



Colchester School District

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CSD Community,

I hope the information that we sent last week, both the hybrid announcement and the [Reopening Colchester Schools: A Guide for the 2020-2021 School Year](#), has been helpful in your decision making process. If you're not yet aware, Governor Scott announced yesterday that he will issue an Executive Order to delay the start of school until Tuesday, September 8th. The Agency of Education said they will have additional guidance once it's issued. We're waiting for that and will communicate what it all means for us in Colchester as soon as we can. For now though, it's safe to say that the first day of school for all Colchester students will be Tuesday, September 8th.

Myself and the district principals received a fair amount of emails and phone calls over the past week and I want to thank those who reached out to share their support and/or their concerns. I am always very grateful when families engage with us. Although we have spent countless hours planning different scenarios, weighing pros and cons, and working to make sure we are communicating all of our decisions in a timely manner, family feedback initiates important checks and balances on our reopening plan. It helps bring clarity and perspectives that may not have been considered.

[Below you'll find some new updates and answers to questions we've received in an FAQ style.](#)

Question: Are the decisions that have been made final?

Answer: To be honest, all decisions regarding the reopening of schools are extremely difficult. It is challenging to obtain consensus on reopening decisions as there are conflicting opinions on many of the issues we are grappling with. However, we understand that families need definitive information in order to plan for the fall. Some of our decisions we do not anticipate changing. For example, the requirements to wear masks, for students to eat in classrooms, and restrictions on visitors and volunteers. As a school district, we need clear guidance from both the Vermont Agency of Education and the Vermont Department of Health in order to make, and be confident in our decisions. As you saw, the start date of school changed recently and later this week we are anticipating that the overarching guidance from the state ([A Strong and Healthy Start: Safety and Health Guidance for Vermont Schools](#)) will have some crucial revisions and updates that may impact the information we've already put out to families. Every time the state revises or issues new guidance, we, at the local level, need to reassess our decisions. As always, we are committed to keeping you informed every step of the way and put a priority on communicating changes as they occur so that you can continue to plan for your family.

Amy Minor
Superintendent
of Schools

George Trieb
Business & Operations
Manager

Carrie Lutz
Director of Student
Support Services

Gwendolyn Carmolli
Director of Curriculum
& Instruction

Q: The Reopening Guide mentioned that the district will clean on Wednesdays when students are not in the building. Is that the only day the buildings will be cleaned?

A: Absolutely not. While we indicated in our guide that we will thoroughly clean our buildings on Wednesdays since the majority of our students will be learning remotely, we want to be clear that is not the only day our buildings will be cleaned. The district has developed a comprehensive cleaning and disinfecting procedure using guidance from the CDC, OSHA, and our district nursing team. This procedure will be consistent throughout the entire week with multiple cleaning and disinfecting practices occurring in all of our schools. All common spaces and equipment, including bathrooms, frequently touched surfaces and doors, tools and equipment, and vehicles shall be cleaned and disinfected regularly each day, when possible, prior to transfer from one person to another. What we were trying to say was that Wednesday will just afford our custodial team more flexibility to move around the buildings since there will be very few people inside.

Q: Why does the high school hybrid schedule look different than the K-8 schedule?

A: The developmental and instructional needs between students in grades K-8 and 9-12 are vastly different. While we know that aligning schedules among students in all grades would have afforded families with a high school student to supervise an elementary sibling, when we looked at the instructional benefits of having CHS on a slightly different schedule, we felt the need to try to make it work. After we released our guide to families on Friday, we heard from some of our families who have younger children in other CSD schools that the decision to split K-8 and 9-12 made a difficult situation even harder.

Each decision made thus far has truly been made with the best of intentions, and only after careful consideration with both safety and instruction in mind. Across Vermont, we are seeing a wide variety of reopening plans as districts are doing their best to develop a plan for their specific school community. This week, the CHS Reopening Committee and the CHS Leadership Team met together and one of the areas they focused on was reviewing the schedule, taking into consideration safety, instruction, and family needs. While we want to give our families information as soon as possible, some decisions take time. We are going to continue our discussions and brainstorming and will communicate any potential changes to the CHS schedule after the weekend.

Q: How do I tell my school if I'm choosing in-person learning or fully-remote learning?

A: Yesterday, our Technology Department sent an email (or multiple emails if you have more than one child in the district) to parents/guardians with a link to complete their child's Online Returning Student Verification Form where you will be asked which learning option you would like your child receive. If you did not receive an email with a registration link yesterday, please contact helpdesk@colchestersd.org.

Please note, there are two forms available on the homepage, New Student and Returning Student. In almost all cases, families should be selecting the Returning Student Verification form. We had several families fill out a New Student Registration form which is only for students brand new to the district. If you are the parent/guardian of a new student (such as a kindergartener or an incoming student from the Islands or Georgia) and you already filled out a registration form in the spring, your school will contact you directly to get your decision.

Q: Why was a hybrid model selected? Why aren't all students returning to in-person instruction 5 days a week?

A: To be clear, I, along with administrators, teachers, and support staff across our district want nothing more than to be able to bring all of our students back into our schools. However, we need to do that safely while following the recommendations set by the Vermont Agency of Education and the Department of Health to reduce the spread. In those recommendations they say, "Space seating/desks to at least 6 feet apart." In Colchester, our current class sizes are too large to accommodate that spacing. We cannot put 20 students in one of our classrooms and have them be spaced out that far from each other. So, the only way for us to bring *any* students back was to split the classes in half. Please know, I believe the best model for education is one where our students and teachers are together in our buildings. I am hopeful and optimistic that the COVID-19 cases will continue to remain low in Vermont and that health data will ultimately support the Agency of Education and Department of Health relaxing the physical distancing guidelines or moving the state to Step 3 where districts have more flexibility. Until then, we are doing the best we can to support the educational and health needs of our entire community.

Q: I'm going to need childcare for the 3 remote days. Does the district know of any local places providing supervision for school-aged children?

A: We acknowledge the childcare challenges that hybrid learning presents for some families. We are collaborating with local providers to brainstorm solutions. We will let you know when we have more information.

Q: Will the ACE after school program run by Colchester Parks and Recreation operate this fall?

A: We do expect the Colchester ACE program to run this fall. For information regarding the ACE program please contact the Parks and Recreation Department at 264-5640.

Q: My child receives special education services, what should I expect in the fall? When will I find out more information about their plan?

A: The district will continue to deliver special education plans (IEPs) to students regardless if they're learning in-person or fully-remote. We don't have all the special education guidance from the Agency of Education yet, but district teams are already working on what our structures will look like. Once we know which students will be learning in person and which will be remote, we will work with families on what their child's individual plan will look like. For families choosing virtual services, special education services and support in accessing general education will be provided remotely.

For families choosing in-person instruction, special education services may be done in person on the days that the student is in school or they may be done remotely on the days when the student is not in the school building. For some students based on their needs, they may have both in person services and remote services. In addition, if students need support accessing general education during their remote learning days, that will be provided to them remotely.

When will I know who my child's case manager is?

Some of the decisions regarding case manager assignment is based on general education class placement. Once our schools know which students are receiving in-person instruction and which are enrolling in virtual schooling, they will be able to determine class placements and assign case managers.

Q: What about recess? What happens if there's a positive COVID-19 case? How will students learn on the 3 remote days?

A: All of the above questions are answered in our [Reopening Colchester Schools: A Guide for the 2020-2021 School Year](#). If you have not yet read it, we suggest that you do. While we want to emphasize that this guide does not include every detail of our reopening plan, it does serve as a frame to give families some initial information in regard to instructional delivery, scheduling, health and safety precautions, transportation, special services, and how the district would respond to a positive case in the district. Our teams working on the district's reopening are continuing to develop the many complex layers of logistics that need to be determined prior to students returning. We will continue to update this guide as additional decisions are made.

Q: I sent an email to my principal or other administrator and I haven't heard back.

A: We are reading *everything* and we are committed to making additional decisions and reassessing current ones as needed. We are trying to respond to everyone who reaches out, but if we can't, expect to see answers to many of your questions answered in emails like this. While we are making every effort to respond to each email individually, it may take a bit longer than normal. Please know that we are reading every email, listening to every voicemail, and sorting every survey result. We also want everyone to have the same information. So, if it's a question we're getting a lot, rather than only giving the answers to a few people who ask, we will send it out districtwide to ensure that everyone has the same access to our answers and the deliberations that went into our decisions.

In closing, I just want to stress that we are making every decision with the best intention. We deeply care about our students and our employees. On a district level and on an individual level, there are so many moving pieces and complex factors to consider. Your opinions on what is best for your child, may not be the same as your neighbor or your child's classmate. We look forward to continuing to hear from our families as our plans continue to evolve. Thank you for your patience, understanding, and support.

With gratitude,

Amy Minor
Superintendent of Schools