



Georgia's Pre-K Program Learning Environment Clarifications

Refer to these clarifications as you complete the IQ Guide for the Learning Environment. Items are listed by section in the order they appear on the IQ Guide.

Section #1 – Classroom Environment and Display

- **Inviting, clean, organized, and visually appealing to children** means: appropriate learning centers are established and the setting promotes and motivates children's learning. The classroom should have adequate space for children to move freely, but without large empty spaces that could cause children to run or tumble. The shelving and materials should be clean and free from dust. The classroom furnishings, carpets, rugs and materials should be cleaned on a regular basis and materials should be organized and stored neatly. Materials and shelves should be labeled appropriately. The storage and organization of materials is crucial in helping children take care of and use them appropriately. Labels (photos, pictures cut from catalogs, drawings or tracings) and words show where materials belong, promote children's familiarity and responsibility for their environment, and help children begin to recognize symbols and words.
- **Unique, child-initiated work** should be included in the classroom display. Majority means more than 50% of what is displayed in the classroom should be unique and child-initiated. The children should have selected the subject and materials and completed the work in their own creative way without teacher direction or teacher choice in the materials. Dittos, worksheets, teacher-directed work and patterned artwork are not considered child-initiated. The items in the display should be current and changed regularly. The dates on items displayed should be from no more than 6 weeks ago.
- **Photos of children** and families and recent activities should be posted in the classroom.
- **Dictation:** Teachers take the time to ask children about their artwork/writing/drawings and child statements are written on or near the artwork/child-initiated work.
- **The classroom display includes charts**, stories, and/or class lists. The purpose of these charts is to model writing and support literacy development. They can include stories that the children create as a class, recalling events of a recent field trip, special event, or special visitor that occurred during the Pre-K day. Charts, graphs, and stories included in the display should include pictures and symbols, as well as print.
- **Classroom rules** are developed and posted: Establish four or five classroom rules. Rules should be written out using simple words and symbols/pictures and posted at the children's eye level. The rules should be concrete and include only what the children "can" do (e.g., "walk inside" rather than "don't run inside").
- **Safety hazards** include: accessible toxic substances, dangling electrical cords, exposed electrical outlets, and broken toys or equipment. Teacher's supplies are kept in a space that is not accessible to the children. Teachers should separate teacher materials and areas from the children's materials and areas. Space must be available to store hazardous materials out of children's reach. Teacher's backpacks and purses must be kept out of the reach of children.

Section #2 – Language and Literacy

Furnishings: the library area should be cozy and inviting to young children and may include soft furniture, rug, lamp, pillows, or stuffed animals.

The basic materials for the reading area should be accessible, labeled and organized.:

- **At least one book** per child should be available in the reading area. There should be a variety of books to meet the varying literacy levels of students. This can include books with few or no words per page, 1-2 paragraphs per page or books with short sentences for emerging readers.
- **Reading books about current topics** being discussed in the classroom further expands children's vocabulary and knowledge about the subject. Young children learn best by being able to actively see and work with materials related to what is being discussed in the learning environment. As topics change, these books should be rotated.
- **Displayed books** should be neatly organized with front covers facing so children can see and make choices.
- **Alphabetic principle** is the idea that letters and letter patterns represent the sounds of spoken language. Children's reading development is dependent on their understanding of the alphabetic principle. Children will learn by reading books such as Chicka Chicka Boom Boom, singing songs, and reciting rhymes. At least 3 types of props to develop the alphabetic principle should be accessible. Materials can include: letter puzzles, alphabet books, displayed alphabet, word cards, labels with pictures and words, letter stamps/stencils/sponges, alphabet games (bingo, lotto, matching, dominoes, interlocking cubes, wooden blocks), letter tiles, magnetic/flannel letters, computer keyboards, or typewriters.
- **Language and literacy props** are materials placed in various learning areas to promote language development. These materials include but are not limited to a flannel board and stories, big books, telephones, teacher-made games, puppets, class-made books, magnet stories, cell phones or walkie-talkies. Flannel board stories should be familiar to the children, so they can practice retelling and sequencing stories. Teachers should refrain from including flannel board stories in this area that have not been retold several times in large and/or small group instruction. Language and literacy props should be clean, unbroken, and contain all pieces.
- **The listening area** should be set up and ready for children to use complete with a minimum of two books, corresponding CD/cassette/Ipod/Ipad/computer and headphones. To be accessible the listening center equipment should be ready for student use (plugged in, have working batteries, be charged, etc.)

The basic materials for the writing area should be accessible, labeled and organized.

The writing area should be separate from your art area and accessible daily. The area should be kept interesting by rotating materials and adding fun and unique writing tools and paper. The center teaches children writing has a variety of functional purposes (communicate ideas, remember to do something, or give directions).

- **Three different types of writing instruments** of various sizes should be accessible to children. This may include: fat and thin markers, pens, chalk, crayons, pencils, and colored pencils.
- **Word cards** with icon, picture, or photograph should be accessible and changed frequently to maintain interest. Seasonal word cards or word cards that relate to the current theme or topic keep the area interesting.
- **Three types of real and found** materials should be accessible daily.
- **At least three different types of paper** should be accessible daily.
- **Name cards** with pictures for children in the class should be accessible each day and used for reference when children are writing their name.

Section #3 - Dramatic Play

The dramatic play area should be large enough so that several children playing can be active and noisy without interrupting other activities. This area should be one of the largest in the classroom and accommodate five or more children.

Furnishings

- **Three types of housekeeping furniture** are required. Examples of furniture are: stove, sink, refrigerator, and hutch. Each of these items reflects a different purpose in the home living area.
- **Dress up clothing storage** is required. Dress-up clothes should be organized and visible so children can see their choices. Some of the clothes should be hung so children can see them clearly. Additional clothing choices can be stored in drawers or in storage bins or tubs if they are neatly sorted and organized and clearly labeled with words and pictures. Clothing choices should be rotated to maintain interest throughout the year.
- **Table and chairs**
- **Basic shelving** for housing the dramatic play materials is required.

The basic materials for dramatic play should be accessible, labeled, and organized.

- **At least 5 multicultural dolls** are required.
- **Quality dress-up clothing** should be accessible to children (a minimum of 6 types). Clothing choices should include a variety of items with which children can identify as a part of their everyday lives. Examples include: fantasy costumes and clothing items (story book characters), community worker outfits (mail carrier, doctor, fire fighter, police officer), fancy dress-up clothing (sequin dresses, suits, dressy hats, gowns), attire that is reflective of different cultures (African dashiki and kufi or wrap hat, Latino shirt with serape, Native American attire) and work attire (overalls, suits, dress shirts, dress jackets, uniforms from local businesses).
- **A full length mirror**
- **Props for kitchen play:** eating utensils, dishes, pots and pans, pretend food, cooking utensils, (rolling pin, egg beaters, etc.)
- **Props for cleaning play:** sponges, mop, broom, dust pan, bucket
- **Props and furniture for pretend play with babies.** At least three types should be accessible. Examples include: baby bed, high chair, blankets, bottles, diaper bag, baby clothes, and/or baby blankets.
- **A collection of empty containers** should be found on dramatic play shelves. Recycled materials such as: cereal and other food boxes, detergent bottles, spice bottles, milk cartons, and/or juice bottles.
- **Three types of additional housekeeping accessories** are needed. Examples include: ironing board/iron, telephone, cash register, clock, and/or pet dishes.
- **Prop boxes** should have an adequate number of props to foster meaningful play experiences related to the intended theme. Props should be stored in boxes, baskets or containers and should be clearly labeled with words and pictures and/or be visible to the children. Examples of themes for prop boxes include: birthday celebration, picnic, flower shop or office. There should be at least one prop box accessible to children and prop boxes should be rotated throughout the year.
- **Props to encourage reading and writing** might include: menus, magazines, cook books, clipboards with paper, telephone message pads, and notepads. Environmental print is encountered in the context of everyday life and should be a part of the dramatic play area. Some examples are company logos, menus, coupons, real food labels and containers, a food pyramid or USDA's MyPlate, phone books, restaurant items, catalogs, junk mail, or signs that relate to topic of study.

Section #4 – The Block Area

Blocks are essential materials in the classroom, and block play enhances all areas of a child's development. The Block Center should include many different types of building materials for children to use in their own constructions and combinations. The Block Center should be designed to allow children to be active builders as they think through their thoughts and ideas about construction. Through block play, mathematical concepts are explored and put to practical use, including: shape, patterns, size, length, weight, and spatial relationships, such as symmetry. While building structures with blocks, children can develop an understanding of physical science concepts such as simple machines (lever, wedge and inclined plane), cause and effect, gravity, balance, and stability.

- **Unit blocks should be organized** neatly on shelves so children can use them independently. To facilitate clean-up labels for unit blocks should support stacking blocks by shape and size. The large majority of unit blocks should be stacked on shelves and not in bins or tubs. This arrangement helps children practice the skills of sorting and stacking. Labels for unit blocks should support stacking blocks by shape and size on shelves. Labels can include photos, drawings and/or pictures from magazines and/or tracings.
- **The block area should be located** in an area of the room where traffic patterns will not disturb block play. Many teachers let the large group carpet area also serve as the block center.
- **This area should be large** enough so that several children can build and create structures without interrupting other activities. The block area should be one of the largest in the classroom and can accommodate five or more children.

Furnishings

- **Basic shelving** is required for organized storage of unit blocks, props, and accessories.

The basic materials for block play are accessible, labeled, and organized.

- **A minimum of 200-250** unit blocks should be accessible for several children. Unit blocks are wooden and include shapes such as rectangles, squares, triangles, and cylinders.
- **A minimum of 17-30** large wooden hollow blocks should be accessible to children each day.
- **Three types of block accessories** should be accessible. Examples include: vehicles, animals (farm, zoo, ocean), traffic signs and or people.
- **At least two types of real and found** materials should be in this area. Examples: egg cartons, PVC pipes and fittings, paper/plastic cups, and/or cardboard tubes.
- **Materials to promote literacy** development might include: maps, alphabet blocks, books related to block play, and/or writing materials.
- **An additional type of block** with a minimum of 10-20 blocks. Additional blocks might include: foam, cardboard, plastic, or teacher made blocks (such as covered cardboard juice box containers). The additional block type should not be interlocking.

Section #5 – The Math Center

Math for young children should be concrete and filled with play and exploration. It is important that young children truly understand mathematical foundation concepts before moving to more abstract operations such as addition and subtraction.

Furnishings

- **Basic shelving** is required to house and organize the math and manipulative materials should be housed on low shelves with an adjacent table or designated play area near the shelf.

The basic materials for math are accessible, labeled, and organized.

- **One type of material for each of the following:** counting, sorting, recognizing shapes, and hand/eye coordination should be accessible daily and be rotated regularly.
- **Materials for measuring weight, length and time** should be accessible. Materials for measuring weight might be a scale or balance. Materials for measuring length might be rulers or tape measures. Materials to measure time might be an hour glass, stop watch, or kitchen timer.
- **Real and found materials** for the math area might look like: buttons, bottle tops, beans or dominoes. There should be two different types accessible.
- **Math and manipulative materials to address different developmental levels** of the children in the classroom and meet children's needs as they progress throughout the year.
- **Three types of puzzles** that address varying levels of difficulty should be accessible. Examples: knobbed, wooden, and floor.
- **Three different types of math games** accessible each day. Examples of math games: dominoes, number bingo, matching games, counting games, patterning games, and folder games.
- **Materials to promote literacy development** might include: stringing alphabet beads, books to develop math concepts, writing materials, alphabet cube and beads, alphabet puzzles. Monthly rotation of literacy development materials is not a requirement.

Section #6 - Science

Children are curious about the things that are in their world. In the Science Center young children question, become scientists, and explore and learn about new materials. The Science Center allows children to examine things closely, compare and contrast, and draw conclusions about observations. The well-equipped Science Center allows children to explore living and non-living things, but most importantly encourages them to learn about the biological and physical world.

Furnishings

- **The sensory table** must be prepared daily and be clearly visible and open prior to center time. Sensory materials are defined as materials that are pourable or scoopable. The sensory table/tub must be supplied with ample sensory materials along with materials for children to dig, scoop and pour with, containers to fill and dump, pouring materials, and other items such as tweezers or tongs. If the sensory table is used for cutting or other materials such as plastic grass an additional container with sensory materials must be accessible to children.
- **Basic shelving** is required to house and organize the science materials.

The basic materials for science are accessible, labeled, and organized.

- **Three different basic science materials** are needed. Basic materials are: magnets and items to attract and repel, binoculars, magnifying glasses, prisms, color paddles.
- **Three types of discovery materials** are needed: matching sounds, identifying scents, feely bags, sequencing cards, gears, discovery tubes/sensory bottles, simple science experiments, health and nutrition games, or animal bingo.
- **A minimum of 2 sets of pictures and collections** related to science/nature should be displayed in the area. Examples might include: seashells, rocks, feathers, tree bark, fossils, acorns, variety of leaves.
- **Something living to care for.** Children should be involved in the daily care of the plant and/or animal to learn that all living things need care, food and water to live.
- **Materials to promote literacy development** such as: age-appropriate science concept books, writing materials that support recording observations and making lists, walkie-talkies, science word cards with pictures to develop vocabulary.

- **Sensory table materials** should be changed monthly to provide a variety of textures and experiences. The changes to the sensory table should be documented on the Changes to the Environment Form. Examples: beans, sand, rice, water, dirt, etc.

Section #7 - Art

The purpose of art in the preschool classroom is to allow children to explore artistic media and to provide a vehicle for them to express themselves creatively. As young children begin to experiment with different media, they begin to understand their world and how to control the tools they use. Young children are imaginative and enjoy using art materials to express their ideas. In the preschool years, the process of creating is more important than the product the children develop. The Art Center should be a safe, comfortable area to foster the freedom of creative expression with materials and teachers who support these endeavors.

Furnishings

- **Table and chairs**
- **A drying space** or rack is required.
- **Full size easel** that holds 16x22 or 18x24 paper. The art easel should be supplied with paint and paper and accessible daily. Young children need daily painting opportunities to express themselves creatively, as well as to develop large and small motor skills associated with easel painting. The easel, paint, painting implements, and paper should be prepared daily and be clearly visible to children as a choice prior to center time.
- **Shelving** for storage of the art materials. Materials on the shelf should be organized and accessible to children. The writing area must be established separate from the art area and accessible daily. Remember that the art area and writing area help children use materials for different purposes. While there are paper, markers, crayons, etc. in both areas, children will be using the materials for creative work in art, while they are exploring purposes for writing in the writing area.

The basic materials for art are accessible, labeled, and organized.

- **Crayons** should be accessible and organized for student use.
- **Markers** should be accessible and organized for student use.
- **Three different types of paper** should be organized and accessible each day. The paper should be of different sizes, colors, and/or textures. For example: construction, tissue, manila, newsprint, foil, newspaper, and/or wax paper.
- **Scissors** (appropriately sized) and enough for a small group of children.
- **Three types of collage** materials separated by type and sorted in an orderly fashion. Examples: pipe cleaners, fabric scraps, buttons, cotton balls, feathers, foam pieces, sequins, pom poms, and/or yarn.
- **Play dough or soft clay** along with tools for modeling, molding, and making impressions should be accessible each day. Examples of tools for play dough exploration might be: bowls, dowels, toothpicks, cookie cutters, kitchen utensils, rolling pins, buttons or beads.
- **Glue**-enough for a small group of children.
- **Fresh paint for the easel** should be prepared each day. Paint cups should be adequately supplied with a minimum of 3 color choices.
- **Brushes**-developmentally appropriate sized brushes should be in each paint cup.
- **Easel paper** should be sized 16 x 22 or 18 x 24. The easel paper should be hung on the easel or easily accessible for children to hang on the easel independently.
- **Painting smocks** should be accessible.

- **Variety of materials for three-dimensional creations** should be accessible. Examples include: small boxes, straws, paper plates, plastic bottles, pipe cleaners, and/or cardboard tubes.
- **Materials for promoting literacy development** might include: early childhood books related to color, shape, lines/forms, drawing or creating. Art history books or books about artists could also be included. These books can open opportunities for discussion about how creative efforts are made and famous people from our past and present who have made them. Other literacy materials might be: storybook paper, alphabet stickers, lined paper or journals, pens, pencils.

Section #8 – Music

Music provides an opportunity to reinforce other areas of the curriculum, such as reading readiness, dramatic play, math development and gross motor development. Children develop musical skills by singing, playing rhythm instruments, moving to music, listening to music and being creative with music. A classroom environment should be established where children can experiment with sounds while creating their own music.

- **Music player**-separate from the listening center.
- **Musical Props**- Two types of musical props (enough for 22 or the number of children enrolled). For example: 22 scarves, 22 ribbons, and/or 22 bean bags.
- **Musical Instruments**- various types of musical instruments (enough for 22 or the number of children enrolled)..
- **Age-appropriate music**- at least 3 types (classical, children’s jazz, nature sounds, multicultural, dance, foreign language.)

Section #9 – Physical Development

Physical Development Gross motor activities develop the large muscles of the body and enable children to develop mastery of body movements. As children develop mastery over their bodies, their self-esteem increases. Early experiences with gross motor activities lay a foundation for a lifetime commitment to physical fitness. In order to develop their large muscles, children need daily access to balls, jump ropes, wagons to pull, slides, and a climbing apparatus. Other activities like marching, running, jumping, bending and dancing also contribute to the development of the whole body. The outdoor play area provides a space for children to run and play.

- **Age-appropriate mobile equipment**- Three types such as: balls, hoops, parachute, wagons, tricycles, scooters, plastic bats, catching games/gloves, cones for obstacle courses.
Note: helmets are required when riding vehicles.
- **Use stationary equipment daily**, weather permitting. Children should participate in some type of physical development each day. When children are unable to go outside due to inclement weather, the teacher should provide opportunities for gross motor activities that can be done while inside. Examples might include: a balance beam, toys for catching and throwing (soft, large balls, or beanbags), games such as Simon Says and Follow the Leader which incorporate gross motor movements, children can hop, run in place, touch toes (other body parts), move like an airplane and dance or exercise to music, create an obstacle course in the classroom using natural barriers combined with crawling, hopping, balance beam, or hula hoops, and paper plate skating – children stand on paper plates and use them to slide or “skate” around the room to music or the teacher’s directions.