



Prepare parents to attend virtual 504 meetings

The implementation of Section 504 may look different in a remote learning environment, but the fundamentals for student and parent civil rights haven't changed, said Catherine L. Lyons, a school attorney at Lyons & Rogers, LLC in Rockland, Mass. The student's Section 504 team must still meet, though that meeting may occur in a virtual setting. Along with making sure to notify parents of the 504 team meeting for their child and giving them their notice of rights, also make sure they are able to fully participate in the virtual meeting.

"The No. 1 thing to do is facilitate parents input in the process," Lyons said.

Here's what you'll need to do to **prepare parents** to attend a virtual 504 meeting.

- **Ensure access.** If you have a Section 504 team meeting on a virtual platform, make sure before the meeting that parents have access to that platform, know how to use it, and have a stable Wi-Fi connection, Lyons said.

It's the district's responsibility to make sure the parent has access to the virtual meeting. If they don't, then the district needs to facilitate that for them, she said. This may include hosting a training session on how to use the technology, for example.

- **Communicate beforehand via email.** If the parents regularly communicate via email and by their actions demonstrate that email is a preferred or acceptable form of communication, then you can email them the information about the meeting, Lyons said.

"Email is acceptable if it's acceptable to the parent," she said. "I find in my own practice for most families it is." You can share communication with notice of the meeting and about scheduling the meeting. But if the parents have not conveyed that email is an acceptable form of communication, either by actions or statements, then send the information via the U.S. Postal Service, she said.

Consider using both email and snail mail. "I don't think it's a bad idea to duplicate efforts to make sure they got that notice," she said.



- **Don't overlook need for translation.** If English is not the language in the home, or if the parent has some other disabling condition, don't forget to have information about the meeting translated for them, Lyons said. "It's our job to make sure they have access to the information in a way they can understand," she said. If documents need to be translated, that means your emails to them will need to be translated. You may also need to ensure that a translator is present at the virtual meeting, she said.

The virtual platform may also have accessibility features that you can enable for the meeting. For example, you can use an extension on Google Meet to add closed-captioning to your meeting, Lyons said.

"I had a meeting in the spring where we had two sign language interpreters and the meeting was closed-captioned," she said. "We wanted to go the extra mile because there was more than one person at that meeting [who had a hearing impairment]. We wanted to make sure the meeting would be accessible to everybody."

- **Start with review of meeting rules.** "It's always good to set up the rules of the road, because this might be the first team meeting the parent has attended virtually," Lyons said.

At the beginning of the meeting, talk for a few minutes about the purpose of the meeting, go over the agenda, and share a few "rules of the road" to follow when meeting virtually. For example: What should meeting participants do if they have a question? Use the raised hand emoji? Ask it in the chat? What are the rules around recording the meeting? Is there anything that is going to be a bit different in a virtual meeting?

- **Consider using the telephone.** If the parent doesn't have access to the equipment and technology they need to access the meeting, and know how to access it, you can potentially hold the meeting over the phone, Lyons said. "You don't have to do everything on Zoom, particularly if the parent doesn't have access or is uncomfortable," she said. "You can do a lower tech approach."

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