

Sussex Wantage Regional School District

Re-Entry Parent Handbook:
Special Programs FAQ



2020-21 School Year

Welcome to the Special Programs Office Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

On behalf of the district's Special Education staff, I welcome you to this SPO FAQ in hopes that it will clarify the Special Education aspects of the re-entry plan. Per the reopening plan, students who receive special education and related services, as required by their IEPs, will receive the services delineated in their plan either in-person or remotely to the maximum extent possible. For specific questions, parents are encouraged to contact their child's teacher or case manager.

This FAQ serves to provide detailed information concerning students with disabilities. It will be updated regularly to include any changes. This FAQ is intended to clarify general information regarding special programs and related services. Every IEP is unique and, therefore, questions specific to your child's IEP should be raised with his/her case manager.

In ensuring the delivery of Special Education and Related Services to students with disabilities, all districts must continue to meet their obligations to students with disabilities to the greatest extent possible (*The Road Back: Restart and Recovery Plan for Education, 2020*). Specific strategies and considerations for students with disabilities have been included throughout the varied age and grade levels and district programs. All plans will be subject to change in accordance with any updates and guidance received from the NJDOE or United States Department of Education (USDE) on implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The Special Programs Office will collaborate, share information, and review plans that help protect the whole school community, and this includes those with special health needs. Our plans will complement other mitigation strategies to protect high-risk populations, and minimize disruption to teaching and learning, while protecting our students from potential of social stigma and discrimination. Special education administration and staff will maintain its communication with families to discuss the delivery methods of instruction for students with disabilities and update communication as needed through the district's platforms (such as the district website and Realtime parent portal). We encourage active and ongoing communication with our staff.

We look forward to our returning with our students and are grateful for your patience and for continuing to work with us as we prepare for our students and staff to return safely back to school.

Best,
Victoria Wilson
Director of Special Services

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is Child Find? Is Child Find Impacted by COVID-19?

A: Child Find is a legal requirement that public schools identify all students who are suspected to have a disability and who may be entitled to special education services. The Sussex Wantage Regional Schools continues to adhere to its obligations under Child Find. Meetings will continue to be conducted virtually through tele or video conferences.

Q: Will CST/IEP Meetings be live or remote?

A: CST meetings (Identification/Planning Meetings, Eligibility, etc.) will be conducted remotely to minimize risk and number of people in our school buildings.

Q: Have the CST Evaluation Requirements changed?

A: Requirements for evaluations remain unchanged, with the timelines as per New Jersey State Special Education Code NJAC 6A:14. Evaluations may be conducted in person at this time, with aspects (parent survey, for example) conducted remotely.

Before, During and After all in person evaluations

- **All surfaces, equipment and manipulative materials must be wiped down with a sanitary cloth before/after testing.**
- Clear plastic covers will be placed on stimulus books.
- Only necessary materials will be brought into the room. No food, drink, toys, or additional bags unless relevant to testing/therapies.
- The examiner and student must use hand sanitizer at the start of the evaluation and at the conclusion of the evaluation.
- For testing purposes: Students must be seated several feet away from the examiner **with a plexi-glass barrier** between the examiner and student.
- All evaluations/therapies will be conducted in a room with windows.

Q: How do I give consent for evaluations if they are proposed and I am not able to attend in person?

A: A meeting proposes evaluations for a student, the case manager will send an electronic version of the Notice and Consent for Evaluation form. A parent may either print, sign, scan, and email the form back, or electronic consent may be provided via reply email.

Q: How will I participate in my child's Eligibility Meeting?

A: As mentioned, CST meetings (Identification/Planning Meetings, Eligibility, etc.) will be conducted remotely to minimize risk and number of people in our school buildings. This includes an eligibility meeting to discuss completed evaluation results and interpret findings and consider recommendations. The case manager will send an electronic signature form to document attendance at the eligibility meeting. The case manager will send an electronic version of the Notice and Consent for Eligibility. A parent may either print, sign, scan, and email their consent, or electronic consent may be provided via reply email.

Q: How will my child's IEP needs be met?

A: Students with disabilities receiving specialized services are provided instruction in alignment with their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). This may include in-person, small group instruction if it is determined that services can be provided safely in-person. Students with disabilities will follow the programs identified in their IEP to the maximum extent possible. Self-contained programs (Preschool, LLD, MD, AUTISM) will meet in person on their assigned cohort days and will be provided remote instruction, services on virtual days. Split schedule students will continue to attend with their resource-level and/or supplemental programs that are aligned to their cohort assignment (A group/B group). Supported instruction will continue to be provided via teacher assistants as outlined in individualized IEPs. As the district moves to greater in-person time, an increase of in-person specialized instruction, related services, and instructional support will be scheduled.

Q: What will be the role of the Child Study Team (CST) during the re-entry?

A: The CST will be focused on re-entry of all students with disabilities; that our students are transitioning to their new grades, buildings and programs successfully, that there is a review of each student's schedule and IEP alignment, and that CST meetings may be scheduled to review services and progress of their students' educational, social-emotional and behavioral needs.

Levels of academic achievement and functional performance and needs will be reviewed by considering:

- Whether the student participated in continuous learning opportunities provided by the school and district during the COVID-19 school building closure;
- Teacher observations and parental perspective of the student's learning in the continuous learning opportunities provided by the school or district;
- Whether there were services identified in the student's IEP prior to the school closure that the school or district was unable to provide during the building closure due to restrictions on in-person services;
- Whether the student continued making progress toward meeting his/her IEP goals;
- Whether the student experienced any additional or new social-emotional health issues during building closure and re-entry;
- Whether the student experienced any regression during the period of school building closure. Data will be collected within the first three to five weeks of school and compared to the second/last in-person quarter 19-20 SY data.

Q: My child is transitioning to a new school/program? How will my child be supported?

A: Transitions from building to building and program to program involve careful planning and clear communication, and this is especially important for re-entry following the COVID-19 pandemic. When updating transition assessments, teachers may conduct assessments virtually or in person. Meetings may be held to ensure successful transitions were made and whether any additional needs have been identified.

Q: My child attends an Out of District Special Program? How will I be informed of the school's plan and any potential changes?

A: Each Out of District (OOD) School is required to provide information regarding its re-entry plan with both student's families and our district through the child's Case Manager. Families and Case Managers will need to communicate on a regular basis regarding any updates or changes.

Q: Will there still be opportunities for inclusion for students?

A: We are committed to providing an accessible and an inclusive education. As our classrooms are at half-capacity when returning for in-person instruction, this will be done in accordance with maintaining social distancing. Universal design for both in-person and

remote learning, with instructional support provided will allow for more opportunities for students with disabilities to engage in learning with their non-disabled peers.

Q: I have concerns regarding my child's emotional state and needs? What support will be available to students for re-entry?

A: Student-specific needs for transitioning back into school will be addressed through a variety of staff and resources. These include School Psychologists and School Social Workers through your child's Child Study Team, as well as on-site School Counselors. All are trained professionals who will be able to provide support for students who may be experiencing difficulty in returning to school in this very different environment. Students with disabilities may demonstrate greater worry and concern regarding the changes to the school environment and complying with the safety protocols. Teachers will receive professional development re: trauma signs to look for and will make referrals as needed to our counselors for assistance. Additional resources for Social Emotional Learning (SEL) can be found on the district website.

Q: What is the District Mask Policy? Are there exceptions? I have concerns regarding my child's ability to follow the safety and hygiene guidelines independently.

A: All students and staff will be required to wear masks throughout the instructional day both inside the classroom and during transit in the building; staff members may also wear clear face shields in the classroom. If a student is unable to wear a mask, parents will be expected to submit medical documentation in advance of student attendance at school. Any student with disabilities who cannot wear a face covering due to a medical condition, including respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition or disability, and students who would be unable to remove a mask without assistance will not be required to comply with this requirement. An amendment will be made to your child's IEP upon receipt of the medical documentation exempting your child from having to wear a mask.

It is expected that parents will provide masks for their children. If a child arrives at school and does not have a mask, the school will provide a mask for the child to wear throughout the day. Curriculum and lesson plans on these safety and hygiene including PPE, social distancing, and hand washing for those students participating in special education programming will be integrated into their programs.

Students with disabilities that refuse to wear a mask or are noncompliant with CDC policies may require goals for compliance be added to their IEP or behavioral plan.

Q: What is Compensatory Education? How does it apply in response to COVID-19?

A: The United States Department of Education (USED) has advised, “[A]n IEP Team and, as appropriate to an individual student with a disability, the personnel responsible for ensuring Free and Public Education (FAPE) to a student for the purposes of Section 504, would be required to make an individualized determination as to whether compensatory services are needed under applicable standards and requirements.” QA-1 Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak (USED March 12, 2020).

If compensatory services are being requested, the CST will lead a discussion of the educational needs of the student, including the potential loss of skills. Based on these individual needs, the CST may consider the appropriateness of collecting data for an agreed-upon time following the student’s return to school and subsequently reconvening to discuss the need for future services at that time. It is important school staff are documenting with specificity the special education and related services being provided to students with disabilities while monitoring and tracking individual student progress. This information will be necessary to inform the CST in making a determination as to what future services or compensatory services are necessary to ensure the provision of a FAPE.

Q: What are some additional Special Education Resources?

A: In addition to COVID-19 Resources <https://www.nj.gov/education/covid19/>

PACER Center: PACER leaders and staff understand families of students with disabilities because they are those families. Find tips and links here about: <https://www.pacer.org/special/covid-19.asp>

View tips on distance learning and special education for families from Google Sites. A variety of tips from around the world on distance learning and family supports.: <https://sites.google.com/view/distance-learning-specialed/home/tips-for-families>

TASH is an international leader in disability advocacy. TASH has a vision of a world in which people with disabilities are included and fully participating members of their communities, with no obstacles preventing equity, diversity and quality of life.. (<https://tash.org//>)

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is the largest international professional organization dedicated to improving the educational success of individuals with disabilities and/or gifts and talents (<http://www.cec.sped.org/>)