

Best Practice Guidance for Support Personnel

(Special Education Services during COVID-19 School Closures)

There are many complexities regarding the provision of special education services during COVID-19 school closures and procedures that may impact support personnel such as *Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, School Psychologists, and Speech-Language Pathologists*.

This document serves as a collection of best practices and tips that school systems can use to address questions and/or concerns that support personnel may encounter.

Evaluation and Reevaluation

- Update written general supervision procedures to align with current practices and adjustments made during COVID-19 school closures. Ensure that all staff are trained on any updated procedures.
 - General supervision procedures should be specific and include how the school system will provide general supervision (who, how, how often, etc.).
 - Staff training could be delivered during pre-planning to ensure all special education staff are aware of procedural updates.
 - Options for staff training could include face-to-face, virtually, or other modes accessible to the school system.
- Compile a comprehensive list of evaluations that were due from March 2020 through August 2020. In some instances, you may need to consider evaluations that were due before COVID-19 school closures.
 - Prioritize evaluations (initials and reevaluations).
 - Collaborate with Student Support Teams or Individualized Education Program (IEP) Teams to determine what type of evaluation methods are most appropriate (comprehensive, review of existing data, etc.).
- Consider creating a system-level diagnostic team to manage evaluations.
 - Diagnostic team members should be school personnel currently certified to complete components of the evaluation process, such as:
 - School Psychologists
 - Speech-Language Pathologists
 - School Social Workers
 - School personnel who complete hearing/vision screenings
 - School personnel who complete academic achievement, if applicable
 - Selected team members would only serve as evaluators to alleviate the increased number of evaluations due to COVID-19 school closures. However, districts could



consider continued use of this team to address system-wide timely completion of evaluations and reevaluations.

- Compile a comprehensive list of parent requests made from March 2020 through August 2020.
 - School systems should adhere to current practices and procedures.
 - Requests by parents made prior to COVID-19 school closures should be prioritized.
 - Monitor and address all parent requests made post COVID-19 school closures.
- Consider using appropriate communication with parents. All communication should follow school system procedures.
 - Provide parents with a letter regarding adjustments to the evaluation processes and procedures due to school closures.
 - Send correspondence to parents that clearly communicates an amended timeline addressing overdue evaluations.
- Consider using expanded evaluation models following all state and local DPH health and safety guidelines. These models could include the following:
 - Face to face
 - After-school or Saturday service
 - Identify school sites (frequency and duration).
 - Develop a transportation plan.
 - Virtual assessment, if applicable

Services and Supports

- Compile a comprehensive list of services that were provided from March 2020 through the end of the school year.
 - Document services to include date, mode, duration, frequency, and type of services provided.
 - Document student progress towards goals and/or objectives.
 - Document communication with parents concerning IEP implementation and changes.
- Compile a comprehensive list of services not provided from March 2020 through the end of the school year and clearly describe the rationale. Possible reasons could include:
 - Limited or no access to technology
 - Parent refusal
 - Lack of participation
 - Limited progress towards meeting goals and/or objectives
- Compile a comprehensive list of IEPs that were due from March 2020 through the end of the school year.
 - Prioritize the IEP list by due date.
 - As a reminder, ensure that IEPs are completed for students that receive speech-language as a primary eligibility and collaborate with IEP team members for students who receive speech-language services as a secondary eligibility.



- Consider using an expanded continuum of service delivery models following all state and local DPH health and safety guidelines. These models could include the following:
 - Face to face
 - Telepractice
 - After-school or Saturday service (Speech-Language Pathologists)
 - Identify school sites (frequency and duration).
 - Develop a transportation plan, if applicable.
- School-based Occupational Therapy (OT) and Physical Therapy (PT) are related services and provided based on a determination by the IEP team. Therefore, therapy goals are not written in isolation and are aligned with IEP goals. If not aligned, this could result in a lack of access to therapy. Additionally, school-based Occupational Therapists and Physical Therapists must follow the criteria for related services and all criteria should be utilized to ensure FAPE. The following may be considered:
 - Prioritize follow-up observations of students based on level of need such as access to virtual services and ability to follow “paper-pencil” activities.
 - Evaluate academic performance based on academically aligned therapy goals.
 - Perform observations (if possible) and interview teachers about student performance.
 - Triage areas that need immediate intervention.

