Head Start
MID-AMERICA REGIONAL COUNCIL

Early Head Start Classroom Observation and Project Construct Fidelity Tool

Site:_____ Classroom: _____

Teaching Team: _____

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

Ages of Children:_____ Number of Children: _____

Number of Adults: _____ Number of Volunteers: _____

Name of Observer: _____

NOTE TO USERS:

This observation instrument was designed for use only in infant and toddler classrooms at MARC Head Start. The indicators in the left column of each page were drawn from the references below. Observers should write comments in the space provided to evidence whether indicators are met.

REFERENCES:

Baker, H., Seagraves, E., & Mosley, J. (2016). *The fidelity tool for administrators: The creative curriculum for infants, toddlers, & twos.* Bethesda, MD: Teaching Strategies, LLC.

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2014). *Project construct: Infant and Toddler framework for curriculum. 1st ed.* Columbia, MO: Project Construct.

U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start. (2016). *Head Start program performance standards and other regulations.* Washington, DC: Administration for Children and Families.

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ENVIRONMENT

Indicators	Comments
Head Start Program Performance Standards • 1302.31(a) Teaching and the learning environment. A center-based program must ensure teachers and other relevant staff provide…an organized learning environment that promotes healthy development of children's skill growth aligned with the *Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five,* including children with disabilities • 1302.31(b) Materials and space for learning. A program must provide age-appropriate equipment, materials, supplies and physical space for indoor and outdoor learning environments, including functional space. The equipment, materials and supplies must include necessary accommodation, and the space must be accessible to children with disabilities. Programs must change materials intentionally and periodically to support children's interests, development, and learning. **Project Construct** • The classroom arrangement includes: o Adequate space for various developmentally appropriate learning activities, o A carpeted area for the whole class to meet together and for infants and toddlers to crawl and walk safely, o Places for small groups to play together, o Places where children can be alone, o Quiet spaces with soft surfaces, blankets, toys, o Adequate space for motor and sensory play, o Places for displaying children's creation, and o Storage space for children's personal items. o Areas for diapering, dressing, sleeping, and feeding that are visually connected to play areas, o Places for teachers to comfort and cuddle children o A place for parent to say good-bye to ease transitions, and o A place for mothers to breastfeed children. • As developmentally appropriate, the classroom is arranged into learning centers such as construction, pretend play, art, math/manipulatives, reading, music, science, and sand/water play. • The classroom is equipped with ample, varied, and multipurpose materials. Materials are: o Child-sized (such as tables and chairs), o Stored on low, open shelves in containers that are easy to see and reach into, o Easily accessible and clearly organized, and labeled, o Authentic (real equipment), o Reflective of children's current interests, and o Reflective and affirming of children's families and cultural and linguistic backgrounds.	

DAILY ROUTINE

Indicators	Comments
Head Start Program Performance Standards • 1302.31(c) Learning Environments. A program must ensure teachers implement well organized learning environments with developmentally appropriate schedules, lesson plans, and indoor and outdoor learning experiences that provide adequate opportunities for choice, play, exploration, and experimentation among a variety of learning, sensory, and motor experiences. For infants and toddlers, promote relational learning and include individualized and small group activities that integrate appropriate daily routines into a flexible schedule of learning experiences. **Project Construct Daily Schedule** • To meet developmental needs and interests of young children, the daily schedule offers a balance between: o Child-initiated and teacher-initiated learning experiences**,** o Relatively free movement and more restricted, quieter movement activities, and o Individualized, small-group, and large-group activities. • The daily schedule takes into careful account young children's individual needs for nutrition, bathroom visits or diaper changes, rest time, and vigorous exercise. • The daily schedule should be predictable, provide flexible time-blocks, consider developmental differences, and be paced to accommodate children's differing needs and abilities. • Most of the day is devoted to small-group, active learning experiences with opportunities to explore, experiment, and build on prior knowledge. A minimal part of the day is devoted to large-group activities. **Project Construct Transitions** • Teachers help children transition between learning experiences by: o Posting daily schedule in clear view using pictures, symbols, and words children can understand, o Keeping a consistent routine with sufficient time for children to pursue their interests, and telling children what is coming next after the transition, o Giving advance notice of transitions, and explaining variations in schedule in advance, o Using ritual to signal time for change, o Minimizing the number of transitions, o Being gentle and positive but consistent and persistent when guiding children through transitions, o Understanding that it is developmentally appropriate for toddlers and twos to resist transition and finding ways to motivate them. **Project Construct Routines and Rituals** • Teachers foster connection and build a sense of togetherness and unity through: o Rituals for every day (morning greetings, rest time routines, Conscious Discipline). o Rituals for certain events (welcoming new child).	

APPROACHES TO LEARNING: Self-Regulation / Behavior Guidance

Indicators	Comments
Head Start Program Performance Standards o 1302.31(b)(1) Effective teaching practices must emphasize nurturing and responsive interactions, and environments that promote behavioral development. **Project Construct** A few simple rules are a part of all classrooms. Involve children in making and using classroom rules by: o Allowing children to suggest and discuss rules, o Making rules in response to classroom problems, o Explaining that rules make the classroom a safe, happy place for everyone, o Reminding children that rules can be changed, o Explaining why everyone, including the teacher, has to follow the rules. • Conflict is an inevitable part of life. Knowing how to deal with and resolve conflicts is an important skill for children to have. Teachers facilitate conflict resolution when they: o Establish routine procedures for dealing with conflict, o Allow and encourage children to solve problems by themselves, when possible, o Designate a place for children to resolve their own conflicts, o Model calmness through tone of voice and facial expressions, o Accept responsibility for all children's physical safety, and o Help children repair relationships but do not force them to apologize. • To create an environment of trust and respect, teachers: • Listen attentively to children, and • Facilitate and encourage respectful conflict resolutions.	

APPROACHES TO LEARNING: Initiative & Curiosity

Indicators	Comments

Head Start Program Performance Standards
• 1302.31(b)(1) Effective teaching practices must emphasize nurturing and responsive interactions, and environments that promote behavioral development; provide supportive feedback for learning; motivate continued effort; and support all children's engagement in learning experiences and activities.
Project Construct
• Adults show respect by valuing children's ideas, supporting children's interests, and treating children as capable.
• In response to children's individual interests and to promote their independent learning, teachers add learning centers and/or materials to the classroom.
• Teachers support children's efforts with resources, materials, and suggestions.
• Teachers support children's initiative and curiosity by creating environments with opportunities to:
  ○ Explore and experiment,
  ○ Make decisions and choices,
  ○ Investigate personal interests, and
  ○ Function at individual developmental levels.
• To promote inquisitiveness, teachers:
  ○ Provide a safe, yet stimulating environment
• To promote initiative, teachers:
  ○ Provide children opportunities to make meaningful choices and to explore their environment, and
  ○ Allow children to direct their own play and pursue their own interests.
• To promote confidence, teachers:
  ○ Accept and support children's actions and attempts at mastery.
• To promote inventiveness, teachers:
  ○ Encourage curiosity, initiative, and confidence.
• To promote reflectiveness, teachers:
  ○ Encourage children to ask questions, express thoughts and ideas, and use past experiences to guide their behavior.	

APPROACHES TO LEARNING: Creativity

Indicators	Comments

Head Start Program Performance Standards
• 1302.31(b)(1)(iv) Include developmentally appropriate learning experiences in creative arts.
Project Construct
• Teachers can encourage symbolic expression by providing:
  ○ Sufficient time and space to create make-believe play, dance, music, art, and constructions,
  ○ An environment rich with stories, songs, and pictures,
  ○ Props and adequate supplies,
  ○ Opportunities to collaborate with peers,
  ○ Opportunities to think about things in new ways,
  ○ Opportunities to create rather than to imitate, and
  ○ Opportunities to combine elements into relationships to form new ideas or creations.
• Teachers encourage representation through Pretend Play by providing a Pretend Play learning center with materials such as child-sized tables and chairs, kitchen furniture, dolls and beds, toys dishes and food, dress-up clothes, phones, grocery carts.
• Teachers encourage representation through Music and Movement by providing a Music learning center with materials such as a variety of musical instruments, equipment for playing music, musical recordings.
• Teachers encourage representation through Art and Construction by providing an Art learning center with art supplies such as easels, paints, glue, yarn, ribbons, paper, pencils, markers, and crayons.
• Teachers encourage representation through Construction by providing a Construction learning center with materials such as blocks of different shapes, sizes, and colors, ramps and rollers, a workbench and tools.	

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Relationships

Indicators	Comments

Head Start Program Performance Standards
• 1302.31(b)(1) Effective teaching practices must emphasize nurturing and responsive interactions, and environments that promote social development.
• 1302.31(b)(1)(iv) Include developmentally appropriate learning experiences in social development.
Project Construct
• Teachers create a learning community that motivates students by giving them a voice, a sense of worth and accomplishment, and an opportunity to learn from others.
• Teachers encourage shared experiences with infants and toddlers by:
  ○ Sharing attention,
  ○ Letting children share space or a toy, or
  ○ Encourage just watching each other.
• Teachers:
  ○ Realize that children need positive peer interactions to develop maximally,
  ○ Arrange activities in such a way that all children have many opportunities daily to interact with peers, and
  ○ Provide guidance so toddlers can be successful in interactions with peers.
• To create an environment of trust and respect, teachers:
  ○ Recognize that infants and toddlers seek relationships with peers and adults from birth,
  ○ Promote primary caregiver-child relationships, and
  ○ Engage in “serve and return” interactions with infants and toddlers.	

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
Emotional Functioning / Sense of Identity & Belonging

Indicators	Comments

Head Start Program Performance Standards
• 1302.31(b)(1) Effective teaching practices must emphasize nurturing and responsive interactions and environments that promote emotional development.
• 1302.31(b)(1)(iv) Include developmentally appropriate learning experiences in emotional development and social studies.
Project Construct
• To help children develop a sense of worth and security, teachers reflect in words the emotions and feelings of infants and toddlers.
• Teachers create environments of trust and respect for children by:
  o Listening attentively to children
  o Seeking children's opinions and acknowledging the value of their input
  o Facilitating and encouraging respectful conflict resolution
  o Supporting children's efforts with resources, materials, and suggestions
  o Questioning children to understand their thinking
  o Allowing children to make mistakes that do not compromise their health or safety; and
  o Talking with children to promote their understanding.
• Children are allowed to make choices based on their own interests and judgments.
• Children share classroom tasks daily.
• Rather than doing it themselves, teachers encourage children to share in the responsibility of distributing things (e.g., materials for table-setting).	

LANGUAGE & LITERACY: Language & Communication

Indicators	Comments

Head Start Program Performance Standards
• 1302.31(b)(1) Effective teaching practices must emphasize nurturing and responsive interactions and environments that promote language development.
• 1302.31(b)(1)(iv) Include developmentally appropriate learning experiences in language development.
• 1302.31(b)(2) For dual language learners, a program must recognize bilingualism and biliteracy as strengths and implement research-based teaching practices that support their development:
• (i) For an infant or toddler dual language learner, include teaching practices that focus on the development of the home language, when there is a teacher with appropriate language competency, and experiences that expose the child to English.
Project Construct
• Adults support the development of children's listening and speaking skills by providing an environment:
  ○ That is rich in language and extensive in vocabulary,
  ○ That encourages and supports communication and a degree of risk-taking,
  ○ With numerous opportunities to express and share ideas,
  ○ With numerous opportunities to hear and talk about stories, and
  ○ That is rich with information.
• Adults go a long way in helping young children develop strong language skills when they:
  ○ Talk a lot to infants and toddlers,
  ○ Try to understand and respond to their attempts to communicate,
  ○ Repeat their attempts back to them clearly and correctly, and
  ○ Foster children's experimentation.
• Adults provide a language model for children to observe as they:
  ○ Greet others,
  ○ Ask questions,
  ○ Share experiences, and
  ○ Engage in conversations.	

LANGUAGE & LITERACY: Emergent Literacy

Indicators	Comments
Head Start Program Performance Standards • 1302.31(b)(1) Effective teaching practices must emphasize nurturing and responsive interactions and environments that promote literacy development. • 1302.31(b)(1)(iv) Include developmentally appropriate learning experiences in literacy development. **Project Construct** • Teachers provide a variety of opportunities for children to learn about and manipulate spoken language. • Teachers guide children toward an understanding of how written language works. • Adults maintain a literacy-rich environment and provide numerous opportunities for children to interact with print and with other individuals. • Teachers provide a well-stocked classroom Library learning center with publications in different genres and at varying levels of challenge. • Teachers provide puppets and possibly a puppet theater. • Teachers provide opportunities for children to learn nursery rhymes and play rhyming games with words. • Adults read to children and provide regular opportunities to engage in the act of reading themselves. • Teachers provide numerous opportunities to experiment with writing and scribbling for meaningful purposes such as birthday cards for friends, letters to parents, or stories about personal events. • Teachers model writing such as jotting lists, making notes and journal entries, or expressing themselves through letters or stories. • Teachers provide writing materials, including paper, pens markers, pencils, and crayons.	

COGNITION

Indicators	Comments

Head Start Program Performance Standards
• 1302.31(b)(1) Effective teaching practices must emphasize nurturing and responsive interactions and environments that promote critical thinking and problem-solving.
• 1302.31(b)(1)(iv) Include developmentally appropriate learning experiences in science and social studies.
Project Construct
• To help children feel that they are trusted, and their thinking is valued, teachers:
  ○ Trust infants and toddlers to solve their own problems,
  ○ Observe children as they act on the physical and social environment, and allow them time to formulate a response or solutions,
  ○ Support children's efforts with resources, materials, and suggestions,
  ○ Question children to understand their thinking,
  ○ Allow children to make mistakes that do not compromise their health or safety, and
  ○ Talk with children to promote their understanding.
• To support infants' and toddlers' cognitive development, adults need to provide young children with:
  ○ Numerous opportunities to manipulate materials,
  ○ Sufficient time to reflect on their discoveries since active learning is more than mere manipulation of physical materials; it is both "hands-on" and "minds-on."
• The is no screen time for infants and toddlers.	

COGNITION: MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

Indicators	Comments
Head Start Program Performance Standards • 1302.31(b)(1) Effective teaching practices must emphasize nurturing and responsive interactions and environments that promote critical thinking and problem-solving. • 1302.31(b)(1)(iv) Include developmentally appropriate learning experiences in mathematics. **Project Construct** • Adults provide a Math/ Manipulatives learning center. • Teachers provide opportunities for infants and toddlers to construct relationships, such as “sameness” or “difference” between things. • Adults model how numbers are used in everyday life, such as counting out plates when setting the table or counting two shoes. • Adults provide opportunities for children to navigate spaces, such as crawling through a tube or putting a block on top of another. • Adults provide a Science learning center stocked with science equipment, including magnifying glasses, binoculars, nature samples, and balances. • Adults provide a Sand and Water Table with utensils. • Adults provide opportunities for children to act on the environment and observe the reaction (e.g., squeezing lumps of playdough, mixing paints, rolling balls down inclines, throwing balls, or dropping objects. • Adults support children in making sense of the physical world. Children have opportunities to mouth, drop, push, pull, stack, throw pour mold, or mix things. • Adults provide opportunities for infants and toddlers to interact with the natural world.	

PERCEPTUAL, MOTOR, & PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT: Perception / Gross & Fine Motor

Indicators	Comments
Head Start Program Performance Standards • 1302.31(b)(1)(iv) Include developmentally appropriate learning experiences in physical development. • 1302.31(e)(4) A program must recognize physical activity as important to learning and integrate intentional movement and physical activity into curricular activities and daily routines in ways that support health… A program must not use physical activity as reward or punishment. **Project Construct** • The daily schedule includes time for vigorous exercise. • There is adequate space indoors and outdoors for active play. • Children have opportunities to develop gross motor skills by participating in activities such as rolling over, scooting, crawling, cruising, walking, running, climbing, jumping, and bouncing. • Children have opportunities to move with objects such as riding toys and balls. • Children have opportunities to develop fine motor skills by participating in activities such as banging two blocks togethers, dropping objects through a hole, picking up small pieces of food, stacking, scribbling, drawing, writing, tearing, picking up small puzzle pieces, and picking up objects using tongs. • Teachers arrange both indoor and outdoor play experiences that challenge children to navigate obstacles and use their physical abilities to cause changes in an object through force and motion.	

PERCEPTUAL, MOTOR, & PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT:
Health / Safety / Nutrition

Indicators	Comments
Head Start Program Performance Standards • 1302.31(e) (1) A program must implement an intentional, age-appropriate approach to accommodate children's need to nap or rest, and that, for preschool age children in a program that operates for 6 hours or longer per day provides a regular time every day at which preschool age children are encouraged but not forced to rest or nap. A program must provide alternative quiet learning activities for children who do not need or want to rest or nap. • (2) A program must implement snack and meal times in ways that support development and learning. Snack and meal times must be structured and used as learning opportunities that support teaching staff-child interactions and foster communication and conversations that contribute to a child's learning, development, and socialization. Programs are encouraged to meet this requirement with family style meals when developmentally appropriate. A program must also provide sufficient time for children to eat, not use food as reward or punishment, and not force children to finish their food. • (3) A program must approach routines, such as hand washing, and transitions between activities, as opportunities for strengthening development, learning, and skill growth. • 1302.43 Oral health practices. A program must promote effective oral health hygiene by ensuring all children with teeth are assistant by appropriate staff, or volunteers, if available, in brushing their teeth **Mid-America Head Start** • Follows "We're on the CASE" procedures. **Project Construct** • In order to maintain both physical and emotional well-being, children need to develop healthy living practices. They need opportunities for vigorous exercise, balanced diets, sanitary toileting habits, and adequate rest. • Infants and toddlers are provided nutritious choices at mealtimes, outdoor play or activities when the weather permits, and developmentally appropriate play equipment. • Teachers model and discuss the benefits of healthy living practices with children. • Teachers work with children to establish common safety precautions	

FOUR TYPES OF PLAY

Type	Indicators	Comments
Sensory-Motor Play (Sometimes called Functional or Practice Play)	Children engage in sensory and motor exploration of toys, materials, spaces and people in order to learn about them. Sensory-Motor Play is more physical play like experimenting with the world through senses, manipulating objects, and crawling, rolling, running, and jumping.	
Constructive Play (Sometimes called Productive Play)	Children manipulate objects in order to create something. In Constructive Play, children play with toys and other objects and materials to accomplish a goal. Examples: • Using wooden blocks to build a tower, • Using playdough or clay to model an insect, or • Using art materials to represent a flower.	
Socio-Dramatic Play (Sometimes called Pretend, Dramatic or Symbolic Play)	Children pretend to be other than what they are and use actions, objects, or words to represent things or situations OR use small toys to play out themes. During Socio-Dramatic Play, children pretend, take on roles, and act out sequences of events. They can role play real characters and events such as mom and dad, store worker, dog and cat, or police officer. The play can also be fantasy themed—wizards, fairies, princesses, or superheroes. During Dramatic Play, children use small toy people, animals, vehicles, etc. to act out roles and sequences	
Games with Rules	In solitary or group play, children recognize and follow rules that conform to the expectations and goals of the game in order to sustain play. Games with Rules can be movement games, board games, card games, or social games. Types of games include aiming, racing, chasing, hiding, guessing, card, board, and games involving verbal commands.	

INFANT/TODDLER PLAY EXPERIENCES OFFERED

Experience	Examples	Comments
Teacher-Guided "Play-Like" Experiences **Teachers initiate**, plan, and facilitate experiences based on curriculum objectives. Some elements of play are present—e.g., joyful, engaged, interactive, hands-on materials provided.	• Teachers provide materials such as masking tape or tissue boxes filled with scraps of fabric and guides children's exploration. • Teachers bring out toy phones and make pretend phone calls with the children. • Teachers guide *Baby Doll Circle Time.* • Teachers invite children to finger paint at the table. • Teachers lead a game of *I'll Find You*--hiding a teddy bear for children to find. • Teachers bury attribute blocks in sand for children to uncover and explore. • Teachers set up simple obstacle courses and use spatial words as children go in, out, under, over, and through.	
Free Play Teachers provide blocks of time and set up inviting indoor and outdoor environments to encourage **child-initiated** play.	• Children choose toys, objects, loose parts to explore with all their senses. • Children engage in child-initiated sensory-motor play in the gym or on the playground. • Children explore drawing, painting, modeling, and building materials. • Children imitate others in socio-dramatic play—pretend to talk on phone, stir food, feed baby, ride in the bus. • Children initiate and play simple games such as Peek-A-Boo and Chase.	
Teacher-Supported Play After observing children at play, **teachers respond** to them and provide intentional and individualized support for play and learning.	• Teachers provide doctor's office props and join doctor's office play. • Children and teachers play together with soapy water in the sensory table. • Children and teachers build block towers, knock them down, and rebuild them. • Teachers bring toy food and grocery cart outside. Children and teachers play picnic or grocery shopping themes together. • Teachers provide paper for children to tear with their hands or snip with toddler scissors.	