



# FAMILY TOOLBOX FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

To ensure a strong start to the 2020–2021 school year, school systems across Louisiana are preparing for three flexible learning scenarios: instruction offered virtually, traditionally, or through a hybrid combination of both. While learning may look different across parishes, schools, and students, all schools must continue to provide high-quality instruction and specialized services that support the unique needs of students with disabilities.

No matter which of these scenarios your child's school system uses, there are concrete ways that you can support your child's experiences and learning. This document gives you, as a family member of a student with a disability and a valuable member of the IEP team, a brief overview of the ways you can work collaboratively with the school to support your child's learning this year.<sup>1</sup>

## KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

All students with disabilities have the right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The [rights of students with disabilities](#) have not changed, no matter which way your child is receiving instruction this school year.

## PROMOTE HEALTH AND SAFETY

Above all, a strong start to the 2020–2021 school year means staying healthy and protecting the well-being of yourself and your child.

- Talk with your child about the importance of following [CDC health and safety measures](#). You can use [stories, pictures, and other visuals](#) to help them understand the steps for washing hands, wearing face coverings, and social distancing. You can also give them positive reinforcement (praise, a small reward) for unfamiliar activities like wearing a mask.
- Work with your child's IEP team to find flexible and creative solutions for safety measures that may be hard for them, based on the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education's [minimum health and safety standards](#). Make sure there is a plan to address health needs such as toileting, feeding, and/or complex medical needs.
- Understand that your child may feel [frustrated, worried, or scared](#) about the upcoming school year and new safety precautions. Talk together and acknowledge your child's feelings. If your child needs additional classroom support, reach out to their teacher.

## COLLABORATE WITH THE IEP TEAM

IEP teams—including parents—are still the key decision-makers to ensure students have access to FAPE in the least restrictive environment. Collaborate with the IEP team to make sure your student has the support they need this year.

- Talk to your child's IEP team about the learning scenario that will best support your child's unique needs. Develop a plan for how instruction and direct services (speech therapy, occupational therapy, etc.) will be provided this year. Remember that instruction and direct services can and must continue across all learning scenarios.
- Decide on a point person for communication about your child's progress, challenges, and needs for support. This could be your child's classroom teacher, a special education teacher, or another service provider. Talk to them about the best way to communicate (e.g. email, phone, video call) and how often (daily, weekly, bi-weekly).
- Talk with the IEP team about options for holding IEP meetings. Since parents may not be able to access school buildings, other options like [virtual meetings](#) or meetings before or after the school day may be needed.
- Reach out to the IEP team if your student is struggling or needs more support in any area. Remember that you always have the [right to call an IEP meeting](#) to discuss your child's needs.

<sup>1</sup> The information in this document is a summary and does not provide every detail, exception or circumstance. Nothing in this document is meant to state new law or take the place of any federal or state laws, regulations or requirements.

## PREPARE YOUR CHILD FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR

The return to school will look different in 2020 than it has in past years. After you address the foundation of health, safety, and access for your child's academic experience, prepare them for the "new normal" of starting back in the fall.

- Talk with your child about the three possible learning scenarios (virtual, traditional, hybrid). Discuss how we will all need to change and adapt to these settings over the course of the year.
- Review IEP goals with your child to ensure they understand expectations for the year.
- Make sure your child can access reliable internet and all [assistive technology and adaptive equipment](#) called for in the IEP at home. If you do not have home internet access, [see these resources](#) or talk to your child's school.
- [Practice new activities](#) your child will need to learn to stay safe in the school building (hand washing, wearing face coverings, social distancing, daily temperature checks) or at home (new ways of keeping organized, asking for clarification or help, talking with teachers online, video conferencing).
- Understand that your child may respond to the change of routine in [new or unexpected ways](#). Make sure that any existing mental health and emotional support in their IEP will be enough to support them in this context.

## CREATE A SUPPORTIVE HOME-BASED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Students will be doing some degree of learning at home this year, whether full-time virtual learning or the usual homework expected for their grade level. A positive home learning environment can support your child's success.

- Set up daily routines for school and homework to take place. You can use [visual calendars](#) and [daily or weekly planners](#) to keep track of which activities take place at school and which take place at home.
- Create a dedicated space for your child to work to help build routine and limit distractions.
- Break tasks or assignments into smaller pieces and use [timers](#) to support focus. Plan for creative, physical, nutritional, and/or relaxing breaks.
- Let your child connect with peers over the phone, through video calls, or in small groups to work together and encourage socialization.

## SUPPORT THE USE OF ACCOMMODATIONS AND ACCESSIBILITY

Your child's IEP or Section 504 plan lists the accommodations that help them succeed with learning. You can support your child in using these accommodations, especially when instruction and learning is happening at home.

- Review and understand your child's accommodations (frequent breaks, extra time, testing, modifications). Talk to the IEP team about how you can help your child use them at home.
- If your child uses assistive technology (speech-to-text software, calculator, closed captioned video, etc.) for schoolwork, talk with their teacher about how to support using it at home. [Assistive technology](#) can be no-tech (paper stabilizers, graphic organizers, braille), low-tech (visual timer, calculator, computer, recorded lectures, audiobooks), or high-tech (electric wheelchairs, augmentative communication devices).

## SUPPORT INSTRUCTION AND DIRECT SERVICES

At home, you can play a critical role by supporting your child and setting high expectations for learning.

- Talk to your child's teachers about ways to support instruction at home, including homework. For example, you can [read directions together](#), guide them through work as needed, and step in early with corrections and ideas to help if they struggle.
- Help your child [stay engaged](#) in learning by varying the time they spend on reading, writing, moving, watching, playing, listening, and speaking.
- When you notice your child needs more opportunities to master new skills learned through direct services, encourage them to [practice these skills at home](#).
- Ask your child about what they are learning in their classes, how much they understand what they are learning, and if they feel comfortable asking for help. Alert the IEP team [when your child is struggling](#) and may need new or different supports.



**Remember that this is new to everyone! Schools, school systems, and families are all doing their best to keep everyone safe and continue to learn at their best level. The key to making it work is to be patient, have high expectations, and communicate clearly with your child's school and IEP team.**