School Closure Toolkit: Special Populations

Summary

School closures and the implementation of virtual learning opportunities due to the COVID-19 pandemic have raised questions regarding the provision of services to special populations.

Such events can create serious challenges for local education agencies (LEAs). Much of this toolkit will focus on approaches should districts/schools decide to provide educational opportunities or services through closure. For questions related to serving special populations, please contact Theresa.Nicholls@tn.gov.

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CHECKLIST

For staffing decisions and related actions

2

BEST PRACTICES

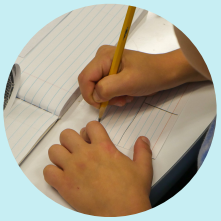
For managing employees who are working on-site, including hourly

3

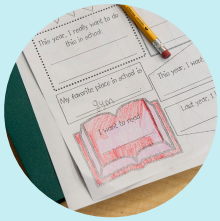
RECOMMENDATIONS

Sample schedules and procedures.

OSEP Guidance
Reviews federal information.



Compensatory
Defines current guidance on compensatory education requirements.



Accommodations
Provides ideas related to accommodations when students are at home.

Checklist

Below is a brief checklist that districts and schools should consider during periods of closure.

If the district or school is not providing educational opportunities or services through closure, then a school Point of Contact (POC) should be identified to maintain documentation for the IEP or 504 team to assess the need for compensatory services.

District

□ Designate a POC at the district level for each population (students with disabilities, English learners, at-risk, highly mobile, etc) to ensure district policies are created, shared, met and documented.

□ Establish the virtual-collaboration expectations between general education teachers and teachers of special populations (e.g., EL teachers, special education teachers, etc.) for student lesson support, accommodations, and other needed support for each school.

□ Establish the platform or use of technology that is available for student and teacher use.

□ Ensure district messages are accessible to all parents (i.e., consider the language for communication, parent literacy skills, etc.).

□ Coordinated with the district special education supervisor and coordinated school health coordinator to compile and disseminate a list of resources that are available in the community to help families with daily living (i.e., meals for students, access to food banks, support for utilities, child care, etc.).

DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT: WASHINGTON COUNTY

Following the Governor's request to enact school closures statewide, Washington County immediately began implementation of a protocol through which every student received daily telephone or electronic contact with their teacher. Special Education Supervisor Dr. Mindy Myers has worked closely with TDOE's Special Populations Division to ensure that, in the midst of this rapidly-evolving public health concern, all Washington County Special Education students continue to receive support from the district in alignment with IDEA law.

School

□ Designate a POC for each school site who can ensure proper documentation and implementation of various student support plans.

□ Announce allowable building activity to teachers to allow for the preparation of student work that will be sent home (i.e., device check out, assigning of books, packaging school materials, etc.) Any gatherings within school facilities should comply with applicable social distancing guidance as well as health safety recommendations.

□ Virtually convene general education teachers and teachers of special populations (e.g., EL teachers, special education teachers, etc.) for student lesson support, accommodations, and other needed support for each school.

□ Determine student support service plan including the method of providing services (telehealth, phone calls, virtual conferencing, etc.) as well as coordinating service opportunities with community-based service providers.

□ Establish the platform or use of technology that is available for student and teacher use.

□ Ensure school messages are accessible to all parents (i.e., consider the language for communication, parent literacy skills, etc.).

□ Designate a main hub for parents to get important information related to school updates, but also use local communication such as various radio stations for parent and community outreach.

Review of Related Requirements

Tennessee Department of Education's Services to Students with Disabilities COVID-19 Guidance

US Department of Education Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak

If an LEA elects to close one or more of its schools and does not provide any educational services to the general student population, it is not required to provide services to students with disabilities during that same period of time. However, once school resumes, the LEA must make every effort to provide special education and related services to the child in accordance with the child's individualized education program (IEP) or 504 plan. If services are not provided in accordance with the IEP team or 504 plan, the assigned team must assess the need for compensatory education and services.

Alternatively, if an LEA continues to provide educational opportunities to the general student population during a school closure, the school or district must ensure that students with

disabilities also have equal access to the same opportunities, including the provision of a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). LEAs must ensure that, to the greatest extent possible, each student with a disability can be provided the special education and related services identified in the student's IEP or 504 plan.

This toolkit will provide an overview of the requirements for specific populations as well as resources and suggested procedures for the closure or implementation of a virtual learning model to help meet the needs of special populations and support their learning at home.

For students with disabilities, there are certain requirements related to compensatory education and timelines. Compensatory education and services should be determined based upon the unique needs of the student. The table below summarizes the timelines, associated requirements, and flexibility available.

	Requirement	Flexibility
Initial evaluations	Must be conducted within 60 calendar days of receiving parental consent or within a state established time frame	Evaluation timeline extended to 90 calendar days for evaluations initiated or in process after March 3, 2020.
Re-evaluations	Must be conducted at least once every three years	Reevaluations must be competed as soon as possible upon return after closure. If providing services virtually, every attempt should be made to complete the re-evaluation to the extent possible
IEPs	Must be developed within 30 days of eligibility determination	Services are to be made available "as soon as possible" as determined by the IEP team.
Annual IEP meetings	Must review the IEP at least annually	IDEA allows for parent and district to agree to make changes without convening an IEP team meeting and to use alternative means of participation such as video conferences and conference calls.

Compensatory Education

In the case that districts or schools are closed, but virtual or home-based work is assigned (to count towards any attendance requirements or to provide instructional time), students with IEPs who do not receive services may be eligible for compensatory services. Compensatory services are services that should be provided to a student that are needed to elevate him or her to the position he or she would have otherwise occupied had the services not been delayed or postponed. This can include making up missed hours of occupational therapy, hours of individual academic intervention, etc. It should also be noted that each child should be evaluated and supported based on the unique needs of that child. In some cases, a delay in services can be more challenging to “make-up” and may require more hours than what was originally scheduled in order to bring the child back to the position he or she would have otherwise been in had the services not stopped. The reverse could also be true, though it is not recommended that fewer hours be provided to any children.

Decisions related to compensatory education and services should be clearly documented in terms of the hours or services that were missed, and the decision on what services are necessary to bring the child to the same position he or she would have otherwise been in, had services not stopped. Districts and schools are strongly encouraged to document decisions related to these re-evaluation timelines and maintain that decision-making rationale in the student’s file.

Best Practices

Availability of Learning Opportunities

If your school district is providing meals on wheels or meal delivery, make take home learning opportunities or resources available at the same location or through the same delivery mechanism to support families. Look for the support of parents that have strong communication ties in the community to help with the outreach of information. Build the sense of community and support, as many families will be looking for childcare, since some parents will still have to report to daily work sites.

ESL Activities and Language Practice

School communities understand the importance of consistent, regular support for students who speak a language other than English as it relates to English-acquisition. An important part of that directly connects to the amount of exposure that children have to the English Language.

For more information on some ways in which schools and districts can consider ongoing support of students, even when school has been closed please see: TDOE Suggestions for ESL Classes and Activities: COVID-19 Guidance.

Highly Mobile or At-Risk

Establish a more frequent communication plan for each individual student with one school-based staff member responsible for carrying out the support and communication plan. It is likely that our students who are highly-mobile or at-risk could benefit from additional supports such as time with counselors or frequent updates regarding access to meals. Weekly, if not daily communication related to individual non-academic student needs should be established.

Handling Bullying and Discrimination Associated with COVID-19

The Coronavirus is not tied to any race, ethnicity, or nationality. Misinformation about coronavirus can create bias information, develop fear, and create hostility that harms the community and makes it challenging to help in time of necessity as well as keep everyone healthy. If schools are using online student collaboration features or chat options, it may be a good reminder to have a/an educator(s) monitor student activity for online safety. Encourage parents to talk to their students about questions or feelings they may have related to COVID-19. This is a great opportunity to focus on hygiene and healthy habits.

For more information on helping prevent and addressing potential discrimination associated with COVID-19 please see: Letter to Leaders Preventing and Addressing Potential Discrimination Associated with COVID-19.

For more information on multi-language resources to better inform about COVID-19, please see: A Round-Up of Multilingual Resources on COVID-19.

General Strategies for School Closures

Through the period of school closure, the following are suggestions for learning activities and supports that can be provided during the extended time at home:

For families:

- Encourage parents and/or caregivers to set routines in the home learning environment to help keep students in the mindset of learning. Teachers can help develop example schedules for grade bands and distribute them online, school websites, or places where parents will gather, such as meal support locations. Provide parents with resources to establish routines using visual schedules to reduce anxiety and establish expectations.
- Provide families with lists of online libraries or audio book sites that parents can easily access at no cost.
- Recommend structured activities that promote communication and interaction but do not require online access, such as games; shared or independent reading; daily living routines, such as cooking, pet care, and other home responsibilities; outside activities to explore nature, etc.
- Provide resources to support sensory needs of children and how parents can support a child's dysregulation at home during the closure (e.g., sensory activities, calming spaces, visual supports, etc.).
- Remind parents that while children are not able to attend school, they are not expected to replace school; reassure parents that any structured learning is beneficial but not to set expectations so high that children and families experience additional undue stress.
- Provide skills practice ideas that can be embedded within everyday routines; parents may not be trained special education providers, but they can support communication, motor, literacy skills with some encouragement and resources to practice at home.
- Prepare families to support communication for children who rely on alternative and augmentative communication (AAC); identify websites or send home picture symbols, Core Vocabulary boards, etc.

For students:

- Establish a student work district hotline and share the information with parents. The district may work with translators to help continue the support of EL families.
- Send books home with articles, poetry, and writing prompts that are appropriate for language levels as well as skill level. This work can be linked to revisiting a task or skill for mastery.
- Provide learning packets to review or enhance material already taught. This is a great time to focus on purpose for writing and comprehension (oral and independent).
- Have students write reflection essays about a movie watched or a book read and scaffold the assignment for different age range and language levels.
- Provide information on how students can safely access peers for emotional support and maintaining communication skills (e.g., Google hangout, phone tree system, etc.). Some students may need support constructing conversations with sentence starters.

- Assign a long-term research-based project aligned to multiple standards and language objectives. This can include science and history. A student friendly rubric for self-reflection may be very helpful for independent projects.
- Use the activities or extensions presented in the Supplemental Resource: Teacher Manuals that accompany main textbooks but do not often get assigned during class time due to time constraints.

Virtual Learning Model

If your district chooses to utilize a virtual school model, which is defined as daily/weekly work sent to students electronically with an expectation of student completion of the work and considered as days of attendance, then the district will need to ensure access and participation of the students in a manner that is equitable as well as meaningful. While it is recognized by the department that the richness of direct interaction between the teacher and the students cannot be fully replicated in a virtual space, every effort should be made to ensure the lessons are high quality and provide the students with opportunities for engagement, discovery, learning, and application of skills. Additionally, many students will be home during the day while their parents are working outside the home. They may have siblings at home, but they will also have school requirements. This must be considered in the design and delivery of the instruction. Schools that have one-to-one technology will be assured the student has a working electronic device, however, this ***does not mean the student has equitable access to the instruction***.

Please review Office of Civil Rights Webinar on Online Education and Website Accessibility

Accessibility of Instruction

Ensuring accessibility for all students is critical when employing a virtual school model. Not all students may have access to the internet, phone lines, television or radio during an extended school closure. In these cases, the district will need to ensure access. Many internet providers are offering free connection and service during this national emergency. Schools can support by ensuring families have access to tablets or other forms of digital literacy for student learning.

Main Internet Providers in TN (most have accessibility to various spoken languages)

- Spectrum 1-833-780-1880
- Comcast 1-800-934-6489
- AT&T 1-800-331-0500
- Google Fiber 1-866-777-7550
- Sprint 1-889-211-4727

Instructional Planning Considerations

The following are a few considerations when planning for virtual instructional delivery.

- How will students **access** the online delivery of instruction?
  - Are there students for whom access online requires **adult support**? Who will provide this support and how? (Reminder, students of an appropriate age may be home during the day while their parent is at work or home with an older sibling who is also trying to complete their school obligations.)
  - Are there **accommodations** that can be provided through electronic resources such as the accessibility setting for text-to-speech or screen reader, bookmarked links on a single document, speech-to-text software or apps, etc.?
  - If considering an online program available through a vendor, what **accommodations**, **accessibility features**, or **differentiated instruction** is available? What is missing but needed in order for all students to have equitable access?
  - Who will create the **alternative activities** for those students who require significantly modified assignments or who cannot access the activity in the virtual format?

- How will students **interact** with the teacher?
  - Can they contact them by phone, chat, or video chat software like Zoom?
  - How will students with limited communication, or who use an assistive augmentative communication system participate?

- Can a **daily schedule** be created for small groups of students and the teacher to work together online or through a video chat system?
  - Will the special education teacher have the opportunity to preview the online lessons provided by a general education teacher to ensure the students have **access**, or if needed, to provide students with specific **accommodation(s)** or **modification(s)** on the assignment/activity?
  - Are there supports or services currently in the student's IEP that will not be deliverable in a virtual format or would be so significantly compromised that the student will require **compensatory services** once schools are reopened?
  - Are there opportunities to engage students in "**life skills**" or "**transition**" goals the student could practice within the home setting (i.e. laundry, cooking, etc.).
  - How will students' **non-academic needs** be supported? (i.e., emotional, life skills, transition, prevocational, etc.)

Virtual Instructional Delivery Suggestions and Resources

Instruction that can be provided in an interactive real-time format through free resources such as Zoom and Skype can be one method for bridging the instruction form the school setting to the new virtual format. Teachers may want to implement some of the following suggestions to support the students during the transition:

- Set new classroom/group norms including:
  - when to be present online and what "present" means
  - how to comment or ask questions,
  - how to seek individual teacher help (or special education support) or a private conversation,
  - how to access and turn in work, and
  - deadlines and procedures.

- Clearly outline the directions and timeline for all assignments sent electronically. For students who require accommodation(s) and/or modification(s) to complete the assignment, the students should be contacted individually and provided the support, information, or tools that are needed in accordance with their IEP. This should be as confidentially and respectfully addressed as it would be within the typical school day.
- Utilizing electronic features such as screen readers or speech-to-text may need to be specifically taught to students if they have not used these features independently. Consider developing a video tutorial that students can watch while mirroring the video online in real-time. These tutorials should be kept in location easily accessed and located by students.
- Deliver the instruction utilizing engaging graphics, videos, or visuals. Long pages of text can be overwhelming and finding the needed information within a large document can be overly difficult, minimizing access.

Providing predictable structure and consistent schedule supports all students but may be especially beneficial for some students with disabilities for whom this has been a critical strategy within the school setting, including some students with autism, emotional disturbance, or intellectual disabilities. Providing a visual schedule that the student can refer to at home can support the student's engagement with the virtual learning. Teachers may want to create a schedule that can be printed out at home or will be delivered to the student's home. Some possible resources include:

- Do2Learn
- Earlywood Educational Services
- Boardmaker

Students with limited communication or who use assistive technology and/or augmentative assistive communication systems will need extra supports provided in order for them to communicate with the teacher. The teacher may need to create communication systems for use at home, or deliver the student's communication system used at school to the student's home for use. Potential resources include:

- Boardmaker
- Storm Speech Therapy
- AAC Language Lab

Recommended Schedules and Procedures

The decision to continue providing educational services after school closure will have different implications for action. The following checklists are applicable for those districts and schools choosing to provide educational opportunities or services through closure.

Checklist

- ☐ Before closing or at start of closure:
  - ☐ Develop communication plans and protocols for the district and recommended protocols for schools.
  - ☐ Announce allowable building activity to teachers to allow for the preparation of student work that will be sent home (i.e., device check out, assigning of books, packaging school materials, etc.) Any gatherings within school facilities should comply with applicable social distancing guidance as well as health safety recommendations.
  - ☐ Establish how updates based on student learning will be collected by collaborating educators for the monitoring of student goal progress on Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and Individual Learning Plans (ILPs).
  - ☐ Establish process for accommodating and or modifying work for students.
  - ☐ Determine the process of how teachers will log or note important parent communication that the school will need to be aware of when school schedules resume.
  - ☐ Determine the evaluations, reevaluations, and annual IEP team meetings that are due during the closure/virtual period.
    - ☐ If an initial evaluation will exceed the initial 60-day timeline, it is not necessary at this time to complete a timeline extension form for evaluation timelines that fall within the parameters provided in the guidance document and any provided updated guidance.
    - ☐ Reevaluations are due by triennial date; however, refer to guidance document on how to address reevaluations given the pandemic health crisis.
  - ☐ Contact parents to inform them about the required evaluations and/or meetings and how each will be handled. See the guidance document and chart provided for the specific requirements in each situation.

- ☐ During closing:
  - ☐ Daily: Log/note key communication from parents or guardians in district or school logs.
  - ☐ Daily: Communicate with students to provide services or check-in.
  - ☐ Weekly: Continue the process for two-way communication with school families and the community for updates and learning opportunities.
  - ☐ Weekly: Update school websites and district or school(s) social media.
  - ☐ Weekly: Accommodate and or modify work for students.
  - ☐ Weekly: Document fulfilled and unfulfilled service hours required through IEPs or 504 plans.
  - ☐ Weekly: Designate and announce when sites will be available to produce more learning packets, gather needed resources for student projects, or refill student learning packets if needed.
  - ☐ Weekly: Provide ongoing tips for families to practice healthy habits and routines with students.
  - ☐ Periodically: Assessment specialists are encouraged to work on written reports for evaluations in process, prepare paperwork to the best extent possible for reevaluations that are coming due, participate in professional learning opportunities online, and provide resources for school personnel regarding student needs.
  - ☐ Periodically: Begin developing compensatory education plan for when school reopens.
  - ☐ Periodically: Provide support for answering questions students may have about COVID-19. Keep in mind in some cultures health and sickness may be considered private matters, so it is important to build relationships with families.

- ☐ Upon reopening:
  - ☐ Establish welcome back messages for teachers, families, and the community.
  - ☐ Review fulfilled and unfulfilled service hours and develop compensatory education plans.
  - ☐ Communicate the importance of revisiting daily routines with students. It should not be assumed all students will recall routines previous to schools closing.
  - ☐ Allow time to have personal learning based on experiences while on school closure.
  - ☐ Develop and communicate the check-in procedure for materials that have been assigned to students for learning.
  - ☐ Complete any evaluations, re-evaluations, and annual meetings as soon as possible.
    - ☐ Make sure the prior written notices completed include any information related for reasons for delay in the “other factors” section (Item #6 on the prior written notice).
    - ☐ If timeline exceeds deadlines due to factors unrelated to reasons outlined in the guidance documents or for lengths longer than those included in the guidance documents, follow the normal steps to document delays or extension requests.

Template: Individual Student Support Plan

Student Name: [Insert]
School-based POC: [Insert]

Method for Communication (select one)
□ Call
□ Virtual conference (Facetime, Skype, etc.)

Weekly Schedule
Monday: [Insert duration of time] at [Insert time am / pm]
Tuesday: [Insert duration of time] at [Insert time am / pm]
Wednesday: [Insert duration of time] at [Insert time am / pm]
Thursday: [Insert duration of time] at [Insert time am / pm]
Friday: [Insert duration of time] at [Insert time am / pm]

Services
The following is a list of services provided to the student

Services as identified through IEP / 504	Expectations – How services were provided

Resources
List of additional resources that could benefit the student:

Resource	How to acquire/access the resource

Documentation of Services
List the services that were provided

Date of Service	Time of Service	Type of Service Provided / Notes

Template: Teacher or Student Support Staff Service Plan

Teacher Name: [Insert]

Schedule

Monday:

Student	Time of Service	Type of Service Provided

Tuesday:

Student	Time of Service	Type of Service Provided

Wednesday:

Student	Time of Service	Type of Service Provided

Thursday:

Student	Time of Service	Type of Service Provided

Friday:

Student	Time of Service	Type of Service Provided

Resource List

Health Resources

- ***Centers for Disease Control and Prevention***

US Department of Ed Resources and Office of Civil Rights

- ***US Department of Education Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak***
- ***US Department of Education COVID-19 Information and Resources for Schools and School Personnel***
- ***Letter to Leaders Preventing and Addressing Potential Discrimination Associated with COVID-19***
- ***Fact Sheet: Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Schools While Protecting the Civil Rights of Students***