

September 20, 2021

Dear Families,

I am excited to be writing to you today in celebration of our return to school full time for the 2021/2022 school year. It has been a busy first couple of weeks getting settled but we are off to a great start. I hope that you were able to spend some time with family and friends enjoying the beautiful weather and long summer days. We had a busy summer of reorganizing, hiring, and preparing for another outstanding school year. It is amazing to be surrounded by such dedicated educators focused on assuring success for all students.

We are happy to announce that we have been able to do some administrative restructuring to better meet the needs of our students. **Will Verbits** joins us as the new Assistant Director of Special Education for Services and Supports. **Marissa MacDonald** has assumed the new role of Assistant Director of Special Education for Instruction and Programming. We also hired a Special Education Department Head who will cover both Healey and West Somerville Neighborhood School, **Ashley Pennell**. Each of these new administrators comes to us with extensive experience in public education. We are excited by their diverse experience and the passion and knowledge they bring to Somerville. You may have also noticed that my title has been expanded to Director of Special Education, Nursing, and Health Services. As of July 1st we are happy to welcome the School Nurses from the City Public Health Department to Somerville Public Schools. This has been a long awaited transition and one that we know will help to further support and enhance our services and supports for students.

A few important initiatives and program expansions have been launched for this school year. In order to maintain our focus on literacy instruction and our continued work with Melissa Orkin from Crafting Minds a new position of Special Education Literacy Specialist has also been created to actively support special educators. We are excited to have **Siobhan Healey** join us in this new role. Under the leadership of Marissa MacDonald, the instruction team has already met with Melissa Orkin to map out our focus on creating structured literacy routines using a combination of professional development and coaching.

The AIM Program (Adapt, Include, Motivate) for autism continues to expand. As a result of student needs we have added a kindergarten classroom and restructured an ECIP classroom at the Capuano School to meet the needs of the AIM students at both the Pre K and K levels. We also created an additional 1st/2nd grade classroom at Winter Hill Community Innovation School. The addition of these classrooms have resulted in an addition of an AIM Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) at the Capuano/WHCIS, as well as, an additional AIM Speech and Language Pathologist both at the Capuano and at WHCIS.

To support our special education students at Somerville High School who participate in the Career and Technical Education (CTE) program and to ensure access for all, we have added the role of a **CTE**

Transition Specialist to our Somerville High School Special Education team. We also hired 3 additional resource room teachers to support students and address the need for compensatory services due to the COVID-19 school closure. Two additional speech and language pathologists have also joined our team to address the need for additional compensatory services.

We will be posting on our Somerville Public Schools Special Education website a link to a Parent/Guardian letter from Russell Johnston, Senior Associate Commissioner of Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) regarding your child's IEP Team's need to discuss compensatory services. We are hoping to receive all of the translated documents in the next few weeks. In the meantime, most teams have been meeting with parents and guardians to discuss the potential need for compensatory services. We continue to assess student progress and collect data to ensure success for all students.

IEP meetings will be held virtually for the 2021/2022 school year unless an in-person meeting is requested by the family/guardian. We are committed to ensuring the safety for all members of our community and have found the use of virtual meetings to be beneficial for everyone. If you request an in-person meeting, we will make every effort to ensure a safe environment for the meeting to assure proper safety protocols including the use of masks and social distancing is adhered to within all school buildings.

In accordance with federal special education law, IDEA 2004, school districts must distribute **Parent's Notice of Procedural Safeguards** once per year to parents/guardians of students in special education. As you know, we provide copies of these safeguards at all IEP meetings and also send copies home with each proposed IEP. You will also find a copy of the Parent's Notice of Procedural Safeguards on our website. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us if you need an additional hard copy. If you have any questions regarding the contents of these Safeguards, please contact the appropriate Special Education Department Head/Facilitator. A list of Special Education Department Heads/Facilitators can be found on our website.

The Somerville Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) is an important resource and partner to many families in Somerville and also to our district and Special Education department, serving as an important school and family liaison. We invite you to learn more about SEPAC, resources and workshops they offer throughout the year, by visiting their website (www.somerville.k12.ma.us/ssepac)

I look forward to this new school year and to working collaboratively with parents and staff as we strive to achieve a common goal of ensuring a positive school experience and outcomes for all our students. Best wishes for a smooth beginning and an inspiring and successful school year!

Sincerely,

Christine Trevisone

Director of Special Education, Nursing, and Health Services
Somerville Public Schools