



Speech and Mental Health Teletherapy: Quick Start Guide





The Small and Rural Schools Network (SRSN) has developed this Quick Start Guide for small and/or rural local education agencies (LEAs) who are interested in providing speech and mental health teletherapy to help enable the provision of special education services and offset challenges in staffing.

Overview of Teletherapy

The use of teletherapy (also referred to as telepractice and telehealth) in schools has become widely utilized to deliver speech and mental health services to students. In rural areas experiencing a shortage of qualified service providers, teletherapy provides access to timely evaluations and therapy.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) define telepractice as “the application of telecommunications technology at a distance by linking a clinician to client or clinician to clinician for assessment, intervention, and/or consultation”. National organizations, such as ASHA, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), and the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), recognize teletherapy as an effective, appropriate, and often times needed model for service delivery.

While this quick start guide will focus on speech and mental health, teletherapy can be used to provide services in an array of other areas.

Types of Services

A variety of speech and mental health services can be provided via teletherapy. Common services include direct services and evaluations. Direct service may include speech therapy, counseling, psychological services, and compensatory services. Evaluations, such as initial evaluation, re-evaluation, and an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEEs), could also be provided. Teletherapy providers may also be available to attend Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) meetings, write and update goals and objectives, monitor and update student progress, and communicate with staff and parents.

"Our students are excited to attend their online therapy sessions. We were concerned with students staying on task during sessions, but they are really engaged with the online SLPs."

Mary Luhr
Director of Special Services

Benefits and Limitations of Teletherapy

Benefits

- Offers more flexibility
- Reduces caseload of current LEA service providers
- Continuity of services
- Cost-effective
- Well-suited to technology-based learners

Limitations

- Technology and connectivity issues
- More difficult to build a relationship with the therapist
- Privacy concerns
- Not all students will respond well to teletherapy

Technology Needs

For teletherapy to be effective, your LEA will need adequate technology. It will be important to work closely with your provider to determine the specific technology that you will need for which to plan. Below are basic needs that LEAs must plan for when considering teletherapy:



Dependable Internet Access (preferably wired/Ethernet)



Computer



Headphones with a microphone and webcam

"We were apprehensive at first, but we did a lot of the training and the provider was great about making sure we had the right equipment. Our skepticism for using an online platform to serve students quickly turned into appreciation."

Ellen Biller
Director of Special Education

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Service Providers

The first step to setting up a teletherapy program at your LEA is to choose a vendor to provide the services. There are a variety of providers that work with LEAs in Texas. Below is a list of providers as well as website/ contact information.

This is not an all-inclusive list, and the companies listed below are neither preferred nor recommended by the Texas Education Agency nor the Small and Rural Schools Network.

Provider Information and Services Provided

Company Name	Company Website	Speech Therapy	Physical Therapy	Occupational Therapy	Mental Health Services	Other Related Services
Amplio	ampliolearning.com	√	√	√		Literacy and Dyslexia & Remediation
Assessment Intervention Management	aimeducate.com	√				Various related services
AXIS Teletherapy	axisteletherapy.com	√				
eLuma	elumatherapy.com	√	√	√	√	
Global Teletherapy	globalteletherapy.com	√			√	Psycho-educational Assessments
Presence Learning	presencelearning.com	√		√	√	Psycho-educational Assessments
Specialized Assessment & Consulting	specializedassessment.com	√	√	√	√	Various related services

Possible Costs

Costs will vary depending on the services provided as well as the needs of the LEA. Companies may charge a per-session or a per-year rate for therapy. Rates may range in cost from about \$35 to \$90 per session and range from \$700 to \$2,000 per student per year. Typically, evaluations/assessments are an extra charge. Participation in ARD meetings, and other indirect services, may be included or could require an additional charge. Each company will be able to provide a detailed list of prices upon request.



Implementation Process

Planning for teletherapy should begin as soon as you know there will be a need. If the plan is to start a school year utilizing teletherapy, best practice would be to contact a vendor at least 6 weeks in advance of anticipated start date of services. There are several steps the LEA and vendor will need to go through before teletherapy begins:

Information Gathering

You may be asked to attend a kick-off call to explain the services you will need and to provide the following information about your LEA, students, and policies.

- Provide a main point of contact (District/School Contact)
- Scheduling Availability (when are students available to receive services)
- Student Referrals
- District Policies (such as approved technology platform)

Logistical Planning

The next step will be to work through the logistics of delivering teletherapy in your LEA.

- Determine location of service provision (physical location where student will receive services)
- Assignment of providers (the vendor will assign a provider to individual students)
- Provide vendor IEP Access
- IEP System Training (for vendor)

Staff Members Required

Even though a therapist will be providing services online, most companies will require someone on-site to facilitate the session. A specific certification is not typically required; most any staff member of the LEA could serve in this capacity.

Final Preparations

Once the gathering of information and logistical planning is complete, you are ready for final preparations. This includes ensuring your system is equipped to provide high quality virtual teletherapy:

- Internet connections/Internet Access/Identify a school IT specialist to help with logistics
- Availability of a computer or iPad with an up-to-date browser
- Webcam and audio headset
- Specific device and web browser requirements dependent upon vendor.
- Primary Support Person (PSP or facilitator)
- Training provided via online videos or direct support provided by the vendor either by email, phone, or a virtual platform.

Still Have Questions??

Feel free to contact:

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