

Beyond the Bell Program: Frequently Asked Questions

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Program Basics

What is Beyond the Bell?

Beyond the Bell is a before- and after-school program offered at Fairfax County Public Schools that previously offered School Age Child Care (SACC). Offered in partnership with Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), the program provides safe, engaging, high-quality care that supports children's learning and development while helping meet the child care needs of families. The program is designed to expand access to affordable, high-quality child care in Fairfax County by improving hiring practices and expanding capacity.

What are the Beyond the Bell program goals?

The goal of Beyond the Bell is to reduce long waitlists for before- and after-school care by expanding access to more families, while continuing to provide safe, high-quality and enriching programs for children. Implemented in stages through school year 2029-2030, the program allows NCS to evaluate its effectiveness, identify improvements and gather feedback to support future program expansion.

What is a VDOE licensure exemption?

Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) is the state agency responsible for overseeing public education in Virginia, including setting policies, standards, and regulations for K–12 schools and for licensed child care programs. Virginia law allows local government-operated child care programs to be exempt from VDOE licensure. Beyond the Bell operates under Virginia's regulations for school-age child care programs offered by local governments and staffed by local government employees. While it is regulated differently than traditional licensed child care centers, it maintains Fairfax County's long-standing commitment to safety, quality, staff training and enriching experiences for children.

Why was the transition to Beyond the Bell required to add more positions?

After reviewing data, the Beyond the Bell design team developed several strategies to better meet out-of-school-time child care needs in Fairfax County. Converting vacant non-merit positions to merit positions makes these roles more attractive to job candidates and easier to fill. However, even with all vacancies filled, current demand would still exceed capacity. To address this, the local government license exemption allows NCS to modestly increase enrollment at each site by adjusting staff-to-child ratios. Together, these strategies improve recruitment and increased capacity to enable NCS to serve more families and make meaningful progress toward reducing waitlists.

Why is a new program model needed to increase enrollment capacity?



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The Beyond the Bell model allows Fairfax County to operate without some of the staffing and enrollment limits set by the state. This flexibility means NCS can hire more quickly, adjust maximum staff-to-child ratios from 1:18 to 1:22, and open more spots for children.

What are the Beyond the Bell program hours?

Beyond the Bell and SACC hours operate on the same schedule at all sites: Before school is available 7 a.m. until school begins. After school is end of the school day until 6:15 p.m.

How many sites are participating in Beyond the Bell?

A total of 20 schools participated in the 2025-26 Beyond the Bell pilot. An additional 21 schools will be added in 2026-27. All SACC sites will convert to Beyond the Bell sites by school year 2029-30.

How are sites selected for Beyond the Bell?

In collaboration with FCPS, NCS identified 21 schools across all nine Board of Supervisors districts for expansion in SY 2026–27. Site selection criteria prioritized localized waitlist sizes, high vulnerability indices, Title I status, and Free and Reduced-Price Meal populations, while also factoring in upcoming school boundary redesigns and capital improvement projects.

Will Key and Kilmer transition to Beyond the Bell?

No. Due to the specialized populations that these sites serve, Key and Kilmer are not expected to transition to the Beyond the Bell model.

I added my name to a SACC waitlist... does that mean my school offers SACC? Can I choose to stay in SACC instead of Beyond the Bell?

If you are enrolled or waitlisted for a SACC location, that will automatically transfer to Beyond the Bell when your school transitions. Transitions from SACC to Beyond the Bell will occur prior to the start of each school year. When space is available, your family will be enrolled in the program that is offered at your school. At that time, families can choose to enroll or indicate if they no longer require care.

Will families need to learn new processes or create new accounts for Beyond the Bell?

No. Beyond the Bell waitlists, enrollment and payment are currently managed through the SACC registration system. This ensures a smooth transition and a consistent experience for families.

Will transportation be provided?

Beyond the Bell's goal is to enroll students at their base school, so transportation is not necessary.

Is Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) supporting this program?

Yes. This program was driven by Superintendent Dr. Michelle C. Reid and supported by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors to address a shared priority of increasing access to affordable school-age child care for Fairfax County families. FCPS is providing access to school facilities and collaborating with NCS to ensure a smooth transition and successful rollout of Beyond the Bell.

How will higher staff-to-child ratios affect program quality and safety?

As part of the program, the staff-to-child ratio could increase from a max of 1:18 to a max of 1:22. This change is still within accepted safety standards set by the [Virginia Education Standards of Quality](#) and allows more children to be served while expanding staff capacity. The program's maximum ratio of 1:22 remains below Fairfax County Public Schools' elementary school ratios. Beyond the Bell will continue to

uphold the same high standards of safety, enrichment and child development as SACC. The individual needs of all children of all abilities remain a priority.

What sites are participating in the Beyond the Bell program?

For a complete list of Beyond the Bell locations, visit [Beyond the Bell](#) (see Locations bar under Program Information).

Current SACC or Beyond the Bell Families

When will our current SACC site transition to Beyond the Bell?

Beginning with the 2026-27 school year, the transition from SACC to Beyond the Bell will occur in the summer prior to the start of the school year (for sites identified as part of that transition phase).

How will I know when my school will transition to Beyond the Bell?

Phase 1 schools were announced in early July 2026. Schools transitioning in future phases will be announced by July each year. Because transition decisions consider several factors, including planned capital improvements and facility maintenance schedules, schools for each phase may not be finalized until closer to the end of the preceding school year. Enrolled families and waitlisted families will be notified once their school is scheduled to transition.

Aside from staff ratios, what other changes should current SACC families expect?

Day-to-day operations will remain consistent with a VDOE-licensed program and the high quality of child care families are accustomed to. Families may notice some changes, such as larger group sizes, additional staff and expanded use of space in the school.

Will the Beyond the Bell program be in the same space as the SACC program?

NCS is working closely with Fairfax County Public Schools (including principals at Beyond the Bell sites) to identify additional space requirements to accommodate increased enrollment.

Waitlisted Families

When will my waitlisted child begin receiving before- or after-school child care?

If you are waitlisted at a SACC or Beyond the Bell site, you will be contacted as soon as space becomes available at your selected location. We may not be able to accommodate your child at the start of the school year but will work to increase capacity throughout the school year.

What if I no longer require before- or after-school care?

If your needs have changed and you no longer need before- or after-school child care, please update your enrollment status using one of the following methods:

- Online: [SACC Registration Online](#) (Select “Enrollment” tab to change status or preferences)
- Phone (Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.): Call 703-449-8989, TTY 711.

I have been on a SACC waitlist for a long time. Can I move to Beyond the Bell?

In order to support a smooth transition, we are not able to transition all sites to Beyond the Bell immediately. We know this is a challenge for families waiting for child care; we appreciate your patience as we work to expand to all schools and better meet the demand for school age child care.

When joining a waitlist, will I be registering for SACC or Beyond the Bell?

You will be registering for whichever program is offered at your school for that school year. Though your school may be a SACC location for 2026-27 school year, it will transition to Beyond the Bell by 2030. At Beyond the Bell program sites, registration will be for Beyond the Bell. Though Beyond the Bell is a separate program, waitlists, enrollment and payment will be managed through the same registration/payment system used by SACC. This ensures a smooth transition and a consistent experience for families.

I prefer to remain on the waitlist for a SACC site. What are my options?

Families have the option to decline enrollment and also to join a waitlist at a different site. Transportation is not offered between sites.

Will all SACC waitlisted families be able to receive child care through Beyond the Bell?

The Beyond the Bell program is designed to eliminate the waitlists at current SACC sites by 2030.

How can I find out when my waitlisted student will begin receiving child care?

Waitlisted families should ensure their SACC waitlist status reflects their current needs. When space becomes available for your child, NCS staff will contact you to provide further information and a start date. You will be contacted using the information in the SACC registration system.

Cost & Impact

Will the cost of the program/fees assessment be different than SACC?

Beyond the Bell has the same fee structure as SACC. The sliding fee scale is still available.

Is financial assistance available for Beyond the Bell?

Multiple financial assistance options are available for Beyond the Bell families:

- The sliding fee scale will continue to be available for Beyond the Bell.
- Federal and military subsidies through Child Care Aware of America (CCAA) and Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood (MCCYN) will continue to be available.
- Beyond the Bell sites will not participate as vendors for Child Care Assistance and Referral (CCAR) subsidy program. However, Beyond the Bell will honor the copayment amount for current CCAR-eligible families at the Beyond the Bell sites through the family's eligibility period. For more information on CCAR subsidy eligibility, visit CCAR webpage, call 703-449-8484 or email CCARInfo@fairfaxcounty.gov.
- Families should check on licensure requirements for any other employer-based subsidy programs.

This document will be updated as needed. To view the most current information, please visit:

<https://engage.fairfaxcounty.gov/beyond-the-bell-pilot>
<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/neighborhood-community-services/beyond-the-bell>
