



Early Education and Care FAQ for the 2020-21 School Year

Revised August 28, 2020

[Executive Order 20-82](#) states that school districts and charter schools may continue to run early childhood programs, including Community Education programs, and may charge fees on its normal sliding fee scale. Similar to K-12, early childhood programs must be run pursuant to Public Health guidelines (paragraph 25).

Primary 2020-2021 guidance for early care and education programs can be found in three locations:

1. Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) regulations and guidance for [Schools and Child Care: COVID-19](#). All program types serving children from birth to age five can be found in child care guidance.
2. [Governor's Executive Orders](#), specifically EO 20-81 and EO 20-82.
3. [Minnesota Department of Education \(MDE\) website](#) specifically, Minnesota's [Safe Learning Plan](#) and the [2020-2021 Planning Guidance for Minnesota Public Schools](#).

The purpose of this document is to help districts answer questions related to the primary guidance documents listed above. We recognize that your programs/learning environments will require teams to use thoughtful strategies when applying guidance to meet the health and safety needs of all children/students and staff. Always consult with your school district administrators/leaders and your COVID-19 program coordinator. If you find guidance that appears to be in conflict, proceed with the stricter guidance.

Frequently Asked Questions

What's New

Programming and Services - General

1. **[ADDED 08/28/20]: Do we operate on the 50% maximum capacity in the hybrid model? Or is there a different requirement for class size for pre-K in a hybrid model?**

In a hybrid model, Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK), School Readiness Plus (SRP), School Readiness and Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) classrooms for children should maintain groups of 10 or less, including children and staff for health and safety reasons. Limiting group size to 10 will decrease exposures or transmissions, reduce contact with shared surfaces, facilitate more efficient contact tracing and allow targeted testing, quarantine and/or isolation of a single cohort instead of school-wide measures in the event of a positive case.

Note that group size and room capacity are not mutually exclusive, and the size of cohorts may vary depending on factors specific to individual schools and classrooms. If your facility allows, you may

operate more than one group of 10 (including adults) in any given space. For more information about cohorts please see: [Preparing K-12 School Administrators for a Safe Return to School in Fall 2020](#) on the CDC website.

2. [ADDED 08/28/20]: Our School Readiness program is starting the year in the in-person scenario. Does the group size limit also apply, or is it just hybrid?

In the in-person scenario, programs have to meet program requirements listed in Minnesota statutes. In short, the answer to this question is “no, this is not a requirement.” However, it is a recommendation. Guidance from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) states that programs should “consider reducing class sizes or using alternative spaces with greater capacity to allow for more physical space between people.” In addition, early childhood programs should carefully consider the possibility that they may need to dial back during the school year. Starting the year in groups/cohorts, like stated in the hybrid example, would provide for smoother transitions. Remember, a goal for early childhood programs this year is to focus on effective risk mitigation strategies.

3. [ADDED 08/28/20]: Must early education and care programs follow the same learning model as their district or school?

If a district or school offers VPK or SRP, School Readiness, community education pre-K or ECFE they should generally follow the same learning model recommended for the elementary level in their county. If a school district or charter school chooses to dial back to a more restrictive learning model at the elementary school level, they may select a different model for pre-K or ECFE as long as it fits the parameters outlined in the Safe Learning Model Guidance and has been affirmed by the regional support team.

As always, discussions should revolve around policies, practices, and strategies that early education and care programs must implement and recommendations they should consider to optimize educational experiences and promote health and safety, while mitigating risk throughout the school year.

4. [ADDED 08/28/20]: What items/domains should a VPK/SRP, ESCE, or other early learning program administer from a Kindergarten Entry Profile (KEP) Approved Assessment?

There are two guidance documents that answer this question. One document provides a framework for early learning assessments, the [MDE 2020-21 Planning Guidance for Minnesota Public Schools](#), which is posted on [MDE's COVID-19 Updates](#) website. Search for Early Learning Assessments.

The other document is a detailed [COVID-19 Early Learning Assessment Guidance: Required KEP-Approved Assessment Items](#) (the document is posted on the [Early Learning Assessment](#) website). There is one table for each KEP-approved assessment that shows you the minimum items (for each of the three domains of learning). Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) Programs using a KEP-approved assessment to obtain a Child Outcome Summary (COS) Score will need to assess students on additional items, as the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs has not waived the responsibility to report COS outcome data on behalf of infants, toddlers, and preschool children with disabilities. Programs and teachers may choose to include additional items from their KEP-approved assessment based on the needs of their program or students. Other early learning programs may choose to integrate the above guidance into their programs, as appropriate, though other federal, state, and local guidance specific to their program that may supersede some or all of the guidance above.

Once the MDH is able to relax social-distancing limitations, MDE is likely to return (no sooner than school year 2021-22) to its previous guidance promoting a whole child, all learning domain approach to early learning assessments.

5. What does a hybrid model look like specific to early learning programs?

Three examples of a hybrid model in early learning programs are presented below for districts or schools to use and/or modify. In each of the three scenarios, [MDH guidance](#) procedures would be followed including: sanitation, occupancy and social distancing.

- a. **Example 1: Cohort model when space is limited.** If a district is limited to the originally assigned classroom for Hybrid programming, the class size would be split into two groups (Cohorts), Group A and Group B. Each group would receive an instructional mix of face-to-face and distance learning that equals the amount of instructional hours planned. For instance, if the planned half-day schedule is for five days/week, it might be possible to instead have one full-day of face-to-face program for each group and three half-day distance learning experiences. Another possibility would be using Monday/Tuesday and Thursday/Friday face-to-face groupings with Wednesday as a sanitation/distance learning day for everyone.
- b. **Example 2: Cohort model when additional classroom space is available.** In this example, a class could be split between two rooms that would each function as independent classrooms that are taught by one teacher. Assistant teachers would remain with the same group of children throughout the day. The teacher would split their time between the two groups following masking guidance. The following processes could be used to plan the day in this scenario:
 - Activities most closely align with core goals of the week's lesson plan or for individual children are taught by the teacher.
 - Guided activities like free choice play, outdoor play time, snack, etc. are lead and supervised by the assistant teacher.
 - Schedule co-planning and professional learning time for all staff following appropriate masking guidance.
- c. **Example 3: Teacher-guided cohort model.** Develop a set of criteria to help identify children who would benefit from more face-to-face learning opportunities and those who have the support needed for an expanded distance learning time. Develop a set of classroom criteria (e.g., students experiencing homelessness, food insecurity, lack of access to technology, parent work schedule issues, etc.) that helps identify two cohorts within the classroom. Group A would receive one face-to-face learning opportunity with teacher and peers each week. The rest of their scheduled instructional time would be planned distance learning activities that could also include a weekly synchronous event(s) planned between the in-class and distance learning groups or an event/work projects for small groups using technology. Group B, the face-to-face group, would maintain a regular schedule with one planned day of distance learning each week.

6. What is the status of home visits?

Home Visit guidance is on page 32 of the [2020-21 Planning Guidance for Minnesota Public Schools](#):

A school district or charter school may allow school staff to visit a student's home to build and preserve relationships with the student and their families. Under no circumstances should school staff enter the student's home or place of residence. The visit may occur outside of the student's home or at another suitable outdoor location, such as a park or taking a walk. Limit visits to no longer than 45 minutes. Students, staff, and families shall follow MDH and CDC Public Health Guidelines, including social distancing at least six feet of separation at all times. All students, families, and staff should wear

appropriate face masks at all times. If school staff are handing off instructional materials or other items, staff should follow the same procedure used in school to hand off materials or receive materials from the student and family.

Nothing in this guidance should be construed to encourage or require school staff, students, or families in at-risk categories to act inconsistently with public health recommendations or the advice of their doctors.

Early Childhood Screening

7. If a district or school is in a hybrid model, can in-person screening take place?

Screening programs should align and follow the same model as their districts or schools (in-person, hybrid, or distance). The decision to resume in-person screening is a district or charter school decision in consultation with MDH and not a program level decision.

- a. If the district or school model is in-person or hybrid, then in-person screening may resume following the [MDH Direct Service Guidelines](#) and the [MDH 2020-2021 Planning Guide for Schools](#).
- b. If the district or school model is distance learning then distance or virtual screening may continue online, phone, or mail. Just as a parent may request distance learning if their district or school is following the in-person model, a parent may request and receive distance or virtual screening even if their district or school is following the in-person model. The 2020-21 Planning Guidance for Minnesota Public Schools will soon be updated to reflect this change under the Early Learning section.

8. How will districts or schools screen children if they are not able to meet in-person due to the distance learning model?

Executive Order 20-82 (30): Upon approval by the Executive Council, the requirement to perform in-person developmental screenings under Minnesota Rules 2019, part 3530.3400, is waived if a district or charter school chooses to dial back in-person instruction to a distance learning model pursuant to paragraph 5 or is required to dial back in-person instruction to a distance learning model pursuant to paragraphs 4 or 6. MDE must develop guidance on a parent report tool in place of the in-person developmental screening.

- a. Districts may use the parent report tool, [ASQ 3](#), to meet the developmental screening component. Many district Early Childhood Special Education teams already have this tool, so there would not be a need for a screening program to purchase an additional license for this tool. [Short free virtual training videos](#) on the ASQ:3 and the ASQ:SE-2 for social emotional screening are available. During August 2020 through September 1, 2020, districts may request free access to [ASQ:3 by text](#) to send to families who are receiving virtual or distance screening.
- b. The 2020-21 Planning Guidance for Minnesota Public Schools under Early Learning outlines the steps districts may take to complete screening by the distance model (online, phone, mail).

9. Will the 30 day requirement to complete screening of kindergartners be extended?

Yes, [Executive Order 20-82 \(31\)](#) states: Upon approval by the Executive Council, the requirement to complete early childhood developmental screening within 30 days under Minnesota Statutes 2019, section 121A.17, is extended to 90 days. This will allow children to remain enrolled in kindergarten if a district or charter school chooses to dial back in-person instruction to a distance learning model

pursuant to paragraph 5 or is required to dial back in-person instruction to a distance learning model pursuant to paragraphs 4 or 6.

Tuition and Fees

10. Can districts and charter schools that offer School Readiness and Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) programs charge tuition for programming during distance learning?

Districts and charters may implement their normal fee structure for operating School Readiness, community education pre-K and ECFE programs if the programs are being offered through distance learning and the parent opts in to receive the services.

11. Can districts and charter schools that offer Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) or School Readiness Plus (SRP) programs charge fees for programming during distance learning?

Districts and charters must follow existing guidelines regarding fees for operating VPK and SRP programs during distance learning, hybrid learning and in-person learning. No 4-year-old attending a VPK classroom can be charged a fee. No 4-year-old meeting SRP program eligibility requirements can be charged a fee.

12. Will there be any implications for Parent Aware ratings, school-based pre-K and child care partnerships?

In coordination with the Minnesota Department of Human Services, any school-based programs with a Parent Aware rating expiring in summer or fall 2020 have been extended to December 31, 2020 in order to provide more time for completion of paper work and training requirements and documentation. This applies to all sites rated under the school-based programs including child care partners. The policy modification will be revisited in November 2020 to determine if an additional extension is warranted. Programs should continue to work towards their Parent Aware rating requirements to the best of their ability to meet the December 31 expiration.

Health and Safety

13. What are the requirements for teachers working in early childhood programs to wear masks?

Face coverings or masking requirements are found on the [MDH website](#). The childcare requirements apply to staff working with children birth to age five in all program types.

14. What if a teacher, child or staff member gets sick?

MDH has guidance on [What to Do When Notified of a Lab-Confirmed Case of COVID-19 in a School or Child Care Setting \(PDF\)](#) and [Decision Tree for People with COVID-19 Symptoms in Youth, Student, and Child Care Programs \(PDF\)](#)

15. What are the precautions to be used by those offering direct services?

MDE and MDH recognize that a variety of educational programs and services require close, physical, and prolonged contact, and would be difficult to provide to students while still abiding by social distancing guidelines. These include: evaluation for service eligibility; screening for developmental or other health conditions; personal care services; and specialized instruction and related services for students with special health care needs or disabilities. Guidance on the precautions to use are found in the document, [Guidance for Delivering Direct Student Support Services: Staff Protective Equipment](#).

16. Are children under 5 years old, who are riding a bus required to wear a mask?

All students over two years old are encouraged to wear a mask to the extent possible when riding a bus. For more information on school transportation and masks see page 6 on Face Coverings of the [MDH 2020-2021 Planning Guide for Schools](#).