



**Illinois State Board of Education  
Special Education Services Department**

**Resource**

**Remote Learning for Students  
Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired**

**This document is intended to provide non-regulatory information on the subject matter listed above during the suspension of in-person instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

**For specific questions, please contact the Illinois State Board of Education.**

**April 2020**

## **Introduction**

---

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) recognizes the difficulties at-home instruction and remote learning pose for teachers as well as the parents/guardians of students who are blind or visually impaired. For some, this situation is complicated by the lack of reliable internet access and/or the unavailability of technology in the home.

We also recognize the fact that all students with disabilities are entitled to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE). Teachers have the responsibility to provide ongoing learning opportunities to their students during this mandatory suspension of in-person instruction in our state's classrooms.

Successful remote learning opportunities are contingent, however, on a number of factors including not only technology and access, but also involve teacher and parent schedules, responsibilities, and personal factors as well as other logistics.

ISBE would like to provide you with some suggestions and ideas related to remote learning opportunities for students who are blind or visually impaired, including ideas that do not depend on technology. We would also like to provide you with resources for additional information related to services, programming, and information intended to enhance learning opportunities and the functional development of students who are blind or visually impaired.

## **General Considerations**

---

For students who are blind, visually impaired, or DeafBlind, accessibility is likely the most prominent hurdle in remote learning. Students in the blind and low vision population present with a range of needs regarding access to print media, instructional materials, and communications.

Many students who are blind or visually impaired require instructional materials presented in a tactile manner through braille or other tactile methods. Students who are DeafBlind may require the use of a tactile sign language interpreter to facilitate communication and/or support from an intervener in the regular school environment.

While engaged in remote learning, students may not have access to supports such as on-site braille transcribing, assistive technology, or support from an intervener. It is up to schools and educators to seek out methods and avenues for the provision of supports typically available to students.

At this challenging time, educators are working to identify and utilize many different methods of instruction and enhance general accessibility for their students in an effort to continue providing quality instruction and FAPE to the best of their ability.

Before deciding on any method, analyze the individual needs of the student(s) you are serving. More than one option may be required or trialed until a good fit is identified. Data provided by the student's functional vision assessment or learning media assessment is important to consider while planning remote instruction.

### Related Services

Some students who are blind or have visual impairments require services such as speech and language, social emotional learning, occupational therapy, and orientation and mobility. Students with visual impairments also require an expanded core curriculum. Given the unique challenges posed during this time of crisis, including accessibility and heightened stress and anxiety, service providers continue to act as crucial supports for students and families. Many students may be struggling to transition skills they have learned in school to at-home learning environments. While students have goals in their IEPs, some skills may be prioritized during this challenging time such as coping/self-management, executive functioning, advocacy, and independent living skills which can be supported by service providers.

### Print Media and Braille

Students who require braille materials continue to need such materials at home. Schools and educators may have access to braille transcription technology and might continue to provide materials as they would in the classroom; however, many educators do not have access to such technology at this time. To this end, the use of printing services may be necessary. Schools may be able to access materials in braille or other accessible formats through authorized users (AUs) of the National Instructional Materials Access Center (NIMAC), a national repository of files from educational publishers.

**NOTE: Only students with IEPs, and eligible as per 34 CFR 300.172, can access and use NIMAS/NIMAC – sourced materials. These materials, whether in hardcopy/concrete, virtual, digitized, or any other alternate format, must not be made available to students who are not eligible for NIMAS/NIMAC-sourced materials, nor distributed broadly.**

Illinois has four AUs, and the contact information is found here:

- Bookshare® <http://www.bookshare.org>  
Contact: Jennifer Ofiana at [nimas@bookshare.org](mailto:nimas@bookshare.org) or (650)644-3400.  
Bookshare®  
480 South California Avenue, Suite 201  
Palo Alto, California 94306

- Illinois Assistive Technology Program (IATP) <https://www.iltech.org/>  
Contact: Lynette Strode at [lstrode@iltech.org](mailto:lstrode@iltech.org) or (217) 522-7985  
Illinois Assistive Technology Program  
1020 South Spring Street  
Springfield, Illinois 62704
- Illinois Instructional Materials Center  
<https://chicagolighthouse.org/program/illinois-instructional-materials-center/>  
Contact: Greg Polman at [Greg.Polman@chicagolighthouse.org](mailto:Greg.Polman@chicagolighthouse.org) or (312) 997-3699.  
The Chicago Lighthouse  
1850 West Roosevelt Road  
Chicago, Illinois 60608
- Infnitec (<http://www.myinfnitec.org/>) is affiliated with United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) Seguin of Greater Chicago. Additionally, Infnitec administers "InfniTEXT", a repository of electronic versions of textbooks and other instructional materials for students with print disabilities.  
<http://www.myinfnitec.org/infnitext;jsessionid=2F1F5B9F79E47494886741EA269092CB>  
B  
Contact: Steve Clements at [sclements@ucpnet.org](mailto:sclements@ucpnet.org) or (708) 444-8460.  
United Cerebral Palsy – Seguin of Greater Chicago  
7550 West 183rd Street  
Tinley Park, Illinois 60477

**NOTE:** LEAs should be aware that once a NIMAS file is retrieved from the NIMAC repository by one of the authorized users above, it may be necessary to render the file into the requested format (e.g., braille, audio, digital/electronic, large print, etc.). This process may entail costs that will be passed to the LEA making the request.

Other print needs can also be fulfilled by some of the partners listed above such as tactile graphics, large print, adapted materials, audio media, etc.

Materials can be mailed or provided to families at a pick-up/drop-off arrangement deemed safe by the school and family.

### Tangible Cues at Home

Many students with visual impairments use tangible cues at school as part of daily routines to navigate the physical environment and master other aspects of the learning environment. Tangible cues use real objects to help students associate language with items, tasks, and other concepts and begin associating these with braille. Families may need assistance in creating and using tangible cues for home and remote learning routines and other important factors. A link to using tangible cues at home is found in this document under "Resources - General."

## Assistive Technology

Students who are blind or visually impaired often depend on support from assistive technology to access instruction and environment. Assistive technology can be “high” or “low” tech. Schools may loan students assistive technology devices and tools while remote learning where possible and appropriate. Educators and families may be able to secure assistive technology tools via organizations such as the Illinois Assistive Technology Program (<https://www.iltech.org/>).

As many students are using computers, tablets, and other personal devices during remote learning, access to supports like screen readers, magnifiers, and refreshable braille displays is crucial.

## **Remote Learning for Students with Technology and Internet Access**

---

Some students and families have access to technology and reliable internet connections which allow them to access a wide variety of learning options. Some students may have full-sized screens to use, while others are using devices like small tablets or smartphones. This is important to identify because use of some media or features could be challenging on small screens.

### Accessibility Features

Any online content should allow for use of accessibility features such as increase in font size, color contrast, large print captions, and magnification.

In the resources portion of this document, there is a list of websites which include online learning options. Most online learning outlets are useable with appropriate accessibility features. Educators may need to reach out to families in order to educate parents and guardians on the use of technology and accessibility features for their child.

Educators can investigate the accessibility features of various online meeting platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams. It is beneficial to test and practice with these features prior to instruction. While time consuming, creating an accessibility guide or outline for individual students can be helpful for students and families.

For families who have access to technology such as an e-reader or tablet, helping the family connect to free apps associated with the public library enables families to access the library’s collection at home. E-reader apps often include accessibility features such as text color and size as well as the ability to highlight or bookmark passages. Through public library applications, audio books are also often available to borrow which download to a device like a smartphone or tablet.

## Related Services

Service providers can utilize similar methods of instruction as teachers on their teams. Service providers can utilize online media and meeting platforms to engage students in activities which relate to their goals or areas of concern. Service providers should pay close attention to maintaining privacy and confidentiality, when appropriate, especially when using online meeting platforms. Some providers may need to discuss privacy provisions with families in order to plan services.

## **Remote Learning for Students without Technology and/or Internet Access**

Some students may not have access to technology or a reliable internet connection, or the student may not be developmentally ready to use complex technology like online meeting platforms. Thus, educators and service providers may need to provide “offline” instructional supports and materials for students.

### Hands-on Learning

For students who do not have internet access, hands-on, project-based learning may be a creative option. For students who are blind or visually impaired, hands-on projects can incorporate communication strategies, orientation and mobility practice, independent living skill practice, and so much more. For some students, this might be a unique opportunity to establish connections with family members through collaborative activities. Families and students can engage in orientation/mobility and executive functioning skill-building while participating in every-day activities like navigating the home environment, making breakfast, doing laundry, caring for a family pet, doing simple science experiments, etc. with the added support of picture communications or steps and routines prepared by teachers.

### Offline Technology

Some families may have access to technology like a DVD player or computer without internet. Videos can be shared with families in DVD format or on a flash drive if possible. Some online content can also be accessed “offline” on a computer or tablet. The family may be able to access internet temporarily at a “hot spot” to download content for students to use at home. One such example is the PBS Kids Games App (link provided in “Resources”).

For families who have access to television or other broadcast media, planning activities around television shows or movies, such as those through public access television, can relate to many skill areas like listening comprehension, reading comprehension, story analysis, math computation, everyday math, writing, and social skills.

## Other Instructional Options

Additionally, board or card games can also be used as instructional tools. Common and popular card or board games capitalize on math, literacy, and social skills while providing opportunities for families (including siblings also participating in remote learning) to connect and practice communication. Toys such as Lego blocks or other building materials can be used for STEM activities. Card games like Uno and toys like Lego may also offer instructions or materials in braille or audio format. Other games and toys are also available with braille through online retailers.

\*The latter statements are not intended as endorsements of products but made in order to create awareness around accessible materials for educators. Links for ideas below under “Resources – Other.”

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

---

**Question 1:** How do educators access appropriate print media for students who are blind or visually impaired?

**Answer:** There are several outlets and organizations through which educators can access braille, audio, and tactile instructional materials for students. Please see the section above titled “Print Media and Braille.”

**Question 2:** How do educators access assistive technology for students who are blind or visually impaired?

**Answer:** Assistive technology owned by the school can be loaned out to students or families where possible and appropriate such as magnifiers, braille displays, closed circuit television (CCTV), and others used by students in school. Educators and families can also contact the Illinois Assistive Technology Program for further assistance. <https://www.iltech.org/>

## **Resources**

---

### **Covid-19**

American Foundation for the Blind: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Resources

<https://www.afb.org/blog/topic/coronavirus-covid-19>

Paths to Literacy: Coping with School Closures During COVID-19

<https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/blog/coping-school-closures-during-covid-19>

## **General**

American Foundation for the Blind at Home Learning Resources

<https://www.aph.org/athomewithaph-resources/>

The Chicago Lighthouse

<https://chicagolighthouse.org/>

PBS Learning Media (closed captions available)

<https://illinois.pbslearningmedia.org/>

PBS Kids Weekday Newsletter (provides parents and families activities and tips for at-home learning) <https://www.pbs.org/parents/pbskidsdaily?source=pbskids.org>

PBS Kids Games App (can be played offline, closed captions available)

<https://pbskids.org/apps/pbs-kids-games.html>

New York Deaf-Blind Collaborative Tip Sheet: Providing Access through Sign Language & Text for Low Vision & Tactile Communicators During the Coronavirus Pandemic

[https://ddi.wayne.edu/covid19/nydbc\\_tip\\_sheet\\_sign\\_language\\_during\\_social\\_distancing.pdf](https://ddi.wayne.edu/covid19/nydbc_tip_sheet_sign_language_during_social_distancing.pdf)

Illinois Service Resource Center Online Resources

<https://www.isrc.us/isrc-student-online-learning-resources>

CHARGE Syndrome Foundation: At Home Resources

<https://www.chargesyndrome.org/sample-page/at-home-resources/>

Project Reach: technical support, training regarding DeafBlindness

<http://www.philiprockcenter.org/project-reach>

Active Learning Space

<http://www.activelearningspace.org/>

Teaching Students with Visual Impairments

<https://www.teachingvisuallyimpaired.com/>

## **Perkins School for the Blind**

ELearning Webpage

<https://www.perkinselearning.org/>

Scout Resource Database

<https://www.perkinselearning.org/scout>

Paths to Technology

<https://www.perkinselearning.org/technology>

Orientation and Mobility

<https://www.perkinselearning.org/topics/orientation-and-mobility>

Zoom Activities

<https://www.perkinselearning.org/technology/blog/six-cool-games-can-be-played-zoom>

Distance Learning

<https://www.perkinselearning.org/technology/blog/objectiveed-offers-free-distance-learning-students-visual-impairments>

### **Paths to Literacy (Perkins School for the Blind and the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired)**

Virtual Expanded Core Education Learning (ExCEL) Academy for Students with Visual Impairments <https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/resources/Virtual-ExCEL-Academy>

ExCEL Daily Web Classes

[https://aph.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_wGdMvOrMRGmV2xJ2CvSsMg](https://aph.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_wGdMvOrMRGmV2xJ2CvSsMg)

Using Tangible Symbols at Home

<https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/strategies/using-tangible-symbols-home>

Tips to Adapt Games for Children with Vision Impairments

<https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/strategies/tips-adapt-games-children-vision-impairments>

Stay-at-Home Activities for Children with Visual Impairments

<https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/blog/stay-home-activities-children-visual-impairments>

Orientation and Mobility Game Suggestions

<http://www.pdrib.com/pages/omgames.php>

### **Technology and Accessibility**

Office of Civil Rights: Technology Accessibility

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/frontpage/pro-students/issues/dis-issue06.html>

Zoom Accessibility Features

<https://zoom.us/accessibility>

Zoom Hot Keys and Shortcuts

<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/205683899-Hot-Keys-and-Keyboard-Shortcuts-for-Zoom>

Google Meet

<https://support.google.com/meet/answer/7313544>

Google Classroom Screen Reader

<https://support.google.com/edu/classroom/answer/6084551>

Google Hangouts Screen Reader

<https://support.google.com/hangouts/answer/6320673>

Microsoft Teams Accessibility

<https://support.office.com/en-us/article/accessibility-support-for-microsoft-teams-d12ee53f-d15f-445e-be8d-f0ba2c5ee68f>

Adobe Accessibility

<https://www.adobe.com/accessibility.html>

Described and Captioned Media Program

<https://dcmp.org/>

## **Other**

Uno with Braille

<https://www.mattelgames.com/en-us/uno-braille>

LEGO Instructions: Audio and Braille

<https://legoaudioinstructions.com/>

Games and Toys with Braille

<https://www.maxiaids.com/braille-games-and-toys>

## **Appreciations**

---

Special thanks to the Illinois educators and service providers taking part in collaborative efforts to share resources and support one another for the benefit of Illinois students in low-incidence populations such as those from the following organizations:

- The Illinois Vision Leadership Council
- Project Reach

The efforts of dedicated educators and service providers is greatly appreciated during this time of crisis, and these partners are credited with gathering many of the resources mentioned in this document.