

SACERS-U: Lowest Scoring Items and Indicators



This document provides a summary of the lowest scoring items and indicators from SACERS-U assessments conducted between May 1, 2022, and June 1, 2025. The data reflects DCDEE assessments completed across North Carolina. In total, 230 assessments with an overall average score of 5.11 were conducted in 225 programs during this period.

This document does not replace the SACERS-U or the NC Additional Notes, which are essential for accurate scoring and interpretation. Rather, it draws attention to frequently noted areas of concern and should not be considered a complete explanation of all scoring considerations, scenarios, or requirements.

The items in this summary are separated by subscale and focus only on those with average scores below 5.0. The average scores are shown in parenthesis after each item's name. While the emphasis is on lower scoring areas, we encourage programs to thoughtfully review all subscales, items, and indicators within the SACERS-U to support comprehensive quality improvement.



Activities

Item 25. Science/nature activities (3.25)

- **Indicator 3.2:** Books are not used to provide additional information during science activities. Books are not placed with related science materials to encourage children's research skills during free choice times and provide additional information (e.g., a shell collection and book about shells, a collection of magnets and objects to use with magnets with book about magnetism and activities for children to complete, etc.).
- **Indicator 5.1:** There are not enough different types of science materials, or the science materials do not provide an appropriate level of challenge for all ages enrolled. Children cannot independently use materials for at least 30 minutes daily when the program operates for 3 hours or more.
- **Indicator 5.2:** Children do not have opportunities to care for and observe living things such as a classroom pet, plants, or a garden.
- **Indicator 5.3:** Activities that allow children to observe nature over a period of time are not planned at least twice during the year. For example, children can observe caterpillars turn into butterflies or plant and care for seeds.

Item 23. Language/reading activities (4.04)

- **Indicator 5.1:** There is an insufficient number of language games for one or more age groups enrolled. Children cannot independently use materials daily for at least 30 minutes when the program operates for 3 hours or more.
- **Indicator 5.3:** Children are not encouraged to use reading/writing skills in daily, practical situations (e.g., reading directions for games, making signs, lists, etc.).

Item 22. Dramatic play/theatre (4.15)

- **Indicator 5.1:** There is not a variety of age-appropriate dramatic play props in the classroom. Materials do not provide enough accessories to support more complex pretend play for older school age children. Children cannot independently use materials for at least 30 minutes when the program operates for 3 hours or more.
- **Indicator 5.2:** Teachers do not extend children's dramatic play by actively joining in the activity or providing assistance such as offering suggestions or helping with the development of roles or themes.

Item 20. Music and movement (4.88)

- **Indicator 5.1:** Children cannot independently use materials for at least 30 minutes daily.
- **Indicator 5.2:** A choice of music materials from at least 2 of the 3 categories is not provided. Children cannot independently use materials for at least 30 minutes daily.

Item 24. Math/reasoning activities (4.90)

- **Indicator 5.2:** Math concepts are not incorporated into daily, practical events such as keeping score for games, getting materials for correct number of children, etc.



Interactions

Item 29. Staff-child interactions (4.67)

- **Indicator 5.1:** Back and forth conversations do not occur between the staff and the children frequently during the observation.
- **Indicator 5.3:** The language used with the children is mostly to give directions or correct behaviors instead of using language to teach or socialize.
- **Indicator 5.4:** Staff do not ask open-ended questions to encourage children to give more detailed or extended answers.



Space and Furnishings

Item 8. Furnishings for gross motor activities (4.42)

- **Indicator 5.1:** Stationary gross motor equipment does not stimulate at least three skills, there is a single piece of stationary equipment rather than a variety, or children are not able to use stationary gross motor equipment 30 minutes daily when weather permits. For example, outdoor play does not occur when ground/equipment is wet but there is no active precipitation. Another example, the staff's personal perception of too hot or too cold is the basis for a decision not to go outside and children remain in centers.
- **Indicator 5.2:** Stationary equipment does not support the development of at least three different age-appropriate gross motor skills or does not provide an appropriate level of challenge for all children enrolled.
- **Indicator 5.3:** A variety of portable gross motor materials that stimulate the development of at least five different skills are not provided each day, indoors or outdoors.



Health and Safety

Item 14. Safety practice (3.25)

- **Indicator 3.1:** Resilient surfacing is not deep enough (inadequate cushioning) or does not extend far enough beyond gross motor equipment, or equipment not far enough apart (insufficient use zone). Open "s" hooks, older equipment with safety hazards (protrusions, splintered wood, etc.). Outdoor play area is not surrounded by a fence.
- **Indicator 3.5:** Evacuation procedures do not occur monthly, at times when the school-age children are present.

Item 17. Meals/snacks (3.96)

- **Indicator 3.5:** Tables are not first cleaned with a soapy solution, then sanitized and left to air dry for at least 2 minutes. The same cloth and a bucket of cleaning/sanitizing solutions are used for all tables. Teacher's hands are not washed or are re-contaminated before serving food. Contamination of food/beverages occurs.
- **Indicator 3.6:** Menus are not posted either in the classroom or near the entrance to the facility, so that they can easily be viewed by parents, children, and staff. Menus do not accurately reflect the food and/or beverages that are served to the children.
- **Indicator 5.1:** Staff do not sit with the children during meals/snacks.

Item 18. Personal Hygiene (4.77)

- **Indicator 3.2:** No tissues in the classroom where children can see and reach them.
- **Indicator 5.1:** Staff and/or children do not wash hands at least 75% of the times when needed (e.g., upon arrival/returning to classroom from outdoor play, before/after eating, after messy activities, after toileting).



Program Structure

Item 36. Schedule (4.86)

- **Indicator 3.3:** A daily fine motor or language activity is not provided.
- **Indicator 5.2:** Teacher planned, and free choice activities are not offered at the same time during the observation.
- **Indicator 5.3:** Children do not play outside every day that weather permits.

