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**Sent:** Friday, April 3, 2020 1:01 PM

**To:** Marchese, Nina (DESE) <[Nina.M.Marchese@mass.gov](mailto:Nina.M.Marchese@mass.gov)>

**Cc:** Johnston, Russell (DESE) <[Russell.Johnston@mass.gov](mailto:Russell.Johnston@mass.gov)>; DOE-DL - Approved Special Education Team <[OASES@doe.mass.edu](mailto:OASES@doe.mass.edu)>; [lyndamwomack@yahoo.com](mailto:lyndamwomack@yahoo.com)

**Subject:** Update from OASES - With the attachment!

Dear Executive Directors of Collaboratives and Leaders of Approved Special Education School Programs,

First, a note of thanks to the residential programs for the ongoing efforts of you and your staff in continuing to ensure the health and safety of the students comes first in these difficult and uncertain times. My colleagues and I continue to be impressed with how your programs have prepared for and then handled situations where staff and/or students tested positive for the coronavirus, and the great lengths you have taken to limit the spread and provide additional support to students and staff. Collaboratives and day programs have started remote learning, and while challenging, the creativity, sharing of resources, and technological tools being used impress me greatly.

In addition to my gratitude and appreciation, I would also like to update you on a few fronts:

#### **Important updates**

- **Notification of Coronavirus:** While updates from your programs are not required to be reported to OASES, when students or staff have been confirmed as having COVID-19, many of you have chosen to notify our office, which we appreciate. That reporting allows us to have an idea of how many students/staff are affected in the residential programs and informs us how the program is addressing and maintaining the health and safety of other students and staff.
- **Updates from programs:** We also appreciate periodic updates from day and residential programs on your communication with parents and school districts to keep them informed of how your program is providing remote learning opportunities for students.
- **New email addresses:** Just before the closure of schools, the Commonwealth changed all of the email addresses at DESE, which now follow the [mass.gov](http://www.mass.gov) format. While emails to our previous DOE accounts mostly continue to be forwarded to our new email addresses, there have been a few instances where this did not happen. To ensure you have the right contacts, a list of contact info (including emails) for my department can be found at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/oases/specialist.html>. Last week I announced a new OASES team member, Lynda Womack, whom you will now see on the list as well.
- **Restraints:** We have consulted with our colleagues at EEC about restraint reporting and are in agreement that the reporting requirements remain the same. Restraint reports during school day hours must be report to DESE; during residential hours (nights, weekends, holidays) programs should report to EEC.
- **WBMS trainings:** For those of you who are scheduled for a review in the 2020-2021 school year, you have recently participated in a training. As you know, Commissioner Riley has stated all monitoring is on hold during this time. I just want to clarify that the trainings still happened because they had already started and there are some important

updates on criteria that needed to be shared. It is very likely the self-assessment timeline will be extended. Your focus should continue to be on the students and staff and ensuring they are safe and have a robust remote learning experience. I will keep you updated on the self-assessment submission date, knowing that some of you may still need additional time for a variety of reasons. Be assured, my team and I will work with you all.

- **Maaps and MOEC:** Russell Johnston and I have been in weekly contact with Elizabeth Dello Russo Becker, the Executive Director of maaps, the Executive Board of maaps, and their attorney, Janine Brown-Smith and separately with MOEC, specifically, Joanne Haley-Sullivan, the Executive Director of MOEC, and members of the Board of MOEC. We have established and maintain a running list of hurdles specific to collaboratives, day and residential programs and we are working feverishly to address them as quickly as possible. Updates will be provided through the weekly Special Education Director meetings via zoom, email updates from me and/or Russell as well as resources from Commissioner Riley, USDOE, and EOE.

#### **A few additional reminders:**

- Communication with families – As you all know, every family situation is different at this time. It is critical to find out where each of your families are and develop daily or weekly goals with them for their son/daughter to complete while they are home learning. Doing so will increase their buy-in and will likely result in better outcomes for students.
- Communication with school districts – Continue to keep the school districts informed of how you are providing remote learning services to students. Share helpful information such as letters sent to parents, links to your websites or other information that demonstrates that you continue to educate each student, just in a different way.
- If any residential programs close, below are general procedures to follow. I am also attaching the “Residential and Congregate Care Program Guidance” from DPH for your reference.

#### **Notification:**

- State agencies have advised that if you plan to close your program for reasons related to COVID-19, administrators must contact:
  - Local Board of Health
  - Department of Public Health at 617-983-6800
  - EEC licensor (in writing)
  - DESE, Associate Commissioner, Helene Bettencourt, at [Helene.H.Bettencourt@mass.gov](mailto:Helene.H.Bettencourt@mass.gov) and cc Nina Marchese at [Nina.M.Marchese@mass.gov](mailto:Nina.M.Marchese@mass.gov)
  - DCF (if appropriate)

#### **Documentation:**

- Document all factors leading to your decision to close and maintain onsite at the school available for review. Information documented may include:
  - The specific circumstances leading to the decision
  - Who was involved in making the decision?
  - When was the decision made?
  - When was closure implemented?
  - How and when were parents notified

I would like to take a moment to thank Joanne Haley-Sullivan, Elizabeth Dello Russo Becker, and Janine Brown-Smith for their ongoing collaboration with the Department. It is hard to express how difficult a time this is for everyone. Navigating these uncharted and unprecedented waters is both challenging and all-encompassing. On your behalf Joanne, Elizabeth and Janine have provided unwavering support and insight to Russell and me, for which we are incredibly grateful.

My best to all of you, your families, and all of the students we are privileged to serve during this difficult time.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns please email me or call me on my mobile phone at (781) 870-0432.

--Nina

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