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.