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Effectiveness of Increasing Decoding Skills through the Read Well Curriculum For Elementary Students with Learning Disabilities

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Effectiveness of Increasing Decoding Skills through the Read Well Curriculum
For Elementary Students with Learning Disabilities

A Project Presented to
The Graduate Faculty of
Minnesota State University Moorhead

By
Angie Augedahl

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in
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Study Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the Read Well Curriculum within the special education setting for students who have a learning disability within the area of reading through a quantitative research design. Six students ranging from third through fifth grade with specific learning disabilities in the area of reading participated in this study. Before and after the intervention process, students participated in a screener using FastBridge CBM English reading probes. Students were given 3-one minute reading passages to assess their average number of words read correctly in one minute, before and after the six-week intervention phase. During the intervention phase, students participated in small reading groups using the Read Well Curriculum for six weeks. Students learned various decoding strategies to implement into their reading. Throughout the intervention phase, students were given a one-minute fluency probe, once a week, to monitor their progress. Only students whose parents signed an informed consent form, Appendix B, participated in the study. Screening and progress monitoring scores were stored in an individual student folder within a locked filing cabinet in the special education room during the study.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were required to follow a Distance Learning Model during this research study. Results of the Read Well Curriculum study were inconclusive, and the focus of the research study shifted to focus on experiences of being an educator during COVID-19.

Acknowledgement

I wish to express my deepest appreciation to all of those who encouraged me throughout this journey to complete my masters in special education. First and foremost, I would like to thank my friends, families, and colleagues at Spring Grove Public Schools for encouraging me to take this next step in my career as a special educator. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Leslee Rogers for inspiring me to pursue a career in the field of special education. Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Ximena Suarez-Sousa for allowing me to embark on this milestone.

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Chapter One Introduction

General Problem

As a special education teacher, I had noted that many students receiving special education services relating to their needs within the area of reading, often struggled with decoding, fluency, and comprehension skills. Throughout my career as an educator, I have searched for reading programs to teach the necessary strategies for my students to become better readers. This was important because if students knew the necessary strategies to become a better reader, it would boost their self-confidence. Students in special education are said to have a lower academic self-concept than their peers do (Savolainen, Timmermans, & Savolainen, 2018). In order to increase these reading skills, students participated in individual or small group specialized instruction sessions within the special education classroom. The intent of specialized instruction was to close the achievement gap between students and their same aged peers. In the past few years of my career as a special educator, several special educators in neighboring school districts had stated they were unaware of effective reading programs to use with their elementary students with learning disabilities. In hearing that other special educators were struggling to find effective programs to use for direct instruction, it encouraged me to focus my research study in that area. By focusing on the Read Well Curriculum, it allowed me to provide data on its effectiveness in the special education setting for elementary students with learning disabilities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness behind a specific reading curriculum, the Read Well curriculum, when increasing decoding skills within the area of reading for elementary students with learning disabilities. This study examined students' abilities to increase their decoding skills when reading unfamiliar words. In this study, the results were examined for six students with learning disabilities, ranging from third through fifth grade. The curriculum being studied was the Read Well Level 2 Curriculum (Sprick, 2004). The 25-unit intervention allowed students to continue to build their foundational skills that were essential for mastering low-frequency letter/sound associations, word parts, and multisyllabic word fluency. In addition, this supported student's vocabulary and comprehension skills (Sprick, 2004). This study allowed special educators to determine the effectiveness behind a potential program they could implement with their elementary students with learning disabilities who have a need for specialized instruction within the area of reading.

Subjects

The participants of this research project were students with specific learning disabilities varying between grades 3-5. Each of the students received special education instruction within the area of reading prior to the study. The services they received were described in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP). There were six students participating in the study who had a goal to increase their decoding skills. The students were labeled as a number for confidentiality. Each participant had an identified specific learning disability and the disability and grade level can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Study Participant's Disability and Grade Level

Student:	Grade:	Disability:
1	3	Specific Learning Disability

2	4	Specific Learning Disability
3	4	Specific Learning Disability
4	4	Specific Learning Disability
5	5	Specific Learning Disability
6	5	Specific Learning Disability

Selection

The participants in the study had been receiving special education services relating to their needs within the area of reading. The study was done during semester two of the spring of 2019-2020 school year. These students were already receiving reading services based on the results of a special education evaluation that included information on each individual student's intellectual functioning, academic achievement, district assessments scores, standardized assessments scores, teacher input, and parent input prior to the study. Each of the students met initial criteria for special education services in Minnesota. The students met in various small reading groups comprised of 2-3 students, one time each day for 25 minutes. This small group setting allowed for individualized learning and progress monitoring. The students were placed in groups with other students who were performing at a similar reading level based upon their individual needs.

Setting

This study took place in an elementary school in Southeast Minnesota at a rural school. The school was located in a kindergarten-12th grade building with approximately 350 students ranging from kindergarten to 12th grade. 52% of students in the school were male, with 48% being female students. There were approximately 3% minority students enrolled in the district,

with the majority of students identifying as Caucasian. In addition, the school was receiving Title I funds at the time of the study. The researcher conducting this study was in her mid-twenties and had worked within the special education field for 2.5 years.

Informed Consent

Permissions from several parties were obtained prior to beginning. During the study, participants were assured of their protection as human subjects. The parents or guardians of each student received detailed information regarding the study, its possible risks and benefits, and provided consent for their child. In addition, students were read an assent form that described the same details their parents received with the affirmation that there was no penalty for not participating. The researcher used pseudonyms without any identifying information throughout the course of the study. Participants and parents or guardians had the option to withdraw from the study at any time. They could do so without any consequences. School administrators consented to the study prior to beginning, as noted on Appendix A. Lastly, the Institutional Review Board at Minnesota State University reviewed and consented to the study. The board reviewed the purpose of the study, potential risks and benefits for the participants, as well as additional documentation. In addition, the IRB reviewed permissions from the building administrator and consent letters that were sent to parents to outline the details of the study. These documents included detailed information regarding the study.

Chapter Two Literature Review

Review

As a special education coordinator, I have worked with many teachers searching for reading programs to incorporate into the special education classroom to help improve decoding skills for students with a learning disability in grades three through five. This inspired me to research various reading strategies that have been proven to increase students' decoding skills. The students that took part in this study had needs for specialized instruction with decoding, fluency, and comprehension skills. To increase these skills, students were receiving special education services that specifically targeted these areas by using direct instruction. While receiving these special education services, the researcher used research-based strategies relating to the areas of deficit. To improve reading skills for students with a disability, it was important to focus on improving children's phonemic awareness, knowledge of letter-sound correspondence, and decoding skills (Hudson, Isakson, Richman, Lan, & Arriaza, 2011). In order to become a fluent reader, students needed to work on developing their decoding skills to a level of automaticity (Hudson et al., 2011). Once these skills are mastered, it can have lead to an increase in their related reading skills, such as comprehension.

Materials needed and Procedure followed

In order to increase each individual's decoding skills, there are various materials that could be used. In the literature review, several programs were examined. In Hudson et al. (2011), materials were used in which students could participate in repeated readings three times a

week for 20 minutes. The researcher used 16 isolated letter pages that began with continuous sounds, short vowel sounds, stop sounds, and digraphs (Hudson et al., 2011). As the students read, five sounds were listed on the first page. On each page thereafter, five additional sounds were added to each page. Students were given the opportunity to practice various word families and individual words. Wall, Rafferty, Camizzi, Max, and Blargan, (2016) reviewed a color-coded onset-rime reading intervention created to target the decoding of all short vowel onset-rime patterns. To do this, they utilized several consonant-vowel-consonant and consonant-vowel-consonant-consonant words. There were eight books used throughout the intervention. In books 1-4, students were required to have 5 or fewer errors while reading to move on, and in books 4-8, students were required to have 8 or fewer errors to be proficient. Once students had completed their reading, they were provided additional opportunities to practice the words by sorting the color-coded words. Santoro et al., (2006) focused on the Read Well Curriculum. While using this program, researchers used placement tests, unit plans, end of unit assessments, and teaching materials that were provided with the program. Students practiced high frequency sounds and words using sound cards and story books. Students learned the skills for phonological awareness, alphabetic understanding and decoding, word reading accuracy, word reading fluency, and comprehension. The researchers also used the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test before and after each intervention to assess each student's word attack skills. In this research study, the researcher used FastBridge screeners and progress monitoring tools to assess the student's fluency.

When students learn to read, instructors must focus primarily on improving children's phonemic awareness, knowledge of letter-sound correspondence, and decoding skills. By increasing their phonemic awareness, students are able to identify how to segment words into

individual phonemes as they read. In addition, by understanding the letter-sound correspondence, students can break down larger words into smaller, more manageable parts when they are presented to them. Once students identified the individual sounds, they are able to start blending the sounds together to fluently read words. When students are able to do this, there is an increase within their self-efficacy. Research has shown that children's beliefs about their ability to decode and comprehend a particular text will influence their motivation to read the text (Horner & Craig, 2002). It is important to monitor each individual's progress over the course of the intervention to determine if the intervention was successful or not. If the intervention is successful, the students have received the appropriate instruction necessary to increase their decoding skills.

Through the completion of a literature review, several strategies for decoding were also researched. These strategies included phonological awareness, word fluency, word accuracy through repeated reading, rhyme and rhythm, and functional literacy. Results of each strategies' effectiveness are summarized below.

Phonological Awareness

A strategy to increase fluency that uses proper decoding skills is being phonologically aware. This means that a student has the ability to fluently segment three to four phoneme words into individual phonemes (Santoro, Jitendra, Starosta, & Sacks, 2006). Santoro et al. (2006) described an intervention in which students worked to increase their reading skills. Every two weeks, students completed a phoneme segmentation fluency assessment. This assessment tested the individual phonemes within each word. In addition, once every four weeks, students completed a one-minute assessment to measure their accuracy and speed while identifying letter names (Santoro et al., 2006). By completing these assessments, the researcher was able to

determine if the student was making progress towards individual phonemes of words up to four phonemes. In the study I conducted, students participated in a similar learning process.

Word Fluency

In addition to being phonologically aware, students can increase their decoding skills by practicing using various strategies to increase their word fluency. In order to become a fluent reader, students must read at an appropriate rate and blend sounds together without errors or interference while reading (Gregory & Burkman, 2011). Gregory and Burkman describe fluency as being about activating our brains to remember various words and being able to retrieve them without effort (Gregory & Burkman, 2011). It is noted that this put students with a disability in the study at a disadvantage, because they might not all be able to automatically activate previous learned information easily, due to delays in their processing speeds. In order to increase fluency while reading, it is important to practice high frequency words and sounds until they become automatic.

Word Accuracy through Repeated Reading

Students can participate in repeated readings to increase their oral fluency. Researchers can include repeated readings with students who have developed initial word reading skills, yet they have not met the required reading fluency rate for their grade level. Gregory and Burkman (2011) stated that students require a minimum of four re-readings to achieve comprehension for students that already speak English and do not have a disability. This is why it is vital for English Language Learners and students with a learning disability to read passages even more than the average of four times. While students partake in these re-readings, it is vital that students read the stories aloud. By reading out loud, the students are able to hear the words in

context and make corrections to words they may not pronounce correctly the first time. Many students learn best by using multi-model techniques. By seeing the words in front of them and hearing them aloud, students are activating multiple senses at the same time. Silent reading is said to do more harm than good, because students are not able to access the information through multiple senses (Gregory & Burkman, 2011).

Rhyme and Rhythm

Another important strategy to include to increase decoding skills is to incorporate rhyme and rhythm in student's learning. When rhyming, students experience a repetition of similar sounds in two or more words. When exploring rhyme, students are more successful when a rhythm is followed to keep the tempo of reading. It allows students to play with language (Gregory & Burkman, 2011). Researchers also paired symbols with words in the study to represent sounds and words at an early age. This allowed learners to make a connection to the words they were interacting with. By using repetition, pattern, rhymes, and words with predictable storylines, students can master concepts within oral reading (Gregory & Burkman, 2011).

Functional Literacy

Functional literacy are the reading skills that are necessary to manage daily living tasks. In order to be a functional reader, Gregory and Burkman discussed various strategies to use with learners that may be diverse, such as English language learners or students with special needs. The first strategy they recommended using was pairing pictures and words together for students as they read. In doing so, the student could have a visual to put meaning to the text, but the student could also use the picture later to recall information learned. Within the Read Well Curriculum, stories include pictures and text. Another strategy that was considered was

identifying patterns among words. For example, the words rain, plain, and gain all have the *ai* pattern. If readers are not able to identify word patterns, they are not able to move to more advanced, efficient decoding (Hudson et al., 2011). Once students have learned a word pattern, they have an easier time identifying additional words following that same pattern. Within the Read Well Curriculum, students have the opportunity to practice word patterns prior to reading each chapter. In addition, it is important to speak clearly with students, as opposed to speaking louder. By enunciating each sound, the student can clearly hear each individual sound, which will lead to better success in reading. Lastly, it is key for teachers to label objects around the classroom. By labeling objects around the classroom that students are familiar with, it gives them an opportunity to build confidence as they read.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, terms necessary for completing this study are defined below:

- **Decoding:** Proficiency in decoding, specifically segmenting and blending letter sounds, supports automatic recognition of words (Larabee, Burns, & McComas, 2014).
- **Fluency:** Being a fluent reader means that the student can read the text with speed, accuracy, and with expression. Fluency is explicitly taught and prompted. Rereading a text and reading text at a student's independent reading level assists in fluency (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009).
- **Emergent Literacy:** Emergent literacy skills develop from various experiences that a child has with spoken language in social interactions, written words through storybook reading, and opportunities to interact with print (Chen & Dote-Kwan, 2018).

- Phonology: This is the relationship among speech sounds. The most frequent phonological processes that are observed in children with Down syndrome are the reduction of consonant clusters and the deletion of final consonants or words (Penke, 2018).
- Phonemic Awareness: The understanding that spoken words can be separated and manipulated as contrastive sound units (Ukrainetz, Nuspl, Wilkerson, & Beddes, 2011).
- Strategy: A systematic plan, consciously adapted and monitored, to improve one's performance in learning (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008).

Hypothesis

Learning decoding strategies have been shown to have a positive impact on the reading abilities of beginning readers. Increased reading of correct words per minutes is evidence that students are applying decoding skills. Therefore, it was hypothesized that instruction of decoding strategies would improve the number of words read correctly to increase fluency.

Chapter Three Methods

Research Question

As a special educator coordinator, I have worked many teachers that worked with students with specific learning disabilities within the area of reading. I was curious to analyze the data to determine the effectiveness in using the Read Well Curriculum to increase decoding skills with students who have a learning disability in reading in 3rd-5th grade. Through this curiosity, I developed the following research question:

1. What is the impact of the Read Well Curriculum on decoding skills among 3rd-5th grade students with learning disabilities?

Research Plan

Students met in the special education classroom one time each day for twenty-five minutes each session. During the study, students learned strategies to improve their decoding skills. Students were able to apply their knowledge of letter-sound correspondence to various letter patterns as they encountered them in their stories. In following these patterns, students participated in a visual information category, meaning they were using letters and patterns within words to read (Serravollo, 2015). When students encountered words they did not know, they applied the decoding skills they learned to fluently read the passage. During the interventions, students were taught various reading strategies they could apply to their reading. Students practiced high frequency sounds and words in which they later encountered in the stories

presented; practiced stretching and shrinking words; read words in context; and read real and nonsense word patterns. Once each week, students participated in a progress monitoring assessment using Fast Bridge progress monitoring. During this time, students were given a one-minute timed assessment using fluency probes at their grade level. Students had the opportunity to apply the decoding skills they learned during progress monitoring checks. In addition, students graphed their progress on their individual charts to monitor their progress from week to week. According to Kolic-Vehovic (2006) and Yang (2006), when students take part in self-monitoring, it enhances their comprehension, accuracy, and fluency. It was noted that the students participating in the study showed an increase within their performance when they were included in the data tracking process. The students began to take ownership of their learning, and it is likely this would continue if students self-monitor their progress in the future within the special education setting.

Methods

During the intervention, students were given reading probes during pre-intervention, post-instruction, and two weeks after the intervention to determine their maintenance skills. There were three pre-intervention probes given to the student at their individual grade level. Students' scores were averaged based on the number of words read correctly in one minute using the Fast Bridge progress monitoring. Students completed the intervention using the Read Well Series. In the Read Well Curriculum, students practiced high frequency vocabulary, blending, and reading multisyllabic words to increase their fluency using repeated reading strategies. Participants were required to decode 80% of words presented prior to moving on to the next booklet. During interventions, students were tested one time every week using the Fast Bridge progress monitoring checks to determine the number of words

read correctly in one minute. After six weeks of intervention, students discontinued their intervention and were given three probes two weeks after their intervention discontinued. This determined if the student maintained their skills or regressed. Data was analyzed by pre-intervention, post-instruction, and maintenance to determine the effectiveness of the Read Well Curriculum.

Schedule

Prior to beginning the study, students were given three pre-intervention probes for baseline data. Students then participated in 6 weeks of interventions using the Read Well Curriculum. Students participated in the study for 25 minute sessions on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday while attending their special education services. On Wednesdays, the students completed a progress monitoring probe on Fast Bridge. During progress monitoring, students completed a 1 minute fluency passage, synthesis recall of events from the story, and were asked to answer 10 comprehension questions. At the end of the 6 weeks, students completed 3 fluency probes 2 weeks after the intervention to determine if they maintained their progress. This provided quantitative data to analyze. Data was analyze individually for each participant at the end of the study by averaging their number of words read correctly in one minute from their screeners before and after the intervention. Each student's trend line on their progress graph was also examined to determine if it was a positive, negative, or had no correlation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues were very limited within this study. Students did not appear to be stressed while participating in progress monitoring sessions. During the progress monitoring sessions, students participated in a one-minute reading assessment in which they were tested on their

ability to read the number of correct words per minute. It was considered that this one minute time limit may cause students to become anxious. If this stress or any other ethical issue would have arisen, I would have addressed them accordingly. However, this was unexpected as students participated in similar practices on a daily basis while receiving their special education services. Therefore, practices used in the study were typical for each student.

Protection as Human Subjects

Protection as human subjects was guaranteed. Parental consent was given for individuals participating in the study. Prior to beginning the study, participants and their guardians learned the potential risks or benefits. To protect individual's confidentiality, the researcher used pseudonyms without any identifying information. Parents or legal guardians were asked to provide written consent for their child to participate in the study prior to it beginning. Students participating in the study were read an assent form, as seen in Appendix C, which displayed their rights to participate, risks or benefits, and were given the option to discontinue participation at any time without any repercussions. Those participating were at minimal risk, as they already participated in reading special education services to increase their decoding skills.

Chapter Four Results

Data Collection

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all schools across Minnesota began distance learning, per the governor's orders on March 30, 2020. This began after an eight day school closure for students from March 17-March 27, 2020, in order for school staff to plan for distance learning. Because of this, the focus of this research project changed from focusing on the effectiveness of the Read Well curriculum for elementary students with specific learning disabilities. The new focus of the research project then became an analysis of my experience during distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a special education coordinator, I continued to work virtually with special education teachers, related service providers, administrators, and additional school staff within my five school districts during the pandemic.

In addition to the focus of the research study changing, the research design also changed. Previously, the research design followed a quantitative research design. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the new research design was an autoethnography. Autoethnography is a qualitative design used for research that analyzes personal experiences through self-reflection and writing. When using this design, the researcher uses principles from both an autobiography and an ethnography to document their experience. The researcher documents their experience while journaling and then analyzes their writing. When analyzing their journal entries, the researcher codes the journal entries. During this process, they define what the data is about.

In order to analyze my experience from the pandemic as a special education coordinator, I created a journal to note key aspects of my teaching experience during distance learning. Each day I had the opportunity to write a reflection noting my experiences relating to distance learning. The individual daily journal entries included my reflections regarding information relating to due process guidance, creating helpful documents for special education teachers, collaboration, documentation, and attitudes and feelings experienced during distance learning. The journal entries from 16 school days were analyzed to summarize how the COVID-19 pandemic changed the teaching practices and job duties of special education teachers and administrators. After coding my journal entries line by line, I used content analysis methods to organize each line into alike categories, as seen on Appendix I. For example, in a journal entry from March 24, 2020, I noted in the journal entry, “Today I met with the other 4 special education coordinators that I work with in my education district.” This line was categorized into the category of collaborating with special education leaders. In addition, on a journal entry from April 2, 2020, it was noted, “We created an example attendance chart that teachers could use to easily document their services for their students each week.” This journal entry was grouped into the category of making handouts for teachers. Many of the journal entries that I created were categorized by meetings with my special education teachers, special education directors, or the other special education coordinators that I worked with.

Results

Research Question: What was your experience during distance learning due to COVID-19? Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were required to implement distance learning, per the governor’s orders. As a special education coordinator, I was able to continue my work from home, while meeting virtually with my colleagues. During this time, I reviewed and interpreted

updated due process guidelines, created helpful documents for special educators, collaborated with colleagues, gained insight on proper documentation, and encountered many various attitudes and feelings amongst staff. Through this experience, I was given the opportunity to learn various strategies to overcome unexpected crises in the educational field.

Data Analysis

Due Process Guidance

When the state of Minnesota was first informed that distance learning was going to be put in place beginning March 30th, 2020, many educators began to panic. With only eight school days to prepare, several questions began to arise regarding due process. Many teachers began to question, “Will I have to amend every single Individualized Education Plan?” As fear began to set in for many special educators on what steps they needed to complete, we as special education coordinators and directors began seeking out information to answer the many questions that were being asked by special education staff.

In order to answer the many questions we were receiving, we began participating in webinars hosted by the Minnesota Department of Education as well as our Minnesota Administrators of Special Education leaders. As the Minnesota Department of Education released updates each Tuesday and Thursday, we designated one of our special education directors to be our point contact person to review the updates. This helped us to divide and conquer workloads during the unprecedented times. Through these updates and webinars, we received guidance to begin answering the many questions our special education teachers and related service providers were asking.

First and foremost, it was important for special educators to continue to provide free and appropriate public education for each individual student, as well as still include parent or

guardian input when they created plans for each Individual Distance Learning Plan. After leniency on special education timelines during the eight day planning period, all special education timelines became effective again beginning on March 30th when distance learning began.

In addition, special education teachers were required to hold all Individual Education Program meetings in a virtual fashion. This included but was not limited to using virtual platforms such as Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts, and phone calls. Teachers were required to create an Individualized Distance Learning Plan for each of their individual learners. Teachers collaborated with parents, related service providers, and other colleagues to ensure they met free and appropriate public education requirements for each of their students.

We also received guidance regarding special education evaluations and three year reevaluations. All initial evaluations for students were postponed due to face to face requirements to complete assessments such as cognitive and achievement testing, observations, and more. Teachers had the option to amend reevaluation plans in situations in which they were able to collect enough data in non-face to face methods to prove the student would continue to have special education needs. Lastly, teachers asked for guidance regarding completing Individualized Distance Learning Plans for students who had upcoming annual Individualized Education Program meetings coming up. Unfortunately, teachers were required to create an updated Individualized Distance Learning Program when they updated each individual student's Individual Education Program. While this left teachers with an abundant amount of paperwork to complete, we were confident as a leadership team that we were guiding our teachers to meet all updated compliance regulations from the state of Minnesota, as well as following all legal requirements to prevent any potential lawsuits against their school district.

Creating Helpful Documents for Special Education Teachers

To help further guide the special education teachers that I worked with, I collaborated with the other special education coordinators in my education district to create documents that would assist teachers with various situations they encountered during distance learning. Each week, we met for up to four hours to create documents that guided our teachers through various situations they were encountering.

The first document that we provided to our teachers, Appendix D, was called *Updated COVID-19 Information Relating to Special Education*. Key points within this document included important reminders for creating Individualized Distance Learning Plans such as following free and appropriate public education requirements and collaborating with parents and guardians. In addition, we provided further guidance to staff to note updated timeline regulations, information on how to conduct Individualized Education Program meetings virtually, and how to maintain confidentiality when meeting virtually. We shared this document with each of our teams to review via email.

An additional document, Appendix E, that we created for our special education teachers was *Individualized Distance Learning Plan-How To*. This document included not only detailed descriptions of the steps to take when completing an individualized distance learning plan, but also pictures for the teachers to visualize each step of the directions. This document was shared with each team during an emergency virtual meeting via Zoom. During this meeting, I presented the document in its entirety, modeled how to complete an Individualized Learning Plan, and then allowed time for questions.

I also collaborated with special education coordinators to provide a document, Appendix F, called *Sample Language on a Prior Written Notice for Amended-Postponed*

Evaluations/Reevaluations for our school psychologists and special education teachers to use when they amended and postponed evaluation plans. This provided them with sample language that met our school lawyer's standards, as well as parent friendly language. This document was shared out via email, as well as during team meetings with each of my individual districts.

Lastly, we created a document to share via email with our special education teams that included information on various Individual Education Program and Individualized Distance Learning Plan scenarios. We created this document based off of frequently asked questions we as coordinators had been receiving from our special teachers. By creating these documents, it provided a clear and concise presentation of necessary information when we collaborated with our special education teachers and related service providers.

Collaboration

During distance learning, I was able to collaborate with various colleagues including special education coordinators, special education directors, special education teachers, related service providers, administrators, and parents of students. While face to face interactions were not permitted due to COVID-19, all of our meetings and interactions were done virtually. I used Zoom for business, a secure platform, as provided by my education district. While collaborating with other professionals, this platform allowed me to easily share my screen to present and work on documents together throughout our meetings.

Each week I was able to meet with the other special education coordinators and directors that work in my education district and make up our 'leadership' team. During our meetings, we created documents to share with our teachers and discussed frequently asked questions that were asked by our teachers. In addition, we worked together to find ways to help our teachers feel less overwhelmed by providing them with clear and concise information. We also decided that our

monthly meetings with each of our teams would focus on time to ask questions relating to distance learning and COVID-19, as opposed to our typical topics we planned on sharing at our April monthly meeting. We agreed this would help teachers become less overwhelmed by information that is no longer relevant during distance learning. We determined it would be more appropriate to present our typical information to teachers upon returning to face to face schooling.

I was also able to collaborate with special education directors and building administrators on a weekly basis to ensure we were on the same page in regards to expectations for special education teachers during distance learning. We were able to work together to agree upon deadlines for their special education staff to complete their Individualized Distance Learning Plans in a timely fashion, while still focusing on providing special education services to each individual learner. In addition, we were able to identify the students that needed internet or devices at their home to engage in distance learning. We were able to collaborate with area internet providers to get internet hooked up in each of our family's homes prior to distance learning beginning. For a handful of our students who were unable to have internet installed at their homes, we were able to work with our district administrators to have them provide a hot spot to each family. This helped each of our students have the necessary resources in their homes to be able to equally access materials for distance learning.

Most importantly, I was able to continue working with my special education teachers virtually. During these difficult times, I offered several emergency team meetings to each of my five district's special education teams and related service providers in the week prior to distance learning beginning. These meetings were last minute which left some teachers unable to attend, due to prior commitments. To help accommodate their busy schedules, I offered that teachers

could attend another team's Zoom meeting when they were unable to attend their own meeting. Despite last minute meetings, I was able to still meet with all thirty-five special education teachers across five different meetings to share the necessary information needed to complete their Individualized Distance Learning Plans for each of their students. During these meetings, I was also able to combine some of my smaller districts into one meeting to allow them time to collaborate. This was very beneficial as one of the districts was struggling with ways to provide special education services during distance learning. As a group, we were able to share strategies and instructional plans that were going to be used in other districts. This allowed them to get started with their own planning for instruction.

In each of the following weeks, I offered to meet with each district's special education team weekly. I also offered individual meetings with teachers via Zoom. This gave me the opportunity to meet each individual teacher's needs. Most teachers utilized our meeting time to complete their first Individualized Distance Learning Plan together. From there, many of the teachers had me review their next Individualized Distance Learning Plan prior to sending it to parents to ensure they were on the right track. By continuing to meet as a team and individually with my special education teachers, I was able to see firsthand the successes and complications they experienced each day.

Documentation

In collaborating with our 13 member districts, many administrators were lenient on their attendance policies they put in place. As long as students were logging in and making attempts to complete their work in some fashion, they were counting students as present. The general education teachers completed a weekly Google form to note any students that were not attending sessions or completing their work. We asked that each of our special education teachers

document when they offered special education services to their students and if they were present or absent to each session. We as special education coordinators were able to provide a sample attendance chart as seen on Appendix H, *Attendance Document Example* that would be simple for teachers to use to document each student's attendance.

In addition to documenting student attendance, it was important for teachers and support staff to document their time spent working each day. Employees who did not have enough job duties to fulfill their typical work day were offered additional job duties to ensure they could work their normal amount of scheduled time. Each day, we used our Outlook calendar to document our work day while including our daily tasks completed. This provided proper documentation to our employer to ensure we were meeting our expected amount of work.

Lastly, I was able to work with teachers to provide examples of ways to document attendance during Individual Education Program meetings. I provided examples such as listing attendees names on their normal Record of Team Meeting form that SpEd Forms offers, writing the meeting date and details along with attendees names on a piece of printer paper, or even giving them the option to document attendees on a typed document. As long as teachers were able to document those who were in attendance of meetings in some way that could be included in their special education file, we were very flexible in ways teachers documented this information. Our flexibility decreased some of the stress that was overwhelming our special education teachers.

Attitudes and Feelings Experienced During Distance Learning

During distance learning, many educators experienced a wide range of emotions. Teachers were asked to plan for distance learning instruction in only eight days. In addition to the demands of planning instruction and learning new technologies to provide instruction, special

education teachers were also required to complete additional paperwork to ensure students were offered free and appropriate public education that met their unique individual needs. This led to high amounts of stress amongst educators.

In reaching out to teachers that I worked with, everyone expressed how overwhelmed they felt during distance learning. Each teacher struggled to prioritize their lengthy to do list each day. In meeting with teachers, I suggested they break up their paperwork into smaller chunks each. I recommended they focus on 2 or 3 Individualized Distance Learning Plans each day, and the rest of their day could focus on providing instruction for their students. We simply followed a ‘do the best you can’ motto. This helped teacher’s anxiety levels decrease drastically. In addition, many teachers just needed to hear they were on the right track, as no one had ever experienced a situation like this before. Many teachers felt lost and felt relieved just by hearing, “You are doing a great job”.

At each meeting with my teachers, I was sure to start off by asking, “What is going well for you during distance learning?” This gave my teachers time to celebrate their successes and start the meeting off on a positive note. The positive atmosphere allowed teachers to thrive. Many of my teachers that had a positive attitude were able to complete all of their Individualized Distance Learning Plans and progress reports well in advance before their expected due dates. I noted that those who had a positive attitude and were flexible during distance learning thrived in their teaching experience.

Conclusions

In conclusion, distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic allowed for me to further my experiences as an educator. I was provided with the opportunity to further my knowledge within due process by reviewing guidelines released by the Minnesota Department of

Education, as well as guidance from our special education lawyers. My biggest takeaway regarding due process was the more you can collaborate with your student's families and document, the better. In addition, it helped me to realize the importance behind creating documents that are clear and easy to understand to our educators. As much of the information released by the Minnesota Department of Education was overwhelming to teachers, I realized the importance behind my job in interpreting the laws and providing guidance to staff in understandable and meaningful terms. In addition, by collaborating with my special education staff to find ways to meet their individual learner's needs and provide adequate documentation, this pandemic gave me the opportunity to build stronger relationships with each special education teacher. Lastly, I learned that my positive attitude carried me through some of the most difficult days in my career.

Chapter Five Implications for Practice

Action Plan

While I faced many challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, I was given the opportunity to further my knowledge as a special educator. I was able to see the value behind collaborating with your colleagues to create individual plans that meet each individual learner's needs. By working together with those around you, you have the opportunity to share ideas that can lead to quality instruction. In going forward as a special education coordinator, it is my personal goal to continue to build positive relationships with each individual special education teacher and service provider that I work with. By having a positive relationship with each of my teachers, I will be able to work more closely to create and implement educational plans that allow the individual learner to flourish.

In addition, I plan to continue to review updates from the Minnesota Department of Education on a regular basis. I will work with the other special education coordinators within my education district to continue to interpret the department's guidance and use it to create easy to use documents for our special education teachers. Not only will this benefit those who are just entering the field of special education, but it will also provide easy to reference documents for veteran teachers to update their knowledge in the world of special education.

Lastly, I will strive to bring more positivity into each of my meetings with my teams. I will include more opportunities for team building, as it is important to have a strong team to guide you through difficult times. During our meetings, I plan to begin every meeting by sharing

celebrations. This will allow my teams to focus primarily on the good things happening around them. We will be able to move mountains with a positive mindset.

Plan for Sharing

The common themes that I found to positively impact special education teachers and their practices during the COVID-19 pandemic included strategies that can be implemented during typical face to face schooling. When school resumes to normal face to face instruction, I will share my findings with any teacher, administrator or parent who is interested in learning more about how to overcome challenges in the classroom. In addition, I will use my study to educate parents on the difficulties that educators have encountered during these unprecedented times. I will share the successes that I have seen first-hand with any citizen who questions why teachers are continuing to be paid when their students are at home, despite their efforts behind the scenes.

In addition, I will share the results of my findings with my professional learning community, as it will help us to see the importance of collaborating, interpreting due process guidelines from the state, and remind us to have a positive attitude no matter what difficult task we encounter.

Lastly, I will use this information to mentor new related service providers, special educators, or any other support staff in the educational field.

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List of Tables

Table 1: Study Participant's Disability and Grade Level

Student:	Grade:	Disability:
1	3	Specific Learning Disability
2	4	Specific Learning Disability
3	4	Specific Learning Disability
4	4	Specific Learning Disability
5	5	Specific Learning Disability
6	5	Specific Learning Disability

Appendix/Appendices

Appendix A:



SPRING GROVE SCHOOLS

113 2nd Ave NW • Spring Grove, Minnesota 55974 | 507.498.3221 | Fax 507.498.3470

January 17, 2020

The Spring Grove Public School District grants permission to Angie Augedahl to complete an Action Research Study within Spring Grove Public Schools. Angie will complete an eight week study within the Special Education Setting. The study will examine the effectiveness of the Read Well Curriculum with students who have learning disabilities and receive direct instruction within the area of reading.

Through parent consent, students receiving special education for reading will be monitored to determine the effectiveness of the Read Well Curriculum. Three pre-intervention probes will be given to the student. Students' scores will be averaged based on the number of words read correctly in one minute using FastBridge progress monitoring. Students will then participate in an intervention using the following program: Read Well Series. In the Read Well Curriculum, students will practice high frequency vocabulary, blending, and reading multisyllabic words to increase their fluency using repeated reading strategies. During interventions, students will be tested one time every week using the FastBridge progress monitoring checks to determine the number of words read correctly in one minute. After six weeks, students will discontinue their intervention and be given three probes two weeks after their intervention has discontinued. This will determine if the student has maintained their skills or regressed. Data will be analyzed from pre-intervention, post-instruction, and maintenance sessions to determine the effectiveness of the Read Well Curriculum in students with various disabilities.

I hereby grant Angie Augedahl permission to conduct this study within our special education program.

Sincerely,

Nancy Gulbranson

Rachel Uidsuen
Superintendent

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT 297

Nancy Gulbranson
K-12 Principal

Appendix B:

Informed Consent Form:

You are invited to participate in a study of the effectiveness of the Read Well Curriculum for students with specific learning disabilities in the area of reading. I hope to learn if this curriculum has positive growth amongst students within the special education setting. Students with learning disabilities in grades 3-5 will be studied while using the Read Well Curriculum. You were selected as a possible participant in this study to determine if this curriculum is effective to improve your reading skills within the special education setting.

If you decide to participate, you will partake in pre-intervention, intervention, and post-intervention phases. During the pre-intervention phase, you will be given 3 1-minute fluency probes to determine your average number of words read correctly in 1 minute. During the intervention phase (6 weeks), you will participate in small group reading sessions using the Read Well Curriculum 4 days a week for 25 minute sessions. During this time, you will also participate in a 1-minute fluency passage to monitor your progress over the course of the 6 weeks. Two weeks after the intervention has ended, you will be given 3 fluency probes to determine your average number of words read correctly in 1 minute to determine if the intervention was successful. Subjects participating in this study will be exposed to activities that are part of their daily routines in the classroom and do not present any threat of harm or discomfort to them.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relationships with Angie Augedahl or Spring Grove Public Schools. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without any repercussions.

Please feel free to ask questions regarding this study. You may contact me later if you have any additional questions at 507-429-8676 or by email at aaugedahl@hved.org. Any questions about your rights may be directed to Dr. Lisa I. Karch, Chair of the MSUM Institutional Review Board, at 218-477-2699 or by email at: irb@mnstate.edu.

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Parent or Guardian: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C:

Child Assent Form:

Project Title: Effectiveness of Increasing Decoding Skills through Read Well Curriculum for Students with Learning Disabilities

Investigator: Angela Augedahl

We are doing a research study about **whether or not you will show progress in your reading skills while using the Read Well Program**. A research study is a way to learn more about people. If you decide that you want to be part of this study, you will be asked to **use the Read Well Program during our daily reading sessions. You will participate in this study for 6 weeks. Each day, we will use the program for 25 minutes, 4 days of the week. One day a week, we will continue to use our FastBridge progress monitoring probes to see if you are making progress.**

There are some things about this study you should know. This is very similar to the programs we use already. The only discomfort that might be an issue is if you get nervous about taking a one minute test each week. It is important to know that you will not be judged, whether you make progress or not.

Not everyone who takes part in this study will benefit. A benefit means that something good happens to you. We think these benefits might be **to help your reading abilities. This should help you to become a better reader by being able to read more words in one minute.**

If you do not want to be in this research study, we will tell you what other kinds of treatments there are for you.

When we are finished with this study we will write a report about what was learned. This report will not include your name or that you were in the study.

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. If you decide to stop after we begin, that's okay too. Your parents know about the study too.

If you decide you want to be in this study, please sign your name.

I, _____, want to be in this research study.

(Sign your name here)

(Date)

Appendix D:

Updated information from Minnesota Administrators for Special Education (MASE) and attorneys Laura Booth, Elizabeth Meske and Christian Shuler from Rinick, Kozsak & Maloney, P.A., as of March 19, 2020.

Updated COVID-19 Information Relating to Special Education:

2 questions to keep in mind:

Does it provide FAPE?
Does it provide the parents the opportunity to participate in decision making?

Due process Timelines:

- During the closure through March 27th, all timelines falling during this time do not count towards your 30 day re-evaluation, or evaluation, as they are not school days.
- Timelines still count for the IEP.
- If an annual IEP meeting is due between now and March 27th, please document on box 5 of the Prior Written Notice (PWN) "Due to mandated school closures because of COVID-19 pandemic, the annual IEP meeting was unable to be held prior to the annual IEP due date. The annual IEP meeting was conducted upon school resuming normal operations."
- Teams need to include parents in the decision making process. If there is a delay in holding a meeting, consider whether or not it caused educational harm? If educational harm was caused, then compensatory education may be required.
- Evaluations/Re-evaluations can take place during distance learning, but if face-face is required (WJ, WISC, etc.), then the completion of the evaluation will be delayed. Document in a Prior Written Notice (PWN) that the evaluation will be completed upon school returning to normal session.
- Use reasonable means to collect appropriate data for evaluations.

Team Meetings During Distance Learning:

- IEP team meetings must continue as normal in non in-person fashions (phone conference, skype, etc.).
- IEP teams need to make every effort to comply with IDEA including required team members.
- All members need to have the functional ability to engage in the meetings.
- Need to document attendance. Can be a Record of Team Meeting noting members participated via zoom, phone, etc. or could just be a word document noting who is all in attendance.
- Document how meetings will be held and how they are contacting parents to be involved in the IEP process. Good documentation will help with any possible disputes in the future.
- If a required IEP team member isn't able to attend, follow the procedures you normally would. If the parent agrees in writing the team member can be absent from the meeting-use the excusal form with written consent. This should be sent prior to the meeting to the parent.
- If they agree, the IEP team meeting can continue without; if not, the IEP meeting should be postponed. It is a denial of FAPE to proceed without written permission from the parent. Communication is key prior to the meeting.

Due Process Documents:

- Schools can accept electronic signatures including email from parents providing consent. Copy the email and put it with the PWN in the file.
- Text message, ify but be sure to document (i.e. take a picture of text). Save texts with consent as a screenshot and then print for the student's file.
- If a parent wants to give verbal consent, this will not hold up in court, however, a document could be sent home that states the parent gave verbal consent to move forward with an IEP or Amendment or Evaluation. Include a stamped/addressed envelope to return written permission. Use the school address for the return envelope. A letter could be sent home to say, "Today you provide verbal consent to ...".

Amending IEPs:

After attending a legal conference, we have been advised to document each individual student's distance learning plan. HVED Directors are working on developing a template to document this information. Please do not complete any amendments until we receive further guidance. Think about what services you can provide through distance learning that would continue to provide FAPE for your students.

Questions from listeners:

Question: Do we close the eval then re-open when it's delayed?

Answer: Districts and charters are expected to move forward with assessments and evaluations virtually with no in-person contact. For activities that are not reasonable to carry out if a school is closed or a student is ill, those activities could be delayed until the district is reopened. Leave the evaluation open and provide a Prior Written Notice (PWN) to parents stating the evaluation will be completed upon school returning to normal session. HVED will provide a sample template for the PWN.

Question: Should WJ be delayed?

Answer: Some protocols can't be used such as WISC and WJ because they are not normed virtually. Evaluation should be delayed in these cases.

Question: Can teachers record lessons and post them?

Answer: Yes, and this would be helpful for parents that work and can't assist at certain times.

Question: What if the para is listed and the parent wants someone in their home.

Answer: Governor said no.

Statement: During these difficult times, be sure to remain professional in your interactions with parents and students.

IEP reflection during distance learning:

- FAPE is an obligation. We need to consider the student's unique circumstances. COVID-19 Pandemic doesn't alter the fact that the schools need to consider the student's unique needs. Services still need to be individual basis. One size fits all approach is not appropriate.
- Changing from classroom to distance learning affects the IEP in most cases for accommodations, transportation, child specific paraprofessional support, etc., as they are not provided during distance learning.
- Annual Goals: Need to collect data as always - there is no grace period for this due to the pandemic. Needs to be real data on their progress. Some of it might need to be after we can do face-face.

Educational Data/Confidentiality:

Can you use video conferences with multiple students at the same time?

1. Connecting via video: If/when they conference with multiple students, ensure no private data is in frame (Mark's foster during Mattie's session). Especially when working from home or setting up your desk space (blank wall is best). Please be aware of what is in your background.
2. If staff videoing with multiple students, parents can view other students in that session. Recommend parents consent to private data for their student during distance learning. This should be documented in the Distance Learning Plan provided to parents.
3. Respect to security for online platforms, there are additional privacy features built in. Staff needs to take steps to maintain security (multiple chat sessions at the same time, you can't have multiple screens that would show grades of other students, etc.)
4. Email/Texting seems more informal: if you don't want it read allowed in a courtroom, don't put it in writing.

Appendix E

Individualized Distance Learning Plan (IDL P)

- The Individualized Distance Learning Plan can be found on the Service Plan section of each individual student's forms below the IEP.

- BEFORE making any changes to the IDLP make sure your **IEP is FINALIZED**
- Information already existing in the FINALIZED IEP will auto populate into the sections of the IDLP.
- If you delete information from the IDLP because it does not pertain to the distance learning plan, it will not delete from the regular IEP.

Student Information Page:

- Federal Setting:** Use the same federal setting as your Stay Put IEP.

Goal Page:

- Enter your Method of Service Delivery for each goal.

Program Supports for School Personnel:

- Enter any supports required for school personnel during Distance Learning.

Consideration for Translation/Interpreter Needs:

- DHH/DEIVELL or Non-Verbal Students:** Add in statements for how services and communication will accommodate this student's unique needs.

Least Restrictive Environment:

- Sample LRE Statements:** Due to the unique nature of the Distance Learning Model due to COVID-19 Pandemic STUDENT will...
 - not miss any general education classes, as special education time will not overlap general education time (or something to this extent)
 - will receive services during individual work time (or something to this extent)

Transition Page:

- This will auto-populate from the IEP. Remove any Postsecondary Transition services that are not necessary during Distance Learning.

Service Page:

Services:

- Indirect: Any supplemental material and assignments (packets, websites, apps).
- Direct: "virtual contact time"- Via video, phone, text or virtual audio or chat.

Accommodations/Modifications:

- This will auto-populate from your IEP. Remove any Accommodations/Modifications that are not necessary during Distance Learning.

IEP Services and Supports Placed on Hold:

Prior Written Notice:

Dear SAMPLE Mom and SAMPLE Dad:

You are receiving this notice because the school district is proposing or refusing action(s) regarding your child's identification, evaluation, educational placement or the appropriate public education (IEP).

- 1. Action(s) Proposed or Refused**
Consistent with guidance from the U.S. Department of Education and the Governor of Missouri, the District is proposing to modify your child's IEP to indicate the type and quantity of special education services, related services, and accommodations that your child will receive on days that are designated as distance learning days. The specific changes are documented on the attached IEP document (Individualized Distance Learning Plan).
- 2. Explanation: Why each action is proposed or refused**
The District is proposing these changes so your child can continue to receive a free appropriate public education on school days that are designated as distance learning days. The regular services, supports and accommodations listed on your child's IEP will resume when face-to-face instruction in school is reinstated.
- 3. Sources of Information: Basis for proposed or refused action**
In proposing these changes to your child's IEP, the District considered your child's current IEP, most recent evaluation report, and input from all members who work with your child. The District also considered guidance from the U.S. Department of Education, the Missouri Department of Education, and the Governor of Missouri.
- 4. Other options considered and why those options were refused**
Should an emergency action of suspension and the Director determine the school and other programs, no other options were considered.
- 5. Additional factors relevant to the district's proposed or refused action.**
The District considered the instructional options that are available through a distance learning model.

- Use the drop down relating to COVID-19 for each statement.
- If a parent objects to the proposal, contact your Special Education Director immediately.
- In this unique circumstance, electronic consent is sufficient. Per MDE, the Individual Distance Learning Plan the team may accept an electronic signature or an email from a parent confirming consent to the amendments.
- If you receive electronic consent:
 - Via email: print the email containing consent

- Via text: screenshot and print the text containing consent
- Attach electronic consent to PWN/Parental Consent/objection form
- File consent in the student's SpEd file

Send the Following Completed Documents to Parents:

- Prior Written Notice
- Individualized Distance Learning Plan

Finalize Documents:

- Finalize the Individualized Distance Learning Plan
- Finalize the Prior Written Notice
- File in Permanent Special Education File Upon Returning

Appendix F

Sample of an Amended Reevaluation Plan

Dear SAMPLE Parents

You are receiving this notice because the school district is proposing or refusing action(s) regarding your child's identification, evaluation, educational placement or free appropriate public education (FAPE).

2. Action(s) Proposed or Refused

Based on the emergency nature of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the district is proposing to amend the re-evaluation plan dated _____. Due to the inability to complete the following tests and observations to determine CONTINUED NEED FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES, the district is proposing to remove the following assessments from the original evaluation plan: (ex: Woodcock Johnson, observation, etc.). The items listed in the chart below will be conducted during the evaluation through the distance learning model to demonstrate continuing need for special education services.

Area	Materials & Procedures	Evaluators
------	------------------------	------------

3. Explanation: Why each action is proposed or refused

The team is proposing the amendment of the re-evaluation plan dated _____, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic which has required school districts to put in place a Distance Learning Model. The team is unable to complete the standardized testing or observations in the Distance Learning Model, as they must be completed in person.

4. Sources of Information: Basis for proposed or refused action

Basis for the proposal is the COVID-19 Pandemic which prohibits staff and students from meeting in person.

5. Other options considered and why those options were refused

The team considered postponing the completion of the evaluation until school resumes in person, but determined we will have enough data to complete the evaluation during the distance learning model through the procedures listed in the chart above.

6. Additional factors relevant to the district's proposed or refused action.

The District considered the instructional options that are available through a distance learning model.

Sample of a Postponed Evaluation Plan

Dear SAMPLE Parents

You are receiving this notice because the school district is proposing or refusing action(s) regarding your child's identification, evaluation, educational placement or free appropriate public education (FAPE).

1. Action(s) Proposed or Refused

Based on the emergency nature of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the district is proposing the postponement of the completion of STUDENT'S evaluation until school resumes regular in person programming due to the inability to complete the following tests and observations to determine INITIAL ELIGIBILITY or determine CONTINUED NEED FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES.

Area	Materials & Procedures	Evaluators
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2. Explanation: Why each action is proposed or refused

The team is proposing the postponement of the completion of the evaluation due to the COVID-19 Pandemic which has required school districts to put in place a Distance Learning Model. The team is unable to complete the standardized testing or observations in the Distance Learning Model as they must be completed in person.

3. Sources of Information: Basis for proposed or refused action

Basis for the proposal is the COVID-19 Pandemic which prohibits staff and students from meeting in person.

4. Other options considered and why those options were refused

INITIAL TESTING STATEMENT: Based on the emergency nature of a pandemic and the direction of the Governor of Minnesota to implement a Distance Learning Model beginning March 30, 2020, no other options were considered as the testing and observations that require staff and students to be in person are not able to be completed while the district is in a Distance Learning model.

RE-EVALUATION TESTING STATEMENT: The team considered amending the evaluation plan to replace the standardized test and/or observations but determined that it/they are essential for the re-evaluation of STUDENT and require staff and students to be in person to complete. These are not able to be completed during the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Governor of Minnesota's requirement for Distance Learning.

5. Additional factors relevant to the district's proposed or refused action.

The District considered the instructional options that are available through a distance learning model.

Appendix H

Week: March 30-April 3, 2020					
Student:	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
JP Reading: 2 x wk	x	Present	x	Absent-ill	x
JP Math: 2 x wk	x	Present	x	Absent-ill	x
CJ Reading: 3 x wk	Present	x	Present	x	Present
CJ Social Skills 3 x wk	Present	x	Present	x	Present
LM Preacademics:2 x wk	Present	x	Present	x	x

Appendix I

Primary Themes:	Sub-Themes Related to Primary Theme:
Due Process Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MASE leaders and our attorneys for important updates relating to special education during COVID-19 • Must complete an IDLP for each student. • Hold all IEP meetings virtually • Timelines extended between March 17-March 27th • All initial evaluations postponed during distance learning • All re-evaluations could be completed if they had enough data to prove the child continued to have special education needs. • All IEP annual dates still apply after March 30th. • Guidance for what to do when they missed deadline between March 17-March 27th-document in box 5 of PWN. • MDE released updates every Tuesday and Thursday-we had one point person (director) review this information and reach out to leadership team with vital information. • Early childhood membership and attendance-document as normal. • MA billing must include virtual platform (platform must be HIPAA compliant) for service delivery to receive MA funds • Create another IDLP at the time of annual IEP if it's yet to come this year.
Creating Helpful Documents for Special Education Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated COVID-19 information relating to special education: Remember FAPE and collaborate with parents, due process timeline requirements, conducting IEP meetings virtually, confidentiality, etc. • Step by step instructions for completing an IDLP • Sample Prior Written Notice with sample language for amended evaluation plans and postponed evaluation plans.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document with various IEP and IDLP Paperwork scenario options. • Documentation examples for attendance.
<p>Collaboration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings via zoom and hangouts-share screen options allows for sharing agendas and important documents while working together. • Special Education Coordinators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ review IDLP form from SpEd Forms and plan for sharing with teachers ○ Met via zoom at least once a week to discuss pertinent information teachers needed answers for. ○ Strategize for meeting team’s needs-be flexible and remove typical monthly meeting agendas to focus on COVID-19 information. • Special Education Leadership Team (coordinators and directors): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Meet once a week • Special Education Teachers/Teams: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Emergency team meetings to share pertinent information ○ Difficulties scheduling emergency meetings with short notice-offered flexibility for teachers to join other team’s meetings virtually if they were unable to join their own session. Held 4 meetings in one day and offered additional next day to meet with all 35 of the teachers I work with. ○ Combine smaller district’s meetings to save time and allow teams to collaborate. ○ Meet individually with teachers to answer questions, walk through first IDLP, review 1-2 IDLP to ensure they’re on the right track. Share examples of common things teachers were taking out of IDLPs (accommodations that weren’t necessary during distance learning) ○ Weekly check in’s with teams to offer team meeting. Weekly individual message to each teacher to offer assistance. • District administrators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Collaborate to create due dates for IDLP’s • Related service providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Seek input for evaluations: upcoming and current • Special Education Directors:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Meet weekly to discuss each individual district and what's going on, receive input on individual situations I was experiencing. ● Parents/students: provide access to internet for those without, provide devices for those without, and provide additional paper/packets for those whose internet is not strong. ● Technology was new for many teachers/admin-work together to share features of programs. Working together makes life easier.
Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Many area schools are not counting students absent, as long as they are logging in or completing work in some fashion. ● Provided sample attendance chart to special education teachers to document their service delivery for special education students. ● Teachers create a weekly google form for principal to document students who aren't attending. Form showed what forms of communication they've tried, how they've tried to adjust their teaching for the student's needs, and any other relevant information. Teachers needed to prove they've done everything possible before having principal contact the parents regarding lack of attendance. ● How to document IEP meeting attendance. ● Document our work day for our employer to ensure we are meeting our 40 hour work week requirements-could reassign duties if not.
Attitudes and Feelings During Distance Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● By creating simple step by step instructions for how to complete the necessary paperwork, it will decrease overwhelming feeling teachers are experiencing. ● High stress due to meeting with all my teams in one day to share out important updates to allow teachers to have as much time as possible to create IDLP's prior to Distance Learning beginning. ● Stress levels decreased after meeting with all my teachers. ● Teachers and related service providers found documents very helpful and expressed gratitude ● Many teachers felt overwhelmed so they asked for individual meetings to ensure they were on the right track. ● Special education directors told teachers to "do the best you can".

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide communication in clear and concise fashions to aid in the stress parents/families are feeling. Limit number of people contacting parents to make things less stressful.• Each teacher expressed they were feeling overwhelmed with trying to provide services during distance learning, complete IDLP's, and complete progress reports. Recommended break tasks into smaller/manageable tasks each day (ex: 2-3 IDLP's a day and 1 progress report each day)• Begin meetings with "What's going well?" Positivity is key-negativity brings down the team and work production decreases in negative environments.• Monthly meetings-adjusted topics covered to prevent overwhelming teachers with new information that isn't relevant during COVID-19.• Reassure teachers they're doing good job.• End each day on a positive note.• Busy schedules caused teachers to be forgetful and left feeling overwhelmed when they forgot about meetings.• Many teachers were relieved to receive our assistance, advice, and helpful documents.
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