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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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**TIPs for Recovery Planning for Students who are Blind, Low-Vision,  
Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, and Deaf/Blind**

Students who are Blind, Low-Vision, Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing and Deaf/Blind are a small but diverse group. Meeting their individual learning needs and ensuring equitable access to, and participation in educational opportunities during the recovery process requires thoughtful and proactive planning. Designing schedules, virtual learning opportunities, and other programming with their needs in mind is more efficient and effective than attempting to “retrofit” plans and procedures after they are established. Input into recovery plans from professionals and leaders with expertise with this population of students (such as Teachers of the Visually Impaired, Teachers of the Deaf, Interpreters, Orientation and Mobility Specialists, and Educational Audiologists) is essential. The tips and strategies below may be useful in combination with considerations for all students with disabilities and for students with intensive, individualized needs.

Setting	Strategies for Support
<b>In-Person Instruction</b> Students who are Blind, Deaf, or Deaf/Blind, especially those with multiple disabilities, may require educational and support services that require close physical proximity (e.g., tactical signing, human guide, Braille instruction, some forms of prompting).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When social distancing cannot be maintained, enhanced safety protocols may be needed (e.g., face shields, masks, gloves, etc.). Create plans to acclimate students to these procedures.</li><li>• Consider how the sharing of materials can be minimized. If items must be shared or used sequentially by different people, plan for cleaning and disinfecting them between use. For items that travel between home and school (e.g., communication devices, white canes, mobility devices), consider any needs for cleaning and disinfecting.</li><li>• Consider ways to assign staff that limit the number of different individuals who interact (e.g., if a class has two teaching assistants, divide students between them for direct support rather than both adults assisting all students across the day).</li></ul>

<b>Setting</b>	<b>Strategies for Support</b>
<p><b>Face Coverings</b>            For Deaf and hard-of-hearing students and staff, masks can impact communication access. Other students may have developmental, sensory, or medical needs that make mask-wearing difficult.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For students/staff who use speech reading or American Sign Language (ASL), explore alternatives to traditional masks, in consultation with health officials. Masks with clear panels in front of the mouth and clear face shields may be alternatives.</li> <li>• Remember that the adults and peers who interact with the Deaf students/staff members need the alternative masks, not just the Deaf person.</li> <li>• For students who use listening and spoken language, masks and face shields may negatively impact sound quality. Consider whether additional or different assistive listening devices, captioning services, or other supports are needed to provide equitable access to communication.</li> <li>• Develop appropriate sanitization protocols for assistive listening devices (such as FM systems), including procedures for the sharing of microphones between staff and/or students.</li> <li>• For additional resources about Deaf students and masks, including sources for clear masks/face shields, visit the <a href="#">National Deaf Center</a>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Student and Staff Scheduling</b>            Consider student needs and logistical concerns when determining schedules in a hybrid service delivery model.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritize student needs (e.g., opportunities for direct communication with signing peers and adults, access to specialized equipment and instruction, difficulties accessing virtual content/learning) when planning for staggered return to in-person instruction and/or considering additional face-to-face time for some students in a hybrid model.</li> <li>• Consider how students in the same or nearby schools served by the same itinerant teacher can be placed on the same schedule.</li> <li>• Account for interpreters, paraeducators, and other support staff when considering capacity limits for socially-distanced classrooms.</li> <li>• Ensure appropriate space is available for service providers to meet with students individually, especially if they cannot “push-in” to classrooms because of safety requirements.</li> <li>• Consider structured routine planning time for co-teaching teams and opportunities to collaborate with other service providers.</li> </ul>

<b>Setting</b>	<b>Strategies for Support</b>
<p><b>Virtual Instruction</b>            Systems using virtual/distance learning for all or part of their instruction must ensure accessibility of learning management systems, instructional tools, and curriculum materials. Students should have access to content at the same time as non-disabled peers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some tools and solutions used in the initial continuity of learning may need to be revised or replaced if they do not meet accessibility requirements.</li> <li>• Students may need additional technology tools and devices; and students, families and staff (teachers, paraeducators, and interpreters) may require additional training and ongoing technical support. Consider developing tip sheets, videos, help lines and other resources that can be accessed by students, families, other caregivers, etc. for technical support.</li> <li>• Systems need to develop protocols for the selection and creation of accessible digital content and train teachers accordingly. The <a href="#">AEM Center</a> provides tips and resources for teachers and school leaders for remote learning.</li> <li>• Consider grouping students for synchronous virtual instruction and social interaction opportunities who do not normally attend the same physical school but would benefit from such opportunities (e.g., a teacher of the Deaf could conduct a virtual small group with two hard-of-hearing students of the same grade and instructional level who don't go to the same school; a Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) might conduct a virtual "lunch bunch" or other session to address self-advocacy or social skills with students from several schools.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Specialized Instructional Needs</b>            Planning for the specific instructional needs of students who are Blind, Low-Vision, Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, or Deaf/Blind will allow enhanced virtual supports and prepare for a return to the school building.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support IEP teams to consider the unique learning needs of each student as it relates to their specially designed instructional goals, accommodations, supplemental aids and services.</li> <li>• Consider alternatives for orientation and mobility services, if off-campus travel is not possible.</li> <li>• Identify strategies for providing instruction and practice on expanded core curriculum goals (e.g., self-advocacy, technology use, independence) in the virtual setting and when in school buildings.</li> <li>• Develop virtual (synchronous and/or asynchronous) options for family support, ASL classes for parents/caregivers, parent coaching on instructional and behavioral support strategies, etc.</li> <li>• Take advantage of creative methods to engage and support families who may not have been able to participate in traditional, in-person events.</li> </ul>

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