

Back-to-School Tips

Special Considerations During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Virtual Instruction

- Each school district (DCPS or charter school network) is making its own decisions about in-person instruction. Check with each school to find out what their plans are. For DCPS, see <https://dcpsreopenstrong.com/> for more information. If the school is open for in-person instruction and the family wants the student to stay home, the parent can ask for a meeting to talk about how the student will receive their education. Parents may also want to consult with their pediatrician about the best decision for the child's health.
- Schools are giving devices and internet access to families that need them. Families should contact their school ASAP to request this assistance.
 - DCPS students can take the tech survey to ask for devices or hotspots [here](#). DCPS families that need help with technology can call (202) 442-5885.
- If parents want to homeschool their child instead of enrolling in a public or charter school, they must register with OSSE. Each student must keep a file of their work to prove that they have been learning all the required subjects.
<https://osse.dc.gov/service/homeschooling-district-columbia>

Enrollment & Attendance

- Children should have had a physical in the past twelve months and be up-to-date on immunizations for the school year, even if they are attending school 100% online.
- All students K-12 have the right to enroll with their neighborhood DCPS school, regardless of immigration status or health insurance coverage.
- All charter schools must accept all children who are DC residents through a lottery system, regardless of disability, income, language capacity, or ward.
- Non-parent caregivers can enroll children in school if they bring proof of care, such as:
 - Records from last school year indicating non-parent was caregiver;
 - Immunization/medical records that the child is cared for by non-parent;
 - Proof that caregiver receives public benefits on behalf of the child;
 - A letter from legal, medical or social service provider that says the person registering the child is the primary caregiver.

- Attendance is mandatory for all students, regardless of whether they are attending in-person or virtually. Students must log in or contact their school daily. Schools may report students with 10 or more absences to Child Protective Services (CPS).

Special Education during COVID-19

- All students with IEPs should keep getting the services on their IEP during the pandemic. Parents should contact their school's special education coordinator to discuss how their child will receive IEP services. DCPS parents should expect to hear from their child's school by Sept. 30th to create an "IEP Distance Learning Addendum" that will describe how the student will receive IEP services while learning at home.
- Parents can keep weekly log of the special education and related services (e.g., speech therapy, counseling, etc.) their student receives. The log can include who met with the student, how long the session lasted, and (if known) what was worked on.
- Schools must hold an annual meeting to review each child's IEP. Check the front page of the IEP to determine when the next meeting must be held (no later than one year from the last meeting date).
- Students with IEPs should receive quarterly IEP progress reports that say whether the student is making progress on their IEP goals. If the student is not making progress, parents can request a meeting with the school to discuss what other services the student might need.
- Parents have the right to participate in all meetings about their child's IEP and consent to any changes.

504 Plans during COVID-19

- Students with 504 Plans should continue to receive any services that are needed to make sure the student has access to their education. If the child is attending 100% online, it is possible that only some 504 Plan accommodations and services might still be needed.
- Parents can ask for a meeting with their child's school to discuss how the 504 Plan will be used during the pandemic.
- Families can keep a weekly log of 504 Plan services their child receives during the pandemic. The log can include who met with the student, how long the session lasted, and (if known) what was worked on.

Discipline

- Children in Kindergarten through Grade 5 cannot be given a suspension longer than five days in a row. Children in Grade 6 through Grade 12 cannot be given a suspension longer than ten days in a row. Being dismissed early or being told not to log onto online learning is a form of suspension.
- No student can be suspended for more than twenty total days per school year unless special circumstances apply. Being dismissed early is a form of suspension.
- Children with disabilities cannot be suspended for more than ten total days per school year without holding a special meeting called a Manifestation Determination Review. If the child's behavior was a result of their disability, the suspension cannot go forward.
- Schools cannot require a meeting with the parent before their child returns from suspension.

Language Access

- All DC agencies (including DC Public Schools and charter schools) must communicate with and provide "vital documents" to parents who are limited English proficient (LEP) in their native language. This includes special education and 504 Plan documents.

Custodial Powers of Attorney

- Custodial powers of attorney (POA) can be used if the parent/guardian is unable to care for a child due to COVID-19. Custodial POAs do not require court involvement.