

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.

 <p>In-person/Blended Instruction</p> <p>This option allows in-person attendance at the school for a set number of days. Counties will decide what the school day and school week look like. Some counties will be in school five days each week while other county plans will opt for reduced days or hours for students in order to increase cleaning and sanitation and reduce exposure. On the days that students are not in school, learning will continue at home.</p>	 <p>Virtual Learning</p> <p>Every county must offer a full-time virtual learning option for students. These students will still be considered public school students. Families who choose this option, would enroll their children in a virtual learning program and that child would ideally remain there at least for a semester.</p> <p>The available virtual learning options are not the same as what families experienced at the end of last school year. Instruction will be provided using a West Virginia-certified teacher and families can expect the same instructional quality and rigor for their virtual school student as would otherwise be provided in a traditional classroom setting (including, in many cases, daily live virtual interaction with the teacher). In the event of an ordered school closure, virtual learning will continue unaffected.</p>
 <p>Remote Learning</p> <p>Remote learning will occur for students participating in the in-person/blended option if it is necessary to close a school or county temporarily due to increases in COVID-19 cases impacting the school community. Schools cannot activate remote learning. This instructional model requires that all students remain engaged in learning and instruction at home using a range of tools and resources from basic materials to online applications.</p>	<p>For more information about the virtual learning options available for your student, please contact your local county board of education.</p>

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.

DATE _____

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Your child was referred for additional evaluations at his/her spring IEP meeting. Those evaluations would normally be conducted while your child is at school as soon as the school year resumes. However, with the current situation, I wanted to give parents some options for testing, since your child will only be attending school in person XX day(s) per week. I can still test your child while he/she is at school, as long as you know they will be pulled out of class at least once or twice for about an hour each time. If you don't want your child pulled out of class since they are only there XX days, I would also be happy to test them at LOCATION on one of the XX days they are not at school.

Please sign the enclosed permission form and any other paperwork that is included and then choose your preference below. Send back all the forms in the self-addressed stamped envelope that I have included.

____ I prefer to have my child tested while he/she is at school.

____ I prefer to bring my child and have them tested at the LOCATION on a day they are not attending school. (Please provide a phone number that I can get in touch with you to schedule this testing _____).

____ My child will NOT be attending school in person and will be on Virtual School. I would prefer to bring him/her to the LOCATION for testing. (Please provide a phone number that I can get in touch with you to schedule this testing _____).

____ I do not wish to have my child tested at this time.

Please feel free to call me with any questions!

Sincerely,

XXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXX County School Psychologist
PHONE NUMBER

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.