

HINTS AND TIPS FOR VIRTUAL SPECIAL EDUCATION MEETINGS

Special Education Mediation Services



SPECIAL EDUCATION
MEDIATION SERVICES
MICHIGAN ALLIANCE FOR
FAMILIES 2020 TO 2021

HINTS AND TIPS FOR VIRTUAL SPECIAL EDUCATION MEETINGS

Special Education Mediation Services

- ▶ We provide free dispute resolution services for special education issues in Michigan.
- ▶ Our highly trained communication specialists facilitate meetings and mediate disagreements between families and schools.
- ▶ We are a grant funded initiative from Congress and the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education



Today's Topics

- ▶ **VIRTUAL MEETINGS**
 - ▶ General Considerations
 - ▶ Challenges
 - ▶ Before Meetings
 - ▶ During Meetings
 - ▶ At the End/After Meetings

General Considerations

- ▶ Virtual may be the “new normal”
- ▶ Although it will take some adjustment, it will get easier each time you experience it.
- ▶ IDEA supports virtual participation
- ▶ All legal requirements remain intact
- ▶ Same accessibility as face-to-face

- ▶ Technology
- ▶ Privacy/Confidentiality
- ▶ Distractions
- ▶ Fatigue

Challenges
To Plan For

Before the Meeting

- ▶ **Test Your Technology**
- ▶ If you are concerned about your “connectivity,” perhaps you can either arrange with a family member or friend, or ask the school to arrange a private location, with a computer and internet reception. The school should help you participate.
- ▶ Using a cell phone or tablet may be a fallback, but it does **not** offer the same communication benefits as a full-sized laptop or computer.
- ▶ **Your active participation is essential to your child’s education! Don’t be afraid to let the school know of any concerns you have in advance.**



Before the Meeting

Request Information – When you are notified of the meeting, immediately request copies of all relevant information (such as a draft of your child's IEP), as well as a meeting agenda setting out what will be covered. Let them know you want to participate.

Request Accessibility – Let the school know if you have any need for accessibility, such as an interpreter or closed captioning.

Consider a Mediator or Facilitator- If you have any concerns about the meeting going well, ask if a neutral mediator or facilitator could assist to help keep the conversation productive and focused upon your child. We are free!!

Virtual Meeting Preparation

▶ **Environment**

▶ **Lighting**

▶ **Background**

▶ **Clothing**

Virtual Meeting Preparation

► Camera Position

- On-screen positioning follows the rule of thirds: Have your eyes about 1/3 down from the top of the screen, with your body centered
- Shoulders and torso show. Your shoulders and your torso from the waist up, or less should be showing.
- Not too close, not too far. Too close and your face will seem enormous; too far you will seem disengaged.
- Webcam is positioned away from lights/sunlight.
- Look and feel comfortable. Make yourself comfortable and relax. You may be in that position for some time. Maintain a professional, upright posture, however.
- Ensure everyone in the room can be seen in one view if sharing a device.

During the Virtual Meeting

► **General Presentation**

- Watch but don't stare. Work to maintain appropriate eye contact. Just as it is in face-to-face meeting, it is fine to look down at documents or periodically look away.
- If you are concerned about background noise, mute yourself except when you would like to speak.
- Calm movements. Avoid large or jerky movements. They may use excessive band width and create a blurring effect.
- Remember, you can be seen and heard. Avoid the same side-activities as in person, eating included.

During the Meeting

- ▶ ASK QUESTIONS
- ▶ BREAK-OUT ROOMS
- ▶ CHAT FUNCTION
- ▶ CONFIDENTIALITY

During the Meeting

- ▶ Prepare for and expect for there to be glitches, due to the technology. You may have to be extra patient.
- ▶ Be aware that things are different virtually than being together in person. Due to the delays in seeing and hearing people speaking, it is much harder to process what people's words mean and it is easier to be misunderstood.
- ▶ To make sure the spoken words are heard, you may want to go a little slower and ask for more time to process.

During the Meeting

ZOOM FATIGUE

- ▶ Due to these realities, you may want to ask for more time to absorb information and/or to take a five-minute break every 30 minutes or so, to stand up, look out the window and move around a bit.
- ▶ You may also ask to end the meeting after an hour and a half or so, especially if you are in a disagreement or feel frustrated about any issues.
- ▶ This may also give you the opportunity to suggest having a SEMS facilitator or mediator assist you in a second meeting.
- ▶ If you think you need an additional meeting, be sure to get a time scheduled before you leave if possible.

At the End of The Meeting

▶ **Follow up**

- ▶ Don't hesitate to ask for dates by when any promised actions will be completed.
- ▶ Be sure to ask for copies of any paperwork completed at the meeting.

▶ **Disagreements**

- ▶ If disputes arise during or after the meeting, the district and/or families have the option to pursue mediation or file a complaint.
- ▶ Calling SEMS to get a facilitator or mediator to help with the communication is free!

Resources

- ▶ OSEP Guidance Including Electronic Signatures -
<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/qa-procedural-safeguards-idea-part-b-06-30-2020.pdf>
- ▶ FERPA Guidance for Parents -
https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/sites/default/files/resource_document/file/FERPAGuidanceForParents.pdf
- ▶ Guidance for Compliance with IDEA and MARSE During the COVID-19 Pandemic - https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/MDE-0SE_GuidanceIDEA-MARSE_Covid-19_685879_7.pdf
- ▶ Guidance to Address Foregone Learning for Students with IEPs as a Result of the COVID-19 Pandemic - https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/RecoveryServices_695362_7.pdf

Thank You

Special Education Mediation Services

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Stay Connected

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Michigan Alliance for Families

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