



# Colchester School District

Administrative Offices, 125 Laker Lane, PO Box 27, Colchester, Vermont 05446

Phone: (802) 264-5999 • [www.csdvt.org](http://www.csdvt.org) • Fax: (802) 863-4774

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October 2, 2020

CSD Community,

The primary focus of this update is to outline the district's plan and timeline to bring elementary students back in our schools more days a week. It includes our plan, the reasoning behind it, as well as some important reminders on how you can help keep our schools safe so we can stay open.

Our highest priority is to bring students back in a way that will allow us to maintain the state's health and safety requirements. Doing this safely and with a high degree of quality is a complex task that requires extensive thought and planning. **It is critical that we take the time to get this right.** This plan will only affect students currently enrolled in in-person learning. Students enrolled in our fully-virtual academy will continue to learn remotely.

**OUR PLAN:** We will begin to phase Kindergarten through Grade 5 students to 4 days a week, in-person learning, starting October 19th. It starts by bringing back the youngest grades in each school first.

**Kindergarten:** Beginning on Monday, October 19, all kindergarteners will attend school in person Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. They will learn remotely on Wednesday.

**First Grade:** For the week starting on Monday, October 19, all first graders will follow their assigned hybrid schedule on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of that week. Beginning on Thursday, October 22 and Friday, October 23, all first graders will attend school in-person.

**Second Grade:** Beginning on Monday, October 26, all 2nd graders will attend school in person Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. They will learn remotely on Wednesday.

**Third Grade:** Beginning on Monday, October 19, all 3rd graders will attend school in person Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. They will learn remotely on Wednesday.

**Fourth Grade:** Beginning Monday, October 26, all 4th graders will attend school in person on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. They will learn remotely on Wednesday.

**Fifth Grade:** Beginning Monday, November 2, all 5th graders will start attending school in person, 4 days a week. However, there is no school on Tuesday, November 3, so for their first week, they will attend in person on Monday, Thursday and Friday and will learn remotely on Wednesday.

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**Amy Minor**  
Superintendent  
of Schools

**George Trieb**  
Business & Operations  
Manager

**Carrie Lutz**  
Director of Student  
Support Services

**Gwendolyn Carmolli**  
Director of Curriculum  
& Instruction

### **WHY GRADES K-5?**

Children in grades K-5 are being given the highest priority for return to full-time in-person learning by the AOE as these students are most likely to benefit from in-person learning and least likely to become infected with or transmit the virus that causes COVID-19. The current distancing guidelines recommend 3 feet of space between students in grades K-5, when possible. This means that we should do our best to limit students being in close proximity to each other and continue to use additional layers of protection such as wearing masks, standing side-by-side instead of face-to-face, and practicing good hand hygiene. Another layer of protection is plexiglass. We currently have some plexiglass in classrooms and have ordered more.

### **WHY A PHASED APPROACH?**

This gradual addition of more students in the building will allow us to evaluate our systems as they flex to accommodate things like arrival/dismissal, lunch preparation and delivery to classrooms, supervision of recess and outdoor mask breaks, acquisition of additional PPE and necessary furniture such as desks, and allotting additional time for hygiene routines such as regular handwashing. It is also important to note that each of our schools operate differently and as a result, they have varying staffing needs and class sizes. Those differences affect our ability and the timeline of bringing students back to school for additional in-person learning. Families should anticipate further communication from their building principal regarding the logistical components to this plan.

Our leadership team has carefully considered the complex variables involved in this decision. We've reviewed the state's guidance requirements, our own district's operational demands, the vast array of our students' needs, as well as the findings and opinions of health experts studying the virus. We had a very successful opening using the hybrid learning model. Our community transmission rate remains incredibly low. The handful of cases that have been reported in Vermont schools were not transmitted in the school. This means that those individuals contracted the virus out in their community, came to their school while they were unknowingly positive and because of the strong safety layers in place, the virus was not transmitted to anyone else at the school. This is an early indication that the steps we and other schools throughout the state have taken are working to keep everyone safe.

### **WHY REMOTE LEARNING ON WEDNESDAYS?**

Throughout the three week transition from October 19 through November 6, Wednesdays will continue to be a remote learning day for all students. The state's health and safety guidelines require adjustments to student and teacher schedules, curriculum and teaching methods. These factors have reduced planning time for teachers. Additionally, educators need time to analyze and develop plans based on assessment information for individual students. Therefore, we need time on Wednesdays for planning, and team meetings during the transition period. We will continue to assess our needs for remote learning on Wednesdays and will notify families of any changes.

### **IS THIS PERMANENT OR WILL THIS PLAN CHANGE?**

In last week's email, I spoke about three essential benchmarks that we needed to meet before considering to bring students back for more days of in-person learning. *It is important to know that if our*

*status with any of the below benchmarks change, we may need to adjust, alter, or outright cancel the plan outlined above.*

- We have sufficient staffing levels to follow health and safety procedures and meet the needs of students.
- We have the ability to maintain compliance with the guidance from the Department of Health and the Agency of Education.
- Department of Health guidance and data continues to support an increase to more in-person instruction.

Lastly, a few important reminders to help keep everyone safe, especially as we unroll our plan to bring more students back into classrooms. We need everyone to do their part to help us stay safe to stay open.

#### **TRAVEL: WHEN TO QUARANTINE**

An important reminder for families who may be traveling outside of Vermont for events like sports competitions, celebrations, visiting extended family, or just taking a long weekend or vacation. **Anyone traveling outside Vermont must follow the Department of Health's rules for quarantine upon return.** Make sure to review the [cross-state travel map](#) to determine if quarantining is required based on the area that you're traveling to. If you choose to go to a yellow or red zone, students will need to follow the quarantine guidelines upon their return. Per the Vermont Department of Health, there are two options. Option A: 14-day quarantine or Option B: Taking a COVID-19 PCR test on day 7 if they are without any symptoms of COVID. The travel map is updated weekly on Tuesdays and is populated with raw data from Johns Hopkins University. The Department of Health also has a [FAQ page](#) with answers to many popular questions about traveling or hosting out-of-state visitors in your home.

#### **SYMPTOMS: WHEN TO STAY HOME**

If your student wakes up with a runny nose or a headache, you need to keep them home for 24 hours or until their symptoms improve. If you send them to school, there is a very good chance they will be sent home by our nursing staff following guidance from the health department. To that end, it is incredibly important that a caregiver or designated emergency contact be available to pick the student up within 30 minutes if notified to do so. We have outlined several scenarios in our [Symptoms and Positive Cases Guide](#) and we strongly encourage families to review the information inside.

Thank you in advance for following these protocols, the longer our buildings stay healthy, the longer we will remain open.

Be well,

Amy Minor  
Superintendent of Schools

