



## NC Pre-K Program Guidance – COVID-19 Crisis: Expectations Through the End of the Program Year

May 18, 2020

***NC Pre-K contracting agencies should ensure that this guidance is shared with all NC Pre-K site administrators, and NC Pre-K teachers and teacher assistants.***

In this unprecedented time, thank you for your continued attention and hard work supporting young children and their families through the NC Pre-K program. This document builds on the initial NC Pre-K remote learning guidance and was designed in response to the data and perspectives collected through actions taken in April and early May 2020.

In April and May, NCDHHS Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) provided support and sought input by:

1. Issuing initial guidance to NC Pre-K programs on remote learning and family engagement. [Click here to review the remote learning guidance](#) issued on April 22<sup>nd</sup> to all NC Pre-K contract and site administrators, which included expectations on documenting family engagement and ongoing professional development through a [weekly work plan](#).
2. Distributing a survey to all NC Pre-K contract administrators and site administrators on remote learning practices and areas of need. Some areas which are featured in the guidance below respond directly to survey feedback, including support for making real-time contact with hard-to-reach families, supporting children with identified disabilities, and distributing physical materials to share with families in support of remote learning. [Click here to view the full interim survey report for more details on the April NC Pre-K survey results](#).
3. Holding webinars the first week of May to provide resources and to field questions from NC Pre-K teachers, administrators, and contractors. In total, over 2,050 participants joined the discussion. In response to these webinars, a frequently asked questions document will be sent out and further information is outlined in the guidance below to provide additional support.

The guidance that follows is intended to provide expectations to all NC Pre-K programs on how to close out the remainder of the year to best prepare children and families for kindergarten.

### **Instruction for the Remainder of the Program Year**

- All NC Pre-K programs, whether facilities are physically open or closed, are expected to offer remote or in-person (if applicable) learning opportunities to NC-Pre-K children through the end of each site's identified program year. Every NC Pre-K site is expected to provide instruction through the approved end date of their program year.
- All NC Pre-K lead teachers must have time during the regular school day to teach remotely with NC Pre-K children who are learning at home. However, lead teachers and teacher assistants should not be expected to work outside of their regular hours.

- NC Pre-K teachers may be providing assistance, whether remote or in-person, in other classrooms or be serving children that are not funded through NC Pre-K in their classroom during this unusual time.
- All NC Pre-K lead teachers should continue submitting a [weekly work plan](#) as identified in the [April 22 guidance](#) through the end of the program year.
- All NC Pre-K sites are encouraged to refer to regularly updated remote learning resources such as [DPI's Early Learning webpage](#) and [DCDEE's webpage](#).
- [The DCDEE Resource Moodle site](#) has a "Remote Teaching and Learning" page under "My Courses" with tutorials, additional resources, and suggestions for teachers and administrators.
  - Users can access this site with an NCID username and password.
  - This site includes resources on topics such as preparing instructional materials for families, working with children with special needs, and more.
  - Please note that although these resources are posted on the Moodle platform, using it **does not** count as a training course and **will not** earn hours or credits. (However, an online training course on digital literacy is being developed and will be announced in the future.)
- NC Pre-K lead teachers in private programs should continue to receive daily and weekly remote learning and family engagement support from lead consultants and their mentors/coaches from their regional hub location through the end of the program year.
- To the greatest extent possible, administrators in private sites should allow NC Pre-K teachers and teacher assistants to safely access their classrooms and/or other relevant program facilities to gather materials for remote learning to share with families. Any staff member present on campus must abide by [applicable health and safety guidance](#), including sanitation and social distancing.

#### **End of Year Assessments and Documentation**

- NC Pre-K lead teachers and teacher assistants should not administer end of the year preschool assessments while children are learning remotely. Instead, any data collected to document a child's progress prior to the onset of remote learning should be gathered. Evidence on a child's growth may include information from the Teaching Strategies Gold System, learning examples, and anecdotal notes.
- All NC Pre-K lead teachers and teacher assistants, whether facilities are physically open or closed and whether they are teaching remotely or in-person (if a program has re-opened for onsite instruction), are expected to share progress on each child's growth with families in an end of the year dialogue to inform them of strengths and any concerns teachers may have about the child's progress.
  - Discuss with families if they have noticed any progress while they have been supporting children during this time of remote teaching and learning.
  - Dialogues should be real-time on the phone or in person while distancing of at least six feet from the family, wearing a face mask, and using hand sanitizer or wipes to protect against potential transmission of the virus. Locations for dialogues that would allow for social distancing include: on a front porch, in a parking lot, or at a public park.
- By the end of May, every NC Pre-K lead teacher and teacher assistant will be emailed a survey to complete on their experience teaching throughout the COVID-19 crisis, particularly regarding serving our most vulnerable populations, and to highlight hard-to-contact children and families to ensure they are best served upon entering kindergarten.

## Engagement with Families

- It is essential that every NC Pre-K family receive real-time contact during this time of crisis. NC Pre-K lead teachers, teacher assistants, and administrators can provide ongoing, trusted relationships and resources for families when they are facing tremendous amounts of stress.
- NC Pre-K lead teachers are expected to make twice-weekly real-time contact with each child/family in their classroom, and to document ongoing attempts to contact a child/family if they are not successful item number two under family communications in the [weekly work plan](#).
  - A real-time contact is defined as a live voice-to-voice communication, including phone or a socially-distanced home visit.
- NC Pre-K lead teachers, with support of teacher assistants and site administrators, if necessary, are expected to make every attempt possible to reach families that have not yet been reached in real-time. It is critical that all NC Pre-K staff remain understanding of the challenging circumstances facing families, which may be impacting their ability to connect.
- Some suggested approaches for making contact with hard-to-reach families include:
  - Making a home visit or "porch visit" using physical distancing practices
  - Getting in contact by phone, text message, or other communication platforms with teachers of older siblings, who may have been able to connect regularly with some families. Sometimes older siblings may receive priority at home for using limited technology for remote learning, and as a result, younger children may have less access, if any, for their own remote learning.
  - Hosting a conference call for families to learn more about kindergarten enrollment and answering frequent questions
- At the end of the year, all NC Pre-K lead teachers and teacher assistants should be prepared to provide documentation of families they were unable to reach or had extremely limited real-time contact (0 - 3 times throughout the remote learning period), compared to other families in the class. Children who received no or extremely limited real-time contact during months of remote instruction may be at significant risk for learning loss or other health risks related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- As a part of local transition plans, NC Pre-K lead teachers, teacher assistants, and administrators are encouraged to create and distribute summer learning activities and kindergarten transition materials with all NC Pre-K families.

## NC Pre-K Payment and Teacher Bonuses

- All NC Pre-K programs will receive payment for NC Pre-K children as long as they are providing remote or in-person (if applicable) learning opportunities to NC-Pre-K children through the end of each site's identified program year. NC Pre-K funds should be used to pay NC Pre-K teachers their regular salaries through the approved end date of their program year.
- NC Pre-K lead teachers and teacher assistants who worked onsite directly with children (in-person) in an emergency child care center during the months of April and/or May are eligible for and should receive bonus payments available to all early childhood teachers providing child care during the COVID-19 crisis.

## Reopening of Child Care Centers to Non-Essential Workers

- North Carolina moved into Phase 1 of easing restrictions as of 5:00PM on Friday, May 8<sup>th</sup>, which allows for child care providers across the state to expand from serving solely essential workers. This is an opportunity for early learning programs which had physically closed to now reopen.
- Child care providers who wish to reopen their facility should complete the [COVID-19 Child Care Reopening Application](#) at least 48 hours before planning to reopen. To assist child care providers in submitting this application, DCDEE has put together [COVID-19 Child Care Reopening Step-by-](#)

### [Step Instructions.](#)

- A child care consultant will contact the center within 48 hours of receiving a reopening application to review the requirements for updated health, safety, and sanitation guidelines and to answer any questions the provider may have.
- The center will then receive a Health and Safety Certificate that recognizes the program is following all up-to-date guidelines. The certificate should be prominently displayed in the child care facility.

### **Preparing for the 2020 – 2021 Academic Year**

- To the greatest extent possible, administrators in private sites should allow NC Pre-K teachers and teacher assistants to safely access their classrooms and/or other relevant program facilities to prepare applicable materials as necessary for the fall. Any staff member present on campus must abide by [applicable health and safety guidance](#), including sanitation and social distancing.
- Contracting agencies, site administrators, teachers, and teacher assistants should be prepared for NC Pre-K to open and progress differently in the fall of 2020. Every effort will be made at the state level to learn from survey data and ongoing input from the NC Pre-K community across the state to best prepare for the year ahead. However, flexibility on all fronts will be essential.
- More guidance for NC Pre-K will be forthcoming as the state plans for the future of education in the next phases of easing restrictions.