



200 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201

# Technical Assistance Bulletin

MarylandPublicSchools.org



Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services | Supplement to TAB #20-09

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Date: January 2021

## Tips to Address Special Education Staff Shortages, Scheduling, and Logistical Challenges Across Varied Service Delivery Models

As local school systems continue to develop, implement, and evaluate specially designed instruction (SDI) across a variety of service delivery models during the COVID-19 pandemic, they may face several logistical challenges related to staffing and scheduling. The following tips may aid local school systems in addressing these challenges in creative ways.

### 1. Reallocate existing resources to address staff shortages.

- Consider a [staffing model](#) utilizing teacher teams differentiated by roles according to their skill, expertise, demands of the curriculum, and the needs of students.
- Offer willing and qualified staff [flexibility](#) and/or additional compensation to take on additional responsibilities/caseloads to cover shortages.
- Collaborate across departments to address staff shortages through strategic scheduling and cross-training with specialist teachers, interventionists, and assistants. Include in this collaboration job developers, job coaches and employment specialists.
- Engage with private providers and temp agencies to address shortages.

### 2. Find creative ways to use substitute teachers and paraeducators.

- Strategically engage paraeducators in lesson preparation, materials, and resource development to support teacher workload. Paraeducators may also facilitate communication with other members of the instructional team in order to manage data collection.
- Include long-term substitutes and [paraeducators](#) in professional development opportunities.
- Deploy paraeducators to implement accommodations and other supports for students completing asynchronous assignments and participating in classes.
- Keep parents informed about who is providing instruction and services to their child.

### 3. Strategically schedule to balance competing priorities.

- Embed standing planning times into weekly or monthly scheduling blocks so that instructional teams can effectively “divide and conquer” roles such as IEP goal practice and progress monitoring amongst themselves.

- Coordinate with general education colleagues to plan for instructional blocks that allow for both whole group and individual/small group instruction times that can incorporate targeted intervention on goals.
- For students with complex needs whose engagement in virtual instruction is limited, collaborate with families to prioritize goals to be addressed during that time. Provide parent coaching and asynchronous activities to address other goals/skills.

#### **4. Consider tools and structures to schedule related services.**

- Consider [systemic scheduling](#) as opposed to school-based scheduling for key positions, part-time positions, unique groups of students with like needs, course choice or interests.
- Ensure that related service providers who work in multiple schools have access to all student and school schedules.
- Set aside designated time each day or week for the provision of special education and related services, keeping in mind that services should reflect the unique needs of the student.
- Use an electronic calendar or tool (e.g., Calendly, Google or Outlook Calendar, Doodle, Meeting Bird) to allow parents and students to pick the service delivery time that works best for them.
- Utilize virtual tools for teachers, related service providers, paraeducators, and others to collaborate and share information through regularly scheduled meetings and/or asynchronous structures like chats and shared documents, especially if they are not working from the same location.
- Create structures such as email lists or shared calendars to ensure that related service providers, itinerant teachers, and other team members are aware of scheduling changes.

#### **5. Use [CARES Act](#) funding.**

- Provide financial incentives for staff who take on extra responsibilities or dedicate more instructional or service delivery hours during the pandemic.
- Provide stipends to staff who agree to attend professional development opportunities outside of school hours and those who support students participating in work-based learning and internships in the community.

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