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MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services
IMPLEMENTATION BEST PRACTICES & CONSIDERATIONS

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DATE ISSUED: August 2020

TIPs for Teaching and Learning and the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) in Varied Service Delivery Models

As school buildings closed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, plans were developed to preserve learning during the prolonged school closure. The plans developed by local school systems and public agencies supported “continuity of learning” with an emphasis on providing special education and related services to students with disabilities to the greatest extent possible. Now, systems are determining when and how to safely and effectively serve students in the midst of the ongoing pandemic. Regardless of the service delivery model(s) employed by local school systems, students with disabilities remain entitled to an educational experience in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Systems are encouraged to consider the opportunities offered to all students and use this context as the basis from which to make individualized determinations about how to maintain LRE on a continuum of alternative service delivery models, with a continued emphasis on maximizing opportunities for students with disabilities to learn and make progress alongside their non-disabled peers, and access and participate in the school community.

Co-Teaching Considerations

The MSDE Division of Early Intervention/Special Education Services recognizes the significance of co-teaching as a commonly used method to deliver special education and related services in the least restrictive environment during traditional instructional times. The collaborative instruction resulting from the intentional planning of co-teaching can translate to the distance and/or virtual environment. The following tips are offered for co-teaching planning and delivery of instruction in this setting.

- Develop and adhere to a collaborative planning schedule that allows for 1-2 weeks of lesson planning in advance. Build-in time to reflect on completed lessons, include assessing student progress, analyzing student responses, and troubleshooting any technology or other challenges that occurred.

- Develop a teaching schedule. Based on the learning objectives, content, and service delivery model(s) used, outline the schedule and various strategies for two teachers to collaborate to meet the needs of all students in the class, including the specially designed instruction (SDI) needs of students with disabilities.
 - **Synchronous Tip:** Don't shy away from "high-use" co-teaching models that were effective in the school building (i.e., parallel teaching, alternative teaching, or stations implemented through breakout rooms). For example, if the day's learning objective is focused on citing text evidence in response to a class prompt in English Language Arts (ELA), plan for small group breakout sessions or rotations that include supports that students with disabilities may require as part of their SDI (i.e., projected annotated text group, sentence starter group, word bank group).
 - **Asynchronous Tip:** Add scaffolds to pre-recorded or televised lessons (i.e., adding visual supports using video editing software such as iMovie) or break the lesson into smaller chunks. This same scaffold approach can be applied to hard-copy packets or other concrete learning materials.
- Determine together what criteria will be used to assess student participation, mastery of daily objectives, growth, and progress in the virtual setting. Use this information to gauge the effectiveness of instructional techniques and to group students who may require more support. For example, if the algebra teacher introduces a concept, the special education co-teacher may monitor student responses after an independent example, noting students who did not answer correctly and placing them into the appropriate breakout group.
- Collaboratively communicate with students and families so that the co-teaching relationship is strengthened and recognized by families and students.

Least Restrictive Environment Considerations

As schools shift in operation, it is important for teams to consider how to preserve the intent of LRE - meaningful access to general education grade-level content and opportunities to engage with non-disabled peers in academic and non-academic activities. In planning for such opportunities, proactive collaboration and actions are critical. The following considerations will assist teams in planning ahead to build a foundation upon which individualized academic and non-academic opportunities in the LRE are readily accessible, regardless of the service delivery model(s) used:

- How can supports such as accommodations, supplementary aids, and assistive technology be built into synchronous instructional periods and asynchronous assignments and activities during the planning phase so that students can access the content without face-to-face support?
- How are accessibility needs accounted for in the creation and display of content, materials, and learning tools?
- For students who receive services or intervention outside of the general education classroom, how are one-on-one meetings structured to make the most out of the time with the student to support the instruction and progress monitoring of all IEP goals and objectives?
- How can additional materials and tools be prepared and sent to the student to support independence and access during both synchronous and asynchronous opportunities? For example, if the student had a weekly visual word bank taped to his classroom desk to support comprehension, can this same support be emailed or mailed to the parent or student for printing in advance of the unit?

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The following table offers additional considerations that support individualized decision making and example scenarios to exemplify service delivery within the categories of models that students and staff may experience as schools shift in operations in response to health and safety metrics and other locally determined factors.

Service Delivery Model	LRE Considerations
Distance and/or Virtual Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What opportunities exist for students with disabilities to access general education grade-level content and participate with their non-disabled peers? • How much is synchronous instruction being delivered to students in all subject areas (general education)? What is the expectation for the amount of time students will spend participating in asynchronous learning activities, to support their general education opportunities? • How will SDI and practice on IEP goals be delivered with sufficient intensity to allow students to progress without significantly increasing their total time or workload? • For students who receive services primarily in self-contained settings, how is the time typically spent in general education maintained in the distance and/or virtual environment? For example, do students’ daily/weekly schedules account for related arts classes that they may have participated in during face-to-face instruction? • What opportunities exist for all students to socialize and participate in extracurricular activities (i.e., virtual lunch bunches, virtual recess, virtual club meetings during what may have been a “study hall” in the physical building)? • If these opportunities do not exist for all students, can they be facilitated to preserve participation in non-academic activities for students with disabilities? • What structures are in place to ensure that students with disabilities receive the supplementary aids and services, accommodations, and other supports they require in order to participate in these activities?
Blended or Hybrid Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For students with disabilities who spend the majority of their day with their general education peers, do the staffing and/or rotation schedules for face-to-face instruction account for the face-to-face supports needed by the student in this setting?(This includes accounting for additional adults that may be needed to effectively deliver SDI when thinking about the number of people allowed in a classroom). • When determining instructional groups, consider how to balance the amount of time students interact with their non-disabled peers in both the virtual and face-to-face settings so that they are not further restricted from accessing general education peers and content when they are in the school building.

Service Delivery Model	LRE Considerations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of the face-to-face opportunities offered, to what extent are students in self-contained classrooms included with their general education peers?
Face-to-Face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When fully face-to-face instruction resumes, how can schedules that were in place prior to COVID-19 be redesigned so that additional staff is available to support students with additional instruction/intervention as needed? • If the student developed or gained skills since the extended closure, is there a more inclusive opportunity for the student?

Scenario Planning: Service Delivery Examples

In order to support individualized decision making, the following example scenarios are offered to demonstrate how services may be delivered for students in a variety of service delivery models.

Scenario 1: *Mya, a student with a specific learning disability, will be entering 4th grade in the fall and spends 80% or more of her day in the general education setting.*

Virtual and/or Distance Learning	Hybrid (Combination of Virtual and Face-to-Face)	Fully Face-to-Face
<p>Mya’s ELA and special education teachers collaborate weekly to preload accommodations and supplemental supports into learning activities (synchronous and asynchronous) so that they are accessible by Mya.</p> <p>Four days a week of synchronous 90-minute ELA lessons are provided to 4th-grade students. During each session, her special education teacher monitors responses and provides corrective feedback during the main lesson and uses a breakout session with a small group of peers to reinforce concepts and explicitly monitor progress on her IEP goals and objectives, which are embedded into the main lesson.</p> <p>The reading interventionist meets with Mya and one other student four days a week for 30 minutes a day to virtually deliver her reading intervention.</p>	<p>On the two days a week, she attends school in person, Mya receives her special education services face-to-face during the ELA block in her general education classroom and participates in her reading intervention.</p> <p>On the other three days, when she is at home, Mya completes the asynchronous assignments created for her class, with accommodations and supplementary aids embedded.</p> <p>The general and special education teachers collaborate to replace some of the assignments with activities to provide practice on her IEP goals. She has a 30-minute session two of the days with her special education teacher to receive direct instruction on her IEP goals, and support as needed on her learning activities. She participates virtually in her reading intervention each day.</p>	<p>Mya will receive her special education services in the general education classroom and reading intervention outside of the general education classroom five days a week.</p>

Scenario 2: Noah, a student with Autism entering 8th grade, spends 70% of the day in the general education setting and receives speech-language therapy sessions (one inside general education and one outside of general education).

Virtual and/or Distance Learning	Hybrid (Combination of Virtual and Face-to-Face)	Fully Face-to-Face
<p>Noah will participate in English 8, Pre-Algebra, American History, Physical Education, and Life Science virtually. These sessions will be led by general education teachers with Noah receiving additional supports from the special education teacher and trained paraeducator four days a week.</p> <p>Noah will participate in math intervention during a one-on-one session with the math interventionist on Tuesdays and Thursdays, supplemented by a 30-minute session with his special education teacher preloading and reinforcing concepts on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.</p> <p>The speech pathologist collaborates with his special education, ELA, Reading, and American History teachers to rotate her support in a general education course once per week and provides direct service virtually in a one-on-one meeting once per week.</p>	<p>When students are phased into the school building, the same virtual schedule applies for all students, but on an A/B week schedule. On the A week, Noah will participate in English 8, Pre-Algebra, American History, Physical Education, and Life Science with the same cluster of students with content area teachers rotating in and out.</p> <p>The special education teacher assigned to Noah’s cluster is trained on his SDI needs and implements instruction, supports, and services in accordance with his IEP.</p> <p>Noah’s one-on-one math interventions continue on the same schedule with the supplemental sessions delivered by his special education teacher.</p> <p>The speech pathologist follows the same rotation as in the virtual environment to maintain consistency but implements these services face-to-face during the A week.</p>	<p>Noah receives services in the general education setting with the support of the special education teacher, speech pathologist, and paraeducator in alignment with the school’s regular schedule. He continues to receive math intensive intervention outside of the general education setting.</p>

Resources

- Council for Exceptional Children: [Quick Take: Co-Teaching with Remote Learning](#)

Reference

- NASDE. (2020). *Least Restrictive Environment in the Wake of COVID-19: A Brief from the National Association of State Directors of Special Education*. Retrieved from https://www.nasdse.org/docs/NASDSE_LRE.pdf

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