



# **COLCHESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**Kathleen Perry, Director & Rebecca Lopes, Assistant Director**  
**Department of Pupil Services & Special Education**  
**380 Norwich Ave, Colchester, CT 06415 Phone 860-537-3103 Fax:860-537-6391**

August 11, 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians:

We hope that you and your family are safe and well during this unprecedented time. We wanted to provide you with an update on all of the plans and preparations that are underway for the opening of school in a few short weeks. The district administrators, staff, and health advisors have been working collaboratively in multiple workgroups in order to develop protocols and procedures based on the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines and the “Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut’s Plan to Learn and Grow Together” issued by the Connecticut State Department of Education. As you can imagine, information is changing and being revised daily. Today, we will provide you with the information that we have available and provide you with the plans to issue ongoing information as we receive it. Beginning today, we will be sending a weekly correspondence to you with any updates and changes, highlighting how these changes will impact your child’s special education programming and services.

For the foreseeable future in order to limit exposure and increase safety precautions, the district will continue to hold Planning and Placement Team Meetings virtually, as we did in the Spring. Within the first two weeks of school, your child’s case-manager will be scheduling any missed annuals from the Spring and they will be developing an Individual Digital Learning Plan for your son or daughter. This plan will document the services and the method of service delivery that your child will receive when they are learning remotely-either in a Hybrid Model or in a fully remote model. The district is committed to providing special education and related services synchronously (in real time) when students are learning at home and in person with the appropriate precautions when students are in school. These services will follow a consistent weekly schedule. Case managers will be contacting you within the first two weeks of school in order to seek your input in your child’s Digital Learning Plan.

The state has not yet issued its guidance on the implementation of special education services for those students whose families have opted into Voluntary Remote Learning due to COVID-19. State and federal laws, and the associated guidance, do not address the provision of special education services via remote learning as a matter of choice, which constitutes a different circumstance than a state or local public health mandate or an individual medical necessity. THE CSDE will be providing further guidance regarding special education students who voluntarily opt into remote learning. At this time, we are anticipating this guidance sometime this week.

Colchester Public Schools has made the determination that it is safest to open schools using a Hybrid model of instruction. This means that your son or daughter will be assigned to a group and will

attend school in person two days per week and will learn remotely two days per week. On Wednesdays all students will learn from home.

During this Hybrid model, your son or daughter will be cohorted with a certain group of students throughout the school day. For those students who receive pull-out special education or related services, the district will schedule these groups following the cohorts to the greatest extent possible and staff will use increased levels of Personal Protective Equipment. For small group instruction and individual assessment, the district will utilize clear plastic dividers and follow all CDC safety guidelines. Staff will also be provided with clear face masks to work with students who have hearing impairments or to use when the instructional focus requires students to “see” a teacher’s mouth.

The state has issued guidance on returning to school for Students With High Needs. In this guidance the state has indicated that these students have been impacted the most significantly during the school closure. Colchester is in agreement that these students should be provided with additional in-person learning in an Hybrid Model of instruction. For those students who are in a specialized district program, the Colchester Public Schools will provide services four days a week within the school setting. If your son or daughter is in any of these programs, you will be receiving additional correspondence from the special education office next week, and you will be invited to attend a virtual meeting should you have any additional questions.

If your son or daughter was due for his or her triennial evaluation during the school closure, staff will work to complete this testing once students are back and acclimated to the new school environment. The special education department recognizes that this time away from school has been difficult for everyone, but especially for students with special learning needs. The district will be providing professional development and resources for all staff on social emotional learning so that this remains at the forefront of planning when students return. Additionally, the week before school starts parents will be provided with a brief survey about their child which will address any social emotional concerns that you may have. The staff will then contact you if you have concerns and discuss the various school-based supports that the district can provide your child.

The special education department is also in the process of developing some virtual tours for students who were not able to meet staff and visit their new school in the Spring. Staff will also be available to conduct individual socially-distanced in-person tours for your child if you feel that he or she needs this option. Within a short period of time we will also be able to provide you with some additional resources and social stories that will address the changes that students will encounter when they return i.e., wearing masks, seeing staff in PPE etc. Please reach out to us or to your child’s case manager if you would like to take advantage of these options. Staff is back on the 24th and many of them are checking their email constantly, but if you do not hear back from them, please reach out to us or your building principal. We are all working during this time.

We know that you may be experiencing a lot of anxiety and uncertainty about the return to school for your son or daughter. We recognize and understand how you may be feeling. Please reach out with your questions or concerns. We will do our best to answer your questions or to seek additional guidance if necessary. We hope that you are able to enjoy some of these summer days and that you remain safe and well.

With warmest regards,

Kathy Perry and Becky Lopes