

The School Age Update

The North Carolina School Age Initiative

Fall 2020

Division of Child Development and Early Education



NC CCR&R Council



Southwestern Child Development Commission



Adapting for School Age Success

CHANGE. This one word describes the state of school age care in North Carolina over the past year. New terms like quarantine, social distancing, and personal protective equipment are now common words for staff and students. Mask wearing is now essential, program-wide sanitation is now routine, and actions like hugs and high-fives are being replaced with waves and elbow bumps.

While these changes bring fear and anxiety, we must remember that change, at its core, inspires innovation. Legendary basketball coach John Wooden highlights this process, stating that "if we fail to adapt, we fail to move forward." As school age professionals the changes brought on by Covid-19 place us in a perfect position to adapt and help students develop socially and academically.

Take a minute and reflect. How can your program adapt to address pressing issues like:

- Health and safety protocols
- Student trauma and stress
- Recognizing signs of abuse and neglect
- Connecting families to social supports and community services
- Virtual learning and classroom arrangement
- Program scheduling and activity creation

After taking time to reflect, think hard about how your program can implement the change your students and families need. Maybe, it's setting out social services pamphlets on your parent table, actively listening to a student going through virtual learning stress, providing more time for gross motor play, or rearranging your classroom to provide more privacy for online learners. Don't let the fear of change limit your efforts to positively develop your school age program. Like a potter molding clay, making small and intentional improvements will help foster success and progress during this trying time.



Virtual Pressure

Addressing the Stress of Virtual Learning

Over the past year, virtual learning has become an important element of school age care in North Carolina. Afterschool and early education providers across the state have stepped into the academic gap created by Covid-19 with an effort to help their students succeed.

Recent national data produced by the U.S. Census Bureau asserts that 93% of all households with school age children have participated in some form virtual learning during the last six months, with school age programs assisting with a significant portion of the virtual learning load (US CB, *Household Pulse Survey*, 2020). Subsequent findings from the Pew Foundation builds upon the Census Bureau's research and highlights that school age program based virtual learning is essential for the success of lower income students with limited resources and working parents (Pew Foundation, *Virtual Learning Means Unequal Learning*, 2020).

School age programs are vital, but the day-to-day implementation of virtual learning presents a host of new struggles for school age providers. Issues like internet speed, virtual learning scheduling, all-day instruction, and academic support create challenges that foster group leader stress and program chaos.

Take a moment to think about your personal school age program over the last school year. What elements of virtual learning have created stress for staff and students? How have you tried to address this stress?

Here are three effective ways to help tackle virtual learning stress in your school age program.

Address Your Real Priority ●●●●●

The quickest way to reduce virtual learning stress is to assess your real priority as a care provider. As school age providers, we are charged by the Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) to provide quality **CARE** for students. Our goal is to promote safety and student learning in line with what the DCDEE Rules and Regulations require us to do. Moreover, the effort that you give to the education standards of your program or classroom must fall within the bounds provided by the DCDEE.

For school age providers this translates to:

- Providing a safe environment for students to learn.
- Setting up DCDEE approved lesson plans and schedules.
- Providing students with age appropriate materials and activity areas.
- Following the DCDEE guidelines for nutrition and health and safety.

It is important to remember what responsibilities fall outside of your scope of work. This includes:

- Making sure that students complete homework and primary school assignments.
- Making sure that students attend virtual learning sessions.
- Ensuring that virtual devices are charged and ready to go.

The above issues are supplemental to your role as a school age care provider, and are issues that must be handled between the child's family and their teacher. This does not mean that you should not help students with school work or virtual learning setup if you can. Just remember your role as a school age provider and don't overstretch yourself.

Taking time to address your priorities with parents and staff will help remove some of the stress associated with directing the education of your students. It will help you focus on the true scope of your work, creating effective lesson plans and establishing a safe environment where virtual learning can take place.

Address Your Program Policy ● ● ● ●

Along with addressing your priorities, you must fine-tune your site's virtual learning policy. It is recommended that you **WRITE** out your program's virtual learning policy to include the extent group leaders will go towards facilitating virtual learning support. Having a written policy will help you explain to parents what virtual services your school age program will provide, and what responsibilities will inevitably fall on parents to oversee. Providing this document to parents before they enroll in your school age program will help you set boundaries and protect your group leaders from hard conversations.

Some ideas to include in your program's virtual learning policy are:

- Expectations on virtual learning attendance and "making" students attend virtual sessions.
- Your program's role in students completing homework during program hours.
- Expectations on materials that need to be supplied by families.
- Expectations on tech device use and supplying materials like headsets and microphones.
- Boundaries between parents and group leaders.

As with all policy creation, make sure to share any potential documents with your licensing consultant to ensure that you remain firmly within DCDEE Rules and Regulations.

Make an effort to go over the policy in detail with staff to make certain they know their job responsibilities and how to properly handle challenging parent conversations. For group leaders with limited virtual skills, it might be helpful to seek outside training opportunities or team them up with another group leader with stronger virtual experience.

Address Your Student Outlook ● ● ●

In addition to addressing personal and programmatic approaches to virtual learning, you must reflect on how you approach students during this stressful transition. Take a moment to think about the mental and social strain placed on your students and how this stress is transmitted through their behaviors. Negative behaviors like constant moving, screaming, arguing, and talking back are common expressions for students dealing with the prospect of sitting for hours and being separated from school peers. Monitor your program's approach to these behaviors and adapt to help students develop socially and emotionally.

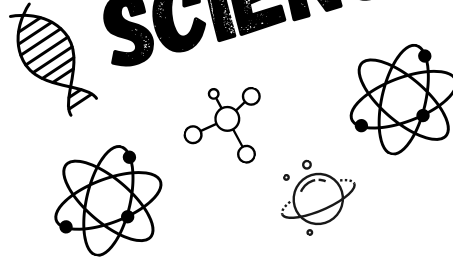
Here are some ways to address negative changes in your student's behaviors:

- Focus on connecting with students exhibiting negative behaviors. Make eye contact when talking with students, give them verbal and non-verbal praise when they are on task and try to "catch" them doing good.
- Be clear on expectations during virtual learning and activity time. Make an effort to give students a say in the creation of classroom rules, and go over these expectations daily.
- Have students learn to advocate for themselves if another child is not showing them respect. Help coach students to address personal boundaries with others, and use their words to relay these boundaries to peers. Two great examples are "I don't like it when you scream in my ear" and "Could you wait to talk to me when my class is over?"

By taking a moment to address these three areas, you can work to make your school age program more apt to adapt and succeed during this time of stress and change.

Rethinking Your Approach to...

SCIENCE



With fall in full swing, now is the perfect time to strengthen your classroom's approach to science. Cooler weather and shifts in outdoor scenery provide students with great opportunities to witness environmental changes and practice concepts like cause and effect. Here are some easy ways to bring science to life over the next couple of months.

Restock your natural science area...the fun way!

Take a moment and look at your program's science area. Where is it located? What materials are present? How often do students play and learn in the area? For many school age classrooms, science areas are grossly understocked and neglected. Issues like material costs, poor room arrangement, and lack of teacher interest often push science areas into dusty corners of the room away from student interaction.

You can use the fall weather change and bring your science area back into the forefront of the classroom. The easiest way to regain interest in this area is to connect the natural science center to real life learning experiences. Plan weekly nature walks with students outside, give them a collection bag, and have them gather natural materials that peak their interest. You can also have students bring in natural materials from around their home if nature walks are not possible for your program.

Outside of restocking your science area with materials, students can use these natural resources in a number of different ways. On their own, students can observe, chart, and study these found natural materials. These objects can also be used as art materials to develop student expression and creativity. Placed in the dramatic play area, natural materials are great for making costumes, environments for playscapes, and additions to fairy gardens and bug hotels. With a bit of imagination and classroom discussion, the learning possibilities for natural science materials are almost limitless.

Natural material examples for your science area:

- Rocks
- Leaves
- Small branches
- Shells
- Pine cones
- Seed pods
- Wood shavings
- Crystals
- Flower petals
- Tree cookies
- Logs



Natural science and student expression

Some of the most profound American minds turned to natural science for personal expression. When living among the natural beauty of Walden Pond, author Henry David Thoreau gathered the inspiration needed to craft some of the most influential poems of American history. Famed novelist Mark Twain focused on the natural might and power of the Mississippi River to develop his many noted works. Landscape artist Winslow Homer, credited the natural flow of the American countryside as he transformed landscape art during the turn of the 20th century.

As a school age professional, make every effort to use natural science and exploration as a means to develop student expression. Take art, reading, and writing outside of the confines of the indoor classroom and have students explore these skills in the freedom of the natural environment. Here are some great activities to think about:

- Have students find one aspect of nature outside and write a short story about it.
- Set up an outdoor drawing area and have students illustrate natural wonders around them.
- Have students use chalk and the blacktop to create a landscape drawing.
- Bring reflective journals outside and have students write about their connection with the outdoors.
- Use natural materials as paintbrushes to create one-of-a-kind art pieces.

Cause and effect...with a green thumb

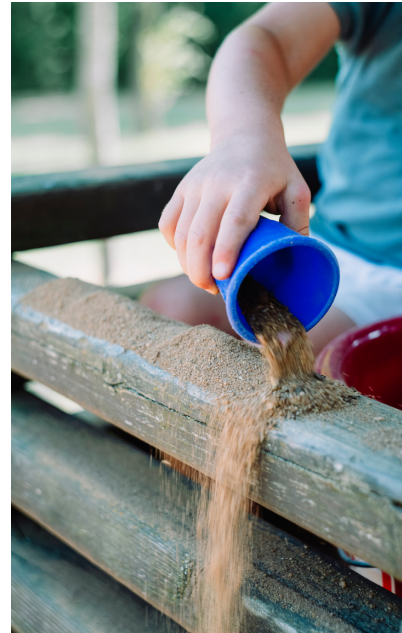
One of the easiest ways to observe natural cause and effect is through the growth and development of plants. Fall weather might not be the ideal time to start planting a garden, but there are other concepts of plant growth that can spur thought and exploration during the cooler autumn months.

One idea is the prospect of brown material composting. In agriculture, brown compost is the breakdown of materials like leaves, pine needles, bark, and paper. In contrast with green compost like food scraps and grass, students can use brown compost without the negative side effects of bad smell and pest attraction. Fall weather brings about a host of brown compost materials falling off of trees and bushes. Have students create a

small bin out of an old cardboard box, collect brown compost, and chart its natural decomposition throughout the following weeks.

The same activity can be done by growing hardy plants like onions and garlic. Have students plant these strong crops near a window or in a garden box outdoors, and chart their slow but continuous growth during the fall and winter months.

For more information about strengthening your science area please contact Jonathan Williams, Statewide School Age Program Coordinator, at williams.joneswcdinc.org.



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Easy Tips for Guiding Attention Seeking Students

- Every school age group has at least one student who craves attention. Maybe it's the class clown who tries their hardest to make the group laugh or the student who screams at the top of their lungs during snack time or transitions. As school age professionals, it is easy to become frustrated with these students. However, we must remember that the root of attention seeking behavior is a desire for connection and affirmation. Below are three easy ways to develop connections with attention seeking students, and help transform these challenging behaviors into positive expressions.

1

Provide positive connection experiences

Attention seeking behaviors evolve from a simple desire to connect with others. Many attention seeking students resort to negative behaviors because they have never connected with others using positive means of expression...they are only seen when they act out. Take time to connect with these students by "catching them being good". Verbally affirm these students with specific praise, and acknowledge them everytime they stay on task and follow directions. When verbal connections are not possible, offer non-verbal signs of affirmation like a thumbs up or a smile whenever you notice positive behavior. This process will help attention seeking students pursue positive social expressions for connection and shy away from negative behaviors.

2

Reflect on your schedule

Take a second and think about the portions of the day when attention seeking behaviors occur in you program. Is it during transition times or during remote learning sessions? Maybe these behaviors occur during the start or the end of the program day? Reflect on these hard sections of the day and make small changes to increase

engagement. Techniques like providing longer periods of time for transitions, providing interactive activities during challenging time slots, or providing materials and brain-breaks for students needing to step away from virtual learning. Charting these difficult times and adapting might stop attention seeking behavior before it starts.

3

Teach students to advocate for themselves

It is tempting for teachers and group leaders to jump in and help resolve group conflicts with attention seeking students. When a child is yelling in another student's ear or constantly trying to crack a joke, it can be almost second nature to try to control the situation. It is important to remember that these challenging times are great opportunities for students to engage with attention seeking students and learn how to ask for respect. Teaching phrases like "I need space" and "Please don't yell in my ear" allows students to create personal boundaries in a safe and facilitated environment. Make an effort to help students navigate these conversations with attention seeking peers, and step in to help guide conversations and suggestions.



School Age Supports For Your Program

The North Carolina School Age Initiative is here to help your school age program succeed. We are a state funded initiative that operates under the direction of the Division of Child Development and Early Education. Our regional school age consultants will work directly with your licensed afterschool, summer camp, or school age community center to help your program meet all quality enhancement and professional development needs.

Some of NC School Age Initiative's services include:

- Free program-specific technical assistance for program administration and teaching staff. This technical assistance can take place in-person or virtually through Zoom.
- Assistance with DCDEE health/safety regulations and licensing regulations.
- BSAC courses for new staff and SACERS-U CEU courses for programs going through the Environmental Ratings Scales assessment.
- Access to a wide range of virtual and in-person professional development trainings. These trainings are provided statewide on a quarterly basis.
- Access to our detailed resource guides and statewide school age publications.

If you would like to connect with the North Carolina School Age Initiative, or if you have any questions about how our project can help your program contact:

Jonathan Williams
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We look forward to helping you and your staff grow.

North Carolina School Age Initiative

For more information or school age support contact

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