

CITES | Virtual Learning Project

IEP/504 Plans in Virtual Learning

The CITES Virtual Learning Project focused on promising practices related to educating and supporting students with disabilities and their families in virtual school programs. Central to this work was identifying what technologies are used in these settings and how students who require assistive technology (AT) to access instruction are supported.

The process for the development and implementation of [Individualized Education Programs](#) and [504 Plans](#) varies depending on whether the virtual school or the student's school of record is responsible for managing the case. To ensure students with disabilities receive the recommended accommodations, the development and implementation processes should be collaborative.

Developing IEP/504 Plans

General considerations when developing IEPs and 504 Plans in a virtual school setting:

- If the school of record is responsible for developing the IEP and 504 Plans, and the student is attending a full-time virtual program, educators from the virtual school should be encouraged to collaborate in the development of the plans and attend the final meeting.
- For full-time virtual students, identifying student supports can be more challenging. Success is more likely if educators and families collaborate in the development of the plans. As plans are developed, educators need to take into account that recommended supports for students with disabilities may need to be monitored in the home.
- If the school of record is responsible for developing the IEP and 504 Plans, the virtual school should have a plan in place to ensure that once the plans are received, they are shared with every staff member who has a responsibility for the student's program needs, and that those educators clearly understand the services they are to provide.
- IEP team meetings may be held virtually, in person, or via hybrid settings where some members participate remotely.

Virtual School as the Lead

- For full-time programs, typically the virtual program's special education staff develops IEPs and 504 Plans.
- Training for special education staff and families is typically provided by the school. In the case of Assistive Technology, an outside state agency or contracted agency may provide training.

School of Record as the Lead

- Typically, the special education staff at the school of record develops IEPs and 504 Plans and shares those with the virtual school program.
- Training for special education staff and families is typically provided by the school of record.

504 Accommodations

While many 504 accommodations provided to students in traditional classroom settings are easily met by virtual programs, barriers may arise, so educators should monitor student progress and needs regularly. For example, extended time is a common 504 accommodation, and most virtual programs are self-paced and/or provide flexible schedules for completing assignments. Preferred seating doesn't apply to the virtual setting.

Although some of these accommodations are easy to implement, virtual learning poses additional challenges. For example, a student may require additional support for time management in a virtual learning setting. A thorough evaluation process is always required to ensure the needs of the student are being met. Even if accommodations are easily met by the virtual setting or by readily available accessible features in the technologies used in the virtual setting, they should be clearly documented and shared with students, families, and educators, considering staff may change or the student may change schools.

Accessibility Features & Assistive Technologies

Many accommodations and modifications specified in IEPs and 504 Plans can be met by the accessible features found in the Learning Management Systems and other software programs used in virtual schools, such as voice recognition, text-to-speech, high contrast, and enlarged text. Additional assistive technology considerations related to IEPs and 504 Plans may be [accessed on the CITES website](#) in Aligning IT, AT & Accessibility for Virtual Learning.

Ancillary Services

When ancillary services, such as physical therapy, speech therapy, or occupational therapy, are recommended for full-time virtual students, virtual schools may need to collaborate with outside organizations to provide these services. Some ancillary services need to be provided in person, which can take place in the home, on a school campus, or via a third-party vendor. Virtual schools may contract with:

- an outside agency
- a local collaborative or consortium
- the school of record
- a university program

Resources

- [AEM in the IEP Guide](#): The two purposes of this guide are to (1) help families and educators understand the importance of including AEM in the IEPs of students who require them, and (2) to discuss sections in the IEP where it may be appropriate to refer to a student's need for and use of AEM.
- [IDEA Website: U.S. Department of Education's Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#): Provides information and resources for students, parents, educators, and service providers regarding children with disabilities.
- [Understood](#): This organization, dedicated to helping those who learn and think differently discover their potential, provides an overview of accessible features often recommended in 504 plans.



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