

Return to In-Person Learning: What You Need to Know

When your child's school returns to in-person instruction, there are many things to consider and to do in order to advocate for your child's needs and to ensure that the transition back is as smooth as possible. Here are some advocacy tips to help you navigate this process.

Addressing gaps in learning:

- Think about the skills your child is learning/developing, how they were performing in those areas when remote learning started, and how they are performing now
- Look at the IEP goals to see what skills the team was focusing on and what level your child was expected to reach by the end of the goal period. Have they obtained those skills and reached those goals?
- If your child has not made expected progress in any area, or has regressed in any skill, advocate not only for the services that were in your child's IEP previously, but also more intensive services to allow them to reach the levels that were previously determined appropriate and attainable but were not achieved
 - This could include tutoring, instruction, and/or services, before, during, and/or after school or during the summer (although after school and summer services are harder to get)
- School staff should identify the learning standards that were not covered during remote learning and prioritize a strong review/teaching of the critical standards and key skills that were not addressed or mastered from the previous year
- Request evaluations to determine your child's current functioning in any areas of concern
 - If you've kept documentation of what your child has been working on, areas they've struggled in, ways in which you've assisted them at home, you should share that information with the school as part of your request for evaluations
 - If you haven't kept this information, start a log NOW with at least weekly data recording of how your child is doing currently during remote learning
- If you have concerns, request an IEP or 504 meeting to discuss your concerns, your child's performance and current needs
- Discuss a transition plan to help your child adjust back into the school environment

Addressing COVID-19 precautions:

- Some disabilities may make it difficult for children to understand and/or comply with COVID precautions in school, such as wearing a mask or social distancing from peers or staff. However, the school cannot exclude children from in-person learning due to these disability-related issues
- If you have concerns, you should put them in writing to your school and request accommodations accordingly. Letters from doctors or clinicians who know your child supporting the accommodations you're requesting can be helpful
- Request that your child's issues related to safety precautions be added to their IEP and behavior plan to ensure that they are not punished for their inability to follow those rules

- Face masks
 - Using a face shield instead of a face mask is a reasonable accommodation
 - If your child needs to see facial features for instruction and/or communication, request that teachers wear face shields or clear face masks
 - Provide a note from your child's medical doctor if they need an exemption from wearing a face mask
- Social distancing
 - If your child has difficulty maintaining social distancing, peers and staff should be made aware of this in a sensitive way and you should work with the school to develop a plan for what to do if your child gets too close to someone else in school
 - If your child's IEP calls for a one-on-one aide, that person may need to be in close proximity to your child. If this is the case, and you and the aide both agree, there should be no issue with the aide supporting your child from closer than six feet

Opting out of in-person instruction:

- Your school district may provide parents with the opportunity to opt out of in-person instruction and continue with remote learning, even if they reopen for students
- Separate from this opt-out option, if your child has a medical or psychological condition that puts them at higher risk of harm if they contract COVID-19, you can request homebound services by sending a written and dated letter to the school
- You will also be required to provide a letter from a physician describing your child's diagnosis, why they require homebound services, and the expected amount of time they will need to be at home
- Unlike remote learning, homebound instruction is based on an individualized determination that your child cannot be safely educated in the school environment due to specific medical or psychological issues
- Homebound instruction could include individual instructors and service providers coming to your home (although districts may not agree to this), virtual instruction, or a combination of both, depending on your child's needs. You should meet with your child's IEP team to develop a homebound plan

Resolving disputes:

- If your school won't agree to provide appropriate instruction and/or services to account for your child's lack of progress or regression during remote learning, or if the school refuses to make reasonable accommodations in response to your requests, your next step would be to file a mediation request, due process hearing request, or a complaint with the Illinois State Board of Education
- You can find more information on dispute resolution at www.isbe.net/Pages/Special-Education-Effective-Dispute-Resolution.aspx, however, we do not recommend filing a due process complaint without legal representation
- Our office can also assist you in determining the best course of action depending on the specific facts of your case
- Contact us at 866-787-9270 or tami.kuipers@gmail.com to set up a consultation if you believe you need assistance in advocating for your child's educational needs