

Special Education Reentry Checklist

Public Consulting Group (PCG) is pleased to offer this Special Education Reentry Checklist to assist school districts in COVID-19 special education planning for 2020–2021. This resource serves as a companion to existing local, state, and federal guidance on both education and public health. Used together, these can support a safe and effective school reentry for our most vulnerable students.

This checklist inventories essential actions in four critical areas for Directors of Special Education:

✔ Health and Safety ✔ IEPs and Instruction ✔ Communication Planning ✔ Budget and Finance



Following these steps will help ensure that special education departments are equipped to meet health and safety guidelines for classrooms, therapy rooms, and interactions between students and educators.

Health and Safety

1. How will new procedures for personal hygiene and safety—based on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), state, and local health guidelines—be implemented in special education classrooms and therapy rooms?
 - ✔ Develop a plan for training and professional development in the areas of hygiene and social distancing for staff who interact closely with students. Continue reviewing ongoing guidance from agencies to modify professional development when necessary.
2. Are there protocols to accommodate students for whom traditional use of personal protective equipment (PPE), social distancing, and hygiene techniques may not be feasible?
 - ✔ Procure face shields of different sizes, in addition to masks for students and district personnel.
 - ✔ Consult with the district physician about handling situations in which a child cannot or will not wear PPE.
 - ✔ Create curriculum and lesson plans on PPE, social distancing, and hygiene for those students participating in basic skills classes.
3. Are there additional sensory accommodations or modifications to match PPE to student needs?
 - ✔ Consider students' sensory needs, visual supports, and boundaries when implementing social distancing, and use social narratives and video modeling to teach new hygiene routines such as more frequent handwashing.
 - ✔ Develop signage for all students about PPE and handwashing.
 - ✔ Consider using signage with illustrations (e.g. using picture communication symbols) and social stories to support needs.
 - ✔ Create Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals around COVID-19–specific needs that are transferrable to student activities of daily living (ADL) needs.



Following these steps will help prepare special education departments to assess performance, ensure continuity of service, comply with IEPs, address staffing concerns, and prepare for hybrid instructional models.

IEPs and Instruction

4. Is there a plan for assessing students' present levels of performance and regression of skills when students return that includes progress toward IEP goals?
 - ✔ Identify diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment tools to identify specific learning needs for students with disabilities.
 - ✔ Consider a data management platform to collect and analyze district data on a routine basis.
5. Is there a plan for providing continuity of services to the greatest extent possible during a school closure, should schools close again in the 2020–2021 school year?
 - ✔ Ensure students and district personnel have access to instructional technology prior to anticipated closures.
 - ✔ Provide trainings and guided practice for students and parents to ensure they can effectively access and use instructional technology at home (including navigating virtual platforms and online meeting etiquette).
 - ✔ If assessments and data must be given and collected at home, consider providing trainings and guided practice for parents in the administration and collection of both.
 - ✔ Consider creating distance learning plans for students with IEPs to ensure continuity of instruction in hybrid and virtual learning environments.
6. Is there a plan to integrate social and emotional learning (SEL) practices into the district's special education programming in both hybrid and online learning environments?
 - ✔ Consider lessons and instruction based on students' various levels of understanding regarding social distancing.
 - ✔ Working with building administration, establish protocols for how school personnel will check in with students with disabilities on non-academic matters (e.g. discussing the social emotional impact of school closure, their comfort level when in the building, etc.)
7. Is there a plan to support students who may have special difficulty transitioning back to the school environment?
 - ✔ In collaboration with building administration, develop a protocol to support students who may need altered school schedules to allow for virtual education services when in-person services resume.
8. Have you implemented a system to ensure staff have time to address any backlog of special education evaluations and IEP team meetings, as well as time to collect data on student present levels of performance and progress toward IEP goals to determine regression and impact on progress that occurred during the public health emergency?
 - ✔ Analyze data from the district special education management system to identify records that have exceeded compliance timelines.
 - ✔ Create master schedules for all district-employed evaluators to ensure the maximization of internal capacity.
 - ✔ Provide stipends for district-employed evaluators to work overtime and possibly on weekends.
 - ✔ Identify retired, credentialed district evaluators to hire as contractors to support backlog. Identify outside agencies and evaluators to support backlog.

9. **Are there students who did not receive special education services during the school closure?**
 - ✔ Identify students who did not receive special education services during the school closure.
 - ✔ Determine the rationale for why individual students did not receive services (e.g. parental withdrawal or refusal, access to internet/technology, etc.)
10. **Do you have protocols in place to assess current levels of performance on IEP goals to determine student progress?**
 - ✔ Develop procedures to immediately assess baseline data upon reentry.
 - ✔ Identify processes and tools to support staff in data collection.
 - ✔ Coordinate with case managers to collect teacher notes and data from virtual learning during the 2019–2021 school year to assess potential deficiencies, so they are prepared to address them at the next IEP meeting.
11. **Have you convened IEP teams to consider, on an individualized basis, whether and to what extent additional services are required due to the impact of the public school closure?**
 - ✔ Develop protocols for IEP teams to determine if additional educational and related services are needed.
 - ✔ Coordinate with board counsel to develop protocols for determining compensatory services.
 - ✔ If additional services are needed, collect documentation for the determination, including information from the IEP meetings, discussions, and any cited data.
12. **Are there potential staffing needs as a result of additional services being provided due to the impact of the school closure?**
 - ✔ Utilize information from your special education case management system to quantify the impact of the school closure.
 - ✔ Begin conversations with vendors to provide contracted therapists (both in-person and tele-therapy).



Following these steps will assist special education departments in making policy decisions, conducting virtual meetings, and communicating with the families of special education students.

Communication Planning

13. **Have you developed a COVID-19 special education steering committee to make policy decisions related to health and safety for students with disabilities in various school settings?**
 - ✔ Engage the district’s leadership team to agree on key participants of this steering committee. Consider including school district physician, local board of health representation, school nurses, board counsel, special education counsel, special education director, superintendent, and building leadership.
 - ✔ Determine the frequency and duration of steering committee meetings as well as expected outcomes.
 - ✔ Ensure the steering committee’s informed recommendations are consistent with the most recent state guidance.

14. Over the summer and into the 2020–2021 school year, are you continuing to conduct virtual or phone-based IEP team meetings to the extent possible?
- ✔ Continue holding virtual meetings, in addition to in-person meetings when safe to do so, to ease the backlog from school closures.
 - ✔ Develop a plan to resume in-person evaluations when safe to do so.
15. Have you developed a plan for communicating with families regarding the process for determining whether and to what extent additional services are required due to the impact of the extended school closure?
- ✔ Develop external communication plans for supporting students with disabilities who have regressed during virtual instruction.



Following these steps will allow special education departments to plan for additional costs and funding, address maintenance of effort requirements, and remain aware of waivers.

Budget and Finance

16. Have you identified additional costs associated with providing services due to COVID-19 and determined the best funding source (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) formula funding, CARES funds, or local dollars)?
- ✔ Coordinate with your business administrator to identify additional resources to support students and staff within the special education program who may be at a heightened risk of COVID-19.
17. Have you considered that IDEA maintenance of effort (MOE) requirements have not been waived?
- ✔ Coordinate with your business administrator to ensure IDEA resources are being spent in a manner that will allow for consistent, appropriate spending in future years.
18. Have you considered that IDEA equitable services and proportionate share requirements have not been waived and must continue as usual?
- ✔ Coordinate with your business administrators and private schools to ensure your district is conducting meaningful consultations with private schools for FY 2020–2021 and is spending down the mandatory proportionate share.

Many of the questions on this checklist are adapted from the *Special Education section of Education Forward: Safely and Successfully Reopening Wisconsin Schools* by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. June 29, 2020. Madison, WI. https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/Education_Forward_web.pdf

Action steps were developed by special education subject matter experts at Public Consulting Group (PCG).

To learn how PCG can help you with your reentry planning, contact us today.

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