



October 2, 2020

Greetings Brunswick Families!

I hope this communication finds you well, and enjoying the fall season. I am writing to share with you some updates regarding special education in Brunswick since I joined the team on September 14, 2020.

First, I want to let you know that I have prioritized, in these first few weeks, efforts to connect with my Special Education team members, either virtually or in person, and to become familiar with our Department's schools. To these ends, I have been fortunate to conduct a number of school visits, during which I utilize proper personal protective equipment (PPE), hand sanitizer, and social distancing techniques. These visits have been instrumental in helping me develop a sense of the special education practices in Brunswick, and have allowed me to meet some of our students, whose energy and evident joy in attending school have already served to inspire and sustain my work!

Secondly, I want to offer some clarification regarding special education service delivery for our students during these challenging times. Special educators must, first and foremost, comply with the health and safety guidelines issued by the Maine Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Maine Department of Education (DOE), and the Brunswick School Department in order to ensure the continued well-being of students and staff. However, due to schools' legal obligations under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), special educators also must ensure they:

- Support the social emotional wellness of students,
- Facilitate student access to both virtual and live general education settings,
- Provide specially designed instruction and related services,
- Collect data to both track progress and inform instruction, and
- Facilitate student inclusion in the least restrictive environment as per their IEPs.

As such, Brunswick's Student Services Department is working to balance these key responsibilities in as efficient and effective a manner as possible. Student IEPs require that, in some instances, students be pulled from their regular education classrooms to receive targeted instruction in their areas of need. In other instances, student IEPs require that students from self-contained classrooms be included in a regular education classroom with their peers for the purposes of academic or functional skill instruction. In an effort to follow the cohort model instituted by Brunswick's schools, special educators will continue to maintain a careful awareness of student interactions, work to provide services to students in "like" groups as often as possible, and utilize creative ways, such as ZOOMing into other classrooms, to support inclusion. Please note, however, there may be increased contact between special education students in different cohorts due to educators' need to group students for the purposes of the provision of appropriate special education and related services. All necessary precautions, as

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related to established social distancing, hygiene, and personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements, as well as contact tracing, are being utilized throughout any and all student and staff interactions.

Thirdly, I want to draw your attention to our Special Education Resource site (<https://sites.google.com/maine.edu/bsd-special-ed-resources/home>), which is designed to support the efforts of our special educators, and our school communities, to foster student progress through the provision of appropriate special education programs. The site, which is admittedly a work in progress, consists of a number of different sections, including, but not limited to *COVID-19 Special Education Resources*, *Parent Resources*, *General Educator Resources*, and *Paperwork and Compliance Resources*. I encourage you to visit the Resource site often, as it will be constantly updated as new resources are developed, and new understandings arise.

Lastly, I want to share with you a few specific examples of the fine work occurring within our special education programs. In Ms. Parker's classroom at HBS, students are excited to add links to their paper chains through mastery of key functional skills, and are learning about individual and collective resilience. In the realm of speech therapy, our speech therapists are brainstorming creative ways for students to practice social communication skills, such as through the use of video-conferencing between students while in school. In Mr. Barron's classroom at BHS, students are participating in read-alouds and enjoying associated discussions with peers who are either present in the classroom or joining the group via a virtual platform. Indeed, Brunswick's special educators are ensuring our students can safely access appropriate special education programming, one IEP at a time.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions or concerns at (207) 319-1900 or jyates@brunswicksd.org

Sincerely,

Jess Yates, Ph.D.
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