

Learning Center Options at Church
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Many parents are facing difficult decisions in this time of COVID-19 about how to best school their children this fall. Schools may or may not reopen or may be available for in-person attendance on a limited basis. Households with working parents will be challenged to provide virtual classrooms at home while maintaining their work schedules either at home or in their workplace.

Some churches are considering ways to assist parents by offering **temporary, short-term** places where children can attend school virtually while being supervised by church volunteers or staff. This is a great ministry outreach and can provide time for discipleship that many children are missing. In order to have a ministry that provides optimal learning environments for children, here are some considerations your church must address.

As of Aug. 17, 2020, the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services enacted a plan for our current state of emergency that allows churches and other community-based organizations to apply to be an all-day “Remote Learning” center for remote learning supervision and support by completing a request for a short-term contractual agreement from your local school. Your organization will be, in essence, an extension of the local school district. You can find this announcement [here](#).

(This information does not act as legal guidelines for planning for or conducting church-based virtual learning centers. The following are suggested recommendations only. Currently state law requires licensing if a church wants to offer this ministry more than four hours per day. Check with the [Department of Health and Human Services - Division of Child Development and Early Education](#) for updates to this law. The following is based on current phases and plans for reopening ministries to the public.)

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Staff Considerations:

1. How many hours are volunteers/staff willing to give to this ministry?

- If staff is paid, any work schedule of 30 hours or more will require the provision of benefits.
- If staff is paid with taxes taken from their compensation, they must be included in the church's worker's compensation program. Paid hours worked must be documented.

2. What information should be included in a job description? This sample [job description](#) is a good place to start your consideration.

3. What information should be included in a Staff Handbook? Below is a list of items to consider including in your staff handbook. You will need to decide, based on your circumstances and needs, what each form and handbook should need and look like.

- Agreement to Check-in Wellness Survey
- Agreement to follow CDC Protocols
- Job Description
- Times of Operation

4. What information will you need to gather from staff? Below is a list of items you will need to gather from your staff. You will need to decide, based on your circumstances and needs, if there is anything else you need to add to the list below.

- Application
- Background Check
- Emergency Contact Information
- If your staff are going to be paid:
 - Medical Records
 - Tax Forms
 - TB Test

5. Will you use volunteers or paid staff? If paid, who will cover the expenditure if tuition does not cover payroll?

6. What steps do you need to take to ensure that your staff or volunteers are approved to work with the children? Steps to approve workers to serve include completed application with permission to conduct a criminal background check, criminal background check form, reference checks, and interview. Two resources that can help with this are "[Creating Safety & Security Policies in Your Church](#)" and the "[Safety & Security N.C.](#)" website.

5. How will you train staff/volunteers before opening? How will you train staff/volunteers who join later in the season? Areas of training can include hygiene and sanitation based on [CDC recommendations](#), safety and security protocols, and how to effectively assist children with online learning. If discipleship is a goal of this ministry, training on how to have faith conversations with children and how to lead a child to Christ can be offered. An example of a simple way to do this is using the Three Circles Gospel Conversation - you can find the video training [here](#), and the downloadable booklet [here](#).

Children/Parent Considerations:

1. Will you open this to families outside your church? Will you charge families and if so, how much? Will there be scholarships for those who cannot afford tuition?

2. Children should bring their own school supplies, lunch in disposable bags, snacks, masks, headphones, etc. to limit exposure to COVID and other viruses.

3. What information should be included in a Parent Handbook? We have provided a few examples for you below. Samples of other documents can be found online. You will need to decide, based on your circumstances and needs, what each form and handbook should need and look like. We have also provided a [sample handbook](#) to view for reference.

- Agreement to Check-in Wellness Survey
- [Application/Registration forms](#)
- Child Medical/Physical Care Plan
- Code of Conduct (include social media policy)
- Discipline and Logical Consequences Policies (include weapon and drug policy)
- Drop Off/Pick up Procedures
- Emergency Contact Information
- Release of liability for possible contraction of Covid-19 and for damages to computer equipment
- [Parent Health & Safety Plan](#)
- [Parental/Guardian Consent form for photography/video](#)
- Parents' provision requirements (agreement of what parents are required to provide for their children's school work - laptops, electronic devices, chargers, headphones, etc.)
- Permission to Dispense/Administration of Medications (if applicable)
- Release of Liability for Stolen/Broken/Missing Property
- Schedule of open/closed days
- Shot Records
- Sickness/Wellness Policy
- [Staff Health & Safety Plan](#)
- Times of Operation
- Tuition & Payment Policy
- Withdraw or Change Days Notice

Facility/Care Considerations:

1. What ages/grades will be allowed to attend? Kindergarten attendance is optional in North Carolina. A great idea may be to create a kindergarten class in the church's existing preschool ministry structure.

2. How many hours per day do you plan to be open and available to students and families?

- State licensing is required for preschool age children for more than 4 hours per day.
- State licensing is required for school age children for more than 4 hours/day.

3. Does your church have enough bandwidth in the teaching spaces you plan to use for children who will use virtual learning? Will extra boosters or routers need to be purchased? Are there enough receptacles for charging laptops? Who do you need to contact for this information? Will there be an expectation from parents that the church will provide internet security settings to block inappropriate websites?

4. Is your church's current insurance coverage adequate for hosting this ministry? It is important to notify your insurance company of the addition of this ministry.

5. What information needs to be in your written protocols and procedures such as safety and security requirements, expectation for mask wearing, sanitation protocols, drop off and release plans, etc.?

Two resources that can help with this are "[Creating Safety & Security Policies in Your Church](#)" and the [Safety & Security N.C.](#) website.

6. Will you share spaces such as a gym or playground with a weekday preschool ministry? If so, how will you schedule use of shared spaces?

7. How many students can you safely handle while maintaining social distance guidelines in your teaching areas? For help determining this, please visit the CDC's "[Considerations for Schools: Operating Schools During COVID-19](#)" document.

Health Considerations:

1. How will you conduct daily health checks of volunteers/staff, students and others each day before entering the building? How will you monitor health status throughout the day?

2. Will you require the completion of a screening form each day? How long will you store the forms? Forms should be kept a minimum of 30 days.

3. What other forms will we need?

- Daily Health Screening Questionnaire & Temperature Check
- Daily Screening Log
- Sign-In Procedure
- Time Sheet (or some other procedure to document time)

4. What are some ideas for creating safe spaces for students to learn?

- Social distancing reminders such as tape on desk tops, hula hoops, Plexiglas in stands, science fair boards, pool noodles, vinyl signs or shower curtains with tension rods are all good examples. Masks should be worn if children are not six feet apart.
- Offer classroom space outside the building.
- Provide multiple hand washing or sanitizing stations (at least one station is required in each room).
- Provide power cords at each desk for charging computers.
- Make available wipes or spray and paper towels for cleaning personal areas.
- Provide secure storage bins for book bags and have students only use materials needed at their work area.
- Provide a one way in and one way out traffic pattern for students.
- Limit those who will have access to teaching areas.
- Remove communal activities such as sand or water play.
- Encourage families to limit access to others when not a school

5. Who will pay for cleaning supplies, extra masks, upgrades to bandwidth, classroom and restroom cleaning at the end of the day, etc.?

6. Will you provide transportation to and from the church? If so, how will social distancing guidelines be enforced while transporting students? Who will cover the cost of the transportation needs?

7. Will you allow backpacks/book bags in the teaching space? Book bags can be stored outside the classroom and children can bring in necessary materials to use.

Other Considerations:

1. Will you offer a discipleship program during the day when children are in attendance? If so, what materials will you use, if any? Who will be responsible for overseeing this part of the ministry? How will you notify parents of this intentional discipleship?

2. Can you engage seniors by offering zoom enrichment opportunities such as cooking or art classes?

Additional Resources:

- [Interim Guidance for Child Care Settings](#). (updated July, 15, 2020)
- [ChildCareStrongNC Public Health Toolkit](#)
- [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit](#)
- For the latest on the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) COVID-19 Response, click [here](#).
- Sign up to receive the latest updates from the [Department of Health and Human Services \(DHSS\)](#).