

fall 2020 reopening guidance

Based on 7/9/2020 Massachusetts DESE Guidelines,
accurate as of 7/23/2020



A FREE AND APROPRIATE PUBLIC EDUCATION

School districts must continue to provide **free and appropriate public education (FAPE)** consistent with the need to protect the health and safety of students with disabilities.

IEP TEAM MEETINGS

At the start of the 2020-2021 school year, teachers or liaisons must provide parents with written notification with specific information about how IEP services will be provided.

- **IEP Teams must continue to conduct annual review Team meetings** as scheduled (603 CMR 28.04(3)). Districts are advised to update the IEP as though the student will be attending school full-time, in-person.
- **IEP Team members must consider information from parents** regarding their children's experiences during the pandemic, including primary areas of need and ability to access remote learning.
- Keep in mind: School closure can be traumatic and students may have regressed and/or developed a new disability-related area of need (e.g. anxiety). Schools and districts should obtain as much information from parents and caregivers as possible to anticipate the student's areas of need.



ADAPTING TO DISTANCING

Students must receive all services documented in their IEPs through in-person instruction, remote instruction, or a hybrid of both.

- **If services are provided differently** for the 2020-2021 school year than as described in a student's IEP (e.g. if student will no longer receive speech therapy in person, but through video conferencing in a gen-ed classroom to minimize classroom movement), **parents must be notified in writing** with specific information about how, when, and where services are now being provided.
- Schools and districts **must make their best effort to ensure students with disabilities** – especially preschool-age children and those with significant and complex needs – **receive as many services as possible in person**, whether full-time, part-time, or in a student's home or a community setting.
- When in-person instruction cannot be provided, **students must receive special education instruction and services through and "Instruction and Services" model** (e.g. structured lessons, teletherapy, Zoom lessons, etc.) instead of relying solely on a "Resources and Supports" model (e.g. packets and assignments), which can only be used for up to two weeks.

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STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT AND COMPLEX NEEDS

For students with significant and complex needs, **one-on-one instruction in the home or a community setting should be considered** and made available as feasible if in-school instruction is not possible. These students include:

- Those identified as “high needs” through their IEP;
- Students who cannot engage in remote learning due to their disability-related needs;
- Students who primarily use aided and argumentative communication;
- Students who are homeless;
- Students in foster or congregate care; and/or
- Students dually identified as English Learners.

KINDERGARTEN 'CHILD FIND' SCREENING

Because of the shift to remote learning in the spring, kindergarten screening may have been delayed for some children. **Districts are still required to screen 3- and 4-year-old children for the Child Find process**, and all children of age to enter kindergarten.

- It is recommended that schools and districts resume the screening process in the summer using phone/video meetings. If a student has a suspected disability and/or has been referred for a special education evaluation, the district should move forward with evaluation procedures in a timely manner.

ABC



GENERAL SCHOOL RIGHTS AND GUIDANCE

- As always, **all written and oral communication from the school or district must be provided in the primary language of the home**, including providing an interpreter at all IEP Team meetings and translating IEPs, schedules, and progress reports.
- Given the circumstances, **schools and districts should use disciplinary action as a last resort** when students with disabilities exhibit behavioral challenges, such as difficulties wearing a mask, maintaining social distance, and adapting to new routines.
- School districts, collaborative programs, and approved special education **programs must continue to issue Progress Reports**, at least as often as provided for students without disabilities (603 CMR 28.07(3)).