



Colchester Public Schools

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Dear Colchester Families,

Out of an abundance of caution, effective immediately, Colchester Public Schools is canceling all field trips and large events, including concerts through the end of April. The district will reevaluate future trips at that time. Details of event cancellations will be provided as decisions are made and may be viewed on our website's calendar.

In a continuing effort to update families with respect to Coronavirus (COVID-19), this letter is intended to address several questions and concerns that have been raised since our last correspondence. Colchester Public Schools has been monitoring the quickly evolving situation and have been working closely with the Town, Chatham Health District, the Connecticut State Department of Education, and the Governor's office along with many State agencies, including the State Department of Public Health. We are receiving updates on a daily basis and will continue to develop our response to this situation. Please use the following websites for the most up-to-date and accurate information:

- <https://portal.ct.gov/Coronavirus>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Because circumstances are rapidly changing and public health officials are providing continuous updates, our approaches to preventing the spread of COVID-19 are subject to change. We will communicate any changes to our school programs or mitigation procedures in a timely fashion.

Cleaning

Custodial staff are cleaning and disinfecting all hard surfaces every day, including touch points such as door handles and keyboards, where viruses are often found. We are using products that are established by Federal guidelines as 99.9% effective against COVID-19. Cafeteria hard surfaces are being cleaned on a daily basis with appropriate products. Parents are encouraged to clean Chromebooks and other devices, including any district-issued device, on a regular basis with a disinfectant wipe; please do not use liquid disinfectants. In addition, we will be placing hand sanitizers in more public areas.

M&J Bus, our bus transportation carrier, is responding to COVID-19 through increasing its bus cleaning efforts. Approximately two weeks ago, as a first response to COVID-19, the bus company performed a major cleaning/disinfecting of the entire Colchester fleet. In addition to drivers disinfecting the handrails and seats on a daily basis with disinfectant wipes, once per week there will be an additional wipe downs of the seats, handrails, and high traffic areas.

Handwashing & Healthy Habits

Advice from all health experts addresses the importance of thorough and regular hand washing. The district is encouraging all staff to wash their hands on a regular basis, or at a minimum, use an approved hand sanitizer. Under staff supervision, CES and JJIS students will wash their hands at more frequent intervals throughout the day. Hand sanitizers will be available in large meeting areas, such as the cafeterias. At WJJMS and Bacon Academy, staff will encourage students to wash their hands with soap and water at regular intervals or use an approved hand sanitizer. The district is also recommending that all students and staff adopt everyday preventive practices including no handshakes, high-fives, or hugging, and avoid sharing food or water bottles.

Parents and caregivers may provide their children with a bottle of hand sanitizer for their children to use in school, provided it is a brand commonly purchased in retail stores. Staff may bring in their own cleaning products as long as they follow federal guidelines, or those that have been purchased at any regular retail outlet.

Suspected Cases of COVID-19

Please review and follow the advice from local, state, and federal health agencies. In general, the district is asking that any students presenting identified symptoms (see CDC link <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>) NOT attend school, contact their family doctor immediately, and call the school nurse with updates. Students should not attend school until they are cleared by a medical professional. Staff and any parent volunteers or visitors should follow the same guidelines.

School Closings

As the State Department of Education has directed: “Absent an emergency declaration from the Office of the Governor or Federal Government, school closures are local decisions made by the school district in coordination with and at the direction of the local health officials.” The decision to close Colchester Public Schools will be made in consultation with the Chatham Health District, the Center for Disease Control (CDC), and the Connecticut State Department of Public Health. In the case of an extended closure the district will review all possible scenarios afforded by the CSDE to make up the lost time, including the possibility of canceling April break and extending the school year until the end of June.

Continuity of Teaching and Learning

If the district is forced to close for an extended period of time, the recommendation from the Connecticut State Department of Education and the Commissioner of Education is to not attempt “distance learning” unless we can guarantee equity of access to all students. In other words, the district will not be providing daily instruction via online learning platforms due to the fact that not all households of Colchester students are equipped with internet access. Digital learning and take-home work as a stand-alone form of instruction cannot compare with the impact that a teacher has on student learning. However, under

the leadership of Dr. Charles Hewes, Director of Teaching and Learning, and in conjunction with Principals and Teachers, we are developing a number of strategies that, in the event of a school or district closing, will allow for a degree of optional home-based learning.

Further Information

We will continue to share pertinent information with respect to this rapidly evolving challenge. In the interim, we encourage all families and staff members to take part in daily preventative practices toward the objective of helping us maintain a healthy school environment.

If your student is exhibiting the main symptoms of COVID-19 (see CDC link <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>), keep your student home from school and contact your medical care provider. Anyone experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 should refrain from entering the schools.

For further information on COVID-19 please see the enclosed links to state and federal updates. If you have questions about this district's plans, please see our website for the most recent information call my office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeffrey Burt', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jeffrey Burt
Superintendent