

## **Guidance on Universal PreK and Early Childhood Special Education During a Novel Coronavirus Outbreak**

### **Background**

Pursuant to 20 V.S.A. §8, §9, §11, Governor Phil Scott has issued a [directive](#) regarding the Closure Period of PreK through 12 schools and state regulated child care programs in the State of Vermont from March 18, 2020 through April 6, 2020. He has further ordered that child care services be provided by schools, and state regulated child care programs are asked to provide care to, at a minimum, their own enrollees who are children of Essential Persons. Please review [Supporting the Child Care Needs of Essential Persons During a Novel Coronavirus Outbreak Guidance to Schools and Child Care Programs](#) for additional clarification.

The Agency of Education, Agency of Human Services and Department of Health recognize that additional details may be necessary in some areas and will share further information as clarification becomes available and the situation evolves.

**The new directive\* from Governor Scott on school and childcare closure directly affects the implementation of Universal PreK, Early Childhood Special Education and Part C Early Intervention service delivery.**

\*The March 17, 2020 directive ordered state regulated child care programs be closed no later than Wednesday, March 18, 2020 through April 6, 2020. This is considered the closure period.

### **Closure of Schools and regulated Child Care Programs Effective March 18, 2020 through April 6, 2020**

- During this period of school closure ordered by the Governor, students are not to report to school or their regulated child care program.
- School employees are directed to report to work. School staff members may be required to report to work or to work remotely, depending on the needs of the district and the guidance of public health officials.
- During this period of school closure, regular educational services (PreK -12) are not to continue, and students are not expected to make educational progress.
- Other services, such as child care for essential public safety and health care workers, will be supported by the school district staff and regulated child care programs choosing to remain open to serve identified essential services families.

The following guidance addresses how school district and child care closure affects Universal PreK funding and Early Childhood Special Education.

### **Universal Prekindergarten Education Act 166 Funding**

Due to the COVID-19 crisis and the Governor's closure of schools and childcare programs, this health emergency is no fault of the school district, private PreK program or family. Families should continue to be eligible for publicly funded UPK tuition dollars for their children who are

enrolled (regardless of actual daily attendance) in a private PreK program to off-set their tuition costs.

Therefore, status quo is maintained for publicly funded UPK under Act 166 and school districts are to maintain the payment structure that has been established in the school district/private PreK partnership agreement/contract.

**Due to the orderly closure of schools and child care programs as of March 18, 2020, will a private PreK education program receive publicly funded UPK dollars from partnering school districts to offset family costs if the private PreK education program remains open and elects to provide care to children of Essential Persons?**

Yes, the private/and or public PreK education programs will continue to receive publicly funded UPK dollars to offset family tuition costs during this emergency closure. School districts are to maintain the payment structure that has been established in the school district/private PreK partnership agreement/contract.

**Due to the orderly closure of schools and child care programs as of March 18, 2020, will a private PreK education program receive publicly funded UPK tuition dollars from partner school districts to offset family costs if the private PreK closes during the closure period?**

Yes, school district and child care closure due to this health emergency is no fault of the school district, private PreK program or family. Families should continue to receive publicly funded UPK tuition dollars for their child enrolled in a private PreK education to off-set their tuition costs. School districts are to maintain the payment structure that has been established in the school district/private PreK partnership agreement/contract.

## **Early Childhood Special Education Service Delivery**

### **During school district and child care closure period:**

- As schools are closed and there are no academic or extracurricular services offered to general education students, there are no services required for students with disabilities. This means that all PreK students on Individual Education Plans (IEP) will not receive itinerant services from school district early childhood special educator and/or related service personnel.
- During the closure period, a district may supply parents and students with supplemental enrichment materials to prevent learning loss and to support parents in keeping students engaged. However, any such materials must be made accessible for students with disabilities (e.g., the district must not utilize online-only learning if all students do not have internet connections, translated materials must be provided, accommodations should be made for students who are vision or hearing impaired). These enrichment materials should remain optional for parents to use. The district should not assess students or input grades based on the optional materials.

- Please note that for exceptional circumstances during this period of closure, an LEA, at its discretion, may support and provide necessary special education and/or related services to a child on an IEP if that child is the child of a parent who is considered an Essential Person under the Governor’s directive.

Please visit [Free Appropriate Public Education for Students with Disabilities During School Closure Called for in Governor Scott’s Order](#) for more on the provision of FAPE during school closure.

The Office of Special Education Programs has provided guidance to states on COVID-19. You can locate that guidance here [Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak](#).

## Technical Assistance and Resources

Finally, your AOE Early Education Team is working on prekindergarten education and early childhood special education online resources for school districts/partners and families to support each and every child’s development during this health crisis. We will be rolling this out via the UPK Café and AOE listservs. We ask that you push out these resources to your partner programs for families, in case they are not on the UPK listserv.

Listed below are websites containing further information on COVID-19 in relationship to early education, childcare and early intervention/special education.

- Vermont Agency of Human Services, Child Development Division: [Children’s Integrated Services/Early Intervention Part C State Guidance](#)
- [Vermont Department of Health COVID-19 Website](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)
  - Centers for Disease Control: [Guidance for Schools and Childcare Programs](#)
  - Centers for Disease Control: [Community Mitigation Strategies](#)
  - Centers for Disease Control: [Keep Your Workplace, School and Home Safe](#)
- Office of Special Education Programs: [Q & A on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak](#)
- National Institute for Early Education Research: [Resources for Early Childhood Policymakers and Stakeholders on Preventing and Preparing for Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)