

## New website offers tips for teachers about virtual special education

*Teachers can share ideas online for serving students with disabilities during the pandemic*

APRIL 10, 2020 | CAROLYN JONES



ALISON YIN/EDSOURCE

To help teachers better serve special education students during the school closures, a coalition of more than 30 disability and education groups has created a digital one-stop shop of teaching resources.

[EducatingAllLearners.org](https://educatingalllearners.org) includes specific guidance on how teachers can deliver lessons online to students in special education, which has been a challenge as schools transition to online learning during the coronavirus pandemic. Special

education students include those with physical disabilities, emotional challenges and dyslexia.

“There are so many resource lists out there. Teachers are overwhelmed. Parents are overwhelmed. It’s link after link after link,” said Lindsay Jones, president of the National Center for Learning Disabilities, an advocacy group based in Washington, D.C., one of the groups that created the website. “So we gathered experts to research relevant, evidence-based, useful tips and resources,” she said. “Basically, our criterion was, does it work?”

Launched Wednesday, the site is free and available to anyone, although it’s aimed at special education teachers and general education teachers who have students with special needs in their classes. It includes brief, vetted lists of online teaching tools, like videos and lesson plans from NASA and National Geographic; advice in multiple languages on how to support students with autism; tips on how to provide speech therapy online; and first-person accounts from teachers on how they solved specific problems.

But among the most important offerings, Jones said, is guidance for conducting online meetings with parents to discuss a student’s Individualized Education Program, or IEP, the federally required education roadmap for each student enrolled in special education. These meetings had been a challenge for some teachers because the shift to online learning has meant that IEPs must be updated, and parents need to agree to the changes. Also, not all parents have computers at home.

Another critical resource, Jones said, is a list of tips for general education teachers, who might have overlooked steps to help special education students, such as using large fonts and high-contrast lighting during online classes and turning on closed captions when showing videos.

That’s important because 60 percent of special education students spend 80

percent of their time in general education classes, Jones said.

The site will be updated regularly, and teachers can contribute their own ideas, Jones said, describing it as “the ultimate crowd-sourcing activity. We want to share what’s working, in real time.”

A resource like EducatingAllLearners.org is sorely needed, said Kathleen Mortier, an assistant professor in San Francisco State University’s Department of Special Education.

“This will be a great resource,” she said. “Special education teachers have been amazing at developing new materials and at finding ways to give their students access to learning every day, and they’ll be very happy that there is a way to share materials on this website.”

The site should also help bring some level of equity to special education during the school closures, she said. While school districts are hammering out online learning systems for all students, special education teachers face unique challenges connecting virtually with students who have highly individual needs.

“It will be wonderful that those teachers will be able to benefit from the distance learning materials and ideas that have already been developed by other teachers,” Mortier said.

Many students in special education already lag behind their peers academically, an achievement gap that is expected to widen during the school closures, Jones said.

“That’s our biggest fear,” she said. “That’s why it’s so important we keep engaging, keep pushing forward, keep trying.”

Among the groups who are sponsoring the website are WestEd, a nonprofit education research firm; Digital Promise, a technology education initiative

launched by President Obama; the Council of Chief State School Officers and the Autism Society.

## Comments

### Comments Policy

We welcome your comments. All comments are moderated for civility, relevance and other considerations. [Click here for EdSource's Comments Policy.](#)