

ND Best in Class – Environment Standards

The Environment Standards are designed to ensure that all learning experiences and environments are delivered with intentionality to promote strong child outcomes aligning with the North Dakota Early Learning Standards.

- Materials and equipment listed in the standards are required to be purchased during the first year of funding and replaced as needed through BIC participation.
- All materials should be age appropriate for four-year-old children of all abilities.

Definitions

- An interest center is a clearly defined area for a particular kind of play including but not limited to; library, fine motor/tabletop manipulatives, art, block play, dramatic play, discovery.
- Free choice is a designated time when children choose the materials and peers to play with. Adult interaction is in response to the child's social and developmental needs.

Classroom furnishings and room arrangements

- Cubbies/lockers are designated for each child enrolled
- Appropriate child-size tables and chairs are used (children's feet are flat on the floor when seated), desks are not used with children
- A minimum of six clearly defined interest centers are available to provide a variety of experiences
- Interest centers are organized for independent use by children; materials are stored on open shelves in labeled containers (picture and word), and near designated play space
- Additional materials are available to add to or change interest centers
- Furniture and materials must be sturdy and in good repair
- All interest centers are accessible to children with disabilities and adaptive furniture to permit inclusion is available (when applicable)

Gross motor

- Adequate designated space outdoors for gross motor play exists
- Adequate materials are accessible for gross motor play indoors
- Children have access and the opportunity to use equipment daily that promotes a variety of gross motor skills
- Adaptations are made or special equipment is provided for children with disabilities (when applicable)

Library

- One front-facing bookshelf is available to display books
- A minimum of 20 age-appropriate books accessible to children (categories shall include people, feelings and emotions, nature/science, math, gender representation, jobs/work, health or self-help skills, sports/hobbies, abilities, concepts, realistic picture books)
- Books representing diversity are accessible
- Soft seating is available to children
- Additional materials are accessible to enhance library area (examples: puppets, soft toys, flannel boards, etc.)

Fine motor, toys and games

- A minimum of one shelf and one table for fine motor and manipulative storage are accessible
- A minimum of three types of interlocking building materials are accessible (building bricks, waffle blocks, bristle blocks, connecting tubes)
- A minimum of three types of manipulatives are accessible (nuts and bolts, magnet tiles, lacing cards, beads and strings)
- A minimum of three games (memory, candy land, chutes and ladders)
- A minimum of five puzzles are accessible (with many different subjects and number of pieces), floor puzzles, knob less and knobbed puzzles, puzzle rack

Math and numbers

Materials are accessible in multiple interest centers

- A minimum of three types of materials are accessible for counting and comparing quantities (counting animals, bingo games and chips, dominoes, magnetic numerals, unifix cubes, math theme books and number books, sorting trays and items, variety of graphs)
- A minimum of three types of materials are accessible for measuring (measuring cups, tape measures, rulers, balance scale, height chart)
- A minimum of three types of materials are accessible for learning shape/size (pattern card blocks, shape puzzles, lacing shapes, geoboards, tangrams, magnetic shapes)
- A minimum of three types of materials are accessible with written numbers (calculator, play phone, cash register with play money, simple number cards, clock)

Art

- A minimum of one shelf and one table for art are accessible
- Art easel for painting is accessible to children daily
- Drawing materials are accessible (crayons, markers, colored pencils, chalk)
- Painting materials are accessible (watercolor, finger paints, tempera, dot art)
- Three-dimensional materials are accessible (playdoh/clay, Styrofoam, cardboard, bottles, craft sticks)

- Collage materials are accessible (yarn, felt, paper, fabric, wiggly eyes, pipe cleaners, pompoms)
- Tools materials are (glue, scissors, tape, paintbrushes, paint aprons, paint cups, stapler, stencils)
- Writing (may be combined within another center)
- Writing materials are accessible in multiple interest centers and include, but not limited to, a variety of writing tools and paper (clip boards, white boards, journals)

Block play

- A minimum of two shelves and a space that is enclosed on three sides to protect from traffic
- Complete set of standard wooden unit blocks (100 minimum blocks) are accessible
- Three categories of accessories, including diverse people, animals and vehicles, are accessible

Dramatic Play

- A minimum of one shelf and adequate defined space for dramatic play are accessible
- A wooden play kitchen and kitchen accessories (food, pots/pans, dishes) are accessible
- Baby dolls that represent diversity and accessories (clothing, stroller, bottles, blankets, crib) are accessible
- Dress-up clothing and storage is accessible
- Additional props including, but not limited to, cash register, play phones, doctor kit, vet kit, tool kit, cleaning set are accessible

Discovery, nature and science

- A minimum of one shelf for discovery is accessible
- A minimum of three collections of natural objects (seeds, rocks, seashells, leaves, sticks, pinecones, feathers) are accessible
- A variety of books (realistic pictures), games representing nature/science (realistic and fact based), and a collection of specimens (living and preserved) are accessible
- Magnifying glasses, balance scale, tweezers are accessible
- Additional science tools (sorting trays, color paddles, magnets, goggles, droppers, microscope) are accessible for activities
- One living object is recommended not required

Sand and water

- Sensory table is accessible to children indoors containing a material that can be dumped and poured (sand, water, potting soil, snow, kinetic sand)
- Accessories are accessible (funnels, measuring cups, sifters, shovels, water toys, buckets)

Music and listening center (if children do not attend music class regularly)

- Music materials are accessible (variety of instruments, scarves, ribbon sticks)
- Listening Center includes CD player or listening device and recorded stories/songs for independent use (listening center is recommended not required)

Calming area

- Emotional literacy (books, charts, posters) are accessible
- Problem solving strategies (timer, solution kit, Tucker the Turtle) are accessible
- Soft furnishings are accessible
- Must include sensory activities (fidgets, calming bottles) are accessible

Classroom display

- Behavior expectations or rules (no more than five) that are positively stated and include a visual are posted
- Daily visual schedule (with pictures) is posted at child's level in classroom and relates generally to what occurs
- Photographs of children and their families are posted in the classroom
- Child's art is displayed
- The alphabet and numbers are posted and are easily visible

Schedule

- Free choice is an uninterrupted time that occurs daily for a minimum of 60 minutes. All interest areas must be accessible during this time. *Minimum of 30 minutes is required for half day programs
- Outdoor play occurs daily for a minimum of 30 minutes. *Weather permitting
- Whole group experiences occur daily and are limited to no more than 20 minutes
- Small group experiences are planned to address individual strengths, needs, and interests of each child
- Transitions are optimized for learning experiences and minimal wait time
- A minimum of one read aloud required daily
- Technology may be used for up to 15 minutes for individual use and 15 minutes of group use for a total of no more than 30 minutes per day.
- A balance of teacher and child directed activities daily