

Westchester County
Preschool Special Education
During the COVID-19 Pandemic



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A Message From Health Commissioner, Dr. Amler

Thank you for your commitment to preschool special education. This year has been a real challenge for all of us, but the challenges have worked to reinforce and strengthen the existing relations between public health, our schools, and our related services provider community. The impact of COVID-19 has pushed us to develop methods to continue to provide educational, medical, and related services to the children we all serve through telemedicine and other virtual avenues. It has also pushed us to collaborate smarter and more efficiently than ever before.

What we know and how we respond to COVID-19 has continued to evolve. We have learned a great deal about the natural course of the disease. We now have a new FDA approved drug, Remesivir, approved for emergency use to treat COVID-19. There are multiple vaccine trials currently underway and the hope of a vaccine within months.

Until the current pandemic has resolved, the WCDOH will continue to strive to identify new cases, ensure case investigation and contact tracing, and work to prevent the spread of this novel virus. We will also continue to collaborate with our education community to find safe ways to provide the necessary services. We appreciate your assistance in getting our messaging to those you serve. Blocking the exposure is the best way to prevent disease. To that end, it remains important to ensure that everyone continues to social distance, wear a mask, and avoid large gatherings. Stay safe,

Dr. Sherlita Amler, M.D.

Presentation Agenda

- CPSE Overview
- Transportation
- Roles and Responsibilities of the Parent, District, Provider, WCDOH
- Evaluations
- Services in the Home & Community
- Special Education Preschool Programs

CPSE Overview

Westchester County Department of Health - Children with Special Needs.

Responsible for children enrolled in the Preschool Special Education Program through the School District Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE), children **5** years of age.

By the numbers:

Preschool children served for school year 2019-2020: **4,765 children**

- Center Based: 1810
- Related Services: 3170
- Special Education Itinerant Services: 988

What is the CPSE?

Every school district has a CPSE that decides a child's special education needs and authorizes services. The Committee is comprised of members, including parents, who have a broad range of experiences with evaluations, planning for and/or working with students with disabilities. The CPSE works as a team to make sure that special education programs and services are provided to meet a child's individual education needs.

CPSE Overview (continued)

What is the CPSE process?

If a parent or a professional suspects a child of having a disability, a referral may be made to the CPSE. Once a referral is made, a parent chooses the evaluation site from a list of agencies that are approved by the State Department of Education and contracted with the Westchester County Department of Health.

Once evaluations are completed, the CPSE will schedule an initial meeting to determine if a child is eligible. If a child is eligible, the committee will develop the Individual Education Program (IEP). The IEP will specify the type of services and program, how often services are provided and when and where the services are provided.

Services approved in center based programs?

Center based school programs are offered 5 days a week as follows:

Half day: 2.5 hours, either am or pm session

Full day: 3 hours or 5 hours

All special services, such as speech, physical and occupational therapies are offered within the scheduled program hours.

CPSE Overview (continued)

Transportation

Transportation is an approved service provided only to children enrolled in half day or full special education programs. The CPSE determines how transportation will be provided. The County is responsible to provide a variety of options such as a bus, parent mileage/taxi reimbursement or Metro card. WCDOH transports approximately 1300 children daily.

As of 9/1/2020, transportation is only provided to programs that are open in person 4-5 days per week. The CPSE will discuss transportation options to programs open fewer than 4 days a week.

During COVID-19 the WCDOH follows all SED and DOH guidance for reopening schools when providing bus service. The WCDOH Parent Transportation Handbook details all the requirements that must be followed by the bus company, the family and the school receiving the child. Your child's program is responsible to provide you with a copy of the handbook. The Parent Handbook is located in the [Preschool Protocol Manual](#).

CPSE Overview (continued)

How are services provided?

Related services such as Speech, Physical and Occupational therapies and Special Education Itinerant Teacher-SEIT are provided in the recommended IEP locations: home or community settings such as daycare and nursery school.

During COVID19, SED guidance allowed for services to be provided virtually via teletherapy over the phone or on the computer as an approved way to deliver services and meet a child's special education IEP requirements.

As of July 6, 2020, based on the governor's orders, the County has allowed for services to resume in person only if the program and provider have met all the State Department of Health and State Department of Education health and safety requirements for reopening of schools.

Responsibilities & The Process

Parent/Guardian	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Fill out forms in a timely manner (district registration, consents, transportation, scripts)2. Return calls from agencies/providers (spots fill up quickly)3. Daily health screening form required for in home, transportation and programs (forms stay with provider or agency)4. Report to provider/agency if your child is sick
School District (Committee on Preschool Special Education)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Request evaluations2. Hold CPSE meetings and determine eligibility3. Make recommendations for services4. Request services/program and arrange transportation

Responsibilities & The Process (continued)

Provider / Agency	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Receive requests from CPSE2. Call and schedule appointments directly with parents3. Update / communicate with CPSE regularly4. Submit evaluations, reports, regression statements and progress monitoring to CPSE5. Screen all staff/employees6. Ensure DOH guidelines are in place and followed (including PPE, social distancing and disinfecting protocols)7. Submit attendance records submitted to the district monthly
Westchester County Department of Health	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Provide transportation2. Pay for CPSE services approved by the CPSE.3. Maintain list of approved and contracted SED program providers and service providers4. Provide assistance to CPSE families and providers5. Participate in CPSE meetings

CPSE Evaluations

What are evaluations used for?

Once you have made referral to your School District CPSE, you will be asked to select an evaluation agency. The school district CPSE will schedule an initial meeting to review all evaluation results and help determine eligibility for CPSE and what special education services, or programs, are needed. The school district will send the referral to the selected agency who will contact parent directly to schedule all requested evaluations.

What evaluations will the CPSE require?

- Physical exam
- A Psychological Evaluation
- A Social History
- An Observation
- Evaluations are submitted to parent and school district

How will evaluations be completed? *During COVID-19, evaluations can be conducted via teletherapy or in-person.* The option will be discussed prior to scheduling the evaluations.

Teletherapy vs In-Person Evaluations

Teletherapy Evaluations

- Technology must be available for the duration of the evaluation; audio and video component.
- The evaluator may conduct a “virtual tour” prior to the scheduled evaluation date to ensure that all technology works, determine the best location for the evaluation and to help you prepare items that will be helpful during the evaluation.
- Parent/caregiver involved in the evaluation; the evaluator guides parent/caregiver through activities for child to complete.

*****Evaluations should be provided via teletherapy to the greatest extent possible**

In-Person Evaluations

Home/Community-Based Evaluations

- No materials brought into the home/community setting.
- Social distance maintained to the fullest extent possible.
- Protective equipment worn during the evaluation (e.g. face coverings, gloves etc.)

On-site/facility-based evaluations: Some evaluation agencies have the capacity to conduct evaluation within their facility. In addition to facility regulations regarding safety, each facility must comply with Westchester County Health and Safety protocols (e.g. temperature screen, face covering, etc.).

Regardless of location, parent/caregiver **MUST**:

- Sign a consent form acknowledging the potential risk to household members for COVID-19 and the precautions required for home-based evaluations.
- Complete a Health Screening Assessment with the evaluator prior to the scheduled evaluation
- Be involved in the evaluation; the evaluators depend on parent/caregiver for input regarding the child’s development and to assist with various aspects of the evaluation.

In Home or Community Related Services

CPSE services may be provided in any combination of the following:

1. Remote telehealth session - for both home/community
2. In home in person session
3. In person community based session (in a daycare or preschool program)

TELEHEALTH SERVICES Parent / caregiver(adult) required to be available to participate in all sessions (home/community)

IN PERSON HEALTH AND SAFETY (for both home/community settings)

Must have signed parent consent to follow all health and safety guidance for in-person service

Must get signature for daily health screenings at each in-person session (both in home and community)

Must follow State Education Department/Department of Health guidelines at all times

PPE, social distancing, no outside toys/materials, hand hygiene, outdoor/open window is best

Parent / caregiver(adult) required to be available to participate in all sessions to assist if social distancing between child and provider cannot be maintained

HOME Providers and parent / caregiver will wear a mask, children over two should be encouraged to wear mask as well. No more than one adult in addition to provider and child in instructional space.

COMMUNITY Providers must follow SED/DOH health and safety guidelines for themselves and their instruction; children will follow guidelines of the site. If the site guidelines make it impossible for a provider to maintain the SED/DOH requirements for providers, then the site cannot be considered an option for in-person service to occur.

CPSE Special Education Preschool Programs

Health and Safety:

All New York State approved special education programs are required to submit reopening plans to the New York State Education Department (NYSED) and complete the New York State Department of Health [NY Forward Safety Plan](#). The health and safety requirements for preschool programs are the same as those required by school districts as outlined in the [NYSED Reopening Guidance](#). Preschool programs approved as day care centers are also required to follow the health and safety protocols of the NY State Office of Children and Family Services. To mitigate the spread of COVID-19, preschool programs MUST:

- Require employees to always wear face coverings when in the presence of children.
- Require children over the age of two to wear face coverings when they cannot social distance, unless a qualifying medical or health factor excludes them from doing so.
- Complete daily health screenings for employees and students.
- Keep children in stable groups or 'cohorts' and not mix students from different cohorts.
- Limit visitors.
- Maintain vigilance with cleaning and disinfecting routines.
- Ensure adequate building ventilation.
- Implement a plan for contact tracing.
- Develop a response plan, including notification and testing requirements, to initiate in the event of a positive COVID case.

CPSE Special Education Preschool Programs (continued)

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Special Education Preschool Programs are responsible for collaborating with school districts to ensure all students with disabilities continue to receive a *free appropriate public education* (FAPE) through implementation of the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

During the COVID-19 public health crisis, preschool programs may not be able to deliver all IEP services in the same manner they were typically provided. In order to maintain the health, safety, and well-being of students, families, and staff, preschool programs may need to implement IEPs through a combination of in-person, remote, and hybrid learning. These alternative options do not mean FAPE is denied for a student and do not require an amendment to the student's IEP.

NYSED's Office of Special Education (OSE) has [guidance documents](#) to address frequently asked questions raised by parents, educators, administrators, and other key stakeholders regarding the implementation of special education programs and services and the provision of FAPE during this public health crisis.

CPSE Special Education Preschool Programs (continued)

Teaching and Learning Program Models

The teaching and learning models offered by special education preschool programs include:

1. In-Person: Students come into the school building for all or part of the school day/week.
2. Remote/Virtual/Distance: Students remain at home and receive education and related services through a distance learning platform. These typically include synchronous and asynchronous learning.
3. Hybrid/Blended: Students come into the school building for part of the school day/week and receive the remainder of their education and related services through a distance learning platform

Special education preschools are responsible for collaborating with families and school districts on the program models offered and how students are progressing in those models. This includes:

- Maintaining documentation of programs/services offered and accepted/declined
- Tracking student attendance and participation
- Offering resources for families to effectively engage in each learning model
- Communicating changes in program models/schedules

Updated COVID Information and Resources

- Visit the Westchester County Department of Health Coronavirus Webpage and click on the “Information and Resources for Reopening Schools” tab: <https://health.westchestergov.com/2019-novel-coronavirus>
- Contact your local School District CPSE

THANK YOU