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SPECIAL EDUCATION RESOURCE HUB:
What Families & Students Need to Know this Year

I WANT TO KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT THIS YEAR FOR MY CHILD WHO HAS A DISABILITY

YOUR CHILD'S RIGHTS

1 MY CHILD HAS A DIAGNOSED DISABILITY. WHAT SUPPORT SHOULD I EXPECT FROM THEIR SCHOOL?

Your school will give your child a specially designed education at no cost to you that meets your child's unique needs. This will include:

- Your child will receive specially designed instruction. Depending on their needs, they may also qualify for services like speech therapy or counseling.
- A team made up of teachers and others, including you the parent, decides what services and support the student gets.
- The plan for providing this education must be written down in an individualized education program (IEP).
- Your school will provide you with reports or updates on your child's progress throughout the year. You can also discuss any concerns you have.
- You as a parent may be able to receive training as part of your child's IEP to help you understand and assist with your child's special needs.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a federal law, guarantees this right to a "free and appropriate public education" (also known as FAPE) for children with disabilities. This right applies whether your child is enrolled in a DCPS school or a DC public charter school, or attending a nonpublic special education school.

The IDEA also guarantees many other rights, known as "procedural safeguards," to ensure that your child receives FAPE. OSSE's Notice of Procedural Safeguards has more detailed descriptions of these rights.

COVID-19 does not change your child's rights. These are the same whether your child is learning at school or virtually. However, special education might look and feel different for your child this year. The question, "What support can I expect from my child's school in the upcoming school year, given COVID-19?" offers more information about this.

If you have questions, contact your child's teacher or special education coordinator.

2 IF IT IS NOT SAFE FOR MY CHILD TO RETURN TO SCHOOL, WILL MY SCHOOL HELP THEM LEARN AT HOME?

Your school must continue providing special education, even if your child can not return to school but other students are returning to in-person services.

If school buildings are closed, or health officials or your child's doctor say your child should stay home, your child's individualized education program (IEP) team will help.

Individual home instruction can be delivered in many ways, below are some of several options your child's IEP team will consider. This can include things like:

- Telephone calls
- Homework packets
- Internet-based lessons

Your child's IEP team will work with you on planning for your child to learn at home. This will include getting the special education required by your child's IEP that can be delivered through a distance learning model, while balancing the health and safety needs of your family. This may mean that some, but not all, of your child's IEP services will be delivered while your child is learning at home. This may also mean that IEP services may look different than they have before. For example, your child may receive only a portion of their IEP-required specialized instruction hours, based on how many hours of virtual classroom time your child student is attending, or your child may receive speech and language services alone with the therapist instead of in a group with their peers. You should discuss with your child's school how these services will be recovered during this school year.

Remember that home instruction as part of an IEP is not the same as homeschooling. Students receiving home instruction are still enrolled at their DC school. Homeschooled students do not get any special education or services from DC schools.

For more information, see OSSE's guidance on special education and COVID-19.

WHAT TO EXPECT THIS SCHOOL YEAR

3 WHAT SUPPORT CAN I EXPECT FROM MY CHILD'S SCHOOL IN THE UPCOMING SCHOOL YEAR, GIVEN COVID-19?

Your school has been hard at work planning for this school year. Below are key things to keep in mind about what you and your child can expect from your school. If you have any questions, contact your school.

1) **Your school must keep providing special education**, even if the school is not returning in person. This will include getting the special education required by your child's individualized education program (IEP) that can be delivered through a distance learning model, while balancing the health and safety needs of your family. However, some learning and services might look different during distance learning. For example:

   - Learning might involve virtual ways to accommodate your child's disability
   - You might meet with service providers over phone or video
   - Your child may need new technology to help them do work at home (called "assistive technology"). This is different from the device used for remote learning and may include software to enlarge text or read it aloud.
   - You should discuss with your child's school how any services that cannot be delivered will be recovered during this school year.

2) **Your school should partner with you, as needed, to review and update your child's IEP.** If necessary for your child, this process should consider how your child's needs may have changed and how they will be met if your child is learning from home or at school. It should also consider your needs as a parent for training to support your child. If your child attends a DCPS school, DCPS has committed to creating a distance learning plan for each student with a disability.

3) **Your school should test your child's learning levels at the start of the year and share those results with you.** This test, known as a "formative assessment," will help the school understand how your child's needs may have changed.

4) **Your school should help you support your child.** This includes providing training and resources for distance learning. They should also help you learn how to use new technology.

5) **Your school should communicate with you about how they are going to take these steps within the first two weeks of school**. Your school has been developing a plan called a "Continuous Education and School Recovery Plan." This plan should be shared directly with you. It will also be on your school network's website and OSSE's website, once finalized. This plan will explain, among other things, how your school will:

   - Teach students at home and in person
   - Take attendance
   - Connect families with needed technology
   - Adapt academic, behavior and specialized supports for distance learning

Read more about these expectations in OSSE's Guiding Principles for Continuous Education and OSSE's IDEA, Part B Provision of FAPE: Guidance Related to Remote and Blended Learning.

Here you can find school contact information:

- DC Public Schools
- DC Public Charter Schools
- Nonpublic Special Education Schools

4 I AM CONCERNED MY CHILD MAY HAVE LOST LEARNING PROGRESS THIS SPRING. WHAT CAN I EXPECT MY SCHOOL TO DO TO HELP MY CHILD CATCH UP?

For the 2020-21 school year, schools are developing plans for **"recovery services"** for all students, including recovery services considerations for your child. These plans, generally, will help your child with learning loss that may have occurred last spring. Your child should receive recovery services that are delivered alongside the regular school-year education.

Beyond recovery services, some students may need **"compensatory services."** Compensatory services are designed to make up for education a child loses when a school does not provide individualized education program (IEP) services. These services would be in addition to "recovery services." Your child's IEP team, including you, should discuss whether your child might need compensatory services.

5 MY CHILD IS PLACED IN A NONPUBLIC SPECIAL EDUCATION SCHOOL. HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT THEIR SCHOOL'S PLAN FOR THE FALL?

Your child's nonpublic special education school is working with the public school in DC that referred them to create plans for this school year. These plans will include details about how learning will take place - at school or virtually. They will also describe how the school plans to operate safely. **For questions about learning or safety plans, ask your child's nonpublic school or DC school.**

In general, if you have concerns about the nonpublic school your child is attending, you should reach out to the public school in DC that referred your child and your child's individualized education program (IEP) team.

Here you can find school profiles, along with contact information:

- Nonpublic Special Education Schools
- DC Public Schools
- DC Public Charter Schools

For more information, see OSSE's guidance for nonpublic schools.

WHO TO REACH OUT TO FOR HELP

6 HOW CAN I ADVOCATE FOR SERVICES AND SUPPORTS FOR ME AND MY CHILD AT THEIR SCHOOL?

The DC school where your child is enrolled is the first point of contact for you to advocate for your child. If you have concerns, you should start by sharing them with your child's DC school. You can contact your child's teacher, special education coordinator or other school officials.

You can talk about this over the phone, email or video. Here are sample resources and letters that may be helpful.

Several organizations in DC can help you advocate. They can also talk to you about next steps if you are having trouble working with your school. These organizations are:

- Office of the Student Advocate - Supports DC students and families through parent education, coaching, resources and training.
- Office of the Ombudsman - A neutral office that uses mediation and conflict resolution to help families with concerns about public education in DC.
- Advocates for Justice and Education (AJE) - DC's Parent Training and Information Center. They help parents advocate on behalf of their children and provide parent training and resources.

7 WHO DO I REACH OUT TO IF I BELIEVE MY CHILD'S NEEDS HAVE CHANGED OR IF THEIR LEARNING OR SKILLS HAVE REGRESSED?

If you have concerns about your child's needs, talk to their teacher or special education coordinator to request an IEP meeting for review of their special education services. You can prepare for a conversation with your child's school by:

- Writing down your thoughts about your child's learning
- Keeping a home log of your child's services

A review by your child's IEP team may result in the need for a "reevaluation" of your child's needs. A reevaluation is a formal process to check in on your child's academic performance and needs to see if they would benefit from different special education or services, based on a redetermination of the child's disability classification. A reevaluation is required every three years, but you can also request it at any time.

OSSE's Office of Dispute Resolution or State Complaints Office are the next places to go. The Office of Dispute Resolution Parent's Guide has more information on next steps.

8 WHERE DO I GO IF MY CHILD AND I ARE NOT GETTING THE SUPPORT WE NEED FROM MY SCHOOL?

If you try and are not able to come to an agreement with your school about special education issues, you have other options. If your child attends a DCPS school, you can contact the DCPS Office of Integrity to ask for support first. Otherwise, OSSE's Office of Dispute Resolution or State Complaints Office are the first places to go for these next steps:

- **Facilitated IEP Meeting** - an IEP team meeting led by a neutral person. This is likely the first step you should consider. It gives you a chance to solve problems quickly among the people who know your child best.
- **Mediation** - a conversation with the school led by a neutral third person. The goal is for you and the school to come to an agreement. This is often faster than due process.
- **Due Process Hearing** - both you and the school share their respective point of view through witnesses and relevant documents presented to a neutral hearing officer. The hearing officer makes the decision. This can be appealed to court.
- **State Complaint** - you file a written complaint to OSSE and an investigation takes place to see if the law has been broken.

The Office of Dispute Resolution Parent's Guide has more information.

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD AND FAMILY THIS SCHOOL YEAR

9 WHAT QUESTIONS CAN I ASK MY SCHOOL TO ENSURE MY CHILD IS GETTING THE SUPPORT THEY NEED AT HOME?

Your school has been planning how to support students with disabilities for this new school year. Your school should share their plan for supporting your child with you within the first two weeks of school. They should also put this information on their website.

Here are a few questions you can ask your child's teacher or special education coordinator to learn more:

School-wide plans for the school this year:

- What supports and services will be provided to all students at this school? Will additional supports be available to my child and family?
- How are you choosing technology? How are you making sure my child can use it?
- How much time will my child have with their teacher each day?

Learning expectations:

- What services in my child's individualized education program (IEP) will be online?
- How will my child's progress be reviewed virtually? What will this look like? How can I help at home?
- What is the school's timeline and plan for reviewing and, if needed, revising IEPs to account for student-specific needs, such as behavioral differences?
- What worked and didn't work well for my child this spring? How should we make adjustments based on that?

For more questions you can ask your school, see here:

- Top Tips for Parents of Students with Disabilities during COVID-19
- National Center for Learning Disabilities

Here, you can find school profiles, along with contact information:

- DC Public Schools
- DC Public Charter Schools
- Nonpublic Special Education Schools

10 HOW CAN I LEARN ABOUT MY CHILD'S PROGRESS?

Your child's school is responsible for monitoring your child's receipt of special education and related services and providing you with periodic progress reports. They should communicate this information to you throughout the school year. In particular:

- **At the start of the school year**, your school should check on your child's learning levels. They should share this information with you, and they should use this information to consider whether any changes are needed to your child's individualized education program (IEP).
- **Throughout the school year**, your child's school should monitor progress from your child's IEP. They will communicate with you regularly. This will all be based on the goals in your child's IEP. If you need help understanding your child's IEP, ask your child's teacher or school.

If you have questions, you can ask your child's teacher or special education coordinator.

Schools are required to continue to monitor your child's progress during distance learning during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

11 HOW CAN I BEST SUPPORT MY CHILD AT HOME DURING DISTANCE LEARNING?

You are doing so much by providing a safe and loving home for your child and encouraging them to engage with school. Supporting your child or children at home during this time can feel overwhelming, but your child's teachers care and are there to support you.

Your school should provide training and resources to help you support your child's learning at home. You can always ask your child's teacher for help.

Here are some suggestions for supporting your child(ren) at home:

Set up a space for them to learn. If possible, set up a space just for learning. Try to find a place that avoids distractions and can be organized. See School Virtually for more tips.

Help them structure their day. Distance learning provides less structure than being at school. Your child may benefit from help creating a schedule and staying on task. If possible, create a daily schedule that is similar to what it would be in school.

- Here is a set of posters, printouts and other resources you can use to build structure.

Help with teletherapy. Teletherapy is therapy provided virtually. Your child may be working with an outside therapist or counselor at home. Family tips for teletherapy include being ready to join video or phone calls if needed and ensuring your child's face is visible to the service provider.

Take Good Care of Yourself. Managing your own mental health is important. You can start by calling the Access HelpLine at 1(888) 7WE-HELP or 1(888) 793-4357.

Additional Resources:

- Family Guide to At-Home Learning
- Distance Learning Resources for Learners with Disabilities
- Best Special Education Apps and Websites
- Remote Learning for Students with Significant or Multiple Disabilities
- Helping Students with Special Needs Cope with Remote Learning

12 WHAT CAN MY FAMILY DO TO MANAGE STRESS AND WELLNESS DURING THIS TIME?

We know this is a stressful time for families and students across DC. There are many resources available to help.

Attend a virtual training/ workshop:

- DCPS Parent University Online has virtual workshops for all families in DC. The workshop schedule and past recordings are available online.
- If you care for a child younger than age 6, you can participate in the online Positive Parenting Program. This program is provided by the DC Department of Behavioral Health. This program will help you practice handling challenging situations. To access the program, enter "dcparents" as the enrollment key when you create an account.

Access support or resources:

- Resources from the Department of Behavioral Health:
  - You can call DC's Access HelpLine, 1(888) 7WE-HELP or 1(888)793-4357.
  - This one-page behavioral health flyer explains the types of supports available.
  - The Department of Behavioral Health has more information and resources.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has a resource page to help students and families.
- Interested in more support for your child? Call your school and ask to be connected with the "Behavioral Health Coordinator." They can help connect your student to services.

Connect with other families:

- The State Advisory Panel on Special Education (SAPSE) has open meetings where you can meet other families.
- The Family and Youth Engagement Committee on DC School Behavioral Health is a space for parents to share experiences, concerns, and ideas. The committee meets every third Friday of the month. You can email Dr. Chioma Oruh at chioma@drchibornfree.com for the virtual meeting link.
- Understood.org's collection of stories shares how families of students with disabilities are coping with COVID-19.

TRANSPORTATION, ATTENDANCE, DISCIPLINE, SCHOOL RECORDS

13 IF SCHOOL BUILDINGS ARE OPEN, HOW CAN I MAKE SURE MY CHILD RECEIVES SAFE TRANSPORTATION?

Your child's individualized education program (IEP) may include transportation services. If this is the case, OSSE will provide bus transportation or reimbursement, depending on the operational status and public health actions of DC and surrounding areas.

This is for the safety and protection of students and staff during the COVID-19 public health emergency. **You can contact the OSSE Division of Student Transportation's Parent Resource Center at (202) 576-5000 or osse.dot@dc.gov with any questions.**

Contact your school directly if you have questions about the school calendar, whether or not the school building is open, and to make sure a transportation request has been submitted for your child.

To read more about transportation and safety during COVID-19, visit the links below:

- Phase 2 Health and Safety Guidance for Schools
- COVID-19 DOT Policy Updates
- For Parents: Transportation for Students with Disabilities

14 HOW WILL ATTENDANCE WORK THIS YEAR IF SCHOOL IS VIRTUAL?

Schools will still take attendance every day this school year. If your school is providing distance learning, they have several options to track attendance. These options include:

- Monitoring when your child logs in to technology
- Submitting a particular assignment
- Making contact with the teacher over phone or email

More detail can be found in OSSE's attendance policy. If you have questions about how your school is taking attendance, ask your school. You should also contact your school if your child needs help with technology to log in on time.

15 HOW IS MY CHILD'S SCHOOL HANDLING DISCIPLINE THIS YEAR?

All students must follow their schools' discipline policies and code of conduct. This includes things like appropriate use of school technology. However, your child has special protections under IDEA, the federal special education law, that require the school to take extra steps before disciplining them. To learn more about these rights, see this short video on school discipline. These rights remain in place during distance learning.

Your school may update its discipline policy this year when considering distance learning. Your school should have this updated policy available and easy to find on its website. The policy will explain what happens if your child does not follow the school's rules.

For more information:

School Discipline: The Rights of Students With IEPs and 504 Plans

16 HOW CAN I GET A COPY OF MY CHILD'S SCHOOL OR SPECIAL EDUCATION RECORDS?

You can request a copy of your child's records from their school. This includes special education records.

- If your child attends a school that is part of the **District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)** (or attended a DCPS school that is now closed), request records from DCPS.
- If your child attends a **DC public charter school**, request records from DC public charter schools.
- If your child attended a **DC public charter school that is now closed**, call (202) 328-2660 or email dcpublic@dcpcsb.org.
- If your child attends a **nonpublic special education school**, you should request records from the public DC school that referred your child. Use the categories above to select which option applies to you.

If you need more information or have trouble with the above, you can learn more or visit OSSE's website on Accessing Student Records.