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How schools, teachers and families are adjusting to coronavirus
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Home-made Play Dough

You’ll Need:
- 1 C. Flour
- ½ C. Table Salt
- 1 Tbsp. Oil
- 2 Tbsp. Cream of Tartar
- 1 C. Boiling Water
- Food Coloring

Instructions:
1. In a bowl, combine the flour, salt and cream of tartar. Mix well.
2. Add the oil.
3. Mix a few drops of food coloring into the boiling water and add to the bowl.
4. Mix everything very well and massage with your hands until it is no longer sticky.
5. Once it has fully cooled, wrap in plastic and put in an airtight container. Store at room temperature for up to 6 months.
Back to school! Well, sort of

By Lauren Jennings
The Daily Independent

Students, parents and teachers alike are preparing for back to school as they do every year. But this time around it is a little bit different.

Sierra Sands Unified School District has been preparing for the return, despite not knowing what Kern County’s COVID numbers would look like by the time August rolled around. Early on in the pandemic, SSUSD moved to a distance learning model where students learned from home.

With COVID numbers still not under control, Kern County has been placed on a watchlist that forces schools throughout the county to close in-person classes. SSUSD announced the move to distance learning during a school board meeting on July 21.

Dave Ostash, SSUSD superintendent, reiterated during the board meeting that although schools will be starting school online, once Kern County is removed from Governor Gavin Newsom’s watchlist SSUSD will return to holding in-person classes with some modifications.

Those modifications could be seen in a number of different ways, such as AM/PM classes in order to help facilitate smaller class sizes.

Schools will be required to re-close if five percent of the student body and staff have been COVID-19 confirmed within a two-week period, according to the Department of Public Health guidance. The guidance also recommends that all schools within the district close if 25 percent of its schools have been closed from COVID-19 cases within two weeks.
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Based on state and county health requirements, the current COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in REALMS starting the 2020-21 school year with 100% Distance Learning. We believe in Safety first!!! REALMS offers a Multi-Tiered System of Support including a ‘push-in’ service model for serving special education students, annually hosts Burroughs High School drama club to perform segments from Dr. Seuss’s favorable material, and annually holds Scholastic Book fairs for students and families.

REALMS is now enrolling TK-6 Grade for 2020-2021 school year. Stop by or give us a call.
Schools scramble to teach teachers how to educate virtually

By Mikhail Zinshteyn
CalMatters

For most California students in schools and colleges, the fall term will look like the middle of spring: online with little to no in-person instruction.

But if students and parents accepted the rapid switch to online in March and April as an emergency need while a pandemic spiraled out of control, their expectations for fall will be different.

"With a number of months to prepare, that same grace and gratitude probably won’t be there," said Brad Rathgeber, the CEO of One Schoolhouse, a Washington D.C.-based consortium of 218 mostly “independent” private K-12 schools that offers online coursework to students and trains teachers readying for a virtual fall.

Schools at every level have tried different strategies to prepare teachers for distance learning in the fall, from paying companies like One Schoolhouse to developing their own training curriculum.

Here’s a look at how some of that is shaking out.

Spring training

When teachers rushed to move instruction online back in March, “they were basically taking what they did in their face-to-face classrooms and finding an online equivalent,” said Rathgeber.

But the rules of in-person instruction don’t fully apply to teaching virtually. Educators need to spend considerable time learning not just the new digital tools but totally different strategies for teaching students who’ll likely never set foot in a classroom this fall.

Experts say teaching is about building relationships. Without the ability to see students in-person, how can schools and colleges forge the human element that can easily go missing in a virtual environment? One strategy is for teachers and professors to organize group learning activities over video conferencing software. Another, which takes time to get right, is figuring out what content should instructors prioritize for live instruction and what can be assigned as homework for students to review, such as explanatory videos or articles to prepare for a live discussion.

One Schoolhouse charges schools $300 per teacher for approximately 15 hours of training for teaching virtually, or $450 if the school isn’t part of the One Schoolhouse consortium. Several California schools took on those services, Rathgeber said, including Marin Academy, a private school in San Rafael, CA, where all roughly 70 teachers and faculty took part in the training. One Schoolhouse also provides free training to any teacher outside its network through webinars.

Los Angeles Unified School District, California’s largest, in May created 30 hours of online training to ready teachers for distance learning. More than 11,000 teachers completed the training, just under half of the district’s teaching corps.

Public and private universities are running faculty training programs this summer to help them create virtual courses and teach them techniques for improving student learning online. Some are even offering faculty stipends to learn the virtual instruction ropes.

For California universities that made early decisions to move most, if not all, instruction online for fall term, the summer has been smoother. By focusing on online teaching, the fall learning plan “is coherent from beginning to end and doesn’t have a lot of this flipping back and forth” between scenarios that bring instruction back in person mid-term, said Deanna L. Fassett, assistant vice provost for faculty development at San Jose State University, where all instruction is expected to be remote in the fall.

An ideal plan for K-12 teachers

For K-12 schools, training faculty for an online fall is key, says Alix Gallagher, director of strategic partnerships at Policy Analysis for California Education, an education research center made up of faculty from several premier California universities that last week published a guide for schools to prepare for online learning. “What happened this past spring, I’ll say as a researcher and parent, in general, was pretty terrible and we need to get it better,” Gallagher said.

Learning the bells and whistles of
The university hired additional instructional designers and paired them with learning specialists and faculty — who’re also receiving $5,000 stipends — to build the courses. The collaboration is vital to developing online material that in the pre-pandemic era would take much longer to engineer, said Terry Johnson, faculty director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Berkeley.

Some design details are still being worked out. A team developing a chemistry course in Semester in the Cloud is searching for the right tool to capture the chemical equations students need to write out that software can automatically grade. The grading software can’t always accurately read the equations that students upload with their smartphone cameras because of camera glare or other lighting effects. One idea is for students to use a stylus pen to record their answers. Another is to use a simple scanner that just reads what’s on the page.

Other experts stressed the importance of tinkering on the backend to make the technology intuitive for students. Johnson doesn’t want “students to have frustration with the technology” and instead focus on the content.

One Schoolhouse’s Rathgeber agrees. A mistake he saw educators make in the spring was overwhelming students with technology, apps and links. “Actually, no,” he said. “You want to make sure that there’s a simplicity there.”

**Federal funding**

This summer San Jose State began offering full and part-time faculty $1,000 stipends to enroll in a three-week training institute for online instruction. More than 1,000 faculty heeded the call.

Diane Belger, a lecturer in accounting and finance, enrolled. Like the others in the training institute, she had to pass four mandatory training courses and take three others of her choosing from a pre-selected list, not unlike the required and elective courses of a college minor.

One key takeaway from the institute was that she doesn’t need to lecture as much during the live courses and can instead record her own videos or find ones on YouTube to explain key concepts to supplement assigned reading material.

“And then I can use my time with students to break them into smaller groups, to work problems with them,” Belger said. “Or to talk about what’s going on in the real world.”

Another strategy she hopes to employ is assembling more of her students into small groups for all of fall term, which she says will allow students to learn more from each other.

In addition to tech know-how and virtual curriculum planning, the San Jose State training also included courses intended to benefit faculty and students even after in-person learning resumes, like structural inequality.

In all, the university has spent about $2.5 million on faculty training and preparing for a virtual fall, including money for the stipends, hiring faculty trainers, bringing on mentors who each guide about 20 faculty members into the fall, and other software and equipment for students, such as engineering kits that are being mailed to them.

Much of the money came from the federal CARES Act, the March stimulus package that awarded the California State University system $563 million, about half of which went to students.

“We wouldn’t be able to do this at this scale without the CARES Act,” said San Jose State Provost Vincent Del Casino, Jr.

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They worry about who will care for the children and how far their education will slide.

They anxiously await details on what distance learning will actually look like this fall, hopeful but skeptical that there will be more structure and support than a spring of crisis education that left many dissatisfied.

They’re furiously networking on Facebook and Nextdoor in the tens of thousands to form learning pods or arrange childcare. They’ve placed a huge number of calls to local tutoring services in search of help. Some wonder who will watch their child — let alone supervise online classes — while they work essential jobs.

Parents of more than 5.9 million California K-12 children are scrambling to adapt to a new reality without schools to send their children to. Ninety six percent of the state’s total enrollment calls one of the 37 counties currently on the state’s watch list home. Many students still do not have computers and internet essential for connecting online, and research has increasingly shown the inequitable toll distance learning took on disadvantaged students who lacked opportunities to meaningfully engage in learning.

Many teachers and parents remain worried that physically reopening schools while coronavirus cases surge in most of the state will endanger edu-
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Code inspector in neighboring Yuba County, where she spends her days scoping out buildings, nuisance calls and illegal marijuana grows in the rural northern county.

A few weeks ago, Hill and her husband debated whether to opt for morning or afternoon in-person classes under proposed hybrid scheduling — an anxiety-inducing prospect since her husband is immuno-compromised and receives dialysis three days a week. After their district said last week that it would start the year online, the question became whether to enroll full-time in an online school offered by the district, which Hill is leaning toward to minimize chances that her husband will get sick if and when schools do re-open in-person. Homeschooling might be an option if they had the time.

One thing is for sure: “We definitely don’t have the ability for me to not work,” said Hill, the family breadwinner.

Unanswered questions

In Los Angeles, Tunette Powell’s three sons will begin the new year under distance learning, but details so far remain sparse three weeks before schools begin instruction, adding stress for how she and her husband, an essential worker, will balance work and co-teaching their kids.

As it did when it initially closed schools in mid-March, L.A. Unified, a massive district of 600,000 students, created a ripple effect across the state when it said July 13 that it would begin the year with full-time distance learning, citing surging cases in the county.

Superintendent Austin Beutner and school leaders across California have told families that distance learning programs will be more rigorous and robust than what schools offered this spring. New statewide standards for distance learning will attempt to hold schools accountable, and students will be graded for their work.

A recent survey by Speak Up, a Los Angeles-based parent advocacy group, found wide disparities in the amount of live instruction Black and Latino students received this spring compared with their white peers. Many were dissatisfied with how little live, or synchronous, instruction their students received, and the group has called on the district to gather input from parents over how to improve distance learning.

Several critical questions remain unanswered for Powell and other parents as the first day of school draws closer.

What will the school day look like? Will there be a consistent start time every day to plan her workday around? How much face time will her kids get with their teachers, and will her 11-year-old receive more live interaction than the weekly, one-hour check-ins from this spring? Will the district distribute newer devices to replace the outdated ones that resulted in several technical headaches last spring? Will there be support for Powell’s kindergartner and other young students not yet adept at using technology to learn?

“I don’t know any of that. I know none of that. It worries me,” said Powell, interim director of UCLA’s Parent Project, a think tank aiming to improve parent engagement in schools.

Powell’s oldest son, the 11-year-old entering sixth grade, is not enthusiastic about continuing distance learning. She’s especially worried about her youngest son, a 5-year-old who will start kindergarten at Baldwin Hills Elementary. Many academics believe younger students should be among the most prioritized groups for getting into physical classrooms once it’s reasonably

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safe to do so, arguing that elementary students stand the most to lose from being away from classrooms.

“He knows he’s going to a new school,” Powell said, “but I don’t think he’s fully grasped that going to a new school is going to happen in his room, so that’s been difficult.”

**DIY education**

With schools across the country planning for distance learning starts, parent interest in arranging “learning pods,” in which small groups of students are taught by a tutor or teacher, has grown. Shannon Mulligan, owner of Marin Tutors, has seen that spontaneous interest firsthand.

“As soon as Gov. Newsom announced schools weren’t going to open, my phone rang every day, all day, for four days in a row,” Mulligan said, with parents inquiring about teachers or tutors willing to participate in a learning pod.

Traffic on Mulligan’s website has increased by 75% since Newsom’s July 17 announcement. She said many calls come from parents with incoming kindergartners wary of how the tots will fare learning remotely.

“So many (parents) said to me when they called, ‘I didn’t want to have this happen, but I’m forced to homeschool now,’” Mulligan said.

**Insufficient support**

Comprehensive current data on how working parents are adapting to school closures remains elusive. It’s unclear how many parents statewide have been laid off, reduced work hours or quit their jobs and filed for unemployment, since neither the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics or the California Employment Development Department include parental status in monthly job reports. That’s especially true for essential workers, who in California are disproportionately Black and Latino and have experienced higher infection rates, since policy analysts usually rely on longer-term Census surveys to gauge economic status.

“I don’t know if we do know a lot about those families, to be honest,” said Kristin Schumacher, a senior policy analyst at the California Budget & Policy Center, who is also juggling her 6-year-old’s Zoom classes while she works remotely. “The reality is a lot of families are really scrambling under impossible situations to make this work.”

In Santa Cruz County, Erendira Guerrero and her team at Encompass Community Services are trying to help fill the gaps for parents who work at farms, grocery stores, cleaning services and medical offices with remote versions of their Head Start and Papás program for fathers. Wellness check-ins are now done by phone or video chat, and more than 600 care packages have been distributed with diapers, toys and learning aids like puppets, bubbles and songs in English and Spanish.

Still, the pandemic has exposed major holes in systems like unemployment, rent assistance and health care, especially for undocumented families.

“A big part of our program’s work is focused on connecting parents with resources in the community to support their needs,” Guerrero said. “Some of our families are just not as comfortable sharing their needs over the phone or video.”

Existing regulations offer limited protection for working parents considering requesting time off or other alternatives to juggle school and jobs. For companies with 25 or more employees, California workers are guaranteed five days of job protection for emergencies under the Family School Partnership Act. The California Family Rights Act allows workers at companies with 50 or more employees to take 12 weeks off for a new child or family illness. In March, the federal government enacted the Families First Coronavirus Response Act to extend 12 weeks off for school conflicts, but it only applies to companies with 500 or fewer employees and excludes industries including health care providers.

For many families, that leaves “no great options,” said Katherine Wutchi-
“We always recommend talking with your employer, seeing if there’s something that you can work out with them,” Wutchiett said. But outside those limited exceptions, “At the end of the day, if the employer says you have to be at work and they cannot be at work... there isn’t any legal obligation on their employer’s part to continue holding their job.”

Education policy advocate and former teacher Elliot Haspel floated the idea of a “Parent Protection Program,” modeled off forgivable loans made to businesses under the federal Paycheck Protection Program, but the prospect of major reform is uncertain. A bill from Santa Barbara Democrat Hannah-Beth Jackson, S.B. 1383, would expand state requirements for employers to provide 12 weeks of unpaid family leave and was approved by the state Senate but still requires sign off in the Assembly. Presumptive Democratic Presidential nominee Joe Biden’s plan for universal childcare, introduced this week, could help, but is several months away at best.

In the meantime, remote schools offer a prime example of the state’s increasingly polarized economy. Some employees of deep-pocketed companies, especially in the tech industry, are offered company-funded online tools, additional paid time off or flexible schedules. Many essential workers have no recourse. The toll on women’s employment and the gender wage gap, kids’ educational attainment and costs for businesses seeing employees leave the workforce are just the beginning.

“What economists don’t consider often enough is the economic cost of duress,” said Tracey Grose, founding principal of Bay Area business consultancy Next Curve Strategy, who herself helped supervise Zoom classes for the children of two working neighbors in the spring. “When a family is stressed out trying to keep a roof over their heads, they cannot be the best parents they can be.”

Felecia Przybyla, a Sacramento County mom, is trying to answer long-term questions on short deadlines before classes resume. She works remotely for a company out of state while her husband reports to his job with the county, leaving her to juggle her own work calls and her three elementary-age children’s need for instruction and technology help. While she doesn’t want to rely on the state, Przybyla has considered leaving her job to focus on school and file for unemployment with expanded aid available to contractors like her.

So far, she’s held off.

“We’re hoping to buy a house in the next six months, and I need to have a job,” Przybyla said. “I don’t want to give that up, either, and I don’t think I should have to be put in a position to decide between a job that provides for our family and my kids’ schooling.”

CalMatters is a nonprofit, nonpartisan newsroom committed to explaining California policy and politics.
When her South Carolina high school went online this spring, Maya Green struggled through the same emotions as many of her fellow seniors: She missed her friends. Her online assignments were too easy. She struggled to stay focused.

But Green, 18, also found herself working harder for the teachers who knew her well and cared about her.

“My school doesn’t do a ton of lessons on social and emotional learning,” said Green, who just graduated from Charleston County School of the Arts, a magnet school, and is headed to Stanford University. “But I grew up in this creative writing program, and I’m really close to my teachers there, and we had at least one purposeful conversation about my emotions after we moved online.”

From the other teachers, Green didn’t hear much to support her mental health.

That was a common complaint among parents when classes went online in March to stem the spread of coronavirus. With the sudden halt to in-person learning, many students missed their friends, yearned to be out of the house, developed erratic sleep habits and drove their (often working) parents crazy. On top of that, many were dealing with the trauma of sick or dying family members, economic hardship and disruption to the life they once had.

As the pandemic drags on, it’s clear that not all kids are all right. Nearly 3 in 10 parents said their child is experiencing emotional or mental harm because of social distancing and school closures, according to a nationwide Gallup poll in June.

“Unmoored” is the best way I can describe it,” said Michael Rich, associate professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School. He’s seen a rise in young patients with anxiety and depression during the pandemic.

“They don’t feel like getting up and going to another Zoom class,” Rich said. “They don’t feel like finishing their college applications.”

As more districts are electing to start the school year virtually, teachers will have to get better at delivering new academic content online while also meeting students’ social and emotional needs.

Schools, Rich said, should think about using the virtual environment to create new relationships between teachers and students.

“Not just one where kids can get help with algebra, but where kids are talking to teachers about what’s going on.”

**Fitting it all in: Academic and emotional learning**

In normal times, many schools didn’t deliberately set aside time for teaching non-academic “soft skills” such as empathy, determination and self-care. That makes ramping up the focus in a virtual setting, amid a set of challenging circumstances, even more daunting.

But the world is a stressful place right now, given
A lot can change in a year! Don’t let COVID-19 delay your child’s annual well-visit or physical, it is an important part of their overall health. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a yearly physical for all school-aged children.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a yearly physical for all school-aged children.
In El Paso, Texas, schools are planning a 30- to 45-minute weekly block for students to connect with their teachers around social and emotional skills. And each day will include a short, live session on connection and community building, said Ray Lozano, executive director of student and family empowerment for the El Paso Independent School District.

Lozano said time spent on those skills will be more structured than in spring. Teaching and learning, especially this year, needs to be “more relational and less transactional,” he said.

Why stress emotional health so much?

In recent years, “social and emotional learning” has become a buzzword in schools, but it doesn’t get as much attention as academic learning because it’s harder to measure progress and results.

But a growing body of research, as well as anecdotal evidence from schools, suggests students perform better academically when they’re taught how to control their emotions and how to develop traits like empathy, determination, a collaborative spirit and the ability to navigate conflict.

“We’re talking about fostering an inclusive environment and caring relationships that elevate student voice and agency,” said Justina Schlund, director of field learning for the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, a nonprofit in Chicago. “They can contribute to their own learning, but also contribute to their school and their community.”

The challenge: how to do that when classes are starting virtually, before teachers have ever met some or all of their students, and before the students know each other well.

Austin Achieve Public Schools, a charter school network in Texas, plans to start each morning with 45 minutes of social and emotional learning. The network will adapt its tradition of “circle time” – where kids sit in a circle for a moderated talk, and where just one student speaks at a time – to an online setting.

Usually, those in a circle pass around a token known as the “talking piece,” but when circling up via videoconference, teachers will have to get better at using the mute button on everyone but the speaker, said Danielle Owens, restorative justice coordinator at Austin Achieve.

In California’s Oakland Unified School District, which will open Aug. 10 with all students learning remotely, virtual morning meetings will be held for 10 to 30 minutes, depending on the grade level, said Sonny Kim, who coordinates the Office of Social and Emotional Learning.

The plan is to have teachers greet every student individually, set the tone and purpose of the day and teach or practice a social skill through a virtual activity. The district hopes to create a sense of belonging and build inclusion, Kim said.

“The goal is more student talk than teacher talk,” he said. “We want to be asking, ‘Who else agrees and why?’ and ‘Who has something to add to what was just said?’”

Allison Grill, a third-grade teacher at Emerson Elementary in Oakland, started adapting social and emotional learning to an online space in spring. She and her fellow third-grade teacher even devised a “virtual recess” for students.

The teachers would mute themselves in the videoconference program and encourage the students to talk live and chat live in the application with each other – about anything they liked.

Also, each morning in a quick online form, they’d have students pick a color that described their feelings, like red for angry, yellow for high energy but positive, green for focused, calm and ready to learn.

“We’d ask them: ‘Is there anything you want your teacher to know about you today?’” Grill said. “And we then asked a question to start the day, like, ‘What TikTok dance do you want to learn this week?’ Or, ‘What’s your favorite ice cream?’”

In the spring, students had already gotten to know their teachers in person. So for this fall, Emerson’s teachers are working more closely with their colleagues in the previous grade to understand the individual personalities of incoming students. That’s easier at Emerson, Grill said, because teacher re-
Attention is high and there are only two classes of students per grade.

Another idea that's brewing in Oakland: Teachers might make home visits – either in-person outside, or virtually – to all their students' families at the beginning of the school year, to try to foster strong relationships.

Parents are co-teachers.
Here’s how they can help.

Because so much development is happening at home right now, parents and caregivers can do a lot to encourage good mental health, several behavioral health experts said.

That means enforcing regular times for sleeping, eating, and exercising. And sit-down family meals are still important, said Rich, who also runs a specialty clinic for children with internet use disorders at Boston Children's Hospital.

Parents also must put down their own devices and listen to their kids, he said.

"Ask how they're doing," Rich said. "Observe them. I am as concerned about parental screen time as kid screen time. It erodes our connectedness with each other."

Teachers can model good at-home behaviors, too, said Ghinassi of Rutgers.

During virtual connections with students, teachers can encourage kids to do jumping jacks before focusing on their work. Teachers and staff can talk about having gone for a walk or run that morning, and they can stress to students how they keep their own consistent bedtimes and wake-up times, he said.

"With older kids, you can convince them at the beginning or end of class to go through a deep breathing exercise or a mindfulness strategy," Ghinassi said.

One problem, however, is that parents are already overwhelmed right now.

In Randolph, Massachusetts, just outside Boston, Yahaira Lopez is the mom of twin boys headed into fifth grade. One has attention deficit disorder and the other has autism, and both rely heavily on social and emotional supports at school.

Through the pandemic, she said, one of her sons has become convinced he has to eat every two hours, while the other has become addicted to online games. If Lopez doesn't sit next to her sons while they're doing schoolwork, they'll open another tab on their computers and goof around instead of doing their work.

"They're bored at home, and they don't want to be here," Lopez said.

But the boys also feel safer at home and don't want to go back to a school building, she said.

Lopez hopes the boys' new teachers figure out ways to help them express their anxiety and uncertainty through art or music or books when school starts virtually.

"I feel like they need something creative that helps them understand their world," Lopez said. "Their music teacher gave them an app that let them download their own beats in the spring. They loved that. Could they sing a song and upload it?"

Taking care of teachers is important, too

One of the most overlooked areas of social and emotional learning, several experts said, is how much schools need to foster it among teachers and staff.

School staff have faced their own trauma since March, including economic uncertainty, the challenges of remote learning, managing their own children while working remotely, caring for sick family members or being sick themselves.

Because much of the teaching that happened in spring was chaotic and disorganized, teachers need to feel a sense of safety and belonging before they can discuss among their peers and superiors what didn’t work – and how they can improve, said Grill, from Oakland.

The first virtual back-to-school staff meeting at her school didn’t go very well, because teachers just dove into talking about how to reinvent school this fall, Grill said.

"We all forgot to stop and do the kind of community building among ourselves that we do so well with students," she said.

When the staff reconvened virtually two days later, they started with a check-in about everyone's emotions, and they played a little game. That helped build connection and trust, and the talks about how to improve online school this fall went much more smoothly, Grill said.

Adults need this kind of support before they can foster it in students, said Schlund, of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.

"It might sound basic to say: ‘Let’s have adults sit in a circle and talk about our feelings,'" Schlund said.

"But we’re seeing that these are really important moments, especially when talking about race and identity and being able to develop the type of community who can have difficult conversations and work with each other to solve problems."

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CINCINNATI – As school officials chalk up plans for students to learn off-site, in schools or both this fall, child care providers across the country are working to create more safe spaces and care scenarios for kids.

And they’re doing it under pressure. School plans are iffy, so solutions must be fluid. Care centers are already working with their own coronavirus pandemic guidelines for children, often with crippling costs.

“We are in the midst of a tornado, and we’re trying to figure out how to educate in the middle of it. The tornado is COVID-19. It is not letting up,” said Jorge Perez, president and CEO of YMCA of Greater Cincinnati.

“The systems are in flux. We are going to have to be speedy. We are going to need additional funding.”

That need was expressed nationwide among child care providers who took part in a survey from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) released in July. 40% of U.S. child care centers in the U.S. said they are certain that, without additional public assistance, they will be forced to close permanently.

The survey also found that, of child care providers that are open, 86% are serving fewer children than they were before the pandemic. Average enrollment is down by 67%.

At the same time, the providers face substantial and unprecedented costs of personal protection equipment (81%), cleaning supplies (92%) and staff (72%). Additional costs fall on parents, too – and is a particularly heavy weight to bear among families with less financial resources, who can’t afford additional child care.

Yet more kids – especially school-age children – will need adult supervision while they learn remotely this fall as their parents work. Some will need all-day supervision. Others will need after-school care. School clubs might be out as an option, and gathering at a neighbor’s home could be risky now, too.

Many public school systems hope to start the school year with a “blended” or “hybrid” schedule – a mix of online and face-to-face instruction – which either alternates students’ days in buildings, or has students attend “in-person” classes for a just couple of days each week.

In other school districts, parents may opt to have their children do all distance learning instead of ever entering a school building this year.

The intricate child care needs come after child care centers cut enrollment to meet social distancing requirements.

Some relief is coming from that. For example, on Tuesday, Ohio’s Gov. Mike DeWine said that, beginning Aug. 9, child care providers in Ohio can return to their normal class sizes and staffing ratios.

The child care providers, DeWine said, will have a choice. They can maintain their lower capacity and receive a government subsidy, or they can go back to normal and not receive one.

Child care options

Here are a few more options that may be in play when school starts:

• Stay after school: Some kids will be kept in their schools, limiting transportation, and may be under the eyes of paraprofessionals brought to their classroom.

• Daylong supervision: Some kids who are learning remotely will get supervision at child care centers, with an academic morning (as they work online) and an enrichment-oriented afternoon.

• Nontraditional care centers: Some libraries, churches and museums likely will offer space for child care.

• Outside organizations: Some kids, for example, may spend time with the Boys and Girls Club.

In New York, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced free child care for students in preschool through eighth grade, planning to serve 100,000 of the city’s 1 million students. About 50,000 will participate in child care each day, since New York is scheduled to send children to in-per-
Breakfast and lunch will continue to be provided during distance learning. Drive thru Grab n Go meals will be available at 5 school sites; Faller Elementary, Inyokern Elementary, Pierce Elementary, Richmond Elementary, and James Monroe Middle School.

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In San Francisco, Mayor London Breed announced the Department of Children, Youth and Their Families will launch community “learning hubs” to serve 5,000 to 6,000 high-need students on Sept. 14 – at more than 40 sites across the city, pending approval from local and state health officials.

“It will take a village to address the wide range of learning needs for our city’s children and youth during the COVID-19 pandemic,” Breed said in a statement.

Full-day programming at the hubs will include education support and enrichment services, meals and snacks and physical activity.

**Costs spiral for child care centers**

The costs of pandemic care already have piled up on child care centers. They worry about their futures even as they make plans for this fall.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children’s survey of child care providers, among other findings, shows:

- More than 70% of child care centers nationwide are experiencing additional costs for staff (72%), cleaning supplies (92%), and personal protective equipment (81%)
- On average, large child care centers are spending an additional $3,136 a month on increased expenses
- 73% of programs have or will engage in layoffs, furloughs, and/or pay cuts. For minority-owned businesses, the situation is worse; only 12% have not had...
Parents: Look for child care now

Child advocates say that now is the time for parents to start figuring out a child care strategy – even if their kids’ school district hasn’t finalized back-to-school plans.

“Parents need to be more active than they have been,” Perez said.

Because the vast majority of child care in the U.S. isn’t free finding affordable options is challenging for many families who encounter financial barriers.

In Louisiana, for example, parents may have more difficulty affording child care, as some face job loss at the same time as child care costs could go from $12,000 a year to $16,000 a year, according to averages included in a cost modeling report by the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children.

According to a Care.com COVID-19 Child Care Survey, more than half (52%) of parents anticipate that the cost of child care will be higher than before the pandemic, and 47% are more concerned about the cost of child care now than they were before.

Providers suggest reaching out to previous caregivers or forming a group with other parents on social media to share ideas for school-year child care.

Employers encouraged to work with parents

The care providers recommend, too, that parents approach their employers about flexibility in scheduling in case they need to stay home to care for school-age or younger children.

It’s a familiar request, which employers faced in March when state governors shut down schools to try to dampen COVID-19 outbreaks.

The Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce found, through a survey in May, that 30% of its members said child care was a barrier to having employees return to work.

“What schools are planning to do has a tremendous impact on employees and employers,” chamber President Brent Cooper said. “Our advice to the employers has been to ask them to be as flexible as possible and to continue to work with their employees who are parents.”

There’s also the Families First Coronavirus Response Act: Employee Paid Leave Rights, which expanded leave for families through December 2020.

The act allows up to an additional 10 weeks of paid expanded family and medical leave at two-thirds the employee’s regular pay rate those whose care provider or school is closed because of COVID-19. The rule applies to workers who’ve been employed at least 30 calendar days. Details are on the U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division’s website.

Child care leaders in the Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky area said that despite all of the complications of getting kids’ care covered this fall, they remain confident they’ll do it – with community-wide help.

“The reality is, we have dealt with difficult times in Cincinnati before, and we’ll figure it out,” Perez said. “But we can’t underestimate the challenge we have in front of us.”

Contributing: Wyatte Grantham-Philips, USA TODAY; Leigh Guidry, Lafayette Daily Advertiser

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Amir Morris works on a craft at the Carl H. Lindner YMCA children’s program.

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