Related Service Decision-Making Considerations for Telehealth or In-Person Services during the Pandemic

PURPOSE

This document was designed to guide related service providers, administrators, and school teams in making decisions for services provided in-person, a hybrid model, or via telehealth alone. Teams must adhere to Federal regulations like IDEA, as well as state, regional, and local administrative policy, procedures and/ or guidelines. This document is intended to guide teams using questions to make collaborative, individualized team decisions based on student needs, mitigating COVID-19 infection risks in the school and home environments.

SAFETY

During this public emergency, collaborative, responsive decisions are even more essential. Depending on the safety rating in your region, team members should consider the appropriate aspects listed in the flowchart in this document. According to the CDC in September 2020, risks of further COVID-19 transmission in the schools is based on several core indicators: infection trends, percentage of positive tests in the region, and the ability of the school to implement safety practices (mask use, social distancing, hand hygiene/respiratory etiquette, cleaning/disinfecting and contact tracing) consistently. As safety ratings will be dynamic during the school year, teams should consider creating fluid plans to transition between remote service delivery, hybrid models, and face-to-face services. Related service providers often work in close proximity to their students. They are frequently itinerant, managing a caseload of students across many schools and will likely have close contact with other staff members and students throughout the district. School personnel must prioritize safety, employing practical strategies to limit the number of weekly and daily contacts and reduce the potential to spread infection to students and staff. This may include reducing the number of buildings and classrooms related service providers travel to in a given week or using telehealth as a service delivery method to limit direct contact.
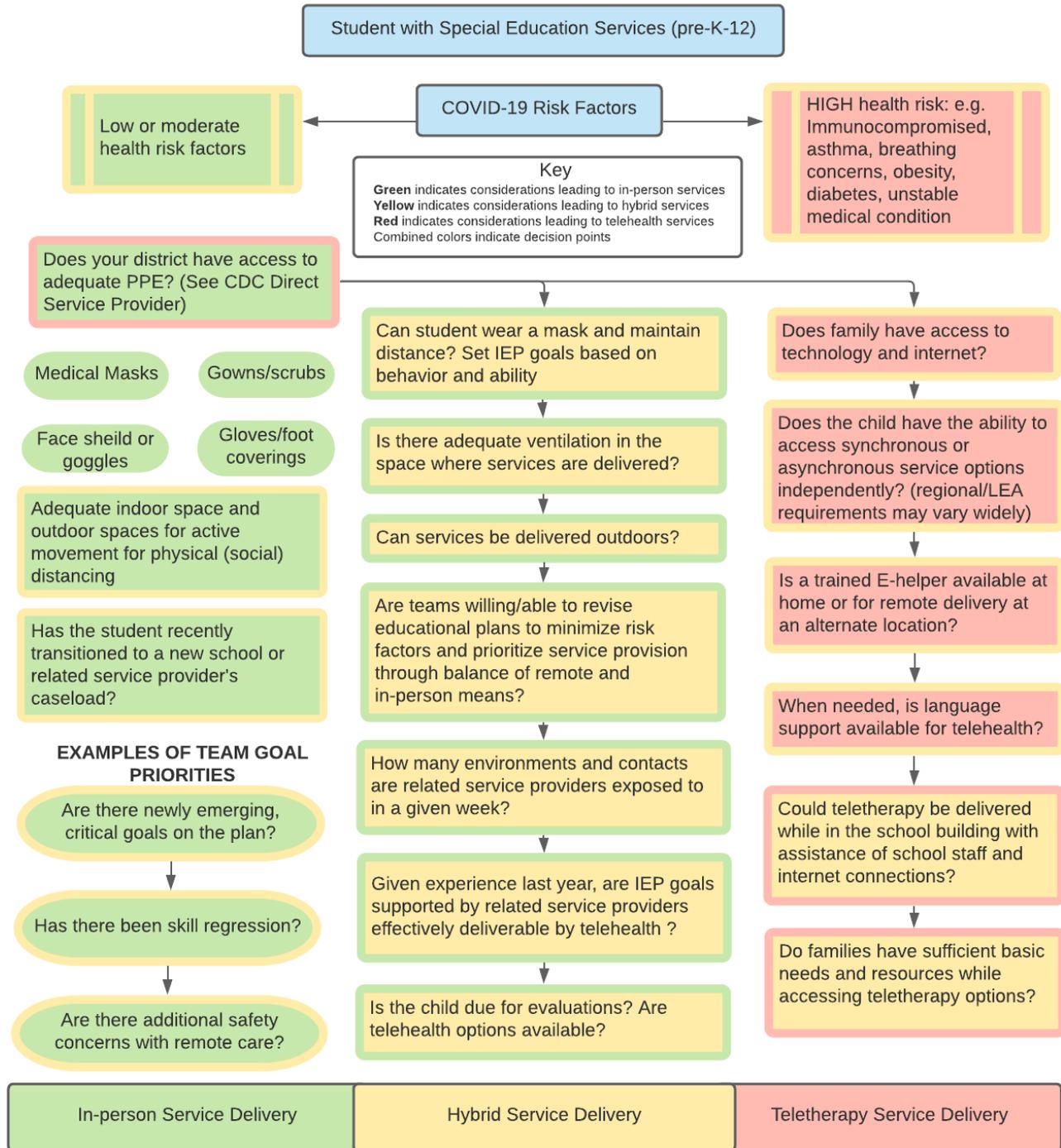
EQUITY

The 2010 World Health Organization's Social Determinants of Health Framework suggests that families and children with socioeconomic impediments, people of color, and those who live in rural areas often have decreased access to healthcare and technology. These considerations must be acknowledged in providing services through telehealth options. School teams must be persistent in ensuring student and family wellness and exploring all options (including creative and novel solutions) to meet student educational needs. This is particularly important when family resources, capacity, or access to services or technology are limited. Teams must continue to consider the child's least restrictive environment in the context of service delivery, as telehealth options might more frequently include individual sessions and therefore a more restrictive environment than in-person service delivery in the presence of peers.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR RELATED SERVICE PROVIDERS

The following flow chart outlines considerations for related service providers during the COVID-19 pandemic. School teams can review these considerations to support decision making related to services provided in-person, via a hybrid model, or via telehealth alone

Considerations for Related Service Provision during the Pandemic

Student with Special Education Services (pre-K-12)

COVID-19 Risk Factors

Low or moderate health risk factors

HIGH health risk: e.g. Immunocompromised, asthma, breathing concerns, obesity, diabetes, unstable medical condition

Key
Green indicates considerations leading to in-person services
Yellow indicates considerations leading to hybrid services
Red indicates considerations leading to telehealth services
Combined colors indicate decision points

Does your district have access to adequate PPE? (See CDC Direct Service Provider)

Medical Masks

Gowns/scrubs

Face sheild or goggles

Gloves/foot coverings

Adequate indoor space and outdoor spaces for active movement for physical (social) distancing

Has the student recently transitioned to a new school or related service provider's caseload?

EXAMPLES OF TEAM GOAL PRIORITIES

Are there newly emerging, critical goals on the plan?

Has there been skill regression?

Are there additional safety concerns with remote care?

Can student wear a mask and maintain distance? Set IEP goals based on behavior and ability

Is there adequate ventilation in the space where services are delivered?

Can services be delivered outdoors?

Are teams willing/able to revise educational plans to minimize risk factors and prioritize service provision through balance of remote and in-person means?

How many environments and contacts are related service providers exposed to in a given week?

Given experience last year, are IEP goals supported by related service providers effectively deliverable by telehealth ?

Is the child due for evaluations? Are telehealth options available?

Does family have access to technology and internet?

Does the child have the ability to access synchronous or asynchronous service options independently? (regional/LEA requirements may vary widely)

Is a trained E-helper available at home or for remote delivery at an alternate location?

When needed, is language support available for telehealth?

Could teletherapy be delivered while in the school building with assistance of school staff and internet connections?

Do families have sufficient basic needs and resources while accessing teletherapy options?

In-person Service Delivery	Hybrid Service Delivery	Teletherapy Service Delivery