



Early Childhood Staggered Schedules for Beginning the 2020-2021 School Year

Context

Smooth transitions into early childhood programs lay the foundation for a successful year. As you develop plans to welcome children and families for the 2020-21 school year, the DECE strongly encourages you to use a staggered schedule to help children and families adjust. In our current moment of increased stress and anxiety, this is especially important to help children from birth - 5 feel a sense of security. Even if your program does not typically use a staggered schedule, we recommend doing so this year to support children and families.

This year, all children will learn 5 days a week, with many children participating in blended learning, which is a combination of in-person learning and remote learning. A program's blended learning model will vary, depending on families' needs, group size requirements, and staffing limitations. The sample schedule documents available [here](#) (see appropriate version for your setting) provide more detailed guidance on structuring a blended learning instructional experience. While attending school remotely, children could engage in synchronous or asynchronous activities:

- Synchronous means that live instruction is provided simultaneous with child participation. With children ages 2-5, this may include a video chat where a teaching team reads a story and children ask questions.
- Asynchronous means that instruction is provided via pre-recorded lessons, learning platforms, and/or hands-on experiences that children explore with their family member/caregiver at home. With children ages 0-5, this may include at-home play or a family member/caregiver reading a child a story.

This document contains suggestions for planning a staggered schedule that accounts for the unique challenges of this school year and is aligned to the 2020-2021 school year calendar. The DECE also recommends that programs help children and families get to know classroom routines and build strong relationships with staff by planning experiences to support increasing familiarity with the classroom, teachers, and peers. Find additional resources with suggestions and strategies on the [Early Childhood Summer/Fall 2020 Readiness](#) webpage, and adapt as necessary to meet the needs of children, families, and staff.

Sample Strategies for Staggering Schedules During the 2020-21 School Year

Suggestions for Staggering Instructional Activities

1. Staggering in-person attendance

Invite each cohort of children who will be attending in-person learning together to come in smaller groups, for shorter amounts of time, during the first 1-2 weeks of school. Note that sanitization procedures should be implemented between shifts if multiple small groups will be visiting the classroom on the same day.

2. Staggering synchronous activities as part of remote learning

Increase the length and group size of synchronous learning experiences during the first 1-2 weeks of



school (referencing the suggested care synchronous and asynchronous screen time recommendations on page 12 [here](#)). Note that this can include children participating in remote learning 5 days a week as well as children participated in a blended learning schedule.



Below is a sample of what this might look like. Cohort A includes 10 children who will be attending in-person on Mondays, Wednesdays, and alternating Fridays, and participating in remote learning on the other days each week. Cohort B includes 8 children who will be attending in-person on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and alternating Fridays, and participating in remote learning on the other days each week.

Key:

In-person	Remote
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Week 1 Sample

Note that this sample is only for one week, and should be adapted to meet the needs of children, families and staff. It could be extended into the second week of school if needed, with the Friday schedule rotated because it is the alternating day.

Week 1	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Cohort A, Group 1 (5 children)	Attend in-person from 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM	Participate in synchronous experience from 9:00 AM - 9:10 AM	Attend in-person from 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM	Participate in synchronous experience from 9:00 AM - 9:10 AM	Attend in-person from 9:00 AM - 11:30 AM
Cohort A, Group 2 (5 children)	Attend in-person from 12:00 PM - 1:30 PM	Participate in synchronous experience from 10:00 AM - 10:10 AM	Attend in-person from 12:00 PM - 1:30 PM	Participate in synchronous experience from 10:00 AM - 10:10 AM	
Cohort B, Group 1 (4 children)	Participate in synchronous experience from 9:00 AM - 9:10 AM	Attend in-person from 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM	Participate in synchronous experience from 9:00 AM - 9:10 AM	Attend in-person from 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM	Participate in synchronous experience from 9:00 AM - 9:15 AM
Cohort B, Group 2 (4 children)	Participate in synchronous experience from 10:00 AM - 10:10 AM	Attend in-person from 12:00 PM - 1:30 PM	Participate in synchronous experience from 10:00 AM - 10:10 AM	Attend in-person from 12:00 PM - 1:30 PM	





Suggestions for Staggering Meetings with Children and Families

The suggested strategies below are sequenced intentionally to provide scaffolding during the initial period of remote learning for all children (September 16-18) and into the blended learning transition (beginning September 21).

1. Virtual meetings

Provide virtual tours of your classroom for families and children to watch together. This could be shared asynchronously or synchronously using a remote learning platform (e.g. Google Classroom), with children and families who are participating in blended learning or fully remote learning. This can take place during September 16 - 18, when all children will be participating in remote learning.

2. Individual meetings

Schedule individual 30-minute slots for each child and one family member to visit the program once blended learning begins, during the week of September 21. This would take place instead of having children attend regular in-person instruction to allow time for acclimation and relationship building. Provide asynchronous activity suggestions for families and children to engage in on the days that they are not scheduled for an individual meeting. Ensure that all health and safety protocols are followed, including room capacities, distancing, and sanitization, with sufficient time for transitions and sanitization between meetings. Teachers can use individual meetings to provide families with materials for remote learning; additional guidance about materials distribution to families whose children are participating in full remote learning is forthcoming.

3. Staggered schedules using outdoor space

Outdoor space allows social distancing to happen more naturally while providing fresh air and ventilation. Invite small groups of families and children (as outlined in the sample staggered schedule above) to meet outdoors during some or all of the in-person meetings once blended learning begins. This can provide children and families with opportunities to meet each other and the teaching team while maximizing safety considerations, before children are expected to go into the classroom. All health and safety protocols should be followed during these opportunities.

4. Children who need extra support

The DOE has [communicated](#) that while families should not typically enter classrooms due to health concerns, there may be individual circumstances for young children at the beginning of the school year that require unique considerations. This should be determined on a case-by-case basis, based on discussions with families. If the determination is made that this is necessary, a child can be escorted by one family member to their classroom door in the beginning of the school year. The following protocols should be followed:

- The family member escorting the child is required to follow all health and safety protocols, including health screening, physical distancing, and use of face coverings.
- Staggered arrivals should be implemented to ensure that family members dropping off their children at the classroom door are maintaining physical distancing of at least six feet from other families and staff.
- Principals should consider the easiest path to the early childhood classrooms, as well as the entrances that can be used to mitigate any contact with other age groups or staff. Since



early childhood classrooms are often on the first floor, this should prevent the family member from greater access to the building.

Children should be able to adjust at their own pace, and determine when they no longer need to be escorted to the classroom door. The teaching team and family should collaborate to develop this transition plan, following each child's lead. Additionally, the Division of Early Childhood Education is available to provide further guidance and coaching in cases where other support might be needed for entry and dismissal of 3-k and pre-K children.

5. Welcoming new children and families to year-round programs

When new children and families join your program throughout the year, offer a similarly staggered start using the strategies outlined above.

Considerations for Staggering Schedules

- Consider the unique needs of children, families, and staff in your community when planning your staggered schedule. Partner with families to determine their availability to support drop-off and pick-up on a staggered schedule, as well as the best times of day for staggered experiences.
- Extend the staggered schedule for individual children as needed. A child may need more time to adjust to the new setting, especially considering their recent experiences. When possible, allow for this by talking to the family and creating a plan that ensures the child has the time they need to acclimate to the classroom. If a family is unable to accommodate this because of their own schedule, work together to find ways to help the child feel more comfortable with the transition.
- Ensure you are communicating clearly with families and children about the schedule. Consider creating a simple schedule that shows home/school or remote/in-person days to hang in your classroom, as well as for children to reference at home.
- If your program includes infants and toddlers, please discuss children's nap schedules with families. Plan your staggered schedule according to the information the family shares.
- Ensure that you are adhering to all health and safety protocols, including social distancing, sanitization, health checks, and appropriate face coverings.

