

## **Providing Special Education Services to Students with Disabilities**



Vermont Independent  
Schools Association

Conference Call Summary — March 24, 2020  
Special Ed-Only Independent Schools

*Note: Vermont has 32 special ed-only independent schools enrolling approximately 800 students. Students attending these schools have disabilities too serious for their local public school to address.*

Distance learning is working better than some special education school administrators initially thought it might, but it is clearly not a substitute for normal instruction. In addition to its inadequacies as an instructional medium for students with disabilities, distance learning has other significant problems:

- Internet access is inadequate or nonexistent in some regions of Vermont.
- Some households do not have adequate equipment such as iPads, headphones etc.
- Family cooperation sometimes is not possible (e.g., children of essential workers) or fragile families may not be cooperative.

Schools are using telephone contact when internet service is not available in a household. This requires a student to be verbal and capable of using a phone and also requires the family to cooperate and support the daily or multiple daily calls—conditions that sometimes are not met.

- Can the state urge internet service providers to make internet service available at reduced or zero cost to families of IEP students unable to afford service otherwise?
- Some special ed-only schools have purchased Verizon “Jetpack” cellphone interfaces to obtain internet service for families without service and some have purchased Chrome-books or iPads for students.

Schools need assurances of continued revenue flows matching normal operations. This includes federal Medicaid and special ed support as well as state support.

Though distance learning means fewer direct instructional minutes per student, work needed to prepare and sustain distance learning services is greater than normal preparation and delivery work. Specialists must be kept on staff to support preparation and assessment even if they are not providing direct instruction.

Schools need clear guidance and assurances of protection against FERPA complaints arising from the process of developing remote instruction tools and techniques. Though schools are aware of their responsibilities, they are concerned that inadvertent or unavoidable errors will occur. We understand the federal DOE already has addressed related HIPAA concerns.

Schools need clear guidance on the 175-day school year requirement and possible extensions of the school year into the summer to support their planning. Summer programs operated by some special ed-only schools would be upset if the regular school year is extended. These summer programs are vital for several reasons: IEP students need summer support, schools need the summer revenue, school staff members who have made commitments to the summer programs would be damaged by an unanticipated change.

Some special ed-only schools have State Board of Education reapprovals scheduled to come up in a few months. Will the current approvals remain in effect until AOE and State Board are able to review the schools and consider reapproval?

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