

Dear Parents, Guardians, and Community Members,

I am writing to provide you with updated information about the impact of the COVID-19 closures on Special Education procedures in Abington. Before discussing the specifics of our response, please let me assure you that our Special Educators will work closely with your child upon his or her return to school in order to understand the impact of missed instructional time on your child's skills. We expect that most students will retain the progress they have made this year and their instruction can pick-up where it left off. However, if your son or daughter shows regression from missed schooling, then our staff members will work closely with your family to identify supports that will promote your child's progress.

As you are aware, Special Education is guided by strict procedures to ensure that students receive necessary services and parents have the right to participate in their child's educational planning. When a school district closes unexpectedly for three weeks, this prevents students from receiving services, evaluations from taking place in a timely manner, and meetings to proceed according to schedule. The Federal Office of Special Education Programming (OSEP) and Massachusetts' Department of Elementary and Secondary (DESE) have issued preliminary guidance to school districts on managing Special Education procedures during the COVID-19 closure and our district has adopted the guidance and will continue to revise our approach as new advisories are issued.

Service Delivery: Since the Abington Public Schools will not be providing educational services to the general student population, we will not be providing services to students with disabilities during the closure. In the event that a student with disabilities experiences substantial regression as a result of the COVID-19 closure, the student's IEP Team will identify additional services to compensate for the skill regression.

Active IEPs: Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are developed for one calendar year and it may be the case that your child's IEP goes beyond the active IEP dates during the COVID-19 closure. If this is the case, then your child's active IEP will remain in place until the Team reconvenes. Our IEP Team Chairpersons will work diligently to reconvene your IEP Team once we return so that a new IEP can be developed for your child.

Evaluation Timelines: Special Education Evaluations are an important component of individualized education planning and state- and federal- regulations allow school districts 30 school days to complete them. In the event that your child is in the midst of a Special Education Evaluation, the timeline has paused as of March 12, 2020, and will resume once school resumes. This arrangement ensures that APS evaluators can be as thorough as possible when assessing your child.

Out-of-District Programs: Currently, the majority of Chapter-76 Approved Special Education Schools are closed to reduce the spread of COVID-19. However, these schools may reopen before the Abington Public Schools, as Governor Baker's mandated closures do not apply to them. If your child's school reopens prior to the reopening of the Abington Public Schools, and you wish for your child to attend, then Abington Public Schools will arrange transportation for your child. Our Out-of-District Coordinator will reach out to families as the Special Education Schools reopen.

In general, we get the best results for students when school staff members work closely with students' families. With this in mind, I encourage you to reach out to me if you have any questions or concerns. During the COVID-19 closure, I am best reached by email at jamesrobbins@abingtonps.org. I hope you and your family stay safe and healthy during these challenging times.

James Robbins
Director of Student Services
Abington Public Schools