# Special Education Students After COVID-19 Key Considerations

## POTENTIAL TOPIC: ASSESSMENT

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| **Potential Issues** | **Key Considerations** | **Target – Students with Disabilities: ECSE, E, M, H** |
| Increased number of referrals resulting from school closures, increased parent awareness, home instruction, and/or students experiencing trauma. | * Ensure LEA clearly differentiates between request for assistance and referral for suspicion of a disability. * Increase or reassign staff to assist with increased referral and testing. Outreach through Family Engagement to assist with an understanding of disabilities and need for specially designed instruction. * Provide staff training on impact of trauma on development and providing trauma informed care. * Strengthen Tier I and II interventions and data collection procedures. | All |
| Some students with disabilities will be on target with goals and objectives, whereas others may have been adversely impacted by extended school closures. Teams are to review individual student data to document recoupment of skills or persisting skill deficits. Consider the student’s progress compared to the progress of all students during the extended school closure to determine needed interventions or COVID recovery services. | * Complete observations and utilize various sources of data (e.g., screening tools, progress monitoring and outcome data, family input). Compare with data collected prior to school closure. Revise IEPs as needed and plan instruction. * Consider academic and social emotional competencies (e.g., positive self-concept, emotional literacy, social problem solving, and friendship skills). * For elementary, middle, and high, conduct formal and/or informal assessments to determine students’ instructional levels in reading and math * Provide additional support in math as needed since declines may be steeper for math than for reading. | All |

## POTENTIAL TOPIC: INSTRUCTION

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| **Potential Issues** | **Key Considerations** | **Target – Students with Disabilities: ECSE, E, M, H** |
| Prioritize the social-emotional development of all students and utilize trauma-sensitive teaching practices to support students and families in learning environments and meetings. | * For young children, ensure nurturing relationships and strong teacher-child interactions. Provide a structured environment with a consistent schedule and routines. * Prioritize young children’s social emotional skills (e.g., positive self-concept, emotional literacy, social problem solving, and friendship skills). * Enhance Tier 1 supports. * Consider looping elementary school teachers with the same group of students this year to provide a sense of familiarity for students, when possible. * Assign the same case manager to students for this school term. * Continue offering online learning, support and enrichment opportunities with adequate instructional supports. * Conduct relationship mapping to ensure that every student has an adult they are connected with at school. * [For Educators: Relationship Mapping Strategy (New Version!)](https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/resources-for-educators/relationship-mapping-strategy) * Incorporate [Trauma-informed practices](https://padlet-uploads.storage.googleapis.com/418766834/6f6ba9f08c5c35e8f8997b75d68327fa/TraumaAlignedVTSS10.docx). | All |
| Dependent upon the impact of the extended school closures on students and their skill development, additional, new, or remediated instruction may be needed. | * Consider the services provided during the school closures and how core content instruction and specially designed instruction were delivered. * Determine the need for COVID recovery services. (Refer to the Virginia Department of Education Considerations for COVID Recovery Services for Students with Disabilities document for more information.) * Offer training on effective remediation practices and researched-based instructional approaches during the summer months before school starts. * Plan with school based teams and utilize existing structures to support instructional support (e.g., Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports (VTSS)). | All |
| Students may have missed extensive instruction. Instruction may or may not have been differentiated and may or may not have met the student’s needs. | * Consider any ESY services during the summer. * Consider providing in-person instruction, especially for young children and those who may not benefit from distance learning. * Enhance family engagement activities. Help families better support their children in the home and address concerns and individualized needs. * As appropriate, address any missed content at the start of the year, accelerate the pace of instruction, or provide missing content throughout the year. * Use decision rules and multiple sources of data to identify students who require Tier II supports. * Explore pacing guides for opportunities to reinforce or re-teach concepts throughout the year. For example, if students missed a unit on measurement add extra teaching time to this to allow for remediation. * Provide tutoring opportunities throughout the school day or after school. * Consider alterations to the school day or school calendar. (School Board Responsibility) | All |
| Students may require assistance to understand issues related to the COVID pandemic. Provide ongoing support using social emotional learning, culturally responsive education and trauma sensitive practices. | * Utilize social stories, visual supports, and other means to help young children understand issues such as why people wear masks or why materials cannot be shared. * Offer opportunities for students to express their emotions, concerns, and questions through drawing, writing, morning meetings, collaborative circles, or regular check-ins. * [Building Community With Restorative Circles](https://www.edutopia.org/article/building-community-restorative-circles) * Integrate content regarding COVID into the curricula. | All |

## POTENTIAL TOPIC: SAFETY

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| **Potential Issues** | **Key Considerations** | **Target – Students with Disabilities: ECSE, E, M, H** |
| Students may come to school without personal protective equipment (PPE). | * Prior to school starting Allow families to request access to PPE for their student (family survey, mailed flyers, post on marquee, etc.). Prepare PPE student kits, and make them available for students entering the building. * Review safety protocol established by the Virginia Department of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and your local school division in regards to PPE for younger children. * Assist students with disabilities in understanding why masks are needed and how to wear them. * The Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities and Children’s Specialized Hospital resources include: * [A Parent’s Guide: Helping Your Child Wear a Face Mask - (English)](https://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/Links/documents/ParentGuide-HelpingYourChildWearaFaceMask-F.pdf) [(Spanish)](https://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/links/documents/ParentGuide-HelpingYourChildWearaFaceMask-SPA-F.pdf) * [Help Your Child Feel Good about Using and Seeing Others Wearing Face Masks - (English)](https://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/Links/documents/HelpyourChildFeelGoodaboutUsingandSeeingOthersWearingFaceMasks-F.PDF) [(Spanish)](https://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/links/documents/HelpyourChildFeelGoodaboutUsingandSeeingOthersWearingFaceMasks-SPA-F.PDF) * [I Can Stay Healthy by Wearing a Face Mask - (English)](https://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/Links/documents/ICanStayHealthybyWearingaFaceMask-F.PDF) [(Spanish)](https://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/links/documents/ICanStayHealthybyWearingaFaceMask-SPA-F.PDF) * VCU-ACE’s [Wearing a Mask video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugjxzDBtiWU&t=47s) includes clips for video modeling. | All |
| During the period 2002-2004, schools were required to develop a pandemic plan around the SARS outbreak. In 2009, schools had to update plans for the H1N1 Influenza Virus. Based on the impact of COVID and the possibility of future pandemics school divisions should be prepared to adapt quickly to a situation and rely on an established plan to the extent appropriate. | * Make the environment more predictable and positive by teaching students new routines and reviewing those that have remained the same. * [Resource: Getting Back to School after Disruptions: Resources for Making Your School Year Safer, More Predictable, and More Positive](https://www.pbis.org/resource/getting-back-to-school-after-disruptions-resources-for-making-your-school-year-safer-more-predictable-and-more-positive) * Revisit prior pandemic plans and update, as needed, to ensure the safety of All students, including students with disabilities. | All |
| Younger students and students with developmental disabilities may have challenges following social distancing guidance and maintaining adequate hygiene habits. Use consistent visual representations throughout schools. | * Obtain child friendly videos that highlight appropriate hygiene and social distancing. Review and show daily as part of the opening activities. Resources are available from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/share-facts-h.pdf). * Consistently provide large universal floor markers such as tape or furniture to reinforce social distancing in classrooms and common areas. * Use fun activities such as making airplane arms to demonstrate a social distance of six feet. * Schedule times for handwashing frequently and make it fun (e.g., put a stamp on the child’s hand to scrub off). * Utilize [social stories](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/prevention/social-stories-and-communication-tools-sped.pdf) to teach students about washing their hands and PPE. | All |
| Students with significant disabilities and/or health issues may have medical needs that require continuous sanitizing of common surfaces. | * Consult school division guidance and supply sanitizer wipes and disinfectants for classroom teachers, and ensure that staff are aware of cleaning procedures that may impact classroom procedures and scheduling. * Use timers set to remind staff to clean surfaces throughout the day, or look at the classroom schedule for organic opportunities to clean. * Train or retrain paraprofessionals specifically assigned to individual students on safely managing personal care duties and maintaining staff personal safety. | All |
| Students with disabilities are vulnerable to abuse and neglect. Ensure staff are knowledgeable at detecting physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and neglect and aware of mandatory reporting requirements. | * Monitor All students and immediately report suspected abuse and neglect. * Review CPS reporting procedures and [signs of abuse](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/signs.pdf) with staff. | All |

## POTENTIAL TOPIC: BEHAVIOR AND SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL

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| **Potential Issues** | **Key Considerations** | **Target – Students with Disabilities: ECSE, E, M, H** |
| Students may not feel safe or comfortable upon their return to school. | * For young children, ensure a nurturing environment with strong teacher-child relationships. * For young children, consider implementing a social-emotional curriculum. * Train staff on [trauma informed](https://www.edutopia.org/article/trauma-informed-classroom-strategies) care. Train on and use “[compassionate teaching](https://www.edutopia.org/blog/resources-creating-radically-compassionate-classroom-rebecca-alber)” approaches. * Develop curricula, programs, or practices, in cooperation with school psychologists and school counselors, which will focus on stress relief and incorporate into daily instructional routines (e.g., calming/breathing exercises). * Conduct [relationship mapping](https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/resources-for-educators/relationship-mapping-strategy) to ensure that every student has an adult they are connected with at school. * Incorporate [trauma-informed practices](https://padlet-uploads.storage.googleapis.com/418766834/6f6ba9f08c5c35e8f8997b75d68327fa/TraumaAlignedVTSS10.docx). | All |
| Some students, especially younger children, may be frightened by staff wearing masks and rubber gloves.  Students new to school (i.e., preschoolers, kindergarteners, transfer students, students with Autism) may also have a high anxiety with covered faces. They may be thinking, "if it's safe for me to come here, why is everyone in masks, and why do I have to sit so far away from my friends?" | * Conduct group parent meetings before school opens to respond to questions/concerns, to explain what school will look like upon reopening, and Allow parents to tour the classrooms. Consider virtual tours that can be disseminated online and used as a first touch with students and families. * Send out materials (newsletters, pictures, videos) explaining what the staff will look like, and have parents review it with children prior to reentering school or entering school for the first time. * Create [social stories](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/Links/documents/ICanStayHealthybyWearingaFaceMask-F.PDF&sa=D&ust=1592584611510000&usg=AFQjCNHCvZMydtWRt1O9re1eaf1i8FqLPQ), review books and videos for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and others related to using PPE. Or use resources available on the [ADL website.](https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/draw-me-safe-coloring-and-conversation-about-a-pandemic) * Teachers use eye contact and appropriate body language (e.g., get on the child’s level) when interacting with children. | All |

## POTENTIAL TOPIC: MEDICAL

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| **Potential Issues** | **Key Considerations** | **Target – Students with Disabilities: ECSE, E, M, H** |
| Students with medical needs may require updated health services plans in light of the virus. | * Update health plans to address any gaps or changes in protocol. | All |
| There may be an increase in medical homebound requests for students with medical needs. The IEP Team might recommend homebound services based on chronic medical or crisis related issues. | * Provide additional staff or reassign staff to expedite homebound requests. * Homebound instruction is meant to be short-term (8-9 weeks in length) and is only designed to be supplemental. School staff may want to examine more appropriate instructional models (homebased or online) for students who are unable to physically attend school. * Review with staff the differences between [homebound and homebased](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/homebound/index.shtml) services. | All |
| Some students may be prone to anxiety regarding the virus and may make requests to see the nurse or engage in behaviors to communicate their anxiety. | * Design a process to see students in an expedited manner, with divided spaces that protect other students who are in the nurses’ station for other health needs. * Utilize behavior intervention specialists, school counselors, and psychologists to develop protocol in order to be better prepared to triage issues (e.g., dedicated spaces, personnel) and to assist with behaviors and anxieties. | All |

## POTENTIAL TOPIC: FISCAL

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| **Potential Issues** | **Key Considerations** | **Target – Students with Disabilities: ECSE, E, M, H** |
| Many of the services, training, and supplies will require additional financial considerations. Some staff may require a modified change in job descriptions (e.g., paraprofessionals). | * Order supplemental materials and supplies prior to school opening and ensure a plan for dissemination. Consult your local school division policy to be prepared for emergency spending requests and have expedited processes available. * Review the job descriptions of support and contracted staff, lead teachers, etc., to determine job modifications. | All |
| The first days of school will be critical for students with disabilities, teachers, and parents. Separation anxiety may be a factor for many students who have not struggled with this in the past. | * Organize temporary teams (i.e., community partners, central office admin, related service, mental health specialists, school counselors), and make assignments to position personnel around the school to assist and provide support during the first week of school. If schools are aware of a student who will struggle with separation anxiety, consider working with the family to allow for an early visit to the school/classroom before opening/open house. This will allow the student to visit/meet staff and get used to their environment before the first day. * Help caregivers establish [routines](https://www.edutopia.org/article/4-steps-to-easing-kindergarten-jitters-michele-borba) that ease students into the school day with consistency and care. | All |

## POTENTIAL TOPIC: COMPLIANCE

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| **Potential Issues** | **Key Considerations** | **Target – Students with Disabilities: ECSE, E, M, H** |
| Many students with disabilities may have regressed during the school closure. Requests for additional services may increase. | * Retrain staff about considerations, data collection, interpretation and review. As a reminder, LEAs have flexibility to offer ESY at various times throughout the school year for eligible students. | All |
| Review timelines for IEPs and students being evaluated as schools closed. | * Develop a priority list to complete the IEP or eligibility process for each student. * Evaluate, prioritize and address any noncompliance immediately. * Document efforts of communication, meetings, and provision of services. | All |
| Many students will not have completed a work based learning (WBL) experience; applied for CTE Programs, or have a WBL experience when school begins. Project SEARCH and Start on Success may be delayed due to circumstances with business partnerships, and consider that you may need to regroup as some internships may not be available.  Community-Based Instruction will likely not start at the same time that school starts. This will affect how IDEA requirements will be addressed for secondary students. PERT, which is used for functional vocational evaluations, will be closed through the summer, thus affecting fall scheduling. | * Communicate with local agencies (i.e., Social Services, Community Service Boards, Department of Blind and Vision Impairment, Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services) on how to meet students’ transitional needs. | H |
| Some annual goals and objectives may not have been mastered within the year timeline. | * Address whether or not to continue a goal from the last IEP or update short term objectives when developing, reviewing, or revising IEPs. Be sure to document why any goal and objective may be duplicated and/or repeated from the previous IEP. | All |
| When identifying the strengths and weaknesses of students in the present level of performance, address social emotional issues related to the pandemic. | * Consider psychological services and supports for students when developing, reviewing, and revising IEPs. * Consider counseling and training for parents when developing, reviewing, and revising IEPs. * Consider resources to assist parents, families, and caregivers in supporting children in the home environment. | All |

## POTENTIAL TOPIC: OUT OF DISTRICT OR PRIVATE DAY SCHOOL PLACEMENT

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| **Potential Issues** | **Key Considerations** | **Target – Students with Disabilities: ECSE, E, M, H** |
| Students who are attending Private Day Schools for Students with Disabilities and their families may feel a disconnection from their home school division. Plan for a successful transition from Private Day School back into their home school setting. | * Assign at least one case manager to ensure a collaborative effort of resources are available for students placed in private day placements through their IEP and their parents or guardians. * Communicate with private day schools and other agencies, if necessary (i.e., social services, community service boards, Department of Blind and Vision Impairment, DARS) on how to meet students’ transitional needs as they prepare to return to their home school setting. | E, M, H |

## POTENTIAL TOPIC: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

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| **Potential Issues** | **Key Considerations** | **Target – Students with Disabilities: ECSE, E, M, H** |
| Family engagement may be impacted by instability, loss, and/or grief. During COVID-19 some parents were furloughed, experienced job loss, or had to use sick or personal leave and may have a limited schedule of availability. | * Listen to families. * Ask the family what they need to support their child in the home and consider enhancing family engagement activities. * Enhance communication with families. * Continue to offer virtual meetings or an availability to hold meetings outside of traditional work hours to better accommodate some parents' work schedules. | All |

**NOTE: Remember to follow the *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia* when addressing special education and all of the required compliance, procedures, and practices normally associated with the start of a new school year.**