

Guiding Principles for Serving Students with Learning Disabilities During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic

The current COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in unprecedented challenges for children and their families, schools and the entire education and human services communities. The member organizations that comprise the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) are united in ensuring that students with learning disabilities receive the services and supports they need to succeed.

The following principles should guide decisions that impact the lives of pre-K-12 and postsecondary students with learning disabilities (LD):

- **Legal rights should not be compromised.** Every effort should be made to ensure the protection and maintenance of students' educational and civil rights as mandated by law.
- **Provision of specialized instruction and related services must continue even while schools are operating virtually.** School and district obligations under IDEA and Section 504 remain intact during this crisis. Educators should communicate and collaborate with families to ensure that students with disabilities have maximum access to the instruction and services outlined in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), with appropriate supports to address needs related to speaking, writing, attention, and other areas of academic and behavioral functioning.
- **Support for educators should remain a priority.** Professional development and support for teachers and service providers should be ongoing; with special consideration given to issues including workload, telepractice, personal safety, security and privacy for students, teachers and families.
- **Students and educators must have equitable access to online instruction.** This includes the availability of high-speed internet and technology devices, the provision of assistive technologies, and high-quality instruction that is personalized to students' needs and reflective of the principles of universal design for learning (UDL).
- **Enhanced collaboration between school personnel and students' families is essential.** High-quality online instruction will require effective

communication and collaboration between providers and families to a) facilitate instruction and b) identify essential life issues (e.g., food insecurity, access to medical care, social-emotional wellbeing) that can disrupt learning.

- **High expectations for student achievement must be maintained.**
Flexibility in the delivery of instruction, assessing and monitoring student performance, and grading should be encouraged while maintaining ambitious, reasonable goals and milestones for skill mastery and curricular content learning.
- **Addressing the needs of students exiting high school and those transitioning to, or enrolled in, postsecondary education is essential.**
This includes such issues as transition planning for life after high school, college advisement, evaluation and documentation procurement, housing and supports for subgroups (e.g., international, homeless, financial hardship), credit transfer, and the completion of practica and internships needed for certification and licensure.
- **Funding for school improvement and research must increase.**
Investments must be made in building knowledge and in creating and delivering evidence-based instruction to all students, both during periods of online instruction and when in-school learning resumes.

This is an official document of the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD). The following are the member organizations of the NJCLD: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Association of Educational Therapists, Association on Higher Education and Disability, Council for Learning Disabilities, Division for Communicative Disabilities and Deafness, Division for Learning Disabilities, International Dyslexia Association, International Literacy Association, Learning Disabilities Association of America, National Association of School Psychologists, and National Center for Learning Disabilities.

The mission of the National Joint Council of Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) is to provide multi-organizational leadership and resources to optimize outcomes for individuals with learning disabilities.