



## **Recommendations for Collaboration Between Special Education Teachers and Parents During COVID-19 Pandemic**

The overall state of the American educational and family environment has changed dramatically as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. Prior to the onset of the virus, a child was exposed to a “two-level” experience. When the child went to school, it was the teacher and the child; and the teacher was the “educational parent” for 6-7 hours. The second level occurred when the child came home, and the parent was the environmental parent, and the majority of the connection to the school was homework. In this environment, the parents were more of a resource, and knowing what their children were learning was based on the curriculum and then taught by the teacher at school.

Now, the school environment is in the home and it's like the parents being at “Parent Day” every day. Except, they are now present in their child’s classroom every day and the intrusion and change of routine have created an overall state of confusion, insecurity and increased unfamiliar responsibilities.

For many parents, their roles have become overwhelming, since they must take on unknown educational responsibilities. The parent is now the Math teacher, the Physical Education teacher, the cafeteria, and the disciplinarian with school responsibilities. The parent now looks to the teacher to parent him or her, since school at home is such a predominant force that was never there. It has changed the parents and child’s rhythms and routines, reduced protected time for parents, requires them to try and help with levels of work they may not understand. Furthermore, parents may feel left on their own with learning and behavior now 12-14 hours a day rather than having a 6-8 hour break every day depending on the ages of their children.

All of these factors have created a need to change our thinking, our outlooks, our expectations, recommendations, roles, goals, and outcomes. What is also confusing are the different types of distance learning taking place and it is possible for a parent of 3 children attending different schools to have to adapt to 3 separate learning and collaborative educational systems.

Some teachers are not doing direct (synchronous) teaching but instead, providing assignments to their students. Unfortunately, we are hearing that some parents wind up battling with their children to do assignments. Younger children are fighting to sleep longer while secondary level students must attend classes at certain times. If a parent is working from home, the added pressures of this responsibility may limit patience, time, outlook, and willingness to assist. Schedules are off due to a need to now multitask on many more variables than they are used to dealing with at one time and they may lose focus when working with one of their children. As a



result, some parents wind up playing “catch up” to unfinished assignments, and may follow over to the next day, adding more pressure to the situation.

Just to add to the complexity, there may be Common Core confusion, because this structure challenges parents who are not geared to know how it works but may have no choice but to turn to the way they were taught many years ago, further confusing their children. Therefore, it may become too challenging for parents to relearn material and too hard for the teacher to train the parents.

These issues require very specific practical and logical guidance to parents and students. The role of the outside experts will play a very important role during this period and will need to provide guidance, teaching options, and skills to the teachers so that they can improve the delivery of their services and further provide the structure that parents need at this time. As a result, the following recommendations are suggested for improving conversation and collaboration between special education teachers and parents, for addressing behavioral concerns, foundational concepts around structure and learning support in home settings and goals and expectations for distance learning:

- Provide parents with an explanation of the different styles of collaboration. For example, direct collaboration where parents and teachers discuss issues and work together with the child; and indirect collaboration where the teacher educates the parent to go back and work with the child alone.
- Work with the parent in developing a triangular treatment or learning plan with specific goals outlined for teacher, student, and parents. In this way, the parents will not have to guess what is needed but will instead have an outlined plan of responsibilities in helping educate their children.
- Provide a short-scheduled collaborative weekly video conference team-meeting with the child’s teacher, assistant teacher, and all of the child’s related service providers. Give a supportive constant form of communication on the “total child” to the parent and answer any questions so that frustration and assumption do not increase. Most parents would like this weekly form of communication but may not initiate the request.
- Teach parents behavioral vocabulary so they know what to look for and how to communicate using appropriate language to express what is happening.
- Request that parents provide narrative daily reports to teachers on behaviors exhibited at home so that the teachers can respond with specific questions and recommendations.



- Reassure parents that the distance learning system is improving every day and that they are in a technological transition period. Teachers should address all concerns and ways that are being explored to improve the process.
- Teachers and psychologists should provide guidance on home routines, organization and structure and the parenting skills that have been shown to be effective in order to develop a healthier and less chaotic or anxiety-filled learning experience.
- Provide parents with rating scales or other forms of informal assessment measures (e.g., checklists, surveys) so they can report back and provide levels of success or difficulty in their children's work and behaviors. A rating scale can be very useful for teachers to determine level of strengths and degrees of difficulty for children.
- Provide parents with developmental charts so they can learn what to expect from their children at certain age levels. In the cases of some children with developmental delays, these types of charts and information can be very useful for understanding developmental age and grade expectations.
- Provide task-oriented assignments for parents with the specific goals of accomplishment and success. Here, length of assignment is not the goal, but a sense of success is the goal.
- Where appropriate, have parents of children with special needs develop a success bank account so they can see day to day their accomplishments. This is critical for confidence-repeated successful experiences.
- Where appropriate, develop an emotional vocabulary list from which a can choose specific feelings to communicate, point to, etc. Create pictures of facial expressions of those feelings so they can recognize them in others.
- Help parents understand the basic foundational requirements in the development of self-esteem and confidence, building actions to help their children through this pandemic so they can better manage their anxieties, frustrations and tensions.
- Discuss the causes and motives of behavior, since behavior is the end point and understanding the motives behind behaviors may allow parents to be more understanding of what drives a child's behavior. Two steps are important here. Seeing it as a symptom rather than a problem is the first step. Providing management tools to manage symptomatic behavior patterns would be the second.



- Provide teachers and parents suggestions for extended school services so many of the children do not forget what they learned since being in school. Developing a Extended School Year Service Plan as a team might be beneficial for some children so they can hit the ground running when school reopens.

Although there are many more possible recommendations that could be provided, we hope that this outline creates a starting point of discussion for you and your colleagues, as we move through surreal times under circumstances that none of us could have imagined in the field of education. As always, NASET welcomes your feedback and looks forward to your input on these and all other matters pertaining to special education teachers and children with special needs.

Respectfully submitted:

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