



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Directors of Special Education and Pupil Services

FROM: Jeffrey Wihbey, Superintendent, Connecticut Technical Education and Career System
Thomas Cronin, Director of Admissions, Connecticut Technical Education and Career System
Bryan Klimkiewicz, Special Education Division Director

DATE: May 29, 2020

SUBJECT: Connecticut Technical Education and Career System Revised Admissions Process

Consistent with directives from Governor Lamont and Commissioner Cardona, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) has provided ongoing guidance to school districts and school operators to address emerging and complex educational issues arising from the public health emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Included among the guidance communications provided to date, the CSDE issued memoranda to Superintendents and Directors of Special Education and Pupil Services on March 24, 2020 and April 24, 2020, in part, addressing the impact of public health mandates on federal procedural requirements, including Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings. This communication is based upon current statutory requirements and provides further guidance for local and regional boards of education regarding pre-enrollment processes for students who receive special education services and plan to enter a Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS) program in the fall of 2020.

In response to questions about CTECS admissions process, the CSDE Bureau of Special Education collaborated with CTECS administration and various stakeholders to develop a process for convening transition PPT meetings for special education students intending to enroll in a CTECS program in the 2020-21 school year. To facilitate this process, CTECS implemented a centralized application review process for applicants for the 2020-21 school year through CTECS Central Office under the guidance of the Director of Admissions, Tom Cronin. In early February of this year, CTECS began communicating enrollment opportunities to current 8th and 9th grade applicants who applied to a 9th or 10th grade CTECS program for the 2020-21 school year. CTECS has continued to extend such opportunities on a rolling basis since February despite the COVID-19 related disruption of in-person classes and will continue to do so throughout the spring and summer. In order to ensure that incoming students with disabilities receive an appropriate program at the technical high school, it is vital that sending school districts convene transition PPTs as soon as possible. Sending schools districts and CTECS will work together to implement this guidance for enrollments in the 2020-21 school year to the extent practicable given public health mandates and safety protocols as follows:

1. **CTECS Sends Notice of First Step Letters to Sending Districts:** CTECS has and will continue to notify sending families and their districts of students' First Step letters for admissions to a CTECS program. As approved by the United States Office of Civil Rights, the First Step letter provides applicants with notice that they have met the initial requirements for admissions to a CTECS school for enrollment in the fall. After receipt of a First Step letter, an applicant must submit the

Parent Response Form within the time provided in the First Step letter to indicate the applicant's intent to enroll in a CTECS school and must successfully complete the 8th grade as a requirement for final enrollment. Successful completion means that the student has been promoted to 9th grade by the sending district.

2. **CTECS Requests Student Records:** Upon receipt of the Parent Response Form confirming the intent to attend a CTECS school in the fall, CTECS will promptly request up-to-date education records directly from the sending school district, including the most recent individualized education program (IEP) and other education records for students who receive special education and related services. During school disruption from COVID-19, sending districts should provide all relevant documentation to the extent accessible in electronic format, with appropriate confidentiality precautions.
3. **Sending Districts Convene Transition PPT Meetings:** When a student who receives special education receives a First Step letter for admission to CTECS, the sending district should schedule and conduct a virtual/telephonic PPT meeting as soon as possible and invite the special education department head of the technical high school. The purpose of the transition PPT meeting is to address the student's transition to the CTECS technical high school and ensure that the IEP reflects the current supports and services that the student requires in order to access a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). The CTECS representative will provide information regarding CTECS to inform the PPT recommendations regarding implementation of the IEP in the CTECS environment. PPT meetings for transition to CTECS technical high schools should be scheduled in May and June of 2020 and held in a manner consistent with BSE Guidance, including but not limited to the publication dated April 24, 2020.
4. **CTECS Will Review the Outcome of the PPT Meeting:** If, in rare circumstances, the PPT determines that the CTECS technical high school is not an appropriate placement for the student, the CTECS representative will provide a detailed justification to the Director of Admissions explaining the determination. The Director of Admissions may, based upon a review of the PPT documents, available resources and programming options, request that the PPT reconsider its recommendation. If the Director of Admissions accepts the initial determination of the PPT meeting that the CTECS technical high school is not an appropriate placement for the student, the Director will accept the PPT's determination as final.
5. **Families May Appeal to the CTECS Superintendent and Exercise Their Rights Under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):** In instances where the Director of Admissions agrees with the PPT determination that CTECS is not an appropriate placement, the family may appeal the decision to the CTECS Superintendent. Nothing in this guidance changes the family's ability to exercise their due process rights under the IDEA at any time.

Alternate Process for Transitioning Students to CTECS in the Fall:

In the event a sending district is unable to hold a transition PPT meeting before the end of the school year because of continued school disruption and/or public health mandates, CTECS will hold an incoming student transition meeting with the parent via an acceptable means of meeting participation.

For the purposes of this guidance, an “incoming student transition meeting” refers to a meeting to address a special education student’s transition from the sending district’s middle school to a technical high school. The incoming student transition meeting held by CTECS is not a PPT meeting. CTECS will make its best efforts to ensure participation of relevant sending school district staff members in CTECS’ “incoming student transition meeting.” Sending school districts should make an effort to have personnel attend (even if virtually) and contribute to this meeting. At the meeting, participants will consider the student’s most recent IEP, evaluations from the sending school district and other information provided by the parents and sending school. The purpose of the meeting is to determine whether the student can participate in the technical high school program with or without reasonable accommodations.

In rare circumstances where the CTECS’ incoming student transition meeting recommends that the student does not enroll at CTECS, the school will provide a detailed justification to the Director of Admissions explaining the determination. The Director of Admissions will review the documents, available resources, programming options and information provided by the parent, and determine whether the student can participate in the technical high school program with or without a reasonable accommodation. If the Director of Admissions concludes that a student cannot participate in the technical high school program with or without reasonable accommodations, then the parent may appeal to the Superintendent or file a complaint with the Bureau of Special Education, State Department of Education and/or the Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education.

We anticipate that this guidance will clarify the process for transitioning students to a CTECS school program. We appreciate, however, that the safety precautions necessitated by the pandemic complicate timely implementation of the process as intended and may require sending districts and CTECS to remain flexible in completing the transition for student enrollment in the fall of 2020.

Please contact Jay Brown, Bureau of Special Education Consultant (Jay.Brown@ct.gov) or Tom Cronin, CTECS Director of Admissions (Thomas.Cronin@ct.gov) with any questions or assistance with implementation of this guidance.

cc: Charlene Russell Tucker, Deputy Commissioner of Education
Desi Nesmith, Deputy Commissioner of Education