



# SPECIAL EDUCATION CONSIDERATIONS AS SCHOOLS REOPEN

The Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) has made available information supporting the development of programming and protocols for the 2020-21 school year in response to COVID-19. The information is designed to support alignment with IDEA/504, Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) policy, regulations, guidance; and recent Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) health and safety recommendations.

Special education administrators may draw upon these resources as an entry point from which to proactively plan for or fine-tune the re-opening of our schools, whether using a traditional, virtual or hybrid model. In addition, the documents may serve as a time-saving resource highlighting some of the critical information and abundant research available to educators.

In response to the challenges of re-opening schools with the inherent concerns and unknowns, four critical areas are addressed:

- communication and compliance
- health and safety
- emotional and mental health
- instruction

The aforementioned topics will follow with considerations for special education administrators and their fellow administrators and colleagues. To that end, we recommend that special education directors prioritize crafting action plans that set reasonable and attainable goals including who does what by when as well as identify data sources to measure progress toward meeting goals.

Of note, the Bureau of Special Education (BSE) recommends frequent communication between school district staff and parents/guardians/caregivers regarding the provision of FAPE, especially as it relates to our most vulnerable students. Stakeholders are strongly advised to communicate frequently, systematically and in a culturally sensitive manner both in the giving and receiving of pertinent information. It was never more important to promote a shared understanding of the school district's approach to providing special education and related services, as well as to safeguard all students' equity in accessing those services.

We have some final tips for your consideration. For those of us who are in the field of special education, we have had many opportunities to accommodate and modify to ensure educational benefit. We just need to continue these practices as we reopen our schools. With regard to remote learning/technology and hybrid educational models – think people first! Be proactive and above all do not become overwhelmed--be sure to take care of yourself first, so you are able to care for your students, staff, colleagues and families. With strong leadership skills and a comprehensive support system in place, the reopening of schools will be a success! We hope these briefs will be of support as you begin this journey.



# READER'S GUIDE/ DISTRICT SELF-ASSESSMENT

## READER'S GUIDE / DISTRICT SELF ASSESSMENT

Most school districts already have district-wide plans for re-entry. As a Special Education administrator, you will be charged with making modifications and accommodations to meet the unique needs for a range of identified students. As you read through each topic outline, you will find it helpful to complete the following District Self-Assessment to determine the specific needs of your department.

### TOPIC #1 COMMUNICATION & COMPLIANCE

- Our district has a comprehensive plan for Communication and Compliance
- The Special Education Department needs additional resources/support in the following areas:

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Comments:

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### TOPIC #2 HEALTH & SAFETY

- Our district has a comprehensive plan for Health and Safety
- The Special Education Department needs additional resources/support in the following areas:

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Comments:

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# READER'S GUIDE/ DISTRICT SELF-ASSESSMENT

## READER'S GUIDE / DISTRICT SELF ASSESSMENT

### TOPIC #3 EMOTIONAL & MENTAL HEALTH

- Our district has a comprehensive plan for Emotional and Mental Health
- The Special Education Department needs additional resources/support in the following areas:

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Comments:

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### TOPIC #4 INSTRUCTION: IN PERSON, DISTANCE LEARNING, HYBRID

- Our district has a comprehensive plan for Instruction: In Person, Distance Learning, Hybrid
- The Special Education Department needs additional resources/support in the following areas:

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Comments:

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ADDITIONAL NEEDS/AREAS OF CONCERN WHICH ARE NOT CAPTURED IN THE TOPIC OUTLINES:

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Comments:

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NAME OF SCHOOL DISTRICT: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME OF ADMINISTRATOR: \_\_\_\_\_

#### RESOURCES

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Academic-Office/CT-Learning-Hub>

## HOW CAN SPECIAL EDUCATION DIRECTORS EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE WITH PARENTS/GUARDIANS/CAREGIVERS?

- Communicate frequently and in culturally appropriate ways with parents/guardians; select familiar point person to communicate with parents/guardians; develop call log
- Provide information and training as needed for parent role in remote learning process
- Inform parents/guardians of available resources and support in the community

### RESOURCES

Bureau Bulletin (posted May 4, 2020). *Supporting parents/ caregivers of students with high needs during COVID-19.*  
<https://ctspecialnews.org/2020/05/04/supporting-parents-caregivers-of-students-with-high-needs-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-resource-guide-webinar-series/>

Center for Parents Action Committee (2020). Effective communication and collaboration  
<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Special-Education/CPAC---What-Families-Need-4-6-2020.pdf?la=en>

Center for Parent Information & Resources (2020). *Coping with COVID-19 for adults and children*  
<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/cv19-coping/>

## HOW CAN SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS USE THE GUIDANCE FROM IDEA/504, CSDE, USDE & CDC TO HELP PLAN FOR THE 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR?

- Communicate updates and provide professional development to staff on memos, revisions, recommendations, and guidelines from CSDE, BSE, USDE & CDC
- Follow CSDE/BSE compliance guidelines on current memos—Part C-Part B transitional planning, IEP/PPT/evaluation timelines, continued education, privacy and confidentiality, etc.
- Facilitate frequent meetings using a pre-determined (data-driven) format/agenda for certified and non-certified staff to plan for appropriate delivery of services (FAPE, FERPA, etc.)
- Review/revise IEP documents, PPTs, initial/re-evaluation timelines and related services scheduling in accordance with CSDE & BSE updates and working documents
- Encourage monitoring of meaningful educational benefit, progress toward goals/objectives, learning standards, credits toward graduation, and accommodations/modifications
- Use recording templates on student/parent communication, services, and continued education
- Use of health and safety checklist, collaborate with principals for reopening (see CAS template)
- Establish data collection mechanisms to discover emergent patterns of student and staff need, including trauma-informed care, SEL, mental health, etc.
- Establish contingency plans for continuum of services across the grade levels in the event of disruptions to learning and/or delivery of mandated services (prepare for most likely scenarios)

### RESOURCES

Bureau of Special Education Guidelines and Resources for COVID-19 (2020)  
<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Special-Education/Bureau-of-Special-Education/Coronavirus>

CAS COVID-19 Clearinghouse for Education (2020). <http://cas.casciac.org/?p=17755>

Special Education Resource Center (SERC). Online Learning and Other Resources for the 2020 Coronavirus Pandemic: Home.  
<http://ctserc.libguides.com/c.php?g=1016552>

## HOW WILL THE SPECIAL EDUCATION DIRECTOR BE ACTIVELY AND PROACTIVELY LINKED IN BUILDING AND DISTRICT PLANNING FOR REOPENING OF SCHOOLS?

- Prioritize achievable tasks systematically on a 30-60-90-day basis or a similar model that delineates degrees of priority for return to school and beyond
- Maintain active role on district/building strategic and ad hoc planning meetings
- Develop mechanism to receive advanced communication from district/building regarding imminent schedule changes
- Develop and reinforce effective two-way communication networks among district, building, curricular areas, off-site settings, parent/guardians, & community
- Create or align with multi-tiered approaches to address safety needs of students and staff (suggestion: use CDC model of lowest risk--more risk—highest risk, PBIS 3-tiered model, etc.)
- Provide emotional support, mental health options, and additional training for staff
- Design ways to teach safety procedures to all students and staff; give positive reinforcement and provide prompts for expected behavior
- Develop a checklist for staff (includes physical space, safety procedures/reminders, PPE, technology, learning materials, etc.); checklist for building administrators (see CAS template)
- Design systems to measure progress and needs of students, parents & staff (learning progress, attendance, surveys, interviews, on-line polls, forums, etc.)
- Create a continuum of professional development for staff including technology best practices, IDEA/504 revisions, social emotional learning, etc.
- Provide embedded support among staff by developing coaching, peer-mentor, and communities of practice models
- Develop/maintain a technology platform, software, and training to support equity in access to remote learning for students with disabilities & English language learners
- Review district budgetary effect of COVID-19 and availability of resources for department

### RESOURCES

Bailey, J., Hess, F. (2020). A blueprint for back to school.

<https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/a-blueprint-for-back-to-school/>

Bureau of Special Education Guidelines and Resources for COVID-19

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Special-Education/Bureau-of-Special-Education/Coronavirus>

CDC Coronavirus19 Considerations for School (updated May 19, 2020).

<https://www.cdc.gov>

McIntosh, K., Simonsen, B., Horner, R., Swain-Bradway, J., George, H., & Lewis, T. (2020). PBIS-OSEP Technical Assistance Center. Getting back to school after disruptions

<https://www.pbis.org/resource/getting-back-to-school-after-disruptions-resources-for-making-your-school-year-safer-more-predictable-and-more-positive>

Tucker, E. and Kruse, L. (2020). Preparing to Reopen: Six Principles That Put Equity at the Core

<https://www.educatingalllearners.org/post/preparing-to-reopen-six-principles-that-put-equity-at-the-core>

## HEALTH & SAFETY CHECKLIST FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES UPON RE-ENTRY

		Students with Disabilities Return to School Fall 2020	Students with Disabilities Receive Distance Learning and Face-to-Face Instruction	Students with Disabilities Receive Distance Learning For the School Year	Comments
1	Transportation				
2	Entry Screening Protocols				
3	Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)				
4	Classroom Sanitizing				
5	Cafeteria Safety				
6	Medically Fragile Students				
7	Special Education Staff Health				
8	Financial Impact				
9	Substitutes				

**RESOURCES**

[https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/Schools-Decision-Tree.pdf?deliveryName=USCDC\\_1191-DM28864](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/Schools-Decision-Tree.pdf?deliveryName=USCDC_1191-DM28864)

<https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/6890141/Guidance-for-Opening-Up-America-Again-Framework.pdf>



## SCHOOLS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



The purpose of this tool is to assist administrators in making (re)opening decisions regarding K-12 schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to check with state and local health officials and other partners to determine the most appropriate actions while adjusting to meet the unique needs and circumstances of the local community.

### Should you consider opening?

- ✓ Will reopening be consistent with applicable state and local orders?
- ✓ Is the school ready to protect children and employees at higher risk for severe illness?
- ✓ Are you able to screen students and employees upon arrival for symptoms and history of exposure?

ANY  
NO



### Are recommended health and safety actions in place?

- ✓ Promote healthy hygiene practices such as hand washing and employees wearing a cloth face covering, as feasible
- ✓ Intensify cleaning, disinfection, and ventilation
- ✓ Encourage social distancing through increased spacing, small groups and limited mixing between groups, if feasible
- ✓ Train all employees on health and safety protocols

ANY  
NO



### Is ongoing monitoring in place?

- ✓ Develop and implement procedures to check for signs and symptoms of students and employees daily upon arrival, as feasible
- ✓ Encourage anyone who is sick to stay home
- ✓ Plan for if students or employees get sick
- ✓ Regularly communicate and monitor developments with local authorities, employees, and families regarding cases, exposures, and updates to policies and procedures
- ✓ Monitor student and employee absences and have flexible leave policies and practices
- ✓ Be ready to consult with the local health authorities if there are cases in the facility or an increase in cases in the local area

ANY  
NO



OPEN AND MONITOR

ALL  
YES



## **EQ: HOW CAN SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS BECOME INFORMED ABOUT RESOURCES FOR ADDRESSING EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF BOTH STAFF AND STUDENTS AND BE ABLE TO PROACTIVELY ADDRESS THE NEED FOR INCREASED PROGRAMS AND SERVICES IN ANTICIPATION OF HIGHER THAN USUAL LEVELS OF ANXIETY IN BOTH STAFF AND STUDENTS?**

As we plan to move toward school openings for Fall 2020 it is critically important that we understand the emotional impact that the pandemic has had on both staff and students.

We must expect that there will be a heightened anxiety among both staff and students, and that anxiety will interfere with and sometimes disable our ability to follow through with planned back to school responses. Planning rather than reacting is crucial. Schools, of course, already have many important resources in place. Schools have already given special attention to social and emotional learning. Some schools have introduced trauma informed classrooms. Morning meditation seems to be growing and occasionally, there is attention to staff self-care.

It is difficult to reduce anxiety among staff in the face of constantly changing expectations. One of the very important considerations is staff-district communication. Staff want clear guidelines – “What are we supposed to do?” Communicating decisions quickly and to everyone is key.

Administrators of Special Education Programs must be key players in district planning. Anticipating how the district plan will impact programs for students with disabilities and voicing concerns during planning will become extremely important.

There are many resources available, such as the federal COVID-19 response from the CDC, Connecticut State Department of Education and the Bureau of Special Education, education publications, responses and resources from professional organizations such as the American Psychological Association, the National Association of School Psychologists, the American Council of School Social Workers, etc.

**Many questions remain unanswered:**

- How will our Employee Assistance Program respond?
- How will districts accommodate staff who feel uncomfortable returning to school buildings?
- How will we evaluate new referrals in a distance or hybrid engagement model?
- How will we deliver appropriate counseling services to students with counseling needs?





## ANNOTATED NOTES AND DIRECT LINKS TO RESOURCES WHICH ARE QUICKLY ACCESSIBLE ARE FOUND BELOW.

ACSSW American Council for School Social Work <https://acsw.org/COVID-19Resources.html> Adopt trauma-informed models of education and support for students and staff.

Center for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html#> Good advice for parents and families and self-care.

NASP-National Association of School Psychologists. <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/covid-19-resource-center/special-education-resources/telehealth-virtual-service-delivery-updated-recommendations> Excellent Reference to provision of Psych Services and Telehealth

**School Social Work Association of America.** [www.Sswaa.org](http://www.Sswaa.org)

Excellent resources for staff and administrators – 33 topic resources on the opening page of the Coronavirus Topics are on opening page when COVID-19 Resources is clicked. Good info about FERPA, Telehealth, and Social Distance Practice.

**The American Council for School Social Work.** [www.acsw.org](http://www.acsw.org). Crisis and bereavement

American Psychological Association Covid Resources. <https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2020/03/covid-19-research-findings> Excellent short document on Research Findings to help understand COVID

<https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2020/03/covid-19-leadership.pdf> How Leaders Can Maximize Trust and Minimize Stress During the COVID-19 Pandemic

<https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2020/03/psychologists-self-care> Good tips for Self-Care (for Psychologists, but good for all}

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) - Reopen Your School Community <https://casel.org/resources-covid/> This document points out that SEL is foundational to the holistic success of your school community. There is a checklist for putting this into practice and many references to resources. Important: Emphasize staff needs as well as student. Staff need to be able to process their emotions and experiences, and have strategies to address their own anxieties.

NCTSN - National Child Traumatic Stress Network  
[https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/trauma\\_informed\\_school\\_strategies\\_during\\_covid-19.pdf](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/trauma_informed_school_strategies_during_covid-19.pdf) An excellent fact sheet - Trauma-Informed School Strategies during COVID-19. Has “considerations” for Educators and for Administrators

Mayo Clinic [COVID-19 and your mental health - www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/corona](https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, you may experience stress, anxiety, fear, sadness and loneliness. And mental health disorders, including anxiety and depression, can worsen. Learn self-care strategies and get the care you need to help you cope.

UCSD <https://medschool.ucsd.edu/som/fmph/research/mindfulness/free-sessions/Pages/covid-19-resources.aspx> An excellent resource for understanding Mindfulness practices.

# INSTRUCTION: IN-PERSON, DISTANCE LEARNING & HYBRID MODEL CONSIDERATIONS

## **WHAT ARE SOME INITIAL ACTION PLANNING STEPS THAT DIRECTORS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND SCHOOL LEADERS CAN CONSIDER THAT SUPPORT HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTION WITH TECHNOLOGY TOOLS AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING PRACTICES WHILE ENSURING COMPLIANCE WITH STUDENTS' INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLANS?**

- Identify, create and/or purchase academic/social-emotional learning assessments to determine current student performance levels in relationship to IEP goals/objectives and to establish a baseline for instructional planning and record results and revisions to current IEPs with a timeline for progress reviews.
- Create a template for IEP Addendum/COVID 19 Recovery Plan & Services and have it reviewed by the district's attorney before distribution to staff.
- Establish department-based planning teams for varied age-groups(Pre-K, Elementary, Middle, High School, Transition), disabilities, and/or settings (Resource vs. Self-Contained, One-to-One therapy vs. small group, Push-In vs. Pull Out, etc.) to discuss instructional planning, delivery of services, implementation of IEP goals and objectives, etc. based on the specific models for instruction, e.g. distance learning or combination of in person/distance learning.
- Offer remote instructional options for higher risk staff as it relates to the pandemic and their return to school, e.g. using one-to-one configurations or small group cohorts, and develop "back-up" plans, if needed, for reassigning teachers based on certification, hiring of substitute teachers, contacting local universities for using university students for internships while using veteran teachers and higher risk staff as mentors (work from home option), and reconsider assignments of para-educators.
- Construct a framework for instructional planning and delivery that will capitalize on special education teachers' strengths, reduce their burden, and ensure consistency and quality. This can be accomplished by (1) A review of each IEP in the teachers' caseloads and grouping common IEP goals at a given grade level/instructional configuration. (2) Teachers will be assigned instructional objectives for which they will create on-line lessons. (3) Develop a process for collaborative teaching to support students with disabilities in the general education classroom within the virtual learning environment. (4) Parents/Guardians will be sent a "menu" of instructional tasks/activities for their child/children to complete on a weekly basis and engagement will be monitored by the case manager with periodic check-ins.
- Determine specific distance learning tools, resources, practices, and ongoing supports that can help address the challenges faced by students with disabilities, English Language learners, and at-risk learners within the remote learning environment to ensure that equitable outcomes for all students are achieved.



# INSTRUCTION: IN-PERSON, DISTANCE LEARNING & HYBRID MODEL CONSIDERATIONS

## WHAT ARE SOME INITIAL ACTION PLANNING STEPS?

**(continued)**

- **Survey - Contact parents/guardians within the school district to determine technology needs at home so that distance learning can continue where appropriate and necessary, e.g. computers, laptops, tablets, Wi-Fi, training, etc.**
- **Develop a process for tracking issues with regard to technology infrastructure, return, repair and/or replacement of student devices owned by the school district and determine subsequent future purchase needs emphasizing one-to-one computing and ensuring timely technical support for teachers, students, and parents/guardians**
- **Survey students, parents/guardians, and teaching staff regarding March-June, 2020 distance learning efforts: Successes – Challenges – Future Needs and then create a plan to support ongoing distance learning efforts to increase student engagement and greater alignment to district curriculum standards through a combination of asynchronous and synchronous instructional activities**
- **Develop a process for collecting data on effective supervision and evaluation of teachers that focuses on implementation and application of effective teaching practices while supporting teacher growth areas within a hybrid model learning environment.**

### RESOURCES

Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning at St. Andrew's Episcopal School, "A Science of Learning Guide to Education Technology – Mapping ED TECH products to teaching needs", May, 2020

McCarthy, John, "4 Key Aspects of Teaching an Online Class", April 24, 2020, Edutopia

Burns, Mary, "Getting Ready to Teach Next Year", May 26, 2020, Edutopia

"Leading Distance Learning: Lessons from Virtual Principals and Research", Connecticut Center for School Change, April, 2020.