

Considerations for Missouri School Districts to Make Prior to Entering into a Contract for Telepractice for Speech-Language Services

Benefits of Telepractice to Schools in Missouri:

- Children needing speech-language services can receive direct services from a fully licensed speech-language pathologist (SLP).
- Children of all ages have experience with screen-based technology and are comfortable interacting with the modality.
- All IDEA responsibilities of an SLP can be conducted by a teletherapist including, but not limited to, assessments validated for online administration, development of an IEP and attending conferences via the internet.
- Receiving services from a licensed SLP allows the district to bill Medicaid for the services, if the student is otherwise qualified.
- If it is necessary for the SLP teletherapist to be absent, a substitute is automatically provided under the telepractice contract.
- Districts have reported that when the facilitator for telepractice is also an aide in the classroom of children receiving SLP services, the students benefit from coaching, cuing and use of therapy strategies throughout the week resulting in improved progress.

We strongly recommend that districts be discerning about the telepractice vendor with whom they enter a contract. Not all vendors are equal and considerations beyond the lowest hourly or subscription cost are important.

Is telepractice appropriate for each child in need of SLP services? The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) recognizes telepractice as a service delivery model, if the SLP is following any licensure requirements of the state. A company should be willing to discuss student-specific characteristics and needs when making caseload selection decisions. We encourage you to ask the company's policy regarding students who are not appropriate for telepractice or not making progress.

Is the SLP licensed in the State of Missouri? It is a requirement that any SLP working with students at your school be licensed by the Missouri Board of Registration for the Healing Arts. The SLP may be located within Missouri or residing in another state.

Will the company provide training to the SLP specific to Missouri standards & indicators? Providing services to students within the context of schools requires specific knowledge and a unique skill set. Schools are encouraged to ask about the background and experience of the SLP assigned as a teletherapist to their school. It is critical that the assigned SLP understand current special education compliance and effective practices in Missouri.

What technology does my district need to participate with this model? Generally, your district needs a reliable internet connection, computer or tablet with video camera options and speakers. Ask the telepractice company if there are additional specific requirements.

Will the assigned SLP submit Medicaid claims using my school's vendor? Many schools rely on revenue from Medicaid Direct Service claiming to help cover the cost of SLP services. Services provided by an implementer do not qualify for Medicaid claiming and reimbursement. Medicaid claiming and reimbursement may now be available to your district if you are transitioning from the implementor model to direct services provided by an SLP. Check with your Medicaid claiming vendor for specific provider and documentation requirements. Ask the

telepractice company if their teletherapists will comply and if there are additional charges associated with Medicaid claiming.

Will the SLP enroll as a Missouri Medicaid provider and complete the RMS (Random Moment Samples) as required? Almost all Missouri schools receive important revenue from Medicaid under the School District Administrative Claiming or SDAC program, which includes participation by speech-language pathologists. Your revenue may be significantly impacted if the teletherapists are not enrolled as Missouri Medicaid providers or are not willing to complete the RMS on behalf of your school.

What general knowledge of IDEA and Missouri compliance is possessed by the telepractice company's lead program director or SLP supervisor? Typically, telepractice companies have a program director or supervisor to offer guidance and support to the teletherapists when they have general practice questions. Ideally, this person would have a working knowledge of IDEA and Missouri public school experience with telepractice.

What are the terms of the contract? Pay careful attention to all terms of the contract and base your decision on more than an hourly rate or subscription fee for services. The contract should be flexible and respond to the school's changing needs. Ask whether you can reduce the number of sessions under the contract immediately or terminate the contract with no further cost to your school district if a student or students are dismissed from services or move out of the district. You should be able to terminate the agreement within a short period of time, such as with 30-days written notice.

What general customer support is available? Know in advance the company's policy for responding to questions and concerns and if there are additional fees associated with support.

Who covers the cost of activities such as on-boarding, technology and overall customer support? Be careful of hidden costs associated with on-boarding your district and technology set-up. Know in advance if you will be charged for these services, and if so, whether you are paying by the hour for overall customer support or whether it is prorated in smaller time increments.

Does the company provide a secure platform for service delivery and documentation? Ask questions to ensure that the video conferencing platform, communication and documentation used by the company are FERPA and HIPAA compliant.

Will the SLP use our school's special education software and/or paperwork like our existing staff? Use of your school's special education software and/or paperwork will ensure that the new SLP becomes part of your existing team and allows your special education administrator(s) to monitor compliance.

What onsite staff does my school need to provide in order to participate in telepractice? It is a requirement that someone be present on the ground to observe the students and facilitate the service delivery. Whether this is line-of-sight observation or hands-on support depends on the needs of the individual students. The responsibilities of a facilitator could include setting up the technology, communicating scheduling changes with the SLP, gathering materials prior to a session and, in some cases, assisting with behavioral management. Typically, there are no formal licensure or educational requirements for this position.

How will the district facilitator/implementer know what to do? Ask if the company will be providing facilitator training and, if so, what it entails. Be sure to ask what, if any, additional charges you may incur with facilitator training.

Can the company ever provide someone onsite in special circumstances? Inquire about the company's ability to arrange for a qualified provider to be onsite for specialized training, evaluations or at the district's request. Be sure to ask what, if any, additional charges you may incur with onsite services.

What does my invoice look like each month? DESE requires that special education costs be separated between K-12 and ECSE and also by location code. Ensure that the company you select is able to provide you with an invoice each month that meets Missouri standards and separates these costs for you.