

Family Engagement: Supporting Students With Disabilities During COVID

As schools move to remote learning in response to COVID-19 school building closures, families have been unexpectedly thrown into the role of supporting students learning from home. Many are searching for ways to best support their children at this time. This document provides resources that can be given directly to families and also provides resources for educators to support them in distance learning environments.

In this guide, you will find:

- **Resources for Families** that can be adapted or sent directly
- **Resources for Educators** to give guidance on supporting families with at home learning

Marshall has additional related resources for

- [Supporting Teachers with Accommodations in Distance Learning Environments](#)
- [Providing Supports to Students with Low-Incidence Disabilities](#)

Audience: Special Education Teachers, General Education Teachers, Administrators

Respecting and Considering Families' Contexts

Families have been thrown into a distance learning environment amid a crisis that is placing additional stress and pressure on them. It is important to understand a student's family context and provide flexibility and additional support as they may be in one or more of the following situations that impact their ability to access and engage in academic work:

- Parents/guardians may be working from home as well as supporting students learning
- Parents/guardians may not be at home and students may have limited supervision
- Parents/guardians may have several students at home using the same electronic device
- Older students may also be caregivers for younger siblings if parents/guardians are working
- Families may be facing higher levels of income, food, or housing insecurity
- Family members may not have the knowledge and skills to help students with all the work assigned
- Families have many assets - now is the time to honor and build upon those assets
- Families have different levels of access to technology and internet access
 - There are companies and organizations nationwide active in helping provide [access to devices and broadband](#).

These create constraints for students in terms of the time and attention they can dedicate to school in this context.

Resources for Families to Support Students with Disabilities With at Home Learning

Families may be looking to schools to give them guidance on supporting their students learning full time from home. Here are resources that can be sent to families with tips to help their students engage in learning at home, either synchronously or asynchronously.

Understood has created a list for families to help set their students up for success with learning at home. [8 Tips to Get Your Child Ready to Learn at Home](#)

- Create a learning space for your child
- Make a schedule and stick to it
- Reduce Distractions
- Use a Calendar and color-code it
- Get plenty of exercise
- See which accessibility features help your child
- Reach out to your child's teacher(s)
- Look for ways to remove learning barriers

HelpGuide.org has tips for families in [Helping Children with Learning Disabilities](#), highlighting how strategies for supporting their students in a traditional setting can be applied in the virtual setting. The tips include:

- Taking charge of your child's education (including communicating with the school)
- Identifying how a child learns best (visually, auditorily, or kinesthetically)
- Supporting life success, rather than school success
- Emphasizing healthy lifestyle habits
- Taking care of yourself (parent/guardian)

The National Center for Learning Disabilities has put together [A Parent's Guide to Virtual Learning: 4 Actions to Improve Your Child's Experience With Online Learning](#), to give families things they should know and can do to support their students learning at home.

- Best practices for children with disabilities who are engaged in online learning
- Help organize your child's time
- Your child may need new ways to access services
- Families and students still have rights

Prepared Parents has [COVID-19 tips for Stay-at-Home](#) and has guidance for families to help support successful learning. Some of the topics they cover include:

- Space usage plan
- Set goals with the self-directed learning cycle
- Mindful moments
- Focus on Resilience, one of 16 Habits of Success

Resources for Educators to help families support adaptations for students with disabilities with at home learning

Families whose students are now learning from home full time may also be balancing other life activities, such as work from home, or may be continuing to work outside the home. They will be looking to teachers and schools for guidance on how to support their students with disabilities at home. Additional Marshall resources are available to support adaptations, including accommodations, modifications, aides and learning tools for students.

- [Supporting Teachers with Accommodations in Distance Learning Environments](#)
- [Providing Supports to Students with Low-Incidence Disabilities](#)

Step 1: Determine Adaptations

Teachers and Families can determine which adaptations in the student’s IEP will be necessary in the home setting. Some adaptations provided in the brick and mortar setting are met due to the new setting at home, for example, if a student is normally accompanied from one class to another, that adaptation is not necessary in the home setting. Determine if some adaptations need to be revised, such as sitting near the teacher or using special lighting or acoustics.

Sample adaptations that might NOT be necessary in the virtual/home setting

- Working or taking a test in a different setting to reduce distractions
- Taking a test in a small group or separate setting
- Sitting near the teacher (this may be modified at home)

Sample adaptations that might need to be revised for the virtual/home setting

- Getting notes from another student - teacher could send out notes electronically
- Hearing instructions spoken out loud - these could be recorded and sent as a link
- Dictating answers to a scribe - these could be audio or video recorded by the student to send to the teacher

Step 2: Create a Plan for Families on Using The Adaptations

Teachers have spent time understanding how to implement the adaptations for their students. Families might not have the knowledge or skill to support these adaptations. Families may need support in learning how specific adaptations are utilized. Create a plan/document with tips that are student specific for adaptations that are used. The table below could be used to create documentation for families.

Sample Plan

Adaptation (aide, accommodation, modification)	How to Implement	Tools/Resources Needed
Example: Use calculator	<i>Calculator may be used on all math assignments and tests</i>	Used at school: TI-84 Online calculator
Example: Frequent check-in with student AND on-task	<i>Check in with student approximately every ten minutes</i>	Timer On Task Chart

<p>monitoring</p>	<p>during independent work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Words I use for encouragement: “You’ve done a great job completing this problem, keep going.” ● Words or phrases for redirection, “I see you haven’t quite gotten started, do you need help determining the first step?” ● On the On Task Chart, place a tally for every on time student is on task. At the end of the work session, if a student has 5 or more tallies, they get 10 minutes of time on a game of their choice. 	
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Guiding Questions for Teachers to Answer in Planning for Working with Families

- What are the strategies that work in the classroom that can be shared with families?
 - *Example*: Give students a break after 10 minutes of work, use a timer in the student’s view for self-monitoring
 - PBIS Example: Share your token economy, use task charts, and rewards you have found successful with students in the past.
- What training (technology, monitoring progress, adaptations) will need to be provided for families? When and how will I provide this training?
 - Provide an online training or a video recording for families. See [Step 4](#) below
- How and when can families reach out to you with questions?
 - Specific hours, email, text, call, video conference (Zoom)?
- How can you offer flexibility when doing 1:1 minutes with a student online?
 - If the minutes are 40 minutes per week, give families choice: one 40 minute session, two 20 minute sessions, four 10 minute sessions
- Is the amount of work I’m expecting students to do reasonable at this time (not everything from school can or should be replicated)?
 - The family context and additional course load has been taken into consideration
 - Work with the child’s family to determine how to best break down weekly assignments into daily tasks.
 - Consider: dedicating days to specific content/subjects, providing families with high-leverage strategies that help their student complete tasks, and ensure there is daily routine

Step 3: Communicate with families

During this time, relationships and communication with families are crucial. Teachers will be taking on a coaching role with families in helping them support student adaptations and learning. Frequent check-ins are recommended. Tips for communication follow.

- The **initial conversation** with families will give you the context you need to plan for learning adaptations and at-home learning, and can give you information to know how to adapt the student’s plan.
 - Consider doing a combined call with those who will be working with the students, such as Special Education Teacher, General Education Teacher, Instructional Assistant, etc.
 - Questions to consider in this call
 - Will family members be working in or away from home?
 - What is the device and internet accessibility?
 - What type of space is available for learning or other activities such as gross motor or sensory?
 - How are family members feeling about supporting learning full time at home?
- **Ongoing communication** will be critical in meeting student needs. Educators have recommended having a regularly scheduled time to check in with families, daily if possible, otherwise set a schedule with the family.
 - Schedule office hours for family questions and concerns (It’s recommended to have various times on different days that this can be scheduled)
 - Email, phone and Text availability for questions and concerns
 - What will your response time be?
 - There are tools available for phone and text messaging that protect your personal number, such as [Google Voice](#) or [Remind](#)
 - Additional Communication Ideas
 - **Technical Support** - Communicate how families will get technical support
 - **Virtual Family Meetings** - Administrators can hold regular family check-ins such as ‘Second Cup of Coffee’ with families virtually
 - **Surveys** - Send surveys to get pulse checks from families
 - [Virtual Learning Community Feedback](#)
 - **Remote Learning Websites** - CMOs are creating websites dedicated to remote learning
 - [Brilla Public Charter Schools Remote Learning](#)
 - [KIPP K-8 Remote Learning](#)
 - RocketShip Public Schools has set up [CareCorps](#) to reach out to families everyday utilizing a daily survey as a first step in the process.
 - Fivestar has a [communication guide](#) to communicate your at-home learning plan with families.

Step 4: Provide training for families

Teachers are being called learning coaches for families during this time of distance learning. Families may need help learning how to provide adaptations, progress monitor, implement curriculum, navigate the platforms, use hardware and assistive technology, and address behavior related to learning.

- When and how will support for families be completed?
 - Provide training for families on using technology, assistive technology, curriculum or adaptations for learning
 - Video Recorded training
 - Real Time Video conference (multiple parents, these sessions can be recorded and emailed or put on a website or hub)
 - Written instructions
 - Provide time for video (Zoom, Google Hangouts) coaching in the moment as families are working with students
- Resources for supporting family education
 - Center for Parent Resources provides background information on [Supports, Modifications, and Accommodations](#)
 - [A Parent's Guide to Google Classroom](#) is a slide presentation that can be modified
 - [Zoom Cheat Sheet for Parents-Caregivers](#) gives information on using this platform for students.

Additional Resources

The **California Department of Education** has put together some resources for supporting students learning at home due to COVID-19. They have specific resources for [Students with Disabilities](#).

Final Word

Families are all in different places and it is important that we meet them where they are so that they can provide the safest and most productive learning environments at home possible where students are able to access and engage with curriculum. Relationships and communication will help make this time successful, and frequent check-ins will help support the learning as educators take on the role of learning coach for parents.



www.marshall.org/covid/

Appendix

Parent Role

Clearly define the role of the family and the support the school staff will be providing. Sample role description from [Special Education in Online and Virtual School Programs](#), by Jose L. Martín, Attorney at Law.