

February 2021

Dear Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers,

With the District decision to [return to school](#) through a phased in approach, I wish to share several important updates unique to students with disabilities. First, let me say, we are so excited for this return to in-person learning and at the same time we are proceeding with due caution and thoughtfulness. The above link provides a comprehensive description of our District reopening plans, educational model, health and safety procedures and a listing of helpful resources.

The Department of Student Services has provided guidance for school-based staff in a number of areas regarding the unique needs of students with disabilities. The following is a summary of that guidance. To create the safest circumstances we can, staff and students will be limited in the number of cohorts and/or classrooms they support. Doing so will greatly reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread. While we are returning to in-person instruction, there may continue to be situations where virtual special education or related services at the elementary level will be provided. Virtual services will continue to minimize instructional environments and maintain highly effective service arrangements. To the greatest possible extent, students with disabilities will be scheduled into classrooms within natural proportions. District office staff will work with the school principal in situations where this may not be possible to understand the circumstances and develop solutions.

As we begin the reopening process in early elementary grades, I would like to share what special education and related services staff will be doing in preparation. This is followed by updates on IEP meetings, mask wearing, specialized transportation and early childhood special education services.

- To begin, special education casemanagers will be reviewing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and if applicable Prior Written Notice forms (PWN) for their students. If the IEP or PWN can be implemented as written given the reopening instructional model - no changes to the documents will be necessary. However, if that is not the case, staff will identify areas for potential revision (e.g., adjusting 5 direct service days to 4 plus an asynchronous day). They will then communicate the proposed changes with you, then finalize after a brief conversation. Any revised PWNs will be sent to you in the coming weeks. If there are substantial concerns about the proposed changes, staff will reconvene an IEP team meeting to discuss your concerns and ultimately develop an appropriate educational program.
- If there are concerns about students returning to the reopening instructional model (either from virtual or individualized in-person services), the special education casemanager will convene an IEP team meeting to determine the most appropriate services/environments based on the student's disability related needs.
- For all grades, special education case managers will continue to review student progress for those still participating in virtual education using all relevant sources of data to assess the effectiveness of their program. In circumstances where a student is not making expected progress, special education teachers will communicate with relevant IEP team members, including you, in an effort to problem solve. Simple adjustments will be made through revisions to the Prior Written Notice. For more substantial concerns, we will convene an IEP

meeting and continue problem solving adjustments to the student's program including the potential need for in-person services.

- Special Education teachers are asked to maintain well developed and differentiated substitute teacher lesson/activity plans in the event they become ill or exhibit symptoms which preclude them from coming to school.
- Similar to above, if and when your child is unable to come to school due to illness, COVID-19 or close contact quarantining, please contact your child's special education casemanager to determine alternate learning activities.
- While beginning with early elementary grades, our team is actively planning for the return of additional grade levels after Spring Break.

IEP Meetings. To assist schools in maintaining required physical distancing requirements and decrease the risk of viral spread, we will continue with virtual IEP meetings. Once we feel in-person IEP meetings can be conducted safely across the District, we will transition to in-person meetings. If there are extenuating circumstances where an in-person IEP meeting is the only viable option, please coordinate this with your child's casemanager or principal.

Mask Wearing. The Board of Education recently addressed mask wearing as part of District policy (The Protective Measure policy approved by the [BOE on 1-25 is linked here](#)). Students with disabilities like everyone else in the school are expected to properly wear a mask. While this is the expectation, we acknowledge this may not be possible for some students. School staff and the IEP team will explore all possible accommodations (e.g. distancing, different student personal protective equipment options, etc.) based on the student's individual needs, prior to considering an alternative environment. The IEP team will carefully balance the health and safety of the student/others with their Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) as part of any consideration of a separate educational environment.

Specialized Transportation. Our goal is to provide uninterrupted specialized transportation services during the initial reopening transition. We are collaborating with our carrier to analyze the highly complex logistics of rerouting nearly 350 daily routes to ensure all students get to and from school safely. Please know we are doing our very best to limit any interruptions.

Early Childhood Special Education Services. The Early Learning Sessions (ELS) will begin when 4K school site classes start on 3/23/21. In-Person Hybrid format for ELS, students with disabilities, as well as peer models, would be provided in the ELS classrooms, students could attend up to 2 half days per week using an A/B model.

- Group A attending Tuesday and Wednesday half day (PM)
- Group B attending Thursday and Friday half day (AM)
- Transportation can be provided when documented in the IEP. Program times may vary (see below for estimated start/end times).
- Program times:
 - AM 7:40-10:52 (Early Start); 8:30-11:42 (Late Start)
 - PM 11:33-2:47 (Early Start); 12:23-3:37 (Late Start)

Virtual Instruction: Will be provided as specified in the child's Prior Written Notice. Formats may include a combination of synchronous and/or asynchronous instruction.

Itinerant Home Services: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our obligation to limit community spread and maintain staff/child/family safety, there will be no provision of special education services in a family home or home daycare. The district will closely monitor the situation and

in collaboration with community public health/medical experts will return to itinerant services when deemed safe and appropriate.

While acknowledging the many challenges we're all facing at this time, your child's academic and social-emotional wellbeing continue to be our highest priority. We remain steadfast in our commitment to providing your child with an excellent education irrespective of the circumstances. Please do not hesitate to reach out to your child's casemanager or member of our [administrative team](#) if there is any way that we can provide additional support to you or your child.

Sincerely,

John Harper

John Harper, Ph.D. Executive Director, Department of Student Services