

Special Education in a Pandemic: Challenges, Innovations & Lessons Learned



CSA Conference
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Agenda

Introductions

Background

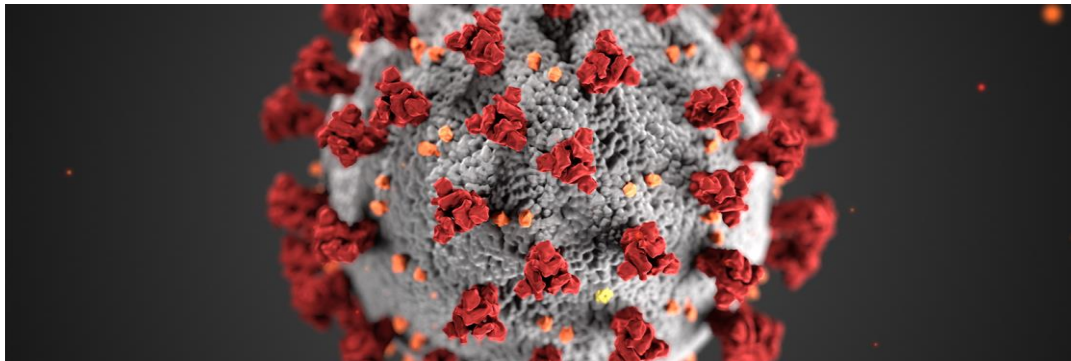
VDOE Return to Learning Guidelines

“Doing School” in a Pandemic: What It Looks Like in Implementation

For Every Challenge There’s a Solution

Lessons Learned

Where Do We Go From Here?



“We have a chance to do something extraordinary. As we head out of this pandemic we can change the world. Create a world of love. A world where we are kind to each other. A world where we are kind no matter what class, race, sexual orientation, what religion or lack of or what job we have. A world where we don't judge those at the food bank because that may be us if things were just slightly different. Let love and kindness be our roadmap.”

— **Johnny Corn**

Background:

- All Virginia schools closed on March 13, 2020 by Executive Order from Governor Northam.
- On March 30, Governor Northam announced that schools would be closed for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.
- Most schools provided remote instruction for the remainder of the school year.
 - A few provided new instruction.
 - Many provided “Continuity of Learning”.
 - Many school divisions created “Temporary Learning Plans” instead of IEP amendments that outlined the special education services to be provided during the time of school closure.
 - Private Schools continued to provide services with no guarantee of payment
 - VDOE directed private schools, CSAs and LEAs to collaborate on tuition rates for IEP-placed private school students.
 - Private schools provided individual therapy, groups, and behavioral support virtually in addition to instruction
 - Most schools in Residential Treatment Facilities remained open as an essential service

Schools Were Unprepared

- Nothing like this has ever happened in recent history.
- Schools have a lot of plans in place, but a plan for 100% remote or virtual learning wasn't one of them.
- Teacher preparation programs did not include training on virtual instruction!
- Good teaching is all about connections & relationships - more challenging virtually.
- We recreated special education from March-June!



And, by the way.....

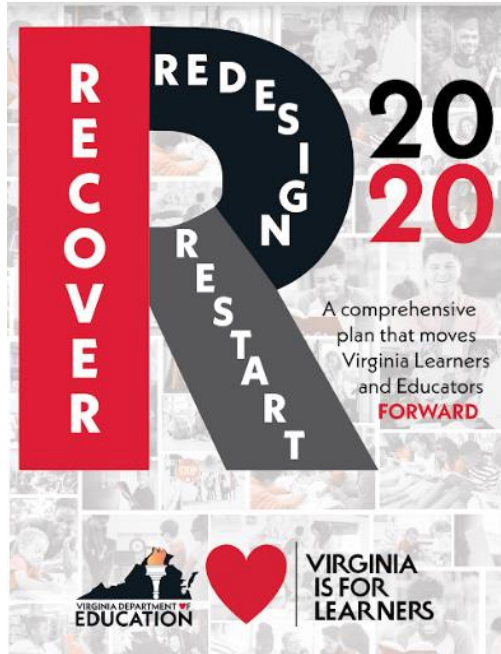
There was no relaxing of IDEA requirements for schools!!



- The 65-day timeline for evaluations remained in effect.
- Timelines for annual IEPs stayed in effect.
- Adherence to IEPs was still required.

- And we made it work!!

June 9, 2020 - Governor Northam Announced the Plan for Reopening of Schools



- 120-page document that outlines the phased reopening of schools
- Schools will open but instruction will look different.
- New instruction - different from spring
- Some in-person, some remote
- Aligns with Virginia's reopening phases
- Prioritizes the needs of most vulnerable students
- CDC guidelines - 3-6 feet between desks and on busses, closing or staggering common spaces, health screenings, use of face coverings, etc.

Phases of School Reopening

Phase 1 - Predominantly remote but exceptions for special education ESY, private placements only if IEP team agrees and parent consents; Phase 1 in place effective June 9, 2020

Phase 2 - preschool - grade 3, summer camps and special education, 50-person limit; had to have approval from VDOE for Phase 2.

Phase 3 - Shift to in-person instruction with CDC guidelines in place



VDOE Reopening Guidelines

Focus on health & safety, social-emotional learning, data collection/measurable goals/progress monitoring systems, and remediation.

“Vulnerable students” prioritized in the Reopening Plan.

Special education students and other “vulnerable” learners need targeted attention throughout all 3 phases.

Additional resources provided for special education.



What does the Reopening of Schools Look Like?

Each school district & private school submitted their own plan to VDOE or VCPE.

Some schools are operating 100% remotely.

Some schools have limited in-person instruction.

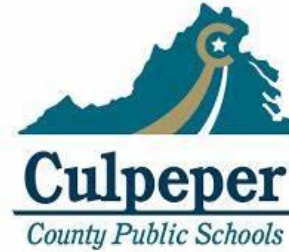
Some schools have a hybrid or blended model.

Some schools have had more than one plan.

The ability to shift between phases and models as needed based on spread.



Culpeper's Journey....



Parents given the choice of a 2-day in-person with 3 days of remote learning (blended option) or 100% remote instructional option.

Special education students in alternate assessment programs have the option of attending 4 days per week.

No students attend on Wednesdays - reserved for planning, team meetings, "office hours" for teachers, deep cleaning of the schools.

Putting together the puzzle pieces of the blended option and the 100% remote option with corresponding teachers was complicated.

Before Schools Opened on August 24...



IEP Meetings had to be held for each student with an IEP to amend for parent choice of instructional model.

Training provided for all staff on the Health & Mitigation Plan.

PPE ordered for all staff, including additional protective measures for teachers in classrooms with students with intensive needs.

Training provided for all staff on new virtual platform (CANVAS), strategies for remote teaching and student engagement, new reading programs, new on-line IEP system, etc.



Charterhouse's Journey



The Tale of Two (3?) Campuses

Edinburg (Shenandoah County):

Opened for in-person instruction 5 days per week Aug 31st - decision based on local COVID data and decisions of local school divisions.

Students remain in self-contained pods and receive content via virtual modes with staff in-person support.

Behavior support and therapy provided in-person

About 18% of students chose a completely virtual option.

Charterhouse's Journey



The Tale of Two (3?) Campuses

Richmond Day School:

Opened 100% virtual Sept 7th - decision based on local COVID data and decisions of local school divisions .

Staggered cohort in-person instruction beginning Oct. 12th with new groups starting every 2 weeks.

Students remain in self-contained pods and receive content via virtual mode;
Behavior support and therapy provided in-person

About 18% of students chose a completely virtual option.

Charterhouse's Journey



The Tale of Two (3?) Campuses

Richmond Residential School (Child & Family Healing Center):

Tele-working for all support functions

Students remain in self-contained pods and receive content via virtual modes with staff in-person support.

Quarantine and isolation procedures in cottages/units

Before Private Day Schools Opened....



Participate in IEP Amendment Meetings for each student.

Coordinate transportation based on private school schedule

Collaborate with school divisions for resources and CARES Act funds.

Training provided for all staff on the Health & Mitigation Plan.

PPE ordered for all staff; increased cleaning and sanitization services.

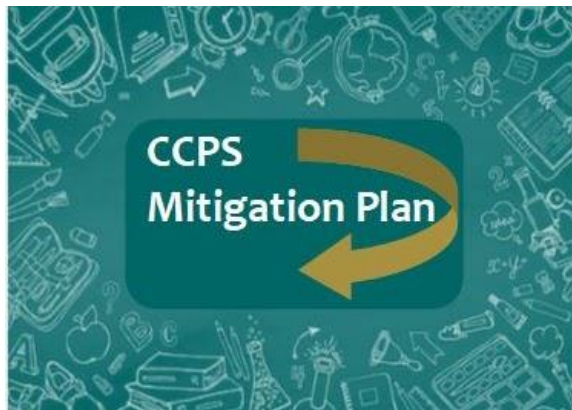
More in-depth training provided for all staff on virtual platforms (CANVAS), strategies for remote teaching and student engagement.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a light blue rectangular card. The card is tilted slightly to the right. The word "Challenges" is written on the card in a blue, cursive-style font. The hand is positioned on the left side of the frame, with the thumb and index finger gripping the edges of the card. The background is plain white.

Challenges

Convincing Staff it was Safe to Return to School

- So much was unknown!
- Staff members with underlying medical conditions or family members with underlying medical conditions and childcare needs.
- Our Mitigation Plans helped most staff members have confidence in returning to a safe environment.



Together, we can overcome anything.

Preparing the Physical Environment & Obtaining PPE

- Installed plexiglass screens in numerous locations in schools (for evaluations, speech therapy, front office staff)
- Determining how many students could safely fit in each classroom with 6 feet between each desk.
- Bus routes - VDOE return to learning required one student per seat (unless sitting with siblings or other close contacts) and skipping every other row.
- Establishing protocols for lunch, recess, bathroom breaks, etc.
- Supplies were on back-order

Preparing the Physical Environment & Obtaining PPE

- Installed plastic desk shields on each student desk.
- Re-designing and moving classrooms to insure students could fit in each classroom with 3 feet between each desk and desk shields/face covering.
- Implementing daily health screenings for staff and students
- Designing isolation spaces for “screened out” students; Transportation home
- Supplying individual student sensory bins and other supplies to prevent sharing of items
- Physical restraints in a pandemic
- Masks and students with emotional disabilities and sensory challenges
- Establishing protocols for lunch, recess, bathroom breaks, etc.



Converting a Self-Contained Classroom Schedule to a Virtual Schedule

My Daily Schedule



- Collaboration with parents
- Several learning “chunks” a day
- 1:1 instruction, small group instruction, synchronous & asynchronous instruction
- Use of new Assistive Technology tools
- Set of instructional materials and equipment for home

Converting a Private Day School to a Virtual School



- New virtual instruction tools
- Providing Chromebooks for the home
- Collaboration with parents
- Telehealth therapy, groups, and related services (SLT, OT)
- Behavior support services for family
- Social-emotional learning increase
- 1:1 instruction, small group instruction, more synchronous than asynchronous instruction
- Parent support and community resources from therapists

Providing Meaningful Remote Instruction for Students with Limited or No Internet

- Parent partnership is key!
- Teachers and parents created a weekly schedule and simplified lesson plans.
- Asynchronous lessons and instructional resources loaded on student's chromebook and/or emailed to parent to download.
- Learning packets mailed home/drop off-pickup
- Daily teacher and/or paraeducator contact via phone.



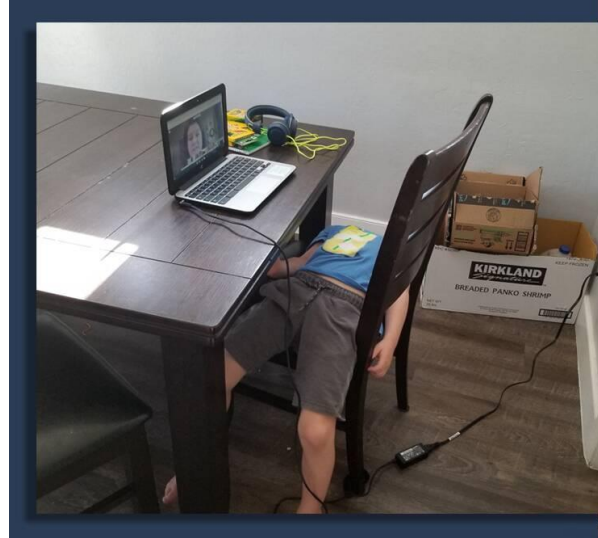
Filling the Learning Gaps

- Kids have huge learning gaps from school being closed in the spring.
- VDOE guidance document on “COVID Recovery Services” - some kids will need additional support to close the gap
- Assessment and remediation needed
- Different from Compensatory Services which are required when a school division fails to provide FAPE.
- COVID Recovery Services can't change the student's LRE; must be provided outside of the regular instructional day/schedule.



“Attendance” & Non-engaged Students

- How do you take attendance with virtual instruction, especially for kids participating asynchronously?
- How do you get kids to engage when there are more pressing issues going on at home?
- How do you get parents engaged as collaborators when they are stretched thin?
- How does attendance impact the provision of services?



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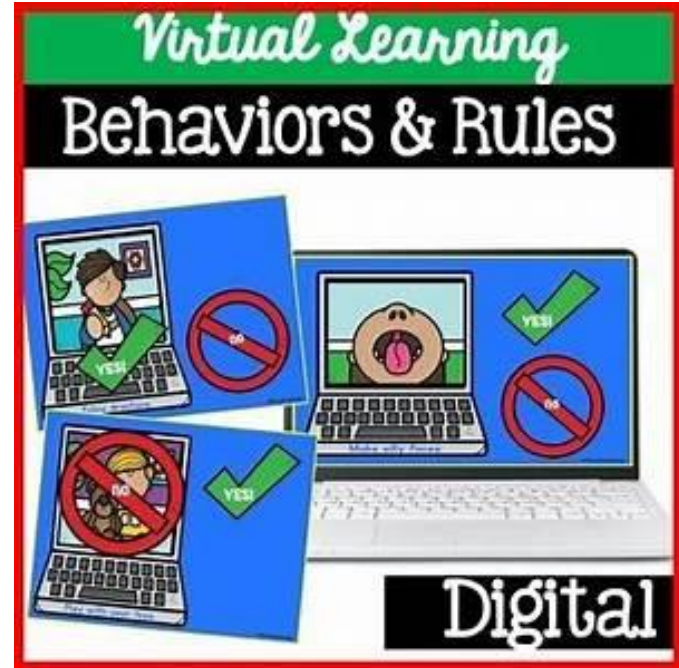
**Also me after my 40
min zoom calls. And
I'm a whole entire adult!
Lol**



 **The Indian EXPRESS**

Addressing Behavior in the Virtual Setting

- Some of our most behaviorally challenged students are enrolled in 100% virtual learning.
- IEPs contain behavioral goals and interventions that now need to be delivered virtually.
- Parent partnership is critical!
- Development of a “Virtual Behavior Intervention Plan” template for use at home - simplified and adapted for home setting.
- Behavior Support aides and Therapists provide virtual support and at times home visits (private day)





Lessons
Learned

New Education Buzz Words!



Importance of Parent Partnership!

Parents are overwhelmed with this new reality.

School may be a lower priority than other more basic needs.

Parents need support in knowing how to assist their children with virtual instruction.

Parents need to be heard and understood.

Best scenario: Parents are our co-teachers.

Worst scenario: Parents are not engaged - for many reasons; therefore students are often not engaged.

Virtual Parent Workshops

Supporting Your Child with Virtual Instruction

Addressing Behavior Challenges

Zones in the Home (Zones of Regulation)

Addressing Depression & Anxiety

Suicide Prevention

Family Support Groups

Workshops are recorded and made available on Parent Resource Center website.



Some Students Do Better in a Virtual or Blended Model

- Some kids have a greater comfort level with technology than with a group of students/adults.
- More 1:1 time with adults
- Less anxiety about coming to school
- Opportunity to increase confidence
- Fewer kids = less peer pressure & negative behavior in classrooms
- Increased participation in therapy and groups
- Pace of curriculum is different this year - kids are having a better chance at keeping up with peers



Importance of Public School-Private School Partnership

IEP amendments for students placed in private schools.

Transportation.

CARES Act funding.

Understanding the need for these services even when virtual



Flexibility and Creativity are Key!

Sensory rooms closed - individual sensory bins created for classroom & home use.

Visual supports created for home use.



New Opportunities for Partnerships

UVA partnership for providing teacher preparation opportunities

1:1 virtual tutoring with EBP reading intervention

Benefitting both UVA and our struggling readers



Teachers Need Emotional Support

Fear of catching the virus

Anxiety with all of the new demands

Working longer hours

In some cases, lack of community support

Balancing caregiver needs with employment



“Every teacher is a first year teacher this year.”

Teacher Virtual Workshops

- Managing Stress and Anxiety
- Parents as Partners
- Teaching in a Pandemic
- More topics to be presented at a later time
- Workshops are recorded and made available to teachers on division intra-net so that teachers can access them on their own time.





where

do we go

from

here?

We may be here for awhile....

- Heading into flu season with the possibility of the pandemic worsening
- IEPs were written with a back-up plan for 100% virtual learning in the event that schools are completely shut down again.
- Teachers are prepared this time; new and rigorous instruction will continue



New way of doing business

- Use of virtual meetings has increased parent attendance at meetings and eliminated driving time for staff.
- Increased focus on parent communication & collaboration.
- New emphasis on mental health of students and staff.
- Virtual learning is an effective method for some students; increased virtual learning options in the future.
- Better hygiene practices will hopefully decrease the spread of other common illnesses!
- New partnerships will hopefully continue!
- Teachers have new tools in their toolboxes!



Considering how to provide more in-person instruction for our neediest students

- Some schools are at maximum capacity, while some schools have plenty of space left, even with the mitigation plan in place.
- We can't have all special education kids attend 4 days a week, so how do we develop objective and fair criteria?
- How do we make it instructionally beneficial?
- Starting with preschool special education and students who are deaf with sign language interpreters.



Questions?



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