



Meeting Notes and Summary
PCPI Virtual Forum via Zoom, May 7, 2020

(This meeting summary includes a transcript of the introduction by Mariah Battiston and Lesley Romanoff followed by notes and comments provided by attendees reporting out from breakout sessions.)

Mariah Battiston: Hello and welcome to everyone. I am Mariah Battiston, the President of PCPI streaming to you from Burnaby, BC. We are privileged to share this platform with you all here today from across the US and Canada.

Parent Cooperative Preschools International is a non-profit international council dedicated to the family and the community. PCPI represents more than 50,000 families and teachers, providing on-going support to families, educators, and social agencies who recognize the value of parents as teachers of their children and the necessity of educating parents to meet the developmental needs of their children. Membership is open to schools, councils, libraries, and individuals.

PCPI supports and encourages...

- Parent involvement,
- Parent participation, and
- Parent education in early childhood education programs.

The birth of PCPI was the natural outgrowth of the spread of cooperative preschools. From their beginnings in 1916, cooperative preschools have sought ways to share information and resources.

I'd like to quickly introduce the PCPI Board members that are present today.

Dianne (Virginia), Lesley (Maryland), Kathy (Oregon), Natalie (Virginia), Meg (Michigan), Lisa (Maryland), Leta (Maryland), Carole (Vancouver, BC), and Nicole (Indiana).

We are excited that there was such interest in attending this online discussion, though it's unfortunate that it took a pandemic to bring us together in this way. From looking over the registration list, it looks like we have a great representation of our community. Many of you are members of PCPI and some of you are not. We have teachers, parents and directors here and some who are interested in starting a preschool so the shape of the discussion will be different depending on your position. One thing we all share is we have a vested interest in



cooperatives and we want to see them not just survive but thrive in this new and strange time that we are faced with.

We are here today to provide a platform to share ideas and experiences of how we are all coping with the COVID-19 pandemic and what it means to us as individuals, teachers, parents and as members of cooperatives.

We would like to facilitate the conversation and learn from each other.

- How are people managing and how do we go forward in this new “normal”?
- We hope to find out from one another what we need to know moving forward
- If there are great ideas out there, we can provide an avenue to share them
- Hopefully this is the first of many conversations and depending how this goes we can look to focus on certain areas in more depth in future calls

Now I'll tell you about the format for our discussion today. We acknowledge that this is brief, we only have an hour, but we look at this as just the beginning of a larger conversation. We encourage you to use the chat feature and write down your questions and thoughts. In a few minutes we will separate everyone randomly into breakout rooms of about 8-10 people so you can have a more personal discussion.

Based on the feedback from people who registered to be here, it appears that there are 3 overarching areas of concern. I'm going to turn it over to Lesley Romanoff to introduce the topics.

Leslie Romanoff: Welcome to Zoom and thank you so much for coming. You might want to take a picture of this first screen. The first slide has three buckets because as we looked at your list of discussion suggestions and issues that had been posted on the Facebook page, we found that concerns really fell into three buckets or areas, including financial, enrollment, and operational. I'm looking at this like an overarching theme of everything we always do, but in this discussion we'll be channeling it through this pandemic. So it's about planning, about sustaining membership, and just how we are going to operate. Dianne created an email address which is at the top of the slide that you can use to continue the conversation, share burning issues, or to send in any questions you'd like to have answered.

So let me just tell you a little bit about the financial bucket. This pandemic is really causing us to need a bylaws system check. We don't have a map for this journey. Some of us have been through other difficult times, but I don't think any of the school planners could have even established something that could deal with this, so we want to talk about the bylaws. How have your bylaws and handbooks helped you so far, share tips that you have, how have they hindered you? How do you plan to pay for staff? Have you applied for grants, loans, or anything that you can help out and again we're coming from all different areas, so there are



different jurisdictions and governmental agencies, so those are all things that we have to deal with.

The next slide is the bucket dealing with enrollment. Many of us are in open house season and are looking for ways to increase enrollment and to sustain enrollment that you already have. How will you conduct tours and build momentum and just make sure that your community stays intact? How do you make sure that people stay committed?

The final bucket is operational. Some of the government agencies around the country have already been talking about how schools may look when they open back up. This is a time that we can share what's possible, share success stories, share what's not possible, hurdles and success stories. This might be where we really get into the guts of things.

Now we're ready to go into the breakout rooms. It takes a few seconds for everyone to pop into the group, but once it seems like you're all there, take a moment to introduce yourselves and share a bit about your school and the role you play there. After that, you can tackle the discussion topics in whatever order suits you (they will appear in the chat box so you have a reminder). We ask that one person in each group takes notes and when we come back together we'll have a very short amount of time for a few people to share the highlights from their discussions.

We won't get to every group so we ask that each of the note takers email their notes to meetingnotes@preschools.coop (we'll remind you of the address when we come back together). The breakout session will last about 25 minutes, and you'll get a notification when there's 1 minute remaining so you can wrap up your discussion before returning to the main meeting.

Breakout sessions (See summary below)

Mariah Battiston: Welcome back. I hope you had a great discussion with your group - I know I did, and we're looking forward to reading over the notes so we know how we can support all of you as we move forward. Does anyone want to share a thought or observation that came out of your discussion? (Make sure you turn your mic on so we can hear you.)

Comments from Attendees (See summary below)

Mariah Battiston: Thank-you so much for joining us today. We hope you were able to share your ideas. We do hope to try this again in the near future with more focused discussions based on what we learned from today, so stay tuned. One of PCPI's best member features is



the networking that naturally happens. Sharing information and learning from each other. We look forward to reading your notes, so notetakers, please take a minute to send them to the address on the screen meetingnotes@preschools.coop (it's also in the chat box if you want to copy and paste it somewhere.)

We always encourage new members and of course have to do a little member plug at the end. If you would like more information or are interested in becoming a member either on an individual or school level, please visit our website. New members who sign up anytime from now until the end of this year get next year included.

Together we are stronger!

Summary of Breakout Sessions and Comments from Attendees

(The summary below covers ideas and concerns that came to light during the breakout sessions, in the end-of-session comment period, and through emails that came in post-meeting.)

In general, participants shared a high degree of uncertainty about how to proceed and how school will look in the future. The discussion was loosely organized into financial, enrollment, and operational considerations, but all are interrelated and blend into one another.

Many groups talked about what they have been doing with students since their school closed. The following activities were mentioned:

- Video (aka Zoom) meetings on a regularly planned schedule. Not all kids are interested in participating. During meetings, teachers lead activities such as:
 - Story time, songs and fingerplays
 - Games
 - Virtual scavenger hunt - teachers asks children to find e.g. something round, something that starts with the letter "b", etc.
 - Show and Tell - this and the scavenger hunt very popular as the children could participate and they hold their attention.



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- Yoga
- Virtual farm tour
- Mystery reader; have various people read the stories and the reader can be a mom, teacher's son, etc.
- dance party on Fridays
- Sending video recordings and emails to parents as a group and/or individually.
- Sending activity ideas and links, and making available for pick up packets of materials or craft packets for students (Teachers were also delivering projects to homes - wearing masks and keeping a safe distance, but able to say hello)
- Reading & recording stories on YouTube or a free [Loom](#) (free and private) account
- Using Google Drive to read books and post
- Using [Padlet](#) for posting as it is more visual than google
- Using Google Docs to schedule one-on-one face time with students, which the younger ones seemed to enjoy more than the larger classes.
- One teacher spoke to the adults in each family weekly to make sure they are doing OK.
- Organizing games for kids to do online.
- One teacher shared the book [Not Forever But For Now](#). She has used that with her class and used puppets over Zoom to educate kids about the times.
- At one school, teachers are curating videos, which are added to a [YouTube playlist](#) for each Teacher.
- One school is offering a [free supported differentiated learning profiles space](#) that also has parent supports (they welcome others to join).

There was general agreement that distance learning is working as well as can be expected for the time being, but we can't continue with this type of curriculum with preschoolers in the fall. The question was raised as to whether children really benefited from on-line contact.

Parent education has been ongoing for many schools and has been used to calm worries with



the parents. Ongoing parent education could be a way to create trust and loyalty - and of course to help parents be better parents. One person suggested the parent ed topic of “Parenting in the Era of Coronavirus” and recommended puppet shows and other resources by Susan Lynn, Ed.D.*. Teachers and directors have been checking in with Parents via phone or Zoom. Sharing videos from [Teacher Tom](#) was also mentioned.

* Three resources were shared after the meeting for helping families with young children cope with the challenges of living in a country beset by the Coronavirus.

- Susan Lynn worked with [Defending the Early Years](#) to create a [video featuring Audrey Duck](#) and myself talking about the virus and its ramifications in our lives.
- Here's the [link to three COVID-19 resources](#), including the video, DEY's terrific Guide, and a Webinar from [Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood](#) for parents of young children. containing suggestions for activities and more resources, and webinar for parents of young children living through this challenging time.
- [Link to another video](#) with Audrey Duck to help young children and their parents cope with the Coronavirus. This one is a sequel to the first and reflects the effects of such a long, drawn out process of social distancing.

Financial Considerations

The financial impact of closing school before the end of the year was detrimental to many. Schools took a variety of approaches to working through the problem, and each based their decisions on their own school's resources and community needs. A few schools will be able to resume operations this school year after an extended break, but most will not. Many are unsure whether opening in the fall will be even possible. The following situations and solutions were shared:

- Some US schools applied for and received a PPP loan or EIDL loan (note that both offer conditions under which the loan will be forgiven) from the Small Business Administration. It was suggested that smaller community banks can be a good option for processing loans.
- Some have applied for but did not receive a grant or small business loan. There were questions about whether a school having a reserve fund would disqualify them from receiving loans or grants.
- There was concern about the fact that PPP funding must be used now, not saved for the future, and the timing is difficult because most schools have already had to make decisions about how to handle staff pay in the short term and are heading to what would normally be a summer break when payroll and other expenses would be different.



- Some schools did not charge tuition for April and May. Other schools had already received tuition payments for those months; some refunded them in whole or in part or allowed parents to apply amounts already paid to the next school year. In several cases tuition was not being charged but parents were asked to donate an amount to match the uncharged tuition if they could. Some schools gave parents the option to pay what they want. Others have reduced tuition by half.
- In some schools parents were encouraged to make a donation in lieu of tuition. Many gave the full tuition amount.
- Some teachers were furloughed. Some teachers are taking unemployment rather than salary to help save the school money. Some are retiring for the same reason.
- Furloughed teachers still reported to be doing some work, such as conducting virtual meetings with students and advising the board.
- At least one school reported having enrollment/financial concerns before the virus.
- Some schools have reserve funds for emergencies, but how much should a school have in reserves?
- Some schools reported receiving rent reductions or refunds.
- There is no way that this situation could have been addressed in bylaws, of course, so how does this apply with regards to refunding fees? Schools should consider adding language in bylaws or handbooks of what to do in a State of Emergency and how the situation affects tuition reimbursements in relation to attendance versus enrollment. This information should also be written into orientation documentation and an acknowledgement signed.

There was little discussion of fundraising being a viable option to cover the loss of tuition, in part because this all came on so suddenly. One person suggested making an agreement with small local businesses to support them in return for a percentage of their profit. This would work especially well for businesses that are fragile and may not survive if they don't have committed customers. Another said they might do a Talent Show or a "Move On" show to raise funds.

Enrollment Considerations

Some schools are fully enrolled for fall (or at least well on the way), but for others, they were in the midst of their enrollment campaign when the pandemic hit. There is concern that it will be difficult to recruit new families without the ability to tour the school and with the uncertainty of whether school will start up again in the fall. Also of concern is keeping the



commitment of families who are already enrolled. The overarching theme for enrollment was keeping a connection via communication. The following thoughts and ideas were shared:

- A few schools are developing online or virtual tours of their facilities. One reported using Headliner (a free app) to make a virtual open house. Photos of the empty classroom were followed immediately by a photo (with permissions) of children playing in that area. Several schools were inaccessible, so videos or slideshows were created from older photos. One school that had access went into the closed school and photographed/videoed and then did a photo montage with pictures on file from when it was open.
- It was suggested that a teacher could do a Zoom call with perspective families while observing the class (when school is in session again). This would keep traffic down in the school.
- For families already enrolled, schools are working to maintain contact and goodwill. One school has been doing Zoom calls with parents to make sure relationships are still being nurtured. Virtual parent orientations are planned at some schools.
- We were reminded that we all provide a service to the parents: Parent Education. This is a good opportunity to refocus on that aspect of co-ops.
- The Indiana Council (ICPC) has started a blog to highlight different aspects of schools within the council to show that there is still life and intent to go on.
- One school is cancelling their summer camp, but using the time to do thorough maintenance. Others are offering virtual summer classes.
- We need to plan for the Fall with fewer numbers of students and staff, no parents, no “specialty” teachers like music, yoga, etc. masks on everyone, hand washing stations, etc. and also creating budgets that would show delayed opening in, possibly as late as January.

It was suggested that due to concerns about exposure, some schools may be able to have a combination of part time and full time children in the fall, and possibly some virtual-only students if some families have vulnerable members in the home. The question remains regarding how large classes can be, which makes enrollment challenging. This is addressed further in Operational Considerations.

Operational Considerations

The questions about how schools will need to change operationally in order to reopen are a large driving factor for decisions regarding financial and enrollment aspects of schools. There is talk of (and current CDC guidelines for) smaller classes, staggered schedules, limits on persons entering schools, and limited physical contact between students and with teachers,



all in addition to increased cleaning requirements. Most schools at this point have many questions, but no clear plan for how to proceed.

One thing is clear. A childcare facility may be able to operate without allowing parents to enter the school, but that's not an option for co-op preschools. Perhaps a few parents could share what they hope it will look like when school resumes in the fall.

Operational considerations have been grouped by topic.

Class Size/Structure

- Generally it seems that smaller classes are being considered as being safer. There are many ideas about how to achieve that. Some are cutting a class - having one class instead of two classes. Some are considering rotating program locations or groups so that class sizes can be made smaller but the school can still sustain the number of students they need to be financially viable. For example, a class of 16 could be split into 2 groups, one inside and one outside, then switch places.
- Limit classes to 10 or 15. Remove small objects that might go into mouths and are more labor-intensive to clean. Limit the number of items available to play with so things can be cleaned sufficiently.
- Possibly one class M/T/W and other class Th/F so that the intense cleaning between classes only happens once a week. One Oregon school has done this for years and likes it.
- Block scheduling is one idea to limit the number of adults. The same adults parent teach every session for several weeks until they have completed their obligation, then new parents begin. One school is considering having parents do one week worth of parental obligation at a time so that there wouldn't be revolving door of parents in the classroom.
- Many parents travel out of the country, so a rotating schedule that accommodates this would be a priority.
- If regulations require that class sizes be smaller, how can that be done in a way that makes sense financially? If classes are limited to, say, 10 children, schools worry they won't be able to pay their teacher.
- One person suggested looking at a "come back to classroom model" - come for 1.5 hours having some inside and some outside and then supplement circle time with Zoom. Could work long term with the idea of resuming to a normal schedule later.
- It's important that families have peace of mind. Schools could possibly delay their start date to October so parents are more comfortable waiting and seeing what the



orders will be even if elementary schools start sooner. (May lose some families by doing this.)

- Part of the membership could choose to be virtual and another part could choose to meet in person.

Masks

- There is a great deal of concern about teachers and students being able to communicate effectively if masks are worn because so much communication comes from facial expressions.
- What will it look like for our children when a teacher has a face mask? Will kids need to wear masks? Age restrictions? Families wear masks? Teachers? Schools need to help make families feel safe and to teach kids and parents that masks help keep a healthy class. This means getting kids used to seeing adults in masks. One way to help with this is by using a puppet.

New outbreaks

- What kind of plan to schools have to have in place if there's an outbreak in the local area or within the school? Plans need to address illnesses within households and what will happen if a teacher becomes ill. Important to keep communication open with a plan A,B,C. Planning ahead to adapt.
- How will children be affected mentally if school is cancelled again because of an outbreak? Should parents just keep children home to avoid starts and stops in schooling that will be confusing for children?

Cleaning Protocols

- Having a plan to do more intense sanitizing of surfaces and toys will be important. The question is how to make this work during class, between classes, or more importantly between children who play with an item.
- Schools should have a big focus on cleaning protocols and let parents know about it in order to ease their worries.
- Will students need to have their own school supplies? Will each marker need to be cleaned between uses? Lots of questions about how the details of this will work.
- Finding cleaning supplies if public schools and full-time childcare facilities reopen is a concern.



Snacks

- A question was asked of whether young children should wear masks and how this would work if a snack were provided.
- Some schools are not offering snacks or are asking that children bring their own snack in a lunchbox to have whenever they want it. This is how they currently operate.
- If a school shortens their day, they may eliminate snack time to minimize group eating.
- Students would need to be taught to serve themselves and clean up after themselves.
- Will they be able to bring lunches? Some have heard that students can't bring bags to school. Will the schools be required to provide snacks?

Outdoors

- Will schools that are all outdoors fare better? Is that an option? What would it look like for schools that have not traditionally operated that way? Is it even possible to make the transition before starting school this fall?
- Spending more time outdoors was suggested although this would be hard in rain or cold weather. Some parents are not comfortable being outside. Need to address educating families to learn to go outside more.

Administration and Board Cultivation

- A question was posed: I'm very interested in hearing how many co-ops have executive directors either alongside their educator contracts or separate positions. How are people transitioning their leadership through boards that are transitioning?
- One school has asked all board members to set up Zoom meetings to meet with their incoming chair to turn over the position. They have a Google Sheet to track who has met with whom. They normally would have had a gathering to welcome the new board and thank the outgoing board.
- Increasing and maintaining communications (some boards are meeting weekly but the participants talked about how Spring marks the time for board recruitment with summer hand-over)
- Re-visioning how schools are administered as well as operated may be necessary.



- One school is considering hiring a director to handle administrative work as it can be too much for volunteers. One school offered that one of its teachers has a separate contract to be the educational director.
- It may be necessary to add an addendum to teachers contracts anticipating changes that may come. Teachers may be doing different levels of tasks. Boards need to discuss how to handle future contract options.
- What are the teachers responsible for in the fall? If the day is shortened or a reduced number of children, will there be a reduction in pay?
- Will schools need to have a parental/legal agreement written up that states that touching will happen and have the parents sign off on it?

Ensuring Developmentally Appropriate Programs

- There is a great deal of concern that in making plans for safety, regulators may not take into account what is developmentally appropriate for children. We need to do what we can to ensure that new requirements make sense, but also that children are being adequately considered in the equation.
- Currently, essential care workers' children at schools in Maryland are in classes with a 10 person maximum per room (8 kids and 2 adults). Kids have to be dropped off/picked up at the curb and teachers aren't allowed to physically touch kids. How is this possible in preschool, and is the right thing to do?
- Meeting for two hours is not sufficient for 4 and 5 year olds.
- What will the parent responsibilities be in the future and how can they remain involved in their childrens' education?

Suggestions for future meetings

We intend to set up future forums based on what we heard today. Some subjects were suggested, and others will evolve based on the feedback we received from this forum. Three direct suggestions were made:

- Exploring the publication of PCPI Position Statements on social-emotional development so that we support the implementation of policies that will hurt rather than support children. We need to take a stand for protecting the social-emotional health of very young children.



- Holding PCPI “train the trainer” sessions so that schools have resources for parent trainings. These opportunities could be led by PCPI experts talking about Zoom icebreaker ideas and parent training because we can build a community of adults while we are waiting for things to open back up.
- A PCPI focus session on Board Cultivation