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**Celebrating Excellence**



August 19, 2020

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

As we prepare for the school reopening phase, we have taken the guidance and direction from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Our preparation during these past few weeks has been to develop a hybrid learning plan and a remote learning plan. Both plans have been created to accommodate family decisions that have been made or will be made. Understanding that remote learning does not replace the immediacy of in-person learning and discussion, we are striving to put together a hybrid and remote learning plan that will provide for richer, in-depth-learning to the best extent possible.

You will begin to hear and read more terminology used to describe digital learning. For instance, *synchronous learning* provides face-to-face instruction and opportunities for discussion with peers, facilitated by general and/or special education teachers. Synchronous learning conducted by the hybrid learning model also allows general and special education teachers and service providers the ability to tailor instruction to a learning format for each student, whether it be in-person or online (digital).

In some cases, hybrid classes may include asynchronous learning, online video conferencing or pre-recorded video instruction from teachers and service providers. Conversely, *asynchronous learning* can be used to supplement synchronous, face-to-face instruction. Pre-recorded lessons or demonstrations are most typically found within the model. Students are able to learn at their own pace, complete work, assignments, or projects.

Given our experience with remote learning during the spring and summer months, it is evident that our DLC population benefits most from consistency and direct teaching to the greatest degree possible.

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***To educate and challenge all learners in the Tewksbury Public School Community while supporting their development as well prepared and productive members of a diverse global society***

Guidance from DESE (July 9, 2020) has supported our concerns for these students. DESE has noted:

*Students must receive all services documented in their IEPs through in-person instruction, remote instruction, or a combination of both, with a strong emphasis on providing in-person instruction to the greatest extent possible, while abiding by the current necessary health and safety requirements. In particular, the Department urges schools and districts to prioritize in-person instruction for two particular groups of students with disabilities: preschool-aged students, and students with significant and complex needs. Remote learning is often more challenging for these students.*

*Special education students with complex and significant needs include:*

*Students already identified as “high needs” through the IEP process on the IEP form entitled “Primary Disability/Level of Need-PL3.” Such students must meet at least two of these criteria:*

- *Services provided outside of the general education classroom;*
- *Service providers are special education teachers and related service providers;*
- *Special education services constitute more than 75% of the student’s school day*
- *Students who cannot engage in remote learning due to their disability-related needs; and*
- *Students who primarily use aided and augmentative communication.*

In response to this guidance, we have reviewed student IEP’s and PL-3 placements to assist us in identifying the “high needs” of students who have met this guidance. By **Friday, August 21, 2020**, families will receive a letter by email notifying them that their child has been identified for four days in-person instruction.

Additionally, for those students who do not meet the criteria set forth by DESE, we are working to offer in-person options pending staff availability and scheduling. Families will receive a letter by email notifying them that their child has been identified by **Friday, August 28, 2020**, if not sooner.

There are a number of challenges ahead of us, and our thinking and planning includes:

- Professional development for the delivery of hybrid learning and remote learning with focus on robust in-person and remote instruction
- Training all special education faculty and staff on the new hybrid learning plan and remote learning plan
- Developing guidelines for family and student engagement and communication expectations
- Remote learning platforms for synchronous (face-to-face) delivery of specialized instruction and services
- Determining in-person related services for students with significant and complex learning needs

Over the next couple of weeks, our department will be finalizing the *Hybrid Learning and Remote Learning Plans*. These plans have been created and developed with the guidance from DESE. These plans will provide a substitute mode for delivering services, with emphasis on addressing the IEP goals/objectives as best as possible. We would like you to know that:

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- Hybrid or Remote Learning Plans do not replace your child's IEP
- The purpose of the Hybrid Learning Plan is to outline the opportunities for in-person instruction and for remote supplemental instruction.
- The purpose of the Remote Learning Plan is to communicate how educational opportunities and services will be delivered to your student during the COVID-19 emergency.
- A liaison or case manager for your child's team will contact you to discuss the plans.
- *We will seek your input when developing the hybrid and/or remote learning plans.*
- Special education services will adhere to the IEP service delivery grid to the best extent possible, however, your student's learning may look different during this period of national and state public health emergency.
- As the district continues to develop and improve the hybrid and remote learning systems, the learning plan may be modified.
- This plan is not an IEP amendment.
- Services are contingent on faculty and staff availability.

We know that there are challenges with this new way of learning and we, along with building principals and faculty, will make every effort to ensure individual student progress while maintaining and reviewing their skills whether in-person or remotely or a combination of both.

We would like to conclude by reiterating that we are here to provide the best possible special education service for your child. We continue to value open communication, as we are unable to tackle the issues that lay ahead of us without your patience and support.

Sincerely,

*Rick Pelletier*

Rick Pelletier, Director of Student Services

*Lynn Noyes*

Lynn Noyes, Asst. Director of Student Services

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