



School Closures Due to Coronavirus/COVID-19: FAQs for Families of Students With Disabilities

Governor Wolf has ordered a closure of all Pennsylvania schools, including brick-and-mortar schools, approved private schools, cyber and charter schools, and other educational agencies. The purpose of this closure is to ensure the safety of Pennsylvania's students to the greatest extent possible and limit the spread of the coronavirus, COVID-19. At this time, local education agencies are working hard to provide continuity of education during this crisis.

If you are struggling through this difficult time, you are not alone. Your school and other community agencies can provide you with resources to help you and your child(ren) at this time. Assistance with academic support, behavioral issues, mental health and well-being, or technical support is available through your school's website or the PaTTAN website at www.pattan.net. Do not hesitate to ask for help. Below are some frequently asked questions (FAQs) regarding the school closures.

What will happen to my child's services when school is canceled for all students due to COVID-19?

When a school is closed because of COVID-19 and educational services for all students have stopped, the local educational agency (LEA) is generally not required to provide services to students with disabilities during this time. This follows the policies of the [Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services \(OSERS\)](#). (See [OSEP Letter to Pergament, December 2013](#))

If a district has extended school closures, but continues to provide educational services to all students, the district remains responsible for the free appropriate public education (FAPE) of its students with individualized education programs (IEPs), to the greatest extent possible.

After an extended closure, LEAs are responsible for reviewing how the closure affected the delivery of

special education and related services to students who are eligible for special education services. Once school resumes, a student's individualized education program (IEP) team (or appropriate personnel under Section 504) must make an individualized determination of the effect of the closure and whether and to what extent compensatory/future services may be needed. These services may include making up for any skills that may have been lost during the closure. A student's IEP team may recommend additional services to make up for the loss of delivery of special education and related services during the closure.

What will happen to my child's services when a school is closed, but educational services continue to be provided to all students?

Pennsylvania schools are currently providing continuity of education throughout this crisis. Local educational agencies will communicate with families of students with disabilities throughout this crisis. Districts and schools will work to ensure that all students receive reasonable and appropriate services to the maximum extent possible.

All schools are different and may continue education in different ways, including online learning opportunities and learning materials sent home with students. Your child's school will update you on their plan as it evolves. Your district will remain responsible for providing free appropriate public education (FAPE) to students who are eligible for special education services through their individualized education program (IEP) to the extent that is reasonable and appropriate in light of current circumstances.

LEAs will be providing written notice to families about special education or related services that may need to be adjusted, based on current circumstances. Services might include schoolwork

packets, online learning, or other learning adapted to the student's needs and location. IEP teams should work to ensure that students are receiving appropriate and reasonable services during the COVID-19 mandatory closure, while ensuring alignment with social distancing guidelines. Schools should continue to follow local policies regarding changing or amending an existing IEP.

If annual IEP reviews or eligibility reviews are due during this time, meetings will be held virtually or through conference calls. Collaboration and communication are critical during this time.

What can I do to support my child's educational development during school closures?

The most important thing you can do for your child is ensure his or her safety. Follow public health directives, such those recommended by the [Center for Disease Control](#) and the [Pennsylvania Department of Health](#). Comply with "Stay Home" procedures. These activities are put in place to slow the spread of the virus and to help your family be safe.

Stay in contact with your child's teachers as much as possible. Your child's teachers might communicate with you in a variety of ways, such as through email, phone calls, educational portals, or texting apps. Teachers can provide important educational information and it may comfort your child to know that his or her teachers are still communicating with and caring for students. If you do not have access to the

Internet, or have limited access, many companies are offering free or low-cost Internet access.

If your child is having difficulty participating in continuing education activities due to his or her disabilities or for other reasons (e.g., lack of internet capability), talk to your child's teachers. They may be able to provide you with alternative means for your child to learn and complete schoolwork.

During this time, gather any information or data that you think might be helpful in the development of your child's evaluation, re-evaluation, or IEP, in anticipation of future meetings. You are an important partner in your child's education and the team will appreciate your contributions.

Since face-to-face gatherings are not recommended during this time of social distancing, consider participating in your child's special education meetings through the phone or online connections, such as Skype or Zoom.

Continue working with your child to the best of your ability. The [PaTTAN](#) website provides information to help you work with your child on academics, such as math and literacy, and additional skills, such as communication.

Additional guidance from the Pennsylvania State Department of Education: <https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx>



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Tom Wolf, Governor