

April 6, 2020

To our valued families,

Most importantly, we hope this email finds you and your family safe and healthy. We fully appreciate the impact the mandated public health closures have had upon all families and truly everyone in our society. We understand that this impact is particularly complex for families of students with disabilities. We appreciate your understanding, collaboration and support as we navigate this difficult time as a school community. This letter is provided as a complement to the primary communications you have been receiving from our school district superintendent, Dr. John Doherty, as well as the communications that have been or will be sent by building principals.

Consistent with federal and state guidelines, while our school district is closed during this health crisis, we are continuing to shift to the next phase of distance learning and in addition to personal support and connections with students and families, to provide directed remote learning opportunities. As the health and safety of students, families and staff is paramount during this challenging time, we will provide educational services in a different manner than if your child were physically present in his/her school program. Our special education staff have been working hard to identify alternative and creative ways to provide instruction and related educational services. While we acknowledge this move towards a different way of learning will be a challenge for us all, the Reading Public Schools is committed to working with everyone as we navigate and problem solve the new demands during this unprecedented situation.

We are confident in the resilience of our students, families and staff to persevere through the unexpected situations we will all encounter, and trust that we will continue to build upon our mutual goal of supporting children in their educational journey. This segment of the journey will have more unexpected turns than those we are more accustomed to, as the current situation has not provided us with a proper roadmap; thus we are pioneers together. As pioneers in this leg of the journey, it is more important than ever to support one another's efforts and stay focused upon our shared goal - promoting your child's growth and development.

Please know we are doing the best we can under these novel circumstances to ensure students have equitable access to educational supports. We appreciate your patience, understanding, and partnership in this process. We will continue to work hard to help families keep students engaged in practice of previously learned skills and materials and to make these materials as accessible as feasible. Special education staff are happy to guide you on how to make activities more accessible for your individual child. Teachers and providers will continue to reach out to support you and your child. We are working diligently to ensure that we have redundancy within our system so that students can continue to receive services if individual staff are not able to work during this time.

Dr. Doherty shared the following information in a recent letter to families:  
The Massachusetts Department of Education has issued guidance to all school districts regarding the provision of special education and related services (OT/PT/SLP/Counselor/BCBA) to support and maintain students' current levels of progress as best as possible (see attachment). One model ensures that student accommodations and modifications are present in

enrichment based learning activities and lessons as designed by the general educator or sub-separate teacher. The second model speaks to the provision of instruction and services remotely. A major tenant of this is to provide supports and resources to ensure accommodations and modifications are addressed in enrichment-based learning activities designed by general educators, special education teachers and/or sub-separate teachers. The goal is to provide supplemental resources and materials for families to use at home. Supplemental materials/strategies/activities will be provided by the special educator and related service provider for you to do at home with your child.

Remote instruction is another model, which continues to provide a continuum of approved methods to deliver services which may include but are not limited to: online virtual instruction (lessons with whole class, small groups or individual), pre-recorded lessons, audio instruction/therapy, telephone or internet based parent consultation (part of the Liaison/primary contact weekly communication). You can expect that educators and related service providers will develop a Continuum of Learning plan which may contain a variation of services/supports in both models of service delivery based on what is feasible for your family and child. These plans will begin to be distributed to families during the week of 4/13/20. Because each plan is individualized it will take 2 to 3 weeks to ensure all of the plans are completed to support each individual student.

At present, the Reading Public Schools has a plan to hold remote IEP team meetings, where required, for example, if your child's current IEP has expired or another type of IEP team meeting had been previously scheduled for a date during our school closure period. Our Team Chairpersons are currently assessing the status of all students' active IEPs and we will provide you an update on this topic in the near future. This is also an area national experts and professionals expect Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos to address in her response to the CARES act. Please know the Team Chairpersons remain available to answer any questions about your child's special education support and continuation of learning plan and any previously planned team meeting status. Please reach out to them with any questions.

A few details to help you understand how, when, and what we will communicate over the coming days/weeks:

#### Week of 4/6:

- Student's individual team members will provide more specific and personalized learning opportunities for students.
- Student's individual team members will reach out via email, either as a 'group' email or as individuals, to each family to seek information about ways in which parents/families would like staff to prioritize their work for that student.
- Team chairpersons will review every student's current/active IEP status and develop a plan to reschedule those previously scheduled meetings that were cancelled due to school closure; they will also develop a plan for conducting team meetings for those IEPs due for an annual review in the next few weeks.
- Office Hours with the Director and Assistant Director will be offered on Thursday, 4/9, 12-2pm. The link to a doodle poll to sign up for a time is below. Upon selecting a time,

a link to an individual 'Microsoft TEAMS' virtual meeting will be sent.

<https://doodle.com/poll/3i7wpybe4cm8kkdh>

- Team Chairpersons for any student whose program is located in an out-of-district school, will continue to contact the private or public school to ascertain their plans for instituting a remote learning plan. The Team Chairperson will continue to ensure you receive direct communication as soon as possible about that plan and what to expect from the out-of-district school.
- As suggested by DESE, staff will be developing a Continuation of Learning Plan for each student and will use IEP goals as the guide to focus these plans. Student Continuation of Learning Plans will include a combination of on-line and off-line activities. These documents are not IEPs, but a guide for how a student's learning needs will be addressed during the schools' closure.

Week of 4/13:

- Student Continuation of Learning plans will begin to be provided to families, along with a schedule of activities for each day; these schedules will include direct contact with a combination of educators familiar with your child. Please note that these projected/planned schedules may be adjusted and/or supplemented as the week progresses and staff members review student work, participation and response (and any unexpected obstacles), and consider feedback from parents. These plans will begin to be distributed to families during the week of 4/13/20. Because each plan is individualized it will take 2 to 3 weeks to ensure all of the plans are completed to support each individual student. Please note the students will continue to receive remote learning opportunities the plan will assist in formalizing the work.
- Should your child's IEP require a team meeting review during the currently scheduled school closure period, you will receive notification from your child's team chairperson regarding the plan.
- If your child was in the process of either an Initial Eligibility or Re-evaluation eligibility evaluation process during this school closure period, you will receive information from your child's chairperson regarding the status and a plan for completion.
- An open 'drop in' session with the Director and Assistant Director will be offered during this week and a date will be provided as soon as possible. There will be a link to a doodle poll to sign up for a time and you will be sent a link to the 'Microsoft TEAMS' virtual meeting.

*\* Please note, references to the scheduling of team meetings in the above bullet points will be further informed by our review of students' current IEP status and any guidance from MA DESE and/or the federal education office.*

We are sending you heartfelt compassion given this period of personal, community, national and global crisis. We are genuinely concerned for the safety and well being of each of our students and staff and their families . It is not lost on us that this situation is very unsettling for our most vulnerable students and their families and caregivers. We are committed to your child's success and want to express our sincere commitment to continued diligent work and partnership to get through this pandemic together. Compassion, empathy, respect, and a

commitment to collaboration will serve us well towards that end. Please be assured the delivery of special education services to students is of paramount importance, and we look forward to working together for the educational benefit of your child(ren) while safeguarding the health and safety of your child, your family members, other students and our valued staff.

Thank you for your ongoing partnership as we navigate this new way of learning.

Jennifer Stys, Director of Student Services  
Allison Wright, Assistant Director of Student Services

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Liaison (Primary Educational Contact - i.e. special education teacher or SLP)**

**I'm not sure who my liaison is? What should I do?** If you are not sure who your liaison is please email the special education team chairperson in your building. As part of your learning plan the contact information for all of the service providers will be listed.

**No one has contacted me about my child since the emergency closure? What can I do?** If you have not received any communication since the emergency closure, please email the special education team chairperson in your building. Team chairperson emails can be found [here](#).

### **IEP Services**

**Can I expect an individual service/lesson (i.e.: a specialized reading program, discrete trial training, or a specialized program used by one of the related service providers) to be administered remotely during the closure?** In these circumstances, services will be provided differently than they are when school is fully operational. Staff will continue to target IEP goal areas with learning activities designed to target those goals/objectives.

**Are students required to participate in special education services?** Like with all of our continuity of learning plans, we are giving families/students services and programming that they can and should access to the best of their family's unique situation.

**Will the special educator and RSP-related service provider (RSPs are Speech/Language Pathologists, OTs, PTs, Counselors/Psychologists) match the frequency and duration as provided in the IEP?** In these circumstances, services will be provided differently than they are

when school is fully operational. Service delivery will not 'match' all that is specified in the IEP.

**How will summer services be addressed?** While the Reading Public Schools is currently focused upon the immediate educational needs of students, we are also looking ahead to this summer and concurrently developing plans for summer programming. As this pandemic is novel with critical implications, we plan to follow further public health and governmental guidance regarding safety measures for students, staff and families in the coming weeks. We will provide more guidance in the upcoming weeks regarding summer services, 'Extended School Year' programs.

**Are students eligible for compensatory services following these extended closures?**

DESE anticipates providing further guidance regarding compensatory/additional services before schools re-open in accordance with any further advice on this topic from the United States Department of Education. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos has 30 days from the date the CARES act was signed (3/27/20) to provide her recommendations for flexibility regarding some IDEA requirements.

**My child has significant disabilities. I'm not sure if online learning will be an option.**

Remote learning comes in many forms and is not always online learning. Your child's teacher/related service provider will work with you to plan several options.

**How much time should I expect will be allocated for instruction and services?** Frequency will vary depending on program and grade level. Adhering to state and district guidance, you can expect your child to receive a remote learning experience that encompasses half a day (approximately 3 hours). Please note: this is not all teacher directed. Students can engage in self-directed learning.

**Can I record the lessons?** Audio or video recording of online and/or telephonic lessons are not permitted without prior written authorization from the Reading Public Schools.

**How will my child's social-emotional and/or behavioral needs be addressed during this time?** Your child's service providers will work with you to address any concerns you may have about social-emotional/behavioral challenges.

**Will my child receive office hours from their teacher every week?** The staff is going to be available for questions and additional support. Not all of the staff will be holding 'office hours' weekly, but will be able to schedule individual times to provide support.

**Will my child receive direct teletherapy from Speech and Language, OT and PT?** At this point, our main service delivery model will not include universal teletherapy. However, we will continue to work with families and staff to identify the appropriate models to students and

families.

## **Individualized Education Programs**

**Is consent required to provide support and services remotely?** No. According to the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, consent is not required. The remote continuation of learning plans are not a replacement of IEPs, but a tool to provide ongoing educational services during this unprecedented time of the pandemic crisis.

**Will Reading Public Schools hold IEP meetings during the emergency closure?** RPS will provide more guidance in the upcoming weeks about the scheduling of virtual IEP meetings. You can expect to hear from your team chairperson regarding meeting rescheduling. If you have any specific questions team chairperson emails can be found [here](#).

**Will the Team reconvene to make changes to the IEP?** No. DESE has stated that there is not a need to reconvene the Team and make changes to the IEP during this closure.

**Will the Continuation of Learning Plan service delivery models change the IEP or impact “stay put” rights?** This does not change the IEP or impact “stay put” rights.

**When can I expect to see my child’s Progress Report?** At this point, Report cards at the middle school and high school levels will be sent out at the end of the year combining Quarter 3 and Quarter 4 and will include progress reports. Elementary report cards were just administered with progress report information prior to our school closure. We will determine whether end of the year report cards and progress reports at the elementary level will be administered based on when we get a return date.

## **Technology**

**Are the platforms (i.e.; Microsoft TEAMS) secure?** Microsoft TEAMS provides a more secure educational environment. RPS has an education license with Microsoft Teams, which gives us privacy protections. Because we have this license, it is protected under the guidelines of the Children Internet Protection Act (CIPA) and the Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule (COPPA). In order to keep our students and staff safe and the only tool that we have that allows us to safely videoconference is Microsoft Teams. We do not have an educational license for Facetime or additional platforms.

**My child still does not have a device or access to the internet. How will he/she/they receive this?** If your student does not have a device or access to the internet, please contact

your child's principal. We will be able to provide an appropriate technology device for families that do not have access to a device. For families that do not have wifi in their homes, Comcast is offering free WiFi for everyone, with hotspots available to all, including non-Xfinity subscribers. To access the service, look for the "xfinitywifi" network name in a list of hotspots. For more information, go to [www.xfinity.com/wifi](http://www.xfinity.com/wifi). You can also receive free internet services for 60 days and then it's \$9.95 per month after that if you qualify. (In order to qualify to pay just \$9.95 per month, you must be eligible for public assistance programs such as National School Lunch Program, Housing Assistance, Medicaid, SNAP, SSI, and others.) Please read more at this link: <https://www.internetessentials.com/>

**I don't know how to use technology? Will RPS offer guidance and training for parents.?** If you have questions about the technology needed, please contact your child's principal and they will coordinate technology support with members of the Instructional Technology Team.

## **MCAS**

**MCAS is part of the competency determination for graduating high school. What will that look like for students graduating?** Original MCAS dates were to occur during our school closure window to date. RPS is still waiting for guidance from the state DESE about whether MCAS will be delayed or canceled and what if any implication there may be on MCAS as part of graduation requirements.

**If students fall behind in high school (in order to pass the MCAS for the following year), how will RPS provide the necessary content and instruction to close the gap?** RPS teachers are doing everything possible to target the most essential content/concepts for learning activities during this emergency closure. When schools reopen, we will provide further guidance as to how staff will address the gap (if any) that may have impacted your student during this time. Additionally, members of the Special Education department will be working with curriculum leaders to review curriculum choices and compacting of content that may need to occur for next year.

**What is the status of my child's MCAS ALT.?** Original MCAS ALT. submission dates were to occur during our school closure times. RPS is still waiting for guidance from the state DESE about whether MCAS ALT will be delayed or canceled.

## **Assignments/Grading**

**Will work assigned remotely during the closure be graded (either by general educators or special educators)?** At this time, the district is **NOT** grading any assignments. Students will not

be penalized for not completing work. Students are expected to work on assignments. Families should reach out to their teacher/liaisons if completion of work if students are unable to participate for any reason. Please refer to the remote learning plan for your child's grade level for more specific information. These can be found [here](#).

### **Additional Parent Support**

**Is there a support group I can join or a way I can connect with families to share and learn about resources during this time?** For more information about groups and networking with other families, please contact our SEPAC directly. If you are not already part of the SEPAC community, you may reach out by sending an email to [sepacreading@gmail.com](mailto:sepacreading@gmail.com), by [following SEPAC on Facebook](#) and set preferences to ensure that you see SEPAC's updates, or by visiting [SEPAC's website](#) for information that they sent out earlier in the crisis.

For additional support around Mental or Behavioral Health services and where to access resources please reach out to our District Behavioral Health Coach Lauren Sabella SAC, LMHC. by emailing her directly at [lauren.sabella@reading.k12.ma.us](mailto:lauren.sabella@reading.k12.ma.us) Information about the District Behavioral Health Coach can be found [here](#).

Additionally, Dr. Doherty included the following resources in a communication of how families may access support:

Contact your behavioral health provider to see if they can schedule a telehealth visit. Telehealth is a virtual therapy session. Many providers are now offering this option.

- Contact [Samaritans](#) 24/7. **Call or text our 24/7 helpline any time at 1-877-870-4673.**
- Contact [Crisis Text Line](#) by **texting HOME to 741741**
- Visit the new [Massachusetts Network of Care](#) website to locate behavioral health resources in your area.
- Contact SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline. The Helpline provides 24/7, 365-day-a-year crisis counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters. Call **1-800-985-5990** or **text TalkWithUs to 66746** to connect with a trained crisis counselor.
- Contact the Massachusetts Emergency Services Program/Mobile Crisis Intervention (ESP/MCI) – **1-877-382-1609** ([read more about this program](#))
- Interface : 888-244-6843 for resource information and/or provider referrals from a mental health professional.
- Elliot Crisis  
:<http://www.eliotchs.org/services/outpatient-services/emergency-services/>
- Mental Health and Well Being Partners:  
<https://sites.google.com/arlington.k12.ma.us/mentalhealthandwellbeing/partners>

- Reading Coalition for Prevention and Support :Visit the website for resources and services available.<https://www.reading.k12.ma.us/community/readingcoalition>