Pittsburgh Public Schools – Protocol for Continuity of Services for Students with Disabilities During Staff Leave

Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) is committed to ensuring that all students with disabilities continue to receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) when a related service provider is absent for an extended period of time (e.g., three weeks or more for medical or maternity leave) or on a short-term basis. This protocol outlines the district's process for service coverage, family communication, and compensatory service provision.

1. Coverage Assignment

When a provider goes on leave for any reason, PPS follows a tiered approach to maintain services, with minimal disruption:

- For sudden and/or short-term leaves of absence (LOA), per the District's definition, the District will utilize the internal "Floater" staff, when available.
- For known and long-term LOAs, defined as three weeks or more, the District will utilize Board-approved contracted agencies, with coverage provided in alignment with agency onboarding timelines.
- As a last resort, the District will activate "B" Schedule coverage with the redistribution of students across existing PPS providers with alternate scheduling.

2. Communication to Families and Schools

To ensure transparency, PPS will provide written notification to school teams and families that includes:

- Anticipated leave start and return date (estimated if not exact).
- Introduction of the coverage provider (if known).
- Assurance that services will continue in accordance with student IEPs, with minimal disruption.
- Assurance that progress notes will be maintained and missed service hours will be made up.
- Contact information for the Program Officer.
- Sample Letter or Email Notification to Families.docx

3. Service Delivery Expectations

- Coverage providers are required to implement IEP services as written.
- PPS prioritizes scheduling outside of ELA/Math blocks whenever possible, recognizing the importance of foundational literacy and numeracy.
- During coverage periods, if avoidance of those times is not feasible, services may occur during ELA/Math to ensure IEP minutes are met; however, students will not be pulled from school subject areas that impact IEP goals and progress monitoring, with parent input.
- Building administrators are expected to support flexible scheduling so that students receive their mandated supports.

4. Compensatory Service Protocol

PSE Program Officers monitor service delivery to prevent loss of access. If interruption occurs, despite coverage efforts:

- After 2 weeks of service interruption: An IEP meeting (or IEP revision, if agreeable to the family) is required to document compensatory minutes owed and create a plan for provision. Program officer will provide the dates that services were not provided and share an accounting of missed service minutes with the IEP team.
- After 1 quarter if service interruption is ongoing and/or compensatory minutes are still owed: PSE Program Officers arrange compensatory education options, which may include:
    - Add-on minutes or increased frequency during the school day
    - Double-dose, when available
    - Related service clinics/programming – after school or Saturdays, if agreeable, or from outside sources (transportation would be provided)
    - Posting additional service provider positions
- Ongoing, quarterly: An additional IEP meeting will occur to review continued service interruptions, recalculate minutes owed, and update the compensatory education plan with families and obtain family input and approval of the plan.

5. Transition and Documentation

- Coverage providers must maintain accurate service documentation throughout the leave period.
- Quarterly progress monitoring must clearly state when services are not provided and include the service minutes that were provided and not provided.
- Upon the provider's return, documentation is reviewed to determine whether compensatory services remain owed. The provider will collect and report data and work with the IEP team to revise goals as needed (especially if regression has occurred).
- IEP teams reconvene, as needed, to finalize compensatory service delivery plans, adding the plan in Present Levels, ensuring compliance with IDEA and state regulations. A NOREP will be issued to document IEP team considerations and parent consent.
- Program Officers and Principals will serve as the LEA for IEP meetings that document compensatory services and minutes owed, even in the absence of a service provider.

PPS has established a clear, multi-layered protocol that prioritizes continuity of services, transparent communication, and compensatory education when service disruptions occur. This process reflects the district's commitment to ensuring that all students with disabilities continue to access FAPE in alignment with federal and state requirements.