

July 23, 2020

Dear Parent,

Due to continuing health and safety concerns for our students, staff and community due to the COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic, Fort Bend ISD has decided to begin the 2020-21 school year on August 17, 2020 through an online format. We believe starting school online will allow our district and our campuses to refine our established health and safety protocols before introducing students back into the building. It also will provide the opportunity for staff and students to learn and master online learning tools, which will make any swift transition to online learning easier if we are required to close a classroom, or school, due to COVID-19 in the future. The District is in the process of finalizing the transition plans to resume face-to-face instruction for all students. Once that transition begins, students will be provided with the option of attending school in a face to face environment or remaining 100% in the virtual online learning environment. The online option will include synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities.

Fort Bend ISD will continue to offer all students with disabilities a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). All decisions regarding your student's special education and related services will continue to be determined by your student's Admission Review Dismissal Committee (ARDC), with you as a valued member of the committee. In some circumstances where a meeting is determined by you and your school as unnecessary, changes to your student's IEP may be made by an Individualized Education Program (IEP) Amendment—a change to your student's program that can be made outside of the ARD process and only with your agreement. A copy of the Notice of Procedural Safeguards, outlining that process is attached to this communication. You may also find a copy on the FBISD website at <https://www.fortbendisd.com/Page/668>.

### **Decision Making – Return to School**

An ARD committee meeting, or an IEP Amendment if appropriate, will occur for all students eligible for special education services. During that process, you and school staff will address special education services, including an appropriate schedule of services for online learning and if applicable, on campus face to face instruction, for your student. More details are provided below regarding instructional models for the 2020-21 school year.

Special Education staff members soon will begin contacting parents by phone to discuss proposed IEP Amendments and if necessary, scheduling ARD committee meetings, in the coming weeks. Parent contact will begin on July 27, 2020, and virtual ARD committee meetings will be scheduled as appropriate beginning the week of August 3, 2020.

While our goal is to complete all IEP Amendments/ARDs prior to the first day of school, in the event that your child's IEP Amendment/ARD isn't completed before that time, the current schedule of services page, previously developed at your child's last annual ARD committee meeting will be implemented via remote/virtual instruction until the IEP Amendment is in place or the ARD committee meeting is held.

## **Face-to-Face Instruction and the Extended Face to Face Model**

In order to afford students with disabilities instruction that is reasonably calculated to enable them to make progress that is appropriate in light of their unique circumstances, the district recognizes that some special education students may require face to face instruction before FBISD offers face to face instruction for all students. For those students, if the ARD committee has determined that face to face instruction is required, the district will provide instruction through a face to face model on school campus. This model, identified by FBISD as the "Extended-Face-to-Face Model" (EFFM), will be discussed during the ARD or IEP Amendment process. In order to guide those discussions, FBISD has outlined specific considerations to assist in identifying those students who require face to face instruction through the EFFM due to their unique circumstances. A copy of those considerations are provided with this letter.

All decisions regarding when and how the students will be phased in to face to face instruction through the Extended Face-to-Face Model will be made on an individualized basis with specific consideration given to each student's individual program needs and all necessary health and safety protocols.

What this potentially could look like:

- Students served with self-contained and resource services may receive face to face instruction in the special education setting with their teachers and other students.
- Students who receive instruction in the general education setting with special education support may be served in a "lab" setting, where they will have access to a computer and can participate in synchronous and asynchronous learning online with their general education teacher and non-disabled peers. This will allow students to continue to receive their special education services during instructional time with their non-disabled peers. More information regarding this component of the model will be forthcoming.

## **Transportation**

During the ARD meeting or conversation regarding amending the IEP, transportation will be discussed. If the student will be receiving the Extended Face-to-Face Model, the transportation supplement will be completed/verified and sent to the Transportation Department for routing. Once formal face-to-face instruction districtwide resumes, campuses will communicate further with all families regarding transportation needs at that time.

## **Assistance**

The Special Education Department will provide regular updates via video and written communication (email, website, and links on social media) as more information becomes available.

Additionally, if a parent or student needs support in the online environment, or if there are any other concerns, the parent is strongly encouraged to reach out to their campus and speak with the student's Case Manager or designated principal. Parents can also reach out directly to their student's Program Manager or Specialist or contact the Special Education Administration office at 281-634-1143 or complete the Special Education Request for Support Form found on the website <https://www.fortbendis.com/Page/123385>

We look forward to a successful 2020-2021 school year. Know that the safety of students, staff and our community remains of paramount importance to Fort Bend ISD, and we will continue to partner with you to promote a safe and appropriate learning environment for every student.

Sincerely,

*Deena Hill*

Deena Hill, Ed.D.

Executive Director, Student Support Services