

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Remote Learning

Connecticut State Department of Education
November 4, 2021



The purpose of this Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document is to provide clarification related to the [CSDE Guidance Regarding the Future of Remote Learning in Connecticut Schools](#) (Remote Learning Guidance), in response to input from school districts, families, and other stakeholders. The Remote Learning Guidance and FAQs are intended to summarize recently passed laws pertaining to remote learning, and to explain the extent to which remote learning can be implemented during the 2021–22 school year and subsequent school years.

School leaders are encouraged to engage with families and other stakeholders regarding decisions on remote learning policies and other educational opportunities, in order to provide the most appropriate learning experience for our students.

The Remote Learning Guidance and FAQs are working documents and may be updated due to the rapidly changing responses to the ongoing pandemic emergency, as well as potential legislative or executive actions related to COVID-19.

1.) Q: What is “remote learning?”

A: Remote learning is instruction by means of one or more internet-based software platforms as part of a remote learning model. Remote learning takes place specifically off school grounds, and should not be confused with instruction provided in school using internet-based platforms.

2.) Q: Was remote learning permitted in Connecticut schools prior to the COVID-19 pandemic? If not, why was remote learning permitted during the 2020–21 school year?

A: Remote learning was generally not permitted prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020. High school students were, and continue to be, permitted to take online courses in some circumstances in order to accrue credits toward graduation. Those online courses are, however, distinct from the remote learning discussed in the Remote Learning Guidance and FAQs.

Due to the emergency created by the pandemic, remote learning was originally authorized by Executive Order and a Connecticut State Board of Education (SBE) resolution, and could be implemented on districtwide, schoolwide, and individual bases. Remote learning was, however, limited to the 2020–21 school year.

3.) Q: Which recently passed laws affect remote learning?

A: [Public Act 21-46](#) (An Act Concerning Social Equity and the Health, Safety, and Education of Children) and [Public Act 21-2](#) (An Act Concerning Provisions Related to Revenue and Other Items to Implement the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023) are the two laws passed in the 2021 legislative session which affect remote learning (collectively, the June 2021 Public Acts).

As discussed further herein, existing disability laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) remain in effect regardless of the June 2021 Public Acts.

4.) Q: Is remote learning permitted during the 2021–22 school year?

A: Generally, no. In May 2021, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) issued [Interim Remote Guidance for the 2021-22 School Year](#), establishing that there will be no mandate for districts to offer remote learning for the 2021–22 school year. The June 2021 Public Acts contemplate a return to full-time in-person instruction, and therefore generally do not permit remote learning for the 2021–22 school year.

As discussed further herein, however, there may be rare circumstances where remote learning can be offered to students on a case-by-case basis due to health and safety concerns associated with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (See Question & Answer No. 5).

5.) Q: Is remote learning permitted in individualized circumstances due to health or safety concerns?

A: In some cases, yes. While the June 2021 Public Acts generally do not permit remote learning during the 2021–22 school year on a districtwide, schoolwide, or individual basis, there may be limited circumstances where remote learning may be offered to some students due to health or safety concerns related only to the COVID-19 pandemic. School districts are encouraged to develop policies and procedures addressing continuity of instruction (1) for students who must be in isolation due to a confirmed COVID-19 infection, or who must quarantine due to close contact with a confirmed case; (2) to address localized outbreaks in a specific classroom, school, or district; and (3) in rare and individualized circumstances, for students with live-in family members who have documented an unusual vulnerability to COVID-19.

The CSDE does not direct the specific educational opportunities that must be made available in the circumstances described above rather, school districts are encouraged to make decisions regarding programming and additional mitigation strategies on a case-by-case basis. However, at a minimum, schools should offer educational opportunities that equal at least half the school day so that the student can be “in attendance” using the CSDE’s [four-part framework](#) (see question 7). School districts are not prohibited from offering remote learning in the circumstances described above, but they are encouraged to prioritize access to in-person learning and to consider a variety of educational opportunities and mitigation strategies.

School districts should consult with their local health departments, and should make determinations regarding isolation, quarantine, and localized outbreaks on guidance issued by CSDE, the Connecticut State Department of Public Health (DPH), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). For example, when key mitigation strategies are implemented with fidelity, it is not anticipated that a single positive case of COVID-19 will necessitate the quarantining of entire classrooms or schools.

School districts are invited to submit promising best practices regarding continuity of instruction to Chief Academic Officer, Irene Parisi at Irene.Parisi@ct.gov. Best practices will be reviewed and considered for sharing statewide among school districts.

6.) Q: Can remote instruction be used as a method to implement a student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP)?

A: Yes. Planning and placement teams (PPTs) should continue to proactively address pandemic-related circumstances that result in disrupted, delayed, or interrupted special education services. Remote instruction may be used to deliver special education and related services to students with IEPs who must quarantine or isolate due to a COVID-19 diagnosis or close contact in the same way that general education instruction may be offered to general education students who are required to quarantine or isolate. Additionally, if a PPT determines that the appropriate educational placement for a student is in the home, the district may use remote instruction to implement the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP). Instruction in the home is among the continuum of educational placements identified in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). An educational placement in the home can only occur if a PPT determines that

instruction in the home provides the student with a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE), and the student's IEP must be revised accordingly.

Homebound and hospitalized instruction should not be confused with an educational placement in the home. State law sets forth the requirements that must be met when a child in public school is unable to attend school due to a verified medical reason, and thus requires homebound or hospitalized instruction. This law applies both to general education and special education students. Remote instruction may also be used as a means of providing homebound or hospitalized instruction for all students. If a child requires homebound or hospitalized instruction due to a verified medical reason, the district must follow the procedures set forth in State law. If the district determines that a special education student requires homebound or hospitalized instruction, the PPT must, where necessary, modify short-term instructional objectives in the student's IEP. Furthermore, the instruction provided by the district must maintain the continuity of the student's general education program so the student is able to continue to participate in the general education curriculum, and to progress towards meeting the goals and objectives in the student's IEP.

7.) Q: If remote learning is provided to students as described above, can those students be considered “in attendance?”

A: Yes. Students learning remotely can be considered “in attendance” on a particular day if the total time spent on remote learning, using the CSDE's [four-part framework](#), equals at least half the school day.

8.) Q: Can school districts provide remote learning during school closings due to inclement weather days for purposes of the 180-school-day requirement?

A: No. School districts cannot provide remote learning during school closings due to inclement weather days in order to satisfy the 180-school-day requirement.

9.) Q: Are school districts obligated to provide remote learning for homeschooled students?

A: No. School districts have no obligation to provide remote learning for students who have been withdrawn from public school in favor of homeschooling.

10.) Q: Will remote learning be permitted in future school years?

A: Yes. Pursuant to the June 2021 Public Acts, starting in the 2022–23 school year, school districts will be permitted, but not required, to authorize remote learning for students in grades 9–12 only, provided the remote learning complies with standards set forth by the Commissioner of Education. Students who participate in remote learning for at least half the school day will be considered “in attendance,” and remote learning will be considered an “actual school session” for the determination of meeting the 180-day requirement.

The June 2021 Public Acts also require the CSDE to establish a Connecticut Remote Learning Commission to study the efficacy of remote learning and the feasibility of a statewide remote learning system. The Commission will report on the feasibility of a statewide remote learning system, and the CSDE will ultimately propose a plan for such a program which, if accepted by the Connecticut General Assembly, will be implemented in future school years.

11.) Q: When will the CSDE publish its remote learning standards?

A: The June 2021 Public Acts direct the Commissioner of Education to publish standards for remote learning in grades 9–12 by January 1, 2022. Remote learning offered by school districts starting in the 2022–23 school year must comply with the Commissioner's standards for such learning to count toward the 180-school-day requirement.

The CSDE is currently in the process of developing its remote learning standards and will provide the opportunity for stakeholder review and input.