

Inclusive Education: Supporting students with special needs during the **COVID-19** pandemic



BC teachers believe in inclusion

While schools may be closed, teachers' hearts are open and students with special needs are a vital part of our school communities. A key part of continuous learning during these unprecedented times is continuing to support students with special needs. While students and their families across the province are experiencing increased stress and anxiety, these pressures can be accentuated for students with special needs by factors such as:

- struggling to understand why the routines of school have been disrupted
- challenges to learning without in-person and specialized supports usually provided at school
- disruption to key personal relationships with teachers, education assistants (EAs), and peers
- inaccessible or inappropriate technology
- unclear expectations for on-going instruction in line with the individual education plan (IEP)
- increased concern about transitions, both back to a school environment as well as between grades or transitions for after graduation.

Making continuous learning inclusive

As a part of inclusive education, students with special needs have the right to ongoing learning opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Teachers understand that all students function better within a highly predictable routine with core relationships at the center. This is even more pronounced for a student with special needs. During this pandemic, it will often take patience, flexibility, and creativity to maintain these key components.

Your professional judgement remains at the heart of making continuous learning inclusive and responses will be as unique as each individual. In collaboration with your school-based team, key elements to consider include:

- work with parents to develop a learning plan that is manageable for the student and for parents/caregivers
- work with your school-based team to identify supports or accommodations that can support learning in the home environment
- work with EAs to support your teaching—for example, EAs can:
 - help prepare assignments, content, and activities
 - assist with the collection of materials and checking in with students
 - support families and students to access remote learning and therapy experiences as needed
- review the IEP goals and begin to set new goals for the following year
- keep lines of communication flowing between school, the family, and community.

Questions to consider

School-based teams can continue to meet virtually to develop a plan for on-going learning and supports for students with special needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Here are some questions you may want to consider:

- Who in our team will help track progress while students are working at home?
- What are alternative delivery models for students who were receiving specialized supports in school (e.g., physical therapy, occupational therapy)? Are there supports within the community that can be provided?
- What is the plan for ongoing learning and supports for students who require 1:1 assistance?
- What supports are available remotely for transition planning (K–1, 7– 8, and high school graduation)?
- What supports will the students need for transitioning back into the school environment?
- What supports are available to address mental health needs?
- What community service agencies can provide supports for families? How will these supports be established?
- How and when will planned and/or needed assessments take place?
- How can the teacher and support staff work together to continue including students within the virtual classroom and larger school community?