



TAKING OWNERSHIP OF YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION

...IN THE MIDST OF THE CONTINUING COVID CRISIS

TOP 10 STRATEGIES FOR THE UPCOMING SCHOOL YEAR 2021-2022

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How to create a plan to navigate your child's special education needs for the school year and beyond:

1) **Review your child's IEP (Individual Education Plan) and/or 504**

Accommodations Plan. Be certain that you understand the goals, objectives, services, accommodations and staff who are key to implementing the IEP or 504 Plan. Will the services and staff contained in your child's IEP be in place at the commencement of the school year? If not why not? *If you are starting the school year without these plans in hand, call the school ASAP and request a copy of the IEP or 504 Plan.*

2) **Familiarize** yourself with the terms and acronyms in the IEP. Do you understand the language used in the IEP? For a useful guide to the ABC's of special education and related acronyms: www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/acronyms/

3) **Request** an informal meeting with school staff to review your concerns if there are questions about the implementation of the IEP or the Section 504 Plan.

4) **Confirm** that the school staff has acquired the training in certain areas of delivering the IEP services to your child since the last PPT meeting. If the school's staff was required to obtain training in certain areas in order to deliver the IEP services to your child, have you confirmed that the school staff has acquired that training since your last PPT? If the school was supposed to purchase equipment, technology or software/APPS, have you confirmed that this will be in place at the commencement of the school year?

5) **Request** the scheduling of a formal PPT meeting as soon as possible to review and address your concerns, if your concerns with the IEP are not addressed through an informal meeting.

6) **Meet** with the staff assigned to your child for the new school year. Discuss how you want to monitor your child's progress and how you want to be informed: daily, weekly, monthly, and what form the communication will take such as meetings, telephone calls, or emails. Consider developing a communications plan with your child's teacher and other staff to ensure there is regular back and forth communications.

7) **Orient and/or Re-orient** your child to the school environment to ease the level of anxiety, especially if your child was not attending in-person instruction during the previous school year. Plan for you and a school staff member to walk a child around the school building to meet with school staff, to locate classrooms and lockers, and to become familiar with the layout of the school building, especially if it is a new school environment for your child.

8) **Discuss** your concerns with your child's transition to the 2021-22 school year. This past school year has caused much anxiety for parents and students alike due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Did you notice any changes in your child's behaviors, health, level of anxiety, social skills, and development of academic skills during the past school year or so? Did your child's pediatrician or other treating professionals have any developmental or medical concerns? If so, consider sharing this information with the school.

9) **Ensure** that you are on the same wave length with your child's teachers. Send your child's teachers a letter or e-mail that describes your perceptions of your child's strengths, weaknesses, learning style(s), behaviors, social issues, and any other concerns that you may have for the 2021-22 school year, such as a profile of your child from a parents' perspective on what works, what does not work, and any other information that would ensure a successful commencement of the school year.

10) Mask Mandates, Vaccinations, and COVID-19 Policy Guidance- we are in the midst of an ever-evolving situation affecting our lives and the lives of our children while this COVID-19 pandemic continues. In order to make informed decisions about your child's education, you should consult your own medical professionals, local health department, State Department of Public Health, State Department of Education, your school's health director (often the school nurse), the Center for Disease Control (CDC) for latest Guidance on the COVID-19 health and safety protocols as they pertain to your child's circumstances.

Special Notes/New Developments:

Mask mandates for the beginning of 2021-22 school year were authorized by Governor Lamont. Whether or not there will additional or fewer COVID-19 related mandates will depend on the evolving public health data on the efficacy of COVID-19 prevention and safety strategies including but not limited to wearing masks, social distancing, handwashing, vaccinations (if available), and other measures to protect the individual and public health.

As of May 24, 2021, the State Department of Education had issued policy entitled: *Guidance Regarding Special Education Recovery for Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) due to the COVID-19 Pandemic* that is an evolving policy covering special education recovery for students with IEP's who did not receive services specified in their IEP during either the 2019-20 and/or 2020-21 school years. In all likelihood, that guidance will change and continue to evolve throughout the school year. ct.gov is the State of Connecticut's website.

As of July 26, 2021, the U.S. Department of Education - Office for Civil Rights (OCR) had issued a policy guidance entitled "Long COVID and Disability Rights under the ADA, Section 504, and Section 1557," after determining that a diagnosis of "long COVID-19" could be a disability that is covered by the protections of the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)* and Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended*. ed.gov is the U.S. Department of Education's website.

As of August 5, 2021, the CDC had issued a new policy guidance entitled *Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools* for the reopening of school. In all likelihood, that guidance will change and continue to evolve throughout the school year. cdc.gov is the Center for Disease and Control's website:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>

As of August 19, 2021, the State Department of Education had issues and update to the agency's *Adapt, Advance, Achieve-* Connecticut's Plan to Lean and Grow Together-Fall 2021 that updated the back to school policy guidance from the 2020-21 school year for mitigation strategies for vaccines, masks, social distancing, hygiene, bus transportation, visitation policies, cafeteria, and sports. In all likelihood, that guidance will change and continue to evolve throughout the school year. ct.gov is the State of Connecticut's website.

Building Success for the School Year: *This is the time to plan your own back to school transition, anticipate your child's needs and start to create a framework for collaboration and a path for a successful school year. This can be a time of great anxiety for you and your child, due to the on-going impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; so, take a proactive approach to your child's education and set the stage for open communications during the school year. We can all take ownership when your child succeeds.*

The Last Word: Your Child's Educational Future Matters

We all start the school year with the greatest of hope and expectations. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our lives and the lives of our children as we are dealing with mask mandates, issues with vaccinations, potential lapses in the student's development of academic skills, social skills, and emotional coping skills especially if your child has not been attending school on a regular basis since the declaration of the COVID-19 health emergency during March 2020. It is important to reconnect with the school staff if your child has been participating in school through virtual or on-line learning, or with a hybrid learning model. It is time to create new expectations with your child's school since the world has changed for you and your child since March 2020. If those expectations are not met to your satisfaction within a reasonable amount of time and your child continues to struggle, or you feel your child is continuing to achieve below his or her potential, then you have rights to pursue as outlined in your "*Procedural Safeguards*." Those rights include a plan of action: reviewing your concerns at a PPT meeting, obtaining outside evaluations and/or pursuing other administrative remedies. Students (over 14 or 15 years old) should become familiar with transition planning and transition resources including the *Transition Bill of Rights* available on the State Department of Education website: Ct.gov.

Attorney Lawrence Berliner has practiced special education law, disability law and legal advocacy throughout Connecticut for 38 years. Get in touch with him via e-mail lwb.esq@gmail.com or telephone **(203) 255-0582**. He is available for consultations to discuss your concerns and next steps via Zoom or telephone. His offices are located in Westport and Guilford, Connecticut.

Please consult Attorney Berliner's website for additional information:
www.berlinerspecialedlaw.com

MAKING A DIFFERENCE! ONE FAMILY AT A TIME

This article is for informational purposes only and should not be construed as providing specific legal advice for your child's circumstances. You should consult an attorney for specific legal advice.