

August 19, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians;

I hope this finds you and your family healthy and well. I am writing to provide information on the 2020-21 reopening plan as it relates to the provision of special education and related services. I am sure you are anxious for details so you can make important decisions for your child and family. Several communications have been shared recently by Dr. Conner and Dr. Parvey related to the District's plans for the 2020-21 school year. The 2020-21 Re-entry Plan and other related documents may be accessed on our website at https://www.middletownschools.org/recent_news/2020-2021_re-entry_plan

Middletown Public Schools and the BOE have selected the Hybrid Model as the model of instruction for the Fall 2020 reopening. All students, including those with disabilities will begin the 2020-21 school year following the Hybrid Model. A PPT is not required based on the model of instruction selected by the Board of Education. If adjustments need to be made in how the IEP is delivered, based on the District model selected, this is done through a Learning Model IEP Implementation Plan in accordance with State Department of Education guidance and in collaboration with your child's team. Adjustments to the Implementation Plan do not require a PPT. <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/COVID-19/Addendum6-Reopen-Guidance-for-Educating-Students-with-Disabilities.pdf>

The first 3 - 4 weeks of school will be utilized to transition students and staff back to the physical environment, provide time for staff and students to learn and practice health and safety protocols, monitor enrollment to ensure our classrooms and buildings do not exceed maximum room capacity for social distancing, assess students' present levels of functioning, ensure adequate staffing and monitor student and staff health data. During the initial weeks of school, your child's special education team will support your child's transition back to school. This transition period will be used to:

- Reestablish connections and assess student's social emotional well-being
- Implement schedules that provide access to rigorous instruction while maximizing cohorting and minimizing exposures
- Implement IEPs and establish in-person and remote instructional routines
- Assess students' health and safety skills to determine which skills are limiting access to school and life during the pandemic (wearing masks, washing hands, social distancing)
- Develop and implement teaching plans to address deficits in health and safety skills
- Acclimate to and build tolerance for wearing PPE or accepting PPE being worn by others
- Collect baseline data, consider regression and the need for revision of Individual Education Plans
- Assess students with unsafe behaviors and adjust behavior intervention plans to support behaviors that will lead to continued access to school and life
- Provide students who may have difficulty adjusting with greater physical distance, increased opportunities for PPE breaks and more outside breaks
- Create social stories and visual supports to teach and support student understanding of routines and expectations and provide opportunities for practice

We understand that some parents and guardians may want to begin the year with additional in-person days, however the health, safety and well being of all of our children and the full school community must take priority in the current health emergency.

The Connecticut State Department of Education requires the school district to first consider providing additional in-person services to students who are "high needs", if it can be done so consistent with public health and safety protocols. [Resource-Document-for-Students-with-High-Needs.pdf](#) (***High needs students are those who due to the nature and degree of disability cannot access remote educational activities, who require physical assistance to learn and attend to basic safety, health and self care needs, who have deficits with functional verbal and non-verbal communication such as they may not be able to express feelings or symptoms of illness, exhibit significant behaviors that at times require an escort or emergency physical restraint or who many not be able to wear personal protective equipment, practice social distancing or***

abide by other CDC, OSHA and CSDE reopening guidance.) The District will follow CSDE guidelines in giving first consideration to students in the "high needs" group for receiving additional instructional days. These decisions will be made on an individual basis while adhering to current health and safety protocols and following the initial 3-4 week transition period. A number of student, classroom, building and community factors will be considered in making these determinations. We are currently awaiting guidance from the CSDE on masks/face covering exemptions for students with disabilities. We understand this guidance will be provided this week. These requirements will be posted on our website as soon as it is received by the District.

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School teams will consider providing students with disabilities who do not fall into the "high needs" group with additional in-person instructional days if and when we have been able to accommodate the previously discussed "high needs" population, and if it can be done so consistent with health and safety protocols. These determinations will be made using established criteria related to the nature and extent of the student's disability, student progress and regression, the student's ability to access remote learning and the capacity of the school to safely provide in-person instruction. Decisions will be made on an individual basis based on each school's capacity to safely accommodate additional students within current health guidance.

Some additional factors that may impact the ability to add additional instructional days to any student's school plan include the following:

- A rise in local or state Covid-19 infection rates
- Staffing - many special education professions are shortage areas. FMLA or infections may make it difficult to fill some positions. It is essential to have highly qualified and adequate staff to support the needs of students with disabilities when adding additional in-person instruction
- We are required by law to provide students an education in their Least Restrictive Environment and in accordance with the IEP. This means that classroom capacity must be able to accommodate additional students and support staff while maintaining distancing, safety and accounting for the health and safety of all students and staff.
- Staff working with students with disabilities often need to work in close proximity, hand over hand, or with body to body contact. Some students may not be able to wear masks. To decrease risk to students and staff, staff members will need to wear additional PPE including masks, gloves, face shields and smocks. This staff will need frequent breaks and schedules that decrease exposure time.
- Many of our special education teachers and related service providers work in very small classrooms and offices. This will limit the number of students a provider may be able to safely work with at a given time. These spaces and student materials will need to be cleaned between student groups.
- Some students with significant behavior challenges can become unsafe and require the emergency use of physical intervention. This can increase the risk of infection and cause a potential health hazard. Additional staffing, PPE and follow up hygiene procedures (changing clothing or showering) may be required.

We believe that there is a greater chance that a phased re-entry for our students will lead to early success that will more likely be able to be sustained over time. A rush to return students to in-person instruction, outside of recommended health guidance, has the potential to jeopardize a successful reopening. An intentional and planned transition is best for the social, emotional and academic well-being of our students. It is our hope and request that you partner with us in this process in the coming weeks. Please visit the Middletown Public Schools website where you will find the most updated information. This can be accessed at middletownschools.org. We very much look forward to welcoming our students back to school. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Amy A. Clarke

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