



## Back to School During COVID-19: Parent Resource Guide

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

With the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, families likely have ongoing concerns and questions about returning to school.

Students with disabilities and their families have experienced unique and profound challenges connected to accessing education consistently and in ways that are appropriate.

**Autism Alliance is here to help!**

We want to support Parents and Caregivers in learning and understanding their child's rights connected to education in making informed decisions.

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



## Part 1

# Interrupted Learning

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Over the past two years, many students with disabilities who have special education plans experienced periods of time where instruction was interrupted and services were missed or delayed.

### *Keep in Mind:*

- Core principles of the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** have not been changed during the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - 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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- The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) continues to provide guidance on the use of **Contingency Learning Plans**.

[MDE: Guidance on the Recommended Use of Contingency Learning Plans \(PDF\)](#)

- The Contingency Plan does not replace the student's Individual Education Program (IEP).
- Carefully read over anything you receive from your school district or IEP Team – 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 lots 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).
  - ASK for ACCESS to DATA.
  - Make sure you UNDERSTAND what the DATA shows.
  - 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 assessments this school year?
- Insist that progress is measured and monitored to ensure educational benefit is realized.
- 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**.
- Gather documentation including –
  - U.S. Department of Education: [COVID-19 Resources for Schools, Students, and Families](#);
  - student's current IEP;
  - benchmark assessment data, report card and IEP Progress Reports;
  - samples of student work and observations from parents
- Focus on **individualized services & supports** for your child based on the areas of need documented in the IEP.
  - 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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- ASK Resource Center: [Six Principles of IDEA](#)
- Center for Parent Information & Resources: [IDEA Parent Participation](#)
- U.S. Department of Education: [\(Fact Sheet\) Providing Students with Disabilities Free Appropriate Public Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Addressing the Need for Compensatory Services Under Section 504](#)
- Michigan Department of Education: [Guidance Documents](#)
  - [Child Find](#)
  - [Timeline for Initial Evaluations](#)
  - [IEP Development](#)
- MDE – Family Matters: [Fact Sheets](#)
- MDE – Office of Special Education: [Information Line](#)
- [Disability Rights Michigan](#)
- [Michigan Alliance for Families](#)
- [Special Education Mediation Services](#)

### **Autism Alliance of Michigan (AAoM)**

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

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

Phone: (877) 463-AAOM

Check out the AAoM Neighborhood Directory for a complete list of Statewide Agencies and Providers that serve the Autism community!

#### 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/>.