



Best Practices in Completing Educational Evaluations During School Closure

School psychologists around Arizona are concerned about the expectation that multidisciplinary evaluations will be completed to the extent possible during the COVID-19 school closure. Federal and state guidelines regarding timelines for current evaluations in special education offer no flexibility beyond what exists in the law (the procedures for a 30-day extension). However, these guidelines intimate that missing deadlines is understandable considering the current exceptional circumstances and therefore LEAs may not be significantly penalized when timelines are not met.

The Arizona Association of School Psychologists (AASP) encourages school psychologists to refrain from completing or conducting evaluations that require additional data which would usually be collected through an in-person testing session using standardized assessment materials. While there may be some school psychologists who already engage in telehealth practices and have the appropriate training, materials, and support to yield valid and reliable data, the majority of school psychologists do not. The learning curve for administering this manner of assessments is steep and the necessary tools for successful administration, including a trained, on-site facilitator present with the examinee, are likely out of reach.

The best-case, best-practice scenario for completing an evaluation during a school closure is an evaluation for which existing data are sufficient for planning and decision-making. Teachers and parents are a wealth of information about their students and use of work samples, consultation, problem-solving, and interviewing skills to dig deep when gathering input may yield a sufficient level of detail regarding strengths and weaknesses typically gleaned from an individualized assessment. (For example, Nicole can write simple sentences but she does not consistently use appropriate punctuation. Her misspellings are phonetic in nature.)

There may be circumstances where collection of new information via rating scales to parents and/or teachers may be used to complete an evaluation. Having access to an electronic version of rating scales through a publishing company would facilitate this process while not violating copyright laws. Considering the circumstances of the closure, however, you may not yield reliable data from teachers who have not seen a student for at least a month and parents who are observing behaviors at home during a pandemic stay-at-home order.

The logistics of gathering data through paper copies of similar rating scales are prohibitive, including access to the forms when most school buildings are inaccessible and delivering and receiving the forms from the raters.

These issues are significant barriers to completing reliable and valid evaluations during this school closure. However, school psychologists have knowledge and expertise that goes well beyond assessment for special education eligibility. If a parent is concerned about continuing with an evaluation for their child, their concern should be addressed. As school psychologists we can work with that parent so that their concerns are heard and addressed given the

constraints of the current social-distancing guidelines. We can gather data through parent and teacher interviews and offer support and strategies to help parents work with their child to cope with the academic and social-emotional demands of the current stay-at-home order. We can provide suggestions for at-home intervention strategies that may be easily completed by parents. This process can build rapport, provide comfort to students and their families, and results can inform an eventual educational evaluation. Examples from the field include using google classroom (or a similar format) to run intervention groups, or working with parents to establish routines and schedules, design and implement simple behavior plans and provide simple direct instruction interventions.

PRESCHOOL

Screening and initial evaluation of preschool-age children is an area where it may be feasible to utilize existing data and standardized assessments to determine the presence of significant delays and need for specially designed instruction. There are multiple assessment tools that may be administered remotely in a standardized manner using adult raters for young children. Parents and Arizona Early Intervention providers may be able to provide adequate information to facilitate decision-making. Again, varying access to electronic protocols and platforms to interact with parents and service providers in a safe manner may limit psychologists' ability to conduct mandated screenings and In-By-Three transitions.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

NASP (2020b) recently recommended working through special circumstances that arise by engaging in a problem-solving process. They suggest we “consider a problem-solving model presented in Armistead, Williams, and Jacob (2011) as a model. It includes seven steps:” (NASP, 2020b, p. 2):

1. Describe the problem situation.
2. Define the potential ethical–legal issues involved.
3. Consult available ethical and legal guidelines.
4. Confer with supervisors and colleagues.
5. Evaluate the rights, responsibilities, and welfare of all affected parties.
6. Consider alternative solutions and the likely consequences of each.
7. Elect a course of action and assume responsibility for this decision. (NASP, 2020b, p. 2)

Although AASP will not offer legal advice or perform district-level advocacy, our regional directors and other officers are available to consult with school psychologists across the state to be a sounding board and offer support. Please see our website in order to submit a request for support.

For further guidance regarding virtual assessment/evaluation, the following is an excerpt from NASP's updated virtual service delivery resource document (NASP, 2020a):

NASP Virtual Service Delivery Recommendations for Assessment/Evaluation (NASP, 2020a)

1. Assessments must be administered in the manner in which they were developed and validated. If adaptations are made for remote administration, there must be high-quality evidence that such adaptations produce results that are similarly reliable and valid to the face-to-face administration. Any such adaptations should be documented in the evaluation report.
2. Assessments should be administered remotely only on platforms designed for that purpose. Appropriate training is needed for both the school psychologist and any individual at home who assists the student. Even when appropriate supports are available, school psychologists should still identify and report any validity issues given the student's level of anxiety, disruptions during the testing session, etc.
3. Although rating scales, interviews, and possibly home-based observations could be conducted remotely, it is important to remember that students' behavior during the time of school closure may not be typical for that student, which may reduce the utility of those assessments, particularly when planning interventions that may eventually be delivered when school resumes.
4. Some reevaluation decisions can be made based on data available prior to the school's closure. School psychologists should carefully consider whether there is sufficient evidence to support the continued need for special education services without further 1:1 testing for individual students.
5. If the evaluation or reevaluation cannot be completed safely, ethically, and/or legally, school personnel should communicate with parents about this and request extensions to timelines until a date when the comprehensive evaluation can be completed with integrity. The federal government and state governments have provided guidance on the implementation of the Individuals Disability Act and where flexibility is appropriate, and this guidance is addressed in the COVID-19 "Ask the Experts" webinar called, "[Wading through a Sea of Ambiguity: Charting a Course for Special Education Services in the Pandemic](#)." (NASP, 2020a, p.2)

For additional information, click this [link](#) to NASPs Principles for Professional Ethics

REFERENCES

Armistead, L., Williams, B. B., & Jacob, S. (2011). *Professional ethics for school psychologists: A problem-solving model casebook* (2nd ed.). National Association of School Psychologists.

National Association of School Psychologists. (2020a, March). *Telehealth: Virtual service delivery updated recommendations*. Bethesda, MD.
<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/covid->

[19-resource-center/special-education-resources/telehealth-virtual-service-deliveryupdated-recommendations](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/virtual-service-delivery-in-response-to-covid-19-disruptions)

National Association of School Psychologists (2020b, March). *Virtual service delivery in response to COVID-19 disruptions*. Bethesda, MD.

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