



Frequently Asked Questions: Special Education and COVID-19

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Evaluation

Q: What is the process for evaluating my child for a disability during COVID-19?

A: The process to find and evaluate students with a disability has not changed. The [DPS Early Childhood Child Find](#) team and Rocky Mountain Human Services work together to provide developmental screenings and evaluate children from birth through age two who are at risk for or have a disability. The DPS Early Childhood Child Find team evaluates children before they turn 3 to determine whether or not they are eligible as a child with a disability under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

If your child is ages 0-5 years old and is not currently enrolled in a school, you can contact Early Childhood Child Find via their [online form](#) or by calling 720-423-1410 to initiate the screening and possible evaluation.

The evaluations for these young children are play-based and **can be performed remotely or in-person.** The play-based assessment allows our multidisciplinary team (which includes a special education teacher and/or a speech language pathologist and a psychologist, motor therapist, and possibly a nurse) to observe your child’s speech/language, fine and gross motor skills, learning and social emotional response while he/she plays. Although the team has been conducting play-based assessments remotely since April 2020, we recognize not all families have access to technology. If you know of a family with a young child who has been waiting for an initial evaluation but does not have internet or technology, please have them **contact DPS Child Find** via their [online form](#) or by calling 720-423-1410 to identify next steps to complete the evaluation.

If your child is of school age (5-21 years old), every school in DPS is equipped with a multidisciplinary evaluation team to do screenings and evaluations. You will need to contact the Special Education Department at your school. If you are not enrolled in a school, please contact the [Choice and Enrollment office](#) to find a school. The Special Education department does not make school recommendations. If you need assistance on the Special Education process and you cannot reach the school’s Special Education department, please reach out to SPED@dpsk12.org.

If your child already qualified for an individualized education plan (IEP) in another school district, please provide a copy of that plan to your child's new IEP team in DPS. They will guide you through the next steps.

Q: If my school starts an evaluation that is interrupted (due to school closure, shift to remote learning, etc.) what is the timeline for completing the evaluation?

A: The school has **60 calendar days to complete the evaluation** and determine if your child is eligible under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). If the multidisciplinary evaluation team determines your child meets the eligibility criteria for one of the disability categories, the team has 30 more days to develop an IEP and make an offer of a free, appropriate public education.

As a result of COVID-19, initial evaluations and eligibility determinations have been delayed for some children. Beginning in August 2020, school teams were advised by DPS to reach out to families to discuss any evaluations that had already been completed, and for the parent and the school team to determine if additional evaluation or information was necessary to determine the child's eligibility. If enough information was gathered, the IEP team will convene to determine eligibility. If the team determines that your child is eligible, they will schedule a meeting to develop an IEP.

Remote, In-School or Hybrid

Q: My child does not do well with remote learning and screen time is not meaningful, does the district have something different to offer?

A: Your child's IEP includes a **contingency plan for services and goals that can be addressed remotely.** School teams have been advised to consider the following when developing a student's contingency plan:

- Can the student operate the technology independently and/or with limited assistance?
- Is the content available and understandable?
- Can the digital content be utilized via various technology supports (e.g., built-in speech to text, text to speech, etc.)?
- Are the demands of executive function skills supported?

Educators recognize that it is important to build in supports to address the student's learning, attention, behavioral, sensory and physical needs, while providing appropriate materials. Some students may be offered short videos and work to practice independently, while others may have limited screen time and use hands-on materials. DPS will schedule and record training for parents and educators on a list of topics including: how to encourage practice with less preferred activities, dealing with behavior, etc.; more information will be shared soon.

Q: My child has one-on-one support in the school setting. Can that staff come to my home and provide one-on-one support for remote learning?

A: If the district moves to remote learning for all students, in-person support will be put on hold until it is deemed safe for staff to work directly with your child. IEP teams will consider on a case-by-case basis whether paraprofessional support will be provided to the student in-person. This offer will be recorded in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) and will include the number of hours this staff will work with your child each week. The paraprofessional will not be responsible for providing instruction, but can facilitate the child's participation in instruction and completion of classroom work.

Q: If DPS offers in-person instruction, will my child's school provide the services in the setting identified in my child's IEP?

A: Yes. When schools are providing in-person instruction, your child will be assigned to a classroom, and become part of a set group called a "cohort," that includes the teacher and other students in that classroom. This assignment will allow your child to stay with the same cohort of learners and adults. It is important to note that your child's schedule, school day, or week may be different due to health guidelines:

- Children may attend school 4 days a week.
- Eligible students will continue to receive transportation.
- Some related services may be delivered via live streaming.
- If a member of the cohort (student or adult) tests positive for COVID-19, students and staff will quarantine at home for 14 days. In consultation with our health partners, DPS will determine when it is safe for a quarantined cohort to return to school.

Q: What will special education services look like during remote instruction?

A: If the district moves to remote learning for all students, **students who had already selected the virtual program option will continue to receive the same services in their virtual IEP.** For families who chose in-person, IEP teams will implement the contingency plans developed at the beginning of the school year.

Q: Will students who receive special education services be a priority for acceptance into a Remote Learning Support Center?

A: Yes, students in special education will be prioritized for acceptance in Remote Learning Support Centers. Contact your child's school for more details.

Q: Who do I contact if I have questions or concerns about my child's IEP during remote instruction?

A: All decisions regarding a child's special education programs are determined by **the child's IEP team.** Start by contacting your child's case manager at the school to initiate the IEP problem-solving process.

Q: Who is responsible for providing accommodations and modifications to ensure that my child's general education schedule does not conflict with their IEP Services?

A: It is the responsibility of the school IEP team to schedule service in collaboration with general education. If you have concerns about the delivery of your child's services, start first by talking to your child's case manager or call an IEP meeting to discuss concerns.

Q: How will DPS support kids with sensory issues who struggle with wearing masks for in-person learning?

A: Our teachers and related service providers are wonderful educators, who understand that some students need different methods of teaching to learn a skill. Our central speciality instructional specialists (autism, intellectual disabilities and serious emotional disability) have put together **targeted lessons on health topics and are training teachers on how to best teach these skills**. This might mean that the method used to teach a child to wear a mask might be applied-behavior techniques for some and cognitive-based techniques for others. We encourage families to ask their child's IEP team to share more information about their approach.

Compensatory Services and Lost Learning

Q: If services were missed due to delayed evaluations or services cannot be delivered during remote learning, will they be made up?

A: Making up of any missed services is called compensatory education. **The IEP team determines if a student is owed compensatory education**, based on guidelines provided by the Colorado Department of Education. The team will use data to discuss what the student missed, whether the student regressed and what will it take to get the student caught up. Before any shift to in-person learning, IEP teams will review the process to determine if compensatory education is needed.

Q: How and when will my school calculate compensatory services for my child?

A: The IEP team will determine compensatory services that will be provided to make up for services missed during COVID-19. There are two factors that an IEP team must consider when making a decision about if a student has their own compensatory education services:

1. Was the student denied a Free and Appropriate Public Education?
2. Were they able to recover lost learning when returning to in-person services?

If your child is in high school, it is important to consider the number of credits your child has earned and their course of study. For students in ECE through high school, the IEP team will meet to discuss compensatory services (special education and related services). The team will identify services that will place your child in the same position they would have been in if a free appropriate public education (FAPE) had been provided during COVID-19. Compensatory services are individualized to each student's circumstances because of the varying amount of time each student may need to recover academic, social emotional and or language skills.

Q: How can I make sure the individual needs of my student are met, virtually and/or in-person?

A: Individual needs must be addressed by the child's IEP team. Parents/guardians have a right to call

an IEP meeting at any time to discuss concerns with the child's IEP or implementation of the IEP. IEP teams are dedicated to creatively problem-solving each situation within health restrictions and school/district policies. In addition, under the Individuals with a Disability Act (IDEA), the team can review a student's progress to determine if compensatory education should be an option to make up for lost learning.

Q: What are my rights as a parent to advocate for my students needs?

A: Every family has due-process rights through the Individuals with a Disability Act (IDEA). These are provided at every single special education meeting. Our guidance is clear that the IEP must be a mutually agreed-upon plan. If you don't feel that your reasonable voice has been heard, we can provide facilitation to ensure that the IEP team has reached consensus. Your first point of contact to problem-solve your issues is the IEP team. If you are not able to resolve your issues with the IEP team, please reach out to your school principal. If this doesn't yield a resolution, then you can work with your school's Special Education Instructional Specialist.

Please email at SPED@dpsk12.org to find the Special Education Instructional Specialist assigned to your school. In addition to due-process rights, this specialist can also explain other ways to file complaints. Keep in mind that during remote learning the standard established by Federal guidelines is the "greatest extent possible." Upon returning to in-person learning, then we will revert back to the Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) standard.

Individual Education Plans (IEP)

Q: To what extent will parents/guardians be expected to help implement the IEP at home?

A: Parents/guardians should not be responsible for delivering services that should be provided by their school based staff. If the contingency plan is not working, you need to let your IEP team know so that you can collaborate on finding a solution.

Q: How will progress reports be handled during COVID-19?

A: In DPS, progress reports on IEP goals are to be provided to parents during each report card period. **This will not change during this time of remote learning.** If you have not received a progress report during the report card period, first reach out to your child's case manager and/or the principal at your school. If you feel like you are not getting the answer you need, please reach out to sped@dpsk12.org so we can connect you with a Special Education Instructional Specialist to help.

Q: How will students with behavior plans be supported during remote learning?

A: If a student requires a behavior plan, regardless of the learning environment, the IEP team must conduct a functional-behavior assessment and develop a behavioral plan. That behavioral plan should outline the supports needed to implement the plan. Since behavior plans are not historically developed for a home environment, **staff will provide supports to the greatest extent possible** to address behavior concerns in the home, given the health constraints of that moment in time.

Q: Will virtual IEPs change a student's Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)?

A: During COVID-19, there are three possible types of plans for students in Special Education: a virtual IEP for students whose families chose remote-only; a regular IEP for students whose families chose in-person learning -- and a contingency plan for when in-person learning is not possible for those students. Virtual IEPs do not change a student's Least Restrictive Environment. And for in-person students, the purpose of a contingency plan is to identify what we can do to the *greatest extent possible* in a time of remote learning. The virtual IEP and the contingency plan are not intended to address a student's Least Restrictive Environment.

Q: What if we want our child in a full inclusion program?

A: Under the Individuals with a Disability Act (IDEA), IEP teams have the authority to decide the appropriate level of inclusion. However, health guidelines during COVID-19 create additional challenges to full inclusion. This is a good topic to discuss with your student's IEP team. Our role at the district level is to help facilitate these conversations if team members cannot come to a consensus.

General

Q: Do we offer interpretation during IEP meetings?

A: Yes, this is required by law. Your IEP team must secure an interpreter if needed, whether remote or in-person.

Q: Why am I not receiving email communication from the district Special Education Department?

A: The primary point of contact for information about Special Education is your school. When the DPS Special Education department does send out an email, we rely upon the contact information you provide to your school during registration. Please make sure your information is up-to-date. Please also check with your school to make sure they have correctly identified your child in the Infinite Campus system as having an IEP.

