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TIP OF THE WEEK: ≤ Ensure parents meaningfully participate in virtual IEP meetings

The increased use of virtual IEP meetings as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to be a boon to both districts and parents in terms of scheduling flexibility. But districts need to be mindful that there is a heightened risk that the parent's participation will fall by the wayside when an IEP meeting takes place virtually.

Howard Fulfrost, a partner at Fagen, Friedman, and Fulfrost, LLP, believes the increased reliance on virtual meetings is here to stay. Virtual IEP meetings are an additional option districts will have in their toolset to help ensure parents participate in IEP development, he said. But once a parent enters the meeting, the challenge becomes ensuring the parent is able to actively participate. Fulfrost recommended districts take steps to facilitate parental participation in the virtual context.

- **Keep parents engaged in the discussion.** As in all IEP meetings, the team leader should take extra steps to engage the parent in the process of discussing and developing the student's programming. Educators should be mindful that it may be easier for a parent to slip into the background during a virtual meeting, especially if the parent isn't visible on video.

"Districts maybe have to be even more on their toes during virtual meetings," said Fulfrost. "Keep the parents involved by asking questions, checking for understanding of specific issues, and ensuring they understand the overall process."

- **Address unexpected connectivity issues.** If a parent has trouble connecting, whether it's at the start of a meeting or after the meeting has begun, Fulfrost observed, parental participation needs to remain paramount. If the parent can't connect or gets disconnected, districts either should pause or postpone the meeting or find another way for the parent to participate. Importantly, any alternative meeting method needs to allow the parent's participation to be contemporaneous. Fulfrost suggested that teams try having a parent who cannot connect participate in the meeting via teleconference.

- **Assign someone to monitor other participants' connectivity.** A team member's failure to participate, particularly where that member's input is critical to an understanding of the student's needs, may itself impede a parent's participation by depriving the parent of needed information. The team leader might consider assigning one district team member to monitor team members and alert the team leader when someone has dropped offline. The leader can then determine whether it would be prudent to pause or postpone the meeting until that member reconnects.

See also:

- [Checklist to prepare student for involvement in virtual IEP meeting](#)
- [Don't forget IDEA requirements when conducting virtual IEP meetings](#)
- [Check in often when parents use phone during IEP videoconference](#)

For more stories and guidance on this topic, access the [Return to School Roundup](#).

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