



WESTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Honoring Tradition, Inspiring Excellence, Shaping the Future

ABIGAIL C. HANSCOM
Director of Student Services

April 24, 2020

Dear Parents,

With the news from the Governor on Wednesday that school buildings are closed for the rest of the year, I wanted to send out an update on the provision of special education and related services. First of all, thank you for doing everything you are doing at home to help implement the programming that is being produced by the general and special education staff. They are working very hard and are thinking about ways to connect and teach your children everyday. That being said, a huge impact has happened for parents and I want to acknowledge the difficulty of the situation. Please know that we are aware of this and we are trying our best to be supportive and provide materials and experiences that are meaningful for every single student.

Last Friday, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) asked districts to share a letter to parents of students with disabilities outlining the State's expectations for special education and 504 supports and services during the closure. DESE's letter [is attached here](#). Please take time to review it as it addresses many questions about Team meetings, FAPE, and other important topics. DESE has also produced a [Family Resource Toolbox document that is linked here](#) and posted to the WPS Student Services webpage. Here in Westwood, we have been busy providing supportive and direct services, scheduling and hosting "virtual team meetings", and continuing to support general education instruction and provide specially designed instruction in small groups and to individual students. The pandemic presents many challenges and here are some of the issues we have been working on:

Extended School Year (ESY) - We won't know if ESY is in person or if it must be delivered virtually for a few more weeks. Because of this uncertainty, we are going to continue to plan for "in person ESY" similar to other years and also plan for what it would mean if ESY couldn't be delivered in person. That planning is in process now and an update will be sent out in future weeks.

Progress Reports/Report Cards - Now that we know that remote learning will continue until June, things are much clearer on this front. Each level of the school district has a different calendar for progress reports and report cards: preschool and elementary are conducting ongoing progress monitoring that will be reflected in progress reports aligned to the timing of the June report card. Thurston Middle School issued report cards and progress notes just prior to the closure and will do so again in June. The High School just recently issued report cards and Term 3 special education progress reports are coming out "virtually" to parents via email on April 27th. The High School will also generate Term 4 progress notes again in June.

Remote Learning Plans - DESE has indicated that school districts across the Commonwealth need to provide a remote learning plan to parents to indicate which services are being provided from a student's IEP and in what manner. DESE has created a two page form for this purpose which is shared between school and parents. This Remote Learning Plan officially documents which services the student is receiving during the period of closure. It can be updated if the plan changes over time. The plan will be issued as a virtual document to you via google docs and shared between all members of the Team. Westwood has decided to use the model plan made by the DESE and [a sample of it can be seen here](#). You can expect to receive these documents electronically from your child's liaison in the coming weeks.

Supporting students who are not accessing online learning successfully - Since we now know the length of the building closure, we will again reassess how things are going and focus outreach to students with limited online participation or who are not participating at all. For some students, we may be able to re-engage them and for others the online format is extremely challenging. If you feel that the remote learning options currently available are not working for your child, please contact your liaison and special education administrator and we will do our best to problem solve with you.

Compensatory Services - DESE has recently given us some clarity on this issue. When we are back in session in the fall, IEP Teams will identify students for whom there is a concern about regression. Normally, the term "compensatory services" means something negative and infers that the District didn't meet their obligations to the student. This is a different type of compensatory conversation - the teachers are doing everything they can possibly do given the situation. That being said, there will be students for whom the right thing to do is provide additional services and we will use the Team process to make those determinations together.

MCAS and MCAS/Alt - The Department of Education at the Federal level and the Massachusetts legislature have taken the necessary steps and officially cancelled MCAS testing for this year. This applies to both the standard MCAS exams at all grade levels and the individualized student portfolios that are developed for students who participate in the MCAS via a highly modified and individualized process. We were notified that the State is not going to receive the portfolios or review them. The teachers put over a hundred hours into each portfolio and we are going to be recognizing their work at School Committee. In a very unusual move, DESE is also awarding the teachers each 25 Professional Development Points as part of their recertification process to acknowledge this work. If your child participates in MCAS Alt, please know that the information will still be used. We will keep and use the portfolios as part of ongoing progress monitoring and we would love to share them with you. You are welcome to make a time when we return to school to come in and make a time to view the portfolios.

Team Meetings - Utilizing guidance from DESE, the District is moving forward with scheduling virtual Team meetings for annual reviews for students whose meetings have been cancelled during the period of closure. We held our first meetings at all levels this week and worked out many of the technical questions. We are also prioritizing students at key transition points (Preschool to Kindergarten, Grade 5 - 6, Grade 8 - 9). We are not conducting evaluations at this time due to significant concerns across the disciplines about the validity of any testing during the pandemic. Teams will address the backlog of testing when we return to in person school in the fall. The District is following a similar procedure for 504 plans and I encourage you to reach out to your child's case manager if you have questions about setting up a Team meeting.

Westwood's recent Special Education and Civil Rights Audit results have been received by the school district and shared to the School Committee at their most recent meeting. The report is [attached here for your review](#). I am very proud of the work of all our staff and was pleased that the review process recognized their consistent efforts to provide excellent services.

Parent Outreach - The [Westwood Special Education Parent Advisory Council](#) (SEPAC) is a great support. I encourage you to join their organization and participate in the workshops and support groups the SEPAC offers. The next event is a Parent Support Group Meeting on April 28th from 7:30 - 8:30 pm held virtually via Zoom. [Please see the linked flyer here](#) for more details.

Finally, I know there are many, many unanswered questions ahead. My hope is that we can all continue to work together to support our students and each other in what is continuing to be an evolving situation. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have questions or concerns and we will problem solve together.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Abigail C. Hanscom". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Abby Hanscom
Director of Student Services
Westwood Public Schools