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[Robin Madell](#) Aug 10, 2020, 10:08 AM

**Waivers, limited class sizes, and 'indoor shoes' are just some of the ways private preschools are planning to reopen in the fall**



- Some preschools are ready to reopen with new guidelines and procedures to prevent the spread of coronavirus.
- Montessori Children's Academy, based outside Chicago, is having parents sign a liability waiver as well as reducing their normal hours of operation and limiting class sizes.
- Private preschool franchise The Goddard School is permitting one family at a time inside the foyer and for pick-up, a teacher brings one child at a time back into the foyer.
- "We removed all carpets and toys made of cloth," said Dorota Mani, founder and director of Academy of Excellence Preschool in Jersey City, New Jersey. "At the door, students are welcomed by teachers and asked to change their outdoor shoes into indoor shoes. We are lucky to have six separate entrances to our school, allowing us not to mix our students and their parents during drop-off and pick-up."
- Despite these precautions, some parents are still opting for virtual learning for their preschoolers for the fall — Willie Greer, a father of two in Memphis, Tennessee, said his preschool is sending parents tablets to keep kids engaged with the curriculum.
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[Alina Adams](#), who works closely with many affluent parents and private preschools, has had a front-row seat to the confusion and concern surrounding schools reopening.

"Some preschools are telling parents that they plan to be open five days a week, only at reduced capacity and with plenty of social distancing," said Adams, author of "[Getting Into NYC Kindergarten](#)" and "[Getting Into NYC High School](#)." "It will be interesting to see how that will work, as one preschool director told me the guidelines are physically impossible, with kids needing to nap six feet apart or be staggered in their nap times. 'Am I supposed to shake a sleepy three-year-old awake after lunch so they don't fall asleep too close to another child?' she asked."

In an acknowledgement that even taking an "[abundance of caution](#)" isn't a guarantee that infections won't occur in school settings, some institutions are requiring parents to sign a waiver, adding another layer of defense on top of a school's COVID-19-related safety procedures.

"Our first priority is always the safety of our students, but we further needed to consider whether we were opening ourselves to liability by resuming operations during a global pandemic," Lillian Smith, owner and executive administrator of the [Montessori Children's Academy](#) outside Chicago, told Business Insider.



Lillian Smith. Lillian Smith

The school worked with attorney Brian Weinthal to create a liability waiver that protects the institution in the event that a student, parent, family member, or visitor was to bring a lawsuit against the business.

Weinthal said the waiver "identifies the potential symptoms and complications associated with COVID-19 and further asks parents to acknowledge that even in light of every conceivable safeguard, children or parents can still become ill as the result of the uncontrolled spread of the disease."

"Although we are taking every possible step to keep our students healthy and socially distant, the liability waiver gives us additional comfort and peace of mind in the wake of personal injury actions that have been filed against other local businesses," Smith said.

### **A litany of safeguards and new procedures**

Even with the school's mandatory waiver, Smith said they're also implementing a heavy battery of safeguards in hopes of preventing the spread of coronavirus on school grounds. In addition to all current safety protocols mandated by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), the [Department of Child and Family Services](#), and the [Illinois Department of Public Health](#), Smith said that the academy is doing "everything in its power" to keep students healthy and socially distant.

The school has reduced their normal hours of operation by two hours each day — from their previous schedule of 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Monday through Friday to a new 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. schedule.

"Depending on age, classroom size is limited to between [eight and 15 students](#) (depending on DCFS regulations for particular age groups), and different classrooms are prohibited from interacting or co-mingling during the school day," Smith said. "All staff members and students over the age of two are required to wear masks, and handwashing/hygiene breaks are conducted as often as possible during the day."

Upon arriving at school in the morning, temperatures are recorded for both students and the parents who drop them off, and screening questions are asked to ensure that parents and children are not experiencing symptoms and haven't been in proximity to individuals with COVID-19. The school has a daily cleaning and disinfection routine, and Smith said that a state-mandated safety protocol is in place to "quickly and safely isolate students who appear to manifest symptoms consistent with the disease."

Other preschools planning to hold in-person classes have similar laundry lists of health and safety protocols. Craig Bach, vice president of education at private preschool franchise [The Goddard School](#), with more than 525 schools in 38 states, told Business Insider that it's incorporated new drop-off and pick-up procedures where only one family at a time will be permitted inside the foyer. Once there, school administrators will conduct a "quick health screening" to ensure each child doesn't have a fever above 100.4 degrees or other flu-like symptoms. A designated teacher will then take each child to and from the classroom, and for pick-up, a teacher brings each child to the foyer.



**Craig Bach.** Craig Bach

The school advises parents to "Please be mindful of keeping a six-foot distance from others during drop-off and pick-up."

The Goddard School is also implementing new food prep procedures, where teachers will continue to wear gloves while helping children with snack time and lunch. They will also discontinue family-style servings and serve children individually. Special events and visitors are postponed until further notice, the school reported to parents.

"Along with our guidance, Schools must follow local health and state guidelines to ensure they're compliant with health and safety orders," the school's new guidance added. "For example, it's mandatory for businesses in Pennsylvania to provide face coverings to their employees, which must be worn at all times while on site."

While Goddard Schools are currently open Monday through Friday, Bach explained that there's flexibility in scheduling.

"Locations across the country offer half-day or full-day programs, and parents have flexibility in terms of the number of days per week their children attend school," he said.



**Dorota Mani.** Dorota Mani

Dorota Mani, founder and director of [Academy of Excellence Preschool](#) in Jersey City, New Jersey, said that her school is not only following CDC guidelines and her [state's requirements](#), but has rebranded its classrooms.

"We removed all carpets and toys made of cloth," Mani said. "Each child has his/her own personal desk and chair, set of supplies, books, and manipulatives. At the door, students are welcomed by teachers and asked to change their outdoor shoes into indoor shoes. We are lucky to have six separate entrances to our school, allowing us not to mix our students and their parents during drop-off and pick-up."

Academy of Excellence also includes many of the more standard procedures designed to cut down on the chance that students, staff, or parents will contract COVID-19 in and around the school setting.

"Their temperature is measured, hands are sanitized, and daily COVID-19 questionnaires [are] conducted," Mani said. "The physical space of each classroom is sterilized and steamed every single day."

The preschool has also gotten creative to try to overcome kids' natural tendencies.

"The children wear masks throughout the day and if one of our students refuses to do so, we provide him/her with a fun and protective shield," the school director said. "To ensure social distancing, we are using hula-hoops to mark each student's personal space."

Academy of Excellence Preschool currently provides three program options: a morning academic program from 8.30 a.m. to 12.45 p.m., a full-day program from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., and an extended-day program from 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Monthly tuition fees vary by program and age group, ranging between \$1,375 for the academic program and \$2,400 for the extended-day program.

**Despite safety protocols, not all are convinced school reopenings are safe**

Many schools, public as well as private, are currently not able to reopen due to state mandates — for example, in [California](#) — and have shifted to virtual learning.

Yet preschools are considered "childcare" and are exempt from California's most recent order, according to Katie Provinziano, founder and CEO of [Westside Nannies](#), a boutique staffing agency based in Beverly Hills. She confirmed that many elite preschools are planning to reopen in August, but added that many of her clients aren't comfortable sending their children back.



**Katie Provinziano.** Katie Provinziano

"Most agree it's just not safe yet to be in any large group environment," Provinziano said. "As a result, we've seen a dramatic increase in the number of parents who have decided to pull their children out of elite private schools — including preschools — and [instead] homeschool for the upcoming school year."

In some cases, she said, parents are hiring private educators to act as a homeschool teacher.

"They want to spare their children from any emotional stress that may come along with the new rules schools have to abide by," she said. "They are concerned about the effect that masked teachers, teachers focused more on cleaning, not being able to share toys, lunches alone, etc., will have on their children."

Many parents also feel that their children will receive a better academic experience overall, she said, with one teacher solely focused on their children and able to customize a curriculum to their personal interests and learning styles.

Amol Parab, a dad in San Bruno, California, and the lead data modeler at Blue Shield of California, is among the parents with concerns about kids returning to preschool in the fall.

"With new data coming in almost every day and changing guidelines we have seen from CDC and [WHO](#) [the World Health Organization], we don't feel comfortable sending our kid to school," Parab said.

The private school his child is enrolled in offered two options for learning this fall: virtual, and if local authorities allow, in person. His family chose the virtual option, and plans to stick with that route until more data about the coronavirus in schools becomes available.

Willie Greer, a father of two and founder of tech review site [The Product Analyst](#), has a child enrolled in an elite preschool in Memphis, Tennessee. Greer told Business Insider that he and his wife have already coordinated with the school's management and they won't be holding regular in-person classes in the fall.

In lieu of reopening, the preschool has prepared alternatives to keep kids engaged in learning, including manuals, online classes, and activities students can do at home, according to Greer. They've also prepared students and parents so that they'll be up to speed on the new setup and have tablets ready with learning manuals and modules uploaded.

"Shifting to digital learning is the best thing they can offer to prevent students from getting left behind in terms of education," Greer said.

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