

# School-based PreK, Kindergarten, and the Early Grades: Pandemic-related Planning

## Peer-to-Peer Conversations with State Education Agencies (SEAs) and School Districts

Summary as of June 19, 2020

The National P-3 Center (NP-3C) periodically hosts *Peer-to-Peer Convenings*, in-depth and highly interactive sessions, that bring together people engaged in similar work to collectively strategize about thorny challenges. NP-3C's mission recognizes that the PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> grade years are unique and require differentiated attention from upper elementary, middle, and high school grades.

As states and school districts begin to navigate plans for fall 2020 and beyond, NP-3C is hosting a series of conversations with education decisionmakers at state and school district levels. We do not have the answers to what are the “best” or safest options for the fall, but we believe better and smarter ideas emerge when colleagues have the space for open discussion and deliberation. To this end, we will summarize our various conversations, and share with the field the ideas and strategies discussed.

Our conversations began with a focus on the transition to Kindergarten, and quickly expanded to include issues that also affect school-based PreK and the primary grades (K-3). This document covers the following topics related to the current context (to facilitate reading, each topic has a different color of header):

- Kindergarten Registration/Enrollment for fall 2020
- Transition to Kindergarten
- Kindergarten Entry Assessments (KEA)
- School Year 2020-21 Re-opening Scenarios for PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Grade
- Effective On-Line/At-Home “School” for PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Grade

This document provides a summary of conversations held to date. We will continue to update/revise this document as we host additional conversations.

## Kindergarten Registration/Enrollment for Fall 2020

Issues to Consider	Trickle Down Issues	Guidance, Solutions, and Policies that Matter
Usual places and spaces that promote PreK and Kindergarten registration (e.g., libraries, community centers; churches, early learning centers) are closed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Late registrations may make the fall start rockier for school districts and could affect fall count dates.</li> <li>Child Find screenings typically held in the spring have been postponed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>States that have universal PreK have better data about, and access to, Kindergarten-eligible children.</li> <li>Some districts are hosting drive-through and on-line registration processes.</li> <li>Issue guidance on how to continue Child Find screenings (see examples from <a href="#">Connecticut</a> and <a href="#">Maine</a>).</li> </ul>
“Pandemic Red-shirting” – some families are considering holding out children from Kindergarten, given the uncertainty/lack of predictability of school schedules in the fall.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child care capacity – families who choose to red-shirt may still require full-day, full-week care. Some families will be able to accommodate this; others will not (equity issues). Will the child care sector be viable enough to enroll more 5-year-olds?</li> <li>Lower Kindergarten enrollment in the fall could have financial implications on school district funding for 2020-2021.</li> <li>It is difficult for districts to solidify plans for physical distancing without knowing how big cohorts will be (chicken-egg conundrum).</li> <li>Red-shirting in fall 2020 could make the fall 2021 Kindergarten cohort bigger and more age diverse.</li> <li>Yet, for some, lower enrollments may make physical distancing/adequate classroom space less of a problem.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>States with mandatory Kindergarten attendance laws have waiver processes in place that may discourage families from red-shirting.</li> <li>Issue public encouragement (through media, social media, and agency communications) for families to enroll children in Kindergarten.</li> <li>Issue explicit, detailed information about how schools will meet CDC healthy/safety guidance, while also providing a quality learning environment, to allay families’ concerns.</li> <li>Survey families about attendance preferences and the potential impact different scenarios would have on their work/family arrangements.</li> </ul>

## Kindergarten Registration/Enrollment for Fall 2020

Issues to Consider	Trickle Down Issues	Guidance, Solutions, and Policies that Matter
<p>In some places, child care closures are actually creating <i>increased</i> registration/enrollment for district-based PreK.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● School districts may not have enough slots to accommodate larger-than-usual PreK enrollment.</li> <li>● Where slots are technically available, higher enrollments may make physical distancing/adequate classroom space more of a problem.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● State- and federally-funded district-based PreK slots may need a special allocation process this year, to ensure slots are assigned where demand (and capacity) are greatest.</li> </ul>

## Transition to Kindergarten

Issues to Consider	Trickle Down Issues	Guidance, Solutions, and Policies that Matter
Usual spring transition events were canceled. The lack of transition activities altogether may cause extra challenges in the fall.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connections between pre-school and Kindergarten teachers were disrupted.</li> <li>• Connections between teachers and families were disrupted.</li> <li>• Children at all grade levels may benefit from repeating portions of the learning experiences/curriculum that were missed in the spring.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replicate traditional transition events as virtual experiences (e.g., virtual classroom/elementary school tours; on-line meet-and-greets with Kindergarten teacher).</li> <li>• As practical, implement summer programs for entering Kindergarteners.</li> <li>• Explore options for staggered or delayed starting schedules in the fall, creating time and opportunity for Kindergarteners to ease into the school year.</li> <li>• Provide guidance on how to enhance existing transition models.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for PreK and K teachers and others (e.g., curriculum specialists) to talk and plan <i>together</i> about the range of re-entry options for fall 2020.</li> <li>• Discuss the pros and cons of looping models for teachers.</li> <li>• Conduct Kindergarten assessments in 1:1 appointments that meet health/safety guidelines.</li> </ul>
Many entering Kindergarteners will not have attended PreK in the school district.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elementary schools and Kindergarten teachers have not yet developed relationships with the children and their families.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host virtual meetings that bring together community-based preschool/child care/PreK/Head Start teachers and K teachers to share perspectives and experiences.</li> <li>• Connect with other community-based supports (e.g., local early childhood councils; county mental health departments) to better</li> </ul>

## Transition to Kindergarten

Issues to Consider	Trickle Down Issues	Guidance, Solutions, and Policies that Matter
		<p>understand the variety of supports that increased during the spring and summer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produce and widely disseminate YouTube videos, podcasts, and other social media tools that provide guidance to families. See example from <a href="#">Denver Public Schools</a>.</li> </ul>
<p>Kindergarten teachers will need to adapt and implement new strategies for acclimating children in the fall.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers are experiencing professional development fatigue. On-line learning for adults can be exhausting, just as it is for children.</li> <li>• Relationship-building (with both children and their families) has taken on even greater importance.</li> <li>• Screening/observation/assessment of children has also taken on greater importance, so teachers can have a clearer understanding of what skills and behaviors children are entering with.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delay the start of the school year, and use the added time to: [a] engage teachers in professional learning; and [b] connect with students and families.</li> </ul>

## Kindergarten Entry Assessments (KEA)

Issues to Consider	Trickle Down Issues	Guidance, Solutions, and Policies that Matter
Schools are likely to be overwhelmed with re-entry plans and waiving KEA requirements would lessen the burden on teachers and students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools and teachers are concerned about not knowing where students are in their learning and development, especially in the social-emotional domain.</li> <li>Because quarantine may be re-instated with a second wave of COVID-19, it is important to make connections immediately upon re-entry. Schools will need to find the balance between assessing children immediately to better understand their skills/behaviors and focusing on building family/child connections.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider identifying a limited number of “power indicators” to assess, instead of the full set.</li> <li>Identify processes and items that best capture the skills students already possess, rather than what has been lost (strengths-based).</li> <li>Waive KEA administration for fall 2020 altogether (<a href="#">Oregon</a> has already done this).</li> </ul>
If fall 2020 ends up being fully/partially virtual, and KEA requirements are not waived, assessments may need to be administered virtually and/or by families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need to consult with vendors about administration and score validity when completed by families.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider using tools designed to be family-friendly (e.g., Ages and Stages Questionnaire).</li> <li>Where vendor-based solutions are not possible, design own screening/assessment items that can be used to inform Kindergarten teaching practices and curriculum decisions.</li> <li>Strive to incorporate KEAs into overall K-12 assessment system, so districts do not have separate guidance on KEAs and other assessments administered in K-2 (e.g., literacy assessments).</li> </ul>

## Re-Opening Scenarios for PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Grades

Issues to Consider	Trickle Down Issues	Guidance, Solutions, and Policies that Matter
For K-12, in general, there are multiple authorities issuing “guidance” (e.g., CDC; SEAs; state/local departments of public health) and the ever-changing landscape makes it difficult to finalize decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Families are waiting to enroll students until they know what district plans are; districts need to know enrollment numbers before they can finalize physical distancing plans (chicken-egg).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication matters more than ever!</li> <li>Update and revise district and school websites so they are easier to navigate and provide relevant, timely information.</li> <li>Explore new modes of communicating with families (e.g., text messaging; social media) to keep them updated of changes to schedules/plans.</li> </ul>
For district-based PreK, there is not only the general K-12 guidance to follow, but also (often) guidance provided by state-funded PreK, Head Start, and/or child care.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is confusing, if not competing, guidance which leads to uncertainty about what is mandatory and what is recommended. Often, decisions are based on feasibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner with non-district early learning programs (e.g., Head Start, child care) to share/discuss regulations and guidance, then devise shared strategies.</li> </ul>
The uncertainty of a second wave of COVID-19 and the impact it could have on sub-populations (e.g., only one elementary school, not all, in a district may be forced to close; or one child from a classroom may elect not to return in-person).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need to have contingency plans –for both regular, intermittent closures and for longer-term closures – that can be enacted school-by-school.</li> <li>Need to have strategies that can be adopted for a small number of students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication matters more than ever!</li> <li>Update and revise district and school websites so they are easier to navigate and provide relevant, timely information.</li> <li>Explore new modes of communicating with families (e.g., text messaging; social media) to keep them updated of changes to schedules/plans.</li> <li>Install cameras and microphones in classrooms so individual students who are unable/unwilling to attend in-person has access to classroom.</li> </ul>

## Re-Opening Scenarios for PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Grades

Issues to Consider	Trickle Down Issues	Guidance, Solutions, and Policies that Matter
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design “drop-and-dash” strategies where curriculum and other materials can be dropped at families’ homes.</li> </ul>
<p>Some of the CDC health/safety requirements will not permit developmentally appropriate environments and interactions for young children. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students not being able to read teachers’ and peers’ facial cues because of masks.</li> <li>Individual children sitting in taped-off squares, playing only with their own toys goes against the interactive, social aspects of early learning and development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Families are waiting to enroll students until they know what district plans are. Nationally, most family surveys suggest families want their young children back in classrooms in-person, full-time. What are the developmental trade-offs that will be made? How will this influence children’s learning (and ultimate performance on assessments)?</li> <li>Teachers and staff may have their own health concerns that counter-balance families’ needs/desires.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For PreK and K, K-12 can look to/engage with child care sector and the regulations they are issuing/lessons they are learning.</li> <li>Focus more on the issues that matter most to young children’s learning: sturdy relationships and experiential engagement. Focus less on replicating the “old normal” of classroom learning.</li> </ul>
<p>If school districts open with staggered schedules (e.g., smaller groups that attend part-time), teachers will be challenged to simultaneously provide instruction in-person and virtually.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers are experiencing professional development fatigue. On-line learning for adults can be exhausting, just as it is for children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage teacher teams that maximize each individual’s strengths (e.g., some teachers have been more successful in on-line environment; empower them to take lead on virtual offerings).</li> </ul>
<p>Bus transportation that adheres to physical distancing guidelines may not be financially feasible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rural districts that cover large amounts of square mileage may be more affected by the cost of transportation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survey families to ask about transportation needs and scenarios (e.g., “if your child was picked up X days/week, would that work for you?”).</li> </ul>



**Re-Opening Scenarios for PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Grades**

<b>Issues to Consider</b>	<b>Trickle Down Issues</b>	<b>Guidance, Solutions, and Policies that Matter</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bus drivers will face all-new dilemmas (e.g., implementing health screenings and needing to have strategies for when a child has a fever/appears sick and there is no family member or other responsible adult available).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure explicit communication with families about school transportation procedures.</li> </ul>

## Effective On-Line “School” for PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Grade

Issues to Consider	Trickle Down Issues	Guidance, Solutions, and Policies that Matter
In the fall, many families will be back-to-work, and the assumption that a responsible adult will be home is less certain.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possibility of further exacerbating inequities in both learning opportunities and subsequent student learning.</li> <li>• Adults who were <i>not</i> part of the spring at-home learning experience (e.g., babysitters, grandparents, friends) may now be the ones responsible for supporting at-home learning activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create more robust partnerships between schools and community child care/early learning/after school programs to develop plans to support families who have young children.</li> </ul>
Teachers need to adapt, learn, experiment, and implement new strategies for improving on-line teaching and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers are experiencing professional development fatigue. On-line learning for adults can be exhausting, just as it is for children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every corner of education needs solutions to address on-line learning fatigue (for adults and children)!</li> <li>• Survey, or otherwise engage with, families to understand what worked and did not work for them. Share this information with teachers.</li> <li>• Create time and space for teachers to share the lessons they have learned and the strategies that work best.</li> <li>• Some districts moving to 4-day instructional week, with 5<sup>th</sup> day dedicated to teacher professional learning and connecting with families.</li> </ul>
Young children’s learning, not to mention fundamental health/safety, requires the presence and active engagement of adults.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scenarios that include full or partial time in on-line or at-home learning are not viable, much less desirable, for many families.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create, in collaboration with families, intentional guidance for how schools and teachers can support family engagement.</li> <li>• Create guidance that focuses on the strengths, not the deficits, of extra time spent</li> </ul>

## Effective On-Line “School” for PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Grade

Issues to Consider	Trickle Down Issues	Guidance, Solutions, and Policies that Matter
		<p>at home with families and other responsible adults.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create guidance that coaches families on creating engaging learning environments that reflect their home, not trying to replicate the school classroom.</li> <li>• Consistency in technology/lesson platforms is essential, so families are not needing to continually learn new ones.</li> <li>• Strive to provide both synchronous and asynchronous opportunities every week. Asynchronous provides flexibility for families, and synchronous is important for building/maintaining relationships with teacher and peers.</li> </ul>
<p>Access to technology remains an issue in many communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In families with multiple children of different ages, young children often are the last to gain access when families have only one (or too few) devices.</li> <li>• Lack of or inconsistent internet access causes barriers for families to access on-line learning content and synchronous events with teachers and/or peers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide hard copy curriculum materials to families at no cost.</li> <li>• Ensure 1:1 technology devices for all children.</li> <li>• Engage with community partners in efforts to expand broadband access and provide hot spots where necessary.</li> <li>• Improve and streamline district/school communication strategies, so accessing/finding information is easy and predictable.</li> </ul>