



Elizabeth S. Fitzmaurice  
Assistant Superintendent for Student Services

Dear Families,

Enclosed you will find the most recent letter to families from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Senior Associate Commissioner, Russell Johnston. This letter contains much of the guidance and information that DESE has provided to districts in Massachusetts during the health crisis. I encourage you to read it so you are fully up to date.

I'd also like to take the opportunity to explain and clarify how NPS is planning to manage in light of the unexpected building closure and with the DESE guidance.

#### Services and Service Plans

You will learn in the DESE letter that Newton has aligned with the guidance that DESE issued. Service delivery during the building closure will look very different from actual IEP services provided in school, and the services are temporary for the duration of the building closure. Although service delivery will look different at this time and may not be provided at the same rate, NPS will provide services to the extent possible. NPS initiated service plans which are designed to provide you with notice of the services that your child will be receiving while at home. NPS was able to implement service plans a week prior to DESE requiring districts to use such plans. We also view the service plans as an opportunity for multiple service providers to coordinate their services and streamline communication to families on one document from special education.

#### Support Personnel

During the school closure it has been complicated to manage the distance learning format while also working out the expectations of everyone's role. We have had conversations about how to most effectively and equitably involve teaching assistant and behavior therapists in our new phase of distance learning. Some of you may have children whose IEP lists this type of support. Now that the schools' schedules and service plans have been largely designed, we have had the opportunity to examine how to utilize the skills of these NPS staff members. Primary and first instruction remains an appropriate role of the teachers and special educators/related service providers. Any support provided by teaching assistants and/or behavior therapists will primarily focus on practice of already acquired skills and strengthening maintenance and generalization of learned skills which is designed by the teachers while the teacher is present to deliver the instruction.

### Special Education Meetings

The DESE letter also outlines possibilities for virtual annual IEP meetings. Newton is committed to holding team meetings and is doing so in a methodical and thoughtful manner. Currently, our educators are prioritizing the provision of services to students and collaborating with general education teachers to ensure a supportive educational experience while school buildings are closed. While educators are focused on the most important priority of providing services to our students, our special education administrators are holding team meetings for emergency matters at this time. Decisions made at these meetings will be implemented once school resumes. All current active IEPs will continue to be active, even if the review date passes. Until the Team writes a new IEP, the previous IEP is the active IEP and it remains in place. If your child is in a transition year (meaning entering K or 6th or 9th grade) your current team will be in communication with you this spring after they have been able to complete their conversations with the receiving administrator. If you have a concern, please reach out to the administrator or team specialist that supports your child's school team.

### Special Education Evaluations

With respect to initial evaluations, where all necessary testing has not yet been completed, these meetings will be held once physical school is back in session after in person evaluations are completed. Re-evaluation meetings will be postponed as well. If before our schools closed, all necessary assessments were completed in full, and if all parties agree to hold the meeting virtually, the special education administrator in your child's building may convene the team.

Finally, DESE's Family Resource Toolbox referenced in the attached letter is a valuable source of information, which nicely complements the resources available on the Newton Public Schools website. The Student Services Office has posted many resources to help talk with children about COVID-19 and school closure on the [Student Services Resource Page](#), the [Family Resource Page](#), and the [Supporting Students through COVID-19](#) page.

If you have any questions, we are happy to speak with you. We always value our relationship as we collaborate on educational matters for your child.

Yours in service to education,

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