

Back to School RI:

Guidance for Implementing the Itinerant Early Childhood Special Education (RI-IECSE) Service-Delivery Model

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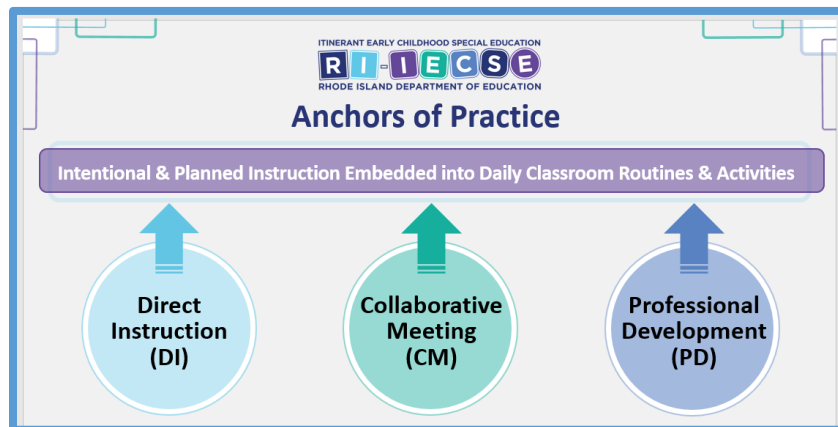
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Introduction

Rhode Island Itinerant Early Childhood Special Education (RI-IECSE) is a research-based service-delivery model for providing special education services to children who are differently-abled within general early childhood classrooms. It allows children who are differently-abled to actively participate in all classroom-based activities by embedding the necessary supports, services, and interventions into their everyday routines. RI-IECSE services ensure young children have the opportunity to practice new skills multiple times throughout each school day, as they occur naturally within the classroom routine. This approach allows children to receive their special education and related services seamlessly, without unnecessary transitions between programs.

The RI-IECSE service-delivery model includes three anchors of practice which lead to the identification of intentional and planned instruction, embedded into the daily classroom routines and activities. The anchors include direct instruction, collaborative meetings, and professional development, each provided or facilitated by the IECSE teacher or therapist. The three components are designed to increase access to learning opportunities, which are distributed throughout the day and embedded into the general EC classroom routines and activities.



Why the RI-IECSE Model Lends Itself to a Variety of Scenarios

During this uncertain time, when districts find themselves planning for a variety of scenarios, it is important to note that the [RI-IECSE Anchors of Practice](#) can be implemented across any number of scenarios. As the service-delivery model has been designed to support young learners through embedding intentional instruction throughout the child’s daily routine, it can be easily modified to a variety of settings, including both school and home. It can also be delivered either in-person or virtually. The RI-IECSE service delivery model allows for an easy shift between scenarios as state, local, and private early childhood policies change due to the COVID crisis.

Critical Elements

When planning for a variety of scenarios, it is important to identify and begin with the critical elements that must be considered, regardless of in-person instruction, distance learning, or a hybrid approach. Such considerations include, but are not limited to:

- Access to a **free appropriate public education (FAPE)** that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet the unique needs of children that are differently abled so that the child can meet the educational standards that apply to all children.
- The **least restrictive environment (LRE)** determined by the IEP team and based on the defining principles of special education law and the presumption that the general education environment is the first choice for educating all individuals that are differently abled. To the maximum extent appropriate, children that are differently abled are educated with all children; and special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children that are differently abled from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.
- Promoting **equity** throughout the early childhood special education system, with a focus on access to high-quality inclusive supports and services. Intentionally identifying and working to counteract inequities across systems and services is now more critical than ever due to the impact of the pandemic. COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted some populations and communities more than others and therefore calls for heightened attention to ensure equitable and individualized access to and implementation of services. Districts identify and address policies, procedures, and practices that serve as barriers to equitable access and implementation of FAPE in the LRE. Ensure practices are responsive to each family’s unique and changing circumstance, are based on sincere and collaborative relationships, and allow for full family engagement, focused on the best interest of each individual child.
- Use of evidence-based interventions, including **embedded instruction** and the critical components of the RI-IECSE Service Delivery Model that serves as the vehicle for implementation.



- **Direct instruction** embedded into the child’s daily routines and designed to allow the special educators and related service providers to get to know the individual child, determine and refine interventions, model for the early childhood teacher or family, monitor and assess progress and support the acquisition of skill
- **Collaborative meetings** which provide for the routine and scheduled opportunity to collaborate with the early childhood teacher or family to determine the intentional & planned instruction to be embedded into the daily routines and activities. *Decisions regarding how and when to embed instruction can be captured in a planning matrix.

Specific EC Considerations within each Scenario

While considering a variety of state and local circumstances and how the general education systems will operate, it is important to remember that the COVID-19 pandemic has not changed individual special education student rights. The critical elements discussed above, as well as other requirements, must take center stage in all scenario planning efforts. LEA’s will need to determine how they will provide high quality equitable special education and related services within a variety of situations, including in-person, distance learning, and hybrid models. Providing services to young children who are differently-abled takes on an added layer of complexity when one considers the multiple places that children may be in school. Not only must districts consider whether the public schools are open and, if so, the district policy and protocol related to the provision of in-person service, but whether community-based early childhood programs are open and, if so, their specific policies and protocols related to in-person service.

Consider the following Early Childhood specific scenarios.

- **Full In-Person:** IECSE teachers and therapists are able to service children in person.
- **Limited or Partial In-Person:** IECSE teachers and therapists are sometimes able to service children in person, and sometimes are required to provide distance learning.
- **Distance Learning:** IECSE teachers and therapists are unable to service children in-person because *the public school buildings are closed and all personnel are providing distance-learning, *the early childhood program the child attends is closed, *and/or state, district, or early childhood program policies preclude IECSE personnel from entering the child’s class and working with the child in-person.

Critical Elements across Scenarios

The table below shows how RI-IECSE services can be provided within each of the scenarios while maintaining the identified and critical elements.

	Full In-Person	Limited or Partial-In Person	Distance Learning
FAPE in the LRE	<p>The child is enrolled and participates in a general early childhood classroom.</p> <p>In-person individualized special education and related services are provided so that the child can meet the educational standards that apply to all children.</p>	<p>The child is enrolled and participates in a general early childhood classroom, as well as the virtual classroom activities when at home.</p> <p>In-person and virtual individualized special education and related services are provided so that the child can meet the educational standards that apply to all children.</p>	<p>The child is at home but is enrolled and participates in the virtual general early childhood classroom activities.</p> <p>Virtual individualized special education and related services are provided so that the child can meet the educational standards that apply to all children.</p>
Equity	<p>In-person services and practices are designed to be responsive to each family’s unique and changing circumstance, and allow for easy transition to other scenarios, as necessary.</p>	<p>Virtual and in-person practices are designed to be responsive to each family’s unique and changing circumstance and to provide necessary access to technology and the internet.</p>	<p>Virtual practices are designed to be responsive to each family’s unique and changing circumstance and to provide necessary access to technology and the internet.</p>
Direct Instruction: <i>to inform discussion of embedded instruction</i>	<p>The child receives in-person direct instruction embedded into the general early childhood classroom routine.</p>	<p>The child receives in-person or virtual direct instruction embedded into the general early childhood classroom routine and home-based routine, including any virtual general early childhood classroom activities.</p>	<p>The child receives virtual direct instruction embedded into the home-based routine, including the virtual general early childhood classroom activities.</p> <p><i>(There are multiple ways direct instruction can be implemented virtually, all supporting the embedding of instruction throughout the child’s everyday routine. Options include live or recorded video, with individual decisions determined with each family.)</i></p>

Collaborative Meetings: <i>to determine embedded instruction</i>	Routine and scheduled in-person meetings are held, including the IECSE provider & EC teacher (and parent, if possible), to determine how and when to embed instruction into the EC classroom routine.	Routine and scheduled in-person or virtual meetings are held, including the IECSE provider & EC teacher and the parent/guardian, to determine how and when to embed instruction into the EC classroom and home routines.	Routine and scheduled virtual meetings are held, including the IECSE provider & the parent/guardian, to determine how and when to embed instruction into the home routine and the virtual general early childhood classroom activities.
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Conclusion

As providers transition between scenarios, it is important that districts actively monitor the implementation fidelity, as well as the impact on student learning, families, and educators.

For additional IECSE resources, see [Special Education Resources for Early Childhood Education/Covid](#).

