



Colchester School District

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March 13, 2020

Dear Colchester School Community,

Our district is continuing to implement proactive and assertive steps to do our part to prevent a communal spread of COVID-19. As of today, CSD still has no confirmed cases of the coronavirus. As news continues to emerge regarding COVID-19, our primary concern is for the health and safety of our students, staff, and community. We are very much connected to the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) and the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) and receive updates multiple times a day.

With the closure of several large universities in our region, we know that many are turning to their local PreK-12 districts to see what is being planned in the event a closure is needed. We want to assure you that although this is uncharted territory, we have been working around the clock with state and local agencies on the many logistics and unique challenges that would result from a district closure.

This morning, superintendents from Addison, Chittenden, Franklin, and Grand Isle County participated in a meeting with Dr. Mark Levine, the Commissioner of Health from the VDH and Vermont's Education Secretary, Dan French. We learned that Governor Scott will be holding an important press conference at 5:30 pm today that should provide new and specific information for all Vermonter to follow. We anticipate that the guidance will include broad-based health recommendations, information on potential school closure and/or dismissal, the role of schools in mitigating the COVID 19 epidemic, updated travel recommendations, and what individuals can do to keep safe including social distancing. Once the Governor has provided direction, our district leadership will determine the next steps for our schools and we will be back in touch with families and staff as quickly as we can. At this time, we are planning for both scenarios; one where we close and one where we remain open. We would recommend our families begin considering what family planning they may need to do in the event of a district closure.

Because this situation is rapidly evolving, we know there are a lot of what-ifs being asked. We wanted to provide you with some additional information in a FAQ-style below. Above all, we recognize that this is a challenging time for our community. We are doing our absolute best to make decisions with the information we have at any given moment.

Sincerely,
Amy Minor
Superintendent of Schools

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

This guidance has not changed and we **cannot stress how important it is to reinforce the importance of washing hands, staying at home when sick, and practicing the small habits to bolster overall health:** sleep, exercise, talking with friends, getting outdoors, etc. The following simple actions can support in reducing the spread of COVID-19:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with your sleeve or a tissue. Throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

WHEN SHOULD SOMEONE SELF QUARANTINE?

The Vermont Department of Health has continued to provide updated guidance in regards to COVID-19 (coronavirus). As of March 4, travelers returning from China, Italy, South Korea, Japan, and Iran **should stay home for 14 days and practice social distancing**. As of March 12, travelers returning from the [specified countries in Europe](#) must stay home for 14 days after returning from travel, monitor their health, and practice social distancing. If individuals remain symptom-free following the 14 days, then the Vermont Department of Health recommends that they return to their normal activities. CSD will continue to follow these recommendations.

All travelers should call the Health Department at (802) 863-7240 to determine what precautions should be taken prior to returning to work, school or other public environments. **Please continue to keep your building principal informed if you or your students travel.** The district will continue to stay updated on the status of individuals in our school community who are self quarantined.

WILL SCHOOL TRIPS BE CANCELED?

The district is limiting unnecessary travel. All international and out of state student trips through the end of the school year have been canceled. We are doing our best to work with companies to see that families are reimbursed as much as possible. School travel within Vermont and bordering states will be determined on a case-by-case basis. All school-related employee travel out of state has been suspended at this time.

ARE SCHOOL-SPONSORED EVENTS GOING TO BE CANCELED?

We are assessing all of our events outside of normal school hours to determine if they should be postponed, canceled or if they can continue as scheduled. Any postponement or cancellation decision is out of an abundance of caution and concern for our high-risk community members, including older adults and anyone with chronic (long-lasting) medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes or lung disease. **Communication**

with information regarding event changes will come from school-level leadership. Based on each school's unique circumstances, events may go forward with limited attendance or may be canceled or postponed. **If formal guidance is issued that impacts these decisions, we will communicate that as soon as the decision is made.**

So far, the following upcoming events have been postponed.

- MBS Lucky Day Carnival on March 13
- CHS Variety Night on March 13 & March 14
- CHS International Festival on March 19
- CMS PE Dance Program Performance on March 19

HOW ARE SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND BUSES BEING CLEANED?

The custodial staff in all of our school buildings are using proper cleaning procedures and disinfectants as recommended by the CDC. They are cleaning with added frequency to include coming in on the weekend. In addition, all of our school buses are being cleaned and disinfected daily.

WHAT ABOUT STUDENT ATTENDANCE?

We respect the decision of parents/guardians to do what they believe is best for their student(s). We are required by law to keep attendance records and will continue to log all absences. A student will not be penalized for absences that are the result of following medical advice or the guidance of the Department of Health.

HOW AND WHEN WOULD IT BE COMMUNICATED IF THERE IS A SCHOOL CLOSURE?

The decision to close school would be made in consultation with the Vermont Department of Health and the Vermont Agency of Education. For additional information, please read the technical guidance that the two agencies developed: [School Closure and Dismissal During a Novel Coronavirus Outbreak: Technical Guidance for Local School Officials](#).

HOW LONG WOULD WE BE CLOSED?

The length of time school would be closed will vary depending on the severity of the risk. The Superintendent will obtain guidance from the Vermont Department of Health and the Agency of Education to determine when students and staff should return to schools and what additional steps are needed for the school community.

WILL WE HAVE TO MAKE UP THE DAYS?

The closure of a school due to COVID-19 may qualify as an emergency reason under the State Board of Education Rule 2300 to support a waiver request from the minimal number of student attendance days

required during a school year. The Superintendent will consult with the Secretary of Education in advance of making a school closure decision in order to assess the qualifying emergency nature of such a decision relative to state attendance regulations.

WILL MEALS BE OFFERED TO STUDENTS IF WE CLOSE?

This plan is in the works but nothing has been officially decided yet. Providing meals is absolutely something we will strive to do.

HOW CAN I STAY INFORMED ABOUT CONFIRMED CASES IN VERMONT?

The Vermont Department of Health has a website that shows current status in Vermont. It can be found here directly: <https://www.healthvermont.gov/response/infectious-disease/2019-novel-coronavirus>. Additionally, the district has made a website that lists all the communication sent out so far from CSD as well as important links to the VDH and CDC. <https://www.csdvt.org/district/about/covid.php>

RESOURCES FOR TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT COVID-19

- [Talking to Children About COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\): A Parent Resource \(NASP\)](#)
- [How to talk to kids about the Coronavirus \(NY Times\)](#)
- [What Kids Want to Know About Coronavirus \(NPR Comic format\)](#)
- [How to Talk to Kids About Coronavirus \(Seattle Times\)](#)
- [Brainpop video about Coronavirus](#)
- [5 Ways to Help Children with Coronavirus Anxiety - Little Flower Yoga](#)

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