



Nadine G. Ekstrom
Executive Director

Dear EDCO Collaborative Families/Guardians/Caregivers,

As the impact of the COVID-19 crisis continues we are definitely in uncharted territory. I want to take this opportunity to thank staff for all of their efforts to date. As you know, the health and safety of all of our families, staff, and students are our highest priority. It is paramount that we maintain continued communication with families and ensure all students receive a Free Appropriate Public Education while protecting the health and safety of our students, educators, and service providers. Because of the challenges resulting from the pandemic *it is important to remind ourselves that although services will continue to be provided, they will be implemented differently than when school is fully operational.*

Since March 11th, Program Directors and Senior Leadership have been talking, strategizing, and planning for the well-being of our organization's students, staff, and families. Teachers, counselors, and therapists are currently working with students and families to provide learning opportunities and support.

On March 25, 2020, Governor Baker announced that all public and private schools in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts are to ***remain closed until May 4th***. Therefore, we will continue to educate students remotely and virtually, as we have been since March 16th. Please know that our staff continue to work on communicating with all of you on a regular basis to provide support and continue student engagement in learning.

This letter serves as a notice that EDCO Collaborative is following the recommendation of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to provide remote learning to our students. This recommendation was reinforced to all districts on March 26, 2020. We are hoping to positively implement this strategy by creating a virtual learning environment for all involved.

Our first and foremost priority is to maintain connections between school staff, students, and families. It is paramount that all students receive an education during this time of school closure. Our main challenge during this pandemic is providing a Free Appropriate Public Education while protecting the health and safety of our students, educators, and service providers. Our key interest is continuing communication with families.

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Remote Learning:

This type of learning comes in many forms, not always online learning. In fact, as the Commissioner of DESE has referenced, remote learning is not synonymous with online learning. We do not want all learning to be via screen time, but through deep, authentic experiences. We are providing educators with time to plan their lessons collaboratively and individually. All of our educators are participating in regular meetings, some meetings lasting nearly two hours in length. EDCO Collaborative is committed to establishing systemic resources, supports, and services to our students and to one another. Educators may provide students with strategies for learning to incorporate in their daily lives, real-world assignments with online check-ins, and potentially require mini-research projects. In addition, some students may be given packets through virtual platforms such as, but not limited to, google classroom.

We want our educators to consider providing students with choices and options in completing this work. However, an important reminder is that work during this time is not optional. *We have moved from enrichment activities during a short recess from school programming, to remote learning.* Therefore, the work should be completed by students and our staff want to support families in making sure this happens through continuous communication. Some remote learning activities may include links to YouTube channels, WGBH, and/or recommendations for Apps on devices. We are asking our staff to establish “office hours” with specific hours in the day for parents to sign-up to touch base, if needed.

Online Respectfulness:

One major challenge is understanding and respecting proper protocol when using virtual learning. We ask that teachers, students, and families do NOT record lessons or therapy sessions. This is out of respect for our students and our staff. The only time a recording is allowed is if the teacher is preparing a pre-recorded lesson to be sent to students.

We will continue to monitor the situation and communicate with all of you if there are any changes or if this re-opening is further delayed based on recommendations/guidelines put forth by our Massachusetts Governor.

EDCO Collaborative’s Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program in Newton, will be following the protocols of Newton Public Schools. The Youth Alternative Program in Charlestown, will be following the protocols of Boston Public Schools.

Sincerely,

Nadine G. Ekstrom, Ph.D.
Executive Director EDCO Collaborative

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