

An Important Piece of the Puzzle: Child Care and Afterschool Care 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 virtual learning for all or part of a school-day. 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 for those with parents/guardians that work both in and outside the home.

Child care and afterschool programs can have an important role to play as school districts plan their reopening in the fall. Many districts will not have worked closely with child care and afterschool programs but will now be looking to them for school-age care capacity. Both child care and afterschool programs will have to proactively reach out to school districts to be a part of the planning process.

In order to be part of solving the dilemma of providing a safe education to students in the next school year, child care and afterschool programs need to jump into action right away! Below are some things to assess and steps to take in order for these programs to become a critical piece to next year's school puzzle:

1. **Are you licensed to serve children up to age 13?** The biggest issue will be for elementary students who cannot stay by themselves at home during those days in which virtual learning is taking place. If you are licensed to age 13, then...

2. **Do you have the space to care for school-age children?** Assess how many young students (by following current DCF licensing guidelines) your program has the capacity/space to take during the day. If so, then...
3. **Does your program have the capacity to support learning?** Do you have adequate staffing and technology for multiple age groups to support learning while the students are at your location? If so, then...
4. **Contact the school district.** Either by phone or by letter, contact the superintendent of the school district in which the program is located and/or districts that are close to the program and:
 - a. **Request to be part of the planning process.** Districts are already engaging stakeholders and holding meetings to develop plans for the next school year. Child care and afterschool should be at that table!
 - b. **Advise the superintendent that you have the capacity to help with child care.** Either in writing or by phone, explain that you are licensed to care for children to age 13 and currently have space and age-appropriate educational supports to care for children who need care during school days.
 - c. **Discuss funding.** It remains unclear what funding will be available to support this work. Whether paid for by child care subsidies, school districts or parent-pay, programs should determine how much such care will cost them and discuss it with the district.

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.

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