



Creating Inclusive ECE Spaces

Prepared for Wisconsin Department of Children & Families

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Sharing a mission of change



Please Note: IFF is not involved with the administration of *Child Care Counts* Program C.

The information contained in this presentation is provided by IFF to share their ideas, expertise, and suggestions in creating inclusive early childhood education spaces.

If you have questions about IFF services, please visit <https://iff.org/>

For all questions related to Child Care Counts and Program C, please contact the Child Care Counts Call Center at DCFDECECOVID19CCPayments@wisconsin.gov or 608-535-3650



Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

About IFF

- **Nonprofit lender, real estate consultant, and developer since 1988**
- **Serves Wisconsin and 8 other Midwest states**
- **Assists nonprofits across human service sectors**
 - Including health care, schools, childcare and housing
 - Core values of accessibility and disability inclusion
- **Community-based ECE initiatives in four states including Wisconsin**
 - Research
 - Technical assistance
 - Consulting services
 - Grants and loans to improve ECE facility quality



Sharing a mission of change



Good inclusive design
=
Good ECE design

Inclusive design benefits **all children**

Barrier free design creates an environment where all children can learn and play.

Elements such as lighting, paint colors, windows and material selections create a more productive and healthier built environment for everyone.



Disability in Children

Over 3 million U.S. children -- **4.3% of the under 18 population** – have a disability

(2019 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau)

1 in 44 U.S. children is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder

(US Centers for Disease Control, 2018 data)

Who benefits from accessible ECE spaces?



Everyone -- Children, Families, Caregivers and Staff

Four factors that create welcoming space for all

1. Space Use & Accessibility

2. Lighting -- Natural & Artificial

3. Acoustics

4. Color and Visual Clutter





Space Use and Accessibility



A design that encourages inclusion...

- Eliminates physical barriers
- Is efficient and safe
- Doesn't create blind spots
- Creates defined areas based on activities
- Has flexibility of use
- Promotes independence for every child

Ramps & Railings

Can be a design element or a functional adaptation

Everyone uses it the same way



Bathrooms



Barrier-free entry, low toilets, roll-under sinks, grab bars, motion activated faucets –
and no high powered air dryers



Flexible spaces

- Design for options
- Allow space for mobility devices
- Organize room into activity areas based on function
- Provide storage space for non-relevant materials



Quiet Spaces



Create areas of retreat or refuge that also inspire wonder and imagination



Play Spaces

Fun for All



A photograph of a school hallway. The ceiling features a large, grid-patterned skylight that allows natural light to enter. The walls are a mix of brick and light-colored panels. On the left, there is a long row of grey metal lockers. On the right, there are white door frames and a black pipe running along the wall. In the background, a red door with a glass panel is visible. A semi-transparent white rectangle is overlaid in the center of the image, containing the word "Lighting" in red text.

Lighting



POOR LIGHTING IMPACTS A CHILD'S ABILITY TO FOCUS AND CAN LEAD TO POOR LEARNING PERFORMANCE.

“Research in the use of light in schools has shown that cool-white fluorescent bulbs, (which are used in virtually all classrooms) cause: bodily stress, anxiety, hyper-activity, attention problems and other distress leading to poor learning performance.”



CONTROLLING LIGHT LEVELS

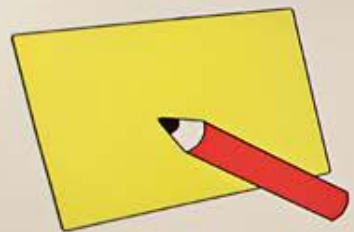
Research has shown that adjusting light levels within a classroom can affect children's behavior and mood.



1 Wonderful Wednesday
200 Emotions
AAA

- Breakfast Time
- Greeting Time
- Large-Group Time
- Planning Time
- Work Time
- Cleanup Time
- Recall Time
- Small-Group Time
- Outside Time
- Lunch Time
- Nap Time

BEFORE



Writing Area
Área de escribir



Art Area
Área de arte



AFTER



CRYSTAL SWANS
DETROIT, MI



ACCESS TO NATURAL LIGHT HAS A DIRECT LINK TO LEARNING OUTCOMES.

Children with limited natural light were outperformed by those with the most natural light by 20% in math and 26% on reading tests.

SOURCE: U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY



OUR KIDZ WORLD
DETROIT, MI



NATURAL LIGHT

Natural light elevates mood, increases concentration, and can even help raise average grades by up to 25%



BLESSED BEGINNINGS
DETROIT, MI



BORROWED LIGHT

Many centers are not able to have large windows in every classroom. Work with what you have and look for ways to "borrow light" when direct light isn't possible.

SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

Replacing a solid door with glass is a cost effective way to introduce light into a classroom without having to create a new opening.





Acoustics



Acoustic Panels





Luxury vinyl tile (LVT)
flooring, low-pile rugs,
soft sculptural elements help
control sound



Color

COLOR IN LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Light unsaturated earth tones with small areas of bright color are calming.

Using color to designate different spaces is another useful tool for neurodiverse children.





BEFORE

Bright colors and patterns promote excitement and movement



AFTER



BEFORE

AFTER

- Soothing neutral colors
- Woodgrain flooring brings in nature and feels warm and familiar.



A photograph of a child's playroom. The room has light green walls on the left and a white wall with a clock in the background. The floor is made of light-colored wood. In the foreground, there is a small wooden table with four chairs. To the left, there is a large window with a black frame. In the background, there is a white counter or partition. The text "Visual Clutter" is overlaid in the center of the image in a red serif font.

Visual Clutter



Itsy Bitsy Spider

37
KERMIT

FROGS
FACES

SEAT POCKET

SEAT POCKET



EXCESS VISUAL NOISE NEGATIVELY IMPACTS LEARNING.

A Carnegie Mellon University study (Fisher, Godwin, & Seltman, 2014) found that children in heavily decorated classrooms were more distracted, spent more time off-task, and demonstrated smaller learning gains than when the decorations were removed.

A group of four young children are sitting around a light-colored table in a classroom. They are engaged in a hands-on activity using colorful pom-poms (red, yellow, blue, green, purple) and a worksheet. The worksheet has a grid of squares and some numbers written on it. One child is pointing at the grid, while another is looking at the camera. A third child is in the background, and a fourth is on the left. A semi-transparent white box with red text is overlaid in the center of the image.

Project ideas
for every budget

Under \$1,000

SENSORY KITS

Create an age-appropriate kit with sensory bags, noise canceling headphones, fidgets; purchase an imaginary play structure that doubles as quiet space

OUTDOOR PLAYSPACES

Add a sensory wall; install a small water feature; build a raised planting bed for a sensory garden

FRIENDLY FINISHES

Repaint a room in a sensory-friendly color; add ADA drawer pulls; add dimmers to existing lighting; install handrails in bathroom; reduce clutter with a modular organizer

ADAPTIVE TOOLS

Buy large foam grips for crayons and utensils, items with larger buttons, specialty scissors, adaptive feeding spoons, bowls with suction cups for stability, visual choice boards



\$1,000 to \$5,000

ACCESS

- Install exterior concrete ramp and handrail
- Widen doorways to double-stroller width
- Level or replace flooring with durable LVT in a soothing color

SOUND & LIGHT

- Install sound baffling wall panels
- Replace fluorescent lighting with LED cans or silent adjustable lighting
- Bring in more natural light by replacing a glass block window

MORE

- Switch traditional faucets to motion-activated models
- Add a child-level plumbing fixtures, like a work sink
- Communication devices for non-verbal kids can be as simple as a tablet with an app



\$5,000 to \$10,000

ACCESS: Install automatic door opener with access button

LIGHT: “Borrow” internal light with a glass door or interior window

FF&E: Replace furnishings with modular roll-under pieces that can be reconfigured easily and matching storage cabinets with doors

OUTDOOR PLAYSPACES: Add inclusive outdoor play equipment; replace wood chips with a rubberized poured-in-place surface

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