

Best Practices: Remote School Based Support Team Functions

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Guidance: Best Practices in Remote IEP Team Functions

Note

As of March 23rd, 2020, the NYCDOE is moving to remote learning as a means of protecting the safety and well-being of our students and families due to the emergency situation posed by COVID-19. Transitioning to remote learning means that we will engage with our families and students in a new and innovative way. This is a moment where we ask for IEP team clinicians to be ready, willing and able to serve our community at a distance in order to ensure that students receive the services and supports that they may need to access the curriculum.

Clinicians should refer to the SOPM throughout the evaluation and IEP process. These best practices supplement the SOPM only during the COVID-19 pandemic closures.

Open and Incomplete Cases

IEP teams are required to finalize reports for all completed evaluations conducted through March 13th 2020. Additionally, IEP teams are required to complete and finalize IEPs for all IEP meetings that were conducted through March 13th.

For open cases for which sufficient testing to make a recommendation for a classroom placement (i.e., cognitive and academic assessments along with a classroom observation) or to make a related services recommendation has already been completed, the IEP meeting should be scheduled and the appropriate program/service recommended. As additional testing becomes available, an additional IEP meeting may be held to consider the addition of services when appropriate. The same is true for IESPs.

Referrals

Guidance on the remote process of referrals can be found [here](#).

IEP Meetings

IEP teams should meet remotely while schools are closed. See SOPM. When conducting IEP meetings using an online platform, teams should use Microsoft Teams or Google Classroom to conduct IEP meetings. These platforms are compliant with FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act).

Microsoft Teams: Clinicians will be able to schedule meetings using their Outlook calendar from Office 365. They will use the Teams meeting toggle to set their location to conduct meetings using the Microsoft Teams Video conferencing. In addition to allowing for video conferencing, Microsoft Teams allows for telephone participation by any IEP team member by also providing a dial-in phone number and PIN for each meeting.

Google Classroom: Clinicians will be able to schedule meetings using their DOE Outlook account. They will be able to have video conferences and audio conference when selecting the “Meet” application. They will find the “Meet” application in the Google waffle grid. Once they select “Meet”, they will be prompted to join or start a meeting. To start the meeting, enter a nickname (name) for the meeting. Then select Continue and Join. The clinicians will have the option to join using a phone for audio. IEP teams will send meeting invites to

participants by email once they have been added to the meeting. Google Hangouts Meet creates a dial-in phone number and PIN for each meeting allowing each participant to communicate via phone conference. For security purposes all video and audio streams in Meet are encrypted.

The IEP Process

Prior to IEP Meeting

1. To the greatest extent possible, ensure and maintain the privacy and confidentiality of information, files, and communications. Conduct telephone calls and meetings in a place where confidential information will not be overheard or viewed by individuals who are not involved in the meeting. Use Microsoft Office 365 online tools and approved platforms, which provide appropriate safeguards for maintaining the confidentiality and security of DOE information and records.
2. Contact parents and schedule meetings at a mutually agreed upon time.
3. Inform all participants that they should be present for the entire duration of the meeting and that they will be actively participating throughout the meeting.
4. Contact School Principals and Administrators if contact information is needed for required participants. Meetings must not be held without the participation of mandated IEP members. All outreach efforts must be documented in the SESIS event Log. Document School/Non-Public School/Private School requests to reschedule meetings due to COVID-19 related unavailability by creating an event in SESIS. These meetings will be rescheduled.
5. Clinicians with clerical support will oversee that at least 48 hours prior to the meeting, families are contacted to confirm attendance and to ensure that parents have and can utilize the dial-in phone number and PIN for the meetings. For video conferencing, confirm that parents have access to a smartphone/tablet/laptop/desktop computer with webcam and speakers, and that parents have video and audio components for the entire duration of the meeting.
6. Discuss video conferencing and audio conferencing with parents and select the method of conference with proper consideration given to the parent's comfort with and access to the necessary technology. Supervisors are currently setting up trainings for clinicians on how to effectively hold meetings on Microsoft Teams.
7. Be prepared for IEP meetings. Review all pertinent documentation, evaluations and reports that will be considered during the meetings and ensure that all participants have all pertinent information/documentation to make appropriate IEP recommendations prior to the IEP meeting.
8. Ensure that parents and DOE IEP meeting participants have access to the content of the meeting. Send evaluations and reports that will be considered during the meeting to parents electronically prior to the IEP meeting, and inform DOE participants that all pertinent documentation and records are available in SESIS or electronically prior to the IEP meeting.

Sending special education records to families:

The parent may elect for special education records to be sent to them by email. During the school closure, you may accept a parent's email requesting materials by email as their consent.

To send a document stored in SESIS to a parent, the user should follow these steps:

- -Print or save the document as a PDF on the DOE network**
- -Attach the saved PDF to an email to the parent using Outlook in Office 365
- -Select "Encrypt"
- -Send to the parent's email address

Special education records include any meeting notices, prior written notices, IEPs, assessments, progress reports, or other material requested by the parent.

**If the user does not have access to the DOE network, the user should save to an encrypted flash drive. If the user does not have an encrypted flash drive, the user may save on their local drive into a private folder. All contents of that private folder should be deleted as soon as the school closures end.

9. To the greatest extent possible control background noise before starting the meeting. Find a quiet location, minimizing external noise, and dedicate uninterrupted time for the duration of the meetings. The space should be quiet and free from distractions (e.g., noises, other conversations, other persons in the space).
10. Ensure that the background of the location is appropriate and professional for all video conferences.
11. Present in the same professional manner as if it were a meeting face-to-face meeting
12. Establish the online video conferencing connection several minutes before the meeting start time and test the dial-in phone number and PIN for the meeting before the conference call (15 minutes are recommended).

Holding IEP Meetings

The IEP team must arrange for families, teachers and/or services providers to participate in the IEP meeting via Microsoft Teams or Google Classrooms. All IEP attendees will be notified 7 days prior to the date of the meeting. SESIS contact information will be used to identify the families preferred method of remote communication. The invite should include the date, time, phone number and access code for each meeting.

School staff should share and update Outlook calendars daily to determine availability to facilitate the planning and organization of IEP meetings.

1. Ensure that all participants can see and hear all other participants. Ask participants to indicate if they are having any difficulties with their video and audio at the start of the meeting.
2. Start the meeting by allowing all IEP meeting participants to take turns introducing themselves by name and title.

3. Ask participants to mute their microphones if their location has background noise and when not speaking. Microsoft Teams and Google Classroom support the use of computer audio. If joining a virtual meeting using a cellular phone or landline use *3 to mute phone and for desk phones use *6.
4. Start the meetings by presenting an overview of topics to be covered and planned outcomes. Confirm that all DOE participants and parents have received and have access to the content of the meeting and will share any pertinent documentation that will be considered during the meeting with any DOE participants or parents as needed.
5. Engage and encourage parent participation and contribution to the discussion, and check for understanding and alignment during the meeting.
6. Listen closely and monitor participant's turn-taking during the meeting to ensure engagement and contribution of all IEP participants.
7. Indicate IEP meeting participation of participants by phone in the SESIS attendance page. For further guidance see: [Guidance for School Building Closure for School Staff](#)
8. For guidance regarding attendance sheets and Initial Placement/ provision of services see [here](#):

Interpretation and Translation

The IEP team will arrange for interpretation services at the IEP meetings and translation of special education documents, as necessary. Schools' language access coordinators can assist in arranging interpretation services during an IEP meeting. For more information about the DOE's Language Access Plan, including information about interpretation and translation please visit the [Translation and Interpretation InfoHub Page](#).

Eligibility

The IEP team determines whether a student is eligible for special education. To make this determination, the IEP team draws upon information gathered during the evaluation. This includes a careful consideration of the supports and strategies employed prior to the IEP meeting, to ensure that the student is not classified as student with a disability as a result of limited English proficiency or deficiencies in the general education environment or interrupted education due to the COVID 19 pandemic. For further guidance please refer to the SOPM [here](#).

Services/ Recommendation and Implementation

During this period of time, the IEP team should make the same recommendation of special education programs, services, and placement as they would make if school were in session. However, IEP teams may consider the student's remote special education program and service needs and address those temporary remote services during the IEP meeting.

Comparable Service Plan (CSP)

If a student is admitted or readmitted to the NYCDOE and has an IEP from a prior school district, the IEP team may need to create a Comparable Service Plan (CSP). The IEP team should follow the SOPM with respect to the creation of the CSP and opening of the case. The CSP should be provided to the parent via email, with the parent's agreement. Placement or Initial provision of services will be as per guidance below.

If the parent is unable to provide all the necessary documentation electronically, the team should document all the relevant information provided to them via telephone in SESIS events. The team should also reach out to the previous school/school district to receive the appropriate documentation electronically, and to also secure verbal confirmation. If the IEP team is unable to secure sufficient confirmation of previous special education placement/services after contacting the prior school/school district, the parent should be provided with contact information to the Family Welcome Center for General Education admission.

Contacts for the Family Welcome Centers are below:

Bronx: bronxfwc@schools.nyc.gov

Brooklyn: brooklynfwc@schools.nyc.gov

Manhattan: manhattanfwc@schools.nyc.gov

Queens: queensfwc@schools.nyc.gov

Staten Island: statenlandfwc@schools.nyc.gov

At the Conclusion of the Meeting

During the IEP meeting, please ensure that families provide IEP teams with a valid email address and agree that special education records, including the IEP, should be sent via email. Teams should make every effort to obtain Consent for Use of Electronic Mail from families during this time, but in the event that the consent cannot be obtained, teams should move forward with the process. At the conclusion of the IEP meeting, the IEP team is to provide the parent with a copy of the Recommended Special Education Programs and Services page of the draft IEP from SESIS. This should be emailed to the parent if they have the parent's agreement to do so. The IEP must be finalized in SESIS and sent, along with the Prior Written Notice, to the parent via email no later than 10 business days after the meeting was held. All efforts must be made to ensure that IEPs are completed within the compliance date.

In the event that families do not have access to email, alternate arrangements for the delivery of IEP and other special education records will be made. Additional guidance about alternate forms of delivery is forthcoming.

For issues related to SESIS documentation please see the guidance for **School Building Closure for School Staff**

Prior Written Notice

Guidance can be found [here](#).

Placement or Initial Provision of Services

Guidance can be found [here](#).