday, Tuesday or first day of the week.
3. Among the materials that might be used in this area are: magnets, magnifying glasses, thermometers, plants, scales, charts, various experimental materials, counting games, numeral puzzles, sorting trays with objects for sorting and/or counting, books that picture animal and wild life or science themes, books that encourage counting, numeral or color recognition, and teacher made folder games. Also, ongoing seasonal collections should abound (twigs, corn stalks, cotton stalks, hay, evergreen branches, bird nests, bee hives, etc.).

Art Area:

1. The art area will contain a large table, chairs, one or two storage shelves, easels, drying rack, and bulletin board for display of children's work.
2. This area will contain a variety of paper to include: manila drawing, various colors construction paper, newsprint, and finger paint paper. A variety of items with which to paint, draw, and create must be available including: pencils, markers, scissors, crayons, tempera and water paints, and (most of all) collage materials.
3. Easels OR finger painting **must** be available daily. The easel painting may include tempera painting with brushes, roller painting, or water colors (these should be rotated being careful not to overuse any one material).
4. **The art activity must always be a creative experience with NO stencils, pre-drawn, or finished product of any kind to go by.**

Writing Area:

1. The writing area will contain a small table with space for one or two children at a time.
2. Items in this area to be rotated could include: pencils of various sizes, markers (fine and broad tip), various size and shapes of paper, envelopes (new and "junk mail" type), a sample name strip for each child to trace or copy, an etch-a-sketch, magna doodle, and a chalk board.

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3. A good pre-writing activity is the use of drawing/writing paper. Encourage the child to draw and then tell about the picture while the adult prints what the child dictates.
4. This area is also a good place to create experience charts. Introduce the chart's theme (example: "Things for which we are thankful") in large group and then list children's thoughts on the chart as they come to this area.

Sand/Water Area:

1. Sand OR water will be open every day.
2. The area will include a container for sand, a container for water, aprons, small items for manipulation (rotated with themes), measuring items, squirt bottles, funnel sets, molds, etc.

Carpentry Area:

1. The following items will be available: hammering board with plastic hammers and wooden teas, small wooden pounding boards, the Little Tykes Carpentry bench with play tools, wood scraps and wood glue, wooden screws and bolts (rotating these items often or with themes).
2. **Upon entering this center, children MUST put on child-sized safety goggles if hammering activity is available.**

Manipulative Area:

1. This area will contain a table with chairs and one or two storage shelves.
2. Items will be organized in the shelves in an orderly fashion with most items labeled with a picture for storage and to promote organizational skills.
3. Six or more puzzles will always be available in a storage rack. Puzzles are rotated with themes and level of difficulty.
4. Other manipulative items to be rotated could include: shape sorters, various papers, pencils, markers, scissors, teacher made folder games or puzzles, playdough, pegs and pegboards, and other theme related items.
5. Theme related activities or simple projects that require following directions and adult supervision may be planned for this area periodically (no more than ONE a week). **Stencil sheets or pre-drawn pictures are NEVER permitted.**

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Large Group/Music Area:

1. The large group area will contain: a rug or carpet, a teacher's storage shelf with curtain or doors, a flannel board, flip chart, record player with a variety of records, a CD player with a variety of CD's, a tape player and tapes, a television and VCR.
2. Music and/or exercises are planned for and encouraged with participation being the child's choice.
3. During Interest Center time, this area may be used for music and exercise activities for small groups of children OR for various rug activities including (but not limited to): waffle blocks, floor puzzles, playhouse, barnyard activities, legos, tinkertoys, or a gross motor activity.
4. Television, VCR and/or DVD use will be very limited. Thematic, educational, or cultural awareness tapes may be used during Interest Centers OR for no more than 10 minutes at a time for a large group activity (child's choice to participate). **Cartoons and movies are strictly prohibited!!**

Nutrition Area:

1. Lesson plans will reflect a nutrition activity at least once a week.
2. During the first half of the program year, the "Food Groupies" Curriculum will be utilized with a "hands-on" food activity planned once each month depending on availability of supervision staff. After Christmas break the teachers will utilize activities found in the Curriculum Guides or the Head Start Nutrition Education Curriculum. Food/Nutrition education activities (games, songs, folder games, exercises, etc.) will be planned each week except once a month when/if the nutritional activity could be a "hands-on" food preparation.
3. Where space allows, this area will contain a table with chairs, real food preparation items, nutritional games, puzzles, etc. If space is limited, the housekeeping area can double as the nutrition area on day of planned nutrition activity until all the children who want to participate in the nutrition activity have had the opportunity to do so.
4. "Hands-on" food preparation activities must be well planned making sure all safety and sanitation guidelines are met: an adult must supervise this activity at all times, adults and children must wash hands before participation, individual containers are provided for all participants, adults wear plastic gloves, children handle ONLY food they eat.

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Computer Area:

1. Each classroom is equipped with at least one child-sized computer station (table, computer, chair) which accommodates one child at a time per computer. At the beginning of the year, the teaching staff will work with individual children to teach general rules and operation of the age appropriate programs. As the year progresses, the children will learn to operate these programs with minimal assistance from the staff.
2. The Computer Area will be utilized at every opportunity possible--early arrival time, Interest Center Time, waiting time before departure, etc. A timer will be used, allowing each child approximately ten minutes at a time in the center (20 minutes total daily time per child).

High Hat Area:

1. The High Hat area will contain a small table with space for 1 to 2 children at a time and a storage shelf.
2. Materials will be rotated to coincide with the letters/sounds the curriculum presents during the year.
3. The High Hat Symbols notebook will always be available for the staff and children to review sounds and symbols on an individual basis.