



COUNTY OF DUTCHESS

MARCUS J. MOLINARO
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

May 1, 2020

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

Closing schools for the remainder of the academic year was a prudent and unfortunately necessary decision. As plans to reopen New York State's schools and summer educational services are contemplated and developed, it is of utmost importance that the needs of special education students and their families are thoughtfully and carefully considered. Efforts underway by your office as well as those of the Board of Regents, New York State Education Department, and our 700 public school districts must incorporate input from special education teachers and parents of students with special needs. It is also critical to provide needed services to special education students throughout the summer.

Throughout this process, so many of our schools and teachers have gone above and beyond to provide quality education during these difficult times. Many students with special needs have adapted well to the new paradigm of remote learning and are finding success utilizing Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or other platforms. Other students are struggling with the hands-on attention of teachers and specialists. For many special education students, the most daunting challenge is overcoming the stress of change and inconsistency. That is why a careful and student-centric approach is paramount as we move forward.

Since schools were closed, parents have played an even greater role in their education. This was a challenge for all parents, however, for parents of special needs students, the task could be even more daunting. The technology we all relied on to make remote learning possible, needed modifications and innovative adaptations to make them more accessible. Not all platforms are compatible with critical assistive technologies, nor are they always conducive to educating students with very specific needs. Parents and teachers have been asked to do a lot of heavy lifting to ensure their children and students are receiving a high-quality education.

Special education students must have access to services throughout the summer. These services will help support students and their families bridge the gap until schools are once again able to provide a more conventional education. Not all special education students will want to take advantage of services throughout the summer, however, for those who do, they must be available.

The unique circumstances, needs, and challenges of special needs students and their parents/guardians, as well as educators and specialists, must be considered. I know it is a difficult and complex task to set a path forward that addresses the health, safety, and educational needs of all students. The input of special education teachers and parents of students with special needs could be invaluable to these efforts.

Having been engaged in issues related to the provision of quality special education services for years, I am willing to help in any way I can. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Stay safe. Be well. We are all in this together.

Sincerely,



Marcus J. Molinaro
Dutchess County Executive

C: Assemblymember Didi Barrett
Assemblyman Kieran Lalor
Assemblyman Kevin Cahill
Senator Peter Harckham
Senator Sue Serino
Assemblyman Jonathan Jacobson
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