

## Considerations for Students with Low Incidence Disabilities in Hybrid and In-Person Models for Returning to School

As school districts and charter schools begin planning for teaching and learning models that may include in-person contact, the accessibility and safety needs of all students and staff must be considered. While districts and schools must follow Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) [2020-21 Planning Guide for Schools](#), along with and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) health guidelines, there are unique considerations that must be made to ensure access for all students and not inadvertently limit the access of some. Special consideration and planning must be made to address the unique cleaning and disinfection needs, communication access and educational implications of social distancing of some students and staff. This document is intended to initiate consideration and conversation to plan for the unique needs of this population and is not intended to be an all-inclusive list.

### Cleaning, Disinfection and Storage of:

- Shared and/or specialized equipment used to facilitate communication and access (e.g., hearing aids, cochlear implant processors, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices, hearing assistive technology [microphones and transmitters, batteries, attachments to devices], monocular aids, hand held magnifiers, wheelchairs, walkers, orthotics, standers, straps, railings, and mats).
- Equipment used for assessments and evaluations (e.g., audiology booths, low vision devices and equipment, intelligence and academic testing manipulatives, headsets).
- Educational materials used in the classroom (e.g., computers/tablets, keyboards, refreshable braille displays, digital book readers, desk top magnifiers, manipulatives, adaptive furniture, microphones, screens, books, writing instruments).

### Communication Access:

- Cloth face masks can limit or obstruct access to communication for persons who rely on speechreading, facial expressions and American Sign Language (ASL) grammatical markers. Masks with clear, plastic “windows” still obscure access to the face, which is a critical part of speechreading and impacts spoken language comprehension.
- Cloth face masks can also limit or obstruct access to instruction and classmates/peers for social interaction.
- Cloth face masks and greater distances between people may distort or reduce the volume of speech sounds. It can also make accessing and understanding facial expressions and ASL grammatical markers difficult.
- Because of the straps around the ears or around the head, wearing masks can be difficult for persons who use behind-the-ear hearing aids, cochlear implant processors, eye protection, glasses, helmets, head gear, head/neck supports on a wheelchair/in standers.

- Wearing cloth face masks can create barriers for persons who have difficulty controlling their saliva.

## **Educational Implications of Social Distancing:**

- Some students will not understand the concept of social distancing and may not observe the practice independently.
- Some students may be tactilely selective and may not tolerate wearing a cloth face mask. Others may not understand the need to wear a cloth face mask or may become distracted by wearing a cloth face mask.
- Many students who use hearing assistive technology and/or students with low vision need to be in close physical proximity with teachers and peers in order for spoken language to be accessible and understood.
- Many students require physical touch with adults to support their communication access and physical access to education (e.g., hand-under-hand support, use of tactile sign language, support for physical transitions in and out of equipment, personal cares [toileting and feeding] and therapies).
- Students may be in contact with many service providers and staff (e.g., nurses, paraprofessionals, interpreters, classroom teachers, special education teachers, deafblind interveners, therapists) throughout the day, thus increasing exposure. Considerations may include the prioritizing of some services or utilization of virtual support in an effort to mitigate risk.
- Itinerant staff travel to many different sites in a single day and come into contact with numerous staff and students, increasing the potential for exposure. Considerations may include virtual coaching of an on-site proxy if possible in an effort to mitigate risk.
- Itinerant staff will need extra time to sanitize material before and after visiting each different school / classroom. Considerations may include provision of additional materials that can remain on-site or with specific students, if possible, in an effort to mitigate risk.
- Administering assessments and evaluations may require staff and students to be in close contact with one another.

For questions regarding this document, please email:

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