

Provision of Related Services During Blended Learning

Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Speech Therapy

This policy applies to the provision of Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Speech Therapy only.

The following guidance describes how related services will be delivered in a safe, effective, and compliant manner in a blended learning environment upon return to school in SY 20-21.

Under typical circumstances, related services are provided by a licensed provider in an in-person setting in either the classroom or a separate location according to the frequency, duration and group size specified in the student's IEP as per NYSED Part 200.6(g). During the period of remote learning, Special Education Remote Learning Plans were created for students with disabilities, including for school-age students with IEPs in D1-32, D75, some charter schools, and for 3-K/Pre-K students in DOE SCIS or Special Class programs. These plans sometimes modified the frequency and duration of related services in order to account for student and family-specific needs during remote instruction. This policy clarifies that upon return to school in SY 20-21, related service IEP recommendations will be expected to be offered in full to the greatest extent possible.

While blended learning allows students to return to their school building for some portion of time, space needs for related services may be altered due to health and safety considerations. In-person services will be appropriate for many students. However, social distancing guidelines, "podding", and other health/safety considerations may preclude provision of classroom-based services. Spaces formerly used by related service providers may no longer be

adequate. For these and other reasons, it is imperative that schools identify appropriate space for delivery of related services as they plan for reentry in the Fall. Designated therapy and other related service spaces should:

- Account for the number of providers (and students receiving services per session),
- Be physically appropriate, and safe for delivery of services,
- Meet social distancing, health and safety guidelines, and
- Provide access to technology, including internet connectivity with sufficient bandwidth.

Policy Overview and General Guidance

Upon return in September, schools will be expected to plan for the delivery of related service IEP recommendations in full. In order to prepare for this and to ensure that student's instructional time is also prioritized on days when students are in person, families will be sent a survey allowing them to express preference for services either in person or via teletherapy. Recognizing that it may not be possible to provide in-person services to all students receiving in-person instruction, the survey will inform families that in-person services are not guaranteed. In situations where families select in-person services and it is not possible to provide in-person services, the family will be offered remote services, and in-person services will be provided if additional capacity becomes available.

To maximize provision of in-person services for students, schools and families will need to assess students' individual needs to make strong instructional decisions about how to best program and group their students with disabilities in the blended learning environment. Related service providers and supervisors, in collaboration with schools, will support this review process as needed.

When scheduling in-person related services for students, schools should consider prioritizing students who are less able to fully benefit

from remote therapy. Some students have high frequency service recommendations due to significant needs. In scheduling services for these students, schools should consider the impact on a student's time participating in classroom instruction and whether it is feasible to integrate services with instructional activities. Schools may recommend, in consultation with families, that such students receive blended related services, with some related service sessions being delivered in person and others being delivered via teletherapy.

IEP determinations regarding group size, location, frequency and duration of services made prior to the COVID-19 pandemic did not consider the physical distancing requirements that will be in place in the fall or the unique demands of remote therapy for students and families. Schools should prioritize the health and safety of their students and staff along with instructional feasibility when deciding if a service will be delivered in a classroom or in a separate location. The location of the service may need to be changed to accommodate existing circumstances. Similarly, student specific IEP-recommended maximum group size, without exceeding mandated group size, should continue to be followed during blended learning, to the greatest extent possible, unless the designated therapy space and the adherence to social distancing guidelines require fewer students in the group. While the current IEP mandate should be the norm, shortened sessions may be appropriate for students who cannot benefit from or whose families cannot support the full duration of a teletherapy session in a remote or blended environment. In these situations, schools may consult with related service providers and supervisors to determine appropriate service delivery. Due to pre-existing conditions placing them at a higher risk for severe complications of COVID-19, some related service providers will work remotely in the Fall. Providers working remotely will continue to serve the school(s) population(s) for which they are assigned. Providers approved to work remotely due to a medical accommodation, will be expected to provide teletherapy to students for the duration and consistent with the group size maximum that is on the IEP, to the greatest extent possible. Providers working

remotely will have the same caseload expectations as providers serving students in person.

In consultation with the family, schools will be expected to complete individual schedules for families documenting when and how services will be provided in a blended environment. Subject to the considerations outlined in this guidance, the child's schedule should reflect the full provision of services, during school hours, to the greatest extent possible. All outreach to families must be documented in the consent form and/or SESIS consistent with DOE guidance for the service

Related Services Counseling

The following guidance describes how related services counseling will be delivered in a safe, effective and compliant manner in a Blended Learning environment.

Under typical circumstances, related services counseling is provided by a credentialed practitioner in a confidential in-person setting in either the classroom or a separate location according to the location, frequency, duration and group size specified in the student's IEP as per NYSED Part 200.6(g). During the period of remote learning, Special Education Remote Learning Plans were created for students with disabilities, including for school-age students with IEPs in D1-32, D75, some charter schools, and for 3-K/Pre-K students in DOE SCIS or Special Class programs. These plans modified the location (remote) and sometimes modified the frequency and duration of related services in order to account for student and family-specific needs during remote instruction. This policy will clarify that upon return to school in SY 20-21, related service counseling IEP recommendations will be expected to be offered in full to the greatest extent possible.

While blended learning allows students to return to their school building for some portion of time, space availability for related services counseling may be altered due to health and safety considerations. While in-person services will be appropriate for many students, social distancing guidelines and other health/safety considerations may preclude provision of classroom-based services. Spaces formerly used by related service counseling providers may no longer be adequate. For these and other reasons, it is imperative that schools identify appropriate space for delivery of related services counseling as they plan for reentry in the fall. Designated counseling spaces should:

- Account for the provider (and students receiving services per session),
- Be physically appropriate, and safe for delivery of services,
- Be in keeping with social distancing, health and safety guidelines, and
- Ensure access to technology, including internet connectivity with sufficient bandwidth.

Policy Overview and General Guidance

Upon return in September, schools will be expected to plan for the delivery of related service counseling IEP recommendations in full. In order to prepare for this and to ensure that student's instructional time is also prioritized on days when students are in-person, families will be sent a survey allowing them to express preference for either in-person or remote services.

Recognizing that it may not be possible to provide in-person services to all students receiving in-person instruction, the survey will inform families that in-person services are not guaranteed. In situations where families select in-person and it is not possible to provide in-person services, the family will be offered remote services, and in-person services will be provided if additional capacity becomes available. Keep in mind that remote services by the

related service counselor are considered remote counseling and not tele-therapy. As such, the consent process for tele-therapy does not apply to remote counseling services.

To maximize provision of in-person services for students, schools and families will need to assess students' individual needs to make strong instructional decisions about how to best program and group their students with disabilities in the blended learning environment. Related service counselors, supervisors, in collaboration with schools, will support this review process as needed.

When scheduling in-person related services counseling for students, schools should consider prioritizing students who are less able to fully benefit from remote counseling. Some students have high frequency service recommendations due to significant needs. In scheduling services for these students, schools should consider the impact on a student's time participating in classroom instruction and whether it is feasible to integrate counseling services with instructional activities. Such integration with instructional activities can only be provided if it maintains the confidential nature of the work and is in alignment with social distancing guidelines and other health/safety considerations. Schools may recommend, in consultation with families, that such students receive blended related services counseling, with some related service counseling sessions being delivered in person and others being delivered via remote counseling.

IEP recommendations regarding group size, location, frequency and duration of services made prior to the COVID-19 pandemic did not consider the physical distancing requirements that will be in place in the fall or the unique demands of remote counseling for students and families. Schools should prioritize the health and safety of their students and staff along with instructional feasibility when deciding if a service will be delivered in a classroom (via group counseling session and/or while maintaining confidentiality) or in a separate location. The location of the service may need to be changed to accommodate

existing circumstances. Similarly, student specific IEP-recommended maximum group size should continue to be followed during blended learning, to the greatest extent possible, unless the designated counseling space and the adherence to social distancing guidelines require fewer students in the group. While the current IEP mandate should be the norm, shortened sessions may be appropriate for students who cannot benefit from or whose families cannot support the full duration of a counseling session in a remote or blended environment. In these situations, schools may consult with the related service counselor and supervisor to determine appropriate service delivery.

Due to pre-existing conditions placing them at a higher risk for severe complications of COVID-19, some related service counselors will continue to work remotely in the fall. Counselors working remotely will continue to serve the school population(s) to which they are assigned. Providers approved to work remotely due to a medical accommodation will be expected to provide counseling to students for the duration and consistent with the group size maximum that is on the IEP, to the greatest extent possible. Providers working remotely will have the same caseload expectations as providers serving students in person.

In consultation with the family, related service counselors will document when and how services will be provided in a blended environment. All outreach to the family must also be documented in SESIS. There will be additional and more specific guidance on documentation requirements shortly.