



COVID-19 FAQ: Remote Counseling and Student Support Services

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As local education agencies (LEAs) transition to remote instructional approaches, LEAs are strongly encouraged to provide remote counseling and student support services during the response phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is not a “one size fits all” response, given the particular resources and staff roles within an individual LEA. This document highlights guidance and best practice considerations that school systems can take to provide remote counseling and student support services.

Remote counseling and student support services are defined as any student support services that directly support learning and personal student needs that are not delivered face-to-face and use technology for two-way communication. Remote student support services may include:

- tele-mental health
- telemedicine (including telepsychiatry)
- academic and career advising
- counseling and supportive guidance
- solutions-focused problem-solving interventions
- information, referral and connection to community resources
- supplemental best practice-based academic or social, emotional, behavioral or mental and behavioral health skill-building lessons or targeted groups
- consultation with educators; support service coordination
- follow-up that is provided with students or families and educators in the school context

Counseling services may also be provided under a student’s individualized education program (IEP) through counseling as a related service. For more information on how LEAs may plan to provide counseling as a related service to students, please see ***Providing Counseling as a Related Service*** on the [TEA Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Support and Guidance webpage under SPED & Special Populations](#).

Remote counseling and student support services may be delivered by Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP) within the scope of the professional’s job duties. As defined under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), SISP can be school counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists; and other qualified professional personnel (including school nurses, speech language pathologists, and school librarians), involved in providing assessment, diagnosis, counseling, educational, therapeutic, and other necessary services (including related services as that term is defined in section 602 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. §1401) as part of a comprehensive program to meet student needs.

Additionally, school-based tele-mental health services may be provided by non-physician mental health professionals who are employed by LEAs (Texas Education Code, §38.0101) or contracted to provide school-based mental health services. Services may be reimbursed by Medicaid (22 TAC §174.9; 22 TAC §681.41) for eligible students or reimbursed by private insurance or paid by other funding

sources or through written agreements or contracts with school-based clinics or other community mental health providers. Mental health professionals should refer to guidance from their respective licensing boards or certifying entities for guidance regarding the provision of tele-mental health services. Telemedicine and telepsychiatry may also be provided in LEAs through contracted mental health service providers, school-based clinics or through the Texas Child Mental Health Consortium authorized by Senate Bill 11, 86th Texas Legislature, 2019.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Is it permissible to provide counseling and student supports remotely?

Yes. LEAs are encouraged to transition to a remote service delivery system to provide counseling and student supports that engage students and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Counseling and student support services that were provided in a physical school building should (or may) continue via remote technology. Please see the guidance from the [Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation \(TDLR\)](#) for more information about Governor Abbott's waiver of certain regulations related to telehealth.

As a best practice during the COVID-19 pandemic, counseling and other student support services can be provided remotely through audio voice (telephone), video conferencing, or text. A schedule and plan for follow-up and service continuity for each student should be developed. Additionally, families should be provided with information so that they can seek emotional self-help through support lines and other social support resources available in the community.

2. When is parent/guardian consent needed?

Consent is needed when personal guidance and counseling will be provided that is *beyond the scope of universal services*. Typically, activities within the scope of universal services include standard academic support services such as checking-in with students, providing information, and advising contacts that are provided to all students that is similar to the SIS role in a brick-and-mortar school. Universal services are supports that are normally available to all students in a school.

For activities that are not intended for all students, then parent or guardian written consent is required pursuant to Texas Education Code (TEC), §33.003, and is always needed for tele-mental health services, before services can be provided. If the nature of the setting for counseling or services will be materially different, particularly if others may be present in the setting, the agency recommends that school systems obtain new parent or guardian written consent for remote counseling and student support services, even if consent was obtained prior to school closure in a brick-and-mortar setting.

3. What guidelines should my school system adopt related to obtaining parent/ guardian consent?

TEC, §33.003, requires LEAs to adopt guidelines to ensure that written consent is obtained from the parent, guardian, or person entitled to enroll the student for the student to participate in those activities for which the district requires parental consent. TEC, §33.004, provides that the LEA consent form shall include specific information on the content of the program and the types of activities in which the student will be involved.

LEAs may consider flexible guidelines to obtain written consent during COVID 19 in a variety of ways, such as: a consent form submitted by US mail to an LEA address that is available for this purpose during COVID-19; electronic transmission via a secure web portal; consent submitted via a secure email system; consent confirmation by text in response to a notice or invitation to participate in a remote service; consent by texting the SIS a photo of a signed consent form; or by personally collecting a signed consent form such as outside of a home concurrently while delivering instructional materials, or a meeting location, at a safe distance, when access to internet or cellular technology in the home is unavailable (see also *Logistical Consideration for Paper Based Packet Pickup* in the [Instructional Continuity](#) section of TEA's Coronavirus website).

LEAs should develop guidelines with the goal of keeping families informed and engaged, whenever student needs are identified, and provide families with options for counseling and remote student support services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. **How can LEAs notify families of the services that will be provided remotely?**

LEAs are encouraged to notify parents or guardians of services in various ways such as phone calls, robocalls, texting, email, regular US mail and/or by posting on the LEA's website which remote counseling and student support services are available. Best practice notification examples include:

- Inform parents or guardians which remote counseling and support services will be provided to all students in a class or schoolwide; notice of services and supports will be provided for students already participating in special programs; and notice adding any additional support options available for students and families.
- Notify and inform parents or guardians about how they can request and participate in available services and supports; and how they can provide written consent needed to participate.
- Notify families that SISPs in special programs will provide information to parents and guardians of any continuing or additional remote counseling, services or supports that may be offered.

5. **What type of student support services can LEAs provide remotely?**

LEAs have many options to provide remote counseling and student support services during COVID-19 to meet student academic, social, emotional, mental health, and behavioral health

needs. All SISPs and educators can provide student support services remotely within the scope of their practice and responsibilities and should consult with their respective LEAs to ensure alignment with local parent consent documentation requirements.

The following is a non-exhaustive list of examples of student support services that can be provided remotely:

- Academic advising and consultation with students and families such as preparing, reviewing and guiding effective personal graduation plans.
- Supports and check-ins from special programs by the SISP or educator whose role it is to serve as liaison or by specialists providing supplemental academic instruction or providing support services available for students and their families served by those programs; including but not limited to students at-risk of dropping out of school or students with special needs or students served by other programs such as workforce readiness programs under TEC, Chapter 29.
- Small groups and targeted interventions for supplemental instruction, support services, counseling and other activities designed for students enrolled in special programs, such as special education or at-risk students needing compensatory education or workforce readiness or other programs under TEC, Chapter 29, or for students referred by an educator or MTSS team or requested by a parent or guardian to address behavioral or mental health challenges.
- Individual check-ins, information, and support provided specifically for special populations such as for homeless students, pregnant and parenting students, military connected students, students in foster care, welcoming and orienting new students in a school; or providing supports for students transitioning back to school from mental health treatment, DAEP, juvenile justice placements; implementing transition and safety plans; or addressing attendance concerns and identifying root causes for truant students; assessing and addressing barriers to learning; and coordinating with families to connect students with programs and needed support services.
- Online educational webinars on special topics or support sessions open for all parents, guardians, or students such as offering speakers on coping strategies, at-home learning strategies, mindfulness and stress reduction exercises, video movement exercises for children, a virtual tour of enrichment resources available for youth or family activities online, virtual family coffee hours with a topic of interest for each session, other strengths-based information and support groups.

6. What technology can LEAs use for remote service delivery?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, flexibility has been granted to use telemedicine and telehealth through a variety of technology. LEAs may use popular applications that allow for video chats, including, but not limited to, Skype for Business / Microsoft Team, Updox, VSee, Zoom for Healthcare, Doxy.me, Google G Suite Hangouts Meet, Cisco Webex Meetings /

Webex Teams, Amazon Chime, GoToMeeting, Spruce Health Care Messenger, Facebook Messenger, Apple FaceTime to provide telehealth.

Please refer to the **Information Technology FAQ** on the [TEA Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Support and Guidance webpage](#) for more information about steps an LEA can take to secure online platforms when providing remote service delivery. TEA is conducting a webinar regarding appropriate security precautions to take with several of the most popular tools during the week of April 13.

7. What confidentiality considerations should my LEA be aware of related to remote counseling and related services?

LEAs are encouraged to mitigate risk of inappropriate sharing of confidential information, as much as possible, when consulting with students and families remotely. While notifying staff and families of the risks to privacy in video-conferencing is important, mitigation and awareness strategies should be used so that confidentiality concerns do not become a barrier to providing services remotely.

The following best practices may be considered as part of locally designed remote counseling activities:

- Read the privacy policies of the platforms that your LEA is using and know the limitations of the platforms.
- Enable available encryption and privacy modes when using applications.
- Follow FERPA guidance on student privacy to mitigate privacy risks.
- Do not record sessions while using Zoom or Google Hangout.
- Inquiry about level of privacy student has access to for pre-planning purposes with students.
- Use headphones with a microphone and suggest students do as well, if available.
- Use ethics and facilitate group rules, similar to professional practices applied during support and skill-building groups in the physical environment.

8. Would my local policies impact our school systems' ability to provide remote counseling and student support services in a virtual environment?

School systems should review local policies to determine whether district policies that require in-person or physical documents, or that limit or prohibit remote counseling or related services, might need to be amended or waived by school boards or superintendents with delegated authority to do so.

Resources and Definitions

- [American Psychological Association](#)
- [American Counseling Association Effective Remote Counseling](#)

- [National Association of School Psychologists COVID-19 Resource Center](#)
- [American School Counselor Association Ethical Guidance for Virtual Counseling](#)
- [Planning for Virtual/Distance School Counseling During An Emergency Shutdown](#)
- [National Association of Social Workers Ethical Standards](#)
- [Supplemental Ethical Standards for School Social Workers](#)
- [US Department of Education Policy Office letter on protecting privacy under FERPA during COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19 Provider Information from the Texas Health and Human Services Commission and Texas Medicaid](#)
- [Emergency Rules under 28 TAC 35.1 for COVID-19 Telemedicine and Telehealth](#)
- [Compendium of Telehealth state laws and resources](#)
- [National Center for School Mental Health Guidance](#)
- [LSSP Ethical Considerations](#)
- [Service Delivery LPC Guidance](#)
- [Service Delivery LCSW Guidance](#)
- [Student Privacy USDOE](#)
- [HIPAA Guidance](#)
- [HHS OCR Guidance](#)
- [HHS COVID Provider Update](#)
- [TEC, §33.003](#)
- [TEC, §38.007](#)