



# Colchester School District

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CSD Community,

Health and State officials are continuing to plan for the endemic phase of COVID-19 and announced some updates at yesterday's press conference that will impact our school operations as we return from February Break. Please take the time to familiarize yourself with the below information.

## **Test Distribution for February Break**

The Vermont Agency of Education has provided enough antigen test kits for us to distribute one kit to every student and employee in the district for use at the end of February Break (February 21 - March 1). As it has been all year, testing is not required to attend school.

Each kit includes two tests. We encourage CSD students and employees to test twice (at least 24 hours apart) in the days before returning to school. For example, you could use the first test on Tuesday, March 1 and the second test on the morning before school on Wednesday, March 2.

Kits will be handed out Thursday or Friday of this week. For PreK and elementary students, kits will be delivered to classrooms and placed in backpacks. For middle school students, the kits will be distributed to students in their TA. For high school students, kits will be available in front of the school counseling office before school, during lunches, and at dismissal.

If your student is absent at the end of the week or you find you need additional tests, we will also be distributing tests on Voting Day: Tuesday, March 1 at the Bayside Activity Center. From 1-4 pm families and employees can stop in to do a rapid test and/or pick up test kits. The Bayside Activity Center is located at 36 Blakely Road at the entrance to Bayside Park.

## **Closing of Bayside Testing Center**

With the increased accessibility of at-home testing kits, we are seeing fewer families coming to the Bayside Testing Center in the mornings. Given the staffing and logistics needed to run the testing center, it no longer feels like the best use of our resources. **This Friday will be the last day that we will offer morning testing at Bayside.** After February Break, at-home test kits will be distributed at the school level through the nurse's office.

## **Universal Masking Changes**

At yesterday's press conference, State officials announced that when we return from February break, mask-wearing can be made optional for schools that have over 80% of their students vaccinated for

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COVID-19. This is exciting news because it is a clear indication that COVID-19 conditions in Vermont are improving greatly.

We've been told that school vaccination percentages will be calculated by the state, however, the data has not been made available to us yet and we have not been given a clear timeline for when to expect it.

**Masks will continue to be required in all CSD schools until we receive verified vaccination data from the state.**

That being said, through our own estimation, we believe that CHS is likely to be above the 80% threshold and we believe that CMS may be just below it. We do not believe our elementary schools are near 80%. While this data is helpful for planning purposes, we will have to wait for the State to verify those percentages before any changes are made.

Once the state confirms that CHS is over 80% vaccinated we will notify our CHS community. At that point, masks will no longer be required at CHS. All other CSD schools that are under 80% vaccinated will be required to wear masks until they meet the State's 80% threshold.

The CDC still requires masks on public transportation, which includes school buses and other forms of school transportation. This means that all bus riders, even CHS riders, will be required to wear a mask when using any type of school-based transportation (bus, van, and cab, etc).

We know that a change in masking requirements will have an impact on athletics and co-curriculars too. We are waiting to hear from the Vermont Principals Association on any changes to their guidelines.

State officials also stated that mask guidelines will likely be removed altogether, regardless of vaccination rate, if cases continue to decline. However, they did not share a projected timeline of when that decision would be made.

Even though masks may not be required at CHS next month, the Vermont Department of Health still recommends mask-wearing when indoors, regardless of vaccination status. We anticipate that many CHS students and employees will continue to wear masks. As a community, we must respect each individual's choice and we hope that as mask mandates are lifted at other schools and within the greater community, we can continue to support each other.

### **Changes to Elementary Recess and Lunch**

Other areas that will see changes in the near future are recess and lunch. Our elementary schools are already preparing to transition recess to allow K-5 students to mix with other classes. When we return from February Break, each elementary school will be taking steps to update their schedules from a single class at recess to multiple classes together. At the same time, students will be receiving instruction on the skills and positive behaviors needed to play successfully with their peers. This work will be important as we acknowledge that students have only been having recess with their immediate classmates for over a year. Once recess changes are underway, we will begin to look at lunch procedures in hopes of creating a smooth and clear transition back to the cafeteria.

### **No Changes to Sick Procedures**

Even though we're transitioning to the next phase of this pandemic and there is potential for some of our schools to be able to move to optional mask-wearing, what has *not* changed is the requirement for students or staff to stay home if they have any symptoms. **If you have a runny nose, cough, fever, etc, you need to stay home.** If symptoms develop while at school, you will be sent home. Now that we are on the horizon of no longer requiring masks, it will be even more prudent to monitor the health of yourselves and your family members.

### **Pandemic EBT Benefits for 2021-2022**

P-EBT is a temporary food benefit approved by the federal government to help households who have been affected by COVID-19 related school closures and school absences. P-EBT has been extended through the 2021-2022 school year and the summer of 2022. We've communicated directly with families who have received previous P-EBT benefits but want to make sure everyone is aware in case you think your family might qualify. [For more information visit our P-EBT Information Page.](#)

### **Looking Ahead**

We have lived with shifting COVID safety guidance for the past two years and as a district, we have done an amazing job keeping each other safe. We are hopeful that this next phase of COVID recovery will allow for more joy and connection while we continue to build a culture of respect and kindness in our buildings.

I am grateful for the support we have received during the pandemic and I appreciate the patience and understanding granted as we continue to move forward with updates and changes. Thank you for all that you do to make Colchester a wonderful place to work, live, learn and grow.

Be well,

Amy Minor  
Superintendent of Schools