

*A year like
no other*



VOTING DAY

Tuesday, March 2, 2021
7:00 am to 7:00 pm
Colchester High School

REGISTER: There is no deadline to register to vote. You can register ahead of time or at the polls on the day of the vote.

VOTE BY MAIL: Voting by mail is a great option. You can request a ballot be mailed to you through the Colchester Town Clerk or the My Voter Page online at the Vermont Secretary of State website: www.mvp.sec.state.vt.us.



On average, 27% of Colchester voters participate in the March election.

42 community members have subbed in our schools this year. We are always looking for more. Please visit csdvt.org/sub for info.



Students have access to 21 outdoor classrooms across the district. Moving learning outside helps students engage with the natural environment, reduces stress, and increases focus.



From the Superintendent

THE CHANGES WE'VE SEEN IN EDUCATION

over the past year have been extraordinary. While I've never doubted the strength of the Colchester community, I have been floored by the response of our employees, families, and students who approached the sweeping changes with compassion, understanding, grit, and determination to persevere.



The reopening guidance issued by the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) was substantial. The guidance was designed to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 and keep school open for as much in-person learning as

possible. Trust me, we want ALL of our students learning in-person five days a week. We know that students learn best when physically in our buildings, but the pandemic required us to prioritize the health and safety of our community. As a result, we had to make significant changes to school as we knew it. Flexibility and innovation became our mantra. Teachers, support staff, food service, custodians, administrators – nearly every position was forced to reimagine their role and routine.

As the public's understanding of COVID-19 grows, the AOE's guidelines continue to shift and we have adapted each time. From appropriate distancing standards between students, conducting daily health screenings upon entry to the building, podding students to prevent classrooms from mixing, creating a



classrooms and delivering meals to students at home using buses, providing our support staff with Chromebooks so they can connect with students

learning from home, replacing student tables with individual desks, moving celebrations and traditions like spirit week to online formats, streaming high school sport games, and honoring our 2020 graduates at the Sunset Drive-in Theater; it took our entire educational community working as a collective group to accomplish what we have this year.

The journey has been far from perfect. There has been frustration, uncertainty, and a fair amount of lessons learned. Some lessons we will leave (far!) behind in 2020, but others have been embraced, and we will continue to incorporate them into our daily routines after the pandemic. As we settle into 2021 and grasp at the glimmer of hope in front of us, I look forward to the healing owed to our school community. The recovery phase of this pandemic will be important and there's no doubt we have a lot of work to do, but I've never had more confidence in the people of this town. Thank you, Colchester.



Sincerely,

Amy Minor
SUPERINTENDENT

virtual academy to provide instruction to students unable to come to school in-person, closing our cafeterias and instead feeding students in their



Community members made and donated more than 500 cloth masks to the district for students in need.





Unexpected Takeaways

Almost everything we know about school has been impacted by this pandemic. There are new health and safety procedures, guidance about social-emotional learning, and shifts in academics and co-curriculars. While these adaptations were unexpected and required us to plan quickly, we have been able to build upon our existing strong systems.

Outdoor Classrooms: With tight space requirements in our indoor classrooms due to health and safety guidelines, teachers have taken advantage of our beautiful campuses by using the 21 new outdoor classroom spaces located across the district. Studies show that students benefit from outdoor learning through increased engagement, academic achievement, problem-solving, physical activity and self-esteem. Instruction

outdoors leads to lower levels of stress, fewer behavioral problems, and connections to the natural environment.

Online & Blended Learning: With students learning at home and in-person at the same time, our teachers are balancing instruction in different ways. Using platforms like SeeSaw and Google Classroom, teachers post lessons and assignments for students at home to complete asynchronously while they instruct a different group of students who are learning in-person in the classroom. In both settings, teachers use elements of blended learning—a mix of digital and non-digital—to engage students and build consistency regardless of the learning environment.

New School Routines: Many of our school routines have been impacted by the pandemic. Despite the challenges, we have found ways to keep the school community safe and healthy while still having lots of fun. Spirit week at home and school, online art shows, recorded concerts, class meetings with students attending in school and online, even a graduation at the drive-in theater. Our amazing staff and students continue to inspire us with their creative ways to connect and celebrate with each other.

Supporting Our Students

Beyond teaching academics, schools have a responsibility to support the mental health of students. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral process that gives students the skills to manage their emotions, achieve personal goals, and show empathy for others. Improving students' SEL helps reduce anxiety, behavioral problems, and substance use to ensure they are ready and able to engage in academics.

Access to Students: The social and emotional support we provide our students has been challenged this year. Educators have less access to students, and students have fewer opportunities to receive in-person support. This has taken a toll, especially for our middle- and high-school students, where they are in-person two days a week due to physical distancing requirements. We have seen an increase in the number of students grappling with anxiety and other emotional challenges.

Reaching Students: Each school has a mental health team that works collaboratively with our community partners to offer both therapeutic and educational services. The District SEL Plan prioritizes building relationships, teaching students when to ask for help and strengthening their conflict resolution skills. The district is hosting online family information nights about parenting during the pandemic, our classrooms have morning meeting check-ins or advisory time, and our guidance counselors offer support and small groups for students as needed. Our school employees are gaining knowledge on how to build resiliency in our students and we have found creative ways to identify and to provide support during this challenging time.

Power of Relationships: Whether in-person or remote, our SEL strategy is maintaining strong relationships with our students and families. Colchester is fortunate to have a medium-sized student body. With just over 2,100 students, our classes are small enough so that we can get to know each of our students but also large enough so that our students have opportunities to create relationships with others that share similar interests. We will always have work to do in the area of supporting our students' mental health, but we are committed to helping them gain the knowledge and skills to cope with stressors both large and small.



Alumni Check-in: Laker Stories

ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT ||| **DUY PHAM, Class of 2018**



“Colchester High School provided me with the high-quality education I needed to survive and succeed at college. I am certain that I would not be at Middlebury College if it were not for the type of support and kindness I received from every teacher,

especially those in the humanities department such as Ms. Albright, Ms. Lenox, Ms. Gauding, and deLa. The many times that I sat and talked to my teachers after the school day had long ended foreshadowed the same type of open-door relationship I enjoy with my professors. Their emphasis on critical thinking and writing are

skills that I see using far past my college years. I am also indebted to my unofficial guidance counselor, Mr. Hall, who not only closely helped me with my college essay but also directed me to be a more emotionally mature person. I still have my quarterly conference with him after every semester.

Now I am a junior, interning with the college’s museum, on track to graduate with high honors from a rigorous institution and, in the future, pursue a career in architecture. When I get older, I hope I am able to offer my child the same quality of education I received in the school district I grew up in.”

Duy Pham is studying architecture at Middlebury.

ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT ||| **AMY BUCHANAN LUMSDEN, Class of 2001**



“This year marks twenty years since my graduation from CHS. I’m not sure where the time went, or how it passed so quickly, but looking back on my time spent as a student in the Colchester School District I have only fond memories.

From kindergarten at Porters Point School, to Project Grad on the night of my high school graduation, my time as a student in Colchester includes countless milestones and memories filled with a sense of belonging and the security that comes with growing up in such an incredible school community.

The experiences afforded to me as a student in the Colchester School District lead me to pursue a degree in nursing from UVM, a career that I

continue to enjoy and am reminded often of how lucky I am to work in the same community where I grew up.

Whether it was the educators, the administration or the support staff, every single person had a vested interest in every student’s education and wellbeing. It was everything from a quick hello in the hallway to a one on one conversation with a teacher, encouraging you to push yourself beyond what you thought you were capable of accomplishing, because they saw in you something you didn’t see in yourself.

I feel forever indebted to the staff at Colchester School District for making my time as a student something that I continue to be proud of, even twenty years later.”

Amy Lumsden, RN, is a nurse case manager in the Intensive Care Unit at UVM Medical Center.



VERMONT TEACHER OF THE YEAR

SUSAN ROSATO, CHS English Learner Teacher

Susan Rosato has worked in the Colchester School District teaching immigrant and refugee students learning English for more than 15 years. She collaborates with classroom teachers, guidance counselors, social workers, and administrators to support her New American students and their families as they navigate the education system and community life in Colchester.

Vermont Secretary of Education, Dan French touted Mrs. Rosato as a passionate advocate for equity in education. “Her creativity in helping students access the educational pathways that will make the greatest impact on their lives makes her a leading example of the critical work educators are doing statewide for our students,” he said.

A fierce advocate for her students, Mrs. Rosato regularly goes above and beyond her typical classroom duties. When the pandemic hit, learning shifted online and families started receiving an abundance of important information in writing. Mrs. Rosato recorded multiple videos with translators to go over important details sent by the district to ensure non-English speaking families were kept informed. Colchester is proud and fortunate to have her as a teacher in our district.

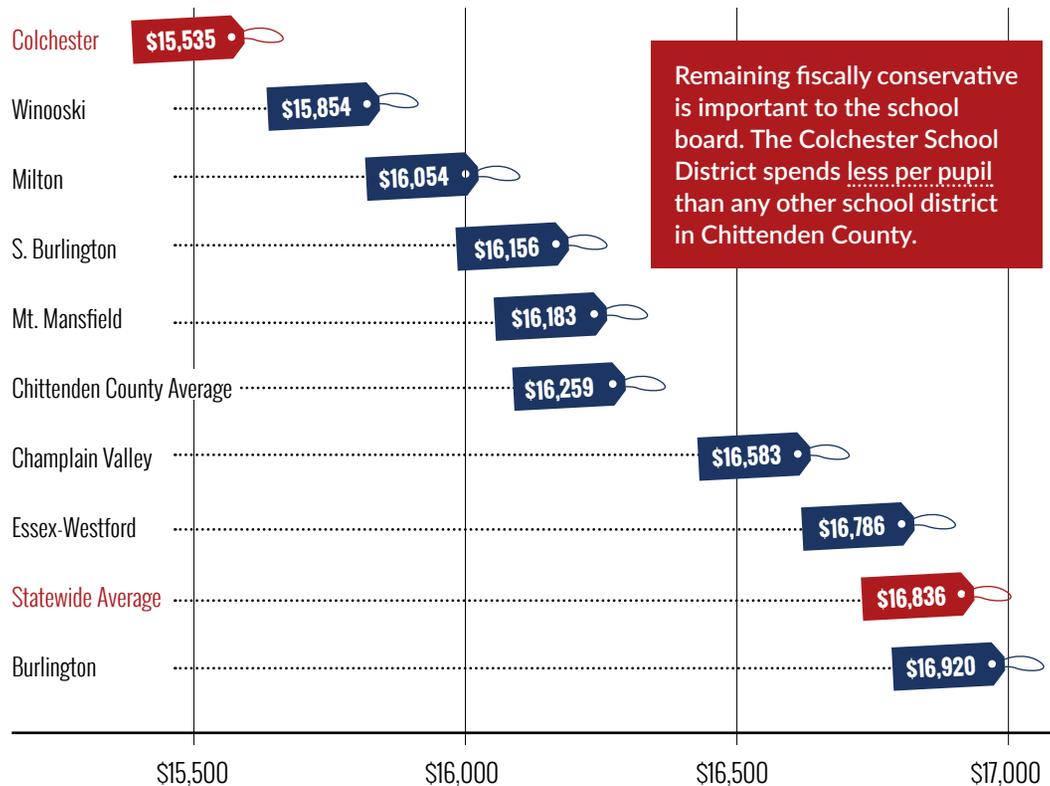
Susan Rosato, a CHS English Learner Teacher, was named the 2021 Vermont Teacher of the Year.

PHOTO BY MIKE NOSEK, THE COLCHESTER SUN

The FY22 Budget

On January 19th, the Colchester School Board approved a budget of \$46,679,911 for fiscal year 2022. This represents an increase of 4.60% over the current year's spending plan. When calculated in the state formula, this translates to an estimated 4.19% educational tax increase. Approval of this budget by voters would permit the school board and administrators to advance academic planning, support student needs, and maintain the district's facilities and grounds used by students and the Colchester community.

Spending Per Equalized Pupil by District



How Would This Proposed Increase Affect You?



If your household makes less than \$138,500

Household Income	FY 2021 Taxes Current Year	FY 2022 Taxes Proposed Budget	Annual Increase
\$50,000	\$1,150	\$1,217	\$67
\$60,000	\$1,380	\$1,461	\$81
\$70,000	\$1,610	\$1,704	\$94
\$80,000	\$1,840	\$1,948	\$108
\$90,000	\$2,070	\$2,191	\$121
\$100,000	\$2,300	\$2,435	\$135
\$110,000	\$2,530	\$2,678	\$148

Approximately 70% of Colchester households make less than \$138,500 a year and meet eligibility requirements to qualify for a property tax credit. This allows them to pay their taxes based on their household income, instead of the value of their home.



If your household makes more than \$138,500

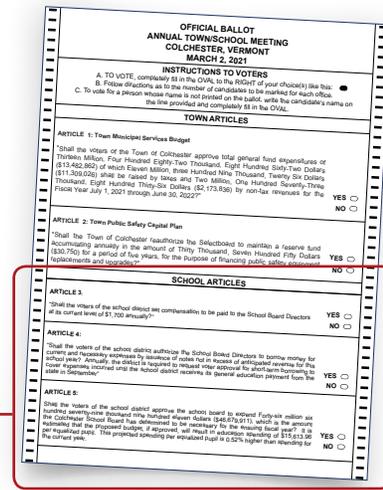
Property Value	FY 2021 Taxes Current Year	FY 2022 Taxes Proposed Budget	Annual Increase
\$100,000	\$1,580	\$1,646	\$66
\$150,000	\$2,370	\$2,469	\$99
\$200,000	\$3,160	\$3,292	\$132
\$250,000	\$3,950	\$4,116	\$166
\$300,000	\$4,740	\$4,939	\$199
\$350,000	\$5,530	\$5,762	\$232
\$400,000	\$6,320	\$6,585	\$265

Approximately 30% of Colchester households make more than \$138,500 a year and pay their taxes based on property value.

Visit tax.vermont.gov/property/tax-credit for more information.

Understanding the Ballot When You Vote

Normally, the residents of Colchester are welcomed to Colchester High School on the evening before voting day to share a meal and hear presentations from both the town and school district. Following the presentations, residents in attendance vote “from the floor” on several housekeeping items. Due to COVID-19, there will be no Town Meeting this year and subsequently, the school district will be adding two articles to the ballot for voter approval.



The school district entered into a net metering agreement for two solar arrays which will save taxpayers \$33,461 a year in electricity for the next 25 years. That's a total savings of \$836,525!

SCHOOL ARTICLES	
ARTICLE 3:	NEW
“Shall the voters of the school district set compensation to be paid to the <u>School Board Directors</u> at its current level of \$1,700 annually?”	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/>
ARTICLE 4:	NEW
“Shall the voters of the school district authorize the School Board Directors to <u>borrow money</u> for current and necessary expenses by issuance of notes not in excess of anticipated revenue for this school year? Annually, the district is required to request voter approval for short-term borrowing to cover expenses incurred until the school district receives its general education payment from the state in September?”	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/>
ARTICLE 5:	
Shall the voters of the school district approve the school board to expend Forty-six million six hundred seventy-nine thousand nine hundred eleven dollars (<u>\$46,679,911</u>), which is the amount the Colchester School Board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? It is estimated that the proposed budget, if approved, will result in education spending of \$15,613.96 per equalized pupil. This projected spending per equalized pupil is <u>0.52%</u> higher than spending for the current year.	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/>

Board members meet twice a month for school board meetings. In addition to preparing for and attending regular meetings, they negotiate union agreements, participate in related training, and engage in special project work sessions.

When residents pay their town's educational taxes, the money actually goes to the State and is held in the general education fund. The State then pays each school district their allotted amount. This process takes time and while the district waits for their payment from the state, they must temporarily borrow money to continue operating.

When calculating spending per student, Vermont uses “equalized pupils” rather than an actual headcount. The formula gives less weight to pre-kindergarten pupils and extra weight to students in secondary schools, those from economically deprived backgrounds, and those whose first language is not English. The principle behind the weighting is that it costs more to educate students in certain categories.

\$46,679,911 operates a total of 7 buildings, and provides transportation and education for over 2,100 students.

0.52% is the percentage increase from the FY 2021 budget.

Source: Public Assets Institute

Graduating seniors have the option to buy their school laptop as they leave the district. This ensures that all graduates have access to a device as they move on to college, the military, or the workforce. Last year, the district recouped \$3,300 through the buy-back program.

The district spent close to \$1 million to be in compliance with the Agency of Education's pandemic guidance. The money, which will be reimbursed through grants, paid for plexiglass, single student desks, food for students, thermometers, PPE, cleaning supplies, and extra staff hours.

Visit csdvt.org/budget for more information.

 ColchesterSchoolDistrict
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