



Colchester Public Schools

127 Norwich Avenue, Suite 202

Colchester, CT 06415

"We create innovative thinkers for a dynamic world"

Jeffrey E. Burt
Superintendent of Schools

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March 13, 2020

Dear Families and Staff,

I am writing to inform you that effective at 5:00 p.m. today, Friday, March 13, 2020, Colchester Public Schools will be **closed indefinitely** and for a minimum of two weeks. This decision is made with the professional guidance from public health officials at all levels of government that the spread of the Coronavirus is not only imminent, but is actively occurring across Connecticut communities. This trusted advice from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the State Department of Education, the State Department of Public Health, and the Chatham Health District cannot confirm that this illness will run its course in two weeks; in fact, it is not likely to do so. We have been advised that the implementation of social distancing measures is a proven science-based intervention that has been shown to reduce the morbidity and mortality associated with communicable disease outbreaks. Experience has shown that communities in which schools closed are able to positively impact and reduce the spread of disease.

While no Colchester resident has been diagnosed with COVID-19, in this rapidly evolving situation we are being proactive to close schools in order to prevent the potential spread of the virus and protect our vulnerable community members. The closure includes the cancellation of all academic, athletic, and extracurricular activities. No District or school facilities may be used for any event during the period of closure. All schools and facilities will be thoroughly cleaned while closed.

School Year Revision

Yesterday, Governor Lamont waived the requirement that students must attend school for 180 days. The Board of Education may be required to determine the use of some or all of the April break to make up missed days. However, it is likely we will have school until the end of June. We will provide regular updates on how we intend to make up missed days.

Further Information & Updates

For further information on COVID-19 please see these links to state and federal updates:

Connecticut Department of Public Health: <https://portal.ct.gov/Coronavirus>
Centers for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Colchester Public Schools website:

<https://www.colchesterct.org/page.cfm?p=593>

Town of Colchester website: <https://www.colchesterct.gov/>

We are acting in consultation with the First Selectman and Chatham Health District, and will continue to communicate with you at regular intervals throughout the period of closure. We ask that you closely monitor your email for regular updates, including an email every Friday for the duration of the closure. Our next communication regarding extra-educational opportunities (see below) will be sent out by Wednesday, March 18, 2020. All communications will be linked on the District COVID-19 update webpage linked above.

Extra-Educational Opportunities

It is our position that our highly-trained and talented faculty have the greatest impact on the learning of our students. Our teachers provide our students with an unmatched level of individualized support, personalized instruction, and emotional safety that motivates our students to learn. You might have noticed that other districts are pursuing approval from the Connecticut State Department of Education that would allow for digital learning. If waivers are granted to those districts, any days spent in a digital learning environment would satisfy days towards the 180 school day requirement if students aren't present in schools.

Under the guidance of Dr. Charles Hewes, Director of Teaching and Learning, the District is exploring digital learning as an option if we go beyond two weeks of closure. There are barriers that prevent us from moving in this direction too fast and too soon. These barriers include a lack of universal home access to the Internet for all of our students, a lack of access to needed supports in a digital learning environment for students with special needs, and too few District-owned devices to provide every student (PreK-12) access to the Internet. Our plan is to provide extra-educational opportunities to our students during the period of closure. Please note that these opportunities are not a requirement for students, nor will teachers be assigning required work to students over the period of the next two weeks. We continue to work-through the aforementioned barriers in the event that we are unable to return to school and resume face-to-face instruction provided by a teacher. The link provided will bring you to our District website where you can access the learning opportunities developed by our expert teachers.

I understand that the precautionary measures that we are taking to protect the health of the community may involve significant inconvenience and personal sacrifice. Please accept my gratitude in advance for your patience and understanding. Coming together as a community will help us successfully navigate these turbulent and uncertain times.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Burt
Superintendent