



Hita Para Mo'na *Moving Forward Together* September 10, 2020

The division continues to provide guidance to support our families, students, teachers and schools. Remote learning is less than ideal for all students, but we are all doing what we can to provide successful learning experiences for our students.

Teacher Preparation

Prior to the opening of school, our teachers and service providers were provided with a variety of professional development training in remote teaching, use of Google Meet and Zoom for video-conferencing, Google Classroom and interactive Google Slides. Additionally, all our staff attended training from the Compliance Office on the process for interim IEP's. Special Educators have the unique challenge of not only teaching online, but to do so with students with behavioral, learning or physical challenges. Our providers are exploring techniques with continued professional development in these specialized areas. There is ongoing professional development for the various professionals and therapists within the division.

Interim IEP's

All students with special needs and IEP's are to have their evaluations and annual/triennial evaluations on time. IEP's are written as *if school is in traditional session* and students were to receive the recommended and agreed upon services. In order to address our current situation with remote learning, all students are to have an *interim IEP* in place. Our Consultant Resource Teachers (CRTs), IEP Coordinators (IEPCs) and Service Providers are coordinating and/or participating in these meetings. It is at these meetings the team, along with the parent/guardian are to agree what services are to look like and how they will be delivered. Special education is following the same Model of Learning used throughout the schools. The interim IEP addresses the particular adjustments needed to provide the various services during the pandemic. We want you to know our SPED Leadership Team is here to help address any challenges that your school IEP team may struggle with.

Online Learning

Many students are successfully participating in remote learning for their special education and related services, along with regular class participation. While there were bumps along the way, the experiences are becoming more and more positive as time goes on. As you are well aware, our biggest concern is for families that do not have devices for online learning or even internet services to make connectivity possible.

While the Department is currently pursuing solutions to 'access' for students, including community learning centers and distribution of laptops, the Division has an added responsibility. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has not given any relief to IDEA mandates as those granted in general education programs. Every day we are unable to connect with students, we are concerned about the inability to provide services. Therefore, our Division is working to secure internet services for any student with a disability in GDOE that needs connectivity to fulfill the IEP requirements. We hope this will be home internet services for the remainder of the school year. Similar to the district-wide initiative, we are looking at eligibility for internet services and criteria that will be used to determine if it is appropriate for us to provide internet in the home.

Devices

No different than our general education population, not all of our students have a device at home to access remote learning options. We hope to provide student devices in the near future. Some of these devices are in the schools already assigned to students and need to be picked up by the parent/guardian. Students will receive devices from the district that are in need. Our Division has been represented in the distribution of laptops committee established by Deputy Superintendent Sanchez and supported by Superintendent Fernandez and Deputy Superintendent Cruz. Additionally, any student needing a specialized device listed on an IEP will receive one through the Division. It is imperative we have updated lists of student models of learning so we can ensure students have the tools to participate.

Transition Services

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Guam Department of Education and service providers are challenged by the current health concerns, closings, restrictions, and fluid reopening plans associated with the pandemic crisis. It has created an environment that requires teachers and service providers to explore new methods to deliver transition services to students with disabilities remotely. To assist in this process, the Special Education Transition Services Program has provided some information to help build supports for teachers, providers, and families with options to incorporate secondary transition services into weekly activities through our online *livebinder* page located in the Special Education GDOE website at <https://www.gdoe.net/District/Department/2-Special-Education/2114-SPED-Resources-SY-20-21.html>.

Related Services

These unusual circumstances have not changed the right to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for children with IEPs. These unusual circumstances did change, however, what the special education and related services will look like and how they will be delivered. This change includes the delivery of related services described in the IEPs of students with disabilities such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, leisure education, physical therapy, orientation and mobility services for children who are visually impaired, along with services from the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program and the Emotional Disabilities Program. The related service providers from the various programs have been diligently working with school IEP teams to determine how these services will be delivered based on the models of learning

selected by the families. Through their collaboration with the school teams, the service providers have either been providing *online therapy* to their students, or they have provided hard copy packets to students with disabilities for families to pick up using the same distribution schedules as the GDOE schools.

Additionally, online therapy for speech and occupational therapy services will also be delivered by GDOE's contracted vendor, *TinyEYE Therapy Services*. These contracted services are filling the gap for schools that do not have an onsite GDOE therapist. As the Administrator at your school, TinyEYE should have reached out and placed a speech therapist and/or an occupational therapist at your school.

Physical therapy will continue to be delivered by GDOE's contracted vendor, NewGEN. The assigned physical therapist from this company has been delivering physical therapy to students with IEPs who need this related service; and has been working in partnership with the IEP teams at your schools to ensure there are no interruption of services.

Evaluations

Depending on what continuous learning opportunities the student is receiving from the school at the time the initial evaluation is conducted, the evaluators may need to rely more heavily on existing data, particularly if health and safety precautions prohibit the school from conducting in-person standardized assessments. Professional judgement is also an option, as long as the evaluation team has sufficient data to support their decisions.

It is recommended that schools complete as comprehensive of an initial evaluation as soon as possible in a timely manner. If the team has sufficient information to support a decision regarding the student's eligibility, it is recommended that the school move forward and complete the evaluation, with the understanding that once in-person school resumes, the team could consider whether additional assessments may be needed.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Health and safety considerations remain a priority, and must be in place to the extent feasible, including physical distancing recommendations and a need for personal protective equipment such as cloth face masks or face shields, in providing specially designed instruction.

Accommodations and modifications to those requirements (based on disability) must be considered and implemented to the maximum extent possible by the school, upon request or identification of need for a student to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

Students who are unable to consistently wear PPE or maintain physical distance due to sensory, behavioral or other disabilities must not be disciplined or denied access to educational services as a result. Positive behavior interventions, explicit instruction in safety compliance, and consultation with families are among the tools available for meeting FAPE obligations during COVID-19. Face shields, which cover the entire face

without touching or hiding the mouth, are considered a safe alternative to face masks and may make it easier for staff members and students to communicate and be understood, as can clear physical barriers or shortened periods of close contact. It is likely the student may need to change MODEL OF LEARNING for educational services during the school year, based on exposure and illness.

I hope this update is helpful. The Division of Special Education has continued to benefit talking to mostly all of you while the pandemic has gone on, please continue to provide us your recommendations as they are always being considered as contributions to use in continuing our work together.

If you have any questions or would like additional support, please contact the Special Education Office, sped@gdoe.net or visit our webpage at <https://www.gdoe.net/District/Department/2-Special-Education>

Thank you in advance for all that you do for our children and youth with disabilities and their families. ***Si Yu'os Ma'ase.***

September 2020 – information shared during Special Education Distance Learning Parent Session 9.10.20