

# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

### STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

DATE: November 23, 2020

TO: Superintendents of Schools, Special Education Directors< Providers of Child Care Services

FROM: Beth Bye, Commissioner, Office of Early Childhood  
Dr. Miguel A. Cardona, Commissioner, State Department of Education

RE: Coronavirus Memo # 32  
Children who Attend Child Care Programs and Receive Support Services

This joint memo is issued by the Commissioners of the Office of Early Childhood and the State Department of Education to respond to the need to coordinate services for children who attend child care programs and receive support services. Coordination of these services during the COVID-19 pandemic is imperative to ensure children are receiving the support they need, and proper implementation during this unique time is sometimes complex. Open, two-way communication and collaboration are key when managing each organizations' responsibilities and obligations in order to meet the needs of children and their families.

#### **What types of supplemental services might children who attend child care receive?**

- **Special Education Services:** A child who attends a child care program may have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) implemented by the school district. The specialized instruction and related services provided as a result of the IEP might be offered at a district location, at the child care program by school district personnel, or might be offered remotely due to the disruptions caused by COVID-19.
- **Birth to Three Services:** A child who attends a child care program may have an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) and receive Birth to Three supports. These supports are provided to address the outcomes that the family has determined to be their priorities for their child. The focus of intervention is to coach the caregiver(s) who work with the child in order to support the child's learning and development as well as address the family's priorities.
- **Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP):** A child who attends a child care program may be referred to the ECCP program for a child level intervention. In partnership with the child care program and the child's family, the ECCP Consultant co-creates an individualized action plan designed to support the child's social emotional development. The ECCP Consultant works directly with the caregivers/teachers with the goal of building their capacity to implement the strategies outlined on the action plan. The ECCP also provides classroom and center level consultation which aims to support caregivers in addressing the social emotional needs within their classroom or program. The focus of ECCP services is to provide consultation which supports the caregivers/teachers and helps them build their capacity to meet the social emotional and/or behavioral needs of young children. ECCP is currently providing all services

virtually, and continues to evaluate when a return to standard ECCP services will be possible. For more information, visit ECCP's website at: [www.eccpct.com](http://www.eccpct.com).

### **Why are these important?**

Young children may require support services from school district personnel or other professionals in order to be able to access and benefit from their child care program. Children identified under the IDEA require specialized instruction and related services to access their education. For other children, support with social and emotional learning is needed for them to be able to fully participate and benefit from their early childhood experience.

These types of services are important for young children. Children's current needs may be even greater due to the stressors that families and programs are facing due to the pandemic. In addition to prioritizing the health and safety considerations that are necessary due to the pandemic, careful planning, coordination, and flexibility are important to ensure that children and families can access the services they need to be successful.

### **How are these support services commonly provided?**

Three common scenarios for children requiring special education support are:

- **Shared placements** between a school district and a community-based center. Shared placements are when children receive services from more than one organization in order to meet their needs related to early care and/or education. Shared placements are common for children who have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and need child care.
- **Itinerant services** involve a professional from a different organization traveling to a child care program to provide services. A special education teacher, a speech therapist, or another professional might travel to a child care program to work directly with a child, to observe a child and/or to provide consultative services to their teacher.
- **Remote services** allow professionals from outside of the child care program to connect with children and/or child care staff while remaining physically distant during COVID-19. These services typically involve video conferencing.

### **How might support services be impacted by COVID-19?**

- Child care programs may have reduced capacity as a result of COVID-19. Despite this reduced capacity, child care programs should continue to provide an inclusive early learning environment. Programs should not set policies that exclude children with special needs, and are reminded of the important protections of non-discrimination laws. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act prohibits discrimination against a person with disabilities. Programs are obligated to make reasonable accommodations for children with disabilities.
- External providers and child care staff will have to work closely together to strategize and create and/or adjust plans related to cohorting and safety.
- When school districts shift to remote or hybrid models, support services might be offered remotely. This may impact children's interest in participating in services and may present challenges for child care staff supporting children to access these services. Also, families might be concerned about children's access to support services and participation in early learning opportunities. Communication with families is extremely important in planning solutions that will benefit children.

## **What can we do to make sure children and families are getting the services and supports they need?**

Be Proactive: Partner and Plan!

Partnering with families is a key first step. Engage families and all partners to create a plan for meeting each child's needs in a manner that works for their family. Review the plans and any relevant data frequently to see if the current plan is working for children, families, external support providers, and child care staff. In these unusual times, it will take extra work and flexibility to come up with solutions and address potential barriers.

## **Where can families find information and/or support regarding their child with special needs?**

- For information regarding special education services visit the Connecticut Department of Education [website](#).
- For information about Birth to Three services visit the Office of Early Childhood's [Birth to Three website](#).
- For information on early childhood mental health consultation, visit the [Early Childhood Consultation Partnership website](#).
- [Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center, Inc. \(CPAC\)](#) is a statewide nonprofit organization that offers information and support to families of children with any disability or chronic illness, age birth through 26. The Center is committed to the idea that parents can be the most effective advocates for their children, given the confidence that knowledge and understanding of special education law and its procedures can bring.

## **What are some strategies that school districts, early intervention, behavior and mental health supports and child care programs might consider when coordinating around shared placements?**

Possible strategies to coordinate shared placements may include:

- School districts provide specialized instruction and related services within community-based programs instead of having a child attend multiple programs;
- Child care programs and itinerant staff visit a child care program and agree to the precautions that are necessary to keep everyone safe. For example, itinerant staff follow the same screening procedures that child care staff undergo, wear masks and see a child in a separate space or room;
- External providers assign the same itinerant staff to programs or classrooms to restrict mixing between groups;
- The child care provides a separate space for specialized instruction and related services, disinfects between children and/or adults using this space, and has a plan for safely moving to that space;
- Limit interaction or exposure to other children or staff by carefully planning arrival times and procedures;
- Services from external providers are planned so that the total number of adults and children is as low as possible. This includes adults who are a consistent part of the cohort (e.g., teachers, paraprofessionals) and adults entering each group periodically (e.g., administrators, related service providers);
- Distance learning opportunities, consultations, or coaching sessions are coordinated with the child care program. This can include adjusting the timing of sessions;

- Develop a plan for each anticipated scenario in advance. This might include plans for child care or school closures that require an adjustment to the ways in which the support services are provided;
- School districts or child care programs may consider cohorting students that have common shared placements or who require support services; and
- School districts and child care providers may work together to offer child care at the same school where the child receives specialized instruction and related services.

Regardless of the strategy, communication between families, child care programs, and support staff from other organizations is extremely important. All programs should obtain releases of information from families to allow for open and frequent communication between programs and providers to develop plans, handle scheduling and review plans after they are implemented.