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## **Facility Guidelines for Early Childhood Programs in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia**

Any construction of new facilities or re-construction of existing facilities are to follow the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW). regulations § 3270 as well as the zoning specifications for building occupancy for the local municipality or township.

Depending on how far along your facility is in the process when you read this guide, you should reasonably dedicate nine months to two years to renovate/build and subsequently license a new center. The process requires a moderate level of expertise, capital, and above all else determination and patience. The regulations outlined in this document will help your facility planning team to take the steps to create a safe accessible environment for children and the personnel who care for them. The document goes one step further by first outlining the top best practices that have been implemented at existing facilities. Leaders in the child care provider world know that thoughtful construction and renovation of a facility can enhance children's capacity for learning as well as curricula and should not be an afterthought because of fear of higher costs or complications to the development process. Quality facilities promote children's social, emotional and cognitive growth, and have also proven to substantially improve employee satisfaction while also promoting stability and retention.

- Department of Public Welfare Regulations The Pennsylvania Code, Title 55, Public Welfare, Chapter 3270 defines a child is "a person 15 years of age or younger."
- This guide uses the term "day care center" in order to conform to the legal usage of the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW). According to the code (DPW regulations § 3270.3a), day care centers include preschool programs, child development centers, and part-day school-age programs that operate for more than 90 consecutive days per calendar year.
- All programs that provide care for children, including those not required to obtain a DPW license, must meet building fire code regulations.

# Best Practices: Provide a Higher Quality Environment for Children

Incorporate these best practices into your design BEFORE you renovate or build your space in order to cost effectively provide the highest quality environment possible. The following practices relate to quality measures from Pennsylvania's Keystone STARS program and related Environmental Rating Scales (ERS) for infants/toddlers, early childhood and school-age populations.

- **DAY-LIGHTING**

- PLACE WINDOWS IN CLASSROOMS FOR NATURAL LIGHT
- WINDOWS AT EYE LEVEL OFFER CHILDREN, ESPECIALLY TODDLERS AND young children, an opportunity to gaze outside and expand their environment.

- **SPACE**

- PROVIDE MORE THAN SQUARE FEET OF CLASSROOM SPACE PER child, (The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare requires only 40 square feet of classroom space per child.)

- **DESIGNATE A RESOURCE/BREAK ROOM AND RESTROOM FOR STAFF**

- Staff need a space outside of the classroom for breaks and/ or classroom planning. This could be a space with table(s), chairs, resource materials, a microwave and refrigerator. Adults should have private restrooms not accessed by children.
- The staff toilet should be accessible from reception area for use by parents as well.

- **PROVIDE OUTSIDE OR INDOOR PLAY SPACE FOR LARGE MUSCLE activity.**

- THE PLAY SPACE SHOULD PROVIDE CLEAR LINES OF SIGHT FOR supervision.
- ONE THIRD OF THE PLAY SPACE SHOULD BE OPEN AND FREE of obstructions for running and games.
- THE PLAY SPACE SHOULD OFFER AT LEAST SEVEN DIFFERENT types of physical skill opportunities in addition to walking, running, skipping and hopping created by open space. Options include: climbing, sliding, bouncing, swinging, balancing, hanging, rolling, tumbling, pushing, pulling, riding, throwing, kicking, catching, digging, building, manipulating, pulling-up, crawling, scooting and wiggling.

- THE PLAY SPACE SHOULD OFFER A VARIETY OF developmental opportunities for the support of social, emotional and cognitive growth. Options include playhouses, kitchen toys, toy cars and animals, dolls, outdoor instruments, paint, chalk, large outside toys, buckets, funnels and shovels.
- ONE THIRD OF THE PLAY SPACE SHOULD BE SHADED
- THE PLAY SPACE SHOULD OFFER SOME EXPERIENCE WITH natural materials and the natural world. Options include: sand, water, mud, grass, gardens, butterfly bushes, ornamental grasses, natural terrain, bird houses and wind chimes.
- IF POSSIBLE DRINKING WATER SHOULD BE AVAILABLE
- **CLASSROOM EFFICIENCY**
  - PLACE SINKS IN ALL CLASSROOMS AND LOCATE CHILDRENS TOILETS in or adjacent to classrooms. This will allow staff to spend more time in the classroom, give children choices, and reduce disruptions to classroom schedule. All of this will help improve scores on the Environmental Rating Scale (ERS).
  - IT IS HIGHLY DESIRABLE THAT PROVIDERS HAVE SEPARATE sinks for bathroom hand washing and all other instances of hand washing (e.g. a separate station for maintenance purposes)
  - SINKS SHOULD BE INSTALLED AT A CHILDS HEIGHT TO eliminate the need for step stools. (While portable sinks are acceptable for obtaining a DPW license, they will reduce ERS scores because refilling and emptying them many times a day reduces the amount of time teachers interact with children.)
  - PROVIDERS SHOULD EXPLORE THE FEASIBILITY OF MOTION- activated faucets and soap dispensers.
  - CONSIDER THE OPTION OF INSTALLING A HANDS FREE DRINKING fountain in the classroom.
- **SAFETY**
  - CREATE A SECURITY HAIRLOCK AT FRONT DOOR BY BUILDING A foyer or vestibule that can be monitored and controlled by receptionist to prevent unwanted visitors.

- POSSIBLE OPTIONS FOR ADDITIONAL SECURITY MEASURES INCLUDE remote door release, keyless entry, and the installation of an intercom and CCTV system.

## Zoning Issues

- Zoning regulations dictate land use, the height and bulk of buildings, parking requirements, placement of signs, character of development on private property, and how property is “used,” inside and out.
  - For example, zoning laws tell what kinds of structures can be attached to our homes, such as decks or fences, or the number of families that can legally live in a particular property. They also tell the business operator where he/she can legally locate commercial activity.
  - Zoning is important for Early Childhood centers:
    - The Zoning Code sets limits on how each property in the city/township may be used. It is important to check the zoning of a property before purchasing, leasing, or renovating particular location.
    - You can request this information at Licenses and Inspections— Zoning Archive. You will need the legal address for the building. Sometimes this is the mailing address or “house” number. If this address does not work you can search the website of the Board of Revision of Taxes, Property Search Services, to discover what address is used.
    - To legally use a property as a child care center in the City of Philadelphia, you must obtain a zoning permit from the Department of Licenses and Inspections. If the property is not properly zoned, this may be difficult or impossible.
      - Primarily, prospective child care providers must be concerned with whether the child care “use” is allowed, according to the zoning of the property.
      - The prospective child care provider should also be concerned with “zoning” restrictions, particularly if the provider intends to make any changes to the exterior of the building.
      - Before securing rental or purchase of a property for use as an early learning center, the provider may want to seek necessary zoning approvals.

- If the property is not yet owned or will be rented by your organization, you must have the written permission of the owner to apply for zoning approvals.
- Accessory to a House of Worship
  - Early learning centers may operate as an “accessory use” to a house of worship, regardless of whether the house of worship is zoned residential, commercial, recreational, or industrial.
  - “Accessory uses” must be on the same lot as, and secondary to, the principle use. That is, the Early learning center cannot be the main use of the property.
  - Applicants should be sure to list what floors of the building will be used for the Early Learning Center.
  - You should also be sure to list “accessory preparing and serving of food” in the application, as well as any other accessory uses you intend to have in the building. These may include playground space, office space, storage space, etc.
  - When deciding whether to grant a variance for early childhood, the ZBA has also considered whether the facility will be in compliance with applicable Building Code and Department of Public Welfare standards. Often, the expectations of the ZBA are higher than Building Code and Department of Public Welfare standards for early childhood licensing. For example, the ZBA has sometimes considered whether the facility has:
    - SEPARATE TOILET FACILITIES FOR STAFF AND CHILDREN
    - AIR CONDITIONING OF CLASSROOM AREAS
    - CHILDRENS TOILETS EXCEEDING THE \$07 MANDATED 15:1 ratio for toilet trained preschool-age children,
    - SPACE EXCEEDING THE 3TATE’S 40 SQUARE FEET PER child rule
    - WINDOWS FOR LIGHT AND VENTILATION IN THE CLASSROOM AREA
    - VENTILATION AND EGRESS FROM ANY BELOW GRADE classroom area

- PICK UP AND DROP OFF POINTS TO MINIMIZE THE IMPACT ON traffic flow,
- ADEQUATE TRASH STORAGE AND REMOVAL
- SAFE AND APPROPRIATE PLAY SPACE WITHOUT DISRUPTION TO the surrounding community,
- OTHER COMMERCIAL USES IN THE SURROUNDING PROPERTIES
- GARBAGE DISPOSAL
- SUPPORT OF THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITY MEMBERS, CIVIC association, or City Council representative.

## **Building Codes (Fire Safety and Handicapped Accessibility)**

These regulations apply to major renovations and new construction. Providers should first review the current, existing documents on file with the City/township for a selected building. It is not uncommon to have a building that already has zoning and a Certificate of Occupancy (CO) for child care.

This section deals with some of the most confusing aspects of the building code. Please consult with a licensed architect experienced in municipal and DPW child care regulations for further insight about the specifications of your building. All buildings located in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia must comply with building codes in order to meet fire safety and handicapped accessibility requirements.

- These regulations can result in pricey upgrades and modifications to your center, but they are in place in order to ensure that children are in a safe accessible space.
- Depending on the age group that the center will serve, certain fire safety regulations must be followed in order to obtain licensing.
- . Classrooms must be located at grade level and not located in a basement or above-grade level.
- Each classroom must have an exit that opens to the exterior without steps.

- **Fire separations:**

- If the daycare facility has both I-4 and E use groups, rooms containing these groups may need to be separated by a one hour rated wall construction
- if the building is equipped with a sprinkler system, or 2 hours where not equipped with a sprinkler system. (One hour rated wall construction refers to the amount of time, one hour in this case, that a particular wall of this construction would take to be destroyed by fire.)
- Sprinklers:
  - Use Group I-4: Sprinklers are required.
  - Use Group E: Sprinklers are required when the fire area is greater than 20,000 square feet in area OR if the spaces used for educational purposes are below the level of exit discharge. If your center is larger than 20,000 square feet or you plan to place classrooms in a space below grade, sprinklers are required.
  - Exception to the rule: Renovations to existing buildings may not require sprinklers for the above use groups if you are altering less than 50% of the floor area OR if there is not enough water pressure at the street to support a sprinkler system without a fire pump.
- Fire alarm and detection systems:
  - Use Group I-4: A manual fire alarm system is required along with an electronically supervised automatic smoke detection system.
  - Use Group E: A manual fire alarm system is required. Where sprinklers or smoke detectors are installed, they shall be connected to the building fire alarm system.
- Fire extinguishers (with a minimum rating of 2-A:10-B:C) are required for both use groups and must be placed as directed by building inspectors.
- Basements: Are allowed for classroom use, but may require sprinklers (see "Sprinklers" above).
- Exits from building: A minimum of two exits are typically required from each floor level within a building (Note: there are a few exceptions). They should be as far from each other as possible. There is no exact guidance on how far apart exits should be, and this could be a point of disagreement at licensing.
- Stairwells may require enclosure with one hour rated walls.

- Dead end corridors can have a maximum length of 20 feet for new construction and 35 feet for existing buildings. In the event of an emergency personnel and children should not be confused by dead end corridors.
- **Accessibility (by those with handicapping conditions):**
  - Any alterations to an existing building must comply with accessibility codes unless it is “technically infeasible.” Where compliance is technically infeasible, the alteration must provide access to the maximum extent that is technically feasible.
    - Note: “Technically infeasible” is a quote from the regulations. It is probably meant to be vague so that plan examiners can make decisions based on local circumstances. Generally, it means that an existing building does not need to be adapted for accessibility if the cost is very great or if the historic nature of the building is compromised too much. An example: It would be possible to make the top of the Great Pyramid in Egypt accessible to wheelchairs, but the cost would be huge and the pyramid would not retain its historic and cultural integrity.
  - New buildings must fully comply with all accessibility codes, including toilet rooms, accessible paths and routes.
  - Accessibility codes may require ramps at entrances/ exits, 32 inch wide doors at entrances and restrooms, handicap accessible restroom with a 60 inch turning space to accommodate wheelchairs, and ramps or an elevator to access other floors.

## **Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW) Requirements**

- **RUNNING WATER FOR HAND WASHING IN BATHROOM AREAS**
  - DPW regulations—Chapter 3270.82 (j)—state: A source of running water for hand washing shall be present in bathroom areas. If the running water does not flow directly into a drain that is connected to a sewage system, a receptacle shall be provided to contain the water used for washing. The receptacle shall be emptied into an approved sewage system at least once a day. This is usually interpreted to mean that portable sinks can be used in these areas. Please refer to the “Best Practices” section for more information on portable sinks.
  - **30 SQUARE FEET OF CLASSROOM SPACE FOR EACH CHILD ENROLLED IN the center:** this does not include closets, bathrooms, halls, etc.

- OUTDOOR OR INDOOR PLAY SPACE FOR LARGE MUSCLE ACTIVITY
  - MINIMUM OF 65 SQUARE FEET PER CHILD for PRESCHOOLERS AND SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN
  - The regulations do not specify that all children enrolled in the center must be able to use the play space at one time. Centers have been licensed that provide play space for only one classroom of children at a time; classrooms then take turns using the play space.
- RATIO OF TOILETS TO TOILET TRAINED CHILDRE
  - TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS: 1 TOILET FOR EVERY 15 CHILDREN
  - RATIO OF SINKS TO CHILDREN: TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS 1 SINK FOR EVERY 25 CHILDREN
  - DPW regulations—Chapter 3270.82(c)—state: “A sink shall be located in or near a toilet area.”
- 3TAIRS AND RAMPS
  - INSIDE OR OUTSIDE STAIRS WITH THREE OR MORE STEPS MUST have a handrail.
  - INSIDE STAIRS MUST HAVE NONSKID SURFACES
  - RAMPS AND PORCHES MUST HAVE HANDRAILS

## **Food Service Requirements (Department of Health and Department of Licenses & Inspections)**

in most cases, you will have to submit documents to the Department of Health (DOH) for a Plan Review for Food Establishments. It is recommended that in developing a new or substantially renovated facility, these plans should be submitted for DOH review BEFORE proceeding with renovations, as there may be adjustments required by DOH.

- DOH regulations generally concern food safety— preparation, serving, and storage.
- The Department of Licenses and Inspections also regulates food service; they are concerned primarily with fire safety.
- There are a number of approaches to providing food in day care centers.
  - A center can prepare meals on its premises or it can arrange for children or some caterer to provide meals.

- Many centers today have a mission to provide full healthy meals to children in their care; however, preparing any meal, no matter how simple, will require upfront costly installation of kitchen equipment.
- No/limited on-site preparation of food will require far less costly kitchen equipment; however, the center loses freedom to cook in the kitchen.
- On-site food preparation for 20 or more children.
  - If meals are prepared on a regular basis for 20 or more children, the kitchen must meet all of the requirements of a commercial kitchen as defined by the Department of Licenses and Inspections. This means, among other things, installing commercial grade equipment and an approved fire suppression system.
  - The center needs to submit architectural plans of the proposed kitchen and a complete description of equipment to be installed.
  - The center must receive approval of the plans and undergo an inspection once the kitchen has been installed. This decision could require employing an architect
- . On-site food preparation for 20 or fewer children.
  - If a center prepares meals for fewer than 20 children, some domestic type equipment can be used and a fire suppression system is usually not required.
  - In this case the organization will need to sign an “Affidavit of Limited Cooking.” The Affidavit of Limited Cooking includes a promise that your center will not fry foods.
- No/Limited on-site food preparation.
  - If the center decides that children should bring their own lunches to the center, or if the center uses catered meals like those provided by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, a full-service commercial kitchen is not required. However, a commercial NSF-approved refrigerator and sometimes microwave oven are required. (NSF = NSF International—[www.nsf.org](http://www.nsf.org) —formerly National Sanitation Foundation). Limited food preparation, as used here, refers to warming of already prepared meals.

## **Outdoor or Indoor Play Space for Large Muscle Activity**

Pennsylvania DPW requires play space for all age groups. Play space can be inside of your center, or it can be located outside and adjacent to your center. DPW regulations do not specify that all children enrolled in the center must be able to use the play space at the same time. Centers have been licensed that provide play space for only a few classrooms of children at a time; classrooms then take turns using the play space.

- The play space must be in or adjacent to the center.
- While it is permissible for centers to visit a nearby playground or park, these spaces will not satisfy the DPW requirement for outdoor play space.
- The following are the specific square footage requirements
  - PRESCHOOLERS AND SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN: A MINIMUM OF 65 square feet per child
  - IF THERE ARE UNSAFE AREAS OR CONDITIONS IN OR NEAR an outdoor play space, “fencing or natural barriers are required to restrict children from those unsafe areas . . . .”
  - Other regulations These regulations apply to both indoor and outdoor play space.
    - ALL PLAY EQUIPMENT SHOULD MEET THE AMERICAN SOCIETY for Testing and Materials - ASTM Standards for Public Play Equipment
    - ALL SAFETY SURFACING SHOULD MEET THE ASTM 1292 Standard for Impact Attenuation.
    - ALL PLAYGROUNDS SHOULD BE DESIGNED TO ALLOW FOR safety of use according to the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission Handbook for Public Playground Safety.
    - THE PLAYGROUNDS SHOULD BE ACCESSIBLE TO PERSONS WITH disabilities according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
    - PLAY SPACE SHOULD BE FREE OF TRIPPING SUSPENDED or protruding hazards.
    - REGULATIONS REQUIRE FENCING OR OTHER BARRIERS IF there are hazardous conditions nearby; best practices suggests fencing or barriers for all playgrounds. Fencing must conform to the new ASTM Fencing Standard F2049.