



## Back to School Guidance 2021 – 2022

The following information provides guidance to Georgia's Pre-K programs as they begin the 2021 – 2022 school year. It is intended to support Georgia's Pre-K programs in creating high-quality instructional environments which foster the individual development and growth of children while also prioritizing the health and safety of staff and children. The information is not comprehensive. Programs should refer to the most current recommendations for early childhood environments from the [Centers for Disease Control](#), as well as guidance including the [Georgia Department of Public Health](#) and [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) when making decisions for their programs. All licensed programs should follow any requirements and guidance provided by the Child Care Services division.

**Are child and staff required to wear masks?** DECAL encourages the use of masks for children and staff but does not require masks in Pre-K classrooms.

**Will make-up days be required due to COVID-19 closures?** All programs should have a plan to continue offering Pre-K services if classes must be closed due to COVID-19. Closures due to COVID-19 do not have to be rescheduled if distance learning is provided to meet the Pre-K instructional day requirements.

**If my Pre-K program will be temporarily closing due to COVID-19, who should I contact?** Pre-K Project Directors should contact their Pre-K Specialist regarding any closures. If your program is licensed, you must also follow childcare licensing regulations and contact the licensing division.

**Are programs required to provide virtual learning in the event a closure is necessary due to COVID-19?** All programs should have a plan to continue to offer Pre-K services if classes must be closed due to COVID-19. Distance learning can be provided through virtual learning and/or at home, hands-on learning activities. Programs should prepare materials and plans in advance so they can easily be shared with families in the event of an emergency closure. If providing activities with materials to be completed at home, written instructions to support families in completing the activities should be provided.

**Should Pre-K students be counted as absent on days when the Pre-K program is closed, when the student or a family member is quarantined, or when a family decides to keep a child at home due to COVID-19 concerns?** If the program/classroom is closed, the closure should be noted on the attendance roster. If individual students are not present due to a quarantine, the absence should be marked as excused.

**Should the Pre-K lead and assistant teachers be paid if the Pre-K program is closed due to COVID-19?** Payments will not be adjusted for closure days due to COVID-19. The minimum salary requirements for lead and assistant teachers must be met. Programs are required to pay Pre-K lead and assistant teachers during COVID-19 closures. Providers must arrange to process and distribute pay to Pre-K teachers.

**What are the expectations for lead and assistant teachers if the Pre-K program is closed due to COVID-19?** Lead and Assistant teachers are expected to provide instruction daily while the program is closed due to COVID-19. They can actively support daily instruction through a variety of methods:

- Provide hands-on learning kits with supplies and materials including manipulatives, books, etc. and written directions for at-home learning.
- Connect with students through individual, small group and large group video sessions using online platforms, apps, and phone calls.
- Provide virtual instruction online including circle time, story time and small group lessons.

**Can programs create cohort groups to minimize contact among children?** It would be appropriate to establish cohorts of children that participate in activities together as a consistent small group to reduce interaction among all students. Cohorts don't mix, but physical distancing isn't always observed within the cohort group. In a cohort, children remain the same within the group, and the same teacher could remain with the same group each day. The lead teacher could be assigned to one cohort and the assistant teacher is assigned to the other cohort. The lead teacher is responsible for developing lesson plans and ensuring assessment data is collected. Co-planning is encouraged between the lead and assistant teacher. Teachers may mix among the groups of children.

**What are the requirements for Work Sampling Online (WSO)?**

During the 2021-2022 school year, teachers will collect documentation for Language and Literacy and Mathematical Thinking domains only. Documentation is NOT required to be collected for Personal and Social Development, Scientific Thinking, Social Studies, The Arts, and Physical Development, Health and Safety. Although not required, if a teacher feels it is necessary for him or her to collect documentation in these domains prior to entering a rating on the WSO Developmental Checklist, the teacher may choose to collect documentation.

- WSO Developmental Checklist: Teachers should enter student assessment documentation for the language and literacy and mathematical indicators on a weekly basis. Teachers should also review linked documentation and enter ratings on the WSO Developmental Checklist as needed to update a child's progress.

**I am unable to fill a lead teacher and assistant teacher position with sufficiently credentialed teachers. Is there a waiver process?** Providers that are unable to fill a vacancy with a sufficiently credentialed lead and/or assistant teacher can request a waiver for teacher credential. The [Request for Waiver of Teacher Credential](#) form is posted under the Project Director Resource List. Look for it under + *Georgia's Pre-K Credential Information*. Submit the form to your Pre-K Specialist for review and approval.