

Equitably Serving Children with Disabilities and their Families during Coronavirus (COVID-19)

updated June 24, 2020

The ECTA Center is committed to promoting equity in the systems and services that support young children with disabilities and their families. Furthermore, we are committed to upholding the principles of equality of access and inclusion that are central to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). We recognize the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on families across all population groups including, but not limited to, race, culture, ethnicity, language, age, gender, ability, and socioeconomic status.

Additionally, we are aware that the intersection of multiple identities alters how COVID-19 has and may continue to disproportionately impact some populations and communities. During this time when IDEA services are being delivered virtually or at a distance, we must take intentional steps to make certain services are occurring equitably.

The time to examine our systems and services through an equity framework is now. Doing so will require a commitment to the close scrutiny of our systems to ensure that services for children and families are appropriately differentiated and individualized. The view of systems through an equity framework requires state and local leaders to recognize the difference between equal (the same) and equitable (fair) opportunities for children and families to receive services individualized to their needs and contexts.

In this document we set forth four guiding equity statements along with questions to guide the discussion of equitable early intervention and preschool special education for young children with disabilities and their families among system leaders, administrators, and teachers or direct service providers. We offer this document as one tool for beginning to examine systems and services.

The ECTA Center is a program of the FPG Child Development Institute of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, funded through cooperative agreement number H326P170001 from the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily represent the Department of Education's position or policy.

Project Officer: Julia Martin Eile



**FRANK PORTER GRAHAM
CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE**



Office of Special Education Programs
U.S. Department of Education

Equity Statement 1: IDEA Demands Equity

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) makes available a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children. The goal of IDEA is to ensure children with disabilities have the same opportunity for education as those children who do not have a disability. **Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the tenets of IDEA remain the same.**

What actions are your state and local systems taking to:

- Continue to ensure access to a free and appropriate public education and early intervention services through alternative strategies?
- Use the tenets of IDEA to guide decisions to ensure equitable implementation of early intervention and preschool special education services?
- Address policies and procedures creating barriers to ensuring children with disabilities are receiving inclusive services with their same age peers?

Equity Statement 2: Strong Family Partnerships Promote Equity

Evidence-based practices include family-centered practices that recognize and are responsive to each family's unique circumstances. During the COVID-19 pandemic, families' unique experiences and contexts affect their engagement in services. A strong partnership between professionals and family members includes collaborative, ongoing decision-making grounded in the family culture and identity to ensure the team is working together to achieve mutually agreed upon outcomes and goals.

What actions are your state and local systems taking to:

- Promote and support culturally competent personnel who understand, value, and integrate family beliefs and culture into distance service delivery that fits into the daily routines and activities of families?
- Encourage and support flexible, responsive practices and service delivery to meet the evolving needs of families and children during different stages of the pandemic?
- Alter existing family data collection efforts to include items rating the accessibility and equity of services families received during the pandemic?
- Collect and analyze data to more clearly understand families' participation in distance learning and service delivery across multiple variables (e.g., race, income, location)?
- Link services across sectors to support the varied needs of families?
- Identify supports available to meet the diverse home language needs of children and their families?
- Partner with parent information and training centers and other parent support organizations?

Equity Statement 3: Innovative and Responsive Service Delivery Promote Equitable Access

All children served in IDEA Part C and Section 619 preschool special education have the right to equitable and specialized services, including online and other remote learning delivery methods tailored to the needs and resources of their family. When programs offer a combination of online and offline and synchronous and asynchronous supports, families are able to identify delivery methods to match their needs and contexts. This facilitates equitable access and allows all families to participate in services meeting their needs and supports the accomplishment of their IFSP outcomes and IEP goals.

Online and synchronous strategies include supporting child and family access to tele-intervention, online learning and video-based coaching.

What actions are your state and local systems taking to:

- Increase access to tele-intervention and synchronous learning for children and families?
- Identify needs and provide access to devices including access to Chromebooks, tablets, and smart phones, for children and families?
- Identify needs and provide access to other resources that allow online and synchronous communication such as cellular data plans and internet hotspots for families?
- Increase access to internet broadband or wi-fi including the Lifeline program through the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)?

Offline and asynchronous strategies include supporting child and family access to offline, and asynchronous strategies in addition to online, synchronous strategies (particularly when online options are not possible).

What actions are your state and local systems taking to:

- Encourage and facilitate use of telephone calls, text messaging, and other methods to coach the family around supporting their child's development?
- Encourage and facilitate use of recorded video by the family to share how their child is participating in routines and for the teacher or provider to share potential activities and suggestions?
- Encourage and facilitate the dissemination of written materials (through email and postal service mailing) to support developmental and learning activities and potential adaptations?

Equity Statement 4: Prepared and Supported Personnel Promote Equity

Effective leaders develop and implement a professional development system that provides practitioners a variety of supports to ensure they have the knowledge and skills needed to implement effective services and evidence-based practices. Individual teachers and providers have varied circumstances, knowledge, and expertise in providing physically distanced services and supports. State and local agency leaders must understand the needs of their workforce and provide professional development and other resources to effectively support practitioners in developing the knowledge and skills needed.

What actions are your state and local systems taking to:

- Assess each practitioner's access to technology (devices, broadband internet and video conferencing platform)?
- Assess each practitioner's access to the necessary services and supports (e.g., childcare, COVID testing, protective equipment) that allow them to do their work?
- Offer professional development opportunities to build personnel knowledge and skills around implementing online and remote learning opportunities designed for children and families?
- Offer professional development opportunities to build personnel capacity related to coaching families around social emotional learning and development?
- Assess and provide supports addressing the mental wellness and self-care of personnel, including reflective supervision?
- Adapt current evaluation strategies to capture data on the various and unique ways in which practitioners are delivering services to children and families?