

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR FAMILIES REGARDING SPECIAL EDUCATION

August 2021

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (the Department) continues to provide new information and updates related to special education and the COVID-19 pandemic. This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document is intended to empower families by providing information on meaningful engagement with schools and districts, and to provide support so students and their families can actively participate in the IEP Team process.

The goal of family engagement in education is to build genuine relationships between students, families, educators, and the community. Positive relationships and shared responsibility support family well-being and children's academic achievement and healthy development from the earliest ages into young adulthood.

- *Effective family engagement is culturally responsive, collaborative, equitable, and respectful of diverse languages, norms, and values.*
- *Effective family engagement tries to eliminate barriers to participation and takes place in schools, the community, and wherever students live and learn.*

Q. What things have NOT changed because of COVID-19:

- Districts must provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to students with an Individual Education Program (IEP).
- Students with IEPs must receive all special education services agreed upon in their IEPs.
- IEP and evaluation timelines have not changed.
- Districts must continue to hold IEP Team meetings. With your consent, the IEP Team meetings may be held virtually, such as by telephone and/or video.
- Districts are required to complete preschool screenings for 3 and 4-year-old children and for all children who are of the age to enter kindergarten.
- Districts must accept and act on referrals from Early Intervention providers within required timelines.

Q. How can I help the IEP Team understand how my child did during periods of hybrid and/or remote learning?

Your input is always valued and is particularly critical during this time when you may have added insight into your child's learning experiences, including any difficulty in accessing remote learning. Sharing what you know about your child's needs, including their engagement, attention, behavior, progress, skills, home experiences, and other observations about their academic, emotional and social well-being, is important and can help the school to better meet your child's needs. Reach out to your child's teachers or the special education contact to find out how best to share this information.

- Share information about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your child.
- Share information about your child's daily routines.
- Share information about how your child has been learning.
- Share information about how your child is feeling about returning to school, changes in schedules, and any other changes or challenges that your child is experiencing at home or at school that may impact your child's school experience.

Q: Will schools use "COVID-19 Special Education Learning Plans" during school year 2021-2022?

No. Schools must use IEPs.

If you want to communicate regularly with your child's teacher, you should contact them to set up a plan. You can share what works best for you – phone or email. You can also reach out to other members of the school staff, as needed, to discuss any questions or concerns that you may have. Please do not hesitate to let your child's school know if your primary language is a language other than English and you need translation or interpretation services to communicate with the school.

Q. Who can I talk to if I have questions?

You can contact your child's teacher(s), your school district contact person, the IEP Team chairperson, or any other school personnel, such as principals and guidance counselors.

Q. Where can I find additional resources?

For DESE's Special Education webpage: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/sped>. For DESE's webpage dedicated to information for Students and Families: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/StudentsFamilies.html>.
