



STEP AHEAD NEWSLETTER

FALL 2020

From the Executive Director

Hello STEP Friends:

With the temps cooling off a bit, we at STEP are enjoying the transition into sweater and sweatshirt weather. We also recognize that Fall means a new school year and all the new possibilities we look forward to as our children and teens take their next steps on their education journey.



This school year has been anything but typical, as school systems across the state have taken different approaches to the pandemic, with some providing classes in person, some only remotely, and then some a mix of the two. We know your families are experiencing many of the impacts of the ongoing pandemic—because our STEP Team families are right there making decisions for our children too, and spending some restless nights hoping we are making the right choices. It is of utmost importance to us to make sure that you have the information and tools you need to ensure your children’s education, services, and IEPs continue, because each day in our children’s education is important.

The most essential thing we want you to know during this time—and frankly always! - is that the STEP Team is here for you. **You Can COUNT on STEP** for any questions you might have about the special education process, and especially during this period when even the schools are setting new policies almost weekly. **You Can COUNT on STEP** for up-to-date information. **You Can COUNT on STEP** to get back to you as quickly as possible if you call or send us an email. **You Can COUNT on STEP** to have the expertise and experience to help you problem solve through these times. And **You Can COUNT on STEP** to always be working for families and students that experience disabilities to promote successful education outcomes.



Karen Harrison
Executive Director, STEP, Inc.



A New Fiscal Year for STEP—What We’ll Be Up To

We have new grant funding to support our efforts in the following topic areas throughout the next few years:

- Emergency preparedness and responsiveness
- Mental health and wellness
- Family and youth advocacy
- Family and school partnerships
- Interactive virtual training and support
- Supports for at risk youth and their families
- Focused outreach to foster and adoptive families

In addition, our website will feature expanded resource tabs on emergency preparedness and responsiveness, and information for educators. We are also developing a youth portal with interactive content. We’re excited, and hope you are too!

New For Podcast Fans!

Families told us during our planning sessions that listening to podcasts is their “go to” media choice to stay informed and get inspired, during commuting time or waiting to pick up groceries or their school kids.

STEP is diving into the podcast pool and would love your suggestions. Send your ideas for STEP podcast topics to lisa.gosnell@tnstep.org, and be entered to win a set of superb-sounding headphones!





STEP wants you to know about our **YOU CAN COUNT ON STEP** Campaign, designed to keep students and families informed during these challenging times. Each of the 5 main topics listed below has an accompanying **Infographic with 5 key points AND a video featuring one of the STEP Team members**. These videos can be watched at <http://www.facebook.com/steptn>. Please know that STEP Team Members are always available to help you understand any of these vital issues concerning your or your child's education.

5 Things You Can COUNT On About IEPs

- 1) Even during the pandemic, IEPs must be implemented. The laws surrounding IEPs & Section 504 plans remain unchanged.
- 2) Parents can request an IEP team meeting at any time during the school year.
- 3) Parents are an essential part of all IEP decisions.
- 4) Student progress on goals must be recorded, reported, and discussed.
- 5) IEPs and other documents should be clearly understood before signing.

5 Things You Can COUNT On About Special Education Timelines

- 1) The laws about IEPs and Section 504 plans remain unchanged. Federal and state timelines are still in effect.
- 2) Parents and families should continue to advocate for the services their children need.
- 3) Schools must continue to follow IDEA and Section 504 laws and work with parents to determine how services can be effectively delivered.
- 4) Schools need to ensure that students with special education needs get the support they require, whether they're learning in a school building or remotely.
- 5) Parents can still request an IEP team meeting at any time.

5 Things You Can COUNT On About Transition to Adulthood

- 1) Knowing the roles of the participants in transition planning.
- 2) Actively participating in IEP Transition Planning - youth and family!
- 3) Being informed about diploma options.
- 4) Accessing adult services when needed.
- 5) Building skills for adulthood.

5 Things You Can COUNT On About Communication

- 1) Establish communication with your child's IEP or 504 Team early.
- 2) Familiarize yourself with supports and services offered by your school system.
- 3) Encourage open dialog.
- 4) Follow the chain of command.
- 5) Follow up and follow through.

5 Things You Can COUNT On About Staying Engaged

- 1) Know your child's needs and what services are possible through an IEP or 504 Plan.
- 2) Establish an effective communication system with your child's teachers.
- 3) Get to know the members of your child's IEP or 504 Team.
- 4) Work with the IEP or 504 Team to make sure your child's Plan is followed properly.
- 5) Talk with your child about his or her school day.



YOU CAN COUNT ON THE STEP TEAM MEMBERS

NEW! STEP QUICK GUIDE TO SCHOOL AT HOME TERMS

Since school closures began taking place in late March and April due to the Covid-19 pandemic, families have faced uncertainty and confusion about how their child's education and special education services would continue. It has been especially difficult as school systems have had to create or update policies based on coronavirus surges in certain areas. STEP staff have been continually fielding questions from families during this challenging time, and, in particular, explaining the differences between several terms that refer to learning at home. In response, STEP produced a **Quick Guide to School at Home Terms**, which explains the differences between the following instructional labels:

- **Homeschooling**
- **Homebound Instruction**
- **Virtual or Remote Learning**

For each of these terms, the Quick Guide gives details about public school status; IEP status; returning to school and the continuation process; responsibility for instruction; scheduling determination; IDEA rights status; and additional resources.

To access the STEP Quick Guide, please go to www.tnstep.org.

 QUICK GUIDE TO TENNESSEE SCHOOL AT HOME			
<i>Tennessee's Parent Training and Information Center, STEP, knows there are questions around schooling your child at home. It is vital that students and families understand the definitions of and differences between terms, like "Homeschooling," "Homebound Instruction," and "Virtual or Remote Learning," as explained in this Quick Guide. Please contact STEP if you have further questions or need special education assistance or visit www.tnstep.org.</i>			
	Homeschooling	Homebound Instruction	Virtual or Remote Learning
PUBLIC SCHOOL STATUS	The student is removed from enrollment in the public-school district.	The student remains enrolled in the public-school district.	The student remains enrolled in the public-school district, including students being educated through virtual or remote learning due to emergency closures or public health crisis, and students enrolled in Tennessee's Virtual School.
IEP STATUS	The student's IEP is no longer valid and all educational and related services will no longer be provided unless the student has a "services plan" agreed to by the school and family.	LEA (Local Education Agency) Review Team determines homebound eligibility based upon certified medical necessity. The IEP remains in effect with the educational placement changed to home instruction.	The student's IEP remains in effect with no change in placement. A new IEP can be written during this virtual or remote learning period. An IEP team meeting can be requested at any time by the student or parents.
RETURN OR CONTINUATION PROCESS	To return to the district, the student must be re-enrolled and may be re-evaluated for eligibility for special education services.	Homebound is meant to be a temporary placement – with a maximum of 30 school days unless there are extensions for medical necessity – with the goal of the student returning to a less restrictive environment.	The student's return to in-person learning is dependent on the school district's policies regarding emergency closures and/or public health crisis.
RESPONSIBILITY FOR INSTRUCTION	Instruction is the responsibility of the parent, including curriculum, lesson plans, assignments, and tests. (Including state mandated tests)	Instruction is delivered in the home or another appropriate setting for a minimum of 3 hours per week. Related services listed in the IEP must also be provided.	Instruction is the responsibility of the student's teacher and school district. This includes the curriculum, lesson plans, assignments, and tests.

CONTACT YOUR STEP REGIONAL DIRECTORS:

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NEW ADDRESS! The main STEP offices in East TN have moved. If you are mailing an item to our business office or East TN staff, please send to STEP, Inc., 1113 Tusculum Blvd. #393, Greeneville, TN 37745. If you are coming by for an appointment, the new physical address is 113 Austin Street, Greeneville, TN 37745.

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