



July 10, 2020

Dear Norfolk Public Schools' Parents/Guardians and Students,

It is with excitement and hope for the future of our students that I greet you as the new Senior Director of Learning Support-Special Education Services. The opportunity to serve the children and families of the City of Norfolk is an honor and a privilege. As we prepare to move into an unparalleled school year, I look forward to learning more about the needs of our students as well as their triumphs. To that end, it is my desire that we embrace each other as educators, parents/guardians, and families. I ask that as parents/guardians and advocates for your students that you continue to share your recommendations, concerns, and positive feedback with us so that we can continue to refine the work. All our students can successfully realize their purpose if we respect and utilize opportunities to communicate, collaborate, and celebrate together as a greater home-school community.

In the spirit of communication, I understand that many parents/guardians, families, and students are eager for more information about school reopening this fall. Particular to our students with disabilities, there are questions about the continuation of various special education meetings and how school reopening options will meet individual student's needs. Be assured that as the division continues to tackle the complex details and process of reopening, Learning Support-Special Education Services is also planning for the return of our students. We recognize that in doing so we must address the continuum of concerns expressed by our families ranging from the need for teacher-directed structure and instruction to the hesitation of returning students who are medically at-risk back to school. Our intention is to prepare options in collaboration with the *NPS Reopening Schools Innovation Taskforce* that will safely and effectively meet the diverse needs of our students.

The COVID-19 pandemic has without a doubt impacted many aspects of our daily lives. The mandated closure of schools for the remainder of the 2019 – 2020 school year in March 2020 resulted in many educational challenges, including an interruption of child study, Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and eligibility meetings. Concern for the safety of students and staff has been and will continue to be paramount in these decisions. The ability of special education teams to collect and access necessary information/data in order to develop effective IEPs and make accurate evaluation determinations for our students has also been evaluated on an ongoing basis. As the COVID-19 pandemic progressed and conditions improved, opportunities to resume some meetings prior to the end of June were identified by the staff of the Department of Learning Support-Special Education Services in collaboration with schools. These initial opportunities included IEP meetings with the most immediate impact to students as follows:

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Norfolk Public Schools

The cornerstone of a proudly diverse community

- high school graduates eligible to receive standard or advanced diplomas; those eligible for locally verified credits; post-graduate candidates; and students aging out of the special education program requiring referrals and support for post-graduate opportunities;
- students transitioning between pre-kindergarten to PreK4/Kindergarten, elementary to middle school, and middle to high school recommended for a change in their least restrictive environment prior to school closure;
- students attending private day schools, residential facilities, or SECEP; and
- extended school year (ESY) IEP meetings to name a few.

At this time, the Learning Support-Special Education team is working diligently to schedule child study, IEP, and eligibility meetings that were postponed during the mandated closure of schools. I look forward to planning ahead and communicating with the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) and our families both for the reopening of schools and a return to collaborative discussions and procedures.

Norfolk Public Schools continues to boldly communicate the belief that every student within our care is able to develop his or her individual potential, maximize skills for lifelong learning, and successfully contribute to our global society. We have established that such an ambition requires that all personnel intentionally facilitate an environment that supports exemplary and innovative teaching and learning opportunities in every school, in every classroom, every day, for every student - no exceptions. In the Department of Learning Support-Special Education Services, this means effectively meeting the unique needs of the approximately 4,500 students we serve.

Thank you in advance to all our families and students for partnering with us to truly innovate and reimagine the possibilities of education in 2020 – 2021!

With appreciation,

Dr. Glenda P. Walter, Senior Director
Learning Support-Special Education Services
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