



Colchester Public Schools

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Dear Colchester Families and Staff,

The Colchester Public Schools "[School Reopening Plan](#)," first published in July, states that the District will reconsider our instructional model every four weeks. As we approach the end of our eighth week of school in the hybrid model, we have reviewed the available data to inform our next decision. State guidelines, shared below, indicate that it is possible to move a portion of our students into full, in-person learning. Our original decision to start the year with all grades working in a hybrid model was based on balancing staff and student safety with the educational needs of our students. We planned to shift to full, in-person learning in mid-October; however, Department of Public Health officials recommended caution because of a spike in cases in our region and we determined that the District would remain in a hybrid model.

Over the past few weeks more information about the spread of the virus within schools has been published. The CSDE recently modified "[Addendum 4](#)" that acknowledges that schools are a very different setting than the general community and our reactions to an increase in cases should be different than on a community-wide level. **As of today, we have no knowledge of a documented case of student to student transmission in Colchester.** In addition, it has been reported nationally that very few cases have been traced to in-school transmission, in particular when safety measures were in place. While the New London county rate remains moderate at about 20 positive cases per 100,000 people, the transmission rate in schools remains very low across the state, including in schools that have had students in full-time for a number of weeks. We feel that with the current safety measures that are in place, and the addition of desk shields for all students PreK-5, it is safe to bring students in grades PreK-5 back to full time, in-person classes.

Since closing in March due to the pandemic, the safety of our students and staff has been our first priority and educating our students has been a close second. In the recent weeks we've collected feedback from students, families, and staff, and reviewed student outcome data such as attendance and assessment results. We feel that, because it is safe to bring students back into our schools full-time, it is our duty to expand students' opportunity to access high-quality instruction provided by our faculty. By returning to full, in-person classes we will accelerate the pace of learning, more than double each student's time with their teacher, reduce the amount of groups of learners/cohorts that teachers need to plan for each day, support students' sense of community, provide additional access to social and emotional services for students, and alleviate family scheduling and care coordination.

The District is proposing students in grades PreK through 5 return to school for a full, in-person model starting on

November 12, 2020. We have determined that the learning needs of the students and supervision needs of our families remain the greatest at these grade levels, and that our current risk mitigation strategies have been effective in deterring the spread of the coronavirus within our schools. Students in grades 6-12 will remain in the hybrid model as many of the mitigation strategies, specifically small cohorts, are not possible at the secondary level. However, we plan to make adaptations to support learning at the secondary level, including more synchronous instruction for students who are at home. All Voluntary At-Home Learners (VAHLs) in all grades will be allowed to remain in the VAHL Program.

INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL TRANSITION PROCESS

1. October 27 Complete meetings with faculty and staff to finalize transition planning
2. November 2 Review of plan by Board of Education (via Zoom)
3. November 6 Deadline for VAHL notification (change in status)
4. November 9 Cohort A (Prek-5) attends school
5. November 10 Cohort B (Prek-5) attends school
6. November 12 Begin new instructional model (see below)

PREK-GRADE 5 INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL CHANGES

Full, In-person Safety Protocols:

- Desks will be spaced as much as possible. Due to the number of students and the dimensions of individual classrooms, most desks will be spaced approximately 5 feet apart. A minimum desk spacing of 3 feet will be possible at both CES and JJIS. **Desk shields have been purchased for each student's desk as an added precaution.**
- Regular hand washing, use of hand sanitizer, and wearing of masks will continue. Regular mask breaks will also continue.
- Cleaning protocols will continue.
- Bathroom and hallway protocols will continue.
- Classroom cohorts will remain intact.
- Students will have an opportunity to eat lunch in the cafeteria or other large spaces at both JJIS & CES, although most likely not every day to ensure social distancing and separation of cohorts.
- Push-in specials (e.g., Art) will continue at JJIS and students will move to specials rooms at CES.
- Risk mitigation for physical education and music will continue.
- If a COVID-19 positive case is detected in an individual classroom, that cohort/classroom of students and the teacher may shift to remote learning for 14 days. Non-affected classes will continue in person.

Student Schedule:

- Full, in-person classes on Monday through Friday
- Early-release schedule on Wednesdays. (Pre-planned early release days in the school calendar will be removed, e.g., Friday, December 4 will be a full day. A revised school calendar will be published prior to November 12.)

PreK-5 VAHL Program:

- One teacher will be assigned to provide a mix of synchronous instruction and asynchronous instruction by grade level. In addition some tutoring and/or small group instruction will take place each week.
- Students are required to attend virtual meetings and complete all assignments and assessments
- **By Friday, November 6, 2020 please contact your school administration directly if you are switching from VAHL or complete this [form](#) if moving into VAHL.**

GRADES 6-12 INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL CHANGES

Safety Protocols:

- Continue with the hybrid model of 50% students in-person learning.
- Desks will be spaced as much as possible, average of 6 feet
- Regular hand washing, use of hand sanitizer, and wearing of masks will continue. Regular mask breaks will also continue.
- Cleaning protocols will continue.
- Bathroom and hallway protocols will continue.
- Classroom cohorts will remain intact at WJJMS.
- Push-in specials (e.g., Art) will continue.
- Risk mitigation for physical education and music will continue.
- If a COVID-19 positive case is detected in an individual classroom, that cohort of students and the teacher **may** shift to remote learning for 14 days. Non-affected classes will continue in person.

Student Schedule:

- Continue in the hybrid model with two cohorts and Wednesdays as remote learning day.

6-12 VAHL Program:

- Teachers will either push-out recorded mini-lessons or host live Google Meet sessions including VAHLs on a daily basis.
- Students are required to attend all virtual meetings and complete all assignments and assessments

Colchester Public Schools will review for a third time our learning model by November 30, 2020. Thank you for your continued patience and support as we navigate through these difficult and uncertain times. As the Holidays approach we understand the desire to be together with family and friends as emotional support and traditions are important. However, we remind everyone to remain vigilant and do everything possible to mitigate risk in our community. We are truly in this together and I thank you all for your efforts!

Please use the following email address if you have questions or comments: covid19@colchesterct.org

Best Regards,



Jeffrey Burt
Superintendent