

Guidance to Schools Regarding Novel Coronavirus

As assigned by Judi Harris, lecturer in the Exceptional Education Department, student teachers share reflections on the impact the pandemic has had on special education teachers' ability to provide services to students with disabilities.

Anastasia Arzaga

The special education teacher must think of ways where they can meet their student's academic and social needs, from a distance while still giving the student support. Special educators currently must now create activities that will increase their student's strengths and areas of improvement through different approaches. Special educators are built to adapt to the environment they are placed in and must adapt for their students to learn now in their own environment. I believe every student can learn during this period in history if they have teachers who are willing to be creative and mold their learning by utilizing the environment around their students.

Kaeley Biondo

This world pandemic is clearly a time of learning for all. However, I feel that special education teachers may be one of the only lines of work where we are somewhat prepared. This is a time of adaptation, differentiation, modification, accommodation, etc. All these things are things that special educators know very well and practice daily. A strong special education teacher knows how their students learn best, they know what they must do to help the student become academically motivated, they know what areas need the most focus, they know how to minimize unwanted behavior, etc. This last-minute change clearly shook the world, but change is something we as educators know very well. When one strategy does not work, we move onto the next one.

Deborah Eaton

As special educators, I think it is imperative to have an open line of communication with our student's families. Class Dojo and Google hangouts are great places to start but our students need more than that. Parents of special needs children need guidance and support to keep their students motivated and learning during our time apart. Call your parents to ask them their greatest need, their student's strengths and what forms of media they have at home. Create an at-home learning schedule for each student as if they were in your classroom. Help your parents come up with a behavior management chart that encourages their child to complete tasks. This is a learning curve for all of us, and we will be better off for embracing this challenge while moving forward to educate our students. My teaching philosophy is to encompass the whole child in their learning, this includes their home life and family. We cannot stand alone and teach a child from 8-4 Monday through Friday. We must learn how to be creative working with the families to support their child. We will not be able to meet all the needs, but we can and must try!

Maria Gelyon

Through the uncertainty and learning process of remote learning during COVID-19, I believe Special Education teachers are prepared for this change. Special Educators are devoted to differentiating and modifying to students' specific needs. The determination does not change due to the setting. Teaching for Special Educators goes far beyond students sitting stationary all day taking endless notes. Special Educators take the time to find the best practices and accommodations for each of their students. During this unprecedented time, Special Educators will be able to still align the learning objective with their students' skill level. For remote learning, it is important for Special Educators to be aware of what supports their students' have access to at home. It is also significant for there to be constant communication with parents or guardians during distance learning. Communication will ensure that students are still receiving support even though they are not in a traditional classroom setting. My philosophy as a special educator is to always find the best practice for each individual student. Whether in a classroom or remote instruction, finding the best practice for each student is essential.

Abbie Huntington

Special Educators have the responsibility of making sure that they can meet the needs of their students in every way. It is harder to make accommodations and modifications as needed, and specifically for each child. The easiest way to help meet the needs of each child is to have communication... with the guardian of the student. Parents are already struggling with balancing everything at home, so the best way is to come up with a routine that works for the parents. I feel that it is crucial to let the parent know that basic everyday things can also be a learning experience for that child. Learning isn't always sitting down and looking at PowerPoints and having that student do a packet (I have seen a lot of this, being around teachers and children doing schoolwork at home). This aligns perfectly with my philosophy. As a special educator, it is my responsibility to make sure that all students have the resources that they need to be successful.

Jessica Kubik

I was student teaching in a third-grade general education classroom when there was talk of schools shutting down for only a two-week period. Friday, March 13th was the last day of my placement before schools were shut down first by the district, followed by the order signed by Governor Cuomo. I remember the panic and hustle that happened that. My mentor teacher and I were given a short 20-minute planning period, where our main objective was to decide on and gather resources to send home with students in preparation for the closure of schools for a two-week period. My mentor teacher also had to type up a letter to send home to families explaining the need to be sending home schoolwork, as well as what to have students work on daily to keep them up to date with the curriculum. It sounds like a lot of work, doesn't it? I thought so, as we were rushing to put all of this together and send it home with our students, while also trying to keep them all calm, as they were all very scared of the coming news of the pandemic as well. Now, take all of this, as our special education teachers had to do this same thing for each of their students. However, they can't just send home general materials for their entire class, as each student has their own goals that they are working on. Materials need to be individualized. It's also not uncommon for some students in our special education programs to have stronger behavioral reactions to the changes that will soon be coming to their lives. The amount of notice that was given to teachers in New York State was little to none.