




September 2025

TO: BOCES District Superintendents  
School District Superintendents  
Superintendents of Special Act School Districts  
Superintendents of State-Operated Schools  
Superintendents of State-Supported Schools  
Public School Administrators  
Charter School Leaders  
Special Education Directors  
Chairpersons of Committees on Special Education  
Chairpersons of Committees on Preschool Special Education  
Administrators of Nonpublic Schools with Approved Special Education Programs  
Preschool Providers of Special Education Programs and Services  
Organizations, Parents, and Individuals Interested in Special Education

FROM: Christopher Suriano 

SUBJECT: Guidance Related to Protocols and Procedures to Prevent and Respond to Instances of Student Elopement and Wandering

This memo updates previous guidance issued in November 2013 and April 2014 by the New York State Education Department's Office of Special Education (OSE) reminding all public school districts (districts) and approved special education programs (preschool and school-age programs serving students with disabilities) of the importance in having district/program-wide protocols and procedures in place to prevent and respond to instances of student elopement and wandering.

It is strongly recommended that districts and Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) incorporate protocols and procedures to prevent and respond to student elopement and wandering in their building-level emergency response plans. Additionally, it is strongly recommended that all approved preschool and school-age special education programs adopt such student elopement and wandering protocols and procedures.

For students with disabilities, the committee on preschool special education or committee on special education (CPSE/CSE) must consider the management and behavioral needs of students when developing their individualized education program (IEP). This should include a consideration of whether a student has the tendency to elope and/or wander and, if so, to ensure that a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) of the behavior is conducted and that the behavior is addressed through proper supervision and

through an individualized behavioral intervention plan (BIP) based on the results of the FBA. For guidance on documenting this information on a student's IEP, please see the information listed under Present Levels of Performance and Individual Needs on the [Questions and Answers on Individualized Education Program \(IEP\), the State's IEP Form and Related Requirements](#) webpage.

Protocols and procedures to prevent and respond to student elopement and wandering should include, but are not limited to, the following components:

- staff training on awareness and response;
- supervisory notification and 911 calls;
- communication protocols with local law enforcement agencies;
- use of system-wide communication and alert systems;
- pre-assignments for building and ground searches;
- procedures for assuring that crisis response and law enforcement agencies have access to floor plans, blueprints, schematics or other maps of the school interior, school grounds and road maps of the immediate surrounding areas;
- immediate parent/family notification;
- identification of students with known elopement and/or wandering behaviors to local building principals, hall monitors, school resource officers, and security guards
- consideration of installment of door alarms and use of other elopement and wandering warning devices; and
- ensuring students with known elopement and/or wandering behaviors always carry basic identification information.

It is important to be aware that for some students, their history of elopement and/or wandering may not be immediately evident and/or communicated to all the appropriate school personnel. To mitigate any potential health and safety issues that may arise from this type of situation, any school personnel that observe and/or are made aware of a student's behavior—particularly one that could pose a health and safety risk—should be promptly reported to supervisory staff and all school personnel working directly with the student. School administrators must ensure that designated staff in the building are prepared to effectively and appropriately respond to this type of safety concern and a plan to ensure the safety of the student is developed and implemented. When a behavioral concern is raised that was not considered by the CPSE/CSE, the teacher or other school personnel should request a meeting of the CPSE/CSE to review and, if appropriate, revise the student's IEP and consider an FBA and BIP to address the behavior.

For information on FBAs and BIPs, as well as behavioral supports and interventions, please see the [Behavioral Supports and Interventions & Discipline Procedures for Students with Disabilities](#) webpage. Additional resources and professional development materials are available on the [Resources page](#) of the [OSE Educational Partnership website](#).

Thank you for your attention to this very important matter.