

Special Education Services During COVID-19 School Closures

As the COVID-19 situation continues to escalate in Indiana and nationwide, there have been further questions regarding e-learning due to school closures, particularly concerning instructional opportunities for students with disabilities. Currently, Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb has directed that all schools remain closed until at least May 1, 2020. President Trump has also issued a continuation of "Shelter in Place" and social distancing through at least April 30, 2020.

The U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs has released information and guidance related to the provision of services specifically related to students with disabilities: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/idea-files/q-and-a-providing-services-to-children-with-disabilities-during-the-coronavirus-disease-2019-outbreak/>.

The outbreak of COVID-19 represents an unprecedented event regarding school closures and the process by which educational services to students with disabilities are provided. The U.S. Department of Education has stated that if a Local Education Agency ceases provision of services due to the outbreak, services for students with disabilities shall also be suspended. The Local Education Agency must ensure all efforts to provide services upon reopening of schools. Services must comply with all IEPs and 504 plans.

Furthermore, for all schools providing educational services to students via e-learning during closure, each Local Education Agency shall provide equal access to services to students with disabilities. Schools may hold IEP and 504 meetings virtually or via conference call for the duration of closures. A Local Education Agency may require school employees to meet all requirements and deadlines. Any delay or cancellation of a meeting between the school employee and family/student parties involved in IEP or 504 meetings must be documented under the agreement.

Additionally, the Indiana State Department of Education has issued guidance regarding the provision of educational services to students with disabilities during school closures. The Indiana Department of Education Office of Special Education and Office of E-Learning is undertaking all options to continue instruction to Hoosier students during this outbreak. The department has released the following criteria for e-learning days: <https://www.doe.in.gov/elearning/elearningday-program>.

More information specifically related to services for students with disabilities may be found here: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1daTpwPj-eXDgah6MyMNUJu9eRiOe7tAhbtB40YAEI1o/view>.



Priority issues remain as follows: 1) district plans for e-learning days 2) school employee and parent/student communication 3) technology capacity, standards and activities used by teachers. Key issues under ongoing consideration include assistive technology and accommodations, communication needs, access to instruction and physical needs. All e-learning days must follow guidelines set forth on meeting appropriate standards, modes of communication to access curricular requirements, IEP goals and related services and differentiated lessons/activities.

Specifically regarding IEP discussion and documentation required, a student under an appropriate IEP case conference committee must discuss how a student with disabilities will access technology assistance for the duration of school closures. The discussion must also include a description of all services provided including curriculum and related services. Student work may be modified to meet all IEP goals. All accommodations and modifications to accommodations must be documented by the appropriate school employee under a student's IEP.

Please stay tuned as further developments occur and further guidance is issued either by the U.S. Department of Education and Indiana Department of Education. Also continue to follow the Governor's directives regarding COVID-19 precautions as they relate to school closures.

ISTA remains committed to providing our members and all Hoosier students with up-to-date information regarding the pandemic and best practices to provide students with instructional services during this crisis.

