

We are experiencing an unprecedented time in our nation and in our education system. Please note that because of the unknown and uncertain factors of this crisis, this information is subject to change. This working document will be updated as new information becomes available from the state and federal governments.

Students who receive special education services are general education students first. School districts must provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) consistent with the need to protect the health and safety of students with disabilities and those individuals providing education, specialized instruction, and related services to these students. FAPE may include, as appropriate, special education and related services provided through distance instruction provided virtually, online, or telephonically.

1. What can I expect from my child's school district and teachers?

School districts have been advised by the [Connecticut Bureau of Special Education \(BSE\)](#) to communicate frequently and regularly with families on an individual level taking into consideration their preferred methods of communication. It is not enough to rely on information that is sent to the entire district. Special education departments should be reaching out with additional information. If families have not heard from their child's teacher(s) they are encouraged to reach out to the teacher or district.

The [Office for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services \(OSERS\)](#) is strongly advising districts to move forward with plans to educate all students. If you still have not received communication after reaching out to your child's teacher and the director of special education for your district, please contact the [Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center \(CPAC\)](#).

2. What should families and districts be doing in preparation for the eventual return to school?

Families and districts are advised to document everything that has been offered to students and everything that has been received.

Families should document what activities they are doing with their child(ren) including the type of work, the functioning of the child, any behavioral concerns, and in general, what they see happening regarding the child's learning from the family's perspective. Families should save all documentation and communication with the school district including e-mails and written communication.

3. What can I expect if my child is due for an evaluation or was in the middle of an evaluation when classes were cancelled?

[OSERS](#) encourages districts and families to work “collaboratively and creatively to meet [Individualized Education Program] IEP timeline requirements”.

Initial Evaluation - If the child has not yet been found eligible for special education but was in the initial evaluation process, current guidance from the [Connecticut State Department of Education \(CSDE\)](#) is that the timeline has been paused for that evaluation. While there is no requirement on the part of the district, families can contact the district and ask if there is enough information to help them with accommodations and modifications of the general education work that the student is receiving.

Reevaluations - If districts were in the middle of an evaluation when school closed, families are encouraged to communicate with districts to ask if there is enough information to share with the family or if there is information that may be helpful to the family at home. There is no requirement to share this information, and districts should consider this request on a case by case basis. [Current guidance from the CSDE](#) is that a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) should not convene to determine eligibility with incomplete evaluations. Incomplete evaluations should be completed as soon as it is safe to do so.

Families and districts may agree in writing that a reevaluation (triennial evaluation) is not necessary. However, triennial evaluations can offer important information in planning for special education for the next three years, and families should consider whether new information is necessary

to appropriately program for their child. In some instances, families and districts may be better off delaying instead of waiving the evaluation.

The State is exploring options for evaluation while students are at home. For example, if the evaluation can't happen face to face, what would a remote evaluation look like? Can an evaluation happen remotely? The State is actively working on these questions and families and districts can expect further guidance in the future.

4. What if my child's evaluations were completed before COVID-19 school classroom closures but the PPT to determine eligibility has not yet been held?

Districts and families can choose to move forward with a PPT meeting to determine eligibility virtually or telephonically. (See Question 5 for things to consider when holding a PPT meeting).

5. What can I expect regarding my child's PPT meeting?

PPT (IEP) meetings are an important requirement in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). A PPT is called if changes are necessary in the IEP document.

While PPT meeting requirements remain, the national pandemic has impacted team's ability to hold in person meetings. Virtual/telephonic meetings can and should be held in some cases. Here are some things to consider before convening a meeting:

- Both families and required district staff must be available and able to meaningfully participate in the PPT meeting.
- Both the district and the family must agree to hold a virtual or telephonic meeting.
- If districts refuse or require PPT meetings, families should document their disagreement in writing and should contact the district director of special education. If the situation is not resolved with the director, please reach out to [CPAC](#) and/or the [BSE](#) to discuss the specifics of the situation.

- District and families must consider confidentiality, translation services, and if the family is able to access the technology used.
- [Current guidance from the CSDE](#) encourages districts to have conversations with families around extending timelines, if appropriate, until school resumes or when we know better what continued educational opportunities will look like.
- PPT meetings should not be held if evaluations are not complete.
- An amendment is a written agreement between district and families to change the IEP without a PPT meeting. Amendments cannot be used to fulfill the annual review requirements.

6. My child turned 21 this school year and was going to age out. What happens now?

School districts are required to provide continued educational opportunities for all students to the greatest extent possible at this time. PPTs are required to assess the impact of statewide school classroom cancellations on students when school resumes including students who are aging out or exiting special education at the end of the school year. The BSE is currently working on this issue and gather information from stakeholders. More direction will be provided by the BSE in the future.

7. What happens with my child who receives accommodations under Section 504?

Continued educational opportunities that are provided by districts must also be provided to students with 504 accommodation plans ([OCR Guidance](#)). Families should contact the district to discuss reasonable accommodations for schoolwork, if appropriate. The impact of school closure on students should be considered when returning to school.

8. Is my child entitled to compensatory services when they return to school?

During this unprecedented national pandemic, schools and families are collaborating to reduce the impact of statewide school classroom closures. [Current guidance from the OSERS](#) indicates that when schools resume normal operations “IEP teams must make an individualized determination whether and to what extent compensatory services may be needed.” PPTs will come together to assess the impact of the statewide closures on each student with a disability and to develop appropriate compensatory services. The State will provide more information about this process as we navigate through this health crisis.

CPAC continues to provide individualized support during this challenging time. Our consultants are available to discuss specific concerns about your child. Please contact us at (860) 739-3089 or e-mail cpac@cpacinc.org.

For more information, visit our website at www.cpacinc.org.

For the latest information from the Connecticut State Department of Education, visit their website: [Special Education Guidance and Resources for COVID-19](#).

For the latest guidance from the U.S Department of Education, visit <https://www.ed.gov/coronavirus/>.