Spencer East Brookfield Regional School District

Student Services Department

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SEBRSD Community:

First and foremost, I hope this email finds you and your loved ones doing well and staying healthy in the “new normal” in which we are currently living. We will get through this and we will do so together. As you have likely heard, Governor Baker announced that schools in Massachusetts will remain closed through the end of the 2019-2020 school year. While perhaps not unexpected and certainly a decision that we support as safety must come first, it brings with it much sadness, just the same. We miss our SEB students and SEB staff. But, as declared by the Governor, we will not reopen this school year, therefore it is necessary upon all of us to continue to do our best and I am confident we will do just that!

SEBRSD staff continue to communicate with students and families designated as receiving special education services on a regular basis. We cannot provide the same level of individualized service as we could if school were in session. We are working to provide support so all students can access the enrichment activities. We are closely monitoring guidelines from state and federal education officials.

**Special Education Evaluation Timelines While Schools are Closed**

The Department recognizes that school closures may impact the ability of school districts to meet the 30-day timeline for conducting evaluations in addition to the 45 school working day timeline to develop an IEP after receipt of a parent’s written consent to evaluation or reevaluation. We encourage school teams and parents to work collaboratively and creatively to meet IEP timeline requirements. Districts are encouraged to work with parents to reach mutually agreeable extensions of timelines, as appropriate. (3-26-2020 MA DESE FAQs for Special Education)

**IEP Team Meetings**

It is not necessary for a district to convene an IEP Team to provide learning opportunities and services to students with disabilities during this period of extended school closures because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The current IEP will remain in effect until a new IEP is developed and accepted, irrespective of the expired date reflected in the IEP forms. (3-26-2020 MA DESE FAQs for Special Education)

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 using technologies such as Zoom. Districts must consider whether all IEP team members, particularly parents, have access to necessary technology and accommodations to allow remote participation. Districts should ensure that interpreters are provided during telephonic or virtual IEP team meetings when the parents primary language is not English. (3-26-2020 MA DESE FAQs for Special Education)

**Service Modes and Considerations**

Each service mode comes with a set of benefits and challenges. Below is a brief description of some of those considerations by service model.

**Service Types and Considerations**

In some cases, specific service delivery types have additional considerations. Below is a brief description of some of those considerations by service type.

**Occupational Therapy (OT)/Physical Therapy (PT) Services**

Implementation of OT and PT services is almost always done in a face-to-face, in-person context. Given that this mode of delivery may not be available at this time, virtual instruction may be a viable option as well as pre- recorded activities or a take home packet. If the student is using a sensory diet or sensory breaks during the day, the therapist may send home a visual schedule with the exercises the student will be performing. Complicated tasks may be broken down into a visual task analysis for students to reference. Any exercises that can be dangerous if done incorrectly should not be attempted during virtual instruction.

A parent/guardian/caretaker should plan to be present, facilitate movement activities, and provide assistance throughout the therapy sessions. The student may benefit from access to art and craft supplies such as pencils, crayons, glue, playdoh, child scissors, beads, puzzles, and blocks as needed. Therapists may also be available to consult with parents/caregivers to provide additional support and resources during this time.

**Speech and Language Services**

Speech and language services may be delivered by virtual or telephone consultation and/or instruction. Students may require supervision from a parent or caregiver to facilitate sessions with direct instruction from the Speech and Language Pathologist (SLP) or Speech and Language Assistant if the student is unable to independently access the electronic device or needs additional attention/behavior support during sessions. Attention and behavior support could include breaks, snacks, and reinforcers such as stickers or time to play with a preferred toy. Students and caregivers may need to consult with the SLP on selecting an appropriate environment for sessions, seating/positioning in front of the camera, using the online platform’s tools and functions, and general expectations for virtual sessions. Students may also need training on the proper way to video chat and how to appropriately position themselves in front of the camera so that the SLP can see their mouth and facial movements.

**Behavior Services (BCBA)**

Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA) services may be provided to students who currently receive consultation service. These services will be a consultative model and must be conducted with the parent or legal guardian. The purpose of these services is to support behavior plans and procedures in the home environment to promote student success. Meetings will focus on parent concerns and actionable behavior analytic strategies to use in the home such as reinforcement systems, prompt fading, visual schedules, etc. Virtual BCBA consultative services will be most effective in an environment where the parent or legal guardian is able to actively participate without interruptions. Ideally, the parent or legal guardian should have access to the internet and a technology device (i.e. laptop, smart phone, computer.

We fully recognize the challenge this has placed on all of you and on our staff. We also know that TOGETHER, we can do great things...after all, WE ARE SEB!

Please continue to follow all of the recommended guidelines, including practicing social distancing and washing your hands regularly, take care of yourselves and your loved ones, check in on your neighbors (remotely) and please stay well. STAY SEB STRONG.

In closing, we ask that you continue to be well and stay safe. Our SEB community will continue to rally together in the weeks ahead. During this tough time, as we always do, we will move forward together and support one another as one. And as always thank you for your support of the Spencer-East Brookfield Regional School District.

Be Well,

Kara A. Westerman M.Ed.,M.S.,CCC-SLP