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COVID-19 Best Practices & Innovations Brief: How Mississippi Ensured Free and Appropriate Public Education for Students Receiving Special Education Services Online

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COVID-19 Best Practices & Innovations Brief:

How Mississippi Ensured Free and Appropriate Public Education for Students Receiving Special Education Services Online

Providing Effective Instruction

Across the United States, special education teachers were in "survival mode" as the global pandemic left them in unusual and challenging circumstances. Lessons learned during this time are a valuable resource as we move forward. In particular, learning to effectively deliver instruction using a virtual modality increases opportunities for students to be provided a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in many situations that could take students out of the traditional classroom over a longer period of time. When asked, teachers across the country shared FAPE was met for students receiving special education services when it related to procedural matters; however, other types of instructional delivery were less effective (Jenkins and Walker, 2020). Providing and accommodating to meet individual students' needs in a virtual learning environment was significantly more difficult than traditional face-to-face learning (Jackson and Bowden, 2020).

A recent statewide study funded by the Governor's Emergency Educational Response Grant asked both Mississippi's special education directors and K-12 special education teachers to share how they addressed the challenges of continuing to deliver services during the pandemic. To increase effective instruction, Mississippi special educators shared they met challenges by making adjustments as they learned that keeping a consistent routine, even online, helped students make progress towards goals. According to survey responses, organizational scaffolds such as to-do lists, checklists, calendars, or access to progress grades were implemented by over half of Mississippi special educators to help students stay on track. Learning management systems, such as Google Classroom, Ingenuity, and Schoology, were used to help keep materials and resources in consistent locations. Teachers indicated Mississippi students participated better in virtual sessions when they were one-on-one or in smaller groups. Participation also increased when students were engaged in computer-based instruction, such as Splash Learn and Near Pod. Providing students with flexible due dates increased opportunities to meet students' individual needs as well. Teachers also shared that providing students with video models of

WHAT WORKED IN THE CLASSROOM

Consistency in routines and practices

To do lists, Calendars, Checklists

Synchronous One-on-one or small group instruction remediation

Computer based instruction

Flexible due dates

Video modeling for instructional tasks

Video modeling for using new technology and digital tools

Token economy

Intentional time for peer interaction

Social stories

Frequent parent communication

Flexibility in availability

Model a positive and engaging attitude

skills for new learning and remediation differentiated learning for academic, daily living, and vocational skills. This is aligned with research findings indicating video models may serve as an effective resource for teaching and assessing skills for students with disabilities (Padillo, Espina, Capuno, Manguilimotan, Calasang, and Bellete, 2021). Mississippi teachers also indicated they held office hours outside of learning sessions to answer questions and provide remediation with challenging skills.

Progress monitoring was reported to be difficult by 85% of special educators. Despite the challenge, teachers worked to find effective tools to monitor progress. Tools found to be effective included observing students during virtual sessions and informal assessing responses, and checking accuracy of submitted assignments. For example, students were asked to submit videos performing skills. This provided teachers with opportunities to track progress toward annuals goals more accurately. Checklists and rubrics were also designed to more accurately assess progress. Mississippi teachers found that a consistent designated time to assess goals was easiest method to progress monitor.

Engaging Students in Virtual Learning

Student participation and motivation was a significant challenge for Mississippi teachers, who held office hours outside of instructional learning sessions for students to talk with each other and check-in. During instructional sessions, teachers provided opportunities for students to engage in conversations with each other.   Teachers realized to keep students motivated they needed to serve as an example by staying motivated and positive as well. Reminding students of the end goals and allowing them to see purpose in what they were learning helped keep them on-task.

The Parent Teacher Team

Parents and teachers working together is critical to meet the needs of individual students in an online learning environment (Young and Donovan, 2020). Virtual learning sessions provided daily opportunities for teachers and parents to communicate. To enhance collaboration between parents and teachers, teachers scheduled office hours that were flexible during times parents were available. Teachers provided "how-to" videos and written instruction for parents to utilize new technology, learn new skills, and provide remediation for challenging skills. During virtual sessions, parents were asked to help with proximity control and assisted with manipulative and hands on activities. Teachers used emails, text, phone calls, and home visits to facilitate as much communication as possible. Virtual IEP meetings were found to beneficial for enhancing parent-teacher communication and facilitating appropriate instruction (McKittrick and Tuchman, 2020). Since approximately 77% of the special educators who participated in the statewide surveys were pleased with the effectiveness of online meetings, it is possible that virtual IEP meetings could become a viable tool for use in future.

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FULL REPORT

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