



April 8, 2020

Dear Families:

We appreciate the concerns of parents and students, especially those who depend on the delivery of special education instruction, accommodations, supports and related services. This letter contains important information about our plan for implementing special education instruction, providing related services and facilitating Section 504 team, Committee on Pre-School Special Education (CPSE) and Committee on Special Education (CSE) meetings during the extended school closures. Administration and staff have been working diligently to develop plans to maintain consistency of special education services. We are committed to doing our best to address your child's needs remotely and recognize that there may need to be adaptations and adjustments to the delivery and approach for your child's special education instruction and related services in light of the distance learning model required during the present health crisis. Your patience and understanding are greatly appreciated as we work through the logistics of this challenging time together.

Please closely review the information provided below and reach out to us as explained regarding any concerns you have relating to the implementation of your child's special education services and/or accommodations in the weeks ahead. We are here to support you and your children during this challenging time. Thank you for your patience and understanding in working with us as our school community responds to COVID-19.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Debra Jackson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Dr. Debra Jackson, Interim Superintendent

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The District will make every effort to provide students a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in accordance with services indicated on each student's Section 504 plan, IEP or IESP during the continued school closure due to the COVID-19 crisis and State of emergency declaration.

Special education and related service providers will be in touch with you to discuss a schedule for service delivery. Related services which are usually provided in a group may have to be provided individually, in a smaller group size, or adapted according to the environment, in light of the present distance learning and staff/provider and student availability. This may result in a reduction in the

contact time between the provider and your child as indicated on your child's Section 504 plan, IEP or IESP, but we will continue to make every effort to address and support the needs of all of our students. Related services may be provided directly with the provider on the telephone, by online communication/virtual meeting, using computer-based instruction, or instruction using written materials, assistive or other technology.

When the extended closure ends, the District will be conducting program reviews, if needed, to review how the delivery of special education and related services to your child was impacted by this school closure, whether substantial regression has or is likely to have occurred as a result, and whether the provision of compensatory education is necessary or appropriate. Decisions relating to compensatory education will be made on a case by case basis, in light of the unique needs of each child, taking into account the duration of the disruption, missed special education supports and services and the impact of these factors on each student's achievement.

The District is committed to providing parents with a meaningful opportunity to communicate their concerns and participate in the on-going implementation and development of their children's Section 504 plans, IEPs or IESPs. The District understands that parents may have questions or concerns about their child's special education program. The District encourages parents who have concerns about the special education supports being provided during this period of distance learning to contact Jennifer Muller, CSE Chair. Additionally, as long as the school remains closed, all Section 504, CPSE or CSE meetings will be scheduled via telephone or video conference, to comply with existing health and safety guidance. If you would like to schedule a 504 Team, CPSE or CSE meeting via telephone or video conference, please contact Pat Martz at [pmartz@gufs.org](mailto:pmartz@gufs.org) or Jennifer Muller at [jmuller@gufs.org](mailto:jmuller@gufs.org) to request a meeting.

If your son or daughter has been recommended for an evaluation which requires a face-to-face assessment or observation, the evaluation will be delayed until school reopens, at which time the evaluator will follow-up with you to discuss the applicable rescheduled timeline to complete the evaluation. Any evaluations and re-evaluations that do not require face-to-face assessments or observations may take place while schools are closed, so long as a student's parent or legal guardian consents to the re-evaluation or evaluation. If your child's evaluation falls into the second category, the evaluator will contact you to secure your consent. Otherwise, the evaluation will be delayed until school reopens.

Because your child has been identified as a student with a disability and may receive special education and/or related services, such as school-based counseling, speech, occupational or physical therapies, I am writing to inform you about "Telepractice." Telepractice is a process that allows us to deliver a service, not "in person" but through the use of telephone or other technology, including videoconferencing.

I want to specifically address individual and group services using telepractice as it relates to special education and related services and advise you of some of the potential benefits and concerns regarding the use of telepractice. Potential benefits of telepractice may include, but are not limited to:

- Reaching individuals who would otherwise not have access to services during this closure
- Positive experiences with telepractice.
- If videoconferences are utilized, your child may be able to connect with his or her peers, as appropriate.

- Your child can continue to work directly on his or her goals with their service provider.
- Concerns regarding telepractice include, but are not limited to:
- Some students, due to their unique learning needs, may not be able to access this support effectively.
  - Some students may have difficulty maintaining attention or participating effectively due to the physical distance.
  - Ensuring student confidentiality due to the visual or auditory nature of telepractice.

The District is using Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and NY Education Law 2-d (data privacy and confidentiality) compliant platforms to address privacy and confidentiality requirements. If services or instruction are provided using technology and remote learning platforms, please be advised that we expect students and parents to respect the confidentiality and rights of others by not recording (audio or video), taking screen shots or otherwise capturing instruction or services in any electronic, audio or digital manner. If your child needs a copy of the lesson or of any materials that have been (or will be) provided through telepractice, please have them contact their teacher or provider to obtain them. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

To facilitate this process, if your child(ren) participate in his or her special education and/or related services via teletherapy, you may have your child use headphones/earbuds during group sessions and, when practicable, be in a private location or away from others or noise.

You may have been sent a consent form, in a previous correspondence. Since that time, we have received updated guidance from the Federal and State Departments of Education, and Medicaid all of which reassure us that a supplemental consent form is not required to allow the use of teletherapy and/or distance learning and instruction. If you have not turned in that form, you do not need to do so now. Furthermore, IEPs do not need to be modified or adopted in light of telepractice for instruction or therapies, which means we will not be convening meetings for that express purpose at this time. Each provider will follow-up with you in an email, or by phone, to coordinate their services or instruction for your child. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

More information regarding the District's response to COVID-19 is available at: [www.gufs.org](http://www.gufs.org)