

Template Communication to Families Regarding Special Education and Related Services During School Closure due to COVID-19

The template below is to assist supervisory unions/supervisory districts and independent schools communicate with families of students with disabilities.

Dear Families and Parents of Students with Disabilities,

As we are determining the most appropriate steps to ensure student and staff safety, we want to take this time to provide guidance relating to supporting students with disabilities and their services, as a result of closures and dismissals related to COVID-19.

As a reminder: any actions taken by a school district regarding closures are being taken for the safety of all students and school personnel working with students. That said, we are aware that closures and dismissals are disruptive, and that they raise questions for parents about the supports and services that will be provided to their children.

The guidance below seeks to answer some of those questions, with the understanding that impacts on educational practice will vary from district to district. Because of this variation, it is important for families to collaborate and communicate with their schools and districts regarding local approaches for the delivery services for students with disabilities.

What will happen to my child's services when school is closed for all students due to COVID-19?

1. If a school closure causes educational services for all students to stop, then the school/district is generally not required to provide services to students eligible for special education services during that same period of time. This is especially true in cases where the school district will still provide the required minimum of school days, after school is reinstated.
2. During the period of school closure, a school district may provide supplemental enrichment materials to prevent loss of learning or loss of skills. However, any such supplemental enrichment materials must be made accessible for students with disabilities. These enrichment materials are optional for parents to use.
3. After an extended closure, districts are responsible for reviewing how the closure impacted the delivery of special education and related services to students eligible for special education services. Schools may be required to provide additional services or extended school year services to make up missed services.
4. If annual IEP reviews or eligibility reviews are due during a school closure, please work with your school closely to meet as soon as school is back in session, or through alternate means during a closure, such as video or audio conference calls.

What will happen to my child's services when a school is dismissed but educational services continue to be provided to all students through remote methods?

5. If a school district has dismissed on-site educational services but continues to provide educational services to all students through the provision of educational packets or remote learning opportunities, the district will remain responsible for ensuring the Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) of its students eligible for special education services with an individualized education program (IEP), during the dismissal period.
6. All districts should be communicating with parents and guardians prior to, during, and after a school dismissal regarding modifications and accommodations to support the continuation of their child's IEP services. LEAs should work to ensure that all students continue to receive services to the most appropriate extent possible.
7. Although special education or related services may need to be adjusted, IEP teams should work to ensure that a student on an IEP receives services comparable to all other students. Services might include schoolwork packets, online learning, or some other learning adapted to the student's needs and location.
8. After an extended closure or dismissal, districts are responsible for reviewing how the closure impacted the delivery of special education and related services to students eligible for special education services. Schools may need to provide additional services or extended school year services to make up missed services.
9. If annual IEP reviews or eligibility reviews are due during this time, please work closely with the district to meet as soon as school is back in session or through alternate means during a dismissal, such as video or audio conference calls.