



## ***Special Education Guidance Return to Learn 2020-2021***

**Welcome back to the new school year! In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Forest Hills School District has taken steps to provide a continuity of learning and guidance to ensure our special education students receive services and supports that are aligned to their IEPs. We understand that remote instruction has been difficult for many students and their families. We understand that this is a form of instruction that significantly alters the teaching and learning process, as well as the student-teacher relationship. Students may also require a gradual and supportive transition back to the school year. All special education students will be monitored upon their return to school to determine the necessary steps for continued learning, intervention and support services. To the greatest extent possible, we will work together to ensure special education and related services are provided based upon their Individualized Education Program (IEP). This is guidance that was shared during professional development with all District special education providers.**

**OUR TOP PRIORITY IS THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF OUR STUDENTS, STAFF, AND FAMILIES.**

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**We continue to receive updated guidance related to public safety requirements regularly. Special education guidance from federal and state sources will also be updated through this district guidance document. Additional guidance may be found through the Ohio Department of Education Website:**

**[ODE Reset and Restart of the 20-21 School Year - Special Education Services K-12](#)  
(August 2020)**

As we return for the 2020-2021 school year, school teams will require sufficient time to determine the best ways to address the needs of all students, and they will need time to collect updated and current data, and collaborate with parents. They will also need the patience and support of families to collaboratively make the appropriate decisions with families based on the needs of students.

The school district will continue to keep the obligation to FAPE at the forefront of decision making for all students with disabilities, while protecting the physical, mental and emotional health, and safety of all students and staff. The specific needs and circumstances of each student and family will always be considered.

As was previously communicated to parents in July 2020, there are three learning plans that have been developed based upon the status of COVID-19 cases in the FHSD attendance areas. The FHSD Virtual Academy is an option in each of the learning plans, if a student is unable to return to school due to health and safety concerns.

**The FHSD protocol is as follows:**

- **Traditional Learning Plan = Level 1, Level 2 (Based on FHSD attendance area zip code COVID-19 confirmed cases in coordination with local medical and health official guidance.)**
- **Blended Learning Plan = Level 3 (Based on FHSD attendance area zip code COVID-19 confirmed cases in coordination with local medical and health official guidance.)**
- **Remote Learning Plan = Level 4 (Based on FHSD attendance area zip code COVID-19 confirmed cases in coordination with local medical and health official guidance.)**

**FHSD Virtual Academy:**

**Parents can choose to opt-in to the Forest Hills Virtual Academy if their student is unable to return to the classroom. This full-time option will run independently of the district's three learning plans. As such, students must commit to the virtual academy for the full semester. Students will be assigned a Forest Hills teacher and every effort will be made to allow students to follow their previously scheduled courses. Some elective courses, specials, or encores may not be offered in this setting. [Virtual Academy FAQs](#)**

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## Important Guidance for Special Education Providers

- Through our **FHSD Virtual Academy Option**, Forest Hills must provide educational services to students with disabilities to ensure equitable access to education and a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). We must make a good faith effort to determine how FAPE is provided, and to the greatest extent possible. Students with disabilities will follow the same guidelines and protocols as all other students, with specific consideration for their individual needs. It is important to note that IEP services that were developed and intended to be provided for the traditional school environment may not be replicated in the virtual setting. At this time, IEP teams will discuss the most appropriate ways to provide services and supports, and document this virtual learning plan in a Prior Written Notice (PR-01). The IEPs will not be amended at this time, so as to preserve the integrity of the IEP developed for the traditional setting. Service providers may change due to staff reassignments and for the provision of specially designed instruction and services. This practice may be reviewed at the end of the first quarter of the school year.
  - There will be important differences in the Virtual Academy in comparison to the Spring 2020 remote learning plan, including increased direct/small group instruction during scheduled times, access to general instruction, and the provision resources and materials to assist students.
  - Consider whether this alternative delivery model can effectively support FAPE for each student, including the ability to provide specially designed instruction.
  - IEP meetings will be scheduled at the beginning of the 2020-21 school year to discuss a structure and routine for working with the student, and any modifications to services via the IEP. These will be determined on a case-by-case basis. A Prior Written Notice (PR-01) will include documentation of modifications related to the virtual learning plan, and the following considerations:
    - Documentation of the plan for instruction (i.e.virtual)
    - Implications for how the student will learn in this virtual environment
    - How will student needs be met in this virtual environment?
    - What types of supports will be needed in the virtual environment?
    - Parent/team Agreement to the services
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- Through our **Traditional Learning Plan**, Forest Hills will continue to provide educational services to ensure a Free and Appropriate Public Education. Service providers may

change due to staff reassignments, and for the provision of specially designed instruction and services. School environments will be modified to support social distancing guidelines, and promote safety for students and staff. Staff and students will wear face masks and personal protective equipment (as appropriate and depending upon developmental needs of students). Additional considerations may be required for students who are unable to wear face coverings. [Mask Waiver \(PK-12+\)](#)

- Due to more individualized and small group contacts with special education students, providers will intentionally plan for the cleaning of materials that may be shared, the scheduling of small groups in other building locations, and how students will transition to other areas throughout the school day.
- **Documentation of parent communications and service delivery will be focused, consistent, and detailed.** All special education service providers will be expected to continue to report on student's progress toward his/her goals. Considerations should be made for all assessment possibilities, what services were offered and delivered, student attendance, alignment to the IEP and data collection methods. Additional safety protocols may be needed to support behavioral, health and other unique needs.
- **ETR and IEP timelines will be monitored and followed,** to the greatest extent possible. Any team member, including the parent, may schedule an IEP meeting at any time to address questions, concerns, parent feedback and sections of the IEP.
- **Transition to Work Program/Community Based Instruction:** At this time, community experiences and work based institutions will be discontinued through the first quarter of the 2020-2021 school year. Risks associated with health and safety will be reassessed at that time. Work based experiences, events and activities will be continued on district campuses and will be planned according to the student IEPs.
- Home Instruction services will not occur in home settings, due to safety risks associated with COVID-19. These services, if determined by the IEP team, will be reviewed and discussed through the district's FHSD Virtual Academy option.

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## Recovery vs. Compensatory Services

- **As referenced by the Ohio Department of Education, “recovery services” reflects the “need of learners to recover from any educational gaps in learning caused by the unexpected school-building closures”.** The determination to provide recovery services to students with disabilities must be done on a case-by-case basis. These additional services should be based on individual student assessments, needs and IEP progress monitoring documentation. The district will consider progress/regression during the closure, baseline measures prior to the closure, and services provided (to the greatest extent possible). It is important to note that recovery services for services that

were not provided during the ordered closure period do not need to be replaced minute for minute. Recovery services are not extended school year services (ESY).

- If recovery services are determined as necessary, considerations will include possible evaluations, amended present levels of performance, and method, frequency, and duration of the services. In addition, the team will determine how progress will be reported, related services (if applicable), and time and location of the recovery services.
- Compensatory Education Services are educational services provided to a student because the district failed to provide the special education services listed in the student's IEP during the ordered closure.

