



PREKINDERGARTEN & SURE START  
COVID-19 CONSIDERATIONS



## Prekindergarten and Sure Start COVID-19 Return to School Considerations

**Purpose:** To provide supplemental guidelines and considerations for the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) students returning to preschool programs for school year (SY) 2021-22.

### **Instructional Planning**

DoDEA preschool classes will be conducted in-person. Students will attend school full-time, with regular instruction from teachers. If local HPCON levels prevent in-person classes, students will engage in remote learning with their classroom teacher. Teachers will continue to lead investigations through synchronous sessions. Support for parents regarding in-person and remote learning experiences will be provided via the Creative Curriculum digital family resources.

### **The Preschool Classroom, Young Children and Learning**

Young children need structure, routines and procedures—they need to know they are cared for and need to be able to socialize with their friends. Young children learn best by actively engaging in their environment and with people. In addition, young children require opportunities that enable them to take initiative, explore, solve problems, investigate, create, socialize, make choices, have language-rich experiences and more, all of which occur in a child-centered classroom. Understanding the development and learning of young children, teachers must rethink daily routines and procedures, which will be crucial for students' health and safety.

### **Health and Safety**

As stated in the [DoDEA COVID-19 Operational Guidelines and Protocols for Schools](#), “DoDEA Headquarters acknowledges that these guidelines and protocols can create tradeoffs; mitigation measures effective in reducing viral spread may impact teaching and learning. Measures that are suitable for adults and older students may not be suitable for our youngest students. Therefore, each school, in coordination with their district, will have the flexibility to implement the guidelines and protocols in a manner that best meets the health and safety needs of the school staff and students while minimizing the impact on teaching and learning.” This preschool supplement will address many factors for consideration in DoDEA’s early learning environments during this challenging atmosphere.

DoDEA preschool programs will follow the health and safety guidelines set forth by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Department of Defense (DoD), as well as any locally established guidance. Physical distancing guidelines are found in DoDEA’s [DoDEA COVID-19 Operational Guidelines and Protocols for Schools](#). Because the physical environment is essential to student learning and implementation of the curriculum, teachers will need to work with their administrators to determine a cleaning schedule. A sample cleaning schedule, as recommended on the CDC website, is located here, <https://nrckids.org/files/appendix/AppendixK.pdf>. This sample cleaning schedule is for normal operations. Considerations will have to address intensified requirements due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The schedule will assist with ensuring all areas and items are considered, as well as AM and PM classes (two cohort groups) and shared spaces and resources.

### Physical Distancing Mitigation Strategies for Preschool Environments

- *Individuals in preschool classes will follow DoDEA guidance regarding cloth face coverings, allowing children to be active participants in a developmentally appropriate learning environment.*
- *Build in times for handwashing, use Mighty Minutes to engage students during transitions.*
- *Children should bring their water bottles each day.*
- *Ensure there is a back-up plan if a child forgets their cloth face covering or water bottle at home.*

The following resource is provided with specific guidelines for operationalizing a safe, appropriate preschool learning environment. All schools should ensure maximum use of this site.

**[GOOGLE SITE: PK/SS COVID-19 Considerations for Preschool](#)**

### Physical Learning Environment

The physical learning environment should be safe, comfortable and used as the instructional resource in early learning classrooms. In particular, a Creative Curriculum classroom is arranged in ten interest areas where children interact with each other and the materials. This arrangement supports physical distancing so that children are in defined spaces and not gathered in groups. Learning is hands-on; children use and share materials every day. There are no individual desks, workbooks or activity sheets, etc. DoDEA's adopted curriculum for preschool cannot be implemented without the materials and resources in the physical learning environment.

Physical Learning Environment	Purpose	Considerations/Relevant Health and Safety Guidance
<p><b>As much as possible, room arrangements should continue to use furniture &amp; shelving to establish three-sided interest areas/centers. Line of sight should be maintained throughout the classroom.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It defines spaces for children to work and play.</li> <li>• These arrangements help establish traffic patterns that provide for safe movement in and around the classroom.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to use ten interest areas to allow for fewer children and physical distancing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Use effective storage:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>open storage for materials that are accessible to children</b></li> <li>• <b>secure storage for materials you want to control</b></li> <li>• <b>personal storage for children and adults</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All materials have a place and can be easily tracked while allowing some choice.</li> <li>• Each person has a designated place for their items (coats, backpacks, individual materials).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimizes the materials that are required to be cleaned.</li> <li>• Designated spaces decrease opportunities for personal materials to mingle together.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Limit the materials in each area &amp; ensure that the resources are relevant to the current study. At the beginning of the year, less is more.</b></p> <p><b>Additional materials are easily accessible in secure storage, allowing for the rotation of resources and new learning and experiences.</b></p> <p><b>Ensure that each area and its materials are well organized and clearly labeled.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too many materials overwhelm children.</li> <li>• Children need to learn how to use and care for the materials.</li> <li>• Assists with student choice and clean-up</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fewer materials allow for cleaning to occur quickly at the end of the session.</li> <li>• Store like materials in containers so that they may be cleaned after use, according to CDC, DoD, and local guidance.</li> <li>• Create a checkout system for students to track what has been used and will need to be cleaned after use, according to CDC, DoD, and local guidance.</li> <li>• Create boxes or baggies of individual, daily use materials, e.g., crayons, pencils, markers, glue sticks, scissors — this could also have individualized materials for learning during the day or week. Materials may be stored in the individual cubbies.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Each classroom should have meeting areas (whole group, small group, individual)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For engagement in teaching and learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instead of a whole group meeting, have two-three small group meetings while other children are in centers.</li> </ul>

### Modifying Daily Schedules

Purposefully plan for adult physical distancing, with maximum student interactions. Both teacher and paraprofessional engage students in learning by working with small groups. Consider creating a schedule that implements small cohort groups throughout the day and student rotation in the interest areas to limiting movement throughout the room.

Daily Structure	Considerations
<p><b>Arrival</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Screening Procedures (follow school guidelines).</li> <li>• Cloth face covering reminders.</li> <li>• Create a staggered procedure for putting away personal items.</li> <li>• Wash hands/sanitize hands.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Whole Group</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider having two or three small groups for shorter periods — eliminate calendar activities, focus on the current study, the question of the day &amp; the read-aloud.</li> <li>• Other students would be working in the interest areas and with the paraprofessional at a small group activity.</li> <li>• Wash hands/sanitize hands.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Small Group Time</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As students work in the interest areas, minimize the movement of children from area to area, allowing students to have extended time with materials to engage deeply.</li> <li>• Use the checkout system for materials. This system will allow teachers to know what materials need to be cleaned before further use.</li> <li>• Wash hands/sanitize hands.</li> </ul>

<b>Outdoor Time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optimize and maximize outdoor time for focused learning. Have learning experiences outside - take materials outside; many learning experiences in the Creative Curriculum can occur outdoors.</li> <li>• Wash hands/sanitize hands.</li> </ul>
<b>Dismissal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a staggered procedure for students to gather their belongings.</li> <li>• Wash/sanitize hands.</li> </ul>
<b>Other Program Considerations</b>	
<b>Snack</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staggered schedule; cloth face coverings are removed while eating.</li> <li>• Snack is part of the morning small group/interest area time (rotational to allow for physical distancing).</li> <li>• Cooking will have to be minimized to individual assembly with food/materials prepared for each child, so that there is no sharing of food, utensils, etc.</li> <li>• Afternoon snacks could be served outside, weather permitting, or part of the afternoon small groups (rotational basis).</li> </ul>
<b>Family-Style Dining</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Given very low risk of transmission from food, food packaging, surfaces and shared objects, there is no need to limit food service operations to single use items and packaged meals.</li> <li>• Maximize physical distance as much as possible. When possible, consider using additional spaces for mealtime seating, including eating meals and snacks outdoors or in well-ventilated spaces whenever possible.</li> <li>• Consider a staggered schedule.</li> <li>• Wash hands with soap and water before and after family style meals.</li> <li>• Clean frequently touched surfaces. Surfaces that come in contact with food should be washed and sanitized before and after meals.</li> </ul> <p><a href="https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/child-care-guidance.html">https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/child-care-guidance.html</a></p>
<b>Tooth brushing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Toothbrushing is an important component for many ECE programs. Therefore, Sure Start programs should follow CDC guidance to implement toothbrushing in the classroom.</li> </ul> <p><a href="https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/child-care-guidance.html">https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/child-care-guidance.html</a></p>
<b>Rest Time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children do not wear cloth face coverings during rest time. Rest mats/cots should be spaced for physical distancing. If the room size and arrangement do not allow for adequate spacing, then mats/cots should be placed in a head-to-foot arrangement.</li> </ul>
<b>Parent Volunteers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DoDEA guidelines limit visitors’ access to the schools; therefore, the parent volunteer requirement may need to be modified.</li> <li>• In coordination with the school administrator, develop plans or procedures for Sure Start parents and/or guardians to participate in teaching and learning experiences in the classroom while maintaining prevention strategies.</li> <li>• When DoDEA schools return to normal operations, in-class volunteer hours will be required and prorated based on the remaining time in the school year.</li> </ul>

	<p>In situations where parents are unable to participate in classroom volunteer hours consider the ideas below to assist with the Parent Education Component:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider giving family assignments that parents can complete with their child at home, such as the learning experiences that support the current Creative Curriculum Study. Each weekly overview has ideas for family partnerships; there are also family resources for sharing in My Teaching Strategies.</li> <li>• Create family learning logs (the child draws a picture of experiences and the parent writes what the child says about the experience) — teacher verifies and logs hours.</li> </ul>
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### Creating Effective and Essential Partnerships in the Classroom

Rethink roles and responsibilities throughout the day to maximize the learning opportunities provided to students.

- Open communication is vital. Discuss weekly and daily plans, goals and priorities in a timely manner.
- Determine each adult’s role for active engagement with students during the daily learning experiences (use strengths).
- Discuss observing and documenting student learning (who, when, how, focus objectives and general observation notes).
- Reflect on the day/week together as an iterative process to make improvements.

### Implementing the Creative Curriculum and Daily Resources

<b>Curricular Considerations</b>	
<b>Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During planning, review learning experiences to determine which will not be possible due to health and safety requirements, e.g., study trips, special visitors, curricular cooking. How could learning experiences happen at home in partnership with families?</li> <li>• Other ideas — Google Meet with special visitors, virtual study trips or families create the recipe at home.</li> </ul>
<b>Interest Areas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine what materials will be used in the interest areas during the week (limit materials, checkout system, use outdoors, etc.).</li> <li>• Determine when and how each child will engage in the interest areas to include free choice.</li> </ul>
<b>Learning Experiences: Large Group, Choice Time, Read-Aloud and Small Group (one extended time block)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combine large, small group, and choice times, creating simultaneous learning experiences.</li> <li>• Teacher/paraprofessional meets with two or three small cohort groups for large group time activities and the read-aloud — much of the learning in preschool is through oral language development, so the reader may choose to remove their cloth face covering for reading.</li> <li>• Teacher/paraprofessional conducts the small group learning experiences.</li> <li>• Some children are working independently in centers.</li> </ul>
<b>Mighty Minutes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use Mighty Minutes during transitions, hand washing, dismissal, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Large Group Round-Up</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If feasible, use the small group structure or conduct round-up outdoors at the end of the day.</li> </ul>

## Maximizing Learning Opportunities

### Checkout System:

- Individual water play containers
- Individual sensory bins
- Art bins (painting, collage, stamping, etc.)
- Discovery bins
- Puzzles
- Dramatic play items (dolls, dishes, food)
- Block play items
- Dollhouse furniture & people
- Book boxes with retelling materials
- Bins that support the current study
- Theme bins (market, office, doctor, vet, etc)
- And so much more!

### Options for Soft Materials:

- Students create their own dress-up clothes, hats, accessories from paper
- Students create puppets from paper bags or stick puppets

### Family Partnerships:

- Share family facing resources from the Creative Curriculum online platform
- Guide families in creating learning experiences at home that are not possible in school during the COVID-19 pandemic

## DoDEA Headquarters: Continuity of Learning for Preschool

### Essential Learning

- The 38 Objectives for Development and Learning focus on the whole child and are critical to all developmental areas and contents. Each student's development is addressed regarding their progress on the continuum. These objectives can continue to be addressed in the remote environment with the adopted instructional resources. The curricular resources include learning experiences that address a primary objective, as well as secondary objectives.

### Guidelines for Relevant Policies

- DoDEA Regulation 1307.02, Home Visits: A memorandum regarding the implementation of home visits during SY 2021-22 was distributed on April 29, 2021, in the Weekly Packet.
- DoDEA Regulation 1307.01, Sure Start Program: Program requirements are addressed in this supplement.

### Online assessment resources

- Assessment in the preschool programs will continue as usual and use My Teaching Strategies® Online Assessment and Portfolio System to document learning.
- The Creative Curriculum for Preschool has embedded assessments that are used during teaching and learning.

### Remote Teaching Resources and Digital Tools

- My Teaching Strategies with Digital Curriculum and Family Resources, <https://my.teachingstrategies.com/>. Secure login with username and password.
- Google Apps for Education: Google Classroom can be used as a repository for resources shared with parents, Google Meet for synchronous sessions, and any additional approved Google app that enhances engagement and learning.
- [Schoolology](#): Pre-K/Sure Start Group — join with code MNPRS-3RVJW.
- The Pre-K/Sure Start Schoolology Group has a folder with short videos on using My Teaching Strategies to implement remote learning.