

ITERS-3: Lowest Scoring Items and Indicators

This document provides a summary of the lowest scoring items and indicators from ITERS-3 assessments conducted between May 1, 2022, and June 1, 2025. The data reflects both DCDEE and Outreach Assessments completed across North Carolina. In total, 179 assessments with an overall average score of 4.46 were conducted in 105 child care facilities during this period.

This document does not replace the ITERS-3 or the NC Additional Notes, which are essential for accurate scoring and interpretation. Rather, it draws attention to frequently noted areas of concern and is not intended to provide 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 along with a list of indicators often not earning credit. While the emphasis is on lower scoring areas, we encourage programs to thoughtfully review all subscales, items, and indicators within the ITERS-3 to support comprehensive quality improvement.



Learning Activities

Item 16. Art (2.16)

- **Indicator 1.1:** An art activity is not offered to children who are 18 months or older during the observation.
- **Indicator 1.2:** Art materials that are unsafe or otherwise inappropriate for the age group are used (e.g., small crayons, glitter, googly eyes, or foam stickers).
- **Indicator 3.1:** Children who are 24 months and older cannot use a drawing material during the observation.
- **Indicator 3.2:** Children are required to participate and are not offered something else to do when they do not show interest in the art activity.
- **Indicator 3.3:** Close supervision is not provided during art activities to prevent problems such as children putting art materials in their mouths or using art materials inappropriately (e.g., on the tables, walls, or peers).
- **Indicator 3.4:** While children are engaged in art, staff do not name colors.
- **Indicator 3.5:** Individual expression is not observed in any of the art activities that occur or are displayed. (e.g., hand prints or footprints, children are guided by the teacher where to put certain items so that the final products look the same).
- **Indicator 5.1:** Children who are 24 months and older cannot use a drawing material during the observation. Or, the drawing material is present, but there is a long period of time when children cannot use it.
- **Indicator 5.2:** Close supervision is not provided during art activities to prevent problems such as children putting art materials in their mouths or using art materials inappropriately.
- **Indicator 5.3:** While children use art materials, staff do not talk with them about what they are creating.
- **Indicator 5.4:** Art activities do not allow for children's individual expression (e.g., quick hand print but no time to explore with the paint), or children follow a model, are told how/what to draw or paint, etc.

Item 21. Math/number (2.56)

- **Indicator 3.2:** Shape or size is not discussed with children as they use materials.
- **Indicator 3.3:** An example of staff counting while pointing at items does not occur.
- **Indicator 5.1:** There are not many age-appropriate math materials. Or, the materials are present in the classroom, but children are prevented from using them for a long period of time.
- **Indicator 5.2:** Staff do not talk with children about similarities or differences in shape, size, or amount.
- **Indicator 5.3:** Staff do not count objects in an interesting way with at least two different children.

- **Indicator 5.4:** Staff do not use numbers in songs or finger plays, such as "Five Little Monkeys," "One, Two Buckle My Shoe," or "Five Green and Speckled Frogs."

Item 18. Blocks (3.01)

- **Indicator 1.2:** Children do not use blocks and/or children's block play is not supported (e.g., staff do not acknowledge or talk to children about their block play or encourage them to become involved in block play).
- **Indicator 3.1:** Blocks are not accessible to all of the children. There are no blocks present in the classroom or the schedule experienced by children does not allow them to use blocks for most of the time they are awake and not involved in routines.
- **Indicator 3.3:** Children do not use blocks and/or when children use blocks, staff do not interact with them in a positive way.
- **Indicator 5.1:** There are not enough blocks for the children. Or, the blocks are present, but the children are prevented from using them for a long period of time.
- **Indicator 5.2:** The blocks and accessories are not organized by types (e.g., blocks have matching pictures on the container or shelf, transportation items, animals, and people are all stored separately).
- **Indicator 5.3:** Materials other than blocks and accessories are stored and/or used in the block center. For example, there are musical instruments, gross motor toys, large interlocking blocks, or dramatic play props (beyond basic block accessories). Block area is not out of traffic. For example, teachers or children have to walk through the area to get to other parts of the classroom.
- **Indicator 5.4:** Staff do not talk with at least two different children about their block play. This talk needs to be specifically about blocks and not other items that are in the block area.

Item 20. Nature/science (3.47)

- **Indicator 3.2:** No opportunity to experience something natural indoors or outdoors (e.g., grass or plants on the playground, a classroom pet or plant, a window that children are taken to where they can easily see plants or animals outdoors).
- **Indicator 5.1:** Children are not taken outdoors to experience nature on days that the weather allows.
- **Indicator 5.2:** No living things in the classroom such as a plant or fish tank that can be easily seen by children, or staff do not draw children's attention to outdoor living things that can be easily seen from the classroom windows.
- **Indicator 5.3:** Instances of staff talking about science experiences or materials with children do not occur.
- **Indicator 5.4:** Sand or water play with toys is not provided for children who are 24 months and older.

Item 19. Dramatic play (3.51)

- **Indicator 3.1:** Dolls and/or soft animals are not accessible. Children are prevented from using dolls and soft animals for most of their play times, and/or staff do not make these accessible to non-mobile children.
- **Indicator 3.4:** Staff do not name objects for at least two different children while they use dramatic play materials.
- **Indicator 5.1:** There are not enough of the different types of required dramatic play materials for the children. Or, they are present, but the children are prevented from using them for a long period of time.
- **Indicator 5.2:** There are no dress-up items for children 12 months and older. Or, they are present, but the children are prevented from using them for a long period of time.
- **Indicator 5.3:** A dramatic play interest center for children 12 months and older is not present. There may be some dramatic play materials present, but they are not well-organized and/or there is not enough space for the children to use them.
- **Indicator 5.4:** Staff do not interact positively with at least two different children while they use dramatic play materials.

Item 17. Music and movement (3.92)

- **Indicator 3.1:** There are not at least three music materials for children. Or the materials are present, but the schedule experienced does not allow all the children to use them for most of the time they are awake and not involved in routines.

- **Indicator 5.1:** There are not at least 10 different types of music materials for children. Or, they are present, but the children are prevented from using them for a long period of time.
- **Indicator 5.2:** A music or movement activity does not take place for an individual child during the observation. For example, dancing or singing does not occur with a child during free play, no singing occurs during handwashing, diapering, or individual feedings.

Item 24. Gross motor (4.09)

- **Indicator 3.2:** Children over 12 months of age are not taken outdoors for gross motor play at least 20 minutes on days that the weather allows.
- **Indicator 5.1:** Children are prevented from using indoor space for play for a long period of time. For example, children are confined in furnishings that prevent them from moving freely or kept in groups where they are required to stay seated.
- **Indicator 5.2:** Children over 12 months of age are not taken outdoors for gross motor play for at least 30 minutes on days that the weather allows. Or there is not direct or easy access to the outdoor play area.
- **Indicator 5.3:** There are not enough age-appropriate gross motor materials and/or equipment for the children to use. There are one or more major safety hazards in children's space used for gross motor play.

Item 15. Fine Motor (4.25)

- **Indicator 5.1:** There are not at least 10 appropriate fine motor materials. Or, the materials are present in the classroom, but children are prevented from using them for a long period of time.
- **Indicator 5.3:** Children are not frequently talked to as they play with fine motor materials such as grasping toys, stackers, or simple puzzles.

Item 23. Promoting acceptance of diversity (4.46)

- **Indicator 3.3:** Dolls from at least three different races are not provided for children's use. Or the dolls are present, but the schedule experienced by children does not allow for them to use dolls for most of the time they are awake and not involved in routines.
- **Indicator 5.1:** There are not at least 10 examples of diversity found for children to experience in the classroom. Or there are no examples in books, pictures, and/or other classroom materials. Or, the examples are present, but there is a long period of time when children cannot use them.
- **Indicator 5.2:** The materials do not represent at least 4 of the 5 types of diversity. The categories are race, culture, age, ability, and nontraditional gender roles. Senior adults must be represented in classroom display, books, or other play materials.



Language and Books

Item 14. Encouraging children's use of books (3.79)

- **Indicator 3.1:** There are not more than five books for children. Or the books are present, but the schedule experienced by children does not allow for them to use books for most of the time they are awake and not involved in routines.
- **Indicator 3.3:** Staff do not show interest in children who use books on their own. For example, they do not interact positively with a child who looks at a book during play times.
- **Indicator 5.1:** There are not more than 10 books for the children. Or, the books are present, but the children are prevented from using them for a long period of time.
- **Indicator 5.2:** Books are not easily accessible to the children. For example, the books are stacked on top of one another, making it difficult to see or use the books other than the one on top.
- **Indicator 5.3:** Either no children use books during their play times, or there are times children use books, and they do not receive positive interactions from staff.

Item 10. Encouraging vocabulary development (4.12)

- **Indicator 5.1:** Specific and descriptive words about people, places, things, and actions are not often used by staff during routines and/or play.
- **Indicator 5.2:** Staff do not often repeat words for the children.
- **Indicator 5.3:** There are not at least two examples of staff talking about the past and/or future with the children.
- **Indicator 5.4:** There are not at least two examples of staff talking about how items are alike and/or different.

Item 13. Staff use of books with children (4.53)

- **Indicator 5.1:** A book is not read with a child or small group of children informally. For example, a book is not read during free play with interested children.
- **Indicator 5.2:** Book times are not engaging and/or children are not allowed to leave a story time when they show signs of not being interested, such as trying to leave, attempting to use nearby materials, or engaging more with their peers than the story.
- **Indicator 5.3:** Pictures in books are not named and pointed out to at least two different children.
- **Indicator 5.4:** Teachers do not read the words or talk about the pictures in books with children.
- **Indicator 5.5:** When staff use books with children there is little interest or excitement.

**Space and Furnishings****Item 4. Display for children (3.56)**

- **Indicator 1.3:** There is not an example of staff talking to children about any of the display.
- **Indicator 5.2:** There are not obvious signs that the display is changed on a regular basis (e.g., themes, seasons, recent artwork, or pictures of the children engaged in a recent activity).
- **Indicator 5.3:** There are not many items that the children can easily see. For example, items are mostly displayed up high instead of low on the walls or backs of shelves. Or there is no display that children can easily touch.
- **Indicator 5.4:** Staff do not point out and talk about any of the items displayed with the children.

**Interaction****Item 30. Guiding children's behavior (4.47)**

- **Indicator 5.1:** A teacher uses negative language to guide or correct behaviors that are age typical and not dangerous (e.g., young children put toys in their mouth or reach for one another). Children are told to stop behaviors they are engaged in, rather than re-directing them to the behavior that is expected.
- **Indicator 5.2:** Positive methods, such as modeling and redirection, to help guide children's behaviors are not always used.
- **Indicator 5.5:** Children are not told the reason or explanation for a rule or why a certain behavior is not allowed.



Program Structure

Item 31. Schedule and transitions (4.55)

- **Indicator 3.1:** Schedule does not meet the needs of most of the children enrolled. For example, diapers are not visually checked or changed at least every 2 hours; children are not fed when hungry or allowed to sleep when tired.
- **Indicator 5.1:** Transitions happen as a group, which leads to children waiting for an activity to begin or for their turn to wash hands, go to the restroom, or sit down for lunch.
- **Indicator 5.2:** Children must wait for the next activity or routine because staff is not ready. For example, children are waiting by the back door while the teacher finds the water, first aid kit, gross motor equipment, etc. Or children wait at the table while the teacher gathers various supplies for the activity instead of having materials prepared before calling the children to the table.



Personal Care Routines

Item 7. Health Practices (3.37)

- **Indicator 3.1 and 5.1:** Mouthed toys are not sanitized before being used by other children or are put away with clean toys. The teachers and/or children touch the trash can lid when throwing away paper towels after handwashing routines, instead of a hands-free method. Children drink water or mouth toys during group water play and the water is not changed. Runny noses are not wiped.
- **Indicator 5.2:** Child and/or adult handwashing does not occur as needed (e.g., arrivals, re-entry, after sand or other messy play, before and after water play or using playdough, after wiping noses, and after any other type of contamination).
- **Indicator 5.3:** Cribs/cots/mats are placed too close together such that the entire sleep surface is not at least 36 inches apart or separated by a solid barrier. Mats or cots are stored with bedding touching.
- **Indicator 5.4:** The nap schedule does not meet the needs of each child as demonstrated by child behaviors and/or staff comments (e.g., child rubbing eyes and crying is told "I know you are tired, but it is too early for your nap.")
- **Indicator 5.5:** Positive teaching interactions do not occur during health-related practices such as handwashing considered in indicator 5.2, nose wipes, cleaning faces, putting on jackets, or sunscreen application.

Item 6. Diapering/toileting (3.77)

- **Indicator 3.2:** Children's diapers or pull-ups are not visually checked or changed at least once during the 3-hour observation.
- **Indicator 5.1:** There are often lapses in the sanitary diapering procedure, such as supplies are not taken out prior to starting a change, wipes are not used at the correct time during the diapering process for adult/child hands, or the disinfectant does not air dry for at least 2 minutes. Teachers and/or children do not wash their hands after diapering or toileting routines.
- **Indicator 5.2:** Children's diapers or pull-ups are not visually checked or changed and/or children are not taken to the bathroom at least every 2 hours.
- **Indicator 5.4:** Teaching interactions do not occur during diapering or toileting routines at least twice during the observation.

Item 5. Meals/snacks (3.88)

- **Indicator 5.1:** Water is not served between meals to children who primarily eat solid foods. Individual needs of children for appropriate eating times are not met (e.g., crying babies must wait for long periods or until the scheduled meal time for bottles, children who say they are hungry are told they must wait for lunch).
- **Indicator 5.3:** Children or staff re-contaminate their hands after washing them before meals by touching toys, walls, floors, trash can lid, etc. Or hands are not washed by the children and/or staff before or after a bottle, meal, or snack. Tables or high chair trays are not first cleaned, then sprayed with a sanitizer that is left to air dry for at least 2 minutes. Bottles or other perishable foods remain unrefrigerated for longer than one hour.
- **Indicator 5.4:** Staff are not close enough to children or are focused on other duties while children are eating/drinking in high chairs or at a table. Lapses in supervision often occur at the beginning and end of meals when all staff prepare/clean up or assist some children with handwashing or other activities while some children are still eating.

Item 8. Safety Practices (4.67)

- **Indicator 5.1:** There are more than two safety hazards indoors and outdoors combined. Some common examples include the following indoors: There is not a barrier on the edge of the changing table or the barrier is not at least 6 inches above the surface where children lay during changes; infants are put on stomach to sleep; when lifting or assisting children, they are pulled up by their arm(s) or hand(s); small toys are present that are choking hazards; unsafe art materials are used or accessible such as small crayons, glitter, googly eyes, or foam stickers; food choking hazards are observed such as whole grapes or hot dog rounds; sanitizer or disinfectant is sprayed where children can inhale mist; electrical outlets are not covered. Outdoors: Resilient surfacing is not deep enough or fall zones are not adequate; there is no fence, or equipment is too large for age group or is in poor repair with broken/sharp edges; there are open S-hooks.
- **Indicator 5.4:** An explanation for a safety rule is not provided.

