



Karen B. Salmon, Ph.D.
State Superintendent of Schools



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

Marcella E. Franczkowski, M.S., Assistant State Superintendent

DATE ISSUED: February 2021

TIPs to Address Special Education Staff Shortages, Scheduling, and Logistical Challenges Across Varied Service Delivery Models

As local school systems continue to develop, implement, and evaluate specially designed instruction (SDI) across a continuum of service delivery models during the COVID-19 pandemic, they may face several logistical challenges related to staffing and scheduling. The following tips may aid local school systems in addressing these challenges in creative ways.

1. Reallocate existing resources to address staff shortages.

- Consider a [staffing model](#) utilizing teacher teams differentiated by roles according to their skill, expertise, demands of the curriculum and needs of students
- Offer willing and qualified staff flexibility and/or additional compensation to take on additional responsibilities/caseloads to cover shortages.
- Collaborate across departments to address staff shortages through strategic scheduling and cross-training with specialist teachers, interventionists and assistants. Include in this collaboration job developers, job coaches and employment specialists.
- Stagger schedules for teachers to accommodate services outside of standard instructional time, increase flexibility for families, and meet other needs.
- Engage with private providers and temp agencies to address shortages.

2. Find creative ways to use substitute teachers and paraeducators.

- Strategically engage paraeducators in lesson preparation, materials and resource development to support teacher workload. Paraeducators may also facilitate communication with other members of the instructional team in order to manage data collection.

- Ensure that long-term substitute teachers working with students with disabilities receive support, coaching and supervision from a certified special education teacher.
- Include long-term substitutes and [paraeducators](#) in professional development opportunities.
- Deploy [paraeducators](#) to implement accommodations and other supports for students completing asynchronous assignments and participating in classes.
- Keep parents informed about who is providing instruction and services to their child.

3. Strategically schedule to balance competing priorities.

- Embed standing planning times into weekly or monthly scheduling blocks so that instructional teams can effectively “divide and conquer” roles such as IEP goal practice and progress monitoring amongst themselves.
- Take advantage of asynchronous work times to schedule “pull-out” special education and related services to maximize time in general education.
- Coordinate with general education colleagues to plan for instructional blocks that allow for both whole group and individual/small group instruction times that can incorporate targeted intervention on goals.
- For students with complex needs whose ability to engage in virtual instruction is limited, collaborate with families to prioritize goals to be addressed during that time. Provide parent coaching and asynchronous activities to address other goals/skills.

4. Consider tools and structures to schedule related services.

- Consider [systemic scheduling](#) as opposed to school-based scheduling for key positions, part-time positions, unique groups of students with like needs, course choice or interests.
- Ensure that related service providers who work in multiple schools have access to all student and school schedules.
- Set aside designated time each day or week for the provision of special education and related services, keeping in mind that services should reflect the unique needs of the student.
- Use an electronic calendar or tool (e.g., Calendly, Google or Outlook Calendar, Doodle, Meeting Bird) to allow parents and students to pick the service delivery time that works best for them.
- Utilize virtual tools for teachers, related service providers, paraeducators, and others to collaborate and share information through regularly scheduled meetings and/or asynchronous structures like chats and shared documents, especially if they are not working from the same location.
- Create structures such as email lists or shared calendars to ensure that related service providers, itinerant teachers, and other team members are aware of scheduling changes.

5. Access supplemental funding (CARES, GEERS, CRRSA).

- Provide financial incentives for staff who take on extra responsibilities or dedicate more

instructional or service delivery hours during the pandemic.

- Provide stipends to staff who agree to attend professional development opportunities outside of school hours.
- Consider hiring temporary staff to take over some teacher responsibilities (grading, documentation, etc.) to free up time for teachers to teach multiple classes.
- Consider partnering with community resources to provide either after-school or Saturday tutoring supports.

6. Secure additional personnel to support students.

- Collaborate with Institutes of Higher Education with Personnel Prep Programs to leverage teacher candidates to supplement the efforts of veteran teachers and to provide teacher candidates with enhanced professional development and practical experiences. Consider utilizing teacher candidates for summer services, after school or weekend learning opportunities.
- Leverage existing and/or develop new [community partnerships](#) to recruit personnel for supporting students working with one teacher from different locations to maintain social distancing. If this support is utilized, keep in mind it does not replace the role of qualified professional educators.

© 2021 Maryland State Department of Education. Produced under the guidance of Marcella E. Franczkowski, Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services. Please include reference to the Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services on any replication of this information. To request permission for any use that is not “fair use” as that term is understood in copyright law, contact the Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services, 200 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201, 410-767-0249 voice.

Karen B. Salmon, Ph.D., State Superintendent of Schools

Clarence C. Crawford, President, Maryland State Board of Education

Larry Hogan, Governor

Carol A. Williamson, Ed.D., Deputy State Superintendent for Teaching and Learning

Marcella E. Franczkowski, M.S., Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services

200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
MarylandPublicSchools.org
MarylandLearningLinks.org