

# SCHOOL AGE GUIDE TO PLANNING ACTIVITIES

NC DCDEE



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Southwestern  
Child Development  
Commission



## Good Activities Matter .....

High quality activities are the heart of a successful school age program. After sitting for hours, students yearn to move, play, socialize, and communicate.

Data published by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care highlights that engaging and interactive activities are necessary for the proper cognitive and social development of school age children. This research highlights that quality school age activities help students strengthen educational milestones, and cement social skills developed in a traditional school setting (MEEC, *The Importance of Play*).

As a school age professional, you have the perfect opportunity to help students put learning into action. By taking time to incorporate fruitful activities into your daily schedule, you can effectively turn a dull afternoon into a program day filled with connection, excitement, and hands-on education.

This resource guide is designed to help you understand the process of creating and implementing a successful activity for school age students. As you go through this guide, make an effort to reflect on how you currently plan activities and the steps you can take to strengthen this valuable skill.



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES**  
Division of Child Development  
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**CCR&R Council**  
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# Types of School Age Activities .....

Take a second and reflect. When you think of a high quality school age activity, what is the first thing that comes to mind? A pick-up game of soccer...a S.T.E.M. project on robotics...an interactive community development project with an afterschool teacher?

While many learning experiences require higher amounts of movement, materials, and interaction, it is important to keep a broad understanding of what a high quality activity looks like. Quiet activities, small group play, and simple transition activities provide similar learning outcomes as large, teacher directed events. **Do not limit your definition of a school age activity to a single, large scale learning event.**

Below are five different activity types to consider as you plan your daily and weekly lesson plans. Crafting enriching activities for each of these types of engagement will help you keep students engaged throughout the day.

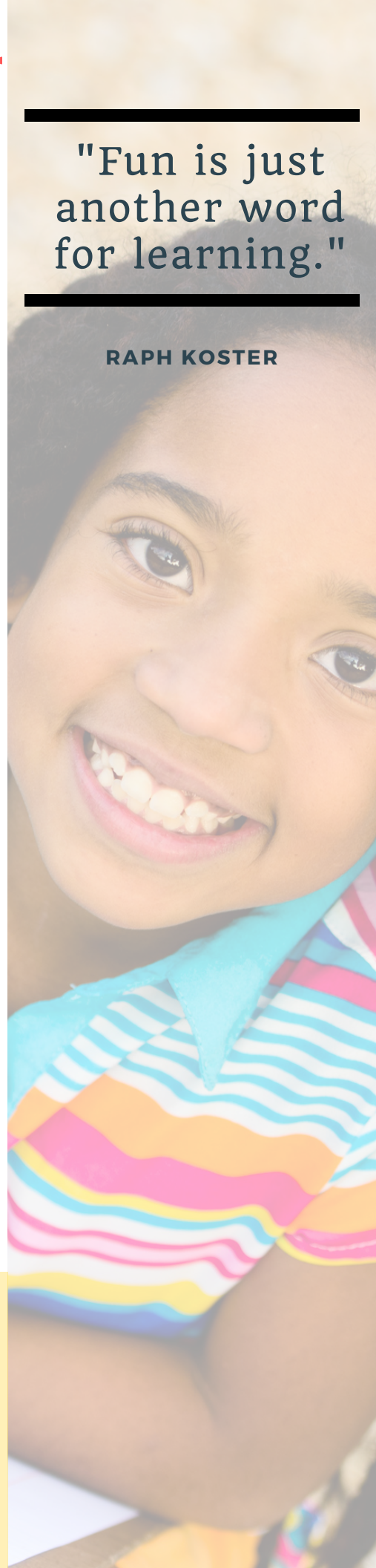
## 1 Independent Activities

Independent activities are perfect for students during transition times when sections of the classroom are being used for other care needs (snack, arrival, departure). Independent learning also helps students who need to decompress or self-regulate.

Independent activities are more likely to succeed if students have the ability to choose a location for independent play. Giving students multiple spaces to learn alone promotes autonomy and learning freedom.

"Fun is just another word for learning."

RAPH KOSTER



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) highlights that structured physical activities help students produce endorphins that are linked to healthy weight control, brain development, and emotional well-being. For more information, visit the CDC website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)





## 2 Small Group Activities

Small group activities take place throughout the program day. This type of activity helps students learn valuable skills like problem-solving, brainstorming, cooperative learning, and sharing.

It is beneficial to center small group activities around set classroom topics where students work and learn in teams. Small group activities are also a great learning option during periods of free play where students have the chance to choose learning materials and peer interactions.

## 3 Cooperative Activities

Cooperative activities involve all interested students in the group or program. Teacher directed games, group meetings, field trips, and projects are great examples of cooperative activities that build learning skills and social interaction. Successful cooperative activities require larger amounts of time than other activity types, and must be scheduled and planned accordingly.

It is important to provide some alternatives for students who do not want to participate in larger cooperative activities.

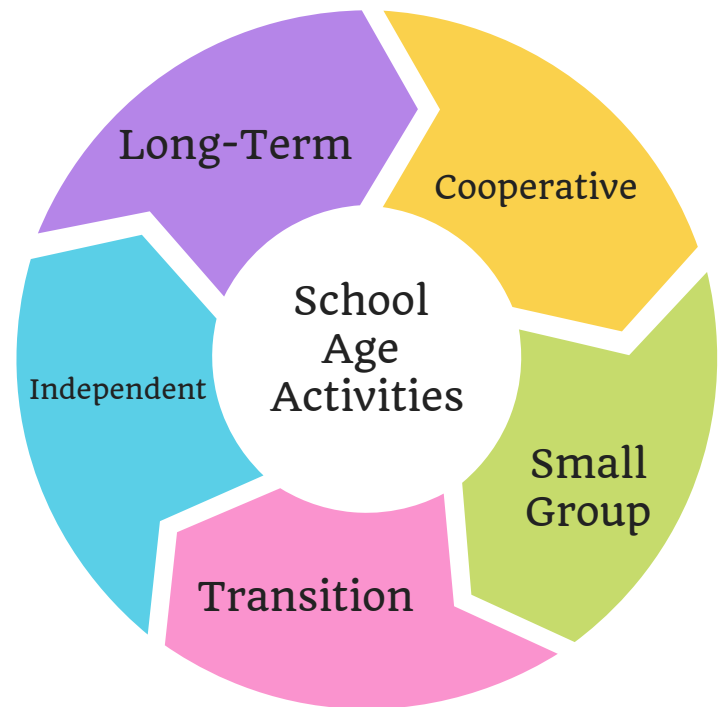
## 4 Transition Activities

Transitions provide the perfect opportunity for students to learn. Preparing transition games and songs can turn a hectic 15 minutes into a time for engagement.

## 5 Long-Term Activities

Long-term activities extend from one week to several months. This type of activity is a great way to help student expand learning and develop complex problem-solving skills.

It is important to consider the space and time allotment for long-term activities that extend for multiple days. Students might also need special areas to store materials they are using for longer periods of time.



# Getting Students Involved

Student engagement is the foundation of a successful activity. Taking time to discover student interests and incorporating their current input into an activity increases overall interest and participation rates.

Research conducted by Wang and Fredricks (2014) highlights that students are more likely to participate in school activities and events when material is catered to their interests. Rates of participation increase when students have the ability to help plan activities and give insight into the direction of the program.

When planning activities for your school age program, take time to look and listen to your students. Reflect on what they are interested in and let them work with you to transform these interests into learning experiences.

## 3 Ways to Get Students Involved

### Observe

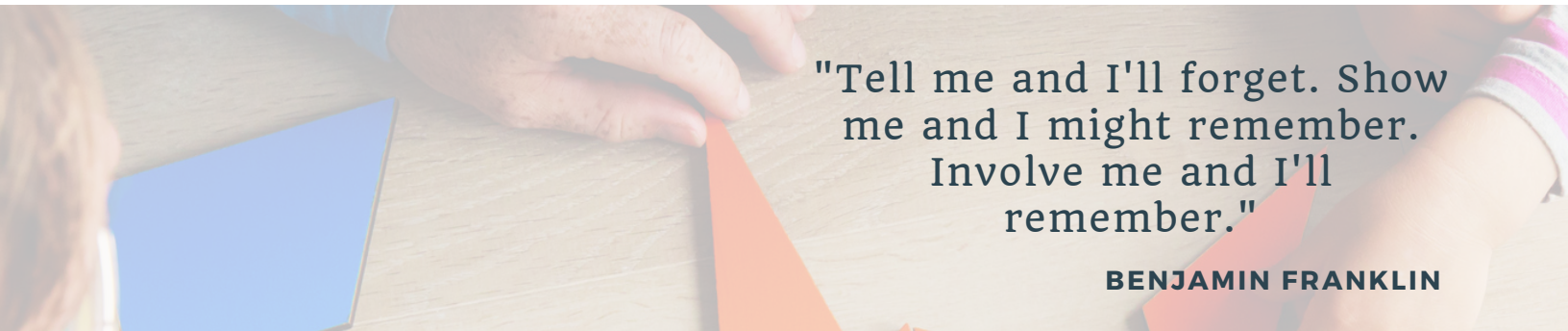
Observing play and listening to student conversations is a great way to understand current topics of interests. Time periods like arrival, snack, transitions, and outdoor play provide perfect opportunities to see what topics you can incorporate into program activities.

### Plan

Schedule a planning time with your students to come up with activities surrounding their interests. Have students think about what materials and themes they would like to see with each activity.

### Expand

If students show signs of boredom with certain materials or activities, help them discover new ways to engage. Have students help you rotate materials, rearrange sections of the classroom, or come up with new ways to play an activity. Even small changes will increase student interaction.



"Tell me and I'll forget. Show me and I might remember. Involve me and I'll remember."

**BENJAMIN FRANKLIN**



# 5 Steps to Planning a Successful Activity

After you determine the direction and theme of your lesson plan, it's time to plan your activity. As you develop your activity, take a minute to reflect on the types of activities mentioned in the first section of this guide. Do you want to create a quick transition game for bathroom breaks, or are you looking to implement a long term project over the next two weeks? Understanding the type of activity you want to create will keep your students and schedule on track.



It is important to remember that the Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) requires licensed school age programs to provide multiple types of activities throughout the program day (10A NCAC 09 .2508). Providing a mixed assortment of activities falls in line with this requirement and keeps the program day engaging.

When you start to plan your school age activity remember these five easy steps to keep you organized and prepared.

## 1 Space

One of the most important factors to planning a successful activity is determining the amount of space needed for proper engagement. Conducting an activity with inadequate play space can lead to challenging behaviors, fighting, and arguing.

Gross motor activities often require larger play areas where students can run, jump, and move freely without interfering with peers. Smaller activities require less space depending on the direction of play.

## 2 Age

It is important to reflect on the age of the students participating in a planned activity. The intended age range contributes to the rules of an activity, the materials used, and the overall length of the activity.

Activities that are not developmentally appropriate for the age of the students will often end with frustration and boredom.

## 3 Materials

When planning an activity, it is important to select the right materials. Make sure that materials are age appropriate and can be handled and used by all of the students in your group. Outdoor activities might involve larger, stationary materials like soccer goals, climbers, or basketball goals. Be sure to think about how you and other staff members will be able to move materials throughout your program and activity areas. Sometimes it might be necessary to move materials to a desired location before program hours start.

## 4 Time

Reflect on the amount of time required for each activity. Some smaller activities only require a few minutes, while other long-term projects need days or weeks to complete. Giving students and yourself a designated amount of time to focus on an activity will keep your group engaged and on schedule.

Remember to mold the time of an activity around the age of the students in your group. Younger students have shorter attention spans than older children. Allocating too much time to younger-aged activities will lead to challenging behaviors.

It is also important to give students advance notice when transitioning from one activity to another. Sand timers are a great visual tool to help students know how much time is left with a current activity.

## 5 Supervision

Think hard about the level of supervision required for each activity you plan. Some activities require close teacher support, while other are geared to develop independence.

Younger students will require more supervision and facilitation during an activity. However, it is important not to confuse supervision with control. Make sure to give students freedom to explore, experiment, and try new things with each activity.



## 5 Steps At-a-Glance

- **Space**
- **Age**
- **Materials**
- **Time**
- **Supervision**

# Thinking About Accommodations

A great school age teacher always thinks ahead. The ability to adapt to the changes of the day ensures that students stay engaged and learning takes place. When planning successful school age activities, it is important to have a back up plan for students who might have trouble participating.

Academic research from the University of Washington describes an educational accommodation as an "alteration of environment, curriculum, or equipment that allows and individual...to gain access to content (DoIT, University of Washington, 2021)."

For school age activities, accommodations need to be anticipated and expected. Physical disabilities, cognitive differences, age, IEP plans, and the emotional effects of trauma can alter the success and engagement level of an activity. As you plan your classroom's weekly activities, be sure to reflect on the accommodations your students need to learn and play.



## Examples of Activity Accommodations

**Space:** Increasing the size of indoor activity areas for students with physical disabilities or movement issues. Moving an outdoor gross motor activity inside for students with allergies.

**Age:** Simplifying games for younger students. Reworking rules to a game to make the activity age-appropriate.

**Materials:** Incorporating larger crayons and markers for students needing fine motor support. Providing Velcro dramatic play clothing for students who might have issues dressing for play.

**Time:** Shortening an activity for students experiencing stress or fatigue. Lengthening a kickball or basketball game for older students who are still engaged in play.

**Supervision:** Providing closer supervision support for students dealing with trauma-induced anger or depression. Staff members helping a student with a broken bone transition from the classroom to the playground area.



# Roadmap To A Successful Activity

Potential Activity

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Space

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Time

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Materials

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Age

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Supervision

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Potential Accommodations