



NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Dear Early Childhood Partners:

First, thank you so much for the important work you are doing during this time of crisis. We understand that during this rapidly changing time, many partners and advocates have questions about how the Governor's executive order on school closures will impact families with young children, and how the State is responding to ensure that children and families are supported while schools are closed.

We want provide you with a brief update about some of the work underway to ensure families have access to child care, access to nutritious food, and access to remote learning:

- On Saturday, March 14th the Governor appointed an [Education and Nutrition Working Group](#) to develop a plan to ensure that children and families are supported while schools are closed. The working group is focused on issues such as (but not limited to) nutrition, health, child care access for critical health care and other front-line workers and learning support for children at home. The Working Group is co-chaired by Susan Gale Perry, Chief Deputy Secretary of NC DHHS and David Stegall, Ed.D, Deputy State Superintendent of Innovation at DPI, and will have representatives from DPI, NC DHHS, the State Board of Education, as well as other education, nutrition and child care associations.
 - **Access to Safe, Affordable Child Care**
 - DHHS sent a letter to child care providers (attached) about the decision to stay open or close down, and guidance for those facilities that do stay open.
 - DCDEE released [guidance](#) on public health information for child care providers about when someone is sick, screening criteria, exclusion criteria, cleaning, helping the community, limiting exposure, and preparedness.
 - DCDEE released [guidance](#) to child care providers on subsidy and pre-K payments, stating that for the month of March, 1) child care centers will receive full subsidy payment for each child enrolled in their facility according to each child's plan of care, and 2) NC Pre-K programs will be paid in full for March, regardless of child attendance or closure.
 - DHHS and DPI released joint [guidance](#) for the operation of school-based emergency child care during the COVID-19 school closure.
 - DCDEE released [guidance](#) on the need to maintain compliance with all child care rules to the extent possible, while also providing flexibilities to child care providers around staff/child ratios, group size, training requirements, records, activity areas, and nutritional standards.
 - On March 19th, NC set up a toll-free number for families to call and find out which child care providers are open. We are prioritizing communicating the 1-800 line to healthcare providers and other essential workers.
 - **Access to Nutritious Food**
 - USDA has approved multiple waivers for NC to provide food to children through the Summer Food Programs in non-congregate settings, which enables meal delivery. As of March 19, 2020, all 115 public school districts, 3 federal schools, 33 charter

schools, and 35 community partners (e.g., food banks, Feeding America, large faith-based entities) have approved plans to serve meals to children. School districts have flexibility on how to distribute food and have implemented a variety of innovative methods for meal pick-up/delivery (e.g., yellow school bus delivery, grab-and-go meals, drive-by pickup). Most sites began serving meals on Monday, March 16th (averaging 250,000 meals per day).

- DHHS and DPI are seeking multiple additional waivers and flexibilities to maximize federal programs (e.g., WIC, CACFP, SNAP, and school nutrition programs) to increase access to food for families and children.
 - DHHS and DPI are providing regular guidance and technical assistance to schools and community food sponsors.
 - DPI is continuing to coordinate Nutrition Hubs at schools, connecting schools and community organizations with school meals with food packages for households.
 - DHHS and DPI are soliciting feedback from schools, child care providers, and others to identify possible underserved communities in order to better deploy food assistance.
- **CDSA Guidance**
 - As of March 18, 2020, the North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program (ITP) is suspending face-to-face services until March 30, 2020, unless extended beyond that date. The program will be providing alternate methods to ensure the best support for our families during this difficult time and ensure service continuity.
 - **Access to Remote Learning**
 - NC DPI has launched a [COVID-19 Response & Resources webpage](#) with a robust set of resources for educators and families.
 - NC DPI has published [resources](#) for parents to support learning for children birth to grade 2.
 - NC DPI is working with internet service providers who are offering free and affordable options for high-speed internet while schools are closed. NC DPI has launched an [interactive map](#) for families to find free and affordable internet service offerings across the state.
 - NC DPI is partnering with The Friday Institute for Educational Innovation to provide instructional support.

This work is evolving quickly and we are committed to keeping you updated and to ensuring children and families are supported. We will continue to pursue every opportunity to support child care programs and schools with good health and safety guidance, financial stability, and flexibilities during this time. DHHS has developed a [COVID-19 website with a robust set of resources](#) related to the coronavirus. We will be posting updates on our DHHS website. If you have any questions, please reach out to Hayley Young at hayley.young@dhhs.nc.gov or (803) 413-4694.

Best,

Susan Gale Perry