



**SPECIAL EDUCATION
REMOTE LEARNING PLAN
FOR EDUCATORS AND FAMILIES
DURING SCHOOL CLOSURE
DUE TO THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS**

Lawrence Public Schools
Office of Student Support Services



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NOTE: Information contained in this plan reflects the most recent advisories from the US Department of Education and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Addenda will be provided as changes/updates are provided. Additional information and resources are available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/covid19.html>



Purpose

The following resource document provides recommendations for the provision of supports for students with disabilities during the COVID-19 outbreak, with the goal of ensuring continued implementation of special education through opportunities for remote learning. While remote learning may take the form of virtual or online instruction, it may also include strategies, recommendations, consultation, and work packets.

In this complex education environment, we are confident that special educators and related service providers will rise to the challenge of providing educational services to students with disabilities. It will require special educators and related service providers to collaborate, be creative, and stay attuned to the needs of each of their students. We understand that each student is different and will need individualized supports and considerations consistent with the current, signed, IEP. Parents and guardians are assets and collaborators in this process. We will partner with them as we navigate these unusual circumstances.

What follows are:

- considerations for special educators, related services providers, and families to use when supporting students with disabilities in accessing the general education curriculum;
- recommendations for approaches to the continued implementation of individualized education program (IEP) services as appropriate; and
- actions special educators, related service providers, and families may take to ensure that appropriate documentation is collected and available.

Ensuring Access to Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) (34 CFR §300.101)

The United States Department of Education (USED) has stated that during this national emergency “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.” DESE recognizes that these unprecedented circumstances may affect how all educational and related services and supports are provided. While USED and DESE will offer flexibility where possible, USED has emphasized many disability-related modifications and services may be effectively provided remotely or online.

Schools may not be able to provide all services in the manner they are typically provided pursuant to students’ IEPs. The provision of FAPE may include, as appropriate, special education and related services provided remotely through resources and supports (such as strategies, projects and packets provided to students matched with regular and ongoing communication from special education team members) and services and instruction (such as virtual, online, or telephonic instruction). During this period of school closure, districts should make every effort to use creative strategies to provide special education instruction and services to the extent feasible. Moreover, any educational opportunities offered to the general student population, including enrichment activities and resources, must be made accessible to students with disabilities. *(3-26-2020 MA DESE FAQs for Special Education)*

Resources and Approaches for Providing Remote Learning and Accommodations

USED has stated that the IDEA does not mandate specific methodologies. Where technology itself imposes a barrier to access or where educational materials simply are not available in an accessible format, educators may still meet their legal obligations by providing children with disabilities equally effective alternate access to the curriculum or services provided to other students. DESE encourages parents, educators, and administrators to collaborate creatively to continue to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Consider practices such as



distance instruction, teletherapy and tele-intervention, meetings held on digital platforms, online options for data tracking, and documentation. In addition, districts can provide resources and supports such as instructional packets, projects, and written assignments that are not dependent on students' access to technology. (3-26-2020 MA DESE FAQs for Special Education)

Appropriately supporting students in virtual learning environments requires key instructional planning and preparation. When students with disabilities access online learning programs, additional planning may need to occur so students can be supported with additional services determined by the student's IEP. These added programmatic needs often require extra levels of consideration to determine the appropriateness of the online interventions and accommodations. Other student modifications and accommodations to consider include:

- Scribe: many platforms have built in programs and add-on apps, as well as accessible tools online for providing speech to text support.
- Text to Speech: many platforms have built in programs and add-on apps, as well as accessible tools online.
- Decreased Workload: decrease the number of questions or criteria for completed work. In addition, special educators should consider providing:
 - Supplementary material to go along with virtual learning.
 - IEP targets and data collections methods so families are able to monitor progress

Lawrence Public Schools has provided a curated set of web-based educational resources for students, families, and educators. Specific resources for supporting students with disabilities is included. These resources may be accessed by visiting <https://www.lawrence.k12.ma.us/> and the link “LPS Learning at Home”. Additional resources and supports will be added continuously.

In addition, USED has designated the [National Center for Systemic Instruction \(NCSI\)](#) as a resource hub for remotely provided special education services and supports during this period of school closures. The Department encourages educators and administrators to refer to the [padlet site](#) NCSI has specifically created to share instructional resources and service delivery solutions. NCSI anticipates continually adding resources and content to support remote special education learning options.

- NCSI website: <https://ncsi.wested.org/>
- Padlet site for educators and administrators: <https://padlet.com/wested/educate>

Communication and Support for Parents/Guardians during this School Closure

School districts will ensure that an IEP Team member (e.g., classroom teacher, special ed teacher or other service provider) will communicate regularly with parents and guardians during the period of school closure. The frequency and type of communication will vary depending on the child's individual needs, the availability of the team member, and the mode of communication utilized. This ongoing communication will help educators and parents/guardians develop a plan for students to receive as much individualized instruction and related services as is feasible through distance learning or other remote learning opportunities. Communication will also promote and sustain important connections between students and their teachers, a source of vital support and stability for students. (3-26-2020 MA DESE FAQs for Special Education)

Considerations Related to Providing Services on a Student's IEP Remotely

During this national emergency, schools may not be able to provide all services in the same manner they are typically provided. Many disability-related modifications and services may be effectively provided remotely.



These may include, for instance, extensions of time for assignments, videos with accurate captioning or embedded sign language interpreting, accessible reading materials, and many speech or language services through video conferencing. It is important to emphasize that federal disability law allows for flexibility in determining how to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities. How FAPE is to be provided may need to be different in this time of unprecedented national emergency. *(3-26-2020 MA DESE FAQs for Special Education)*

Considerations for Parent and Family Involvement

In addition to ensuring the content is presented in an accessible format for the student, educators will support the individuals who will be helping to provide the student access to their learning platforms. Special educators may consider parent training as a consultation related service. This support may be provided to assist parents to:

- Create an appropriate educational learning environment for the student including managing the time students spend on activities
- Develop a consistent routine for distance learning by providing guidelines for how long assignments or activities should take
- Motivate or organize their child to help them stay engaged throughout the instructional day
- Provide directions with examples whenever possible
- How to use behavior plans and transitions in the distance learning environment
- Reduce the amount of skills work and add opportunities for applied practice, such as warm-up activities and opportunities for students to engage in tasks in which they have already showed proficiency to ease into the remote learning environment
- Consider options that will provide opportunities and contact information for student and family feedback and questions
- Create project-based learning or portfolios of work that reflect interest of the personalized learning plan of the student.

Teachers and Related Service Providers

Teachers and other professional staff including Related Service Providers (OT, PT, Speech, etc.) involved with the student's instruction may support students in this educational environment. These educators may collaborate as teams to:

- Create a communication plan with other staff involved in the educational programming for the student. This may include direct instruction, related services, consultation, and providing resources.
- Document consultation time or contact logs with family and other staff, as well as student support.
- Include creative, flexible, and personalized activities.

Additionally, special education teachers should have individualized communication with students/families on their caseload. For students who are unable to communicate verbally, this may take the form of individualized communication with parents. This communication can be email, remote platform, or phone.

MCAS and MCAS-Alt

The Department has not made any changes to the MCAS testing schedule or the deadlines for MCAS-Alt submissions at this time but is evaluating appropriate extensions or changes of the assessment windows, or additional action that may be needed. More guidance will be forthcoming. *(3-26-2020 MA DESE FAQs for Special Education)*



Special Education Evaluation Timelines While Schools are Closed

The Department recognizes that school closures may impact the ability of school districts to meet the 30-day timeline for conducting evaluations in addition to the 45 school working day timeline to develop an IEP after receipt of a parent's written consent to evaluation or reevaluation. We encourage school teams and parents to work collaboratively and creatively to meet IEP timeline requirements. Districts are encouraged to work with parents to reach mutually agreeable extensions of timelines, as appropriate. *(3-26-2020 MA DESE FAQs for Special Education)*

IEP Team Meetings

It is not necessary for a district to convene an IEP Team to provide learning opportunities and services to students with disabilities during this period of extended school closures because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The current IEP will remain in effect until a new IEP is developed and accepted, irrespective of the expired date reflected in the IEP forms. *(3-26-2020 MA DESE FAQs for Special Education)*

In circumstances where an IEP Team meeting may need to be convened during this time when IEP teams are not able to meet in person due to health and safety considerations while schools are closed, districts should convene IEP Team meetings **telephonically** or **virtually** using technologies such as Zoom. Districts must consider whether all IEP team members, particularly parents, have access to necessary technology and accommodations to allow remote participation. Districts should ensure that interpreters are provided during telephonic or virtual IEP team meetings when the parents primary language is not English. *(3-26-2020 MA DESE FAQs for Special Education)*

Service Modes and Considerations

Each service mode comes with a set of benefits and challenges. Below is a brief description of some of those considerations by service model.

- Remote consultation and instruction

Some of this will require an internet connection, a computer or device with a camera, and all the proper equipment and materials needed to complete activities. Lawrence Public Schools engaged in a comprehensive distribution of devices (Chromebooks or iPads) from March 24-26. During this time, more than 80% of families were provided with a device along with an offer for internet access at no cost. If the student requires additional Assistive Technology (AT) to access the material, all efforts will be made to provide these resources. It is further understood that remote learning can take many forms. Additional learning supports such as educational programming offered by WGBH as well as work packets and/or suggestions for engaging in project-based learning may be included.

If services require physical maneuvering of students, an adult must be present who can accurately maneuver the student as needed to provide the service. If there is a question of whether this can be done safely, it should not be attempted. An adult may need to be present to redirect the student to the instruction, provide prompting, and to keep the student on task, particularly for younger learners. Progress should be monitored closely to ensure the effectiveness of the strategies being used.

- Telephone consultation and instruction

In this case students must have a working phone line, or a cell phone with service. Services must not require visual aids or face to face communication. Student will require all the proper equipment and materials needed to



complete activities; if the student requires Assistive Technology (AT) to access the material, all efforts will be made to provide these resources.

If services require physical maneuvering of students, an adult must be present who can accurately maneuver the student as needed to provide the service. If this cannot be done safely without visual instruction, it should not be attempted. An adult may need to be present to redirect the student to the instruction, provide prompting, and to keep the student on task, particularly for younger learners. Progress should be monitored closely to ensure the effectiveness of the strategies being used.

- **Take-Home Packet Instruction**

Service providers may wish to supplement virtual or telephone consultation and instruction with packets. For example, a counselor working with a student on self-esteem may send home a series of self-esteem worksheets or an SLP may send home a packet of idioms for the student to practice. Students should be clear on what is to be done independently and what is meant to be supported work. Packet work should be meaningful, and therefore must be monitored and adjusted to meet student need. Packets may be sent via email or US Mail.

Service Types and Considerations

In some cases, specific service delivery types have additional considerations. Below is a brief description of some of those considerations by service type.

- **Occupational Therapy (OT)/Physical Therapy (PT) Services**

Implementation of OT and PT services is almost always done in a face-to-face, in-person context. Given that this mode of delivery may not be available at this time, virtual instruction may be a viable option as well as pre-recorded activities or a take home packet. If the student is using a sensory diet or sensory breaks during the day, the therapist may send home a visual schedule with the exercises the student will be performing. Complicated tasks may be broken down into a visual task analysis for students to reference. Any exercises that can be dangerous if done incorrectly should not be attempted during virtual instruction.

A parent/guardian/caretaker should plan to be present, facilitate movement activities, and provide assistance throughout the therapy sessions. The student may benefit from access to art and craft supplies such as pencils, crayons, glue, playdoh, child scissors, beads, puzzles, and blocks as needed. Therapists may also be available to consult with parents/caregivers to provide additional support and resources during this time.

- **Speech and Language Services**

Speech and language services may be delivered by virtual or telephone consultation and/or instruction. In order to provide speech and language services virtually, the student should have access to the materials needed, including high or low tech alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) systems (e.g. PECs board, Proloquo2Go) if applicable. Lawrence Public Schools will work with families to ensure that AAC systems included in a student's IEP are available. The Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) will address how to edit and use devices as needed with caregivers.

Students may require supervision from a parent or caregiver to facilitate sessions with direct instruction from the Speech and Language Pathologist (SLP) or Speech and Language Assistant if the student is unable to independently access the electronic device or needs additional attention/behavior support during sessions. Attention and behavior supports could include breaks, snacks, and reinforcers such as stickers or time to play with



a preferred toy. Students and caregivers may need to consult with the SLP on selecting an appropriate environment for sessions, seating/positioning in front of the camera, using the online platform's tools and functions, and general expectations for virtual sessions. Students may also need training on the proper way to video chat and how to appropriately position themselves in front of the camera so that the SLP can see their mouth and facial movements. This may require some pre-made visuals and instructional material.

- Behavior Services (BCBA)

Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA) services may be provided to students who currently receive consultation service. These services will be a consultative model and must be conducted with the parent or legal guardian. The purpose of these services is to support behavior plans and procedures in the home environment to promote student success. Meetings will focus on parent concerns and actionable behavior analytic strategies to use in the home such as reinforcement systems, prompt fading, visual schedules, etc. Virtual BCBA consultative services will be most effective in an environment where the parent or legal guardian is able to actively participate without interruptions. Ideally, the parent or legal guardian should have access to the internet and a technology device (i.e. laptop, smart phone, computer). BCBA's will include a Spanish bilingual interpreter for consultations if requested.

- Transition Services

A shift toward transition services that can be implemented virtually is recommended. Career Exploration activities such as interest and personality inventories, or virtual job shadows can readily be implemented virtually. There are many online career planning and exploration tools. Students can work on resume building, research into potential future employers, practice answering interview questions, or practice budgeting using different potential salaries. In person work experiences are paused during this time.

Transition services like community-based instruction, transportation training via a public bus, and work experiences in the community all put the student and others at risk for spreading the virus and should be avoided. If students are currently working in the community, they may be able to reflect on their struggles and experiences thus far, reflect on feedback from their community employers, or do research/reading on future tasks they may be asked to complete when they return. Some students will find the change in routine challenging and may benefit from maintaining as much as their daily structure and routines as possible during their time away from community work.

- Specialized Instruction

Specialized instruction, defined as, 'adapting, as appropriate to the needs of the eligible child...the content methodology, or delivery of instruction...to address the unique needs of the child... and to ensure access of the child to the general education curriculum...' ([CFR §300.39\(b\)\(3\)](#)) may be delivered remotely via internet platform, telephone consultation and instruction, or via student work assignments and project suggestions. Special educators should consider if the nature of and type of specialized instruction that their student requires may be implemented remotely.

When providing virtual specialized instruction, educators must ensure that students have everything they need including instructions for the virtual platform, username and login information, a number or email address to contact if technical issues arise, and any other materials needed for instruction.



Special educators will make every effort to maintain personalized communication with all students/families on their caseload. For students who are unable to communicate verbally, this may take the form of individualized communication with parents. This communication may be via email, google classroom, phone calls, or texts.

- Counseling

Counseling services may be provided by virtual or telephone consultation. When able, the best platform to use would be zoom meetings for reasons of confidentiality. Please note that this platform is not encrypted, so counseling should focus upon IEP goals, checking in on general well-being, providing strategies for self-care.

Counselors may need to give extra consideration to building trust with students that they are unable to see face to face and allow for extra time for the student to become comfortable. Counselors will need to prepare students already receiving counseling about the impending changes and prepare to make adjustment. Students should have a password protected WiFi connection to protect their privacy. Students who are not currently being treated for anxiety and anxiety related issues may be experiencing anxiety related to the panic caused by the virus. Typically healthy families may be in crisis due to lack of income or access to necessities so counselors should be aware of changing family circumstances. Counselors may provide packet materials to supplement their typical services such as worksheets on building self-esteem, journal prompts, body checks or anything else related to the student's IEP goals. Counselors should make referrals for additional outside agency support as necessary.

