

Summer 2020 Guidance for EarlyLearn Centers, Version I (Released July 8, 2020)

Note: This guidance applies to all EarlyLearn center-based programs that transitioned from the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) in July 2019 and are now contracted by the NYC Department of Education (DOE) to provide year-round services to eligible infants, toddlers, 3-year-olds, and 4-year-olds.

Introduction

On Tuesday, July 7, the New York City Board of Health voted to lift the child care closure order, and authorized group child care and school-based child care programs operating pursuant to Health Code Article 47 or Article 43 to **resume in-person services beginning Monday, July 13**. In response, the DOE Division of Early Childhood Education (DECE) is issuing the guidance below to EarlyLearn programs contracted by the DOE to provide year-round services to eligible children and families.

This guidance is intended to align to and supplement the current [New York State Interim COVID-19 Guidance for Child Care and Day Camp Programs](#) ("NYS June 2020 guidance"), which is subject to change. **Prior to reopening, all NYC early childhood programs must train their staff in the [NYS June 2020 guidance](#), complete an affirmation online, and complete and post the [NYS Business Reopening Safety Plan Template](#)** (in addition to updating your existing safety plan as an Article 47 provider). Programs should also continue to check the [NYC Health COVID-19 page](#) for updates, as requirements may change as we learn more about COVID-19 and the best ways to reduce transmission and keep New Yorkers safe.

Many of the typical requirements for programs will remain in place, while others will need to be modified during this time. Programs should still refer to the [3-K and Pre-K for All Policy Handbook](#), along with Health Code [Article 47](#). However, where expectations differ, you should adhere to this guidance document, the most recent guidance issued by New York State, and the most recent guidance issued by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). **All guidance is subject to revision and approval by City, State and Federal regulatory and funding agencies at any time.**

Additionally, please note:

- While EarlyLearn programs contracted with the DOE to provide year-round services may resume in-person services starting Monday, July 13, programs **are not required** to reopen on that date. All EarlyLearn programs should plan to provide some level of in-person learning services in DOE-funded EarlyLearn classrooms this summer; please review this guidance document for more details.
- The DECE is hosting a [mandatory webinar for all EarlyLearn program leaders](#) **Thursday, July 9 from 10:00-11:30am** to review this guidance and important next steps for programs.
- As an attachment to this guidance document, we have provided a [Family Schedule Needs Sample Survey](#) for programs to assess their families' needs and interest in **three different learning models**:

- Full-time in-person learning;
- Full-time remote learning; and
- Blended learning (a combination of in-person learning and remote learning)

The DECE will share more information in the coming days on how programs should prioritize children and families for in-person services in the event that it is not possible to provide in-person services to every family that wants it. **Programs should not communicate to families which learning model they will be receiving until the DECE shares this information on priorities for in-person services.**

- The DECE will release additional guidance to EarlyLearn programs in the coming days, including:
 - A **program readiness checklist** to complete prior to resuming any in-person services in DOE-funded EarlyLearn classrooms;
 - A **program readiness planning tool** to outline how currently-enrolled children in DOE-funded EarlyLearn classrooms will be served and how staffing requirements will be met;
 - **Detailed health and safety guidance**;
 - **Budget guidance**; and
 - **Attendance and enrollment guidance.**

- EarlyLearn programs must carefully review all guidance issued by the DECE, and complete the DECE program readiness checklist referenced above **prior to resuming any in-person services in DOE-funded EarlyLearn classrooms.** This checklist may be self-certified, but it must be submitted to the DECE before in-person services in DOE-funded EarlyLearn classrooms resume.
 - Some programs may be required to review this checklist with an assigned DECE readiness staff member prior to resuming in-person services; the DECE will reach out proactively if this is a requirement for your program.
 - All contracted EarlyLearn programs will receive a virtual or in-person visit from a DECE staff member over the coming weeks.

The DECE’s mission, vision, and commitment to quality, as described in our [Early Childhood Framework for Quality \(EFQ\)](#), will remain the same as we resume in-person services. At the same time, it is our shared responsibility to recognize and respond to the collective and individual trauma experienced by the NYC early childhood community as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the disproportionate impacts that the pandemic has had on Black and Latino/a/x communities. The DECE recognizes that the needs of each family, program, and community are different. Additionally, we know that young children learn through play and in the context of relationships with caring adults. In times of stress and change, it is even more important that we support young children with safe, nurturing and predictable environments. As such, we intend to provide as much flexibility to programs as possible to decide how services will be structured in an trauma-informed and equitable way, while maintaining and implementing necessary new health and safety standards.

Supporting the mental health and emotional well-being of your staff, children, and families is extremely important during this time. See [here](#) for free digital mental health resources for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. All New Yorkers can also connect with counselors at NYC Well, a free and confidential mental health support service. NYC Well staff are available 24/7 and can provide brief counseling and referrals to care in more than 200 languages:

- Call 888-NYC-WELL (888-692-9355)
- Text “WELL” to 65173
- Chat online at the [NYC Well page](#)

We value your input and want to be an effective resource for your program during this challenging time. If you have any questions or feedback, please contact us at earlychildhoodpolicy@schools.nyc.gov.

Key Upcoming Dates

- **Tuesday, July 7:** NYC Board of Health votes to lift the child care closure order
- **Wednesday, July 8:** DECE releases two guidance documents to contracted EarlyLearn programs
 - DECE Summer 2020 Guidance for EarlyLearn Centers, Version I - **this document**
 - [Family Schedule Needs Sample Survey](#)
- **Thursday, July 9:** DECE holds a mandatory webinar for all EarlyLearn programs
- **Monday, July 13:** Article 47 and Article 43 child care programs may resume in-person services, if they are able to comply with [NYS June 2020 guidance](#)
- **Wednesday, July 22 (5pm):** Deadline for programs to apply for [New York Forward Child Care Expansion Incentive Temporary Operating Assistance Program](#) (CARES 2)
- **Wednesday, August 5:** Last day for programs to begin providing some in-person services and still be eligible for the [New York Forward Child Care Expansion Incentive Temporary Operating Assistance Program](#) (CARES 2)
- **Monday, August 31:** Last day for contracted EarlyLearn programs to resume providing some level of in-person services in DOE-funded EarlyLearn classrooms, or to seek an exemption from the DECE, to continue receiving payment from the DOE for contracted services

Key Operational Parameters

Enrollment & Learning Models

- All contracted EarlyLearn programs will be expected to provide services, in some form, to **all** eligible children and families **currently enrolled** in their DOE-funded EarlyLearn classes. **No children or families should be dropped from program rosters at this time.**
- **The needs and preferences of your enrolled families will likely be different, and the services provided by programs will need to reflect these differences.** Some families may not be able or ready to send their child to a program for in-person learning; other families may need a full day and full week of care; others may be able to accommodate a more flexible schedule that includes a combination of in-person and remote learning.
- Programs may serve currently-enrolled children and families through **three potential learning models:**
 1. Full-time in-person learning
 2. Full-time remote learning
 3. Blended learning (a combination of in-person learning and remote learning)

- In a child’s early years, learning is most impactful when it takes place in person. **All EarlyLearn programs should plan to provide some level of in-person learning services in DOE-funded EarlyLearn classrooms this summer.** We anticipate that most programs will provide a combination of the learning models listed above, depending on families’ needs, group size requirements, and staffing limitations.
- Programs must continue to provide remote learning services to all currently-enrolled children until they resume in-person services.
- Programs that want to be eligible for the [New York Forward Child Care Expansion Incentive Temporary Operating Assistance Program](#) (CARES 2), will need to **apply to the grant by Wednesday, July 22 at 5pm** and plan to resume some in-person services by Wednesday, August 5. EarlyLearn summer services should not be cost allocated to state grants. Programs should continue to work with their Budget Analysts for questions related to cost allocation.
- In order to continue to receive payment from the DOE for contracted services, **EarlyLearn programs are expected to resume some level of in-person learning services in DOE-funded EarlyLearn classrooms, or seek an exemption, before August 31.**
- **Programs that are unable to meet this expectation can request an exemption from the DOE. Exemption requests should be sent to earlychildhoodpolicy@schools.nyc.gov.** Possible rationales for being unable to resume in-person services may include:
 - Program has no currently-enrolled families who want in-person services at this time;
 - Program has no staff who are able to provide in-person services at this time;
 - Program has facility health and safety issues that will not allow for in-person services (e.g., planned construction that has been delayed due to COVID-19); or
 - Program is co-located and cannot meet new health and safety expectations due to shared spaces within their facility.
- To maximize in-person learning opportunities for currently-enrolled children, program may:
 - Request flexibility in their operating hours for in-person services in DOE-funded EarlyLearn classrooms, **including providing fewer than the usual 10 hours per day.** Programs should request this flexibility through their assigned DECE readiness staff member, and must clearly communicate operating hours in advance to families.
 - Request to **provide in-person services to children in mixed-age groups**, as long as they continue to comply with applicable [Article 47](#) regulations. Programs should also request this flexibility through their assigned DECE readiness staff member.
- **Programs should provide in-person services to as many currently enrolled income-eligible families as possible**, given family needs, group size requirements and staffing limitations. The DECE will issue guidance shortly on how programs should prioritize children and families for in-person services in the event that it is not possible to provide in-person services to every family that wants it
- **The DECE will share additional guidance with EarlyLearn programs currently operating as DOE Emergency Child Care Centers (ECCs) about enrollment implications and next steps.**
- **Programs should be prepared to implement changes if the public health situation in NYC worsens, and in accordance with State and City guidance.** It is

possible that if multiple individuals connected to a specific program become ill, or there is a widespread community outbreak of COVID-19, programs may need to transition to a fully remote learning model for a period of time.

Staffing

- **Programs should plan to continue employing all staff currently on their DOE budgets**, but they may need to make adjustments to their current staffing plan.
- **Programs should comply with federal and state requirements, if applicable, regarding the provision of medical accommodations for staff members who request them.** [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) guidance](#) regarding exposure and quarantine is useful in shaping medical accommodation policy decisions, and should be used to promote the health and safety of employees and children in child care programs. Programs should also discuss this issue with their own board or counsel as appropriate. Any staff who receive accommodations to work remotely should be tasked with providing remote learning services to children and families who are participating in a fully remote learning model, or in a blended learning model. The same staff members may provide remote learning services to children across multiple age groups. Programs should ensure that any staff working remotely have devices and internet access needed to perform their responsibilities.
- **Programs must have the following documentation on-site for all staff:**
 - A primary contact number and two emergency contact phone numbers;
 - Evidence of appropriate security clearances;
 - All staff must be added to the program’s online PETS roster (including if they were fingerprinted and cleared through DOI or IdentoGO); and
 - **All staff must be fingerprinted and cleared through PETS, DOI or IdentoGO** in order to begin working and the program must be able to provide proof of such clearance (e.g. appears eligible in PETS, has a clearance letter from IdentoGO or DOI).
 - Current medical form; and
 - Evidence of training in child abuse and maltreatment identification, reporting and prevention.
- **Program staff who are feeling ill should not come to the program.** Programs will need to have substitute staff available on short notice if a staff member is not feeling well.
- In alignment with the [NYS June 2020 guidance](#) and DECE policy, **maximum group size and staff-to-child ratios** in DOE-funded EarlyLearn classrooms will be as follows, until further notice

Age	Staff	Max. Group Size
Infants (under 12 months)	2	8

Age	Staff	Max. Group Size
Younger Toddlers (12-24 months)	2	10 (8 for Early Head Start classes)
Older Toddlers (24-36 months)	2	12 (8 for Early Head Start classes)
Preschoolers (3- and 4-year-olds)	2	15

- **Children should stay in stable groups not to exceed the maximum group sizes above.** These groups must avoid coming into contact with each other during their time on-site. For the most part, there is not an expectation that young children will maintain physical distancing within their stable groups. However, during certain activities (e.g. meals, naptime), NYS health requirements mandate more physical space between children.
- **Adults should maintain a physical distance of 6 feet from each other, whenever possible.** Additionally, adults should avoid congregating in groups, whenever possible (e.g. during drop-off and pick-up routines, staff meetings, and breaks).
- For public health reasons and to support responsive caregiving, children should have consistency in their in-person and remote-learning services, such that the same staff members are regularly assigned to the same group of children. For in-person services, programs should **limit the number of classrooms** that are supported by any single staff member, including non-lead teachers.
- Programs must identify a **site safety monitor to oversee daily staff and child health checks** and track all people entering the facility. In programs that have existing nursing staff, nurses may be best qualified to fulfill this role, but this role can also be combined with other staff duties. Please see the Health and Safety section below for more information on daily health checks.
- Programs must identify **custodial or other staff to clean and disinfect throughout the day and maintain a cleaning and disinfection log on site**, especially in common areas such as shared bathrooms, onsite playgrounds, hallways, and on frequently touched surfaces.

Blended Learning

- Depending on families' needs, group size requirements, and staffing limitations, programs may need to offer a **blended learning model** to some currently-enrolled children and families. This could include:
 - Split schedule with **alternating days** (i.e., in-person learning services on Tuesday and Thursday, and remote learning services on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday); or
 - Split schedule with **alternating weeks** (i.e., one week in-person and the next week remote)
- Remote learning activities can be planned and shared in advance with families and do not need to be delivered live. Please see the [Guidance for Remote Learning in 3-K and Pre-K](#) for information and suggestions on how program staff can effectively

support remote learning. Additionally, [these suggestions](#) can support leaders and teachers in reflecting on their remote learning experiences to inform their communications and planning. Families are also encouraged to visit the [Learn at Home: Early Childhood](#) for additional resources to support them in engaging their children in fun, educational experiences at home.

- Program staff are expected to have **at least two remote interactions** per week with each currently enrolled family that is participating in the fully remote learning model (per [this guidance](#)).
- Program staff are expected to have **at least one remote interaction** per week with each currently enrolled family that is participating in the blended learning model.
- Programs should consider **equipment and materials necessary for remote learning**, and supply materials for staff and children who may not have these resources at home. Examples may include art supplies, manipulatives, books, etc. Programs should have any supplies delivered first to their program address for auditing purposes before distributing to families.

Health and Safety (more detailed guidance to be shared with programs in the coming days)

- Programs should review the [DOHMH Checklist for Child Care Program Guidelines](#), as they will be expected to meet all requirements outlined in this document, in addition to the requirements of [Article 47](#) of the NYC Health Code.
- Upon re-opening the facility (5 to 10 days prior to resuming any child care), **programs should flush all faucets for at least 10 minutes**. Flush cold water from all outlets first, and then flush hot water.
- All children must have the following **before resuming in-person learning**:
 - Current [Emergency Contact Card](#) (“blue card”) that includes at least two emergency contacts, approved escorts, home language, and health-related information;
 - Current medical form (within 12 months of the date of re-entry);
 - Proof of completed immunizations, based on the age;
 - Children must meet at least the [provisional vaccination requirements](#) (1 dose from each series) to begin on-site services, and continue to obtain vaccinations based on the “catch-up” schedule
 - Written consent for staff to act and obtain appropriate health care in the event of an emergency;
 - *If applicable*, an individualized health care plan indicating specific emergency medications (i.e., an epinephrine auto-injector, asthma inhaler and/or nebulizer) to be administered for the child;
 - *If applicable*, an [Allergy Response Plan](#) identifying their allergy(ies) and detailing the steps that need to be taken; and
 - *If applicable*, all necessary documentation to allow trained medical personnel to administer over-the-counter or prescription medicine (for programs with a designated MAT trained staff member or nurse).
- **Staff must wear face coverings at all times** when interacting with children or families onsite, both indoors and outdoors. Reusable face coverings are strongly encouraged as they are best for the environment, most sustainable over time, and easier to disinfect.

- The DECE will share additional guidance in the coming days about children and face coverings.
- Programs must use classrooms for serving meals non-family style. **No food should be shared.** Recently, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) granted a nationwide waiver for non-congregate feeding which allows CACFP Sponsors to continue serving meals to children and adult participants individually. This option will allow **all enrolled children to continue to receive nutritious and well-balanced meals and snacks daily, even when they are not on-site.** As a CACFP participating child care center, if you would like to use this option to continue feeding your regularly enrolled children, please follow [this guidance](#) for options, how to obtain approval, and general requirements for non-congregate feeding and logistical considerations, and complete [this application](#).
- Programs must identify a **private, enclosed area for isolating anyone who becomes ill while onsite.** Additionally, programs must designate specific entrances and exits, and create distance and directional markers inside and outside of the program to support physical distancing.
- Some early childhood programs are co-located in buildings that are used for multiple purposes. Programs with shared spaces should collaborate with other groups using the facility to ensure all groups are following shared health and safety guidelines.
- **Daily health checks must happen for both children and staff upon arrival.** Child health checks must be documented and done before families leave in the morning (unless done remotely before arrival). Staff checks should also be documented and completed upon staff's arrival for their shift. Consider using these resources to document the [child health checks](#) and [staff health checks](#).
- If a **staff member or enrolled child tests positive for COVID-19**, programs must immediately notify the DOE at earlychildhoodpolicy@schools.nyc.gov and notify the NYC Test and Trace Corps at CovidEmployerReport@nychhc.org with the following information (subject to change):
 - Full name of individual with positive test result;
 - Program name, address, and phone number;
 - Date program was informed of positive test results; and
 - Date individual with positive test result was last in program building.
 Programs must also follow [existing communicable disease reporting processes per DOHMH](#).
- **Upon notification of a positive staff or child test result at a contracted program:**
 - The DECE will inform the program of any required next steps and will share letter template(s) for the program to use to notify staff and families (while maintaining the confidentiality of sensitive health information).
 - The Test and Trace Corps will direct any individuals who test positive for COVID-19 to isolate at home, and will also attempt to interview all diagnosed individuals (or their family members, in the case of young children) to identify close contacts who were potentially exposed. These close contacts will be directed to get tested and isolate based on their exposure.
- **There is no testing requirement for a staff or child who has previously tested positive to return to a program after their quarantine is complete.** However, NYC recommends that all New Yorkers receive [COVID-19 diagnostic testing](#) whether or not they have symptoms or are at increased risk. It is not currently recommended that people who previously tested positive get retested, unless advised to do so by public health guidance or their health care provider.

- In the event that a parent/guardian of a child must be isolated because they have tested positive for, or exhibited symptoms of, COVID-19, the parent/guardian must be advised that they cannot enter the site for any reason, including picking up their child.
 - If the parent/guardian – who is a member of the same household as the child – is exhibiting signs of COVID-19 or has been tested and is positive for the virus, utilize an emergency contact authorized by the parent/guardian to come pick up the child. **As a “close contact,” the child must not return to the program for the duration of the quarantine.**
 - If the parent/guardian– who is a member of the same household as the child – is being quarantined as a precautionary measure, without symptoms of the virus or a positive test result, staff should walk out or deliver the child to the parent/guardian at the boundary of, or outside, the premises. **As a “contact of a contact” the child may return to the program during the duration of the quarantine.**
 - If a child or their household member becomes symptomatic of COVID-19 and/or has a positive test result, **the child must quarantine and may not return or attend the program until after quarantine is complete.**

- Per [State guidance](#), all travelers entering New York who have recently traveled within a state with significant community spread **are required to quarantine for a period of 14 days.**
 - The requirements of the travel advisory do not apply to any individual passing through designated states for a limited duration (i.e., less than 24 hours) through the course of travel.
 - The designated states with significant community spread **will be conspicuously posted on [the State DOH website](#) and will be updated weekly.** Programs should check the website frequently as the information will change as often as daily, as rates of COVID-19 transmission increase or decrease.

Next Steps for EarlyLearn Programs

All EarlyLearn programs should use the guidance above, along with the [NYS June 2020 guidance](#), and the [DOHMH Checklist for Child Care Program Guidelines](#), to plan for summer services that will best meet the needs of your children, families, and staff.

Critical steps for EarlyLearn programs to take now to support this planning include to:

- Join DECE for a [mandatory webinar for all EarlyLearn program leaders](#) **Thursday, July 9 from 10:00-11:30am** to review this guidance and important next steps for programs. You can register for this webinar [here](#); it will also be recorded, and we encourage programs to share with all staff.
- **Distribute the [Family Schedule Needs Sample Survey](#) to each currently-enrolled family** as soon as possible. Families should be asked to complete a separate survey for each enrolled child.
- **Gather information on the needs of all staff members** on your DOE budget, including any staff who may seek accommodations based on your program’s HR policies.
- Direct all **staff with outdated medical forms** to schedule physician appointments now.

- **Share information about medical and vaccination requirements with all currently-enrolled families**, and support families with referrals and community resources.
- **Encourage all adults affiliated with the program to get tested for COVID-19**, even if they have no symptoms. It is especially beneficial for program staff to be tested prior to supporting in-person learning. More information about the free COVID-19 diagnostic test, and a map of available testing sites, is available [here](#).
- Prior to resuming in-person services, all programs must train their staff in the [NYS June 2020 guidance](#), complete an affirmation online, and complete and post the [NYS Business Reopening Safety Plan Template](#) (in addition to updating your existing safety plan as an Article 47 provider).

Next Steps for the DECE

The DECE will release additional guidance to EarlyLearn programs in the coming days, including:

- A **program readiness checklist** to complete prior to resuming any in-person services in DOE-funded EarlyLearn classrooms;
- A **program readiness planning tool** to outline how currently-enrolled children in DOE-funded EarlyLearn classrooms will be served and how staffing requirements will be met;
- **Detailed health and safety guidance**;
- **Budget guidance**; and
- **Attendance and enrollment guidance**.

All EarlyLearn programs must complete the DECE program readiness checklist referenced above **prior to resuming any in-person services in DOE-funded EarlyLearn classrooms**. This checklist may be self-certified, but it must be submitted to the DECE before in-person services in DOE-funded EarlyLearn classrooms resume.

- Some programs may be required to review this checklist with an assigned DECE readiness staff member prior to resuming in-person services; the DECE will reach out proactively if this is a requirement for your program.
- All contracted EarlyLearn programs will receive a virtual or in-person visit from a DECE staff member over the coming weeks.