
Strong and Healthy Start FAQ: Supporting Students with Disabilities in the VTVLC Collaborative School Option

Purpose

This FAQ provides guidance related to special education students participating in the Vermont Virtual Learning Cooperative's (VTVLC) Collaborative School Option (CSO). VTVLC is a Vermont Education Organization that provides curriculum, a learning management system, professional learning and technical supports to Supervisory Unions/Districts (SU/SDs) and schools offering remote learning options to students.

Q1: Who is responsible for the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and special education and related services for those students participating in online learning through education organizations such as VTVLC?

The local District is responsible for FAPE and for all additional services and specially designed instruction each special education student might receive. VTVLC is prohibited by law from discriminating on the basis of disability.

Q2: How are IEPs shared with VTVLC teachers?

There are two strategies by which SU/SDs and schools can communicate IEPs and accommodations/modifications to online teachers through VTVLC.

1. Send all accommodation/modification plans to CSO Coordinators for upload into MAESTRO. Your CSO Coordinator can be found on the [VTVLC virtual academies webpage](#). Your CSO Coordinator is responsible for acting as the liaison between your school community and VTVLC and should be your first point of contact.
 2. Special Educators can directly upload student accommodations/modifications to MAESTRO. See the [VTVLC Help Desk](#) for instructions.
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Q3: When should student accommodations and modifications be shared with CSO instructors?

LEAs are required to make the IEP accessible to each teacher and provider responsible for implementation and each teacher must be informed of their specific responsibilities related to implementing the IEP. Uploading plans **prior to** the start of a class is necessary and ensures that

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online instructors are afforded the opportunity to familiarize themselves with any necessary accommodations/modifications, consult with special educators and receive support, and identify any anticipated challenges/needs/obstacles prior to the student being in class.

Q4: If parents have questions about their child's accommodations, particularly if they are in CSO and have out-of-district teachers, who should they contact?

Parents' first point of contact should always be their home school. If their school or child's special educator have any questions, they should consult the CSO Coordinator for the school/district.

Q5: Should students who cannot independently navigate full-time online learning environments participate in the CSO?

The district IEP Team needs to determine if the online learning environment is appropriate given the unique needs of the student. If the IEP Team determines this is an appropriate learning option, additional considerations for the team to address should include if the district/school can support collaboration on all modifications, work with the virtual learning instructors on implementing the accommodations a student might require, and provide any other supplementary aids and services listed in the IEP, such as paraprofessional or behavioral interventionist (BI) support that they would normally receive in in-person learning environments. From there, an IEP team's next step should be to contact their CSO Coordinator and VTVLC to determine how those supports could be provided in the online learning environment. If VTVLC's structure is determined to be conducive to the supports the school/district can provide, then the IEP team can consider next steps to ensure the student is prepared to be successful for this learning environment.

Q6: Can schools engage in off-grade placements for special education students? For instance, can an eighth-grade student be placed in a third-grade math class to match their math ability?

No, off-grade placements are inappropriate for several reasons. In this instance, the teacher endorsement would not be appropriate (i.e., grade levels), the class community would not be developmentally/socially appropriate for the student, and teacher requirements to manage both third grade and eighth grade maturity levels would be unreasonable. As a general rule, view this question the same way you would instruction in the brick and mortar school building. If you would not do this in your buildings, then it probably isn't appropriate online.

Q7: How should CSO teachers prioritize attending IEP meetings when they receive multiple invitations? How can special educators and/or IEP teams solicit feedback from CSO teachers in VTVLC learning environment?

CSO teacher student loads are significant, and their classes include in and out-of-district students on support plans. It will be difficult for some teachers to attend all meetings "in-person," especially if they are out of district. Special educators should prioritize inviting local (district employees) teachers to attend local (district resident) student meetings and ask for any input/comment from out-of-district teachers as needed. If special educators are looking for a specific type of feedback, it is recommended to provide prompts to focus online teachers' feedback.

In the instance where there is only one general education teacher, and that is the VTVLC teacher who is not a district employee, the IEP team can excuse that general education teacher's appearance at the meeting and move forward with input and observations by the special educator, para-educator and/or behavioral interventionist, etc.

Q8: How can special educators observe and receive ongoing information for students on their caseloads?

Special educators have "Observer" status in Canvas. This resource makes a variety of information available to them. They have the ability to see all courses across CSO so they can preview any content/curriculum they wish, but in order to connect to a given student as an observer, they will request a code from that student to enter in Canvas to connect with them. This will ensure the right educators will connect with only the students they need to be connected to and ensures student confidentiality is maintained.

Additionally, direct instruction courses can be and have been created for special educators to work with their student caseloads.