

BEDFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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Dear Parents/Guardians:

The District is preparing for the start of the 2020-2021 school year. Due to the ongoing public health emergency and the regulations set forth by the Centers for Disease Control and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, all districts have been asked to assess the feasibility and prepare plans for school opening, the options included: All In, Hybrid, Full Remote. Bedford Public Schools is seeking to implement a hybrid model to return to school. Moving into the new school year, DESE has indicated that districts are responsible for providing Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and implementing students' Individualized Educational Program (IEPs) as agreed upon. Delivery of services identified in the IEP, however, may look differently and therefore districts are also responsible for communicating with families and students about how and when services will be implemented. Students identified as "high needs" will have priority for full time (4 days) in-person services, so long as it is safe to do so and that the local board of health supports in-person services and the opening of schools. The document below identifies questions and answers regarding Special Education services and Section 504 Accommodation Plans as they relate to the opening of school.

Below are FAQs: (please note that guidances and directives are evolving and changing)

Q: What is the criteria for "Cohort C" special education services?

This has been a question asked by many parents, administrators and educators. It would be our hope to have as many students back in school as possible. However, the safety and well-being of students, families, and staff has been and must continue to be our top priority as an educational community. Based on our classroom capacity, we will need to adhere closely to the guidelines outlined by DESE in an effort to ensure we are able to maintain the six-foot social distancing requirement.

Students qualifying for full time "Cohort C" are described below and such students must meet at the following criteria:

According to the [Guidance on Fall 2020 Special Education Services from DESE, dated July 9, 2020](#), students with significant and complex needs, as well as preschool children, will be prioritized for receiving in-person instruction. 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;
- Students who primarily use aided and augmentative communication;
- Students who are homeless;
- Students in foster care or congregate care; and/or
- Students who are dually identified as English learners, SEI Level.

Using the above guidelines, Special Education personnel have worked to further analyze service delivery grids for each student. These categories indicate the amount of in-person learning time that would be required for students to receive the maximum in-person services, recognizing that health and safety guidelines may not allow for all students to receive the maximum. The District used this analysis of students’ IEPs in conjunction with the DESE criteria for prioritizing in-person learning to develop proposed schedules for students with complex and significant needs, taking into account what is feasible within the health and safety guidelines.

Q: What will service delivery for students with disabilities look like in the “new normal”?

- Students will receive a consistent schedule of classes, services, interventions and therapies as outlined in the signed and accepted IEP
- Students will have structured learning time to access state standards
- Students will have frequent interaction with teachers, teaching assistants, related service providers (i.e. Psychologists, Speech and Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Board Certified Behavior Analysts, Physical Therapists) and other trained staff to ensure participation

Q: My child does not meet the criteria for the definition of “high needs,” however is a student with a disability. What will services look like for my child in a hybrid model?

Students will receive services both in- person and remotely per the above-mentioned definitions. An emphasis will be placed on providing as many services “in-person” as are feasibly possible.

Q: My child meets the criteria for “high needs” and receives most of their services in a substantially separate setting, however there is an element of inclusion in their IEP. How will inclusion service be provided if my child is expected to remain in their sub separate cohort?

Due to the constraints of social distancing, IEP teams will make every effort to include students in inclusive settings, even if that is through remote access; every effort will be made to make that opportunity a reality for students.

Q: What is the criteria by which students will be identified to get more in person services/schooling?

Walk-in services- Individually determined based upon the student's service delivery grid. These services will remain remote for the start of the school year.

Less than 2 hours per week of services - 2 days - follows hybrid/cohort model. Students in this model will receive their IEP services when they are either in person or remote. Service providers will be in contact to get parent feedback.

2+ hours and under 25% - 2 days - follows hybrid/cohort model. Students in this model may receive their IEP services both during in-person and remotely depending on their individual service delivery grid. If services are going to be delivered differently, parents will receive notification.

>25% of day - Students in this model may receive their IEP services both during in-person and remotely depending on their individual service delivery grid. If services are going to be delivered differently, parents will receive notification.

>75% of day - 4 days attendance; secondary level will be determined with students and families. Students in this model will receive their IEP services during in-person and remotely depending on their individual service delivery grid.

Parents will receive notification from their Special Education providers outlining specifics.

Q: How will parents be made aware of the service delivery for their child?

IEP teams are working to develop cohorts and service delivery schedules for all students. While DESE requires that all agreed upon services in the IEP are implemented, it is understood given the current health and safety requirements, they will look different. Your student's Special Education team will be communicating with you about this.

Q: If my child is to receive services remotely, what will that look like?

Remote learning will be more robust than the experience from the spring of 2020. It is expected that students will receive an "instruction and services" model of remote learning through

- A regular and consistent schedule of classes, services, interventions and therapies
- Structured learning time to provide access to state standards
- Frequent interactions with teachers, therapists and support staff
- Synchronous lessons via teleconference and/or video conference
- Asynchronous lessons via recorded lessons

Q: My child receives "services only" through Bedford Public Schools. How will services be delivered?

In an effort to maintain cohorts and reduce the visitors to the school buildings, all itinerant services will be provided remotely at this time.

Q: If a family opts to participate in remote learning will they still be eligible for IEP services through their own school?

If a parent chooses remote learning it is assumed that the parent prefers to keep their child out of in-person instruction. For students on IEPs, remote service delivery would include:

- A regular and consistent schedule of classes, services, interventions and therapies
- Structured learning time to provide access to state standards
- Frequent interactions with teachers, therapists and support staff
- Synchronous lessons via teleconference and/or video conference
- Asynchronous lessons via recorded lessons

Q: If a parent opts for remote learning and their child is scheduled for an evaluation, how will that be addressed?

Many evaluations must be conducted in whole or in part in-person. The psychologists and related service providers will complete as much of the evaluation as they can remotely, however, we may need to ask parents to bring students to the building to meet in person. When in person, safety protocols will be followed. The staff and student will wear masks or face shields where appropriate and be as distanced as possible. Additionally, Plexiglas dividers may be used when it is necessary for an evaluator to be less than 6 ft. apart from the student.

Q: What will be the procedure for IEP and 504 meetings in the Fall of 2020?

Given the requirements for social distancing provided by DESE, team meetings for both Special Education and Section 504 plans will be held remotely via teleconference, Google or Zoom. If a parent or guardian requests an in person IEP or 504 meeting, all efforts will be made to accommodate the request following all social distancing requirements.

Q: My child was due for an evaluation in the spring of 2020 and due to school closure, that evaluation was not completed. What are the next steps?

IEP teams will be prioritizing evaluations based on necessity for completion and date of consent. The District will continue to work with families to meet timelines. If that is not possible, special education administration or liaisons will work with families in an attempt to come to an agreement to waive or extend initial evaluations, re-evaluations or Team Meetings as needed.

Q: How will eligibility and re-evaluations be conducted?

Once school resumes, special education staff will be scheduling outstanding assessments in a timely manner. Some evaluations, where feasible, will be completed remotely, with an emphasis on “in-person”

assessments. Special Education Program Administrators will be in contact with families and students to discuss all options.

Q: How will outstanding team meetings be scheduled?

We will continue to work with families to meet timelines or agree to extensions for Initial Evaluations, Re-evaluations, and IEP Team Meetings as needed. At the beginning of the year, Special Education Program Administrators will be reaching out to parents to discuss evaluations and rescheduling of team meetings from the spring.

Q: How will toileting assistance be provided for students requiring such service?

Best practices will continue to be in place for assistance with toileting as well as other self-help skills. In addition, the educators working with your child will be provided with additional PPE to maintain learner and educator health. Nursing staff in each of the buildings have developed specific protocols, best practices and training for staff.

Q: My child receives transportation as a related service in the IEP. Will transportation be provided for “in-person” services?

The District will be contacting all families of students currently transported via the IEP process to ascertain families’ willingness to transport their child to school. If families are unable to transport their child to and from school, transportation will be arranged with the District’s chosen transportation company. Students riding on a transportation vehicle will have to follow all health and safety protocols put in place by the transportation company and DESE including, but not limited to wearing face coverings and social distancing. If a parent begins the year by transporting their child and decides that transportation is not feasible, it is required to provide the District with notification and expect at least a 72 hour turn around for transportation to be arranged.

Q: If a student has a hearing disability, will the teacher wear a face shield instead of a mask?

According to DESE guidance released July 9, 2020, a clear mask or face shield may be worn by staff so students will be able to see the speaker’s lips. The Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is working on resources to address FM system use and will disseminate these when they are available. The District has also purchased a number of clear face masks.

Q: If my child was starting the IEP planning process, how will that be handled moving forward since the end of year review couldn’t take place last year?

IEP meetings will likely be held remotely to limit the number of people in a building. Given the requirements for social distancing provided by DESE, all team meetings both Special Education and 504 will likely be held remotely via teleconference, Google or Zoom. The District will continue to work with families to meet timelines or agree to extensions for Initial Evaluations, Re-evaluations, and IEP Team Meetings as needed. At the beginning of the year, Special Education Program Administrators will be reaching out to parents to discuss evaluations and rescheduling of team meetings that did not occur in the Spring.

Q: How will students who require class support receive it during Google/Zoom sessions?

Students with IEPs will receive support in breakout rooms or through an additional invite provided by the classroom teacher/special education teacher/teaching assistant (depends upon platform Google, SeeSaw, Zoom etc). To the greatest extent possible, break-out sessions should be accompanied by an adult. Our teaching assistants work under the license of our special education teachers and will receive training and support on how to best facilitate push-in services in a remote setting similar to what occurs during in-person learning.

Q: What support will be in place to help parents of children who struggled with remote learning in the past due to difficulties with attention and focus?

At the start of the school year, Special Education liaisons will be reaching out to parents to engage in collaborative conversations aimed at developing comprehensive services. Information from parents regarding their child's primary area(s) of need and ability to access remote learning will be considered and changes may be made. In addition, in a hybrid model, all teachers will be able to prepare students for their remote learning experiences when students are in-person. This will include teaching students the routines of how to use their technology, providing materials to support work at home, and preparing students for their remote activities.

Q: How will social learning goals be addressed this fall?

Special education liaisons will collaborate with parents/guardians in determining services to address individual social emotional goals. Some of the services provided could include social skills groups, small group social time, individual counseling, specific student behavior plans, check in/check out systems in addition to the general education supports that are planned.

Q: Will teaching assistants be in the classroom with the teacher even in the hybrid model and smaller class size?

Teaching assistant support will be consistent with the student's IEP.

Q: If a student has a full time teaching assistant assigned, what will those teaching assistants be doing to support students on remote days?

Students will receive all of the services documented in their IEPs through in-person instruction, remote instruction or a combination of the two.

Q: Are teaching assistants going to be given the same training as teachers on how to conduct a Google /Zoom session?

Yes, all staff will be participating in Professional Development (PD).

Q: How will teachers, educational support professionals, as well as related service providers of students with complex needs, deliver services when close proximity and physical prompting is needed? Will they still be required to have a 3 or 6 foot space?

Staff will wear a mask and/or shield and other PPE as warranted by situation protocol provided by DESE's Guidance on Fall 2020 Special Education services. Staff will be trained on the proper use of PPE. In these scenarios providers may need to be within a closer proximity.

Q: Will specialists be traveling between schools in the new structure putting additional risks for the special education population?

In order to reduce the number of teachers and students in a classroom, it is possible that Special Education teachers and related service providers may provide services remotely from within the school building. Service providers will schedule services in a manner that maintains physical distancing requirements and avoids overlapping with other staff in the classroom.

Q: Will students receive 504 accommodations during remote learning?

Yes. A free appropriate public education ("FAPE") under Section 504 is the provision of equal access to the educational environment which continues during remote learning. Students with existing Section 504 plans are entitled to accommodations, and/or support that will allow for equal access to the provision of distance learning.

Q: How will my student receive 504 accommodations during remote learning?

All of a student's teachers are responsible for implementing the accommodations in the plan.

Q: Will we receive communication at the start of the school year regarding our students 504 plan?

Yes. Each building 504 coordinator will review their assigned students' existing Section 504 plans and, in collaboration with each student's teacher(s), determine which listed accommodations or supports continue to be applicable/make sense within the distance learning format the teacher(s) are utilizing.

Q: Will there be MCAS this year?

DESE will be making the determination about the MCAS for the upcoming year.

Q: Are there exceptions to wearing masks or face coverings?

Exceptions to mask/face covering requirements must be made for those for whom it is not possible due to medical conditions, disability impact, or other health or safety factors. Face shields may be an option for students with medical or behavioral challenges who are unable to wear masks/face coverings.

Q: Can parents send children to school without a mask/face covering if they do not have access to one?

Masks/face coverings should be provided by the student/family, but all buildings have available face masks for students who need them.

Q: Do parents need to send their students onto the bus or van with a mask?

Yes. Bus company policy states that all students are required to wear masks. The drivers and monitors are aware that students are sometimes unable to wear masks or keep masks on for the durations of the ride. Drivers and monitors are also offered additional PPE, if needed.

Q: Can students in Pre-K, kindergarten, and first grade who are unmasked sit together on the rug?

Students in Preschool, kindergarten and first grade will be required to wear a mask/face covering, or a face shield if masks are not tolerated. We aim to keep all students six feet apart but lesser distances are acceptable (but no less than three feet). Classrooms will be reconfiguring space to discourage prolonged close contact and encourage activities that allow children to spread out. Classrooms may design their own strategies to implement this recommendation – such as spacing chairs at tables, designing games and group activities where children may engage in play that can be spaced apart (for example, by using visual cues, like hula hoops or tape on the floor), and increasing outdoor time.

Q: Will there be role model peers as part of the preschool program?

Yes, role model peers will be part of the preschool program, but due to health and safety guidelines, we will be limiting the amount of peers. Therefore, the ratios of Special Education students and typical peers may not be exact.

Q: My child was referred to the District through Early Intervention and turned three during the time of school closure. Services are currently being offered through Early Intervention until October 15, 2020. What is the plan moving forward for determining eligibility for Early Intervention (EI) referrals?

The Team at the Special Education Preschool program is reviewing each and every referral on an individual case. Collaboration with EI is assisting with providing updated information in regards to continued service delivery and child presentation. The Team will be contacting families to either schedule evaluations or to schedule a Team meeting to utilize available information to determine eligibility.

Q: My child attends the preschool at the Davis School as a child with an Individualized Education Plan and placement in a preschool classroom. What will school look like for my child?

Preschoolers with special education needs and services outlined in their IEP and placement in the preschool program will be prioritized for “in-person” services. The District's goal is to maintain an integrated model with learners with Special Education needs learning alongside their peers without disabilities.

Q: The start of school is now 10 days later, does that mean our home ABA services will also start 10 days later?

No, home services provided by outside agencies can begin on September 2 as originally planned.

We will be holding a SEPAC meeting this Wednesday. We will be recording the meeting for those who cannot attend to view later. If you have any additional questions that I have not answered, I can answer them for you at the meeting or you can feel free to send them to me ahead of time.

Topic: SEPAC Meeting

Time: Aug 19, 2020 09:30 AM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

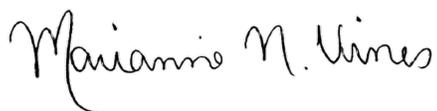
<https://zoom.us/j/96307901750?pwd=a2V6e1JYNXNKSGF5MXozbTBSU1VSdz09>

Meeting ID: 963 0790 1750

Passcode: 362522

I know this is stressful not knowing all of the details for the start of school. I hope this provided you with some answers and eased a bit of your concern. I know some are anxiously awaiting to learn which cohort your child will be placed in. As a leadership team, we have been working on this and we hope to provide parents with that information very soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marianne N. Vines". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M'.

Marianne Vines