

September 4, 2020

The Illinois School Psychologists Association recognizes the disruption of the stay-at-home order issued in March, 2020 and subsequent transition to remote learning in the 2019-2020 school year. Our school communities were substantially disrupted in losing instructional time, in-person contact time for evaluation and service delivery, and limited time to properly transition to a remote learning model across the state. Despite these disruptions, requirements for special education timelines still remain in full force.

The Illinois Administrative Code, at 23 IAC 226.110(d), requires that upon completion of the identified evaluation assessments, but no later than 60 school days following the date of written consent, the determination of eligibility shall be made and the IEP meeting be completed. These timelines must be followed regardless of a school's instruction being in-person, remote, or a hybrid of the two.

Schools across Illinois have made reentry decisions based on their local and county COVID-19 community transmission and their available school personnel, technology, and other resources. Given the wide range of reentry plans across the state, and the necessity for those plans to be able to pivot from in-person instruction to remote mode of instruction fluidly, the following guidance is provided to assist school psychologists in their role for conducting special education evaluations safely and ethically. These recommendations are made in accordance with currently released guidance from the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Illinois State Board of Education, and may be subject to change with new guidance. As always, school psychologists should adhere to Illinois state regulations, their local county health department's directives, their school districts policies and procedures, and follow professional ethical standards.


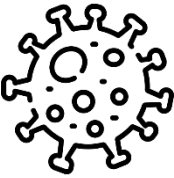

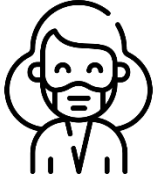



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## COVID-19 Evaluation Considerations for School Psychologists

	<p><b>Essential Data.</b> The initial question before considering any evaluation method in-person or remote, is if the data that results from that particular evaluation is essential in answering the referral question. School precautions for COVID-19 may significantly limit opportunities for data collection and methods. Practitioners should always strive to provide an individualized evaluation, and not rely on a “standard battery” approach.</p>
	<p><b>Health &amp; Safety.</b> If an assessment cannot be completed safely, legally, and/or ethically it should not be attempted. Current precautions at school require all staff and students to be screened or certify no fever or other symptoms, face coverings be worn at all times at school, social distancing of 6-feet apart should be observed as much as possible, and increased hand-washing. Special consideration should be made for individuals with pre-existing health conditions, including the practitioner.</p>
	<p><b>Close Contact.</b> Recognize that in-person administration of some assessments will cause unavoidable “close contact”, defined as being within 6 feet of an individual for at least 15 minutes. This should be discussed with parents/guardians when determining what data is necessary for evaluation.</p>
	<p><b>Masks and PPE.</b> IDPH guidelines require all individuals to wear face coverings. Face coverings may impact intelligibility of verbal responses and limit nonverbal facial cues during assessment. Face shields are not effective protection against COVID-19 and are not a suitable replacement to face coverings. Likewise, dividers cannot be used in lieu of face coverings.</p>
	<p><b>Cleaning &amp; Mitigation.</b> Any area used for assessment should be cleaned before a student’s arrival and handwashing should be promoted for the practitioner and student prior to assessment. Use of protective measures such as sheet protectors for stimulus books may be considered. Procedures for cleaning test materials or establishing a no-use period between evaluations should be established. Use of digital manuals or assessment platforms can help reduce cleaning and potential exposure.</p>
	<p><b>Specialized Training.</b> Just as specialized training and practice is necessary for in-person evaluation of students, specialized training is also necessary for remote evaluation both by the school psychologist and any individual acting as a proctor. School Psychologists must ethically work within the limitations of their own training and professional competencies.</p>
	<p><b>Pre-COVID-19 Data.</b> Use of record review is encouraged when there is adequate data for evaluation components, as it provides no risk of close contact with students. The pandemic is an ongoing crisis and comparison to pre-COVID-19 performance as a baseline will help in determining if a student’s performance is typical.</p>

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	<p><b>Assessment Validity.</b> Assessments should only be administered in a manner and mode for which they were validated. Many measures are not validated for remote delivery. Special adaptations made for remote delivery or COVID-19 precautions (e.g. masks) should be evidence based and carefully documented when presenting results.</p>
	<p><b>Interpretive Utility.</b> COVID-19 is an ongoing crisis and a student’s behavior during this time may not be typical. Some constructs such as academic achievement and social-emotional skills may be impacted by disruptions from the pandemic. Lack of appropriate instruction may be a significant concern early in the fall for many students. Use of the <a href="#">COVID-19 School Adjustment Risk Matrix (C-SARM)</a> or similar tools to better understand the pandemic’s impact on student performance may help in interpretation. Additionally, any special assessment accommodations, including COVID-19 precautions, should be documented.</p>
	<p><b>Technology.</b> Consider internet access, bandwidth, and video capable device availability for both examiner and examinee. Support and training for use of devices or platforms is necessary for the examiner, proctor or facilitator (if used), and examinee. If using video, be mindful of your background items, dress professionally, frame yourself in the camera view, use adequate lighting, use a headset, and remove or warn about any possible distractions. Check out <a href="#">NASP’s Tips for Participating in Virtual Meetings</a>.</p>
	<p><b>Privacy &amp; Confidentiality.</b> Expectations for remote contact should be discussed with parents regarding location used, ability of others to overhear conversations or responses, potential for distractions, scheduling constraints, and security of platforms used for communication.</p>
	<p><b>Special Factors - Interviews.</b> Use of video conferencing tools or the phone for interviews provides the highest degree of COVID-19 exposure safety. These formats be more convenient for scheduling with families. Video conferencing provides the benefit of seeing nonverbal cues during the interview. In-person interviews should adhere strictly to social distancing and masking requirements.</p>
	<p><b>Special Factors – Observations.</b> In-person observations should adhere to social distancing, and may require additional planning with the classroom teacher for positioning due to limited space. Use of video may be needed if allowable per school policy. Students in a remote setting may be observed remotely during synchronous video conferencing time. It may be necessary for additional planning with the teacher to explain an extra attendee being present (depending on platform). The observer’s camera should not be on to avoid distraction to students.</p>
	<p><b>Special Factors – Rating Scales.</b> COVID-19 is an ongoing crisis and a student’s behavior during this time may not be typical. Likewise, raters may be dealing with additional stressors that can impact the accuracy of their rating. Use of online platforms may provide more convenience for raters and eliminate exposure concerns.</p>

Information adapted from: National Association of School Psychologists (2020). Telehealth: Virtual Service Delivery Updated Recommendations. (Handout); Illinois State Board of Education (2020). Starting the 2020-21 School Year: Part 3 – Transition Joint Guidance.

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Illinois School Psychologists Association COVID-19 Evaluation Considerations for School Psychologists (updated 9/4/2020)