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Dear Families,

We know these are hard times for families. Between the balance of job securing, working from home, and now having our children to keep busy and motivated to learn, we look for relief and support. As of Wednesday, March 25, Milestones rolled out a plan to provide multiple opportunities for families and students to have live face time with our staff on a daily basis. Many of the key components that DESE is asking of schools are what we started this week. However, when the news of May 4th was announced, some families have asked if we will be increasing the time.

Today, Milestones Administration participated in a conference call with the Senior Associate Commissioner and State Director of Special Education, Russell Johnson. The purpose of this call was to share additional guidance with schools on how we can continue to educate our children during our time away from school. First, he re-emphasized the priority for all of us to be on health and safety. We understand many families and our communities have or will have a personal impact or relationship with COVID19. Schools and families are now faced with a unique opportunity to provide educational learning for our children, for even longer than expected.

It is clear that special education services will not be implemented in the manner that our kids are accustomed to. Our therapeutic approach can not be replicated, however, we all share in the collaborative goal to have all of our students maintain the skills that they have been learning up and until this juncture. We take comfort in our current approach to balance enrichment with structured fun activities. Moving forward, lessons and group activities will be based on standards that our students have learned this year. Review and practice of previously learned skills will be incorporated into the weekly instruction in all areas, academic and therapeutic. Additionally, a variety of fun and social opportunities will be rolled out for students to participate in after the morning check-ins. Please look for more information from case managers.

Special education services will continue to be implemented by our highly qualified staff and therapists/specialists. We will be meeting next week to assess how the first few days of online connectivity is working. In addition, we will develop our next steps as we face the ever-evolving new data. DESE has emphasized that their guidance, too, is continuing to evolve as they are in regular communication with the US Department of Education. Although we at Milestones and DESE know we can't replicate all the great work we do daily for your children, we are committed to providing opportunities for active engagement and learning. Please expect at the end of next week the third version of the implementation.

For now, please encourage your children to actively participate in these online times to the best you can. It is important that our students ease back into the mindset of learning. We imagine some children will need extra support, and we are here for you. Case managers continue to be your direct line for additional assistance.

Prior to this message, the activities have been "optional." Moving forward, please prepare your children for projects, packets, and expectations to practice skills. As a school, we will be

outlining in our future communication how this time will be tracked for “credit” purposes, given the inherent challenges that are evident in this state and national crisis. At this time, we want our students to know that this time away is not an early vacation. To reiterate though, we want our families to put health and safety first, and find a balance. Our hope is that we begin to provide greater structure for your children, with various activities and connective moments to be frequently engaged throughout parts of their day.

This afternoon, in the case managers’ email, we let you know of changes to DESE with regard to obtaining consent. While our students are temporarily out of school, DESE waived the need for schools to obtain consent for online learning. With remote learning, schools need to be able to access our students. We are limited in our ability to connect with kids face to face without the use of technology and video capabilities. We want all families to understand appropriate internet practice remains in effect. Appropriate online behavior is paramount. We will not be recording or sharing online lessons with students in them and our platform will be Google Hangout.

As parents, you always have the right to have your children participate via a phone call into sessions if you do not want your children to be present via video. Thank you always for your questions and patience as we navigate this together. Keeping our families safe and engaged remains our focus. Be well.

Stay healthy and until next week,
Kirsten and Gillian