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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS WILL NOT RECEIVE APPROPRIATE EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR INSTRUCTION THIS SUMMER

Remote learning will impose continued learning drawbacks to over 200 students with special needs due to Salt Points BOCES summer closure

Poughkeepsie: After nearly a year and a half since the COVID pandemic shut down school classrooms, imposing remote learning on students within Dutchess County's 72 districts, the impact of these closures has been most harshly felt by students with disabilities, who struggle with remote learning, modified or inconsistent schedules and hybrid learning models.

The closure of the Salt Point BOCES campus this summer has now made this challenging situation even worse for these students, the majority of whom are diagnosed with severe cognitive disabilities.

Extended School Year (ESY) instruction is provided by Salt Point BOCES during July and August to students with special needs who are identified as at risk for regression through their school district's CSE. ESY provides in-person learning supports to students with disabilities during the summer break to allow for a continuum of their educational experience. Taconic Resources for Independence (TRI) first became aware of the closure of the Salt Point campus in mid-May and identified as many as 210 students who would be impacted due to the BOCES campus closure. Although Dutchess County BOCES Administrators attempted to find an alternative location in one of the 13 Component School Districts and met with the Superintendents of these districts, none were willing to accommodate these students within their respective school buildings.

"We continue to hear from families of students of special needs as well as educators that remote learning is not a substitute for in-person learning," says Lisa Tarricone, TRI executive director. Parents have emphasized that even if they were home, they would be unable to help and meet the high needs of their child in the same way that a specialized educator does, she adds.

Daniel Gonzalez, a father of a student that attends Salt Point BOCES says "If my son's school is only offering the option of remote summer, it will not work to prevent regression and close his learning gaps! Giving him remote means giving me the job of teaching and trying to support him in ways that I am not trained to do. I am not a teacher and by having parents try to fill or supplement these teaching roles, negatively impacts and strains our relationship as parents and children."

TRI's Special Education Advocates have been hearing from numerous parents who are expressing concern that their children will continue to experience behavioral and learning regressions due to the COVID pandemic, which will now be exacerbated with remote ESY this summer.

"To now offer a remote remedial program to those students who have already been gravely affected by this pandemic is an additional, unjust inequity to the students and their families," says TRI Special Education Advocate, Jennifer O'Neill.

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