Small Group Virtual Instruction:
A Quick Guide for Service Delivery

The transition to virtual school has many people wondering how to provide students IEP service minutes in a virtual setting. Small group instruction is a vital tool for student learning and progress toward mastery of IEP goals, requiring implementation of learning tools and varied service delivery model options for student success.

In this guide, you will find:

- **Quick tips** to set up virtual learning
- **Guidance** on instructional models for service delivery
- **Resources** for additional learning

Audience: Special Education Service Providers, General Education Teachers, Administrators

Getting Started: Setting Up for (Virtual) Success

To get started, put in place a system that is built on collaboration, communication, and coordination:

- ❏ **Communicate** with families and students about immediate changes to service delivery, schedule, and instruction.
    - ❏ *Notify* of any learning platform / teletherapy implementation for instruction and services
        - ❏ Send home consent forms for teletherapy, if required (samples A and B)
    - ❏ *Hold* an IEP meeting or send home an amendment when necessary for service changes
- ❏ **Assess** student needs and access for technology, tools and learning
    - ❏ *Problem-solve* with students and families to address barriers to access
- ❏ **Collaborate** with people in the home who might be supporting the learner(s), including parents/guardians, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents
- ❏ **Coordinate** the network of support for students: engage students, families and educators in regular communication
    - ❏ *Clarify* each party's role and responsibility within the network and for individual students
    - ❏ *Establish* means and frequency of communication systems (i.e. daily or weekly updates; meetings/phone, emails)
    - ❏ *Send* student IEP information, including learning adaptations (i.e. aides, accommodations and modifications) for educator and family access

For more information, see recommendation on creating cross functional teams in the resource section.

Step 1: Prepare with Purpose

When planning small group instruction, be clear about small group expectations with each educator or provider. Decide as a special education team (including educators, providers and administrators when possible) when and how services will be provided. Establish systems for ongoing communication and collaboration for student learning (i.e. daily check-ins, weekly special education team meetings, etc).

- ❏ Set up a system for collaboration / communication
    - ❏ Establish regular points of collaboration for whole staff, departments
    - ❏ Establish times of day specific staff are available to teach, collaborate, consult and plan
    - ❏ Create space within the week to take a team approach for sharing new learnings and problem solving immediate needs
- ❏ Set up a system for tracking services
    - ❏ Organize trackers by case manager, grade level or student (sample documents A and B)

Step 2: Select the Delivery Model for Instruction

Teaching virtually will require flexibility and a varied approach based on learner needs. Instructional approaches exist for co-teaching, separate setting small groups and consultation models. Once teams and providers have determined the focal students and topic of the group, select the service delivery model to provide instruction to students.

Identify the who, what and how of your instruction
- ❏ **Schedule** and group students for services. Groups might be created based on:
    - ❏ Common IEP goals (i.e. math problem solving, writing organization, social thinking)
    - ❏ General education course content
    - ❏ Coaching needs for consultation
- ❏ **Identify** the focus for instruction
    - ❏ Preview, review general education course content
    - ❏ IEP goal skill development
    - ❏ Teach, coach and reinforce skills and habits for virtual learning environments (i.e. using accessibility features and adaptations in virtual learning, establishing a routine)
- ❏ **Make** a plan for instruction
    - ❏ Lesson plan for small group individually or in collaboration with other educators
    - ❏ Communicate the lesson or instruction time with students (calendar invites, email, chat)
    - ❏ Provide options for students to participate live and offline, if concerns for access exist

Co-Teaching Models	General Education and Special Education Teachers: Co-teach breakout rooms (Educator-specific Zoom tips) for small group(s) during live (synchronous) instruction. This is most effective for supporting students with grade level content for core instruction. *Tip: Make sure both teachers are hosts of the meeting so each can run and manage breakout rooms and send out announcements for time reminders!*
	Special Education Teachers: Provide individualized feedback asynchronously on core content to increase student engagement and provide opportunities to review. Examples may include comments on assignments, providing content for preteaching of concepts, or recorded audio or video messages for students to view. *Tip: Continue to support in a 1:1 check-in for upcoming coaching and when teaching strategies in small group(s) to target specific student themes / needs.*

Separate Setting Models	Special Education Teachers: Plan a [mini lesson](#) for targeted skill instruction. ***Tips:*** ● *Focus instruction for a live strategy group, teaching a skill to all students to practice with immediate feedback before working independently on the task.* ● *Create an agenda that includes whole group and 1:1 elements in the learning time. This might include a group teach that is paired with 1:1 check-ins during independent work time.*
	Special Education Teachers: Schedule specific instructional sessions with a small group (3-5 students at a time) that is coordinated with the core instructional teachers (either during core class time or at a separate time of day). ***Tips:*** ● *Coordinate with general education teachers on timing so students are not being removed from core-instruction* ● *Send students separate invitation for small group instruction breakout session*
	Special Education Teachers: Provide individualized feedback asynchronously on core content to increase student engagement and provide opportunities to review. Examples may include comments on assignments, providing content for preteaching of concepts, or recorded audio or video messages for students to view. ***Tip:*** *Continue to support in a 1:1 check-in for upcoming coaching and when teaching strategies in small group(s) to target specific student themes / needs.*

Consultation Models	Special Education Teachers: Review student data and progress on core content and/or check in with the general education teacher(s) regarding assignments that need to be completed for the week. Based on student data and any IEP service requirements: ● Special Education Teacher provides **consultation to colleagues** to support student in learning environments ● Special Education Teacher provides **consultation to students** directly to coach students in use of adaptations (i.e. aides, accommodations, modifications) in the learning environment

Related Services (OT, PT, SLP, etc.)	Schedule 1:1 check-ins and progress monitoring of exercise skill development. ● Has the student been doing the exercises/drills? ● What corrective feedback or coaching can be provided? ● What mastery can be demonstrated, or new skills can be introduced? ***Tips:*** ● *Service providers create videos of exercises or drills in order to provide personal playlists for students to practice at home*
	Provide consultation with staff or students for accessibility in virtual learning. ● Co-construct tools or resources for students ● Record video for tool use for program-specific challenges / barriers ● Direct instruction for small group or 1:1 setting for use of strategy or tool to address adaptation needs

Step 3: Plan to Differentiate Instruction for Diverse Learning Needs

Meeting the learning needs of students in a virtual space may feel daunting. Begin with the tools and technology most familiar, and rely on highly effective or universal supports for differentiation. Remember to:

- ❏ Be flexible in the instructional approach. No two learners are alike! (resource: UDL for Online Learning)
- ❏ Provide choice for students to demonstrate knowledge
- ❏ Share content in multiple formats
- ❏ Leverage Digital Reading Supports for eligible students:
    - ❏ Bookshare - Online ebook library with texts read in high quality text-to-speech voice. Available for free to qualifying students. Must be registered by school
    - ❏ Learning Ally - Online ebook library with human-narrated texts. Available to any student as a reading accommodation or for qualifying students. Schools must have a subscription to access.
    - ❏ Audible Stories- Online collection of books to stream for students. Available for free to the public while schools are closed.
- ❏ Utilize accessibility features (see separate resource for ensuring instructional accessibility)
    - ❏ **Guides:**
        - ❏ Quick Guide for Chromebooks
        - ❏ Apple accessibility site
        - ❏ Microsoft built-in accessibility checker
        - ❏ Accessibility check - Google Suite
- ❏ Plan with student learning profiles in mind (resource: Sample - Learner Profiles)
    - ❏ Create separate plans as needed to support learners with moderate to severe needs (resource: Providing Supports to Students with Low Incidence Disabilities)

Step 4: Anticipate Barriers

While we cannot anticipate all barriers for small group instruction in a virtual setting, some commonly reported barriers include behavior expectations, accessibility of online learning materials, and equity.

Behavior for Online Learning	
What it might include: ● Refusing to follow tech norms ● Interrupting instruction ● Poor digital citizenship (i.e. privacy, bullying, etc)	**Strategies to try:** ● Post and teach expectations for online learning ● Use visual at start of each lesson/section ● Check preset permissions and settings to turn off functions as appropriate (i.e. chat with everyone, participant ability to mute/remove others); ● Guided access / tech monitoring tools for students
Top Resources for reference: ● Online Norms Example (UWC Singapore) ● Online Learning Day Example (De LaSalle High School) ● Common Sense Media Resources for Parents	

Barriers for Equitable Student Access	
What it might include: ● Documents not compatible with text-to-speech ● Scanned documents that are difficult to read for students with visual weaknesses ● Some students do not have 1:1 technology to access learning at the same time as peers	**Strategies to try:** ● Teach students how to use and personalize learning tools on technology and platforms Ex: Google Voice Typing for writing; reverse contrast with enlarged font for reading ● Provide opportunities for asynchronous communication and learning Ex: Email, chat, discussion boards, videos for viewing at any time
Top Resources for reference: ● Accessibility for Students with Disabilities Quick Reference ● School - family communication tips for equitable access	

Step 5: Reflect and Follow Up with Team Members

After providing small group instruction for students, provide clear communication and guidance to families and other team members (teachers, administrators, related service providers). Adjust future instructional plans, review assessment data and collaboratively communicate with the student's IEP team to ensure success.

● Take time to document service delivery during or after instruction
● Send a follow up email to the student, family and relevant team members with next steps, assignments and deadlines
● Provide prompt feedback to students for work in progress
● Communicate availability for follow up and future instruction, establishing check-ins between due dates
● Seek help and collaboration from team members, site leaders and district coaches where needed.

Final Word

Even though school closures are creating questions about how to best provide services, we know there is a good faith effort to provide the right support to students. During this time of uncertainty we recommend: 1) ensure you have a strong collaboration system and structure, and maintain flexibility, 2) provide students with small group instruction that is differentiated and tailored to their needs, and 3) ensure you are reflecting and following up with key stakeholders.

Appendix - Further Resources

Small-Group Lesson Plan Template	
Topic	• i.e. Identifying main idea of a text; finding slope of a line
Students	• List group of students to work with and date/time
Check-In / Warm Up (5 Min)	• Provide space to check-in with students about social emotional needs
Teach (I Do) (5 - 10 min)	• Teach and model new content or skill • Remember to connect learning to past learning • Share the "why" with students to establish context and buy-in • Share screen using learning platform or additional tool • Use video link to have students watch instruction (ideally doing asynchronously only, otherwise teach in the moment to model and interact with students)
Practice (We Do) *if applicable (5 min)	• This may be difficult to do. Students could solve and show on screen, write out ideas, do a shared writing prompt with the group, or use breakout sessions for students to work together and share out work on a task (can also be used for independent practice)

Launch Students into Independent Work (You Do)
(5 - 10 min)
	• Provide independent work / assignment for students to complete (IEP Goals and/or core content)
	  ○ Can do synchronously and ask questions / comment for feedback
	  ○ Can do asynchronously and use commenting / discussion board features to ask questions and collaborate

Assess / Close
(5 min)
	• Use exit ticket or post assessment for skill mastery / development
	  ○ Take photo of end product (personal schedule for routines, visual representation)
	  ○ Record learning, question, challenges verbally or in chart/table/form
	  ○ Complete open ended question or concrete item for mastery (i.e. math problem, text response)
	  ○ Provide a space for students to tell you how things went and what they need

Recommendation for System/Network Approach

The AEM Center and CAST provided a webinar March 2020 titled "Supporting Students with IEPs in eLearning Days". It was recommended all Special Education teams collaborate with site team members to develop cross functional teams and systems for student support. Notes for these steps are provided in greater detail below. For more information, access the full webinar here.

Create cross functional teams that can: ("4 Cs")

1. **Coordinate**
   a. Administrators, General Education Teachers, Special Education Teachers, Related Providers, Assistive Technology (AT) Specialists, EdTech Leads, Families, Students (as applicable)
      i. Know role and responsibility in this system
2. **Collaborate**
   a. General Education and Special Education Teachers instructional collaboration on units
   b. Consult on accessibility of materials and tools
   c. General Education consult with Case Managers to meet needs of students in new platform
   d. AT and EdTech Team collaboration (plan and ensure interoperability of technology)
   e. Technology personnel are accessible to students and families (they know who to contact for what type of support or technology issue)
   f. Administrators, Special Educators and Families are collaborating (and communicating)
3. **Communicate**
   a. Each member of the system needs to know who to contact right away when there is a problem with progress
      i. Give recommendations to direct instruction
      ii. Alert Special Education to provide additional supports
      iii. Educators need to convey concerns or actions to families
      iv. AT contact when issue with tools or access for learning
4. **(Maintain) Continuity**
   a. Select tools already in place whenever possible
      i. Minimize introduction of new technology and digital materials
   b. Collaborate with AT/EdTech teams in selecting new digital materials
      i. Consider interoperability and minimizing barriers for access

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