

To: Helen Cheek, Superintendent
From: Casey McCarty
RE: Integrating Special Education Services into Smart Start Plan

As the district develops a Smart Start Plan for 2022-2023, the IASD Special Education Support Team proposes the integration of special education services be as follows:

LOW RISK – School is fully open on a regular schedule:

Students with disabilities will continue to receive special education support services within the general education classroom and/or through pull-out services as stated in their individual educational program (IEP). The low-risk option reflects no change from a school day under non-pandemic times.

Initial referrals and student's requiring re-evaluations for Special Education Services will continue with the initial evaluation process as before Covid-19. The timeline from consent to services offered in an IEP is 90 calendar days.

MEDIUM RISK – School applies a modified schedule with reduced hours of attendance:

Students with disabilities will continue to receive special education support services within the general education classroom during the time that they are attending on reduced days or hours. Student's IEP goals will be met during the time the student attends school. If a student receives pull-out services, such as for speech therapy, the student would attend the speech therapy session at the school but may be before or after the regular classroom is meeting so as not to reduce the student's allotted time with peers. Compensatory educational services will be offered to the student as necessary and appropriate.

Initial referrals and student's requiring re-evaluations for Special Education Services will be evaluated using a variety of assessments to determine eligibility. Information will be gathered from school staff and parents through distant measures. Evaluations will be made through the use of virtual and/or telephonic communication with service providers, special education staff, teachers, parents, and student. The timeline will continue to be 90 calendar days.

HIGH RISK – School building is closed:

Students with disabilities will continue to receive special education support services through virtual and/or telephonic communication with teacher, parent and student. Material targeting the student's IEP goals will be provided through learning packets (paper) and/or pre-loaded devices. If a student receives support with related service provider (e.g. Speech) the student will attend therapy sessions virtually or telephonically, dependent on what is appropriate to the student's need and situation. Compensatory educational services will be offered to the student as necessary and appropriate.

Initial referrals and student's requiring re-evaluations for Special Education Services will be evaluated using a variety of assessments to determine eligibility. Information will be gathered from school staff and parents through distant measures. Evaluations will be made through the use of virtual and/or telephonic communication with service providers, special education staff, teachers, parents, and student. The timeline will continue to be 90 calendar days.

Additional Notes:

For all scenarios, it's important to remember the following information from the Alaska State Guidance for Special Education:

The defining focus of special education programs is a **disability** in an educational setting; a lack of instruction or English proficiency prevents teams from determining if a disability exists in that setting. Special education programs should never be confused with remedial education programs.

The district's immediate job for these 'ineligible' students is **to provide appropriate reading, math, or English instruction**, not to provide inappropriate disability-focused special education.

Eligibility

Alaska regulation 4 AAC 52.130: 'Criteria for determination of eligibility' specifies the eligibility criteria for determination of eligibility in 14 categories. Disability alone is insufficient grounds for determining eligibility. Under 4 AAC 52.130, a student must "...require special facilities, equipment, or methods to make the child's education program effective."

Eligibility teams must determine three things:

1. Whether the student has a **disability** (34 CFR § 300.301) which adversely affects their educational performance; all disability categories have documentation requirements (4 AAC 52.130);
2. Whether the student **requires special education** and/or related services (4 AAC 52.130);
3. The **educational needs** of the student (34 CFR § 300.301).