April 6, 2020

Dear Families,

I hope this letter finds you and your family well. I am reaching out to provide you with some updates regarding your child’s special education services. The special education department at Bristol-Plymouth Regional Technical School has been hard at work designing instructional materials and sharing online resources to support your student during this school closure period.

**A Progression of Special Education Services ~ March 16, 2020 - Present**

Following guidance from state and federal education departments, our primary goal over the past three weeks has been to provide **supports and resources** by:
- Working collaboratively with our general education colleagues in order to transfer from classroom based instruction to a remote learning model.
- Providing accommodations and modifications for the enrichment activities to ensure student access to the material.
- Communicating with students and parents through Google Classrooms, emails, and phone calls to ensure student access to the technology hardware and online resources.

In addition, our goal for this week and through the remainder of this school closure is to broaden our interaction with students by providing **instruction and services** to address IEP specific needs. While students begin working on assignments that will be counted for credit, special education staff are working to modify, scaffold, provide supplemental tools, and differentiate activities so they are able to access learning. Our related service providers will begin language, communication, and motor skill instruction, as well as counseling services. Any virtual sessions provided will be accompanied by independent activities to reinforce skill development during the closure. Instructional material will be a review of previously taught concepts. It is our hope that these activities will maintain continuity of learning and continue to provide opportunities for students to connect to learning and with each other to assist with the re-entry to school.

Within the week you will receive an Individual Remote Learning Plan designed for your student. This plan will include all the links and resources your student needs to access instruction.

**IEP Team Meetings**

IEP meetings that were scheduled over the past three weeks will be rescheduled and will be held remotely with parent consent. We will begin contacting families soon to set up these meetings. We plan to use Zoom for our conferences. You will find information attached about Zoom meetings. When school resumes we will work collaboratively with families to ensure that IEP timelines are met by following guidance from the Department of Education.
If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at acohen@bptech.org or 508-823-5151 ext. 114. Voice messages are checked periodically.

On behalf of the Special Education Department, I would like to extend my extreme gratitude for your patience and flexibility during this challenging and ever changing time.

Sincerely,

Amy Cohen
Special Education Coordinator

Parent Resources provided by DESE
http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/ed-resources.html#ele

Zoom Set-Up Video for Students and Parents
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7xXZxRDFUU

Frequently Asked Questions provided by DESE

Q: During the period of time a district is closed related to COVID-19, must the district provide special education services to students with disabilities?

The United States Department of Education (USED) has stated that during this national emergency “school districts must provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) consistent with the need to protect the health and safety of students with disabilities and those individuals providing education, specialized instruction, and related services to these students.”[i] DESE recognizes that these unprecedented circumstances may affect how all educational and related services and supports are provided. While USED and DESE will offer flexibility where possible, USED has emphasized many disability-related modifications and services may be effectively provided remotely or online.

Schools may not be able to provide all services in the manner they are typically provided pursuant to students’ IEPs. The provision of FAPE may include, as appropriate, special education and related services provided remotely through resources and supports (such as strategies, projects and packets provided to students matched with regular and ongoing communication from special education team members) and services and instruction (such as virtual, online, or telephonic instruction). During this period of school closure, districts should make every effort to use creative strategies to provide special education instruction and services to the extent feasible. Moreover, any educational opportunities offered to the general student population, including enrichment activities and resources, must be made accessible to students with disabilities.

Q: What are the district’s obligations to provide FAPE to students with disabilities during extended school closures related to this health emergency?

How a district will provide FAPE will look different during this unprecedented period of national and state emergency. While ensuring the health and safety of students and educators is a priority, it may not be feasible during the current period of school closures to provide, for example, hands-on physical therapy, occupational therapy, or tactile sign language services. However, many specialized instructional opportunities and related services may be modified to be effectively provided by sending resources and supports to students or online or
telephonically. Such forms of specialized instruction may include, for instance, accessible reading materials, speech and language services through video conferencing, and videos with accurate captioning. Moreover, districts may continue to implement many of the accommodations on a student’s IEP, such as extensions of time for assignments, large prin., and use of speech-to-text and other assistive technology.

Once school resumes, the district must review how the closure impacted the delivery of special education and related services to individual students and convene IEP Team meetings as necessary in order to make an individualized determination as to what compensatory services may be necessary, and to ensure the student receives FAPE prospectively.

Q: Does the district need to provide all services on a student’s IEP remotely?

During this national emergency, schools may not be able to provide all services in the same manner they are typically provided. Many disability-related modifications and services may be effectively provided remotely. These may include, for instance, extensions of time for assignments, videos with accurate captioning or embedded sign language interpreting, accessible reading materials, and many speech or language services through video conferencing. It is important to emphasize that federal disability law allows for flexibility in determining how to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities. The determination of how FAPE is to be provided may need to be different in this time of unprecedented national emergency.

Q: What types of services can be provided remotely?

USED has stated that the IDEA does not mandate specific methodologies. Where technology itself imposes a barrier to access or where educational materials simply are not available in an accessible format, educators may still meet their legal obligations by providing children with disabilities equally effective alternate access to the curriculum or services provided to other students. For example, if a teacher who has a blind student in her class is working from home and cannot distribute a document accessible to that student, she can distribute to the rest of the class an inaccessible document and, if appropriate for the student, read the document over the phone to the blind student or provide the blind student with an audio recording of a reading of the document aloud. DESE encourages parents, educators, and administrators to collaborate creatively to continue to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Consider practices such as distance instruction, teletherapy and tele-intervention, meetings held on digital platforms, online options for data tracking, and documentation. In addition, districts can provide resources and supports such as instructional packets, projects, and written assignments that are not dependent on students’ access to technology.

Q: How can the district meet special education evaluation timelines if schools are closed?

The Department recognizes that school closures may impact the ability of school districts to meet the 30-day timeline for conduct 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.

Q: A student’s IEP expires during the school closure period. Will it still be in effect?

Yes. 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.

Q: How can the district hold an IEP Team meeting if school is closed or Team members can’t meet face-to-face?
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.

Q: Do I need to make changes to the student's IEP to provide these services?

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.