



Early Childhood Guidance and Considerations

Leadership & Planning (Governance, Operations, and Technology)

Operations

Advisory Committee

- Utilize existing advisory committees to gather community input on how the school year might look or changes that might need to be addressed.
 - Review the current membership list to make sure the committee includes representation from staff and families in order to include their input.

Instructional Hours

- School systems unable to meet the minimums for instructional hours (in either center- or home-based early childhood programs) due to epidemic sickness, severe storm conditions, or destruction of the school house may request permission from the Board to offer fewer than the minimum hours by submitting an affidavit sworn to by the secretary of the school board and explaining the circumstances resulting in the request. This affidavit should be submitted to the NDE as soon as the school year is completed.

Scheduling

- Be sure to have conversations with local childcare and Head Start programs when considering any changes to existing scheduling arrangements.
- Be mindful of families' considerations, including the possibility of remote learning opportunities for some children whose family does not want their child to attend, either initially or in case the need arises as the year progresses.
- Ensure that if multiple groups of children are using the same space, that there is enough time for sanitizing the high touch surfaces before the next group utilizes the same space. This might mean shortening the length of an am/pm session to ensure time for cleaning between the sessions.
- In order to limit exposures, consider keeping groups/classrooms of children and the staff that work with those children contained as much as possible.

Home Visits

- Rule 11 Requirement 005.02C "At least two (2) home visits per year between the parent(s) and the teacher to discuss the child's development and learning. If the family decides to have the visit at a location other than the home, it must be conducted at a location determined jointly by the family and teacher."
- The purpose of home visits has always been to develop a strong

school/family partnership. Given the circumstances of the pandemic, it is even more imperative to nurture this relationship between the teacher and family members.

- Depending on the current risk levels, determined by the local health department in your district, home visits might look different this year. The default should be in-person home visits, if at all possible. However, schools should have a clear policy on steps to be taken to ensure both district staff and families are protected during home visits. The policy should also include when and under what circumstances the district might move to other home visit options. Some considerations to meet the Rule 11 requirement if local health measures require something other than in-person meetings include:
 - Meeting outside of the families' homes while practicing social distancing,
 - Virtual visits, or
 - Phone calls.
- Districts with early childhood home visiting programs should continue to document contact with families.
- Documentation should be kept on the format of home visits and attempts to follow the requirements of Rule 11.

Conditions for Learning (Facilities and Wellness)

Facilities

ECERS recommendations

- The ECERS observation assessment tool was not developed to be used during a pandemic situation with any additional allowances based on the health guidance provided locally. The intent of the tool is to provide children with the highest quality learning environment to support learning.
- While following the local directed health measures and local health department risk dials is of utmost importance, care should be given to meet the quality indicators within the ECERS observation tool whenever possible.
- At this time, the NDE does not anticipate doing widespread observational assessments in the Fall of 2020.

Social Distancing

- Social distancing is in direct opposition to young children's developmental needs. In order to support teachers, districts, and families these social stories can be used to help children understand what it might look like:
 - [Going Back to Child Care](#)
 - [Going Back to School story \(PDF\)](#)
- As always, preschool children should not spend the majority of their day doing seat/desk work. If children and teachers are able to maintain their classroom group, social distancing within the classroom is less of a concern; however, teachers and staff need to practice spacing and physical distance with other staff.

- Ensure that classrooms/cohorts of children and their teachers/staff maintain distance from other classrooms/cohorts of children to minimize exposure
- Encourage discussions among staff with local childcare programs that have remained open through the summer to learn how those programs met the many CDC guidelines while providing care/education over the summer months.

Playground

- Care should be taken to limit the amount of exposure children have to other classrooms and grade levels, by keeping the same group/classroom of children and staff together and minimizing contact with other groups/classrooms.
- Normal routine cleaning of surfaces, including washing surfaces that are frequently touched with soap and water, between classrooms/grade levels may help to limit exposure.
- Proper handwashing of at least 20 seconds when returning to the classroom will also help to reduce exposure.
- As with other age/grade levels, consult the CDC guidance for [parks and recreational facilities](#).

Wellness

Face Masks in Early Childhood Settings

- Before determining how to use face masks, it's important to note that children under the age of 2 should NOT wear face masks as well children who have difficulty or trouble with breathing or are unable to remove the mask without assistance.
- For additional information regarding the use of cloth-face masks, visit the CDC's [page here](#).
- Most experts would not advocate for young children wearing masks due to challenges with keeping children properly masked.
- If masks are required, here are some resources/suggestions to assist teachers, districts, and families with supporting children:
 - [I Can Stay Healthy by Wearing Face Mask](#) - Social story for children 3 to 8 years of age
 - A [short video and song](#) for young children 2-5 telling them about a face mask and its purpose. This video can be shown to children before they arrive to school.
 - Recommendations and developmentally appropriate ways to introduce children to wearing face masks from the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#).
 - Use pictures of staff without masks to play a game in which children guess who the staff member wearing the mask is. Or play a matching game with pictures of staff wearing & not wearing a mask.
 - Staff could wear buttons made with their picture so children can see the person's full face.

- For children with disabilities: the Early Childhood staff must review the child's IEP and/or consult with the IEP team to determine if the child is able to wear a mask or the appropriate length of time the child is able to wear/tolerate the mask due to the child's disability/special health care needs.
 - Additionally, children with hearing impairment may likely require utilization of additional technology in order to access sound, closed captioning, etc. to ensure full access to the learning environment.

Meals/Snacks

- Meals served in the classroom ensure children are exposed to the least number of people; however, serving the meals "family style" (passing of foods/dishing own foods/sharing utensils) is not recommended and should be avoided.
- Children should be cohorted with their classroom/group to minimize exposure to other classrooms/groups.
- Consult the Environment Rating Scales Institute's document detailing the [Table Washing Procedure](#) to assist with sanitizing of surfaces prior to meals/snacks.

Personal Care Routines

- Following the routines established within the ECERS observation tool for [Diapering and Handwashing](#) are always important in the early childhood classroom. As a reminder, hands should be washed, using the proper handwashing procedure anytime they are visibly dirty in addition to the following times: arrival in the classroom, re-entry in the classroom after being outside, before and after the use of shared wet materials (such as water or play dough), after play with shared sensory materials (such as sand) or after messy play, after dealing with bodily fluids, and after touching contaminated objects or surfaces (such as trash can lids or pets).
- The use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers is an alternative to the traditional handwashing with soap and water of children over 24 months of age and adults when hands are not visibly soiled; however, the use of sanitizer by children should be closely supervised.
- According to [Caring for Our Children](#) (CFOC): Hand sanitizers using an alcohol-based active ingredient must contain 60% to 95% alcohol to be effective in killing most germs including multi-drug resistant pathogens. Child care programs should follow the manufacturer's instructions for use, check instructions to determine how much product and how long the hand sanitizer needs to remain on the skin surface to be effective

Cleaning and Disinfecting

- [Caring for Our Children](#) (CFOC) provides national standards for cleaning, sanitizing and disinfection of educational facilities for children. Toys that can be put in the mouth should be cleaned and sanitized (see below). Other hard surfaces, including diaper

- changing stations, door knobs, and floors can be disinfected.
- Intensify cleaning and disinfection efforts:
 - Facilities should develop a schedule for cleaning and disinfecting. An example can be found [here](#).
 - [Routinely clean, sanitize, and disinfect](#) surfaces and objects that are frequently touched, especially toys and games. This may also include cleaning objects/surfaces not ordinarily cleaned daily such as doorknobs, light switches, classroom sink handles, countertops, nap pads, toilet training potties, desks, chairs, cubbies, and playground structures. Use the cleaners typically used at your facility. Guidance is available for the selection of appropriate [sanitizers or disinfectants](#) for child care settings.
 - Use all cleaning products according to the directions on the label. For disinfection, most common EPA-registered, fragrance-free household disinfectants should be effective. A list of products that are EPA-approved for use against the virus that causes COVID-19 is available [here](#)
 - If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for concentration, application method, and contact time for all cleaning and disinfection products.
 - If possible, provide EPA-registered disposable wipes to child care providers and other staff members so that commonly used surfaces such as keyboards, desks, and remote controls can be wiped down before use. If wipes are not available, please refer to CDC's guidance on [disinfection for community settings](#).
 - All cleaning materials should be kept secure and out of reach of children.
 - Cleaning products should not be used near children, and staff should ensure that there is adequate ventilation when using these products to prevent children from inhaling toxic fumes.
 - Cleaning of Toys/Materials
 - Toys that cannot be cleaned and sanitized should not be used.
 - Toys that children have placed in their mouths or that are otherwise contaminated by body secretions or excretions should be set aside until they are cleaned by hand by a person wearing gloves. Clean with water and detergent, rinse, sanitize with an EPA-registered disinfectant, rinse again, and air-dry. A mechanical dishwasher may also be used. Be mindful of items more likely to be placed in a child's mouth, like play food, dishes, and utensils.
 - Machine washable cloth toys should be used by one individual at a time or should not be used at all. These toys

- should be laundered before being used by another child.
- Do not share toys with other groups of infants or toddlers, unless they are washed and sanitized before being moved from one group to the other.
- Set aside toys that need to be cleaned. Place in a dish pan with soapy water or put in a separate container marked for "soiled toys." Keep the dish pan and water out of reach from children to prevent risk of drowning or ingestion. Washing with soapy water is the ideal method for cleaning. Try to have enough toys so that the toys can be rotated through cleanings.
- Children's books, like other paper-based materials such as mail or envelopes, are not considered a high risk for transmission and do not need additional cleaning or disinfection procedures

Continuity of Learning (Instruction and Transitions)

Instruction

CLASS Recommendations

- At this time, the NDE does not anticipate doing widespread observation assessments in the Fall of 2020.

Remote Learning Possibilities

- Create opportunities and guidance to support parents as the child's most important teacher, including guidance to coach families on creating engaging learning environments that reflect their home, without needing to replicate the school classroom.
- Create time and space for teachers to collaborate with each other, and draw on each other's strengths to promote family engagement and remote learning opportunities.
- With so many unknowns, focus more on the issues that matter most to young children's learning: building relationships with the child and his/her family and experiential engagement, rather than replicating the classroom learning environment and schedule.
- Webinar on Teaching Young Learners in a Pandemic: Supporting Children Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 3 and Their Learning Partners at Home:
<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midatlantic/app/Events#EventId:2260,EventType:archived,Page:1>

Child Outcomes

- At this time, the October 31st GOLD checkpoint due date for child outcomes remains for all children.
- Consider how teachers will collect child outcome data, not only to support regular instruction within the classroom, but also in case in-person classes are not possible due to local directed health measures, to continue to support children's growth and development through the remote learning possibilities.
- Ensure staff have a plan in place to collect and enter documentation of skills and abilities regardless of the learning

environment.

- Ensure that relationships between teachers and families are of utmost importance in order to help children continue to make progress regardless of his/her learning environment.
- Utilize resources within the family tab in GOLD to help include families in providing input and documentation of their child's skills and abilities.

Transitions

Orientation

- Be sure to provide some sort of Open House opportunities to allow children and families the chance to see their classroom before the first day of school. In order to reduce exposure, these orientations may be done virtually or one-on-one with families as long as health practices including sanitization of the area are done between family groups and local directed health measures allow.

Partnerships with Families and Childcare/Head Start

- Now more than ever, it's important to partner with the people in the child's life who have been caring for the child when they've been out of school. Schedule time with community childcare programs who have been working with children coming to the program to discuss strengths and how the district and childcare program can work together to meet the needs of each of the children and their families.

PreK-K Transition

- If not already completed, ensure that Kindergarten staff have the opportunity to meet with former teachers of students to discuss individual student & family transition plans, strengths, needs, etc.
- Remember that if a child turns 5 years old on or before July 31st of the current school year, that child is kindergarten age eligible, and not eligible for the district-operated preschool program unless the child is on an IEP and the IEP team determines that preschool is the best fit. See [Nebraska Revised Statute 79-214](#) for more details.
- If a child will be six years old before January 1st of the current school year the child is of mandatory attendance age, and must be enrolled in the school district's beginner grade, according to [Nebraska Revised Statute 79-201](#).
- For information about the requirements and resources regarding the PreK Transition Agreement between Head Start and Public Schools per Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and [Head Start Performance Standards](#).

Additional Resources

- Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA): [Supporting Children and Families during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)