April 16, 2020

A Message from Special Education

Dear families of students receiving special education services,

We hope you are well and healthy and finding moments of joy during the inevitable challenges of this time.

We wanted to give you an update on how we are shifting support of our students with disabilities who are served through IEPs (Individualized Education Programs).

When the closure first was announced, our district focus was on health and safety first, providing food for families who need it, providing childcare for children of essential workers who are unable to find childcare elsewhere, and providing educational opportunities for students. Our special educators were focused on connecting with families and students and supporting modifications and supports to the learning sent to all students.

Now we know that the closure will be through the end of the school year. While our big picture focus hasn't changed, our state and district have been continuing to move toward a higher level of learning for all students.

For our students who receive IEP services, we are taking steps to implement IEPs in ways that are meaningful and sustainable. You are our partners in this challenging, exciting adventure.

It's important to say up front that implementing IEPs at a distance will look different than implementing IEPs in full within the school setting, just as the current learning opportunities being shared by teachers across our district look different than a full day's instruction in the school setting.

This effort also will take time, and we must recognize what we can do and what we can’t do. I have been impressed by the video chats that Chris Reykdal, our state superintendent of schools, has been putting out. In his message of March 27, he said this:

“Please be patient. Our teachers are remarkable. They are dealing with their own health risks and their own families. They are watching their own children at home. They too are ordered out of their buildings. So it’s a pretty amazing thing that our teachers are both experiencing this firsthand like all of us and they’re doing the best they can to reach out to their students.”

So with humility and grace, we are ready to partner with you on implementing IEPs, or parts of IEPs, in creative ways that also recognize that you, our families, are in different places in your ability to support education at home. We have held meetings with all of our teachers and specialists and given them tools to continue with and enhance the IEP-related work they are already doing.

Thanks for your understanding and partnership. We have dedicated, talented staff, and we love our students. We are excited to roll up our sleeves and do everything we can to provide meaningful, sustainable learning based on student IEPs and conversations with you, our families. We are strong together, though apart.
Sincerely,

Mike Haberman, special education director, and the special education team

Additional resources and reminders for families:

Helpful resources for families of students receiving special education services:

- **Bellingham Public Schools Covid 19 Resources** - [https://bellinghamschools.org/about/departments/resources/](https://bellinghamschools.org/about/departments/resources/)
  Learn about the school district’s work to provide food, support technology needs, and support childcare for essential personnel during the school closure. Also, find answers to Frequently Asked Questions

- Developmental Disabilities Administration - [https://www.dshs.wa.gov/dda](https://www.dshs.wa.gov/dda)
  Families should be aware that in home care through DDA (Personal Care and Respite Care) are still accessible during the school closure, and in some cases, additional care hours may be available. Contact your DDA case manager for more information, or visit the DDA website above to apply.

  The Arc provides information, resources, and support for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families through their Parent Coalition, Parent to Parent, Down Syndrome Outreach, and Self-Advocacy programs. While their offices are closed at this time, they continue to provide for support for families. You can reach them via parentcoalition@arcwhatcom.org, Facebook, or at the website above.

- Whatcom Taking Action – [www.whatcomtakingaction.org](http://www.whatcomtakingaction.org)
  Whatcom Taking Action provides helpful handouts (including this one on social media resources) and other information for families of children with special health care needs on their website and Facebook page. They also provide system navigation and connection to local services through the Single Entry Access to Services (SEAS) line 360-715-7485.