



Office of Student Services

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Dear Parents and Families of Students with Disabilities served through an IEP in Cherokee County Schools:

I hope you and your families are doing well and are safe. These past weeks have been stressful and challenging during this unprecedented event. This letter will aid in answering questions you may have in reference to school closure and services for students with disabilities.

During this time of school closures due to COVID-19, there are some important things to remember. Any actions taken by a district or school regarding closures are for the safety of all students, families, school personnel and community members. As districts are determining the most appropriate steps to ensure student and staff safety, we want to provide you with guidance relating to students with disabilities and their services. It is extremely important for families and schools to collaborate and communicate regarding services for students with disabilities.

The United States Education Department understands that, during this national emergency, schools may not be able to provide all services in the same manner they are typically provided. It may be unfeasible or unsafe for some institutions, during current emergency school closures, to provide hands-on physical therapy, occupational therapy, or tactile sign language educational services. Many disability-related accommodations/modifications and services may be effectively provided online. These may include, for instance, extensions of time for assignments, videos with accurate captioning or embedded sign language interpreting, accessible reading materials, and many speech or language services through video conferencing, when applicable. In Cherokee County services are being provided through paper/pencil/manipulative packets, online learning and/or video chats to the degree feasible and appropriate.

What will happen to my child's services when school is canceled for all students due to COVID-19? These answers are in accordance with the U.S. Department of Education update (3-21-20) and the SC Department of Exceptional Children's Programs.

1. If a school closure causes educational services for all students to stop, then the district is generally not required to provide services to students eligible for special education services during that same time.
2. After an extended closure, districts are responsible for reviewing how the closure impacted the delivery of special education and related services to students eligible for special education services. The IEP team may determine students need compensatory services or extended school year services. The IEP team should consider that the current length of the school day has been modified. Special education services will be considered, by the team, in the perspective of the modified day.

Special Education, Comprehensive Health Programs, Speech/Language Services, Psychological Services, School Health Services, Preschool Special Education, Homebound Program, Home Schooling, Individual Evaluation/Assessments

The District does not discriminate in the provision of program, service, or employment opportunities.

3. If annual reviews or eligibility determinations are due during a school closure, please work closely with your school to have the eligibility determination meeting as soon as school is back in session or through alternate means, such as video or audio conference calls. If your child's IEP date expires while schools are closed, please be assured that services will continue in accordance to the current IEP.

What will happen to my child's services when a school is closed but educational services continue to be provided through nontraditional means such as distance learning?

1. If a local school district elects to utilize nontraditional methods to provide educational opportunities to the general student population, then the district also must ensure that students with disabilities have equitable access to the same opportunities, including the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education. Districts should be communicating with you during and after this period of instruction regarding your child's IEP services. Districts and schools will work to ensure that all students receive services to the most appropriate and reasonable extent possible.
2. Although special education or related services may need to be adjusted, districts must provide IEP services. Districts may provide IEP services through an alternative means, such as curriculum-based schoolwork packets, online learning, or some other distance learning adapted to the student's needs and location.
3. This is not a change in placement for your child. This is a temporary adjustment in service delivery for all students due to the current natural emergency.
4. Once schools reopen, IEP teams will be responsible for reviewing how the closure impacted the delivery of special education and related services to students with IEPs. Each student's IEP team must make an individual determination to decide whether the student requires compensatory education to make up for any skills that may have been lost because the student did not receive educational benefit due to missed special education services. If services and communication were available during the COVID-19 school closures, the IEP teams may determine the student has had FAPE during these unprecedented times.

Additional guidance may be found in the following:

- [OSEP Supplemental Facts Sheet](#)
- [COVID-19 and South Carolina Schools](#)
- [OSEP Q&A on Providing Services to Students with Disabilities during COVID-19](#)
- [OCR Fact Sheet COVID-19](#)
- [Supplemental Fact Sheet](#)

Please direct student-specific questions to Bessie D. Westmoreland, Executive Director of Student Services @ 864-206-2255. For general questions, you may access the South Carolina Department of Education's Office of Special Education Services webpage at <https://ed.sc.gov/districts-schools/special-education-services/>.