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Dear Parents,

The following information is based on the latest directive we have received from the Department of Education in New Jersey regarding services for students with disabilities. We will be adhering to their guidance and will update you as that information is received.

Services:

- Special Education Instruction/Services including Speech/Language services and Counseling may be delivered to students through the use of electronic communication and virtual or online platforms, as appropriate. Service providers will be reaching out to parents through email to set up a schedule and will be documenting this contact. Days of virtual or remote instruction will count/qualify as a day of instruction. At this time OT/PT services cannot be held remotely via a virtual or online platform.

Evaluation:

- If a student is in the process of evaluation that requires in-person physical access/contact with the student, then the evaluation cannot be completed until school is once again in session. The district cannot send a staff member to the student's home. The district will be contacting parents in writing to notify them of the status of the student's evaluation and indicate that the evaluation will be completed once the district can have access to the student. If the evaluation can be completed remotely (i.e. Social History) the district will make every effort to conclude the evaluation in a timely manner during the school closure.

Re-evaluations:

- Re-evaluations which can be completed without testing will be conducted during the school closure period. Parents will be notified and consulted regarding this process.

IEP Development:

- Annual IEP's may be completed via a variety of options as follows:
 - Districts may hold an IEP meeting remotely via video or telephone conferencing. A draft IEP will be sent to the parent prior to the conference. Staff members (teachers) may be dismissed from attending the conference with written permission from the parent. The conference will be recorded for documentation purposes including the date and verification of those individuals in attendance.
 - Parents may opt to review and sign the IEP if they do not wish a conference.
 - If the district is unable to contact the parent after multiple attempts by phone and in writing to schedule the IEP conference, the district may hold the IEP meeting. The IEP will then go into effect after 15 days if the district has not heard from the parent.
 - If the parent refuses to hold the IEP meeting remotely the district will tentatively schedule a meeting with a projected date for when school is once again open. If this puts the district outside the timelines for the student's annual review, then the parent must agree in writing to waive the requirement. If school does not re-open as expected, the district will be forced to hold the IEP meeting remotely, despite parental disagreement.
- Paperwork to parents:
 - The district may send paperwork (i.e. written notice, reports, IEP's) to parents electronically. Every effort will be made to follow up with a hard copy via mail when the school is open. The district will be requesting that parents confirm receipt of all correspondence/paperwork. An electronic copy of Parental Rights (PRISE) will be made available to parents. District case managers will verbalize this practice during the IEP recorded meeting. The following is a link to PRISE which parents may access electronically: <https://www.state.nj.us/education/specialed/form/prise/prise.pdf>

Initial Eligibility/IEP

- If an initial eligibility conference and IEP is concluded during the period of school closure and the parent signs, the IEP team may agree to implement special education services or to continue services being provide depending on the transition needs of the student.
- An Identification Meeting to determine if a student is eligible for referral to the Child Study Team may be conducted. It is noted however, that data required to make a decision may not be available. In that case, the ID meeting may be postponed until school resumes. If the referral is accepted and the evaluation plan requires direct access to the student, the testing will be delayed until school resumes.

Home Instruction previously provided prior to school closure

- All “in-home” instruction provided by teacher will cease immediately in order to maintain the health and safety of staff and the student. Students will be redirected to remote or virtual learning with classmates.

Transfer Students

- A student with a disability may register during the school closure. The new district must provide services if the previous district is not. The student’s needs will be analyzed based on the previous IEP and implemented via an appropriate program that exists in the new district. Once the district is open, the student may be re-evaluated and a new IEP developed. Parents should be cautious about transferring during school closures. Whenever possible it may be more appropriate for the student to remain in their current district with staff who is more familiar with the student’s needs. However, a district may not deny services to a student who has transferred and established domicile.

Students who refuse to participate in virtual or remote instruction.

- The district will maintain attendance. All students will be recorded as present unless the district knows and can document that the student was not participating. Once school is back in session and municipal courts are re-opened the district may file truancy charges if appropriate.

Compensatory Services

- At this time districts have been advised not to make any decisions regarding compensatory services. Depending on circumstances of this closure and individual student needs, this decision may differ. It is expected that the district will assess each individual student’s needs based on a number of factors, including progress made on IEP objectives, regression and student participation in the program provided. All decisions will be made through the IEP process.

Progress Monitoring

- Teachers are being required to monitor and document student progress on IEP objectives. Progress may be monitored via informal assessment measures and email with parents. It is the district’s intent to maintain an active role in the education of all students and carry out our obligations to provide FAPE while working with our parents.

In closing, it is noted that all virtual or remote instruction practices/procedures and educational opportunities implemented for general education students shall be provided to special education students to the extent appropriate and practicable.

The Mt. Laurel School District is committed to equable access educationally for all students with special needs.

I hope that this information is helpful and has answered many of your questions regarding Special Education services during this time of school closure. **Please contact your case manager for further clarification if needed or if you have any concern about your child and this guidance.** I will also be happy to address your questions, but due to our limited staff, your case manager may be able to response more quickly.

Stay safe and well until we are back to school. I look forward to that day.

Sincerely,

Diane G. Willard

Dr. Diane Willard
Director of Child Study Team Services

cc: Dr. George Rafferty
Principals
CST Case Managers