



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

Resource

**Remote Learning for Students Who Are
Deaf or Hard of Hearing or DeafBlind**

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.

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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 deaf or hard of hearing (DHH) or DeafBlind (DB). 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 several 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 DHH or DB, 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 DHH or DB.

General Considerations

Communication and Language

For students who are DHH or DB, communication and language access is likely the most prominent hurdle in remote learning. Students in the DHH/DB population present with a range of communication needs with respect to modality and methods of access.

Many students who are DHH/DB require the services of a sign language visual or tactile interpreter per their IEP to access instruction, social interaction, and general environmental information. Students who are DB may require instructional or functional materials of a tactile nature and/or support from an Intervener in the regular school environment.

Additionally, "auditory-oral" students continue to require engagement in listening and spoken language interventions.

At this challenging time, educators are working to identify and utilize many different methods of communication and general accessibility for their students 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.

With an understanding that some families have limited sign language skills themselves, having conversations with families about specific strategies for facilitating learning would be beneficial. Reaching out to parents and families is a crucial piece of remote learning as they are the educator's best ally in connecting with students at home. Resources for at-home communication would be beneficial for families such as sign dictionaries, online sign language classes, videos, etc.

For parents and families who are not able to learn or utilize sign language, helping the student and family set up communication methods would be helpful. Discuss options such as text communication, pictures, visual schedules and communication boards, and other visual methods.

Related Services

Some students who are DHH/DB have related services such as speech and language, social emotional learning, auditory discrimination, or other therapies which are integral to the student's ability to access instruction listed on the IEP. Given the unique challenges posed by this time of crisis such as communication barriers and heightened stress and anxiety, service providers continue to act as crucial supports for student and families. Many students may be struggling to transfer skills they have learned in school to at-home learning environments. While students have goals in their IEPs, some particular skills may be prioritized during this challenging time such as communication repair, coping/self-management, advocacy, executive functioning, and independent living skills.

Audiological Technology

For students who do or do not use sign language, managing audiological technology is also an important factor. Some students and families depend on the expertise and access of school personnel to manage the upkeep of students' personal technology like hearing aids, implants, BAHAs, and assistive listening systems. Some students depend on school for hearing aid batteries or a secure place to charge implants. Parents and families might need additional resources regarding the care and use of the student's personal technology and assistive listening devices. Extra batteries or charging ports may need to be supplied to families temporarily depending on the situation and availability. Students who have access to assistive listening devices (ALD) at school should have similar access at home. Some ALD technology allows Bluetooth or direct connection into a device. If possible to provide at home, this technology would benefit students who are attempting to learn at home and communicate with caregivers in a possibly noisy environment.

Remote Learning for Students with Technology and Internet Access

There are many students and families who have access to technology and reliable internet connections to use for remote learning. Reach out to families to identify exactly what types of technology the students and families have. 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 remote interpreting or captioning services could be challenging on small screens.

Additionally, some students and families have access to assistive technology such as video phones, refreshable Braille displays, augmentative or alternative communication (AAC) devices, and others. Assistive technology can help support learning for many students at home just as it is supportive in the school environment.

Remote Interpreting

As access to an in-person interpreter is not an option currently, consider options for remote interpreting services. Remote interpreting can be embedded into platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet. Remote interpreting can also be accessed via phone if the student has access to a video phone or video relay service. Some students may not be used to using a remote interpreter, so preparation and practice may be required. Remote interpreting might not be appropriate for some students due to age or developmental level, which presents a need for alternate methods.

Captioning

Including captions on video media is crucial for students who sign and/or communicate orally. For students who do not sign, captions can add context or clarity, especially if the device audio lags behind the visual.

If you use video or online meeting platforms, secure a way to include captions either live with a computer program or captioning service (live/open caption) or added to a recording of the content (closed caption). Some online meeting platforms include captioning as an added service or feature. Be aware that some auto-captioning features may produce inaccurate captions. Captioning online classes and videos is an important support for students even at an emergent reading level. While some students may not be able to access instruction solely via captions, access to captions can support literacy development.

If communication factors present overwhelming barriers, consider using media presented in sign language and/or with embedded sign language.

If you are using media from outside sources that is already captioned, review the captions to be sure they are accurate. A transcript of any discussions or online meetings can also be provided to students as well as session notes.

It is important to note that if the student's IEP lists captions on video media as an accommodation, the educator is responsible for making efforts to include captions. If the IEP does not list captions as an accommodation, consider the student's rights and ability to access instructional information and content. Some captions are provided live through an online or remote service such as CART. Closed captions can be added to a recording post-production. Some online meeting platforms include a captioning feature, such as Zoom or Google Meet. It is advised that educators test and investigate these features prior to instruction. Also review captions on outside media to ensure accuracy and appropriateness, such as media found via YouTube.

Students may also have interpreting services per their IEP. As with captions, it is up to the schools to provide remote interpreting when possible and appropriate. Remote interpreting can also be embedded into online meeting platforms using split screen or "pin" features. As with captions, it is recommended that educators test this process prior to instruction. Remote interpreting can also be accessed via video phone/video relay service if the student has one available.

Other Technology

For a student who is DB, use of assistive technology such as a refreshable Braille display can support access to online classes or videos by providing real-time captions in Braille. Schools may need to make special requests or extra efforts to secure assistive technology for students who access information via tactile methods. Additionally, educators may need to provide alternative versions of online media to match a student's visual needs such as large print, contrasting colors, or in formats that can be manipulated or printed and magnified by the student or families.

For families who have access to technology such as an e-reader, 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. Related service providers may be held to high confidentiality standards depending on the field. 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 to plan services.

Online Meeting and Video Recording Considerations for Educators and Meeting Participants

- Use a neutral background.
- Avoid eating or chewing gum.
- Reduce background noise.
- Use appropriate lighting.
- Avoid having lights behind you or “back lighting” yourself.
- Mute participants when appropriate.
- Speak at a normal pace and be mindful of remote interpreters and captioning.
- Pre-warn students if you are sharing your screen or content which causes your face to become not visible.
- Prepare notes to provide to students after the meeting or video.
- Check-in with the student for understanding.

Remote Learning for Students without Technology and/or Internet Access

Some students may not have access to technology or reliable internet connections, 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.

Packages of instructional materials sent to the home or picked up by families may include supplementary visuals such as signs, instructional images, contextual information, etcetera. Some of the materials provided may need to be adapted to fit a particular student’s needs or to cover various instructional levels.

For students who are DB, refer to functional vision and learning media assessments to determine what type of print or tactile media might be appropriate which can be produced and given to students and families.

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 DHH/DB, projects can incorporate communication strategies, auditory/listening activities, independent living skill practice, and so much more. For some students, this might be a unique opportunity to establish connections through collaborative activities with family members with whom communication is a struggle. Families and students can engage in communication and executive functioning skill-building while participating in everyday activities like 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. This may include prerecorded lessons given in sign language or DVD media produced privately like sign language instruction.

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”).

Other Instructional Options

Teachers can also send home books, supplementary pencil and paper activities, and other hands-on materials. 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.

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 or Sign Language 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.”

Resources

Below you will find a list of resources you may wish to access. ISBE does not endorse specific products or providers but intends for the items on this list to serve as general suggestions of the types of resources educators may utilize.

Covid-19 Information

National Deaf Center COVID-19 Information

<https://www.nationaldeafcenter.org/covid-19-information>

Technology and Accessibility

See Hear Communication Matters: Resources gathered by Educational Audiologist Tina Childress, Illinois School for the Deaf
<https://tinachildress.wordpress.com/>

Zoom Captions Instructions
<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/207279736-Getting-started-with-closed-captioning>

Illinois Assistive Technology Program
<https://www.iltech.org/>

Chicago Hearing Society
<https://chicagohearingsociety.org/>

WebCaptioner
<https://webcaptioner.com/>

TypeWell
<https://typewell.com/>

Directory of Illinois CART Providers (The Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission)
<https://www2.illinois.gov/idhhc/community/Documents/CART/Cart%20Directory4.pdf>

Described and Captioned Media Program
<https://dcmp.org/>

Sign Language

Signing Time
<https://www.signingtime.com/>

LifePrint (American Sign Language University)
<https://www.lifeprint.com/>

Signing Savvy
<https://www.signingsavvy.com/>

ASL Pro
<http://www.aslpro.com/>

Hand Speak
<https://www.handspeak.com/>

Books and Stories

Signed Stories ITV

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

American Society for Deaf Children ASL Stories Directory

<https://deafchildren.org/knowledge-center/resources/sign-language-stories/?fbclid=IwAR1uhvE3ridJMXr3RpXDLs37Yby5uWMBKmFJ-SwSX2nKSYowBBXpeh5Qbq4>

Advocacy Activities

National Deaf Center: DeafVerse

<https://www.nationaldeafcenter.org/deafverse/>

Supporting Success for Children with Hearing Loss

<https://successforkidswithhearingloss.com/>

General

Hearing Our Way Magazine

https://www.hearingourway.com/resources?fbclid=IwAR0oKp5zfquPgWDNbU6D9vwGB4kMmfG1nQuw2tutJUfu_OJKK9PyG-EBPBE

It's a Noisy Planet

<https://www.noisyplanet.nidcd.nih.gov/>

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

Illinois Service Resource Center Online Resources

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

HearBuilder

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

Adventures of Bionic Buddy Coloring Book

<https://www.isrc.us/sites/default/files/external-resources/textual/ab-the-adventures-of-bionic-buddy.pdf>

Instructional Materials

Bookshare®

<http://www.bookshare.org>

Illinois Assistive Technology Program

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

Illinois Instructional Materials Center

<https://chicagolighthouse.org/program/illinois-instructional-materials-center/>

Infinitec

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

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.

Telecommunications, Video Relay Services

Illinois Telecommunications Access Corporation

<https://www.itactty.org/illinois-relay>

Sorenson Communications

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

Purple Communications

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

ZVRS

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

Convo Relay

<https://www.convorelay.com/vrs>

Hearing Technology Resources

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association Daily Care and Troubleshooting Tips for Hearing Aids

<https://www.asha.org/uploadedFiles/AIS-Hearing-Aids-Troubleshooting.pdf>

Phonak Rodger Assistive Listening Device Support

<https://www.phonakpro.com/com/en/support/product-support/wireless-accessories.html>

Infinitec Information on Assistive Listening Devices

<http://www.infinitec.org/assistive-listening-devices>

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>

Games and Puzzles with Sign Language

<https://www.verywellhealth.com/sign-language-games-and-puzzles-1048723>

Illinois Service Resource Center: Downloads for Parents

<https://www.isrc.us/parentdownloads>

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 involved in the following:

- The Illinois Supervisors of Programs for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals
- The Illinois Vision Leadership Council
- Project Reach
- Illinois Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- DHH Teaching During COVID-19 Collaborative Group
- The National Deaf Center State Team

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