



*Pre-K Reopening Plans  
July 2020*

## Review of State School Reopening Plans and Implications and Suggestions for State Funded Pre-K Programs

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### Key Takeaways

- Between May and July 2020, states released their public school reopening plans, however, most only superficially addressed pre-K, if at all.
- As states revise and update their school reopening plans, there is an opportunity to include specific guidance for pre-K that can recognize the unique needs of preschoolers and of the preschool systems that typically rely on mixed public-private delivery.
- As states and school districts decide on their fall 2020 reopening plans, priority should be given to younger grades and include the implementation of health and safety protocols.
- For those pre-K programs with remote learning, technology use expectations should be specified along with activities and materials that do not require devices.

Starting in May 2020, states<sup>1</sup> began to release the reopening plans for public schools following an interrupted 2019-2020 school year. Forty-five states (88%) have state-funded pre-K programs. Many of these use a mixed-delivery system that serves children in both public school settings and private settings. Similar to K-12 classrooms, most pre-K classrooms closed in March 2020.<sup>2</sup>

Most state pre-K programs are administered by a department or office within the lead state education agency, most of their school re-opening plans released between May 28 and July 28, 2020 only superficially addressed preschool, if at all. This paper presents a scan of the 51 state education reopening plans and the degree to which pre-K guidance was included. This is followed by guidance some states may consider as they look at revising their plans that are inclusive of pre-K.

As of fall 2020, states continue to review their school reopening plans, providing an opportunity for states to be more intentional and include specific guidance for pre-K programs.

## Inclusion of Pre-K in School Reopening Plans

When examining school reopening plans for the 45 states that fund pre-K, only ten offered detailed and specific guidance for pre-K, even though the vast majority of state preschool programs in 38 states are administered at least partially by the State Education Agency (SEA).<sup>3</sup> Separately from the administration of these programs, most pre-K programs operate partially if not fully within public schools.<sup>4</sup>

While 31 states included pre-K or early learning in their reopening plans (Table 1), most provided guidance that only briefly mentioned pre-K fall reopening issues or combined pre-K guidance with child care. No state included in their reopening plan a dedicated section addressing pre-K learning environments, operations, early academic guidance, preschool educator support and professional learning, mental health support for preschoolers, or other areas typically addressed for K-12 students.

State guidance was typically a single document. Another approach was to have a landing page multiple documents that addressed various components, such as English Learners or pre-K. State reopening plans provide guidance, recommendations, and sometimes required policy changes for local school districts, local school boards, and/or schools responsible for reopening schools in the fall 2020. Most states require plans created at the local level be submitted to the state.

Ten states (Table 1) included pre-K when describing the scope of the plan and embedded pre-K throughout the document. For example, Michigan's reopening roadmap includes pre-K among the grades "required to follow the safety protocols outlined" in the plan. (P8). *Navigating Change: Kansas' Guide to Learning and School Safety Operation* divided its guidance into grade level bands (e.g. Pre-K through Grade 2, etc.) and includes examples of instructional practices that align with competencies based on program model (in-person, remote, hybrid).

Other states had separate sections dedicated specifically to early learning:

- California's *Stronger Together: A Guidebook for the Safe Reopening of California's Public Schools* includes a chapter dedicated to

Early Learning and Care that includes programs beyond state funded pre-K.

- Iowa's *Return-to-Learn Support* includes materials for preschool programs, including how to align the Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards during remote learning.
- The Kentucky Department of Education created a document that addresses the needs of preschool children, including those with disabilities, that aligns with the state's K-12 guidance and is available on the SEA's website.
- The Tennessee Department of Education's Reopening Guidance includes a school reopening toolkit dedicated to early childhood as well as an *Early Childhood Education Reopening FAQ*.

A few states in which the SEA does not administer the state's pre-K program generated guidance from the agency that administers the program. For Example:

- The Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education collaborated with the Alabama State Department of Education to create the *First Class Pre-K Reopening and Operating Framework*, which illustrates a variety of frameworks: teaching and learning, child assessments, and remote learning.
- The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning's landing page devoted to COVID-19 includes a regularly updated FAQ for all of the state's early learning programs, including pre-K.

## Pre-K Reopening Plans

In July 2020, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) provided guidance "to support states and school systems in addressing the critical set of challenges they will face as they plan for—and restart—teaching and learning in the 2020-2021 school year (SY21) amid the COVID-19 pandemic."<sup>5</sup> The document is organized by three interrelated components: 1) System Conditions; 2) Wellbeing & Connection; and 3) Academics.

CCSSO's framework has been adapted and used in this document to frame guidance to states as they develop plans to reopen pre-K programs. *System Conditions* includes engagement of stakeholders that operate programs for all preschool children in the state and then possible coordination when implementing services in fall 2020. The *Wellbeing & Connection* section includes acknowledging the needs of children, their families, and the early learning workforce in the fall 2020 including supports for children transitioning to kindergarten. The learning needs of children is addressed in the third section, *Early Learning* which examines the three possible pre-K models (in-person, hybrid, and remote learning) and covers curriculum selection, student and program assessments, and teacher professional development.

#### CCSSO's Framework for Re-Opening Schools

**System Conditions:** School systems need to engage stakeholders (e.g. students, families, teachers, school leaders, staff, etc.) at the start of the planning process to make decisions that will frame the school systems' approach to student support and learning in such areas as scheduling, staffing, curriculum selection, technology, and monitoring.

**Wellbeing & Connection:** School systems need to address the staff and student wellbeing and tailor social-emotional supports to best meet their needs, specifically around social isolation, stress, anxiety, and trauma.

**Academics:** Planning is necessary to create a seamless transition between in-person and remote learning. School systems must prioritize instructional content, curriculum, assessment, and professional development of teachers.

Source: Council of Chief State School Officers. (2020). *Restart & recovery: Considerations for teaching & learning overview*. [https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/CCSSO\\_RR\\_Consider\\_Teach-v3.pdf](https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/CCSSO_RR_Consider_Teach-v3.pdf)

### System Level Conditions: Engaging Stakeholders

**Planning.** Some state have encouraged the engagement of a variety of stakeholders in creating school reopening plans, including early learning providers. In Wisconsin, school districts are required to form *Return to School Committees* that include district staff, students, families, and community groups; and may include other support staff such as school counselors, school nurse, and social workers, and janitorial or maintenance staff. For districts with pre-K

programs, districts are encouraged to include child care and Head Start partners on the planning team to better understand both system protocols and regulations. Oregon recommends that while planning for reopening, "schools have the opportunity to cultivate relationships with the families, tribal and community organizations, and the early learning and child care providers who supported student learning and development during school closure."<sup>6</sup> Florida's plan encourages districts, educational programs, and schools to connect to the state's education family which includes 21 different entities including child care and pre-K.

### Engaging the Early Childhood Community in Delivering Services.

As states look at how their pre-K programs will operate in the fall, collaborations that existed prior to the pandemic need to be understood, including that state-funded pre-K programs typically operate in mixed-delivery systems. In its *Recovery Plan*, Maryland recognizes the need for local school systems to coordinate with the state's Office of Child Care's regulatory and temporary operating procedures to support pre-K programs and child care classrooms co-located in public schools. In addition to understanding regulatory requirements, pre-K programs in most states are encouraged to blend state dollars with other funds by partnering with other providers. In 2018-2019, at least 40 state-funded programs (65%) allowed funds between pre-K (state) and Head Start (federal) to be blended to operate wrap-around services. Other examples of blending funds to increase services include:

- Colorado Preschool Program providers may use additional funding sources, such as federal Head Start money, to extend the program day, supplement services, or provide wraparound care.
- New Mexico and other states use Child Care Subsidy dollars for wraparound care in some private or nonprofit facilities to assist parents who qualify, or to offer reduced rates for private pay.
- In New Jersey, the DOE funds the pre-K program for the school calendar year and day (6 hours per day). Some programs offer extended-day programs with an additional four hours of wraparound care for income-eligible children funded through the state's DHS.

Minnesota’s school reopening plan identifies opportunities to connect school readiness services with other organizations or programs, including Head Start; collaborating with specific groups, such as kindergarten teachers and childcare providers; and specific audiences, such as parents

*The 2020-21 school year presents new challenges, it also presents new opportunities for early childhood programs to provide high-quality programming and services.*

Source: Minnesota Department of Education. (2020, June 18). *Guidance for Minnesota public schools: 2020-21 school year planning.* [https://staysafe.mn.gov/assets/mde-2020-21-school-year-planning-guidance\\_tcm1152-436943.pdf](https://staysafe.mn.gov/assets/mde-2020-21-school-year-planning-guidance_tcm1152-436943.pdf), p. 65.

of children birth to age 5 (see Text box). Similarly, Illinois encourages school districts “to work with partners in their communities, including child care centers, other before- and after-school child care providers, park districts, churches, and other community-based organizations, to develop plans that comprehensively address families’ needs

for care before, during, and after school hours and on any days that children will not be able to attend school in person.”<sup>7</sup> New Jersey’s state plan recognizes that more families may now for the first time utilize child care programs due to modified school schedules and districts may want to involve child care providers in leadership and planning meetings and communicate the school’s staggered or modified schedule. Virginia has encouraged its school divisions to work with community partners to plan, communicate, and develop options for families. Finally, Nebraska suggests utilizing advisory committees and recommends having conversations with local childcare and Head Start programs to coordinate scheduling arrangements.

To facilitate these conversations, states have developed planning documents including California’s *Stronger Together* reopening plan that has developed a series of actionable steps for schools and districts; and Virginia’s *Recover, Redesign, Restart 2020* that identifies a series of questions that may help school divisions partner more effectively with community partners (see Text Box). Louisiana has created a planning framework to support the coordination of the state’s early childhood programs and services around four categories: health & safety, access, quality & continuous learning, and family engagement & support.<sup>8</sup>

### Actionable Steps and Questions to Support Community Partnerships

#### California’s *Stronger Together*

- Find out who is offering after-school and summer programs at or near your schools.
- Invite them to talk about their approach and their programs.
- Engage them in the planning process as early as possible to align with instructional programs to accelerate learning. They often know much about the local community and its resources and opportunities. When asked, they are good at coming up with innovative solutions and flexible models for supporting the students.
- Be clear about your parameters and expectations, and then continue to engage as equal partners. Like you, expanded learning providers are professionals and experts in their field.
- Do any existing memoranda of understandings (MOUs) require updates on modifications to ensure students and staff are safe?

#### Virginia’s *Recover, Redesign, Restart*

- Have you coordinated with partner providers to discuss protocols and procedures and alignment with school division expectations?
- Have you coordinated with local health officials and partner providers about different requirements for opening before/after school programs alongside or separate from school opening?
- How will the operation of these programs impact your plans for staffing, facility cleanliness, transportation, and other operational factors?
- Have you discussed overall community-wide child care needs with your community partners?
- Where space is shared, have you considered how cleaning supplies, protective equipment, and protocol can be provided, shared or coordinated?
- Have you discussed overall parent child care needs with your community partners and involved libraries, recreation centers, local higher education, independent providers and other partners in planning?
- Have you surveyed your workforce to identify their concerns related to child care for their own family?
- Will there be an increased need for before school and after school programs under various operating scenarios?

Sources: California Department of Education. (2020, June). *Stronger together: A guidebook for the safe reopening of California’s public schools.*

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/documents/strongertogogether.pdf>, p. 29;

Virginia Department of Education. (2020, July). *Recover, redesign, restart: A comprehensive plan that moves Virginia learner’s and educators forward.*

[http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/health\\_medical/covid-19/recover-redesign-restart-2020.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/health_medical/covid-19/recover-redesign-restart-2020.pdf), p. 37.

### Wellbeing and Connections

A number of states provide resources for adults experiencing anxiety due to COVID-19. Some states have embedded this guidance and/or links to it through their fall 2020 reopening plans. For example, the Guidance for Minnesota Public Schools provides a link to the Minnesota’s Department of Health’s page on *Supporting Mental Well-being During COVID-19*. The following are

examples of how states provided guidance on addressing the social emotional wellbeing of all students, including preschoolers, their families, and teachers:

- Louisiana's *Guide to Supporting the Well-Being of Students and Staff* provides guidance and links to resources that can help identify the needs of students and staff and then ways to prioritize, develop, and sustain intentional relationships and provide appropriate support.
- In Michigan, the fall reopening plan includes a section on *Mental & Social-Emotional Health* that strongly recommends steps schools should take to support students, including those in pre-K, when schools are closed to in-person instruction.
- The New Mexico Public Education Department Reentry Guidance includes considerations for being culturally responsive and building and maintaining relationships with students and families during remote learning.
- In New York's plan encourages leveraging community partnerships, especially those that encourage integrated student supports, family engagement, collaborative leadership, and expanded learning.
- West Virginia requires schools and counties to address the social-emotional wellness of students, their families, and school staff by undertaking a series of tasks including developing a mental health crisis response team and implementing a continuous advisory system that supports students.

North Carolina passed two pieces of legislation that support student's well-being in public schools beginning in the 2020-2021 school year: HB1206 (May 26, 2020) tasks school psychologists, social workers, and counselors with providing social-emotional support to students and staff; and HB1203 (May 27, 2020) appropriates funds to provide at least one nurse in every public school.<sup>9</sup>

Another needed area of support is for children transitioning into pre-K and kindergarten in the fall. Oklahoma reminds school districts that extra support may be needed for entering pre-K and K students due to their missed Early/Head Start and child care experiences in the spring 2020. Some recommendations include hosting a virtual open

house for families and students. Nebraska also reminds pre-K programs to provide some open house opportunities, such as virtual one-on-one with families.

*The Returning to School: A Toolkit for Principals* includes resources and tools that can be used to better support families and students through understanding their needs and collaborating with them, as well as other stakeholders, when planning to return to in-person learning.<sup>10</sup> Kansas' reopening plan has both a sample family survey (Appendix D) and a staff survey (Appendix E).

### **Early Learning**

As pre-K programs begin to articulate their plans to reopen in the fall 2020, there are three basic models: **In-Person**: all<sup>11</sup> preschoolers start the school year attending school in-person; **Remote**: all preschoolers start the year using distance learning, possibly moving to in-person when appropriate; and **Hybrid**: some preschoolers start the school year attending school in-person, and others remotely. Decisions about the model has not been made for most states as of the writing of this brief due to health concerns and COVID-19 uncertainties.

**Delivery Model 1: In-person.** Young children learn best through intentional teaching one-on-one and in small groups in hands-on activities that include social play. Coupled with recent findings that younger children appear to be less likely to contract the COVID-19 virus,<sup>12</sup> states are looking at options to create in-person opportunities for preschoolers while mitigating risks, which while lower are not zero.

A slight variation to this model includes a reduction in dosage (e.g., fewer days or a shortened daily schedule) supplemented with remote learning. New York has authorized flexibilities to certain regulations including a waiver allowing districts to convert one of its full-day funding streams from full-day to half-day. Tennessee has illustrated a flexible pre-K schedule that accommodates for safe social distancing.

Some states and school districts recommend prioritizing children and the earlier grades for in-person learning:

- The Illinois State Board of Education prioritizes in-person instruction for students with IEPs, English Learners, and students under the age of 13.

- Massachusetts  
Preschool-age students with disabilities are particularly in need of in-person services so that they can develop the socialization, motor, and communication skills that are vitally important at this age. Schools and districts should prioritize in-person instruction for this age group but should also be prepared to adjust to remote services if necessary.
- New Mexico’s Public Education Department suggest prioritizing in-person education for PreK and elementary students, as these age groups may require childcare and may require more help from family during online learning.
- New York recommends that schools and school districts should consider in-person programming a priority for high-needs students and preschool students with disabilities.
- Virginia recommended to its school divisions to prioritize having preschool through grade 3 students return to classrooms as soon as safely possible and have older students attend remotely so that they can use their physical building space to serve the earlier grades.
- The *West Virginia Schools Re-entry Toolkit Guidance* recommends a remote learning option only for children in grades six through twelve.

*We recognize that children learn best when physically present in the classroom. But children get much more than academics at school. They also learn social and emotional skills at school, get healthy meals and exercise, mental health support and other services that cannot be easily replicated online. Schools also play a critical role in addressing racial and social inequity.*

--A joint statement by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Education Association (NEA) and School Superintendents Association (AASA), July 10, 2020

Source:  
*Pediatricians, educators and Superintendents Urge a Safe Return to School This Fall (2020, July 10),*  
<https://services.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2020/pediatricians-educators-and-superintendents-urge-a-safe-return-to-school-this-fall/>

washing; adapting mealtimes; and decreasing the number of available seats on buses. Illinois’ school reopening plan was written as a partnership between the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Department of Health.

There has been some variations in the required use of masks for children and adults. The CDC and AAP recommend children wear masks, however the AAP marks this as a “lower priority” for pre-K students.<sup>14</sup> *Science Magazine* reviewed international policies and found that in China,

South Korea, Japan, and Vietnam children already are accustomed to wearing masks during flu season and have expanded to wearing one now due to COVID-19. In other countries, mask wearing in schools is optional, including Canada, Denmark, Norway, the United Kingdom, and Sweden.<sup>15</sup>

Kentucky’s guidance says, “The most current recommendations from Kentucky’s Department for Public Health (DPH) do not require preschool students to wear masks throughout the school day, as masks pose a higher risk of strangulation and suffocation for young students and also may increase the risk of improper wearing due to the developmental abilities of preschool students.”<sup>16</sup> New York recommends masks for children older than 2-years-old and has estimated the number of disposable masks needed, see Table 2. Several state plans deferred the decision to school systems. In the case of Texas’ plan, “Schools are required to comply with the governor’s executive order regarding the wearing of masks.”<sup>17</sup>

In order to return to in-person preschool, states must take health and safety precautions. Most states have created safety health check-lists, including Louisiana’s *2020-2021 Reopening Checklist*, which tend to follow the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and/or AAP recommendations<sup>13</sup> for reducing class sizes; keeping students in small cohorts with the same students; increasing the amount of outdoor time; establishing child COVID-19 screening procedures; increasing the practice of hand

Table 2. Estimated Number of Needed Masks

**DISPOSABLE MASKS**  
*Initial recommended quantities per 100 individuals per group per school*

Group	Quantity per 100 per group	12-week Supply at 100% Attendance	12-week Supply at 50% Attendance	12-week Supply at 25% Attendance	Assumptions
Students	100 masks per week	1,200	600	300	1 disposable mask per week per student (to supplement the cloth masks provided by parent/guardian).
Teachers and other staff	500	6,000	3,000	1,500	5 disposable masks per week per teacher.
School nurses and health providers	1,000	12,000	6,000	3,000	10 disposable masks per week per school nurse.

Source: New York State Education Department. (2020). *Recovering, rebuilding, and renewing: The spirit of New York's schools*. <http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/reopening-schools/nys-p12-school-reopening-guidance.pdf>, p. 33.

**Delivery Model 2: Remote Learning.** Remote learning does not require a digital device. However, we know families are relying more on technology during this unexpected pandemic. There has been research on some elements of digital learning for preschoolers, but the overall effect of a remote comprehensive preschool without in-person contact is unknown. Recent studies have reviewed the content of digital media for young children, the engagement of adults, and the impact of media on children’s brains and literacy development<sup>18</sup>. Due to concerns about negative impact, many early learning programs and families struggle with balancing the use of

digital media for young children. In 2012, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children’s Media at Saint Vincent College created a joint position statement on the use of technology in early childhood programs (see Text Box).

As states moved to online learning for its public schools in the spring 2020, 35 states (70%) included statements in their guidance about digital vs non-digital options, in all grades, beyond preschool.<sup>19</sup> Massachusetts’ guidance included the statement, “We must be conscious of the effects of increased screen time and seek balance between learning through technology and remote learning that happens offline to support students, curiosity and understanding.”<sup>20</sup>

As states developed their fall 2020 reopening plans, some made specific recommendations on using technology for remote learning for preschoolers, including:

- Georgia follows the AAP recommendations of a maximum 1 hour of screen time a day for preschoolers.<sup>21</sup> And specifies in its guidance that “DECAL does not support online learning days for Pre-K children and encourages families and Pre-K providers to limit screen time to no more than one hour a day in high quality digital content.”
- New York recommends that as districts, schools and eligible agencies develop their remote learning plans, they “should be cognizant of the amount of time young learners are spending directly viewing screens. Time spent learning remotely can be

**Key Messages from the NAEYC and Fred Rogers Center Joint Position Statement on Use of Technology in ECE Programs**

1. When used intentionally and appropriately, technology and interactive media are effective tools to support learning and development.
2. Intentional use requires early childhood teachers and administrators to have information and resources regarding the nature of these tools and the implications of their use with children.
3. Limitations on the use of technology and media are important.
4. Special considerations must be given to the use of technology with infants and toddlers.
5. Attention to digital citizenship and equitable access is essential.
6. Ongoing research and professional development are needed.

Source: Paciga, K.A. & Donohue, C. (2017). *Technology and interactive media for young children: A whole child approach connecting the vision of Fred Rogers with research and practice*. Latrobe, PA: Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children’s Media at Saint Vincent College. <https://www.fredrogerscenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Technology-and-Interactive-Media-for-Young->

devoted to authentic learning activities at home.”

- Tennessee in its pre-K reopening plans references NAEYC’s stance on screen time not being developmentally appropriate or an effective means for receiving instruction for young children and further explains, “When using technology, children and their families should have an orientation on appropriate timing and uses to support learning. Technology can be used to build knowledge and expand children’s vocabulary when families are encouraged to research about animals, plants, building structures, places to visit, etc.”

Remote learning for preschoolers requires adult support, especially if children are accessing technology. Tennessee recommends using virtual platforms and apps to provide families with training to support children’s learning at home. Building upon the success of their online parenting classes, Minnesota suggested districts and schools examine utilizing parenting educators beyond pre-K (e.g. Head Start, child care, etc.) and throughout the age span prenatal to third grade. Minnesota also recommends having staff with expertise that can support families in using the same platforms and online resources used by the preschool programs and ensuring that families have access to technology and environments. Access to technology is not universal, and more limited for low income and students of color.<sup>22</sup>

In spring 2020, states and local school districts’ websites began sharing activities families could do to support their children’s learning at home. A few school districts began assembling and disseminating learning materials to families in the spring 2020. In the summer 2020, Chicago Public Schools released learning packets to support pre-K students transitioning to Kindergarten in both English and Spanish. The Center for District Innovation And Leadership for Early Education provides recommendations for school districts across California to support distance learning in early education, including the costs and process of distributing home learning materials kits.<sup>23</sup>

If Alabama’s First Class Pre-K program moves to remote learning in fall 2020, programs are expected to purchase or use existing materials to develop activity packets for each student. Teachers are expected to develop and share

learning activities using the materials in the packets.

**Delivery Model 3: Hybrid.** In this model, some children attend pre-K in person, and some remotely (see previous sections for considerations for both of these models). States must develop a system for collecting family preference input to determine classroom schedules and prioritizing in-person attendance.

Many local school districts and schools are in the midst of collecting family preferences for pre-K model (in-person or remote) and possibly the schedule. The Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education requires each pre-K grantee to gather family data via a survey to inform program plans for the 2020-2021 school year. Survey results must be shared with the state by July 31, 2020.

As described previously, some states have offered suggestions for prioritizing in-person learning. These include younger children as well as children with disabilities and those with IEPs and Dual Language Learners.

**General considerations.** Independent of the pre-K model, attention needs to be paid to the preschool curriculum, including environment and child assessments. Research has that shown comprehensive and integrated curriculum has positive effects on children’s learning.<sup>24</sup> Comprehensive curriculum includes specificity regarding key domains of language, literacy, mathematics, and social-emotional development. Kansas’ state plan includes curriculum implementation ideas aligned with the state’s learning standards in grade bands (e.g. pre-K to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade) for all three program models.

One of the challenges with technology-based remote learning is it tends not to be comprehensive. A 2017 report by the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children’s Media at Saint Vincent College reviewed and synthesized research and practice around technology and media for young children (birth to age 8). The authors found most of the technology and media were focused on literacy.<sup>25</sup>

Several states have offered guidance about rearranging furniture and play spaces to meet social distancing requirements when classrooms reopen in-person. California encourages school



districts to maximize outdoor time, utilize head-to-toe placement of children and creating physical barriers, as needed, during naptimes, and staggering arrival and pick-up times to limit direct contact with adults during pick-up time.<sup>26</sup>

Understanding children’s learning and development at the beginning of the school year is crucial, but especially following the COVID-19 pandemic and the interruption of education programs. Delaware recommends that when schools reopen in person that assessments and appropriate screening processes and diagnostics are needed for new students, including those entering pre-K and kindergarten. If in-person preschool is not available, both Minnesota and Alabama are asking families to document and report on children’s learning and development using ASQ-SE2 (MN) and Teaching Strategies Gold (AL). Nebraska is still requiring home visits, but reminds programs that they “might look different this year” and suggests meeting outside families’ homes, conducting virtual visits, or having phone calls with families.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, in order to support teachers in implementing comprehensive curricula in multiple models of delivery, professional development opportunities and content needs to be reviewed. In the spring as preschool programs were moving remotely, most states provided teacher resources and some organized professional development opportunities. For example:

- The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood partnered with its State Department of Education to create a video for early childhood professionals to support children in distance learning, highlighting the importance of play and predictability.<sup>28</sup>
- Tennessee’s reopening plan reminds school districts that teachers may need training and additional support, possibly virtually, to “re-design of classroom space, structures, routines, and instructional material selection and use to ensure the health and safety of children while at school.”<sup>29</sup> One strategy to accomplish this is to involve teachers in the planning process.
- The West Virginia Department of Education has created an “educator hub” for teachers (pre-K to grade 12) to submit

activities and lessons remote learning; and administrators can share ideas on supporting staff and strategies for student learning.

## Conclusion

States are revising and updating their school reopening plans, providing them the opportunity to include specific guidance for pre-K programs. If such guidance is to recognize the unique needs of preschoolers and of the preschool systems that typically rely on mixed public-private delivery. This process should include multiple stakeholders from the early care and education system. When another agency administers the pre-K program, that agency’s plan should be embedded in or at least coordinated and linked with the K-12 plan.

As states and school districts decide on their fall 2020 reopening plans, priority should be given to younger grades and include the implementation of health and safety protocols. For states with remote learning, they should set expectations for using computers and mobile devices and for activities and materials that do not require such devices. Curriculum should remain comprehensive and set expectations for collecting student assessments for in-person and remote learning modes. Finally, professional development opportunities for preschool teachers need to be expanded to include more content and modes of delivery.

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Table 1. Pre-K Policies Addressed in State’s Reopening Plans

State & Link to SEA Reopening Plan (as of July 28, 2020) <sup>1</sup>	Grades/Ages Covered in State Reopening Plan	Pre-K Policies Addressed in Reopening Plans				
		Changes to class size & ratios	Adjustments to screening requirements (non-COVID-19)/ conducting child assessments	Adjustments to required program/ teacher assessments in pre-K classrooms	Mask policies for pre-K students	Remote Learning for pre-K
<a href="#">Alabama</a> <sup>1</sup> <a href="#">Department of Early Childhood Education</a>	K-12 Pre-K	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<a href="#">Alaska</a>	K-12	No	No	No	No	No
<a href="#">Arizona</a> <sup>1</sup> <a href="#">First Things First</a>	K-12 Birth-Five	No	No	No	No	No
<a href="#">Arkansas</a>	K-12	No	No	No	No	No
<a href="#">California</a> <a href="#">Early Learning and Care COVID-19 Resources</a>	Birth-12 Birth-Five	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<a href="#">Colorado</a>	K-12	No	No	No	No	No
<a href="#">Connecticut</a> <sup>1</sup> <a href="#">Office of Early Childhood</a>	K-12	No	No	No	Yes	No
<a href="#">Delaware</a>	Pre-K-12	No	No	No	Yes	No
<a href="#">District of Columbia</a>	K-12 (PK guidance for ELs)	No	No	No	No	No
<a href="#">Florida</a>	Early Learning, K-12, IHE	No	No	NA <sup>3</sup>	Yes	No
<a href="#">Georgia</a> <sup>1</sup> <a href="#">Department of Early Care and Learning</a>	K-12 Pre-K	No	No	No	No	No
<a href="#">Hawaii</a>	K-12	No	No	No	No	No
<a href="#">Idaho</a>	K-12	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>
<a href="#">Illinois</a>	Birth-12	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<a href="#">Indiana</a>	K-12	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>
<a href="#">Iowa</a>	Pre-K-12	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
<a href="#">Kansas</a>	Pre-K-12 (Pre-K-2 <sup>nd</sup> grade band)	No	No	NA <sup>3</sup>	Yes	Yes
<a href="#">Kentucky</a>	Pre-K-12	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
<a href="#">Louisiana</a>	Pre-K-12	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
<a href="#">Maine</a>	Pre-K-12	No	No	No	Yes	No
<a href="#">Maryland</a>	Pre-K-12	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
<a href="#">Massachusetts</a> <sup>1</sup> <a href="#">Department of Early Education and Care</a>	K-12 Birth-5	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
<a href="#">Michigan</a>	Pre-K-12	No	No	No	Yes	No
<a href="#">Minnesota</a>	Pre-K-12	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<a href="#">Mississippi</a>	K-12	No	No	No	No	No
<a href="#">Missouri</a>	K-12	No	No	No	No	No

State & Link to SEA Reopening Plan (as of July 28, 2020) <sup>1</sup>	Grades/Ages Covered in State Reopening Plan	Pre-K Policies Addressed in Reopening Plans				
		Changes to class size & ratios	Adjustments to screening requirements (non-COVID-19)/ conducting child assessments	Adjustments to required program/ teacher assessments in pre-K classrooms	Mask policies for pre-K students	Remote Learning for pre-K
<a href="#">Montana</a>	K-12	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>
<a href="#">Nebraska</a>	ECE-12	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<a href="#">Nevada</a>	K-12	No	No	No	No	No
<a href="#">New Hampshire</a>	K-12	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>
<a href="#">New Jersey</a>	Pre-K-12	No	No	No	No	No
<a href="#">New Mexico</a>	Pre-K-12	No	No	No	Yes	No
<a href="#">New York</a>	Pre-K-12	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<a href="#">North Carolina</a>	K-12	No	No	No	No	No
<a href="#">North Dakota</a>	K-12	No	No	No	No	No
<a href="#">Ohio</a>	Pre-K-12	No	No	NA <sup>3</sup>	No	No
<a href="#">Oklahoma</a>	Pre-K-12	No	No	No	No	No
<a href="#">Oregon</a>	Pre-K-12	No	No	No	Yes	No
<a href="#">Pennsylvania</a>	Pre-K-12	No	No	No	No	No
<a href="#">Rhode Island</a>	K-12	No	No	No	No	No
<a href="#">South Carolina</a>	Pre-K-12	No	No	No	No	No
<a href="#">South Dakota</a>	K-12	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>
<a href="#">Tennessee</a>	Pre-K-12	No	No	No	No	Yes
<a href="#">Texas</a>	Pre-K-12	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
<a href="#">Utah</a>	K-12	No	No	No	No	No
<a href="#">Vermont</a>	Not specified	No	No	No	No	No
<a href="#">Virginia</a>	Pre-K-20	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
<a href="#">Washington<sup>1</sup></a>	K-12					
<a href="#">Early Learning and Child Care<sup>4</sup></a>	Birth-5	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
<a href="#">West Virginia</a>	Pre-K-12	No	No	No	Yes	No
<a href="#">Wisconsin</a>	Pre-K-12	No	No	No	No	No
<a href="#">Wyoming</a>	K-12	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>2</sup>

1. For pre-K programs that are not administered by the state education agency, then that office's pre-K reopening guidance was reviewed (if available). To see the names of state offices that are responsible for overseeing pre-K in 2018-2019: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G. G. & Gardiner, B. A. (2020). *The State of Preschool 2019: State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. <http://nieer.org/state-preschool-yearbooks/2019-2>, p. 198-199.
2. These states did not have a state-funded pre-K program during the 2019-2020 school year.
3. Program assessments are not required in the pre-K program. See: Friedman-Krauss, et al. (2020), p. 297-299.
4. Washington's pre-K program, ECEAP, was not required to close during spring 2020, thus, all guidance was reviewed, including summer guidance issued by the Washington State Department of Health (July 22, 2020): <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/DOH-OSPI-DYCF-SchoolsChildCareGuidance.pdf>

## End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Throughout this document District of Columbia is included like a state.
- <sup>2</sup> The pre-K classrooms that operated in public schools closed in March 2020; however some pre-k programs that operated in community-based programs remained open to some degree through the spring of 2020. The exact number of classrooms that continued to operate and serve preschool children is unknown at this time.
- <sup>3</sup> In 2018-2019, the following states did not fund a pre-K program that met NIEER's definition: Idaho, Indiana, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. In 2019-2020, Idaho, Indiana, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Wyoming and Montana did not fund pre-K, however Utah did. For more information about NIEER's definition of what qualifies as a state-funded pre-K program see, Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G. G. & Gardiner, B. A. (2020). *The State of Preschool 2019: State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. <http://nieer.org/state-preschool-yearbooks/2019-2>
- <sup>4</sup> In 2018-2019, 62 pre-K programs operated in 44 states and D.C.; at least 8 programs operated only in public schools; at least 2 programs did not operate in public schools; and at least 34 programs operated in a mixed-delivery system, however, the distribution varied, see: Friedman-Krauss, et al (2020).
- <sup>5</sup> Council of Chief State School Officers. (2020). *Restart & recovery: Considerations for teaching & learning overview*. [https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/CCSSO\\_RR\\_Consider\\_Teach-v3.pdf](https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/CCSSO_RR_Consider_Teach-v3.pdf), p. 2.
- <sup>6</sup> Oregon Department of Education. (2020, July 22). *Ready schools, safe learners: Guidance for school year 2020-21, version 2.7.2*. <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/Documents/Ready%20Schools%20Safe%20Learners%202020-21%20Guidance.pdf>, p. 59.
- <sup>7</sup> Illinois State Board of Education & Illinois Department of Public Health. (2020, June 23). *Starting the 2020-21 school year: Part 3 transition joint guidance*. <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Part-3-Transition-Planning-Phase-4.pdf>, p. 13.
- <sup>8</sup> Louisiana Department of Education. (2020, May 14). *Strong start 2020: Louisiana's plan: A planning guide for early childhood communities & providers*. [https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/strong-start-2020/early-childhood-strong-start-2020-planning-guide.pdf?sfvrsn=3a88981f\\_10](https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/strong-start-2020/early-childhood-strong-start-2020-planning-guide.pdf?sfvrsn=3a88981f_10)
- <sup>9</sup> For links to North Carolina legislation: HB1203: <https://www.ncleg.gov/Sessions/2019/Bills/House/PDF/H1203v1.pdf>; HB1206: <https://www.ncleg.gov/Sessions/2019/Bills/House/PDF/H1206v0.pdf>
- <sup>10</sup> Benton, K., Butterfield, K., Manian, N., Molina, M., Richel, M. (2020). *Returning to school toolkit for principals*. Rockville, MD: National Comprehensive Center at Westat. [https://www.compcenternetwork.org/sites/default/files/local/5704/Returning%20to%20School%20Toolkit%20for%20Principals%20\(07-16-2020\).pdf](https://www.compcenternetwork.org/sites/default/files/local/5704/Returning%20to%20School%20Toolkit%20for%20Principals%20(07-16-2020).pdf)
- <sup>11</sup> For a more detailed description of these models see: Gill, R., Goyal, R., Hartog, J., Hotchkiss, J., & DeLisle, D. (2020, June). *Considerations for reopening Pennsylvania schools*. REL Mid-Atlantic. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midatlantic/pdf/ReopeningPASchools.pdf>; Bailey, J. P., & Hess, F. M. (2020, May). *A blueprint for back to school*. American Enterprise Institute. <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/A-Blueprint-for-Back-to-School.pdf>
- <sup>12</sup> See: Roland, A. (2020). *The missing link? Children and transmission of SARS-CoV-2, don't forget the bubbles*. <http://doi.org/10.31440/DFTB.25585>
- <sup>13</sup> See: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, July 23). *Guidance for child care programs that remain open*. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-childcare.html>; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, April 10). *Interim guidance for administrators of US K-12 schools and child care programs*. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-schools.html>; American Academy of Pediatrics (2020, June 26). *AAP interim guidance on school re-entry focuses on mitigating COVID-19 risks*. <https://www.aappublications.org/news/2020/06/26/schoolreopening062620>
- <sup>14</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics (2020, June 26). *AAP interim guidance on school re-entry focuses on mitigating COVID-19 risks*. <https://www.aappublications.org/news/2020/06/26/schoolreopening062620>
- <sup>15</sup> Couzin-Frankel, J., Vogel, G., & Weiland, M. (2020, July 7). School openings across globe suggest ways to keep coronavirus at bay, despite outbreaks. *Science*, 369 (6501). <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/07/school-openings-across-globe-suggest-ways-keep-coronavirus-bay-despite-outbreaks>
- <sup>16</sup> Kentucky Department of Education. (2020, July 20). *COVID-19 considerations for reopening schools*. <https://education.ky.gov/comm/Documents/Reopening%20Considerations%20for%20Exceptional%20Learners%20and%20Preschool%20FINAL.pdf>, p. 3.
- <sup>17</sup> Texas Education Department. (2020, July 28). *SY 20-21 public health planning guidance*. <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/covid/SY-20-21-Public-Health-Guidance.pdf>, p. 6.
- <sup>18</sup> See: Hutton, J. S., Dudley, J., Horowitz-Kraus, T., DeWitt, T., & Holland, S. K. (2020, January). Associations between screen-based media use and brain white matter integrity in preschool-aged children. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 174(1):e193869. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.3869 Published online November 4, 2019. Corrected on March 23, 2020, p. 8.; Hutton, J. S., Dudley, J., & Horowitz-Kraus, T. (2020, May). Letters: Comments and response. *JAMA Pediatrics*. Published online May

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- 11, 2020. doi:[10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.0628](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.0628); Reich, S. M., Yau, J. C., Xu, Y., Muskat, T., Uvalle, J., & Cannata, D. (2019). Digital or print? A comparison of preschoolers' comprehension, vocabulary, and engagement from a print book and an e-book. *AERA Open*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858419878389>
- <sup>19</sup> In March 2020, the MIT Teaching Systems Lab analyzed the 50 states' remote learning guidance to school districts and/or schools, to see the database: <https://edarxiv.org/437e2>
- <sup>20</sup> Riley, J. C. (2020, March 26). *News from the commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley & the MA department of elementary and secondary education*. <https://wellesleyeps.org/blog/2020/03/27/ma-dese-guidance-to-school-districts-3-26-2020/>
- <sup>21</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics. *Children and media tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics*. <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/news-features-and-safety-tips/Pages/Children-and-Media-Tips.aspx>.
- <sup>22</sup> For example, see: Urban Institute (April 2020) mapping student needs during covid-19. [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102131/mapping-student-needs-during-covid-19-final\\_2.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102131/mapping-student-needs-during-covid-19-final_2.pdf); ParentsTogether Action: <https://parents-together.org/parentstogether-survey-reveals-remote-learning-is-failing-our-most-vulnerable-students/>
- <sup>23</sup> For information about the paly-n-learn kits, see: [http://cdefoundation.org/cde\\_programs/dialee/](http://cdefoundation.org/cde_programs/dialee/)
- <sup>24</sup> Research has demonstrated that the use of domain general and specific curricula, when implementation is supported, has positive effects on children's learning, see: Clements, D.H., & Sarama, J. (2008). Experimental evaluation of the effects of a research-based preschool mathematics curriculum. *American Educational Research Journal*, 45, 443-494. Minervino, J. (2014) *Lessons from research and the classroom: Implementing high-quality pre-k that makes a difference for young children*. Seattle, WA: Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Phillips, D. A., Lipsey, M. W., Dodge, K. A., Haskins, R., Bassok, D., Burchinal, M. R., Duncan, G. J., Dynarski, M., Magnuson, K. A., & Weiland, C. (2017). Puzzling it out: The current state of scientific knowledge on pre-kindergarten effects: A consensus statement. Brookings and Duke Center for Child and Family Policy. Yoshikawa, H., Weiland, C., Brooks-Gunn, J., Burchinal, M., Espinosa, L. M., Gormley, W. T., Ludwig, J., Magnuson, K. A., Phillips, D., & Zaslow, M. (2013). Investing in our future: The evidence base on preschool education. Ann Arbor, MI: Society for Research in Child Development.
- <sup>25</sup> Paciga, et al (2017).
- <sup>26</sup> For example, see IL and CA's state reopening plans.
- <sup>27</sup> Nebraska Department of Education. (2020, July 24). *Early childhood guidance and considerations*. <https://www.launchne.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/NDEEarlyChildhoodConsiderations72420.pdf>, p. 2.
- <sup>28</sup> See, <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/COVID19/Professional-Support-Series-for-Districts/Early-Childhood-and-Distance-Learning/Distance-Learning-for-Preschool-Teachers>
- <sup>29</sup> Tennessee Department of Education. (2020, June 11). *School reopening toolkit: Early childhood*. <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/health-&-safety/Early%20Childhood.pdf>
- P. 11.