

Dear Families,

I want to first take a moment to thank you for your continued partnership and collaboration during this extraordinary time. For all of us, the focus has been on family, friends, and survival. I am hoping that you are all well. I am sure that if you are at all like me, you are trying to take care of everyone else, making sure that all of their needs are being met without taking a moment to breathe and think about your own needs. I always try to remind myself that I cannot help others until I help myself first. With that in mind, I hope that you are taking the time to take care of yourself!

As we try to understand the new world we are living in during our school closure I wanted to keep you updated on the ongoing work being provided and developed by the Special Education Department to support our students and families:

- The Special Education Department has been working to collect a variety of resources to support our students and families. A link to these resources was just uploaded onto the **Somerville Public Schools'** website (www.somerville.k12.ma.us/home-learning), under **Home Learning Resources**. Near the bottom of the page under **Cross Curriculum Ideas and Accessibility Resources**, you will find a link to **Recommended Websites from our Special Education Department**. All of the resources on this page are helpful and available to all students.
- Currently, Special Education staff are checking their emails daily to respond to student, staff, and family questions and concerns.
- The Special Education staff have also been in contact with students and families to provide enrichment activities and resources to support students in accordance with individual student needs. We recognize that this may include multiple staff members reaching out to you and that this may be overwhelming. Please let us know how we can best assist you in getting the supports you need without overwhelming you during this challenging time.
- The Special Education Department continues to work with our fellow instructional colleagues and Principals to ensure equitable access to all resources and supports.
- The Special Education Department Heads and Facilitators continue to meet daily with both me and Marilyn Vrontas, Assistant Director of Special Education, to ensure that we are keeping updated on local advisories from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).
- I have also been participating in weekly conference calls with DESE regarding special education timelines and IEP related questions.

As we begin to enter a new phase with the realization that schools will remain close until at least May 4, 2020, we have begun to plan for remote learning. We recognize that remote learning will not replace the sense of community and support provided within a classroom and school but are beginning to plan for our new opportunity to engage students. We are actively working to brainstorm ways to provide services to students and how to individualize these services based on student needs. These services will look different based on student need and parent/caregiver engagement. **It is important to note that IEP services will not be delivered exactly as the IEP states.** Our focus will be on supporting students and their parents/caregivers in various ways which may include paper, online, and/or telephone formats. General education, special education, related service providers and paraprofessionals will be working together to ensure that student learning needs are being met and that modifications and accommodations are being provided. For additional information please see the accompanying FAQ

sheet issued by DESE on Thursday, March 26 regarding [serving students with disabilities](#) during the COVID-19 school closure.

This is a historic crisis in our world that presents so many unknowns. We will work collaboratively to embrace these unknowns and work and shift our usual way of doing business. I am sure this will not be easy or smooth but we will continually strive to improve our work in this new realm. We are blessed to have such amazing staff, families, students, and community as our partners. If anyone can make this happen, Somerville can because Somerville leads the Way!

Throughout these turbulent first few weeks as we are trying to embrace our new normal, I would like to acknowledge the wonderful activities, connections, and resources our special education staff members have been using to engage students and families. I have had the pleasure of seeing some amazing morning meetings on YouTube, ClassDojo activities, etc. It is how we come together during difficult times that defines us as a community. It is my goal to continue to try to communicate with you weekly to keep you posted on our ongoing efforts to support our students and families and to keep you informed of new updates from DESE. There are many more unanswered questions that we will be sure to update you as we get further clarification.

The Special Education Department is here to support you without adding undue stress and anxiety for you and, most importantly, for your children. Please do not hesitate to contact me!

Please stay safe!

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