



Julie Muse-Fisher • Executive Director of Special Education, Interim
1330 Highland Ave • Needham • Massachusetts • 02492
Telephone: (781) 455-0400 • Fax: (781) 455-0437
julie_musefisher@needham.k12.ma.us

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Dear Parents and Caregivers,

I hope everyone is staying safe and healthy during these challenging times. These days can be overwhelming and uncertain and we are all doing our best to take care of our families and each other. As you know by now, your children's teachers, special educators, related service providers, and principals were hard at work last week providing students with enrichment learning opportunities and educational resources to access while schools are closed.

There were two major developments last week which moved us in a new direction with regard to supporting students during school closures. The first was the announcement by Governor Baker that all schools are to remain closed until at least May 4th. The second was additional guidance from the federal and state departments of education regarding shifting from an enrichment model to a remote learning model during extended school closures and ways districts can ensure a free and appropriate education (FAPE) for students with and without disabilities to the best extent possible.

The guidance states that although fully implementing a student's IEP is not currently practical or possible during school closure, school districts should think flexibly about how to address the individual needs of a student as described in the student's IEP to the maximum extent possible in a remote learning environment. We recognize that remote learning cannot replicate the traditional school day. However, we are hoping to alleviate the disruption to student learning caused by the extended school closure and provide services and supports to address the academic and social/emotional needs of our students.



As shared in the Superintendent's communication last night, the district's plan for remote learning, consistent with DESE's newest guidance, will roll out in phases and for all grade levels starting the week of April 6th. In the upcoming week we will continue to provide enrichment opportunities, frequent communication, and maintain our connections with students, while at the same time be busy planning for providing special education supports and services within a remote learning environment.

This week we will be meeting with staff to determine what remote learning opportunities we can provide to address student needs as outlined in their IEPs and to identify what training or resources our special educators and related service providers need to do this work. We are also providing professional learning opportunities for our dedicated teaching assistants so they may continue to support students and teachers during this time. We are also connecting with all of our contracted service providers who provide services such as hearing, vision, and behavior support to include these services remotely as deemed practical.

Additionally, although DESE has not required that districts hold virtual IEP meetings during the period of school closures, we have decided that where meetings were previously scheduled and families are comfortable participating virtually, we will begin holding meetings this week. We will first hold any meetings that were already scheduled to take place this week and begin to reschedule meetings that were missed over the last two weeks. We will be using the Zoom video conferencing platform. Parents can of course request to wait until we are back in school to have a face to face meeting.

We are mindful that the world has changed so much over the last few weeks and we have never been in this situation before. While it is somewhat daunting to be entering into the world of thinking about FAPE and remote learning, I have no doubt that our amazing team of special educators, service providers, and administrators are up for the challenge. You will be hearing from your child's school this coming week with more information.



Please let me know if I can be of further assistance. I will continue to provide updates as new information arises and welcome your feedback. Thank you in advance for your ongoing support and collaboration as we work to keep our school community healthy.

Respectfully,

Julie Muse-Fisher
Interim Executive Director of Special Education

cc: SEPAC
Mary Lammi, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services
Patricia Mullen, Special Education Director, NHS
Rebecca Sparrell, Preschool Director
Special Education Coordinators
NPS Principals