



# Back to School in the Time of COVID Parent Resource Guide

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The **Autism Alliance of Michigan (AAoM)** understands that going back to school this year will be a stressful and confusing time.

Families likely have many concerns and questions about returning to school.

Parents and Caregivers are being asked to make decisions about their child's education without fully knowing and/or understanding their child's rights.

**AAoM is here to help!**

Please use this Parent Resource Guide to inform yourself in your advocacy efforts.



## *Part 1*

# **Impact on Special Education as of a Result of COVID-19**

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**Contingency Plans** are the school's best offer (aka: "Good Faith Effort") during the COVID-19 pandemic closures.

- o The Contingency Plan does not replace the student's Individual Education Program (IEP).

Core principles of the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** have NOT been waived during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- o Core principles of **IDEA** include –
  - Child Find
  - Appropriate Evaluation
  - Parent Participation
  - Procedural Safeguards
  - IEP Development & Review
  - Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)
  - Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Students with Disabilities continue to be entitled to **FAPE**.

**Parent Participation** (meaningful and informed) continues to be required



## Part 2

# Advocacy Tips

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Carefully read over anything you receive from your school district or IEP Team (e.g., **2020-21 Reopening Plan** – look for mention of special education aspects, IEP-related information, etc).

- Look for changes in wording from previous documents.
- Compare to see if anything was added or changed.
- Remember: an IEP Amendment requires *both* school team and parent agreement.

Ask *a lot* of questions – especially WHY!

(Why, When, What, Where, Who + How & Explain)

- Why is this setting the one the school team believes is appropriate?
- When will my child's related services be delivered?
- What is the goal of this (specific) activity?
- Where can my child receive additional help?
- Who is going to be part of my child's IEP Team this school year?
- How can this intervention be delivered with fidelity?
- Explain the ways accommodations can be provided to make a lesson more accessible?

Make every request in writing.

***If it is not written down, it was never said. If it was never said, it did not happen.***  
– Pete Wright, Wrightslaw

Be familiar with the [Procedural Safeguards](#) – those are your “Rights”!

Request that meaningful, quality data (from multiple sources / types) be used in **decision-making** related to your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

- o ASK for ACCESS to DATA.
- o Make sure you UNDERSTAND what the DATA shows.
- o Use DATA to inform your REQUESTS and ACTIONS on behalf of your child.
  - How is my child performing according to standards/expectations?
  - How well is my child performing relative to school, district, state, etc.?
  - What data do we need and don't yet have?
  - What can we expect for this 2020-21 school year's assessments?



Insist that progress is measured and monitored to ensure educational benefit is realized.

- o An aspect of the periodic monitoring of progress toward IEP **goals & objectives** can include regular meetings, check-ins, and/or other communication from your child's school team (request to include this regular communication in the IEP document).

Inform yourself on the various [Dispute Resolution options](#), and assume the [Rules of Adverse Assumptions](#).

### *Part 3*

## **Communication is Key**

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As with any aspect of Special Education, communicate with your child's school / IEP Team.

- If you do not receive a response with adequate answers, work up the administrative chain  
(Case manager > Building Administrator > District SpEd Administrator)

Focus on the **top priorities** for your child's learning and well-being.

- Does the school district's plan address your child's current IEP goals & services to the greatest extent possible under current health & safety requirements?

Parents can request training be included in the IEP and provided by the school district for aspects of your child's IEP where you (as the parent) are needed to ensure there is access to the learning environment, curriculum content, intervention services & supports, etc.

If school team responds with '**No**' to a parent request to meet a particular area of need for your child and you find options that are possible/available, bring that information (as part of a new \*written\* request) to the District / IEP Team for consideration.

For parents considering seeking private services to deliver necessary interventions that the child's school district is not providing (for those services documented in the IEP), be aware of the concept of [unilateral placement](#) and providing a [10-day notice](#) (partial notice for ancillary services when student remains enrolled in public school district) if you may choose to pursue reimbursement\* at a later time.



*It is strongly recommended that parents seek consultation from a special education attorney for concerns related to pursuing reimbursement at public expense.*

## **Part 4**

# **Parent Advocacy**

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Parents must be **proactive** and **organized**.

- o Gather documentation including –
  - the school district’s Back to School Plan
  - current IEP
  - benchmark assessment data, report card and IEP Progress Report (March 2020)
  - samples of student work and observations from parents (March—June 2020, during closure)
  
- o Sept 2020
  - Where is the student now?
    - Grade level expectations, IEP goals & objectives
    - Given student’s present levels, what are their current areas of need?

Focus on **individualized services & supports** for your child based on the areas of need documented in the IEP.

- o Don’t forget to use your [Parent Input](#) section of the IEP! This is the section of the IEP where parents can document their vision for their child, the child’s strengths and areas of need, information relevant to the decision-making of the IEP Team, as well as document your requests for consideration.
  - If a parent request is declined by the school team, ask that you receive [Prior Written Notice](#) with an explanation.



## Part 5

# Additional Resources

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## State of Michigan Resources

### [Michigan Department of Education \(MDE\) Guidance Documents](#)

- o [Guidance to Address Forgone Learning for Students with IEPs as a Result of the COVID-19 Pandemic \(July 7, 2020\)](#)
- o [Guidance for Compliance with IDEA and MARSE During the COVID-19 Pandemic \(Revised May 18, 2020\)](#)

### [MDE Family Matters Fact Sheets](#)

### [MDE – Office of Special Education Information Line](#)

### [Michigan Protection & Advocacy Service](#)

### [Michigan Alliance for Families](#)

### [Special Education Mediation Services](#)



## **Autism Alliance of Michigan Resources**

Website: [autismallianceofmichigan.org](http://autismallianceofmichigan.org)

MiNavigator AAoM: [navigator@aaomi.org](mailto:navigator@aaomi.org)

Phone: (877) 463-AAOM

### **Disclaimer:**

This information has been compiled by a non-attorney advocate.

The intent of the information and resources provided are non-legal and do not in any way constitute legal advice or legal services.

Families which require legal services or representation can search the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA) directory for Michigan at <http://www.copaa.org/>.