



2020-21 Early Learning Outreach, Enrollment, Transition, and Instruction During COVID-19

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Success for students heavily depends upon the depth of relationships and supports provided by their families, schools, and communities. With the current uncertainties created by COVID-19, families of young children are struggling with questions as they think about the school year including (1) whether or not to enroll their child in prekindergarten or kindergarten and (2) where to enroll children in preschool or kindergarten. These uncertainties and concerns present an opportunity for increased collaboration and greater continuity between home, school, and community partners so that meaningful and long-lasting relationships are constructed and better meet the needs of children and families. The following four sections: Early Childhood Screening and Immunizations, Outreach and Enrollment, Transition, and Instructional Considerations discuss key topics for deliberation as schools welcome and engage with young learners and their families.

This link provides additional information on [Prekindergarten through Grade Three \(P3\)](#) practices.

Early Childhood Screening and Immunizations

Early Childhood Screening programs provide an important family engagement opportunity for districts. The screening appointment may be the first contact a district has with a family and is a time to assist families in prekindergarten or kindergarten enrollment. Families may have questions regarding the safety of attending early learning and kindergarten classrooms. Sharing information about the districts' plan to minimize COVID-19 transmission risks will go a long way toward reassuring families. [The Minnesota Department of Health \(MDH\) 2020-2021 Planning Guide for Schools](#) has additional requirements and recommendations. Some staff and students who are at a higher risk due to other health issues may need to teach and learn from home. It is likely that schools will move between in-person, hybrid, and distance learning models throughout the school year due to changing infection rates within their communities.

- [Early Childhood Screening](#) or evidence of a comparable screening by a non-school provider, such as Head Start, Child and Teen Checkups or a health care provider, is required for entrance in Minnesota's public schools or within 90 days of enrollment into kindergarten or prekindergarten programs for fall 2020.
- Right now, due to COVID-19, many components of screening may be done by distance (virtual/online, phone, or mail) or in-person model. The [Minnesota Department of Education \(MDE\) 2020-21 Planning Guidance for Minnesota Public Schools](#) outlines screening program considerations under the Early Learning section. Districts who have chosen the in-person or hybrid model may offer screening and follow [MDH Direct Service Guidelines](#). Parents may choose distance model screening even if a district is

offering hybrid or in-person. For the distance screening model, [Executive Order 20-82](#) allows the observational development tool to be waived and the [ASQ: 3](#) may be used instead. Many district Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) 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 ASQ: SE-2 are available.

- Minnesota 2020 Education Finance Legislation Chapter 116/HF 4415 COVID-19 Formula Adjustments directs MDE to calculate the aid for fiscal year (FY) 2020 and FY 2021 using the formula amounts set in statute for each age group and the 2018-2019 school year counts of children screened for each age group.
- We can assure families that for infection control reasons, clinics now arrange appointments for immunizations and well child visits early in the day and/or in a different area of the clinic than those coming in for COVID-19 concerns. Minnesota immunization schedules and exclusion rules remain in effect during COVID-19 and parent/guardians should make appointments with clinics to assure they are up to date. Immunizations are collected during the screening process. The MDH [Annual Immunization Status Report](#) due date has been extended until February 1, 2021.

Prekindergarten or Kindergarten Outreach and Enrollment

Outreach and enrollment efforts that connect with preschool or kindergarten families are critical since many families with young children have not had previous formal interactions with school districts. They are often unaware of school resources, programs, and enrollment procedures. The questions below will help you identify practices, information gaps, and strategies that will create welcoming practices and a positive school culture that can be easily accessed and navigated by families from a variety of backgrounds. Beginning a relationship with a child and their family in prekindergarten lays the foundation for a strong partnership that can make a difference for the next 13 years of their lives.

Data—Use data to inform outreach and enrollment efforts

1. How are we using the annual Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) Community Needs Assessment or voluntary prekindergarten (VPK)/school readiness plus (SRP) Measuring Impact data to inform our outreach and enrollment efforts? How could we use the needs assessment process to gather useful data? (*Note: The community needs assessment is required for ECFE programs.*)
2. Have our data collection methods (interviews, surveys, focus groups, etc.) accurately captured a representative sample of family voice within our community? If not, how might we learn more? Who else in our community might have knowledge that would provide useful information?
3. Has our assessment information suggested certain methods and/or timelines that can shape our communication and relationship-building practices with families?
4. Have we collaborated with key community early childhood partners (e.g., Head Start, family and center-based childcare, etc.) and other stakeholders (e.g., public library, faith- and interest-based organizations, etc.) to share data and strategies for reaching all families with young children?

Outreach—Use a variety of practices that help build relationships with families

1. Have we created multiple ways for families to access information about school programs? Is it available in the language spoken in the home?
2. Is the website easy to find and navigate? (**Note:** Often early learning is buried several layers deep in a website and not easily found.)
3. Is there a listed phone number to call and will the call be answered by someone able to provide correct information and speak to the family in their home language?
4. How are we identifying families with young children?
5. How are we connecting directly with families to understand their fall prekindergarten or kindergarten enrollment plans?
6. Who is best suited to have the first interaction with a family and can build meaningful connections? This might be a teacher, parent/family educator, social worker, parent/family liaison, home visitor, etc.
7. How are our preschool or kindergarten teachers building relationships with families that are currently enrolled? What types of communication methods are being used, how frequently are they communicating, and what is the goal of this communication?
8. Have our outreach ideas been collaboratively shaped with families?

Enrollment—Raise questions and provide information that supports family decision-making

The following questions, statements, and strategies, are intended to help engage families in conversations about enrolling their age-eligible child in a prekindergarten or kindergarten program.

1. For beginning of school year enrollment, families can be informed that:
 - a. “If you enroll now, you can change your mind later.”
 - b. “By enrolling now, we will know how to contact you so that we can send program updates and resource information now and in the future.”
 - c. Remember that every contact with a family of a child who is not yet enrolled is an opportunity to begin building a long-term relationship.
2. Provide information on what learning models (in-person, hybrid, or distance learning) will be used this year including the plans for preschool/kindergarten. Consider asking the family the following questions:
 - a. What is your impression of these models and how will they work for you and your family?
 - b. What questions or concerns do you have about this plan?
 - c. What might you need from us to make preschool/kindergarten work for your child this year?
 - d. Generally speaking, what kinds of conversations are your family, friends or neighbors having about enrolling their child at the school?
3. For kindergarten families considering holding their age-eligible child back for a year, help them understand the possible implications of not enrolling their child. Have them consider the following questions:
 - a. Who will your child spend the most time with during the next year?
 - b. How will your child develop play and interaction skills with other children if not enrolled or attending a program?
 - c. Who will be your child’s instructional/educational leader or support you in that role?

- d. What qualifications does that individual have for educating young children?
 - e. Looking out a year from now, what might it be like for your child to not progress with their age-level peers? What about 10 years from now when they are in high school?
 - f. How will you ensure your child develops their social/emotional skills as well as their literacy and math skills during this time?
 - g. If your child is struggling with a specific skill, who will you turn to for additional support?
 - h. For children currently enrolled in prekindergarten: Are you aware that there is no public funding available for a child that is 5 by September 1 if they are not enrolled in kindergarten? You may be charged a fee for being enrolled in the prekindergarten program.
4. If a family decides not to enroll their age-eligible child in prekindergarten or kindergarten, in what other ways might the school support that child/family? Consider the following questions:
- a. For age-eligible children that will be enrolled in child care programs:
 - i. What is our school system's relationship with local Head Start or child care programs?
 - ii. Is there a specific site within our district that is serving a large number of age-eligible children?
 - iii. Can our school system develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to offer voluntary prekindergarten (VPK)/school readiness plus (SRP) programming with a Head Start, child care facility, or with a cohort of family child care providers?
 - iv. How might this type of partnership support families who are choosing to keep their children enrolled in a child care program due to employment constraints when schools move to hybrid or off-site learning formats?
 - v. How might the district develop supports for kindergarten children who are enrolled in child care centers during hybrid or distance learning days?
 - vi. Could we offer an extended day prekindergarten or kindergarten program in our building that could continue operating during distance learning times?
Note: Review DHS Guidance for School Age programs to better understand the requirements for licensing and certification as well as separate guidance for funding stipulations when working with any setting for school-age child care. The Minnesota Department of Human Services has provided extended guidance for child care assistance. Visit [Information for Child Care Providers Responding to COVID-19](#) to learn more. Also see the [MDE School-Age child Care Guidance for the 2020-21 School Year](#).
 - b. For age-eligible children that will not be enrolled in a program:
 - i. How might we provide instructional resources that will allow a child to work on the skills needed to enter the age appropriate grade level for the 2021-22 school year?
 - ii. Who in our district is available and best suited to build relationships and develop instructional formats that would prepare children for the next grade-level in 2021-22?
5. What role could virtual home visits play in any of the above scenarios? For more information about developing safe and socially distanced home visiting/communication and outreach protocols during the pandemic, see the following resources from the [Office of Head Start](#) and [MDE 2020-21 Planning Guidance for Minnesota Public Schools](#).

Transition to Kindergarten

The MDE [Kindergarten Transitions](#) webpage has new resources that are designed to support the development of comprehensive prekindergarten to kindergarten transition practices. These multi-dimensional materials provide guidance for bringing school and community partners together so that they can examine their current practices and formulate new transition strategies focused on building pathways and continuity for children and families. The guidance emphasizes building relationships, opportunities, and strong programs that support families and their children's success in school. Also consider the following questions to help with the development of improved transition practices within your district:

1. What transition practices are currently in place to welcome and engage families?
2. How will we actively build relationships this fall? How will information be sent, received, and used by both teachers and families?
3. How will we establish connections between children's current settings (child care, home, etc.) and kindergarten in order to share information and create pathways for children as they transition to kindergarten?
4. How do we develop a meaningful relationship and build trust with families during a vulnerable time for them and their child? How are the voices of families embedded in our current transition planning?
5. How are we building communication and instructional frameworks that will interactively partner teachers and families? How will these strategies be implemented by teachers and benefit the students? The families?

Instructional Considerations

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented challenges that at the same time offer opportunities to examine current practices and explore ways to better align prekindergarten through third grade (P3) practices. This effort will help create a cohesive system where teachers, families, and children can thrive. Consider the following questions:

1. How should kindergarten instruction and the classroom environment look and feel more like prekindergarten this fall given the spring prekindergarten experience was abbreviated at a critical time of development?
2. Below are some innovative instructional formats to consider for kindergarten:
 - a. Looping, or having qualified prekindergarten teachers move into kindergarten with children with their former students, which allows those teachers to build off of pre-existing relationships with children and their families.
 - b. Mixed age grouping, pairing prekindergarten and kindergarten staff.

(Note for considerations c-g : Please review the Note in section 4. iv for DHS Guidance for School Age programs.)

- c. Work with local partners to develop mixed delivery models ([See MDE Mixed Delivery resources.](#))

- d. Provide child care in schools that offer an extended day including full- or half-day VPK/SRP/kindergarten. How might this reduce transportation costs if families are able to transport children? Who is a community partner that we could work with to facilitate this program in our building (YMCA, child care center, local university/college, etc.)
 - e. Is the program DHS certified or in process of being certified, allowing for acceptance of child care assistance funding for eligible children.
 - f. How might this partnership support parents by providing children in other settings with the opportunity to participate in school virtually. Is their adequate technology and staff support available on site to support this type of partnership?
 - g. Have we identified other vulnerable students who might not otherwise be able to attend school?
3. How will we understand what a child knows and is able to do as they enter kindergarten so that we can plan effective instruction?
- a. If the child attended preschool, do we know where? Can we receive assessment information from the preschool with family/caregiver consent?
 - b. Were there any children or families for whom there were challenges in attending school consistently last year? Especially during scheduled distance learning weeks?
 - c. What kind of information can we receive directly from families to better understand the development of their child?
 - d. Have we accessed and discussed the MDE guidance on assessment for fall?
 - e. Are we using or have we considered using a state approved Kindergarten Entry Profile (KEP) assessment tool that aligns with early learning and kindergarten standards? Are we using the online version of the assessment? How might this data help us more comprehensively understand our children and support successful transitions?

Resources

MDE [Kindergarten Transitions](#) Information:

- [The Ready Community](#)
- [The Ready School](#)
- [The Ready Family](#)
- [The Ready Child](#)

The National P-3 Center: [Resources for early grades fall re-entry planning in a pandemic](#)