

Continuity of Learning: Strategies for Supporting Students with Disabilities During PBS Programming and Lesson Planning

Purpose

This document offers supervisory unions/districts (SU/SDs) strategies to support students with disabilities as the Agency of Education (AOE) and Vermont PBS partner to reach and teach students across Vermont, including the most vulnerable.

Introduction

As instructional strategies evolve to accommodate different learning models, so too are the strategies to support students with disabilities. When using PBS programming for instruction, some special considerations may need to be made for students with disabilities.

Strategies to Support Students with Disabilities while Viewing

Preview the Information

Some students have a difficult time forming schemas or lack needed background information, and benefit from a preview to lay an informational foundation. It is sometimes overlooked that students with disabilities, and particularly students of color with disabilities, are barred from some spaces, experiences, and activities that are commonplace to typically-developing people. This leaves them at a disadvantage for comprehension.

Recording the Information

Many students have trouble processing auditory information in real time. They may often miss parts of what is being said while they are still processing what was said previously. Having the ability to record a program and pause or replay the important parts can be very helpful to a student struggling with auditory processing. Students with attention deficits will struggle in a similar way to students with auditory processing challenges. They may miss parts of the program and would benefit from being able to rewind a recording when needed, as well as benefit from written notes or visual cues.

Providing Vocabulary

Providing subject-area vocabulary ahead of time can be very helpful for many students. If a student is using an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device, it will be important to program any vocabulary they will need to discuss the topic. If the student is using a Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), they will also likely need added vocabulary.

Contact Information:

If you have questions about this document or would like additional information, please contact: Katy Langevin, Students Support Services, at katy.langevin@vermont.gov.

Distraction Prevention

Positioning a student in place where distractions are limited will help them to concentrate on the content. Some students may be more focused when their hands are busy and could benefit from a fidget toy/device.

Transcripts and Closed Captioning

For students who are hearing impaired or who have auditory processing challenges, a transcript may be needed to provide access to the content. Closed captioning should be turned on during the show. If the student is not a fluent reader, repeating the information again in slow and simple terms, pausing frequently and providing visuals can help the student with auditory processing issues. For a student who is deaf, using sign language may help to clarify information. For students who are hard of hearing and not using American Sign Language (ASL), speaking slowly and loudly using pictures may help.

Audio Descriptions

For students who are blind or visually impaired, turning on audio descriptions can be an impactful way to increase access to the content. For programs without audio descriptions, pausing the program and describing the content can offer blind and visually impaired students more information about the programming.

Providing Breaks

It is important to keep a student's time limitations in mind and to give that student breaks when needed. These times should be incorporated into the student's visual schedule. A break can be free time, or an activity of the student's choosing. Plan breaks that will meet a variety of the student's needs. Students will need physical activity, food and drink, and quiet moments to relax. If your student is less regulated after a break than they were before, this is a break that may need to be avoided in the future. For example, students with anxiety (which many students on the spectrum also have) may be dysregulated after a break where they sat quietly and did an activity like coloring. This may be because while they were coloring, they were thinking negative thoughts about their performance on the upcoming task. If this is the case, the student may need a task incongruent with thinking negative thoughts like reading out loud or doing a sudoku puzzle.

Strategies to Support Students with Disabilities While Lesson Planning

Transition Activities

For many students, going from watching television to doing a lesson can be a difficult transition. A graduated transition activity may help students make that transition more easily. An example of a graduated transition activity might be coloring. Transitioning from television to coloring might be easier for a student than television to the lesson. Having the student color gets them sitting at the table with a utensil in their hand and helps ease them into the activity. Students can also benefit from doing the parts of the lesson that the student is best at or prefers first, before parts that may be

difficult for them. This will help the student to feel as though they have accomplished something and possibly decrease anxiety about contending with a blank sheet of paper.

Creating Routines

Many students benefit from the following of routines. Doing the work in the same place and at the same time each day will help students get used to doing the lessons at home. This can be incorporated into the visual schedule, so the student has multiple points of reference to understand their schedule and their day.

Create Visuals

It may be helpful to provide visuals either with pictures or written notes for the student to refer back to. Providing visual options can assist students in answering open-ended questions when they are struggling to bring details to mind. For example, you may ask a student “In the show we just watched, what animal did Molly get sprayed by?” The student may struggle to bring the name to mind or may struggle to choose between all the possible animal choices. If you provide a choice board with two or three animals to choose from, the student may have an easier time answering. Creating visuals can also provide a way for students who are not yet verbal and who are not yet using Augmentative and Assistive Communication (AAC) devices to respond to open ended questions. This can be beneficial to students with any communication delays, particularly in younger students.

Provide Image Descriptions and Braille

Students who are blind or visually impaired will benefit from image descriptions for any images within the lesson plan and braille for written text. Image descriptions should be clear and concise and provide the student with a deeper understanding of the content, as images provide more context to the text.