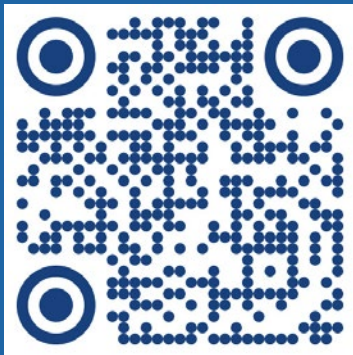


# Opportunities and Challenges of Virtual Assessment in EI and ECSE



*2024 Division for Early Childhood Annual International Conference on Young Children with Disabilities and Their Families*



<https://inteca-idea.org/>

**Sheresa Blanchard & Kathy Hebbeler, SRI Education**

**Lori Ganz, MS, OTR/L;  
CO Part C**

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# Who's Here?



- **What age group do you focus on?**

- Birth to 3 years
- 3 through 5 years
- Birth through 5

- **What's your role?**

- Family member
- Practitioner
- Local program administrator
- State staff
- TA Provider
- Higher Education/Researcher
- Student
- Other

## **How much experience do you or your program have with virtual assessment?**

- None or almost none
- A little
- Some
- A lot
- I don't know

# Today's Session

- Authentic assessment: quick review
- Overview of the INTECA Project
- What we have learned about virtual assessment
  - One program's experiences
  - INTECA's findings

# Background: Authentic Assessment



# 'Authentic Assessment'

## What Word Comes to Mind?



# Authentic Assessment ...

## Looks Like

Occurs in **familiar setting** for the the child

Child engages in **everyday routines**

Child engages in **meaningful, preferred activities with familiar adults**

Assessor **observes** the child and family

Assessor **encourages family sharing** about observations of the child's skills

## Doesn't Look Like

Child is in an **unfamiliar place**

Assessor asks child to complete **specific, structured tasks**

Assessor uses **scripted language** with the child

**Limited use of family observations**, primarily for skills the child will not demonstrate for assessor

# INTECA Project



# INTECA Project Objectives

Funded by OSEP  
Aug 2022- Aug 2025



- Learn about facilitators, barriers, and key information for using technology to support authentic assessment
- Develop frameworks to support state and local decision-making around use of technology
- Develop and share resources to support the frameworks
- Disseminate the frameworks and resources widely

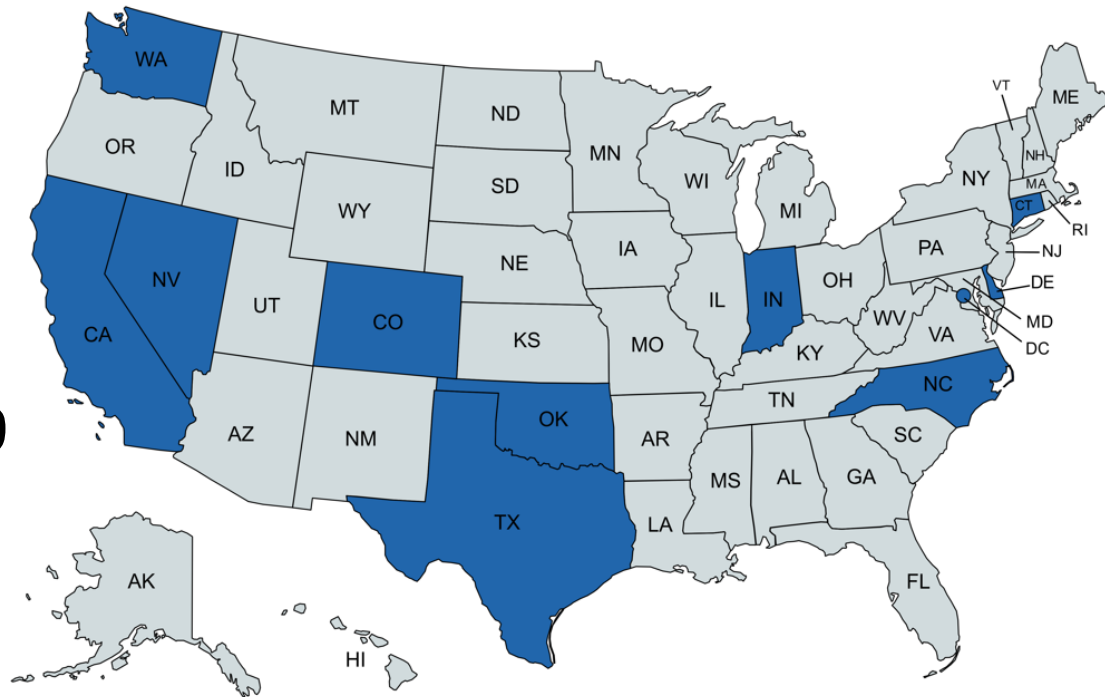
*Note: Interested in all purposes for assessment*





# Interviews and Focus Groups: Participants

- Spoke with 67 individuals:
  - state administrators,
  - local administrators,
  - practitioners, and
  - families
- From 10 states and the District of Columbia
- Included both Part B 619 and Part C



# Virtual Assessment: What We Have Learned



# What INTECA Learned: Decisions to Use Virtual Assessment

## **Decisions to Use VA**

- Many started using VA because of the pandemic
- In some place, state decisions. In others, local decision

## **Continuing VA After Pandemic**

- Mixed – some still use VA, some discontinued it
- Greater continued use in EI than in ECSE
- Often provided to families as an option

# What INTECA Learned: Ongoing Use of Virtual Assessment

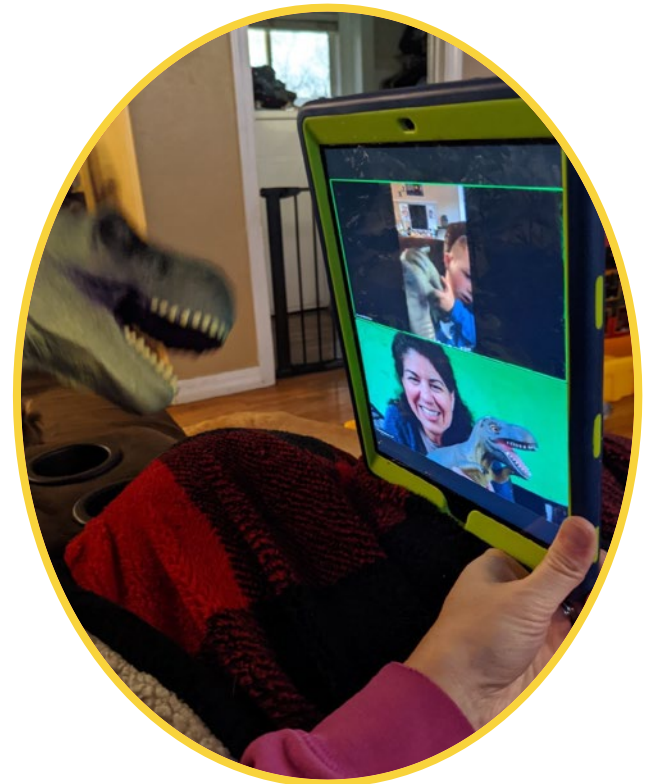
- More use in rural areas or where service region is geographically large
- VA mostly used for determining eligibility
- Sometimes paired with virtual service delivery, but not always



# One Program's Experiences

## Importance of preparing the evaluators

- Ensure they have Telehealth training if required by the program
- Review their comfort with technology
- Provide opportunities to observed several virtual evaluations
- Review their office/home set up –
  - Privacy and minimal distractions
  - Double screens are preferable but not essential
- Area of expertise – motor assessment versus communication/cognitive



# One Program's Experiences



## Importance of preparing the family

- Review their comfort with technology
- Type of technology
- Explain how a virtual assessment works (i.e. child should **not** be asked to sit in front of a computer for an hour)
- Child factors (are the familiar with hearing/seeing the caregivers on a device?)
- Environment preparation
  - Is there a quiet place for the child to play in view of the camera?
  - Suggested toys to have within the child's access

# One Program's Experiences

- Consider technology factors – ease of use, cost
- HIPAA compliant platforms
  - Back ups if one system is down
- Access to the platform, camera, microphone
- Minimum technology requirements – high speed internet
- Test the technology during a reminder contact the day before
- Links and invites – provide as much preparation as possible so there is minimal stress on the day of the assessment
- Have alternative processes in place if internet or equipment is not available

# Additional things to consider

- Have a plan if in-person, in-office, or a hybrid model is needed
- Acknowledge family preferences
- Acknowledge realities- travel time, preparation time, evaluator availability
- Understand that virtual options are not “less than” or an inferior choice
- Resources:
  - [What do I need to use telehealth? | Telehealth.HHS.gov](https://www.hhs.gov/telehealth/what-do-i-need-to-use-telehealth/)



# Questions? Discussion....



# Benefits, Challenges, Possible Solutions



# One Program's Experiences: Benefits and Challenges

## Benefit

- Enhanced ability to see the child's behavior without the influence of strangers or a novel environment
- May hear more spontaneous speech, especially if the child has been exposed to virtual calls
- Much more efficient for evaluators, allowing more flexibility with schedules to meet the family's need
- Eliminates weather, illness barriers

## Challenge

- More challenging for evaluation of motor skills depending on the situation
- Technical limitations or glitches
- Family may perceive it as less than ideal (especially if the child does not qualify for services)



# INTECA: Benefits of Virtual Assessment

## Logistical and staffing benefits

- Easier scheduling/less driving
- Increased access (distance, weather, illness, fewer no shows)
- Staffing flexibility and workaround for staff shortages (reduce wait time)

“It lets us perform more assessments...we can hit a bigger amount of people instead of having to push them off, like we don't have room, we don't have space, we'll see you in a month, we'll see you in two months. Now we can fit them in faster, so they're getting their needs met quicker.”

– Local administrator



# INTECA: Benefits of Virtual Assessment

## **Prepares families for active engagement in intervention**

- Active parent involvement and capacity building (providers coaching parents)

“A big benefit is [that our state] uses the coaching model. So, when we were doing our evals in person...it was a much more structured assessment and much more standardized...it kind of set us up more as the experts at that initial assessment than it does now with the telehealth because we’re already using the parents and coaching the parents. That’s a benefit that helps them out because it already sets them up as the expert...it sets the tone that that they’re the experts on their child and we’re going to observe and then help them from there.” – Practitioner

# INTECA: Benefits of Virtual Assessment

## Increased use of authentic assessment

- Suited to virtual assessment whereas standardized assessments are not

## Increased access to specialists

Especially in rural areas

“...in a certain county, we may never have a speech therapist who goes to that county...so every child in that county is getting maybe always PT and OT. Now, we are able to say your concern is speech, your concern is gross motor, let me put you with the most appropriate team. So that is a huge, huge benefit.”

– Local administrator



# INTECA: Benefits of Virtual Assessment

## Allows for more participation in the assessment process

- Greater participation from
  - **Family/people who know the child**
    - Multiple family members in different places
  - **Collaborating providers** – could be in one virtual location or in separate virtual locations



# INTECA: Challenges and Solutions

## Technology

- **Lack of technology** or strong **internet** connectivity
  - Possible solutions: loaner devices or mobile hotspots
    - “In the past year we’ve had two evaluations where the grandparents were raising the children and they didn’t really understand what a virtual evaluation was because when we were trying to get them on there, they said ‘we have no technology, we have no way of doing this. They thought they could just do it on a phone call.’”
      - Local administrator
- **Limited technology knowledge** or low confidence about using technology (families & practitioners)
  - Possible solution: prepare families and practitioners on how to use the technology, accessible troubleshooting when things go wrong



# INTECA Learned: It's Important to Prepare Families for VA Preparing Families for Virtual Assessment

- Topic areas:
  - About the assessment and general information (both VA and in person)
  - Additional information how VA works, interacting with the child during VA assessment, preparing the environment for VA
  - Using technology
- How programs do this:
  - Tip Sheets
  - Reminder calls with what to expect
  - Practice call with technology checks
  - Informal – provider to provider variation

# INTECA: Challenges and Solutions

## Obtaining information about the child

- Limitations in what can see/hear/touch
  - Possible solutions: prepare parent about camera positioning and type of technology to use, reduce background noise/distractions, enhance practitioner skill in coaching parents

## Practitioner and parent beliefs

Possible solution: Provide accurate information and guidance

## Limited or varied guidance for VA for practitioners and families

- Possible solution: Provide written guidance and PD rather than informal support.

Honestly, I **didn't feel confident**. ... I like being able to be the one interacting with the student and sort of **being able to assess directly** and not necessarily rely on parent report....  
-Practitioner

# INTECA: Challenges and Solutions

## Technology

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# INTECA: Quality of the information

## **Equal or better-quality information because:**

- Familiar home environment
- With familiar people
- During everyday routines
- No stranger present

## **Obtaining information about the child can be challenging**

- Limitations in what can see/hear/touch
  - Possible solutions: prepare parent about camera positioning and type of technology to use, reduce background noise/distractions, enhance practitioner skill in coaching parents



# Can Virtual Assessment Produce Valid Results?

**There is limited empirical evidence on this question.**

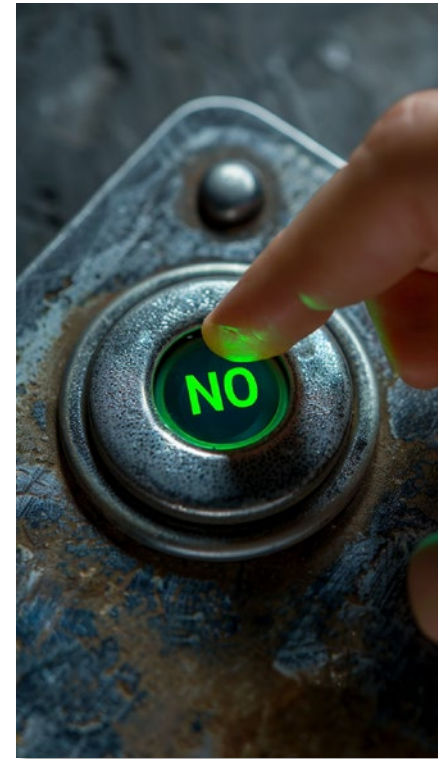
- Views vary from complete confidence as illustrated in quotes like this:

“Why wouldn’t we utilize the parent or whoever’s with that child to help get the information we need about a child. Getting them to have the child demonstrate a particular skill or quality that we’re looking for. Who better to elicit a good response than a parent or a grandparent, versus us as strangers coming into these contrived situations? But, it’s that belief that the expert has to do something with the child in order for results to be real.”

- State level administrator

# Can Virtual Assessment Produce Valid Results?

- ...to views that we should not conduct virtual assessment at all. Some indicated that it is not appropriate for their discipline or encouraged by their provider organization.



# Views Vary About Quality of Information Produced by Virtual Assessment

The quality is **the same** as it is in person. It **depends on the evaluators**, you know. If you're asking the right questions and watching for the right things in the right way. That's what defines the quality. So, you can have a person go in-person and not get quality because of how they ask the questions or don't, So it depends on the provider, the evaluator. – State Administrator

“Staff feel that **in-person is better.**” – Local Administrator

“I feel like the virtual format should kind of **be the last resort.**” – Practitioner

“So, I think it is very dependent on the **observational skills of the therapist.**” Practitioner

So, I wouldn't say that you see a **different quality in assessments.** If anything, the child is not interacting with you, which gives you **more of an accurate depiction of how they are engaging with their everyday environment.** So how they're engaging with their caregivers, how they're engaging with their home. I think that that can be more helpful than if I am present and the child's distracted by me, or just wants to engage with me.  
-Practitioner

“It depends” was a common answer... 31



# Questions and Discussion





# INTECA Next Steps

- Developing a framework for decision making about Virtual Assessment based on interviews and focus groups
- Developing resources and tip sheets
- Expanding website links to external resources.

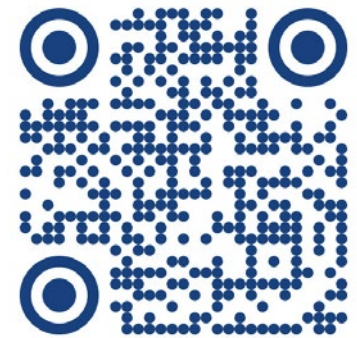


# Thank you!



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Visit us at <https://inteca-idea.org/>



For more information: [Kathleen.Hebbeler@sri.com](mailto:Kathleen.Hebbeler@sri.com)  
[Sheresa.Blanchard@sri.com](mailto:Sheresa.Blanchard@sri.com)



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Project Officers: Anita Vermeer and Rebecca Sheffield.

