

Quality Early Learning COVID-19 Considerations

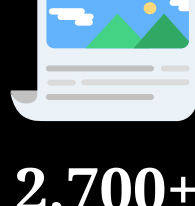
Since the Arizona Department of Education's (ADE) release of the [Roadmap for Reopening](#), Local Education Agencies (LEAs) deployed scenario-based models for the delivery of instruction for the 2020-2021 school year utilizing [benchmarks](#) established by the [Arizona Department of Health Services](#). These instructional models have had significant impacts on the early care and education field, who are providing safe environments for children birth through age 12. This document serves to provide guidance and key considerations for providers and LEAs alike.

Distance Learning Supports for Young Children:

On-site services are required to be provided on school campuses for students who show a need for them. Preschoolers and younger school aged children have unique and enhanced learning needs that may not be met in these on-site offerings.

Distance learning for public schools increases the need for safe, supervised care for an increased number of children. School districts and local childcare should consider partnering to identify the need for out-of-home care while students are participating in distance learning.

Recommendations and considerations are provided below.



2,700+
AZ Public Schools

2,700+
AZ Licensed Providers

"While there are tools online that can support children's learning, the reality is that there is no online equivalent to preschool" (NAEYC, 2020, n.p.). Virtual connections and online tools are simply temporary solutions until it is safe to return to in-person learning.

1 Health & Safety Considerations



The Arizona Department of Education's [Early Learning Standards](#) includes information about health, personal health, and hygiene practices available [HERE](#). In addition, ADE developed [High Quality Program Guidelines](#). Sections 6.0 and 6.1 address children's general health status and developmental needs

First Things First, Arizona's Early Childhood Health and Development Board (ECHDB), developed recommendations for establishing and maintaining safe center and home-based early learning environments in Arizona during COVID-19. This is available at <https://qualityfirstaz.com/>.

Resource

[Caring For Our Children \(CFOC\)](#) is an excellent resource that schools and programs could use. They have recently developed a [COVID-19 CFOC Crosswalk](#)

2 Distance Based Learning

Due to health and safety concerns, in-person instruction may not be offered at all ECE programs. While we do not promote or support the use of online asynchronous preschool programs, we encourage programs leveraging synchronous distance learning formats to ensure that the technology used be interactive; grounded in the principles of child development; and aligned to the [Arizona Department of Education's High Quality Program Guidelines](#) Standard 3.0 Program Practices: Curriculum, Environment and Child Assessment.

Resource

The National Association for the Education of Young Children and Fred Rogers Center joint position statement [Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8](#)

3 Child-to-Teacher Ratios



The Arizona Department of Education's [High Quality Program Guidelines](#) (HQPG) recommends the following staff to child ratios.

Age	Staff: Child Ratio	Group Size
Infants (4wks-12 months)	1:4	8
Toddlers (12-24 months)	1:5	10
Two-Year-old (24-36 months)	1:6	10
Three-year-old	1:9	10
Four-Year-old	1:10	10

The recommended group sizes align HQPG with CDC recommended group sizes of not exceeding 10. Please refer to the [High Quality Program Guidelines](#) 1.0 Program Administration and Qualifications Section.

4 Funding



Childcare is an allowable expense for ESSER funding and other CARES Act funding that went to schools and localities. School Districts are encouraged to maximize current resources so that families in need can access the appropriate supervised care at no or low cost for their young child. School districts should consider potential savings or lower operating costs due to virtual or hybrid schedules and allocate additional funding to pay childcare providers and/or community organizations to provide care and best support distance learning for younger school aged children.

[Supporting and Sustaining Early Learning: Funding Options for Early Childhood Education in Arizona](#) (ADE, 2019)

The Opportunities Exchange has resource to help the early childhood field achieve financial sustainability and strong child outcomes through Shared Services. Visit their website [HERE](#).

[DES Childcare Subsidy](#)

5 Partnerships

Currently the [ADE ECE](#) has the [Early Childhood Quality Improvement Process \(ECQUIP\)](#). This process and structure were developed as a means to assure quality and accountability among schools. ECQUIP is intended to be used to guide program planning and on-going quality improvement and provides programs with a framework for implementing quality practices.

ECQUIP is done from a team-based approach and LEAs are encouraged to include Head Starts, community childcare, local childcare partners, families, etc. ECQUIP is intended to be a vehicle for all early childhood programs to partner within a local education agency and work as one system.



6 Professional Development and Training



The [ADE ECE](#) currently offers trainings relative to the Arizona Early Learning Standards, Infant Toddler Developmental Guidelines, and the High Quality Program Guidelines. <https://www.azed.gov/ece/professional-development/>

The [Arizona Early Childhood Workforce Registry](#) offers training and professional development opportunities relative to child development and ECE in times of COVID

7 Family Considerations

[High Quality Program Guidelines](#) 5.0 Family Engagement and Support.

Parents should consult their school to learn about their options for supervised care for their children during the school day. Arizona's Child Care Resource and Referral can also support parents as they search for care options: <https://www.azccrr.com/>

Resource:

[Read On Arizona](#) is a statewide, public/private partnership of agencies committed to creating an effective continuum of services to improve language and literacy outcomes for children birth through age eight. Their website has an array of early literacy supports for families and practitioners

8 School Age Considerations



It is the responsibility of the school district or charter school to operationalize this portion of Executive Order 2020-41 in coordination with public health guidance and local ordinances. The following are items for consideration:

- If a school district or charter school is offering hybrid learning, it should consider surveying family capacity to support DL at home and prioritize in-person instruction for students without a productive home environment for learning.
- If a school has chosen to move to schoolwide DL instruction, a physical location must be made available for students to go to during the same days and hours as the school operation for students in a physical setting may look like a small subset of students working with an aide on their DL curriculum and activities on a computer at school.
- A school district or charter school with multiple facilities can choose to open one building for this purpose rather than each school having to be open, so long as there is enough capacity for those utilizing this option within that site to follow public health guidelines.
- School districts and charter schools can partner with community-based organizations (e.g. a Boys and Girls Club) to meet this requirement and use CARES Act dollars to support this partnership. All academic and attendance reporting requirements under an approved DL plan must apply to this scenario.

Need for Care and Available Supply: programs should consider the need for supervised care of young children participating using virtual tools, the appropriate care option to best serve this student, and the capacity of the care provider.

Facilities and Licensing: Child care programs and community organizations need to consider their current licensed capacity to serve children. Many factors help determine whether a space needs to be licensed as a child care center including site type, operator (i.e., whether it is run by a school or community partner), ages served and hours of operation.

Technology: School-age children will likely need to access instruction via devices such as laptops or tablets. Schools and childcare providers should work in concert around student supply and technology needs including but not limited to: laptops, headsets, internet access, printers, printed materials, IT help desk supports, etc.

