



*Note: This story from Special Ed Connection®'s archives may assist you in your planning and response to COVID-19.*

**Key points:**

- Confirm functionality of technology on all ends of videoconference
- Use screen-sharing software to ensure everyone is on same page
- Emphasize need for professional demeanor because of visibility of body language

**Follow these steps to prepare for successful IEP videoconferences**

A father may be unable to reschedule a business trip to attend his child's IEP meeting. Or a mother may not be able to take any time off from work for fear of losing her job. Whatever the reason, the ability to use videoconferencing software to participate in their child's IEP meeting may be the best option for some parents -- as long as the technology works on both ends and everyone has an opportunity to meaningfully participate.

Ensure your teams take precautions if they plan to use videoconferencing software at their next IEP meeting to ensure parents can contribute.

"More and more things in our world happen digitally and electronically," said Lenore Knudtson, an education attorney and consultant at Pingora Consulting LLC. "[Videoconferencing] shouldn't automatically take the place of a face-to-face meeting, but it's the parents' right to say they need the meeting to happen via technology. It just requires more preparation."

**Take these steps:**

· **Verify technology is functioning properly:** Recognize that certain parts of a building may not be conducive to holding a videoconference because of a weak internet connection, Knudtson said. Test your software ahead of time. Also check to see if parents' technology is up-to-date, she said. If they have to participate remotely, but lack the appropriate equipment and software, consider temporarily loaning them a laptop just for the meeting, Knudtson said. "It's a way to reduce a barrier," she said. But have a back-up plan in case something malfunctions, she said. For example, have a toll-free line available for parents to call so they can at least participate by phone, Knudtson said.

· **Ensure universal participation:** Setting up a Smart Board with a webcam mounted on the top of it can allow people who are participating remotely in an IEP meeting to see everyone in the conference room, said Derek Ihori, director of pupil services at Las Virgenes (Calif.) Unified School District. "The people we are talking to can see the whole room and everyone in the room can see the person," he said. Screen-sharing software can give parents the opportunity to see the IEP as it is being written as well as follow along with assessment reports as they are being reviewed, Ihori said. "It's nice for everyone to be looking at the same documents at the same time," he said. Also verify that you have an omnidirectional microphone so parents can hear every person talking in the conference room, Knudtson said. "Make sure all of the technology works in a way that doesn't inhibit participation," she said.

· **Involve parents throughout process:** Include parents in the process of creating the meeting agenda in advance so when you have the web-based IEP meeting, they already feel like a part of the team and know what to expect, Knudtson said. Also get relevant documents to parents a few days before the

meeting so they have time to absorb the information everyone will be discussing. Don't forget to make plans so you can address the needs of parents who are English learners or who cannot hear and require interpreters, she said. Closed-captioning could be an option, Knudtson said. Otherwise, you would have to have high-quality video for the parent to see sign language interpretation.

During the meeting, encourage everyone to refer to specific page numbers and sections in documents when talking to ensure parents can follow along despite not being in the room, Knudtson said. Also use clarification and verification techniques throughout the meeting to check for the understanding of all participants. For example, ask, "Does this match your understanding?" or "Do you see the same concerns or strengths?" And ask open-ended questions, such as, "What would an appropriate strategy look like to you?"

**· Emphasize professional behavior:** Remind all team members to remain professional throughout the videoconference because everyone can see each other's body language as well as hear what they are saying.

"IEP meetings are very fluid and, at times, emotional, so videoconferencing has the added benefit of allowing you to read people's nonverbal cues as information is being presented and as various options [for the student] are being discussed," Ihori said.

Encourage team members to monitor each other's body language closely and adjust their approach if they see someone is uncomfortable or anxious, Ihori said. Recognize that you may need to discuss something in more depth if a parent's facial expressions or body movements indicate he disagrees with what you're proposing.

*See also:*

- [Provide proper, individual notice to parents under Section 504 \(May 9\)](#)
- [Recognize when, how parent concerns affect IEE funding \(May 3\)](#)
- [Develop responsive environments to engage children with disabilities \(Jan. 4\)](#)

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