



Vestal Central School District *Back-to-School 2021-2022 Plan*

August 20, 2021

We will welcome students and staff back to in-person schooling five days a week beginning on September 9, 2021. Over the past couple of months, we have received guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), New York State Education Department (NYSED), Broome and Tioga County Health Departments, our school physicians from Endwell Family Physicians, and from our District Reopening Steering Committee, including sub-committees (Instructional and Operations). Please visit our [website](#) to view additional information regarding Vestal's Back-to-School Plan.

Key Takeaways for Back-to-School 2021-2022: In-Person Instruction

- Beginning on Thursday, September 9, 2021, Vestal students in grades K-12 will begin attending full days of school on a six-day cycle, 5 days per week, in-person.
- Vestal schools will focus on in-person instruction, as long as this is allowed by public health officials. We do not plan to offer widely available remote or hybrid options this year.
- The Vestal Central School District will require all students, staff, and visitors to wear a mask indoors and on buses, regardless of vaccination status.
- Masks do not need to be worn while outside.
- The [CDC recommends that schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance](#) between students within classrooms, combined with indoor mask wearing to reduce transmission risk. When it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least 3 feet, the District will follow NYS Education Department recommendations by layering multiple other prevention strategies. These include, but are not limited to, improved ventilation, handwashing etiquette, promoting students and staff staying home when sick, contact tracing in combination with quarantine and isolation, as well as regular cleaning and disinfection of all buildings, classrooms, and school buses.
- Students may eat inside. When eating, we will maximize physical distancing to the greatest extent possible.
- NYSED has indicated "physical distancing is not required on school buses." Additionally, [the CDC does require that students and staff wear masks](#) while on school buses.
- Students, staff, and visitors should not report to school if they show signs of infectious illness consistent with COVID-19 symptoms.
- District staff will disinfect buildings and buses to remove potential viruses that may be on surfaces.
- The District will have hand sanitizer available to students, staff, and visitors.
- District staff will disinfect spaces in which someone was sick or has tested positive for COVID-19.
- The District will continue to work with local health departments when contact tracing. The Broome and Tioga County Health Departments will collaborate with the District to identify individuals who are required to quarantine as a result of COVID-19 exposure in school buildings, grounds, at a school-sponsored event, or on a school bus.
- Masks will be required for *indoor* extracurricular activities, including sports. At such activities, participants will maintain physical distancing of 3 feet or more whenever possible.
- Participants in *outdoor* extracurricular activities, including sports, will not be required to wear masks. Participants in such activities should maximize physical distancing to the greatest extent possible.

- The Broome County Health Department will be conducting a voluntary vaccination clinic at the Vestal Central Jr. High School gymnasium on **Friday, August 27th** from 3 pm to 6 pm. The second dose of the Pfizer vaccine will be available at the same location and time on **Friday, September 17th**.

Rationale for Back-to-School Decisions

Q1. Why is Vestal returning to full in-person instruction?

A1. In its [Health and Safety Guide for the 2021-2022 School Year](#), the New York State Education Department states, **“The overall goals for the 2021-2022 school year are to keep students and staff healthy and safe, be responsive to student needs, and maximize in-person teaching and learning.”** This guidance also aligns with the [recommendations of the CDC](#) and the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#). As a district, we agree with these priorities. While we worked hard to provide the best possible remote and hybrid learning experiences last year, we feel strongly that most students benefit more from exclusive in-person instruction. We have been regularly consulting with public health authorities and using their guidance to develop the health and safety measures outlined above and below. We believe these precautions will enable us to meet the goals outlined by the State Education Department. We will continue to monitor the COVID-19 health emergency and will adjust our health and safety measures based on the best available advice from public health officials.

Q2. Why isn’t Vestal offering a broadly available remote learning option?

A2. Our district is not offering a broadly available remote learning option for the reasons listed in the response above, and because offering such an option would inevitably require diverting our human resources away from in-person instruction. We have staffed our school district in a way that should enable us to meet student needs for high-quality instruction first, while also ensuring that we have the capacity to provide appropriate interventions for those in need of additional support. We would not have, and cannot hire, enough staff to fully accomplish these goals while also providing a broadly available remote learning option.

Q3. Why will masks be required?

A3. The decision to require masking is based on both the recommendations of several medical and public health authorities, as well as research regarding the spread of COVID-19. Most medical and public health authorities agree that masking should be part of a “layered approach” to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. These authorities include [the CDC](#), the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), and our local county health departments. The [New York State Education Department also recommends such an approach](#). Based on both the current recommendations of the medical and public health communities, our District has concluded that a mask requirement is appropriate at this time. All local school districts will also have the same mask requirement.

Monitoring of Health Conditions

The health and safety of all students and staff is essential and must be the first consideration when evaluating practices, procedures, and protocols related to education during the COVID-19 health emergency. The District will adhere to CDC and state guidance to ensure the safety and well-being of everyone, and we will continue to update our guidance as new information becomes available from the CDC, NYSED, NYSDOH, and local health departments, as well as through feedback from our school physicians.

Health and Safety Practices

When students, staff, or community members are in a District building or location, they must adhere to health and safety practices.

- **Physical Distancing:** CDC recommends schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms, combined with indoor mask wearing to reduce transmission risk. When it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least 3 feet, the District will follow NYS Education Department recommendations by layering multiple other prevention strategies. These include, but are not limited to, improved ventilation, handwashing etiquette, promoting students and staff staying home when sick, contact tracing in combination with quarantine and isolation, as well as regular cleaning and disinfection of all buildings, classrooms, and school buses.
- **Staying Home When Sick:** Students and staff should stay home if they are showing [signs and symptoms](#) of infectious illness, including COVID-19, see their health care provider, and get tested.

We are awaiting further guidance from the local health department regarding the use of a daily screener.

Health Checks and Daily Screenings: A Daily Screening Questionnaire form that includes temperature checks must be completed for students, faculty, staff and, where applicable, contractors, vendors, and visitors.

- o Students who do not arrive with the Daily Screening Questionnaire completed will be screened by trained District personnel in an isolated room.*
- o Students who screen positive for COVID-19 exposure, exhibit symptoms, or present with a temperature greater than 100.0° F will be escorted by staff to a designated isolated room. Parents/guardians will be contacted and instructions will be provided to contact their healthcare provider for assessment and testing.*

- **Face Coverings or “Masks”:** Face coverings (i.e., masks) will be required for all students, staff, and visitors as described in the “Key Takeaways” section above. We define a mask as a cloth or paper covering of the mouth and nose. A face shield, by itself, does not meet this definition. Students who are unable to medically tolerate a face covering will be excluded from this requirement. Face covering breaks will be provided for students when they can physically distance, which could include at lunch and outdoor playground. Face coverings will be made available for all students, staff, and visitors when entering a District building.

- **Handwashing and Respiratory Hygiene:** The CDC recommends covering coughs and sneezes to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious illnesses. The CDC also recommends that individuals wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Hand sanitizer may be utilized before and after the use of shared objects.

- **Limited Gatherings:** Student assemblies, athletic events/practices, performances, and school-wide parent meetings will be coordinated to occur virtually or with limited participation to adhere to most current health and safety guidelines.

Transportation

The transportation of students on District school buses will adhere to the guidelines and parameters established by the New York State Education Department and CDC.

- All students and transportation personnel will be required to wear masks on the bus.
- If a student does not have a mask, they will be provided one before boarding.
- Physical distancing is not required on school buses per the [NYSED Health and Safety Guide for the 2021-2022 School Year - page 10](#).
- Buses will be cleaned and disinfected daily.

School Meals

- All students in attendance are eligible to receive a free breakfast and lunch. Meals may be in the cafeteria, classroom, and other locations as determined by the principal and food service director. There will be no meal delivery to students who are not in attendance.
- Physical distancing and mask wearing will be enforced when students are moving through the food service line.
- When eating, students will be allowed to remove their masks. Students will be physically distanced to reduce transmission risk.
- Students will be encouraged to wash their hands before and after eating meals.
- Reasonable accommodations will be made for students who have food allergies or other nutritional needs.
- All surfaces and high-touch areas will be cleaned and disinfected with food safe products. All food service areas will be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected each evening.
- Vestal High School will have an open campus during lunch periods. Students in grades 9-12 will be allowed to leave campus for lunch. Some students may choose to eat lunch at home or at establishments in the community. If community food locations/restaurants are required to close, then this practice will be reevaluated.
- The high school building does not have enough space for all students to eat lunch while physically distancing. Likewise, a reduced number of students eating in the building promotes a reduced risk of COVID-19 transmission. For additional outside space, we are considering the use of an outside tent with a floor. Last year, the grass under the tent in the courtyard turned into a muddy mess, thus it was not available for use.

Contact Tracing in Combination with Isolation and Quarantine

- Vestal CSD will continue to collaborate with local health departments (Broome and Tioga Counties).
- If asymptomatic, fully vaccinated close contacts will not need to quarantine at home following an exposure.
- Close contacts who are not fully vaccinated should see their health care provider. Local or state health departments may quarantine the person at home.
- All individuals who have a positive COVID-19 test result will be required to isolate at home per local or state health departments.
- Please see [CDC guidance under section 8](#) for more information.

Containment of Potential Transmission

A CONFIRMED CASE OF COVID-19 IN THE SCHOOL

If a person is confirmed as having tested positive for COVID-19 (including students, staff, and visitors to the school), the Broome or Tioga County Health Departments will reach out to the District COVID-19 Safety Coordinator for a list of close contacts. This administrator will serve as a liaison and point of contact for other questions and/or information needed for case investigation. The county health departments will report to the New York State Department of Health. The District COVID-19 Coordinator will work with the appropriate school district staff, such as principals, transportation, teachers, etc., to provide needed information. Students and staff with symptoms will be sent to the Health Office for assessment by the school nurse, as chronic conditions such as asthma may present the same symptoms as COVID-19, but the person may not be contagious or pose a public health threat. If students or staff become ill with symptoms of COVID-19 at school, Education Law Section 906 will be followed, which requires that a student showing

symptoms of any communicable or infectious disease reportable under public health law that imposes a significant risk of infection of others in the school shall be excluded from school and sent home immediately, in a safe and proper conveyance. The local public health department will be notified immediately. Attendance must be taken on the bus, in the classroom, and at other school-sponsored events. If the Broome or Tioga County health departments notify the school of a confirmed case of COVID-19, the District will utilize the attendance reports to aid in contact tracing. All reports will be made in compliance with FERPA, HIPPA, and Education Law 2-d, working with health departments to protect student and staff confidentiality.

RETURN OF STUDENTS/STAFF FOLLOWING CONFIRMED DIAGNOSIS:

Only the local or state health department can release a confirmed COVID-19 case from isolation as they deem the individual is no longer a health threat to the public.

Closure of School Facilities and In-Person Instruction, if necessary, by Widespread Virus Transmission

In the case of a school closure to in-person instruction, the school district will move all ongoing instruction to “remote” instruction. School closure may originate from the state (governor), or from the school district (Superintendent). The state may make the decision via an Executive Order issued by the governor for public health and safety reasons covering the state or region in which the district resides.

The Superintendent may make a decision for school closure based on health and safety concerns of students, staff, or community in consultation with local health departments. The school district will make a decision based on the following factors, which are not necessarily all-inclusive:

- Restrictions in place from NYS Governor’s Office and/or Broome and Tioga County Health Departments;
- The District’s capacity to accommodate larger groups while maintaining rigorous health and safety protocols in the schools and on buses;
- Staffing levels in the classroom, nurse’s areas, and administrative positions;
- Staffing levels in transportation.

Communications on school closure will be conveyed via School Messenger, email, school correspondence, website, news releases, etc.

Updates to Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Guidance:

For more information, see the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) website](#).

NYS Department of Education Guidance:

As of August 2021, the NYS Department of Education (NYSED) updated its [guidance](#) for in-person instruction at Pre-K to grade 12 schools for the 2021-2022 school year.