



COVID-19 Guidance - Delaware **March 30, 2020**

It is the mission of the Delaware Association of School Psychologists (DASP) to represent and support school psychologists in their efforts to enhance the learning, mental health, and behavior of all Delaware students. As the COVID-19 pandemic launches us into uncharted educational territory, DASP is releasing the following ethical guidelines and practice considerations for school psychologists and educational agencies in Delaware. These guidelines have been drafted after careful review of guidance documents from relevant professional organizations as well as the United States and Delaware Departments' of Education and the Office of Civil Rights. The selected points below are not exhaustive but the most salient to school psychology practice as we embark on remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. If you have specific questions about how the guidance issued in these documents could apply to your unique situation or individual cases, please consult with your district administrators or the Department of Education. If/when more guidance is released, we will share that with you.

Guidelines for Assessments

During the COVID-19 school closures, school psychologists are unable to administer cognitive or achievement assessments remotely. The cognitive and achievement assessments utilized by school psychologists are normed under specific standardized conditions. Administering these assessments outside of the standardized conditions renders these assessments invalid. As of this guidance, there are no cognitive and/or achievement assessments that are normed to be administered remotely without a trained professional as the examiner and another trained professional in the student's location to serve as an assistant.

Since cognitive and achievement assessments are only part of an evaluation, school psychologists should collaborate with school teams to determine how best to complete evaluations during this time. If, in their professional judgement, school teams determine that evaluations can be conducted, school psychologists should make sure that they are still following all ethical and copyright guidelines related to assessment administration. As always, teams should ensure that all steps are documented based on district and special education guidelines, such as within the Prior Written Notice.

Guidelines for Counseling and Related Services

Given the transition to remote learning and support, school psychologists may be asked to provide supports for their students using remote service delivery. Within this domain, there are certain aspects that school psychologists must consider when providing supports and services.

School psychologists and their school based teams should evaluate whether or not students would benefit from remote services. Given a variety of factors, students may not be in the best position to benefit from receiving remote services during this crisis. School psychologists should utilize data to make decisions about if these services would be beneficial for students. After services begin, keep ongoing data to determine efficacy of services. This will support both IEP development and progress monitoring as well as determination if this mode of support is beneficial to the students given their current situation.

The primary goal of remote service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic should be to ensure connections with students. Students and their families are learning how to function given the new dynamics of our current situation. We, as school psychologists, want to continue to operate as a support for students and families, meeting them where they are and supporting current needs. Many students are experiencing emotional reactions of grief, anxiety, and sadness given the current situation and losses they may be experiencing (i.e. time with friends, disconnection from support systems, loss of favorite activities like shows or sports). Our primary function should be to maintain our connection and support them with coping and problem solving given this time.

When providing remote services, school psychologists should seek informed consent from guardians and students. While school psychologists may be supporting students where there is already informed consent for services, the transition from in person to providing remote services adds new complications. School psychologists are obligated to report and ensure clear understanding of the potential benefits and limitations of this change of support. It would be beneficial to ensure informed consent covers the following areas: confidentiality, emergency/crisis planning, and daily logistics planning. With regards to confidentiality, it is important to consider that students are now in a home environment, potentially with siblings and/or caregivers nearby. New rules for confidentiality may need to be established with the student. With regards to emergency/crisis planning, certain things must be addressed to ensure the student is physically and psychologically safe. School psychologists should be aware of the student's current physical location. In addition, emergency contact numbers should be confirmed in case of disconnection or if students express information that places them in a state of crisis. Finally, school psychologists should outline what steps are to occur if a student or others are at risk of harm. This may include coordination with outside providers, providing the number for Child Priority Response, and/or documenting when 911 would be called. School psychologists should continue to follow their district protocol for documenting students in crisis. With regards to daily logistic planning, this component should include the general plan (please see APA checklist for an example). Things that should be considered include what hours are available to connect, how connections should be made, and a contact plan for if the student needs support outside of those hours. There should be an agreement on how to cancel/change meetings (i.e. phone message, email, etc.) as well as who makes contact in case of disconnection.

School psychologists should focus on ways to support confidentiality in their own practice. Given the change in how services are being delivered, students may have more hesitation when connecting with school psychologists. To help support this concern, school psychologists can do a variety of things to help support student confidentiality on their end. This may include using a headset and environmental controls. Utilization of a headset would ensure that sensitive information shared by the student would not be heard by others in the school psychologists home, increasing confidentiality. With regards to environmental controls, think about where and how you are providing services. If possible, find an area that is more remote in your own home. If providing virtual supports, think about the backdrop behind you. Also, consider your own appearance and its impact on providing services for the student.

Guidelines for Virtual Meetings

During the COVID-19 pandemic, DASP recognizes there may be a need to hold professional meetings virtually with colleagues and families (i.e. videoconferencing). There are a variety of platforms to choose from when engaging in remote service delivery and virtual meetings. It is imperative that whichever technology and/or platform you choose to use is HIPAA and FERPA compliant. Please note that no social media application is compliant at this time.

We understand that this may be a new form of technology for some individuals. At this time, it is important that you become familiar with this type of platform in order to participate fully and engage meaningfully with teams. For a full set of recommendations and consideration to help you more fully engage in a virtual meeting, please see the separate document titled **Breaking Down Virtual Meetings.**

General Guidelines

As it often is in the field of special education, documentation will be important during this time. School psychologists are encouraged to document all the various aspects of your service delivery during this time of remote learning. Documentation should include, attempts to provide service, including date and mode of contact (i.e. email, phone call) for all attempts to provide support. Document the ways in which you connect with families and students. It would be best to try a variety of means in order to make contact with the family when attempting to develop a connection. During sessions/contact, note primary means of communication with student (i.e. phone, virtual platform, etc.) making sure to utilize platforms that are HIPAA and FERPA compliant (i.e. not social media). Document what was focused on during your sessions or communication. This will help gain a better understanding of how close the services you were providing or attempting to provide were aligned to the IEP.

Finally, remember we are working in uncharted territory. The shift from in-person support to remote learning across the country is new for many providers. As school psychologists, our goal is always to support our students' learning and social/emotional functioning/development. As with any service delivery, if you do not feel competent to provide services, it is a school

psychologist's professional responsibility to seek out training while continuing to support our students to the best of our ability. Remember and recognize your limitations; however, do not let that become a barrier to connecting with and providing supports for our students and families as we work through this difficult time.

Closing

DASP is committed to representing and supporting school psychologists in their efforts to enhance the learning, mental health, and behavior of all Delaware students, which is why we would be remiss if we did remind everyone of two key points. First, while we are engaging in remote learning we must address inequities in access to service for students. Not every student has access to technology. Not every student has access to the internet. Not every student has a quiet place to focus on their school work. Not every student has a safe space within their home. DASP recognizes the efforts that districts have made, and are continuing to make, to reduce the impact of these inequities; however, when this crisis is over, we strongly encourage educational and state agencies to take a more active role in addressing equity within our education system. Second, we are in a time of crisis. This crisis extends beyond our students to our communities, our families, and our homes. Therefore, it is up to us, to ensure that our families, our colleagues, our communities, our students, and ourselves are physically and psychologically safe. Please remember that these things come first and are the foundational pieces the remainder of our practice is built on.

As the situation evolves and more information becomes available we encourage you to visit the resources below:

Resources & References:

- <https://www.apa.org/practice/guidelines/telepsychology>
- <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/covid-19-resource-center>
- [Considerations for Delivery of School Psychological Telehealth Services](#)
- [DASP - COVID-19 Resources](#)
- [Delaware Department of Education](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education](#)

Sincerely,
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President
Delaware Association of School Psychologists