

DECE FY21 Classroom and Materials Guidance

The way a classroom is arranged and organized supports and promotes childrens' play and learning. This document provides classroom layout examples in alignment with COVID-19 guidelines, as well as specific considerations for classroom organization, materials storage, and more. This resource can be used to support best practices that are aligned with COVID-19 guidelines and DECE [Early Childhood Framework for Quality](#) (EFO) requirements, such as **frequent handwashing, the use of face coverings, and maintaining 6 feet of distance between individuals throughout the day**. The considerations provided in this document are based on the best information currently available. It is intended to supplement and not replace recommendations provided by city, state and federal regulations. For the most up-to-date COVID-19 guidance, refer to the [Early Childhood Summer/Fall 2020 Readiness page](#) (see appropriate guidance for your setting type).

This resource provides examples of best early childhood practices, aligned with the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) markers of quality care, as a reference point for programs to consider during these unprecedented times, particularly regarding the health and safety of children and staff. COVID-related considerations, such as selecting materials that can be easily cleaned and sanitized, are noted in italics for easy reference. The Division of Early Childhood Education has also provided [additional resources](#) to support planning for the 2020-2021 school year, including sample schedules (see [here](#) for your setting type), [cleaning and sanitizing procedures](#), [Birth-to-Five Blended Learning Implementation Guidance](#), and other resources available [here](#) and [here](#).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the DECE will not be conducting pre-K and 3-K program assessment using the [Classroom Assessment Scoring System \(CLASS\)](#) and the [Early Childhood Environmental Ratings Scale \(ECERS\)](#) through December 2020. The DOE will focus on quality improvements in supporting early childhood programs through a trauma-informed approach. This resource includes suggested best practices.

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Considerations for the Classroom Environment

The following section provides additional considerations in the following areas:

- Clearly defined centers
- Room arrangement
- Activities
- Minimum materials

Clearly Defined Centers Considerations

Having clearly defined centers in the classrooms ensures that children have a variety of places to play. ECERS strongly encourages setting up at least 5 clearly defined centers where children can play with little to no interruption from traffic going through the space, or other children playing in neighboring areas. The number of centers in the classroom may vary based on the setting and room size and arrangement. In classrooms with limited square footage, the size of each center and/or the amount of children allowed could be limited in order to maximize the space and offer a variety of play opportunities.

A clearly defined interest center includes:

- A space designated for one particular kind of play;
- Sufficient space to allow the type of play encouraged by the materials;
- Materials related to that type of play;
- Materials organized and stored for children's easy access;
- Furniture needed to use materials in the space.

The chart below provides examples of centers that can be implemented in a classroom to provide a variety of activities and learning experiences for children. As noted above, the number and size of centers may vary based on what the space allows and considerations made to maintain social distancing throughout the day.

Center	Considerations
Reading Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Books organized on shelves and/or in bins;● Comfortable seating in a quiet space in the classroom;● Away from active/noisier centers (e.g., Dramatic Play, Block, Music Centers) and high traffic areas to avoid interruptions.

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Center	Considerations
Cozy Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Soft furnishings of non-porous materials that make them easy to clean and sanitize, such as vinyl child-sized sofas, bean bag chairs, and rubber mats for softness under children’s feet; ● A substantial amount of softness for children to escape the hardness of the classroom environment while having a designated space to relax and lounge; ● Seat covers on upholstered sofas/chairs so that they can be easily removed and laundered as needed. <p>*Please note, stuffed animals are not required by ECERS in the Cozy Area. Classroom stuffed animals are also discouraged since it is difficult to maintain cleanliness of porous materials.</p>
Block Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A special block area large enough for at least 3 children to each build a sizable structure and move freely while they play; ● Sufficient space, blocks, and accessories for children to play without competition; ● Sets of blocks and accessories (enough to allow at least 3 children to play without competition) can be made available on a rotating basis (e.g., a bin for Monday and a different one for Tuesday) so the same blocks do not need to be cleaned/sanitized on a daily basis. ● A flat surface that is suitable for building. <p>*Since wooden blocks have a porous surface, they require special cleaning procedures as outlined here.</p>
Dramatic Play Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Large enough for the number of children allowed to play without crowding while keeping distance; ● Furniture and props for meaningful housekeeping play, such as play kitchen cabinets, a table with two chairs, along with <i>hard body dolls</i>, <i>vinyl/plastic dress up items</i> (e.g. purse, wallet, jewelry, shoes), play food and cooking utensils; ● A few additional props (e.g., a doctors’ kit, and/or a construction set of tools with a plastic hat).
Nature/Science Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Well-organized materials for children’s easy access; ● Furniture/space to use them in the center; ● Sand/water play (can be a table in or near the Nature/Science Center if space allows or small bins) with enough material and toys to dig, scoop, mold, fill, and pour.
Table Toys (Fine Motor/Math)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Well-organized and clearly labeled materials for children’s easy access; ● Convenient/comfortable furniture/space to use them (tables/chairs that can be used for meals).
Art/Writing Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Well-organized and clearly labeled materials for children’s easy access; ● Furniture needed to use them (tables/chairs that can be used for meals); ● Close to a sink if there is one in the room; ● A separate container to place art materials after use for cleaning and sanitizing.

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Room Arrangement Considerations

- Designate a center for no more than 2 children in order to offer them a “**space for privacy**” to play protected from intrusion.
- Ensure that quiet centers, such as the Library and the Cozy Area, are not next to active/noisy activities, such as the Block, Dramatic Play and Music Centers. **Buffer centers**, such as Table Toys, Art, and Nature/Science can be placed between them to avoid interference.
- *Limit furnishings at each center to what is needed for the specific kind of play (versus many additional pieces) to allow children to keep their distance and move freely while they play.*
- Place furniture, such as shelves and cabinets, between centers to create a physical barrier. This clearly defines the center so the children playing in each center can remain within the space and keep a distance while playing. This will also avoid “runways” and encourage children to walk in the classroom.
- Place centers away from high traffic areas, such as the bathroom, sink, and cubbies, to avoid crowding and interruptions to play.
- Make more room for gross motor activities in the classroom using shelves/casters that are easy to move.
- If possible, do not store materials inside the room in order to maximize space available for children to play.
- Use center signs instead of a single chart to avoid crowding/congregation during center selection.

Activities and Minimum Materials Considerations

The chart below includes examples of ECERS-required materials, at the “excellent” level of quality, that are typically accessible to children and recommended for use during this time since they can be easily and frequently sanitized in order to reduce the spread of germs (e.g., vinyl and plastic soft toys). Materials included for various items in the ECERS scale can be organized in a variety of centers/areas throughout the room (e.g., measuring cups can be in a Math Center and/or in the sand table, and “Table Toys” may include various fine motor and/or math materials). Please note these are examples and not an exhaustive list.

*For COVID-19 health and safety considerations, and to ensure children have access to a variety of materials at all times, **programs are advised to only put out materials that are required by ECERS at each center. Programs should store remaining materials and rotate them daily/weekly to allow time for sanitization.** Similarly, limiting furnishings in centers to only what is needed allows more space for children to move freely while they play, making social distancing easier. The table below lists the ECERS minimum materials requirements.*

ECERS Minimum Materials Requirement	
Item 15 Encouraging children’s use of books	35 books for 20 children on topics, including a wide variety of topics, such as diversity, nature/science, math/number books, and the current theme.
Item 17 Fine Motor Materials	10 choices, at least 1 type from each of the following categories and including varied levels of challenge: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Interlocking building materials (e.g., Duplo, Bristle, Legos, Lincoln Logs)● Art materials (e.g., scissor, markers, crayons, pencils)

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ECERS <i>Minimum</i> Materials Requirement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Manipulatives (e.g., links, beads, pegs and pegboards) ● Puzzles (e.g., floor, framed, knobbed, with images representing diversity)
<p>Item 18 Art 1 material from each of the 5 categories, accompanied by paper and/or another surface suitable for carrying out artwork:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Drawing (e.g., crayons, markers, pencils, chalk) ● Paints (e.g., tempera, water color, finger paint) ● Three Dimensional (e.g., wood, pipe cleaners, cardboard boxes/rolls) ● Collage (e.g., yarn, textured paper, cloth) ● Tools (e.g., scissors, hole punch, dot paints, stamps and stamp pads, stencils)
<p>Item 19 Music and Movement 10 instruments, at least 1 per participating child if used in group time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Different types of instruments (e.g., bells, shakers, maracas, rhythm sticks, triangles). Credit is not given if all materials are of the same type. <p>*Recorded music (e.g., a CD player with CDs) counts as 1 type of music material if used.</p>
<p>Item 20 Blocks Enough blocks* and accessories for 3 children to build sizeable independent structures at the same time (interlocking blocks not given credit here):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unit Blocks (e.g., wood, hard foam, plastic) ● Hollow blocks <p>Block Accessories from 3 categories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Accessories (e.g., small diverse people, vehicles, animals, road signs) <p>*To make a sizable structure using the same type of blocks, each child would need a set of at least 30 small unit blocks or 10 large hollow blocks.</p>
<p>Item 21 Dramatic Play Furnishings and props enough for number of children allowed in the Center:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Child-sized household furnishings (e.g., stove, sink, refrigerator, small table and chairs) ● Household props (e.g., hard plastic dolls, mirror, telephone, wood/plastic play food and/or utensils) ● <i>Dress up clothing items that are non-porous and easy to clean (e.g., wallet, wallet, shoes, jewelry)</i> ● Additional housekeeping props or a second theme (only one additional theme is required). Options include, but are not limited to: restaurant (menus, table setting, play money), construction (tools and plastic hat), farmer/gardener (rakes, shoves, seed packets), or Post Office (mail box, envelopes, postcards) ● Diversity, 4 examples (e.g., dolls representing different races and ages, cultural food and utensils, toy wheelchair or walker)
<p>Item 22 Nature/Science 15 materials, some from each of the 5 categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Living Things (e.g., plants, pets, outside garden) ● Collection of Natural Objects (e.g., shells, rocks, seeds, leaves) ● Factual Books/Pictures/Games

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ECERS <i>Minimum</i> Materials Requirement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Tools (e.g., magnets with objects, magnifying glass with objects to explore, color paddles, microscope, prism)● Sand and/or water (both not required) with toys (e.g., measuring cups, small pails, digging tools). Offering water play in individual smaller tubs/bins is encouraged in order to avoid the spread of germs. In addition, this makes it easier to set up and clean up (e.g., staff discard the water in a small bin after a child uses it and refills it for another child). Handwashing is required after sand play and before and after water play.
Item 23 Math Materials and Activities 10 different appropriate materials, at least 3 from each of the three categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Counting/Comparing Quantities (e.g., unifix cubes, dominoes, dice, pegboards with numbers, objects to count in numbered trays)● Measuring/Comparing Sizes (e.g., tape measure, thermometer, measuring cups, spoons, rulers, height charts)● Familiarity with Shapes (e.g., shape sorters, shape puzzles, geoboards, attribute blocks, shape stencils)
Item 25 Understanding Written Numbers Some print numbers in display materials and at least 3 different play materials that show the meaning of numbers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Print numbers on display (e.g., posters with numbers and corresponding pictures, center labels with numbers)● Play materials with numbers (e.g., telephones, stencils, play money, numbers on furnishings)● Play materials showing the meaning of numbers (e.g., number puzzles with corresponding pictures, matching picture/number cards, pegs with numbered peg boards)
Item 26 Promoting Acceptance of Diversity 10 examples of diversity, at least 1 in each of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Books● Displayed pictures● Accessible play materials with at least 2 types of dramatic play props representing different races or cultures (e.g., dolls of different skin tones; play foods such as tacos, sushi, pizza, a burger, a croissant; a wheelchair, a walker, a guide dog)

Additional Materials Considerations:

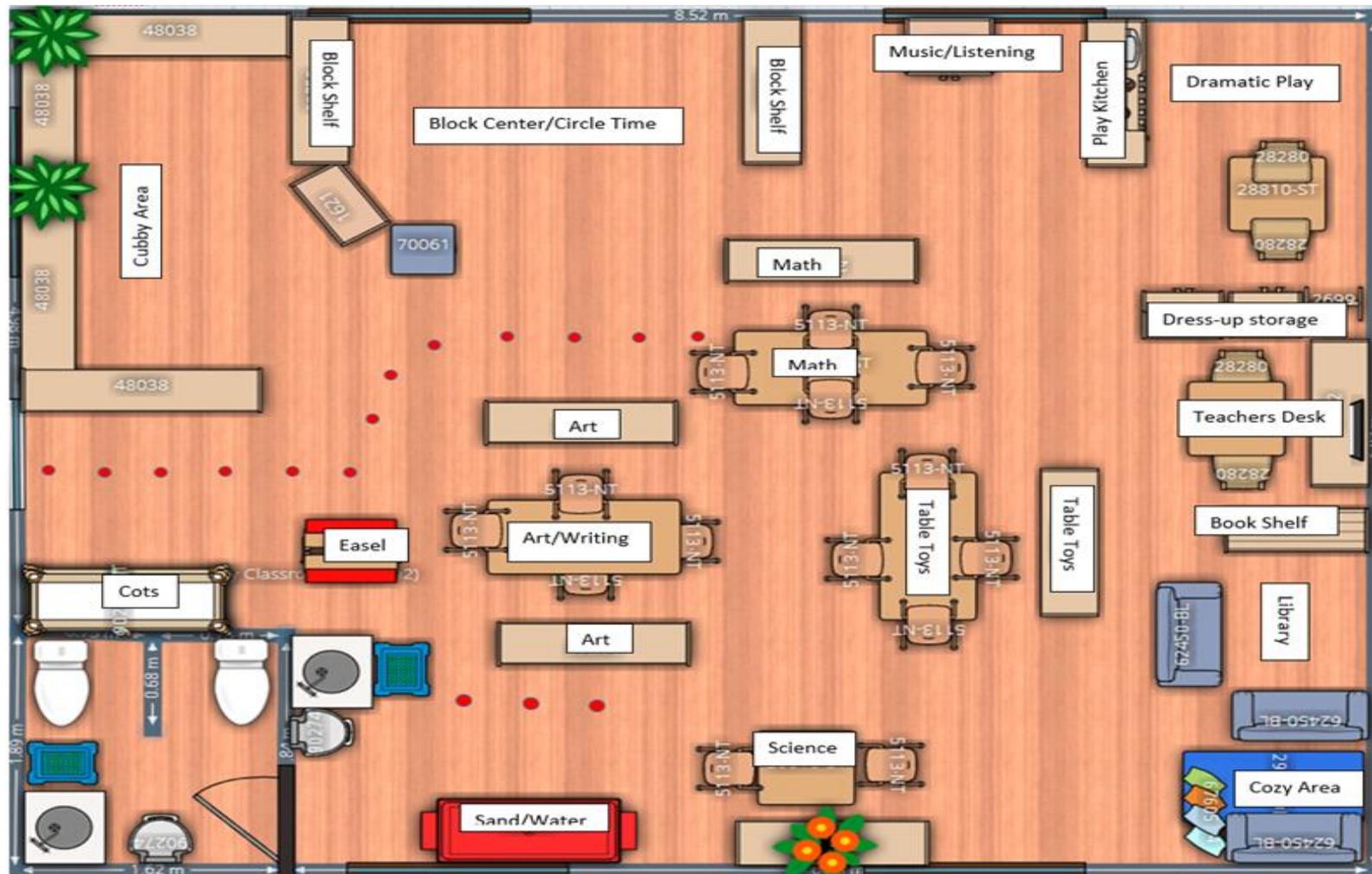
- Use non-porous vinyl/plastic (instead of fabric/cloth) furnishings that can be easily cleaned (e.g. a seat cover can be placed on upholstered soft furnishings that are not vinyl so that it can be easily removed and laundered).
- Provide individualized bins for popular toys (e.g., manipulatives, art supplies) to avoid needing to clean them every day or have bins with toys that can be used on a rotating basis (e.g., one bin for each center for each day of the week).
- If children have a transitional toy from home, ensure it is not shared with other children.
- Use displays, books, dramatic play materials, and/or musical instruments (rather than clothing) that represent the different categories of diversity (race, culture, gender, age, and abilities).
- Organize materials for activities in labeled bins ahead of time so children do not have to wait (and the materials/bin can be cleaned/sanitized as needed as outlined [here](#)).

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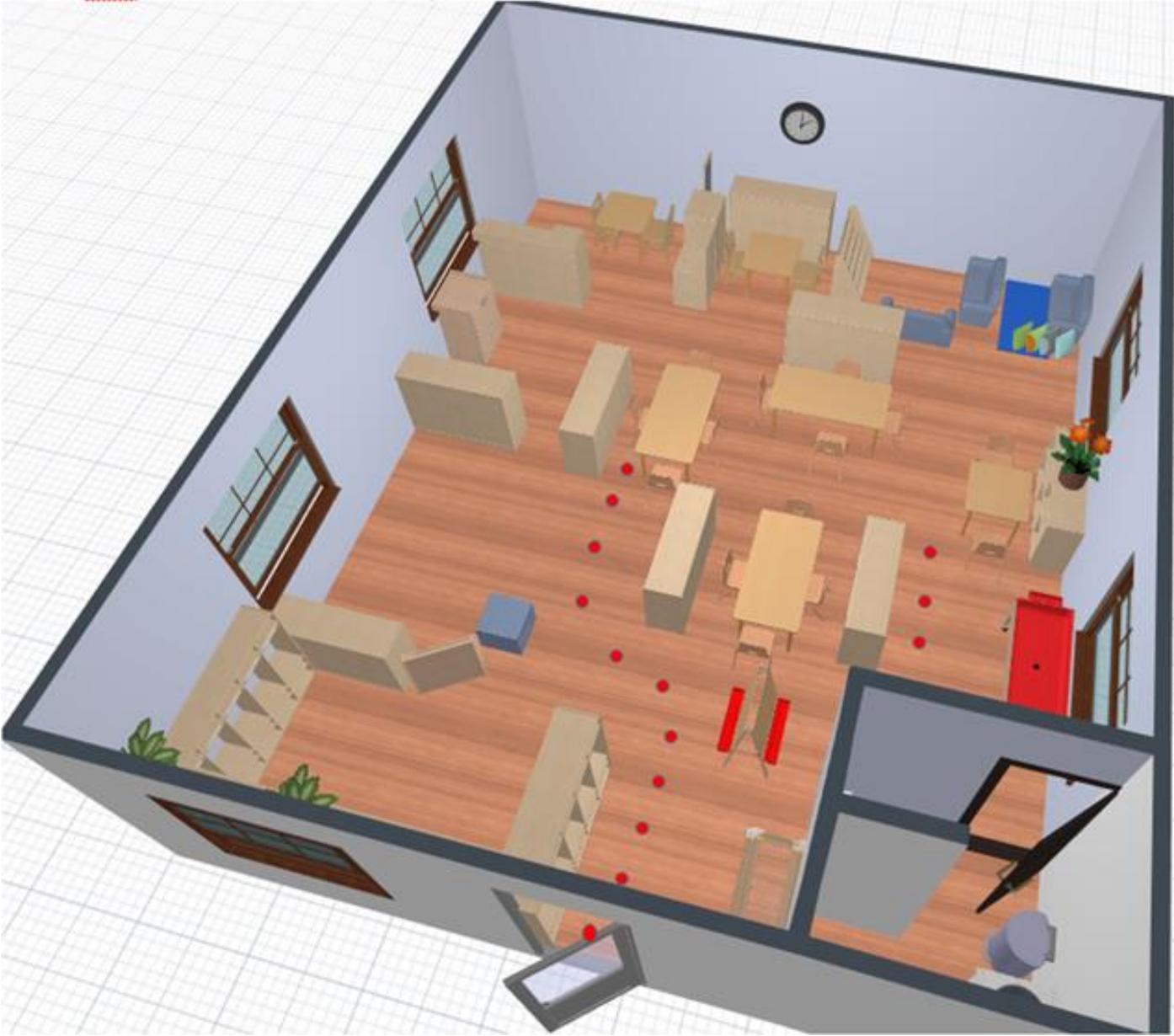
Examples of Classroom Layouts Aligned with COVID-19 Guidelines

The following layout examples support programs with organizing centers and materials in ways that are aligned to current COVID-19 health and safety guidance. Two examples are provided- one for classrooms with sufficient space, and one for classrooms with limited space.

Example 1: Classroom with Sufficient Space



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- This classroom layout has sufficient space and furnishings for storage of materials and play. *This allows the space in the classroom to be maximized so that children can socially distance while still meeting their needs for routine care, play, and learning.*
- The classroom has enough chairs and tables for each child to use during meals, whole group activities, and play time, with *limited seating around each table to ensure children do not sit closely together. For example, during meals and Circle Time, children can sit at the tables and chairs throughout the room, maintaining distance from each other, rather than sitting closely together in a confined space.*
- The shelving units in the room house the required materials in the various centers. Having just enough toys to ensure that children have access to the variety of materials required at each center will ensure that children have gratifying experiences and develop different skills while having more space to freely access materials and move while they play. Centers that require more space, such as the Block and Dramatic Play Centers, are the largest in the classroom to accommodate building large structures and more active play. *This will also provide children with enough space to maintain distance during play.*
- Furniture would need to be moved during nap time to allow for appropriate distance between cots/mats.
- There are no carpets in the classroom as porous materials that cannot be easily cleaned and sanitized are not recommended during the pandemic. Large soft furnishings, such as an adult size vinyl bean bag, a soft plastic chair on rubber mats, or a small rug that is easy to launder are options for the cozy area that would surround children with softness when they relax in the space. If carpets and rugs are used, they should be cleaned regularly, according to the manufacturer's instructions and frequency of use. If these items are heavily soiled or difficult to clean they should be removed. Please see [here](#) for further information.
- The red dots on the floor, which can be made using stickers or masking tape, can help children keep distance when they wait in line.

Please note that the names of the Centers/play areas in the classroom illustrations are suggestions. For example, "Table Toys" could also be called the Math Center, Fine Motor Area, or Manipulative Center. Similarly, the "Dramatic Play Center" could be called "Housekeeping Center."

Example 2: Classroom with Limited Space



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- Adjustments that can be made in spaces with less square footage include:
 - A Library which doubles as a Cozy Area.
 - Instruments in the Music Center on a shelf or in a bin (a cabinet is not needed) in a corner of the classroom.
 - A Table Toys Center with fine motor and math materials.
 - An Art Center where painting can be done on the tables.
 - Removal or downsizing of the teacher's desk, at the teacher's discretion, to allow for more space for centers.
 - Dramatic Play and Block Centers are still the largest in the classroom to allow for the type of active play.
 - All active/noisy centers are on the same side of the room and away from Library/Cozy (quiet center).
 - A smaller sand/water table or play with sand or water in a bin on a table. Offering access to both sand and/or water play on a regular basis is encouraged (both materials are not required at the same time), with more frequent access to water play during the pandemic since it is easier to change after each individual child's use. Handwashing is required before and after water play.
 - Sand/Water, Nature/Science (which can be combined in the same center) and Art are the centers where messy play typically takes place so they are close to the bathroom sink for easier access during handwashing and cleanup.