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Dear Special Education Community,

I hope that you and your families continue to be safe and healthy. Since my last communication to you on March 13, 2020, the Office of Student Services have been working extensively with our district Leadership Team to complete the final stages of our *Remote Learning Plan*. This plan not only includes instructional guidance for providing remote learning to our students with disabilities, but also requires specific training to our teachers in order to launch an entirely new and novel system of delivering specially designed instruction. I appreciate your patience while we redefine pedagogy and develop platforms for asynchronous learning. This is highly complex, creative work and while we are embracing the opportunity to stretch ourselves professionally, we appreciate your support and patience while we navigate through this remarkable shift in the science of teaching. Given the amount of information to cover in this Communication, I will address each topic individually.

ASYNCHORNOUS INSTRUCTION AND LEARNING – ALL STUDENTS

As stated in the District *Remote Learning Plan*, remote learning will be our instructional model; nothing can replace the in-person schooling experience and we are not replicating the school day, nor are we replicating service delivery. Remote learning is not synonymous with online learning. Remote learning can occur in a multitude of ways, and we must seek a balance between the use of technology and promoting offline learning opportunities for students.

Asynchronous learning allows the educator to present/provide learning materials using a virtual platform. Asynchronous learning is self-paced; accommodates differences in personal schedules; allows students to learn at their own pace; provides consistent instruction to many students; and can be reviewed as needed. It offers no teacher-student interaction in real time; however, students and teachers can respond to each other via email or discussion groups to answer questions and to provide feedback over the course of the learning cycle. The District *Remote Learning Plan* will offer guidance and direction to *all* of our educators during this shift to asynchronous instruction. In addition, the Special Education Faculty will be provided with a newly created *Manual for the Provision of Virtual Special Education Services During the COVID-19 Outbreak*. This manual will offer our Special Education faculty more specified guidance on reconceptualizing the delivery of specially designed instruction through asynchronous learning.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PEDAGOGY AND SERVICE PROVISION DURING SCHOOL CLOSURE

Special Educators and Related Service Providers are masters of pedagogy. Pedagogy refers to the theory and practice of learning. Because learning is influenced by the social, political and psychological development of learners, special educators rely heavily on how knowledge and skills are imparted to students while considering the interactions that take place during learning. This *Feedback Loop* offers teachers guidance on how to adjust their practices and instruction based on student feedback, developmental levels, memory challenges, and deficits with mental organization. This learning feedback loop is an essential component of special education pedagogy in that we rely heavily on the feedback we receive from students (e.g. behavioral, verbal, written) in the moment, in order to assess our instruction, modify outcome expectations, and ultimately adjust our practices. When providing asynchronous, remote learning, we need to reconsider our traditional methods of responding to students and how we offer feedback. Therefore, special education instruction during this time of extended school closure will look very different and will be modified extensively. IEP services will not be reproduced to resemble the same service delivery that occurs when we are in session. Instead, teachers will be crafting asynchronous learning opportunities specific to student learning needs while finding ways to offer feedback in order to maintain a positive learning feedback loop.

Special Education Teachers and Related Service Providers are highly skilled, trained, and educated professionals. There is no expectation that families will be able to reproduce the therapy and instruction that these skilled professionals can provide. Our hope is to work together with families to limit as much regression as we can. These expectations must be reasonable for both parties, as we are not able to reproduce what in-person instruction looks like, especially in the field of Special Education. While a digital environment cannot fully recreate the important human contact of a traditional classroom, we are working to provide opportunities for authentic learning and connection, within the parameters of federal and state guidelines. It is important for families to understand that the typical school day cannot be perfectly replicated through remote learning, and in our efforts to shift to on-line delivery of instruction, we need to be sensitive to the needs of all students, families, and staff. We understand the hardships this remote learning environment places on families, and we recognize that partnering with parents and guardians will be more vital than ever. The district is committed to working in tandem with parents/guardians and to provide the necessary resources to help facilitate learning in the home environment.

FAPE DURING A TIME OF GLOBAL CRISIS

The United States Department of Education (USED) has stated that during this national emergency school districts must provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) consistent with the need to protect the health and safety of students with disabilities and those individuals providing education, specialized instruction, and related services to these students. Providing FAPE during the COVID-19 Outbreak and subsequent school closures means that services will be provided differently, in fact, it is going to require a lot of modifications and will be provided asynchronously.

Schools may not be able to provide all services in the manner they are typically provided pursuant to students' IEPs, nor should teachers attempt to replicate in-person therapy. The provision of FAPE may include, as appropriate, special education and related services provided remotely through resources and supports (such as strategies, projects and packets provided to students matched with regular and ongoing communication from special education team members) and services and instruction (such as asynchronous instruction).

Once school resumes, individual teams will review how the closure impacted the delivery of special education and related services to individual students and convene IEP Team meetings as necessary in order to make an individualized determination as to what compensatory services may be necessary, and to ensure the student receives FAPE prospectively. The Office of Student Services will issue guidelines for this process.

PRIVACY RELATED ISSUES, NOTIFICATION AND GUIDANCE

Maintaining the privacy of our students and their families is extremely important and will remain one of our top priorities. We are asking that families avoid sharing or comparing and/or posting teachers' work on social media. Finally, in this unprecedented time, consent is not a requirement to offer remote learning opportunities and any changes to instructional methodology at this time, does not change the active IEP.

During this period of school closure and the provision of remote, asynchronous learning opportunities, students are expected to participate in these services if possible. Please reach out to us as soon as possible if you anticipate or become aware of any issues with your child accessing the remote opportunities provided by the District. In accordance with state and federal laws, including the Massachusetts Wiretapping Act and FERPA, parents and students must refrain from recording any and all remote lessons. Exceptions may be made on an individual basis due to special circumstances, and only with the consent of everyone involved. In addition, while parents/guardians are permitted to observe online instruction in a non-disruptive manner, to the extent that remote learning opportunities provide access to confidential student information, all participants agree, by participating in this remote learning opportunity, to refrain from disseminating any confidential student information about other student participants with any and all third parties. *By participating in the remote learning opportunities, consent to this request is hereby provided.* Similarly, we ask everyone in our school community to recognize that video conferences and other online services will be taking place in the homes of the educators and students who participate in the calls (i.e., Team Meetings), and to be mindful of everyone's right to privacy. Parents/guardians should take all precautions to safeguard personal or private information that they do not wish to be disclosed. Cyber-bullying, harassment, discrimination, and abuse of the remote learning process will not be tolerated and may result in suspension from remote learning, as well as additional consequences when school resumes. *By accessing these services, the District recognizes that you and your child consent to access online instruction and agree to fully comply with the requirements herein.* (This letter, in full, is attached to this correspondence.)

VIRTUAL MEETINGS: TEAM CONSULTS AND IEP PLANNING

According to the DESE, in circumstances where an IEP Team meeting may need to be convened during this time, when IEP teams are not able to meet in person due to health and safety considerations while schools are closed, districts should convene IEP Team meetings telephonically or virtually. If you choose to engage in a virtual meeting of any kind, you will be asked to complete our Virtual Team Meeting Consent and Release Form (a copy is attached to this correspondence). Not all meetings requested need to be IEP meetings. Below, please find some examples of different types of meetings that may meet your needs during this closure. This list is not exhaustive and is not intended to limit meeting requests. It is intended to serve as a means to support effective communication. *Should you desire a meeting with your child's team, please email the Team Chair for your child's school and they can support the scheduling and organization.* Contact information for these individuals can be located at the end of this document.

MEETING TYPE 1: Teacher/Parent Conference	
Possible Purpose	Parents and one or two teachers conference regarding a student's engagement in the remote learning process. This meeting can be scheduled by contacting either your child's general education teacher or special education liaison.
Possible Goal	To understand parent concerns and offer some feedback or further direction as necessary.
Possible Outcome	Parents and teachers develop a common understanding of student expectations and access to instruction.
Possible Follow Up	Teachers and parents may not need to meet again until requested; they may agree to meet again at a specified time; they may decide to schedule a Team meeting.
Possible Documentation	Document the communication through an N1 if the student is on an IEP AND document on the District Special Education Documentation Form.

MEETING TYPE 2: Consultation	
Possible Purpose	Parents and a related service provider (working with the student) conference regarding the student's engagement in the remote learning process. This meeting can be scheduled by directly contacting the direct service provider (e.g. Speech and Language Pathologist).
Possible Goal	To understand parent concerns and offer some feedback or further direction as necessary.
Possible Outcome	Parents and the service provider develop a common understanding of student expectations and access to instruction. The service provider may adjust remote learning objectives following this consultation.
Possible Follow Up	Service providers and parents may not need to meet again until requested; or they may agree to meet again at a specified time; or they may decide to schedule a Team meeting.
Possible Documentation	Document the communication through an N1 AND document on the District Special Education Documentation Form.

MEETING TYPE 3: Team Planning and Discussion	
Possible Purpose	Parents who would like to start initial discussions regarding transitions and services for next school year can have preliminary discussions. IEPs will not be adjusted, but teams can still plan and make note of any changes that may need to be considered upon our return.

Possible Goal	To begin developing plans for transitions between schools: Pre-K to K, 5-6, 8-9, and from out of district into district.
Possible Outcome	Teams will document these recommendations so that when IEPs can be amended, there will be a foundation of information to refer to.
Possible Follow Up	Teams may not need to meet again until we return to school; they may agree to meet again at a specified time; they may decide to schedule a Team meeting.
Possible Documentation	Team liaison will document potential IEP amendments, an N1 will be written to summarize the meeting, and the liaison will add documentation to the District Special Education Documentation Form.

MEETING TYPE 4: Virtual Annual Review Meeting

Possible Purpose	If a previously scheduled annual review meeting was missed due to the school closure, the special education liaison or Team Chair Liaison will initiate communication with parents to see if they would like to proceed with a virtual annual review meeting. All initial and re-evaluation meetings are paused during the closure.
Possible Goal	To follow and maintain IEP timelines.
Possible Outcome	While the current services will not change, the team may discuss potential service changes when we return to school.
Possible Follow Up	The team chairperson (e.g., special education liaison or school psychologist) will follow up with the parents upon the return to school. Another team meeting may or may not be necessary.
Possible Documentation	The team chairperson (e.g., special education teacher or school psychologist) will write an N1 letter documenting the team's discussion. The meeting will also be logged in the District Special Education Documentation Form.

WRITING IEPS DURING THIS PROLONGED SCHOOL CLOSURE

During this time of remote learning, IEPs do not need to be amended to reflect the changes in service delivery or methodology for instruction. Teams will need to determine, on an individual basis, if a new IEP should be generated. These decisions should be made thoughtfully as you are not advised to alter services or due dates during this temporary closure. Current Performance is going to be extremely difficult for teachers to determine, service dates and service recommendations will not be adjusted during this period of closure. If you need a copy of the Procedural Safeguards, please use this link: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/prb/>

EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR SERVICES

Students who currently have ESY services on their IEP will continue to be eligible for services due to “stay put” provisions. For those students who have not been made eligible for ESY services, it is too early to determine the nature and scope of regression caused by this extended closure. Please document the team’s discussion regarding any concerns about potential regression in the N1 as well as any parent concerns.

EVALUATIONS

In person evaluations will not be completed during this time of school closure. All timelines for initial and reevaluation evaluations are suspended and will resume when school is back in session. If a referral for evaluation is received during school closure, please reach out to your school psychologist so that they can track and organize any referrals, however, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, timelines stating ‘*school days*’ will be suspended and resume upon resumption of school. As a result, the Office of Student Services, as well as building teams, will track referral and send a communication to the families identifying the current situation and next steps.

PROGRESS REPORTS

Progress Reports will not be completed during this school closure, unless otherwise directed by the DESE.

FUTURE CORRESPONDENCE

I’m sure that many questions will continue to come to mind. Please know that the Department of Student Services will be working on the following topics in the coming weeks.

- ⇒ Extended School Year Services
- ⇒ Transition Plans for those students moving to a new school in September
- ⇒ Initial and Reevaluation Testing and Meetings
- ⇒ Home Services
- ⇒ Compensatory Services
- ⇒ Updating the Procedural Manual to reflect our plans upon return
- ⇒ Coordinating large volumes of team meetings

Team Chair Contact Information	
Pre-School	Ms. Elizabeth Costanza ecostanza@hinghamschools.org
South Elementary School	Ms. Kim Kerr kkerr@hinghamschools.org
Plymouth River School	Dr. Brett Bolger bbolger@hinghamschools.org
East Elementary School	Dr. Katherine Florek kflorek@hinghamschools.org
Foster Elementary School	Ms. Elizabeth Curran ecurran@hinghamschools.org
Hingham Middle School 6-7	Dr. Maura Albrecht malbrecht@hinghamschools.org
Hingham Middle & High School 8&9	Dr. Linda Kelly

	lkelly@hinghamschools.org
Hingham High School	Ms. Laura Bennett lbennet@hinghamschools.org

It is our hope that this documentation answers many of the questions you have at this juncture. We will continue to update you with any changes to our remote learning plans should there be additional guidance by the DESE. Again, I appreciate your patience while we redefine pedagogy and develop platforms for asynchronous learning. This is highly complex, creative work and while we are embracing the opportunity to stretch ourselves professionally, we appreciate your support and patience while we navigate through this remarkable shift in the science of teaching.

Be well,



Dr. Suzanne Vinnes
Director of Student Services

Enclosures: 1 - Remote Learning Opportunities Notification and Guidance

cc: Hingham Public Schools Administrative Team

REMOTE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES NOTIFICATION AND GUIDANCE

Dear Special Education Community,

During this period of school closure and the provision of remote, asynchronous learning opportunities, students are expected to participate in these services if possible. Please reach out to us as soon as possible if you anticipate or become aware of any issues with your child accessing the remote opportunities provided by the District.

In accordance with state and federal laws, including the Massachusetts Wiretapping Act and FERPA, parents and students must refrain from recording any and all remote lessons. Exceptions may be made on an individual basis due to special circumstances, and only with the consent of everyone involved. In addition, while parents/ guardians are permitted to observe online instruction in a non-disruptive manner, to the extent that remote learning opportunities provide access to confidential student information, all participants agree, by participating in this remote learning opportunity, to refrain from disseminating any confidential student information about other student participants with any and all third parties. *By participating in the remote learning opportunities, consent to this request is hereby provided.* Similarly, we ask everyone in our school community to recognize that video conferences and other online services will be taking place in the homes of the educators and students who participate in the calls (i.e., Team Meetings), and to be mindful of everyone's right to privacy. Parents/ guardians should take all precautions to safeguard personal or private information that they do not wish to be disclosed.

Cyber-bullying, harassment, discrimination, and abuse of the remote learning process will not be tolerated and may result in suspension from remote learning, as well as additional consequences when school resumes. *By accessing these services, the District recognizes that you and your child consent to access online instruction and agree to fully comply with the requirements herein.* We appreciate your time and attention to this notice.

Sincerely,



Dr. Suzanne Vinnes
Director of Student Services

