

**BERKELEY HEIGHTS PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL SERVICES**

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**Michele F. Gardner, M.Ed.**  
**Director**

**Kevin S. Morra, M.A.**  
**Supervisor**

July 23, 2020

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

We wanted to provide an update on the work of the Special Services Department. For the last four months we have not relented in our close work with the New Jersey Department of Education, state level committees, colleagues throughout the county, our Union County Special Education Specialist and our colleagues in the district. We felt it was important to provide some assurances on the discussions and planning occurring on behalf of students with disabilities. Both Mr. Morra and I have collaborated with principals, vice principals, directors and supervisors throughout the district as plans have been developed for the reopening of schools in September. In addition, we have utilized parent input, staff input and the perspectives of various professionals (related services, Child Study Team, teachers, paraprofessionals) within our district, to ensure that our plans are comprehensive and continue to meet the needs of the students that we all serve. We have been discussing the individualized needs of our students and the specialized needs of our more intensive programs.

Our brainstorming incorporates the feedback we have received from families, the challenges that we know many families have faced during remote learning and ideas for additional resources and enhancement. We will ensure that Special Services has an appropriate response to the various scenarios that the district is putting together, based on directives and guidelines from the state. Here are some of the targets that have emerged:

- Individualized needs of students and programs will be considered to ensure we address all of the components of IEP's to the greatest extent possible
- Dependent upon the district plan in place and the details of the executive order at the time, some students may receive extended programming in the afternoon
- Related services will be provided in both a remote and in-person format in any plan that includes in-person instruction
- Meetings will continue to be conducted in a remote format
- Child Study Team evaluations will resume during in-person instruction, with appropriate precautions
- Discussion and brainstorming continues regarding enhanced delivery of remote instruction and services
- Additional PPE is being considered for staff who work in close proximity to students (i.e. face shields, portable sneeze guards, disposable gowns)
- Exploration of in-house vocational experiences; purchasing additional resources for community-based instruction
- Case managers will work collaboratively with families and other members of the student's educational team to determine if additional/temporary services or support is required upon return to in-person instruction

We will continue our planning and hope to share more with you once the district's plans have been approved by both the Berkeley Heights Board of Education and the New Jersey Department of Education. While we know that you are all anxious to learn the specifics of a finalized district plan, I feel it is prudent to provide a very gentle reminder of several important elements. Districts did not receive the 104 page guidance document from the NJDOE until the end of June. This was only a few weeks ago. We still do not have the NJDOE checklist that is required for any plan for September, therefore we do not yet know what else may need attention. We received the announcement from the Governor's office on 7/21/20 regarding the requirement to provide both in-person and virtual options to families - we do not yet have guidance specific to this latest directive.

While we have made, and will continue to make, every effort to move as quickly as possible in this planning process, it is critical we do so in a way that is responsible and thoughtful to ensure the best possible outcome for each individual child. We are also faced with the task of developing not just one plan, but multiple plans, for the start of school on September 3rd. Included in our planning will be ways in which we can further enhance teletherapy and remote instruction should the district be required to move into a fully remote format again.

We hope this letter finds you healthy and enjoying the summer months. We appreciate all of the support and understanding that you have shown since the start of this pandemic. Please plan to work closely with your child's case manager, teacher(s) and related services personnel in September. The scheduled first day for all employees is September 1, 2020.

Sincerely,

Michele Gardner  
Director of Special Services

Kevin Morra  
Supervisor of Special Education