

## ECELS Safety Checklist and Planning Tool for Active Play Areas

The following checklist is based primarily on the recommendations of the US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) as specified in the *Public Playground Safety Handbook*. Not every recommendation is included in this checklist; please refer to the most current guidelines in the *Public Playground Safety Handbook*. The guide for center-based programs is at <http://www.cpsc.gov/PageFiles/122149/325.pdf>. The guide for small family child care homes is at <http://www.cpsc.gov/PageFiles/117306/324.pdf>. Playground equipment should also meet the most current ASTM Standards F1487 for children ages 2-12 years of age and F2373 for children less than 2 years of age. Information on the current edition of these standards is available at [www.astm.org](http://www.astm.org). Portable equipment does **not** meet the ASTM standard for public play equipment and therefore should not be used in early learning programs. Early learning programs with infants and toddlers should refer to ASTM F2373-*Standard Consumer Safety Performance Specification for Public Use Play Equipment for Children 6 Months Through 23 Months* for more guidance on areas unique to this age group.

Successfully completing this checklist will help you make your play area safer. By checking “Yes” below, you confirm that the recommendation has been met or that a hazard is **NOT** present. When you check “No”, be sure to add it to your corrective action plan on the last page of this checklist. Then review the SUGGESTIONS FOR FINANCING YOUR PLANS FOR THE ACTIVE PLAY AREA, the last page in this document for ideas about how to pay for your plans for change.

*You will need a yardstick and/or measuring tape to complete this checklist.*

This checklist refers to three age groups:

- Toddlers: children aged 6 months to 2 years of age;
- Preschool-age: children aged 2 years through 5 years; and
- School-age: children aged 5 years through 12 years.

**The Early Childhood Education Linkage System (ECELS) of the PA Chapter,  
American Academy of Pediatrics does not accept any liability associated  
with the assessment of your play area.**

### **Surfacing**

Measure the highest point on every piece of play equipment. For swings, the highest point is from the pivot point where the swing hangs down to the ground. For elevated platforms the highest point is the height of the platform to the ground. For all other structures, height is measured from the highest point of the structure down to the ground.

- | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Surfaces underneath play equipment that allow children to get off the ground are covered with and surrounded by impact-absorbing material according to the U.S. CPSC recommendations for critical height. (See the <i>Public Playground Safety Handbook, publication 325, 2010</i> ). |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Unitary rubber surfacing like rubber pads and poured-in-place rubber surfacing meets the ASTM F1292 Standard for the highest point of the play equipment.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The following surfacing materials are not in use underneath play equipment that children can climb: asphalt, concrete, soil or hard-packed dirt, grass, turf, linoleum, or carpeting.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The dirt in the play area has been tested and found free of toxic materials, including lead.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no toys or objects with a diameter less than 1-1/4 inch accessible to children who are still placing objects in their mouths.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Loose fill is not used for playgrounds intended for Toddlers.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Children do not play on dark colored surfacing that is exposed to intense sun.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Children do not play on frozen safety surfacing.  |

### **Use Zones**

**Yes**   **No**

- |                          |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Use zone, the area under and around the equipment where impact absorbing surfacing is required, is a minimum of 3 feet for Toddler play areas in early learning programs.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Use zone is a minimum of 6 feet for Preschool-age and School-age children.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | If two pieces of equipment, side by side, are lower than 30" high, the use zone between them is six feet or more.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | If two pieces of equipment are side by side and one or both is higher than 30" the use zone between them is nine feet or more.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Use zones for moving equipment such as swings and merry-go-rounds do not overlap.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | For to-fro swings: the impact-absorbing surfacing material extends twice the height from the pivot point to the ground in front, and twice the height of the pivot point to the ground in back of the swings.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | For full bucket swings: the impact-absorbing surfacing material extends twice the height from the bottom of the seat to the pivot point in front, and twice the height of the bottom of the seat to the pivot point in back of the swing when it the swing is hanging straight down. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | For tire swings: the impact attenuating surface extends the height from the top of the tire to the pivot point plus 6 feet.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | For slides: the impact-absorbing surfacing material extends at least 6 feet from the end of the slide chute-or a distance that equals the height of the slide platform. The impact absorbing surface never needs to extend more than 8 feet.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | For slides: No use zone overlaps the use zone at the exit of a slide.  |

### **Protrusion & Entanglement**

**Yes**   **No**

- |                          |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | All metal edges are rolled.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no small pieces of equipment that stick out from the equipment that could puncture a child or that could catch clothing. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no strings or loose items on children's clothing or around children's necks that could get caught on play equipment.     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Any exposed bolts do not protrude more than two threads beyond the face of the nut; exposed bolts have no burrs or sharp edges.    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no open "S" hooks.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There is a warning sign posted near or on slides or other equipment where potential strangulation may occur.                       |

### **Entrapment**

**Yes**   **No**

- |                          |                          |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no openings in any pieces of play equipment for Preschool-age and School-age 3 ½ and 9 inches that could cause head entrapment. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no head entrapment openings 3 inches to 9 inches for Toddlers.  |

### **Equipment Placement**

- | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Equipment that moves such as swings and merry-go-rounds are placed on the outside edge of the playground. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Traffic patterns are designed to prevent children from bumping into each other.                           |

### **Trip Hazards**

- | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | All anchoring devices, such as footings and bars at the bottom of climbers, are below the playing surface. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no exposed tree or plant roots.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Changes in elevation are made obvious by the use of brightly colored visual or other barriers.             |

### **Appropriate Activities & Equipment**

- | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Age-specific play areas are separated by distance or a physical barrier.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Equipment is warranted by the manufacturer as suitable for the age of the users (2-5 years and 5-12 years) according to ASTM Standard F1487 and Toddlers according to the ASTM Standard F2373. |

### **Crush & Shearing Points**

- | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | All openings are too big or too small to entrap a child's finger in a moving part.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | All wooden parts are smooth and without splinters.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | All corners are rounded, especially at exit ends and sides along a slide bed.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Exposed ends of tubing have caps that cannot be removed without tools.<br>There are no openings in the equipment where insects can build nests. |

### **Guardrails, Handrails, and Safety Barriers**

- | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Guardrails or protective barriers are provided to prevent unintentional or deliberate falls off elevated platforms.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | For Preschool-age children: elevated surfaces more than 20 inches high have a guardrail or protective barrier; those more than 30 inches high have a protective barrier (an enclosing device that is intended to prevent both unintentional and deliberate attempts to pass through the barrier). |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | For Toddlers, elevated surfaces more than 18 inches high have protective barriers.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | For School-age children: elevated surfaces more than 30 inches high have a guardrail or protective barrier; those more than 48 inches high have a protective barrier.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Handrails are between 1 inch and 1 ½ inches and are at waist to shoulder height of (22 inches – 38 inches) for Preschool-age and School-age. Handrails are between 0.6 inches and 1.20 inches and are at waist to shoulder height (15 inches – 20 inches) for Toddlers.                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Boundaries such as painted lines or dividers separate play equipment from walking areas.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Bike or trike riding areas are separate from other areas.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Playgrounds are fenced in.  |

### **Unsafe Equipment**

- | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no heavy swings or swings made out of wood, metal, or other rigid materials. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no animal figure swings.   |

### **Unsafe Equipment (continued)**

- | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no multiple-use occupancy swings (swings used by more than one child at a time) other than tire swings.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no swing sets with more than 2 swings per bay.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no rope swings; all ropes are anchored at both ends.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no trapeze bars or free swinging rings (exception: rings with chains less than 7 inches long).  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Any see-saws present have a spring centering device for children 2-5 years of age. If see saws are used, for older children there must be a shock absorbing material required to cushion seat impact on the surface and the maximum height of the seat above the protective surfacing must not exceed 5 feet. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no trampolines.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no swinging gates.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | If possible, after installation and before use, have an audit done by a Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI). Request that the CPSI provide a copy of their <b>current</b> National Recreation and Park Association's certification.  |

### **Maintenance**

- | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Daily checks include: broken glass, animal waste, trash, toxic plants or plant debris, damage by vandals, displaced surfacing, broken equipment, chipping paint, puddles of water, insect hazards, need for lubrication of moving parts. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | All hardware fasteners, permanent coverings, or connecting devices are tight and cannot be removed without tools.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | All surfaces are intact.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | All structures are sturdy enough that they will not move or tip over when the weight of an adult is put against them.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There is no peeling paint (Lead in peeling paint on older play equipment is a hazard). Play equipment manufactured prior to 1978 is likely to contain leaded paint.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | All ropes are tight, secured at both ends and strands cannot be pulled apart.  |

### **Supervision**

- | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | All areas where children can play are in view of an adult at all times.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The same child: staff ratio is maintained during active play indoors and outdoors.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Every child is accounted for at all times by a supervising adult. Some method of assuring that no child is hidden or missing from the group must be used. |

### **Supervision (continued)**

- |                          |                          |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | When children must leave the play area to use the toilet, to get first aid, or for any other reason, supervision of the child who leaves and the children who remain in the play area is secure and consistent. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Children are prevented from playing in a way that challenges them beyond their abilities or that puts others at risk of significant injury.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Practitioners understand the basics of playground safety.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Practitioners understand the signs of traumatic brain injury and can give recommended first aid.  |

### **Slides**

- | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Slides for Toddlers are no taller than 32 inches high and have side rims at least 4 inches high.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Slides for Preschool-age and School-age are no taller than 6 ½ feet and have side rims at least 4 inches high.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | A bar or other means channels the user into a seated position to go down the slide.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Slide ladders have flat steps and a handrail on each side. For Preschool-age and School-age, steps are no more than 9 inches apart. Rungs are no more than 12 inches apart. (If steps are no more than 9 inches apart, check the steps for an entrapment hazard.) Steps on slide ladders for Toddlers are less than or equal to 7 inches apart and all risers are closed. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Slide beds for Toddlers are sloped no greater than 24 degrees.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Slide beds for Preschool-age and School-age have a flat surface at the bottom to slow children down and are sloped at no greater than a 30 degree angle overall.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Check the surface temperature of all slides before use to prevent burns. Slides with metal or dark plastic beds are shaded and/or face north to prevent overheating. The CPSC says that ALL slide beds should be shaded. What is possible has been done to make sure the slide beds do not get hot.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Any spiral slides accessible to Toddlers or Preschool-age children are one 360° turn or less. (Full spiral slides are acceptable for School Age children.)  |

### **Sand**

- | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sand digging areas are in the shade.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sand digging areas are contained by smooth frames.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sand is covered when not in use to prevent infectious disease and injury risk when animals and insects get into it. |

### **Swings**

- | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Swings are not attached to any other type of equipment.                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Swing footings are stable and buried below the ground and covered by protective surfacing. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There is no corrosion evident on hooks or chains.  |

### **Swings (continued)**

- There are no "A" frames with horizontal cross bars present.
- Full bucket swings are in a separate bay from the other swings.
- Swing hangers are spaced wider than the seats, not less than 20 inches.
- There is a minimum space of 24 inches between seats and 30 inches between the swings and supporting structure for Preschool-age and School-age. There is a minimum of 20 inches between seats and between the swings and the support structure for Toddlers.
- Swing seats are lightweight and not made of wood or metal
- The distance between the bottom of the seat and the protective surface is at least 12 inches.
- The distance between the bottom of the full bucket swing and the protective surface is at least 24 inches.

*Note that ASTM F1487 Section 8.6.7 requires a Suspended Element Impact Attenuation Test for play elements that can be hung. This test can only be done in a laboratory but the manufacturer should document that the suspended equipment meets the test that no suspended element imparts a peak acceleration in excess of 100 g's and shall have a HIC score not to exceed 500 when tested in accordance with this test.*

### **Multi-Axis Tire Swings**

- | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Tire swings are not attached to any other type of play equipment.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Tire swings do not share a bay with any other type of swing and are not mounted on any structure with other play components. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no exposed steel belts in steel-belted radial tire swings.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are drain holes in tire swing tires.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The minimum clearance between the extended tire and support structure is 30 inches.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The tire swing itself weighs less than 35 pounds.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no tire swings used by Toddlers.   |

### **Climbers**

- | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Climbers have a safe way off for children who cannot complete the activity.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | No places exist where Preschool-age and School-age children can fall more than 18 inches onto any component of the climber. No places exist where Toddlers can fall more than 7 inches onto any component of the climber. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Connections between ropes, cables, or chains are securely fixed.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no free standing arch climbers, sliding poles, chain walks, and free standing climbers with flexible components or parallel bars accessible to Toddlers or Preschool-age.                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Horizontal ladders and chinning bars are used only by children who are over 4 years of age. There are no overhead rings or track rides accessible to Toddlers or Preschool-age.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Climbers for Toddlers have a maximum surface for foot support of 32 inches.   |

### **Merry-Go-Rounds**

- | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The platform is continuous, approximately circular.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no components, including handgrips, that extend beyond the perimeter of the platform. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Unless the merry-go-round is tub shaped, there are 1 - 1 ½ inch handgrips available.            |

### **Merry-Go-Rounds (continued)**

- | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no accessible shearing or crush points.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The peripheral speed of rotation is limited to 13 feet/second and verified by the manufacturer. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Merry-go-rounds should not be used on playgrounds intended for Toddlers.                        |

### **Spring Rocking Equipment**

- | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The seat accommodates only the intended number of users at one time.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are hand grips and foot rests for each seating position.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Handgrips for Preschool-age and School-age are between 1 - 1 ½ inches in diameter; minimum length 3 inches for one hand, and 6 inches for two hands. Handgrips for Toddlers are between 0.60 and 1.20 inches.          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Foot rests are a minimum width of 3 ½ inches.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Seats for Preschool-age and School-age are not less than 14 inches nor more than 28 inches above the play area ground or floor surface. Seats for Toddlers are not less than 12 inches and not greater than 16 inches. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no log rolls accessible to Toddlers or Preschool-age.  |

### **Other Hazards**

- | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no litter or animal feces in the play area that may attract insects, hide hazards, and harbor infectious disease agents.     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no attractive climbing hazards (such a trees) that are accessible from an object placed underneath them.                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no plants present that are toxic, thorny, attract bees or have seeds or berries that could cause a choking hazard.           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There is a fence that encloses the play area.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Shade is provided on the playground. There is a warning sign that states that equipment and surfacing exposed to intense sun can burn. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Proper site selection and drainage is provided to prevent wash out of loose fill surfacing.  |

**Notes:**





## SUGGESTIONS FOR FINANCING YOUR PLANS FOR THE ACTIVE PLAY AREA

Once you have all your plans together, make some drawings or cut out pictures of your proposed active play area. The design doesn't have to be fancy.

What (equipment) do you plan to purchase?

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What do you think the active play area budget should be? \_\_\_\_\_

How do you think you could fund the playground?

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Have you reviewed your plans with a CPSI?  Yes  No

Some fundraising ideas include:

- 1) Matching funds: try to get support from your school or community group and then go to local business organizations for matching funds.
- 2) Some ways for the school or community group to raise funds include:
  - Recycling drives
  - Raffles
  - Item or service auction
  - "Own-A-Piece of the Playground" drive -school children, parents, local area businesses and civic organizations can all "buy" a piece of the playground from a single bolt to a slide or more.
  - Budget over a few years
- 3) Various organizations offer grant funding. Check for funding available from federal, state and charitable organizations. For example, in Pennsylvania, see current funding being offered by the Office of Child Development and Early Learning, PA Keys STAR rewards, United Way, Kiwanis. Also, see [www.kaboom.org](http://www.kaboom.org).

*This Checklist and Financing Suggestions updated by ECELS 3-26-14 with input from Betsy Caesar, Playcare Inc.*