

Tennessee Additional Notes to SACERS

Overview

The purpose of the Tennessee additional notes is to improve the interrater agreements of assessors, and to provide further interpretation of items and indicators to assist with scoring decisions by Tennessee Assessment Program Staff (APS). Thelma Harms, Ellen Vineberg Jacobs and Donna Romano White, authors of the scale developed the notes without dates or with reference in parenthesis to North Carolina. These notes have been adopted for use in Tennessee assessments. Some of the information used in the additional notes was adapted from the Environment Rating Scales.

Be sure to replace older notes with newer notes.

The most recent TN updates are:

10/09: General Notes, Items 2, 15, 18, 23, 26 and 28 (Some General Notes have been moved directly under the items)

5/1/09: General Notes, Items 2, 3, 5, 8, 18, 23, 26, 27 and 40

4/28/08: General Notes, Items 22, 23, 26, 37

1/1/2008: General Notes, Item 7, 44

4/30/07: General Notes

11/1/06: No revisions

General Notes for SACERS

In all items involving any type of interaction, “staff” refers to those adults who are in the classroom and who work with the children daily (or almost daily), for a substantial part of the day. This can include volunteers, if they are in the classroom for the required amount of time. Adults who are in the classroom for short periods of the day, or who are not a regular daily part of the classroom, do not count in evaluating whether the requirements of the item are met. For example, if a therapist, parent, a director, or owner of a program comes into the classroom and interacts with children, for short or irregular periods, these interactions do not count in scoring the item.

The term “some” occurs most frequently in indicators that represent a minimal (3) level of quality, although occasionally it occurs at higher levels. In determining how much is needed to give credit for “some” in an indicator, consider the requirements in the parallel indicators at the lower and next higher level of quality. For example, if under inadequate “no” materials are required, then “some” would mean “one or more”. In cases where a plural is used with the term “some”, then “more than one” would be required to give credit. When terms such as “very few” or “very little” or “rarely” are used under inadequate, then “some” represents a mid-point between what is required for the 1 and the 5 levels.

At the three level, materials are considered accessible only if it is observed that children freely access and are permitted to use most of the materials. Ex. Some centers may not be opened during the observation. If the schedule indicates an additional time for access to materials, base score on teacher questions and how materials were used. At the five level, materials must be accessible for one third of the day. **For programs operating more than 5 hours a day, in order to meet accessibility for one third of the day (a ten minute variance is allowed), there should be no significant extended periods of time where structured activities prevent access to materials. Access must be observed throughout the day. In after school programs where children are present for less than 5 hours, the schedule should reflect several opportunities to access materials because children have been in large group, structured activities for much of the school day.** For both levels of quality, another determining factor when deciding accessibility as opposed to availability is who initiates getting the materials. If the teacher initiates putting the materials out, they are accessible for the period of time they are out. If children initiate by asking for materials then they are not considered accessible but are available.

Levels of quality build expectations from minimal to good to excellent. Consider not only the requirements of the indicator, but the level of quality documented as general practice throughout the observation.

The requirement for materials to be accessible for 1/3 day at the good level pertains to the following items and indicators: Items 3, Space for privacy-indicator 5.1; 7, Furnishings for relaxation and comfort-indicator 5.1; 20, Arts and crafts-indicator 5.1; 21, Music and movement-indicator 5.2; 22, Blocks and construction-indicator 5.1; 23, Drama/theater-indicator 5.1; 24, Language/reading activities-indicator 5.1; 25, Math/reasoning activities-indicator 5.1; 26, Science/nature activities-indicator 5.1; 27, Cultural awareness-indicator 5.1.

When two or more teachers are in the classroom and you are trying to determine overall impact of interactions, look for a balance. However, if one caregiver is extremely negative, a balance cannot be achieved and the indicator should be discounted.

For children under the age of 10, staff must be able to hear the child at all times, must be able to see the child with a quick glance, and must be able to physically respond immediately, leaving no child unattended. For children 10 and older, the adult must know the whereabouts and activities of the children at all times and must be able to physically respond immediately.

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For all scales-the presence of weapons or characters displaying weapons is no longer an automatic discount. With regard to books, pictures, and materials, if the combined, overall impact is negative, displays graphic violence, and promotes aggressive behavior such as play fighting that is not stopped by the caregiver, then discounting is valid and should be well documented in the assessor notes.

Disinfectant and/or anti-bacterial wipes do not count for sanitization purposes. Products that can be given credit as sanitizing solutions are: bleach and water solution; or a commercial product that states on the label or manufacturer's products sheet it kills 99.9% of germs, kills HIV virus, or is an EPA registered product. All commercial products used for sanitizing must be used according to manufacturer's instruction.

The following indicators are connected indicators. When credit is not given for the first indicator, credit cannot be given for the second indicator: 4/3.1 and 3.3

Items to be omitted from TN scoring: #9, #10, #11, #12, #14, #36, #39, #41, #42, #43, #45, #46, #47, #48, and #49

Specific Notes for SACERS

1. Indoor space

- 1.3 Score Yes only when space is in very poor repair.
- 3.3 Score Yes when space is generally in good repair; do not penalize for small problems.
- 5.3 This indicator considers ongoing maintenance as well as housekeeping. (TN 7/20/01)

2. Space for gross motor activities

- 1.2 Add "completely" so indicator reads "Outdoor space completely lacks protection . . ."

3.1, 5.1, 7.1 Some space used for gross motor activity should be accessible daily.

5.2 Requires at least three different surfaces. Determine whether the surfaces in the outdoor space enable children to successfully participate in different types of play. For example, each different surface must be large enough to permit a type of play without much interruption from other activities. At least one hard and one soft play surface must be accessible daily outdoors. If there is no equipment present, which requires resilient surfacing, the requirements of this indicator can be met with just two surfaces (one hard, one soft).

7.2 Age groups = K-3, 4-6, or older. N/A if all children are in the same age group.

7.3 Since this indicator is at the 7 level, the playground should be fairly close. Take the age of the children into consideration. "Convenient" includes more than close (e.g., on same level).

3. Space for privacy

No score of 2 is possible.

5.2 This space must be accessible to the children.

4. Room arrangement

- 1.2 Replace "rooms" with "space", so indicator reads, "Space inconveniently arranged . . ."

Omit all of #4a ("When doing homework is part of the program").

Add the following indicators to #4 ("Room arrangement").

- 1.4 No separate area for homework or other quiet study.
- 3.4 Separate area for homework or other quiet study.
- 5.5 Separate area is quiet, not crowded, and has suitable furniture for homework or other quiet study.
- 7.3 Easy access to areas where reference materials are stored (ex: library is open, computer accessible).

5. Furnishings for routine care

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Mats or cots are not required for older children, or where napping in after-school groups is not part of the program.

If table and chairs are present but not used (available, not accessible), stop the score at 3.1 since the note for clarification states that the “furniture should be comfortable.” Furniture cannot be comfortable if it cannot be used. (TN 6/1/01)

1.1, 3.1 If there is no provision for individual storage of children's possessions, such as cubbies or hooks for coats/book bags, score 1.1 Yes. If there is adequate provision that allows the children to store their possessions in an individual space, then score 3.1 Yes if other requirements are met. If there is some small, individual provision, such as envelopes or small boxes for artwork or notes, that does not meet the needs for storing most of the children's possessions, do not give credit for 3.1.

5.1 Appropriately sized (same as child-sized) is defined in the note printed in the book: when children sit in chairs, their feet must touch the floor, elbows comfortably rest on table. Observe also to be sure that chairs and tables are not too small, so children's knees are not cramped under the table. If 75% of chairs and tables are appropriately sized, give full credit for 5.1. If 60-74% are appropriate, give a score of 4.

No score of 6 is possible.

6. Furnishings for learning and recreational activities

This item addresses indoor furnishings. (TN)

5.2 In order to give credit for this indicator, work done by the children in the school age group and materials of interest to them, must be displayed in the space used by the children for most of the time.

7. Furnishings for relaxation and comfort

3.1 Because one rug or small carpeted area provides limited softness, credit is given for this minimal provision of softness as one furnishing for meeting the requirements for 3.1.

3.2 Add “most” so indicator reads, “Most soft furnishings are clean...” (TN 6/1/01)

No score of 4 is possible

5.1 To meet the requirements of 5.1, there must be at least one protected area where children can depend on being able to relax, with a substantial amount of softness to lounge, daydream, read, or play quietly. (TN 1/1/08)

5.1 Delete “several carpeted areas” from the example. (TN 1/1/08)

7.1 If carpet/rugs was not used to give credit at a lower indicator, it can count as one additional softness (it does not matter if it is wall-to-wall carpeting or one or more area rugs, it only counts as one). If one additional softness, give a score of 6. To score a 7, there must be 2 or more furnishings/materials for softness (again, carpet/rugs may only count as one).

8. Furnishings for gross motor activities

If several assessors are doing observations in the same program where all classrooms being observed use the same playground/gym space, each assessor must assess her/his group using the space for supervision and age-appropriate reasons. The assessors should compare structural and resilient surface information so that Playground Assessment Notes will be consistent.

1.2 Add “all” so indicator reads, “All stationary equipment in poor repair . . . “ (TN 7/17/01)

3.1 This must occur daily weather permitting. Requires one appropriate stationary gross motor equipment. Items must be accessible.

3.2 This must occur daily. Requires at least two portable materials for individual games and at least two for group gross motor games accessible.

1.3, 5.3 Portable equipment means the portability is part of the play potential for children (e.g. wheel toys, ball, jump ropes, hula hoops, roller skates, bats, tennis rackets.) Equipment that children can not or do not move as part of play is considered stationary, even though it may not be anchored, and therefore can be moved by adults.

5.1 Variety means at least 3 different pieces of equipment, but they can be part of 1 large, composite structure.

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5.3 Add “accessible” so indicator reads, “Variety of portable materials accessible to play . . .” Variety for this indicator requires at least 3 portable materials for individual games and at least 3 for group gross motor games. Different balls requiring different skills is considered variety. However, more than balls should be observed to give credit for variety at this level. The time requirement for accessibility does not apply at this indicator.

7.1 The intent of this indicator is to provide children and staff the opportunity to be creative in gross motor activities, rather than just using equipment and materials in the same way. Other examples that could be credited here include an obstacle course made of things that children or staff can rearrange to provide new challenges; cubes and planks that can be arranged into various kinds of balance beams, cones that can be placed in different ways to allow different bike-riding paths, or sturdy boxes that can be arranged into various types of tunnels to crawl through.

13. Health practices

3.2 To allow for positive scoring, change indicator to read, “Staff supervise both the sick and healthy children with proper health precautions. (Ex. Staff do wash hands . . .” Hand washing between caring for sick and healthy children is considered for this indicator.

3.3 The list of allergies/medications does not have to be publicly displayed; however, directions for finding this information should be publicly displayed. (TN 1/18/02)

5.1, 5.2 If 5.1 is No, then 5.2 is also No. (TN 6/24/02)

15. Safety practice

For a more detailed listing of Playground Safety Hazards, refer to the Tennessee Playground Safety Sheet found at www.tnstarquality.org.

Indoor space for gross motor play and equipment is not held to the same standards as outside; however, safety as the primary focus should be insured. Consider the placement of equipment as well as the surface under equipment where children might fall. If indoor children’s climbing equipment is used, mats or carpet are required to be placed under the equipment if it is over 12 inches in height. This is in reference to equipment specifically for climbing.

If several assessors are doing observations in the same program where all classrooms being observed use the same playground/gym space, each assessor must assess her/his group using the space for supervision and age-appropriate reasons. The assessors should compare structural and resilient surface information so that Playground Assessment Notes will be consistent. If resilient surface numbers differ due to surface being displaced and not raked back throughout the course of the day, times of measurements should be noted in summary reports.

3.1 Uncovered electrical outlets are not sufficient concern to stop scoring at this indicator, but could be a complicating factor if other hazards are present. (TN 6/1/01)

16. Attendance

No N/A is possible for score on this item. (1.1, 1.3 and 5.2)

3.2 If recording of attendance is not observed, ask teacher question.

No score of 6 is possible.

17. Departure

1.3, 3.3, and 5.3 Ask if not observed. (TN 1/18/02)

3.2 If parents are “asked” to notify staff of alternate pick-up arrangements, give credit.

18. Meals/ snacks

Preparing all eating surfaces for meals/snacks is viewed as a single task; it is permissible to use one disposable towel or fresh cloth to complete the task. (TN 1/18/02)

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1.2, 3.3 The intent of this indicator is to determine whether the correct components of a meal or snack are being served to the children, regardless of whether it is provided by the program or brought from home. No analysis of the nutritional value of foods served is necessary. Use the Food Guide to determine whether the components are present. The guidelines also require all components to be served together. Personal dietary preferences of the assessor (e.g., whole grain vs. white breads; fresh vs. canned vegetables; high vs. low sugar or fat content, etc.) are not to be used in determining the quality of the foods served. Foods that are perishable should not be left out longer than 1 hour. Regardless of source or ages served, 75% of all children must receive meals and snacks that meet USDA guidelines. Providers may supplement if they choose in order to guarantee 75% compliance. Programs that choose to “offer” rather than “serve” food (i.e. family style serving, school-age multiple choice snacks) carry an additional responsibility to encourage appropriate choices and model good nutritional habits.

Combination foods are foods with multiple components that have been packaged together or combined during the cooking process. Combination foods can be counted to meet up to two different components. Scoring consideration of combination foods should be balanced with other items on the menu. Foods that might be served together, but do not meet the definition of combination foods can count for up to 3 components (i.e. hamburgers, sandwiches, cereal and milk with added fruit). When vegetable garnishes are served in sufficient quantities, they may be considered to meet the requirement as a vegetable. Breading on meat products may not be counted. Cooked dry beans, such as kidney or black beans which are considered to be an excellent source of protein, can count as either a protein or vegetable. However green beans, like string or lima beans which aren't considered to be good sources of protein, should only be counted as a vegetable.

1.4, 3.5 Eating surfaces must be cleaned and sanitized prior to, and following, use for food service. Follow the “2-step” process. Eating surfaces should be: 1) washed with a soap and water mixture to remove gross soil and, 2) sanitized with a bleach-water solution before and after being used for meals/snacks. To allow bleach-water solution to do its job, it should be allowed to sit for at least 10 seconds (preferably longer) before wiping dry or allowing to air dry. For other acceptable sanitizing agents, refer to the general notes. If proper sanitary measures are clearly practiced as part of the schoolage program, but an occasional lapse does occur, credit can be given. Sanitary conditions such as table cleaning and sanitizing, using clean serving and eating utensils, protecting food from table surface with a plate, paper towel or napkin, are considered in this indicator. If the 2-step process is not observed, (for example, if children go to lunchroom for snack) ask questions to determine whether tables have been cleaned and sanitized and not re-contaminated before food was served. Hand washing is considered in item 19, not in this item.

3.6 The menu should be posted in a location that is easily seen by parents.

19. Personal hygiene

1.1 Change “little” to “no”. Indicator should now read “No attention paid to . . .” (TN 7/17/01)

3.1 “Some” means that staff might remind children sometimes and not others: partial or haphazard attention. To score a 5, regular or consistent attention must be paid to hygiene.

5.1 Credit can be given for this indicator if adequate hand washing takes place at least 75 percent of the time when needed. Stop at this Indicator for recontamination issues.

20. Arts and crafts

5.1. Add “art and craft” so indicator now reads, “Variety of art and craft materials . . .”

7.1 If only one component (new skills or long range project) is present, score 6.

21. Music and movement

1.1, 3.1 The provision for music/movement activities must be a regular part of the program. This can include teacher led group singing, or provision of materials to enable children to listen to music, dance, or sing along. If there is some provision, but less than weekly, score 2.

5.1 Add the word “appropriate” so indicator now reads, “Appropriate music activities . . .”. Activities must be daily. Requires that music activities are available as free choice. This does not mean that the tape player has to be accessible, but if the teacher’s help is needed, it is given upon request.

5.2 “Variety” means there must be variety in materials for 2 of the 3 categories (cassettes, dance props, musical instruments).

7.1 If every 2 weeks to monthly, score 6.

22. Blocks and construction

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3.2 This indicator means “appropriate” in the most basic sense. If children seem to be able to use materials well, without major inconveniences, give credit to this indicator. For example, if blocks are being used, there should be a level, firm surface, and not too many disruptions.

5.1 Delete the word “some” from this indicator.

23. Drama/ theater

* Materials: dress-up clothes, costumes, props, puppets, action figures, dolls (both adult and baby).

Drama is more organized than pretend. There is no difference in the type of prop, only in the degree of pretend or dramatic play. (TN 7/20/01)

3.1 Change “and” to “/” so indicator now reads, “Some pretend/drama props accessible.”

3.2 For this indicator, “support offered by staff” means that staff have made space and materials needed for play accessible to the children. Children play without much adult input. When disagreements occur in the play, staff participate in helping to solve problems.

5.1 The items in parentheses are just examples. Enough props should be accessible for meaningful play to support two roles or situations.

5.2 To give credit for this indicator, more active involvement is required than that required in 3.2. Staff add to the children’s possibilities for dramatic play. For example, if the drama is very active, staff might provide children with a larger space. Or if children need more props, staff might help them find what they need. Must observe at least one incidence.

7.1 Add “and” so indicator reads, “Pictures, stories, and trips . . .” Outside trips are not required for this indicator. Credit can be given for bringing community resources into the program.

24. Language/reading activities

3.2 Credit can be given when this is done by either staff or older children, who are fluent in reading or telling a story.

5.1 The age of the children in the group is a key factor in deciding appropriateness. Younger children (k-2) who still may not be able to separate fantasy and reality should not have access to inappropriate books or games. Appropriateness includes content that is not graphically violent or sexually explicit. For older children, the vast majority of materials should be appropriate, with no materials being extremely inappropriate. Since children will probably not lack exposure to inappropriate materials in other settings, the school age program should concentrate on positive input. Provision of books and games on different reading levels is also part of appropriateness. (TN 3/13/02)

5.2 Must observe at least one instance during the observation.

5.3 Must observe more than one example.

25. Math/ reasoning activities

3.1 Replace “and” with “/” so the indicator reads, “Some age-appropriate math/reasoning games/activities accessible . . .”

5.1 Replace the phrase “games and activities” with “games and/or activities”. If there are 3-5 games that are accessible, give credit for this indicator.

5.2 The intent of this indicator is for adults to link math and numbers to practical life events in the children’s daily schedule. Therefore, look for use of numbers during meals or when fixing own snacks, setting the table for correct number of children, transition times, using a timer to take turns, keeping scores in ball games, taking attendance by children, talking about times to do things and looking at the clock, arriving/leaving, etc. Do not count play activities such as number games, computer games, or homework in determining the score for this indicator. “Number talk” or number experiences as part of practical life events should be observed more than once during the observation to give credit for this indicator.

7.1 Refers to math-focused games and activities, not practical-life use of math. (TN)

26. Science/nature

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Science/nature toys are included in materials. Look for how they are used. (TN 6/1/01)

3.1 If materials are accessible less than daily, but at least weekly, score 2. If there are either materials or equipment present, but not both, score 2. **Tables and shelves are not considered equipment.**

5.2 May ask question, if not clear from observation.

5.3 At least 1 instance must be observed. Examples may include the use of books, internet or experimentation.

7.2 Outside trips are not required for this indicator. Credit can be given for bringing community resources into the program.

27. Cultural awareness

1.2 Refers only to the staff's interaction or approach to children. This includes stereotypes of gender as well as ethnicity and race.

5.1 In order to give credit for this indicator, the multi-cultural materials must show diversity in positive ways and be accessible to the children. Materials include books, pictures, and other materials that show diversity.

5.2 Remove the designation of "ex" from the indicator so that the expectation is for books and pictures depicting both males and females in non-traditional roles – Look for visual images of males and females engaged in activities that promote equal opportunity or in similar work/play roles. Materials should actively promote equal opportunities for men and women to participate in similar activities. These materials should include books at child level, even if only bindings show.

5.3 This can mean an acceptance of children's choices of the activities in which they want to participate (ex. boys are fully allowed to play with dolls; girls are allowed to freely participate in block or carpentry).

7.2 The intent of this indicator is that all diversity be presented in a positive way. This includes cultures, races, gender, age, and ability or other characteristics. (TN)

28. Greeting/departing

1.1 N/A permitted.

3.1 N/A permitted. To give credit for this indicator, kindergarten children must be escorted by a responsible adult.

3.2 To allow for positive scoring, change indicator to read, "Acknowledgement of children's arrival and departure is consistent." Positive acknowledgement is implied; give credit at this level if arrival/departure of 50% of children is acknowledged **by the classroom staff.**

5.1 N/A permitted. To give credit for this indicator, K-1 children must be escorted by a responsible adult.

No score of 6 is possible.

29. Staff-child interactions

3.1 To allow for positive scoring, change indicator to read "Staff respond consistently." Positive is implied. (TN 5/3/01)

3.2 To allow for positive scoring, change indicator to read, "Staff does not favor or dislike particular children." (TN 5/3/01)

30. Staff-child communication

3.1 Replace the word "brief" with the word "some".

3.2 Replace the word "limited" with the word "some".

31. Staff supervision of children

7.2 This indicator requires that a person knowledgeable in a team sport or other activity (e.g., pottery) is available for instruction and guidance so that the children can develop their skills. This means more than just supervising a game of tag, or coloring with markers.

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32. Discipline

No score of 4 is possible.

3.3 Discount if teacher/caregiver uses harsh punishment, threatens, or physically disciplines any child.

7.2 In most cases “consultant” means someone from outside the program who specializes in the area of concern. The staff working in the program can benefit from an outsider’s perspective of a child who is experiencing difficulties. In a few cases, however, a program staff member can count as the “consultant” if the person has a specialization in the area of concern and can give an unbiased perspective.

34. Interactions between staff and parents

3.2 Interpret this indicator to read: “Parent conferences occur upon staff or parent request”

3.3 Consider things such as parent handbook with open-door policy, welcome letters, etc. (TN 6/1/01)

5.3 Take events such as picnics, parent meetings, open houses, etc. into consideration. (TN 6/1/01)

5.4 “Regularly scheduled” is defined as at least one time a year.

35. Staff interaction

Score this item N/A if there is only 1 staff member working with the children.

5.2 Time for staff communication must not distract from responsibilities with children. (TN 7/20/01)

37. Schedule

If a schedule varies throughout the week, base your scores on what the children experience most of the time. For example, if the Friday schedule is more relaxed, while the rest of the week is more restricted due to time for homework, then base the score on the four days of the more rigid schedule.

5.2 Score N/A if only one age group is in the program.

5.3 Add to end of indicator: “some teacher-initiated and some child-initiated.” (TN 7/20/01)

7.2 Two to three field trips are required during the school year. More is expected during the summer.

38. Free choice

3.1 In some programs, opportunity for free choice may be very limited; at least 2 activities for free choice must exist. A program may allow children to choose a specific area to play in at the beginning of an activity period, and then the children cannot change their choice for the rest of the time. In this case, credit would be given for 3.1 (there is some free choice) but not for 5.1.

40. Use of community resources

3.1 Acceptable use of community resources can be having representatives from the resources come to the program. For example, a fire fighter may visit the program to explain about his or her job, or the Agriculture Extension Agency may provide special gardening activities on-site. Children do not have to leave the program site to give credit for a program's use of community resources.

3.2, 3.3 Score yes if all community resources are used on-site, rather than off-site, and no permission is needed.

5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 Credit can be given for 5.1 if regularly scheduled use is only during the full time program, e.g., on teacher workdays or during school vacation. If resources are brought into the program, give credit at 5.1. Ask questions as needed to score 5.2; however field trips are required for 5.3.

44. Provisions for exceptional children

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Tennessee Additional Notes to SACERS

ECERS 37, ITERS-R 32, FDCRS 35 and 40, and SACERS 44 should be scored NA unless a child with a disability that has been diagnosed through a formal assessment procedure and receives (or is eligible for) early intervention services is enrolled. Across all four scales, the following aspects should be considered when scoring: modifications, parent involvement, inclusion, and use of assessment information. Look for the extent of modifications needed to the schedule or classroom to include the child in daily activities, parent and staff communication regarding the child's assessment information and ongoing therapy, and the use of assessment information into planning throughout the day. Some parents may not share all information with staff for various reasons. Consider the levels of quality when determining if staff and parents have shared enough information to meet the child's needs. Even if staff put significant effort into asking about a child's needs, if parents share no information, the child's development is compromised.