



Colchester School District

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April 15, 2021

Dear CSD Community,

I want to thank everyone for their patience with this long-awaited email outlining our plan for the rest of the school year. Last week, the Agency of Education (AOE) finally released [updated guidance](#) for schools to follow for the remainder of the school year. The following is a very long and detailed message that will outline the changes that will be made for the rest of the school year. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. Principals will send out school-specific information about the changes after we return from April break.

The District Leadership Team has had a chance to thoroughly review the new guidance and forecast how the changes will affect the current operation of our schools. The guidance officially went into effect last Friday and has three main goals.

1. End the year strong and safely, following applicable and relevant health and safety guidance.
2. Work to increase in-person instruction for students to the greatest extent possible.
3. Begin Education Recovery planning and activities.

The decision around increasing in-person instruction has not been taken lightly or casually. The District Leadership Team has been planning, researching, collaborating, and exhausting all potential options for weeks. We've surveyed different groups in our school community, spoken extensively with other school districts in our region, and kept a close eye on COVID-19 case data.

Overarching PreK-12 plan:

- Changes to in-person learning models **will start on Monday, May 10.**
- Grades K-5 at MBS, PPS, and UMS will increase to four and a half days of in-person learning. Students will attend school in person on Wednesdays and all schools will dismiss at 1:00 pm.
- Grades 6-8 at CMS, will increase to four days a week of in-person learning time.
- Grades 9-12 at CHS will increase to four days a week of in-person learning through an opt-in process, meaning families and their students will decide to attend the additional two days in person to complete their assigned asynchronous work.
- Our preschool program will continue with its half-day, four days a week schedule. No changes will be made as this is the schedule they already use in a normal year.

Details by Grade or Learning Model: This section is designed to give families more information specific to each school and current learning model, however, it is not all-encompassing. Building principals will provide further details the week that we return from April Break.

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Superintendent
of Schools

George Trieb
Business & Operations
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- **K-5 In-Person Learners:** Starting on Monday, May 10, all MBS, PPS, and UMS students currently enrolled in in-person learning will be back 5 days a week. On each Wednesday, we will dismiss students at 1:00 pm. All students will have lunch and recess before dismissal. No remote learning will occur between 1:00 and 3:00 p.m. Principal Burke, Principal Millham, and Principal Antonicci will share more information about their specific school plans the week of April 26, which will include a survey asking families for their Wednesday transportation plan.
 - **Aftercare for Wednesday Early Dismissal:** Colchester Parks and Recreation is still working on a solution to offer childcare on Wednesdays after dismissal. Knowing families will be planning care, they will have a set plan by Friday, April 23. If you are interested in aftercare please email Jenn at jturmel@colchestervt.gov and she will email you information on Friday, April 23.
- **K-5 Virtual Learners:** Students who currently enrolled in the fully virtual learning model will continue to learn remotely. Learning on Wednesday afternoons, between 1:00 and 3:00, will remain asynchronous.
- **CMS In-Person Learners:** Starting on Monday, May 10, we are hoping that all students currently enrolled in in-person learning will attend four days of in-person learning. In-person days will be Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. Wednesday will continue to be a fully remote day and students will follow their normal Wednesday schedule. Principal Cote will share more information about the overall plan for CMS the week of April 26.
 - Families may choose **not** to increase their days but instead, continue with two in-person days and three remote days. Families who wish to opt-out and remain hybrid must submit a response to the CMS Learning Model Change Request Form that will be sent directly from CMS the week of April 26. This information will be important to know for their planning.
 - Increasing student attendance has resulted in the need for additional individual desks. The new furniture has been ordered and is scheduled to arrive at the end of May. In grades 7 and 8, students are required to be six feet apart while eating. Finding the space to get this amount of separation between students has been a challenge and is still being worked on. To be in compliance with the guidance, students will see a change to their current lunch routine.
- **CMS Virtual Learners:** Students who are currently enrolled in the fully virtual learning model will continue to learn remotely. Families who would like to request their student return to in-person learning may do so through the CMS Learning Model Change Request Form which will be sent by CMS directly the week of April 26. The CMS Virtual Academy is at capacity and unable to accept requests from families who would like to transition from in-person learning to fully virtual.
- **CHS In-Person Learners:** Starting on Monday, May 10, all students currently enrolled in in-person learning will have a choice to attend school in person on their asynchronous days. Wednesdays will continue to be a fully remote day and students will follow their normal Wednesday schedule. Students who choose to attend CHS four days a week will follow their normal class schedule on their asynchronous days and complete their assigned asynchronous work in the classroom while the teacher instructs the scheduled group of in-person learners. When possible, students will also be able to participate in class activities, receive feedback on their work, and engage in enrichment activities. Principal Baron will share more information about this opt-in model the week of April 26.
 - To ensure the success of this model and to make necessary changes, CHS will ask students and their families to commit to returning to CHS four days a week for the remainder of the year

(beginning on May 10th). After the break, look for a survey where you can indicate if your student would like to come four days a week.

- **CHS Virtual Learners:** Students currently enrolled in VTVLC will continue to learn remotely.

Key Factors in the Decision-Making Process

There were multiple factors considered in the decision to increase in-person learning opportunities, foremost being the health and safety of our school community. The updated guidance points to mounting evidence that “in-person learning can be conducted in a safe manner for students in all grades levels.” It calls attention to other New England schools with similar guidance and set-ups who have been successful at increasing in-person learning. Another factor was the early prioritization to vaccinate school staff, with the added benefit that many of our older students will be eligible to be vaccinated next week. We also have proven mitigation measures in place that significantly reduce the likelihood of transmission of the virus when it is brought into our schools. And the future is starting to trend in a good direction. At Tuesday’s press conference, it was announced that cases have declined 23% this week and the statewide positivity rate is back below 2%.

Survey Results

Knowing that the topic of increasing in-person learning often brings passionate opinions on both sides, last week we surveyed different groups of our school community to get a better understanding of what would be most beneficial for students’ academics and mental health.

The survey data varied by school and had an important influence on the final outcome of the plan. 82% of our K-5 families supported returning to some amount of in-person learning on Wednesdays. At the middle school level, 64% of families and 60% of students supported increasing in-person learning. At the high school level, 51% of families and 30% of students supported increasing in-person learning, citing concerns with changes that would have to be made considering the unique way classes were structured this year using a 4x4 schedule.

Health Screenings

The updated guidance removes some of the less effective mitigation strategies that were put in place at the start of the school year. Statewide data found that only 20% of children developed a fever during the course of their illness with COVID-19 and our own district data confirmed that students very rarely came to school with a fever this year. That data is one of the reasons the updated guidance no longer requires schools to conduct temperature checks of students at the door.

In Colchester, we will end our arrival health screening process when we return from April break. Instead, families will be asked to monitor their child daily for any symptoms of COVID-19 and check for a temperature at home. Any individual with a fever of 100.4 should not come to school. The guidance continues to encourage families to be vigilant and to not send sick children to school. Here is an example of questions to ask your child before they depart for school. If the answer is “yes” to any of the below questions, you should keep your child home and notify the nurses’ office.

1. **Has your child been exposed to COVID-19?**
2. **Does your child have any of the following COVID-19 symptoms?**
 - Cough
 - Fever (100.4 or greater)
 - Shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing
 - Chills
 - Fatigue

- Muscle pain or body aches
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Lost of taste or smell
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea

CSD will continue to be vigilant in our cleaning protocols for the remainder of the school year. Our experience has shown that our cleaning efforts, along with other mitigating measures, including physical distancing, wearing masks, and handwashing, have been successful in limiting in-school transmission. In the last seven months, our district has only had two instances of in-school transmission and one occurrence of transmission that was sports-related, which was contained to the team.

Travel Information: Testing and Quarantine

The Vermont Department of Health (VDH) no longer requires quarantine for unvaccinated individuals who travel outside of Vermont. Instead, if unvaccinated adults or children [travel outside Vermont](#), they must be tested within three days of returning to Vermont. You do not need to quarantine while waiting for results. The test must be a “current infection” test (such as a PCR test), and cannot be an antigen test (also known as a rapid test). The two closest testing sites are 32 Malletts Bay Avenue in Winooski and 405 Pine Street in Burlington. Both are run by VDH and allow you to [schedule appointments online](#) ahead of time.

This updated travel guidance does not include international travel. Any unvaccinated individual who travels out of the country must get tested with a viral test 3-5 days after travel AND stay home and self-quarantine for a full 7 days after travel. If you don't get tested, you must stay home and self-quarantine for 10 days after travel.

Expected Future Guidance

We are still waiting for guidance about end-of-the-year celebrations. Secretary French originally estimated it would be out at the end of April. Our planning teams for celebrations like graduation, 8th-grade celebration, and other grade or team-specific activities are already underway, but are waiting to see the guidance before plans are finalized. We know families are wanting to plan for these important milestones and as soon as we have concrete information to share, we will. We are just as excited to celebrate our students as you are!

Currently, school grounds are open for community use but our buildings are still closed to the public. We expect to hear further guidance about the use of school facilities by outside groups in the near future.

Thank you

Finally, thank you. Not only for reading all the way through this incredibly long letter, but also for all of your support this year. It has taken all of us to get to this point and I am incredibly grateful and proud of the way our district has persevered. We are so close to the finish line, not only of the school year but hopefully of this pandemic. As we kick off April break next week with the plan to welcome more students into our schools in early May, I want to thank you for continuing to be vigilant with the Health Department's advice of masks on faces, six-foot spaces, and uncrowded spaces. These three things go a long way in keeping our doors open.

Be well,

Amy Minor
Superintendent of Schools