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You are responsible for delivering specialized instruction to students with disabilities despite the pandemic and national shift to remote learning. *Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak*, [76 IDELR 77](#) (EDU 2020).

For example, if a student's IEP requires 30 minutes of direct instruction in phonics each week, you may have to get creative in using videoconferencing software to offer the student phonics supports with videos and music, according to Kelly J. Grillo, a special education coordinator at Cooperative School Services in Rensselaer, Ind. And you will have to keep track of those minutes just as you would in the classroom.

You also must ensure students with disabilities stay engaged and on top of their learning despite a shift in instructional methods.

"When we are doing really well in online instruction, we'll know because [students] are going to be engaged," Grillo said. "We can take a look at the number of logins. The number of completed class assignments. The number of discussion posts. Teaching online gives you sensitive data. If you are hearing nothing from your [students] for three days, you've got to engage them. Making a personal connection usually will get your students more deeply connected with you."

Using these ideas may also help you boost your online special education:

1. Provide clear instructions. As in the classroom, students with disabilities may need you to break up online instructions, Grillo said. Share directions for an assignment in a clear, direct sequence of short sentences. Then follow a similar pattern each time so students have a sense of what to expect.

If students have visual impairments or specific learning disabilities, use an app that allows you to record your voice over the step-by-step instructions, Grillo said. Doing this may also help parents who struggle to read be more involved in their child's learning. "If we make the assumption that we have to use tools to help support our students because they may be at home with parents who may not be accessing print, we may do a better job overall in supporting our students," she said.

2. Start with what you have. If you were using polling and other apps to promote student participation

2. Start with what you have. If you were using polling and other apps to promote student participation and learning in the traditional classroom, continue to use the same tools students are comfortable with as you teach online, Grillo said. "We don't want to overwhelm our students and ourselves, so continue to weave those tools into your instruction that students are fluent in," she said. Through online platforms, such as TED-Ed, you can include your preferred tools in a lesson you teach.

3. Offer choices. Look toward universal design for learning practices and offer students different ways to show what they know using high- and low-tech options, such as video recordings or journal entries, Grillo said. For example, if you're reading a story as a class, and you want students to think critically about a character, ask them to describe what song or sound they think represents the character, Grillo said. They can answer in writing, speak about it, upload a music video, or share an audio clip.

"Choice boards" may also help engage students in learning, Grillo said. Divide up a page into boxes and place a different prompt for a different task in each box, such as, "Make a how-to video," or, "Play an online math game." Grade each task equally, regardless of whether one may be harder than another. "Even if you think that something's more challenging, the student shouldn't get more points," she said. "If the deal is pick three things, they get three equal parts of that choice-board grade."

4. Share content in multiple formats. Don't forget to use music, video, and other modes of teaching that engage all the senses, Grillo said. Also share graphic organizers, visual schedules, and other tools with parents and guide them through how to help their child use them. "You may need to walk parents through the different applications of our work," she said.

Grillo spoke about this topic during a Council for Exceptional Children webinar.

See also:

- [Special educators discuss need to support parents in distance learning](#)
- [QUICK TIP: Be aware of verbal or visual disclosures during online instruction](#)
- [RULING ROUNDUP: Virtual schools and online learning](#)

Don't miss our April 16 webinar: [Virtual Instruction During the COVID-19 Outbreak: The Legal Aspects for Special Education Students](#), presented by Betsey Helfrich, Esq. You'll not only learn the legal issues to consider when implementing virtual learning for students with disabilities today, you'll walk away ready to set up policies and procedures for next school year and beyond.

For more stories and guidance on this topic, access the [COVID-19 Roundup](#).

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