

## Advocacy Notes



**TOPIC: With our school districts and regionalized programs closed due to the COVID19 pandemic, how can I continue to serve my students via distance learning?**

This is certainly an unprecedented time in our nation and in the world. For the first time since the passage of the IDEA, students across the United States are unable to leave their homes to attend school in person.

Clearly, no one could have predicted that the end of the 2019/2020 school year would be completed via distance learning while we shelter at home. Not attending school does not mean that instruction has to stop. Our students with hearing loss, no matter their mode of communication, are suddenly at home faced with figuring out how to access their education and communicate with their teachers and peers. Additionally, Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing and Educational Audiologists need to figure out not only how to provide distance learning and access to the curriculum, but also how to navigate the learning curve and often restrictive guidelines of their own school district or regionalized programs.

As per the Supplemental Fact sheet put out by the United States Department of Education on March 21, 2020, some educators were “reluctant to provide any distance instruction because they believe that federal disability law presents insurmountable barriers to remote education.” However, the Department of Education stated that “this is simply not true.” The statement clarified that school districts need to continue to comply with the IDEA, Section 504, and Title II of the ADA. (1)

**What we do know is that to this point, the Department of Education has not waived any requirements under the IDEA including timelines or provision of services.**

Knowing that, how can educators serving students with hearing loss continue to do so during the COVID19 pandemic? Here are some suggestions based on what some educators working with students with hearing loss are currently doing and can continue to do to support their students.

1. All low incidence equipment including hearing technology transmitters, receivers, chargers, and cables to connect to computers and laptops need to be provided to families to use at home.
2. Educational Audiologists can connect with their students and their parents via Zoom, FaceTime, Google Hangouts, or another virtual platform where they can see each other and ensure that the students know how to connect and use their equipment.
3. Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing can schedule their service minutes as per the current offer of FAPE and connect with students using the same platforms.
4. Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing and case carriers can ensure that students who have sign language interpreters or captions in their IEP arrange for the interpreter or the captions to be provided during distance learning with their general education teachers. (Note: CART providers can log into class and provide the captions for the student; Steamer can be used for closed or open captioning on all livestream platforms).

5. **Keep FERPA<sup>2</sup> and COPPA<sup>3</sup> student privacy laws in mind when using internet-based services.** A service may only use the information for educational purposes, not to collect it for commercial purposes or allow it to be accessed by others outside of the educational setting.
6. It is important for the TOD and Educational Audiologist to continue to support the general education teacher and other members of the child's team with regard to degraded signal vs. live voice and the challenges that students with hearing loss may face with distance learning.

Many IEP teams are continuing to hold IFSP and IEP meetings using the same virtual platforms mentioned above or via teleconference. The collaborative spirit of these teams is reassuring and cause for hope during this very difficult and uncertain time. In the next few months, we will continue to learn more about how to serve our students and what will be expected of service providers on a National level, State level, and District level. I also suspect that our students with hearing loss will develop additional skills sets that will be exciting to witness. When the school districts re-open there will surely be many assessments to complete, compensatory time owed, and many more questions than answers. As a community we will continue to monitor the situation and work together.

1. [www2.ed.gov>policyguidance>supplemental fact sheet 3.21.20 FINAL.pdf](http://www2.ed.gov>policyguidance>supplemental%20fact%20sheet%203.21.20%20FINAL.pdf)
2. <https://successforkidswithhearingloss.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/FERPAandVirtualLearning.pdf>
3. <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0031-protecting-your-childs-privacy-online>

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