



#StayStrongNC

2021-2022 Interim COVID-19 Policies for NC Pre-K Programs

Published August 2, 2021



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**
Division of Child Development
and Early Education



2021-2022 Interim COVID-19 Policies for NC Pre-K Programs

NC Pre-K Contracting Agencies must provide this guidance to all NC Pre-K sites and NC Pre-K teaching staff no later than August 9, 2021. Sites should contact their Contracting Agency and Contracting Agencies should contact their NC Pre-K Program Policy Consultant with questions about this guidance. For specific questions about contracts, please contact your DCDEE Contract Administrator.

1. Purpose

The following guidance is meant to address reopening expectations specific to **NC Pre-K programs and classrooms**. This guidance applies to all NC Pre-K classrooms, regardless of the setting in which they operate (public school, * private child care center, Head Start program.) This guidance may be amended by the NC Pre-K state office as needed in accordance with changes in trends related to COVID-19.

*Note: While preschool sites operating in public schools are not expected to follow all requirements outlined in the K-12 public health guidance ([StrongSchoolsNC: Public Health Toolkit \(K – 12\)](#)), they are expected to follow any additional health protocols that may be implemented by their individual schools in response to the new K – 12 schools public health guidance. For example, while preschool children, according to the child care guidance, would not normally be expected to social distance, they may be asked to social distance while eating in the cafeteria.

2. Health and Safety Guidance

All preschool programs in public schools and private sites are required to follow the health and safety guidance outlined in the [ChildCareStrongNC Public Health Toolkit](#), in accordance with the [Memorandum on Preschool Programs and K-12 Public Health Guidance](#).

3. Program Year

The 2021-2022 NC Pre-K program year will operate for a full 36 weeks as usual, 6.5 hours per day, 5 days per week, beginning no later than September 7th. NC Pre-K programs are encouraged to use the weeks before NC Pre-K instruction officially begins to conduct child/family orientation, conduct home visits, engage in professional development training, etc.

4. Classroom Staff

A. Long-term Substitute Teachers

While the expectation from DCDEE is that all sites will work to secure qualified lead teachers and teacher assistants, we recognize the impact that COVID-19 has had on the ability for programs to hire and/or maintain qualified staff. Therefore, for the 2021-2022 program year, DCDEE will continue to offer flexibility to programs by **waiving the 12-week limitation** for long-term substitutes serving in NC Pre-K classrooms.

New Flexibility for 2021-2022 In addition, NC Pre-K Contracting Agencies will **not** be required to assign a lower per-child rate for classrooms who must hire long-term substitute lead teachers. NC Pre-K Contracting Agencies may reimburse classrooms at a higher “approved lead teacher” rate as long as funds are available within their Direct Service allocations. NC Pre-K Contracting Agencies should contact their NC Pre-K Program Policy Consultant for assistance with entering rates in NC Pre-K Plan, if needed.

5. Mode of Instruction

Our goal for 2021-2022 continues to be to provide as much stability and in-person instruction as possible to children and families. Therefore, it is expected that **ALL** NC Pre-K students will be provided **fully in-person instruction** for the 2021-2022 NC Pre-K program year.

- **NOTE: Remote learning may only be provided to children for limited periods of time and only as an option of last resort.** See Section 6. *Circumstances When Remote Learning May Be Needed* for more information.

6. Circumstances When Remote Learning May Be Needed

NC Pre-K programs will **NOT** be allowed to operate **fully remote or hybrid classrooms** for the 2021-2022 program year. However, remote learning may be provided to children for a **limited time** in response to any of the following circumstances:

- During the weeks prior to instruction starting on September 7th (e.g., home visits and orientation may be done remotely)
- If a COVID-19 cluster (5 or more cases) occurs at an NC Pre-K site and the Local Health Department recommends that the site and/or classroom(s) should close temporarily for cleaning
- If a child is not able to attend for an extended amount of days due to the child and/or household member(s) being sick and/or quarantined due to COVID-19
- If NCDHHS issues a directive that requires closure and/or reduced capacity to minimize the spread of COVID-19

7. Remote Learning Requirements

NOTE: Remote learning may only be provided to children if one or more of the circumstances outlined in Section 6 have been met.

A. Method and Duration of Delivery:

A traditional in-person NC Pre-K day is 6.5 hours of time in the classroom, including direct instruction, nap time, snacks, transitions, child-initiated play, and outdoor play. A child/family engaged in remote learning instead of in-person instruction should also be provided with an equivalent 6.5 hours, which includes direct instruction via remote learning (such as Remote Moments, Section 7B), nap time, snacks, transitions, child-initiated play, outdoor play, family-led engagement activities, and 1:1 family check-ins (see Section 7C).

However, it would not be considered developmentally appropriate for a young child to receive 6.5 hours of direct remote instruction via a video meeting, for example, each day. Instead, NC Pre-K teachers should provide short direct instruction and provide activities and learning opportunities for children and families to engage in independently that total approximately 6.5 hours of available material daily for a remote learner/family.

B. Remote Instruction: ‘Remote Moments’

Remote Moments are blocks of live, direct, remote instruction delivered daily by lead teachers or teacher assistants. Teachers are **required** to:

- Plan for and deliver five (5) discrete Remote Moments with different activities throughout the week utilizing Teaching Strategies Distance Learning Solution resources.
 - Remote Moment content must align with the 5 developmental domains from the North Carolina Foundations for Early Learning and Development.
- Offer Remote Moments **at least once per day** if remote learning is being provided individually to **specific children** who are unable to attend in-person (ex. If a child must quarantine at home due to a COVID-19 exposure)
- Offer Remote Moments **at least twice per day** if remote learning is being provided to **ALL children** (ex. If the whole classroom must close in response to a COVID-19 outbreak)
 - Teachers must offer at least two (2) sessions with the same content at different times of day (e.g., offered once in the morning and once in the afternoon) to increase families’ ability to attend the session.
- Offer Remote Moment materials to families based on family needs, such as reliable access to technology or primary home language.

C. Family Engagement: ‘Check-ins’

Family/Child Check-ins are opportunities for the lead teacher (with teacher assistant as an optional participant) and a child/family to connect live through two-way communication (the teacher communicates with the child/family, and the child/family communicates back) every week while the child/family is participating in remote learning. A Check-in could take place through a call, video conference, or through a socially-distanced in-person visit while everyone wears face coverings. A Check-in may be a brief conversation, or it could be a longer period of time depending on child/family need. Building a strong relationship through frequent, quality interactions with families is always important – but even more important when providing remote learning. Families also need to be kept informed changes in schedule or protocols.

Lead Teachers are **required** to:

- Prepare for and document every Check-in in writing
 - A child/family’s participation in the check-in should be documented and used as a means to track attendance.
- Offer Family Check-ins **at least once per week** if remote learning is being provided individually to **specific children** who are unable to attend in-person (ex. If a child must quarantine at home due to a COVID-19 exposure)
- Offer Family Check-ins **at least twice per week** if remote learning is being provided to **ALL children** (ex. If the whole classroom must close in response to a COVID-19 outbreak)
- Make every reasonable effort to communicate with the family in an accessible manner, such as:
 - Adjust the timing of family check-ins to meet family’s needs
 - Attempt to contact a family member through multiple formats (text message, phone call, in-person socially-distanced visit with all people wearing face coverings) if other avenues are unsuccessful
 - For non-English dominant families, provide communication through an interpreter (e.g. staff, family member, etc.)

D. Additional Recommendations for Teachers

- Provide Remote Moments through a virtual platform, such as Zoom, Google Hangouts, and/or using Teaching Strategies digital resources.
- Plan Remote Moments that last for no more than 30 minutes at a time.
- Plan for Remote Moments that allow for two-way communication where teachers, children, and families can speak directly to one another.
- Plan Remote Moments separately from in-person instructional time and designed specifically for remote learners.
- Alternatively, plan Remote Moments that include together in-person and remote learners through a video platform set up during regularly scheduled in-person learning time (e.g., during a shared writing activity, video conferencing would allow remote learners to contribute to the conversation in real time.)
- Lead teachers or teacher assistants can plan and implement Remote Moments, depending on scheduling needs and maximizing time during the typical in-person learning day.
- Consider virtual field trips as a Remote Moment.
- Refer to the [NC DPI Online Pedagogy Considerations for Digital Instruction page](#) for guidance on protecting student safety and privacy while using audio and video conferencing services.
- Provide applicable technical resources and support to families to participate in Family Check-ins (e.g. downloading the Teaching Strategies family application)
- Utilize weekly Family Check-in time to:
 - Provide updates on procedures related to the school or site’s response to COVID-19
 - Share ongoing information on the child’s developmental progress using evidence-based observations
 - Provide individualized recommendations for activities and engagement opportunities for the family to best be able to support their child
- Encourage families to bring questions, concerns, ideas, and evidence of learning at home (e.g., pictures of activities) to the Family Check-in
- Encourage the child to be an active participant in the Family Check-in

8. Teaching Strategies Resources

DCDEE is continuing to provide access to the Teaching Strategies distance learning resources for all teachers and staff who support classrooms with at least one NC Pre-K child.

The Teaching Strategies Distance Learning Solution provides resources to teachers and families including:

- 24/7 access to digital curriculum allowing for consistency across in-person and remote learning
- Remote access to professional development best practices for in-person and remote learning
- Developmentally appropriate assessment resources
- Developmentally appropriate family-facing resources, including videos and activity instructions
- Two-way communication between teachers and families through a mobile application

A. Remote Learning

NOTE: Remote learning may only be provided to children if one or more of the circumstances outlined in Section 6 have been met.

NC Pre-K teachers must use Teaching Strategies resources for remote instruction. Teachers are **required** to:

- Provide Teaching Strategies family engagement resources every day to children and their families
- Highlight opportunities for families to submit evidence of learning remotely through the Teaching Strategies platform or through other methods (e.g., sharing pictures of completed activities, sharing videos of the child engaging in the activity)

Teachers should regularly supplement Teaching Strategies curriculum and materials as needed to support their individual students' and family needs.

B. Child Assessments

NC Pre-K teachers must conduct ongoing formative assessments on NC Pre-K children to gather information about each child's growth and skill development, and how each child processes information and solves problems during the learning process. This information should be used to plan and deliver instruction.

NC Pre-K teachers may use any formative assessment tool that has been [approved](#) by the NC Child Care Commission. However, all NC Pre-K teachers are **required** to document child growth and development data in the *MyTeachingStrategies*® platform regardless of which formative assessment tool is selected.

C. ReadyRosie Family Engagement

Access to ReadyRosie is also being provided for all NC Pre-K programs in order to support increased engagement and partnership with families. NC Pre-K programs are **required** to enroll all NC Pre-K families in the ReadyRosie solution and **must** incorporate ReadyRosie resources into their existing family engagement plans.

D. Professional Development and Training

Teaching Strategies will continue to provide professional development training sessions for NC Pre-K teachers, teacher assistants, site administrators, and contracting agency staff throughout the 2021-2022 school year.

All NC Pre-K lead teachers and teacher assistants, will be expected to complete three (3) required training sessions related to assessment, responsive planning, and meaningful experiences to support learning. A schedule for these trainings will be developed and shared in the coming weeks.

In addition, another offering of the training, *Getting Started: A Day in the Life of a Creative Curriculum*® Classroom, is scheduled to run from August 5th – August 20th. This training is intended for **new** NC Pre-K teachers and teacher assistants who did not receive this training during the 2020-2021 school year.

9. Payment Policy

A. Payments **Revised Flexibility for 2021-2022**

For the 2021-2022 program year, DCDEE will provide payments based on the following:

For the months of **August through November:**

- DCDEE will provide classroom-based payments in order to provide stabilization to NC Pre-K programs during the COVID-19 pandemic when overall child care enrollment has been low as families have opted to keep children at home. These classroom reimbursement rates will **NOT** be contingent on child enrollment or attendance.
- Payments will be generated based on the **assigned teacher rate** and the **number of slots allocated** to the classroom.
- Contracting Agencies must continue to engage in active recruitment strategies and family outreach events and make every effort to fully enroll eligible children in all available slots.

For the months of **December through June:**

- DCDEE will provide payments based on the **traditional “per-child”, attendance-based model** as summarized below and detailed in the [NC Pre-K Program Requirements and Guidance](#). (See *Section 4: The NC Pre-K Site – Subsection C. Program Attendance Policy*)
 - **100% reimbursement** will be provided when a child attends
 - **10 days or 50% of the operating days** during the month, **or**
 - **at least one day** during the first and last month of classroom operation, **or**
 - **at least one day** during the child’s first month of enrollment
 - **50% reimbursement** will be provided when a child attends **between 25% - 50% of the operating days** during the month
 - **0% reimbursement** will be provided when a child attends **less than 25% of the operating days** during the month
 - **0% reimbursement** will be provided when a **slot is unfilled**

B. COVID-19 Attendance Exceptions **New Flexibility for 2021-2022**

Per-child reimbursement rates will **not** be reduced if:

- A NC Pre-K classroom/site is required to close due to COVID-19 exposure or positive cases, **or**
- A child is unable to attend for an extended amount of days due to the child being sick and/or quarantined due to COVID-19

NOTE: NC Pre-K teachers are **required** to provide remote learning services to children until in-person instruction can resume.

NC Pre-K programs must communicate with their NC Pre-K Contracting Agency to request a COVID-19 attendance exception. Contracting Agencies will be responsible for verifying remote learning services are provided in accordance with the guidance above in Section 7 and documenting attendance exceptions in the NC Pre-K KIDS database system.