

NORTHWESTERN COUNSELING

& SUPPORT SERVICES

To: School Partners
From: NCSS School-Based Programming Leadership
Re: Student support during COVID-19 outbreak

March 25, 2020

To all School Partners:

First and foremost, thank you for all the work you've done over the past couple weeks to ensure the safety of Vermont's children and families and to facilitate a smooth transition to this period of extended school dismissal. We find ourselves in the midst of an unprecedented situation where both education institutions and the systems put in place to support our most vulnerable children and their families are being stretched in ways no one ever imagined. We want to assure you that we are working to make sure the students, schools, and families we serve continue to receive the support necessary to continue to access their academics and sustain progress towards the social and emotional goals that are a key part of our role.

At NCSS we are working on plans for our staff to be able to continue to work with their identified clients through telehealth platforms and phone supports. This will involve our staff coordinating support with both families and school personnel to identify methods and times in which services will be delivered, along with types of support that will be meaningful to kids, families, and schools alike. The focus of this work will be the same as it is in the school setting, although the hours maybe somewhat variable depending on a host of circumstances. As with all of our plans right now, these will also need to be sensitive to developing guidelines related to the COVID-19 pandemic, as ensuring the well-being of students, families, and staff is our highest priority.

Our staff are planning for this continued service delivery as we speak, and feedback from all of you will be crucial to successful implementation. Any thoughts about ways to continue to provide valuable supports to students are more than welcome as we strive to minimize the social, emotional, and academic impact of this unexpected and prolonged hiatus.

Below is a list of our individual school-based programs, updates on what each is doing through these times, and contact information for program leadership:

School Based Clinicians: School based clinical services are continuing to provide daily ongoing support to students and families during school closures. We know that our students need us now more than ever as they and their families are figuring out how to manage during this time. Our time is prioritizing phone and telehealth (video therapy) as primary means of communication between clinicians and students/families. If students do not have access to phone or internet service we are still continuing to provide face to face services on an individual and as needed basis. All school based clinicians are available to reach via phone or email and are available to participate in any regularly scheduled school team: IEP, EST/SST or other meetings that are scheduled. When available school based clinicians have also been supporting food, technology, and homework delivery to clients and to community members. We are all working hard to be creative and support our schools and community during this time. If you have specific needs from your school based clinician during this time please reach out to them directly or contact Lance Metayer in order to determine a specific response that would be helpful.

NORTHWESTERN COUNSELING

& SUPPORT SERVICES

Contacts: Lance Metayer, Team Leader, lance.metayer@ncssinc.org, 802-582-8039
Belinda Bessette, Program Manager, bbessette@ncssinc.org, 802-373-8281

School-Based Behavior Consultation Team: The SBBC team is continuing to collaborate with schools and families; from consulting around materials and expectations for students with distance learning to preparing specific materials to develop students' social and emotional well-being. Staff are working with special educators and systems level teams to participate in IEP and other meetings in order to continue our work with children and families. SBBC staff have been or are planning to (depending upon need of families or specific requests of schools) contact students/families via forms of communication that best fit their needs (email, phone, or video). Support at this time is focused on ensuring their basic needs are being met and connecting with resources as necessary. Additionally we are focusing on supporting families in creating consistent and predictable environments for their child to support their distance learning. As needed staff are developing behavior support materials similar to those used in school to promote student engagement in learning and general behavior support for parents. Staff will continue to provide regular check-ins with students and school staff and will be available for tele-support as needed.

Contacts: Amy Irish, Team Leader, amy.irish@ncssinc.org, 802-393-0368
Matt Habedank, Program Manager, mhabedank@ncssinc.org, 802-393-0442

Collaborative Achievement Team (CAT): CAT Staff are continuing to connect with parents and school staff around how best to support the needs of our clients and their families. At this time we are offering support through phone, video or email to ensure that clients and families are continuing to receive the highest level of support possible. CAT staff are currently or are planning on connecting with special educators and school teams to develop systems to provide support through work completion, behavioral support and reinforcement scheduling. CAT staff are continuing to attend IEP and other planning meetings via video platforms or telephone to best fulfill the needs of clients and their families. CAT staff are looking into how other aspects of programming – Social Thinking Curriculums, Yoga 4 Classrooms, etc. can be utilized to continue to support our client's social emotional learning and how we can provide those supports in alternative ways (video – zoom, FaceTime, etc). CAT staff are also in constant connection with other NCSS programs to assist in any aspects of programming and coordination that we can.

Contacts: Meghan Sweeney, Team Leader, meghan.sweeney@ncssinc.org, 802-370-1168
Matt Habedank, Program Manager, mhabedank@ncssinc.org, 802-393-0442

School-Based Autism Program: The SBAP team continues to work on keeping open lines of communication with schools and families, determining the individualized needs of our clients, and providing meaningful services via remote supports. Our clinical staff are working to provide parents with resources for their children to be as successful as possible at home. These supports include regular phone calls/check-ins, visual schedules, building routines with parents, behavior management and crisis plans, assistance with modifying school curriculum, reinforcement schedules, and support with wellness and wellbeing. Similar to other teams at the agency, we are utilizing things like video conferencing and FaceTime as well as exploring telehealth services to stay connected to our clients and families. As we move through the school closure, we will continue to stay connected, collaborate with our community partners, and ensure that families have access to the tools and resources they need. Please continue to communicate any needs as

NORTHWESTERN COUNSELING

& SUPPORT SERVICES

we anticipate these to change regularly. This will help us provide the most accurate level of support!

Contacts: Megan Gargano, Team Leader, megan.gargano@ncssinc.org, 802-370-4624
Shawna Shappy, Team Leader, shawna.shappy@ncssinc.org, 802-370-4027
Matt Habedank, Program Manager, mhabedank@ncssinc.org, 802-393-0442

Soar Learning Center: Soar Learning Center has provided all students with two weeks of academic assignments. Both teachers and special educators have and continue to follow-up with students and families to assist with the assignments. Teachers and special educators continue to have IEP and update meetings using remote technology. Additionally, teachers and special educators are receiving training and technical assistance to build remote learning classrooms through the Microsoft 365 platform. The plan is to offer remote academic classes and assignments no later than April 6th utilizing Microsoft 365. Students and families will also be able to access individualized assistance via phone and in MS 365.

Home/School Coordinators have daily contact with families and/or students to assess ongoing needs and working with the teams to develop and provide creative methods of support. They have also been busy assessing the technological needs of the families and making sure they have access to the items they require to obtain their assignments. Home/School coordinators have also coordinated donations for families and delivered them to their front porches.

Soar Learning Center's school-based clinicians are continuing to have regular sessions with their students over the phone and utilizing appropriate video chat options. They are also providing assistance to families as needed.

Contacts: Michael Bombard, Program Director, mbombard@ncssinc.org, 802-782-1624

More than anything else, keeping lines of communication open during the coming weeks will be key to the success of being able to support the students and families we serve, and to help in the mission to support our communities as much as possible. Please reach out with any request – directly related to our services or not – that we may be able to help with. The guidelines under which are operating are shifting almost daily, but we will strive to help with anything we can.

Again, thank you for all the work you're doing right now, and for your continued partnership.

Danielle Lindley, LICSW
Director of Children, Youth and Family Services
Northwestern Counseling and Support Services
130 Fisher Pond Road
St. Albans, VT 05478
802-393-6586
Danielle.Lindley@ncssinc.org