Joint Guidance for Superintendents from the NC Department of Public Instruction and the NC Department of Health and Human Services for the Operation of School-Based Emergency Child Care during the COVID-19 School Closure

Issued March 18, 2020; updated April 1, 2020

This guidance will be updated regularly with new information as it becomes available.

Service Description
Temporary, emergency, out-of-school child care provided in designated public schools during the COVID-19 school closures.

Registration Requirements and Reporting
LEAs should complete a registration form to operate temporary, emergency, out-of-school child care in public schools or in facilities run by community partners that are not currently licensed. The registration form is available at this link. (Licensed child care facilities have received instructions for completing an application available at this link.)

Your completion of this registration form will provide critical information to DHHS and DPI that is needed for state planning for meeting the needs of families during the COVID-19 school closure. This form will also serve as your attestation of your ability to adhere to the health, safety, and operational guidelines for providing emergency child care during the COVID-19 school closures.

In addition, we will be implementing a daily reporting process through an easy-to-use online form where you will provide information on service status, capacity, and vacancies. This form will be made available soon and will be shared with sites that complete the registration form.

• To support us in matching families in need with available child care options and provide data to help make decisions about financial policies to support programs, we are asking that LEAs and child care facilities visit this form daily to provide DHHS and DPI with the most up-to-date information about current service status, attendance, available slots, staffing resources and resource needs.
• The reporting form consists of a short list of questions and should take you less than ten minutes to complete.
• After your initial entry, your information will be saved, and you will only need to update information that has changed since the previous day.

Working with Community Partners
Superintendents are encouraged to work with community partners, such as before- and after-school providers, child care providers, child care resource and referral agencies, and other community organizations to ensure capacity to provide emergency out-of-school child care and meet specific community needs. Connect with your local child care community to determine available capacity before opening school sites.

Selecting Public School Sites to Offer Emergency Child Care
Superintendents should consider designating public schools as emergency out-of-school child care site to meet specific community needs. Superintendents should consider the following public school locations:
• Schools located near hospitals and other health care facilities
• Schools with open school health centers
• Schools that have served as shelters in past emergencies
• Schools with before- and after-school program supplies and facilities
• Schools with existing community partners
• Schools with programs that are licensed by the Division of Child Development and Early Education

Child Participation
Participating children must be at least age 5 and currently in kindergarten through age 12.

Priority for emergency child care will be given to public school students with parents or guardians who are essential workers, as referenced in Governor Cooper’s Executive Order 121. Essential workers include first responders, hospital staff, front-line healthcare providers, nursing and adult group home staff, child care program staff, food service staff, and others working to keep our communities safe and healthy as we respond to COVID-19. Priority for emergency child care will also be given to children who are receiving child welfare services and children who are homeless or in unstable or unsafe living arrangements.

Operational Criteria at the School Level
Public school sites selected to provide emergency child care are required to include the following program components:
• Cafeteria staff and operational cafeteria
• Custodial services
• Administrative staff for operational/registration purposes
• Care providers (teacher assistants and other appropriate school staff and/or staff provided by community partners), ensuring required criminal background checks and liability protection for service providers
• Practices to reduce COVID-19 exposure, including hand washing, frequent cleanings, social distancing practices and compliance with CDC guidance on mass gatherings.
• School nursing staff (routine medication, healthcare procedures, screening for COVID-19)
  o Access to first aid and care supplies
  o Physical space for separating ill children from general population
  o See additional information about securing nursing services below
• Age appropriate programming
• Plan to address emotional/mental health needs of participating children
• Access to resources for on-line learning (space, connectivity, and technology support)

Health and Safety Requirements for Emergency Child Care

MINIMIZING RISK OF EXPOSURE TO COVID-19

Follow all of the guidance provided in this document:  Interim Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Guidance for Child Care Settings March 23, 2020

In addition to the guidance above, follow these additional steps:

• Ask parents and caregivers who are not considered essential workers to keep children at home with them. This will reduce the chance of spread.

• Signs with screening criteria should be posted IMMEDIATELY at the entrance of the school or facility providing emergency child care. We have developed a sign for you to use (link here.)

• Only staff needed to maintain ratio compliance should be inside classrooms. Schools and facilities should restrict teachers to one classroom with one group of children and should not use “floater” teachers. This is in order to reduce the number of people coming in and out of classrooms.

Minimum Site Requirements

• Emergency communications plan in place
• Staff/Child ratio of 1:25 - no more than two groups per space (if using gym/cafeteria/multipurpose room); Total of 50 children. Sites are highly encouraged to minimize group size per space to 10 in order to better allow social distancing and to reduce risks of viral transmission.
• 25 square feet per child indoors
• Developmentally appropriate materials and activities
• Lockable hazardous product and medication storage
• Outdoor activities
• Developmentally appropriate activities for the children and established program routine. It is important for children who have experienced a major disruption in their lives to have a sense of known routine.

STAFFING Requirements

• All staff must meet current Criminal Background Check qualifications
• One person who has current CPR and First Aid certification must always be on the premises
• All staff must complete emergency information paperwork (DCDEE Sample)

CHILDREN’S RECORDS Requirements

• Emergency information and application on file, and permission/authorization to get medical treatment (DCDEE Sample Application)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SECURING NURSING SERVICES FOR PARTNER CHILD CARE SITES

• District superintendent or local health director request for assignment of school nursing staff (dependent on employer of local school nurses)
• Identification of a partner agency that might provide nursing staff
• Written agreement identifying agency responsible for salary and liability protection

ENSURING CRITICAL WORKERS HAVE ACCESS TO CHILD CARE

Through a new toll-free number, 1-888-600-1685, the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Network will connect families to available care options based on the daily vacancy reporting that you provide.

The toll-free line will indicate that we are prioritizing referrals for essential workers and priority groups, which include emergency and first responders, hospital staff, front-line healthcare providers, nursing and adult group home staff, child care program staff, food service staff and others working to keep our communities safe and healthy as we respond to COVID-19. Care for children who are receiving child welfare services, homeless, or in unstable or unsafe living arrangements is also a priority.