

November 2020

Dear Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers,

As we reflect on the first nine weeks of this most unusual 2020-21 school year, we have learned important lessons which are prompting several adjustments for the second quarter. While current circumstances are quite challenging, our charge remains the same – to provide your child with a high-quality, inclusive education that results in college, career and community readiness. In partnership with you regarding your child's education, I wish to share some important updates and resources.

Staffing

While the district's financial situation remains strained, approximately 10 vacant positions will be filled to ensure each school has the appropriate staffing resources to meet your child's IEP.

In-Person Instruction

Recently, several schools or programs were closed for in-person instruction and/or daycare services due to either staff or students testing positive for COVID-19. A district team meets daily to monitor health and safety related data to problem-solve where necessary. Please know we take these decisions very seriously. The team considers each situation individually and strives to make decisions which balance the health and well-being of students and staff with our educational obligations. Despite our best efforts to separate programs/services and utilize best practices regarding health and safety, several situations have caused us to either shift location or temporarily suspend in-person services for a two-week quarantining period. I will also apologize in advance that the timing of these decisions may leave you with minimal time to adjust to schedule changes. You may want to have a contingency plan for the care of your student, if it is needed to suspend in-person services. We are recommending students bring materials home with them at the end of each day in case a temporary break from in person services is needed. I am asking special education teachers to consider contingency plans should your child's program be impacted. We are also asking staff to remain vigilant regarding [General Health and Safety Guidance](#) and further compartmentalize programs/services to limit the impact any one individual has on the school/programs.

In the coming weeks, staff will be reviewing first quarter baseline assessments, grades, and progress towards IEP goals to understand the efficacy of virtual education. In situations where students are not making meaningful progress, IEP teams will convene to discuss service adjustments, including the possibility of in-person instruction.

Additional Services

Despite our best efforts to allow for continuity of learning during the extended school closure period, some special education, related services, and supplementary aids and supports could not be provided or were not as effective virtually. In some cases, students may have experienced regression of skills and/or virtual instruction has negatively impacted the student's ability to make progress towards IEP goals or applicable

learning standards. As a result, some students will require "Additional Services." In this context, Additional Services refers to services that may be offered to your child, in addition to those provided as part of their current IEP, in order to support them in making up for lost progress during last spring's virtual education period. In the coming weeks, staff will be reviewing data (first quarter baseline assessments, grades, and progress towards IEP goals) to understand the impact of the closure. This data will inform staff, parents and IEP teams as they consider the need for Additional Services. Our expectation is to complete the Additional Services analyses by mid-February. Additional Services will be provided through the school year during summer, 2021.

IEP Evaluations

We are nearly caught up with all IEP evaluations (initials and reevaluations) which were delayed due to the extended closure. Staff have been utilizing schools and district locations to complete required in-person assessment/testing. If your student's evaluation was delayed due to the school closure in the spring, the IEP team will consider whether or not the delay requires Additional Services to support gains that would have otherwise been made. Analysis of this potential need will be completed by mid-February.

Who to Contact With Your Questions

Should you have questions or concerns, I encourage you to first contact your child's special education teacher as typically they are the most knowledgeable about programming details. If for some reason the special education teacher cannot address your questions or concerns, I encourage you to next contact the building program support teacher (PST) and/or school principal. Further, there may be times when a district office-based administrator (assistant director or myself) is needed to address particularly complex or sensitive matters. I am including a link to our Department of [Student Services directory](#) so that you know who does what and when questions or concerns arise, you have the most up to date contact information. Last, please consult our [Special Education Website](#) for additional resources.

Sincerely,

John Harper

John Harper, PhD
Executive Director of Student Services