



MERCER COUNTY SPECIAL SERVICES SCHOOL DISTRICT

Emergency Virtual or Remote Instructional Programs,
2022-2023

Required by P.L.2020, c.27

Remote Learning Plan Overview

- Part I: Introduction 3**
 - Remote Instruction Plan for School Closure 3**
- Part II: Equitable Access to Instruction for All Students 3**
 - Overview of Schedule Design:..... 4**
 - Technology and Connectivity 5**
- Part III- Provisions for Special Education and Related Services for Students with Disabilities and Services Supporting English Language Learners (ELL) 6**
 - Special Education..... 6**
 - English Language Learners..... 7**
- Part IV- Provisions for School Nutrition Benefits or Services of Eligible Students 7**

Part I: Introduction

As districts returned to full in-person instruction during the 2021-2022 school year, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) and Governor Murphy, declared virtual instruction was no longer permitted. The Road Forward guidance from the NJDOE stated, “Local Education Agencies (LEA) must plan to provide full-day, full-time, in-person instruction and operations (beginning in) the 2021-2022 school year.” In addition, districts are also required to annually approve an Emergency Virtual or Remote Instruction Plan as designated under Chapter 27. This plan would be implemented during a district closure lasting more than three consecutive school days due to a declared state of emergency, public health emergency, or directive by the appropriate health agency or officer to institute a public health-related closure. The Mercer County Special Services School District has developed the below plan to ensure the District satisfies the requirements governed under Chapter 27.

Remote Instruction Plan for School Closure

Mercer County Special Services School District is committed to serve as a catalyst for providing innovative integrated programs and services. We serve individuals with significant disabilities as well as meeting the specialized needs of districts and agencies. As such, we recognize that our students and staff greatly benefit from full in-person instruction. In the event that full in-person instruction is no longer an option, this plan will serve to articulate the various ways in which the district will deliver instructional services, related services, and meal distribution to eligible students.

The Mercer County Special Services School District developed an educational plan for remote instruction when schools need to be closed due to the conditions and criteria outlined in the “Local Educational Agency Guidance for Chapter 27 Emergency Virtual or Remote Instructional Programs for the 2021-2022 School Year” broadcast. This plan includes guidance in the event of a declared emergency resulting in a district-wide closure. P.L.2020, c.27 enabled the continuity of instruction in the event of a closure lasting more than three consecutive days, so that districts could use virtual or remote instruction to satisfy the 180-day requirement pursuant to N.J.S.A 18A:7F-9.

Part II: Equitable Access to Instruction for All Students

For the 2022 - 2023 school year, virtual or remote instruction will be provided to students if an approved situation arises. District staff will post information and assignments, as well as instruction and feedback, through Google Classroom, Zoom, Google Meets, posts on the District website, Class Dojo, Talking Points, and/or email. Educational activities and materials will be differentiated to meet the learning needs of the specific grade level class or student.

The following information will designate more specifically how instruction will occur each designated school day according to the Remote Instruction Plan:

Curriculum and Instruction: In-Person Instruction

School Hours: Regular School Day

Mercer High School	8:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Mercer Elementary School	8:00 a.m. - 2:15 p.m.
Joseph F. Cappello School	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Delivery of Instruction

Mercer County Special Services School District recognizes and acknowledges the unique and significant needs of our students and the importance of continuity and routine for students, staff, and families.

The District is prepared to offer various modes of instruction should the event arise, including:

1. Full Day all In-Person
2. Full Day In-Person and Full Day Virtual (If parent choice is Permitted)
3. ½ Day In-Person and ½ Day Virtual (with No In-School Lunch)
4. Full Virtual

Due to the influence and impact of the COVID-19 virus on the educational system, the District has remained focused on the following guiding principles:

- Health, safety, and wellness of students and staff is a top priority.
- Maintain continuity of learning.
- Facilitate equity and ease of access to communications and resources.
- Flexibility to accommodate the needs of all learners.

Overview of Schedule Design:

1. Full Day In-Person Model

Full day all in-person instruction provided for all students.

2. Full Day In-Person and Full Day Virtual (If Parent Choice is Permitted)

Should the Governor and NJDOE allow for parental choice the District will be prepared to pivot our instructional model that would include: full day in-person instruction or full day virtual/remote instruction.

3. ½ Day In-Person and ½ Day Virtual (Parent Choice with No In-School Lunch)

Should the Governor and NJDOE allow parents to choose a learning model, the District would be prepared to pivot to an instructional model that would include: ½ day in-person instruction and ½ day of virtual/remote instruction or full day virtual/remote instruction. This model would be utilized if there was a concern about the spread of COVID during lunches and the District needed to move away from in-person meals.

This plan is based upon the following considerations:

- Schools would be physically open on a modified schedule.
- The modified schedule would be based upon the previously established early dismissal schedule.
- Lunch would not be served on campus. Food distribution will continue for families that qualify for assistance.

4. Full Virtual Model

Virtual learning model for 100% of students would include scheduled synchronous learning, live interaction with teachers, and virtual related services. This model would be implemented as a last resort due to health and safety concerns. Furthermore, this model may be utilized after prolonged school closures such as Thanksgiving, Winter Recess, and Spring Break if allowed by the Governor and/or NJ Department of Education.

Additionally, this model may be used with the permission of the local health official when a determined COVID or other health outbreak should occur.

School Day Attendance

All attendance will be recorded in Realtime. For the remote learning model, students are expected to be present on the Zoom/Google Meet session to be marked as present. Teachers will contact the parents/guardians when attendance issues are a concern. If attendance concerns continue, teachers should contact the school counselor and then the school principal.

Technology and Connectivity

The District will continue to strive to ensure that every student has access to a device and internet connection and prioritize the provision of technology, or, alternatively, in-person instruction, to students that are otherwise without access.

The District acquired additional devices for student use through federal grant funding.

The District will continue to consider the technological needs of all students, including those with learning disabilities, assistive technology needs, and language barriers. Additionally, we will consider the needs associated with deployment of necessary

technology, including student and parent training and acceptable use policy implementation.

Technology and Instruction

The District has identified a consistent technology that would be used throughout the District in a virtual instruction model and provide training in the use of all platforms. Additional District considerations include:

- Providing accessible, and user-friendly resources or training for parents/caregivers and community members for the safe use of the technology.
- Ensuring that novice provisional teachers, teachers new to the District and other new staff have sufficient training in the technologies that will be used.

Part III- Provisions for Special Education and Related Services for Students with Disabilities and Services Supporting English Language Learners (ELL)

Special Education

The Mercer County Special Services School District solely serves students with disabilities. Every child and adolescent with a disability is entitled to a free and appropriate education including special education services based on their individualized education program (IEP). Students receiving special education services may be more negatively affected by distance-learning and may be disproportionately impacted by interruptions in regular education. It may not be feasible, depending on the needs of the individual child and adolescent, to adhere both to distancing guidelines and the criteria outlined in a specific IEP. Attempts to meet physical distancing guidelines and the needs of the individual child may require creative solutions, often on a case-by-case basis, in collaboration with the student's sending district.

Ensuring the Delivery of Special Education and Related Services to Students with Disabilities

Under the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and New Jersey state special education regulations, students with disabilities are entitled to special education and related services, such as accommodations and modifications to instruction, speech-language services, occupational therapy (OT), physical therapy (PT), and counseling.

Consistent with guidance from the United States Department of Education, the District must continue to meet their obligations to students with disabilities to the greatest extent possible. The NJDOE will continue to update school districts and receiving schools with any additional guidance from the USDE on implementation of IDEA. Specific strategies and considerations for students with disabilities must be critical points of discussion for every return-to-school scenario. The NJDOE recommends that school districts consider

the following when addressing the education of students with disabilities for the 2022-2023 school year:

- Procedures to address the return to school of medically fragile students and students with physical or health impairments who may require accommodations and modifications. School districts should communicate frequently with the families of students with significant medical risk factors to determine if additional precautions or unique measures are necessary prior to a student's return to school.
- IEP teams should review student data/student progress to determine whether critical skills were lost during the period in which virtual instruction was being provided to students and determine the need for additional services to address learning loss.
- IEP teams should consider the impact of missed services on student progress towards meeting IEP goals and objectives, and determine if additional or compensatory services are needed to address regression and recoupment of skills within a reasonable length of time.
- IEP teams should develop procedures to complete overdue and/or incomplete evaluations to determine eligibility for special education services.
- The use of school guidance department staff and child study team personnel to identify students whose postsecondary plans may have been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and provide support, resources, and assistance, which may include facilitating connection to community organizations, scholarship programs, county, state, and federal opportunities to access support.
- Clear communication to parents/guardians of the procedures for student referrals and evaluations to determine the eligibility for special education and related services or a 504 Plan as required by federal and state law.

English Language Learners

English Language Learners (ELLs) are entitled to support and services for their literacy and language acquisition development from their English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher as well as from their classroom and/or subject area teachers. As a receiving district, Mercer County Special Services addresses the language needs of students via their individual goals and objectives outlined in their IEP authored in collaboration with their sending district.

Part IV- Provisions for School Nutrition Benefits or Services of Eligible Students

School Nutrition – Food Services: Ensure Continuity of Meal Programs

Food service operations are managed and provided through the district's contracted vendor. Appropriate social distancing and safety measures are implemented for meal delivery and pick-up.

- During a closure, students who receive free or reduced lunch would receive a meal distribution on a weekly basis.
 - Delivery of meals would be made for families who receive a food benefit and are unable to pick-up weekly meals.

This plan will be revised and adjusted as needed.