



## Collaborate with parents to address severe behaviors, work refusal during school closures

Many school districts have found ways to deliver special education to students with disabilities through remote or virtual instruction during extended school closures. However, educators may need to think outside the box to meet the needs of students whose severe behaviors interfere with their learning at home.

David M. Walker, a school attorney with Barley Snyder in Lancaster, Pa., noted that many educators are currently unable to provide students behavioral interventions in person due to ongoing social distancing requirements. As a result, some students with disabilities may present an increased amount of negative behaviors while receiving online instruction. Others may refuse to log in to participate in virtual lessons or complete work packets sent home. To address these behaviors, parents may temporarily need to act as proxies for school personnel by providing certain supports outlined in the IEP or behavioral intervention plan, Walker said.

But districts must also consider the parent's ability to take a role in the student's education. "The conversation about [behavior] must begin with parents," said Melissa M. Bondy, a school attorney and partner at Bricker and Eckler in Columbus, Ohio. "That conversation will define how behavior supports may occur," she emphasized.

If the parent is willing to play an active part in the student's remote or online education, experts agree that close collaboration between the parent and school officials will be the key to effectively managing severe behaviors and work refusal during school closures.

Consider these ideas to enhance collaboration with parents:

- **Offer training and counseling.** Under the IDEA, parent training and counseling can be an appropriate related service. [34 CFR 300.34](#) (c)(8). Accordingly, educators shouldn't shy away from sharing knowledge with parents, Walker said. He recommended that teachers, behavior support specialists, and paraprofessionals provide parents appropriate tips and best practices they can use to address negative behaviors at home.

For example, Walker said that districts could teach parents how to:

- ✓ Implement simple interventions, such as calming techniques and positive reinforcement.
- ✓ Create a home learning environment that limits distractions.
- ✓ Set up a separate "cool down" room that the student can use to take breaks.
- ✓ Develop and stick to routines and schedules that mirror and mimic the school setting.
- ✓ Use preferred activities and incentives, such as video games, to grab the student's attention and turn an incident of misconduct into a teachable moment.

- **Connect parents to virtual support groups.** Some parents, with help from school officials, have developed online support groups to connect with other parents who are facing similar behavior challenges, Walker said. These groups bring parents together to brainstorm ideas to reduce disruptive conduct and share what's working and what's not working, he added.

- **Schedule live instruction.** Although many districts are providing educational services through prerecorded videos, this isn't the best course of action for students with severe behavioral needs. "The main concern with prerecorded videos is that the teacher can't respond in the moment if the student acts out or logs off too early," Walker said. He recommended that educators provide live instruction at a set time to enforce consistent learning routines. Live instruction also gives teachers an opportunity to check in with students, monitor changes in behaviors, and implement supports, such as visual cues and verbal prompts, to supplement any strategies employed by the parent at home.
- **Follow up and document your efforts.** There may be instances where an intervention or support can't be implemented or isn't effective in the home setting. Districts should regularly follow up with parents to discuss any roadblocks that may come up and document all efforts to reduce the student's behaviors, Bondy said. For example, if a parent reports that her child's behaviors are escalating after she provides an intervention, the district should ask the parent to immediately discontinue that intervention and hold a meeting with the parent and a behavioral specialist. The district should document the time and date of the meeting, the platform in which the meeting was held, the individuals who attended the meeting, and the specific behavioral strategies used at home in the continuity of an education plan, Bondy advised. "If no other [behavior interventions] are possible, the district should start looking at possible compensatory services," she said.

See also:

- [Be clear about confidentiality constraints before conducting online counseling, social-skills groups](#)
- [Strategies to use now to ease adjustment of students with autism](#)
- [Tips for adapting accommodations to virtual learning environments](#)

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

*[Amy K. Onaga, Esq.](#), covers special education legal issues for LRP Publications.*

**May 5, 2020**

Copyright 2020© LRP Publications



**© LRP Publications. All Rights Reserved.**