



Cancer and Blood Diseases Institute Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center School Re-entry Information Sheet

Returning to school is essential in improving outcomes for your child after being treated for a serious illness. This process represents a return to normalcy for your child, and helps to address both his/her educational and psychosocial needs. This complex process may also, however, present new challenges for educators and administrators as they seek to support your child during this transition. Effective communication can be a powerful tool for improving this process, and as parents, you may inform the school regarding your child's diagnosis and/or treatment, as these may have educational implications that affect his/her ability to learn.

It is also important for you to understand that under federal legislation, your child may be eligible for special services that provide him/her appropriate access to reasonable accommodations and a safe learning environment. While entitlement to special services is not automatic and is based on a team decision, it is essential to understand that your child cannot be denied access to attending school. Identifying a source you can rely on for accurate knowledge and suggestions for effective advocacy are important as you begin to navigate the process of school re-entry.

Upon re-entry, what types of information should I share with the school?

Your child's treatment may impact his/her school experience. It is helpful for the school personnel to know about your child's diagnosis and/or treatment, and how these may affect his/her classroom performance and behavior. If your child has special medical needs or dietary restrictions, you may need to provide documentation outlining the specifics for the school nurse. It is best to be upfront with the school about these unique needs to ensure that appropriate care is provided.

What if my child needs to miss school for treatment or illness related to his/her diagnosis?

There may be times when your child is receiving treatment that requires an extended absence from school. You can request homebound instruction services for these instances and in many schools asking the principal or guidance counselor is appropriate as they are typically familiar with required paperwork that needs to be signed by your child's physician. It might also be worthwhile to talk with the school about ways to keep your child connected with classmates, particularly if absences will continue to be a concern after re-entry. Additionally, you may consider speaking with the school nurse regarding when to keep your child home from school due to widespread school illness if your child is immunosuppressed due to treatment. Keep in mind, homebound instruction does not have to be reserved for children that cannot attend school and can be utilized in situations when a child's absences are intermittent, yet consistent. For example, requesting homebound instruction for a child that misses every Tuesday for treatment is appropriate.

Will my child experience learning difficulties?

Various treatments affect children in different ways. After some treatments for cancer or blood diseases, children may experience cognitive issues, physical impairments, and/or behavior. Consult with your physician regarding risk factors related to your child's specific diagnosis. If your child's physician indicates that your child is at risk for potential learning issues, pursuing a neuropsychological evaluation is wise. Many school teams welcome the results of neuropsychological evaluations and use the recommendations in the evaluation to plan your child's schedule and delivery of instruction. If your insurance will not cover a neuropsychological evaluation, ask the school psychologist to complete an evaluation.

What do I do if these learning difficulties affect my child's ability to learn?

If you suspect that your child may have a disability or health issue interfering with his/her ability to learn, you can submit a **written** request to a school administrator for an evaluation. By law, the evaluation must be completed by the school within 60 days of the request or signed consent.





I suspect my child is eligible for special services. Who should I contact?

This can vary depending on the school system, but it may help to follow this order:

1. General education teacher
2. Guidance counselor or school psychologist
3. Principal/Assistant Principal
4. Office of Special Education or Student Services/Director of Special Education

What happens next?

A meeting will be set up to discuss the results of the evaluation. If an educational need is determined, your child could be eligible for an Individual Education Program (IEP) or a 504 Plan. A written copy of the eligibility determination will be provided to you.

What is the difference between an IEP and 504 Plan?

An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a plan written to address your child's unique learning needs. It defines the goals and services that will individualize your child's educational program. The federal law, known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), assures that students ages 3 to 21 who have medical needs will receive a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). If a child does not meet IDEA eligibility, Section 504 is then considered. A 504 Plan is a civil rights law which requires all educational institutions receiving federal funding to provide accommodations for students with physical or mental impairment that limits at least one major life activity, such as learning, walking, or climbing stairs. In the school setting, accommodations are given when impairments interfere with the child's ability to access the school environment or prohibit the child's ability to participate in school tasks and activities. An easy way to think of the differences between an IEP and a 504 plan is to consider the intention of the plans. IEP's typically provide modifications, while 504 plans generally provide accommodations. For example, if your child requires a modification to the curriculum such as reading grade level content at a lower level (i.e. volcanoes are taught in 4th grade, but your child reads at a 3rd grade level and needs to read about volcanoes from a different text), then an IEP is usually more appropriate. If your child is capable of learning using grade level material, but needs accommodations to do so (i.e. your child can read the 4th grade text on volcanoes, but needs extra time to read it), then a 504 plan is generally more appropriate.

Who will be present at a meeting regarding an IEP or 504 plan?

People who are involved in a meeting **may** include the parents/guardians, student (when appropriate), principal, teachers (at least one regular education teacher and one special education teacher are required to attend), psychologist, counselor, nurses, or any other professionals who could make a worthwhile contribution to the document.

What types of services would be available for my child?

Accommodations that are provided in your child's education plan must directly address his/her individual academic or physical needs. Avoiding conversations that include what worked for other children is advisable as then intention is to put modifications and accommodations in place that specifically address your child's needs. Examples of accommodations and modifications are: extended time to complete assignments or tests, modified or reduced assignments, extended school year, adapted physical education, assistive technology, textbooks on tape, etc. Related services may also include occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, vision services, hearing services, etc.

Can you suggest any other helpful information?

Carefully document and organize all of the information gathered throughout the process. You may need to refer to your notes, referrals, and signed forms at times, and it is to your advantage to have easy access to the documentation.

Are there resources available if I need further advice?

The Special Needs Resource Directory of Cincinnati Children's Hospital is a valuable source of information for our patients and their families: (www.cincinnatichildrens.org/special-needs; email specialneeds@cchmc.org). You can also call your state department of education to speak to a professional for advice or counsel.