



Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner

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Dear Families and Guardians:

During this period of extended school closure, we recognize this is a difficult time for families, guardians, and caregivers. We understand that one of your concerns is how your children with disabilities will continue to receive support and services from schools while they are closed due to the public health emergency related to COVID-19. During this unprecedented time, we appreciate that families and educators will work together to provide the best possible access to special education instruction and services.

In this letter, I want to share important updates about what schools are doing to support your child during this time. The accompanying Family Resource Toolbox provides some helpful information about resources and strategies for families.

On March 21, the U.S. Department of Education issued a [fact sheet](#) clarifying that schools must continue to provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to students with disabilities while protecting the health and safety of students, educators, and service providers. In these extraordinary circumstances, special education services will be provided differently than they are when school buildings are open and fully operational. Remote special education services should start immediately. You do not need to provide consent for remote services to begin. You should receive a plan about how the school will provide remote services.

In Massachusetts, remote learning for all students, including students with disabilities, should be provided using both:

1. **Supports and resources** for independent learning that can include academic content and homework packets and project-based learning opportunities, with the accommodations your child needs.
2. **Instruction and services** that can be delivered remotely in whole group and small group settings or individually. Instruction and services can be provided by using online programs, television, or the telephone.

Here are a few key ideas to keep in mind.

Ongoing and regular communication between educators and families is important. Your child's teacher and related service providers will be in regular contact with you. You and your child's teachers and related service providers should decide how often and what method of communication works best for you, discuss your child's individualized instruction, IEP goals and service needs and plan for how services can be provided remotely. Let your school team know what issues you are most concerned about for your child and tell them the best way to connect with you, whether it is by email, telephone, or other means.

Your child may not receive individualized instruction and services the same way as they do when school is in session. You and your child's teachers and school team can be creative in designing ways to provide remote learning opportunities, special education instruction and services. It may not be possible to provide hands-on or face to face therapies or instruction, given the public safety order for social distancing. Specialized instructional opportunities and related services can be modified or provided remotely for your child to receive FAPE. The

school should provide you with a remote learning plan, so you know the plan and schedule for your child to receive instruction, services, and other learning opportunities.

Your child's IEP lists the supports and accommodations that help them succeed at school and you can also use them during daily activities at home. The school will ensure that your child can access remote opportunities through appropriate accommodations. Review your child's IEP with your child's teacher to find your child's accommodations and understand how to use them at home. If you do not have a copy of the IEP, contact your child's teacher to arrange to have a copy sent to you or set up a time to discuss your child's IEP with your child's teacher on the phone.

You can use assistive technology. Examples include computers, software, communication devices, calculators, speech-to-text apps, and Closed Captioning, and other specialized equipment to help your child learn at home. Your child's teacher and school leaders should contact you to work together about the best ways to incorporate these devices and technologies into your everyday life. If your child's specialized equipment is still at school, you can talk with your school leaders about how to get access to them.

IEP Meetings can be held virtually while schools are closed. Virtual IEP meetings are a good solution to comply with social distancing rules. You can participate in virtual IEP meetings by phone or video conferencing.

- If your child's annual IEP is due, we encourage you to work with your child's team to decide if it's possible to hold a virtual IEP meeting.
- When school resumes, your child's teachers will review your child's progress and hold an IEP meeting with you as necessary to determine the best next step.

Contact your child's teacher or school leaders if you are having technical problems accessing remote instruction and resources. Utilizing on-line resources is new for many families, and we recognize that parents may need technical support. Let the school know if you have questions or need assistance.

If your child's approved private special education school is closed, educators from the approved special education school will reach out to you to determine how the school will continue to provide special education services remotely. The approved special education school should provide you with a remote learning plan, so you know the plan and schedule for your child to receive instruction, services, and other learning opportunities.

If your child has a 504 plan, your child's teacher and/or 504 Coordinator should be in contact with you about how to provide accommodations or services as outlined on your child's 504 plan. Your child's teacher should explain how to access the accommodations that your child needs on school assignments. If you have any questions, please contact your child's teacher or the 504 Coordinator for your school.

Schools and districts have been identifying different ways to reach students and families. During the coming weeks, your child's teachers and school leaders will continue to develop and expand ways to provide remote special education services.

We encourage school leaders, teachers, and families to work together to find the best ways to support each child during this challenging time.

Sincerely,

Russell D. Johnston, PhD
Senior Associate Commissioner