## Evaluate Your Block Center Around 21st Century Skills: A Checklist for Teachers

**Note:** The term *blocks* in this checklist refers to any type of block, including unit blocks, cubes, dominoes, interlocking, waffle, magnetic, outdoor, cardboard, hollow, and foam blocks; teacher-made blocks; and blocks in any and all commercial kits. Think about the classroom's block area as you complete the following checklist.

**Creativity**

- ☐ There is a designated area for block play.
- ☐ The block area is open daily for extended periods of time.
- ☐ A variety of blocks are available.
- ☐ Blocks are arranged on open shelves so children have easy access and can see what is available.
- ☐ Fiction and nonfiction books are readily available to clarify and extend science and mathematics curriculum content.
- ☐ There are items from nature (e.g., pinecones, sticks, stones) and recycled items (e.g., coffee cans, plastic butter tubs with lids).
- ☐ Children use art materials while building (e.g., Popsicle sticks, pipe cleaners, clay).
- ☐ Block building is integrated with design (and aligns with relevant learning standards).
- ☐ Teachers encourage children to creatively solve meaningful building problems.
- ☐ Children have opportunities to express their ideas in multiple ways.

**Communication**

- ☐ There are props (e.g., small figures of people, dinosaurs, farm animals, cars) available in the block area to encourage representational play.
- ☐ I post written prompts for adults in the block area, with questions for children that support content (like questions that start with *why* and *how*).
- ☐ Children can move from the art center to the writing center and then to the block center and back again.
- ☐ There are paper, pens, and pencils for blueprint designs and redesign in the block area.
- ☐ I give children opportunities to use their block creations for dramatic play and storytelling.
- ☐ Children can help others see their viewpoint or idea. They help others make sense of a concept or solution.
- ☐ Children have access to digital technologies to use in documenting, sharing, and discussing work. Children use digital literacies to communicate their design or to problem solve.
- ☐ There are opportunities for multiple means of representation before, during, and after play.

**Critical Thinking**

- ☐ I allow children's block creations to "fail" (i.e., I resist the urge to intervene to save or fix creations).
- ☐ I encourage children to be resilient in the face of mistakes and frustrations.
- ☐ I encourage children to try again (knock it down and try again using different or better ideas).
- ☐ I encourage children to try a different shape or type of block when re-creating.
- ☐ There are opportunities for children to share solutions and provide suggestions.
- ☐ I provide ways for children to save and document their building. Children can "sign out" a technology tool to photograph or video-record their work.
- ☐ Children can return to their structures frequently to improve and redesign them.
- ☐ Children have independent access to nonfiction books and electronic resources (e.g., the Internet) to expand building and to ask questions and find answers.
- ☐ I encourage children to engage in science and mathematics content and processes (physical science properties, seriation and measurement, the scientific process, problem solving) while building and designing.
- ☐ I differentiate block play for children with disabilities (content, process, and/or product).

**Collaboration**

- ☐ There are enough blocks for groups of children to build with, but not so many that children can each have enough to build alone without collaborating with peers.
- ☐ I use the surrounding community as a resource for expanding block building and design.
- ☐ I ask children to discuss and set up plans for creations and structures before building.
- ☐ I identify tools and other simple machines (forms of technology) to use to problem solve, and encourage children to do the same.
- ☐ Children discuss, share views, and even argue about block use, design, or purpose.
- ☐ Final block constructions are displayed or documented for sharing with others (classmates, families, friends, community).
- ☐ Blocks and props have been modified/adapted as appropriate for individual children's needs (e.g., Velcro added to blocks to assist children with fine motor needs).