



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF

EDUCATION

**Guidance Related to Coronavirus (COVID-19):
Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Program (PKEEP)
2020-21 School Year
Frequently Asked Questions**

(Sept. 15, 2020)

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) acknowledges that child care providers are operating in a rapidly changing environment during an unprecedented time as the District of Columbia addresses the coronavirus (COVID-19) public health emergency. OSSE is issuing the following guidance to provide clarity on questions and concerns raised by child care providers that participate in the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Program (PKEEP).

1. What flexibility do PKEEP providers have to deliver high-quality pre-K while in the context of new COVID-related health and safety guidance?

In OSSE's [Guidance Related to COVID-19: Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Program \(PKEEP\) 2020-21 School Year](#), OSSE outlines the agency's authority to grant waivers from PKEEP high-quality standards found at DCMR § 3501.1, including:

- 3501.1(a) An adult-to-child ratio of 1-to-8 for children 30 months to 3 years of age and of 1-to-10 for children 4 years of age or older. When children of different ages are combined in one group; the adult-to-child ratio for the youngest child shall apply;
- 3501.1(b) The consistent use of a comprehensive curriculum that is aligned with the District of Columbia's Early Learning Standards.
- 3501.1(c) Accreditation by a national accrediting body approved by OSSE.
- 3501.1(d) Utilization of child assessment tools that are aligned with the curriculum selected by the program. Children enrolled in the program shall be assessed using this tool at least three times during the program year and the assessments shall be shared with families at least two times during the program year.
- 3501.1(e) Employ at a minimum one teacher and one teacher assistant who meet the following minimum educational requirements:
 - Teacher: (a) Hold at least a bachelor's degree in child development; early childhood education; early childhood special education or child and family studies; or (b) Hold a bachelor's degree in a field other than child development; early childhood education; early childhood special education; or child and family studies and have earned 18 credits in early childhood education; (c) Hold a bachelor's degree in a field other than a child development; early childhood education; early childhood special education or child and

family studies and successful completion of applicable Early Childhood Praxis Exams;
and

- Assistant teacher: Hold an associate degree in a field other than child development; early childhood education; early childhood special education; or child and family studies and have earned nine credits in early childhood education.
- 3501.1(f) The following teachers and assistant teachers shall be paid wages equivalent to District of Columbia Public School pre-K teachers or assistant teachers, respectively, based on years of experience: (1) a teacher that holds a bachelor's degree in early child development, early childhood education, or child and family studies or who has a bachelor's degree and has completed 18 credits in child development, early childhood education, or child and family studies; (2) an assistant teacher that holds an associate's degree in early childhood education or who has completed nine credits in child development, early childhood education, or child and family studies;
- 3501.1(g) A professional development and training plan for pre-K teachers and assistant teachers.
- 3501.1(h) Provide opportunities for the parents of children to participate in and support the program's educational mission as active partners in their child's learning and development. Plan educational workshops for parents; hold two parent-teacher conferences a year; and provide other activities that foster family partnership over the program year.
- 3501.1(i) A plan that meets OSSE's requirements to ensure inclusion of children with disabilities in accordance with federal law.
- 3501.1(j) Provide and maintain at all times safe; secure; and developmentally appropriate space for use as classrooms. The classrooms shall be of sufficient size to provide a minimum of 35 square feet of interior; usable space per child which space shall be accessible to children with disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- 3501.1(k) Ensure that the daily active play for each pre-K age child includes at a minimum two (2) hours of active play time including a minimum of 45 minutes of outdoor play time; weather permitting. In inclement weather active play shall be encouraged and supported in a safe indoor play area.
- 3501.1(m) Maintain a process for continuous improvement; ongoing classroom assessments; and the collection of authentic child assessment data at least three times a year, and
- 3501.1(n) Provide comprehensive health and support services for all children enrolled in the program. High quality pre-K programs shall ensure all children receive within 45 days of enrollment a developmental screening that includes assessments of social and emotional development. High quality pre-K programs shall also ensure children receive vision and hearing screenings.

These waivers provide flexibility for PKEEP providers to design programs for the 2020-21 school year that comply with [OSSE's Health and Safety Guidance for Child Care Providers: COVID-19 Recovery Period and respond to the needs and desires of families served](#). Examples of this flexibility include:

- Flexibility to institute other models of physical activity opportunities to keep PKEEP students active and encourage physical activity at home.

- Flexibility for PKEEP to operate a remote learning pre-k program or implement a hybrid schedule in which children attend in-person some days or times and participate in remote learning activities during other days or times.

Providers may request a waiver of any of the above provisions using the form provided in OSSE's [Guidance Related to COVID-19: Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Program \(PKEEP\) 2020-21 School Year](#).

Additionally, during the COVID-19 public health emergency, OSSE will not enforce the eligibility criteria, pursuant to DCMR § 3500.3(e). The temporary suspension of the eligibility criteria and examples of the flexibilities provided are below. Providers do not need to request a waiver to take advantage of flexibility provided by the temporary suspension of eligibility criteria.

- Suspension of DCMR § 3500.3(e) that requires high-quality pre-K programs to enroll and maintain a class size of no fewer than 15 and no more than 16 children in classrooms where the youngest child is 3 years old or a class size of no fewer than 16 and no more than 20 in classrooms where the youngest child is 4 years old. This action provides flexibility for PKEEP providers that wish to:
 - Reduce class sizes to meet [OSSE's Health and Safety Guidance for Child Care Providers: COVID-19 Recovery Period](#) limiting group sizes to 10 or briefly 11 individuals (children and staff).
 - Please note that reducing the total number of PKEEP children served would affect a provider's funding allocation, as discussed below.
 - Use partitions to enable two groups of 10 or briefly 11 individuals (children and staff) to occupy one classroom. If the provider intends on using partition, the provider must ensure that physical (social) distancing requirements are met. Please review [OSSE's Health and Safety Guidance for Child Care Providers: COVID-19 Recovery Period](#) to read the requirements for partitions.
 - Please note that PKEEP providers are not required to divide their classrooms into two separate spaces.
 - Split a pre-K high-quality classroom into two groups and assign one teacher to each group (either the teacher or the assistant), provided the PKEEP provider also requests a waiver of DCMR § 3501.1(e)(1) to employ at a minimum one teacher and one teacher assistant for each PKEEP classroom. Please review the [Guidance Related to COVID-19: Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Program \(PKEEP\) 2020-21 School Year](#) to request a waiver of the minimum one teacher and one assistant teacher requirement.
- Suspension of DCMR § 3500.3(g) that requires high-quality pre-K programs to operate Monday through Friday, beginning no earlier than 7 a.m.; provide at least six and a half hours of pre-K education services, at least 39 weeks a year, for a total of at least 180-days; and follow the holiday and closing calendar schedule of the DCPS. This action provides flexibility for PKEEP providers that wish to:
 - Operate a remote learning pre-K program or implement a hybrid schedule where children attend in-person some days or times and participate in remote learning activities during other days or times.

- Create a flexible schedule to optimize parent engagement opportunities and implement modified professional development and training programs.

2. How does DCPS' adoption of a distance learning posture affect PKEEP programs? If DCPS returns to in-person learning after Nov. 6, 2020, will PKEEP programs be required to do so as well?

On July 30, [Mayor Bowser announced](#) DCPS will start the 2020-21 school year distance learning for Term 1. While this decision clarifies the status of District students attending traditional public schools, PKEEP programs are not required to adopt the same operating status as DCPS, and DCPS operating status does not impact PKEEP fiscal year 2021 (FY21) budgets.

Per the guidance released Aug. 4, 2020, OSSE is waiving the requirement for PKEEP providers to provide a 180-day schedule in accordance with the DCPS school calendar, including holidays and closures. PKEEP providers may choose to offer remote learning, in-person learning that complies with [OSSE's Health and Safety Guidance for Child Care Providers: COVID-19 Recovery Period](#) or a combination of remote and in-person learning during the public health emergency. PKEEP providers who do not offer in-person learning are expected to continue to serve enrolled children through remote learning.

3. How will a provider's PKEEP funding be affected if we serve fewer children than projected (e.g., due to smaller group sizes or challenges enrolling children due to families' health and safety concerns)?

A PKEEP program's FY21 funding is based on the final number of enrolled PKEEP students verified through OSSE's annual enrollment audit, which certifies the official PKEEP roster for the 2020-21 school year and ensures students participating in the PKEEP meet the residency and age eligibility requirements. **The audit is based on the students entered in OSSE's Enrollment Audit Child Count Application (EACCA) as of Oct. 5, 2020.** After completion of the enrollment audit (January 2021), OSSE will revise a PKEEP provider's budget to reflect the final audited student roster. If a PKEEP provider's audited enrollment varies from the projection included in the FY21 award notice (sent to all PKEEP providers in July 2020), the PKEEP provider's budget will be adjusted accordingly. PKEEP providers who are serving fewer students than included in their FY21 award notice should take this into account in making spending decisions during the 2020-21 school year. OSSE will provide tools and technical assistance on budgeting related to changes based on the enrollment audit.

4. Will a provider's PKEEP funding be affected if the provider offers distance learning?

No. The PKEEP FY21 budgets are based on the number of students served in PKEEP classrooms, pursuant to the final PKEEP student roster certified through OSSE's annual enrollment audit. A hybrid or fully virtual instruction model does not impact the number of children enrolled in PKEEP¹ for the purpose of the enrollment audit. PKEEP providers seeking to implement remote learning should review [Guidance](#)

¹ Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Programs (PKEEP) are allowed to enroll students eligible for PKEEP classrooms based on the projected number of 3- and 4-year-olds included in the Fiscal Year 2021 PKEEP Award notices.

[Related to COVID-19: Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Program \(PKEEP\) 2020-21 School Year](#) to determine if the provider needs to submit a waiver request for the high-quality standards found in DCMR § 3501.1.

5. May a child enroll in a PKEEP program for in-person learning while the DC Public School (DCPS) or public charter school in which the child is enrolled is in a distance learning posture?

No. Children are not permitted to simultaneously enroll in a PKEEP program and a DC Public or public charter school, regardless of the school's operating status. To avoid potential loss of funding if a child is found, during the enrollment audit, to be enrolled in both a PKEEP program and a DCPS or public charter school, PKEEP programs should inform parents that children cannot simultaneously be enrolled in PKEEP and a DCPS or public charter school.

This does not preclude a PKEEP provider from enrolling in its non-PKEEP classrooms 3- and 4-year-old children who are enrolled in DCPS or public charter schools operating virtually, if the provider and parents wish to do so, the child's attendance in the provider's PKEEP program is paid for through non-PKEEP sources (such as parent-paid tuition or child care subsidy), and such children are not counted toward the provider's PKEEP enrollment during the annual enrollment audit. Parents whose children are enrolled in a DCPS or public charter school are responsible for ensuring their children meet the school's attendance expectations, regardless of whether or not the child is also attending a child development facility.

6. What resources are available to PKEEP providers to support children who may experience trauma and other social and emotional challenges as a result of these unprecedented times?

Child care providers have access to an array of early childhood mental health resources. The Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) has mental health supports available for providers, children and families. The Access Helpline at (888)7WE-HELP or (888) 793-4357 is the easiest way to get connected to services provided by DBH and its certified behavioral health care providers.

Additional resources from the Early Childhood Innovation Network (ECIN) include [Links to Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) information for Local and National Updates, Children and Families, Activities for At-Home Learning, Health and Wellness and Developmental Disability](#), [Resources for Families](#) and [Resources for Teachers](#).