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Keys to Starting a Successful School Age Program

..... Produced by *The North Carolina CCR&R School Age Initiative*

Successful school age care is important for North Carolina to thrive. Afterschool and summer camp programs provide students with a safe avenue to learn, play, and socially develop outside of traditional school hours. Additionally, school age programs are a critical infrastructure resource in times of emergency situations, natural disasters, and public health and safety concerns. Data from the National Afterschool Alliance highlights that over 200,000 North Carolina students attended some form of out-of-school care in 2019; however, the organization reports a need for an additional 200,000 slots across the state (NAA, *This is Afterschool in North Carolina*, 2020).

By starting or expanding licensed school age care during the Covid-19 pandemic, you are providing a fundamental service to the overall function and operation of our great state. This guide will help you reflect on seven elements of school age care that are key for your program's success. Take time to look over these seven points as you fine-tune your school age program's direction.

1

Contact Your Licensing Consultant: Stay Legal

Contacting you local Division of Child Care and Early Education (DCDEE) Licensing Consultant is the first step to start a school age program. Your consultant is dedicated to helping you navigate the rules and regulations associated with school age care. These professionals will connect you to Pre-Licensing workshops, guide you through paperwork, assess you program's environment and help answer all questions you might have about operating legally and effectively. Operating as a licensed facility provides reassurance to your community and families that you are committed to offering a safe, healthy, nurturing environment that meets state standards. It also ensures that you remain in compliance with state laws. Guidelines for operating as a legally licensed school age care program in North Carolina can be referenced in Chapter 09 .2501 and 09 .2502 of the DCDEE Child Care Rules. To stay informed about any changes related to school age rules and regulations sign up for the DCDEE newsletter at www.ncchildcare.ncdhhs.gov.



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**
Division of Child Development
and Early Education

CCR&R Council
North Carolina Child Care Resource & Referral Council

Southwestern
**CHILD DEVELOPMENT
COMMISSION**

2

Stay Connected With Subsidy

School age care can be costly. Supporting your licensed program with subsidy reimbursements is a great way to help alleviate some of the costs associated with operating school age care. It also provides more families with the opportunity to access the quality care you provide. When starting a new school age program, it is important to contact your Local Purchasing Agency (LPA) or Department of Social Services (DSS) to enroll in the Subsidized Child Care Program. If you are expanding your program to serve school age children, it is also important to contact your LPA and Regional Referral Call Center about your decision and make the necessary changes in your NC FAST provider portal with school age services and rates. For more information about North Carolina's Subsidized Child Care Assistance Program visit the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Service's website at www.ncchildcare.ncdhhs.gov.

3

Reflect On Your Materials

School age care must be equipped with the right types of materials to stimulate learning and help regulate behaviors. For virtual learning and school day instructions, make sure that students have suitable furniture for sitting, listening, and working on their computer.

Students need to have access to school supplies like paper, pencils, and other materials for school learning. If your site does not supply these materials, make sure that students have easy access to the school supplies they bring from home.

School age programs must also provide students with activity materials for play and expanded learning. Materials like blocks and construction supplies, dramatic play materials, art supplies, and board games need to be provided to students throughout the school age day. Make sure to set your program's school age schedule up in a way to allow time for these materials and ample open-ended play. For more information about proper school age materials refer to the NC School Age Initiative's Materials Guide located on the NC CCR&R Council's website at www.childcarerrnc.org.

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How Is Your Internet?

If your school age program is providing care for virtual learners, your site needs access to a quality internet connection. Regular business internet is great when one or two staff members are using the internet; however, the circumstances are different when ten students are streaming classroom instruction. Take time to look at the internet plan your program uses and make sure that it can support the needs of your students. One option to increase your internet connection is to have your service provider install an extra internet hub to support your program. Routing this hub into your school age classroom will make access to broadband speeds more readily available. Your program can also set up internet boosters near school age classrooms to increase the range of Wi-Fi connection throughout the building. Check with your local service provider and see what options are available to you.



To stay up-to-date on DCDEE rules and regulations concerning school age care, sign up for update emails at www.ncchildcare.ncdhhs.gov/Whats-New

5

Think About Your Schedule

Keeping students on a set schedule and routine is essential for a smooth program day. Strong schedules help students stay focused on the task at hand and help reduce challenging behaviors and emotional breakdowns. Effective schedules also offer students with a developmentally appropriate mix of academic learning and social play.

For programs providing virtual learning school age care, alternating academic activities like virtual learning time or homework time with breaks to play and rest is highly recommended. Make an effort to provide students with larger segments of time to explore learning materials, participate in small group play activities, and socialize with peers. For many programs, the afternoon is a great time to schedule activities like gross motor play and outdoor time. Outdoor time can be a great opportunity to allow students to listen to music, do a science experiment, or read a book. Be creative with your schedule, provide time for learning breaks, and make sure that students have ample time to transition between activities and still remain safe and engaged.



6

Health and Safety

When dealing with the effects of Covid-19 and other communicable diseases, you must keep the safety of your students in the forefront of all your program's decisions. Make sure that your program stays in line with the health and safety regulations set out by the DCDEE and Center for Disease Control. Care routines like proper hand washing, table sanitation, classroom sterilization, and social distancing are a must to ensure that teachers and students remain healthy throughout the program day. Work with group leaders to set up a sanitation routine and allow students extra time to transition between activities and use the restroom. For more information about the DCDEE's guidance on health and safety mandates, and to access the NCDHHS ChildCareStrongNC Public Safety Toolkit, visit the link at www.ncchildcare.ncdhhs.gov.



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BSAC, Training, and Support

When opening a school age classroom, all school age staff must complete the Basic School Age Care (BSAC) course. The state provides this course through approved BSAC trainers and Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies. This training covers a wide range of topics from developmentally appropriate activities and behavior management to DCDEE rules and regulations and health and nutrition. Refer to DCDEE Rule 09 .2510 for timelines on completing BSAC training.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, it is also important to remember that you're not alone. Your local and regional CCR&R agencies are here to provide school age professionals of all levels with technical assistance and training support. School age technical assistance can help your program navigate issues like room arrangement, scheduling, lesson plan development, and challenging behaviors. This is an essential tool for teachers shifting to full day school age care from traditional afterschool and preschool education.

For more information about how to access CCR&R support visit the NC CCR&R Council website at www.childcarerrnc.org or contact Jonathan Williams, Statewide School Age Program Coordinator at williams.jon@swcdcinc.org.



For more information about starting a school age program or requesting technical assistance or training contact:

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