

Guidelines for Students with Special Needs

(Special Education, Section 504, Health Care Plans)

Children with special needs are all unique, each with personal strengths and various challenges, requiring a flexible educational approach specific to their individual needs. That being said, it is difficult to come up with a “one size fits all COVID plan” that applies to every circumstance.

To the maximum extent possible, our department’s goal is to resume student accommodations, health plans, and special education services on-site, following the existing plans in place, within the context of each building’s academic and safety parameters.

Medical Orders: Of course, some plans may need to be adjusted and amended, such as to comply with orders from a medical health care provider. In such cases, please contact the Special Services Coordinator immediately. Medical orders will be reviewed by the child’s educational team, including parents and the school nurse, on a case-by-case basis. Ideally, these orders should be received prior to the start of the school year.

Safety Measures: All students with special needs will be required to follow the safety guidelines of their school buildings, to the best of their ability and within the scope of their educational goals, as determined by the child’s IEP team.

- It is expected that some students with special needs will struggle learning the new routines, tolerating a mask, frequently washing their hands, etc. Unless the educational team determines there are extenuating circumstances that prohibit a child from following a particular safety guideline, or attempting to learn it, the goal will be to make some effort to develop these adaptive behaviors to promote a safe learning environment for all.
- Working on some IEP goals will entail creativity and flexibility. Plexiglass barriers, clear face masks, and face shields are just some ideas the department will try when working on skills such as articulation and reading facial expressions, or when accommodating children with hearing impairments. Through working with parents, we hope to come up with more creative solutions as problems arise.
- In regards to social distancing, there are some circumstances where the child lacks the skills to maintain social distance from others, social proximity is required to maintain the child’s physical safety, and/or IEP goals require social proximity. These situations should be discussed and addressed by the student’s educational team on a case-by-case basis.

Distance Learning: Students residing within the District have the option of distance learning. For those students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) utilizing this option, specialized instruction/teletherapy will also be provided. What this would look like would depend on each child’s unique circumstances, as determined by the child’s educational team, taking into consideration medical provider orders and other information provided by the parent. Distance specialized education would likely look differently than on-site instruction, but would still be intended to provide the student with the opportunity to make meaningful educational gains. In some cases, the educational team and parents may agree to a blend of distance and on-site services (for example, online academic work and on-site for speech therapy). Distance learning plans will be developed by each child’s IEP team.

For students with academic 504 plans, those accommodations should also pertain to distance learning platforms, whenever applicable.

Parent Meetings: For IEP and 504 meetings with parents, Zoom meetings will be arranged unless parents request a face-to-face meeting. As in the past, these meetings will be scheduled with parents at a mutually agreeable time that works for both the parents and the staff. Some staff members may need to participate via Zoom rather than in-person for a variety of different reasons. The District is looking into electronic means to collect parent signatures on important documents.

Evaluations/IEPs in Progress: The school closure interrupted several special education evaluations and IEP meetings in progress. These processes will be resumed in the fall, although some testing will be delayed some weeks to allow students to recoup skills lost over the summer (a normal phenomenon for many students) and to provide a more valid representation of skills on norm-referenced tests. Also, for teachers to fill out social/emotional/behavioral checklists, they must first observe a child for at least one month. Your child's case manager will be in communication with you regarding this process and the expected timeline.

Determining Proficiency/COVID Impact: The impact of the school closure and the need for adjustments to the educational plan must be considered for every student with an IEP. Goals are written to be objective and measurable. Special education staff regularly collect data on these goals and made every effort to continue with data collection during distance learning. As always, when we return to school staff will take proficiency data at regular time intervals. By examining the data collected pre-closure, during distance learning, and throughout the fall, educational teams will utilize the information to help determine whether students have progressed, have regressed more than we would expect, or have maintained skills. In determining any necessary adjustments to the educational plan, the team will also consider other relevant factors, such as to what extent the student actively participated in the services that were offered and parent observations.

Special Needs Preschool: For returning preschool students, the schedule will remain the same as last year, following the kindergarten start and end dates on the school calendar and running Monday/Wednesday/Friday, 8:20 to 11:00. While busing is provided, parents are encouraged to pick-up and drop-off their children but are not required to do so. Please communicate with the preschool teacher, Ashley Olson, on your child's mode of transportation to ensure staff are adequately prepared to meet your child off the bus or at your vehicle.

For newly eligible preschoolers, the typical schedule will be 8:20 to 11:00 on Tuesday/Thursday for 3 year olds, and 8:20 to 11:00 on Monday/Wednesday/Friday for 4 year olds. If your child is found to qualify for the preschool, the schedule and any questions you have about it will be discussed with you at your child's first IEP meeting.

Communication: Because each child's circumstances and needs are different, communication between parents and school staff is critical. While case managers are the usual point of contact for parents, our teachers and speech pathologists do not return to work until August 24th, and the school nurses return August 17th. To allow for adequate preparation, you are encouraged to contact me, the Special Services Coordinator, with any important information, questions, or concerns.

Best regards,

Jennifer Demmons, Ed.D.
Special Services Coordinator

