

Town Hall FAQ's

General

1. Can parents choose live/in-person or remote learning for their child?

If the child is in preschool through grade 3, the parent can choose live/in person or remote learning for their child. If the child is in grades 4 through 12 and is not in a substantially separate classroom, then the student will receive instruction and services remotely.

2. I am concerned that schedules for services will be developed and presented to parents/caregivers without input from parents/caregivers. Can you tell us how parents/caregivers will be asked how to deliver remote services students in grades 4-12 may need? Would it be possible for the IEP team to reach to families much earlier?

September 14-18, educators will have family conferences with each parent/caregiver. Data from parents on primary areas of need, their children's ability to access remote learning, and other observations about their emotional and social well-being during the state of emergency will be essential to determining how to meet students' needs when schools reopen.

It will also be important for families to provide input and to fully understand how the school or district plans to provide special education services to their children in the new school year, whether or not it is in an in-person or remote setting.

After their conference, parents will receive written documentation describing any differences in how special education services will be delivered should include how, where and when specialized services are being provided, and should be dated to reflect when services that are being provided differently begin.

3. Why are only students in preschool through third grade receiving in-person instruction?

Our highest need learners (PreK- 3, students with disabilities in substantially separate, and English language learners) are prioritized for in-person learning.

4. Will children grades 4-12 with an IEP for an emotional disability be considered for in school instruction?

CPS's current model has students with an emotional disability who are in the Structured Academic Program (a substantially separate class) will be considered for in-person instruction.

5. What will the district do to address equity concerns related to in-person versus remote

learning? How will we ensure that ALL students are getting what they need?

The district will ensure that all students are getting what they need through the following:

- *Parent conferences (9/14-9/18): Data from parents on primary areas of need, their children's ability to access remote learning, and other observations about their emotional and social well-being during the state of emergency will be essential to determining how to meet students' needs when schools reopen*
- *Data from the well-being screener and other informal assessments administered at the beginning of the school year.*

6. How quickly do you feel that the schools will be able to respond to a scholar that starts remotely (4-12) and cannot engage?

The district expectation for the upcoming school year is for each child to have weekly one-on-one check-ins with a staff member. This will ensure that the district is able to determine if students struggle to engage with remote learning and respond with the appropriate strategies and supports.

7. What is the expectation for the 5th day?

Students will participate in a live/video morning meeting or advisory to review the schedule of independent learning at the student's home on the fifth day. The student will spend the rest of the day completing independent learning activities assigned by the student's classroom teachers, related service providers, and/or specialists at their home.

8. Will there be an "outdoor option" for in person?

We are aware of the benefits of an outdoor option. At this time, the district must consider campus size and availability of space on-site (e.g. playgrounds), availability of off-site spaces (e.g. community parks), and weather.

9. For students on IEPs that are leaning remotely, will they be working with their regular provider?

We will do everything that we can to keep students with their regular educator or provider, however, we cannot guarantee that this will be the case. Some of our staff will provide in-person services and instruction. There will be a different educator/provider supporting students who are learning remotely. We will provide you with the names of your child's educators and providers in September.

10. My son asked me today who his counselor would be. He is entering the 10th Grade. When will this decision be made?

Each student will receive information about who their teacher and providers will be prior to the

first day of school.

11. Will students in substantially separate classrooms be able to participate in the gen ed classroom activities and interact with gen ed students, in other words how will inclusion and reverse inclusion work?

Yes. We are currently working with our public health experts to safely provide opportunities for inclusion while minimizing the risk of exposure.

12. What is the specific criteria for deciding on which student (not sub-sep) who has an IEP can attend in-person as in grades, attendance, type of disability, recommendation by case manager or family recommendation, etc? Saying “high needs” or accessing “not at all” is too broad.

The Department of Education has set some specific criteria. Some of the criteria include: if a student is in a substantially separate classroom, if the student is not accessing remote services at all, if the student is in foster care, if the student receives ELL (english language learning) services, and preschool students. Students with complex and unique needs will be discussed with teams on a case by case basis. Teams will look at the nature of the child’s disability and access to services among other criteria. It will be a comprehensive look at the student and that way we can accommodate those students who do not fall into any specific DESE category.

13. How are you managing inclusion peers who cannot access remote learning/cannot do independent work? What I’ve heard from SE-PAC is not what I’m hearing from our OSS team.

*We are working with our public health experts on how to do this safely. We want to limit transmission of the corona virus and ensure the safety of our students, staff, and families. As of right now we are currently looking at having a **pod** for students by creating another classroom for inclusion opportunities.*

14. If remote learning becomes the only option for educating our special needs kids, have you thought of separating our kids into another building for a smaller setting, allowing them the opportunity to still have in person?

Yes our operations/facilities team is looking at all of our school buildings and how we could bring student’s in-person in phases if for some reason we cannot do the full in-person on October 13th.

15. How will IEP push-in services be delivered to elementary, middle school, and high school general education students who are learning remotely?

The special education teacher will be providing support such as pre-teaching, google meet breakout rooms with small groups, co-teaching, and 1 on 1 services. What has been successful has been collaboration with the general education teacher around the lessons.

16. What about opportunities for peer groups for fully included students with ASD?

A: We are working with our health experts to create pods for groups. The main targets for remote learning are peer interaction, building community, social emotional well-being, making connections, and building relationships. All of those tie in to opportunities for peer groups for fully included students with ASD. We are working on utilizing outdoor settings such as Danehy Field where we can do socially distant peer interactions. At the upper and high school level advisory and community meetings will be used for peer interactions. This is still evolving, but they are examples of how we would implement peer interactions.

Meaningful Two-Way Connections

17. I feel strongly that high-quality remote learning should include opportunities for building and strengthening peer connections. Can this be included in the recommendations to schools?

Every student will be matched with a staff member and receive a one-on-one check-in each week, in alignment with districtwide grade-band guidelines.

Special Start

18. How will we keep staff safe if they are changing diapers, facilitating toileting, hand washing, etc.?

Our Operations and Facilities department has ordered thousands of disposable gloves, gowns, masks, and face shields. Our office is also working with the Operations Team to ensure that our Special Start and substantially separate classrooms have additional protective equipment available. Additionally, the district will provide training for staff before students return to school for in person services to maintain safety for students and staff.

19. In an effort to mitigate risk, can special start classrooms be prioritized to be located in the safest, newest buildings within CPS with best air exchange, sunlight & ventilation?

The Operations and Facilities Department is currently assessing each class in each school to determine if the space is suitable for students and for staff. If the space does not meet the requirements as established by (??), then the classroom will be renovated or moved to a safer space.

20. Since special start kids are so young and have trouble learning only on screen, can OSS complement with physical materials, like a school in a box model, where special start kids can work in concert with their teachers and therapists using classroom materials (for example, consider the montessori prepared environment approach)?

Yes we will make sure that happens. We did offer materials in the spring. We have ordered several materials for all students enrolling in special start this year. We will be coming up with a way to distribute materials.

21. Can you confirm that for Remote Special Start, services like SLP, OT, PT will be provided separately and the full IEP durations will be honored? For example, in the Spring, a 15-20 minute virtual morning meeting was counted as including speech and OT services when they actually only occupied 5-10 minutes of time. Clearly, this was not sufficient to meet the IEP recommendation of services.

We are at a very different place than we were in the spring. The case manager conferences will be your opportunity to discuss your child's IEP services. Parents will be a part of the planning of services and we want to align with the IEP as much as possible.

22. Can you give a general overview of how Special Start classes will function remotely?

A: You should have heard from a teacher regarding remote instruction on Monday, September 14th. Students will experience synchronous and asynchronous learning as they did in the spring. They will also participate in morning meeting, interactive activities, small-group activities (from a related service provider), and parents will also be able to schedule office hours to offer any suggestions.

Delivery of Services

23. How will co-taught classrooms be handled this new school year? In the spring, teachers were stretched thin by co-teaching gen-ed classrooms, teaching their sub-sep classes and providing pull-outs remotely.

We are aware that teachers were teaching multiple cohorts of students. To address this issue, the department is examining student caseloads and working with school-based administrators to map out teachers' schedules to prevent this from happening in the future.

24. Can you tell us if how much of the written IEP services will be provided to students who will be doing in-person learning? How much of the IEP services will be provided to students doing remote learning?

(From DESE "Guidance on Fall 2020 Special Education Services, 2020) Students must receive all services documented in their IEPs through in-person instruction, remote instruction, or a combination of both. The consistent schedule of classes, interventions, services and therapies must include time spent interacting directly with teachers and related service providers on a regular basis, as well as some independent work time, as appropriate, and opportunities for interacting with classmates.

25. My son is fully included at the high school. When will his pull-out services (SLP, counseling) happen? Will those be on Wednesdays, the day that classes do not meet? Will those services be scheduled for the daily support block?

Our goal is to adhere to the IEP. We do not want to schedule all services on Wednesday. Some services will be provided asynchronously. When you receive the final copy of the remote learning plan it should correlate with the IEP. If you still have any questions or concerns please follow up with your child's case manager.

Person Services

26. My son has an IEP and is in a general education class. He was unable to access distance learning in the spring. Will he eligible to attend school or another structured setting (like learning community)

*Yes. If your child was unable to access remote learning in the spring and your child is **not** in preschool, JKK, Kindergarten, first, second, and third grade we will be doing full in-person. You will first have that conversation with your child's case manager.*

27. My daughter has a 504, rising into 2nd grade, not in any of the listed categories for whom in-person learning is assured, but would certainly benefit. Can you speak to the "district criteria" by which discretionary in-person learning seats in 2nd-3rd grade will be allocated?

District and school leaders are finalizing the district criteria. This information will soon be shared by the superintendent.

28. I saw on the slide that some students with disabilities would have potential for some in person appointments. What does this mean and would we find out if we qualify for this in the family discussions in early September that you mentioned?

If the district goes fully remote, the Office of Student Services will still explore opportunities to provide some limited in person services (e.g., related services) for students with significant and complex needs. This will only happen if the entire district goes fully remote. At this time, the district is bringing students with significant and complex needs in substantially separate classrooms back for fully in-person services.

High School

29. For high-need students in co-taught classrooms at CRLS - will instruction all be remote or will opportunities be provided for the kids on IEPs in these classrooms to meet in small groups in-person for support?

For students with IEPs in co-taught classrooms at CRLS, instruction will be all remote. All students at CRLS except for those in substantially separate classrooms will receive instruction virtually.

30. Going into 9th grade this year. Just to be clear, using the proposal the superintendent emailed last week, what can students expect compared to last year?

Students should have access to meaningful and productive learning experiences equivalent to a typical school day every day. Students will have access to a combination of whole group instruction, small group instruction, social-emotional learning opportunities, and independent activities, in alignment with districtwide grade-band schedule guidelines. Educators will send weekly emails to students and caregivers before Monday morning with a plan for the week and central location for student schedules and assignments.

31. Will there be any opportunity for peer groups for kids with ASD who need to work on peer interaction? Outside? Going for a walk? (I'm specifically talking about a high schooler.)

Our goal is to adhere to the students' needs. At the high school we are looking at having larger rooms so we can still maintain healthy social distancing while also encouraging peer interaction. We have also received permission for walking field trips within the community. We certainly want to encourage peer interaction and we are working with our public health experts to find ways to do this in a safe manner.

32. I heard that there will be Special Olympics Universal Basketball at the high school. How will that work in this environment?

These programs are currently delayed and the season has been shifted. We are working with parents and the athletic director to start a united sports program this year. There will be a modified schedule with events happening outside as much as possible. The details are still being established but we are planning to move forward. We will be sharing more information once there are sign-ups.

Staffing

33. There are many cps subs who are experienced and could help in substantive ways, like remote and possible in person instruction. We were on the sidelines last spring. We are part of the community. Some of us are important and familiar adults for our kids. Please consider us before going to outside agencies to find teaching support.

CPS is working with the union to leverage existing staff to support our in-person and remote learning models. More information is forthcoming.

34. How will remote and in-person duties be assigned to staff? Will special educators and therapists be expected to provide both in-person and remote IEP services, on the same or different days of the week?

Once HR knows which staff are unable to provide in-person instruction, departments and schools will be able to determine which staff will provide remote or in person instruction. In regards to the second question and per the staff Town Hall meeting, "no". The superintendent has stated that special educators and therapists will not provide both in-person and remote IEP services.

35. Related service providers typically provide their service (OT, Speech, PT) for all students at a given school. How is it possible for those providers to work with only 1-2 classrooms when they may have caseloads that span every grade level?

Once we know which staff are able to provide in-person instruction, the Office of Student Services will work with Margie Carlman, the Related Services Supervisor to examine caseloads and make adjustments if needed.

36. Earlier you mentioned that special educators will not be expected to teach both in-person and remote students. Is this also true for teachers of sub-separate classrooms, who have a specialized skillset?

Yes. This is also true for teachers in substantially separate classrooms.

37. If there are not enough staff to meet the IEP needs remotely are there other resources being considered to meet the gap such as private providers or other solutions?

If CPS lacks special educators or therapists, CPS will either hire additional CPS employees or partner with outside agencies to address services.

38. How will you support staff members who have children at home, so that they can support their students while still managing their work-life balance? Regardless of whether we are working in person or remotely, staff members' children also need to be cared for and educated.

Our office is aware that many staff members have children or elderly family members that they care for. The district is currently working with the union to address staff who need support or flexibility. More information is forthcoming.

39. Many related service providers work with students at multiple schools. Will this continue to be the case? How will we keep staff members and students safe with these multiple chances for exposure? What about Special Educators in grades K-3 servicing

students who receive pull out and push in?

(From DESE “Guidance on Fall 2020 Special Education Services, 2020). The district is carefully developing classroom assignments and service delivery schedules for students with disabilities so that they receive services consistent with their IEPs in the least restrictive environment, as defined in 603 CMR 28.02(12), while also maintaining the current health and safety protocols. In light of the Department’s guidance that students at the elementary level remain in one classroom for the majority of the day, districts may want to consider whether pull-out services can be offered in accordance with the health and safety guidelines or, instead, if services should be pushed into the classroom. For example, special education teachers and related service providers (speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, etc.), could provide special education services in the general education setting (“B Grid”) services remotely from within the school building via video conference, instead of coming into the classroom to provide services. This practice would help to minimize foot traffic in and out of classrooms while also providing access to services that support the inclusion of students with disabilities.

40. Are district and school administrators working in person for the school year, or will you be remote?

Similar to our teachers, there may be administrators who will need to work remotely due to extenuating circumstances (e.g., preexisting medical conditions). Administrators who are able to work in person will continue to visit and support schools, staff, and students. This will occur with safety measures in place including informing the principal and staff the date, duration, and reason for the visit. It is important to keep in mind that in order to make it safer to work and learn in-person, the density and number of people in the building needs to be limited (social distancing) and safety measures need to be followed.

IEPs

41. My son (entering as an 8th grader this fall) was supposed to be reviewed for IEP last March but it did not happen. What is the plan on this?

We are currently working with staff to address deferred IEP meetings from the Spring. We will provide more information about your child’s scheduled IEP meeting in September. If your child is in need of an evaluation, our office is establishing a “Recovery Team” comprised of school psychologists, educators, and related service providers to administer all assessments (initials and reevaluations) to expedite the convening or reconvening of the IEP teams. Our office will provide more information in September once this team is hired.

42. How much of a backlog of IEP meetings are there and what is the plan for being able to keep up with schedules?

We have a large backlog of IEP meetings to address from Spring 2020. Our plan is to hire a Recovery Team of 8 specialists to administer the assessments and support our school-based teams with deferred annuals and reevaluation meetings. The monitoring of these teams, meetings, and evaluations, will be under the purview of the director of the Office of Student Services, Jean Spera.

43. How will we approach testing students? Especially those whose three year reevaluations were not completed last school year. What if they are remote? They are starting the year without a valid IEP.

First, the IEP is a stay-put IEP and that is valid and will continue to operate on that IEP.

In terms of the three year evaluation, there are options that need to be decided in conjunction with parents. We have the option to do a record review because of a history with the student, observations, and using multiple forms that can be filled out digitally that are available (e.g., behavior forms, language development forms, etc). There are variables that need to be taken into account when we use standardized tests.. This needs to be decided on what the student needs and the professional judgement of staff as we consider testing students remotely. Our decisions need to be based on valid and reliable data.

Parent Support

44. Is the remote learning plan being written by the IEP team independently and then presented to the family OR is it being developed JOINTLY with parent input?

*When you meet with your child's case manager you will receive a **draft** of the remote learning plan. This is the time to address any of your comments, questions, or concerns regarding the remote learning plan. The team will then do it's best to make the necessary accommodations and the case manager will follow up with you with a final write-up.*

45. What do you mean by asynchronous?

Instruction that has been pre-recorded. Parents can access this video at any time.

46. I want to know if parents that lack knowledge of the math school programs can be trained so that they can better support their child?

Please contact your school's family liaison for more information about parent trainings/webinars. You can also visit CPS's [math department's website](#) to find additional resources for supporting your child at home.

47. What are your plans to communicate this plan and answer questions in easy-to-understand English and in multiple languages?

You can view the district's reopening plan [here](#). In regards to this Town Hall, our office will translate this document in multiple languages and post it on the department's [website](#).

Personal Protective Equipment

48. With little children (e.g age 5) it seems that a mask is optional. What if a parent decides his/her child should not use a mask?

The district is working with the School Committee to require masks for all students, unless the student has a disability/illness that prevents them from wearing a mask.

49. Will there be weekly covid19 testing to students and staff like MIT is doing to their students and staff? How would you otherwise manage protecting our children if one person gets infected but doesn't show symptoms?

Surveillance testing is in place for all staff entering buildings and community access to testing is free and convenient. There will be Covid-19 testing to students who show symptoms if the parent consents. This is voluntary and cannot be mandated.

50. What happens if a student refuses to keep a mask on?

Masks are required for all students. There will be district and school procedures in place if this occurs.

51. If a special needs child cannot keep a mask or face shield on for long periods, are they still going to be able to attend in-person?

Yes all students will be able to access in-person services. Our team is currently developing protocols and guidance for students who cannot wear a mask or face shields for long periods at a time.

Technology

52. Are there 1:1 devices for students?

Yes. All students in preschool through the post-graduate ASD program will be provided with a device.

53. My child wasn't able to access asynchronous services. She needed cuing from her providers. How can I request all remote services be provided in a google meet format?

All remote services will be provided in a GoogleMeet format.

54. How do I go about obtaining chrome books?

Please inform your case manager if you need a chromebook -- even if your child is out of district. We are currently experiencing a backlog, so please allow a couple of days before you receive your device.

55. I'm very concerned that the Google Meet "breakout rooms" aren't going to work well - this is a brand new feature from Google. I am asking you to keep this on your radar. After the first 6 weeks of school, if Google Breakout Rooms aren't working well, please push the district to pay for Zoom.

We will keep this on our radar. We have teachers who are monitoring the benefits and accessibility of Google Meets so we will be able to hear from parents, teachers, and students about how effective it is.

Communication

56. Can we please have a clearer understanding of the chain of communication of the Special Education team? I cannot get a straight answer of who I should be talking to about an upcoming IEP meeting as well as knowing how to advocate or look for additional support.

The first person you need to contact is your child's case manager. If you need additional support, please email the school administrator (e.g., vice-principal or principal). You can also contact the Office of Student Services Coordinator (Supervisor).

See below for more information:

- Upper and High School: **Desiree Phillips** (dphillips@cpsd.us)
- FMA, G&P, Haggerty, King Open, Amigos, and King: **Dr. Karyn Grace** (kgrace@cpsd.us)
- Special Start, Baldwin, Peabody, Tobin, Cambridgeport, Kennedy-Longfellow, Morse: **Shelagh Walker** (skellywalker@cpsd.us)
- Out of District: **Joyce Costello** (jocostello@cpsd.us)