WVSPA VIRTUAL TOWNHALL  
September 2, 2020

As part of an ongoing effort to support School Psychologists across West Virginia, WVSPA hosted a virtual townhall where an open discussion opportunity with Susan Beck, Director of Special Education. The discussion was recorded and the most common questions are summarized below. Should you wish to watch the recording, please click here.

1. **What is the difference between a blended model, remote learning, and virtual instruction?**

   *Blended learning is a combination between remote instruction and face-to-face instruction. This is not the same as virtual instruction, which is completely off campus. Additionally, more information about each model can be found on the [WVDE Re-Entry website](#). The excerpt below from that website and re-entry toolkit outlines these differences.*

   ![Diagram comparing in-person/blended instruction, remote learning, and virtual learning](#)

2. **If a family member has a medical condition, can they use homebound for the student?**

   *No, the homebound services apply to the student. The district must find a way to provide education virtually if the family is uncomfortable sending the student in.*

3. **What if a physician provides an order for homebound services because of a family member?**

   *The district should consider asking for permission to reach out to the physician and share information about delivery of instruction, safety measures, etc., rather than looking at it as a medical homebound.*
4. What happens if a doctor issues a medical order for a student not being able to wear a mask?

The district is encouraged to find ways to work with students to allow them to come to school if they are not able to wear a mask. Caution should be taken to not to discriminate by saying the student cannot come to school without a mask. The district is encouraged to work around this situation and provide support that is needed for the student. Further, the WVDE Re-Entry Toolkit notes:

- Any student who cannot wear a mask or face shield due to a medical condition, including those with respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition, or disability, and students who would be unable to remove a mask without assistance are not required to wear face coverings. Individuals who are communicating or seeking to communicate with someone who is hearing impaired or who has another disability, where the ability to see the mouth is essential to communication, are not required to wear a mask; however, individuals should consider using another type of face covering such as a plastic face shield or a face covering with a clear panel.

More information regarding face coverings and safety measures can be found on the WVDE Re-Entry website.

5. What guidance is available for assessment practices of School Psychologists during the COVID-19 pandemic?

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the West Virginia School Psychologists Association (WVSPA) and the West Virginia Board of Examiners of Psychologists (WVBEP) joined together to offer guidance for practicing School Psychologists to offer guidance on how to proceed with mandated assessments. This guidance document can be found on the WVSPA website or by following this link.

6. How should I document any changes made to the testing environment in my report?

If any changes are made to the standardization methods for a particular instrument, it should be indicated in the accompanying psychoeducational report. This may include things such as having separate blocks for the examiner and student, using a sample page for the response book to avoid direct contact of paper, using a pencil as a pointer for indicating responses, or changing out specific items (e.g., a plastic doll in place of a cloth doll).

7. What if I am not able to complete the requested evaluation in the required timeframe to be compliant with WVDE Policy 2419 requirements?

There were no extensions granted by the federal government for assessments with students. The only person that can give a time extension is the parent. If the parent does not want an evaluation at the present time due to safety concerns, be proactive and offer the evaluation at a later date. Do not have the parent sign a new consent form. Document any communication with the parent and the agreed upon timeframe for completion of the evaluation that was requested. Be certain to provide prior written notice of the agreement.

8. Are there any changes to timelines if a student enrolls in virtual school?

It is important to remember that special education services do not go away when a student enrolls in virtual school. The student’s IEP should not change just because of the change in delivery for instruction. In addition, policy does not allow for blanket administrative decisions/changes to IEP’s for students. The CDC states that students must be given access to their services based on their needs/IEP. Virtual school is the general education and the services that are in the IEP must be provided. All timelines are still in place – initial evaluation, re-evaluation, and IEP due dates. Similarly, all timelines and requirements remain in place for 504 Plans and Student Assistance Teams.
9. If students are only in school one day per week, am I allowed to pull them for requested evaluations?

It is recommended that you discuss testing parameters with your director and also the building administrator. Also, consider contacting each family to discuss preferences and options. Other options include scheduling a time to complete the evaluation on a day separate from the day of instruction of the students’ grade. Contact with families could be done by phone, email, or by a letter. As an example, a letter might ask the family to select the option they would prefer (see example to the right).

If the family declines the evaluation at the present time due to health concerns regarding COVID-19, document an agreed upon time and provide prior written notice. See question 7 for further information on documenting changes to an evaluation timeline.

10. Is there any guidance regarding taking referrals for initial evaluations when there is a concern for a Specific Learning Disability given the lack of instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Consider it like a tier system of support. Every child will be coming in with some sort of concern from the point they were at in March. Some students may have thrived during this period, but some may need a brief period of intervention to give them the push to get back on track. Give it a bit of time before assessing, even for those students that were struggling in March. There will be students that look farther behind academically, some many have mental health concerns, and others may have trauma from the situation. All these factors should be taken into account before considering a new referral. Above all, if you feel that the situation is urgent, use your professional judgement and move forward.

The WVDE has created a useful resource regarding the West Virginia Tiered System of Support (WVTSS) which has been linked for quick reference.