

A Seat at the Table: The Role of Child Care and Afterschool in School District Planning for the 2020-2021 School Year

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Since the New Jersey Department of Education's (DOE) recent release of [The Road Back: Restart and Recovery Plan for Education](#), school districts have hit the ground running in planning for what learning will look like during the 2020-2021 school year. While the DOE's guidance has made it clear that many of the issues should be district-determined, there is no question that the delivery of education will look different come September. However learning is provided, there are certain issues that all districts must consider and plan for as part of the overall planning process.

Our schools' educational "new normal" may include all or a part of a school-day being virtual. While some districts may conclude that this learning approach is the best way to keep students and faculty safe, that decision has a significant ripple-effect on families, particularly those whose parents/guardians work both in and outside the home. Should virtual learning be all or part of a district's student learning, the following questions should be considered:

Should the district make accommodations for students of working parents, during the period of the school day when virtual learning would take place?

Is there a specific schedule(s) that best meets the needs of working families?

[Research](#) is already showing that the sudden shift to online instruction has had an impact on the educational progress of many students, creating heightened inequities in learning, particularly for low-income students and students of color. This happened when non-essential workers, including parents, were home with their children and could

potentially provide educational supports to their children. As businesses open up and parents return to work, those learning inequities will only become greater beginning in September.

In order to ensure that student learning is provided as equitably as possible, outside-the-home care during school hours may be necessary for students of working parents and the child care and afterschool communities may be able to partner with districts towards achieving that end.

Many of these programs are licensed to care for children up to age 13 and may be able to care for and support student learning during those periods of the day when virtual learning is to take place. This means that districts must make sure from the beginning of the planning process that their child care and afterschool communities are "at the planning table!"

The following are steps districts should take to begin the engagement process:

1. **Find out what types of child care exist in the community and then begin the outreach.** Some districts may already have collaborations with child care programs through their state-funded preschool or through their afterschool programs. Many districts rely on community partners like the YMCA, Boys & Girls Clubs, houses of worship and other community partners to provide care for students during out-of-school time hours.

Reaching out to them is the place to start, but depending on student need and program availability (child care programs must currently meet Department of Children and Families'

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emergency standards of 10 children per room), identifying additional programs may be necessary. [New Jersey's Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies](#), located in every county, provide information to parents and the public on the availability of child care services throughout each county. They are the entity that determines whether families are eligible for child care subsidies that help pay for this additional care. Districts can also attain a list of child care programs in their community by going to the [Department of Children and Families, Office of Licensing Child Care Portal](#). This will help a district identify which programs are licensed to care for children up to the age of 13. Reaching out and engaging this community will assist districts in overall planning for the type of care potentially available in the community during the school day and before/after school.

2. **Make sure that child care and afterschool are represented during the planning process.** As districts move forward in their planning, including child care and afterschool representatives will provide opportunities to address child care issues, as the educational plans are developed. This includes ensuring that they are part of each district's Restart Committee. Reaching out to them sooner rather than later is important as they too will need time to assess the extent in which they can support those students needing care during the school day.
3. **Make sure that parent input drives how the child care component will be structured.** Districts have already begun surveying parents. As part of those surveys, asking parents which educational scenarios would best meet their families' needs, (ex., one week in-school, two weeks virtual, all mornings virtual, all afternoons in-school, all early grades

attending full-time, older students remain virtual), will arm the school with the information to determine which education configuration best meets the needs of students and families. It will also help to engage child care and afterschool accordingly to support those specific needs.

4. **Consider a transportation plan that includes bringing students to child care.** While districts are struggling on how best to keep students safe when they are bused to and from school, the Restart Plan asks districts to consider options that include transportation from school to child care/afterschool locations, if possible.

Even during these difficult times, providing students with educational environments that support their overall learning must remain a priority. That can only happen when districts, along with community groups like child care/afterschool programs, partner in achieving that end.

Questions? Contact Cynthia Rice at crice@acnj.org.

Links referenced in this document:

The Road Back: Restart and Recovery Plan for Education, New Jersey Department of Education— <https://www.nj.gov/education/reopening/NJDOETheRoadBack.pdf>

We Have to Focus on Opening Schools, Not Bars. Resuming classroom instruction is crucial. Infection control inside and outside classrooms can let it happen. New York Times— <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/01/opinion/coronavirus-schools.html?smid=em-share>

New Jersey's Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies— <https://www.childcarenj.gov/Parents/CCRR>

Department of Children and Families, Office of Licensing Child Care Portal— <https://childcareexplorer.njccis.com/portal/>