



FAQ's for Special Education Surrogate Parents: COVID Edition

October 2, 2020

1) I've been waiting to hear from providers as to how my student is doing. Are there steps I should be taking to be more pro-active?

With all the confusion and complexities around back to school this year, it is even more important that you maintain regular communication with providers. This allows you to be informed promptly of changes and issues as they arise.

COVID Checklist

- Contact the social worker to get an update on the student's residence and district.
- Contact the school district and ask for a copy of the learning plan.
- Contact the teacher and (or other school contact) and ask them to share any updates on the student's performance. Are they engaged with remote learning? Are they submitting assignments? Accessing direct services (if applicable)?
- Contact the student's caretaker (i.e. case manager at group home or residential program) and any other providers to ask for feedback. Are there barriers to remote learning? Is the student engaged? Collection of this information is vital when considering compensatory services. (contact RTSC for a sample)

Consider starting an email chain with all team members.

If you do not hear back, contact the SESP Program at 508-792-7679.

2) Who makes the decision about whether my student attends school remotely or in person, if a choice is available?

This should be a collaborative process and consider the student's learning profile, ability to engage remotely, specific IEP services, and health and safety concerns. DCF considers the SESP as the final decision-maker, but if you are not comfortable making this decision you may delegate it back to DCF.

3) My student failed to engage in remote learning in the spring and needs in-person services to make progress. Has DESE addressed this in any guidance?

DESE has encouraged districts to provide in-person learning to students with "significant and complex needs". This includes certain students who are on IEPs, as well as students who are in foster care or congregate care. (Comprehensive Special Education Guidance for the 2020-21 School Year Memo, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/sped.html>, 6th bullet)

4) How will I know how my student's IEP services will be implemented?

Regardless of the way your student is receiving instruction (in-person, hybrid, or remote), the district should have reached out to you to describe when, where, and how IEP services will be implemented, and who will be providing them.

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/sped/learning-plan/>

5) My student is not fully engaging in remote services. What should I do?

First, investigate the reason behind this. Has the district not provided the necessary equipment (ie. Chromebook)? Is the group home not supporting the student in accessing daily lessons? Has the student been offered these things, yet is simply refusing to engage? It's likely that you'll need to get DCF involved to address this issue (as the guardian), regardless of the cause.

6) I'm not comfortable attending meetings on-site and in-person. Is this ok?

Absolutely. Most, if not all, districts are only holding meetings virtually at this time. This is done via Zoom, GoogleMeet, RingCentral, etc., which are all free to access and should not require a login to attend. If you are unfamiliar with the school's platform choice, you can reach out to the school for assistance prior to the meeting.

P.O. Box 1184 ~ Westborough, MA 01581 ~ Ph: 508-792-7679 ~ Fax: 508-616-0318

www.sespprogram.org

7) **How do I find out if my student is eligible to receive COVID-based compensatory services?**

Whether a student is entitled to receive compensatory services because of the suspension of in-person instruction in the spring due to COVID-19, is a fact-specific and individualized determination to be made by the IEP Team. The Department has issued guidance on this topic. For more information, see [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Special Education Technical Assistance Advisory 2021-1](#). (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/sped.html>, fifth bullet)

Please don't hesitate to contact us (The SESPP) or the RTSC (Recruitment, Training, and Support Center for SESP's, <https://fcsn.org/rtsc/>) for additional support and guidance.

DESE Links:

1) COVID-19 Information and Resources.

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/>

Resources Include:

- **Initial Fall School Reopening Guidance (June 25, 2020)**
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/return-to-school/>
- **Letter to Families about Remote Learning (May 8, 2020 and March 30, 2020)**
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/family-letter/>

2) COVID-19 Information and Resources for Special Educators

Resources include:

- **Frequently Asked Questions for Schools and Districts Regarding Special Education**
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/sped.html> (2nd bullet)
- **COVID-19 Special Education Learning Plan**
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/sped/learning-plan/>
- **Coronavirus (COVID-19) Special Ed Technical Assistance Advisory 2021-1** COVID-19 Compensatory Services and Recovery Support for Students with IEPs
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/sped.html> (5th bullet)

Federation For Children with Special Needs (FCSN) Links

1) **Information and Updates on COVID 19**

<https://fcsn.org/info-and-updates-during-covid-19-draft/>

Resources include:

- Educational Guidance on School Closures
- Health Guidance
- Mental and Behavioral health Resources

2) **Fall Schools Re-Opening for 2020-21**

<https://fcsn.org/fall-schools-reopening-2020-21/>

Resources include:

- Q&A's around compliance with IEP and special education laws, in-person vs remote, special considerations for certain populations of students with disabilities, etc.
- Tips for parents on virtual IEP meetings
- DESE Educational Guidance
- Health Guidance

3) **RTSC Webinars**

<https://fcsn.org/rtsc/upcoming-webinars-2/archived-webinar-recordings/>

Webinars specifically designed for SESP's on various COVID-related issues