



Old Dominion Association of Church Schools

IMPORTANT UPDATE – CURRENT VDSS COVID-19 CHILDCARE GUIDANCE

March 19, 2020

Dear ODACS Friends,

Earlier today, the Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Social Services sent a helpful letter to all childcare providers in the Commonwealth. The letter includes some important information that may prove helpful to some of our ministries. Please read the following questions and answers carefully; as always, please feel welcome to contact the ODACS office if you have any questions.

Q: Does information in the VDSS letter apply to Religiously Exempt childcare centers?

A: Yes, it does. To make certain of the answer to this question, ODACS contacted the state licensing director. She replied quickly and confirmed that the information in the commissioner's letter applies to all childcare centers, including those that operate with the Religious Exemption from licensure.

Q: Are childcare centers affected by the governor's order to close all public and private schools through March 27?

A: No, they are not. One of the most helpful things about the commissioner's letter is that it confirms the information that ODACS sent to our ministries last weekend stating that the governor's order does not apply to preschools and daycares and that preschools and daycares may therefore choose to stay open.

Q: May Religiously Exempt childcare centers currently care for school-age children during the COVID-19 emergency?

A: Yes, they may! This is information that ODACS had not previously considered and which may provide an opportunity to some of our ministries to be of help to families that need childcare right now. The VDSS letter quite clearly provides for the care of school age children. To make sure, though, ODACS contacted the licensing director with this question as well. She confirmed that the information is applicable to children of all ages, including pre-school children and school-age children, despite the governor's order to close all K-12 public schools and private schools.

Q: Does the limit of 10 individuals in a room apply to all age groups?

A: Yes, it does, but some clarification is in order. The staff-child ratios for younger children are still the same, but there is a limit of 10 individuals in a single room, to include staff. The effect of the rule for older children is to change the staff child ratio to 1:9. Later in this memo, a chart is provided which may prove to be helpful.

Q: What about the ODACS staff-child ratio bills, HB 1235 and SB 927?

A: Both HB 1235 and SB 927 have been passed by the General Assembly and await the governor's signature. His action deadline for the bills is 11:59 p.m. on April 11. Should he sign the bills, the effective date would be July 1. Nevertheless, ODACS has never changed its advice to follow what we feel is the common-sense interpretation of the Code while we work on a legislative clarification. If your ministry is still being affected by this issue during the COVID-19 emergency, please feel free to contact the ODACS office to discuss your situation.

REDCD Staff-Child Ratios		
Age Group	Current Ratio/Room Limit	COVID-19 Ratio/Room Limit
Ages 0-16 months	1:4, room limit based on square footage	1:4, no more than 10 individuals per room
Ages 16-24 months	1:5, room limit based on square footage	1:5, no more than 10 individuals per room
Ages 24-36 months	1:8, room limit based on square footage	1:8, no more than 10 individuals per room
Ages 36 months to 5 years	1:10, room limit based on square footage	1:9, no more than 10 individuals per room
Ages 5-9 years	1:20, room limit based on square footage	1:9, no more than 10 individuals per room
Ages 9-12 years	1:25, room limit based on square footage	1:9, no more than 10 individuals per room

Here is one more question on a different topic.

Q: Why are many public schools in Virginia extending their closure until a date later than March 27, such as April 14 for example?

A: It is our understanding that the governor's order exempts schools from having to make up the 10 school days missed from March 16 through March 27. Since his order applies to private schools as well as to public schools, then ODACS schools are also not required to make up these days later on. It is also our understanding that public schools that are closing until a later date are simply adding on unused snow days so that they can maximize the missed time that does not have to be made up later. Of course, all of this could change in the future if the governor decides to extend his order.

Based on the answers to these questions, ODACS offers the following advice.

- ODACS K-12 schools should still remain closed until at least March 27. ODACS does not recommend applying unused snow days to the days missed from March 16 through March 27; such a decision is premature, given the strong possibility that the governor will extend the time frame of his school closure order. Of course, this

advice does not preclude the use of online instruction or other methods of teaching children while they are at home.

- ODACS ministries may choose to keep their preschools and daycares open through March 27, provided that they carefully follow all of the guidelines issued by VDSS earlier today.
- ODACS ministries that choose to keep their preschools and daycares open should first recommend that parents keep their children at home if at all possible and then make their services available to those parents who absolutely need them.
- ODACS ministries that choose to continue to provide childcare during the current COVID-19 emergency may choose to care for school age children. ODACS recommends that ministries that choose to do so set an age limit of 12 years, based on the VDSS staff-child ratio chart.
- Be careful not to use the fact that your childcare center may serve school-age children as a loophole to open onsite classes for kindergarten and elementary grades. ODACS recommends that your K-12 classes be closed through at least March 27, but those ministries that choose to do so may provide childcare for children ages 12 and under. Again, this advice does not preclude the use of online instruction or other methods of teaching children while they are at home.

I hope that this information will prove helpful to your ministry. I am praying for all of our churches and schools during this challenging time. God is always good, all of the time!

Sincerely,

Dan Zacharias
Executive Director