

Virtual Special Education Services


WISCONSIN FACETS
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Learning Objectives

- Participants will understand the basics of virtual special education services and virtual charter schools
 - Participants will learn technical, logistical, and privacy considerations for creating and implementing virtual special education services
 - Participants will learn practical strategies for supporting their child's daily living, mobility, fine motor and speech language development at home
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Virtual Schools in Wisconsin

- Data on students with IEPs attending virtual charter schools is based on district sponsored virtual charter schools
- Independent charter schools (e.g. independent LEAs) may not establish a virtual charter school in Wisconsin ([2015 Act 55](#))
- Number of virtual charter schools in Wisconsin: 58

[Virtual Charter Schools](#), Wisconsin DPI

Virtual Schools in Wisconsin

Enrollment trends for students with disabilities (IEPs)

2015: 580 (0.5% of all students with IEPs)

2021: 1,796 (1.6% of all students with IEPs)

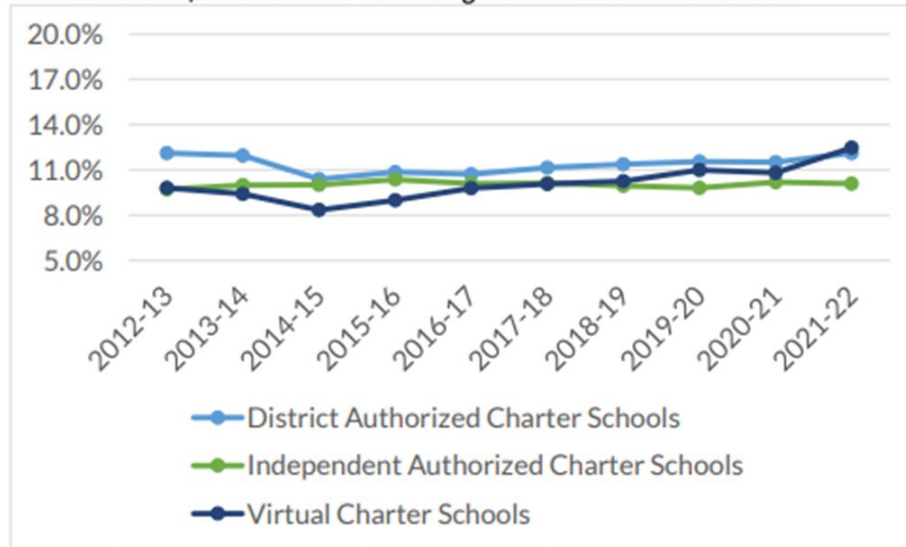
2023: 1,625 (1.3% of all students with IEPs)

- Over 1,000 new students enrolled between 2015 and 2023

Virtual Schools in Wisconsin

■ Figure 7

Comparison of Enrollment – Percent of Students with a Disability in Wisconsin Public Charter Schools from the 2012-13 through the 2021-22 School Years



Source: The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2022

[Statutory Report Series Legislative RReport on Charter Schools 2021-2022](#),
Wisconsin DPI

What we Know

- School day and instructional time in a virtual charter school is not the same as an in-person school program although students must attend regularly in the way attendance is defined in the specific virtual charter school
- Different types of student and parent skill sets and access to resources (technology, time) are required for students to be successful in virtual instruction
- Virtual charter schools that are public schools must meet the same requirements under IDEA as traditional in-person public schools
- Attendance in virtual charter school is not the same as “homeschooling”

What we Think we Know

- Enrollment in virtual charter schools is often through Wisconsin's "Open Enrollment" option for families
- Virtual charter schools or virtual teletherapy are not for everyone
- Based on studies, some services have been shown to be as effective when provided virtually as when provided in-person
- Virtual instruction may be a good option for a "contingency plan" in a student's IEP

What we Don't Know

- The quality and outcomes of some special education services in a virtual instructional setting
- Number of students receiving teletherapy (e.g. for speech-language, occupational therapy, counseling)
- The impact of students not experiencing in-person instruction or in-person social opportunities from in-person school experiences
- Legal decisions on provision of Free and Appropriate Public Instruction (FAPE) in virtual learning environments

Concerns and Outstanding Questions

- Are parents being encouraged to enroll in virtual charter schools when not successful with in-person instruction, e.g. mostly due to functional and behavioral needs?
- What are the creative ways virtual charter schools and resident school districts work to ensure hybrid in-person opportunities are available for social, emotional, and functional development and provision of special education and related services?

Rethinking Virtual After COVID-19

- Development of resource at onset of COVID-19: [Moving from In-Person to Virtual or Hybrid Learning Environments](#), Wisconsin DPI
- Focus on the “questions” and “process” IEP teams should use to determine if there are new or different disability-related needs, IEP goals, and services
- Interpreting a move from in-person to virtual learning or teleservice as a change to the “location” of services in IEP requiring an IEP team decision (e.g. change of placement) and must be document for “location” of service in the IEP

Questions for IEP Teams Moving from In-Person to Virtual

Can the IEP be implemented as written?

- Are there new or different disability-related needs when moving from in-person to virtual instruction?
- Will the student make progress on IEP goals when moving from in-person to virtual instruction?
- How will the services in the IEP be provided virtually (i.e. specially designed instruction, related services, supplementary aids and services)?
- Are there new or different IEP services required for a student to be successful moving from in-person to virtual instruction?

Evaluation and Assessment: What is the Same?

- **IEP team membership, timelines, consent and other procedural safeguards**
- **Comprehensive evaluations still required**
 - **Determine if student has a disability under IDEA**
 - **Identify Disability Related Needs in order to develop IEP**
- **Parent (and student) participation**

Evaluation and Assessment: What Might Be Different?

IDEA, other federal and state special education laws/regulations were not written with virtual assessment or instruction in mind

- **Confidentiality and privacy**
- **Observations**
- **Standardized testing**
- **Differences between in-person and virtual settings/environments and their impact on access, progress and engagement in learning**

Preparing for the IEP Meeting

IEP Team Considerations

- **Synchronous (instruction between student and teacher at the same time) vs. Asynchronous (student accesses instruction on their own time and at their own pace) learning?**
- **What are potential barriers to implementing IEP services in a virtual learning environment?**

More IEP Team Considerations

Differences Between Virtual and In-Person Learning Environments:

- Practical and Functional Application of Skills addressed in IEP goals
- Assistive Technology Needs
- Opportunities for Social Interaction
- Parent vs. LEA/School Staff for student support

Questions to Ask: IEP Development

- What steps are being taken to ensure my child's privacy and confidentiality?
- Does (*fill in the blank*) service, accommodation, support, intervention, etc. adequately meet my child's disability related needs if provided virtually? If so, how will we know?
- What do we do as an IEP team if I feel my child is not making adequate progress toward their IEP goals?

Questions to Ask: IEP Development (continued)

- What are my roles if virtual services are being provided in the home environment? What training/support will I receive to fulfill those roles?
- How will services be connected to the general education curriculum and instruction (especially for contracted services with non-LEA personnel)?
- Can virtual interventions/services be provided some of the time, or “as needed”?

IEP Development and Implementation

More detailed information regarding IEP Planning and Implementation can be found:

- [Teleservice Online Modules](#)
- [Moving from In-Person to Virtual or Hybrid Learning Environments](#)
- [Conducting Parent Friendly and Productive Virtual IEP Meetings](#)
- [COVID-19 Special Education Question and Answer Document](#)

Technology Requirements

- Device
- Reliable Internet
- Secure Platform



Teleservice for Related Services

- **Must adhere to privacy laws**
 - Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
- **Ideally an adult is present**
 - Technical issues
 - Engagement
 - Carryover
- **Teleservice must address the needs and goals of the student's IEP (not the other way around)**
 - LRE

Potential Benefits and Challenges

Benefits

- Flexible scheduling
- Reduced travel time
- Access for underserved areas
- Familiar learning environment

Challenges

- Attention span
- Technical issues
- Limited hands-on activities
- Connection to curriculum

Tips for Success

- Clear expectations
- Create a quiet space
- Be consistent
- Communication between
educator and family



[ASHA Facilitator Checklist for
Telepractice Services in Audiology
and Speech-Language Pathology](#)

Practical Strategies for Home Carryover

- Integrate into daily routine
- Make it meaningful
- Make it fun
- Get creative



[Activities to Encourage Speech and Language Development](#)

[CDC Learn the Signs: Act Early](#)

[Topical Issue Brief: Evidence-Based and Promising Practices to Support Continuity of Learning for Students With Disabilities](#)

Assistive Technology

Definitions:

- **Devices:** An assistive technology device means any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is **used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a student with a disability.**
**The term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted, or the replacement of that device.*
- **Services:** An assistive technology service means any service that directly assists a student with a disability in the **selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device.**

Assistive Technology Strategies

- Familiarize yourself with the technology
 - Text to speech (reading)
 - Speech to text (writing)
 - Other computer and display access
 - Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)
- Determine how to support your child
- Engage in coaching/collaboration with school staff

Support Your Child During Virtual Learning

Parent Tip #1: Invest in Improving the Teacher-Family Partnership

Parent Tip #2: Use Intentional Breaks to Improve Learning

Parent Tip #3: Learn to Look at Screen Time Differently

Parent Tip #4: Establish Routine and Predictability

Parent Tip #5: Learn the Basics of Effective Instruction

Parent Tip #6: Incorporate Rewards

Parent Tip #7: Give Yourself Grace

[A Parent Guide: Support Your Child During Virtual Learning](#)

Additional Resources

- [Online and Blended Resources](#), Wisconsin DPI
- [Virtual Charter Schools](#), Wisconsin DPI
- [Conducting Parent Friendly and Productive Virtual IEP Meetings](#), Wisconsin DPI
- [Moving from In-Person to Virtual or Hybrid Learning Environments](#), Wisconsin DPI
- [Beyond Screen Time: Help Your Kids Build Healthy Media Use Habits](#), American Academy of Pediatrics

Questions



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