



March 23, 2020

Statement on Serving Students with Disabilities During COVID-19 Outbreak

(WASHINGTON, DC) –The Council of Parent Advocates and Attorneys (COPAA), National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) and the National Center for Parent Leadership, Advocacy, and Community Empowerment (National PLACE), stand unified that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and all of the rights for students with disabilities conveyed in the law must remain in effect despite the sweep of school closures occurring across the country in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

It is the firm belief of COPAA, NASDSE, NDRN and National PLACE that despite the unprecedented challenge facing schools, districts and states, **students with disabilities will be best served when diverse stakeholders come together and share resources, innovative ideas and promising practices.** The collective capacity of state, district and school leaders, teachers, parents, students and advocates to address the complex issues they are facing together to engage in teaching and learning is remarkable. The number of examples of innovation, individualization, advocacy for resources and flexibility in modes of delivery to strive to meet student's needs is untold. We urge this collaborative work to continue and expand, focusing on the intent of the IDEA to move forward with educational efforts in a new way.

We therefore call on Congress to increase funding for educational services in every state, for every child. We further call for Congress to increase funding for the organizations with the statutory responsibility to assist families of, and children and youth with, disabilities, such as the Parent Centers and Protection and Advocacy Network, so that they have the resources to address the increased demand at this critical time.

This is not the time to work at cross purposes, rather this is a time for community good will, maintaining trust and for educators and parents to work together to design and implement effective programs for students with disabilities. We also call on:

- Parents to share information regarding their child's needs and to demonstrate a willingness to work as partners with and support educators' efforts;
- Education leaders to lead with equity, while also sharing a message of hope and ability to provide services to students with disabilities in new ways;
- Educators in partnership with parents, to do what they do best: know their students and provide differentiated instruction using a variety of accessible tools and resources; and
- All involved to operate from good faith and working together to benefit all students.

While we know some schools and districts have decided to close school and halt all educational services, we have also heard from many around the country who want to continue to provide the education students need. **In that spirit we offer a few examples of promising practices gathered from around the country.**

FL: UCP Charter Schools: Public Charter School

UCP will be providing a customized Distance Learning program for its' PreK – 12th grade students. This will include daily live lessons and virtual field trips/performances using Google Meet by teachers, “specials” and guests (i.e. legislators, local celebrities), classroom and individualized lessons using Google Classroom, and remote occupational, physical and speech therapies. Clinical Counselors will be providing virtual therapy and behavior technicians will be doing virtual social skills groups and individualized virtual meetings with parents/students. Family Service Case Managers will be doing a weekly “check in” with families to provide any needed support/resources and the School Nurses will be doing check in with students with health care needs.

IL: Signal Hill 181: Belleville West High School: Parent:

"My district is working to keep everything as it was when my daughter left. Related services are being provided through Google classroom and Hangout. Paper documents that my daughter needs (because computer would not be accessible) are being mailed to our home. Her teachers are assigning homework, but only after they have briefly taught and using the actual worksheet as guidance to teach then assigning as homework. Teachers are encouraging Universal Design for Learning (UDL), so not one student is required to submit their assignments a certain way, etc. Example: students can create their own worksheets and/or agendas, take a picture and forward. Teachers are captioning videos. They have an everyday sign-in at a reasonable time of day and asking constantly if students need assistance, even in social work. Her teachers that sponsor clubs are also involving students. Art teachers asked students if they like, should feel free to sketch daily and share."

IL: Evanston/Skokie District 65, Evanston Township High School: Parent

"We just tried an [IEP] annual review over conference call with documents emailed. It was not the easiest, but I appreciate the District trying to keep continuity during e-learning and closures in Illinois."

OH: State- #EachChildOurFuture

One of Ohio's top priorities during the ordered school-building closure period, which seeks to diminish the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), is to ensure students with disabilities receive educational services closest to the manners prescribed within their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). We recognize this might pose some challenges, but we are heartened by how the education community has stepped up to provide educational services during this unexpected and unprecedented time...[the department] encourages school district leaders to consider the following three questions as they think through how best to provide special education services to students with disabilities:

1. Is the activity essential?
2. Can the activity be done virtually?
3. If there is no other choice, then can the activity be done safely? This means individuals are separated by distance, not congregating in close proximity and the health of participants (students, educators and others) is protected. Consulting the local health department is advisable and encouraged."

NJ: Berkley Heights: Parent

"My child has been provided an emergency/interim IEP meeting, is receiving delivery of education services online and the school is using Facetime/Zoom or other visual conferencing services."

NH: Manchester School District

NH's largest school district, Manchester, set up a link to access information regarding home instruction. There's a letter to parents (available in audio in multiple languages), information about food delivery, lessons and materials for elementary school. It appears Manchester is rolling out lesson plans by grade level, starting with elementary school. The letter to parents indicates that the district intends to provide services in students' IEPs and 504 plans, including possibly bringing small cohorts of students into the schools. Teachers will be calling parents. Meals and hard-copy materials are being delivered daily.

TX: Argyle Independent School District: Parent

"We are receiving online instruction through Google Classroom. The teachers are making videos or using WebEx to connect with students and have had great communication and availability. They are currently sending out information for "parent-focus speech therapy". I talked to one SPED teacher today and she is modifying all assignments and hand delivering them to each student's home and is available remotely to help and answer questions. So far, we feel the actions have been great. We are only in day three of online instruction and the teachers have really been on their game!"

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Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA) is an independent, nonprofit organization of parents, attorneys, advocates, and related professionals; over 90% of whom identify as having a disability; or are parents or family members of individuals with disabilities. COPAA members work to protect the civil rights and secure excellence in education on behalf of children with disabilities. COPAA's mission is to serve as a national voice for special education rights and is grounded in the belief that every child deserves the right to a quality education that prepares them for meaningful employment, higher education and lifelong learning, as well as full participation in their community. www.copaa.org
Contact: Denise Marshall, CEO, (443) 310-8638

National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) is a premier membership organization that supports state leaders of special education throughout the United States and its Territories. Our mission and vision is to improve individual and organizational success for state leaders of special education by providing relevant services that guide positive systemic change and results thereby ensuring students with disabilities will live, learn, work and participate in their communities. www.nasdse.org
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National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) is the nonprofit membership organization for the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy (P&A) Systems and the Client Assistance Programs (CAP) for individuals with disabilities. Collectively, the Network is the largest provider of legally based advocacy services to people with disabilities in the United States. <https://www.ndrn.org/>
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The National Center for Parent Leadership, Advocacy, and Community Empowerment (National PLACE) is a national, non-profit, family-led organization that works to strengthen the voice of families and family-led organizations at decision-making tables that affect our nation's children, youth, and families. Our 65 local, state and national organizational members represent Parent Training and Information and Community Parent Resource Centers, Family to Family Health Information Centers, Parent to Parent USA affiliates, National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health chapters, Family Empowerment Centers, Early Start Family Resource Centers, and other family-led, family-run organizations committed to ensuring the highest quality and most effective services and supports for diverse children and families, including those with disabilities. www.parentsatthetable.org
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