

Considerations for Special Education Administrators

Current as of March 12, 2020

About the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

According to the [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC), the Novel CoronaVirus (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness caused by a new virus, with symptoms that include fever, cough, and shortness of breath which may appear between two and 14 days after exposure. While there is currently no vaccine to protect against COVID-19, the best way to protect yourself against the virus is to:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.

Information for Schools

The Centers for Disease Control has suggested that schools do the following:

- Review, update, and implement emergency operations plans including developing information-sharing systems with partners (including parents, families, local health systems, etc.). Use resources from the [REMS TA Center](#).
- Monitor and plan for absenteeism.
- Establish procedures for students and staff who are sick at school. Encourage students and staff to stay home when sick. Use flexibility, when possible, to allow staff to stay home to care for sick family members.
- Review attendance and sick leave policies with employees, students, and families.
- Monitor and plan for addressing fear and bullying related to COVID-19.
- Perform routine environmental cleaning. | [Recommended practices from CDC](#)
- Review CDC's guidance for [businesses and employers](#).
- Use the [resources from CDC's website](#) to help people to understand good handwashing techniques.

For more information and guidance from the CDC, please [click here](#) for K-12 schools or [click here](#) for higher education. (**NOTE:** CDC updates its sites and recommendations often so checking back is important)

Considerations for Special Education Administrators

As administrators of special education programs, you may also wish to consider the following questions:

1. How will students be provided with special education and related services if school attendance is virtual? Check out [these resources](#) from the [Center on Online Learning and Students with Disabilities](#).
2. How will you provide special education services if the virus causes a shortage of special education teachers or education providers (i.e. if your special education teachers or providers have COVID-19 and are unable to provide services)?
3. Will students who miss school due to these absences (whether they have been identified with the virus or not) require additional services or extended school year services?
4. How will IEP goals be measured if a student is out of school for an extended period of time?
5. How will evaluations be closed within legal timelines if schools were to be cancelled or closed?
6. For students with disabilities who already have compromised immune systems, are there additional precautions that should be taken in the school setting?
7. Are there students who are not vaccinated who may need to be excluded from school even if the rest of the school remains open and, if so, have you prepared communication to these families?

8. Is there a consideration for Section 504 services that a school district should be making for students who are diagnosed with COVID-19?
9. Are there FERPA and HIPAA privacy issues that school officials should consider when working with health departments and other agencies? Check updated [guidance on FERPA here](#).
10. Will home or hospital instruction for a student with COVID-19 look different than it does for other students who receive home or hospital instruction and how will you coordinate these services?
11. How will your school system work with the local health department to address provisions for psychological support services for staff, students, and their families during and after a pandemic?
12. For students who may be diagnosed with COVID-19 who also have a disability, are there FAPE related considerations with bullying that the student may have experienced or may experience after the pandemic is over, and if so, how will these be addressed?

Special rules may apply in some states when schools are closed for *pandemic diseases* or when health emergencies are declared (i.e. waiving the need to have school for the required number of days, etc.). However, there is uncertainty about whether these state rules will be applicable to federal laws (IDEA and Section 504) and school administrators will need to follow guidance from the federal government carefully regarding this issue. Secretary DeVos noted during a hearing on Capitol Hill on March 5, 2020 that the Office for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) would be updating its [guidance document](#) related to H1N1 (2009) in the near future. **Update:** The following documents were made available from the Department of Education March 12:

- [Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak](#)
- [Fact Sheet: Impact of Covid-19 on Assessments and Accountability Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#)
- [FAQ: FERPA and Covid-19](#)

Since your role as special education administrators is not one dimensional, it may be helpful to review [this guidance](#) from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) about pandemic related flu outbreaks as they relate to employment questions and [the Americans with Disabilities Act](#). Additionally, you may wish to check out [this bulletin](#) from OCR sent on March 4, 2020. There is also [this guidance document](#) from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) about preparing for COVID-19 in the workplace and [this document](#) from USDA about food distribution (including school lunches).

Considerations for State CASE Units

Several state units are planning on holding conferences in the coming weeks and months. Absent federal travel restrictions and/or local, state, or regional decisions to close venues, *state units are encouraged to continue holding events* as you had planned.

Chad Rummel, Executive Director of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), shared resources from the [American Society of Association Executives](#) which has recommended keeping members and attendees as up to date as possible on your association's plans regarding the Coronavirus. Even if you don't think that people are concerned about it, communicate about your plans so that people are aware. In your messaging, make clear that health and welfare of attendees is the most important factor and that your organization will continue to monitor the situation and provide updates as necessary. On your meeting website, provide links to related resources for attendees to review (such as safe travel tips and any relevant health alerts or travel advisories), and stay current on any [information from the CDC](#) and the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) that may affect attendees' ability to attend an event. A message on the National School Board Association's site reads:

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) is closely monitoring the coronavirus (COVID-19) situation as it relates to the upcoming NSBA Annual Conference in Chicago on April 4-6.

We want to assure conference participants and attendees that your health and safety are of utmost concern and our top priority. We are in close communication with Choose Chicago (the Chicago Convention and Visitor Bureau) and McCormick Place authorities. In addition, we are seeking guidance from the local health, public safety, and transportation authorities to make sure that appropriate disease prevention, monitoring, and response protocols are in place for the conference. Based on the information currently available, NSBA's

current plan is to proceed with the conference as scheduled. We look forward to seeing you in Chicago.

If you consider cancellation, seek guidance from your insurance company and/or an attorney from your association to understand any specific provisions that may apply to hotel and convention center costs, speaker costs, and other costs that you may have incurred. Additionally, you should discuss your relevant plans related to refunds for conference attendees who decide to cancel preemptively and how you would communicate with attendees if needed about last minute changes.

Other Resources for Members

The resources in the table below have been compiled from various other national organizations:

<i>National School Public Relations Association</i>	<i>National Association of School Psychologists</i>	<i>American Association of School Administrators</i>
NSPRA	NASP	AASA

<i>National School Boards Association</i>	<i>National Association of School Nurses</i>	<i>American Speech/Language Hearing Association</i>
NSBA	NASN	ASHA

<i>American School Counselor Association</i>	<i>International Society for Technology in Education</i>	
ASCA	ISTE	

Daily Updates

March 10, 2020 - Document released

March 11, 2020 - Added OSHA guidance document for workplace safety, Added link from USDA about food distribution in schools, Removed language pertaining to epidemic (following WHO declaration of pandemic status), added resource documents from Center for Online Learning for Students with Disabilities.

March 12, 2020 - Added links to OSERS Q&A on Covid-19, FERPA and Covid-19 FAQ, and Fact Sheet on Assessment and Accountability.

About CASE

CASE, [The Council of Administrators of Special Education](#), is the largest division of the [Council for Exceptional Children](#). With close to 4500 members, it is the professional organization of choice for special education administrators across the country. CASE's mission is to provide leadership and support to members by shaping policies and practices that impact the quality of education.

