

COACH'S CORNER

Coach's Corner is a DIEEC blog dedicated to providing fresh ideas for all early childhood education professionals.



Written by Meghan Pallante
DIEEC Quality Improvement Specialist
& ECE Blogger

Summer Programming with School-age Children

Believe it or not, summer is upon us! Along with warmer weather, summer typically brings a change in schedules and activities for many early childhood education programs. For many, summer means welcoming school-age children into the mix.

Having older children in your summer camp can add new elements of energy and fun. The school-agers can even be involved in the planning and execution of some activities!



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Here are some tips and tricks to help ensure smooth sailing through the sunny months ahead.

Assess Your Summer Needs

Ask yourself: What would the ideal summer structure for my program look like? Consider how you might make adjustments to the following areas:

- **Daily schedule.** Will you incorporate more outdoor time, water play days, and/or field trips?
- **Naptime.** How will you keep school-age children quietly engaged while younger children sleep?
- **Materials.** School-age children may range from 6–12 years of age. Do you have materials that will engage and challenge them?
- **Shared spaces.** Do you need to designate specific indoor or outdoor spaces for older and younger children to play safely?

Managing Multiple Age Groups

Once you have assessed your needs, you can begin planning. These strategic approaches can keep engagement high and stress low:

- **Prioritize open-ended materials.** Take an inventory of items that can be played with in various ways rather than having just one intended use. These items are typically great for a variety of ages and invite creativity and problem-solving. Examples include blocks, magnetic tiles, clay, silk scarves, and natural objects (sticks, rocks, shells, etc.).
- **Organization and access.** If your program has materials specifically for school-age children, such as books, board games, or art supplies, consider storing them in a rolling cart rather than on a designated shelf or classroom area. This allows you to move materials out of the way when older children are not present, or into another room during younger children's naptimes.
- **Consider project-based learning.** At the beginning of the summer, encourage the children to brainstorm topics that they are interested in, and help them identify projects associated with those topics. Children could work on planting and harvesting a garden, or writing, illustrating, and publishing a book. Their chosen project could even benefit the younger children. For example, older children could build a cardboard puppet theater and put on a show for the preschoolers. If you have a large number of children, consider letting them work in groups on different ideas.
- **Host a summer kick-off meet-and-greet.** A special event for school-age children and their families lets them get to know each other at the start of summer. This is also a great time to address any questions, collect paperwork, and review policies and procedures.
- **Encourage downtime.** School-age children may not nap, but they still need a break from summer heat and high-energy activities. This is a great opportunity for reading, drawing, journaling, or working on summer school assignments.
- **Ensure safety.** Keep your youngest learners safe by limiting the use of small items like Legos, beads, and game pieces to high tables or in spaces where toddlers cannot reach. Provide active supervision and designated "zones" on the playground that allow big kids to run fast and kick balls while preventing dangerous collisions with smaller children. If you provide water play, children of all ages must be closely supervised at all times.
- **Rotate themes.** While not a must-have for summer programming, themes can help keep things engaging. This is also a great opportunity to get creative and expose the children to new interests or hobbies! Educators can plan a science week and do a different experiment each day. You could have a "You've Got Talent" week where children work on putting together various acts that culminate in a mini talent show at the end of the week. Cooking, animals, water play, sports, travel and art are topics that can provide additional theme inspirations!

Summer provides an opportunity to slow down and enjoy a more relaxed schedule. It's also a great opportunity to add some fresh activities and spend more time outdoors. Planning and preparation are your keys to success! How does your program shine during the summer months?

Resources

[Summer Learning Fun! Tips for School-Age Child Care Providers](#)- National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment

[65+ Real-World Project-Based Learning Ideas for All Ages and Interests](#)- We Are Teachers

[Project-Based Learning \(PBL\) in Preschools](#)- Brightwheel