



REOPENING GUIDANCE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION LEADERS

As the 2020-2021 school year begins, school systems are preparing reopening plans across three possible scenarios: virtual, hybrid and traditional. Across these scenarios, students with disabilities must continue to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment, consistent with the need to protect the health and safety of students and staff. This guide will help school systems and educators prepare for a successful reopening that meets the needs of students with disabilities.

School system leaders should:

- [Understand the guiding principles](#) for supporting students with disabilities during school reopening.
- [Ensure facility reopening plans](#) specifically address and support the unique needs of students with disabilities.
- [Ensure staffing plans](#) meet the needs of students with disabilities including well-being, schedules, and training.

Educators and service providers should:

- [Ensure academic plans](#) continue the use of high-quality instructional materials to support students with disabilities across learning scenarios.
- [Ensure delivery of direct services](#) continues across learning scenarios as outlined by each student's individual educational program (IEP).

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The rights of students with disabilities under IDEA have not changed.

All students with disabilities have the right to FAPE in the least restrictive environment under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Regardless of the method of instructional delivery—virtual, hybrid or traditional—the [rights of students with disabilities](#) have not changed. School systems must continue to follow [timelines and documentation](#) requirements.

BESE policy and LDOE guidance provide flexibility to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

In alignment with CDC guidelines, the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) adopted [policies](#) for school reopening that address the unique needs of students with disabilities. These policies and the [Strong Start Reopening Guidelines and Resources](#) provide flexibility to support the needs of students with disabilities. For example,

- school systems can use a disability impact exception for **face coverings**;
- school systems have flexibility with **student group composition** (e.g. static groups) to ensure special education and related services continue; and
- special education providers can enter schools and early learning centers as **essential visitors**.

IEP teams will play a key role in the success of Strong Start Reopening.

The IEP team will play a critical role in special education and related services decisions, including decisions about instructional delivery methods. These may not be the same for every student, goal, or service, and may change over time. For example, the IEP team could decide, consistent with IDEA and BESE policy, that

- a student receiving virtual instruction requires in-person support for related services such as adapted physical education or occupational therapy; or
- a student receiving in-person instruction requires virtual or remote delivery of speech therapy.

FACILITY REOPENING PLANS

School systems must ensure facility reopening plans prioritize the needs of students with disabilities while considering the individual flexibilities provided by BESE policy. School systems should apply these considerations throughout planning for health and safety measures, arrival and dismissal, transition procedures, transportation and communication with families.

	VIRTUAL	HYBRID	TRADITIONAL	RESOURCES
Supporting Health & Safety Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate with families about health and safety measures, personal protective equipment (PPE), schedule changes and visitor policies across learning scenarios. Provide explicit instruction on safety and hygiene to students with disabilities. Regularly review and reinforce procedures through visual aides, videos, directions and/or social stories. 			Strong Start 2020 School Reopening Guidelines & Resources Strong Start 2020: Family Toolbox for Students with Disabilities BESE Policy for School Reopening School Reopening FAQ CDC Guidance for Schools
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand that BESE policy provides flexibility if disability impacts a student's ability to wear or use PPE (e.g. sensory impairment). Provide proper PPE for staff supporting students' needs such as toileting, physical movement and feeding. 		
Preparing for Arrival & Dismissal		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train staff positioned at entrance/exit points to support students with disabilities with any new safety protocols. Invite students with disabilities to walk through new procedures (e.g. temperature checks, alternate entrance routes). Prepare to teach and reinforce classroom routines and procedures (e.g. getting materials, turning in papers, asking for help) that support social distancing guidelines. 		
Preparing for Transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create and display daily schedules of synchronous and asynchronous learning sessions to provide routine and consistency. Identify routines and rituals that can be translated to a virtual setting (e.g. morning meetings, greetings, closing circles) to maintain a sense of community. Collaborate with families to identify working spaces that meet the movement and physical needs of students (e.g. standing while working, dim vs. bright lighting). 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Display visuals throughout common areas in the school building to support students in maintaining safety protocols. 	
Supporting Transportation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide transportation support, as determined by student IEPs, while adhering to CDC guidelines and BESE policy for health and safety standards. Assign student specific seats, especially for students with complex health needs, to mitigate risk. 		

STAFFING PLANS

School systems must ensure staffing plans for reopening support the needs of students with disabilities. Across reopening scenarios, school systems must take into account unique considerations for the needs of students with disabilities when addressing well-being, schedules and training in staffing plans.

	VIRTUAL	HYBRID	TRADITIONAL	RESOURCES
Supporting the Well-Being of Students & Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the 2019-2020 extended school facility closure and provide intentional support for staff and students. Consider staff who can support new or emerging student social/emotional support needs. If appropriate, convene the IEP team to develop a plan of support. Assign staff to review and revise behavior intervention plans, as appropriate, to ensure students are supported in new or different learning scenarios and safety protocols. Provide training and support to staff to ensure health and safety while supporting students with disabilities, including students with complex health support needs. 			Guide to Supporting the Well-Being of Students and Staff Implementing Adaptive and Flexible Staffing Plans and School Schedules Strong Start Professional Development Vendor Guidance
Building Staff & Student Schedules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include dedicated time to support collaboration across special education, general education teachers and support staff, including time for virtual or in-person IEP meetings. Consider strategies to organize and leverage service providers (e.g. therapists) and support staff (e.g. paraprofessionals) across learning scenarios. Ensure special education and related services continue, as defined by the IEP. Design staff schedules using elementary, middle and high school comeback models to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities 			Strong Start Compensatory Services Guidance Partnerships for Success Vendor Guide Strong Start 2020: Reopening Guidance for Direct Service Providers
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider student-specific needs for home-based or in-person service delivery, based on the IEP, CDC guidelines and BESE policy. Build in time for social interaction and peer-to-peer support during synchronous learning. Build in social interaction during times students typically have unstructured peer interactions (e.g. lunch, breaks). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train staff assigned with implementing new safety protocols and routines to support students with disabilities. 		
Meeting Professional Development Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide professional development to educators on the continued use of high-quality curriculum and accommodations and modifications, aligned to students' IEPs or IAPs, across learning scenarios. Provide professional development to educators and other support staff on the accessibility features of platforms and/or learning management systems. Provide professional development to support the continued delivery of direct services across learning scenarios. Ensure all training sessions adhere to CDC guidelines and BESE policy. 			

ACADEMIC PLANS

Educators and support staff must ensure academic plans continue to provide instruction using high-quality curriculum as well as special education and related services to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Across reopening scenarios, academic plans must include intentional considerations for adapting materials, sequencing learning, ensuring accessibility of instructional materials, providing accommodations and assessing student progress.

	VIRTUAL	HYBRID	TRADITIONAL	RESOURCES
Adapting Instructional Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use Strong Start Instructional Materials Guidance to adapt high-quality instructional materials across learning scenarios while focusing on essential grade-level learning and supporting any unfinished learning from the 2019–2020 school year. 			Strong Start Instructional Materials Guidance Strong Start 2020 Addressing Unfinished Learning Gaps Appendix A: Accessibility Guidance Appendix B: Accommodations Guidance Privacy Guidance for Virtual Small Group Instruction for Students with Disabilities Timelines and Documentation Guidance Instructional Strategies for Virtual Learning Spotlight: Planning for Diverse Learners Strong Start Compensatory Services Guidance
Sequencing Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sequence lesson components to deliver content that is best suited for face-to-face or in-person delivery during synchronous learning time and provide asynchronous elements for activities and content best addressed independently (see Example of Adapting ELA Guidebook Lessons: Hybrid/Virtual Learning). 			
Ensuring Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure all educational materials are provided in accessible formats. Select and use virtual platforms and learning management systems that offer accessibility features outlined in a student’s IEP or IAP. Provide explicit written and verbal directions throughout synchronous and asynchronous instruction to help students use accessible materials and accessibility features embedded within virtual platforms and online learning systems. Provide instructional videos that model the use of accessible materials and accessibility features. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explicitly teach and reinforce the use of accessible formats of educational materials to develop student independence. Provide explicit instruction and guided practice on the use of virtual platforms and online learning management systems during face-to-face instruction. 		
Providing Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan for how accommodations in the IEP or IAP will be delivered during synchronous and asynchronous virtual instruction. Provide frequent check-in and check-out times to reinforce and adjust the delivery of accommodations, based on student needs. Embed accommodations throughout instructional materials, within pre-recorded videos and during small group instruction to support students during asynchronous elements of learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to provide all accommodations in the IEP or IAP. Plan for how accommodations can transfer seamlessly into virtual and hybrid learning during modified operations. Develop student support structures that are easily adapted to hybrid and virtual learning (e.g. check-in/check-out). 		
Assistive Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train educators supporting students with assistive technology on best practices for implementation across learning scenarios. Embed the use of assistive technology throughout lesson delivery and within instructional materials to develop student independence across learning scenarios. Limit the sharing of devices or assign student specific devices, when possible. Clean assistive technology and communication devices in accordance with BESE policy and CDC guidelines. Record videos on the use of assistive technology students that can use during hybrid or virtual instruction. 			
Assessing Student Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to use curriculum-embedded assessments. Continue to document IEP services and disseminate IEP progress reports. Use formative assessment data to inform small group composition and frequency of face-to-face support provided to students. 			
Compensatory Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide compensatory services to address any progress or skills lost towards IEP goals (e.g. academic, behavior, related services). 			

DIRECT SERVICES

Educators and support staff must ensure the delivery of direct services align with the use of appropriate service delivery models and the individual flexibilities provided by BESE policy to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The [Strong Start 2020: Reopening Guidance for Direct Service Providers](#) assists service providers in creating and implementing plans for continued delivery of direct services as school facilities reopen for the 2020-2021 school year.

APPENDIX A: ACCESSIBILITY GUIDANCE

HI-TECH APPROACHES	
ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS	RESOURCES
<p>Support students in using the accessibility features offered within operating systems, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrator • Display and Readability Functions • Text-to-speech • Showsounds • On Screen Keyboard • Speech Recognition 	<p>Windows accessibility features</p> <p>OS for Mac accessibility features</p>
<p>Utilize accessibility features available within web browsers, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjusting text and video size • High-contrast display • TalkBack • Read Aloud • Keyboard Access <p>Include instructions for using accessibility features within lesson directions.</p>	<p>Google accessibility features</p> <p>Firefox accessibility features</p>
<p>Utilize the accessibility features available within delivery platforms such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closed captioning • Automatic Transcripts • Speech-to-text functions • Screen Reader Support • Color contrasting • Zoom functions • Keyboard access <p>Include instructions for using accessibility features within lesson directions.</p>	<p>ZOOM accessibility features</p> <p>Google Hangout accessibility features</p> <p>Skype accessibility features</p> <p>Google Classroom</p>
<p>Ensure documents are designed with accessibility considerations.</p>	<p>Word accessibility</p> <p>PDF accessibility</p>
<p>Utilize web resources that were designed to include accessibility features.</p>	<p>Web AIM Website Accessibility Tool</p>
<p>Review additional accessibility resources for more support.</p>	<p>Google Access For All</p>

LOW-TECH APPROACHES	
ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS	RESOURCES
<p>Ensure printed materials are accessible to all learners, including but not limited to accommodations such as braille, enlarged print, increased white space, highlighting, alternate fonts, or pictorial representations.</p>	<p>Louisiana AEM</p> <p>AEM ELA Guidebook Accessible Instructional Materials</p> <p>National Center for AEM</p>
<p>When possible, provide audio versions of texts.</p>	<p>Audible</p> <p>Barnes & Noble</p> <p>Learning Ally</p> <p>Local Libraries</p>

APPENDIX B: ACCOMMODATIONS

Educators must continue to deliver accommodations as outlined by each students' IEP regardless of the learning scenario decided upon by the school system. Outlined in the table below are additional considerations to adapt the delivery of accommodations across all learning environments.

ACCOMMODATION	VIRTUAL	HYBRID	TRADITIONAL
Groups, Spacing, and Physical Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support to families to generate ideas for limiting distractions and arranging a quiet space for students to work. • Collaborate with families to identify working spaces that meet the movement and physical needs of students (e.g. standing while working, dim vs. bright lighting, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As students shift from different environments, be prepared to regularly review and reinforce safety and hygiene procedures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider allocating designated time for students with disabilities to come to the school building before the first day of classes to become acclimated to space and routine changes, as needed. • Utilize materials, such as tape on the floor, to visually demonstrate safe distancing practices for students. • Prepare to teach and reinforce classroom routines and procedures (e.g. getting materials, turning in papers, asking for help) that account for spacing requirements and distancing guidelines.
Assignment Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide tools for self-monitoring such as checklists, or daily/weekly to-do lists. Provide flexibility for students and parents along with ideas to support student motivation. • Provide clear, realistic expectations for the recommended duration of work sessions, and break assignments into manageable work periods with suggested break times throughout materials to support student needs. Embed timers into assignments, when possible. • Create and teach materials management systems (e.g. color coding, tabs) that students can use to organize materials and keep track of assignments, regardless of location. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide explicit instruction on the use of self-monitoring such as checklists, or daily/weekly to-do lists and how these can be used during hybrid and/or virtual learning. • Regularly use and display timers in the classroom and bring student attention to use of these timers to manage time.
Read Aloud Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use read aloud resources, such as Kurzweil 3000, Immersive Reader. • Provide support for read aloud including one on one phone calls and pre-recording. • Include accessibility features within lesson directions. For example, open a PDF document and then turn on the magnification tool. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicitly teach students how to use system read aloud features (e.g. operating systems, browsers, delivery platforms) and embed practice using those features in daily activities.

ACCOMMODATION	VIRTUAL	HYBRID	TRADITIONAL
Presentation Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clear, explicit directions for students. Some students with disabilities benefit from visual/pictorial directions. • Provide written and explicit directions or scripts for lessons and tasks along with verbal directions during video lessons, so that students can access materials, regardless of location. • Record videos or live lessons to support pause and replay options. • Utilize technology to add closed captioning to prerecorded or replay videos. • When delivering live lessons or recording lessons, include think alouds and models. • Model portions of assignments when in-person with students so that they are equipped to complete assignments when at home. • Utilize a visual bookmarking tool so that students can access common sites and platforms regardless of location. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize recorded videos in-person, when appropriate, in order to monitor and teach necessary engagement with video learning. Explicitly teach students to utilize closed captioning, pausing, replaying, and other accessibility considerations while watching these videos. • Provide visual support like social stories and choice boards to reinforce expectations and support communication.
Response Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use guided note templates with fill in the blanks to support students in synthesizing information. These materials may include pictures, where appropriate. • Provide suggestions for ways to use household materials and toys to aid multi-sensory and hands-on experiences. Consider utilizing non-traditional manipulatives (e.g. beans, pennies) when in-person so that students are equipped to find household objects to continue their work at home. • Plan deliberate stopping points in synchronous and asynchronous lessons for student responses. Create varied opportunities based on the type of lesson (e.g. polls and chats for synchronous learning and forms and discussion boards for asynchronous learning) to ensure • Provide sentence stems or word banks for writing assignments. Consider the students' needs for transcription and be sure to include those in the assignment directions. • Utilize live document collaboration tools to create, update, and sustain student supports, such as directions, sentence stems or word banks, that can be updated responsively and accessed in different settings. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate modes of response that can be seen from a distance, (e.g. hold up cards, thumbs up/thumbs down, white boards) to ensure student progress can be monitored.
Other Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer one-on-one teleconferencing with support staff to review directions and model a portion of the assignment or task for students and parents. • Consider setting up a staff hosted support hotline or office hours so that students can receive on demand support when at home. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicitly teach students to access and use online computation tools, such as calculators or manipulatives, so that they have access at all times.