



# Colchester School District

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Colchester Community,

Here's our first official reopening update of the summer.

## Reopening School: Where we are in the decision-making process

Both the District Leadership Team and the larger Reopening Committee, which includes administrators, teachers, paraeducators, nurses, food service, and the technology department, met several times last week to start to build the framework for how Colchester students and staff can safely return to school in the fall. Welcoming some or all of our students back into our buildings during a pandemic is a complex task that requires rethinking how we operate on all levels.



There are a number of subcommittees who are working on a variety of topics including facilities, health & safety, food service, transportation, remote learning, special education, curriculum, social & emotional supports, technology, human resources, and more. In addition to input from our employees and families, all of our decisions are being drafted using the guidance issued by the Vermont Agency of Education and Department of Health. Every week the Agency of Education puts out additional guidance, or clarifies existing guidance, in a particular area. This week, for example, we're expecting guidance on remote/hybrid

learning. Once we get that guidance, our Remote Learning subcommittee will incorporate it into their planning. They will submit their plans and recommendations back to the District Leadership Team who will approve it and then we will communicate it out to our staff and families.

We will be communicating with you throughout the summer as we make decisions or recognize areas where we can distribute information. Our goal is to get information out to our families and staff as soon as possible rather than waiting for everything to be complete. Don't worry, if you miss a newsletter here or there over the course of the summer, we will be sure to cumulate all of this information and redistribute it prior to the start of school. Our goal

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(and it's a big one!) is to have decisions/action steps for all the major changes that will affect next school year by August 1st.

The rest of this newsletter will outline the new information that we have for you this week.

## Remote Learning or In-Person

We know the decision to allow all students back in our buildings, some students back, some students back on a rotating basis, and/or to offer full-time remote learning is the information many of our parents are waiting for. These scenarios and all of the subsequent decisions and resulting impacts are being exhausted by our district leadership team. However, we are ultimately waiting for additional guidance from the Agency of Education and the Department of Health before we move forward with a specific plan for Colchester. We are hoping to hear from those agencies this week. Stay tuned.



## Transportation/School Buses

Our family survey showed that 22% of our families rely on bus transportation and 35% of families use the bus some of the time. The Agency of Education is allowing local school districts to operate transportation at “Step 3”, which means that buses can be filled to capacity. In order to reduce the number of students on our buses, **we want to encourage families to transport their students to and from school whenever possible**. The State’s guidance requires that before students get on a school bus that they must complete a health screening that includes several questions and a temperature check. This additional process will lengthen our bus routes. There are many other considerations that need to be made regarding transportation and our transportation subcommittee will be meeting soon. For now, we’re asking our families to think about their transportation plans for next year so that when we ask for that information in a few weeks you’ll be prepared to answer. We have limited resources for transportation and we are trying to be as efficient as possible. Thank you for reserving space for the students who rely on the bus.



## Student Arrival

Just as students who ride the bus will complete a health screening, those arriving by car or foot will also complete a screening. To limit long lines and congregation of large groups, you can expect that students will be assigned to enter the building through a variety of doors. Even with distributing entry through multiple doors, the health screening process will take time. Each building is developing specific entry procedures for bus riders who have already been screened and walkers/car drop-offs who will need screening. The guidance is very clear, for obvious reasons, that those two groups should not mix.

## Facial Coverings / Masks

The Vermont Agency of Education is requiring all students and employees to wear a face-covering. Health experts say the evidence is clear that facial coverings can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and that the more people wearing facial coverings, the better. In one simulation, researchers predicted that 80 percent of the population wearing masks would do more to reduce COVID-19 spread than a strict lockdown. Facial coverings are an understood reality these days and coming to school will be no different. Are they uncomfortable at times? Sure. Will some kids have difficulty keeping them on? Absolutely. However, they are proven to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and that is more important than the inconvenience of wearing one.



In light of that, we recommend that families use this summer to try out some different styles of facial covering so you can begin to identify which works best for your child(ren). The district will have emergency/backup facial coverings available for students and staff in the event they are needed, however, we will not be providing facial coverings for students. This is primarily because as soon as you regularly wear a facial covering, it becomes clear that facial-coverings are not one size fits all. Please take advantage of the time at hand to help your child(ren) practice wearing and caring for their own facial coverings.

## Returning Student Form

Each year, we require all students, both new and returning, to fill out an online registration form. This form verifies contact and emergency contact information for your child(ren) as well as medical and transportation information. It is also where you agree to the forms required to access the internet and technology devices. You will get an email when the form is ready, and even more so this year, we really hope you can fill it out as soon as possible. Thank you in advance.

## Survey Results

Thank you for taking the time to complete our first Reopening Colchester Schools Family Survey. We had a tremendous response with nearly 1,400 families providing their feedback and we are already using the data in our subcommittees. Our employee survey is going out this week and you can anticipate future family surveys to help both the district and the individual schools your child(ren) attend to make decisions. Here are a few highlights/examples of the data we're using from the most recent family survey.

- 70% of families feel comfortable or excited about returning to in-person instruction in our school buildings. That leaves 30% who feel uncomfortable or fearful. We understand that and will be working to communicate the steps that we are taking to maintain the welcoming school community that Colchester pride's itself on.
- 49% of families said their child(ren) liked meeting with their teacher and peers through morning meetings, advisory or AT, and 57% expressed that they wished there were more opportunities for live video interactions.
- 60% of families appreciated the ability to work at their own pace (asynchronous learning) while 40% said they struggled to manage or set learning time in their household.

- 88% of families said their child(ren) missed coming to school to learn and see their peers.

## First of Many...

This will be the first of many summer updates. We're going to try to balance providing information to you as soon as possible, with overwhelming your inbox during these important summer months! However, as we said before, don't worry if you don't catch it all. We will be communicating all of this information, and the information that's yet to come, as we get closer to the end of August.

Have a great week!

Amy Minor  
Superintendent of Schools