

# Evaluating and Improving Virtual Assessment in Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education

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*This resource is part of a set of resources designed to support early intervention and early childhood special education programs in planning and implementing virtual assessment. This resource presents information about the kinds of questions one might ask to understand the effectiveness and implementation of virtual assessment and to inform decision-making. If you would like to learn more about virtual assessment, review the [INTECA framework](#).*

## Introduction

Virtual assessment (VA) is a new way of collecting assessment information for many programs and their practitioners. Programs would be wise to invest in examining practitioners' and families' experiences with VA and how VA is impacting their overall system. Ongoing evaluation will help programs understand how well VA is working, identify areas that are successful and areas for improvement, and use that information to improve the implementation of VA.

## Evaluation Questions

Some possible evaluation questions about VA include:

- How effectively are practitioners being prepared for VA? How could preparation for VA be improved?
- How well is VA working for practitioners? What improvements in the process are needed?
- How well is VA working for families? Which families are choosing VA (by demographic, etc.)? For which families is VA not working well? What improvements are needed?
- Are the processes for scheduling VA and communicating with and preparing families working well? What could be improved?
- Are the technology and supports for technology working effectively? What needs to be improved?
- Is VA producing valid results for all children? If not, for which children or families is it not working well?
- What advantages does VA provide for our program? What challenges are associated with VA? How can we address those challenges?
- How well are policies and guidance (e.g., related to consent, permissions, documentation) for VA working? Do we need to revise existing policies and guidance or create new ones?
- How has VA impacted the functioning of our system? How has including VA as a mechanism for conducting assessments impacted wait times for families, caseloads, teaming and collaboration, complaints or concerns from families, costs, and other areas?
- What is the fiscal impact of using VA on our program? How do the costs of VA compare to the costs of in-person assessment?

## Methods of Collecting Information

Programs can collect information about VA in a variety of ways:

- Informally asking questions at a staff meeting
- Holding focus groups with practitioners and families
- Conducting structured interviews with practitioners and families
- Sending surveys to practitioners, families, or both
- Conducting a cost analysis of VA compared to in-person assessment
- Contracting with external evaluators to conduct a formal evaluation of VA (which would likely involve several of the methods listed above)

## Questions for Interviews, Focus Groups or Surveys

Below are examples of questions that programs could ask practitioners and families to learn about their experiences with VA. Questions may need to be modified depending on the assessment purpose for which your program is using VA and the format for collecting the information (e.g., interview, focus group, or survey).

Most questions on surveys provide fixed choices for respondents, which makes the data easy to analyze. For example, a question might ask, “On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is ‘very satisfied’ and 5 is ‘not at all satisfied,’ how satisfied were you with ...” In interviews and focus groups, on the other hand, questions are typically open-ended with no fixed choices provided. Including a few open-ended questions on surveys can be a good idea because these questions allow respondents to elaborate on their answers and provide richer information.

### *Practitioners*

Practitioners are at the heart of implementing VA. Their perspectives on what works and where challenges exist provide key information for program planning and improvement. Example questions that practitioners might be asked include:

- How effective was the professional development you received in preparing you to conduct virtual assessments? What worked? What was missing?
- Overall, how confident did you feel about conducting your first few virtual assessments? What kind of support helped you feel confident? What additional support or information would you have liked?
- What do you like and not like about conducting assessments virtually?
- Has the technology effectively supported virtual assessment? Are any improvements needed? If so, what are they?
- What challenges have you encountered in administering virtual assessments?

- Overall, do you feel that the results of virtual assessments are valid for [eligibility, monitoring progress, etc.]? Does your confidence in the results vary within or across assessments—for example, based on the type of skill being observed or the nature of the child’s disability?
- How well are existing processes for scheduling assessments, managing caseloads, and managing time working for virtual assessment? What is working well? What challenges still exist?
- How well does virtual assessment support teaming and collaboration with specialists, other practitioners, and family members? What is working? What challenges still need to be addressed?
- What would improve virtual assessment in our program?

## **Families**

Informed decision-making and active participation of family members are especially important in VA. Family members are integral to successfully eliciting and observing the skills of young children during VA. Therefore, understanding their experiences with VA is vital to achieving effective implementation. Example questions to collect feedback from families include:

- Overall, how satisfied were you with your virtual assessment? What worked? What could have been improved?
- Were you offered a choice between a virtual and an in-person assessment? Did you feel like you had enough information about virtual assessment to know what you were choosing? If not, what else do you wish you had been told?
- Did you feel prepared for your virtual assessment? If not, what else would you have wanted to know before the assessment?
- Do you think the practitioners accurately understood your child’s strengths and needs from the information they collected during the virtual assessment? Why or why not?
- Did you have any issues with the technology that was used during your virtual assessment?

## **Data Analysis, Reporting, and Use of Data for Program Improvement**

The [INTECA Framework Evaluation page](#) provides several general resources to support the remaining steps of the evaluation, and many more evaluation resources exist on the internet. An evaluation of VA does not need to be complex or costly to provide information for program improvement. Programs can start small, implement improvements, and continue to collect information for ongoing refinement of their VA processes.

To access this and other resources, visit <https://inteca-idea.org/>

November 2025

Suggested citation:

INTECA. (2025). *Evaluating and improving virtual assessment in early intervention and early childhood special education*. SRI.



Office of Special Education Programs  
U.S. Department of Education

This project is funded under a cooperative agreement from the U.S. Department of Education, #H327V220001. This document does not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. Project Officers: Anita Vermeer and Rebecca Sheffield.



Innovative Technology for  
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