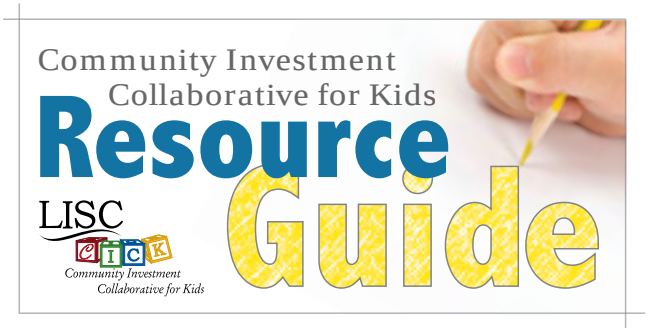
Community Investment Collaborative for Kids

Resource Guide

LISC CICK Community Investment Collaborative for Kids

Creating Quality School-Age Child Care Space



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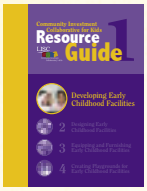
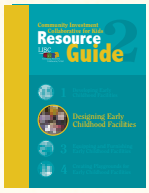
The author and publisher are solely responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained in this resource guide.

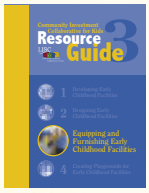
For detailed information on all aspects of early childhood center design, development and financing, see CICK's complete Resource Guide series (www.lisc.org/cick), described below.



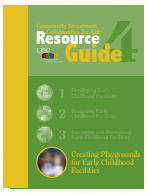
Volume 1 on *Developing Early Childhood Facilities* identifies all of the steps in the real estate development and financing process, and helps early childhood providers and their partners carry out early feasibility and planning activities, assemble an appropriate project development team, select and acquire a site, raise money, and complete construction.



Volume 2 on *Designing Early Childhood Facilities* highlights the connection between well-designed space and high quality programming, and helps early childhood providers, community developers, and architects plan effective spaces for young children. The guide includes an overview of design principles, a tour through a center's functional areas, and information on materials, lighting, security, urban settings and accessibility.



Volume 3 on *Equipping and Furnishing Early Childhood Facilities* helps early childhood providers and others select and arrange classroom furniture and equipment to create a child-safe, child-friendly, functional and attractive physical environment.



Volume 4 on *Creating Playgrounds for Early Childhood Facilities* assists with the planning of an early childhood center's outdoor space to achieve a successful natural environment for young children. This guide suggests equipment and materials that support a range of activities that children can enjoy outdoors.

Greening Your Early Childhood Center focuses on high-impact green design strategies that can be implemented over the long term, as well as low-cost/no-cost ideas for physical improvements, environmental education and facilities operations that early childhood centers can undertake right away.

Contents

"It is a natural impulse to nurture our young – let that impulse extend to the places where young people learn."

- Bruce Mau and Elva Rubio, *The Third Teacher*

Introduction

In an educational system where music, art, physical education and recess are increasingly reduced in favor of more structured attention to academic preparation, and where more and more households are headed by parents who work full time, after-school programs have become essential. By offering a place for creative play or quiet reflection, innovative learning and homework help, as well as relationship building with other children and adults, school-age programs have the potential to be vital community centers that support the needs of children, parents and schools.

These guidelines reflect best practices in the design of high-quality physical environments for school-age children from kindergarten through eighth grade (roughly ages five through fourteen).* Whether you are planning modest changes in your existing center, a major renovation, or a new construction project, this guide will offer strategies for planning, designing and equipping your space in a way that supports your program goals and planned activities.

We know that many after-school programs face serious space constraints, often operating in shared, borrowed and rented facilities, so this guide includes simple, low-cost solutions that can be easily implemented in any setting, as well as more ambitious investments.

The built environment plays an important role in shaping how we view and interact with the world around us. Think about the type of spaces that make you feel comfortable, capable, and inspired to do your best work. Just as we take time to create optimal spaces for our homes and work places, we need to consider how the physical environment can bring out the best in our children. An effective school-age space will not only be welcoming and organized, it will teach children how to value themselves, their peers, and their community by expressing their culture, encouraging their independence, and engaging their minds.

After-school spaces are unique because they are neither home nor school. They offer an opportunity to create special crossover environments where children can learn in a low-stress setting, explore new interests, and develop meaningful relationships with friends and mentors. These centers can also serve an important role in the community as a key point of contact for parents with their children's educational experience.

NOTE:

We recommend that any organization pursuing a building project, whether large or small, secure the services of an architect registered in your state who has experience in designing spaces for children and strong knowledge of local building codes and regulations. The building process can be complicated, so even if your project is modest we recommend that all work be done by licensed professionals.

* The information presented in this guide applies to all types of school-age child care, including before- and after-school programs, drop-in programs, and summer programs, but focuses in particular on after-school programs. The terms after-school and school-age child care will be used interchangeably.

Getting Started

Before you can begin to design or improve your space, it is important to define your program's goals and identify the activities that will take place each day to accomplish these goals. Only then can you create a physical environment that truly represents and reinforces the mission and values of your organization and program. Sit down with your team – which might include program managers, board members, teachers, parents and children – and think carefully about your program and what you hope to achieve. Older children in particular will be more engaged in the space if they played a role in designing it.

Your first step is to think about how your overall mission and program goals will drive the activities you offer and the specific spaces you will need. For example, if one of your goals is to encourage good nutrition and physical fitness, think about the activities you will want to sponsor at your center, such as cooking, gardening, dance, or sports.

Then, consider what types of spaces are needed to support these activities – such as a kitchen that is accessible to children, a gardening area, an interior space that can serve as a dance studio, and a gym or outdoor play yard that can be appropriately equipped. The worksheet on the following page will help you with this process, and the next section of the guide, *Planning and Designing Your Space*, will offer tips on how to set up and equip your space to best support a variety of activities.

Keep in mind that space improvement and renovation projects can be complicated and time-consuming, and fees charged by architects, engineers and other experts can add up. Before engaging professional help, make sure that you have taken time to do your homework and clearly establish your goals and space needs, so that you can communicate them effectively.

In addition to using the tools provided in this guide, you will also want to:

- Take some time to carefully walk through your existing space with a critical eye. Note aspects of your space that work well and others that should be improved.
- Talk with your teachers, parents and children to get feedback on their needs and desires.
- Visit other facilities in the area that house similar programs. Make a list of design features that would support your program's needs and those that don't seem to be effective.

NOTE: Make sure you plan enough space for the number of children who will participate in your program at one time. Licensing standards in most states require classrooms to provide 35 square feet of space per child (check on your state's requirements at **http://nrckids.org/STATES/states.htm**). Keep in mind that this is a minimum requirement and does not necessarily reflect best practices for high quality.

SPACE PLANNING WORKSHEET

Now you can move on to thinking more specifically about the types of spaces that will best support your program's activities and functional requirements. The following worksheet is designed to help you with this task.

To get the planning process started, consider the following:

MISSION: Think about the history of your program and its original mission and core values and any changes that may have taken place over time. Has your physical space had a positive or negative impact on your program? Are there activities you are not able to offer because of space constraints (e.g., lack of access to outdoor space or a science lab, not having a full kitchen, etc.)?

_____

_____

_____

GOALS: Make a list of the concrete goals that you are striving to achieve.

_____

_____

_____

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES: Make a list of the activities your students will engage in. Think about whether there are additional activities you would like to offer to support your goals.

_____

_____

_____

CURRENT OR TARGET AGE GROUP(S):
After-school programs serve a wide age range of children. Identify your program's target age group – such as kindergarteners or pre-teens – or whether you want or need your space to function effectively across all age groups.

_____

_____

_____

FUNCTIONAL AREAS: Consider all the functional areas of the center that support your program, including administration, storage, cleaning and maintenance, etc.

_____

_____

_____

SPACE NEEDS: Identify the physical spaces that would best support your program's activities and functional requirements. The list below can serve as a guide, but you may have different activities or needs.

- Entry
- Gathering/Commons
- Eating/Cooking
- Play (Indoor, Outdoor, Dramatic, etc.)
- Science
- Music
- Arts
- Academic Support/Homework
- Reading/Library
- Computers/Technology
- Adult Personal and Work Spaces
- Bathrooms/First Aid Area
- Storage
- Building and Mechanical Areas
- Other:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

IF YOU ARE UNDERTAKING A MAJOR RENOVATION

or new construction project, we encourage you to consult LISC's Resource Guide Volume 1: *Developing Early Childhood Facilities*, which offers in-depth guidance on the design and construction process from beginning to end.

Make as many copies of this sheet as needed to address each different area of your center. This exercise will be valuable whether you are planning new spaces or evaluating and improving existing environments.

ACTIVITY OR FUNCTIONAL AREA

(e.g., Entry, Homework, Art, Music, Science):

_____

Primary goals for this area:

_____

_____

Number of adults who will work in this area and the type of support (storage, work space, lighting, etc.) they will need to be comfortable and effective:

_____

_____

_____

Number and ages of students who will use this space and the primary activities they will be engaged in:

_____

_____

_____

Functional requirements of this space, for example:

- Area requirement = _____ sq. ft.
- Does this activity require a sink?
- What kinds of finishes (flooring, walls, etc.) are needed?
- Is this a quiet area or a noisy area?
- What other areas should it be close to (or far from)?
- Ventilation requirements (heating, cooling, fresh air)?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What is the look, feel and message you want this space to communicate?

_____

_____

_____

_____

If this is a space that you already use for this purpose, what works well and what needs improvement? (Think about size, configuration, equipment, furnishings, storage, lighting, color, etc.).

Works well:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Needs Improvement:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

If you had the resources and ability to make three changes to this area, what would they be?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

ADJACENCIES

Whether your program is delivered in a single room or multiple rooms, here are some key space relationships to keep in mind as you plan:

CO-LOCATE AREAS THAT ARE FUNCTIONALLY DEPENDENT ON EACH OTHER OR HAVE SIMILAR NEEDS. THE FOLLOWING PROVIDE SOME EXAMPLES:

- Consider office or reception adjacency to the entry to allow for appropriate monitoring of people entering and leaving the center.
- Science, art and play areas should have easy access to the outdoors, and be located near windows to benefit from natural daylight.
- Homework support, library, and computer functions should be close to each other since children and staff may need to go back and forth to get books, conduct Internet research, print or scan work.
- Ideally the kitchen should be near a service entry to facilitate deliveries and trash removal.
- Locate areas that require water – such as the kitchen, bathrooms or art space – together near existing plumbing lines.
- Maximize availability of daylight by placing areas such as art and reading near windows or in skylight rooms.
- Children's bathrooms should be close to activity areas and in a location that is easy for staff to supervise.

SEPARATE SPACES WITH NON-COMPATIBLE USES:

- Noisier activities such as indoor play, music and performance space, and collaborative group work should be located away from quieter homework or reading areas. You may need to consider stronger acoustical separations for particularly noisy areas like music studios or gyms.
- Think about noise from outdoor areas as well, and make sure quiet indoor areas are not close to outdoor play yards.
- Safeguard computers, electronics, and musical equipment by locating these activities away from wet or messy science and art areas.
- Storage rooms, toilets, and other service spaces can be used as acoustical buffers to separate quiet from noisy activities.

PLAN FOR ACTIVITIES THAT MAY SHARE SPACE OR OVERLAP:

- The gathering area/commons can double as either the library/reading area or the snack/eating area once children have settled into their afternoon activities.
- A dramatic play stage can also work as a casual game and reading area with children taking advantage of changes in floor height for seating.
- If the staff work area is kept clean and organized, it might double as a parent meeting and resource room.

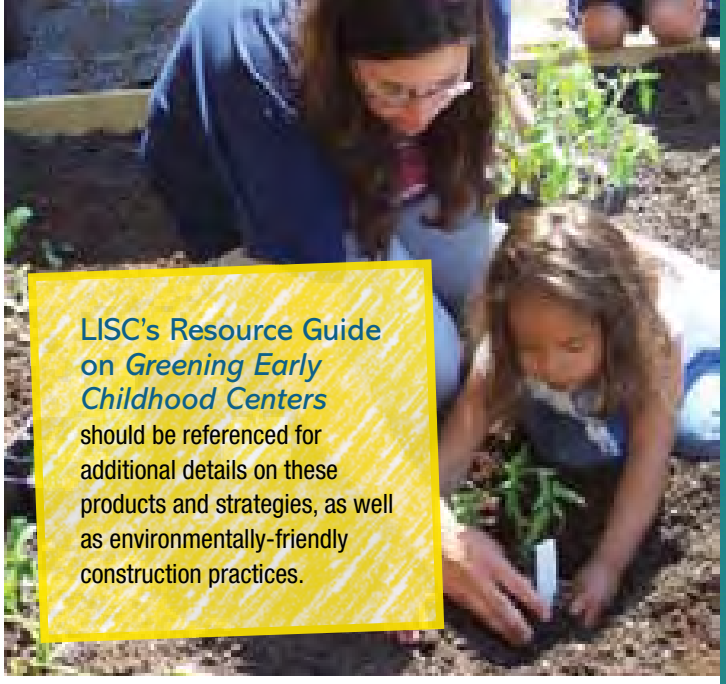
ACCESSIBILITY

DESIGNING FOR EVERYONE

To the extent possible, make sure that your center is designed to accommodate children and adults of all abilities. Minimum requirements for accessibility are defined nationally by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (see: http://www.access-board.gov/adaag/html/adaag.htm), which may be supplemented by local or state guidelines. A local design professional can help you determine what the baseline requirements should be for your particular center and project. Best practices for accessibility are described in the Universal Design Principles developed by North Carolina State University (see: http://www.ncsu.edu/www/ncsu/design/sod5/cud/about_ud/udprinciples.htm).

GREENING YOUR SPACE

School-age settings offer numerous opportunities to introduce environmentally-friendly practices and increase awareness about green materials and products at your center.



LISC's Resource Guide on *Greening Early Childhood Centers* should be referenced for additional details on these products and strategies, as well as environmentally-friendly construction practices.

MAXIMIZE THE OUTDOORS

Your outdoor areas offer many possibilities for encouraging green practices. Incorporate outdoor plantings that require little or no water, and use only organic fertilizers. Think about starting a composting project to generate your own compost and enrich your science program at the same time. Make sure you have an Integrated Pest Management Plan that requires insect-resistant plants near building foundations. Consider ways that rain can be collected for watering plants. Design your outdoor space in a way that encourages children to interact with the environment, such as planting beds.

There are also strategies for bringing the outdoors inside your center. This can make smaller indoor spaces seem larger, and expose children to the external environment and the passage of time. Consider turning a window into a door to provide direct access to an outdoor area, which can often be done with minimal investment. Put mirrors in your window jambs so that outside activity projects back into the space and allows children to engage with the outdoors. Bring green plants into the space, or hang bird feeders or place flowering plants right outside the window to encourage birds and butterflies to drop by.

USE ECO-FRIENDLY MATERIALS

Whether you are building your space from scratch or simply remodeling, the quality of your indoor space can be improved by using environmentally-friendly materials.

- **Flooring:** Cork is a good option for floors. In addition to being a renewable resource, it is fire, pest and allergen resistant; sound absorbing; insulating; and has a cushioned effect which makes it great for standing on. Keep in mind that caution should be used when placing heavy objects on cork, and it can be more costly than other materials. Linoleum is a low-cost and environmentally-friendly choice. It is long-lasting, easy to clean and offers a range of colors. (Note: do not confuse linoleum with vinyl flooring, which is not a renewable resource). Bamboo is another good choice and is becoming popular for flooring. It is comparable in cost to hardwood but is stronger, and can be easily maintained. You may also want to consider reclaimed hardwood from old buildings, which is a recycled material and can add significant character to your space.
- **Cabinetry:** A variety of environmentally-friendly products are available for cabinetry, many of which can also be used for room dividers. Examples include wheatboard, made from wheat grass; and bamboo, made from bamboo grass. BottleStone, made from recycled bottles, can be used for bathroom and kitchen counters as well as dividers. Fiberboard (such as Homasote), made from compressed paper, can be used for room dividers or bulletin boards.
- **Focus on Air Quality:** Avoid wall-to-wall synthetic carpets that capture dust and allergens and are difficult to clean. Consider natural fiber area rugs made of cotton or bamboo fibers. Use non-toxic paints with low- or no-VOCs (volatile organic compounds) that are now readily available. If you don't have operable windows, make sure there is a way to circulate fresh air throughout your space. Locate photocopy machines, which can off-gas VOCs, away from frequently used areas. Finally, minimize the use of air fresheners, and use only non-toxic pesticides and non-toxic, biodegradable cleaning products.

BE EFFICIENT WITH LIGHTING

Maximize natural light, which is the most environmentally-friendly type of lighting. Consider using energy-efficient fixtures and bulbs, and think about incorporating multiple switches and dimmers so that you only use the amount of lighting needed for a particular activity or space. Install automatic sensors that turn lights off when the room is not in use.

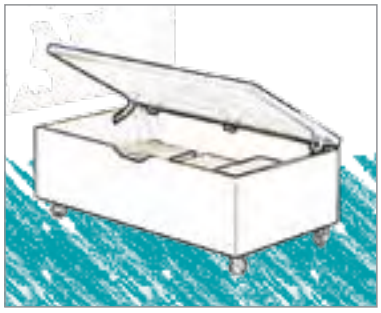
TIPS FOR MAXIMIZING SHARED SPACE

Running a high quality school-age program in space that is shared with others can be extremely challenging, but with a bit of ingenuity you can make this situation work for all. Here are some specific strategies for making the most of this type of situation:

ACTIVITY SPACES:

Think about how you can quickly carve out distinct spaces with easily movable furnishings or supplies. For example, you can use colorful table coverings to create a distinct look for a specific area like eating or art. A reading nook can be put together quickly with an area rug, rolling shelves, bean bag chairs and a floor lamp.

STORAGE:



If most of your equipment will need to be packed up and put away on a regular basis, nothing is more important than having ample, convenient storage. Use the *Storage Assessment Worksheet* on page 25 to help you organize your storage needs and think about innovative solutions. For example, can you hang equipment on the gym wall or build in lockable storage cabinets? Simple storage carts or large plastic bins on wheels that can move equipment quickly to the point of use are great options and can sometimes serve the dual purpose of both storage and work surface.

FURNISHINGS:

Invest in lightweight but durable furniture that is easy to install and that folds up or stacks to store. Foldable card tables and a variety of sturdy folding chairs can quickly be assembled to create activity spaces. Storage crates can become low game tables.

PARTITIONS AND DIVIDERS:

For spaces that will need to be divided, invest in lightweight or movable partitions that can be easily stored. Lightweight table top dividers made of fiberboard (such as Homasote) can be used to create study carrels on standard tables.

LIGHTING:

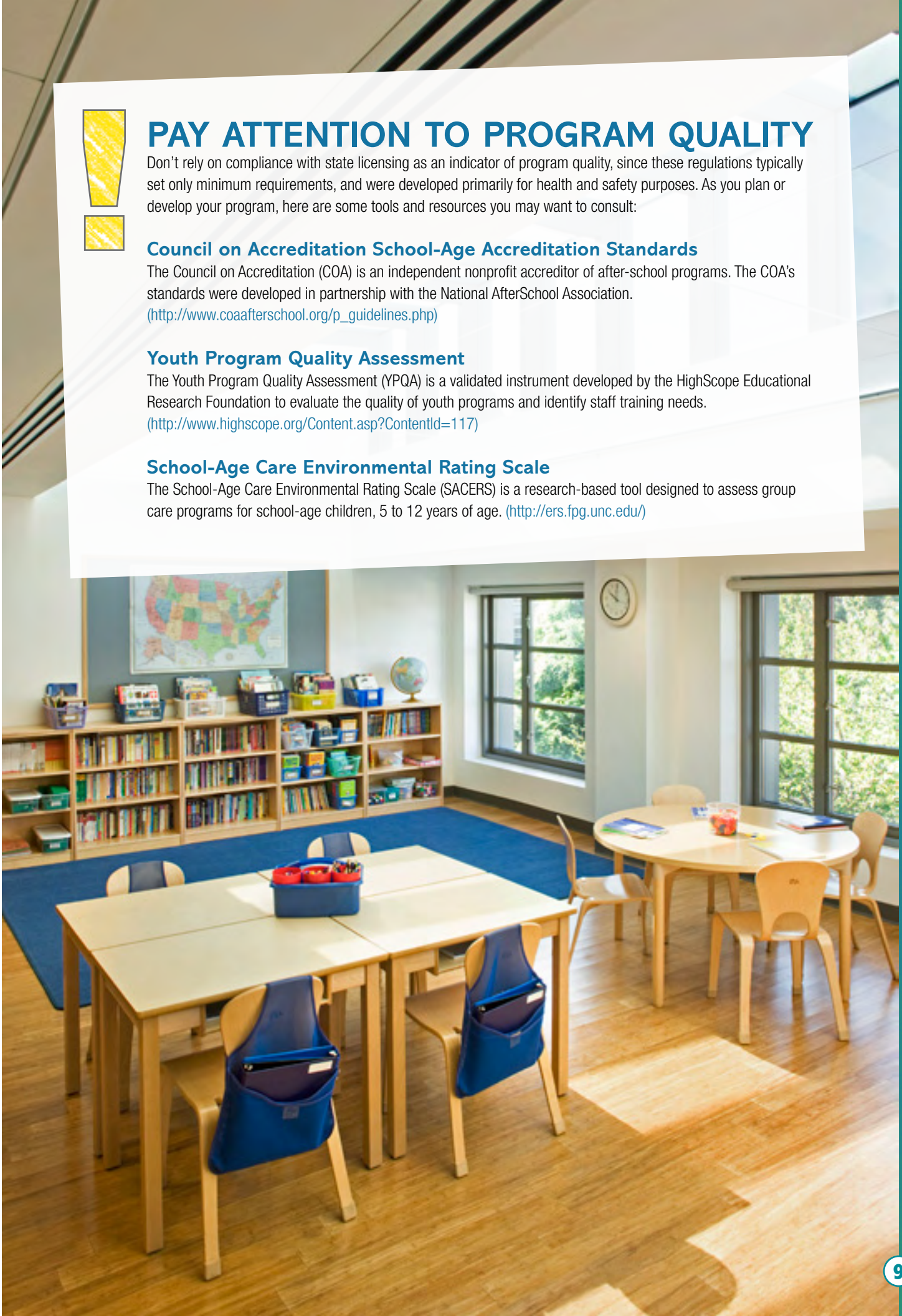
Think about different ways to use portable lighting. For example, table or floor lamps can help define an activity space and a light table or overhead projector can add light to the space and provide opportunities for exploration and dramatic play. Even a simple string of holiday lights can be used to create a festive or restful mood.

FLOOR COVERINGS:

A lightweight rug rolled out in a corner or specific area of the room will help to define that space and encourage children to gather there. Having a stack of individual carpet squares, pillows or gym mats on hand will allow children to create their own special spaces. Non-slip, water resistant mats or interlocking tiles can be used in a water play or art area.

DISPLAY:

Think about how to communicate with children and parents about your program in a portable way: anything from a foldable easel in the main entry to a laptop and projector that displays images or messages on a white wall. These are simple ways you can highlight your program's goals, post informational notices or display completed projects.



PAY ATTENTION TO PROGRAM QUALITY

Don't rely on compliance with state licensing as an indicator of program quality, since these regulations typically set only minimum requirements, and were developed primarily for health and safety purposes. As you plan or develop your program, here are some tools and resources you may want to consult:

Council on Accreditation School-Age Accreditation Standards

The Council on Accreditation (COA) is an independent nonprofit accreditor of after-school programs. The COA's standards were developed in partnership with the National AfterSchool Association. (http://www.coaafterschool.org/p_guidelines.php)

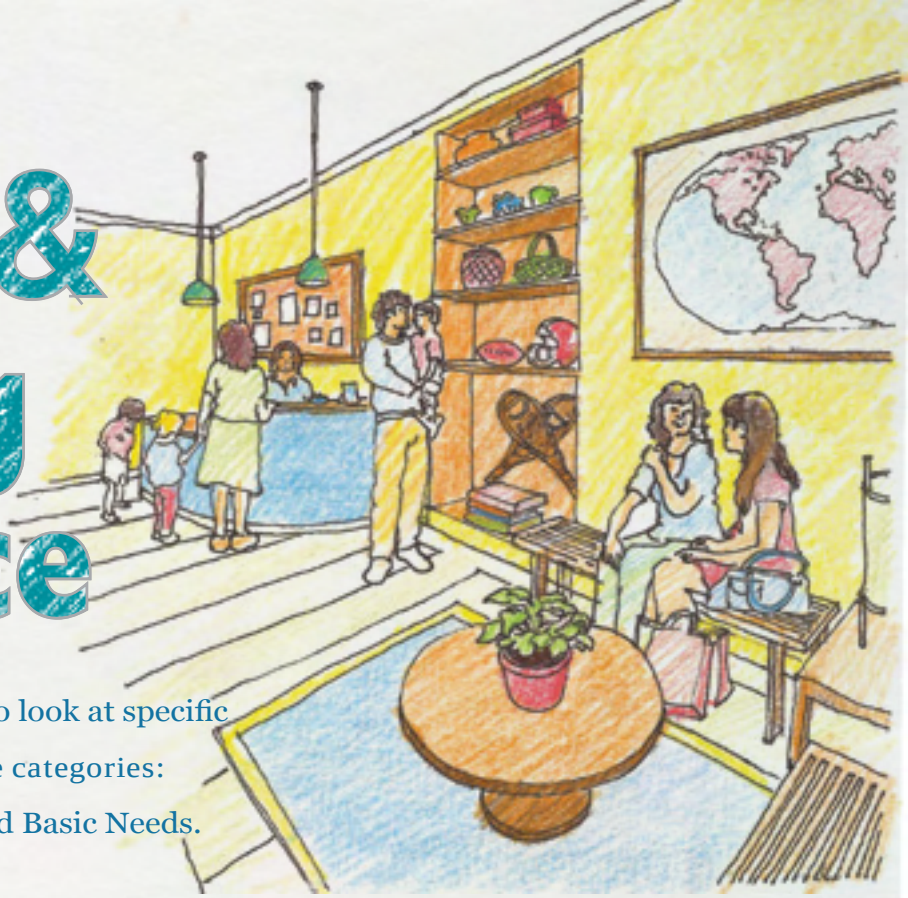
Youth Program Quality Assessment

The Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) is a validated instrument developed by the HighScope Educational Research Foundation to evaluate the quality of youth programs and identify staff training needs. (http://www.highscope.org/Content.asp?ContentId=117)

School-Age Care Environmental Rating Scale

The School-Age Care Environmental Rating Scale (SACERS) is a research-based tool designed to assess group care programs for school-age children, 5 to 12 years of age. (http://ers.fpg.unc.edu/)

Planning & Designing Your Space



Your next step in the design process is to look at specific spaces, which we have broken into three categories: Entry/Gathering, Program Activities and Basic Needs.

ENTRY/GATHERING

ENTRY AREA

While you may think of the entry as simply the way you get into the space, it often serves a range of functions, including:

- Setting the tone and making a good first impression.
- Providing a place to sign in and out and communicate with families.
- Serving as a central hub where parents may informally meet and chat.
- Providing a place to store children's belongings.
- Providing security to the space.

SETTING THE TONE

Your entry area can communicate a lot about your program's mission and culture and set the tone for student and parent expectations. Make sure the space looks and feels like a safe, inviting place. When designing your entry area, think about warm lighting, comfortable seating, and conveying a child-friendly, non-institutional feel. Use display areas, photos and other images to give visitors a taste of what they will find inside.

KEEPING OUT WEATHER AND DIRT

Ideally your center will have a vestibule with an airlock between the entry area and the outdoors to keep cold air outside during the winter and cooled air inside during the summer. Install a walk-off mat or metal grate (or even a simple non-slip rug) to keep dirt, moisture and pollutants out of the building.

RECEPTION

Your entry area should be set up to efficiently manage the flow of children and adults coming and going from your program. Think about how many children will enter the building all at once and how they will be accommodated. Make sure you have a logical and easily understood check-in and check-out process. If space allows, place a reception desk near the entrance with child- and adult-height counters where sign-in can take place. Since this space will likely serve as a waiting area for visitors, include a few chairs or a bench.

SECURITY

The amount and type of security at your center will depend on your program's individual needs. If you occupy shared space, security decisions may be dictated by building design choices that have been made by others. But every program should consider incorporating certain basic security measures, such as:

- A single means of entry for children, parents and other visitors that enables a receptionist or another staff member to monitor and control entry.
- Adequate exterior lighting at your entry points and parking areas, ideally programmed to automatically turn on at dusk.
- Alarms on any locked doors. (Note that these may be part of an elaborate installed security system or can be as simple as single door units available from most large retailers for less than $100.)

For centers that have more control over their space it is ideal to have a locked entry door with a system that enables parents to let themselves in using key cards, access codes or thumbprint swipes. Many of these systems are part of larger center management software programs that assist with things such as tracking child attendance. There are many considerations for choosing the right security system, including:

- Ease of use by families who may have multiple family members picking up a child (for example, an access code may be more easily shared among multiple family members than a key card).
- Ease of use for the center (for example, you should use software that is compatible with your current computer system and is easy to navigate).
- Ongoing utilization or maintenance costs (some systems have a one-time only cost while others have monthly fees).
- Access to a service plan for the system, including the length of the warranty.

STORING PERSONAL BELONGINGS

Install lockers or cubbies near the entry area, or closer to where children will gather for activities. Lockers can be stackable to save space but should be large enough to accommodate backpacks, lunch boxes, and sporting gear. Traditional open cubbies are a good option for younger children, but older students may prefer wooden or metal lockers that close and lock. Secure storage should be available for laptops, musical instruments and other expensive equipment. Plan for one cubby or locker per child and consider a separate coat hanging area for bulky outerwear if you are not using full-size cubbies. Incorporate a low bench or some stools nearby to make it easier for children to remove boots or other foul weather gear.

GATHERING/COMMONS

A central gathering area or commons provides a place for children to congregate and have unstructured time before the formal program activities begin. Some children might still be trickling in from different schools, signing in and putting away their belongings, while others can be setting up activities, getting a snack, or just relaxing with friends. Think about how to signal the path from the entry to the commons: incorporate a change in floor material, paint color on the walls, or put runners or colored tape on the floor.

The gathering area might be one large space or individual classrooms for children in the same age group. Wherever children gather informally, strategically select and arrange furniture, carpets and lighting to create an inviting place to hang out. Use a variety of comfortable seating such as bean bag or other soft chairs. Green plants or an aquarium are naturally calming and can help set the tone for the space.

To section off a larger room, use low walls, furniture or runners. In a large or shared space such as a school gym, grouping tables together in one area of the room and providing low-key activities can create a gathering area. Or, push tables aside and roll out a lightweight rug and some pillows for a gathering space that can later double as a reading area. In some centers, the gathering area can also double as a café/snack area.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Many centers will not include all of the areas described below for reasons of space, budget, or specific program needs. At the same time, many centers will require or desire areas not highlighted here which can support specific activities and program goals (e.g., publishing a newsletter, playing soccer, carrying out community service projects, etc.). In the end, you should aspire to design your space to provide a functional and stimulating environment that is tailored to your program's needs and allows children and staff to be successful, have fun, and learn.

EATING/COOKING

Creating a program that has a healthy and creative relationship to food offers many opportunities to enrich your after-school center. The more ways you can find to integrate cooking projects, nutrition, gardening and multicultural awareness into what would otherwise be just snack time, the better. This means carefully planning the space and gathering the equipment needed to prepare meals and snacks, and thinking about how to make your kitchen and eating space accessible and child-friendly, while promoting independence and good habits such as cleaning up, sharing, and working together.

CREATING A SNACK OR CAFÉ AREA

Ideally the snack area should be centrally located but out of the way of main activities so that children can drop in, get a snack, and sit and socialize while they eat. Try to give the eating area a distinct look and feel that does not resemble a traditional school cafeteria. Think about providing a variety of seating options, such as booths or round tables for four to six children, or a counter with stools. Food can be set out on a low table or counter where the youngest children can serve themselves. Choose floor coverings and furniture fabrics that are easy to wipe, mop and vacuum. If you have access to the outdoors, consider purchasing several picnic tables or large oil cloths that can be spread out to enable children to eat outside during the warmer months.

DESIGNING THE KITCHEN

First, determine whether you will need a kitchen that can accommodate the preparation of hot meals on site or just supports catered items. If your after-school program operates full day during school vacations and summer months, think about how breakfast and lunch will be prepared and served and how this affects the design of the space. Before setting up a kitchen, check with your licensing agency and local health department. If you are designing a new kitchen,

For more information on types of kitchens and kitchen design, see LISC's Resource Guide Volume 2 on *Designing Early Childhood Centers*, page 32.

NOTE:

If you have very limited space or are in a shared space, create an area with portable appliances including a small cooler, a microwave at adult height, a water fountain, and a hand sanitizer station. If you don't have access to a kitchen somewhere in your building, locate a small refrigerator or cooler and sink in the room. A clean vinyl oil cloth can be laid over desks or a tabletop to designate where snacks are served.

engage an architect to help lay out the space, select appliances and materials, and ensure compliance with codes.

Regardless of whether your kitchen is a full commercial kitchen for meal preparation or an activity kitchen designed for snack prep and cooking projects, ideally it should be designed to support easy use by children and adults, facilitate adult interaction with students, allow for clear supervision, and provide a non-institutional atmosphere for children to learn about cooking and food. Plan to have work surfaces at both adult and child height, as well as enough space for a small group to work together. Make sure to locate appliances such as the stove and microwave so that they can only be used with adult supervision. In some areas local code does not allow children to be in a kitchen where meals are being prepared. If this is the case, consider a low counter adjacent to the kitchen where children can watch and participate in what's happening without actually being in the space.

Storage is especially important in a kitchen space so plan accordingly. In order to purchase food and supplies at the lowest prices you will need to buy in bulk, so be sure your kitchen can accommodate sufficient dry food storage, freezer space, areas for paper goods, and food preparation materials.

Your kitchen space can provide opportunities to encourage environmentally-friendly practices. Choose energy-efficient and water-conserving appliances and fixtures, as well as durable, environmentally-friendly materials. Cooking activities can also be a great way to incorporate and encourage green practices – from buying locally grown products to recycling and composting, and even having children participate in growing food onsite. See LISC's Resource Guide on *Greening Early Childhood Centers* for guidance on green design materials as well as ideas for environmental education.

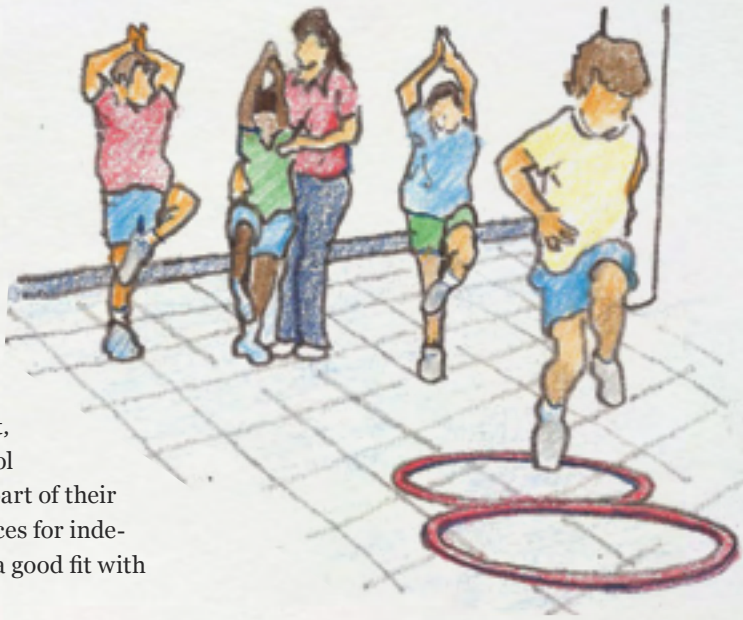
PLAY!

Before beginning formal schooling, the vast majority of children's learning – whether in preschool, backyards, or vacant lots – comes through play and exploration.

Play is the single most important way that young children learn, and opportunities for play should continue long after they reach their fifth birthday and enter kindergarten. Informal learning through play is a wonderful way for a school-age program to support cognitive development as well as social, creative and motor skills.

Your space should be designed to support a variety of types of play, including active play, dramatic play, quiet games, and construction-based play. Play can take many forms, some of which require a specific physical infrastructure (such as basketball), and others that could happen nearly anywhere (like playing cards or board games).

ACTIVE PLAY



Active play will provide much needed physical exercise, and encourage children to interact co-operatively, improve coordination and stamina, and gain self-confidence. Design your indoor and outdoor spaces to encourage physical activity by providing adequate space and appropriate equipment for a wide variety of active play. Whether it is running and chasing games, jumping on a trampoline, or playing a group sport, for many children the time spent at an after-school program might be the most flexible and creative part of their day. Think about how you can offer different choices for independent play as well as organized sports that are a good fit with your mission and make sense in your space.

INDOOR ACTIVE PLAY

Whenever possible, provide a large, open space indoors where children can engage in active play. This could be a gym space or cafeteria, a dedicated room, or even just a long, wide hallway if licensing and code allow. This space should be accessible year-round, but will be most valuable when it is too cold, wet or icy to go outdoors. Make sure you provide the amount of square feet per child specified by licensing, but whenever possible, aim to offer more than this minimum requirement in order to achieve a higher quality environment.

Consider offering sports that are not available during the school day, such as badminton or ping-pong. Older children will be able to master more complicated activities such as yoga, aerobics or martial arts. The indoor play area can be equipped with movable carpet blocks, soft rubber balls, jump ropes, gym or yoga mats, hula hoops, parachutes and whatever other equipment encourages physical activity. These items can be easily stored away and brought out to transform a space.

The space should have an appropriate floor surface such as wood, linoleum, padded carpeting or resilient athletic flooring. If your program includes activities such as aerobics or dance, you may want to consider specialty flooring, although these surfaces may be more expensive. Certain activities, like gymnastics or climbing, may also require mats.

Be sure to provide access to drinking water in these areas, and if possible have a bathroom close by. Also, keep in mind that your active play area is likely to be a fairly loud space and should be acoustically segregated from quiet areas that support homework or reading.

OUTDOOR ACTIVE PLAY

If you have a dedicated outdoor space, such as a play yard, resist the urge to simply purchase traditional play equipment. Think instead about how you can create a space that encourages a variety of play by subdividing the space and providing a range of equipment and materials to accommodate different activities. For example, if an organized sport such as basketball is a priority for your program, you may want to set aside a significant portion of your open outdoor space for this activity. But think about using at least some of the space for other purposes. You can create discrete spaces for other activities by painting the ground to accommodate hopscotch or four-square games.

Provide a variety of equipment and supplies, including tricycles and scooters, jump ropes, hula hoops, racquets, baseball or whiffle ball bats and different types of balls. Don't forget helmets, shin guards and other safety equipment. Also, children will find ways to invent their own form of play if you give them the space and tools to explore – so consider providing hollow blocks, planks, containers, and other loose parts to encourage them to build and create. Make sure you have a secure but accessible storage area that allows children to select equipment and put it away on their own.

You can also create areas that bring more nature into the outdoor play space, such as grassy sections, planting boxes, large flat stones and areas for water and sand play. To vary the playground landscape you can mound up one area to become a small hill, set up a climbing wall, create an area for growing flowers and vegetables, or create a winding path for scooters, tricycles and chase games for the younger children.

Refer to the Equipment, Furnishings and Supplies Worksheet on pages 30-33
for a list of equipment and supplies that will support these dramatic play and other activities.

DRAMATIC PLAY, QUIET GAMES, AND CONSTRUCTION-BASED PLAY

DRAMATIC PLAY

Dramatic play can range from noisy, large-group playacting to quiet, small-group play with dolls and other accessories. Younger children might need more props for playing house or creating puppet shows, while older children can create videos or work with staff on role-playing exercises around social issues. A variety of settings will inspire different levels of dramatic play such as a housekeeping or dress-up area for younger children and a performance/video studio for older children. For all children, consider how dramatic play can include elements of dance, acting and working with light and sound.

There are many ways to use your space to inspire dramatic play among all age groups:

- A raised platform easily becomes a performance area for staging shows.
- Elevating the floor surface with a few steps will create a natural seating area.
- Track lighting will allow children to control lighting and create a stage-like feel.
- A wall-mounted spotlight or overhead projector can be manipulated to highlight a stage or create shadows for shadow puppets that can be enhanced with color films.
- An open shelf or low bookshelf can be converted into a mini-puppet theater, with fabric hung to create a stage curtain.
- A large wall in the dramatic play area can be adorned with different backdrops and/or a large mirror for children to view their own actions or performances.

QUIET GAMES

Quiet games can take place in many different areas of the center. Floor cushions or bean bag chairs can encourage a relaxed atmosphere for playing with cards, board games or puzzles on the floor or low tables. You can also create outdoor spaces in sheltered areas (under a tree or a covered porch) so that children can play quiet games outdoors when weather permits. Locate storage for games and puzzles as close to the play area as possible and make sure it's accessible and well-labeled so that children can choose games and clean up after themselves.

CONSTRUCTION-BASED PLAY

Construction-based play can range from building with blocks and shape systems to making cardboard box cities, kites or paper airplanes, habitable blanket houses and forts, or large outdoor construction projects. The equipment and space required for this type of play depends on the scale of activity and materials that your students will use, but at a minimum will need work tables or floor area and appropriate storage. If possible, have a project area designated for this type of play so that children can leave built projects out overnight and work on a project over the course of several days or even weeks. Since this type of play is very compatible with art, science and math curricula, it may make sense for these spaces to overlap.

SCIENCE

Science in the after-school setting offers an opportunity for exploration both indoors and outdoors, and should be as hands-on as possible.

Ideally, after-school science activities should build on children's innate curiosity and penchant for exploration and discovery, and guide them toward scientific investigation. This means taking science seriously, but helping children see it in their everyday lives and not just in a textbook. The link between science and nature is key, whether it is placing seedlings on a window ledge to grow, participating in outdoor gardening projects or going on nature hikes. Children should feel comfortable with experimenting, making a mess, and asking lots of questions!

Try to locate the science area near a window for access to natural light and the outdoors, so that projects can occur inside or outside. Provide ample work surfaces for experiments and exploration and locate a sink nearby for access to water and easy clean up. Arrange work tables to seat four to six children for group activities, and make sure children can view demonstrations easily. Surfaces should be made of durable, easy-to-clean materials: melamine works well for tables and counters, and linoleum or tile are good choices for flooring.

Plan to have lockable, overhead storage cabinets for tools and equipment. Invest in clear plastic bins for sorting objects and collections. Consider open shelving and counter space for display of found objects and children's work, and where ongoing projects can be left out for several days.

MUSIC

Music programs are often the first to be cut from school budgets, so access to music in an after-school program can be a welcome change, and may be the only exposure children get to an important developmental experience. You can create a vibrant music program by introducing children to a wide range of musical genres – through listening, singing, recording, and playing instruments.

Exposure to different types of music can teach children about culture, language and history, and the simple presence of music to listen to can be very enriching if approached in an organized way. Where possible, find ways to make music a visual element as well, by displaying instruments, photos of musicians, or old album covers.

LISTENING

You can create a listening area simply by wheeling out a cart with instruments and/or a sound system, but when space allows, consider creating a dedicated listening space. A reasonably high-quality audio system and a room (or part of a room) that has some surface to absorb sound – such as carpeting or soft furniture or sound absorbing wall panels or cork boards – is all that is needed to create a space where children can focus on the music. You can also install sound-absorbing panels or cork boards on the walls to minimize sound traveling through other parts of the space.

PLAYING AND PRACTICING

In addition to the musical skills and knowledge gained, studies have shown that learning to play an instrument has a positive effect on reading skills, math ability, vocabulary, and other components of cognitive development. Simple percussion instruments can be used in either teacher-directed or improvisational ways to learn about rhythm and sound. Add in different voices (singing, scat or rap) and children can create and enjoy making music without sophisticated equipment or years of instruction. Consider investing in an upright piano or keyboards or other musical instruments so that children can take lessons. Older children can also experiment with making musical instruments (see: http://www.artistshelpingchildren.org/musicalinstrumentsartscraftstideashandmadekids.html) and may enjoy mixing and recording music on a computer program like Garage Band. Some of these activities will require spaces with a higher degree of acoustical separation from other areas in the center. If music lessons will be provided as part of your program, you may need to consider practice rooms or areas as well as sufficient secure storage for instruments.

PERFORMING

Musical performances can take place on a small stage area that is also used for dramatic arts and imaginative play. The story steps in your library can be used as audience seating for performances at certain times of the day. Any open area, such as your gathering space, can double as a location for informal sing-a-longs or other musical activities. Visiting musicians and volunteers can add variety to the music program. Think about how your space will accommodate these visitors, and invest in a few tall stools and some music stands so that they can set up their instruments and equipment anywhere in the facility. If you have access to an open outdoor area, performances or group lessons can also take place outside in nicer weather. A small amphitheater carved into a hill can house outdoor performances and also create an ideal spot for dramatic play or just hanging out.

NOTE: You will need to store more delicate or expensive portable listening equipment or musical instruments in a secure, lockable place out of the way of common traffic. Large bins or baskets can be used for storing durable musical instruments such as small drums, maracas or tambourines.

THE ARTS

As with music and recess, fine art and studio art have been cut from many school programs in recent years. An after-school center is an ideal place to allow children to explore art in a fun and inventive way. To make the most of this potential, plan an art space that inspires creativity and is equipped with a variety of art materials and helpful displays.

Think about all the different types of art activities your program might offer and the type of work area, equipment, supplies, and storage you will need.

Here are some examples of different art activities to consider:

- Painting
- Coloring and drawing
- Pottery and sculpture
- Beading and jewelry making
- Graphic arts, collage and illustration
- Paper making
- Sewing and knitting
- Video and photography

You will need to provide an art project area where children can get messy and creative. Ideally, locate the art area near natural light, and include full spectrum task lighting over specific project areas. Set up large-group tables with an easy-to-wipe surface. A deep, wide sink will allow for access to water and easy cleaning of multiple hands and supplies. A removable strainer will reduce clogs, and if you plan to do pottery, install a plaster trap in your sink drain as well. Easels and a light table will allow for a wider variety of art activities. Pin up images with color ranges, such as a color chart, and a variety of artwork for inspiration.

NOTE:

Appropriate storage will help make art supplies accessible and keep the space clean and organized. In a shared space, consider one or two art carts with tools and supplies in labeled bins and on shelves that can be rolled out for art activities. In a dedicated space, supplies can be stored in labeled drawers, cabinets and clear plastic bins. Certain supplies can be arranged in easily accessible locations and become part of the display in the space.

What you hang on the walls says a lot about your program. Finding the right balance of fine art prints, posters, and student work can bring color, message and education to students and families. Showing off children's work will help them understand that their art is valued, connect with parents and visitors, and liven up the center. Consider installing picture rails, display shelves and/or art hanging systems with track lighting in key places in the center. In a shared space, a portable display at the entry area can be used to show art projects. In some cases a permanent "art gallery" can be established even in shared spaces or public buildings to provide opportunities for budding artists to show off their work to the world.

In good weather, think about moving some art activities outdoors, and invest in portable art boards or small easels that can be easily moved back and forth. Children can also be engaged in larger outdoor projects, such as painting on mural paper, or simpler activities like sketching, painting and photographing natural subjects, or even chalk drawing for younger children.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT, HOMEWORK AND READING

Every after-school program will have its own approach to balancing a variety of enrichment activities with academic support and homework. A program with a strong focus on tutoring and schoolwork will need to dedicate more space to these efforts and have a more elaborate "academic center," while other programs may only require a few study carrels or quiet nooks for occasional use by children doing schoolwork or other projects.

QUIET WORK ZONE

The quiet zone should include a variety of tables and study carrels where children can work individually without too much distraction. In a large or shared space, this zone could include tables and chairs in quiet corners around the room or separated from the main room with bookcases, shelving or portable dividers such as rolling or folding partitions made of sound-absorbing materials and covered with cork-board or fabric. If you are incorporating comfortable chairs, upholstered furniture or rugs, the quiet work zone may be able to overlap with your gathering space. This area could also double as the library, with books and reference materials displayed for easy access.

COLLABORATIVE WORK ZONE

For the collaborative work zone, small tables and soft movable furniture can be arranged so that children can work in groups with staff, tutors or volunteers. This area should include a white board or easel and audio visual equipment, and should give children the flexibility to move around as needed. If space permits, this more acoustically lively zone could be in a separate room, but wherever it's located, it should not disturb the quiet area.

LIBRARY

In addition to tables and study carrels, a library space should include a mix of low and high shelves with books for different ages, a comfortable seating area including rugs and soft furnishings, story steps or a group reading area, a display area for books, and a place to check out books. The space should be relatively protected and quiet with a mix of task lighting and ambient lighting. In a shared space, books can be stored in sturdy rolling shelves that can be pulled out to create the reading area. On a nice day, children can take books outside and sit on benches or steps. Consider a rolling book cart with books, clipboards, and pens or pencils that can travel from inside to outside.

COMPUTERS/TECHNOLOGY

Start by deciding how computers and technology will support your program goals. While some programs may want to keep computer use to a minimum, or even have a screen-free environment, in many cases the after-school program will be the only opportunity some children have to access computers for research, typing papers, and homework support, as well as more sophisticated activities like video production or newsletter development.

Once you have set your goals and determined how you want to use technology in your program, you can make decisions about the computers themselves (how many, memory, screen size), accessories (printers, scanners) and networking requirements.

Computers can either be set up in a dedicated space or integrated throughout the center. Traditionally, computers, scanners and printers have been located together, but now wireless and network technologies allow for greater flexibility. If clustered in certain areas, computers should be located 18 inches apart with room at the desk or table for papers and other student materials. Seating should be two feet from the screen for optimal viewing and chairs should be comfortable and supportive. Be sure to locate fixed computers in areas where the sun isn't shining on the screens and where adults passing by can see what the children are working on.

Plan ahead so that you have adequate power to computer locations and Internet access where required. Depending on your space and the number of computers you need, you may want your electrician to install dedicated outlets for a hub of computers, or add outlets for more flexibility with your computer layout. Setting up a wireless modem to provide Internet access is an easy option too. Make sure cables can be managed either through prewired jacks (in new construction or major renovations) or by using cable ties to keep them safely out of the way. Install power strips and surge protectors directly to the underside of computer tables so that wires do not become tangled or unplugged.

Install locks on doors to dedicated computer rooms and storage areas. Make sure to keep all computer equipment in a cool, dry place. If your computers are networked on a common server, plan for a secure location for the server (a small server might just be an extra computer which needs to be kept out of the way of accidents and spills while a larger server might require an air-conditioned room or enclosure).

Basic Needs

No matter how much space you have, and whether you are improving an existing facility or creating a new one, it is important to consider your center's basic needs. These are the physical places that support staff in their work and allow daily functions to proceed smoothly, resulting in the best possible experience for children and families.

ADULT SPACES

To be effective in their work, staff needs designated spaces to carry out program preparation and administrative duties, meet with colleagues and parents, and take care of their own personal needs. Be sure to carve out specific places for these functions, even if you have space constraints.

ADMINISTRATIVE SPACE

Ideally you will be able to set up a relatively quiet, defined administrative area, equipped with a desk or tabletop, chairs, lockable storage, a computer and printer, telephone and fax, and copy machine. This area should be separated from program activities and accessible only by staff, but if it cannot be located in a separate room, it should be set apart with furniture or a screen to signal to children that this space is not for them. Situating the administrative space near the entry area can allow staff to monitor people entering and leaving the center.

If space allows, it is helpful to include a private meeting area that can be used for interviews, individual discussions with parents, child-to-child conversations under adult supervision, or other purposes.

STAFF SUPPORT SPACES

Staff members need places to meet with one another, prepare lesson plans and other work, and take breaks. Depending on your space availability and the number of staff you need to accommodate, these functions can be housed in one, two or three separate rooms. If you have the luxury of having three separate spaces, each can be tailored to its specific function:

- The **meeting room** should have a small conference table, storage, and room for a projector and screen for staff training or other presentations.
- The **resource/work room** should have ample work surfaces, bookshelves for resource materials and curriculum kits, and access to a computer, printer, scanner, copy machine and fax machine.
- The **break area** should include comfortable seating, a table, and a small kitchenette or at a minimum a mini-refrigerator and microwave oven. This could also be a good location for staff lockers if space permits.

Think carefully about the location of each staff support area in the center. It may work best to locate meeting space near the front entry if it will also be used for things like parent meetings or job interviews, while the break area might make more sense off the main circulation path and out of view.

ADULT BATHROOMS

Adults will need their own bathroom facility, separate from the children. Local building codes generally require a certain number of fixtures per adult, so make sure to plan accordingly based on how many staff members you have and the expected flow of parents in and out of the center for

pick-up and drop-off as well as other family services. When locating the adult bathroom, consider convenience for staff as well as how a parent or other adult visitors can have easy access without disrupting the program. Think about how your staff travels to and from your facility and, if possible, provide a shower for staff who want to bike or run to work. (Refer to the section on Children's Bathrooms below for more information on fixtures and finish materials.)

CHILDREN'S BATHROOMS

In addition to complying with all local and state codes and licensing requirements (for example, most states require separate toilet facilities for boys and girls over five years of age), make sure that the children's bathrooms are accessible from activity spaces for ease of use and to facilitate supervision. Consider the age groups you are serving and install fixtures at the appropriate child heights. Select surfaces and flooring that are washable and easy to maintain. A good option for walls is FRP (fiberglass reinforced plastic). When installed in bathrooms these panels are resistant to mold and mildew, have high moisture and stain resistance, and are very easy to clean. They are also available in a variety of decorative styles, with some designed to look like beadboard or even ceramic tile. For the floors, use sheet vinyl or linoleum with very few joints. Include a floor drain if possible to make cleaning easier and to help ensure that any accidental flooding does not make its way to other parts of your space. Finally, make sure there is adequate lighting and ventilation.

FIRST AID/ GET WELL AREA

You may want to consider creating a space for a child who is hurt or not feeling well. In this area it is helpful to have a quiet place for the child to sit or lie down, separate from the other children but still supervised by an adult. Keep necessary supplies in a locked cabinet, and mount a first-aid kit on the wall. Ideally this space should be adjacent to a bathroom, but at a minimum have a sink in the area. Install good lighting that can be dimmed, make sure there is proper ventilation, and use easy-to-clean surfaces. Check with your licensing agency about specific local requirements for the sick area.

CLIMATE CONTROL

If you have the good fortune to be designing a space from the ground up, make sure you consider your ability to control the temperature in various zones. Having different heating and cooling zones within a space and installing thermostats in different rooms will allow you to adjust temperatures based on different activities taking place. If you are in a space that does not have operable windows, a fresh air exchange feature can be installed as part of your HVAC system.

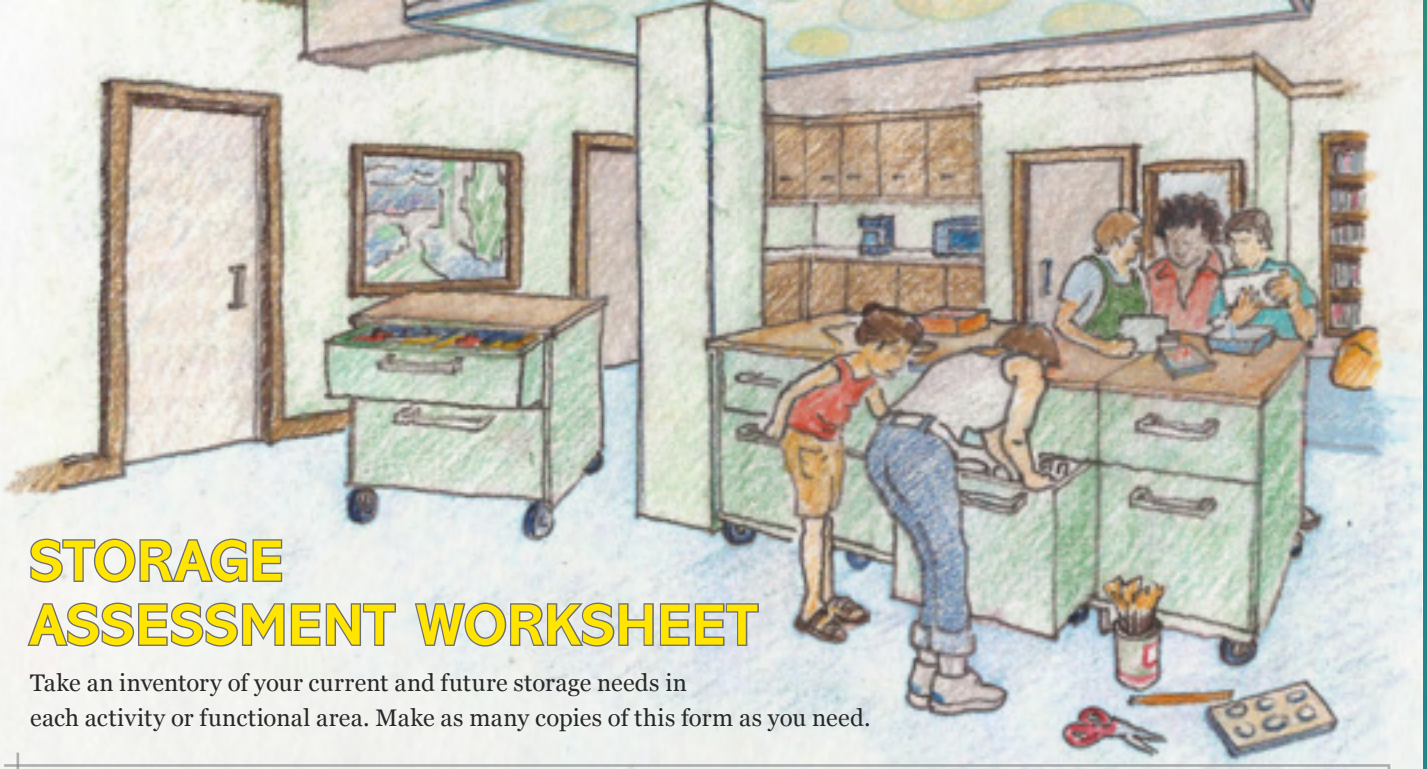
MAINTENANCE

As you design your space, think about the long-term maintenance of your facility. Whenever possible, choose materials that are durable and easy to clean. Plan to have a janitor's closet to securely store cleaning supplies and equipment out of children's reach.

STORAGE

Having enough storage allows your spaces to be better organized and function more effectively. Accessible storage lets your staff spend more time interacting with the children and less time looking for things, and allows children to be more independent.

Use the *Storage Assessment Worksheet* on the following page to help you figure out your storage needs. If you are planning a new facility, work with your design team to translate your storage needs into specific design features. Make sure that the appropriate type of storage (open vs. closed, bulk, point of use, child-accessible, lockable, on-site vs. off-site, indoor vs. outdoor) is provided for each storage need. Identify all of your current storage areas including closets, shelving and cabinets, and determine what is still needed. Look for new storage opportunities such as walls or alcoves that could have a shelf or cabinet installed or logical locations for furniture to purchase (such as an armoire, bureau, cabinet or desk) that incorporates storage. For items not used every day, consider mounting wall cabinets which are readily available at most big box stores. If you keep a sturdy step stool on hand, staff can make good use of space higher up on the wall that otherwise would be wasted.



STORAGE ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET

Take an inventory of your current and future storage needs in each activity or functional area. Make as many copies of this form as you need.

Activity/ Functional Area	Primary activities that take place in this area	Materials/equipment that require storage	Where to store these items	
			Existing Storage	Needed Storage
Example: Entry Area	• Arrival • Sign-in • Storing personal items • Pick-up • Parent conversations with teachers/staff	• Sign-in book • Outerwear • Backpacks • Children's work	• Reception desk with lockable drawers • Cubbies or lockers • Coat closet	• Display shelves for children's project work • File rack for children's homework

Ambiance and Aesthetics

Think about the overall look and feel of your space, and how the physical environment reflects the mission and philosophy of your program. If the design, finishes, furniture and display are carefully thought out, they can communicate a lot about your center and make children, families and staff feel welcome and relaxed.

After-school spaces support many functions and activities, each of which may require a different setting, character and tone, but individual spaces should feel like they are part of an overall family of related spaces with a consciously chosen center aesthetic. An after-school space isn't a house, but should be comfortable and inviting. It isn't an office, but it must support the business of running an organization. It isn't a school, yet the goal is to encourage learning and exploration. You will need to strike the right balance for your space.

Here are some initial steps to take to achieve an appropriate and consistent look for your center:

- **Visit places that encourage learning and exploration,** such as children's or science museums, playgrounds, community gardens or even artists' studios. Get ideas about how different colors and materials make you feel, and what might work for the children, program and community. Avoid gimmicky themes that will quickly seem outdated.
- **Draw inspiration from your immediate surroundings.** Are there elements of the building's architecture, site or neighborhood that could be incorporated into your center's look?
- **Incorporate elements of different cultures** represented in the population you serve. Consider using multilingual signage or posters, art or graphic design images, photos of landscapes, furnishings or fabrics from different cultures or countries.
- **Start a notebook to collect pictures and examples** of rooms, colors, fabrics, furnishings and equipment that you like. This will help you communicate your ideas with an architect or designer.

Above all, try to think beyond a simple "decorating" exercise for your center. Find ways to carefully integrate interesting and relevant design elements to create a space that has its own special identity and is appealing and welcoming to children and their families.

LIGHTING

Most decisions about lighting are about quantity rather than quality of light, location, and the ability to control the lighting source – all of which can have a significant impact on the ambiance of a space and how it is used. While you will need to have a reasonable level of overall lighting for certain activities, this does not require a uniform grid of fluorescent lights that generally makes a space appear institutional. Here are some basic principles to keep in mind:

- **Incorporate as much natural light as possible,** enabling you to minimize the use of artificial lighting.
- **Include a wide range of light sources** such as indirect light fixtures, accent lights and task lighting. Think about ways to use varied lighting to define physical spaces to support different activities, such as track lighting to create a stage area for dramatic play.
- **Consider investing in a light table or overhead projector,** both of which are multifunctional and allow for interesting light play.
- **Aim for a high level of control** with dimmers and multiple switches.

For more detailed information on best practices in lighting design, see LISC's Resource Guide Volume 2: *Designing Early Childhood Facilities*, pages 35-41.

COLOR

As with other sources of sensory stimulation, children need a broad and sophisticated introduction to color. They are capable of understanding ideas about hue, intensity and shading that come through exposure to their surrounding environment and the actual mixing of colors through art activities. At the same time, an overload of quantity and variety of color can result in a chaotic environment that does not support learning. Walls, ceilings, flooring and furnishings should be in fairly neutral tones and serve as a backdrop for the colorful objects, images and art found in different parts of the center.

The effects of color on mood should be considered in each area of your space. For example, warm hues such as reds, oranges and yellows are considered to be more stimulating, while cooler tones such as green, blue and violet are thought to be more calming. Stronger colors can be effective in reinforcing the look and feel that you are trying to achieve but should be used very carefully and intentionally.

MATERIALS AND TEXTURES

Exposing children to a wide range of materials and textures allows them to connect their building to nature (wood, stone, cork), industrial processes (plastics, fabrics) and history (brick, tile) as well as have varied tactile experiences. Look for ways to incorporate even small quantities of materials that will not only look interesting, but will support certain program activities. For example, use washable (and inspirational) mosaic tiles in your art room, bamboo flooring in your dance and movement space, cork or fabric wall panels for pin-up and acoustical purposes in the music listening area. Think about opportunities to introduce different materials and textures through furniture, art and other objects in your space.

ACOUSTICS

Think about adding sound to make spaces richer and more pleasant, but make sure you control the level and type of sound so that it is not disruptive. Certain sounds can be soothing and interesting, as well as mask the noise from conversations and other activities: a small fountain, wind chimes outside an open window, or soft music in a hangout area.

Acoustical control prevents sounds from traveling, and prevents individual spaces from being loud or full of echoes. A room with a plaster ceiling and walls and tile floor will likely be very noisy. Consider covering some surfaces with sound-absorbing materials such as carpeting, area rugs, acoustical walls or ceiling panels, or including fabric hangings, draperies, and soft furniture. Even outside noises can be moderated with outdoor plantings, window treatments and insulated windows. The design of rooms with specific acoustical requirements, such as rehearsal or performance spaces, may benefit from an acoustical consultant.

AROMAS

Aromas (positive) or odors (not so positive) can have a strong effect on how we experience and remember a particular place. The key things that can affect a center's aromascape are:

- **Ventilation:** Make sure that it is adequate and includes a high percentage of fresh air.
- **Cleaning protocol:** Cleaning needs to be thorough but not done with products that leave a strong residual odor. In addition, make sure all trash is emptied and removed from the building on a daily basis.
- **Kitchen location:** If baking or cooking are part of your program, take advantage of the enticing aromas that can result.
- **Aromatic plants:** Green plants such as oregano, mint, thyme and rosemary can add a pleasant aroma (and oxygen) to your space.

Resist the temptation to use commercial air fresheners in your space. These products often contain chemical contaminants that can be harmful, especially for children who suffer from allergies or asthma.

Equipment and Furnishings

Selecting and arranging good quality furnishings and equipment is one of the most important aspects of creating an inviting and functional after-school space. A few well-selected pieces can make a big difference in how a space operates for both children and adults.

Furnishings can range in quality, price and usefulness, so doing an inventory of existing furniture and clearly identifying your program's needs and desires should be the first step before acquiring anything new. Use the *Furnishings and Equipment Worksheet* at the end of this section to help prioritize your needs and organize your purchases.

EQUIPMENT AND FURNISHINGS GUIDELINES

There are a number of general guidelines to keep in mind when identifying and purchasing equipment and furnishings:

- Focus on quality and durability, not on immediate cost savings.
- Consider the weight of furniture and whether and how often you will need to relocate it.
- Keep in mind how much the furniture will be used, and make selections that can be easily cleaned and will hold up to the anticipated wear and tear.
- Make sure the furniture or equipment is scaled appropriately for the size and number of people that will be using it.
- Try to avoid the use of traditional, institutional furnishings and instead look for unique items that can help you create a special ambiance. For example, instead of using typical cafeteria-like tables, consider high tables with ice cream shop stools. Instead of acquiring many sturdy school-type chairs, incorporate bean bag and lounge chairs. Often these more home-like products can be purchased less expensively from local retailers than their more institutional counterparts.
- Use a variety of natural materials and warm colors to create an inviting, comfortable and non-institutional environment.
- Work with vendors known for high-quality and long-lasting products and who provide warranties and replacement parts. Don't forget to ask vendors about upcoming sales or discounts.

NOTE: A HANDYMAN CAN BE A SCHOOL-AGE PROGRAM'S BEST FRIEND!

Having a good, local handyman that your program can call upon will help in a variety of ways. First and foremost, the most cost-effective piece of equipment for your space may be the one you already have. A good handyman can often fix or revitalize a broken or tired piece of furniture. Or, you might find useful furnishings in need of minor repair at local yard sales and second-hand shops. You may also find that more affordable pieces of equipment require assembly, and paying to have these items put together will often be less costly than purchasing a more expensive pre-assembled item. Finally, a good handyman may be able to build some items on site, such as a loft, stage, bench or set of steps, which can save money and create unique features in your space. A custom piece designed specifically for your center may also help to organize your whole space and serve multiple functions, making it more cost-effective than several smaller pieces.

SELECTING AND PURCHASING EQUIPMENT & FURNISHINGS

There is a nearly endless array of options for purchasing furniture and equipment for your after-school space. In many cases these items can be acquired from local "big box" retailers such as Home Depot, Lowe's, Target, Walmart, Staples, etc. However, it may be more convenient to order these items from companies with a wider array of products available.

The following is intended to provide some guidance and ideas, but is not designed to be an all-inclusive list, nor should it be construed as an endorsement of any particular vendor or product.

COMPANY	WEBSITE	NOTES
Community Playthings	www.communityplaythings.com	High-quality wooden furniture that comes with a ten-year warranty. Of particular interest may be their "Room Scapes," which offer shelving units that double as room dividers.
Carolina	www.carolina.com	Science, math and exploration materials.
Discount School Supply	www.discountschoolsupply.com	A range of materials including dramatic play, games, balls and mats.
Flor	www.flor.com	Carpet squares, which you can use to create area rugs that can be easily cleaned and replaced.
Harrison & Company	www.harrisonandcompany.com	Educational furnishings with a home-like feel. Moderately priced items range from comfortable seating to café tables and stools to unique art easels.
Hertz Furniture	www.hertzfurniture.com	Good assortment of furniture basics, including: desks, tables, chairs, lockers, computer furniture, room dividers, chalkboards, outdoor equipment and more.
Ikea	www.ikea.com	Interesting, durable, residential furnishings with many items appropriate for use in after-school spaces, including tables, chairs, lighting, and storage units.
Imagination Playground	www.imaginationplayground.org	"Loose parts" for outdoor play, including their "Playground in a Box."
Jonti-Craft	www.jonticraft.com	Art furnishings including easels, dramatic play equipment, science materials, storage solutions and room dividers.
Kaplan	www.kaplanco.com	Active play equipment as well as books, science materials, art supplies, puzzles and games, music and videos.
KI Education	www.kieducation.com	A range of furnishings, including interesting tables and chairs, cafeteria and café furniture, lounge furniture, library items, and display products.
Kompan	www.kompan.com	A range of playground and fitness equipment, as well as resilient playground surfacing options.
Landscape Structures	www.playlsi.com	Outdoor playground structures ranging from basic pieces to elaborate systems. They offer handicapped accessible structures and some of their pieces include recycled materials.
Offi	www.offi.com	Higher priced but unique furniture, including many interesting chairs, stools and artistic lighting.
Overstock	www.overstock.com	A range of furnishings including stools, bean bag chairs, futons, and throw rugs. Good prices and low-cost shipping.
School Furnishings	www.schoolfurnishings.com	A wide range of school furnishings, including sturdy metal lockers, storage units, desks, unique tables and chairs, and computer carts.
School Outfitters	www.schooloutfitters.com	Furnishings designed for after-school programs including some unique items such as light boxes, projectors, pottery wheels, drafting and art supplies, and a range of music equipment.
Smith System	www.smithsystem.com	A range of school furnishings that are "Greenguard Certified" to meet indoor air quality standards for children's spaces. Good assortment of carts and portable equipment for shared spaces.
Studio UK	www.studiouk.net	High-end supplier of many materials used in Reggio Emilio classrooms, including unique storage cabinets and light tables.
Water Odyssey	www.waterodyssey.com	High-end water play options ranging from basic water sprayers to towers to in-ground water fountains.

WORKSHEET FOR EQUIPMENT, FURNISHINGS AND SUPPLIES

ACTIVITY/ FUNCTIONAL AREA	FURNISHINGS	QUANTITY	UNIT COST	TOTAL
ENTRY AREA				
	Entry or walk-off mat			
	Receptionist desk and/or counter for sign-in			
	Low benches or stools for children			
	Adult seating			
	Cubbies and hooks			
	Portable or fixed bulletin boards			
	Display space for project work			
	Other:			
	Other:			
GATHERING/COMMONS				
	Area rugs to define gathering areas			
	Soft furnishings for relaxing (pillows, cushions, etc.)			
	Comfortable seating (armchairs, sofas, bean bag chairs)			
	Low shelves for books, toys or games			
	Low tables for games, writing, laptop use			
	Media storage (iPod dock, CD player with speakers, computer or DVD player and screen)			
	Green plants, aquarium, fountain or other calming elements			
	Other:			
	Other:			
EATING				
	Tables/chairs or stools/counters at appropriate heights for serving and eating			
	Water cooler or drinking fountain			
	Refrigerator			
	Microwave			
	Trash/recycling bins			
	Serving/eating utensils			
	Plates, bowls, cups			
	Other:			
	Other:			
COOKING				
	Child-height work counters			
	Adult-height work counters			
	Stools			
	Prep table for cooking projects			
	Refrigerator			
	Microwave			
	Sink			
	Stove top			
	Oven			
	Trash/recycling bins			
	Storage for pots and pans			
	Open shelving for cookbooks and utensils			
	Dishwasher			
	Other:			
	Other:			

ACTIVITY/ FUNCTIONAL AREA	FURNISHINGS	QUANTITY	UNIT COST	TOTAL
INDOOR PLAY				
	Different floor levels (built-in steps, platform, loft)			
	Equipment for climbing area (carpet blocks, balance beam)			
	Equipment for gross-motor play (hula hoops, balance balls, jump ropes, etc.)			
	Comfortable seating for quiet games or construction play			
	Tables for games			
	Area rugs			
	Gym or yoga mats			
	Storage for large equipment			
	Toy chest, shelving and/or storage bins for smaller toys (blocks, board games, puppets, marbles, jacks, puzzles, etc.)			
	Dramatic play equipment:			
	Puppet theater and puppets			
	Costumes and props			
	Dollhouses, dolls and accessories			
	Track lighting to create a spotlight			
	Stereo equipment and microphones			
	Video recording and editing equipment			
	Other:			
	Other:			
OUTDOOR PLAY				
	Loose parts (blocks, planks, gutters, etc.)			
	Scooters/tricycles			
	Gardening tools/shovels			
	Hula hoops, balls, jump ropes			
	Bats, balls, racquets, nets			
	Specialized equipment to support specific areas of focus:			
	Weather station			
	Woodworking tools			
	Bird feeders/binoculars			
	Safety equipment (helmets, shin guards, safety glasses, padding)			
	Seasonal equipment (sleds, water play props)			
	Lockable storage for large equipment			
	Cart on wheels or other portable storage for smaller equipment and supplies			
	Other:			
	Other:			
SCIENCE				
	Countertop work area			
	Stools			
	Work tables and chairs			
	Sink			
	Storage shelves			
	Storage bins			
	Lockable cabinets			
	Computer with Internet access			
	Light table for tracing and examining translucent/transparent objects			
	Specialized equipment to support specific areas of focus:			
	Microscopes, binoculars, magnifying glasses			
	Digital cameras			
	Live plants			
	Science kits			
	Weather station			

WORKSHEET FOR EQUIPMENT, FURNISHINGS AND SUPPLIES, continued

ACTIVITY/ FUNCTIONAL AREA	FURNISHINGS	QUANTITY	UNIT COST	TOTAL
SCIENCE, continued				
	Aquarium, terrarium and/or classroom animals			
	Display space for project work or found objects (bones, shells, etc.)			
	Science puzzles and games			
	Other:			
	Other:			
MUSIC				
	Stereo with CD and mp3 players			
	Headphones			
	Speakers			
	Individual CD and mp3 players			
	Computer for mixing/recording music			
	Lockable storage			
	Sound-absorbing furniture, rugs, wall panels			
	Music stands			
	Instruments (recorders, guitars, drums, harmonicas, maracas/egg shakers, tambourines, pianos/electric keyboards)			
	Other:			
	Other:			
ARTS				
	Countertop work area			
	Stools			
	Work tables and chairs			
	Sink			
	Storage shelves			
	Storage bins			
	Drying racks			
	Easels and/or portable drawing boards			
	Specialized equipment to support specific areas of focus:			
	Kiln and pottery wheel			
	Darkroom			
	Sewing machine			
	Printer and scanner			
	Other:			
	Other:			
HOMEWORK/READING				
	Study carrels			
	Work tables and chairs			
	Bookshelves of different heights			
	Book display area			
	Mobile partitions			
	Rolling carts for books or supplies			
	Area rug or carpet			
	Comfortable seating (armchairs, bean bag chairs)			
	White board and/or projection screen			
	Access to computers, electronics and A/V equipment			
	Flexible task lighting (desk lamps, controllable overhead lighting)			
	Storage for school supplies			
	Other:			
	Other:			

ACTIVITY/ FUNCTIONAL AREA	FURNISHINGS	QUANTITY	UNIT COST	TOTAL
COMPUTERS/TECHNOLOGY				
	Comfortable chairs			
	Tables and/or workstations			
	Lockable storage for laptops and portable equipment			
	Whiteboards/flat screen display			
	Technology equipment:			
	Digital and video cameras			
	Microphones			
	AV projector			
	Multimedia production equipment			
	Other:			
	Other:			
ADMINISTRATIVE AREA				
	Desk or table top with chair			
	Lockable file storage			
	Storage for office supplies			
	Computer			
	Telephone			
	Printer/scanner			
	Copy/fax machine			
	Other:			
	Other:			
STAFF SUPPORT AREA				
	Meeting space:			
	Small conference table			
	Chairs			
	Storage			
	Projector and screen			
	Resource/work space:			
	Work surfaces			
	Bookshelves			
	Computers			
	Printer			
	Fax/copy machine/scanner			
	Break area:			
	Comfortable seating			
	Small table for eating			
	Mini-refrigerator			
	Microwave oven			
	Staff lockers			
	Other:			
	Other:			

Resources

The AfterSchool Alliance works with public officials, practitioners and advocates to raise awareness of the importance of after-school programs and advocate for more after-school investments. The website includes policy updates, issue briefs, and state-by-state information on after-school funding and policies. http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/

The After-School Corporation advocates for public funding for after-school programs, conducts research and evaluations, develops program models and strategies, and provides technical assistance to help communities develop after-school systems. The website provides news briefs, publications and information on funding opportunities. http://www.tascorp.org/

The National Afterschool Association (NAA), formerly the National School-Age Care Alliance, is a membership association for professionals who provide out-of-school time programs. The website includes information on professional development and training development opportunities, and a directory of online resources. http://www.naaweb.org/

The National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center (NCCIC) is a service of the Office of Child Care of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NCCIC is a national clearinghouse that provides comprehensive information on child care programs, licensing, health and safety, quality, financing, administration and other topics. State-by-state licensing information for school-age care can be found at: http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/resource/state-licensing-regulations-school-age-care

The National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST), formerly known as the School-Age Child Care Project, seeks to bring national attention to the importance of out-of-school time. NIOST produces a wide array of research and technical papers, assessment and training tools, and publications. http://www.niost.org/

The U.S. Department of Education has an after-school website with information on program operations, federal funding sources and other topics. http://www.afterschool.gov

PROGRAM QUALITY TOOLS:

The **Council on Accreditation (COA)** is an independent nonprofit accreditor of after-school programs. The COA's standards were developed in partnership with the National AfterSchool Association, and are based on generally accepted elements of best practice related to quality improvement, financial management, staff recruitment, training and supervision, as well as other areas. http://www.coaafterschool.org/p_guidelines.php

The **School-Age Care Environmental Rating Scale (SACERS),** developed by the FPG Child Development Institute (formerly the Frank Porter Graham Center), is designed to assess before- and after-school group care programs for school-age children five to 12 years of age. The scale evaluates *process quality*, including the various interactions that take place in a classroom among children, staff and parents, as well as the interactions children have with the materials and activities in their environment. The scale covers: Space and Furnishings; Health and Safety; Activities; Interactions; Program Structure; Staff Development; and Special Needs. http://ers.fpg.unc.edu/

The Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) is a validated instrument developed by the HighScope Educational Research Foundation to evaluate the quality of youth programs and identify staff training needs. YPQA assessments evaluate key aspects of program quality, including the learning environment, adult-child interaction, curriculum planning, parent involvement, staff qualifications and program management, among others. http://www.highscope.org/Content.asp?ContentId=117

Credits

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Community Investment Collaborative for Kids

A Program of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation
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www.lisc.org/cick

CICK increases the quality and capacity of child care and early learning programs by investing in the physical settings where these services are delivered. CICK delivers technical assistance and financial support on facilities projects; crafts new financing mechanisms; influences public policy; and shares best practices on facility design and devleopment. The program emphasizes the connection between well-designed facilities and high-quality programming, and the need for capital subsidies and creative financing to make these investments feasible.