

Governor Phil Murphy

# Governor Murphy Unveils Proposal to Align Preschool and Child Care Facilities Standards, Bolstering State's Mixed Delivery Model

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*Altering Square-Footage Requirement Could Open Up Thousands of Classrooms in Child Care Centers to State-Funded Preschools*

**TRENTON** – Governor Phil Murphy today announced a cross-agency effort spanning the New Jersey Department of Education (DOE), the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF), and the New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS) to align preschool and child care square footage requirements to a single standard. This move aims to bolster the State's mixed delivery model by addressing one of the most frequently cited barriers faced by local education and child care officials as communities across New Jersey look to establish or expand state-funded preschool and child care programs. Mixed delivery refers to serving three-to-four-year-old children in classroom settings that meet all State regulations, and are operated by a combination of school districts, Head Start programs, and private providers.

DOE and DCF have begun the process of amending their respective rules to hold state-funded and licensed child care centers and preschool programs to the same minimum space requirement of 42 square feet of usable space per child. The Administration intends to formally publish the rulemaking proposal for public comment in spring 2025.

The proposed rule change is backed by national research on best practices in classroom space per preschool child. The National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend preschool classroom square footage should range between 42 to 54 square feet per preschool child.

"Our mixed delivery model has played a key role in our rapid expansion of preschool seats. By working together, school districts, Head Start administrators, and licensed private providers are able to better meet the diverse needs of our communities. We know that access to local, high-quality preschool and child care options is crucial for New Jersey families. Not only do these services ease financial burdens on working parents, they also help our young children start to develop social skills and an educational foundation that will aid them throughout their academic careers," **said Governor Murphy**. "Aligning standards makes preschool expansion accessible across the early childcare industry, helps futureproof the state's early childhood ecosystem, and represents another step we're taking to keep New Jersey as the best place to raise a family."

Currently, State regulations for child care facilities licensed by DCF require 35 square feet of usable space per child. DOE's current standard requires a minimum of 950 square feet per classroom. This misalignment can limit opportunities for communities to partner with Head Start programs or private providers in order to offer preschool

services through the State's mixed delivery model.

"We've listened to the calls of local school leaders, licensed providers, and Head Start administrators who have voiced that state regulations on classroom size are limiting in creating and expanding access to high-quality preschool programs," **said Kevin Dehmer, Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Education.** "Our goal is to work in partnership with local school officials to address these concerns head-on, helping them bring this valuable educational benefit to families in their communities."

"At DCF, we recognize that New Jersey needs both a thriving child care industry, and accessible, high-quality pre-K," **said Christine Norbut Beyer, Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Children and Families.** "This plan allows comparable, research-based space requirements so that, whether your child is served by one of our state's licensed child care centers, or in a pre-K classroom, they'll have the same room to grow and learn. It also respects existing child care facilities by grandfathering them in at the space requirement that was in place when they became licensed. By giving parents more options through comparably regulated child care and pre-K facilities, we're supporting New Jersey's working families and setting children on a path to lifelong learning."

"Affordable, high-quality child care is essential to the state's economic health and crucial for New Jersey families to thrive. This proposed rule will expand access to care through the ability of more private providers to partner with local school districts under the State's Pre-School Program," **said Sarah M. Adelman, Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Human Services.** "The change to the classroom space requirement is a perfect example of how state agencies can work together to adjust to the changing landscape of care for our three- and four-year-old children. Parents will now have more choices when considering where their children play, learn, and grow during this crucial developmental period."

DOE's amended square footage regulations will apply to school districts that received preschool education aid (PEA) in August 2017 or thereafter, and to all classrooms relocating to a space not previously occupied for use as a school or child care facility. PEA classrooms will still be held to a class size limit of 15 students. Schools will be able to use smaller rooms to serve fewer than 15 children per classroom, if they find it is advantageous to do so and if they still meet the 42 square foot per-child requirement. The proposal will also allow PEA funding for preschool classrooms without toilet rooms, provided the toilet room is located on the same floor as the classroom, designated for use only by preschool students, and that the district provides direct supervision of preschool students. The Department's revised standard will not include square footage requirements for storage, equipment, or furnishings that are built-in or not easily movable.

Altering the State's square-footage requirements could open up thousands of classrooms in child care centers to state-funded preschools.

DCF's amended regulations will increase the minimum indoor space requirements from 35 to 42 square feet of usable activity indoor floor space. Licensed child care facilities that meet the existing 35-square-foot requirement will be grandfathered into the new regulation.

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[Transition Reports \(/governor/news/reports/approved/reports\\_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml)

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