School Emergency Child Care Guidance

For the duration of the COVID-19 emergency, schools have been asked to establish plans for child care for essential health workers and other critical services.

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) recommends three pathways:

1) Schools can work with child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs) in their region to find additional care for children in existing child care programs. CCR&R link here: https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/childcare/referralagencies.asp
2) Schools that have existing child care facilities (such as a licensed and registered school aged child care program hosted at the school) should contact their regional office in regard to expanding their license for purposes including, but not limited to, adding capacity, expanding hours, serving additional age groups. Link to regional offices: https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/childcare/regionaloffices.asp
3) For the duration of the emergency, pursuant to executive order 202.5 schools can host child care facilities at their school site, without needing OCFS licensure, even if there is not compulsory education occurring. These school based child care programs are not subject to OCFS regulatory oversight. As these arrangements are temporary in nature, serving school-aged children, and are only serving children during school closures, they would not require an OCFS license or registration.

    Schools located in counties outside of New York City that are interested in exercising school based care options should contact OCFS central office: (518) 486-7488. Schools located in New York City should contact New York City Department of Education for school based programs at 718-935-2200 or 311.

Best Practices for Drop-in Care:
Please note: As school based care is not required to be licensed or registered, this guidance is best practice, not binding regulation.

Space
- Schools should identify possible space in their buildings.
- There should be separate rooms to have small groups.
- Programs should keep in mind being on lower floors, having two means of egress, having access to a recreational space.
- Please see evaluation toolkit document for best practices when setting up drop-in space.

Cost

- Some programs may choose to operate the programs as a service for their essential staff. However, some children who attend the program may be eligible for child care subsidies.

- Child care programs that expand capacity to respond to the needs of families during the COVID-19 outbreak will be eligible to serve families in receipt of child care subsidy. Additionally, pop-up programs that have been set up to meet the short-term child care needs of families will be considered subsidy eligible if they enroll with OCFS or DOHMH for NYC-based programs. Programs can submit a request for enrollment directly to OCFS or DOHMH.

Staffing

- As a best practice, school-aged child care typically has a ratio of 1 staff member for every ten children.
- OCFS will be establishing a substitute pool which will include displaced child care workers, teacher's aides, student teachers etc.
- In addition, schools may choose to use non-essential staff to work in the child care programs.
- As a non-regulated program, school based child care programs may bring on additional staff who may not have child care qualifications or background checks.
- As a matter of best practice, programs may want to consider looking up potential staff on the NYS sex offender registry website and require a criminal history attestation.
- See Employee Background information in the toolkit.

Other Considerations

- Parents should inform program of health concerns and background. See child history form in toolkit.
- Programs shall make plans for child meals.
- If the COVID-19 emergency extends beyond April 1, programs should contact OCFS at (518) 486-7488.