



The Road Back

Restart and Recovery Plan for Education New Jersey Department of Education



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Section: Supplementary

Clarifying Expectations Regarding Fulltime Remote Learning Options for Families in 2020-2021

Background

The New Jersey Department of Education ("NJDOE")'s reopening guidance, "The Road Back: Restart and Recovery Plan for Education," ("guidance") emphasizes the Administration's expectation that school buildings will open in some capacity for in-person instruction and operations in Fall 2020 (see, e.g. The Road Back pages 6, 46, and 49). The guidance further acknowledges that the health and safety standards expected to govern school operations might necessitate the establishment of "hybrid" learning models under which schools deliver both in-person and remote learning (see, e.g., page 46). To assist schools and districts in developing and implementing such hybrid models, the guidance provides several sample methods and considerations for scheduling in-person, remote, or hybrid learning (e.g. establishing district-determined cohorts as outlined in pages 51-52; prioritizing in-person instruction for students without access to educational technology needed for remote learning as outlined on page 75; and providing accommodations for students who are at higher risk for severe illness as outlined in "Critical Area of Operation #1: General Health and Safety Guidelines").

Update: Additional Anticipated Minimum Standard

This update includes an additional "Anticipated Minimum Standard," as that phrase is used throughout "The Road Back: Restart and Recovery Plan for Education." This additional anticipated minimum standard provides that, in addition to the methods and considerations explicitly referenced in the guidance for scheduling students for in-person, remote, or hybrid learning, families/guardians may submit, and school districts shall accommodate, requests for fulltime remote learning. Such requests may include any service or combination of services that would otherwise be delivered on an in-person or hybrid schedule, such as instruction, behavioral and support services, special education and related services. A family/guardian may request that some services be delivered entirely remotely, while other services follow the same schedule they otherwise would according to the district's reopening plan. To ensure clarity and consistency in implementation of such fulltime remote learning, it is essential that district boards of education and charter school or renaissance school boards of trustees adopt policies that address, at a minimum:

1. **Unconditional Eligibility for Fulltime Remote Learning:** All students are eligible for fulltime remote learning; eligibility cannot be conditioned on a family/guardian demonstrating a risk of illness or other selective criteria. This includes students with disabilities who attend in-district schools or receiving schools (county special services school districts, educational services commissions, jointure commissions, Katzenbach School for the



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Deaf, regional day schools, college operated programs, and approved private schools for students with disabilities).

2. **Procedures for Submitting Fulltime Remote Learning Requests:** It is important to clearly define procedures that a family/guardian must follow to submit a request for fulltime remote learning, including requests to begin the school year receiving full time remote learning and requests to transition from in-person or hybrid services to fulltime remote learning during the school year. Procedures should meet the following guidelines:
 - i. Clearly define deadlines for submitting a request and district's expected timeline for approving requests;
 - ii. Identify points of contact for questions and concerns;
 - iii. Clearly describe information or documentation that the family/guardian must submit with their request. In accordance with #1 above, such documentation shall not exclude any students from the school's fulltime remote learning option, but rather be limited to the minimum information needed to ensure proper recordkeeping and implementation of successful remote learning.
 - iv. For students with disabilities, districts must determine if an IEP meeting or an amendment to a student's IEP is needed for fulltime remote learning.

Upon satisfaction of these minimum procedures, the district must approve the student's fulltime remote learning request.

3. **Scope and Expectations of Fulltime Remote Learning:** A student participating in the board's fulltime remote learning option must be afforded the same quality and scope of instruction and other educational services as any other student otherwise participating in district programs (e.g. students participating in a hybrid model). This includes, for example, access to standards-based instruction of the same quality and rigor as that afforded all other students of the district, the district making its best effort to ensure that every student participating in remote learning has access to the requisite educational technology, and the provision of special education and related services to the greatest extent possible. Like in-person and hybrid programs, fulltime remote learning must adhere to length of school day requirements pursuant N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3, local attendance policies, and any other local policies governing delivery of services to, and district expectations of, students participating in remote programs and their families. For families/guardians requesting that a service transition from in-person or hybrid delivery to fulltime remote delivery, the district must clearly define any additional services, procedures, or expectations that will occur during the transition period. Districts should endeavor to provide supports and resources to assist families/guardians, particularly those of younger students, with meeting the expectations of the district's remote learning option.
4. **Procedures to Transition from Fulltime Remote Learning to In-Person Services:**



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- i. Definition of the minimum amount of time a student must spend in fulltime remote learning before being eligible to transition to in-person services. This will allow families/guardians to make the arrangements needed to effectively serve students' home learning needs and will support educators in ensuring continuity of instruction.
 - ii. It is important to clearly define procedures that a family/guardian must follow to submit a request to transition from fulltime remote learning to in-person services, including any relevant timelines, points of contact for questions and concerns, and information or documentation that must accompany a request.
 - iii. Definition of the specific student and academic services that will accompany a student's transition from fulltime remote learning to in-person learning to better assist families/guardians anticipate their students' learning needs and help educators maintain continuity of services. School districts that offer Pre-K should consult their Pre-K curriculum providers regarding appropriate measures to assess a Pre-K students' learning progress during the transition from fulltime remote learning to in-person learning.
5. **Reporting:** To evaluate fulltime remote learning, and to continue providing meaningful guidance for districts, it will be important for the NJDOE to understand the extent and nature of demand for fulltime remote learning around the State. Therefore, school districts will be expected to report to the NJDOE data regarding participation in fulltime remote learning. Data will include number of students participating in fulltime remote learning by each of the following subgroups: economically disadvantaged; major racial and ethnic groups; students with disabilities; and English learners.
6. **Procedures for Communicating District Policy with Families:** Clear and frequent communication with families/guardians, in their home language, to help ensure that this important flexibility is as readily accessible as possible. Communication must include, at a minimum, information regarding:
 - i. Summaries of, and opportunities to review, the district's fulltime remote learning policy;
 - ii. Procedures for submitting fulltime remote learning requests;
 - iii. Scope and expectations of fulltime remote learning;
 - iv. The transition from fulltime remote learning to in-person services and vice-versa; and
 - v. The district's procedures for ongoing communication with families and for addressing families' questions or concerns.