

School and Child Care Reopening: Policy and Funding Considerations

The COVID-19 crisis blindsided schools and child-care centers with shutdowns, remote learning and financial uncertainty. While programs continue to battle the cascading effects of these initial challenges, they now have the added conundrum of how and when to reopen and welcome staff, families, and children back safely.

Many states created provisions for emergency child-care at the pandemic's outset and are now beginning the process of drafting new policies and regulations for the re-opening of child-care centers and schools. Your state advocacy group leaders are working to reach out to contacts they have at the state level to inquire about process, timelines, and opportunities for stakeholder input around emerging requirements.

Based on what we are seeing and hearing across the country, MPPI has compiled a list of policy areas that are likely to be impacted and *potential* new requirements. Much will depend on your state or local landscape, how hard hit it was by COVID-19, and what your state health officials are recommending based on a number of variables in your state. We want you to be aware of what may be required so that you can begin contingency planning in the event that these requirements are put into place in your jurisdiction. We have also included information about existing relief funding and areas where you can advocate for funding relief as programs reopen.

This is not an exhaustive list and not all items may come into play in any given state. MPPI's staff will continue to monitor emerging regulations across the country and keep you updated on the trends we are seeing. We hope that this document sparks your thinking so you can nimbly adapt to a shifting landscape and keep serving children and families while keeping everyone healthy.

Health and safety

➤ *Screening and Prevention*

- Temperature checks and/or screening questions mandated daily for each child upon entry, possibly with a requirement for a designated area for the screenings.
- Additional vaccine requirements including flu and COVID-19, once available

➤ *Hygiene*

- Hand washing for all children upon entry in the morning and at certain intervals throughout the day (e.g. hourly)
- Required use of face masks for both staff and children and education/implementation of proper cleaning protocol for those
- Food preparation and service changes
 - No self-serve snack
 - Individually packaged snacks only
 - Disposable plates, cups and utensils only
 - Children cannot assist with food prep

- Children cannot wash dishes
- *Group size and ratios*
 - Reduction to either
 - 10 children per room (or 10 people total, inclusive of staff) or
 - 10 children per group with minimum distance between groups in the same room or
 - # of children based on square footage and distancing requirements (e.g. 6 feet apart)
 - Keeping siblings together to the extent possible
 - Keeping the same adult with the same group of children
- *Cleaning and disinfecting*
 - Cleaning of frequently used items (doorknobs, faucets etc.) at required intervals
 - More frequent laundering of children’s cleaning supplies (like towels) or required to be disposable
 - Daily or twice daily full cleaning and sanitizing of room and bathrooms
 - Shared materials need to be cleaned after each use
 - Full cleaning between groups of children if staggering am/pm
 - List of acceptable cleaning and disinfecting products
 - Advocate to get clarity about what to do if there’s a shortage of those supplies
- *Drop off/pick up procedures*
 - Distancing at drop-off and pick-up; staggered drop off and pick up times
 - No parents/guardians allowed in building; children dropped off by same people every day if possible
- *Distancing (work time, napping, mealtime, playground)*
 - Children need to have an assigned workspace
 - School must provide certain materials, like colored pencils, crayons in a 1:1 ratio
 - Your assigned groups of children cannot be on the playground at the same time
 - Cots need to be further apart than currently required in nap areas
 - Cubby areas or storage bins may need must have more space between and less possibility of mixing of children’s belongings
- *COVID-19 Testing for staff/students*
 - Advocate that testing be free for child-care/school staff
- *Protocols for confirmed case of COVID-19*
 - Designate a space that will be used to separate children or staff showing symptoms during operating hours
 - 2-5 day closure for confirmed case (most recent CDC guidelines)
 - Confer with local health department officials to determine a plan
 - Create a plan for communicating with families and staff

- *Staff Training*
 - Requirement for staff in-service pre-reopening on COVID-19 info. and new protocols (how it spreads, requirement for face masks, hand washing requirements, material sanitizing, proper cleaning techniques, food prep and service, what to do if a child displays symptoms).

Funding

- The CARES Act established the [Education Stabilization Fund](#) which has two prospective streams of funding available for child-care and schools which can support a number of expenses including cleaning supplies and professional development. [See our FAQ document](#) for more information. These funds will be distributed through various state agencies and how they are used will vary from state to state.
- CCDBG funding to states has been increased to support child-care subsidy providers and many states are using this federal funding to increase the payment rates for subsidy providers and/or increase the income threshold for families qualifying for subsidies.
- Additional state and/or local funding relief may become available for:
 - Cleaning supplies and services
 - Masks for staff and/or students
 - Funding for staff COVID-19 testing and/or schoolwide testing when there's a confirmed case
 - Funding for additional materials to reduce sharing
 - Increased cost for staff both to support group size and ratios, as well as simultaneous in person and distance learning
 - Increased cost for back up staff to allow for different sick policies
 - Funding for increased capacity to respond to social/emotional needs for both staff and students

Advocate through your state advocacy group with your governor's office and office of early learning for funding relief to help your program comply with new policies and the increased costs those may bring.

Considerations

- If regulations and space limitations do not permit you to serve all of your children at once, think about staggered schedule options like alternate day or am/pm schedules for different groups of children, with distance learning/homework in between.
- Before reopening, check your water system (legionnaires), HVAC, Gas and other systems that have been shut down for a long period
- Plan for more children and staff out sick or parents who don't want their children in a classroom
 - Emergency FMLA and Emergency Paid Sick Leave through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act is in place through December 31, 2020.

- Review your sick time and attendance policies
- It may be valuable to survey your families now to ascertain how many will be comfortable with sending children back when your state allows reopening.
- No parents/guardians in the building means no parent observations---think about other ways to help parents connect to the classroom.
- Consider whether there are some materials that classroom assistants could be making during this period of remote learning that might allow:
 - Children to take a material home to support remote learning
 - Children to have their own set to comply with regulations
 - One to be taken out of circulation for cleaning while another can be put on the shelf for use
- For Montessori programs in particular, the complexities of cleaning materials in addition to classroom spaces will need to be considered
- Look into Universal Pre-K or child-care subsidy participation which could provide funding either for current families who now qualify due to unemployment, or if you have families withdraw you could enroll children funded through these programs. There may be some different policies you need to navigate.
- States may have a matrix or even an application for relief funds for child-care facilities. Learning the process for distribution of funds in your state is crucial.

The policy and funding landscape will continue to evolve as the country moves through the phases of reopening, and as impacts of initial reopening regulations become understood. MPPI will continue to monitor state and federal changes as we source information to help support Montessori programs.