



Colchester Public Schools

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Dear Colchester Families,

I sincerely hope that last week's "spring vacation" was a welcome break for you and your loved ones. In this weekly email, I will outline where the district stands at this time in our response to COVID19. Any significant updates from the State Department of Education will be communicated in a separate email.

School Closure Update

There has been no change to the Governor's order that schools remain closed until **May 20, 2020**. The State is still determining future action on additional closure time. For regular updates, please see our [School closure update webpage](#). The Connecticut State Department of Education has created six regional advisory teams that will communicate with local districts and provide feedback to the Commissioner of Education on planning for reopening. We will provide updates as we receive them.

Parent and Student Focus Groups

In place of virtual office hours, I would like to establish Parent and Student Focus Groups for input into our ongoing virtual learning. If you would like to join me in working together with teachers and administrators to improve the online learning experience, please email my Executive Assistant, Amy Trinnaman, at atrinman@colchesterct.org. I will run virtual meetings with small groups of 8-10 parents and will also conduct some group meetings with WJMS and Bacon Academy students. I will hold these meetings in the afternoons starting next week once we have enough participants.

Phase III: New Learning

We are excited to announce that Colchester Public Schools (CPS) is planning to transition into Phase III: New Learning on May 4, 2020. The CT Commissioner of Education has continually encouraged school districts to keep the learning going throughout the period of school closure, and up until this point, CPS has proceeded thoughtfully in this process. Phase I: Supplemental Learning occurred between March

13th and March 26th. During this phase, CPS provided optional activities for students under the belief that a school closure would be temporary. Phase II: Interim Learning Opportunities began on March 27th, whereby CPS started to provide interim learning opportunities via Google Classroom to maintain student's skills and knowledge that had been learned up to the point of school closure. On May 4th, CPS will begin Phase III: New Learning, and will introduce new content to students at all levels. Transitioning to this phase will not only fully meet Connecticut guidelines for continuing learning, but more importantly, it will provide significant benefits to students. Phase III will:

- Further limit the impact of a loss of instructional time due to an extended period of school closure
- Keep students engaged in learning by introducing new content and skills
- Better position the District to respond to the needs of our families who are increasingly experiencing challenges due to quarantine orders and school closure

Additional information about the Phase III: New Learning plan, including information on shifts to the curriculum and grade reporting, will be distributed on **Tuesday, April 28, 2020**.

Attendance

As of Wednesday, April 22, forms will no longer be emailed to families of students at CES, JJIS, or WJJMS to report student attendance. Not only has the CT State Department of Education since waived the requirement for schools to collect data on student attendance, recording attendance at these levels was creating an undue hardship on our families. Until further notice, students at Bacon Academy will still be required to respond to the form to document their attendance in online learning. It has been determined at Bacon Academy that completing the form will provide critical data to the school in tracking student levels of engagement in online learning. If your child will be **absent** from engaging in online learning, we ask that you still call the building absent number and report the absence as you would if school was in session.

Student/Parent Feedback Request

Please talk to your student about his or her experience online, then complete the following anonymous survey: [Student/Parent Feedback Form](#).

2020-2021 Budget Process Update

On April 20th, the BOE held a Special Meeting to discuss potential reductions to the proposed education budget for 2020-2021. The BOE's decision on Monday was to revise the proposed 2020-21 budget from a 2.99% increase to a 1.43% increase in light of the difficult economic and social times as a result of the COVID19 closures. For public access to virtual BOE meetings, visit the **Board of Education Website**. Any questions pertaining to agenda items should be directed to boardquestions@colchesterct.org.

Questions must be submitted at least one hour prior to the start of the meeting. Please see the [Town's budget page](#) for updates on meeting dates and the process.

Technology

- **Comcast Internet Essentials:** Given the fluidity of the COVID-19 pandemic, Comcast recently made two key enhancements to the Internet Essentials program. **Extended Internet Essentials 2 Months Free for New Customers to May 13th:** Individuals or families looking to sign up for Internet Essentials should call 1-855-846-8376 or visit <https://www.internetessentials.com/covid19>. **Internet Essentials Offers Amnesty to Households with Debt Less than One Year:** Comcast is temporarily offering amnesty to low-income households who would otherwise qualify for Internet Essentials but have a past due balance that is less than a year old. During this unprecedented time, applicants who sign up before **May 13th** and have an outstanding bill to Comcast are now eligible for the program.

Helpful Tips

- [How to create PDF files via iPhone/iPad](#)
- [How to create PDF files via Samsung](#)

Have a question or concern?

- Visit our Frequently Asked Questions and Answers: [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- **EMAILS**
General questions: covid19@colchesterct.org
Tech questions: techhelp@colchesterct.org
Board questions: boardquestions@colchesterct.org

Food Security Program

Any person 18 years old or younger in Connecticut is eligible to receive breakfast and lunch from our school district. If you intend to participate, please complete this survey so we may plan accordingly: [Food program survey](#). Please email Leanne Ranheim at lrnheim@colchesterct.org if you have any questions.

Long-Term Planning

We are aware that this long-term closure will have an impact on instruction as well as the social and emotional well-being of students, staff, and families. While we are actively planning for the next few days, weeks, and months, we have also started to plan for when students and staff finally return to school. We have begun planning on revising the curriculum sequence next school year to allow for time in the first few weeks to determine the level of skills and knowledge of all of our students to inform instructional support, while at the same time planning support for the social and emotional needs of students and staff. In addition, we are reviewing the lessons we have learned as

instruction has moved to distance learning to see how we can capitalize on these new, innovative skills and continue to improve the district.

Parent Resources and Social/Emotional Wellness

I understand that the stress and disruption that COVID-19 is causing families can be overwhelming. If you need help, please reach out to your student's teacher or administrator to provide resources and support. You may reach me as well at covid19@colchesterct.org. Here are some great resources for families:

- A great article from Harvard Business Review on how to focus and plan in these difficult times: [*Is It Even Possible to Focus on Anything Right Now?*](#)
- [CES Family Resources for Social-Emotional Learning](#)
- “When it Builds Up, Talk it Out”: Parents and caregivers who wish to access support can call 833-258-5011 and speak with trained professionals about their concerns and, if additional help is needed, refer them to responsive services. Parents and caregivers can also visit www.talkitoutct.com. The “Talk It Out Line” is available Monday through Friday from 8AM to 8PM and on weekends from 1PM to 8PM and has both English and Spanish capacity.
- [“How We Feel” App to Improve COVID19 Response](#)
- [List of Resources for Children](#)
- [List of Coping Resources](#)
- [Crisis Hotlines](#)
- **Cragin Memorial Library Spring Reading Program:** Cragin Library has created a Spring Reading Program, including reading 20 minutes every day and Family Book Bingo that promotes reading and being outside. Follow hashtag #CraginFun and visit Cragin's website link: [ReadSquared Program](#). For more information on Cragin Memorial Library, visit the Town of Colchester's webpage here: [Cragin Memorial Library](#).

Lastly, I cannot stress enough the importance to make time for fun. Here is a list of [Museums, Zoos, and Aquariums that have virtual tours](#).

The next update will be sent on Friday, May 1st. Please take good care and be safe.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Burt
Superintendent