



Colchester Public Schools

127 Norwich Avenue, Suite 202
Colchester, CT 06415

Jeffrey E. Burt
Superintendent of Schools

Phone (860) 537-7208
Fax (860) 537-1252
jburt@colchesterct.org

July 17, 2020

Dear Colchester Families,

On June 29, 2020, the State of Connecticut released this school reopening plan: [Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together](#). This report, along with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control, Chatham Health, and our District Medical Advisor, forms the basis for considerations in the comprehensive, three-tier plan that our District must submit to the State for approval on July 24, 2020.

Survey on Return to School: Results

On behalf of the District and Board of Education, I would like to start by thanking the families who provided nearly 1,000 responses to our recent survey on school reopening. We greatly value and truly need your perspectives and concerns to be an integral part of reopening planning. Survey results indicate that there is a wide range of comfort levels associated with return to school. Broadly speaking, approximately 50% of survey respondents indicated they are comfortable or very comfortable with a return to in-person school provided all guidelines and mandates for safety and health are implemented. We fully understand that this also means half of you are not comfortable with in-person learning this Fall, many of you will have impacts to your employment should we need to resume a distance learning model, and securing adequate adult supervision for children at home for distance learning may be challenging. We know that in-person instruction is the best way for students to learn, and understand that many of your students struggled socially and emotionally with the distance learning model.

All of your comments, concerns, and suggestions have been reviewed by our Reopening Task Force. I'd like to provide you with an overview of District initiatives to develop our comprehensive school reopening plan. The District Reopening Task Force is composed of Administrators, Teachers, Nurses, Custodians, and District Directors. The work of the Task Force is supported and informed by the following subcommittees, which include parent participation:

- Teaching & Learning
- Health & Wellness
- Facilities & Operations
- Logistics & Scheduling
- Communications

A Parent Focus Group of over 50 participants is in place to inform decisions within the parameters of State and Federally-mandated protocols and procedures. All members of the Task Force are diligently crafting the three scenarios that the State has required us to include in our school reopening plan:

1. Fully in-person instruction
2. Hybrid model blending in-person and distance learning
3. Distance learning

The District's plan will be available on our website shortly thereafter. I want to be very clear on this plan: **we will not consider the July 24th submission to be fixed and final.** Since March, we have learned that the COVID-19 pandemic is ever-evolving and impactful on our decisions. The District will be flexible and responsive to any further COVID-19 developments as they may impact our learning community and the community of Colchester.

District Priorities

There are two overarching priorities for Colchester Public Schools:

1. **SAFETY AND RISK MITIGATION.** Safety is our first priority. The Task Force has reviewed the guidance and mandates from federal, state, and local health officials, and have made every effort possible to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission for both students and staff. Strategies for risk mitigation include:
 - a. instructing students in cohorts
 - b. the requirement for all students and staff to wear masks
 - c. one-way halls and directional signs
 - d. social distancing protocols within and outside of classrooms
 - e. increased cleaning regimens and extra cleaning protocols
 - f. a schedule of frequent hand washing
 - g. training for students and staff in transmission prevention.

We ask that all of our families join us in our effort to keep our learning community safe by assisting their student(s) understand and practice these risk mitigation strategies. We also acknowledge that our schools are only as safe as our community, and so we also ask that our families and staff join us in the defense against transmission by taking appropriate safety measures outside of school. Measures include limiting exposure to large crowds, wearing masks in public, self-quarantining when in contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, and recognizing the symptoms of COVID-19 and staying home if they appear. Please review these CDC guidelines: [How to Protect Yourself & Others](#).

2. **INSTRUCTION.** Whereas our mission will always be to educate students, we will begin the upcoming academic year with a focus on developing an environment that is socially and emotionally safe for learning. Students are living through a world-wide pandemic. By August, students will have been out of school for five months. Some students have experienced trauma brought on by the disease itself or the economic or social impact the disease has had on their family. Our mission in the Fall will be to prepare all of our faculty and staff with the tools needed to

make the learning environment socially and emotionally safe. Only then will we begin engaging students in academic learning.

School Calendar Impact of 180-Day Waiver

At the July 14, 2020 Connecticut State Board of Education meeting, Commissioner Cardona proposed that the State Board waive up to a maximum of 3 school days for schools to plan re-opening activities, prepare, and train on new protocols and processes implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Board unanimously authorized this reduction of school days, from 180 to 177. The requirement that districts plan for three separate opening plans — full, hybrid or distance learning — necessitates extra time for staff training to maintain public safety. Colchester Public Schools faculty and staff will utilize these three extra days at the beginning of the school year to finalize clear protocol and refine procedures for all aspects of the school day. We will build capacity to safely transition back to in-person classes, through training, preparation of facilities and classroom set-up, increased social-emotional support, and any other transition planning as recommended by the school leadership.

- ***PLEASE NOTE: The first day for students is now Monday, August 31st. Staff will return on August 24th to spend those three additional days preparing for students.***

The BOE will approve a revised calendar as soon as possible and it will be shared with families and posted on our website.

Colchester Long-Term Recovery Committee Survey

The Colchester Long-Term Recovery Committee, which has been established to help our community recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, is asking residents to complete this anonymous survey: [Colchester Long-Term Recovery Committee Survey](#). Deadline is Monday, July 20. To share thoughts or concerns, reach out to the Chair, Town Planner Matt Bordeaux, at planner@colchesterct.gov.

Meals Program

Meals for anyone 18 or younger are available for pick-up at Bacon Academy on Mondays and Wednesdays from 9:30AM to 10:30AM.

Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC)

The Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) awaits guidance from the State on a return to athletics.

Diversity Committee

We are in active discussions with First Selectman Mary Bylone about establishing a community-wide Diversity Committee so we all may make every effort to ensure that all feel welcome and valued in our community.

Online Payment System

Colchester Public Schools is working with MyPaymentsPlus to provide parents with the option of making online payments for lunch, preschool tuition, and pay-to-play during the 2020/21 academic year. The District will expand online payment options to other areas of payment in future years (i.e., dues, fees, field trips, etc.). Families who choose to make online payments will be charged an additional 3.95% on each transaction. Additional

information will be shared when the system becomes activated for use. Families who choose not to make online payments will still have the option of making payments via check or cash at our schools.

Important Dates

- First day of school for students: **MONDAY, AUGUST 31, 2020**
- District Reopening Plan submission to the State: **JULY 24, 2020. The plan will be posted on our website after submission.**

Please enjoy the following highlights:

- [Class of 2020 Graduation ~ Bacon Academy](#)
- [Bacon Academy COVID-19 Portraits & More!](#)

We will continue our weekly updates to keep you informed of emerging plans. Take good care.

Sincerely,

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

Jeffrey Burt
Superintendent