Remote Learning Guidance

Students with significant cognitive disabilities often have complex needs regarding accessing the curriculum. The least restrictive environment for students in this group is many times a self-contained special education classroom with varying opportunities to receive instruction or interact socially with their peers who do not have disabilities. The individual needs of students in this group are varied and present an increased challenge for educators and families currently working to provide instruction and services in remote learning environments.

Due to the nature and design of programs designed to meet the needs of students in this group, LEAs' staffing ratios associated with these students are typically such that teachers and paraprofessional staff could be deployed to have significantly more frequent interaction with individual students' families than perhaps other staff. LEAs should consider capitalizing on this to provide increased communication and support to caregivers in the home working to implement instruction and provide services for students in this group.

This document is designed to help educators identify ways they can work with families to provide instruction and supports to students with complex needs during at home learning. Please also refer to the Special Education Emergency Contingency Plan and Guidance for additional support in collaborating with families to create and document the temporary services provided during the COVID 19 pandemic response.

Planning for Remote Learning

Step 1: Gather family input and information regarding available resources.

Family collaboration is critical in developing a remote learning plan. Reach out to inform each family of your desire to support their student's ongoing learning. Communicate with families to obtain information about available resources and regular routines in the home. Embedding instruction into the natural routine, when possible, creates authentic teaching opportunities and minimizes stress on the family. As you develop an instructional plan, focus on integrating academic and functional skills that have been taught at school into the home setting with materials and routines the family has readily available. Each family is different, and resources may adjust over time. Listen, honor and integrate family input for working on and prioritizing IEP skills into the student's plan. The following questions may help you gather relevant information from families.

- What resources are available in the home that can be re-purposed as teaching materials or manipulatives (e.g., books, toys, assistive technology, office or craft supplies, objects such as cookie pans, cotton balls, tweezers, beans, salt, food containers/lids)?
- What is the family's current access to various technologies that could support home learning (e.g., computers, tablets, smart phones, internet and data plan, digital camera)?
- What time(s) of day and type(s) of communication (e.g., virtual meeting, phone calls, email) are best for the family?
- How much time during the day/week does the family have to devote to instruction (consider other family obligations/work, student medical needs/services, other instructional/related services, etc.)?

Share enough resources and information to set families up for success, but not so much that they are overwhelmed by it.

- Does the family have any immediate needs that the educator can help address? For example, does the student have a schedule and routine in place, is the student experiencing challenging behavior, does the family need visual supports for the home?

Step 2: Review student needs and identify priorities.

Revisit the PLAAFP, IEP goals and objectives, progress data, and any updated information from families. Identify the critical skills that will best assist the student in continuing his or her progress. The following questions may help you identify priorities.

- What IEP skills does this student most need to work on given the current learning environment? What skills, if strengthened now, would best position this student to continue progress on goals once traditional school resumes? What skills are critical for the student to maintain?
  - For example, if the student typically practices functional money skills while working shifts on the student run coffee cart, he or she might be able to generalize this learning through a mock family store where the student "sells" daily snacks to the family. Maintaining these skills will allow the student to continue a highly preferred activity as independently as possible once traditional school resumes.
- Are there IEP skills or instructional strategies that you taught earlier in the year that can be revisited and/or revised to build performance fluency, promote generalization, and/or minimize regression?
  - For example, perhaps the student was following a visual or object schedule at school. Now that the routine is different, the student may need to revisit this skill to generalize a unique schedule in a new setting (i.e., daily routine and schedule for at home learning). You can assist the family with setting up the schedule with pictures or tactile items from around the home to indicate the next task or event.

Step 3: Create and communicate the plan.

Now that you have identified priorities from the IEP and collaborated with the family to understand their resources and needs, it is time to identify the instructional delivery methods that you will provide to meet student needs. This is most effectively accomplished in collaboration with families and caregivers. Consider a combination of methods to create an instructional package that will position the student to continue making progress. You may choose to document this plan using the Special Education Emergency Contingency Plan. Examples for instructional delivery options might include, but are not limited to, the following.

- Family consultation (e.g., phone, text, video calls, email), including modeling and training on how to use resources and materials to support of the creation, implementation, and adaptation of:
  - Daily schedules and visual supports for at home learning
  - Simple strategies to prevent challenging behavior (e.g. first/then, reinforcement breaks, use of choice, simple reward systems)

- o Transferring academic/functional activities and routines that the student has mastered or is very familiar with at school into the home setting (e.g. steps for implementing a calendar routine at home, creating independent work jobs at home)
- o Assisting the family in understanding assignments and use of any equipment or assistive technology materials or tools
- Hands-on non-digital activities:
  - o work packets
  - o task boxes using common household items (e.g., sorting, matching, categorizing, assembly/disassembly)
  - o project-based activities (e.g. cooking, baking, gardening activities that incorporate academic and functional goals)
  - o reading books/magazines
  - o creating/learning with repurposed manipulatives (e.g. fine motor practice with tweezers and cotton balls)
  - o lessons, checklists, visual schedules for functional tasks (e.g., conversation starters and topics to engage in with family members, household chores, hygiene tasks, and other self-care/daily-living activities)
  - o leisure skills (e.g. learning a new game, developing a new hobby)
  - o Vocational skill assignments (e.g. pick out an interview outfit, complete mock interview with family member, complete applications)
- Digital learning activities
  - o Digital learning platform assignments (e.g., watch videos, read online books, play web-based games, complete online documents) - make it as easy as possible for families to use online resources and include direct links and explicit instruction. These assignments should directly reinforce student goals.
- Video instruction (live or recorded)
  - o General instruction – academic activities or functional skills appropriate for multiple students (e.g. social skills lessons)
  - o Individualized instruction – academic activities or functional skills related to unique student-specific goals/objectives or touching base with the student for relationship-building and socioemotional check-ins
  - o Provide video modeling of hands-on tasks expected of students
- Telephone calls, chat, or text communication with the student (e.g. practicing communication skills)

Step 4: Implement Plan and Progress Monitor.
- Touch base regularly with the student and family to monitor progress and adjust instruction and plan implementation (pacing, supports, quantity) as needed.

- Choose monitoring methods that align with the assignments given to the student. Allow evidence such as checklists, permanent product uploads, videos, photos, student/parent report, or audio recordings to show task completion or progress towards IEP goals.
- Document all communication attempts, instructional plans, and student progress.

Special thanks to the TX Complex Access Network (TX CAN) for their support in developing this guidance document. For links to resources that may help you support students with complex access needs (e.g., content-specific activities, socioemotional activities, ESC resources), visit the TXCAN website.